Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma, 2

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Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma, 2

Making a "Catholic" Self, 388–401 C.E.

Jason David BeDuhn

PENN

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For J. Kevin Coyle
mentor, critic, friend

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NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

MY USE OF the term "Nicene" may at first seem out of place to those for whom it invokes primarily the Trinitarian controversy, which indeed plays practically no role in this study. Similarly, my use of "Catholic" may at first be jarring to those who regard this term primarily as a label of the fully developed Catholicism of a later period. Despite the danger of such possible misconstruals, I consider these terms both appropriate and necessary to my subject. My strategy here, as in the first volume of this study, is to employ "Nicene" to refer to the ideology of the community Augustine had joined, and "Catholic" to refer to the community itself and its institutions.

The community in question was formally and legally defined by an edict of Theodosius in 380 (Cod. Theod. 16.1.2) that expressly bestowed upon it the designation "Catholic" as an identifying name, not just an adjectival description. Augustine himself always referred to this community as "Catholic." In North Africa in particular, "Catholic" served to link the identity of the community to the larger imperially sanctioned Church, in distinction from the regional "Donatist" association of churches. It has become fashionable to prefer lower-case "catholic" to refer in this early period to a kind of mainstream residuum that is left over once one has distinguished all of the distinctive sectarian factions within early Christianity, without implying all of the formal institutional forms and normative authority of the later Catholic Church. But with reference to the situation in North Africa, such a usage would obscure the degree to which Augustine's "Catholic" community was itself a sectarian faction, competing not only with other sectarian groups such as the Manichaeans, but also with "Donatists" who, of all the parties, probably had the best claim to represent the Christian mainstream in the region. Overall, then, I find that using parallel capitalized descriptors strikes the right tone of parity among these rival claimants to the Christian tradition, broadly defined. At the same time, throughout the book, I am manipulating the term (Catholic,

catholic, "Catholic," "catholic") in order to bring out facets of the story, including the tendentiousness of the intended implication of "catholic" against the alternative claims of other Christianities, as well as Augustine's own interest in making the "Catholic" church catholic by bringing under its wings all those with a commitment to the authority of Christ, through whatever powers of persuasion or polemic he could muster.

Yet problems would arise, I think, if I used "Catholic" to refer to the ideology of Augustine and his community, since as a system of ideas, or an -ism, it might too easily invoke "(Roman) Catholicism." I have chosen, therefore, to use "Nicene" to avoid that implication and as a convenient designation for the minimal creedal ideology to which members of this particular community were (in theory) committed. Even though a notorious problem exists regarding the various creeds in use within the "Catholic" Church of Augustine's time, they were imagined by their users to accord with "Nicene" positions, not only on the Trinity, but on God as omnipotent creator, on Christ's physical incarnation, death, and resurrection, and on the authority of the Church. Augustine was catechized in reference to one such creed (*Conf* 8.2.5), and Augustine himself treated this creed as the foundational statement of the ideology of the "Catholic" Church (*De fide et symbolo*; *Sermones* 212–14). Any number of more precise designations one might use for this ideology would be either awkward or novel or both. "Nicene" provides the appropriate parity with terms for competing Christian ideologies, such as "Manichaean."

Introduction

AT EASTER IN the spring of 387, Augustine, recently retired civic rhetor of Milan, received baptism at the hands of the city's bishop, Ambrose, formalizing at the same time both his conversion to the "Nicene" faith of the "Catholic" Church and his apostasy from the Manichaean sect to which he had belonged for more than a decade. Some of Augustine's critics, in his own time as well as ours, have suggested that he never ceased being a Manichaean.[1] The Manichaean commitment he held overtly for more than a decade, they have contended, had sunk so deeply into his thinking, or so closely matched the predispositions of his character, that he carried fundamentally "Manichaean" perspectives into his understanding of "Nicene" Christianity, however inadvertently or unconsciously. Even if Augustine consciously intended to commit himself fully to his new faith, the leopard could not change its spots. If these opinions were true, the tremendous impact Augustine has had upon Christian theology and culture might properly be understood as a direct importation of Manichaeism into that tradition. But I disagree with this assessment. The evidence, I think, supports a different story, yet one that makes Manichaeism every bit as central to Augustine's legacy.

Augustine genuinely broke with Manichaeism and wholeheartedly embraced the religion of Ambrose, as he understood it, as the tradition with which he would identify and within which he would find meaning. Certainly, he carried across that apostasy and conversion lingering habits of thought and self-expression. How could he not? By his act of conversion, he presented himself to the authority of his newly adopted community to be educated and shaped by its program. He did not already possess that which

his entry into the community promised to provide. He committed himself to *belief* in that which he did not yet *understand*. Yet, for various reasons, he did not disappear into the schooling and development the community's authorities offered, only to emerge later as a fully mature representative of the faith. He started writing from the moment he anticipated that his new religious commitment would open up a whole new identity and life for him. That fact is a rare gift to us as historians, because it allows us not only to study a representative late fourth-century "Catholic" self, but to trace the making of that self as it finds articulation in Augustine's rhetorical output over time.[2]

By following the record provided by Augustine's dialogues, treatises, sermons, debates, and letters, we can follow a gradual expansion of the role played in his discourse by the creedal and biblical phrasing, and the broader literary tropes, of his new community, as well as a growing integration of these figures of speech in his discursive apprehension of reality. It did not take long for the latter to be purged of the lingering Manichaean elements discernible in his earliest writings at the time of his conversion. Although he recognized some common ground between his former religious outlook and his new one, it might even be said that he tended to gravitate toward those aspects of his new faith that offered the strongest contrast to his former one. But the Manichaeans would not go away; Augustine remained entangled with them—both in his personal ties to former friends who remained in the sect, and in the role he was called upon to play as an apostate in the ongoing religious rivalry for the hearts and souls of the people of North Africa.

In learning more about the resources of the tradition to which he had committed himself, Augustine came face to face with themes and attitudes that bore a closer affinity to Manichaeism than he initially recognized. The apparent reappearance of "Manichaean" elements in Augustine's system, I argue, actually represents his attempts to come to terms with those aspects of the Christian tradition that Manichaeism in some sense "got right" about the tradition, and which the kind of Christianity presented to him as a convert in comparable respects "got wrong"—at least as Augustine apparently came to see it. Never wavering from his commitment to the "Catholic" Church, and never ceasing to offer an anti-Manichaean position, Augustine found it necessary not to cut loose what he considered valid and valuable insights into the human condition to be found in the Christian tradition, just because the Manichaeans grasped and emphasized them in a way "Nicene" Christians up to that point had neglected to do. It might have been otherwise. The Catholic Church came very close to following a trajectory well away from those areas

of Christian discourse on which the Manichaean Church placed a strong claim. Augustine proved instrumental in correcting that course, to the degree that if he had not lived, or if he had chosen differently, Christianity would be quite different across history and today—for good or ill.

Augustine did not simply learn a fully formed, preexisting "Nicene" Christian tradition; he played an active role in defining and establishing that tradition, still emerging in his time. He provided Christian doctrines and practices with new rationales. He invested new meanings into existing *symboli*. He investigated issues on which an orthodox position had yet to be settled. He followed the ramifications of Christian beliefs ever further into new corners of human life and thought. In short, in making a "Catholic" self he did not simply bring his thinking and conduct into conformity with a fixed and established norm, but helped set the terms of what would count as a "Catholic" self.

This kind of Christianity that I am designating by the short-hand expression "Nicene" had been established and institutionalized as the "Catholic" Church by imperial decree only seven years before Augustine's baptism (*Cod. Theod*. 16.1.2, 380). Augustine thus belonged to its founding generation. His counterfactual assertions of its antiquity and universality amount to property claims staked on the Christian tradition as a whole against rival claimants such as Manichaeans and Donatists, whom we are obliged still to call by these sectarian designations due to the success of Augustine and his colleagues. Augustine's return to Africa coincided with and participated in a religious colonization of Africa by a form of faith defined elsewhere and brought as an intruder into existing divisions of African Christianity. The non-Donatist and non-Manichaean churches of the region coalesced into the African branch of this colonial "Catholic" (that is, ostensibly general, "ecumenical," rather than regional or sectarian) Church, and Augustine found himself helping to expound to its leadership the commitments entailed in this allegiance to creedal definitions formulated abroad. That someone so new to the faith became—at least in this performative moment—a voice of authority in it is more than ironic; it is significant for our understanding of Augustine as a self-in-progress. We must never forget that, in order to stand before the bishops assembled in Hippo on October 3, 393, at the institution of the African Catholic Church and expound the creed to which they were committing themselves, Augustine had first to study it himself, get more familiar with traditions of its interpretation, and invest it with meaning drawn from his own background and reflections. This event is one example among

many of how Augustine furthered his own indoctrination and investment in this form of Christianity in the process of fulfilling assignments given to him as a rhetor, intellectual, ordained official of the Church, man with first-hand experience at Christian centers abroad, or former Manichaean.

When the life of "philosophy" first attracted the young Augustine, the Manichaeans had seemed to him to be the only community in Africa offering in an organized form what that life called for: a program of self-mastery through which one could discipline the mind's relationship to the body and senses, in service of its ascent out of mortal corruption and into the divine realm to which it naturally belonged. We should not assume that he had always looked to religion, let alone the "Catholic" Church, to play a primary role in his quest for self-perfection. It may be that only long experience with Manichaeism had conditioned him to feel the need for a religious system of practice as a "natural" complement to philosophical insights in aiding his ascent to Truth. His decade-long Manichaean experience altered his expectations, inculcated new desires and preferences in him, and conditioned him to certain assumptions that made possible his attraction to the kind of Christianity practiced among the imperial elite in Milan as a complement to the Platonism that attracted him intellectually.

When he said in *The Academics*, "I am resolved never to depart from the authority of Christ" (*Acad* 3.20.43), he was asserting not a new allegiance to Christ, but a determination not to be swayed from the primary allegiance which he has held previously under Manichaean colors. He had followed Manichaeism as a true Christianity, just as his Manichaean bishop, Faustus, described being drawn to Manichaeism by his attraction to the figure of Christ (*Faust* 13.1), and as the Manichaean Felix designated himself as a *Christianus cultor legis Manichaei*, that is, a Christian subscribing to the particular school of practice introduced by Mani (*Fel* 1.20). With his conversion, Augustine became the *cultor* of a new *lex*, accepting the different myths, rituals, and moral precepts of the "Catholic" Church as aids to meeting the moral prerequisites for spiritual ascent, framed suitably for pedagogical consumption. The Church of Milan, under the leadership of Ambrose, supplied "technologies of the self" useful for attaining the goals at which Augustine appears to have aimed long before his conversion: purity, wisdom, perfection, and immortality.

Yet even while moral authority would continue to be vested in Christ, albeit now the Christ of "Nicene" Christianity, Augustine had decided on a new intellectual allegiance for working out his rational understanding of the

Truth that Christ in some way represented. "However, regarding that which is sought out by subtle reasoning . . . I feel sure at this moment that I shall find it with the Platonists, nor will it be at variance with our sacred mysteries" (*Acad* 3.20.43). What before he had tried to plumb with the tools provided by Manichaean discourse, he would now explore using Platonic premises. Just as Manichaeism had offered a complete system that combined practical "religious" scripts for conduct with a systematic "philosophical" discourse about the nature of truth and reality, so now the Platonic Christianity in vogue in Milan provided Augustine with an equally holistic context for his desired self-development.

In the years following his conversion, Augustine progressively displaced the vestiges of his earlier Manichaean habits of thinking, as he incorporated more and more Nicene Christian and Platonic constructs into his performative repertoire. He found ways to articulate his identity almost completely free of Manichaean discourse. Yet he would discover that total freedom from it eluded him; and in pressing its demands anew on his life and work, Manichaeism would continue to challenge the meaning of his conversion. Far from being a fading memory of his youth, Manichaeism remained a vigorous rival faith in Augustine's North African environment. In debating its spokesmen and systematically working through its apologetic literature, he discovered things about Manichaeism that he had not grasped when he had been a follower himself.[3] Above all, his public debate with the Manichaean presbyter Fortunatus in 392 revealed to him previously undiscerned depths of the Manichaean system in its engagement with the resources of the Christian tradition and perennial issues of the human condition. The ideas aired in this encounter would fundamentally alter the course of Augustine's integration of Christian themes into his own self-understanding. Augustine may no longer have identified with Manichaeism, but that religion had marked its claim on certain isolated concerns and perspectives that Augustine decided "Nicene" Christianity could not afford to ignore. In the unfolding of Augustine's futures, these points of contact with the Manichaean construct of reality would demand their due from him, even as he struggled to keep the promise of his leap of faith. Augustine found that he constantly had to reinvent what his conversion would mean for him, as he continued to discover the potential of his adopted system and of himself as its point of articulation in the face of the Manichaean challenge.

Typically, it is Augustine's ancient and modern critics who identify supposedly Manichaean elements in his writings, and such identification

constitutes an intrinsic part of their criticism. The attitude reflected in these observations seems to be that wherever Augustine sounds more like a Manichaean, he is deviating in some crucial way from a proper understanding of Christianity. We may begin to question this polemical trope in a number of ways, most of all by recognizing that Augustine has his historical significance precisely in being an innovator, not a perfect reproduction and reiteration of the Christian tradition as it came to him as a convert. Better informed from primary Manichaean sources about what that religion actually stood for, we also have an opportunity to recognize Manichaean elements in Augustine elsewhere than only in those places where he presented a polemical caricature he meant to oppose. Augustine constructed this "other" Manichaeism of those aspects of the religion he regarded as unredeemable for the Christian tradition, while retrieving for Christianity other elements that he found meaningful within a Nicene framework. Once we realize this, we can start to assess what Augustine may have gained, what may have been added to his "thought," and what he may have contributed to Christianity, from his ongoing engagement with Manichaean arguments and insights, just as we may come to recognize that Manichaeism cannot be held to blame for every element of his theology we might judge negatively.

As a convert to Nicene Christianity, Augustine had committed himself to a particular account of the meaning of both his own life and life in general. He had as his primary task the maintenance of this commitment by seeing himself in the terms his adopted tradition provided, an ongoing self-making effort that would keep his momentary promise from being broken, and prevent what he had once considered important from being abandoned as meaningless. The Augustine of the period considered here was a person engaged in a process of *verification*, that is, of supplying discursive reasons for maintaining a choice of self-identification. We trace Augustine's ongoing and unfolding commitment of self to a particular construct of identity, of the proper course and meaning of life. We observe him explaining things to himself at the same time as he explained them to others, working out rationales for his commitments, *articulating* his identity textually—that is, tracing its implications and entailments further and further into what he must think and what he must do in order to be what he intended to be in being a Christian. Thus, Augustine shows in the outflow of his prose over time an increasingly articulated self, reaching into more areas of self, more corners of thought, sentiment, and prompts to action, incorporating more and more "free space" into its program. This process gave to his commitments increasing intelligibility,

as they went from juxtaposed rote gestures of allegiance to integrated and functional parts of his self-reflection and discursive consideration of ideas and experiences.

Augustine's making of a "Catholic" self, his appropriation and accommodation of Nicene Christian discourse along with the "technologies of self" promoted by the Catholic Church, involved a process of development in which later understandings of his faith displaced earlier ones, overwriting previous Augustines with successive ones. Augustine himself repeatedly admitted a course of development in his thought that he acknowledged could be traced on the pages of his compositions (e.g., *Retr*, Prologue; *Ep* 143.2; *SermDolb* 10.15). To make our own determination of the course of this development and the various positions taken along the way, independent of Augustine's, we must exercise a "vigorous effort of forgetting" Augustine's later self-construal, and learn to focus on what James O'Donnell has termed "Augustine without his futures."[4] One notes that O'Donnell called for this effort in 2001, well after a developmental model of Augustine had emerged in the work of Paul Séjourné, Peter Brown, Patout Burns, Paula Fredriksen, and many others. Perhaps O'Donnell meant merely to champion this direction of recent scholarship against the inertia of a field that continues to produce annually vast quantities of studies apparently oblivious to it. But I take O'Donnell's concern to be the possibility, even in fully developmental accounts, of treating Augustine's thought as an inevitable unfolding of inherent implications, as a *logical* progression self-contained within Christian discourse, or specifically "Nicene" discourse, or even Augustine's own individual thought. Those laboring in Augustinian studies have increasingly appreciated the degree to which Augustine clarified his views in the face of specific ("heretical") challenges that served—in W. H. C. Frend's all-too-apt phrasing—as the anvils on which he hammered out his positions. Yet this image is more apt for some of Augustine's opponents than others. I would propose a slightly different metaphor from the blacksmith's craft, and argue that Augustine was not above making his positions stronger by alloying what he received from the normative tradition of his community with substance drawn from the resources of some of his opponents, taking from them whatever he thought valuable and redeemable—or perhaps, less positively, unavoidable.

It would be a mistake, I think, to consider all of Augustine's encounters with opponents in terms of his last, most bitter one with Julian of Eclanum. He was not always so on the defensive. Indeed, it is one of the main points of this study that Augustine often reached out to Manichaeans even as he

combated them. I mean more than simply that he hoped to sway them to his views in all Christian charity. He often worked hard at meeting them on their own terms, at striving to think of what would appeal to them, and measuring his words to accommodate their concerns and values. Of course, the heat of rhetorical debate at times overwhelmed the light of reasoning together. But even a brush with the political dangers of his own Manichaean past did little to cool his ardor to open a constructive dialogue with his former friends, and in the early years of his episcopacy he found his way to a remarkably eirenic set of suggestions to transcend the differences between them, which he hoped would show them the way to embrace Nicene Christianity as he once imagined Plato would, "with the change of a few words and sentiments."

As in my previous volume on Augustine, so here I am touching on areas where many before me have proposed various models and solutions by which to understand what was going on with Augustine during a particular period of development. So it bears repeating in this context that I do not wish to suggest in any way that what I bring to these questions is any more than one angle among many, perhaps a relatively new angle, but a partial one to be sure. Many factors went into making the Augustine of history, and I do not pretend to tell the whole story. But I do maintain that the particular angle I bring to the subject—namely, the Manichaean one—is essential to any picture of what was going on in the years covered here. That claim in itself will not be controversial. I would go farther, however, and argue that any attempt to understand certain key features of Augustine's development that does not take Manichaeism into account, not only as opposition and foil, but also as audience and resource, would fail in its purpose to represent the historical person of Augustine. The key features I have in mind include his exegetical motivations in general and his engagement with the writings of Paul in particular, the trend of his understanding of the human situation from one of free will to one in need of grace, his meditations on the limits of the self and self-knowledge, as well as his self-presentation in *Confessions*, and finally his rather daring relativizing of discursive religion found in the closing books of the latter work as well as in *Against the Fundamental Epistle*. In each of these cases, to be sure, non-Manichaean discourses and sources of inspiration played a role; but none of these cases can be fully understood apart from Augustine's engagement with Manichaeism or particular Manichaean others not only as enemies, but as (once, and, it was hoped, future) friends. I offer this study, therefore, as an affirmation and detailed demonstration of J. Kevin Coyle's assertion that "Without Manichaeism, there would still have been

Augustine, perhaps even Augustine the great theologian; but it would have been a different Augustine, with a different theology."[5]

Continuity and Change

As an integral part of sorting out his own post-conversion identity, along with fulfilling the obligations of his increasingly leading role in his new faith community, Augustine pursued a project of "othering" aimed at his own rejected Manichaean self. He composed a set of what can be understood best as "apostate literature," summoning his former companions in faith away from their common past error and to the truth he had now discovered. His friend and biographer Possidius identifies thirty-four compositions from Augustine's library as belonging to his labors *contra manicheos* (*Indicula* 4), ranging from around 388 to about 405. Sixteen of these are actually relatively short notes included in Augustine's *Eighty-Three Diverse Questions* (*De diversis quaestionibus LXXXIII*); five others belong to his *Sermons*. Four items on the list, composed after *Confessions*, fall outside the scope of the present study.[6] The remaining nine compositions, in roughly chronological order of their completion,[7] are *Genesis Against the Manichaeans* (*De Genesi contra manicheos*), *Morals of the Catholic Church* (*De moribus ecclesiae catholicae*), *Morals of the Manichaeans* (*De moribus manichaeorum*),[8] *The Usefulness of Belief* (*De utilitate credendi*),[9] *The Two Souls* (*De duabus animabus*),[10] *Against Fortunatus* (*Contra Fortunatum*),[11] *Against Adimantus* (*Contra Adimantum*), *Free Choice* (*De libero arbitrio*),[12] and *Against Mani's Fundamental Epistle* (*Contra epistulam fundamenti*).

Yet, if we confined our analysis of Augustine's engagement with Manichaeism in the period under consideration only to these works, we would miss some of the most crucial ways that engagement played out in his formation as a "Catholic" self. Each of the aforementioned texts represents a discrete moment of encounter between the tradition for which Augustine now spoke and the Manichaean tradition that once held his loyalty. They present points where that encounter sharpened into the antithetical *contra* shape most of Augustine's contemporaries expected, and most of his modern interpreters have assumed, to be the only stance the two traditions could take toward each other. But there is more to the story than that. In fact, nearly everything Augustine composed from his return to Africa in 388 to his completion of *Confessions* around 401 belonged to his ongoing engagement with Manichaeism, even when the latter did not stand explicitly in the foreground

of his discourse: his exposition of the creed, his exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount, his interpretive forays into the letters of Paul, many of his earliest public sermons and in-house intellectual table-talks, his exploration of the problem of free will, his response to the exegetical questions of Simplician of Milan, and of course *Confessions* itself.

In the previous volume of this study, I characterized my approach to Augustine's compositions as a "rather sharply refracted version" of a historicist contextualism as represented in the work of Quentin Skinner. This approach involves confining the range of meaning we might impute to a particular text only to what can be shown to have been available as meaning to the author at that particular point of his or her life. I cannot delimit what may have been happening with Augustine at a particular time if I assume all that ever happened to him at any time as somehow inherently present in every moment, every rhetorical and literary act. I leave to others the ambition of synthesizing from these acts something they might want to call the "thought" of Augustine. My interest is in following along as Augustine takes up and makes use of various terms, themes, tropes, concepts, or other rhetorical practices available in his environment, and through this process presents himself, as an authorial voice, taking particular stances and positions within ongoing traditions of discourse. Augustine's making of a "Catholic" self involved this sort of public performance of self, employing available icons, labels, slogans, or categories by which he could signal (to others and to himself) his connection to a particular party and what it valued, while at the same time indicating his own peculiar qualification of that connection in the way he highlighted and coordinated some of the available elements in novel ways.

Contextualism starts from the basic premise that an author has a purpose in communicating, and one of the prime tasks of a historian looking at a text is to hypothesize what that purpose may have been. That "may have been" is delimited first by what it "could have been," and it is in defining that "could have been" that contextualism primarily has its work. Even with novel and idiosyncratic intent, an author is working within conventions of self and language given by society and culture. Awareness of those conventions allows us to track what an author may be invoking from conventional repertoires, and at the same time allows us to compare a particular invocation to others of the same convention. In a given text, we can see how a particular convention is juxtaposed with others, similarly to or differently from the way other authors, or the same author in another text, arranged such juxtapositions. From this we hypothesize what the author may have been trying to do in

writing a text—locutionally (as a communication of meaningful content), illocutionally (as a performance of certain conventional self-positionings), and perlocutionally (as an achievement of social effect for ideas or self).[13]

In previous scholarship, Augustine's compositions have been analyzed almost exclusively for their theological and philosophical discursive content—that is, as what J. L. Austin isolates as the *locutionary* significance of speech-acts. While certainly attending to this aspect of Augustine's language, I have a particular interest in how, at the same time, it delivered the other two possible effects of speech that Austin noted. Augustine's acts of speech had *illocutionary* effects, in so far as they positioned him in relation to community and ideological identities and their entailments—as declarations of commitment, as avowals, as articulation of self-imposed limits of acceptable speech and thought. He did not produce or communicate ideas in a vacuum, but had very real concerns about what to say and how to say it so that he would successfully define and be seen to occupy a position his community could approve. If he had reason to take a position at some remove from those commonly held within his community, he had to find a way to move the whole community with him, to find some justification for his innovation within its resources in order that he could still produce the same illocutionary effect of signaling allegiance. Augustine's speech also had *perlocutionary* effects, both on others and on himself. He intended such effects in his wish to persuade others to his positions. But we should also recognize, as G. H. Mead suggests, that speech has effects on the speaker, reiterating certain stances of self, recalling certain discursive formulas with which one has chosen to identify, generating moments of aptness between ideas and situations, placing oneself at the disposal of public scrutiny, and in this way establishing, modifying, and maintaining a sense of self—or, in terms of Harry Frankfurt's analysis, forming a higher-order set of priorities and choices among the entire available discourse to which one is exposed and in which one participates. When we attend to these other aspects of Augustine's speech, we place it back in the circumstances in which it functioned, and guard against denaturing it from its historical situatedness.

Elizabeth Clark has outlined helpfully some of the limitations of the contextualist approach when applied to ancient literary texts, "whose precise original contexts are often a matter of sheer guesswork."[14] Augustine offers a rare exception to this general situation, however, since we have a great deal of information that allows us to pinpoint most of his compositions to particular periods of his career. One of the primary contexts for any individual work

of literature is the previous work of the same author, by which the author has established certain expectations of meaning in connection with specific favorite terms and phrases, as a kind of set of personal conventions that, when invoked, signal an invitation to the reader to see continuity with their prior use. It remains true even in Augustine's case, however, that "contexts may be either unknown or multiple, are variously assigned by different readers, and largely come to scholars of premodernity in already-textualized form."[15] Modern researchers are still laboring to provide more contextual information about Augustine's literary career, such as understanding conditions in North Africa as well as the character of both Augustine's own community and those of his opponents. My own effort here is to provide the Manichaean context, and test our ability to reconstruct better what Augustine meant in particular moments of rhetorical performance in light of that particular context, regardless of how subsequent readers reset his meaning within new contexts.[16] Indeed, much of the controversy around Augustine's writings arose when they were read in new discursive contexts by those who did not share the background Augustine had in mind for the audience of particular tracts. For the period under consideration here, moreover, Augustine often was attempting to speak simultaneously to two or even three audiences—Manichaean, Nicene Christian, and Platonist—each participating in quite different discourses. The results no doubt at times left all three audiences unsatisfied or puzzled.

This diachronic record of deployment of speech acts offers the modern researcher the material with which to do history on a very focused scale—the history of a single generation as something happened that turned out to be very important for later history. Because the heirs of North African Christianity preserved the bulk of Augustine's writings, from across the sequence of his rhetorical changes, and because this body of work in its totality helped to set the terms and feed the complexities of later Christianity, it will not do for us to try to understand only where Augustine ends up at the end of his life. Later generations have valued different portions of his corpus, and one Augustine has often been pitched against another Augustine—each put forward as the "real" or "essential" Augustine—in the conflicts within the culture and intellectual traditions of the Christian West. As historians, then, we have the task of acknowledging the transilience of a figure such as Augustine, to give full due to the succession of Augustines that appear in the historical record, and not to reify his transient modalities of discourse into a static self.

About a century ago, the modern historical study of Augustine started

to recognize the importance of the development of his positions over time, and even of the protracted character of his formation as a "Catholic," somewhat obscured by Augustine's retrospective narrative in *Confessions*. A series of analyses by Boissier,[17] Harnack,[18] Loofs,[19] Gourdon,[20] and Thimme[21] culminated in the watershed publication of Alfaric.[22] The latter sparked a reaction in Augustinian scholarship that sought to reverse the conclusions of the developmental model, especially as these were perceived to call into question the genuine and thorough character of Augustine's conversion. Nonetheless, the developmental model continued to make its case, and in the studies of Pierre Courcelle and Peter Brown can be considered to have established itself as the dominant paradigm of the field.

The developmental model of Augustine must be measured against the critique Goulven Madec has made of what he refers to as the error of the *plein doctrinal*, the assumption that Augustine's full thinking was revealed in the texts he composed, and therefore we can know the presence or absence of particular ideas in his mind at particular stages of his career based on their presence in or absence from his texts.[23] This cautionary point has merit. Madec reminds us that Augustine is a rhetorician, and his compositions rhetorical performances with particular purposes and specific audiences. Unfortunately, Madec has put this valid point in service of what I regard as an untenable projection of Augustine's later thinking back into his earliest writing. Madec allows for Augustine enriching his core concepts by further thought over the decades, but not for any reconsideration of those core concepts themselves. Similarly, Carol Harrison contends that "the defining features of his mature theology" were in place for Augustine from the moment of his conversion in 386, and that there was no substantial revolution in his thinking in the mid-390s as the developmental model argues.[24] Yet even Augustine himself, who often claimed for his "thought" the same sort of consistency that Madec and Harrison propose, admitted to fundamental changes of course in the crucial areas at the center of this study, and specifically in his views on free will and grace and how to read Paul, in the mid-390s. Whatever degree of continuity we can see in his favorite themes, terms, and images must be weighed against evidence of change in how Augustine used these elements of his rhetoric, how he put new wine into old wine skins, and so obscured sometimes radical discontinuities of meaning.

We come, then, to a fundamental question of how to read Augustine. What should we do with a particular rhetorical performance that juxtaposes various concepts and images and themes that on their performative surface

seem to have only a weak connection to one another? How do we analyze a text that has little discursive coherence overall, even if we can discern its rhetorical function to uphold certain positions with which Augustine identifies while disparaging alternatives? Do we assume an unspoken coherence? Where do we go to find the missing links between the discontinuities of his rhetoric? How should we read, for example, Augustine's references to Adam in connection with his widely varying appraisals of the liberty and responsibility of individual human beings? I contend that we must read such references *forward*, against the background only of what he had previously said, or of what we can reasonably assume to have been a resource for him in the Christian tradition before him. In this way, we can observe Augustine sorting out how he wished to deploy such references, what work he elected to have them do for him in his argument, as these rhetorical choices change from one performance to the next, and not necessarily in a single direction tending toward some final definitive position. Propose what you will about what Augustine may have been entertaining in his private thoughts, the only thing that matters historically is the textual Augustine willing to articulate a particular public stance at a specific time and in a certain circumstance. That public Augustine, and no other, is the Augustine of history. It is also, in a very real sense, Augustine's "self"—keeping in mind that we have in his textual oeuvre not only much of what he said publicly (in sermons, letters, debates, lectures, as well as dictation to the scribes who actually wrote his works), but more precisely what he said most carefully, most deliberately, and was willing to have preserved, as representations of himself.

In my opinion, Madec and Harrison, like many defenders of the traditional image of Augustine, simply have not attended sufficiently to Augustine's own clear distinction between "believing" and "understanding." Augustine's *belief* in something was a commitment to it, an illocutionary avowal of loyalty to it as an icon, accepted in a more-or-less rote manner from authority. I absolutely affirm the evidence for the continuity of Augustine's loyalties to Nicene Christian terms and themes and to the institutions of the Catholic Church from the time of his conversion. From that point forward, Augustine was determined to locate his identity in the company of these terms and themes and institutions, and to limit his intellectual constructions within the boundaries they set. But his *understanding* of these terms and themes and institutions—that is, the discursive content with which he filled them and the systematic connections he drew between them—developed and changed. May we not even fairly say that in some sense Augustine's *beliefs* remained fixed,

while his *understanding* constantly developed? Indeed, Augustine continually tested, and in the eyes of many of his contemporaries violated, precisely where Nicene terms set the boundaries he must observe; and few would dispute that it is in Augustine's understanding of Christian symbols, rather than his mere allegiance to them, that he possesses historical stature as a significant figure. Yet, because Augustine accepted the necessity of fitting his insights about the universe and the human condition into the categories and symbols of an existing normative tradition, we can at times be misled into thinking that he was merely reiterating that tradition, or repeating himself, when in fact he was offering something new—even new relative to his own previous invocations of a particular term or symbol.

We would do well, then, to attend to the way the earlier Augustine deployed terms and phrases as mere slogans he had heard as conventions of speech, without immediately investing them with particular meaning or function in the active, operationalized part of his discourse. Later, he invested these same terms and phrases with meaning and function, or redeployed them with new significance, creating the illusion of continuity and consistency of thought, where there was actually only continuity and consistency of symbols. In saying this, I do not claim to know something about what Augustine was thinking behind the words he used; I merely attend to how he used those words—in what larger discursive constructs, in the making of what particular point, as tools of exposition or as objects in need of exposition.

It is easy enough for those working on particular aspects of Augustine's thought to duplicate his own efforts in the *Retractationes* to find logical continuity between his earlier positions and his later ones. That such logical continuity can be constructed is no doubt valuable theologically, but beside the point historically. Because we know Augustine's futures, it is all too easy to accept a theological or philosophical construal of the earlier Augustine from the vantage point of those futures as revealing something inherent and inevitable in his thinking from the start. Such teleological history arbitrarily picks out details of a past that turned out to have a future, regardless of how minor those details were in their own time, or how much their meaning and setting within larger epistemes were changed by the course of events. Here, we are told, we can see the seeds of the future. But given all of the vicissitudes of history and even of an individual life, is it really valid or useful to play the augur and take those earlier notices as signs necessarily portending all that was made of related terms or images later? And what are we to make of all the other signs, appearing even more prominently in that earlier material, that

came to nothing? Was there anything necessary or inevitable in which seeds bore fruit and which withered away? To suggest that there was is to make a theological or philosophical claim, not a historical one.

My purpose is to give most weight to Augustine in his performative presence in the historical record, in all its vicissitudes, and to view each sequential Augustine "without his futures." He adopted, *in principle*, the whole of the Platonic and Nicene Christian epistemes without knowing either particularly well, or even whether they ultimately would prove compatible. He had yet to trace all the implications of his new commitments that he would eventually discover. It would be sheer anachronism for us to consider those later discoveries to be implicit in an earlier Augustine to whom they were yet to occur. Rather than finding that his "central ideas were fixed from the moment of his conversion,"[25] we find fixed from the moment of his conversion a set of icons, of *symboli* that he will employ as signposts of his developing system, and as containers into which he would pour content as he produced it in the process of understanding the implications of being a "Catholic" self. He discovered and worked out these implications within his own interests, inclinations, and prior conditioning. He tended to present them as inherent in the *symboli* themselves, as inevitable and objective. But that simply was part of his rhetorical purpose to persuade others (and perhaps himself at the same time) that he had reached unavoidably right conclusions. We need not agree; in fact, we may be obligated as historians to note the constructedness of Augustine's system of understanding, and the possible comparable claims on the same icons of the Christian tradition by alternative systems of understanding.

Perhaps Augustine's status as a "Doctor of the Church" has influenced a reluctance among some to view his early works in this way, as a record of *indoctrination*. There has been a tendency to treat him anachronistically as an authority within the Nicene tradition from his very first composition, because of his later importance—and quite frankly simply because he had the audacity to start writing before he had understood what he had undertaken to believe. But Augustine's early compositions are those of a marginal figure gradually working his way to the center of his community's authority structure. In this material, he should be viewed as in some sense catching up with a tradition with which he had only recently identified himself, and diverging at points from the tradition's mainstream, not because he possessed the authority to innovate, but because he had not yet learned or understood where the tradition stood on those particular points. Such idiosyncracy belongs to

the typical condition of the new convert. Of course, the fact that he wrote, in some sense, *prematurely* might be taken as a token of a degree of arrogance and self-confidence in his own intellect that compromised his conformity. He was not reluctant to analyze the logical entailments of ideas put forward by his predecessors or seniors within the Nicene tradition, as well as by his opponents, and identify the problems they posed to what he regarded as the tradition's higher priority commitments (as in the case of his precocious challenges to Jerome over the interpretation of Galatians and the abandonment of the Septuagint). Nor should we make the mistake of imagining a monolithic orthodoxy against which the degree and quality of his indoctrination could be measured (hence his ability to oppose certain practices of the African church by invoking the authority of the Italian church). Augustine discovered, probably to his private horror, that the *Catholica* did not speak with one voice. Nevertheless, he expressed an abiding faith that the Church collectively possessed a unified and clear understanding of truth that he was in the process of learning and disseminating, even as the growing authority of both his position and his personality gave greater leeway to his own personal idiosyncracy as a point of articulation for Nicene Christianity.

Making a "Catholic" Self

"All religion," Augustine declared, "is on account of the soul" (*UC* 7.14). But what is this "soul"? The Nicene Christianity and Manichaeism between which Augustine chose both centered their teachings on the existence of the soul and its need for salvation—that is, ultimate escape and immortality—outside an unsatisfactory world-condition. Both taught that a person needs to get his or her soul into a certain condition, that one had to effect certain changes and become a certain kind of self in orientation, in thoughts, in actions, in order to achieve salvation. Both scripted the condition of soul or self one had to become as a restoration of the state one's soul or self had before, as if the models and techniques of self-manipulation they provided enabled a kind of self-discovery. Both religions, therefore, presupposed a distinctive faculty within the human person within which personal identity was located, and which already in some sense existed to be found and fixed. But what if the soul alleged to be already there is, in fact, made in the very process of looking for it? What if it is one of the primary effects of a religion to invest

a soul into a body, that is, to form a locus of identity by which the various drives, impulses, thoughts, feelings, and needs of an individual may be coordinated and managed?

Regardless of the particular ends to which a religion is attending, and in terms of which its own discourse is dominated, one of its principal means will be a program of practices—rhetorical, ethical, social, ritual—through which adherents are harnessed to their expected roles in service of those ends. In adhering to such a religious program, a person supplies him- or herself with constituents of identity, those properties of self-presentation to which we refer when we say, "Augustine was a Manichaean" or "Augustine was a Catholic." This self-making may be a mere byproduct of the religion's primary program. But it is one of the prime historical effects of a religion. Both Manichaeism and Nicene Christianity devoted considerable attention and resources of discourse and practice to techniques of self-making, self-molding, production of selves conformed to their respective ideals. The extent of this effort reminds us that one of those areas of human concern at the limits of power and control that evokes the phenomenon we call religion is the problem of self-control, power over oneself, management of one's conflicted drives and impulses, consistency and promise-keeping and discipline in working toward goals—or even having goals toward which to orient the self. This is, if you will, the comparative- religion theme I bring to an otherwise historically focused intellectual biography of Augustine.

Compared to the previous volume of this study, the one you are reading now focuses more decidedly on indoctrination than on inhabitation. This shift of balance is due, in part, to the very unsatisfactory state of our knowledge about what Augustine was actually doing in his daily activity as a "Catholic" during this period. Frederic van der Meer's excellent attempt to get at this sort of information for Augustine's later life[26] had the advantage of the much larger volume of Augustine's later correspondence, as well as his increasing references to practices in his writings of this later period. But this is also to say that we have, in some sense, a very different Augustine in later material, *after* the development, the self-making, I am trying to capture here. This "middle-period" Augustine appears almost exclusively as a theoretician, as someone working primarily with discourse, rather than engaging with a system of practices. Certainly, he participated in the latter; but they rarely feature in his rhetorical self-presentation, with the notable exception of the dramatic performance of *confessio* with which this study concludes, where he

employed, of all things, a distinctively Manichaean practice to make a nuanced point against the practice of Manichaeism as he had experienced it.

Yet I think it will be lost on no one that I treat Augustine's production of discourse as itself a practice, and his invocation of "doctrines" as something of a ritual act. "Religious tenets are indeed symbols," Martin Southwold has argued, "functioning in very much the same ways as the concrete objects or actions that are more readily recognised as ritual symbols; and the acts of affirming, assenting to, or even adhering to, such tenets are ritual acts, like immolation, genuflexion, and so forth."[27] Recitation and reiteration of certain terms and phrases declares one's membership in a religious community, and reinforces identification with it. Augustine invoked such stock identifying terms and phrases for precisely such a purpose, and he came to respond to them just as he did to other paraphernalia of the Church. But the performative quality of his works went beyond that, because of the oral context of his relation to text in general. He read by reciting aloud the text before his eyes, speaking the words of others out of his own mouth just as he would have recited a prayer, a creed, or a hymn. He composed his own works the same way, by dictating aloud to scribes, repeating his thoughts, hearing himself say them, doubling back and refining what he wanted to express. A number of his "books," of course, are only slightly redacted transcriptions of publicly delivered rhetorical performances, not to mention his liturgically framed sermons. Thus, we can be sure that Augustine was listening to himself, and responding to his own words as they came out of him, as part of his religious "indoctrination." As Mead has observed, "That the person should be responding to himself is necessary to the self, and it is this sort of social conduct which provides behavior within which that self appears."[28] As Augustine developed aptitude in hitting the marks of orthodoxy in his speech acts, he continually adjusted his relation to this authorized phrasing of his tradition, reconsidered its meaning, found a way to make it his own.

I take a page from the work of Judith Butler in thinking about how the Augustine who emerged in his "middle period" works related to the Nicene Christian system and its embodiment in the Catholic Church. Butler has discussed the need a system of power has to invest in subjects as the means of reproducing itself and maintaining its historical persistence. What do we mean in talking here of a "system of power"? This phrase belongs to a tradition of examining political, economic, social, and cultural interactions in terms of power relationships: the expansion and coming to dominance in a

particular time and place of a certain order of things—a regime, institution, discourse, value system, canon, or norm—to which others are subordinated. The rise of the Catholic Church in the second half of the fourth century, for example, represents a reordering of social and cultural norms and structures in the Roman Empire, one very much desired by those loyal to this particular cause, who saw the success of this particular system of power as very much in everyone's best interests. Building on the analysis of Michel Foucault, Butler has noted that systems of power become less agonistic and more stable in their historical persistence when they succeed in becoming "the willed effect of the subject,"[29] rather than an order imposed through instruments of physical coercion, such as the sanction of law. In fact, it may be doubted that any system of power can long sustain itself solely through overt coercion, to say nothing of the fact that such a path is anathema to the ideals and self-image of many such systems. Members of the Catholic Church both used and abhorred legal proscription and physical coercion in the struggle with competing systems, and labored for the day when everyone would be Christian—their kind of Christian—willingly and spontaneously, in no small part because it would be the only viable option of selfhood available.

We can think of Augustine's conversion to Nicene Christianity in Judith Butler's terms as an act of "subordination that the subject brings on itself,"[30] in order to construct itself as a certain kind of subject, one that reproduces a religious system as its own willed effect on its own person. To imagine how this willed effect comes to be achieved may require some reference to the model of self-formation offered by Mead, which draws connections between socialization and internalization. The individual adopts from others in the community a vantage point of self-scrutiny and self-limitation. By enacting social performances of the approved self, and having that self reflected back affirmatively, one habituates oneself to seeing oneself in the terms of one's own performance, and in this way interiorizes performance as experienced identity. "This is who I want to be" becomes "this is who I am" by convergence around the empowering sense of accomplishment and success in meeting the standards of one's "significant others." The human need for self-intelligibility and self-mastery within a context of social approval may provide one of the clearest examples of what Butler identifies as "a primary vulnerability to the Other," by which "the price of existence is subordination" to an originally external system of power that promises to provide the means to satisfy those human needs.

Conversion entails taking up a role and set of performative expectations,

and putting oneself at the disposal of some social-ideological "apparatus" as a reproduction and transmitter of its self-ordering system. By a public act of conversion, one declares his or her intention to proceed with a process of "self-discovery" within a particular discourse and community life. Someone like Augustine was expected to take himself as "an object of knowledge and field of action,"[31] as Foucault phrases it, confirming the supplied paradigms in his own self-understanding and enacting a replication of the given models of self-realization. His self-identification with the Catholic community placed him in a situation of "self-legitimation,"[32] "self-verification,"[33] or "answerability,"[34] by which he was motivated to conform his speech-acts and other conduct more and more to the ideological and practical system with which he had associated himself and in which he saw himself defined.[35] The story of Augustine's making a "Catholic" self is then, in part, an account of his identifying the discourse and practices promoted by the institutions of the Catholic Church as the medium of self-manipulation through which he would govern himself as an agent, and observing what choices he made in assembling specific resources and elements of the Catholic system into a self-regulatory vis-à-vis, through which he could engage and grasp himself as the sort of self or soul he wished to be.

Yet if the subject is in this way vulnerable in its dependence on systems of power to provide sources of identity and meaning, Judith Butler has highlighted also the reciprocal vulnerability of a system of power in its reliance on individual subjects to be the location of its articulation. Systems of power transcend specific individuals only in a persisting collectivity of other individuals; there is no system of power without the individuals who offer themselves to be points of its articulation. Even with no other system contending for allegiance, any system of power must contend with the variation in the human raw material of its embodiment.

Augustine's case matters more than most because he became an especially important point of articulation for the Nicene Christian system as a whole, successfully reproducing his particular permutation of that system as one of its dominant paradigms. Augustine, I contend, offers a prime example of the capacity, perhaps even the inevitability, of an individually negotiated embodiment of a religion. And this character of the individual human adoption and embodiment of religion is undoubtedly one of the primary forces behind the historical process by which religions change. Each new convert represents an axis around which a religious system makes a slight adjustment as a collective entity, on the way to its as yet undetermined future form. This

may be the bargain religions, as systems of discourse and practice, make with potential adherents, by which they attract in such persons sites of reiteration that, collectively, constitute their historical continuation as social and cultural traditions.

Growing up in Africa, Augustine had looked to Manichaeism as a welcome alternative to a staid and anti-intellectual form of Christianity that held no appeal for him. Now he returned to his homeland with a new system of self-location and self-understanding offering alternatives point-by-point to the Manichaean outlook. In the place of Manichaeism's materialist metaphysic, Augustine now offered Platonic transcendentalism. In place of the assumed shared essence of God and human, he conveyed the utter incorporeality of the divine, separated from all creation by its otherness from all sensory experience and by creation's inherent nothingness. In place of the vivid reality of external evil, he reduced evil to an attitudinal misalignment within humans themselves. In place of literal readings of scripture, with its consequent critique of biblical content, he brought allegory. All this was relatively new to Africa, and would meet with mixed success there. Augustine was not coming to defend an existing "Catholic" orthodoxy, but colonizing Africa with a new, "European" system with which he was returning home. In his opinion, African Christianity needed what he was delivering, to prevent its best people from being lured away to Manichaeism as he had been, in search of a kind of spirituality it was not offering. He was acutely aware that most Christians, indeed most Christian leaders, fell well short of the intellectual depth entailed in the Milanese synthesis.[36] It was up to him and his associates to develop and refine "Catholic" doctrine, "Catholic" community, and "Catholic" selfhood.

In the sophisticated intellectual climate of Italy, Augustine might have been able to hold together in a single self the *curiositas* of the philosopher and the *regula fidei* of the Christian brother; and the colony of intellectuals that formed around Augustine in Thagaste seems to have had as one of its main purposes the preservation of this enlightened atmosphere. But the very different conditions of Africa would not long afford him this luxury, and his project of bringing his old Manichaean friends along on his journey of self-discovery would be appropriated by the starker battle of Nicene Christianity to gain position over Manichaeism as the primary alternative to indigenous "Donatist" Christianity. For Augustine, focused almost exclusively on metaphysical questions of reality, truth, and meaning, the schism between the Donatists and Catholics that preoccupied the Christian polity of Africa at first

failed to register much significance. Only the rivalry of ideas mattered, and Augustine's own prior attraction to Manichaeism signaled the threat it posed in the battle for the minds of the educated urban elite within whose circle he moved. He and his associates organized themselves as a kind of "think-tank," for the purposes of developing and disseminating a system capable of both combating and winning over the Manichaeans. By turning his attention back to the Manichaeans, Augustine revealed that he considered them a prime missionary field for his new and improved "Catholic" Christianity, as much as it suggests that he considered them its primary competition.[37]

Either out of his own zeal or in fulfillment of the role he found unavoidable in the expectation of his peers, Augustine took on the role of the apostate, the informed former insider best equipped to challenge and critique Manichaean claims and pretensions. He blasted his former faith with the disappointment and resentment of one who had wasted years of his life upon it.[38]

> The thought of the Manichaeans filled me with angry resentment and bitter sorrow, yet I pitied them too, because in their ignorance of the sacraments that heal us they raved against the very remedy that could have cured them of their madness.[39] . . . How I wish that my cries could have been heard by those who still set their hearts on shadows and followed lies! Perhaps they would have been made to feel the error of their ways and would have disgorged it like vomit. . . . How I wish that they could see the eternal light within us! Now that I had glimpsed it myself I fretted and chafed because I could not make them see it. . . . [B]ut I could think of no means of helping those deaf corpses, of whom I had myself been one. (*Conf* 9.4.8)[40]

With ironic modesty he dramatically suspends the action before the flood of writings he would produce as an apostate, using his well-honed rhetorical skills in one composition after another, arguing, pleading, explaining. Augustine had the Manichaeans in mind in nearly everything he wrote in the first decade following his conversion.

Augustine positioned himself in his anti-Manichaean writings as someone not only defining his new self over against his Manichaean past, but also seeking to reclaim for himself the significant others who had helped to constitute his identity for so long. Such reclamation of past resources of selfhood stands behind the familiar phenomenon of the apostate missionary. Bringing former friends and relatives into the new faith serves to heal over the

uprootedness of identity that apostasy involves. Along with one's new circle of personal relations, previous ones can resume their place in one's interpersonal network, ameliorating a degree of the alienation that comes with profound personal change. Lingering anxieties about the apostasy are relieved in direct proportion to one's success in persuading valued others to the same course of action. The social self seems to need to bring its society along with it in order to feel the security of never having left home, no matter how far it has actually traveled from where it began.

Accordingly, Augustine sought not just to refute Manichaeism in the service of the Catholic Church, but also to persuade Manichaeans that the Nicene Christianity of that church addressed their concerns more successfully than their own religion. He understood this task in terms of moral duty. "What you aim at in yourself you must aim at in your neighbor, namely, that he may love God with a perfect affection. For you do not love him as yourself, unless you try to draw him to that good which you are yourself pursuing" (*ME* 26.49). Augustine's early anti-Manichaean writings contain several references to his Manichaean friends from his years in Carthage, some of whom he had personally won over to Manichaeism and wished to redeem from that error (e.g., *Acad* 2.3.8; *VR* 12; *Ep* 15.1; *Ep* 27.4; *UC* 1.2–3; *DA* 14.23–15.24). For the remainder of the fourth century, he would temper his anti-Manichaean polemic with sometimes remarkable graciousness and candor, often willing to compromise or sidestep less essential differences, if only the Manichaeans would concede a minimal core of ideas he considered unnegotiable.[41] At times he saw his engagement with the Manichaeans as the primary work of his ministry, and prayed for its successful outcome in the conversion of his former companions.[42] Yet, as far as we can tell, Augustine had only mixed success in his efforts,[43] and his increasing frustration eventually turned his engagement with Manichaeism bitter.

Yet before that bitterness set in, Augustine experienced what is arguably the most important transformation of his understanding in his very long career. Before being dragged away from his own deeply motivated engagement with Manichaeism to the necessary business of taking on the Donatists for mastery of African religious culture, Augustine had found his way to many of the principal themes that would structure his own thinking as a Catholic for the rest of his life. These reformulated themes differed in crucial respects from the set of emphases and understandings of Nicene Christianity with which he had returned to Africa from his conversion in Italy. Between that return and the achievement of a mature set of positions as a Catholic stood

his striving with Manichaeism and little else. The story of Augustine in the fourth century, including the masterworks he produced at its end, has the Manichaean-Catholic encounter as its primary context.

Augustine did not have the luxury of exploring the implications of his faith as a "Catholic" in a vacuum, and so did not simply unfold its inherent meaning. His indoctrination took place in the context of both his prior Manichaean conditioning and his ongoing anti-Manichaean labors. For these reasons, he considered each and every stance as a "Catholic" over against its Manichean alternative, the juxtaposition giving a particular color to the understanding he formed of the tenets of his faith. This process did not revive in him lingering Manichaean sentiments, I argue, but rather, in the pragmatics of the battle joined, impressed upon him, with the force of a completely new encounter, the strength of certain Manichaean positions. Some of these Manichaean positions he simply appropriated, shearing them of their connections to the larger Manichaean system and conforming them to the alternative axioms of the Nicene one. Others prodded him to the development of stronger positions with which the Catholic Church could answer the Manichaean challenge than it had had before. Both kinds of responses Augustine made to Manichaeism became intrinsic parts of his theological repertoire, and of the Western Christian tradition, ever after. Here is how I think that happened.

CHAPTER I

The True Religion

AUGUSTINE RETURNED TO Africa in 388 a new man, the bearer of a new subjectivity.[1] Even while he presented himself as representing an alternative to the options of identity present in Africa, however, his own integration of this new identity into his life was far from complete. It provided the master discourse, but had yet to penetrate and pervade his entire set of self-presentations. He remained engaged in pursuing the life of the philosopher that had held his interest for most of his adult life, now simply recontextualized within a "Catholic" rather than a "Manichaean" setting. He made it quite clear that he considered Nicene Christianity and Manichaeism to share a common set of correct premises with Platonism, on the basis of which a life of mental purification and intellectual ascent could be cultivated. But he regarded the Catholic system of moral discipline as better preparation for Platonic contemplation of intelligible truth than its Manichaean counterpart, and took it as a matter of faith that Nicene creedal assertions and biblical myth symbolically conveyed philosophical truths which Manichaean discourse somehow muddled. Now it was his task properly to perform the persona of a "Catholic" he had learned in Milan to the associated community only now organizing itself in Africa, while articulating the advantages and implications of his new position both for himself and for those whom he wished to follow him into this new opportunity for philosophical and religious synthesis.

Augustine appears to have stayed for some time in Carthage, lodging at least part of the time with a government official in the company of his friend Alypius.[2] Although ultimately he would return to his home town of Thagaste, we find no indication that he had already decided on this course of action. He

may have spent the winter of 388–389 scouting his prospects in his beloved Carthage. They were not good. In the past, he had been able to turn to the Manichaean community for help, both in Carthage and in Rome. His apostasy presumably would have closed that door to him, all the more given the still recent trauma of the anti-Manichaean persecution in the city.[3] Nevertheless, he apparently did not avoid all contact with former Manichaean friends (*MM* 12.26). It must be remembered that as yet Augustine had published—that is, put into circulation—no explicitly anti-Manichaean writings. He still preferred the role of philosopher to that of apostate and polemicist. His most likely purpose in these contacts with his former comrades was recruitment to his new intellectual project. Indeed, for the next decade and beyond—right through the composition of *Confessions*—Augustine never strays far from his single-minded endeavor to win over his Manichaean friends to his new "philosophy."

Whatever the nature and tone of Augustine's contacts with the Manichaeans of Carthage following his return, it could not have helped his prospects among the local non-Manichaean Christians, among them Augustine's host, whom Augustine describes in unmistakable terms as a pious and conservative Nicene Christian. The summer of 389 saw the arrival of the first new edict against the Manichaeans in five years, yet a mere two years after the last prosecutions from which the community must have been still recovering.[4] The language of anti-Manichaean legislation had subtly shifted in this new law from earlier edicts, incorporating allusions to magic that stemmed from the prosecution of Priscillian of Avila by the emperor Maximus, in which the combined charge of Manichaeism and magic had resulted in the death penalty.[5] By associating Manichaeans with nefarious practices, not just dangerous error, Theodosius's edict would have undermined Augustine's efforts to start with a slate clean of his Manichaean past. We do not know whether it was before or after this new law reached Carthage that Augustine decided to give up on Carthage and return to Thagaste.

In Thagaste, Augustine established a communal household on his family property with the lawyer and fellow former Manichaean Alypius, the former government agent Evodius, and Augustine's son Adeodatus (who would die shortly thereafter)—all key figures of Augustine's sojourn in Italy, with whom he had planned just such a philosophical retirement even before converting to Nicene Christianity (*Conf* 6.12.21, 6.14.24; *Acad* 2.2.4). Other local educated and promising young men soon joined them, both from Thagaste itself (e.g., Severus, later bishop of Milevis), and from neighboring towns (e.g., Possidius,

later bishop of Calama). Like conspirators for a coming revolution, a number of this small circle gathered in the modest little town would go on to occupy key episcopacies in the colonial "Catholic" polity of Africa.[6] One by one they would assume posts in cities and towns where, as in Hippo, the Catholic party was a weak minority, second or even third among the Christian sects in number of adherents, and work to advance the cause. Quite a number—perhaps the majority—were former Manichaeans. Later hostile observers characterized the group as a crypto-Manichaean cell; a less polemical assessment would be that Augustine turned to the educated professionals with whom he had associated all his life. He invited these "fellow-travelers" of the Manichaeans, whose commitment had been as faddish and conditional as his own, to renew their common quest for truth in the alternative system he had brought back from Italy. They could establish the sort of lay ascetic household Augustine had observed there (*ME* 33.70) by pooling their resources.

The little community of former Manichaeans and other intellectuals gathered around Augustine sought to "grow god-like in retirement" (*deificari in otio*, *Ep* 10.2)—for, Augustine remarked, "I cannot taste and love that pure good unless I enjoy a certain carefree repose." Through reading and discussion, prayer and contemplation, they aimed at progressive advancement toward transcendence of the mundane world and communion with the intelligible realm. Given the background of those involved, Augustine's outline of premises common to Manichaeans, Nicene Christians, and Platonists in *Morals of the Catholic Church* (begun in Italy but completed in Thagaste[7]) can be taken as a kind of charter for the group, the agreed-upon premises of their shared outlook:

1. human beings desire to obtain a permanent and stable happiness in the good (*ME* 3.4);
2. we serve that goal by identifying ourselves as a soul, which only uses a body as an instrument (*ME* 4.6);
3. on the basis of that recognition, we are to strive for betterment in reasoning and learning (*ME* 5.8),
4. which depends upon moral improvement and the acquisition of virtue (*ME* 6.9),
5. which in turn depends upon the guidance and example of sages and other superior beings, and ultimately on a God who is concerned with the fate of our souls, and provides the assurance of certainty (*ME* 6.10);

6. but since the ordinary human mind is obscured by ignorance, and so cannot directly perceive God or truth, we must be guided by authority to any truths beyond these basic premises, until we are made virtuous enough to perceive truth for ourselves by our trust in authority and our adherence to moral precepts (*ME* 7.11–12).

These premises offered only a framework, of course, on which Augustine wished to erect a more developed system from the progressive understanding of truth he expected to come with mental discipline.

We possess abundant other evidence of the tenor of the Thagaste community. Augustine wrote out short note sheets (*cartulas*) on subjects that arose in the group's discussions (*Retr* 1.25.1), later included in his *Eighty-Three Diverse Questions* (*Diverses questiones LXXXIII*). Passages dating to the Thagaste period address such questions as: what does "soul" properly refer to in a human being (*DQ* 7)? Is the soul self-existent (*DQ* 1)? Is it self-moving (*DQ* 8)? Can truth be perceived by the bodily senses (*DQ* 9)? Does the body come from God (*DQ* 10)? Further discussions concern the nature of the intellect (*DQ* 15), of God (*DQ* 17–22), of the soul (*DQ* 31, 38), and of proper detachment from all that is mutable (*DQ* 33–35). The group had copied out a passage from their reading in a treatise *On the Need to Purify the Mind in Order to See God* that had struck them as an apt motivational summons to their collective task (*DQ* 12), and whose starkly personified dualism appears to have required some explanation from Augustine later in life[8]: in his *Revisions*, Augustine reassured his readers by identifying the author as a pagan (rather than something worse), one Fonteius of Carthage (*Retr* 1.26.2). These notes may have been intended as drafts for the final volume on philosophy of Augustine's intellectual curriculum, a project central to his initial post-conversion plans that he says he abandoned only when ordained to the priesthood (*Retr* 1.6; *Ep* 101).

The few surviving pieces of correspondence from this period fully confirm the impression that Augustine found philosophical rhetoric more appropriate than religious language for his private discourse.[9] This holds true of letters to acquaintances back in Italy as well as to such intimates as his friend Nebridius, from whom, Augustine said, "I conceal nothing that crosses my mind" (*Ep* 3.5). Nebridius could say of these letters, "They speak to me of Christ, of Plato, of Plotinus" (*Ep* 6.1);[10] but the Christ who appears there at times seems to be little more than a front man for Plato and Plotinus when he is not, as he is in *The Teacher* (*De Magistro*), written at this time, another name for the enlightening *nous* that is equally Plotinian and Manichaean.[11]

Even when Augustine expressed himself using biblical terminology in his formal treatises, Christ was still first and foremost God's "power and wisdom" as he had been taught by the Manichaeans, based upon 1 Cor 1:23–24 (cf. *Fort* 9; *CEF* 6; *Faust* 20.8), which, as a divine infusion of *nous*, "dwells in the inner man" (*Mag* 11.38; cf. Eph 3:14–17).[12] While Augustine explored possible ways to understand creedal propositions of Trinity and Incarnation in his correspondence with Nebridius, biblical references fail to appear in any of his private letters written from Thagaste, just as they are entirely absent from the first twenty-six of the notes later collected in *Eighty-Three Diverse Questions*.

In one such letter of the Thagaste period, Augustine outlined the core set of ideas to which he saw himself committed.

> There is a nature mutable in terms of places and times, such as a body. There is also a nature mutable in no way in terms of places, but only in terms of times, such as the soul. And there is a nature which cannot be changed either in terms of places or in terms of times; this is God. What I have here said is mutable in some way is called a creature; what is immutable is the creator. But since we say that everything that we say is existing exists insofar as it lasts and insofar as it is one, and since unity is the form of all beauty, you, of course, see what exists in the highest manner, what exists in the lowest, but still exists, and what exists in an intermediate manner, greater than the lowest and less than the highest. That highest being is happiness itself; the lowest is what can be neither happy nor unhappy. That in the middle lives unhappily by turning to the lowest, but lives happily by conversion to the highest. One who believes in Christ does not love the lowest, is not proud over the intermediate, and thus becomes fit to cling to the highest. And this is the whole of what we are commanded, admonished, and set afire to do. (*Ep* 18.2)

Certainly, this is a deliberately reductive rendition of "the whole" of what Augustine regarded himself as "commanded, admonished, and set afire to do." Yet by its very summary nature, it reveals what Augustine considered to be the heart of the matter, aside from discursive elaborations he accepted as secondarily germane and useful. Nor is this an isolated presentation of his position (cf. *DQ* 19, 20); in fact, it closely matches the opening of *Morals of the Catholic Church* (*ME* 1.1), also composed in Thagaste. But, in the latter treatise for public consumption within the Catholic community, he went on

to elaborate on this philosophical manifesto using biblical material selected for its corresponding sentiments.

In the environment reflected in such material from both his public and private discourse at this time, perhaps it should not be at all surprising that Augustine began the main argument of his contemporaneous presentation of *True Religion* (*De Vera Religione*) by invoking Plato. In this treatise addressed to his patron (and erstwhile Manichaean) Romanianus, Augustine imagined reporting directly to Plato his subscription to the Platonic world view.

> You have persuaded me that truth is seen not with the bodily eyes but by the pure mind, and that any soul that cleaves to truth is thereby made happy and perfect. Nothing hinders the perception of truth more than a life devoted to lusts, and the false images of sensible things, derived from the sensible world and impressed on us by the agency of the body, which beget various opinions and errors. Therefore the mind has to be healed so that it may behold the immutable form of things which remains ever the same, preserving its beauty unchanged and unchangeable, knowing no spatial distance or temporal variation, abiding absolutely one and the same. Men do not believe in its existence, though it alone truly and supremely exists. Other things are born, die, are dissolved or broken up. But so far as they do exist they have existence from the eternal God, being created by his truth. To the rational and intellectual soul is given to enjoy the contemplation of his eternity, and by that contemplation it is armed and equipped so that it may obtain eternal life. . . . You, my master, have persuaded me to believe these things. (*VR* 3.3)

Continuing to speak to "my master" Plato, he posed the following proposition: "Now, if some great and divine man should arise to persuade the peoples that such things were to be at least believed if they could not grasp them with the mind . . . would you not judge that such a man is worthy of divine honors?" (*VR* 3.3). This, then, is Christ, the figure of authority through whom ordinary folk might approach the sublime truths of Plato; and his teaching, Christianity itself, is a kind of "pop-philosophy"—Plato for the masses.[13] Plato himself, Augustine imagined, would regard it as all but impossible to reach the common man under the sway of the senses; but if there might arise a person capable of this feat, "the bearer and instrument of the wisdom of God on behalf of the true salvation of the human race, such a man would

have earned a place all his own, a place above all humanity." "Now this very thing has come to pass," Augustine dramatically declared (*VR* 3.4), proving it with a string of biblical quotes calling people away from material things and the passions toward what Augustine understood to be the Platonic ideal. "These things are read to the people throughout all the earth and are listened to most gladly and with veneration" (*VR* 3.5); as a result people adopt continence, monasticism, and renunciation, and devote themselves to God. Plato, too would join the Catholic Church, Augustine concludes, "with the change of a few words and sentiments" (*paucis mutatis verbis atque sententiis*, *VR* 4.7).

Certainly, we see in this marvelous rhetorical performance Augustine assuming a persona, casting his thinking in a particular discursive garb suited to a specific sort of audience in accordance with his rhetorical training. In other passages of *True Religion*, he employs more traditional Christian phrasing to touch the key bases of his creedal commitments. So which was the "real" Augustine? Both, and neither. "Augustine" as we have him in such a textual persona is, I would suggest, a repertoire of rhetorical stances, culled from various sources and played out for various purposes in his self-performance. If either rhetorical persona represents a "real" Augustine, more transparent to his internal subjective states, we as historians have no way to know it. Nor are we necessarily missing something significant for the historical Augustine. The Augustine we claim to know historically is a performed thing, and his "character" at any given time must be read from the preponderance of his current discourse.

Augustine apparently saw the "philosophical" and "religious" modes of self-presentation of his age as sufficiently consistent with one another, even if we do not. He was able to do so because he had no reason to regard them as competing claimants at the same level of meaning. Platonic phrasing more directly conveyed reality, he believed, while Christian phrasing operated at the level of symbol and metaphor. Both are "true," but at different registers of expression; or at least he assumed so (see *Ord* 2.5.16). He could use them together because he assumed this harmonious relation, even if he had not probed it very deeply. The Augustine expressed in the writings of the initial period of his return to Africa seems to embody the ideals of the detached contemplation of the (Platonic) philosopher, dressed in a nominally yet genuinely Nicene Christian garb. As expressed by Eugene TeSelle,

> He had set out to lead a life in search of wisdom, in a Christian form, to be sure, but with a sense of the superiority of this mode of life to that

> of the ordinary Christian. The tone of the early writings is invincibly classical. Where Christian dogma enters in, it is usually rephrased in language akin to that of philosophy. Popular Christianity is at the margins of his vision.[14]

But at those margins, Augustine saw the biblical allegories, ethical instructions, admonitory sermons, and symbolic rituals of the Catholic Church serving as the instrument of a popular digestion and dissemination of the philosophical truths directly accessible only to the few. He confidently summed up Christian instruction in a paraphrase of the words of 1 John 2:15–16: "Love not the world nor the things which are in the world. For everything that is in the world is lust of the flesh, and lust of the eyes, and the ambition of this world" (*VR* 3.5). Turned by such admonitions away from the false and toward the true, a person might progress in direct contemplation of the immaterial, informed by Platonic metaphysics in mental ascent to the One.

And yet, Augustine clearly saw himself operating in a *religious* literary milieu in the bulk of what he produced for public consumption while in Thagaste. He constructed a self-consciously religious literary set that he published, that is, circulated in multiple copies to a number of recipients back in Italy as well as in Africa,[15] consisting of *True Religion* (*De vera religione*), *Morals of the Catholic Church* (*De moribus ecclesiae catholicae*), *Morals of the Manichaeans* (*De moribus manichaeorum*), and the two books of *Genesis Against the Manichaeans* (*De Genesi contra Manichaeos*). In this anti-Manichaean "Pentateuch," as one admirer termed it,[16] Augustine defined himself against an otherness of which he had once been a part, developing his adopted faith and identity most intently in those areas where he perceived a crucial contrast to his former commitments. For the first time, he engaged Manichaeism as the explicit "other" of his intellectual discourse. His treatise on *True Religion* provided the keystone that held together and capped this project through its dedication to a Manichaean and its systematic explanation of how philosophical and religious commitments were coordinated in Augustine's adopted system. Its anti-Manichaean themes serve as an ever-present subtext to a primarily positive statement of Augustine's new creed (*VR* 9.17).

Given Augustine's new-found regard for authority, we may be struck by how Augustine himself assumed the role of authority among those gathered in Thagaste. A man who had only gone through the basic catechetical instruction prior to baptism, and otherwise had received no formal instruction in Nicene theology, Augustine took on the role of big fish in a very small

pond. No doubt the perceived sophistication of the Milanese milieu in which he had been instructed added stature to someone who already possessed the bearing and habits of a teacher. Nonetheless, Augustine exhibited a certain precociousness in considering himself ready to work out the reasoning behind various pieces of Christian instruction. He frankly listed those dogmas of the Church he himself still primarily believed, and was only in the process of coming to understand: the incarnation,[17] virgin birth, and atoning death of Christ,[18] his resurrection and ascension, the forgiveness of sins, day of judgment, and physical resurrection[19] (*VR* 8.14)—and one could add safely "Trinity"[20] and "Kingdom of Heaven"[21] to the list. It should scarcely need saying that these items constitute the bulk of the Nicene creed, and nearly everything that distinguished the Nicene Christianity to which he had converted from the Manichaeism he had left.

To understand how such a man was, in his time, genuinely a "Catholic," we need to recall the ecclesiastical and legal criteria that made him so. It was above all a matter of the baptismal initiation he received and the company he kept thereafter. His performative avowal of the creed and regular reiteration of its particular phrases, along with a few ancillary acknowledgments of the authority of the episcopal hierarchy and the canon of scriptures, marked him as a "Catholic," and was the primary way he maintained the commitment once made. Upon this minimal grammar of identity, he was free to generate personal articulations—"regulated improvisations" in the words of Pierre Bourdieu[22]—that may or may not correspond with those of other members of his faith community. He became a point of articulation for the Nicene system by taking up its *symboli* and extending their range into realms of meaning effective for himself and his associates. The limit of this discursive riffing would be determined by such effectiveness for more than just himself, and by the variation of meaning deemed tolerable by the other members of the community to which he wished to belong.

True Religion does indeed appear to have been intended, in the words of Carol Harrison, as "a systematic statement of Christian faith which confirms, clarifies, and elucidates the faith to which Augustine was converted in 386."[23] But, given his frank admission in this very treatise that he did not have a discursive understanding of core creedal concepts, Augustine scarcely can be considered capable, at this stage of his intellectual life, of producing "a mature and reflective grasp of the crucial elements of Christian doctrine,"[24] by the standards of his own time, or of his own later self. Naturally, he already cites the Christian *symboli* that would continue to be the reference points

of his discourse throughout his life; but over time he would attach to them a developing understanding that at times would take quite dramatic shifts tantamount to catechresis of his terms. Augustine's commitment to the truth of these *symboli* was indeed unwavering; it was toward in *what sense they were true* that he would channel all of his intellectual effort. He respected such touchstones of membership in the Nicene community as pregnant "mysteries" pointing toward truths, awaiting exposition and integration into his working repertoire of concepts. He accepted that he must start with belief, mere rote iteration of terms and *dogmata* on the basis of authority, and only gradually by the application of reason bring them to life within his thinking, and in this way operationalize them to do real work in his comprehension of reality.

The Priority of Authority

In *True Religion*, Augustine returns to the epistemological fork in the road he had faced between the skeptical pragmatism of the African Manichaean bishop Faustus and the appeal to authority characteristic of both dogmatic schools of philosophy and Nicene Christianity (*VR* 10.20). Faustus, although the leading authority of a religious community that based itself on the supernatural revelations received by its founder, had himself adopted an idiosyncratic skeptical stance toward doctrinal claims, extending not only to the teachings of rival faiths, but even in principle to Manichaean tenets regarding such things as cosmology and Christology.[25] The community he oversaw had attracted Augustine when it had "urged no one to believe until the truth was fully discussed and proved" (*UC* 1.2). In this approach, it broke with the usual expectation of the dogmatic philosophical schools, wherein it was assumed that a novice, much like a child being schooled, would first accept and memorize the core teachings on authority, and only gradually progress in grasping their underlying foundation in reason.[26] Augustine's initial endeavor to adhere to Fautus's skeptical paradigm, however, led him to despair rather than progress; and in his attraction to Platonism and Nicene Christianity he had reverted to the "common sense" of his culture that gave authority priority in the learning process, even though understanding through reason remained the higher goal. Now he reasserted the philosophical instructional trope that authority is appropriate for the "uninstructed," reason more suitable for the "educated" (*Ord* 2.9.26).

Against this background, Augustine set out in *True Religion* to show how the limitations of human knowledge, stressed by Manichaeans in general and by Faustus in particular, actually support the conclusion that authority must be trusted in order to begin the process that leads to rational understanding. In support of this rhetorical purpose, he was willing to mute the Nicene free will position he had been trying to work out rationally in his still incomplete study of *Free Choice* (*De libero arbitrio*), in order to make his epistemological argument that the individual human mind needs guidance from authority. To call an act truly "voluntary" in the forensic discourse of Augustine's age typically required that an agent be in full possession of the facts; anything short of that compromised the liberty of choice by which a person could be held accountable for his or her actions. A soul mistaken about the order of goods and/or attracted affectively to the wrong goods is not in possession of the attributes of voluntariness.[27] Yet in addressing a Manichaean, Augustine strategically recites affirmatively the Manichaean view that "the soul, implicated in and overwhelmed by its sins, cannot by itself see and grasp this truth" (*VR* 10.19; cf. *Keph* 38). Knowledge can never be certain in this world, he agrees, as Paul himself indicated when he spoke of "knowing only in part now," because of the obstacle of "another law in my members fighting against the will of my mind" (*VR* 53.103), combining 1 Cor 13:9f. and Rom 7:23 in a distinctly Manichaean fashion.[28] For this reason, the individual must turn to God and obtain his help in overcoming the passions and desires that cloud thinking and judgment (*VR* 12.24). Augustine could assume that "no one doubts" such concepts and positions, signaling that he understood them to be premises shared by the Manichaeans, on the basis of which he could formulate his arguments (cf. *ME* 7.11–12).

True to these views concerning the human condition and the constant interference of the evil nature with proper perception and thinking, the Manichaeans whom Augustine knew—Faustus most of all—would not swear an oath on the truth of every particular detail of Manichaean teaching (*VR* 49.96; cf. *Faust* 5.2–3; 32.20). But even such skeptics must acknowledge "the light that enables them to be certain that believing is one thing and knowing another," since they themselves asserted such a distinction, and Augustine imagined that they would agree that such a rational faculty is something intelligible rather than material (*VR* 49.96). From this minimal acknowledgment of the human faculty of abstract reason, Augustine claimed, he could lead Manichaeans away from the fantasies they had constructed, by

employing properly the same inductive reasoning rooted in the sensory world that had led them into error (*VR* 32.59–35.65).

Yet Augustine would not rely on such a course of reasoning; he instead suggested that the skeptical position he found among the Manichaeans favored a resort to authority and faith. He recapitulated the Manichaean teaching that God has "used mutable creation . . . to remind the soul of its original and perfect nature," not only in the Platonic sense of forms discernible in nature, but also by sending a series of revelations over time to keep calling humanity back to the truth, manifested in a succession of religious systems (cf. *Keph* 1). Augustine diplomatically maintained merely that Nicene Christianity rather than Manichaeism held the status of the latest, and perhaps by implication ultimate, form of religion given by God (*VR* 10.19).[29] There was more than rhetorical ploy in this dispensationalist scheme, however; it did real discursive work for Augustine. A key (though by no means the sole) aspect of Manichaean criticism of the Old Testament concerned the apparent incompatibility of its moral ethos with that presented by Jesus in the New Testament. Manichaeans objected to granting authority to a text that appeared to celebrate blood sacrifices, battles and wholesale slaughter, polygamy and philandering, and other conduct seemingly at odds with the chaste and restrained values promoted by Jesus. In response to such a critique, Augustine suggested that any differences could be accounted for within a dispensationalist scheme exactly like the one held by Manichaeism itself, by which truth finds different practical expression according to conditions of time and place. He compared God to a father setting different levels of discipline for different children according to their respective dispositions, or a physician prescribing different regimens for different patients according to the needs of their respective conditions. "So divine providence remains entirely without change, but comes to the aid of mutable creatures in various ways, and commands or forbids different things at different times according to the different stages of their disease" (*VR* 17.34). While such moral relativism on Augustine's part may surprise some modern readers, it is consistent with his understanding of moral discipline as wholly in the service of purifying the soul to contemplate God. No earthly moral precept is an eternal truth, but is merely pedagogical, a matter of training the mind for its ascent to God.

Augustine similarly demonstrated the orientation of his argument to Manichaean views in his representation of Christ's Incarnation as principally instructional in purpose, and as such the ultimate example of revelatory

authority. He knew that as a Nicene Christian he was committed to the physical reality of the Incarnation. In *True Religion*, he took his first step beyond merely believing this tenet toward some understanding of it, by suggesting that Christ's physicality furthered his revelatory purpose, as a pedagogical concession to the sensory demands of the masses who must see to believe (*VR* 16.30).[30] He averred that the Nicene sacraments, likewise, should be seen as instructional signs that remind the people of important truths and maintain them as a community (*VR* 17.33).[31] If the Manichaeans truly believed in the necessity of divine aid to the limited faculties of the embodied human, encapsulated in Jesus as an influx of divine *nous* that awakens and liberates the soul, they should be the first to embrace the value of authority and faith, rather than disdaining them.

Through the pragmatic skeptical stance taken by the Manichaean leader Faustus himself, which he had experienced first hand, Augustine lodged a criticism of Manichaeans for their arrogant presumption to know. He characterized human curiosity as a perverse expression of the desire for truth (*VR* 49.94), directed contrary to God's command at creation through the senses rather than at its divine source through reason (*VR* 37.68), and so unavoidably construing spiritual reality in materialistic terms, just as the Manichaeans did (*VR* 49.94). Augustine thus turned the charge of carnal thinking back against the Manichaeans, who had used it in attacking Christian anthropomorphism.[32] By directing one's attention to sensible things, one mistakenly models the transcendent upon them, and wanders lost in misunderstanding of the nature of things, and especially of God, he argued (*VR* 20.40). Manichaeans worked within the terms of their given, unreformed minds, he suggested, and so generated their dualism by turning their subjective likes and dislikes into objective principles of good and evil (*VR* 9.16; cf. *GCM* 1.13.19; *Faust* 32.20).

Even though Mani himself claimed direct revelation of truth, he argued that the same truth could be discerned in the world around us, by extrapolating from partial and limited characteristics to their full and ideal roots in ultimate reality. For this reason, Manichaean proselytism often took the form of inductive reasoning from observation and experience. Limited manifestations in the mixed world of beauty and goodness, they argued, gave some idea of the ultimate beauty and goodness of the unmixed transcendent realm—an idea that Augustine himself had elaborated philosophically in his Manichaean-period treatise, *The Beautiful and the Suitable*.[33] Now he faulted the entire effort to find clues to ultimate reality in what is perceived in the

world through our senses. He regarded it as a futile attempt to hold on to something loved in an ideal form when it had slipped away from us in its physical mutability.

> For it makes him suppose that the material object which the flesh had wrongly delighted in, and which he had known through the uncertain senses, was the primal form . . . so that, when he thinks, he believes he understands, being deluded by shadowy phantasms. If he does not hold on fast to the whole discipline of divine providence but imagines that he does, and tries to resist the flesh, he merely reaches the images of visible things. He vainly excogitates vast spaces of light which he sees has fixed limits here, and promises himself a future habitation there. He does not know that he is still entangled in the lust of the eye, and that he is carrying this world with him in his endeavor to go beyond it. He thinks he has reached another world simply by falsely imagining the bright part of this world infinitely extended. (*VR* 20.40)

The given manner of seeing things must be replaced by a higher vision of reality, which cannot be formed on the basis of analyzing material reality with the ordinary unreformed mind, as the Manichaeans seemed to suggest by their proofs from experience. Until the individual experiences directly this higher vision of reality, he or she must accept the word of those who have done so.[34] Reliance on authority is unavoidable, Augustine argued, even if "reason is not entirely absent from authority, for we must consider whom we have to believe" (*VR* 24.45), and one's ultimate goal is advance beyond authority to understanding by means of reason.

Yet to make the case against relying on reason from the beginning, Augustine found it necessary to empty sensory reality of even the "truth-likeness" that adherents of the skeptical Academy had allowed to it, to a point where he seems to negate even the Platonic concept of the ideas or forms discernible in ordered material reality. He apparently saw a danger that, if he left any correspondence at all between what the senses perceive of temporal reality and what the mind discerns of eternal reality, he could not secure the necessity of turning to authority. Augustine's friend and fellow Manichaean Nebridius put up a staunch defense of more traditional Platonism in this regard, arguing that the doctrine of recollection requires some correspondence between what is experienced in this world and the ideas or forms of the intelligible realm (*Ep* 6). Such correspondence was the basic premise of Manichaean inductive

proofs of the ultimate nature of reality as well. Augustine would have none of this (*Ep* 7). He understood the intelligible realm to be constituted entirely of abstractions, such as number, measure, and order, not of the more concrete embodiments of such principles in images and physical forms (cf. *Ord* 2.11.32–33). All the imagery derived from sensory experience only obscures true reality, epitomized in such imaginary constructs as the face of characters in fiction, the mythical geography of the North Pole or the underworld, or the "five caves of the nation of darkness" in Manichaean myth (*Ep* 7.2.4). There is no connection at all, he insisted, between the physical world experienced through the senses and the intelligible world accessed through the mind.[35] "We once saw these things by the mind. And since we have flowed down from them and have begun to see other things in another way, we see them again by remembering them" (*Ep* 7.1.2), rather than remembering them because we see their derived image in the sensible world. Elsewhere, Augustine showed considerable interest in the Platonic ideas or forms (e.g., *DQ* 46); but pushed by the necessity of a particular line of argument, he radically reconstrued them in a way that opened up a tremendous gulf between God and the world, crossed only by the passage of the falling and ascending human soul, and the pedagogical intervention of God's "power and wisdom," Christ.

Differentiating God and Soul

Augustine connected the epistemological error of seeking to derive truth from sense-bound experience in this world to the human habit of worshipping various things in God's place, above all the soul itself. He suggested that "there could have been no error in religion had not the soul worshipped in place of its God either a soul or a body or some phantasm of its own," when it "should have directed its regard to eternal things and worshipped the one God without whose changeless permanence no mutable thing could have any abiding existence" (*VR* 10.18; cf. *VR* 55.108–11). Augustine considered Manichaeism to be rooted in just such a false exaltation of the human soul to identity with God, and he regarded this difference to be the crucial one between it and Nicene Christianity. In failing to distinguish God from soul, he argued, Manichaeans established their entire system of aspirations and practices—as well intentioned as they may be—on a false premise.

Augustine explored this ostensibly false premise in greater detail in *Morals of the Manichaeans*. In Augustine's view, the Manichaean identification of

the soul with God not only wrongfully exalted the soul beyond its own worth as a mutable thing, but also denied to God the immutability and invulnerability that "the common sense of rational beings perceives, and to which even you assent when you hear it" (*MM* 11.20). That is, even if Manichaeans affirmed God's immutability in theory, Augustine considered their affirmation belied by their own theological narrative, "when you begin to relate your fables, that God is corruptible, and mutable, and subject to injury, and exposed to want and weakness, and not secure from misery . . . for, according to you, God is not only corruptible, but corrupted; not only changeable, but changed; not only subject to injury, but injured; not only liable to want, but in want; not only possibly, but actually weak; not only exposed to misery, but miserable" (*MM* 11.21).

As dramatic as this rhetoric may sound, and as useful as it would be clearly to differentiate Nicene from Manichaean theology, not a single primary Manichaean text actually describes God in this way—as corrupted, changed, injured, or miserable. God remains always transcendent and secure in the realm of light in Manichaean accounts, while divine beings emanating from him, including the soul, engage with evil and pass through experiences that fit Augustine's terms. Augustine knew that, and elsewhere he was just as quick to fault the system for teaching that God sacrificed others to suffering to protect his own realm (e.g., *Faust* 20.17). While presenting what seemed to be a report of Manichaean teaching, therefore, Augustine actually was offering his own extrapolated polemical conclusion from what the Manichaeans actually do assert, namely, "that the soul is God, or a part of God" (*MM* 11.21). It is in this sense, then, with regard to the soul, that the Manichaeans spoke of something being corrupted, changed, injured, in want, weak, and miserable. Augustine had decided for himself that the Manichaean view of the soul necessarily entailed certain consequences for their view of God, which the Manichaeans themselves did not accept. This is evident in *Genesis Against the Manichaeans*, where Augustine repeated the Manichaean identification of the soul with the nature of God, and added, "And thus they are under pressure from us *when we say to them: Then* the nature of God errs and is unhappy and is corrupted by the stain of vices and sins" (*GCM* 2.8.11).

Augustine maintained that, according to the common notions of metaphysics, what is true of the part is true of the whole when it comes to the characteristics of the common nature the parts share with the whole. A piece of gold has the same nature as any other piece. "Hence, when you make the soul part of God, though you allow it to be corrupted as being foolish, and

changed as having once been wise, and in want as needing health, and feeble as needing medicine, and miserable as desiring happiness, all these things you profanely attribute to God" (*MM* 11.22).[36] He acknowledged that his opponents might reject language of the soul or mind being corrupted, and therefore the initial premise of his syllogism. They found it more precise to speak of the soul being in contact with, overlaid by, and imposed upon by evil, while remaining intrinsically pure, like gold buried in mud. Thus, in the continuation of the passage from *Genesis Against the Manichaeans* 2.8.11 quoted above, after characterizing the Manichaean position as one in which the divine nature in souls is "corrupted by the stain of vices and sins," he adds, "or, as you say, it is soiled by the filth of the opposing nature." But if that were so, Augustine rebutted, then the soul would be saved by nature, and "it follows that the spirit is not required to lead the soul into truth, since it is not in folly; nor is the soul renewed by true religion, since it does not need renewal; nor is it perfected by your seals, since it is already perfect; nor does God give it assistance, since it does not need it; nor is Christ its physician, since it is in health; nor does it require the promise of happiness in another life.[37] Why then is Jesus called the deliverer?" (*MM* 11.22). Manichaean prayers and hymns employ the kind of rhetoric Augustine paraphrases here, implying both some impairment of the soul's well-being and its need of assistance to escape this condition. The exact physics of this impairment might technically not involve a change in the soul's nature, but the result was the same: the soul could be negatively affected, in a way that tended to be characterized in terms of bondage and subjection rather than corruption. Since Manichaean rhetoric openly expresses the soul's condition of suffering and need (and since one could directly observe the mutable qualities of the soul, *VR* 10.18), Augustine argued, it followed by the Manichaeans' own preferred approach of inductive reasoning that the same mutability would be attributed ("impiously") to God. "Therefore, according to you, since part of God is God, God is both corrupted by folly, and is changed by falling, and is injured by loss of perfection, and is in need of help, and is weakened by disease, and bowed down with misery, and subject to disgraceful bondage" (*MM* 11.22).[38]

With access to primary Manichaean texts, we are in a position to see how Augustine's rhetorical ploy on this issue failed to deal with the fact that he and they were working within different metaphysical frameworks when they considered the necessary entailments of the soul's common nature with God. While he openly conceded that the Manichaeans deny the logical necessity that God and the soul share identical qualities if they share the same

nature, he simply dismissed their position as contrary to sound philosophical principles. But in the materialist conception of things that Augustine rules out of account, quantity matters—hence Augustine's need to escape the hegemony of quantity in his understanding of the soul in *The Quantification of Soul*, written before his return to Africa. While two material things of the same intrinsic nature potentially possess identical qualities, those qualities will be operative and manifest only in certain masses or degrees of purity of the nature. Under conditions of mixture, some qualities of a nature will go unexpressed as other natures predominate. To formulate a coherent account of how God and soul, though sharing the same nature, might exist in quite different conditions, the Manichaeans needed only to provide an account of a nature that, while possessing immunity from evil at a certain mass (as God), exhibited vulnerability to evil at smaller masses (as souls).

To be fair to Augustine, it may be that such an easily formulated rational account did not reach or impress itself upon Augustine and his associates when they were Manichaean Auditors. He related that this issue of how and why a single immune nature had divided into separate immune and vulnerable portions was "the question which used to throw us into great perplexity even when we were your zealous disciples, nor could we find any answer" (*MM* 12.25). His friend Nebridius had posed it as a conundrum (*complexio*, *Sec* 20): What could evil do to God if the latter simply ignored its assault, foreseeing the calamity that would follow from any engagement with evil and impervious himself to any harm evil might threaten? From what Augustine reported, it would appear that the African Manichaean community familiar to him—effectively leaderless much of the time in the absence of Faustus—had difficulty offering a consistently agreed-upon answer to this puzzle. Individual opinions on the subject coexisted side by side. "Sometimes the answer was, that it was not for the sake of escaping evil or avoiding injury, but that God in his natural goodness wished to bestow the blessing of order on a disturbed and disordered nature." Augustine could raise some (rather weak) logical objections to this explanation, but his primary complaint was that it "is not what we find in the Manichaean books: there it is constantly implied and constantly asserted that God guarded against an invasion of his enemies" (*MM* 12.25).[39]

Another answer seems to have gained wider dissemination in the years following Augustine's departure for Italy; he encountered it in Carthage on his return to Africa in 388, and would do so again in the argument of the Manichaean Fortunatus in Hippo in 392. "Since those times, however,

another answer has appeared which I heard recently at Carthage. For one, whom I very much wish to see brought out of this error, when reduced to this same dilemma, ventured to say that the kingdom had its own limits, which might be invaded by a hostile race, though God himself could not be injured" (*MM* 12.26). This position can be corroborated by Manichaean texts now available to us, which refer to God wishing to protect the inhabitants of the light realm, who as beings of perfect peace do not know martial means of defense.[40] God's omniscience allows him to discern a stratagem that will protect the light realm effectively, involving the emanation of discrete portions of his own nature capable of actually engaging with evil and being absorbed by it, precisely because the divine nature has been reduced in them to a digestible quantity, so to speak. Once mixed with evil, these emanated souls debilitate evil from within.

In place of the emotive drama of the Manichaean myth, Augustine had come to embrace a more static model of a universe beautiful in its perfect orderliness, arranged according to a vast hierarchical scale of being, goodness, and power (*VR* 40.76). Within this hierarchy, the human soul occupies the penultimate position, since it alone of all creation is able to access innate ideas arrived at by deductive reason, rather than through sensory experience: order, proportion, balance, symmetry (*VR* 30.54–55; cf. *Ord* 2.11.32–33). But since the human mind appropriates these ideas imperfectly, and can make erroneous judgments related to them, these ideas in and of themselves are superior to the mutable mind that employs them (*VR* 30.56). They constitute, in fact, an "unchangeable substance" which is nothing other than God (*VR* 31.57–58).

The Human Predicament

And yet, something has happened in this otherwise statically perfect hierarchical order, something that widened the tiny difference between God and soul into a gaping chasm. Augustine explained that, while inferior physical objects are not evil in themselves in God's blessed order, nonetheless the soul, by loving these things that are less than itself, turns from God and lowers itself (*VR* 12.23). Augustine described sin, therefore, not as a wrong choice made in moral terms of evil rather than good, nor as a turn "from substantial good to substantial evil, for there is no substantial evil," but rather as an error of desire or attention "from eternal good to temporal good, from spiritual to carnal good, from intelligible to sensible good, from the highest to the lowest

good. There is therefore a good which it is sin for the rational soul to love because it belongs to a lower order of being" (*VR* 20.38).

In his desire to avoid dualistic themes, Augustine had talked himself perilously close to incoherence in saying that turning to something good is bad. Perhaps more seriously, his rhetoric ran counter to a key component of the Christian ethos. Why is loving what is "lower" bad? Does not God love what is lower? Did not Christ in his descent love what was lower? It would seem that Augustine's hierarchical thinking had replaced such sentiments with the classical world's obsession with superiority and inferiority, with rank and status and power. While Augustine imagined himself to be defending the goodness of material creation against apparently more anti-cosmic Manichaean views, his characterization of human engagement with this supposedly "good" creation was every bit as damning as if it had been intrinsically evil after all.[41] Augustine patched over these problems to a certain extent by borrowing the Plotinian concept of audacity (*tolma*, see *Ennead* 6.1.10.1, 3.7.45.11) to characterize a self-initiated turn (*aversio*) of the soul *in any direction* as self-exalting pride (*superbia*), the soul's quest to exist for itself (*ad seipsam*) and through itself (*per seipsam*) (*GCM* 2.9.12; cf. *Mus* 6.13.40, 6.16.53).[42] By focusing in this way on the soul's turn *from* God, Augustine screens from close scrutiny his problematic characterization of that *toward* which the soul turns.

By definition, this turn the soul makes is freely willed. "We must either say that no sin has been committed or confess that it has been willingly committed" (*VR* 14.27). The first possibility was ruled out, in Augustine's opinion, by the whole premise of religion—Manichaean or Nicene Christian—that there is something to be corrected in human affairs, which religion has means of addressing. Once that was granted, the second possibility followed unavoidably in Augustine's opinion, and not only in his.

> If the defect we call sin overtook a man against his will, like a fever, the penalty which follows the sinner and is called condemnation would rightly seem to be unjust. But in fact sin is so much a voluntary evil that it is not sin at all unless it is voluntary. This is so obvious that no one denies it, either of the handful of the learned or of the mass of the unlearned. (*VR* 14.27)

Augustine was speaking not of some unique freedom of Adam before the fall, but directly of ongoing human experience, as shown by the argument from experience he employed.[43] The common sense of Augustine's culture,

as well as the more carefully reasoned position of philosophers such as Aristotle, ruled out involuntary crime or sin as a meaningless oxymoron.[44] Guilt requires responsibility. So if actual sins—as that term is accepted as having meaning—are committed, they are by definition committed freely. Not just the first sin of the first single soul, as Augustine would say later in his career, but *souls*—plural—continue to act freely in choosing to sin: "I cannot see that it can be doubted that souls have free choice in willing" (*VR* 14.27).[45] "God judged that men would serve him better," he went on to say, "if they served him freely." Even if sinful desires and affections might be attributed to the physical senses or the promptings of the body, they depended on the will, that is, the consent of reason, to be acted upon (*VR* 14.28). Despite living with a body that has become "weak and mortal" as a just punishment for sin (*VR* 12.25; cf. *Mus* 6.5.14), despite "moral difficulty that ensues from vice" (*VR* 20.39), nevertheless "even in this corruptible body it is permitted to us to work towards righteousness" (*VR* 15.29). God, Augustine maintains, "grudges nothing to any, for he has given to all the possibility to be good, and has given to all the power to abide in the good as far as they would or could" (*VR* 55.113). Therefore, to "believe in God and turn from the love of visible and temporal things to the fulfillment of his precepts" is something that "all have in their power if they will" (*GCM* 1.3.6).[46] A person can ascend from "inferior and temporal things" if he or she "begins to cleave to the eternal spectacle of unchangeable truth" (*VR* 38.71). "What obstacle then remains," Augustine asked rhetorically, "to hinder the soul from recalling the primal beauty which it abandoned, when it can make an end of its vices?" (*VR* 39.72). It is in full confidence of the Nicene Christian free-will position, therefore, that Augustine can reduce his Platonic ascent of the soul to a clear formula: "If the soul, while it continues in the course of human life, overcomes the desires which it has fed to its own undoing by enjoying mortal things, and believes that it has the aid of God's grace enabling it to overcome them, if it serves God with the mind and a good will, it will undoubtedly be restored, and will return from the mutable many to the immutable One" (*VR* 12.24).

The soul's sinful self-exaltation amounts to only a slight overreaching, according to Augustine's initial conception of the created order. The soul properly occupies the place next only to God's in the hierarchical order of the universe (cf. *Mus* 6.5.13). Therefore it attempted in a wrongful manner to assert a mastery over creation to which in Augustine's view it was perfectly entitled.

> For what else does a man seek in this case but to be if possible the sole lord of all things, perversely imitating almighty God? If he submissively imitated him by living according to his commandments, God would put all things under him, and he would not reach such deformity as to fear a little animal even while he wants to rule over men. Pride in a manner seeks unity and omnipotence, but in the realm of temporal things, where all things are transient like a shadow. (*VR* 45.84)

While promoting humility before God, Augustine held out the promise of power and mastery as its motive. He rejected not power per se, but only illegitimate power, in this way affirming and carrying into Christianity a value system based on a power model characteristic of Roman society. "We want to be unconquered and rightly so, for the nature of our mind is unconquerable though only as we are subject to God in whose image we are made. But his commandments had to be observed, and if they were obeyed no one would overcome us" (*VR* 45.85). God assigns the fallen souls of sinners temporarily to a lower place in the cosmic hierarchy "until by their orderly movements they return to from where they fell" (*MM* 7.9). The soul's proper place is to dominate all lower things, and in its final perfection that is what it will do (*VR* 23.44). "If the rational creature serve its creator by whom, through whom, and to whom it was made, all other things will serve it" (*VR* 44.82), including the body.

When people mistakenly love creation, Augustine asserted, they are responding to the traces of order within it (*VR* 42.79), perceive by their reasoning and judging minds, not through the senses (*VR* 43.80). In fact, anything offered by the senses, for good or ill, means nothing to the soul. Augustine discounted physical suffering as a matter of indifference. Only what is impressed on the mind matters (*VR* 20.39). Death is not an evil for material things, which naturally change from one form to another; only the binding of an immaterial, immortal soul to a mortal body makes death an evil, because only in this instance is it unnatural.[47] By having affection for lower things, such as the body, the soul subjects itself to them and, in their transitory nature, one opens oneself to the evil of separation and loss.

This line of thinking led Augustine inexorably to the Stoic ethic of valuing only what cannot be a source of subjection beyond oneself.[48] "He who loves only what cannot be snatched from him is indubitably unconquerable, and is tortured by no envy" (*VR* 46.86; cf. *DQ* 33–35). Augustine's efforts to

wed such an ethic to the biblical command to love one's neighbor as oneself conform the latter Christian commandment to the Stoic ethic, rather than vice versa. How, he wondered, can we love our neighbor in a manner that is not vulnerable to being taken away from us? It can only be by loving our neighbor in a way that has nothing to do with any of the mutable qualities of the neighbor's life. It is only an "inner fellowship" that binds one to a neighbor. "If we are ablaze with love for eternity we shall hate temporal relationships. . . . Whoever loves another as himself ought to love that in him which is his real self. Our real selves are not bodies. So we are not to desire and set great store by a man's body," for "we must hate that from which we wish to be set free" (*VR* 46.89). Augustine argued that one should wish for one's neighbors not physical well-being or mundane happiness, but that they transcend the needs of "a beast of burden" as much as we aspire to do (*VR* 46.87). Loving one's neighbor is not to imitate love of family, which is an improper love; there would not even be human families if there had not been a primordial sin that led to reproduction (*VR* 46.88; cf. *GCM* 1.22.33). In line with Stoic tenets of detachment, then, the rightly acting person "is not made unhappy by the unhappiness of another, any more than he is made just by the justice of another. As no one can take from him God and justice, so no one can take from him his happiness. If at any time he is touched with feeling for another's danger or error or grief, he lets it go so far as to help or correct or console that other, but not to subvert himself" (*VR* 47.91). Here the philosophical value of detachment, *apatheia*, finds a central place in Christianity (see *DQ* 35) that had been in the works ever since members of mainstream Roman society sought to be Christians at the same time.

Augustine's entire intellectual and spiritual program at this stage of its development depended on the God-likeness of the soul, its natural proximity to the divine, its connectedness to the intelligible realm through the mind, and its ascensional imperative away from the body and the material in general. Yet other themes and alternative models for thinking about the self and its relation to God and cosmos already had begun to make their appearance, due to Augustine's exposure to traditional Nicene Christian tropes. Chief among these was the homiletical rhetoric of human creatureliness in relation to God as creator, provider, and savior, derived in turn from biblical expressions found in Augustine's preferred religious reading of this period, the Psalms. Such language of human self-abasement and utter dependence came into play to a greater degree whenever Augustine wished to draw a contrast with Manichaean anthropology, and widened what was otherwise a

tiny technical differentiation of God and soul as highest and next-to-highest entities into a stark existential polarity.

Augustine's adoption of an understanding of the human soul that differentiated it from God's nature, and increased emphasis on this differentiation nurtured in conflict with the Manichaean alternative, had tremendous significance for the trend of all his later thought, even if all of that later thought is not yet implicated in his initial comments on the subject. His conviction that the human soul is a created thing slightly less exalted than God established the essential limiting premise that constrained his use of Platonic ideas of immateriality in his exploration of the nature of the soul. Any notion that God and souls share a common nature had been ruled out as an acceptable premise, "prohibited to believe" (*nefas est credere*, *GCM* 1.8.11). He understood humans to be animated not by a portion of the divine, as the Manichaeans thought, but by a sustaining act of God that functions immaterially. The soul's relationship to God took for him the form not of a unity, despite Neoplatonic inclinations in that direction, but of a dependence, in which God looks upon the fallen soul not with the intimacy of sympathy or empathy, as in Manichaeism, but with the distance of judgment. Hierarchy trumped monism for Augustine—not only in this material world where order requires such hierarchy, but also, by a peculiar extension of the model, into the immaterial realm where order theoretically should not be needed. For all his monistic tendencies fed by Platonism, Augustine considered difference and rank to be permanent features of ultimate reality. Hierarchy, in fact, formed the bridge across which Augustine crossed from his initial Plotinian monism to his emerging Nicene creationism. The hierarchical scale of being that dominated his early post-conversion writings rapidly flattened out in his African writings into a stark dualism between being and nonbeing, Creator and creation.

Ex nihilo, nihil est

In pondering the gulf that separates the unchangeable from the many changing things of material existence, Augustine began to put meat on the bones of the Nicene doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.[49] Created things are vulnerable to falling away towards nothingness because they are "in themselves nothing" (*per seipsa nihil sunt*, *VR* 19.37). They do not possess existence as part of their intrinsic nature, but only as an endowment from God. "A life, therefore, which

by voluntary defect falls away from him who made it, whose essence it enjoyed, and, contrary to the law of God, seeks to enjoy bodily objects which God made to be inferior to it, tends to nothingness" (*VR* 11.21). Augustine had come to consider this tendency to nothingness the essence of evil (*MM* 5.7). But, at the same time, the nothingness towards which the sinner tends is the original nonexistence from which God made humanity and all creation (*DQ* 4).

Manichaeism had offered Augustine a rather typical second- or third-century Christian cosmogony, postulating God's creation of the cosmos (through various intermediate agencies) out of preexisting, recalcitrant material. Any defect in creation was to be explained by the limitations of the material with which God worked. While some Christians regarded this matter as merely inert, others, such as the Manichaeans, considered it to possess actively evil qualities. For the Manichaeans, this inherently evil substance was utterly alien to the divine soul and, insofar as the latter yielded in its mixture with evil and consented to evil's inclinations, it had been overwhelmed by something else utterly alien to itself. In this way, sin was understood as an overcoming of what one truly is by something outside and foreign to the self, a coerced alienation of the self from its own proper nature. While Manichaeism did not teach that one was saved by nature, it did offer a rather optimistic picture of the naturalness of the soul's goodness, and therefore its inherent potential for salvation. Its main difficulty, as Augustine discerned, was accounting for how the soul ever becomes complicit in acts contrary to its nature.

With Augustine's commitment to the idea of the soul's creation *ex nihilo*, however, sin amounts to the soul's turn *back* to the nothingness from which God drew it into existence, to its own proper nonbeing. It is a rejection of the gift of existence and a subsidence back into the nonbeing that the soul is of itself without God's creating and sustaining endowment of being. In this way, Augustine believed God would be exonerated from responsibility, even if something he created bears that responsibility. "He on whom nonbeing has no claim is not the cause of lacking (*causa deficiendi*), i.e., of the tending toward nonbeing, because he is, if I may say so, the cause of being (*causa essendi*)" (*DQ* 21). Yet this logic only worked within Augustine's very carefully framed premises of creation *ex nihilo* and a metaphysical limit on God's creative act.

> Why do they become defective? Because they are mutable. Why are they mutable? Because they have no supreme existence. And why so? Because they are inferior to him who made them. Who made them?

> He who supremely is. . . . Why did he make them? In order that they might exist. (*VR* 18.35)

The initial "because" answer in this chain poses a serious problem, in its implication of *inherent*, *unavoidable* defectiveness, just as the "in order to" answer at its end raises the specter of failure of God's purpose.[50] Even for Augustine, there is a kind of preexisting, recalcitrant *condition*, even if not substance, with which God contends in creation; P. Séjourné has referred in this context to a "stigma of non-being."[51] God appears unable or unwilling to overcome a law of nature that demands that what he brings into existence must be less than he, and therefore (and why therefore?) vulnerable to falling back towards nonexistence, even if God has the (limited) capacity and/or will to restrain it from complete extinction, so that "nothing is allowed in the providence of God to go to the length of nonexistence" (*MM* 7.9). In reaction to a Manichaeism that he understood as implying that souls are saved by nature, Augustine went to the extreme of defining souls in such a way that they are damned by nature, doomed to subside back into their original nothingness, but for the supernatural sustaining intervention of God. It was a powerful thesis, rich in its potential to generate large parts of Augustine's future theology and anthropology, if also grave in its implications for the darkening of his vision of the worth of this supreme of God's creations.

There is no denying that in speaking of things being made of or from nothing, Augustine ventured dangerously close to endowing this "nothing" with quasi-substantiality, with the qualities of the recalcitrant material found in other cosmogonies. He went so far as to say that "humankind was made from nothing . . . nothing is, so to speak, its matter (*eius quasi materias est nihilum*)" (*DQ* 4).[52] But, strictly speaking, in the *ex nihilo* scenario things are made not from nothing, but from God's creative *fiat*. To say they were made from nothing means simply that before this *fiat* there was absolutely nothing there, not even some raw material. Everything that goes into the existence of something comes from God. By the same clarification, it should not be possible to talk of some core of nonbeing remaining in something created by God, because this would imply some limit or defect in God's creative power.[53] Since the creative and sustaining power of creation comes *from* God, it should not be possible for it to fail—unless God lets go. By contrast, Augustine regularly referred to a human obligation to hold on to God. This unique responsibility (not shared by any other existent thing) rests upon the free will with which God has endowed people. Such an idea would seem to suggest

that humans are placed in a condition of vulnerability unknown to the rest of creation. Manichaeans attacked the Nicene position on free will on these grounds, challenging the concept of God entailed in a scenario in which God deliberately excluded humans from his otherwise automatic and unilateral sustenance of creation.

Despite any tenuous monistic premises underlying Augustine's early Platonic metaphysics, therefore, he seized upon the established Nicene position of creation *ex nihilo* as a concept that did real work for his overall conception of the human predicament. Cherry-picking Plotinus, he abandoned the idea of the soul's inherent unity with the divine, as sharing problematic ramifications he finds in the same idea in Manichaeism, while retaining the Plotinian opposition of being and nonbeing[54]—a model every bit as dualistic as the Manichaean one, however much it differs in its details and implications. For the Manichaeans, the dualistic divide runs down the middle of existence, with the souls of human beings as of all living things intrinsically belonging to the side of good, which has its highest manifestation in God himself. The deepest ramifications for Augustine's later thinking grow out of his distinctive twist on dualism, which synthesized the Nicene emphasis on human creatureliness with Plotinian categories of being and nonbeing. Out of this synthesis comes the perspective by which everything other than God—including the human soul—falls on the negative side of the dualistic division of reality.

As Carol Harrison has observed, "the ontological divide which the doctrine of creation from nothing places between the Creator and creation seems at first to contradict any idea of an ascending hierarchy by imposing a complete and uncompromising divide between the divine and the rest of created reality: body and soul are both created from nothing and both are therefore on the same level."[55] The apparent contradiction between the monistic theme of ascending hierarchy, by which the soul occupies an ontological status vastly superior to that of the body, and the dualistic theme of ontological divide between creator and creation, by which soul and body possess a common created nothingness, reflects the initial merely juxtaposed character of these two models in Augustine's repertoire at the time—a character that would be subsumed within something having the appearance of a synthesis only by the time of *Confessions*. A similar awkward juxtaposition existed between the concept of a tenuously existent soul *ex nihilo* and the scenario of the soul's fall so closely tied to Platonic and Manichaean notions of the soul's essential God-likeness. The former concept and the latter scenario appear to do the

same work, as alternative accounts of the soul's condition. Harrison notes this apparent disconnect.

> Drawn from nothing, [creation] is defined by temporality, mutability, and corruptibility. These are not the result of sin, but are what define created nature. The tendency which created nature displays to fall short of the good, its incompleteness, its instability and fragility, the difficulty it experiences in holding on to existence, is an inherent part of its nature, not a punishment for some previous sin.[56]

When Augustine spoke in terms of a hierarchical scale of being, with the soul considered as "almost" what God is, he tended to associate these fatal characteristics of creation with the body, with all that is experienced through the senses—in short, precisely with the *material* from which the soul is distinguished as *immaterial* (e.g., *Ep* 7.5–7). But when his focus shifted to a dualistic gap between God and the soul, the soul itself bore these characteristics, as if it were itself material rather than immaterial in nature. The tension might have been resolved, had Augustine been able to come to a conclusion about the exact origin of the soul, and therefore its greater similarity to material or immaterial things in its most essential characteristics. But though he had decided preferences on this question, he lacked the certainty to settle it once and for all.

Augustine's initial anti-Manichaean, "optimistic" stress on the goodness of creation ("all existence as such is good," *VR* 11.21) and its permeation by divine order ("matter participates in something belonging to the ideal world, otherwise it would not be matter," *VR* 11.21), while remaining technically valid claims in themselves, gradually lost ground in Augustine's overall discourse to the implications of a creation rooted in nothingness. This darker, less intrinsically "optimistic" vision of the status of the soul in relation to God may at first have been merely a metaphysical technicality serving primarily as an anti-Manichaean corrective;[57] but it gradually cast its shadow on every corner of Augustine's reflections on the human predicament.

CHAPTER 2

Myth and Morals

IN THE FACE of aggressive Manichaean proselytization, by which "they pursue both the learned . . . and the unlearned," Augustine had been advised by those more familiar with the current African scene to abandon the pretensions of his philosophical compositions in favor of something more widely useful in the competition for the hearts and minds of the people.[1]

> For I was pleased by the opinion of some truly Christian men who, though they had been well trained in the liberal arts, nonetheless saw, when they read the other books we published against the Manichaeans, that the less educated understood them either not at all or only with difficulty. They advised me in a friendly fashion not to abandon the common manner of speaking if I was planning to uproot these destructive errors from the minds of the uneducated as well. For the learned also understand this familiar and simple language, but the unlearned do not understand the former. (*GCM* 1.1.1)

This shift from elite to popular discourse went hand in hand with a change in subject matter from the domain of *philosophia* to that of *religio*. Augustine's conversion to both Nicene Christianity and Platonism carried with it a particular assumption about how religion and philosophy complemented each other and worked together to free the soul from its bondage in this world. He saw in the adherents of Platonism those who recognized the transcendent meaning of true happiness, but did not know or spell out a method for attaining it. For that, he needed a regimen of mental purification and perfection,

comparable to the one he had followed without success as a Manichaean. This he found in the *religio* of the Catholic community, whose moral rhetoric made use of themes and tropes already considerably assimilated to Platonic discourse. The Catholic moral system presented its rationale in the properly religious discursive mode of myth, whose symbolic language Augustine assumed could be interpreted in Platonic terms.

We can see a correlation, evident to Augustine in hindsight (*Retr* 1.9.1),[2] between this shift in his rhetorical mode from "philosophy" to "religion" and the explicitness of Manichaeism as the Other over against which he took his positions. In his Italian philosophical compositions, Augustine had avoided even using the terms "Mani" and "Manichaeans," and often left the positions he wished to challenge implicit, or alluded to them in a way that only insiders would recognize. His rhetorical approach masked to a certain degree the social and ideological context from which his statements took meaning as positions over against alternatives. Once back in Africa, Augustine found it necessary or desirable to fulfill the public role of apostate, and enter into overt polemics with those representing the identity he had left behind.

Since myth and morals represented the principal contributions of "religion" to Augustine's new commitments, he saw a need to combat Manichaeism as a religious identity directly on these two battlegrounds.[3] He sized up the weapons of his opponents: "First, they find fault with the Scriptures which they either misunderstand or want to be misunderstood; second, they parade the image of a chaste and remarkable self-control" (*ME* 1.2). Accordingly, in *Genesis Against the Manichaeans* Augustine employed the allegorical method he had learned from Ambrose to redeem the biblical creation story's symbolic worth in the face of Manichaean criticism of its literal meaning, while in *The Morals of the Catholic Church*, with its companion volume *The Morals of the Manichaeans*, he compared critically the moral systems of the two rival communities.[4]

How to Read a Myth

Augustine had already valued the New Testament as a Manichaean; his conversion to Nicene Christianity entailed acknowledging the authority of the Old Testament as well, which as a Manichaean he had rejected.[5] Such formal acknowledgment was a purely illocutionary act, a declaration of allegiance to one of the prime icons of the Catholic community without any necessary

intellectual ramification. Augustine had been able to overcome his prior disdain of the Old Testament, and embrace it as authoritative, only because Ambrose in his sermons had demonstrated how allegorical interpretation enabled him to bypass deeply troubling elements in the text's apparent literal meaning (*UC* 8.20). "I came to regard those passages which had previously struck me as absurd, and therefore repelled me, as holy and profound mysteries" (*Conf* 6.5.8). Manichaean criticisms of the Old Testament taken literally retained a certain validity; even as a Catholic, Augustine did not disagree that when read literally the Old Testament taught many things at odds with the Christian outlook and value system. Yet the Catholic Church declared it to be scripture, and Augustine had decided to accept the authority of the Church. For that reason "there is nothing more pernicious than to take whatever is there literally, that is, by the words, and nothing more wholesome than (to take it) as revealed by the spirit" (*UC* 3.9).[6] Within Augustine's new Nicene Christian commitment, the evident problem with the literal meaning of scripture only pointed out that the true meaning must lie elsewhere, as Roland Teske explains.

> Augustine tells us that he would have preferred to give a literal interpretation of the text. . . . However, he found that he could not understand the text in its literal sense in a pious manner that is worthy of God. That is, he had recourse to a figurative interpretation of Genesis because he could not take the text in its literal sense and avoid impiety or blasphemy toward God. Hence, his spiritual interpretation of the text is not something he regards as optional, but necessary, not something in addition to the literal sense, but the only way of interpreting the text that accords with the Christian faith.[7]

Augustine's task as a public intellectual with a commitment to the authority of the Catholic Church and its scriptural canon, then, was to apply reason to the text on the presumption that it was divine revelation, in order to find a meaning worthy of that status.

Despite Augustine's (re)discovery of allegory in the sermons of Ambrose, there was nothing new in the technique; it had long been de rigueur in the intellectual analysis of myth, and was the standard philosophical approach to myth of Augustine's age.[8] Indeed, the very word "myth" was understood to refer to sacred tales *meant* to be interpreted allegorically, usually by finding "scientific" metaphysical truths symbolically represented in the story. Both

the Genesis narrative and the Manichaean creation account were looked upon by educated people as popularized just-so stories encoded with philosophical meanings. Coming from a classical education where such interpretations of myth were taken for granted, Augustine had expected an eventual initiation into the hidden meaning of the Manichaean myth. He found to his chagrin that no such interpretation was forthcoming, and this had been one source of frustration contributing to his eventual apostasy. The Manichaeans, motivated by a concern to conservatively preserve and transmit Mani's teachings exactly as he had presented them, eschewed any interpretation beyond the literal sense of the myth he revealed. For this reason, the pagan philosopher Simplicius, writing a few generations later than Augustine, insisted that the Manichaean sacred tales could not properly be called myths—by definition symbolic forms of discourse—because "they do not think they have any other meaning."[9]

Manichaean literalism therefore represented a counter-cultural stance—at least counter to elite culture—on how to read a myth, and Augustine's apostasy from them marked a return to the norms of the larger intellectual culture. The Manichaeans' refusal to embrace the standard philosophical method of interpretation marked them in the eyes of their critics as anti-intellectual purveyors of mere superstition, and tainted their myths as mere *fabula*, *figmenta ludicra*, and *inania* (*VR* 10.18, 25.65, 50.98; *Conf* 3.6.10), without any deeper philosophical meaning. Similarly, their insistence on taking the Bible literally left them with only its surface meaning, which they were quick to criticize—not for being mere fable without deeper philosophical meaning, but for being unworthy in the concepts and values expressed at the obvious level of the text. For this attitude, Augustine taunted them with one of their own favorite biblical passages (Mt 7:7), since the true meaning of the text "would be given to those who ask, and those who seek would find, and it would be opened to those who knock" (*GCM* 2.2.3).

Augustine therefore did not at first see his exegetical method as specifically allegorical in distinction from some other equally valid method of reading mythic narrative. He considered his interpretations simply as the correct way of reading a mythic text, in place of a naive, almost grammar-school approach that could not see past the sound of the letters (*GCM* 2.2.3).[10] In Augustine's understanding of myth-reading at this time, the figurative or allegorical meaning represents the true, ultimate meaning of mythic material. This was the way in which he, following Ambrose, took Paul's contrast of "letter" and "spirit": "I was delighted to hear Ambrose in his sermons to

the people saying, *as if he were most carefully enunciating a principle of exegesis*: 'The letter kills, the spirit gives life'" (*Conf* 6.4.6). The literal or historical meaning of such material was comparatively unimportant, to the point that its actual historical occurrence could be a matter of uncertainty and relative indifference. Augustine did not see the "historical" level of a text, that is, the narration of events, as a location of meaning that might be chosen *instead* of allegorical meaning; rather, it was simply another mode of signifying that allegorical meaning, along with other rhetorical modes such as commandment, parable, or psalmody. Plotinus spoke for a broad consensus on this view of mythic narrative as a heuristic deployment of complex realities along a narrative temporal axis.

> Now myths, if they are really going to be myths, must separate in time the things of which they tell, and set apart from each other many realities which are together, but distinct in rank or powers, at points where rational discussions, also, make generations of things ungenerated, and themselves, too, separate things which are together; the myths, when they have taught us as well as they can, allow the man who has understood them to put together again that which they have separated. (Plotinus, *Ennead* 3.5.9)

Thus, when Augustine said of the Eden story that it "must first be discussed according to history" (*GCM* 2.2.3), this did not lead to what we might normally mean by a "historical" or "literal" reading of the text as a set of events that actually took place as described. "When Augustine speaks of treating a text as history," Roland Teske notes, "he means treating it as a narrative of events—as a story with a beginning, middle and end. It is quite another question whether the events narrated occurred or not."[11] Augustine, in fact, was quite certain that some of the described figures, objects, and events mentioned in the Bible did not actually exist or happen as described,[12] while others may have happened simply in order to provide signifying material for later (allegorical) understanding. In his early writings, Augustine did not give particular significance to past events in themselves, even the great moments recorded in the biblical narrative; they had importance only in how they affected the individual mind exposed to the story, and in how they pointed to a higher, timeless reality beyond themselves.[13]

As demonstrated by Michael Cameron, Augustine considered literal exegesis to go hand in hand with the materialist metaphysics he had held as

a Manichaean, but now criticized.[14] His rejection of both "carried its own pronounced disjunction between the world of spirit and the world of sense. In its wake, Augustine formed a disjunctive theory of signs which radically distinguished the signifying realm of sense from the signified world of true being."[15] For Augustine at this time, language, ritual—in fact everything that occurs in the physical world—was only a sign for things in a true reality invisible to the senses.[16] This meant that the "historical" shape of events or narratives only found its true significance in the way it signaled ahistorical, immutable truth. "We are in full agreement, I think," he writes in a letter to a certain Zenobius, "that everything that a sense of the body attains cannot remain in the same way even for a moment of time, but slips away, flows off, and holds onto nothing actual, that is, to speak Latin, it does not exist (*non esse*)" (*Ep* 2.1).[17] Since that which is physical is subject to continuous change, it cannot ever be known in the same sense that, for example, a mathematical equation is known; knowledge, properly so called, requires a stable existent as its object (*DQ* 9).[18] True knowledge, therefore, involves apprehension of the permanent and unchanging element in phenomena that only reason can discern. Because all of material reality is only a *figura*, its texts and rituals must be taken as symbols for a true reality (*res*) that lies beyond the realm of the senses.[19] Yet the Platonic theory of the investment of the sensory world with supersensible forms—readily assimilated to the Catholic doctrine of creation—saved physical reality from complete irrelevance.[20] Augustine therefore postulated a minimal sort of "likeness" (*similitudo*) between sensory images—either directly perceived or invoked by language—and the corresponding features of the intelligible dimension which they signified (cf. *Ord* 2.11.30–19.51). Although in theory this likeness set some limits to valid interpretation of signs, Augustine's reduction of similitude between material and intelligible reality to matters only of number, measure, and order (*Ord* 2.11.32–33) left little constraint on his own creative imagination.

Aware that his position was all too vulnerable to the charge of reading into the texts meanings that were not really there and were never intended by their authors, Augustine questioned whether it is ever necessary actually to know an author's intention or character, for a writing may have value completely unrelated to an author's intention or character (*UC* 5.10–11). After all, Augustine had submitted primarily to the authority of the Catholic Church, whose "possession" the Bible was, and only on the basis of that authority did he invest the Bible with value. When it came to a confrontation between the dogmas of the Church and the evident meaning of the Bible, the latter must

not only yield to, but also be made to yield, that which the Church taught, by whatever means necessary. The Manichaean critique of the literal meaning of the Old Testament, therefore, was beside the point, since the Church did not read it that way, but rather according to a spiritual, allegorical meaning that supported its religious system (*UC* 5.12).

Without presuming that his own interpretations were perfectly correct, Augustine insisted that the Genesis creation story must have some meaning along the lines he suggested in order both to escape the criticisms of the Manichaeans and to establish an acceptable reading that would allow the text to be sacred for him, and more securely so for Christians generally. He justified the use of allegory in interpreting the Old Testament on the observation that the New Testament—whose authority the Manichaeans do accept—employs the same technique in interpreting Old Testament passages (*UC* 3.5–9).[21] Allegory allowed Augustine to set aside the evident meaning of passages that speak of God's anger, sadness, sleep, remembering and forgetting, repentance, zeal, feasting, hands, feet, and so forth (*VR* 50.99). With this method at hand, he could set aside the anthropomorphic dynamic God of the surface meaning of scripture as "theatrical and poetic trifling"—not just defending it against Manichaean criticism, but also safeguarding it against an all too close resemblance to the mythological panoply of Manichaeism, those "silly phantasms, as unreal as painted banquets" with which he and his fellows formerly sought to satisfy their minds, "weary and parched with the hunger and thirst of vain curiosity" (*VR* 51.100).[22] He had hoped for deeper philosophical meaning behind the Manichaean account of the formation of the cosmos, only to be told that they possessed only their literal sense as factual narrations of events. Now, with the sanction of Catholic authorities such as Ambrose, he could forge ahead with applying an interpretive method that would allow biblical myth to yield the intellectually satisfying content that he and his friends desired.

Augustine's choice of the creation story in Genesis as the subject of his first extensive exegetical effort perhaps had more to do with his own metaphysical interests and inclinations than it did with any pressing need to defend the text from Manichaean criticism.[23] The Manichaeans raised a few embarrassing questions about the Genesis account of creation, but reserved most of their attacks for other parts of the Old Testament where God and his chosen heroes displayed violent, cruel, or immoral conduct.[24] On the other hand, the cosmogonic narrative supplied the logical starting point for any analysis or defense of a particular mythic tradition, and the Genesis creation

story offered the only thing comparable to the elaborate Manichaean drama of the origin of things. Given his confidence in Platonic metaphysics, and his belief in its consistency with Nicene Christian teaching, he understood his exegetical task as one of seeking out—or writing in—the Platonic view of the cosmos in the creation text of the Catholic Church.[25]

Fortunately for Augustine, several capable Christian exegetes had already made initial efforts at interpreting the biblical creation account creatively, and he could lean heavily upon them.[26] Attendance on the sermons of Ambrose had provided the starting point, followed by reading in the available *hexaemeron* literature.[27] With some compelling exegetical solutions already in hand, Augustine assumed that other problematic passages must have similar esoteric meanings, and he bent his efforts to providing them. There was nothing particularly sophisticated in his own eclectic method as applied in *Genesis Against the Manichaeans*. One might even say that the only method was one of expediency.[28] Augustine did not need to provide an allegorical interpretation of every word of scripture. He primarily needed to bring in such an interpretation wherever the Manichaeans could use the text in its literal meaning to score a point in arguing with Christians who held its account authoritative.[29] If a passage seemed to support the reality of dualism, or showed the creator in an unsavory light, or simply appeared unworthy or incredible, it needed to be fixed by interpretation.[30]

Augustine was perfectly prepared to read verses as reports of past events or as prophecy of the future, so long as that sense was worthy of God, even though he assumed that they all had deeper spiritual meaning. Yet Augustine emphatically denied that Genesis recounts the actual creation process; it takes the form it does, he insisted, to provide a set of symbolic references. "Words can in no sense express how God made and created heaven and earth and every creature that he created; but this exposition by order of days recounts it as though (*tamquam*) a history of works he did, so that it has special regard for the prediction of the future" (*GCM* 1.23.41)[31]—that is, as either a prediction of the millennia of world history culminating in the "rest" of salvation or as a charter of the individual's progress toward salvation. In defending details of that narrative against Manichaean criticism, Augustine saw himself defending, not the factuality of actual events as described, but the worthiness of the narrative in how it characterized God, as it went about its business of signaling truths figuratively. Both Augustine and the Manichaeans agreed that a cosmogonic narrative should be worthy of God as they (respectively) understood him.[32] Both likewise agreed that the Genesis

narrative, read literally, was not worthy of God. But they offered different solutions to this dilemma. Augustine asked, "what does piety demand that we think concerning God?" and hinged his answer on the two critical points of distinction between the two religions: (1) whether a dualistic combat or single will underlies the cosmos, and (2) whether the soul shares God's nature or is merely God's spiritual creation.

Augustine could cite not just Manichaean critiques of the Genesis creation story, but also interpretation of elements of it favorable to their views. In fact, Manichaean myth included a story based on the first chapters of Genesis, featuring the figures of Adam and Eve, an attempt to keep them in ignorance, and an enlightening presence who led them to recognize their true identity and condition.[33] The Manichaeans appear to have handled Genesis in a manner similar to that found among various Gnostic sects, that is, as referring to real events from a distorted perspective that needed to be corrected or even reversed (*GCM* 2.26.39).[34] Augustine correspondingly expended the bulk of his apologetic effort in the first book of *Genesis Against the Manichaeans* in trying to show that this narrative, allegorically read, supported *creatio ex nihilo* rather than a more dualistic scenario. Such an effort presupposed some attempt by the Manichaeans, perhaps when proselytizing Jews and Christians, to demonstrate dualism from the Genesis creation story itself.

Manichaean dualism had the advantage of belonging to a broad tradition, both outside and within Christianity, of assuming that the creator acted upon some sort of eternally preexisting material base in fashioning the cosmos. The idea of *creatio ex nihilo* had gained ground in certain Christian circles as an alternative model, and had been deployed against Manichaeism prior to Augustine.[35] It offered the only sure barrier to the implicit dualism of any metaphysics that accepted the existence of a something else upon which God acted. The Manichaeans pointed to the presence of other things besides God at the beginning of the Genesis narrative: the earth was already there, "invisible and without form" (*GCM* 1.3.5); darkness was already there, "over the abyss" (*GCM* 1.3.6). They asked, "From where did that darkness over the abyss come, before God made light? Who made it or gave birth to it? Or if no one had made it or gave birth to it, the darkness was eternal" (*GCM* 1.4.7). They raised the same objection regarding the presence of apparently preexisting water: "From where did that water come, over which the Spirit of God was borne? Did Scripture previously say that God made the water?" (*GCM*

1.5.9). Of these several other presences alongside God at the beginning of the Genesis narrative, Augustine could only posit that God created them before the story begins. Augustine did not so much find *creatio ex nihilo* in the Genesis account, as he presupposed it as a backstory against which to read that account. He treated the Genesis narrative as beginning *in medias res*, in a way that would permit the prefacing of almost any metaphysical scenario. Indeed, precisely in this way various forms of Christianity in the preceding centuries had been offering different metaphysical frames for understanding creation. Offering his own, Augustine contended that "heaven," "earth," and "water" all refer to the primordial matter God had created, the first two terms indicating its potential, the last referring to its unformed condition. The diversity of terms served, he contended, to indicate the non-literalness of what was being described. "Darkness," on the other hand, should not be taken to refer to any such actually existing thing, he insisted, least of all the primordial matter. Following this inconsistent interpretive analysis in order to avoid lending any support to dualism, Augustine maintained that "darkness" in the narrative refers merely to the literal absence of light.

Contending that a good God would not create an evidently flawed world entirely on his own initiative, the Manichaeans argued that creation must be some sort of necessary response to an external stimulus that presented an even less satisfactory alternative. Such an external stimulus to creation explained why God, after an immeasurable eternity, suddenly created the world at a specific point in time. "They say, 'If God made heaven and earth in some beginning of time, what was he doing before he made heaven and earth? And why did he suddenly decide to make what he had not previously made through eternal time?' " (*GCM* 1.2.3).[36] Augustine's philosophical answer would dismiss such a question as meaningless, since time itself begins with the creation of material reality; yet he knew that the Manichaeans cited Paul's reference to "the knowledge of truth . . . which God promised before eternal time" (*ante tempora aeterna*, Tit 1:2), suggesting some sort of pre-creation compact between God and human souls. Unable to resolve this tension between the philosophical and religious resources at his disposal, he nonetheless rejected any necessity that would impinge on God's will, as implying superiority on the part of the impinging force, since otherwise it could simply be ignored. God, at the pinnacle of the hierarchy of being, is the ultimate cause, beyond or above which there can be no other cause in either a being or a circumstance (cf. *DQ* 22). Augustine found in the silence

of Genesis on a cause or inducement or motive for God's creative act a confirmation that questions of "why?" can go no farther than the will of God.

> They seek to know the causes of the will of God, though the will of God is itself the cause of all that exists. For if the will of God has a cause, there is something that surpasses the will of God—and this we may not believe. Hence, one who asks, "Why did God make heaven and earth?" should be told, "Because he willed to." (*GCM* 1.2.4; cf. *DQ* 28)

One notes that Augustine offers not an argument, but a controlling premise of his thinking. God must be conceived in terms of omnipotence and immunity from any inducement to act; Augustine rules out any other way of thinking about God as sacrilege (*quod sacrilegium est credere*, *GCM* 1.2.4).

For Augustine, deity is defined by power. A being possesses the status of God because nothing more powerful exists, nothing that can elicit a necessary response from that being or in any way circumscribe that being's latitude of action. A good being incapable of imposing its will on the universe could not be perfectly good, because it could not be unfailingly effective in its goodness (*GCM* 2.29.43). For the Manichaeans, deity is defined by goodness. A being is considered God because it exhibits the perfect goodness that merits worship and devotion. There exists no necessary correlation between power and goodness; the world is full of powerful beings who use that power for objectively evil ends. From the Manichaean perspective, then, one cannot reason from observations of power to conclusions of Godhood, unless the ultimate values of the universe are indifferent to goodness. Yet humans instinctively approve of goodness, and it is the only thing manifest in the world that unqualifiedly produces the feeling of approval and attraction and loyalty associated with the human relation to God. Augustine, however, detected a hidden danger in basing one's reasoning on what is good for us. He suspected that it is a subtle form of hubris that exalts our personal preferences over God's purposes. It appropriates for humans the status of judge over deity, giving that which we approve or disapprove from our limited and ignorant perspective the highest place in the cosmic order (*GCM* 2.25.38).

The Manichaeans drew attention to aspects of nature that could not be attributed to the creative act of a good God, asking, "If God commanded that the edible plants and the fruit-tree come forth from the earth, who commanded that there come forth so many thorny or poisonous plants that are useless for food and so many trees that bear no fruit?" (*GCM* 1.13.19). The

same question arose with the existence of animals dangerous and hostile to human beings (*GCM* 1.16.25). The claim in Genesis that God had given human beings mastery over all the animals is rather obviously false, they contended (*GCM* 1.18.29). But Augustine proposed that the Manichaeans make a fundamental error of analysis in starting from the world as it is, that is, in reasoning inductively from contemporary human experience. The world has changed, he argued, from its originally created condition.

> We should say then that the earth was cursed by reason of the sin of man so that it bears thorns, not that it should suffer punishment since it is without sensation, but that it should always set before the eyes of men the judgment upon human sin. . . . Poisonous plants were created as a punishment, or as a trial for mortals. All of this is the result of sin, because we became mortal after sin. (*GCM* 1.13.19)

This portrayal of events only played into the hands of the Manichaean characterization of the god of Genesis, more interested in retribution than in mercy, more concerned about guarding his fruit than in compassion on human beings. Yet even if Augustine proffered a "historical" explanation for the painful and poisonous state of nature consistent with his theology, we cannot be sure that it served him as anything more than a tactical rhetorical argument—that is, we cannot be sure that Augustine *believed* it as a consistent position to which he was committed. He could, after all, turn around and explain the same curse not in terms of actual thorns and thistles God placed on earth to cause physical pain, but as a symbolic reference to "the prickings of torturous questions or thoughts concerned with providing for this life" (*GCM* 2.20.30).[37]

Before his conversion, Augustine had found Manichaean criticism of anthropomorphism compelling, and had agreed with them in objecting to the statement in Genesis that God had created humans in his physical likeness (*Conf* 6.3.4; 6.4.5; 6.11.18).[38] He acknowledged that among the Manichaeans "no one is found who limits the substance of God by the shape of the human body," whereas among Nicene Christians "there are found among us certain children who think of God in a human form and believe that he is that way" (*ME* 10.17).

> It is this question above all that the Manichaeans raise with their endless chatter, and they taunt us for believing that man was made

> to the image and likeness of God. They look at the shape of our body and ask so infelicitously whether God has a nose and teeth and a beard and also inner organs and the other things we need. However, it is ridiculous, even wicked, to believe that there are such things in God, and so they deny that man was made to the image and likeness of God. (*GCM* 1.17.27; cf. *Adim* 5)

They poked fun at the image of humans being formed from mud in Genesis 2, and from this made the more serious point that God would appear to be responsible for the weakness and changeableness of human beings by making them of such unfirm stuff (*GCM* 2.7.8).

Augustine agreed with the Manichaeans that the interior human, not the human body, bears the image of God.[39] He shared with them to a considerable degree their vision of the original condition of the soul, in which it enjoyed utter transparency with other souls—whether this is conceived as a property of a spiritual body or merely the nakedness of the unembodied soul.[40] Because Plotinus used the same image, Augustine found it easy to continue to think in these terms after his conversion.[41] In short, in going from Manichaeism to Platonic Nicene Christianity, Augustine retained a belief in the soul's spiritual preexistence,[42] and he sought to make Genesis yield such a belief. Therefore, like so many exegetes, Jewish and Christian, before him, he took the reference to Adam and Eve being clothed after their transgression in "garments of skin" to mean that for the first time they entered into physical bodies.[43] For Augustine, this mortal, physical embodiment was the true meaning of the "death" God threatened to those who transgressed, and gives rise to the condition of lying opacity to which souls have fallen from the realm of transparent truth (*GCM* 2.21.32).[44] The fallen condition involved humans not only in the evident evils of violence and destruction, but also in sexual reproduction, which with complete consistency Augustine connected to fallen embodiment, not to the original state of disembodied souls (*GCM* 1.19.30; cf. *VR* 46.88).[45]

Differing views on the cause and reason of human sinfulness and suffering, of course, stood at the center of the disjuncture between the Manichaean and Nicene systems. The Manichaeans asked, "Why did God," that is, the God postulated by Nicene Christianity and the biblical account it embraced, "make man who he knew would sin?" (*GCM* 2.28.42). "He should have made him," if he possessed the omnipotence and utter freedom of action that Nicene Christians postulated, "so that he would not sin." Augustine rejected

this criticism with a reference to the importance and necessity of giving humans free will to choose whether to sin or not. When the Manichaeans similarly faulted the Genesis account for portraying God as permitting the devil's approach to Eve, Augustine likewise answered that it was up to her free will, rather than to God, to rebuff him, since "she was made so that, if she were unwilling, she would have prevented his approach." But why should there be a devil to begin with? He, too, Augustine argued, was not made a devil, but made himself so by his will. This answer just shifted the question back: Why did God make the devil knowing what he would become? Augustine replied that such knowledge should not have prevented God from making even the devil, since by his justice God orders the whole cosmos appropriately both before and after the misuse of will that is sin.

Augustine's defense of Genesis against Manichaean criticism thus often drew him toward defending a logic even in the literal or historical level of narrative they attacked. But we should not for that reason think that Augustine at this time actually favored the sort of historical understanding of the fall of Adam and Eve that later would form the groundwork for the idea of original sin.[46] We should attend to the indications that he took Adam, Eve, and the serpent primarily as symbolic characters in a myth. For him, this myth held greater significance as a perennial truth about the individual fall of each soul from the oneness of the intelligible world into the multiplicity of temporal and material engagement, than it did as a "history" of a primordial sin. Even though Augustine invoked the biblical theme linking physical mortality to the punishment of Adam and Eve—well established in the interpretive tradition before him—he gives greater attention to the "fall" as an occurrence in the existence of each human soul in its individual turn from God to material things, exactly in the Plotinian sense.[47]

Augustine introduced his exposition of the Eden story by signaling the wrong-headedness of treating it literally or historically. "The whole narrative unfolds, not clearly, but in figures (*non aperte*, *sed figurate*), so that it might exercise the minds of those seeking the truth and call them from carnal labors"—that is, attempts to read it literally—"to spiritual labor" of reading it allegorically (*GCM* 2.1.1).[48] He repeatedly expressed doubt over the reality of the scenario, entertaining the possibility only to defend it against Manichaean critiques ("or, even if there is such a place which is called paradise in which Adam and Eve dwelled corporeally," *GCM* 2.14.20). He left open the possibility that the narrative somehow might be explained literally, but made it clear that he did not see how (*GCM* 2.2.3). Accordingly, his exegesis unfolded

in a manner fundamentally incompatible with a literal meaning of the story. The single day of creation in Gen 2.4 represents "the whole of time" (*GCM* 2.3.4, 2.6.7), just as do the seven days of creation in Gen 1 (*GCM* 1.23.35–41); "the green things of the field" are not plants, but represent "an invisible creature like the soul" (*GCM* 2.3.4), i.e., the soul itself before it sins (*GCM* 2.3.5), "watered . . . by an interior spring, speaking to its intellect . . . the truth flowing from its interior" (*GCM* 2.4.5).[49] Augustine reviewed without conviction the opinion of some Nicene exegetes that the body formed of mud is the actual physical body (*GCM* 2.7.9–8.10); he noted such a view merely in order to offer an anti-Manichaean defense of it, before continuing with his own assumption that physical bodies appear in the narrative only with the "garments of skin" given to Adam and Eve after they sin (*GCM* 2.21.32). The garden symbolizes "happiness," Augustine's code-word for the intelligible realm where the soul experiences its full liberty of being (cf. *GCM* 2.14.20; 2.22.34), while the tree of life and that of the knowledge of good and evil, correspondingly, represent orientations of the soul (*GCM* 2.9.12), and the four rivers stand for virtues of the soul (*GCM* 2.10.13).

And what of Adam and Eve themselves? They represent the soul and the body, or alternatively "virile reason" and the soul's "appetite," that is, "its animal part, by the help of which it governs the body."[50] The relationship between Adam and Eve signifies the internal order of every individual human being, where "the interior mind, like virile reason, should hold subject the soul's appetite by means of which we control the members of the body, and by just law it should place a limit upon its helper." "The woman is made as an illustration of this (*ad huius rei exemplum femina facta est*), for the order of things makes her subject to man" (*GCM* 2.11.15).[51] If the story recounts actual events, which for Augustine it may or may not, those events happened in a particular way in order to create a symbolic signification for the mind exposed to the narrative. "Hence, although in terms of history a visible woman was first made by the Lord God from the body of her husband, this was certainly not done in this way without reason, but to intimate some secret." Even if this wording appears to affirm that the narrative in some sense reflects real events, Augustine goes on immediately to retract that affirmation as at most a concession to a possibility: "Whether these things were said figuratively or were also done figuratively (*sive ergo ista figurate dicta sint sive figurate etiam facta sint*), they were not said or done this way without a purpose, but are clearly mysteries and *sacramenta*" (*GCM* 2.12.17).

Augustine finds the meaning of the story, therefore, in everyone's

experience of moral decision making, which he understands through the standard Stoic model.

> Even now nothing else happens in each of us when one falls into sin than occurred then in those three: the serpent, the woman and the man.[52] First the suggestion is made, whether by thought or by the senses of the body, by seeing or touching or hearing or tasting or smelling. When this suggestion has been made, if our desire is not aroused toward sinning, the cunning of the serpent will be excluded. If, however, it is aroused, it will be as though the woman were already persuaded. At times reason checks and suppresses in a manly way even desire that has been aroused. When this happens we do not fall into sin, but we are crowned for our modest struggle. But if reason consents and decides that what desire has stirred up should be carried out, man is expelled from the whole happy life as if (*tamquam*) from paradise. For the sin is already imputed to him, even if the deed is not carried out, since conscience is held guilty by reason of consent. (*GCM* 2.14.21)

Eve here represents the raw impulse that ancient moral philosophy characterized as dominating the precipitous, nonrational person; Adam stands for the deliberation of reason and assent. In Augustine's opinion, "Scripture reports these things precisely so that we might now avoid them" (*GCM* 2.15.22).[53] Such a statement dispels any notion a modern interpreter may have that already at this time Augustine believed that actual events involving Adam and Eve had actually changed human circumstance in a way that debilitated the free deliberation and choice of the mind. He treats the bad choices of Adam and Eve as moral lessons, not causative forces in our own moral condition.

Augustine likewise scoffs at a literal reading of the curses that follow in the story, such as the one that places enmity between the serpent and woman, but not man. Clearly, he argues, the devil tempts men every bit as much as he tempts women, and women are no more liable to be deceived by him than men are. "Hence, why does Scripture put it this way except to show clearly that we cannot be tempted by the devil except through that animal part, which exhibits (*ostendit*), as it were, the image or exemplification of the woman in the one whole man?" (*GCM* 2.18.28). Nor are labor pains confined to human females, and therefore they are "the condition of mortality rather than the punishment of sin"; this curse, too, therefore must have a figurative meaning. It symbolizes the painful struggle of the animal part of the soul

against the habit of carnal desire. This is why God tells the woman in this context, "You will turn to your man and he will rule over you": "What can this mean except that, when that part of the soul held by carnal joys has, in willing to conquer a bad habit, suffered difficulty and pain and in this way brought forth a good habit, it now more carefully and diligently obeys reason as its husband?" (*GCM* 2.19.29). "Hence," Augustine concludes, "those things which seemed to be curses are commandments, if we do not read those spiritual things in a carnal way. For the Law is spiritual." Similarly, when he turns to explain the union of Adam and Eve in marriage, he can cite the authority of Paul for understanding this as an allegory for the relationship of Christ and the Church (*GCM* 2.13.19; 2.24.37).

We can see the same primarily allegorical understanding of the Eden story in the contemporaneous *Morals of the Catholic Church*. In discussing "those things that turn us away from the laws of God and from the fruit of his goodness, that is, to put it briefly, from the happy life" with reference to the words of Paul in 1 Timothy 6:10 ("the root of all evils is covetousness, and some who have followed after it have suffered shipwreck in the faith and have plunged themselves into many sorrows"), Augustine comments, "For those who understand well, this sin of the soul is signified quite clearly in the Old Testament by the transgression of the man who was in paradise. 'In Adam,' indeed, 'we all die,' as the same Apostle says, 'and in Christ we shall all rise' " (*ME* 19.35). Augustine's use of "signified" unmistakably marks "the transgression of the man who was in paradise" as allegorically—not historically—relevant to the similar lapse of individual souls into sin and "many sorrows." When he goes on to quote the words "in Adam we all die," therefore, he can only mean "in *imitation of* Adam," just as at this time his references to the role of Christ as an example and role model suggest the meaning "in *imitation of* Christ" we may resist covetousness and attain moral reform. Adam stands symbolically for the "old man" that Paul instructs us to "strip off"—"that is, to hold in contempt all the allurements of the body . . . and to bestow one's whole love on things that are invisible and divine" (*ME* 19.36).

Yet juxtaposed in Augustine's interpretation of the Eden story, alongside readings that seem utterly to dispose of any significance in the narrated events as events, we find other readings that seem to hew closer to the historical sense of the story. Augustine could say, for example, that Eve "became destined to bear mortal offspring. . . . For all of us who are born from Adam have begun to owe to nature that death with which God threatened us when he gave the command not to eat the fruit of that tree; that death is figuratively

represented (*figurata est*) by the garments of skin" (*GCM* 2.21.31–32).[54] For Augustine generally, the "garments of skin" represented the soul's fallen condition linked to the body. But how and when each soul becomes connected to a body in this way remained a source of uncertainty for Augustine throughout his life.[55] What exactly did he mean, then, by phrasing that would one day be taken up into his concept of original sin? He certainly missed a prime opportunity in *Genesis Against the Manichaeans* to elaborate anything like the latter idea, and we might question, therefore, whether we have here anything other than some rote trope picked up by Augustine from Nicene oral and literary culture, for which he had not yet found a fully integrated place in his own understanding of the soul's odyssey.

If there is some implicit discursive coordination between his perennialist understanding of the Eden story with reference to the experiences of every soul, and his apparently primordialist references to actual consequences of the events reported in that story, it may lie in the distinct trajectories of the soul and body in Augustine's early thinking. When he reviewed the problem of the soul's relation to the body in a much later letter to Jerome, he referred to souls being "joined to mortal bodies descended from" Adam (*Ep* 166.10), and "being thrust down into Adam, that is, into the flesh which is derived from Adam" (*Ep* 166.27).[56] In other words, he later made explicit the idea that the character of the bodies to which souls are joined differs after the sin of Adam and Eve, from whom all human bodies descend historically, while souls themselves enter into those changed bodies according to the just punishment of their own freely willed *aversio* from God and the intelligible world. Just such a "two sins" theory, bringing an individual preexistent soul in its sinful *aversio* into a body appropriately physicalized and mortalized by the historical sin of the first humans, held sway in the Alexandrian Platonist tradition exemplified by Didymus the Blind.[57] More broadly, even those predecessors of Augustine who did not so eagerly embrace Platonic scenarios of the soul's preexistence spoke of the mortality of the human body, rather than any preexisting guilt or debility of human souls, as the principal consequence of Adam and Eve's sin.

But we must be cautious of doing Augustine's theoretical work for him, and attributing to him at a given time connections that either he himself drew later, or we can draw by our own effort to make sense of him. We may inadvertently invent an Augustine who was never there by assuming a deeper Augustine where all his ideas hold together in a manner they do not explicitly display on the surface of his language. We have no good reason to think that

in *Genesis Against the Manichaeans* Augustine selectively revealed portions of a conceptual complex on a given subject that he held privately in its entirety. While it is fair to identify some controlling premises and master themes in this work, the specifics of his exegesis suggest ad hoc expediency: defending the logic of the narrative at its literal level where he could, turning to allegory to unearth what he regarded as a meaning necessary to be worthy of its subject. Inconsistency in where he located meaning, I would suggest, derives from his attempt to juggle these two interpretive registers, as well as from the existence of both perennialist and primordialist interpretations of the Eden story in the existing hermeneutical tradition on which he drew. He rhetorically deployed *themes* or *tropes* juxtaposed in his intellectual repertoire, which he had yet to fully reconcile into a worked-out discursive *doctrine*.[58]

Augustine broke off his exegesis of Genesis at the point where the current condition of humanity and the world had been established in Genesis chapter 3. He had, in effect, surveyed the Christian cosmogonic and anthropogonic myth, employing eclectic methods of interpretation adjusted to the particular problem and nature of the criticism. He would later codify this interpretive eclecticism in his handbook of exegesis, *Christian Doctrine*, sanctioning a purely pragmatic and circular program of defending scripture by any means necessary, conveniently shifting modes of reading to avoid any vulnerability to criticism. Such an exegetical program is scarcely credible by modern literary (or theological) standards, and the allegorical readings he was so fond of have fallen almost completely out of favor in current Christian biblical interpretation. The resurgence of biblical literalism in recent times has returned the Bible to a place where it is vulnerable to the sort of criticisms leveled by the Manichaeans, while many of Augustine's fanciful interpretations of the text have come to appear incredible. That tells us nothing about how credible they would have been in Augustine's own time. Yet remarks in his subsequent writings indicate that his allegorical approach to scriptural problems was not well received at the time. It seems that he had failed to adjust himself fully to the expectations of the non-elite Christians of Africa, about which his friends had tried to advise him (*GCM* 1.1.1).[59]

The demands of a more literal-minded general public would force Augustine to treat the text more literally, at least when it came to points of debate where the Manichaeans appear, after all, to have been hitting an effective note.[60] *Genesis Against the Manichaeans* was the first of five distinctly different efforts to make Genesis yield Augustine's evolving view of God's creative purpose, followed by *Genesis Literally, unfinished* (*De Genesi ad litteram*

imperfectus liber, circa 393), *Confessions* books 11–13 (circa 397–401), *Genesis Literally* (*De Genesi ad litteram*, gradually composed 404–420), and *City of God* book 11 (by circa 417–418). The fact that he kept returning to the subject with different results arguably indicates that he was never satisfied on this matter. It might prove better to think more precisely in terms of Augustine repeatedly outgrowing prior satisfactions, and returning to Genesis as the literary field on which he needed to project his new thinking as a better reading of what he apparently regarded as the fundamental Christian myth.

Comparing Asceticisms

As a new convert, Augustine had mounted a defense of the Nicene claim to the Christian moral tradition in the first thirty chapters of *Morals of the Catholic Church*, written while he was still in Rome. Yet Augustine had not been converted to the ordinary Christian morality of loving God and neighbor that he affirmed there, but to a particularly ascetic form of Christian life that at the time of his conversion was only beginning to gain a foothold in the Latin West. Augustine had good reason to work at differentiating this new asceticism of the Christian mainstream from the sectarian Manichaean variety most familiar to Africans. He needed to shake off the taint of association with Manichaeism or other "heresies" that ascetic practices invariably bore in the late fourth century.[61] Manichaeism had heretofore been the most visible ascetic tradition on the scene, and that status had given it great attractiveness to those who either were themselves ascetically inclined or expected the holy men and women they supported to exhibit ascetic behavior. Augustine's task, as he came to conceive it, was to demonstrate the superiority of Nicene holiness to that offered by the Manichaeans, while not overplaying its moral heroism to the point of allowing it to appear extreme and exotic.

In the last century, several scholars argued that Manichaeism provided a key impetus for the development of monasticism; but the picture has proven to be not quite so straightforward. There were, of course, basic similarities in the lifestyle of the ascetically inclined of different religions, involving prayer, fasting, reading, surrender of personal property, common dining, and daily observance of rites. The Manichaean Elect were on the scene as ascetic virtuosi more than a half century before Christian monasticism began to develop its familiar forms. But Mani expressly prohibited the Elect from living in isolation as hermits, or forming closed communities cut off from lay

people (*Keph* 81). They were to lead itinerant lives and lodge with Auditor sponsors, in order that the essential daily interaction of Auditor and Elect could be maintained. Thus it appears unlikely that the Manichaeans were responsible for introducing either eremetic or cenobitic forms of monasticism to the Mediterranean world. Instead, Manichaeans in that part of the world came under the influence of the same monastic developments as those that reshaped practice for other varieties of Christianity.[62] Augustine heard about a novel monastic experiment among the Manichaean Elect in Rome, circa 385–386, which failed miserably,[63] but never mentioned any similar experiment among the Manichaeans of Africa. It was ascetic conduct, rather than monastic organization, that the public associated with Manichaeism.

Augustine was fully aware of the suspicions about the Manichaean roots of the new asceticism emerging among Nicene Christians, and the tendency among more traditional members of the community to view it as a dangerous extremism (*ME* 31.66). Having been in Rome in 383–384, he scarcely could have not heard of the scandal involving the death of a woman from a prominent aristocratic family, caused by excessive fasting under the direction of Jerome.[64] The incident was the cause célèbre of the controversy over asceticism within the Nicene community of Rome, and with the death of his protector, bishop Damasus, in 384, Jerome was forced to leave Rome and resettle permanently in Bethlehem.[65] While ready to repeat any unsubstantiated slander that might further his case against Manichaean asceticism, Augustine avoided any acknowledgment of excesses on the Nicene side. He readily admitted the novelty of the ascetic movement coming out of Egypt and "the East" (*ME* 31.65),[66] since its imported character belied claims that it derived from the Manichaean asceticism previously present in the West. He was willing to use the controversial character of nominally Nicene anchorites as evidence that they are every bit as remarkable in their practices as the Manichaean Elect (*ME* 31.66);[67] but he preferred to focus on the more moderate and so less controversial cenobitic communities (*ME* 31.67) which provided the model for his own communal experiments.

Although the pattern of life observed within Augustine's little community at Thagaste bore some surface similarity to Manichaean models, it differed in crucial ways, and drew more from the example of lay house monasteries springing up around Italy, which in turn were inspired by vague reports about cenobitic experiments in the Roman East. Many of the differences between Manichaean and Nicene forms of ascetic practice can be traced to the distinctive purposes of that practice in the two communities. For the Manichaeans,

ascetic observances served the purpose of altering the hegemony and order of the human body in order for it to serve a ritual purpose. One had to attain a level of self-mastery to function as an Elect. The ascetically trained body of the non-Manichaean Christian, on the other hand, had no ritual function for which it was being prepared. Asceticism served as an end in itself, a process of gradual detachment from the world without a ritually defined demarcation between acceptable and unacceptable embodiment.

The principal differences between Augustinian monasticism and Manichaean asceticism follow from this difference of purpose. Whereas the Manichaeans restricted provisions for the Elect to one meal a day and one set of clothing for the year, the single meal per day was a voluntary ideal for Augustine, not to be imposed upon people beyond their capacity, and clothing was distributed to members of Augustine's community as needed (Possidius, 25.1). The Manichaeans required Elect to be vegetarians; an Elect who violated this precept had to step down temporarily from active service. Augustine's circle similarly followed a vegetarian diet, but allowed meat to the sick (Possidius, 22.2) with no change in status. Manichaeans eschewed wine altogether, while Augustine's group drank it regularly in restricted amounts (Possidius, 22.2; 25.2). The Manichaean Elect depended on the contributions of Auditors for their daily sustenance, since this was integrated into a ritual system by which the Auditors gained merit. Augustine's communards lived from their own family wealth, perhaps supplemented by plying their various specialties as rhetoricians, lawyers, scribes, accountants, and agents. Augustine helped to domesticate monastic establishments by emphasizing the simple and familiar communal values underlying them (*ME* 31.68).

Having already drafted a work on Christian religious *mores* informed by his own catechetical instruction, Augustine decided to expand it in the direction of a concrete comparison of the respective ascetical practices of Nicene Christians and Manichaeans. This is how, according to J. Kevin Coyle's convincing reconstruction, *Morals of the Catholic Church* gained chapters 31–35 (and perhaps also the last clause of chapter 30), along with its companion volume *Morals of the Manichaeans*.[68] By appending his presentation of Christian asceticism to a work on general Christian morality, Augustine gave it the appearance of a logical outgrowth of the latter. He hedged it with rhetorical appeals to reason, to scripture, to toleration of diverse practices, and to the reasonableness of a voluntary scale of observances. In these ways, he asserted the legitimacy of such asceticism without calling into question the worth of the ordinary Christian morality of most of his potential readers. He reported

the ascetic movement occurring in Milan and Rome, as well as Egypt as the work of zealous but orthodox believers, reasonable people not fanatics, productive members of society not sociopaths.

Augustine showed particular concern to highlight the fact that Nicene monastics did not indulge in an otiose life—a constant charge against ascetics and other religious virtuosi by those sectors of society anxious that the populace remain occupied and productive. He insisted that all varieties of Nicene ascetics earned their own living in one way or another, no matter how removed from ordinary avenues of commerce. Beside the anchorites and monastics, the urban clergy also displayed ascetic virtue without withdrawing from the multitude (*ME* 32.69); and likewise the voluntary communes in cities such as Milan and Rome "are not burdensome to any one; but, in the eastern fashion, and on the authority of the apostle Paul, they maintain themselves with their own hands" (*ME* 33.70). By contrast, Augustine reported, the Manichaean Elect did no labor, and were entirely sponsored by lay donation. Even with the additional obligation of laboring for their own keeping, Augustine boasted, Nicene monks and nuns met and even exceeded Manichaean levels of ascetic practice. "I was told that many practiced fasts of quite amazing severity, not merely taking only one meal daily towards night," as the Manichaean Elect did, "which is everywhere quite common, but very often continuing for three days or more in succession without food or drink" (*ME* 33.70). In contrast, Augustine presented anecdotal evidence of Manichaean Elect falling short of their ascetic ideals.

Augustine thus appears to have attempted three things at once in his comparative discussion of ascetic practices: (1) to domesticate asceticism within more popularly acceptable general Christian moral values, (2) to laud the superiority of Nicene ascetic practices and their rationale to their Manichaean counterparts, and (3) to offer a protreptic bridge across which his former friends among the Manichaean laity might be enticed to embrace Nicene Christianity. His line of argumentation often seems to presuppose readers like himself, steeped in a classical Latin education and "care of the self" ethos, who value reason and moderation, and distrust "superstition." Accordingly, he presented the Manichaean ethical system as a jumbled set of rigid taboos, in contrast to a rational care of the self, flexibly tailored to individual need (*ME* 35.78–80),[69] wherein "no one is pressed to endure hardships for which he is unfit; nothing is imposed on any one against his will; nor is he condemned by the rest because he confesses himself too feeble to imitate them" (*ME* 33.71). Invoking the imagery of the dangerous journey of Ulysses or Aeneas,

Augustine warned against the apparent attractiveness of Manichaean virtue, wishing his readers to recognize "the difference between show and sincerity, between the right way and the wrong, between faith and imposture, between strength and inflatedness, between happiness and wretchedness, between unity and disunion; in short, between the sirens of superstition and the harbor of religion" (*ME* 34.74).

Augustine could hope to show his former associates among the Manichaeans that Nicene asceticism better fulfilled the aspirations to self-perfection that had motivated their attraction to the Manichaean community. He targeted his criticism of the latter very precisely on the Elect, driving a wedge between them and his well-intentioned but misguided Auditor friends.[70] By lauding the ascetic achievements of Nicene ascetics, while anecdotally savaging the failings of the Manichaean Elect, he played on the pragmatic standard of assessment promoted by their old Manichaean bishop Faustus, who proposed that the outcome in deeds proved the validity of the system of ideas that motivated practice. He made the argument that evidence from the Manichaean community showed that its teachings fail by that standard. Instead of citing his own case, as he would in *Confessions*, he drew on the behavior of those supposedly advanced in their pursuit of perfection in order to demonstrate that Manichaeism did not successfully ground moral progress. If Nicene Christianity did, the only reasonable course of action for those who aspired to self-perfection would be to switch religions.

In order to undermine the attractiveness of Manichaeism based in its ascetic ethos, Augustine provided in *Morals of the Manichaeans* the most sustained attack on Manichaean practices he would ever write, systematically working through the religion's detailed regulations in order to demonstrate their irrationality, inconsistency, and lack of foundation in sound principles. He made his principal target Manichaean dietary restrictions, as the most novel feature of the new asceticism. Even though the Manichaean "Seal of the Mouth" prohibited lying and blasphemy as well as the eating of certain foods, and even though the "Seal of the Hand" forbade murder and theft as well as harm to animals and plants, he skipped over in each case the more widely shared moral values, and focused his attack on the peculiar system of restrictions surrounding human consumption. Mainstream Christianity had few if any dietary rules at the time, and the sort of temporary periodic fasting Christians practiced did not target individual food items as prohibited. This relatively liberal attitude toward the world's edible products caused Nicene and other non-ascetic forms of Christianity to lag behind a growing sentiment

in certain sectors of late antique society against the killing of animals. Just as the "world-affirming" Nicene tradition ignored the moral implications of animal slaughter and kept it out of the burgeoning vegetarian movement of late antiquity, so its sacramentally embedded affirmation of wine separated it from the emerging reaction against Mediterranean wine culture and its effects on reason and emotion. Augustine and other Christian leaders thus found themselves in the position of defending the ordinary diets of traditional culture against various kinds of religiously motivated abstinences.

In *Morals of the Manichaeans*, Augustine made the case that restraint in diet has significance only as a reflection of the soul's detachment from the concerns and desires of the body. It is not outward behavior but inward motivation that matters.[71] The Manichaeans appeared to share this principle of valuation, he noted, when they mocked the celibacy of non-Manichaean virgins with remarks such as "even a she-mule is a virgin" (*MM* 13.28). "Religious" abstinence, Augustine suggested, should partake of the same reasoned purpose as secular "philosophical" abstinence. "Therefore, if your end is to be frugal and to restrain the appetite which finds gratification in eating and drinking, I assent and approve. But this is not the case" (*MM* 13.28). He contrasted an abstemious person who eats a little cabbage seasoned (in violation of Manichaean prohibitions) with lard or bacon and drinks a glass or two of wine for his health, to someone who eats neither meat nor wine but gobbles down large banquets of rich and exotic vegetarian dishes and fruit juices. If a Manichaean Elect lived like the latter person, "he may be reproved by one or two of the more sedate" among the sect as an undisciplined character, but he would not be in violation of the prohibition of meat and wine, and this pointed in Augustine's opinion to the wrong-headedness of the Manichaean code (*MM* 13.29–30).[72] By contrast, the various voluntary abstinences from meat and fish observed among Nicene devotees varied according to one's needs of physical and mental health, rather than being dictated by the superstition that the substance itself defiles the consumer (*ME* 33.72). Therefore, when it came to the virtues of diet, Augustine saw it as better to be an abstemious person who ate whatever was put in front of him or her than someone who gluttonously consumed only vegetables and who therefore displayed an undisciplined character even if it obeyed superstitious taboos (*MM* 16.51). Augustine even could cite hearsay reports of a tragedy involving forced overeating of the food served at the Manichaean ritual meal.[73] At the same time, he discerned a lack of Christian charity in the way Manichaean rules about food led to a refusal to give food to beggars (*MM* 16.53).[74] He found it equally

illogical that Manichaeans permitted their Auditors to eat purchased meat, so long as they themselves did not kill the animal (*MM* 16.53).

Food in itself had no moral significance for Augustine, but for him it belonged, like all of material creation, to ethical *adiaphora* detached from the intelligible reality of the soul and the needs of its spiritual progress. Due to this Platonic orientation, Augustine parted company with the dominant materialistic physics and dietetics of his age, for which the spiritual and the material were part of a continuum of reality,[75] and which understood food to have a direct impact on the state of the mind and soul. Augustine related the Manichaean version of this late antique theory of a cosmic economy of substances and energies without sympathy, apparently confident that it would seem as absurd to his imagined audience as it did to him (*MM* 15.36–37). The fact remains that Augustine could possibly cite Galen or some other medical authority against individual points, but would be hard pressed to find any dietetic system of his time that followed a fundamentally different overall account of how human physiology is interconnected to natural processes from the one at work in Manichaeism. In fact, the prevailing view of the origin of individual human souls in Africa at the time belonged to this materialistic thought world, and Augustine would struggle with it for the rest of his life.[76]

Augustine believed that materialistic thinking was compelling to people because it worked with visible and material images to which they could relate, and he allowed that perhaps the majority of people who thought like this were kept from adopting Manichaeism more by religious fear than by their own powers of reason (*MM* 16.38). At most, he could roll up his sleeves and muck around in the details of the Manichaean theory for some logical contradictions and inconsistencies.[77] But the main point he wished to make involved a complete rejection of the ethical valuation of material things. The divine, spiritual, or intelligible cannot be detected by the senses, he insisted, but only by the mind, as when one perceives that the ordered displays a higher degree of existence than the disordered (*MM* 16.43). By contrast, "your ideas on this subject," Augustine complained to the Manichaeans, "force us to discuss good and evil with you as if you were cooks and confectioners, instead of men of reading or literary taste" (*MM* 16.41).

Augustine's attack on the "Seal of the Hand," the second category of the Manichaean moral code, exposed a basic difference between the Manichaean and Nicene positions on physical violence. Whereas the Manichaeans believed that all living things share the same divine soul, Nicene Christians held that all other living things were created by God for human use and

consumption. Augustine considered the Manichaean view both superstitious and silly, as well as contrary to Christ's own conduct, who both withered a fig tree and sent demons into a herd a pigs who rushed to their death.

> Nor is it any reply to say that our Lord wished in these actions to teach some other truths; for every one knows that. But assuredly the Son of God would not commit murder to illustrate truth. . . . The signs which Christ wrought in the case of men, with whom we certainly have a community of rights, were in healing, not in killing them. And it would have been the same in the case of beasts and trees, if we had that community with them which you imagine. (*MM* 17.54)

This issue of the "community of rights" between plants, animals, and humans was a hot topic of debate in Augustine's time,[78] and Manichaeans shared with many Platonists and Pythagoreans a belief in the common sanctity of life rooted in theories of transmigration, such as the Manichaean one cited by Augustine in this context (*MM* 17.55). The divide between the two views was unbridgeable by appeal to any objective principle, and Augustine could only resort to ridicule.

Augustine began strategically with the prohibition of killing plants incumbent on the Elect, since this rule would appear the most strange to Augustine's audience in the agricultural society of Africa. In a possible allusion to the sort of stories recorded in the *Cologne Mani Codex*, Augustine stated that the Manichaeans believed that souls in trees "can hear your voices and understand what you say, and see bodies and their motions, and even discern thoughts" (*MM* 17.56; cf. *CMC* 6.12–8.14). He pointed out that the abstinence of Elect from harming plants only passed responsibility for this "murder" down to the Auditors. "As for your not plucking fruits or pulling up vegetables yourselves, while you get your Auditors to pluck and pull and bring them to you, that you may confer benefits not only on those who bring the food but on the food which is brought . . . it matters not whether you commit a crime yourself, or wish another to commit it for you" (*MM* 17.57). What about the weeds a farmer cleared to grow the vegetables for the Elect, or the mice and locusts and other things that attacked the crops intended for the Elect? Augustine claimed that the Manichaeans went so far as to say a usurer is more harmless than a farmer, "you feel so much more for melons than for men" (*MM* 17.62). He posited a set of scenarios that would place a faithful Manichaean in a bind as to how to act. If an Elect came across a crow about

to eat a fig, should he break the seal of the hand and rescue the fig from the animal? (*MM* 17.57). Or if the Elect found himself in the midst of the incident described in the parable of the Good Samaritan, with the person "half-dead from his sufferings" imploring an Elect to pluck a pear[79] from a nearby tree, would the Elect refuse, "lest the tree should lament the loss of its fruit, and you should be doomed to the punishment threatened by Manichaeus for breaking the seal" (*MM* 17.58)?

Having painted the Manichaeans in as alien a fashion as possible for eschewing even innocent agriculture, Augustine turned to the prohibition on killing animals, which he regarded as just as absurd. The limited understanding of biology on the part of both parties can render portions of the debate comical from the perspective of the modern reader, while the fundamental issue remains both serious and vexing.[80] The Manichaeans belonged to a growing vegetarian movement in late antiquity, usually justified in terms of recognizing in animals an animate life force, soul, or even rudimentary intelligence shared with human beings. Concepts of reincarnation also played a part. All these ideas factored into Manichaean prohibition of killing animals, and a ban on the Elect eating meat. They regarded killing animals as more serious than killing plants, in part because the latter could be offset by the merit of providing fruits and vegetables for the ritual meal (*MM* 17.59–60). "There is a compensation, we are told, when part of what is taken from the fields is given to the elect and the saints to be purified" (*MM* 17.60). But could not a butcher, Augustine asked, offset his sin by using all his proceeds to supply huge quantities of vegetables to the Elect? No, the answer came back, "in order to expiate the slaughter, the thing must be given as food, as is the case of fruits and vegetables, which cannot be done [with meat], because the Elect do not eat flesh, and so your followers must not slaughter animals" (*MM* 17.62). One could well understand, Augustine acknowledged, how the cries of pain from an animal cause emotional reactions of sympathy in humans; but "man disregards this in a beast, with which, as not having a rational soul, we have no community of rights" (*MM* 17.59).

Augustine reserved for last his turn from dietary to sexual asceticism, and his criticism on the Manichaean "Seal of the Breast," involving their "very questionable chastity." Perhaps cognizant of how careful he had to be not to produce arguments that could be turned against the moral ideals of celibacy and chastity shared by Nicene ascetics, Augustine made no direct attack on the Elect rule of celibacy per se, but instead targeted the peculiar Manichaean emphasis on birth control for the Auditors. Manichaeans

considered bearing children more of a sin than cohabitation without children, he said, and "counsel us to observe as much as possible the time when a woman, after her purification, is most likely to conceive, and to abstain from cohabitation at that time" (*MM* 18.65). Taking a remarkably traditionalist line, he cited against this attitude the Roman marriage contract on the purpose of marriage, which it defined as a sexual partnership for the purpose of producing legitimate heirs, separating the sexual partners from other sexual liaisons. Therefore, "There is no marriage where motherhood is not in view," and a couple avoiding conception are not truly married (*MM* 18.65). The Manichaeans therefore prohibited *nuptias*, because this was by definition a partnership for the production of children, and so involved imprisoning souls in new bodies. At the same time, they did not forbid *concubitum*, cohabitation without the express purpose of producing children—the arrangement Augustine himself had while he was a Manichaean. Traditional Roman culture encouraged reproduction and looked down upon birth control. Augustine played to an audience steeped in this atmosphere with consummate skill, portraying the Manichaeans in this regard, too, as alien to the values of good society, despite the ironic juxtaposition with his own voluntary celibacy.

The mundane social contract of marriage had been invested long before with philosophical respectability, by having read into it the ideal of restraining sexual passion. The indulgence of sexual passion was considered by many philosophers an undignified surrender of rational control, and they therefore praised those who yielded to it as little as possible, and even then for such perfectly rational and socially constructive reasons as reproduction. This philosophical emphasis on sexual restraint formed an entirely separate wing of late antique sexual asceticism from the more radical encratism that sought to completely transcend sexuality, and in doing so slip the bonds of the cosmos that operated on a sexual economy of birth and death. Manichaeism emerged from the latter movement, and directed its attention against perpetuating this world of bondage by reproduction. Augustine saw an opportunity to contrast this position to a philosophical restraint of the passions of sexuality except in the civic service of perpetuating society. "For though you do not forbid sexual intercourse, you forbid marriage in the proper sense . . . although this is the only good excuse for such intercourse." He acknowledged that the Manichaeans would object to his characterization of their position as an unfair caricature, because they actually promoted celibacy, allowing sex only as a concession to those incapable of maintaining such an ideal. This, they argued, corresponded to the position taught by Paul (1 Corinthians 7). Unable

to dismiss this scriptural support, Augustine resorted to prurient slander, suggesting that the Manichaean Elect might be legitimately suspected of engaging in deviant sexual practices designed to liberate the light from human seed as from the seed of plants.[81] Such rumors had been in circulation for some time (see, e.g., Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* 6), perhaps in part deriving from the practices of antinomian sects with which Manichaeism was polemically identified, but certainly in large part the product of a seemingly perennial suspicion about secret societies, including the earliest Christians. While he was a Manichaean, Augustine observed nothing to support the idea of secret sexual rituals—a fact that Fortunatus would cleverly induce Augustine to concede at the beginning of their debate (perhaps in response to this very passage) only a couple of years later. But here, Augustine had it both ways, dropping the hint while rhetorically insisting he would not pursue such a suspicion, but stick to established facts. In this way, like a skilled prosecutor, he scored a polemical point in the minds of his audience without having to substantiate anything.

Having done his best to challenge and ridicule the principles of Manichaean asceticism, Augustine closed *Morals of the Manichaeans* with anecdotes revealing moral failings of the Manichaean Elect in practice, designed to counter the argument that his Manichaean mentor Faustus had put forward, that Manichaeism was justified by its success in producing virtuous human beings. If the contradictory and nonsensical precepts of Mani were kept, Augustine suggested, it would simply be a matter of folly; but if they were taught without being kept, it would entail a matter of deceit (*MM* 19.67). He histrionically declared that he had plenty of reason to charge such deceit. But even a mildly critical reading of his string of reports about ostensible moral violations committed by Manichaean Elect reveals that, other than unconfirmed and unsettled matters of hearsay, Augustine's decade of close observance of the community yielded nothing more serious than a single incident of boorish behavior (*MM* 19.68). Augustine's underlying premise, however, was a valid one: if his observations about the continued mundane character of conduct among the Manichaean Elect were fair, Manichaeism was not consistently producing saints in Africa.

He supported this conclusion with a final story regarding the collapse of an attempt to form a Manichaean monastery in Rome, which served not only to prove the undeveloped virtue of the Manichaean Elect, but also the irrationally strict character of Manichaean ascetic precepts (*MM* 20.74).[82] The episode's denouement comes with the noble Auditor, confronting the revolt

of the Elect against the stringency of the rules, insisting that "either all must be kept, or the man who had given such a sanction to such precepts, which no one could fulfill, must be thought a great fool." Augustine thus placed in the mouth of an unimpeachably virtuous Manichaean Auditor the conclusion he wished his readers to join him in reaching: that Mani was a fool and his ethical system superstitious folly. His description of the collapse of this effort at monastic living—a perfect contrast to the successful tales of Nicene monasticism at the end of *Morals of the Catholic Church*—serves to foreshadow for his readers the collapse of the plausibility of Manichaeism itself, and to put them in the position of the disenchanted Auditor who learned firsthand the failure of both the Manichaean code of conduct and the persons widely imagined to fulfill it.

Just as Manichaean Elect could not strictly observe their own precepts in a monastic setting, Augustine reports, so too their discipline broke down under conditions of persecution (*MM* 19.69). Augustine found it ironic that order would disintegrate so quickly in a sect that gloried in its martyrdom. "What then of their assertion that they will always have persecution in this world, for which they suppose that they will be thought the more of? For this is the application they make of the words about the world hating them" (see John 15.18). If they expected a constant state of persecution, and yet held back from enforcing the precepts under persecution, as Augustine had observed, for fear that the disciplined person would turn them in to the authorities, there never could be anything but laxity among the Elect (*MM* 19.69).

Augustine laid the blame for such failings of moral fiber directly at the feet of the ideology that motivated Manichaean conduct. If the Manichaeans believed that the soul, though a part of God, was so easily overcome by "the mixture of a little evil," he argued, "who that believes this, when incited by passion, will not find here an excuse, instead of checking and controlling his passion?" The Manichaean version of the story of Adam, in which he was overcome by temptation despite possessing the greatest concentration of soul of any human, seemed to confirm the attitude Augustine was decrying (*MM* 19.73).[83] Augustine knew this attitude well. It had been, in fact, his own when, as a Manichaean, he could "make no progress" in the religion because its belief system did not push him hard enough to moral reform. Its fatalistic account of evil saw violations as inevitable under the mixed conditions that prevailed in the world, and so structured a confessional system that constantly pardoned sins while reiterating the distinction between good and evil, but had little in the way of sanctions against sin, such as the rules of

penance employed among non-Manichaean Christians. Augustine appears to have come to the conclusion that the Manichaean system, while too hard in its demands on the Elect, was conversely too soft on the Auditors, too complacent in its long view of multiple lifetimes of incremental progress, too unrealistic about what it takes to reform human behavior in the single lifetime Augustine now thought he had.

Augustine's decision to challenge the Manichaeans on their own ascetic turf was nothing if not brave. He could not pretend that ascetic practice was widespread in non-Manichaean Christian circles, or even that it was a feature of his own African Christian background. He could not easily forget how persuasive Manichaeans such as Faustus were when they derided "semi-Christianity"; even now, he was inclined to agree with these criticisms to a point. His adopted "Catholic" community represented the most lax communion in the region, compared to the more rigorist Donatists and Manichaeans. Ambrose and his associates had already reined in some of the more excessive practices of Italian Christianity, and Augustine would seek similar reforms in Africa as soon as he was in a position to influence Catholic leaders there (see, e.g., *Ep* 22.). He refused to debate with the Manichaeans the low state of practice that could be found among many nominal adherents of non-Manichaean Christianity; he suggested that a religion should be judged by its best elements rather than its worst. Claiming knowledge of lapses even among the Manichaean Elect, he called for equity in judging each other.

> Do not summon against me professors of the Christian name, who neither know nor give evidence of the power of their profession. Do not hunt up the numbers of ignorant people, who even in the true religion are superstitious, or are so given up to evil passions as to forget what they have promised to God. I know that there are many worshippers of tombs and pictures. I know that there are many who drink to great excess over the dead, and who, in the feasts which they make for corpses, bury themselves over the buried, and give to their gluttony and drunkenness the name of religion. I know that there are many who in words have renounced this world, and yet desire to be burdened with all the weight of worldly things, and rejoice in such burdens. Nor is it surprising that among so many multitudes you should find some by condemning whose life you may deceive the unwary and seduce them from Catholic safety; for in your small numbers you are at a loss when called on to show even one out of those whom you call the Elect who

> keeps the precepts, which in your indefensible superstition you profess. (*ME* 34.75)

He closed both *Morals of the Catholic Church* and *Morals of the Manichaeans* with surprising modesty, calling for a truce with the Manichaeans: "you should at least desist from slandering the Catholic Church, by declaiming against the conduct of men whom the Church herself condemns, seeking daily to correct them as wicked children." In its charity, the Church refused to cast off such flawed brethren, in the prospect of their reform or at least some modicum of reward or amelioration of punishment for them insofar as they manifest some slight Christian virtue (*ME* 34.76; 35.80).[84] Even as he granted that the moral ideals of Manichaeism could not be judged by the scandalous conduct of a few of its adherents, he asked the Manichaeans likewise not to judge the Catholic moral system itself by those of its followers who fell short in its practice (*MM* 20.75).

In Thagaste, then, Augustine moved into the role of the public apostate, composing tracts that lauded the virtues of his adopted religion and defended it against the criticisms of his former faith, while finding polemical points of attack against the latter. Such works continued at a more explicit level the same sort of othering he had already begun implicitly in his earlier post-conversion writings. He was in the process of defining his new "Catholic" self not exclusively in the terms with which the Nicene tradition had been delivered to him, but also selectively over against his own former identity, accentuating the differences between the two systems that made a difference specifically for him. He had the temerity to imagine that they might also make a difference for other Manichaeans. Yet he had good reasons for this assumption, because, in the cases he chose to highlight, the Nicene position represented a return to cultural norms, to Roman society's "common sense," over against the counter-cultural alterity Manichaeism presented. Or at least Augustine portrayed things that way. The popularity in Milan of Platonism (perhaps particularly of a kind of "pop-Platonism" that blended with more general philosophical themes) gave the impression that it represented the intellectual mainstream. But back in Africa it represented a colonial novelty, and that fact may explain some of the difficulty Augustine had in being as persuasive as he thought he was.

Augustine had endeavored to introduce into the perennial subjects of God, soul, myth, and morals in their African setting a set of new proposals from the further shores of the Roman world. He had colonized these

subjects with novel formulations that he presented in a far from systematic manner, and he referred to many key elements of his adopted faith in ways that showed them to hold as yet no functional role in his thinking. It is quite possible that they never would have attained such a role, and that Augustine would have remained an intellectual dabbler, had it not been for a fateful trip down the road from Thagaste to Hippo he took in early 391. Quite against his will, Augustine found himself thrust into a new profession where what he had taken to be mere popular signs of philosophical truths had to be treated as the controlling paradigms of his rhetoric, and hence of his thought.

CHAPTER 3

Perfecting the Paradigm

IN THE EARLY spring of 391, Augustine took the road north from Thagaste to the coastal town of Hippo, supposedly on a personal mission to recruit for his community a prominent citizen (one of the *agentes in rebus*, or government comissioners)—such new recruits were essential to keep the project funded—but possibly also with a thought to relocate the community itself to Hippo (*Serm* 355.2; Possidius 3.3).[1] He claimed a few months later that "we were planning a period of retreat for gaining knowledge of the divine scriptures, and wanted to arrange our affairs in order that we could have the leisure for this task" (*Ep* 21.3). But it was not to be.

The local Nicene Christians of Hippo were in desperate need of vigorous new blood. They had only the aged Greek Valerius for a bishop, whose Latin was labored and knowledge of the local dialects nonexistent. The rival Donatist community dominated the town, and had control of the principal basilica. The Donatist Proculeianus, not Valerius, would have been thought of as the "bishop of Hippo."[2] The Nicene party was battling for second place with the Manichaeans, who were led by an articulate and pious Electus named Fortunatus. Since Augustine had been in the town for some weeks, he had become known to people there as a man of means and education. Valerius took advantage of his presence in church one Sunday to speak of his need for a competent priest. The congregation took the hint and conscripted Augustine into the priesthood on the spot (Possidius 4.1–2).

The tears Augustine shed at this turn of events—reported both by himself (*Ep* 21.2) and by his biographer Possidius—suggest that this was not the career path he had in mind. In fact, his initial comment on his ordination

characterized it as a punishment for his sins (*Ep* 21.1). It was not that the priesthood demanded a more austere lifestyle. Augustine had already adopted the celibacy and vegetarianism of a Manichaean Elect on his own initiative; neither was required of a Catholic priest. But he tended to think of a priest as primarily a cultic functionary, carrying out symbolic ceremonies for a general public incapable of comprehending direct instruction in the philosophical meaning of the mysteries. His intellectual pursuits, which he may have been seeking to safeguard from public duties and obligations by relocating from his home town, now would be intruded on all the more by the priestly profession, as William Babcock imagines.

> Ordination came upon Augustine unexpectedly and against his will; and it had the effect of wrenching him from the life-context which he had chosen for himself and thrusting him into a context which he had neither chosen nor desired. It tore him from the leisured pursuit of God in the community of *servi Dei* which he had assembled in Thagaste after his return to Africa from Rome; and it forced him into the turbulent milieu of African Christianity where the Christian life was at least as much a matter of violent ecclesiastical partisanship as it was of philosophic approach to divine truth. In short, Augustine's ordination compelled him to depart the Christianity of the philosophic elite and to enter the Christianity of the North African crowd.[3]

As happened in other similar cases, Augustine may have fled Hippo immediately with the impulse to avoid the service into which he had been conscripted.[4] From a distance, however, reflecting on his destiny, he decided to accept that which had been thrust upon him. He wrote back to bishop Valerius in Hippo, begging time to arrange his affairs and collect his wits before reporting for duty (*Ep* 21).

Given all the evidence, it would require a hagiographic viewpoint to think that Augustine was being unduly modest in his letter to Valerius when he commented on his ill-preparedness for his new role as a priest. It was no exaggeration for him to write, "I did not learn either from my boyhood or young manhood what this manner of service is," since he had never witnessed the sacrament before his baptism in Milan, and in the few years since had expressed not the slightest interest in Christian ritual. In fact, Augustine makes no mention in his letters or more formal writings of the time of attending church services or participating in Christian ritual in the four years following

his initial baptism and communion in April 387.[5] Based on the initiatory ethos of his culture, he may have viewed the latter experience as a rite of initiation into the Christian mysteries, and further participation as superfluous reinforcement. He regarded all such liturgical rites as symbolic representations of inner truths rather than efficacious acts, functioning as alternative means of instruction for the less philosophically inclined.[6]

Nor should we assume that Augustine humbly underplayed his knowledge of scripture at the time. Valerius had made it known that he expected Augustine's duties to include not only the usual liturgical role of a priest, but also the sermonizing function usually reserved for a bishop. The aging and linguistically challenged Valerius wanted to yield this role to the trained rhetorician. Augustine told Valerius that he felt himself under-prepared for this role, and that he needed a period of intensive Bible study before he could conceivably begin to expound scripture from the pulpit.[7] Except for the Psalms and wisdom books of the Old Testament, and of course the first chapters of Genesis, the Bible was largely *terra incognita* for him. The anomalous appearance of extensive New Testament verses in *Morals of the Catholic Church* Augustine himself attributed to his recollection of Manichaean usage (*ME* 1.2), although that recollection may have been supplemented by his catechetical instruction, which would have dwelt heavily on the kind of ethical passages that constituted the focus of that work.[8]

Augustine thus perceived a broad gap between what he knew and what might be suitable for the edification of common people. He expressed confidence that the Christian scriptures could supply such popular counsels for the masses (*Ep* 21.4), but conveyed his anxiety to be better prepared to meet the challenge to this "property of the church," the Bible, by someone else's false claims, against which he must plead the case of the Catholic Church. To do this he needed to learn how to "cultivate" this property so that it could successfully yield the nourishment of the poor (*Ep* 21.5). There can be no doubt that he had the Manichaeans in mind among such rival claimants, based upon his own past experience. Augustine and his circle in Thagaste had only just begun to work out intellectually satisfying readings of the Bible—and a very small portion of the Bible at that—that corresponded with Platonic Nicene Christianity rather than with Manichaeism. Now Augustine was faced with not only accelerating this intellectual reclamation of scriptures, but also producing interpretations accessible to the masses, rather than for the in-house consumption of his close associates.

Given the dramatic change in the conditions of his life, his protestations

of ill-preparedness, and the consequent expectation that he would throw himself heartily into making up his deficiencies, it is remarkable that we see so little immediate consequence in his literary persona. As Goulven Madec rightly notes, "The works composed on one side and the other of the date of the presbyterial ordination (391) do not manifest a change of theological orientation, still less some intellectual or spiritual crisis."[9] Contrary to what some have suggested, Augustine's entry into the clerical profession did not, in itself, initiate the radical transformation that leads from the Cassiciacum dialogues to *Confessions*. The literary fruits of Augustine's first year and a half as a priest continued very much in the same vein as his Thagaste works, with Manichaeism occupying his full attention as the Other over against which he wished to define his new identity, and with little interest in biblical exegesis per se.[10] It almost would seem that he had returned to the sort of divided self he had experienced as a Manichaean, with his "day-job" somewhat at odds with his private pursuits, however much the latter served the same broadly defined religious camp.[11] In *The Usefulness of Belief* (*De utilitate credendi*) and *The Two Souls* (*De duabus animabus*), both written early in his priesthood, Augustine delineated further the differences between the Nicene and Manichaean understandings of truth for an intellectual audience, continuing in the role of the apostate seeking to induce others to follow him in conversion, and into the project of making a "Catholic" self. In the process, he defined and circumscribed the nature and condition of the self or soul presupposed within his adopted faith over against the quite different assumptions about those matters among the Manichaeans. In effect, he strove to perfect the paradigm of Catholic selfhood in his own further articulation of the implications of his commitment.

The Epistemological Necessity of Belief

Augustine's *The Usefulness of Belief* was actually a long letter addressed to Honoratus, a Manichaean friend of his from their days together in Carthage whom he wished to win over to the Nicene Christian faith. Augustine scarcely ever made himself more likable than he did in this composition, in which he proposed to "seek the truth together" with Honoratus to conclusions on which they both could agree. "He had to unsay all that he had once said," Gillian Evans observes, to "lead his friend back from the positions into which he had once led him, and he had to do it without loss of face on either side."[12]

Through the genre of apology, he endeavored to justify the reasonableness and intellectual respectability of going over to that which he and his friends once had regarded as a low superstition. They were rash in this opinion, he now argued, because their youthful impetuousness balked at submitting to authority and learning with patience.[13] They too quickly concluded that they had found truth in Manichaeism, at a time when their intellects, still dependent on the senses for their sense of reality, were incapable of making a sound assessment (*UC* 1.1).[14]

Augustine considered himself personally responsible for leading Honoratus into Manichaeism. "You were not yet a Christian when you were, by my exhortation, with difficulty induced to hear and find out about these men whom you violently detested" (*UC* 1.2). Honoratus apparently had been impressed, as Augustine had been, with their ability to refute other views, while their own teachings seemed less vulnerable to critique. But by insisting that truth was evident and accessible to anyone who simply observed the clues to be found in the world, Augustine now contended, the Manichaeans sold truth too cheaply, and did not take account of the weakness of the ordinary intellect.

> You know, Honoratus, that I fell among these people for no other reason than that they declared that they would put aside all overawing authority, and by pure and simple reason would bring to God those who were willing to listen to them, and so deliver them from all error. . . . They said we were overawed by superstition and were bidden to believe rather than to reason, while they pressed no one to believe until the truth had been discussed and elucidated. Who would not be enticed by these promises, especially if he were an adolescent with a mind eager for truth, but made proud and garrulous by the disputes of learned men in school? Such they found me then, scorning what I took to be old wives' tales, and desirous of swallowing and holding the open and sincere truth which they promised. (*UC* 1.2)

While the Manichaeans promised a religion fully graspable by reason to all, Augustine had found the path of reason difficult even for himself, and so believed it well-nigh impossible for the majority of the unwashed masses. So whatever it was the Manichaeans were peddling as understandable by the reasoning powers of the average person, it could not possibly be that exalted and rarefied truth for which Augustine had been striving all his life. The Manichaeans, he concluded, had stopped short of the real truth, and had

accepted a phantasm in its place. Implicit in Augustine's assessment was his surprise that the Manichaeans did not have deeper philosophical teachings for which their myths served as mere popular parables, whereas the Christians he discovered in Milan offered such philosophical interpretations of the myths contained in the Old Testament. The Manichaeans appeared stuck at the "pop" level.

Augustine suggested that by stopping the search for truth too soon, and allowing people to rest comfortably within a level of reasoning still embedded in the material world, Manichaeism could not hope to lead them out of other, moral entanglements with materiality, however much it tried through moral exhortation (*UC* 1.3). Intellectual and moral detachment from the world must go hand in hand. In a clever reversal of the polemical tropes he had himself employed as a Manichaean, he now portrayed the Manichaeans, rather than other Christians, as the ones who catered to and coddled the crowd. While the criticisms the Manichaeans leveled against the superstitious form of Christianity Augustine and Honoratus had seen around them in their youth might have had some validity, Augustine wanted his friend to know that the new Italian, philosophical variety that he has learned delivered the fulfillment of the quest for truth they had mistakenly thought Manichaeism offered.[15]

For Honoratus to follow Augustine's own lead and be won over to the new truth found in the Catholic Church required only two things: (1) recognizing the necessity of relying on authority to establish the core premises of a rational search for truth, and (2) accepting on that authority the identification of valid sources of truth, such as the Bible (Old and New Testaments alike), at which the untrained mind at first may revolt. If Manichaean objections to these two positions could be overcome, he believed, he could win over Honoratus and untold numbers of other Manichaeans.

Augustine could presume a certain shared outlook and set of interests between himself and his former friends among the Manichaeans. He was not addressing atheists, or people who thought they lived and died as animals without purpose, or those who cared only about mundane measures of happiness or success.

> No one doubts that he who seeks true religion either believes already that the soul, which is to profit by religion, is immortal, or at least hopes to gain that belief from religion itself. All religion is on account of the soul. No man has any care or anxiety about the condition of his natural body, at any rate after death, if his soul possesses that which

> will make it blessed. On account of the soul alone or chiefly, therefore, true religion, if there is one, is instituted. But the soul—I know not why and I confess the problem is obscure—the soul errs and is foolish, as we see, until it obtains and comprehends wisdom. Wisdom is perchance true religion. Am I sending you to fables? Am I compelling you to believe anything rashly? I say our soul is ensnared and plunged in folly and error, but seeks the path of truth, if there be any. If this is not your experience, pardon me, and share with me, I pray, your wisdom. But if you recognize in your own heart that it is as I say, let us, I beseech you, seek the truth together (*UC* 7.14).

If the Manichaeans affirmed even this much of the value and purpose of religion, they already displayed some elements of faith. They must at least believe in God and the soul, and that there is such a thing as true religion, a sure way for the soul to attain to God, if they seek it and are interested in listening to Manichaean authorities expound it (*UC* 14.30). If, as the Manichaeans loved to quote, "He that seeks shall find," on what basis would they seek if they did not believe there was something worth seeking for?

But how should one proceed to seek truth? Many professed truth, but who should be trusted? While maintaining that all the simple people should follow and imitate the wise (*UC* 12.27), Augustine admitted the logical contradiction in assuming that an unwise person would have the ability to discern a truly wise person to follow (*UC* 13.28). The seeker in North Africa faced all sorts of competing claims to truth. What made any one claim to possess truth any more plausible than another? The Manichaeans "promise to give to those whom they attract a reason even for their most obscure doctrines. This is the chief charge they bring against the Catholic Church, that it bids those who come to it to believe, while they themselves impose no yoke of belief, but glory in opening the fount of knowledge" (*UC* 9.21). Augustine understood how attractive such a promise was, and how much it appealed to intellectuals such as Honoratus and himself. If only it had proven true.

> They say this without having any ability to fulfill their promise but only to win popularity by prating of reason. The human soul naturally is pleased with such promises. It does not consider its own powers and state of health, and asks for the food of sound men which should only be given to the strong. Thus it sucks the poison of deceivers. (*UC* 9.21)

The Manichaeans leaped over the necessary preliminaries, and offered access to truth at the beginning, rather than at the end, of personal reform. In this way, Augustine claimed, their followers were fooled into thinking that they had arrived before they had even begun. They reversed the proper order of progress; first must come the moral and intellectual disciplining by which people learned to give up "love of anything besides God and the soul." "To wish to see the truth in order that you may purge your soul is a perverse and preposterous idea, because it is precisely in order that you may see, that it has to be purged" (*UC* 16.34). Reason could not proceed without a disciplined rectification of self, and such a transformation would not occur so long as one either trusted in a poorly established reason or waited in vain for rational certitude. Augustine thus argued that those were to be trusted who, contrary to the Manichaean position, insisted on a preliminary moral purification of the mind prior to supplying the full explanation of truths accepted provisionally on faith.

Augustine raised core epistemological questions of how people know what they know, and how what they think they know could be tested. Belief forms the foundation of understanding, he contended, and the reasoning process relies on authority as its starting point (*UC* 1.2). A child is told things it has no means to discover for itself, even something as basic as the identity of its parents (*UC* 12.26); only later, as it develops, does it acquire the means to confirm such truths for itself. Augustine extended this observation to all historical knowledge. A person could not possibly know first-hand what happened before his or her time, but had to rely on the authority of those who passed down information about past events (*UC* 11.25).[16] The reliability of such information could be confirmed by the general assent of others. The argument *ex consensu gentium* had a long and distinguished history in the rhetorical toolkit of Augustine's classical education, according to which the individual should yield to general opinion, which carried the weight of many minds over many generations against the arrogance of an individual dissenter. By making use of this argument, Augustine rhetorically turned the tables on the Manichaean self-image as a select elite who declared that "truth is found among the few" (*UC* 7.16)—even though he generally agreed with this proposition. While conceding in theory that the ability to grasp truth was rare, he proposed that those able to achieve it would probably also have the skills to disseminate it successfully and widely, even if the majority of their followers were unable to probe deeply into and master that which they accepted on the authority

of the few. When the Manichaeans themselves affirmed trust in Christ and the truth of his teachings, Augustine argued, they implicitly depended not on reason but on belief in a testimony "widely spread and firmly established among the peoples and nations of the earth," who, he unabashedly asserted, "everywhere observe the mysteries of the Catholic Church" (*UC* 14.31).[17] As "Catholic," the Nicene community was for Augustine, by definition, the embodiment of the popular consensus of truth.[18]

For Augustine, the argument from popular acceptance fit into the monotheistic concept of God's omnipotence. If one believed that God presides over human affairs, and intends good, then it naturally followed that he has provided a trustworthy authority and ensured its survival and success by which all could pursue wisdom and goodness. Popular success represented a display of superior power indicative of God-sanctioned authority in much the same way as miracles did (*UC* 16.34). The Catholic Church proved its reliable authority through its domination of the planet, its superior sway, "the highest pinnacle of authority, having brought about the conversion of the human race," by which at the same time "heretics . . . have been condemned . . . by the judgment of the common people" (*UC* 17.35). Given the premise of providence, "how is it possible to be more ungrateful for the help of God than to want to resist an authority so strongly established?" (*UC* 17.35).

It is scarcely possible to overstate the poverty of this argument, both in its general principle and in its application to the competing claims of Manichaean and Nicene Christianity. In the conformist comfort of the newly triumphant Catholic Church, Augustine appears to have lost all perspective on the long struggle during which it labored to be heard against the deposit of millennia of countervailing tradition. In any previous generation, the pagans could (and did) use the same argument to claim that truth lay with them, not with Christian upstarts. The argument *ex consensu gentium* unavoidably defends a status quo. How Augustine could reconcile such a position with his otherwise unrelenting decrial of the conditions of the world and the dismal intellectual state of the average person as obstacles to truth is anyone's guess. Absent from his argument was any consideration of the falsifiability of previously accepted knowledge, or of the sort of historical vicissitudes that had replaced paganism with Christianity among such a large percentage of the African population in the few preceding generations. Just a few years earlier, in his work *Order*, Augustine had outlined a similar "proof" as one suitable only for the unlearned, and compared it unfavorably to a more proper proof of religion (which he had learned from the Manichaean Faustus): its

effectiveness in producing a virtuous life (*Ord* 2.9.27).[19] He juxtaposed the same two sorts of proof in *The Usefulness of Belief* (*UC* 17.35), but without the critical comparison by which he formerly differentiated their worth. Either he considered Honoratus unlearned (but cf. *UC* 10.24), or he had lost some of his own intellectual elitism. Whatever the reason, he proceeded uncritically from a description of the means people ordinarily used to acquire knowledge to an endorsement of such means as fitting and right.

Speaking from the comfortable position of the social consensus allowed Augustine to avoid seriously considering the processes by which disconfirmation of authority might occur. How, for example, had Augustine himself come to be freed from the set of premises and assumptions he had held as a Manichaean, so that he could start over with the new authority of Nicene Christianity? If authority provided the premises by which reason must proceed, if the entire ability to reason about something was dependent on a foundation established by authority, how could one undo this conditioning? Augustine had been able to check Manichaean premises against the broader "common sense" of his surrounding culture, and escape Manichaean authority, ironically enough, because the Manichaeans themselves did not insist upon blind faith in their authority. By promising that reason alone established commitment to their religion, the Manichaeans left their adherents in a vulnerable position of reserved allegiance, open to any apparently better argument that might come along. Augustine claimed that he had remained an Auditor, and not taken the step of full commitment entailed in becoming an Elect, because he had mental reservations about Manichaean teachings that the system itself failed to drum out of him by demanding an attitude of absolute trust (*UC* 1.2). He kept his critical judgment active, and this threw up a barrier to a wholehearted investment in the religion. Faith, on the other hand, was transformative precisely because it called individuals out of their personal predilections and humbled their confidence that they could stand in judgment over what they were being taught. That would work fine if one was fortunate enough to place faith in the right religion; but what if one unquestioningly placed faith in the wrong religion? What if, instead of Faustus, Augustine had sat at the feet of a more dogmatic Manichaean teacher and given him absolute trust? Where would he be now?

Augustine suggested a number of ways Manichaeism was exposed as an invalid authority, and therefore not worthy of belief. For one thing, if Manichaeism was wrong about something as basic as the learning process, how could it be right about anything else?[20] By suggesting that the ordinary

human mind, just as it was, could obtain truth without resorting to authority and without detaching itself from sensory perception, Augustine averred, Manichaeism took an implausible position unworthy of confidence. "Who could allow people to profess to belong to Christ, who maintain that nothing is to be believed unless fools are offered an absolutely clear and rational doctrine of God?" (*UC* 14.32). Moreover, it did not deliver on its promise once made. Manichaeism failed to establish its teachings on reason alone, and in this way not only broke trust but contradicted its own position on the nature of truth. Since the Catholic Church made no such promise, it somewhat ironically had not forfeited trust in the same way. Finally, Augustine intimated that authority could not be assessed by the sort of measures by which rational argument was judged. Authority should be weighed by its own set of standards, he suggested, namely, by measures of power. Just as reason should be tested by the principles of logic, so authority should be measured by the principles of sway. A form of authority that commanded wider respect and obedience, by this standard, had a superior claim over an authority that had less sway.

Augustine did not mean to suggest that the great many who went through their whole life never moving beyond an authority-based comprehension of the world were to be thought better than the few capable of using reason (*UC* 10.24). But even the latter—among whom Augustine counted himself—had to rely on authority for the foundations of the reasoning process by which they would ascend to truth more rapidly and readily than the rest. Because of their mortal condition, enmeshed in distracting and misleading sensory attractions, people work with debilitated rational abilities. Authority provided the discipline and training by which the mind or soul detached itself from its sensory fixations so that it could progress in reasoned contemplation (*UC* 10.24; cf. *UC* 16.34).[21] Even someone of Augustine's ability was struggling well into his thirties to discover truth. Augustine still did not understand many of the key teachings of the Catholic Church, even if he believed instinctively that there were subtle philosophical explanations waiting to be discovered, by which he would gain understanding of them. But since even he had yet to work out a full and coherent understanding of truth, he despaired of ordinary folk ever grasping it. Faith offered the only vehicle for their salvation.

> We see how Christ himself, according to the story which [the Manichaeans] also accept, demanded faith above everything else and before everything else, because those with whom he was dealing

> were not yet able to penetrate to the divine secrets. What was the purpose of so many great miracles? He said himself that they were done for no other purpose than that men should believe in him. He led the foolish by faith; you do it by reason. He cried aloud that men should believe; you declaim against faith. He praised those who believed; you rebuke them. (*UC* 14.32)

Therefore, even the intellectually gifted, such as Honoratus, ought to deign to enter religion by way of belief and authority so as to set a good example for those less capable of reason, who may be harmed by trying to imitate the gifted few, and fall prey to false reasoning (*UC* 10.24).

Instead of doing that, Augustine and Honoratus, arrogantly trusting in their own reason and balking at submission to authority, had rashly and naively rejected "a religion that has taken possession of the whole world," without ever having inquired into it with an open mind (*UC* 7.17). What was their excuse? After all, they had delved into Manichaeism even contrary to the law, whereas Nicene Christianity suffered no such impediment to investigation. "Were we, then, prevented from inquiry into the Catholic faith by some legal penalty, by the power of adversaries, by the worthless character or ill-repute of its sacred officers, by its recent foundation, by the fact that it must be professed in secret?" (*UC* 7.18). Of course, "truth and the soul's salvation ought to be sought at whatever risk, even if they cannot safely be sought and found." But at the very least, the perfect legality and even political favor Nicene Christianity enjoyed should encourage its close examination as the possible true religion (*UC* 7.18–19). The closer examination Augustine wished Honoratus to make had to be performed in the "Catholic" rather than the Manichaean manner, however. "True religion cannot by any means be approached without the weighty command of authority. Things must first be believed of which a man may later achieve understanding if he conduct himself well and prove himself worthy" (*UC* 9.21).

But what exactly did Augustine mean when he said things must be believed before they could be understood? Was he being unremittingly circular, and demanding a blind faith that no further use of the intellect could gainsay? At one level, these words were no more than a slogan, adopted from the Latin text of Isaiah with which Augustine was familiar. Yet it simply is not true, in the ordinary sense of the words, that belief in a proposition is a necessary prerequisite to understanding it. On the contrary, if a proposition is not understood at some basic level, there is nothing present to the mind in

which to believe. Moreover, people can understand a concept perfectly well without committing themselves to it as their own personal belief. If Augustine's proposition comes across as so self-evidently erroneous, have we perhaps misunderstood it?

It seems clear from Augustine's presentation in *The Usefulness of Belief* that he had the Old Testament in mind as the principal example of something to be believed in first, before it is understood. The Manichaeans contended that the Old Testament could not be sacred scripture because on its face it contradicted the teachings of Christ and Mani, and breathed a spirit quite different from theirs.

> You know well that the Manichaeans, by their censures of the Catholic faith and chiefly by their destructive criticism of the Old Testament, affect the unlearned, who do not quite know how these things are to be understood. . . . Because some of these things offend ignorant and uncareful minds—the great majority—they can be popularly attacked. Not many have the power to defend them in an equally popular way, because of the mysteries they contain. (*UC* 2.4)

By their own profession, the Old Testament did not belong to them, and they wanted nothing to do with it other than as an object of critique. It belonged to the Jews and the "semi-Christians." Augustine suggested that he and Honoratus had made a mistake akin to accepting the word of someone's enemies as to the person's character, or to having someone who might be quite knowledgeable in some area expound a subject of which he knew nothing. If the Old Testament was admittedly something alien to Manichaean sensibilities, why should they be taken as authorities on its proper interpretation? "Are the Scriptures of the Law, which the Manichaeans attack vainly and foolishly, so very plain and open to vulgar understanding?" (*UC* 6.13). Augustine himself had initially thought so, and been repulsed by this text (*Conf* 3.5.9). He had found kindred intellects among the Manichaeans, who "with floods of oratory and malevolent criticism, tear to pieces books which they do not understand, of which they do not know the purpose or the nature, books which look quite simple but, to those who understand, are subtle and divine; and, because the ignorant applaud, think they have achieved something wonderful" (*UC* 6.13). Those whom Faustus derided as "semi- Christians," on the other hand, were the actual transmitters and caretakers of the text, affirming it to be sacred scripture, and producing an understanding of its content consistent with that

status within their community. For that reason, he maintained, they were the appropriate experts on the subject. Yet he and Honoratus,

> intelligent youths forsooth, marvelous explorers of reason, without turning over these books, without seeking teachers, without the slightest suspicion of our own slowness of comprehension, without the slightest heed paid to those whose care it has been that these books should be read, guarded and studied throughout the world and for so long a time—*we* had the temerity to suppose that nothing such men said was to be believed, influenced as we were by their bitter enemies, among whom, because of their false promise of reason, we were compelled to believe and cherish an unheard-of number of fables. (*UC* 6.13)

Their respective approaches to the Old Testament signaled the diametrically opposed manner in which Manichaeans and Nicene Christians approached religious matters generally, in Augustine's experience. Manichaeans, rejecting or reserving judgment on the Old Testament's status as scripture, approached it without confidence or certainty that it would prove to be worthy of scripture, and so did not think it necessary to look beyond its literal meaning when the latter appeared unpalatable. Nicene Christians, taking on faith its scriptural status, continued to work on and ponder the meaning of the text, however difficult it appeared to be on its surface, until it yielded the teachings it was expected to contain consistent with the faith of the community.

When Augustine spoke of believing prior to understanding, therefore, he seems to have had in mind something like the openness and positive expectation reflected in the Nicene handling of the Old Testament. This reading is supported by the way in which he chose to relate briefly his own story of conversion in *The Usefulness of Belief*. Plagued by doubts and flirting with absolute skepticism, he had turned in desperation to the sermons of Ambrose, open to any hint of where truth might be found (*UC* 8.20). In other words, he had merely shrugged his shoulders and thought he might as well listen to and look at the vibrant Nicene culture all around him. Once his antagonism toward it had been lowered, it began to make a positive impression. The weak form of Augustine's proposition, then, would be that one must not be predisposed against something, but should patiently allow authority to expound and explain something without automatically rejecting it because one does not fully understand it—in a sense, taking the authority's word for it until

one is in a position to test it by reason (*UC* 10.24). Augustine offered this weaker form of the proposition as an apologetic olive branch in *The Usefulness of Belief*, inviting his former Manichaean associates to reconsider the merits of the Nicene faith. The stronger form of his proposition would entail accepting without doubt the truth of something, and continuing to apply reason to it until it yields a meaning that successfully rationalizes the commitment to it. This was the developmental project in which Augustine himself was now engaged.

"So I hold fast," Augustine concluded, portraying himself as a reasonable emulator of Cicero, "the truth I learned" from the Manichaeans concerning the good nature of God, accepting truth wherever he might find it; but at the same time, "I reject the false opinion they taught me" about the tenets of the Nicene faith that fell under their criticism, in particular that the Nicene view of God corresponded with a literal reading of the Old Testament. In place of this false opinion, he had learned directly from Nicene authorities themselves that they believed God to be incorporeal, that no part of him could be perceived by the senses, that the entirety of his nature or substance is inviolable and immutable, that no part of it is compounded or molded to a pattern (*UC* 18.36). They considered these honorable ideas about God perfectly compatible with the acceptance of the Old Testament as sacred scripture, despite its surface appearance of contradicting them. One should allow them the chance to demonstrate how that is so.

Augustine's invitation to Honoratus went unheeded, and apparently unanswered. Unlike Augustine, Honoratus had "made progress" in the Manichaean religion and advanced to the status of an Elect.[22] He did not see Augustine's conversion as the latter did, namely, as a logical continuation of their former common pursuit of truth. Disappointed by his failure to start a discussion, Augustine abandoned his intention of composing a second work to Honoratus (*Retr* 1.13.8).[23] But looking for the effectiveness of Augustine's reasoning on another may misdirect us from the more immediate purpose of *The Usefulness of Belief*. In addressing another, one always also addresses oneself, reciting and reiterating a particular self-presentation. Writing only a few years after his own conversion, Augustine found an opportunity to rationalize his new commitments over against Manichaean positions not only for Honoratus, but for himself. *The Usefulness of Belief* allowed Augustine to extend for himself the comparison of the two systems that had in turn defined him, and further the critique of his own past self that had been implicit in the act of conversion itself.

Many of Augustine's early post-conversion works provide a self-conscious, brief account of his personal journey as a preface for articulating where he now stood on particular intellectual issues. But in *The Usefulness of Belief* Augustine intertwined his story with that of Honoratus as a kind of alter ego whom he imagined to share in every detail his own predilections and aspirations. As a result, the work became an extended meditation on what it means for a Manichaean self to become instead "Catholic." "What is new in the *De utilitate credendi*," Isabelle Bochet has observed, "is the articulation between the *récit* and the argumentation. The autobiographic evocation is not limited to a prologue alone, it punctuates the argumentation and plays a determining role in the progression of the treatise."[24] Particularly striking is the open-endedness of Augustine's summons of his former comrade to his side, as if he wanted to tell a story about himself and Honoratus for which the ending remained unwritten. He presented himself as waiting on Honoratus to rejoin the quest for truth with him from which Honoratus, not he, had defected by settling for facile, self-gratifying answers. Augustine suggested that the outcome of that quest for truth now appeared clear to him, even before he had achieved full understanding of it. The path was clear, if not the end, and he could report from the road, so to speak, about a promising journey that was not yet complete even for himself. Without a doubt, Augustine offered a rhetorical self-presentation in *The Usefulness of Belief*; but we should not for that reason treat it as *merely* rhetorical. The notion that Augustine secretly had all the (orthodox) answers, and only feigned to be a self still in formation, lacks substantiating evidence—in other compositions of the period, or in the private letters and notes that he always retained when they held anything he thought of substance. No, in performing self Augustine was making self, working out understandings of iconic commitments so that they could do work in guiding his thought and judgment.

The Unity of the Self

If *The Usefulness of Belief* takes the form of an apology for Augustine's new commitments, *The Two Souls* reads as an abjuration of one part of his old ones. In this work Augustine declared his abandonment of the Manichaean account of the divided self, and substituted in its place a conception of the self that embraced both good and evil, both positive and negative thoughts, emotions, and drives. The narrative Augustine later provided in *Confessions*

identified this transition in his thinking as the critical one in revolutionizing his life. In that later account he spoke of reaching the conclusion in Milan that only his own lack of determination offered an obstacle to making moral progress. This Nicene position on the full freedom of choice possessed by all in their moral decision-making had found its first careful articulation in the first book of *Free Choice*, composed while Augustine was still in Italy; now, in *The Two Souls* he contrasted it with the Manichaean view of a divided and debilitated human selfhood.

Although he was on the attack in *The Two Souls*,[25] Augustine maintained the relatively friendly tone he had adopted in *The Usefulness of Belief*, addressing in the Manichaeans "those with whom I was in perfect agreement from boyhood on" (*DA* 15.24). He wished to persuade his own "dearly beloved" friends that they were mistaken in their understanding of human nature, ethical principles, and the relation of humankind to God and, in converting them, to bring an end to the "wounding and tormenting" he experienced in being alienated from them in religious matters (*DA* 14.23). He trusted in the power of reason and persuasion. Surely, their minds would follow the same lines of deduction as his, and they would reach the same inexorable conclusion he did.

The chief challenge for the modern reader of *The Two Souls* is determining the degree to which Augustine may have constructed a largely straw-man caricature of the Manichaean position. This issue has been the subject of considerable debate over the last century: Did or did not the Manichaeans actually teach the existence of two "souls" within each person?[26] Did Augustine misunderstand or deliberately distort Manichaean teaching on this subject?[27] Only when we answer such questions can we proceed to assess the strength and cogency that Augustine's arguments would have had for his Manichaean contemporaries, or draw conclusions about the degree to which his effort was circumscribed by his own personal past construal of Manichaean teaching.

Augustine claimed that the Manichaeans taught the presence within each individual of an inherently evil soul, coexisting with an inherently good soul (*DA* 1.1, 8.10), and that he was employing the Manichaeans' own terminology in referring to an *animam lucis* and an *animam tenebrarum* (*DA* 14.22). Manichaeans explained the experience of inner conflict over what one should think and do, he said, as the struggle between these two souls for control of the human person. Much of Augustine's argument in *The Two Souls* involved demonstrating the incoherence of such an idea according to the accepted categories of reality shared among the intellectual elite of the Roman

world. Augustine was not the first polemicist to represent the Manichaeans this way; Serapion of Thmuis also asserted that the Manichaeans taught the existence of two souls (Casey, 38.18). Did they have it right?

With the recovery of a substantial amount of primary Manichaean sources, we are now in a position to draw fairly safe conclusions on this question. It is clear from the Manichaeans' own literature that they avoided referring to the oppositional force within humans as a "soul." They reserved the latter term for a positive connotation connected to the individual's authentic, divine identity. Thus they never ran afoul of the long-standing tradition in Greco-Roman philosophy that denied the possibility of such a thing as an evil soul per se, despite Augustine's attempt to smear them with this philosophical fault. Augustine, therefore, did not accurately or fairly represent the Manichaeans' position in their own terms. They referred at most to "two minds" (*duas animos*), but never "two souls" (*duas animas*). Subtle phrasing in several of the passages where Augustine remarked on the subject reveals his manipulation of the Manichaeans' own language toward his imposed interpretation, from where it was more liable to attack. In *True Religion* 46, for instance, he first spoke of the Manichaean doctrine as one of *duas naturas uel substantias* before switching to language of *duas animas*. Similarly, in his late *Heresies* 46, he would speak of *duas animas uel duas mentes*. He similarly expressed himself more accurately in *Confessions* 8.10.22: "perceiving two wills in the act of deliberating, they assert that there are within us two natures, of two minds—one good, the other evil" (*qui cum duas voluntates in deliberando animadverterint, duas naturas duarum mentium esse . . . , unam bonam, alterem malam*; cf. *Conf.* 5.10.18: *non esse nos, qui peccamus, sed nescio quam aliam in nobis peccare naturam*). From this evidence it seems more likely that Augustine consciously chose to (mis)represent the Manichaean position as one of two souls, rather than that he misunderstood them actually to teach such a doctrine.[28]

On the other hand, once we get past the issue of the term "soul" itself, we have grounds for considering Augustine not altogether unreasonable in characterizing the evil force Manichaeans believed inhabited every person as, for all intents and purposes, a "soul" in its attributes of consciousness, intention, and will. In his opinion, Manichaeans at least would work within the normal parameters of rational categories if they spoke of "evil" as something naturally harmful to the "good," without any will or volition—as fire naturally harms living things without itself possessing consciousness, life, or will. One could at least discuss such a concept, even if Augustine rejected

the idea of natural evil,[29] and considered impious the idea that there was something like this natural evil powerful enough to effect a change in God, or that God himself might be vulnerable to such a force, as he thought the Manichaean position entailed (*DA* 12.16).[30] But when Manichaeans ascribed something like a conscious will to evil, they removed it, in his opinion, from the category of natural evil and place it in the category of soul. Augustine had no problem speaking of various things present in the human individual (such as the flesh, or the senses) that impacted upon and resisted the soul, but only as *things* without will or intention of their own, dependent on the soul itself for any active role in shaping human thought or behavior. Manichaeism had the advantage of providing a compelling account of the experience of conflict within the individual, while any tradition committed to a concept of the soul as monadic had difficulty explaining what William Babcock terms the "perplexing question of the self's resistance to itself, of its refusal, so to speak, to love and to will one thing. In the culture of late antiquity," he notes, "it was the Manichees, more than any others, who had come to grips with this question and provided an interpretation of the human experience from which it arises."[31] Other accounts of the same experience had been offered within the intellectual tradition within which Augustine had been educated, various ways of describing lower levels of the soul tugging the higher soul down into the passions. Manichaean dualism drove a wedge between these parts of a person's internal experience, offering a dramatic rationale for the effort at moral integrity: vices are not merely adventitious deformations of one's character, they are an infectious disease, a parasitical alien intrusion into one's true self. Manichaeism cited the psychological sensation of conflicting impulses as direct demonstrative proof of the dualistic underpinnings of the universe.[32]

Augustine had the option of denying the experience the Manichaeans highlighted and sought to explain. In his earlier writings, he had tended to force the experiential facts to fit his philosophical premises, leading to an exaggerated affirmation of the individual's freedom to reform oneself at any point. While his thinking on free choice had not significantly changed by the time he composed *The Two Souls*, he had come to accept the experience of internal conflict as a datum with which he must contend. He endeavored, therefore, as William Babcock interprets it, to affirm and take possession of the experience described by the Manichaeans in order to turn it away from their interpretation to his own.

> It is important to note that Augustine does not seek to deny or to avoid the human experience that the Manichees purport to portray and to interpret. He makes no attempt to transmute it into something else—the struggle of reason, for instance, to gain control over the passions or of intellect to convince the will to follow where it leads. His aim, then, is not to displace one experience and to replace it with another, but rather to construe the same experience in a way that will not draw him back into the Manichaean camp to which he had once himself belonged.[33]

As Augustine understood and portrayed Manichaean anthropology, Babcock observes, "the internal opposition of self to self represented not so much a conflict within the self as a conflict between two selves struggling for dominance within a single person." This seemed to make any judgment of the individual incoherent, since a single individual acted on the directives of two distinct souls or wills, each of which was predetermined to be good or evil, respectively, by its nature. Forensic assessments of either soul, or of the human vehicle of their will, thus become impossible. "Whatever these souls do, if they do it by nature not by will . . . we cannot hold that the sin is theirs" (*DA* 12.17).[34] How could it be, then, that Manichaeans taught that some good souls ultimately fail and are condemned to remain bound to evil, if those souls could not possibly have done wrong contrary to their nature, and could not be responsible for the sins committed by the body under the directive of the evil nature (*DA* 12.17)?

It would seem to William Babcock, therefore, that the Manichaean explanation of the individual's experience "dissolves the very internal conflict that it seems to portray, transforming the struggle of the self with itself into a struggle between two selves."[35] For Babcock and several other modern interpreters, as well as for Augustine, "the poverty of Manichaean dualism . . . shows up whenever dualism is called upon to make sense of moral struggle." James Wetzel expands on this impression.

> The Manichees, having partitioned the universe into good and evil natures, leave themselves divested of the language of volition and without resources to explicate the nature and significance of moral evil. Manichaean evil fails by its very nature to penetrate or corrupt in any way the integrity of the good soul. The good soul is thereby accorded

> invulnerability to corruption by ontological fiat. . . . Matters are not made much clearer if the Manichees should, in a revisionist temper, openly eschew the language of volition and wholeheartedly embrace a naturalistic reading of evil's invasion and influence upon the good. What, after all, would be the sense of evil's *in*vasion and *in*fluence, if evil remains essentially alien and external to the good? The ontological partitioning of good and evil makes it difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend what manner of struggle the two natures could be involved in, either at the macroscopic level of the two kingdoms or the microscopic level of the two souls.[36]

If Manichaeism has been properly understood in such characterizations, there indeed would have been little to prevent the young Augustine from drawing the ethical conclusions he apparently held as a Manichaean, completely exonerating himself—one of the two souls in his body—from any role whatsoever in wrongful conduct, all of which he attributed to that other soul within his body (*Conf* 5.10.18); nor would we have any reason to question the efficacy of the sort of arguments he used in *The Two Souls*.

The problem with such assessments of the weaknesses of the Manichaean position is that they are based primarily, and circularly, on Augustine's critiques, rather than on an independent analysis of the Manichaean position as it was articulated by Manichaeans. The unspoken assumption most, although certainly not all, modern commentators make is that every single one of Augustine's anti-Manichaean arguments must have effectively hit its mark. While such an assumption has gradually been abandoned in the study of his polemic against almost any other group, the Manichaeans have continued to be treated largely as beyond the pale of charitable readings. Added to this assumption has been a tendency, found already in the earliest Christian critics of Manichaeism, such as Serapion of Thmuis and Didymus the Blind, simply to imagine the entailments of "dualism," generically conceived, and assume that Manichaean dualism conforms to the imagined model. In fact, as a Manichaean, Augustine had done much the same thing: operating with his own set of culturally predetermined assumptions, he had drawn the wrong ethical conclusions from the Manichaean dualistic account of the source of evil and sin.[37] His misunderstanding has colored the Western intellectual view of Manichaeism ever since.

It is perfectly true that the Manichaeans, following Paul's well-known discussion in Romans 7, asserted that "But if I am doing that which I do not

wish, it is not at all I who performs it, but the sin dwelling in me" (Rom 7:20). Mani himself , in his *Epistle to Menoch*, explained this notoriously controversial passage of Paul's writing as "the voice of the obstinate soul defending the freedom of the soul against concupiscence. For he grieves that sin, that is, the devil, performs in him every concupiscence. . . . Concupiscence is the origin of evil, through which wretched souls become enslaved to lust, not of their own accord, since this is what we do only with unwilling mind" (*Menoch* 177, 187). The soul, naturally good, becomes submerged in a domineering power structure of evil, resisting all the way. "In short, the mind of one who restrains himself from every action of concupiscence is vigilant, it is enriched and prospers, but through the action of concupiscence, it becomes habituated to diminishment" (*Menoch* 177). But we must attend to the materialistic underpinnings of this moral scenario. The Manichaeans, indeed, considered the good soul intrinsically and naturally good; but that did not mean that it controlled its own circumstances, wherein it might find itself entangled with a greater quantity of evil able to dominate it. The two natures of good and evil, both material substances, could and did impinge on one another and did struggle to dominate each other by sheer mass. Evil could and did penetrate and corrupt the good soul by fragmenting it into parcels too small to resist evil's control. In the Manichaean conception of the individual, the soul emerges as a "collection" of previously fragmented divine parcels, each of which has blood on its hands, so to speak, from its former coerced servitude to the forces of evil.

In his letter to Augustine, the Manichaean Secundinus shed additional light on the moral dimensions of this Manichaean anthropology by describing the struggle between the evil and good spirits for mastery of the circumstances of the human soul:

> They fight on account of souls. The soul, whose nature has given it the victory from the beginning, is placed in the midst of them. If it acts in accord with the spirit of the virtues, it will have endless life with him and will possess the kingdom to which our Lord invites us. But if it begins to be dragged off by the spirit of the vices and consents and then after its consent does penance, it will have a source of pardon for this turpitude. For it is led by its mingling with the flesh, not by its own will. But if, after it recognizes itself, it consents to evil and does not arm itself against the enemy, it has sinned by its own will. If it is again ashamed of having gone astray, it will find the author of mercies ready

> to forgive. For the soul is not punished because it sinned but because it was not sorry for its sin. But if it leaves this life with the same sin without forgiveness, it will then be excluded. (*EpSec* 2)[38]

Circumstances of mixture with evil place absolute control of conduct outside the reach of the soul. That is why Paul insisted that absolutely everyone is a sinner. Human beings exist in conditions that necessarily entangle them with sinful conduct. For this reason, Manichaeism placed the stress on repentance for involvement in sin rather than on sinlessness. Repentance serves the role of reinforcing identification of oneself as the good soul, marking bad impulses as alien and intrusive and therefore to be resisted with renewed, if not fool proof, vigor. Repentance was considered necessary because the soul, however much fragmented and overpowered by evil, must consent for an evil action to occur. This view put Manichaeism in continuity with the same tradition of thinking on will and responsibility as that known to Augustine. The (good) soul provided essential properties to the person, without which the person could not live or think or act. However dramatically one characterized the opposing force of evil within, the Manichaeans apparently did not consider it soul-like in certain crucial respects.

In *Kephalaion* 138, Mani expressly excluded the sort of misunderstanding of moral responsibility that Augustine held when himself a Manichaean, and consequently misattributed to Mani.

> This one who sins is no other than the living soul, which [dwells] in the body of sin, since it finds itself in mixture. Another, namely, the "old man," dwells with it in the [body] and causes it to stumble, in that it compels it to do [what] is not [proper]. As soon as it causes it to sin, however, [the] mind (*nous*) immediately bestows the awareness of its sin, which it has begun. Through the awareness of the mind, [it is able] to turn itself from the sin, and consequently it asks the Light-Mind for a forgiveness of sin, and [its] sin is forgiven it. Also, the one who will learn, and forget, is the soul, which learns from the Light-Mind. The one who teaches it gives it the awareness of its original nature, and it forgets its instruction, since the "old man" dwells with it and it must suffer under it. For this reason, it experiences forgetfulness and goes astray, because of its affliction. Its teacher, furthermore, who teaches it and casts repentance into its heart, that is the Light-Mind, the one

> [who] comes from above and who is the ray of the holy illuminator, who comes and shines for the soul and purifies and cleanses it, and [shows the way] to the land of light, from which it has come forth in the beginning. It will be returned and ascend to its original nature.

We shall leave aside here the separate question how well this construct of the personal process worked, and how successfully or unsuccessfully it enabled a person to make moral progress. But that it is a moral system and ascribes specific responsibility to the individual good soul can no longer be questioned, despite the testimony of Augustine.

Augustine put forward in *The Two Souls* the proposition that close scrutiny of internal conflict as it occurred revealed an essentially unified self vacillating between options, producing the experience of conflict out of its own self-contained indecision; "indeed one mind may be at the same time unwilling and willing, but it cannot be at the same time unwilling and willing with reference to one and the same thing" (*DA* 10.14). The monadic soul deliberated among a variety of things it perceived as goods, trying to resolve apparent incommensurabilities among them.[39] As yet unaware of the depths of unknowability within the self that would play such a significant role in *Confessions*, Augustine maintained that, when one will was expressed, any unexpressed contrary will was absent. What then effected a brake on the expressed will? What kept it from continuing to full expression and realization? For Augustine at this point, only a weakness in the will itself played that role, a distractedness and lack of focus amid all the allurements of the body and the senses. There was no contrary will at all, as the Manichaeans thought of it, only various willing impulses of the soul displacing each other from moment to moment in competition for full commitment and being acted upon. All the soul needed to do was focus, sort out the better choices from the less good ones, and marshal its energies for ascent to perfection and truth.

The Manichaeans, on the contrary, insisted that close observation of internal conflict supported their interpretation of it, and they contended that virtues and their opposed vices coexisted at the same time within the conflicted conscience of the human being. One experienced compassion and mercy actively resisting an equally present murderous rage. This psychological experience could not be explained by models such as Augustine's, which permitted only a single level of relative virtue or vice to exist within the individual at any one time. Augustine's confrontation with Manichaeism had

not yet pushed him to the more complex analysis of self for which he would become famous.[40] His own limited understanding of the Manichaean view of a person's internal conflict insulated him from the profundity of its challenge.

Augustine insisted that the kind of evil entity the Manichaeans posited found better explanation by one of the classical explanations for bad actions, such as that the individual acts for a selfish good for oneself (as in the case of theft, in which someone acts from a desire to possess a good thing, *DA* 12.16), or that one acts out of an erroneous idea that something is good that actually is not. Augustine applied such theoretical etiologies of bad actions to the Manichaean mythic scenario, making the ironic observation that evil covets the good in this narrative, in which the realm of darkness assaulted the realm of light out of desire to conquer and possess it. Tongue planted firmly in cheek, he remarked that "That will must truly be declared worthy of distinguished and great praise by which the supreme and true good is earnestly desired" (*DA* 12.16). Even if the Manichaeans described evil as simply aggressive and undiscerningly acquisitive, as Augustine acknowledged that they did, he could offer an account of this evil within the model of motivation by which one misperceives something as a good for itself, even though, because of its antithetical nature, "good" would be "bad" for evil. Augustine rejected such perspectival valuations, and insisted that, "if to see God is evil, God is not a good; but God is a good, therefore to see God is good" (*DA* 12.16).[41]

In *The Two Souls* Augustine afforded himself the advantage of assuming that the Manichaeans agreed with many of the basic premises of the Platonic metaphysics he had adopted, such as the division of reality into intelligible and material realities, and the superiority of the intelligible to the material, or—phrased epistemologically rather than ontologically—the superiority of that which is known by the intellect to that which is known by the senses (*DA* 3.3). It followed from such premises that souls have a higher value than anything material, even if they be vicious souls (*DA* 5.5). By assuming such a shared set of metaphysical valuations, Augustine treated the Manichaeans not as representatives of a fundamentally different world view, but as simply bad metaphysicians who failed to think consistently with premises they and everyone else should accept as true. Ignoring its thoroughgoing materialism, within which no differentiation into immaterial and material such as Augustine values applied, Augustine portrayed Manichaeism as an irrational inversion of what he regarded as self-evident scales of value.[42] Thus the Manichaeans claimed to discern the divine through aesthetic criteria rooted in the senses, associating God with material forms in contradiction to his

intelligible nature. At the same time, they attributed to the forces of evil the kind of animation, agency, and intentionality Augustine considered the marks of a very high level of intelligible being (*DA* 2.2). In this way, they "ascribe more importance to the judgment of these eyes than to that of the mind, asserting and believing as you do that there is no shining feather that does not shine from God, and that there are living souls that do not live from God" (*DA* 8.10). He had once shared this intellectual confusion, "not able at that time to distinguish and discern sensible from intelligible things, carnal . . . from spiritual" (*DA* 9.12).

But now, Augustine declared, he had come to understand that "everything must be considered in its kind." Faulty gold is valued more than excellent lead, an incompetent lawyer more than a skilled tailor. We "praise" excellent lead, but it is not for that reason to be "preferred" to faulty gold; the distinct kinds remain in hierarchy. So mind is always superior to matter, even if within mind we praise some things and find fault with others. The Manichaeans, therefore, simply displayed categorical confusion in considering material light a divine thing superior to intelligible "souls" of an evil nature. Even though "the light which in its own kind is perfect, and is rightly to be praised; yet because it is included in the number of sensible things, it must be ranked below unjust and intemperate souls, since these are intelligible; although we may without injustice judge these to be most worthy of condemnation" (*DA* 5.5). In Augustine's universe, then, the soul of Caligula would be higher, better, more existent in the eyes of God than the sun by whose light and warmth all life on earth directly depends. However wonderful the sun might be, and however much deserving of praise, still as a material thing he considered it inferior in its kind to even the most corrupted and twisted human mentality. A Manichaean would find such a position simply incomprehensible.

Augustine's exaltation of mind-as-such, even a wicked mind, over objects of the senses, derived from a Platonic outlook that had very little to do with the moral categories at the heart of the Christian tradition that Manichaeism attempted to build into a veritable metaphysic of its own. Manichaean dualism put in place of the Platonic opposition of the intelligible and material a universe determined by moral valuations, by which the beneficent properties of light must be counted better than the "mind of flesh" mentioned by Paul, which produces all sorts of harmful vices. Augustine showed some inkling of this fundamental divide in outlook, imagining his Manichaean interlocutors asking, "since injustice and intemperance and other vices of the mind are

not objects of sense, but of intellect, how does it come about that these too which we detest and consider condemnable, in as much as they are objects of intellect, can outrank this light?" (*DA* 5.5). Surely Augustine could not suggest that vices, because incorporeal, are superior to any corporeal thing, such as light.

By the roundabout way Augustine sought to answer this objection, it is clear he regarded it as a difficult problem. He perceived the need to align his amoral metaphysical hierarchy of being with a recognizable moral scale. He attempted to do so by applying his privation theory of evil. Vices, he suggested, can be redescribed as the relative absence or lack of virtuous characteristics. He offered the analogy of a diminishment of the sun's light: what one sees is nevertheless light, not dimness. Likewise, "a certain decline from this light of virtue, not destroying the soul, but obscuring it, is called vice" (*DA* 6.6). "Vice," then, is a falsely reified comparative intellectual perception of a diminishment of virtue relative to some standard. We eliminate vice as a categorical problem if we consider not the degree of decline, but the relative worth of what remains after the decline's effect (*DA* 6.7).

If Augustine was right, we should be able to correct every label of something as a vice, and express it instead as a lesser, declined virtue. Greed would be a relative lack of contentment, lust a relative lack of continence, anger a relative lack of peacefulness, and so forth. But is this true to experience? The Manichaeans contended it was not, pointing to the actual presence of a vicious attribute revealed, so to speak, like an island protruding from the receding waters of virtue. Vice seemed to them to have a motivating force of its own, experienced as actively in conflict with a contrary virtue. No matter how much one diminished a virtue, they argued, the virtue itself, in its most reduced residue, does not reveal itself to be its opposite. So far as there is any particle of the virtue existing, it is not its antithesis. Augustine would seem to be required to acknowledge this analysis, given his own Plotinian view that no matter how reduced the soul becomes by vice, insofar as it still possesses being it never becomes evil or nonbeing.

The same difference in interpreting experience raises a challenge to Augustine's identification of his scale of valuation with a scale of being. Plotinus had tended to use "being" and "nonbeing" as evaluative terms rather than strictly ontological ones. Augustine missed this subtlety in one of his primary sources, and sought to hold both evaluative and ontological meanings of the terms in force at the same time, asserting that diminishment of virtue equates with diminishment of "life" (*DA* 6.8). Given our ability to directly observe

vicious human beings every bit as alive and existent as virtuous ones, this position of Augustine's, also, seems to fly in the face of experience. Augustine "gets away" with such fatuous argumentation only because his compositions represent one side of a rhetorical game, with persuasion, not logical consistency, as its purpose. The modern reader usually must do without the rejoinders his opponents may have made, and so is in danger of being swept along by Augustine's rhetoric, taking its cogency for granted. Like any good rhetorician, Augustine counted on the brilliance of his overall performance to obscure any weakness in individual arguments.

Believing that he had disposed of the "evil soul" as a concept, Augustine turned his attention to the work the concept did in Manichaeism as an explanation for human sin, offering in its place the alternative free choice explanation for sin that he had learned in Milan and had begun to work out in the still incomplete *Free Choice*. All experiences of apparent conflict granted, at what point, he asked, does conflict of purpose lead to decision and action, and who or what is it that actually acts and either sins or behaves virtuously? Despite his later efforts to write over his free will line of argumentation in *The Two Souls*, he left absolutely no doubt in the latter text about exactly what he meant when he wrote it.[43] "Sinning therefore takes place only by exercise of will. . . . Will is a movement of mind, no one compelling" (*DA* 10.14); "sin . . . is the will to retain and follow after what justice forbids, and from which it is free to abstain" (*DA* 11.15). In making these assertions, "Augustine's rhetorical posture," as James Wetzel aptly remarks, "is that of the defender of what everybody already knows to be the case."[44] Augustine invoked introspection as the means for anyone to be convinced that free will is a movement of mind without any exterior compulsion, and that sin is doing an unjust act from which one is free to abstain. His argument from present experience ruled out the supposition found in some modern interpreters that he has in mind a freedom lost in Eden. This ongoing sense of free choice was for him self-evident in human experience, and in accord with "the divine laws absolutely imposed upon nature." Once one recognized this natural law of free will, he maintained, it necessarily followed that "the whole heresy of the Manichaeans" would be disposed of (*DA* 12.16).

Drawing an analogy between the Manichaean model of two separate minds within the individual and the kind of scenario where one person compels or coerces another's actions, he acknowledged the possibility of such cases where an individual was compelled to act contrary to what he or she might will; but he insisted that such cases would not entail sin for that individual.

He alluded to two alternative characterizations the Manichaeans made of the good soul trapped under the domination of evil, as either asleep or bound. "Would a man seem to them to have sinned by whose hand while he was asleep another should have written something disgraceful?" Or, "if some stronger person had done some evil thing by the hand of one not sleeping but conscious, yet with the rest of his limbs bound and in constraint, . . . though absolutely unwilling, should he be held guilty of any sin?" (*DA* 10.12). Given these parameters, Augustine confidently answered no. "Whoever has done anything evil by means of one unconscious or unable to resist, the latter can by no means be justly condemned" (*DA* 10.12).[45] On the other hand, if someone put him or herself into the hands of another, by drinking oneself into sleep or having oneself bound, then the guilt would be shared.[46] The Manichaeans saw the former scenario as the congenital condition into which humans were born in this world, and the latter as the state of moral responsibility to which humans attain only once they have been awakened by divine intervention. Consequently, they viewed human beings as morally incompetent and not responsible prior to grace, but fully competent and responsible for any lapses following grace.

While the human experience of feeling compelled to sin acknowledged by both Augustine and the Manichaeans was analogous to the scenario of a bound person, the two camps differed in their account of how a person came to be in such a bound state. If the Manichaeans were right, and people came to be bound and so compelled to act wrongfully against their will and through no fault of their own, then they would not be guilty of sin. If, however, people deliberately and willfully placed themselves in bondage through their own choices and actions, then all that followed, however immediately compelled, would entail guilt on their part. Augustine offered no logical or metaphysical reason why the latter account of the origin of the condition of bondage should be preferred to the other. Yet it had to be for Augustine, precisely because only the latter account provided a forensic outcome. By the first account, there would be no such thing as sin, guilt, or need for forgiveness. That is not to say that nothing would be wrong or that people would not be in need of salvation. But salvation would be more in the order of a rescue from the bondage itself than it would be a pardon of transgressions. This was precisely where the emphasis fell in Manichaeism.

We have touched upon a very significant and fundamental difference between the Manichaean understanding of salvation and that which had prevailed in the alternative Christian tradition. Manichaeans did not share

Augustine's primary interest in the forensic aspects of the problem of evil. They were not aiming to assign blame, and they did not see God principally in terms of a being that judges souls. James Wetzel well articulates the challenge the Manichaean position appears to pose to familiar ways of conceptualizing morality. "Without a clearly delineated concept of the voluntary, the whole fabric of the moral order unravels. God cannot judge justly the disposition of souls who have no power of will, and when the foundations for divine judgment are undermined, there is a general undermining of moral evaluations of any sort."[47] If God is unconcerned with forensics, Augustine complained, then "there is no judgment of merits and faults, no providence, and the world is governed by chance rather than by reason, or rather it is not governed at all" (*DA* 12.17).

The Manichaeans accepted this state of affairs, in some sense, to be the case. True dualism disposes of providence and total administration of the cosmos. Since good and evil compete to impose their opposing wills on the universe, without a predecided outcome, one can rightfully speak of chance as the only absolute principle over all. That is why the Manichaeans insisted that no one could be perfect as long as he or she existed in the world of mixture. Spiritual progress, for them, involved seizing the opportunity of divine intervention and maintaining a vigilant hold on one's awareness, learning ever more quickly to recognize and resist the assaults of evil from within and without, while never being perfectly immune to the conditions in which one finds oneself. The Manichaeans showed ambivalence over associating God with the properties of a judge. While they considered God to uphold the standards of purity for allowing liberated souls back into the kingdom of light, they did not understand him to actively pass sentence on individual souls as devoid of hope and unworthy of salvation. Such a damning condemnation, the Manichaeans taught, could only rightly be imposed on souls by themselves, by their own choice of alienation from the good within the context of a dramatic, tragic engagement with the forces of evil (*EpFund* apud Evodius, *De fide* 5; *Keph* 58, 148.14–20; 59, 149.29 - 150.16). Obviously, this radical set of ideas stood at odds with much of the moral tradition of Augustine's culture; he therefore insisted that, "it is impious for all those that are bound by any religion to believe this" (*DA* 12.17).

Manichaeism opposed the proposition that the universe was governed by a single will that would punish those who acted contrary to it.[48] In fact, for the Manichaeans, the only will that did that was the evil will, striking out at those who resist its mastery. At stake for Augustine was the entire discourse

of a judicial relationship with God that Christianity had inherited from Judaism. He insisted that either some souls are condemned, or else there is no such thing as sin. "But if there are no sins, neither is there any evil. . . . Therefore they and I agree that some souls are condemned by divine law and judgment" (*DA* 12.17). Even though Augustine here again assumed he had drawn a conclusion with which the Manichaeans would be forced to agree,[49] the latter simply rejected his either/or; they could see no reason to connect the fact of sin with a punishing God in a necessary logical relationship, nor did any relativizing of the individual's responsibility for misdeeds at all call into question the reality of evil for them. If every soul resisted it successfully, evil would still exist. God, they contended, was compassionate and merciful, and acted to forgive and save, not to condemn. In the dilemma between the Nicene and Manichaean positions we see the attempt to form consistent theologies out of the ambiguities and complexities of the biblical tradition, where elements of both views of God stand side by side.

But if the human relationship with God was not a judicial one, and if the message of religion was not centered on sin, repentance, and forgiveness, Augustine asked, why did the Manichaeans practice rituals of absolution that included prayers to God for forgiveness of transgressions? If the good soul never actually sins, but is only in attendance, so to speak, on an evil soul that does, for what does the good soul ask forgiveness? Augustine believed he had caught Manichaeism in a hopeless contradiction.

> For never have they denied that forgiveness of sins is granted when any one has been converted to God; never have they said . . . that some corrupter has interpolated this into the divine Scriptures. To whom then are sins attributed? If to those evil souls of the alien class, these also can become good. . . . Denying which, they have no other class except those souls which they maintain are of the substance of God. It remains that they acknowledge that not only these latter also, but these alone, sin. (*DA* 12.18)

As a polemicist, Augustine concluded his inquiry into the Manichaean position where a contradiction came into view; it was neither his task nor his inclination to probe whether the apparent contradiction pointed to something he was missing in the Manichaean discourse on moral agency. Yet Augustine himself expressed some uncertainty about whether he had correctly represented the Manichaean view.

Not only did the Manichaeans not deny the necessity of forgiveness, they promoted it as the most characteristic action of God with reference to human beings. The Manichaeans actually agreed with Augustine that "Sin is indeed nowhere but in the will" (*DA* 10.12), since they defined sin as the compliance of a human soul with an impulse originating from the evil force (*Keph* 138; *EpSec* 2). The forces of evil by nature do wrong; but this is not sin. Sin occurs when there is a violation of nature, when the good soul acquiesces in an evil act prompted by evil.[50] When the good soul becomes aware of its momentary acquiescence in evil—conscious, that is, of its sin—it repents and seeks forgiveness which God freely gives. Augustine's difficulty in understanding the Manichaean teaching resulted from his insistence that by traditional standards of responsibility, the coerced good soul has nothing of which it need repent and seek forgiveness. The Manichaeans saw things differently, regarding the good soul's entanglement in an evil action, however much it was compelled, as an abomination and pollution from which the soul needs to be purged.

For Augustine, the idea of repentance necessarily implied several key parts of his argument. Repentance only makes sense if the penitent has actually committed a fault (not merely been somehow present when another "soul" committed it), and only if the individual had been free to act otherwise (not been coerced to commit it against one's will by another or by one's own nature). He did not recognize that the Manichaeans concurred on these points, and that by distinguishing between evil, which exists by nature, and sin, which is an act of the soul contrary to its nature, they only ascribed sin to a soul that actually commits a fault it could have abstained from doing, which is not a condition the soul has when it initially finds embodiment in a living being in this world. Because of their materialist understanding of the soul and dualistic acknowledgment of the happenstance of worldly existence, Manichaeans did introduce an element of determinism—or better, fatalism—into their account of the human moral struggle. The particular combination of good and evil properties within an individual, as well as the various quantity of the two forces in the individual's life experiences, played a decisive role in shaping the degree of moral ability with which the person had to work. But when a soul's individual embodiment belonged to the chosen ranks of those touched by grace, then awareness and conscience and an inherent good will revolutionized the soul's ability to withstand evil, if it remained steadfast. This reformed condition entailed regret for all of the past evil with which it had been entangled prior to enlightenment, as well as repentance for

any new momentary lapse of vigilance against the pressure of the still present evil within.

As a result of his particular fixation to articulate an account of evil clearly differentiated from the Manichaean one, Augustine produced in *The Two Souls* a rather unoriginal digest of the traditional views of his broader culture regarding the necessary grounds of moral responsibility. Nothing specifically Christian or biblical appeared in this work, apart from the nondualist assumption—shared with most non-Christian philosophical systems—of a cosmic order derived from a single ultimate source. Nor had Augustine worked out a coherent and compelling argument against Manichaean views. James Wetzel argues that Augustine has trouble in both *The Two Souls* and *Free Choice* distinguishing distinct roles for the voluntary and the natural.[51] Whereas in *Free Choice* Augustine appears to describe a will that would automatically follow the dictates of what it knows of the order the things, in *The Two Souls* the will seems almost too autonomous from its context: "Volitions are so little determined by the order of the world that they cease to be motivated in any intelligible way."[52] In other words, by the time Augustine wrote *The Two Souls*, he had traveled deeper into the inexplicable character of wrong choices, and was no longer quite so quick to dismiss them as rooted in lack of knowledge and discipline. The autonomy of the human will appeared more perverse than before, less accounted for by a simple sensory overload resulting from embodiment. By going progressively farther in identifying the problem as more within ourselves than in our circumstances, Augustine had built ever greater distance from the Manichaean construct of reality. It is hard to ignore the contextual impetus of his polemical engagement with Manichaeism in shaping this progression into what is unmistakably a more sharply anti-Manichaean position.

Internal evidence suggests that Augustine was still at work on *The Two Souls* when he was approached by a delegation of Catholic and Donatist laymen of Hippo in the late summer of 392, and asked to engage the local Manichaean leader Fortunatus in public debate. The air of intellectual confidence and optimism for resolving all issues, as well as the repeated positive gestures towards his presumed Manichaean audience, that is evident in his work to this point would evaporate rather dramatically in the coming years. Until now, Augustine had enjoyed the freedom of a one-sided debate, addressing a mostly imagined set of opponents whose positions were only what Augustine himself understood of a faith he had rejected, at most informed by checking his thinking with the other Manichaean apostates in his inner circle. Augustine met

the first frustration of his rhetorical life in coming up against Fortunatus, who unlike Augustine still found cogency and meaning in the Manichaean world view, and who therefore could articulate it as a coherent system.

Augustine would deploy against Fortunatus all of the arguments he had developed to this point, and one by one Fortunatus would turn them back, showing what can happen when a set of ideas and arguments that seem perfectly satisfying to the one who develops them can appear quite different under the gaze of another. Fortunatus would not only challenge Augustine's specifically anti-Manichaean arguments, but refuse to accept Augustine's entire ontology, cosmology, theology, and anthropology. By his stubborn refusal to adopt Augustine's first principles, he would expose how arbitrary they were. Moreover, by the surprising move of grounding his own positions in the pronouncements of the Bible, Fortunatus would throw down the gauntlet for Augustine to establish his on the same basis, or else surrender the claim to be a Christian. To Augustine's credit, he took up that challenge, and rapidly developed a more "Catholic" rhetorical persona. Hence, it was not his election to the Catholic priesthood, but a subsequent fresh encounter with Manichaeism—a Manichaeism that was not simply a thing of his memory and rhetorical reimagining—that prompted a change of theological orientation for Augustine, and, in the process, something of an intellectual or spiritual crisis.

CHAPTER 4

Fortunatus

TWO DAYS IN the late summer of 392 changed Augustine forever, although at the time he scarcely recognized it. Augustine had served as a priest in Hippo for little more than a year when he was approached by an unusual joint delegation of Catholics and Donatists, asking him to take on in debate the local Manichaean leader Fortunatus. Augustine reports that Fortunatus, who held the rank of a Manichaean presbyter,[1] had lived in Hippo a long time and had won over so many to his religion that it was "most pleasant for him to live there" (*Retr* 1.15.1). Augustine's biographer, Possidius, set the scene in greater detail:

> In the city of Hippo the Manichaean plague had at that time deeply infected many, both citizens and foreigners. They were attracted to it and being led astray by one Fortunatus, a priest of that heresy who was residing there and carrying on his activities. Meanwhile, the Christian citizens and foreigners of Hippo, Catholics and Donatists alike, went to their priest Augustine and asked him to meet the Manichaean priest, whom they regarded as a learned man, and to discuss the Law of God with him. . . . He did not refuse the request . . . but asked whether the other was also ready. The petitioners went straight to Fortunatus with the message, and requested and urged and demanded that he also not refuse. But Fortunatus had already known Saint Augustine in Carthage when the latter was still caught in the same error, and he now feared such a meeting. Compelled however by the insistence of his own followers and by shame as well, he promised to meet Augustine in

> person and engage him in debate. They met therefore at the appointed time and place in the presence of a great many interested people and a throng of the curious. (Possidius 6.1–6)

The motives of the Donatists, who dominated the city religiously, in turning to the new Catholic priest for this purpose invite speculation. W. H. C. Frend has suggested that their action "showed clearly that they feared the Manichee more than they did the new Catholic presbyter."[2] Malcolm Alflatt points to the advantage to the Donatists in pitching the other two major religious camps in the city against each other. If Augustine prevailed, then the Manichaean threat would be mitigated.[3] If he lost, then the new darling of the Catholic community would be taken down a few pegs. Best of all, the two might sufficiently bloody each other that both sides would come out looking bad; and it was likely that Augustine's own Manichaean past would be exposed and advertised in the process, as indeed it was.[4] Another practical factor behind the recruitment of Augustine was his familiarity with Manichaeism, which was starting to become known through the gradual dissemination of his anti-Manichaean works. Possidius's claim that Augustine had a passing acquaintance with Fortunatus from his time in the sect finds no clear support in the exchange itself.[5]

The two met in debate on August 28 and 29, 392 at the Baths of Sossius, a typical venue for such public events. Although stenographers recorded the debate verbatim (Possidius 6.6), Augustine admitted that he "compressed" the record for the purposes of publication (*Retr* 1.15.1).[6] With Augustine controlling every detail, we should not delude ourselves into imagining that we are in possession of a full and balanced account.[7] Yet even Augustine's version of events permits us to witness the famous rhetorician put on the defensive and bested on nearly every point by Fortunatus—to the degree, that is, that the two even entered into actual communication in the course of the debate. Dialogue and persuasion can take place only on the basis of some common ground, premises on which both sides agree. Few if any such shared premises grounded the exchange between Fortunatus and Augustine, and for this reason the two talked past each other most of the time. For two successive days, they stood together placing two rival ideologies on display for popular consideration and consumption, rooted in dramatically different views of the world, value systems, and manners of thought. Their words were judged not only for intellectual cogency, but also—and perhaps more—for appeal as an

expression of an ethos and meaningfulness toward which members of the audience might consider orienting themselves.

Fortunatus's Self-Presentation

The performance of Fortunatus in the debate with Augustine offers us a rare glimpse at Manichaean self-presentation in North Africa at the end of the fourth century, complementary to the textual performance of Faustus only a few years earlier.[8] Since Fortunatus is a characteristically African name, he represents with the similarly native Faustus the face of an indigenized African Manichaeism. We have no information on his family background or the circumstances of his life. He said nothing about how or why he became a Manichaean. His story, rather, was that given by his Manichaean faith: a soul enduring a Christ-like self-sacrifice in the struggle between good and evil. Like Faustus, Fortunatus had risen to a position of leadership in the Manichaean community not necessarily for his intellectual gifts, but due to his successful embodiment of the Manichaean program in thought, word, and deed. Yet he displayed, like his superior Faustus, a consummate rhetorical ability, which had brought him success as a proselytizer in Hippo. He did not wear his education on his sleeve quite so much as Faustus, and perhaps was less widely read. He diverged even further from Faustus in his lack of the latter's urbane skepticism. Fortunatus conveyed an earnest commitment to a religion unapologetically held on faith in authoritative revelation, albeit supported by empirical observation and reason. We have no way of knowing how much he had tailored this self-presentation to the particular audience at Hippo, and whether it pervaded his private priorities and self-understanding as well. Lacking any evidence to the contrary, we must simply accept that the Fortunatus we see is the Fortunatus we get.

As with his superior, Faustus, deeds took priority over beliefs for Fortunatus. In the very significant opening exchange of the debate, he refused to go forward to a discussion of beliefs until the spotlessness of Manichaean conduct was acknowledged. He demanded that Augustine himself attest that accusations of immoral conduct leveled against Manichaeans were to the best of his knowledge false (*Fort* 1–2). In making this move, Fortunatus displayed an astuteness honed by years of public debate. Rumors of immorality were an important weapon in the hands of the enemies of Manichaeism, who by disseminating them could negate any more rational discussion of the

religious issues. Apparently secure in the knowledge that the Manichaeans were innocent of these suspicions, Fortunatus also may have gambled that Augustine would not venture to claim personal knowledge to the contrary from his own Manichaean past, for fear that he would incriminate himself as a participant in immoral acts. He had Augustine right where he wanted him: as the spokesperson of the opposition himself dispelling the rumors by which the Manichaeans were most subject to public hostility. Augustine conceded that he had never directly observed any immoral conduct on the part of the Manichaean Elect, and did not even refer to the rather isolated and minor incidents of misbehavior he had given such attention to in *Morals of the Manichaeans*, nearly all of which were known to him by hearsay alone.[9]

Fortunatus well understood that this moral point meant more to the audience at Hippo than any theoretical issue brought up in the rest of the debate. The illegal status of the Manichaeans invited suspicions of the worst sort among the conformist general public, and these suspicions were taken advantage of by Catholics and Donatists (who should have known better, as descendants of Christians who had been similarly maligned) as an important tool in keeping their constituents a safe distance from Manichaean missionaries. Within the rising cult of the holy man that transcended religious boundaries in the late antique world, popular assessment of one's worthiness to be sponsored as a religious professional relied primarily on the perfection of one's life. By this criterion, the Manichaeans generally fared quite well in public perception, and their rivals in the Catholic Church and other religious camps found themselves forced to resort to characterizing the Manichaeans as ascetic extremists, rather than trying to get charges of laxity to stick. Augustine might have given more effort to defending his earlier claims if he had understood the importance of the point Fortunatus was raising, and had not been so anxious to get on with the intellectual debate for which he had so carefully prepared.

Fortunatus provided his audience with a glimpse behind the mask of his holy life into its spiritual motivations in his citation of the paradigm of Christ. He offered them the portrait of a soul that served with Christ, humbled itself like Christ, suffered as Christ suffered, and kept its gaze fixed upon a heavenly destiny it shared with Christ. But rather than making these Christ connections primarily self-referential, he dramatically expounded this likeness to Christ as the inner truth of each and every one of the members of his audience—even Augustine. Just as he offered them a cogent account of their experience of moral conflict, so he supplied them in turn with a portrait of

themselves as heroes engaged in a battle of epic proportions. He quoted Paul's instruction *hoc sentite in vobis*, "have this consciousness in yourselves," in connection with the dramatic narrative of Christ in Phil 2:5–8.

> We have this consciousness therefore about ourselves which we have also about Christ, who when he was in the form of God, was made subject even unto death that he might show similitude to our souls (*ut similitudinem animarum nostratum ostenderet*). And just as he showed in himself the similitude of death, and having been raised from the midst of the dead showed that he was from the Father, in the same manner we think it will be with our souls, that through him we are able to be freed from this death. . . . So the Apostle said that we ought to have that consciousness about our souls (*sentire debeamus de nostris animis*) that Christ showed. If Christ was in suffering and death, so also are we. If the Father willed him to descend into suffering and death, so it is with us. (*Fort* 7–8)

Fortunatus portrayed a human life given ultimate meaning even in its suffering by its placement within a heroic narrative of divine service. Within Manichaean anthropology it became clear how Paul could dare expect people to imitate Christ: they were similarly divine beings on the same sort of salvational mission. Just as Christ did not grasp at (*non rapinam*) the equality with God that would have given him immunity from harm, so souls voluntarily exposed themselves to the assault of evil in service to God. In Fortunatus's eyes, Paul expressly stated that Christ's descent and suffering involved an enactment of the human condition, *in similitudinem hominum* (cf. *Faust* 32.7).

In other ways as well, Fortunatus presented himself as a representative of the true Christianity. He followed Faustus's lead in offering a Trinitarian formulation of Manichaean theology that at the same time wove distinctly Manichaean ideas into popular phrasings of basic Christian concepts.[10]

> And this is our profession: that God is incorruptible; that he is luminous; that he is unassailable, ungraspable, impassible, inhabiting his own eternal light;[11] that nothing corruptible proceeds from him, neither darkness nor demons nor Satan, nor can anything adverse be found in his kingdom. He sent forth a savior like himself (*sui similem*): the Word, born from the formation of the world when he had fabricated the world; coming among humans after the formation of the world;

> choosing (*elegisse*) souls worthy of himself according to his holy will (*sanctae suae uoluntati*). Sanctified by his celestial precepts (*mandatis*), imbued with the faith and reason (*fide et ratione inbutas*) of celestial things, these souls will return again by his guidance (*ipso ductore*) from here to the kingdom of God, according to the holy promise of him who said, " 'I am the way, the truth, and the door, and no one can come to the Father, except through me" (Jn 14:6).[12] These things we believe: that otherwise, that is, through another mediator, souls cannot return to the kingdom of God, unless they find him as "the way, the truth, and the door." For he himself said, "He that has seen me has seen my Father also" (Jn 14:9), and "Whoever shall have trusted in me shall not taste death forever, but has passed from death to life, and shall not come to judgment" (Jn 5:24). These things we believe and such is the rationale of our faith (*ratio fidei nostrae*); and according to the strength of our mind we obey his precepts (*mandatis*), adhering to the one faith of this trinity, Father and Son and Holy Spirit. (*Fort* 3; cf. *Faust* 20.2)

By such a creed Fortunatus, like Faustus before him, made a claim to both popular conceptions of Christianity and the state's definition of its legitimate form.

It could be argued that the imperial edicts and ecclesiastical creeds technically did not require membership in a particular institution, but only conformity to a particular understanding of religious belief in order for a person to be recognized as a Christian under the law. The Manichaeans had room to bid for recognition under that definition, since the creeds of Nicaea and Constantinople had not specifically anathematized Mani. It could be proposed that the anti-Manichaean edicts were mistaken, and there should be no impediment to those who wished to follow the Manichaean way within a Christian state. The trinitarian expression of Manichaean faith was consistently maintained in the Latin West (by Felix, *Fel* 1.16, and Secundinus, *EpSec* 1, as well as Faustus and Fortunatus), and was fully justifiable from Mani's own trinitarian formulations (cf. *CEF* 11.13).[13] Nicene Trinitarian theology and Manichaean ideas of a complex Godhead had more in common with each other than either had with the more strictly monotheistic non-Nicene theology that had come to be labeled "Arian" and that had been the main target of theological polemics in the preceding decades.[14] Nothing in the recognized Christian creeds necessarily ruled out a dualistic understanding of the universe, the transmigration of souls, the Manichaean account of

sin and its elaboration of Christ's ethical code, or its teaching of salvation by grace and election. Until now, the Catholic Church had been defining itself primarily against other variations of the Christian faith, and had not erected significant impediments to Manichaeism as a school of thought and practice within the larger Church. The conflict with Manichaeism was heating up in Augustine's lifetime precisely because it represented the next frontier, the next "other" over against which the Church sought to define itself, now that it had distinguished itself from "Arian" monotheism. For Fortunatus, then, Manichaeism was a more perfect Christianity, free of the supposed denigration of Christ's divinity ascribed to the Arians, and true to precepts of Christ within a full understanding of the nature of the world in which people were called to shun evil and embrace the good (see *Fort* 16).

Accordingly, Fortunatus based his entire exposition of his faith in the Bible (that is, the New Testament), without a single reference to Mani. Referring back to his opening profession of faith along with its subsequent elaboration, Fortunatus called upon Augustine to confirm its legitimacy according to "the authority of the Christian faith" by the only accepted standard of that faith: the scriptures (*Fort* 20).[15] He stated the he had consciously framed his presentation of beliefs with that standard in mind, and expected to be judged by no other.[16] We have no more right to consider this self-presentation inauthentic than we do Augustine's own, when he likewise invoked scriptural justifications for his beliefs. Scholars of Western Manichaeism have grown increasingly wary of characterizing its Christian elements as a veneer. Primary sources prove beyond doubt that Manichaeism originated from a Christian impetus, albeit one distinct from the antecedents of Nicene Christianity. Fortunatus expressed beliefs far more rooted in the the gospels and the letters of Paul than Augustine's were at this time, and his dexterity with the Bible bespeaks someone who had spent a great deal of time with the text. If the New Testament is taken as the sole standard, as Fortunatus argued it should be, his Manichaeism could be considered much more "Christian" than that articulated by Augustine in their debate, simply because Fortunatus could express his positions with biblical rhetoric, and justify them with a kind of proof-texting that gives scriptural authority the last word. The most telling moments in the debate came when Fortunatus took his stand with biblical models of how God thinks and acts, while Augustine refused to accept them if they did not accord with secular rational principles of what nature, justice, fairness, or responsibility logically required.

A Clash of World Views

Augustine entered the debate under the impression that it would be conducted solely on the basis of reason, without resort to authority-based claims.[17] Such an approach was better suited to his training and experience, despite the supposed revolution in his thinking that had given priority to authority over reason. Augustine consistently approached Manichaean rivals from the standpoint of reason, which he considered their own preference, since in his experience they derided religions that commanded belief without rational demonstration. It would appear that he had expected Fortunatus to adhere to this Manichaean prioritization of reason, and was rudely surprised when he did not, even though he was aware that Manichaeans argued from the authority of Christ when proselytizing Christians, and that they "deceive many by means of the letters of the Apostle" (*GCM* 2.13.19).[18] If he had any forewarning that Fortunatus was adept at biblical argument, he may have sought to preclude it. It appears that he colluded with the debate organizers in trying to limit the discussion to a rational debate of Manichaean dualistic metaphysics.[19] Of course, it was to Augustine's advantage to take the attack to his opponent's views, rather than be put in the position of defending his own; he could play the skeptic, using the tools of reason. If any of these considerations were involved in his preparation, he miscalculated terribly in his confidence that he could maintain control of the debate, and in not making himself ready to meet any sort of argument from biblical authority. When Fortunatus defied Augustine and took the debate down that road, Augustine appeared genuinely discomfited.[20]

After a summary account of the dualistic Manichaean myth that displayed his detailed knowledge of the sect's teachings,[21] Augustine attacked this foundational narrative for its implications for one's picture of God. He declared it impious to believe that God could be constrained by necessity,[22] or be forced to have recourse to a method of defeating evil that entailed harm and loss to human souls. If God had been constrained to resort to such a method, he would be responsible for the human predicament of being embroiled in sin (*Fort* 1). He challenged Fortunatus to show that the Manichaean position did not entail this impious belief about God, either oblivious or disingenuous about the degree to which his own free will account of sin and salvation entailed very similar problems, as Fortunatus proceeded to argue.

Fortunatus's initial profession of faith in God, who is "incorruptible,

luminous, ungraspable, unassailable, and impassible," served to turn away this charge of impiety, directly contradicting Augustine's claim that the Manichaean myth implied the impious notion that God was threatened by and vulnerable to evil (*Fort* 3). He went on to argue that, on the question of God's responsibility for sin and evil, one must indeed attribute that responsibility to God unless one acknowledged another possible source for developments within the universe apart from God. Anything within God's power to cause or to prevent would indeed be his responsibility, and for an omnipotent God, that would include everything. The dualist position offered the only possible alternative, Fortunatus contended, for someone unwilling to commit the impiety of attributing the evils of this world to God.

But if God was immune to evil, as a divine being must be, Augustine countered, then nothing constrained him to launch the defensive action by which souls fell into the clutches of evil according to Manichaean teaching. God could have remained placidly within his realm of light, impervious to evil. That being the case, it would have been unnecessary for him to send forth the soul, and he alone would be responsible for the imprisonment of souls in evil (*Fort* 7). This line of argument repeated the Nebridian Conundrum, the problem posed to the Manichaean dualistic myth back in Carthage by Augustine's late friend (and fellow Manichaean at the time) Nebridius (*Conf* 7.2.3), and employed already by Augustine in previous writings (*Ord* 2.17.46; *MM* 12.25–26). Now that he had at last posed it to the face of a living representative of Manichaeism, how would it be answered?

Fortunatus replied that the responsibility did not rest with God in the Manichaean mythic scenario, because of the voluntary character of the soul's undertaking to repel the assault of evil on the realm of light in which God dwelt with multitudes of light beings.[23] Both he and Augustine believed that the soul acted on a completely free choice (*arbitrio*) in its descent into the material world (*Fort* 11), but they saw this choice in diametrically opposed terms. While Augustine more and more understood this choice to be a bad one—a "fall"—Fortunatus adhered to the Manichaean view of it as a virtuous leap, which he proceeded to illustrate and justify by citing Philippians 2:5–8 (*Fort* 7). Paul said that people should think of themselves in terms of Christ's example, descending in humility and service from god-like status in voluntary surrender of the immunity from evil that God enjoys. The soul willingly made itself, even as Christ did, subject even unto death (cf. *Fort* 11: *et secundum eius arbitrium anima uenisse dicitur*). Christ's descent, passion, resurrection, and ascension served the Manichaeans as an enacted portrayal of the descent,

entrapment, and release of the true, divine being in each human being. Therefore Christ could serve as a paradigm of the human condition throughout the full account of his drama in the passage from Philippians, as Paul said, even in his divine preexistence, which humans also shared.[24] Any objection Augustine might raise to God sending the human soul into pain and suffering and death would apply equally to God sending Christ to the same fate (*Fort* 8). Augustine could not reject the Manichaean position without at the same time refuting the biblical one, and presumably the Nicene one.

Augustine challenged the degree of likeness of the human experience to Christ's implied by Paul, since for Augustine Christ did not suffer as a divine being; only his adopted human component did, regardless of what Paul appeared to say. Did Fortunatus hold that the divine could suffer? (*Fort* 9). Fortunatus answered the question with a question: Is the soul of God or not? Working within the clear polarities of dualism, he categorized everything as either of God or not of God. If the soul is of God, it is divine; and at the same time it clearly suffers. For the Manichaean, the premise of the soul's divinity, combined with the fact of its suffering, set the terms within which further understanding of the soul's relation to God could be reached. Did that answer Augustine's question? Not really, because Fortunatus's characterization of the soul as "of God" was too broad for Augustine. The opponents could agree that the soul was "of God," and mean something quite different by it. Whereas for Fortunatus, all good things were "of God" as emanations of his being, for Augustine, they were "of God" as his creations. He pointed to key differences between the human soul and God that he thought could not be explained within the Manichaean emanationist model, such as the fact that whereas God does not change, the soul does (*Fort* 11). Nonetheless, Fortunatus insisted, that the soul is "of God" is proved by the fact that Christ came to rescue it, which he would not do if it were not of God. Augustine conceded that the soul is "of God" in that loose sense, but only as God's creation (*Fort* 12). The soul is not a part of God, he insisted, or of the same substance. From what, then, Fortunatus asked, did God make the soul? Augustine answered, from nothing (*Fort* 13).

Fortunatus proceeded to point out that Augustine merely posited an alternative dualism to the Manichaean one, rather than refuting dualism itself. Just as the Manichaeans divided the cosmos into that which is of God and that which is not (cf. Jn 8:47), with the members of either set displaying common characteristics that indicated to which side of the dualistic divide they belonged, so Augustine placed God on one side and creation on the other,

distinguishing them by similarly distinct sets of characteristics. But then, Fortunatus countered, one would expect to observe a basic sameness of nature within creation, if it represented a single category of existence. By Augustine's model, creation should either be all good because created by God, or all bad since it does not share God's good nature. Yet, Fortunatus noted, one sees a diversity of forms in creation, suggesting that it is constituted of unrelated things. In fact, that diversity could be reduced to polarities. The Gospel itself said that some "trees" God planted and some he did not,[25] so it directed the reader to the sort of dualistic categories employed by the Manichaeans—things "of God" and things "not of God"—rather than Augustine's distinction between God and creation, which took no account of the more significant divide between good and evil (*Fort* 14; cf. *Keph* 120, 287.16–288.3).

Avoiding any response to Fortunatus's use of scripture, Augustine tried to show that he did take account of evil in his view of the world by setting forth his solution to the question of evil: it existed only in the sin of human beings or their experience of the just penalty for that sin. The world was ordered by God in the best possible way; but through misuse of the free will that God bestowed upon the rational soul within humans, the world that otherwise would have been perfect has been disordered—or rather, reordered in a punitive fashion (*Fort* 15).[26] "To this soul obeying his laws, he subjected all things without adversity, so that the rest of the things that God made should serve it, if also the soul itself had willed to serve God. But if it should refuse to serve God, those things that served it should be converted into its punishment" (*Fort* 15). To the extent that individual human souls fell into disobedience, they were repositioned punitively from their original penultimate position in the cosmos where they were unencumbered by physicality, to a greatly lowered position where they entered an embodied condition subject to nature.[27] This new order retained its essential goodness, specifically, its, *goodness for fallen souls*, inasmuch as it provided a humbling lesson to counteract the original pride which caused their fall. Nevertheless, souls experienced the difficulties and pains and impediments of this punitive condition as an evil, as all punishment is experienced by culpable criminals. In the words of Paula Fredriksen, then, "Augustine's defense of human freedom seems motivated less by a desire to assert something intrinsic about human beings and more by his desire to defend his idea of a just god."[28]

For Augustine, this scenario attested a God who both creates the good and refuses to tolerate evil. Fortunatus agreed on these key characteristics of God: "God does not tolerate evil, but prevents it! (*Non patitur sed malum*

praeuenit deus)" (*Fort* 15).[29] Playing off the range of meaning of *patior* (tolerate, endure, submit to), Augustine rejoined, "From what was he about to endure it?"—hoping to catch Fortunatus in an admission that God had been truly threatened by evil. Fortunatus, however, had kept up with him. "This is my point, that he wished to prevent it, not haphazardly, but with power and prescience (*Hoc meum est, quia praeuenire uoluit, non temere, sed uirtute et praescientia*)" (*Fort* 16). Augustine had demanded why God would take the course of action set forth in the Manichaean myth. Fortunatus proposed that the answer lay in God's ability to foresee the best possible course of action to constrain evil most effectively, not just in response to its immediate assault, but permanently and completely. God's own immediate immunity was beside the point; he sought an ultimate solution to the very existence of evil.

Fortunatus found a lack of logic in Augustine's explanation for evil within an all-good universe, by which humans were held guilty for their attraction to things made—and made good—by God. Religion is based on antitheses, he argued, rules of "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" that implicitly recognize that there are options in the world that are unacceptable to God. Such dichotomous judgments were the essence of reason according to the intellectual tradition Fortunatus and Augustine ostensibly shared. "A precept is not introduced except where there is contrariety" (*Fort* 16), and obedience to such precepts holds out the promise of ultimate liberation from that contrariety. Furthermore, Augustine's emphasis on free will ran contrary to the words of Paul, Fortunatus argued, who spoke of God bestowing grace when humans were powerless and enmeshed in sin. There was no trace of free will in that characterization; instead it described a rescue by which God empowered the captive soul with freedom of action for the first time. "The free faculty of living is not given except where there has been a lapse (*Libera facultus uiuendi non datur nisi ubi est lapsus*)" (*Fort* 16). He found in Ephesians 2:1–18 a description of how Christ initiated this new regime as a liberator of the imprisoned soul.

> He revived you when you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you walked before according to the rulership of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit which now works in the sons of disobedience; among whom we also all once lived in the lusts of our flesh, doing the will of the counsel of the flesh (*facientes uoluntates consiliorum carnis*), and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest. But God, who is rich in all mercy, had mercy upon

> us; and when we were dead by sins revived us together in Christ, by whose grace you have been saved. . . . For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, for it is a gift of God—not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus in good works, in which God prepared that we should walk. . . . For he is our peace, who . . . broke down the middle wall of partition, the enmities in his flesh, making void by his decrees the law of commandments, that in himself he might unite the two into one new person, making peace . . . destroying the enmities in himself. And he came and preached peace to you that were far off, and peace to them that were near. For through him we both have our access in one spirit to the Father. (*Fort* 16)[30]

Where was free will in this seemingly complete account of sin and salvation? Paul described conditions of abject servitude, from which God through Christ accomplished deliverance as an act of grace. Only at that point of liberation, when Christ has "destroyed the enmities" (*interficiens inimicitiam*), Fortunatus argued, are human beings "created in Christ Jesus in good works, in which God prepared that we should walk."

At this point of the debate, Augustine must have felt himself to be in trouble. He had failed to score a single point. He had not cornered Fortunatus with the Nebridian Conundrum, as he had hoped to do. Even worse, Fortunatus was pounding away on him with the scriptures. Augustine apparently had not expected to be attacked from this direction. Fortunatus had met the representative of the Catholic community on its own biblical ground, and effectively dominated it. Augustine had no scriptural citations in his toolkit, and by this point the crowd may have noticed that he had not controverted a single one of Fortunatus's applications of scripture. Perhaps in desperation, he now attempted to give an extemporaneous free will reading of Ephesians 2, glossing the language of grace in the text.[31] He claimed that the very mention of sins implied free will, relying on the traditional legal stance that one could not be held responsible for something not freely willed. Therefore, "by sinning we were brought into opposition to God; but by holding to the precepts of Christ we are reconciled to God; so that we who were dead in sins may be made alive by keeping his precepts . . . from whom we were alienated by failure to keep his precepts, as is set forth in our faith concerning the man who was first created" (*Fort* 17). This rather Pelagian characterization of human freedom and responsibility included a glancing allusion to Adam's

fall which, as we have seen, had at this time primarily symbolic value for Augustine, as an allegory for the fall of the individual soul resulting in material embodiment and mortality. The road back to peace with God rested in the hands of individual human wills "keeping his precepts."

Having stated the answer given by faith, Augustine quickly reverted to the more comfortable ground of reason and the legal logic of free will, known to him from his secular education and reinforced in him by Ambrose's preaching on the subject. If we are forced to sin, he recited, if there is no free will, then it is not our fault when we sin. If we did not choose sin, then why would we be expected to repent of it and why would we seek forgiveness for it? The whole logic of repentance and forgiveness, which the Manichaeans formalized into ritual actions central to their community life, suggested that responsibility rested with the individual soul (cf. *DA* 12). This must be what Paul meant when he said that "we were by nature children of wrath" (*Fort* 17).

Augustine's forced and impromptu alternative exegesis of Ephesians 2 led him into trouble. Fortunatus was able to call him to account for a basic metaphysical error that Augustine would have been the first to fault in anyone else. Natures, by definition, do not change. So Paul could not have been speaking of good souls destined for salvation when he said that "we were by nature children of wrath." Instead, he must have been referring to that part of "us"—speaking corporeally (*corporaliter dixisse*) of the complex human person—which derives from evil and has an evil nature. Obviously if *we*, in our true nature as souls, were *by nature* children of wrath, we would be neither of God nor redeemable by him. In "slaying the enmity," God would slay us. But clearly there was a part of us which was evil by nature: the use of the word "enmity" implied something diametrically opposed to God, which he may therefore justly slay, however metaphorically.[32] So in characterizing aspects of human identity with such negative designations, Paul demonstrated the complex character of the human person, such that there exist parts of it that are to be condemned and rejected. If these bad elements were essential parts of human identity, Fortunatus suggested, then not only would Paul indicate that our nature did not possess consistently good properties, but he also would be calling on us to flee ourselves, to fragment and shed portions of our very soul. This could not be. Rather, the "we" that could at one time be labeled "by nature children of wrath" and yet at another be saveable and saved must represent a persona that could be subject at one time to a bad nature and at another to a good one.

Augustine found himself bested on unfamiliar ground. He complained

about having to lower the discussion—to "descend"—from reason to the level of scriptural exegesis (*Fort* 19). Apparently realizing that Fortunatus could run rings around him in the New Testament, he seems to have felt the debate slipping out of his control.[33] He may have detected signs in the audience indicating that Fortunatus's invocation of sacred scripture in his argument found a receptive audience. They were beginning to see Fortunatus as a man of their own kind, using the familiar, direct argument from scripture in the style of their bishops rather than the hard-to-follow philosophical arguments employed by Augustine. Augustine had to undermine this impression of Fortunatus as a pious devotee of scripture, lest Fortunatus's interpretations prove convincing, and "bring confusion into the minds of those to whom the scriptures are not well known" (*Fort* 19). His only hope lay in challenging Fortunatus's right to use scripture in the debate at all.

Since Augustine knew that the Manichaeans critiqued the biblical text and found error interpolated into it, he decided to broadcast this "impious" attitude (*Fort* 19).[34] Although Faustus openly expressed the idea in his *Capitula*, Augustine claimed in *Confessions* that the Manichaeans reserved for adherents alone the teaching that "the writings of the New Testament had been falsified by unknown persons who desired to insert the Jewish law into the Christian faith" (*Conf* 5.11.21). Augustine apparently counted on this being shocking news to the non-Manichaean audience in attendance on the debate in Hippo. He no doubt considered it a master stroke to reveal this secret teaching in the debate with Fortunatus as a means to undermine the latter's effective use of New Testament passages against him. He cited the example of Manichaean reservations about Jesus' fleshly identity in Romans 1:1–4 (cf. *Faust* 11.1). Fortunatus did not shy away from the revelation, but explained the Manichaean view of the passage by appealing to John 3:6 and 1 Corinthians 15:50: if Christ was anything "according to the flesh," that had nothing to do with his true nature and his ultimate exalted state, for spirit must be distinguished from flesh, and flesh cannot inherit the kingdom. For at least some of the audience, however, Augustine probably had scored his point. Fortunatus did not have the same unqualified piety toward scripture as they did.

The exact nature of the clamor that arose from the audience at this moment is obscured by Augustine's edit of the transcript exactly at this point into a brief and confused summary.[35] He allows only a few paraphrased statements to be heard. There was a call for the debate to proceed only on the basis of reason, and not be conducted by citation of biblical authority. It is likely that for much of the audience the real concern was the prospect that the debate could

bog down in minutiae about whose biblical text was more accurate. They had not come to hear such a pedantic exchange. Another voice emerged from the tumult—from Augustine or one of his allies—declaring that Fortunatus did not accept everything written in the codex of the Apostle. Fortunatus, straining to be heard amid the commotion, was heard to say that "the word of God has been fettered in the race of darkness (*sermonem dei ligatum esse in gente tenebrarum*)." Was he offering an ideological statement on the Manichaean view of the state of Christian scripture, or was he continuing his exposition of the manner in which one might speak of Christ having an identity "according to the flesh"? Whatever the context, lost to us and perhaps to the noisy audience, Augustine claimed that it offended many present. With that, the debate's sponsors decided it best to recess for the day, and perhaps consider mutually acceptable conditions under which to continue on the morrow.

The Difference a Day Makes

Augustine had bought himself some time, and apparently worked through the night preparing scriptural arguments to match those of his opponent, as well as considering other shifts in position the better to corner Fortunatus. One can easily agree with Malcolm Alflatt that "It is indeed fascinating to speculate on what reading he might have done, or what discussions he might have had, in the period between the sessions of the debate."[36] From this overnight session, Augustine emerged armed with the concept of habit (*consuetudo*), well grounded in the intellectual and rhetorical culture of his age as a force that transforms an initial free choice into a "veritable nature," and so capable of rectifying the trouble he had run into on the first day in speaking of a changed nature.[37] This concept would allow him to deal with the biblical and experiential indications of opposing natures or wills and the constraint or necessity to sin that Fortunatus had been marshaling against him. He also came prepared, if necessary, to invoke a connection between the fall of Adam and some qualification of free will in humanity, albeit with a certain amount of ambiguity in how he conceived that connection.[38] No doubt some of his associates had urged these adjustments of his position on him, and he had the benefit of their reading and thoughts in addition to his own.[39] But we have no way of knowing how much he recognized in these responses a major concession to his opponent's position, and a serious compromise of that which he himself had maintained the first day.

The second day's debate opened with the two opponents cautiously circling each other, reiterating their fundamental positions from the day before. While Fortunatus emphasized that the whole point of dualism lies in the pious assertion that God is not responsible for the evil of the world, Augustine repeated that the dualist solution implied an impious conception of God as equaled by some hostile force, and compelled by that other's initiatives to act in certain ways, rather than to have the freedom of action properly attributable to a supreme deity (*Fort* 20). Yet Augustine's alternative view likewise constrained God by insisting that he had to bestow free choice on souls in order to be able to judge them justly.[40] Augustine's position assumed that God's conduct must conform to human legal standards of justice. By that standard as formulated in Augustine's culture, an action is not a sin if it is not willed voluntarily (*peccatum non esse ubi non est liberum voluntatis*). Augustine considered Manichaean moral discourse a failure on these grounds. "In fact, Augustine insisted, the Manichaean view provides no basis for finding anyone or anything at fault," William Babcock observes: "the good souls, compelled to do what they do not will, have committed no sin; and the opposing power of darkness, evil by nature rather than by will, can only be what it is." Consequently, the Manichaeans "had, to all intents and purposes, eliminated the moral dimension of evil from their scheme and undermined their own talk of sin as well as of repentance."[41]

Tacitly agreeing with the standard of liability that Augustine had cited from their common culture, Fortunatus raised the question of when and how humans become competent to meet it.

> For we sin unwillingly and are compelled by a substance contrary and hostile to us; for that reason we pursue the knowledge of things (*sequimur scientiam rerum*), by which knowledge the soul, admonished and restored to pristine memory, recognizes from what it derives its origin, in what evil it dwells, by what good things emending again that in which it sinned unwillingly, by the emendation of its faults by good works it may be able to secure for itself the merit of reconciliation with God, whose author is God our savior, who teaches us also to practice good things and to flee from evil. (*Fort* 20)

Evoking the familiar image of a child's moral education, Fortunatus explained that responsibility requires not just freedom to act, but competency to act with self-determined intention, which from the Manichaean point of

view arises only when the soul acquires the proper knowledge (*scientia*) of its true character and moral purpose.[42] Before that point, the fragmented, dispersed, and submerged soul lacked effective agency. Manichaeism classed the bulk of humankind in the category of moral incompetents, or what Harry Frankfurt terms "wantons."[43] The same Greco-Roman forensic tradition Augustine wielded against Fortunatus explicitly included the concept of involuntary (*akousion*) action as grounds for receiving pardon for an offense one has nonetheless committed under constraint (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.1; 5.8), as well as recognized the absence of choice in moral incompentents (*Nicomachean Ethics* 3.2).[44] Similarly, Roman law excluded children younger than the age of reason and lunatics from criminal liability, on the rationale of their inability to form fully informed intentions of their own.[45]

Fortunatus raised as a second contextual problem for the free choice explanation of evil the very existence of evil options available to a good soul to choose. For a person to freely choose good or evil, Fortunatus suggested, both choices must actually exist. Yet the two opponents agreed that God created only the good. In such an all-good universe, if a good God gave a good free choice to a good soul, there would be no possibility of evil resulting.[46]

> Your proposition is that man is either just or sinful not because of a contrary nature, but because of his own free choice. But if the soul, with its God-given free will, were alone in the body, and if there were no contrary nature, then it would be without sin, and without the guilt of sin. (*Fort* 20)

Paula Fredriksen has observed that Fortunatus appears to have had traditional Greco-Roman ethical theory soundly on his side in this argument. "Free will in philosophical thought had never been imagined as a neutral capacity to choose between good and evil. The truly free will in this system always inclines to the good."[47] Augustine seems to have conceptualized "freedom" more abstractly as the situation of a totally neutral soul, not preconditioned to choose either way. To this, Fortunatus objected that a good God could have no possible motive for creating souls anything but good, let alone going so far as to fill or surround the soul with options that were not good. Augustine could avoid this implication of his position only by suggesting that evil choices arose somehow spontaneously from human minds, despite the problem that those minds had been created by the same God he wished to exonerate from all responsibility for evil. From the Manichaean perspective,

if God so much as makes room for evil, however it originated, by unilaterally creating humans with a potential flaw or by giving them a free will capable of being misused, then he at the very least colludes with the arising of evil, and so arguably would be unjust in punishing anyone who fell prey to it. If God is capable of blocking evil's entry into human hearts, and does not, the Manichaeans reasoned, then he can hardly claim to be just in his hostility to human sinning.[48]

Fortunatus explained that Augustine had apparently misunderstood him. "I have spoken about substances, not about the sin that dwells in us" (*De substantiis dixi, non de peccato quod in nobis versatur*, *Fort* 20).[49] The issue proposed for the debate had been the ultimate origin of evil, not the secondary question of human responsibility. But, of course, Augustine located the ultimate origin of evil precisely in human responsibility. The importance of this distinction for Fortunatus concerned his refusal to endorse the language of Augustine that made sin something about souls that would cause God to reject or punish them. Manichaeans stressed that sin is not a substance, but an action, existing only for a moment and persisting only in memory (see *Menoch* 187). On materialist principles, it must receive its impetus from a substance. Since the soul is a good substance, it could not be the source of the impetus to sin. "The Manichaean case," William Babcock notes, "rested in large measure on a tacit appeal to the notion of continuity between agent and act in determining whether an action does or does not count as a person's own. Since the soul came forth good from God, evil of will or action is simply discontinuous with the soul's moral character."[50] The Manichaeans accounted for the soul's association with sin in materialist terms, by concepts of pollution or impurity, by evil coming over someone "like a fever." Given the premises of materialism and the good nature of the soul, no other understanding of sin seemed possible.

Augustine wanted to assert both that God created all things good, including the soul, and that he did not create evil. For Fortunatus, these assertions were mutually contradictory. By identifying souls as the source of evil, Augustine seemed to be suggesting that souls are themselves evil in nature, since evil must be present as a potential in order to arise from them. By the experience of reluctance, resistance, and regret, the human soul indicated its true nature contending against its corruptive contact with evil (see *Menoch* 177). Fortunatus argued from experience that human beings turn away from evil, not as a turning away from themselves, but as a turning away from some other, something that they are able to reject and do away with without destroying or

diminishing themselves. Christ teaches us to flee from evil, he reminded his audience; one cannot flee from oneself, but only from some other.[51] William Babcock identifies this inner complexity of the human moral dilemma as the key Manichaean challenge to the traditional Nicene free will position as enunciated by Augustine.

> Behind this view of sin—and, in late Latin antiquity, the Manichees were the great interpreters of the human experience of evil as a power that simply overwhelms us and drags us, in spite of ourselves, in its wake—lay the notion that the soul, the self, would not otherwise turn away from the good. If the soul is good and its first orientation is to the good, why would it ever determine itself to the evil? That is the question that Manichaeanism posed and that Augustine never fully escaped nor finally solved.[52]

As Fortunatus had already suggested the previous day (*Fort* 17), Manichaeism taught that the human persona could not as easily be equated with an essential identity, a monadic soul, as Augustine and his colleagues believed. That was why one and the same individual could be spoken of by Paul as "by nature" both a child of wrath and a child of God without violating the metaphysical assumption of the immutability of natures. The Manichaeans viewed the human person as a thin covering of individuation over a complex universal process involving conflicting forces at work within each person, as well as in all of nature. Peel back the covering of apparent selfhood, they suggested, and one will find *two* natures, not one, whose respective passing moments of mastery of one over the other account for all the inconsistencies in human thinking and conduct—account for the very lack of a unified, consistent self—as well as for the unpredictability of experience.

Augustine sidestepped the issue of moral competence, and tried once again to locate the only *relevant* point of responsibility for evil in individual human choice. Restating his foundational metaphysic, he affirmed that God indeed did make an all-good universe, but also that goodness is necessarily relative to the absolute goodness possessed by God alone (cf. *DQ* 41). Sin amounted metaphysically to attachment to lesser goods, which at the lower end of the scale reach the degree of negation one might label "evil." The previous day Fortunatus had already criticized this construct as nonsensical. Now armed with scripture, Augustine contended that the Paul himself located the root of sin in covetousness (*cupiditas*, 1 Tim 6:10), which is not a substance

but an inclination arising in the soul. He could see no point in pursuing the question further back than this inclination of one's will, for "the root of a root I cannot seek." Responsibility arises, he maintained, where the soul makes a bad choice, regardless of how the possibility of such a choice exists. The Christian concern with repentance and forgiveness presupposed individual responsibility for sin, he reiterated, regardless of how one might be stimulated by anything outside one's own soul (*Fort* 21; cf. *DA* 12; *LA* 3.17.49). Redeploying an argument he had introduced in *Free Choice* and *The Two Souls*,[53] Augustine cited the Manichaeans' own practice: why did they themselves require repentance and forgiveness, if people were not responsible for their sins? "The Manichees, like other Christian groups, also spoke of sin and of the need for repentance and forgiveness," William Babcock notes. "But the logic of their own position seemed to rule such discourse out of court—or else to entangle it in hopeless contradiction. . . . Who, in the Manichaean scheme, could possibly stand in need of repentance?"[54]

The answer was: everyone. The Manichaeans disagreed not on human responsibility for sin, or on the need for repentance and forgiveness, but on the question of at what stage of personal and moral development such responsibilities emerged. Augustine had yet to qualify the concept of free choice by any consideration of the question of competence. His compositions of this period speak of human agency and moral responsibility as if only mature, rational adults exist, without even a mention of the classic case of childhood moral incompetence. The entire issue of competence seems to have been obscured for him by his attachment to the idea of a preexistent soul that possessed the full faculties of a mature mind even before birth. As noted by Paula Fredriksen, the Manichaean view aligned more fully than Augustine's with traditional cultural notions of moral development in the maturing person, and the immunity from liability in the undeveloped person not competent to choose the good because lacking knowledge or discernment of the good.[55] In response to Augustine, Fortunatus denied that the Manichaeans negated the moral dimension of conduct, and insisted that they did affirm the existence of sin and the need for repentance and forgiveness. Augustine had mistaken the doctrine about a separate source of evil—primarily theological in its intent to exonerate God as an all—good being—as if it were meant to constitute the sum total of Manichaean ethical theory. Fortunatus had emphasized theology and metaphysics—"substances," not "sin"—in his discussion because he had assumed that was the agreed subject of the debate (as indeed Augustine's remarks show that it was, *Fort* 19), and dualism marked a

key difference of Manichaean doctrine from Nicene teaching. Turning now to ethics in response to Augustine's own shift of argument, he required only that Augustine pay attention and understand what Manichaeism actually taught before attacking it.

The Manichaean dualist metaphysics that Fortunatus had been expounding provided the necessary background to understanding the conditions of competency he wished now to raise against Augustine's free will position. In opposition to the latter's insistence that all evil could be traced back to free human wills, Fortunatus turned once again to passages of Paul to show that sinful opposition to God is not confined to the human will, but exists in the extra-human world as well (cf. Eph. 6:12). Paul said only that covetousness was the root of all evil in human beings, not in the universe at large; it was, in the characterization of C. P. Bammel, "only the door of sin but not its author."[56] A larger evil pervades existence itself, the Manichaean argued, identified in scripture as the evil tree that is not of God, cannot bear good fruit, and so is to be uprooted (Mt. 15:13; 3:10). This larger environment of evil conditions human existence in such a way that persons lack the necessary faculties to make competent moral choices, until such time that God's enlightening intervention initiates the formation of a responsible agent out of the raw materials of the human being.

> For it is said, "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin; but now that I have come and spoken, and they have refused to believe me, they shall have no excuse for their sin" (Jn 15:22). From which it is perfectly plain that repentance has been given after the savior's advent, and after this knowledge of things (*scientiam rerum*) by which the soul can be restored to the kingdom of God from which it has gone forth, as if washed in a divine fountain of the filth and vices both of the whole world and of the bodies in which the same soul dwells. (*Fort* 21)

As Fortunatus explained it, human beings were not responsible for their former condition in which, as moral incompetents under the domination of evil, they could not help but sin. Only after the soul receives an awakening call, is freed from its servitude to evil, and has a chance to act freely in obedience to the good, does it become responsible for what it does.[57] Only at this point do all the terms of free choice and responsibility come into play, and does the individual soul take into its own hands it ultimate fate of salvation or

damnation, just as Mani himself explained in his *Epistle of the Foundation*, which was basic reading among Manichaean Auditors and well known to Augustine.

> The souls which had allowed themselves to be seduced from their former light nature by love of the world became enemies of the sacred light, armed themselves openly for the destruction of the sacred elements, and gave themselves up obediently to the spirit of fire. . . . And because they allowed themselves to be overcome by evil, they shall remain within that breed of evil and have no access to that peaceful earth and the regions of immortality. This will happen to them because they have so entangled themselves in evil works that they have become alienated from the life and freedom of the sacred light. . . . These souls therefore will remain attached to the things they have loved and be left behind in the mass of darkness. This they have brought upon themselves through their own misdeeds. They made no effort to understand these teachings concerning the future, and when they were granted time to do so, distanced themselves from them. (*EpFund* apud Evodius, *De fide* 5)[58]

The damned soul is the one that has said no, however inexplicably, to the summons back to its own original and true identity. It does so, intriguingly, from "love" of that from which it is being called away, with desire or delight overruling mind and reason in much the same way as Augustine characterized the driving force behind human free choice.[59] Therefore, because in some sense it chooses evil even when all the properties of competence have been provided, the soul alone bears full responsibility for its fate.

There is little to distinguish this account of free choice and responsibility given in Manichaean sources from the position taken by Augustine, except for the attention it gives to a condition of prior incompetence to which the soul is subject in its mixture with evil, which is the point at which the Manichaean account opens a space for the workings of grace. At the time of the debate, this concept of the necessity of prior grace to free and empower the soul set the Manichaean position apart from the Nicene free will position articulated by Augustine. The two traditions parted company on the unilateral ability of the soul to seek and attain awareness and initiate self-purification and moral progress. Augustine, in line with his Nicene predecessors, at this time considered the soul fairly intact in its properties and abilities, even if

hampered by the distracting material attachments of the body and sensory experience. His Manichaean opponent spoke the language of moral debilitation and the need for grace that would find its way into Augustine's rhetoric only in the years following the debate, ultimately becoming one of the hallmarks of "Augustinian" thought.

Materialism supplied the basis for the Manichaean view of the soul's condition in this world. According to the Manichaean teaching about the soul's origin, it was specifically formed in such a way as to be vulnerable to evil in a way that God was not, in order to be absorbed by evil and destroy it from within. Since the soul shares the material substance of God, its differentiation implicitly derives from a limitation of its mass relative to God's, to a quantity vulnerable to and "digestible" by evil. But, given this defining limitation of the soul, it could not on its own strength reverse the course of events and free itself of bondage in evil. A fresh, pure infusion of divine substance is needed to tip the balance of power in the soul's favor. Until that intervention of divine aid, the soul endures its captivity in sin. Fortunatus was able to cite a catena of Pauline passages in support of his argument that the human person passes through a period of moral disability, dominated by an alien force (*Fort* 21). "The intelligence (*prudentia*)[60] of the flesh is hostile to God; it is not subject to the law of God, *nor can it be*" (Rom 8:7). Fortunatus argued that this mind of flesh was distinct from a soul, since the latter could repent and be saved, whereas the former, as Paul clearly stated, could not. Paul elsewhere said that it strives against the spirit, so that one cannot do that which one wishes (Gal 5:17). It is the same hostile force, Fortunatus contends, that Paul described as so personally immanent in Rom. 7:23–25:

> I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and leading me captive in the law of sin and death.[61] Therefore I am a miserable man. Who shall deliver me from the body of this death, unless it be the grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.[62]

Since Paul clearly distinguished this force from his own mind, it could not possibly be one's own mind, as Augustine claimed it was. In the opinion of Malcolm Alflatt, "The force of this argument can hardly be overstated. Even viewed in the most dispassionate way, it can be seen that the Pauline texts tell against Augustine."[63]

Krister Stendahl has commented on how at odds Paul's apparent meaning

is not only with Augustine's early free will position, but with his entire subsequent emphasis on human guilt:

> It is most striking that the "I," the *ego*, is not simply identified with Sin and Flesh. The observation that "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want to do is what I do" does not lead directly over to the exclamation: "wretched man that I am . . . !," but, on the contrary, to the statement "Now if I do what I do not want, *then it is not I who do it*, but the Sin which dwells in me." The argument is one of acquittal of the ego, not one of utter contrition.[64]

Augustine saw precisely such an acquittal of the ego in the Manichaean position, which took these Pauline passages as proof-texts. Already by 392, and perhaps as early as his own disenchantment with and apostasy from Manichaeism, he considered such self-exoneration detrimental to spiritual development, since it might be taken to mean that one had no work to do to perfect oneself. Manichaean literature shows an effort to balance self-exaltation with regard to the soul's divine nature with self-debasement over its involvement in sin; but this balance might not have been maintained in individual cases, such as Augustine's (*Conf* 5.10.18). Augustine trusted his own experience with the sect as exposing an inherent flaw in its program.

Yet Augustine had been outdone exegetically in the debate, and found himself with his back to the wall. "Against an opponent as able as Fortunatus, in a situation where the Bible was the supreme authority," Malcolm Alflatt contends, "any deficiency in scriptural learning would be a serious one, and it is questionable whether Augustine had an extensive knowledge of Scripture."[65] He found himself forced to yield ground, and to acknowledge that the language of Paul pointed to a condition of slavery to sin. He had no choice but to significantly qualify his earlier free will stance.[66] He had written before about the difficult circumstances in which the human soul found itself as a consequence of its fall, but had subordinated that experientially based characterization to the needs of an absolute assertion of the "orthodox" free will position. Now he saw the need to bring that experiential aspect of this thought to the foreground again in an attempt to deprive his opponent of such a compelling proof.

His first step away from the strong free will position he had held up to now came, therefore, as a necessary concession to the case effectively made against it by Fortunatus. The evidence supports William Babcock's

contention that "The spark seems to have come when Fortunatus, to reinforce the claim that sin is involuntary, cited several Pauline verses to the effect that flesh, in its warfare against the spirit, compels us to do what we do not will." Augustine found it impossible either to ignore or to dispel the argument Fortunatus forwarded. "He met it, rather, by shifting the free exercise of will from all of us to only 'that man who was first formed' and by acknowledging that, after the first man's voluntary sin, 'we who descend from his stock have been plunged into necessity'."[67] Similarly, in Malcolm Alflatt's opinion, "That admission contains the germ of all Augustine's later understanding of man's helplessness, an understanding which contrasted so starkly with the view held in his earlier works, that man was capable of doing good and avoiding evil by virtue of his free will."[68] While a key shift in Augustine's rhetoric does appear to be emerging before our eyes in the second day of debate with Fortunatus, we need to track this shift very carefully, in both its substance and its extent. To guard against proleptic or anachronistic readings, we need to hold Augustine's futures in abeyance, and understand what he said in the debate on the basis of how he used his terms and what resources of meaning he appears to have had at his disposal at the time.

As we have seen, in his earlier writings Augustine treated the Eden story primarily allegorically, as referring symbolically to the individual fall of each soul into embodiment.[69] Secondarily, he had also accepted the "historical" sense of the story as marking a change in the kind of bodies to which a soul might be joined, so that all souls after Adam's had available only mortal bodies genetically descended from Adam's own "fallen" embodiment. At this point in his debate with Fortunatus, then, he drew these various readings of the Eden story together around a verse we have not seen him employ previously, Romans 5:19: "through the disobedience of one the many were constituted sinners" (*Fort* 22). Just how did Augustine understand these words at this time? Based upon everything Augustine had said on this subject up to this point, when he spoke in the debate of "we who descend from him [Adam]," he referred only to physical descent of human bodies from those of Adam and Eve. He had never favored the traducian concept of the procreative descent of souls from those of the parents, because it conflicted with his Platonic view of the soul, as well as posing seemingly insurmountable problems for ascribing individual moral responsibility. He could say, "We are born of earth, and we shall all go into the earth on account of the sin of the first man" (*Fort* 22), reciting this stock piece of Christian rhetoric with the understanding that the "we" referred simply to human bodies, while souls had for Augustine a quite

different destiny. But in the meantime, he now wished to say, human souls must deal with conditions of human embodiment that put them at a distinct disadvantage relative to the different circumstances in which good or evil could be chosen with absolute freedom (as had been the case with Adam and Eve before the nature of their embodiment changed, and as was true equally of all human souls before their fall into embodiment).

But how much of a disadvantage did this "fallen" embodiment entail? Malcolm Alflatt, for example, states, "In the debate against Fortunatus, Augustine moved from the position of insisting that sin must always result from a deliberate act of will by a free agent who was able to avoid sin if he so willed," on the first day, as recorded in *Fort* 17, "to that of admitting that all men sin of necessity," on the second day, as recorded in *Fort* 22.[70] But a close reading of Augustine's phrasing reveals that he did not mean "necessity" in that way, as Paula Fredriksen points out.

> Alflatt's error comes in his over-interpretation of *C. Fort.* 22, where Augustine states that, after Adam and as a result of his sin, man has been plunged *into necessity* (*in necessitatem*). This, I think, does not mean that men sin "of necessity". . . . By this phrase Augustine intends that man has altered from his early, perfect state and now lives in a justly merited penal state of mortality, ignorance, and difficulty. The vicissitudes of mortal life are the "necessity" of which Augustine speaks here.[71]

If one reads what Augustine said in the debate with Fortunatus against the background of his compositions leading up to it, rather than in light of writings produced several years later, the "necessity" into which humans were plunged (*in necessitatem praecipitati sumus*) would seem to refer to a state in which the soul's will is not immediately an act of itself alone (the kind of act of will that receives primary consideration in book 1 of *Free Choice*), but must somehow move matter in and through the body. This was, indeed, the usual meaning of the term "necessity" in philosophical discussion of the time: an external constraint on one's ability to act as one truly did will.[72] It was hardly the case that Augustine, as William Babcock asserts, "now restricted the free exercise of will to the first instance, the first sin of the first human being."[73] Augustine's remarks give no indication that he understood the consequences of the fall as anything other than the qualified freedom of the embodied soul, relative to the absolute freedom of the preexistent disembodied soul.

He considered the passages cited by Fortunatus to indicate nothing more than the difficulty the free soul faced in directing its attention away from the clamor of the senses and toward the eternal.[74] Because of its engagement with the body, the soul had to give the body attention, and that attention inclined the soul all the more to be absorbed in material reality rather than paying heed to its own intelligible reality and its source in God. Because the body was a mortal one descended from the "garment of skins" Adam and Even received as a consequence of their bad choice, its clamor of needs and desires was all the more intrusive and obstructionist to the soul's good intentions.[75] But for Augustine at this time, the soul would not even be in one of these mortal bodies descended from Adam and Eve's unless it had already fallen into embodiment through a sinful choice of an absolutely free will.

Augustine's Psychology of Habit

Far from anticipating his later subordination of free will to grace, Augustine went out of his way at this very point of the debate to deny that there was an unbreakable necessity or compulsive force to sin, and to dismiss any rhetoric of human moral disability contained in the biblical text as mere hyperbole for deeply ingrained *habit*. His rhetorical education had supplied him with this useful concept, which explained how behavior initially performed consciously and deliberately hardens into an undeliberative reflex, at which point it may seem to be an external "necessity" over which the person has no control. Individual human beings create for themselves this "necessity of our habit" (*necessitatem consuetudinis nostrae*, *Fort* 22), he stressed, with the result that the experience of feeling compelled to sin, on which the Manichaeans built their theory of an evil nature cohabiting with the soul in the human person, reflects only habit ingrained in our own nature over time. By "habit," therefore, Augustine meant simply the ordinary, day-to-day sense of a pattern of behavior that develops within an individual over the course of his or her life, and that could be abandoned at any point with suitable motivation and self-discipline.[76] He had discussed habit in similar terms, notably, in his allegorical interpretation of the birth pangs inflicted on Eve in Genesis 3.

> Still there is a great mystery in this sentence, because there is no constraint from carnal desire which does not have pain in the beginning, until habit has been bent towards the better part. When

> this has come about, it is as though a child is born, that is, the good habit disposes our intentions toward the good deed. In order that this habit might be born, there was a painful struggle with bad habit. . . . After saying "You will bear your children in pain," it adds, "and your turning will be to your husband, and he will rule over you." What can this mean except that, when that part of the soul (*pars animae*) held by carnal joys has, in willing to conquer a bad habit, suffered difficulty and pain and in this way brought forth a good habit, it now more carefully and diligently obeys reason as its husband? And, taught by its pains, it turns to reason (*convertitur ad rationem*) and willingly obeys its commands lest it again decline to some harmful habit. (*GCM* 2.19.29)[77]

It is this habit, Augustine argued against Fortunatus, that wars against the soul, that is the "mind of flesh"—not permanently or by nature, but as long as it is not subject to God. All biblical expressions of things being bad by nature, or being incapable of producing good, or being opposed to God, were in his opinion cases of hyperbole, exaggerated reifications of a temporary condition of opposition they were intended to dramatize.[78] As a consequence of a prior sinful *aversio* of the soul away from God and toward the material, people become prone to sin, constituted punitively in such a way that sin easily takes root in their patterns of behavior (cf. *GCM* 2.7.8). The difficulty they find in attempting to act on their good will is intended to humble them for having willed badly in the first place, when they faced no difficulty whatsoever.

This set of ideas was far from—indeed, fundamentally different from—the "original sin" concept Augustine would develop later,[79] and his choice of "habit" as the designation of the phenomenon signaled the crucial way his understanding of it differed from the inherent evil nature posited in Manichaeism as the obstacle to the good soul's freedom. "In substituting habit for a second soul," William Babcock observes, "Augustine is not simply renaming the alien nature, the intrusion from the race of darkness, posited by the Manichees. Rather he is in the process of devising a new psychology of inner conflict, a psychology of competing desires in all of which the self is genuinely engaged."[80] Crucial to his reconfiguration of the experience of conflict was a determined placement of all the things he wished to subsume under "habit" in the soul rather than literally in the flesh.[81] No matter how problematic the flesh was in Augustine's conception of it, he insisted that the soul alone could enslave itself to it. Regardless of the role of the allurements of

material creation in his theory of the soul's fall, and wherever he intended to go toward tightening the constraints on the soul's free exercise of its will once embodied, Augustine refused at this time to regard anything in our context, circumstances, or condition as *necessarily* prompting a particular response on our part.[82]

Anachronistic readings that impute to Augustine already at this time the complete powerlessness and incapacity of the soul's will that became central to his later soteriology of grace must contend with Augustine's manner of demonstrating his point to the audience of the debate. He asked them to reflect on their own experience with the formation of habit. He expected them to recognize within themselves, both freedom where habit had not yet been formed, and habit where it had formed. That being the case, by a *necessity* of habit Augustine apparently meant neither something with which they were born, nor something impossible to resist. Augustine's "habit" differed from Fortunatus's "evil substance" precisely in these two ways, so it is ironic that several of his modern interpreters have read into the debate later positions that largely correspond with those of Fortunatus rather than providing a contrast to them.[83]

By pointedly citing his audience's experience of freedom wherever a habit had not been formed, Augustine disavowed any intention to claim that all such freedom was confined to Adam, and lost to everyone in the time since. Augustine had always acknowledged the difficulties of spiritual-mindedness while one was beset by the impressions of the material world. But he had not yet reached the point of fully integrating such observations with his theoretical free will position, which had even tended to submerge his ruminations on the soul's difficulties beneath its logical either/ors. In order to distinguish the sort of bondage to sin he was willing to concede from that described in Manichaean discourse, he needed to characterize it as a willing servitude, rather than an unwilling captivity. To that end, he emphasized the attractiveness and allure of sin, its sweetness (*dulcedo*) and pleasure (*voluptas*) to the skewed human will, which by the mere fact of its embodiment the soul showed itself to possess (*Fort* 22). The Manichaeans reserved to only the most hopeless, unredeemable souls such an attraction to evil; for them, embodiment proved nothing in itself about moral orientation. Most people, the Manichaeans taught, hated sin even as they committed it. It was precisely this inner sense of wrong in conflict with one's own actions, described by Paul in Romans 7, that the Manichaeans pointed to as a demonstrative proof of dualism.

While we can confirm, therefore, the insights of several previous

researchers in fixing on his debate with Fortunatus as marking a crucial moment in Augustine's thinking on free will and sin, it is necessary to guard against overestimating how far Augustine moves on this subject already during the debate itself.[84] Augustine had momentarily and tactically adopted a set of positions under the immediate duress of Fortunatus's argument. By looking at the works Augustine produced in the months and years after the debate, we can see him pulling back from some ideas apparently expressed there, as if his rhetoric had run ahead of his thinking.[85] Eventually, he invested this rhetoric with an actual function in his larger system of thought, and that is where, after considerable lag time, he operationalized things he had said under the pressure of debate. This process of development, which we can see happening time and again in Augustine's literary persona, is suggestive of the role of language in shaping thought. Just as Augustine accepted on faith certain Christian concepts merely as verbal statements, with no conceptual understanding, and then gradually invested them with a meaning and function within his thinking, so he momentarily deployed stock ideas from his Catholic and philosophical repertoire as the situation required, and took time to find (some of) them a place in the system of thought taking shape within him.

A sudden shift of direction in the last portion of Augustine's *The Two Souls* suggests an early effort on his part to touch up his arguments in that work in light of his experience with Fortunatus.[86] While he had made occasional references in his earliest post-conversion writings to the difficulties of detaching the mind from its sensory environment, and the role of divine aid and providence in enabling a soul's progress in accord with its desire for self-improvement, these qualifications of free will had been largely bled out of his rhetoric as he came to rely on free will as the answer to the problem of evil. Now, in the immediate aftermath of his debate with Fortunatus, he returned to his earlier acknowledgment that "it has been made difficult for us to abstain from carnal things," since "we been changed from immortal to mortal" in a parallel to the transgression and punishment of mortality in the Eden story that was at one and the same time allegorical and historical (*DA* 13.19).[87] He had now begun to see the limitation of human embodiment as something more than the moment-to-moment confrontation of a freely operating mind with the distractions of the senses. "So it happens, that when we strive after better things, *habit* formed by connection with flesh and our sins in some way begins to militate against us and to put obstacles in our way" (*DA* 13.19). Because *The Two Souls* is mentioned before *Against Fortunatus* in

Augustine's discussion of his works in his *Revisions*, it is typically treated as if it had been completed prior to the debate.[88] Yet we see in both *The Two Souls* and *Against Fortunatus* similar striking shifts from strongly maintained free will views to qualification of those views in light of the concept of habit—in the former work in its last two chapters, and in the latter work on the second day of the debate. The sudden change of course in *The Two Souls* comes as if from nowhere, while in *Against Fortunatus* it is clearly prompted by the immediate press of Fortunatus's arguments. The direct challenge of Fortunatus, therefore, provides the best context for understanding what instigated the modification of Augustine's views on the freedom of the will—that is, what pushed him out of some of the key positions he had received as a convert to Nicene Christianity and had been refining and reiterating ever since.

Augustine's previous absolute free will position had offered a tidy logic and a sharply delineated alternative to the Manichaean view. But, unable to deny the human experience of internal conflict, he sought a way to wrestle this experience free of its Manichaean construal. In doing so, he came up with what was arguably a superior description of the principal force at work in resisting personal reform and moral progress, although he had not yet fitted it into a coherent overall account of evil in a monotheistic universe. Augustine's education made the concept of habit (ἕξις, *consuetudo*, *mos*) a readily available tool of behavioristic analysis. In *Categories*, which Augustine had read (*Conf* 4.16.28), Aristotle wrote, "A habit differs from a condition in being more stable and lasting longer" and in being "not easily changed" (*Categories* 8b, 26). The rhetorical training Augustine had received emphasized the cultivation of good habits of speech and composition to the point where they became "second nature" (*secunda natura*; see Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1.10.1369b.6–11.1370a.7).[89] He had used the term habit in this ordinary sense throughout his earlier writings, albeit with an increasing tendency toward a negative connotation.[90] The more he stressed freedom as the soul's highest original quality, the more he considered habit of any kind a constraint on that freedom. Yet, as long as free will dominated his theory of sin, habit meant for him *mere* habit, easily broken and left behind.[91]

Only in the closing sections of *The Two Souls* did a more vigorous and resistant habit take center stage in a new account of sin that began to qualify the freedom of the will. Habit was no longer *mere* habit, but a deeply entrenched condition due to the more vulnerable condition of our souls encased in mortal bodies (*DA* 13.19).[92] In the opinion of James Wetzel, "A more dramatic departure from book 1 of *Free Choice* could hardly be imagined."[93]

Augustine even attributed to habit the resistance of the Manichaeans to his arguments (*DA* 14.23), perhaps with the debate with Fortunatus still vividly in his mind. This intensification of the meaning and role of habit would prove invaluable for Augustine in his attempt to regain ground on the Manichaeans in the battle over both human experience and biblical declarations of the vitiated will. Habit offered an alternative interpretation of the same subjective experience of interior division as that on which the Manichaeans erected their dualistic construct.[94] The concept presented him with an arguably better, more "realistic" account of the sluggishness of the human will to reform. His acknowledgment of some constraint on the free will "marks the beginning of his new line of thought on the involuntary and by extension the voluntary," Wetzel notes. "This line of thought will contradict and supplant his earlier understanding of involuntary sin and alter the manner of his critique of Manichaeism."[95] But, of course, it would have ramifications far beyond his struggle with the Manichaean Other, and reshape his own self-understanding.

Picking up the Manichaean emphasis on the divided will, "standing in the middle and fluctuating," pulled back and forth between the "evil desires of the flesh" and the "good intentions through the spirit" (*DA* 13.19), Augustine asked, "Am I not therefore compelled to acknowledge two souls?"—referring to the argument Fortunatus had made on this very experiential evidence in their debate. "Nay, we can better and with far less difficulty recognize two classes of good things, of which neither is alien from God as its author, one soul acted upon from diverse directions, the lower and the higher, or to speak more correctly, the external and the internal." We note the shift in Augustine's terminology in light of Fortunatus's extensive use of Pauline language in the debate. The apparent contrarities in the world, for which the earlier sections of *The Two Souls* written before the debate used the Platonic terms "sensible" and "intelligible," "we now prefer to call more familiarly carnal and spiritual" (*DA* 13.19). Augustine offered in place of the two souls of the Manichaeans a single human soul, moving by free will between its better and worse options.

> For it is my own experience to feel that I am one, considering evil and good and choosing one or the other . . . placed in the midst of which we fluctuate. Nor is it to be wondered at, for we are now so constituted that through the flesh we can be affected by sensual pleasure, and through the spirit by honorable considerations. (*DA* 13.19)

We are "now so constituted" because the soul has fallen into bodies. The latter influence souls through sensual pleasure, which for Augustine did not constitute outright evil, but merely a lesser good unworthy of devotion and beclouding the intellect. Even if the Manichaeans were right that the soul had entered into the body "not because of sin but by nature" (a possibility Augustine perhaps was willing not to foreclose because it was likewise left open in Neoplatonism), it should be able to resist any evil influence emanating from the body, even if it "touches us by some internal nearness" (*DA* 13.20). It was imperative for Augustine's entire argument that he maintain the idea of a free will capable of overcoming habit; without it, he risked duplicating in different terms what he took to be the Manichaean understanding of sin as a necessary consequence of an embodiment into which God had sent souls. In forgetting this crucial distinction, as he soon would, he would wreck a perfectly satisfactory answer to Manichaeism, and never find another nearly as strong.

The Final Question

The debate had naturally come around again to its original point of contention: why should God be constrained to respond to evil in such a way that it had negative consequences for innocent souls? Augustine seized upon the necessary consequence (fatalistic rather than deterministic) of the soul's descent at the command of God into engagement with evil in the Manichaean account as a violation of justice as he had defined and placed it at the center of his own position. How, he asked, could our entrapment in sin be imputed to us if we are sent into contact with it by God himself? Would not God himself be to blame for our sins? Fortunatus had already offered several contextualizing explanations for why Manichaeans did not think so. At this point, he chose to resort to the sort of answer from scripture that had served him so well in the debate up to that point. Just as we do not object to Jesus sending his disciples "in the midst of wolves" (Mt 10:16), he explained, so we do not object to God sending the soul into battle with evil (*Fort* 22). These missions are not sent with a purpose hostile to the agents, but as a necessary response to evil, which scripture attested as a really existent force in the universe with which the good must contend.

Was Fortunatus saying that God could be harmed by the attack of evil, Augustine asked, and so necessarily had to respond by some measure less than purely satisfactory in its consequences? In reply, Fortunatus returned to

his original profession of faith: God could not be injured or corrupted by evil (*Fort* 23; cf. *EpSec* 6). If God could not have been harmed by evil, Augustine repeated, then why did he send the soul out against evil as a defense? Fortunatus acknowledged that there was an apparent contradiction here by the standards of secular reason. However, as he had shown throughout the debate, he had no interest in making reason the last resort of assessing truth. He had already declared that "I can in no way show that my faith is correct, unless I confirm the same faith by the authority of the scriptures" (*Fort* 20).

Just the year before, Augustine had written to the Manichaean Honoratus, arguing at length that one should accept beliefs on authority, and not be too hasty to demand rational understandings of those beliefs. He had proposed to the Manichaeans a patient quest for understanding of those passages of scripture that on the surface might seem hard to justify rationally. Was he now prepared to extend the same hermeneutic charity to the Manichaeans that he asked them to extend to the Catholics? No. What should we make of this contradiction of attitude, or what some might call hypocrisy, on Augustine's part? The expectation that Augustine should display consistent positions, principles, or values arises either from treating his literary remains as if they are one tremendously long, rigorously philosophical treatise, or from imagining some sort of extraordinarily stable and self-possessed character within him. Either unstated attitude need only be spoken aloud to be exposed as ridiculous. Augustine was a performer, the Augustine we know from his works a string of performances. He could take up and drop positions at will, depending on the needs and circumstances of the moment. He was engaged in rhetorical battle, and would take advantage of any opportunity, take calculated risks of being caught in a misrepresentation of fact or non sequitur of argument, and press an advantage against an opponent's stumble, even if he knew a better answer the opponent could have given.

The debate began to break down, then, over whether the Nebridian Conundrum could be answered in the absence of an attitude of hermeneutic charity, by publicly accessible reasoning that did not privilege the premises of either party. Elsewhere, Augustine reported that this issue of the logic of God's strategy in the Manichaean mythic scenario had been the subject of substantial discussion among at least the more intellectual Manichaean adherents in Carthage (*MM* 12.26; *Conf* 7.2.3). The uncertainty surrounding its proper interpretation perhaps suggests some ambiguity in Mani's original, dramatic account(s) of it. The efforts of Western Manichaean missionaries to conform their exposition to the acceptable metaphysical models of the

region may have introduced tensions into the way God's actions in the myth were rationalized. The Nebridian Conundrum raised the possibility of a flaw in the logic of the Manichaean myth. Myths, of course, need not be logical, only compelling. The Manichaean myth was a drama, not a mathematical formula. The very idea of subjecting mythic accounts to rational analysis entails a confusion of rhetorical persuasiveness with logical soundness. Augustine did not really mean to subject religion to the assessment of reason; he intended to deploy rational objections only in a one-sided manner against the opposing system as part of a campaign of public polemic, while exempting his own beliefs from similar scrutiny. Was Augustine's position any more rational, Fortunatus asked (*Fort* 24). Fortunatus was unsure if there was a *rational* resolution that would satisfy Augustine, because the two men worked with different premises (*Fort* 25).

Yet, the conundrum could be taken to question not the narrative's logic, but its dramatic coherence, specifically, the motives of its main character, God. In order to assess the merits of Augustine's argument, we need to determine whether the premises of the conundrum fully accord with those of the myth. If, consistent with the logic of absolute dualism, God possesses no intrinsic superiority of power to evil, and could be impinged by it in some way, then his motivation in the myth is clear: self-defense. Yet, in agreement with Manichaean primary texts, Fortunatus insisted that God himself was immune to evil. This position seems to deprive God of a motivation to respond to what should be a futile attack by evil. Augustine, on the other hand, wished to demonstrate that the myth implied an impious view of God as vulnerable, mutable, weak—the very antithesis of the definition of God as ultimate power that mattered so deeply to Augustine's comprehension of the universe.

Throughout his anti-Manichaean writings, Augustine claimed that the Manichaean God was, in fact, mutable. Presumably, then, he attempted to get Fortunatus to admit as much in the debate, so that he could declare Manichaean theology impious and contrary to accepted philosophical definitions of deity, of which immutability was perhaps the most important to Augustine.[96] Fortunatus never acceded to this understanding of the Manichaean view of God.[97] As François Decret has pointed out, Augustine simply deduced the mutability of God in Manichaeism as a logical consequence of the identification of soul and God in the Manichaean system.[98] Augustine tried to force this consequence on the Manichaeans while they themselves rejected it, because his deduction was based on non-materialistic assumptions they

did not share, about the identity in all respects and faculties of any two things of the same nature. Augustine ignored, out of misunderstanding or polemical intent, the materialistic premises by which the greater mass of good characteristics in God could be immune to evil, while the smaller masses of good that constitute souls could be vulnerable to it.

Resorting to primary Manichaean texts to understand the mythic scenario better, we find that God did not inhabit the realm of light alone, but shared it with countless light beings who, being purely good, had no martial characteristics whatsoever by which they might defend themselves against violent attack (e.g., *PsBk* 116–17). God himself was impervious to evil, but the realm of light was a community of beings who, while "of God" and of God's substance, were depicted in some accounts as vulnerable in a way that God was not—and Augustine knew such accounts (*MM* 12.26). Manichaeans spoke of God recognizing that he had to protect these companions in the realm of light, understanding that they were not suited to the required combat with evil (cf. Alexander of Lycopolis 3.5.19ff; Ephrem, Second Discourse, xlvii)—and Augustine himself alluded to this motif (*VR* 9.16). Working within the constraints of his own good nature, God employed his omniscience to discern the best course of action to deflect evil's assault toward the best possible outcome for all concerned (*Keph* 23, 68.33–69.7; *Faust* 16.28). For that purpose he projected a part of himself able to be engaged by evil, and hence to overcome it in its own subtle way.

Returning to the text of the debate, we note that Augustine appears not to have forgotten this more complex situation in the realm of light, even if his opponent failed to mention it. At the beginning of the debate, he had asked whether God was vulnerable to evil, and Fortunatus insisted that he was not. But toward the end of the first day, he slipped in an expansion of this claim, referring to God "looking out for [his] kingdoms, which nothing could harm" (*et tamen uolens cauere regnis tuis, quibus nihil noceri possit*, *Fort* 17), perhaps based upon a passage in Mani's *Fundamental Epistle*, where it is said that God's "most splendid kingdoms were founded upon the bright and blessed land so that they could never be moved or shaken by anything" (*CEF* 13.16).[99] This expanded immunity seems to run contrary to other accounts Mani gave of the primordial situation in the realm of light, indeed, even in the same passage of the *Fundamental Epistle*, where Mani went on to say, "The Father of the blessed light knew that a great pollution and devastation threatened his holy aeons from the assault of darkness if he did not oppose to it something exceptional and splendid, thanks to whose potent divinity

the root of darkness would be simultaneously vanquished and destroyed" (*EpFund* apud Evodius, *De fide contra Manichaeos* 11).[100] Nevertheless, any degree of ambiguity in the tradition made it vulnerable to the Nebridian Conundrum.

Augustine refused to let Fortunatus declare an impasse. The premises stated by the two of them, he asserted, were sufficiently alike that the positions derived from them could be subjected to reasoned assessment. Fortunatus had stated that he assumed God to be invulnerable to evil. On the basis of this premise alone, how could Fortunatus say that God was constrained by necessity to respond to evil's assault?[101] If God was not himself at risk from the assault of evil, then he sent souls to their pain, suffering, and potential damnation willfully and needlessly (*Fort* 28). Fortunatus was probably familiar with several of the explanations in circulation among the African Manichaean community. But he may have reasoned that any venture very far into the details of the Manichaean myth and away from biblical foundations would not serve him well in front of this audience. He chose instead to demonstrate once again that Augustine's criticisms could be turned against his own position. It would be just as willfully and needlessly cruel for God to create humans when, on the basis of his power of foreknowledge, he would know full well that they would misuse free will, fall, and become enmeshed in sin, many to the point of damnation. What was the theological high ground Augustine thought he could assert over the Manichaeans on this point? What one might prefer on the basis of reason was irrelevant, particularly in a dualistic universe in which God could not control all that occurred. People might be able to imagine and wish for a different course of events, but they have been informed how things actually occurred and how they really work in this world through scripture. Human beings are in no position to object to the course events have taken in bringing us to our present predicament (*Fort* 26, citing Rom 9:20; cf. *Sec* 6). Fortunatus took a position here quite familiar to and shared by Augustine himself, as he repeatedly expresses: history does not obey and cannot be known from rational principles (*DQ* 48; cf. *Faust* 28.1); why should salvation history be an exception?

Because of the peaceful nature that the Manichaeans attributed to goodness, they understood the beings of the realm of light to be incapable of violence. Although Manichaean discourse was not above using martial metaphors to describe the initial descent of souls to meet the assault of evil, the myth's overriding ethos involved a kind of self-sacrificing martyrdom, by which the good souls defeat evil simply by being what they are, a nature so

contrary to darkness that the latter is poisoned and debilitated on contact. Fortunatus only alluded to this powerful set of ideas, preferring to bring them across through the analogy of Christ's mission, which, he argued, demonstrated the pacifist manner by which God overcomes evil. The entire Christ story and his mission into the world, Fortunatus suggested, is about the high price of salvation, about being constrained to a certain martyrdom to evil in pursuit of the rescue of life from death. From the Manichaean perspective, if God sent Christ into misery and death for good cause—and both Catholics and Manichaeans acknowledged this—then one must be prepared to accept that God does the same with all souls. God's plan will work; it is not a tragedy ("But even if there was necessity for sending the soul, of right is there also the will of liberating it," *Fort* 26; cf. *Fort* 11).[102] Christ said "I have power to lay down my soul and to take it up again" (Jn 10:18). On the analogy of the soul's mission to Christ's that Paul explicitly endorses, everyone is working through this same basic maneuver that overcomes evil and yet allows ultimate liberation—and doing so voluntarily, not because God was in any way subject to necessity (*non necessitati facimus subditum esse deum, sed uoluntarie misisse animam*, *Fort* 27).

Augustine saw two fundamental differences between Christ's mission as taught in Nicene Christianity and the mission of the soul as the Manichaeans thought of it. First, Christ was sent into the world to rescue souls already held captive, whereas in the Manichaean scenario there was nothing yet to rescue, nor to his thinking any real danger or threat that required a response. So he considered Christ's suffering and death to have a cause, whereas that of the soul as posited by the Manichaeans had none. Second, Christ did not actually suffer; only "the man who was assumed by the inestimable Wisdom of God" suffered and died, while the divine Wisdom itself remained aloof and impassive. With his commitment to the idea of divine immutability controlling his Christology, Augustine at this time continued to see the Incarnation primarily as a communicative and pedagogical act by which the intelligible Word/Wisdom made use of a human to bridge the gap to the material world without itself being impinged in any way.[103]

Turning aside Fortunatus's various reiterations of how the Manichaean myth could be justified in biblical terms, Augustine pursued unrelentingly the one question on which he had heard some uncertainty from his opponent. Why did God follow this particular plan? Why this elaborate, long combat? Why did God enter into a scheme that led even temporarily to suffering and death when he did not have to, when he could have ignored evil and it

could have done nothing against him and his realm of light? (*Fort* 33). Either insensitive to how easily his objection could be raised to the gospel narrative itself, or employing a perfect poker-face, Augustine gave no indication that he was deploying a line of attack from which he could not defend the Nicene position if the shoe were on the other foot. One nonrational myth was being pitched against another, with no objective ground from which to judge advantage.

Fortunatus attempted to bridge the discursive gap by appealing to an explanation drawn from popular philosophy with which Augustine was well familiar. He stated that he had been taught that God acted as he did "to impose a limit on the contrary nature" (*naturae contrariae modum inponere*), in other words to stop and constrain evil before it impacted on the realm of light itself.[104] Once this limit had been imposed, once evil had been stopped and vitiated and thrown back on itself, the soul would be recalled to the realm of light (*Fort* 33–34). This idea of a positive, orderly force acting on a negative, disorderly one to limit and so order it that its chaotic harmfulness would be restrained had a long pedigree in Platonic and Pythagorean teachings,[105] and in its Manichaean form was already known to Augustine (*MM* 12.25)

Augustine refused to be drawn into a discussion of the merits of the philosophical concept of limitation as characterizing a beneficial resolution of a primordial dualism. Augustine himself had mined such concepts in his Manichaean-period treatise *The Beautiful*, and his familiarity with them probably told him that they offered a fairly defensible answer to the problem.[106] But for his polemical purposes in the debate, he stressed the terrible consequences for the soul, which acts as the limiting agent and enters into suffering in place of God himself (*Fort* 35). Fortunatus replied that God redeems the soul from that temporary suffering. It was not a permanent fall or loss, but a limited work that must be done. Augustine merely repeated his question: Why?

What was Fortunatus to answer at this point? He had already answered this exact same question repeatedly throughout the debate: that the soul was sent to impose a limit on and restrain evil (*Fort* 33–34), with the same justification as God sending Christ into the world (*Fort* 7–8, 30–31) and Christ sending his disciples to their martyrdom (*Fort* 22), determined by God's foreknowledge to be the best possible way to deal with evil consistent with God's goodness (*Fort* 16), with the soul's voluntary cooperation (*Fort* 7–8), with complete assurance of the outcome and involving only temporary suffering (*Fort* 30, 32, 35); the course of action God took was not for us, with our limited understanding, to criticize (*Fort* 26, quoting Rom 9:20), and was no more

vulnerable to criticism than Augustine's position that God created humans with full knowledge that they would fall into damnation (*Fort* 28). Augustine was asking of Fortunatus something he himself could not give: an explanation of the mind and will of God, who had, according to Augustine's adopted belief system, sent Christ into suffering even though he did not have to save humanity by that particular method. Indeed, Augustine would himself take up Fortunatus's appeal to Romans 9:20 to argue the illegitimacy of questioning God's methods (*DQ* 68; *Simpl* 1.2). In the opinion of Paula Fredriksen, "his victory here can be ascribed primarily to his unrelenting badgering of Fortunatus, rather than to any superiority of argument," giving the impression of having the upper hand purely by keeping so aggressively on the offensive throughout the debate.[107]

The prospect for the two men to settle any point by some objective standard of assessment was largely an illusion from the start. All they were really doing was setting out two grand mythic scenarios in which they attempted to situate human experience. If the standard of assessment was the agreement of these stories with scripture, then perhaps one might imagine the debate could have been settled. But Augustine refused to let scripture play this role, and succeeded in calling into question Fortunatus's scriptural proofs by showing that alternative readings were possible, if on the whole less immediately plausible. The impasse the debate had reached was probably inevitable. Fortunatus, in apparent exasperation at Augustine's constant repetition of questions he thought he already had answered, finally asked, "What do you want me to say?"

Yet, as it became apparent that the debate had run its course, Fortunatus prepared to outmaneuver his opponent one last time. With apparent grace and humility, he acknowledged that his answers had not satisfied Augustine, and proposed that he would consult his superiors for the kind of answers Augustine demanded. Contrary to the portrayal of Augustine and Possidius, echoed by most scholarship since,[108] rather than an admission of defeat, such a statement was characteristic of an inconclusive debate, without a decision for either side.[109] Yet Fortunatus made his ending proposition in special circumstances, under the shadow of the laws against Manichaeism. In fact, the most recent law issued on 17 June 389 (Cod. Theod. 16.5.18) required the expulsion from Roman territory of all Manichaeans. If there had been any hesitation on Fortunatus's part in agreeing to the debate in the first place, as Possidius claimed, it would have been out of the realization that by accepting, he would expose himself to this law. By strategically proposing to travel to

consult his superiors for answers more acceptable to Augustine, Fortunatus extracted from him what amounted to a safe conduct, and in this way escaped arrest or forced conversion.[110] Anyone who had witnessed the debate could have turned Fortunatus in to the civil authorities, and the transcript of the debate would have clinched his conviction. Instead, he cleverly obtained the implicit safe conduct of the city's authorities, and disappeared to continue his work elsewhere.[111]

Augustine's meeting with the Manichaean Fortunatus had momentous consequences for the subsequent development of the sort of "Catholic" he would be. Although Augustine never publicly admitted to learning anything from his encounter with the Manichaean of Hippo, his rhetoric over the next five years and beyond increasingly showed the presence of Fortunatus's arguments as the spoken or unspoken background to the new things he had to say. The significance of Fortunatus in Augustine's career, let me be clear, does not necessarily depend on his directly imparting any specifically Manichaean ideas to the Catholic priest. His influence can be traced most credibly back to the trauma of the debate itself, and Augustine's discovery that the Bible was still largely a *terra incognita* full of uncharted dangers to his understanding of what Christianity entailed and required. Fortunatus brought to his attention many passages, particularly from Paul, that he had never heard or pondered before. As Paula Fredriksen notes, the debate "provides the first view of the collocation of Pauline verses which Augustine will use so repeatedly in his later exegetical writings, and particularly against the Pelagians. . . . Intriguingly, these verses are drawn together here not by Augustine, but by his Manichaean opponent, Fortunatus."[112] Despite Augustine's combativeness and resistance in the debate itself, Fortunatus had shown him something in Christian scripture that he had never recognized before. In the months and years that followed the debate, Augustine did not necessarily keep turning back to the transcript of the debate (although at times he clearly did), but more generally brooded over those words of Paul that had reached him through a heretic's mouth. It is a credit to Augustine's intellectual honesty that he realized he did not really understand these words, no matter what he claimed in the debate. As he came to new, more compelling understandings of them, it did not necessarily occur to him to look back and compare his insights to the interpretations Fortunatus had offered. Hence, he may have been the last one to recognize the degree to which he gradually reconstructed Fortunatus's reading of Paul and made himself vulnerable to the charge of leading the Catholic Church in Africa in a Manichaean direction.

CHAPTER 5

The Exegete

THE KIND OF Christian Augustine had become in his conversion obligated him to acknowledge the authority of the Bible. But it was entirely up to Augustine to determine how much further he would engage with the biblical text than that gesture of acknowledgment. His compositions prior to his debate with Fortunatus provide a very clear indication that, left to his own intellectual inclinations, the Bible had only a minor place in his discursive repertoire. He typically found a particular catch-phrase here and there useful for anchoring some philosophical position he wished to advance with scriptural authority, much as the writers of the classic Latin curriculum might cite the odd verse of Homer or Virgil in an equally inventive philosophical reapplication. In this attitude, Augustine fit comfortably with the educated Catholic elite of his day. The bridge between their world of thought and the Bible was supplied by bishops in their sermons, the odd phrase or memorable image of which they might recall after they had left the church.

Only two of the sixteen works Augustine had produced by this time display any extended engagement with biblical content: *The Morals of the Catholic Church* and *Genesis Against the Manichaeans*. It would be a mistake to read even these in hindsight as the leading edge of the massive exegetical work of Augustine's later years, and both can be understood better as circumstantial forays into strange territory for Augustine, in service of specific anti-Manichaean arguments. He composed *The Morals of the Catholic Church* to justify on scriptural grounds his adoption of the Catholic moral system over the more stringent Manichaean one, taking advantage of his recent catechetical instruction, still fresh in his memory (or perhaps retained in notes),

in comparison to his own recollection of Manichaean use of the New Testament's moral passages. With *Genesis Against the Manichaeans*, he set out to defend the Catholic creation myth against Manichaean criticism (including his own as a Manichaean) by applying the allegorical approach he had observed Ambrose use. He had no need to proceed further than this token gesture toward redeeming the Bible's fundamental creation myth allegorically as part of the system he had adopted, and presumably left further such exegesis to those more inclined in that direction than he. In short, both compositions served immediate post-conversion functions to enunciate and solidify specific commitments he had made to a new system of practice and belief. He need do no more with the Bible to retain his status as a "Catholic."

His involuntary conscription into the profession of the priesthood in Hippo, however, placed upon Augustine a new obligation to sift the Bible constantly for interesting and edifying things to say in the regular sermons he had been asked to deliver. He now had a professional responsibility to perform rhetorical *acts of Christianness* on a regular basis. Consequently, his daily thinking began to be filled with biblical phrases, and he found more and more ways to read his intellectual positions into scripture. We might be tempted to conclude, therefore, that once he had become a priest it was inevitable that his own writings would gradually take on a more biblical cast. Yet just how gradually and to what extent remains unclear, given that his earliest post-ordination compositions (*UC*, *DA*), as well as the points of discussion in his inner circle (*DQ*) show little impact from his "day job" offering Bible-based sermons.[1]

Perhaps he did little more than deliver what was expected, imitating in a rather unengaged and lackluster fashion what he thought such performances should contain from his own limited experience. As late as his debate with Fortunatus, he spoke of passing from philosophical argument to biblical exegesis (or, more precisely, to the language of the Bible itself) as "descending" to a lower order of discourse, where Fortunatus had "taken refuge" (*Fort* 19).[2] That may explain why he made little or no effort to preserve the sermons of his first few years as a priest.[3]

In what is accessible to us of Augustine's public persona, then, the debate with Fortunatus marks a turning point. The Augustine we observe post-conversion but pre-Fortunatus represents a fairly stable figure with a consistent set of positions, combining a Platonic metaphysic with Nicene Christian creedal assertions and moral stances, selectively accentuated in the direction of anti-Manichaean emphases. But with Fortunatus Augustine clearly

became *disturbed*; his comfortable set of assumptions and discursive predilections began to unravel and mutate. What this means is that a perfectly good "Catholic" self Augustine had as a convert gradually became problematized and seen by him as inadequate. Yet, Augustine's earlier set of stances as a convert would have been considered perfectly sufficient by the standards of his own time. It even may be questioned whether that earlier form of Augustine's Christian faith proved inadequate *to himself*. He might just as well have been acting with conscious rhetorical strategy in shifting his public persona from philosopher to exegete in order to be more persuasive to his particular audience. His experience with Fortunatus—and with audiences such as he found in his church or in the crowd attending the debate in the baths—may have convinced him that he had to work his ideas more systematically through scripture if they were to gain a hearing. Paula Fredriksen has noted the necessity of Augustine's rhetorical adjustment.

> His old solutions, the ones generated in Italy and Thagaste, no longer work for him largely because they no longer work in the changed context of the anti-Manichaean debate. In Italy, he could battle with the Manichees from an academic distance, writing pamphlets elegantly appropriating Plotinus and Porphyry for an appreciative, educated, small audience. Neither his audience nor his opponent back in Africa was concerned with or impressed by such philosophical niceties. For them, the bedrock of all religious discussion was Scripture.[4]

Augustine made a telling remark in a postscript to *The Two Souls*, evidently penned after the debate with Fortunatus, that he now recognized that there awaits him the task of responding to the rival interpretation of scriptures posed by the Manichaeans (*DA* 15.24). He had discovered to his dismay that he could not win over Manichaeans, or secure Nicene Christians in their faith against Manichaean criticism, by means of philosophical debate. His fundamental ideas would have to be substantiated by—and if necessary read into—the biblical text. "Thus," Paula Fredriksen explains, "in the wake of his encounter with Fortunatus, Augustine turned first to Genesis, then again to Paul's letters, to construct an historical and Scriptural understanding of sin and salvation against the Manichees that would neither 'seem to condemn the Law [and thus the God who gave it] nor take away man's free will.'"[5] With such a program, of course, Augustine ran the risk of encountering scriptural content that resisted having his prior positions imposed on it, or

that even seemed to support the contrary positions of Manichaeans such as Fortunatus. In such cases, he faced the more difficult project of adjusting the possible significance of both the Bible and his own philosophical cues into a novel agreement and synthesis that saved both for the Nicene position.

In the months and years immediately following his ordeal with Fortunatus, Augustine threw himself into biblical interpretation in earnest. "Prior to 391," William Babcock observes, "Augustine had written only a single work which might be considered a commentary on scripture; now"—that is, as we have noted, only after the debate with Fortunatus—"biblical commentary, in one style or another, established itself as one of the basic forms of his literary repertoire."[6] In addition to the handful of his *Sermons* (*Sermones*) that are preserved from this period,[7] and the first thirty-two of his *Explanations of the Psalms* (*Enarrationes in Psalmos*) that probably originated as sermons from the same time,[8] he worked on three exegetical projects: *The Lord's Sermon on the Mount* (*De sermone domini in monte*), the only undertaking he completed at the time; the incomplete *Genesis Literally, unfinished* (*De Genesi ad litteram opus imperfectum*), an attempt to deal with the creation account in a less allegorical fashion than his previous effort; and *Against Adimantus* (*Contra Adimantum*),[9] responding to Manichaean criticism of the Old Testament, likewise left unfinished.[10] He also edited a lecture he delivered on the creed as *Faith and the Creed* (*De fide et symbolo*).

Gone were the intellectual examinations of major metaphysical issues; gone, too, were the efforts to reach out to the Manichaeans.[11] Instead, Augustine went largely on the defensive, trying to make the Bible and his beliefs come out in the same place, preferably where Manichaean criticisms could not touch them. It would be several years before he would be in a position to take his campaign on the offensive, and pay the Manichaeans back in their own coin by attacking *their* sacred writings and *their* creation account. Likewise reluctant to dive into contesting the Manichaean readings of Paul to which Fortunatus had exposed him until he had availed himself of any orthodox commentaries on which he might lay his hands, Augustine focused his efforts on exegeting the Old Testament in harmony with both the New Testament and the faith prescribed by the Catholic Church. He treated the acceptance or rejection of the Old Testament as the fundamental division separating that latter's Nicene Christians from Manichaeans; all other issues followed from the parameters of their respective scriptural authorities.

The Manichaean attack on the Old Testament rested on the argument that it displayed ideas and values incompatible with the teachings of Jesus

found in the New Testament. "They say the scriptures of the New and Old Testaments contradict each other, to the point that they cannot both be accepted by one faith," Augustine explained to the Catholic congregation in Hippo (*Serm* 1.1). As with some other early Christian groups, literalism in reading the Bible led the Manichaeans to reject the Old Testament altogether (*Serm* 1.5; *Ep* 237),[12] declaring that its author must have been "one of the princes of darkness" (*Faust* 15.8; cf. *GCM* 2.26.39; *Ep* 236.2), the "demon of the Jews" (*Faust* 18.2; cf. Ephrem, *Against Mani*, xci), or Satan (*Keph* 2, 21.15–23; 65, 159.1–8; *Acta Archelai* 15.8–11), and arguing that even Paul considered it dung (citing Phil 3:8, *Faust* 32.1; cf. Titus of Bostra 3.2). The Manichaeans taught that the combination of the two testaments into a single scripture was one of the root causes of the corruption of Christ's message—a view at the core of the polemic of the Manichaean bishop Faustus of Milevis.

> Scripture says that old and new do not agree. For "no one puts a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, otherwise the rent is made worse." To avoid making a worse rent, as you have done, I do not mix Christian newness with Hebrew oldness. . . . This is what Paul blames the Galatians for; because, going back to circumcision, they turned again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto they desired again to be in bondage. Why should I do what I see another blamed for doing? (*Faust* 8.1)[13]

From what Augustine tells us about his own dislike of the Old Testament when he first tried to read it around the time of his attraction to Manichaeism (*Conf* 3.5.9), it would seem that Manichaean objections to the Old Testament narratives had found in him ready agreement,[14] which did not immediately evaporate following his resolve to become a "Catholic" (*Conf* 9.5.13).

Now, as a convert to Nicene Christianity, Augustine had to overcome his own past opinions. Accordingly, he faulted the Manichaean handling of the Bible in sharply pejorative terms, especially criticizing what we might call the Manichaeans' hermeneutical attitude. He characterized them as "fault-finding" (*Serm* 1.2), rushing to premature judgment, who "would sooner find fault with what they don't understand than seek to understand it" (*Serm* 2.2), "not humble seekers, but conceited quibblers" (*Serm* 2.2). Since they so quickly pass judgment on scriptural passages based upon their personal inclinations, the Manichaeans "have remained in their own fantasy world. They

don't worship Christ as he is preached from the Gospel, but as they have fashioned him for themselves" (*Serm* 2.2).

Through this polemical language, we can discern Augustine's grasp of the great hermeneutical gulf that divided Nicene from Manichaean readings of the Bible with their respective motivations. For Manichaeans, generally speaking, the text meant what it said in its surface meaning. If that meaning was unworthy of God, then the text was to be rejected as unauthoritative. For Augustine as a member of the Catholic Church, the text was authoritative first, and therefore it had to mean what would be worthy of God. If this could not be obtained by a literal reading, than one must resort to figurative or symbolic reading.

> Mistake us no longer. We do not worship a God who repents, or is envious, or needy, or cruel, or who takes pleasure in the blood of men or beasts, or is pleased with guilt and crime, or whose possession of the earth is limited to a little corner of it. These and such like are the silly notions you are in the habit of denouncing at great length. Your denunciation does not touch us . . . for we condemn with no less severity and copiousness any faith which attributes to God what is unbecoming him, and in those by whom these passages are literally understood we correct the mistake of ignorance, and look upon persistence in it as absurd. (*ME* 10.16–17)

The Manichaean rush to judgment on the Bible fit into Augustine's overall diagnosis of the Manichaean error as an attitude of arrogance by which the individual Manichaean stood in judgment of what is proper for God and religion, rather than being subjected to judgment by these authorities. As long as a person maintained this critical stance, Augustine believed, one could never form a firm commitment.

Augustine warned his audience that "the sect of the Manichaeans uses fraudulent, not honest, means with the unlearned to get them to set parts of the scriptures above the whole, the new above the old; they pick out sentences which they try to show contradict each other, in order to take in the unlearned" (*Serm* 50.13). They preyed upon "inexperienced people" (*Serm* 1.5), and were "always eager to make contentious comparisons between the Gospel and the old Law, to show up each part of scripture as contradicting and disagreeing with the other" (*Serm* 50.1). The approach dictated the outcome,

Augustine proposed, because "just in the New Testament itself there is no letter of the apostle or even book of the gospel in which that sort of thing cannot be done, so that any one book may be made to look as if it contradicted itself in various places, unless the reader pays very careful attention to its whole composition and design" (*Serm* 50.13). Augustine liked to quote the statement of Jesus, "If you believed Moses, you would believe me too; for he wrote about me" (John 5:46, *Serm* 1.2).[15] By the very fact that the two testaments have been delivered as one by the authority of the Church, Augustine insisted, a person has an obligation to seek out their harmony, rather than their contradictions. He approached scripture, therefore, with an explicitly harmonizing hermeneutic; for it was only by uncovering the consensus of scripture, he argued, that believers may "retain our inheritance . . . and leave fault-finding quibbles to the disinherited heretics" (*Serm* 1.2), "who wish to accept the gospel and disdain the old law, imagining that they can be following the way of God and walking straight with (only) one foot" (*Serm* 2.2). While acknowledging the different tone of the two testaments, Augustine saw in their difference an overall plan of salvation.

> We say that the one who so generously and mercifully bestows on us the Gospel is the same as the one who manifested himself as the terrifying giver of the Law. He terrified with the Law, he healed the converted with the Gospel, having terrified them with the Law in order to convert them. (*Serm* 2.2)

While Augustine never completely abandoned allegorical interpretation, we can observe him moving rapidly away from it as his dominant method in his years as a priest. It seems that allegory did not enjoy the wide appeal in his new African environment that it had back in Milan.[16] Judging by his decision to attempt a literal interpretation of the beginning of Genesis so quickly after finishing the allegory-dominated *Genesis Against the Manichaeans*, the latter work must have been something of a failure with his constituency.[17] While he preferred the richness of allegory, he was willing to employ whatever figurative or literal interpretation established a consistency of the Bible with itself and with Nicene belief—and safeguarded the biblical text from either Manichaean critique or appropriation. He took as his overriding exegetical rule that the authority of the church and its creed—established throughout the world, he claimed (*GLimp* 1.4)—limited what the biblical text could mean. Of course, Augustine did not undertake exegesis from scratch. He had a large

Christian exegetical tradition from which to draw, and these unacknowledged sources allowed him to appear thoroughly read and adept in the Bible when he was, in fact, still a novice exegete.

The God of the Old Testament Versus the God of the New Testament

The Manichaeans rejected the character of God as it was portrayed in the Old Testament, since it seemed directly contradicted by the view of God put forward by the teachings of Jesus.[18] The Old Testament, for instance, reports that God spoke with and appeared to various beings, whereas the New Testament calls him invisible (1 Tim 1:17, *Adim* 28; cf. *GCM* 1.17.27) and declares, "No one has ever seen God" (Jn 1:18, *Adim* 11). Jesus says that the world has not known his Father (Jn 17:25, *Adim*. 11), and he told the Jews, "You have never heard his voice, nor viewed his face" (Jn 5:37–38, *Adim*. 9). In the face of such typical biblical antitheses put forward by Adimantus, the primary Manichaean missionary to the Roman world, Augustine offered a range of suggestions to resolve the apparent inconsistency between the testaments. On the one hand, he claimed that it was the Son who actually made all the appearances in the Old Testament, which he regarded as implicit in Jn 1:18 (*Adim* 9; cf. *GCM* 1.17.27). On the other, he argued that Paul says that God's invisible perfections have been rendered visible in creation (Rom 1:20), and one should understand references to "seeing" God figuratively, as involving the eyes of the spirit or intellectual perception, not physical vision (*Adim* 28).

Does God actually inhabit a tabernacle made of animal skins and the precious metal of the people's donated jewelry (Ex 25:2–8), Adimantus asked. Does not Paul say that God dwells in the inaccessible light (1 Tim 6:16), while Jesus describes the sky as God's throne (Mt 5:34–35)? But, observes Augustine, the same idea that God's throne is the sky, and that it is not possible to build him a house, is found already in the Old Testament (Isa 56:1–2), and yet Jesus himself refers to the Jerusalem temple as the house of his father (Jn 2:15–16, Mt 21:12–13). So while the Manichaeans oppose to one another two passages that can be taken as contradictory, they have overlooked other passages that show the two testaments to have common ideas (*Adim* 10).

Is God a kind of trickster-deity, the sort of being that sets cruel tests for people, or needs dramatic demonstrations of devotion, or is so ignorant that he does not know a person's inner character without subjecting him or her

to some temptation? So it would seem from the Old Testament story of God testing Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen 22:1ff.). Indeed it says explicitly that *God tested Abraham*; yet, Augustine insisted, "the words must not be taken in a materialistic sense," that is, literally. They mean rather the opposite of their literal sense. God was not trying to find out something about Abraham that he did not know, but seeking to reveal to Abraham something Abraham did not know about himself, namely, his inner righteousness (*Serm* 2.2; cf. *EnPs* 5.4). If the Manichaeans objected to a god who tests people, they must object consistently, and not only when it occurs in the Old Testament.

> You don't like God testing people, you shouldn't like Christ testing people. But since you do like Christ testing people, you should like God testing people. The Gospel is speaking: it says, 'He says to Philip, You have some loaves. Give them something to eat.' And the evangelist continues: 'He said this to test him; for he himself knew what he was going to do" (Jn 6:5–6). . . . So Christ is revealed as a setter of tests, God is revealed as a setter of tests, let the heretic stand rebuked. (*Serm* 2.2)

For Augustine, the New Testament when carefully read reveals its own consistency with the Old Testament. The Manichaeans needed only to start where they themselves consent, on the authority of the New Testament, to be led aright. "Worship Christ, whom you have in the Gospel; it is he who is calling you back to an understanding of the Law." Yet, because of the Manichaean interpolation theory of biblical inconsistencies, the statement that Christ wanted to test Philip was likely to be dismissed as inauthentic. Indeed, the Manichaeans had little regard for any of the editorial comment or account of events in the gospels, giving primary weight to the "preaching and commandment of Christ" (*Faust* 5.1; cf. 32.7), and critically assessing even the gospel reports about these for the reliability of the witnesses (e.g., *Faust* 7.1; 17.1; 33.2–3).

The God of the Old Testament not only tests people himself, the Manichaeans observed, but consorts with Satan and cooperates with him in inflicting harm on the innocent, all in the name of testing someone's devotion to him even in abject circumstances, as told in the book of Job. The Manichaeans raised both moral and metaphysical questions about this story. How could Satan approach, see, and converse with God when those privileges are reserved for the pure in heart (Mt 5:8) and for those who enter through the

door of Christ (Jn 10:7; *Serm* 12.2, expressly attributed to Adimantus)? Or what of Paul's statement that neither princes nor dominions nor powers know God?[19] Augustine had considerable difficulty with this problem, and made two distinct attempts to deal with it, with a variety of answers (*Serm* 12.1; *SermDom* 2.9.32). "It is written that he came into God's presence; it is not written that he himself saw God," he suggests (*Serm* 12.2). As for Satan hearing God, this could occur even if Satan remained on earth and God in heaven, since God by his omnipotence speaks in the conscience of every soul, no matter how wicked, so long as it has not utterly lost the ability to reason (*SermDom* 2.9.32). Yet these answers did not forthrightly deal with the details of the story, in which Satan clearly comes into the presence of God in heaven; nor did they in any way address the moral issue of God's cooperative dealings with Satan. His other efforts at explanation were equally tenuous and far-fetched.[20] In the end, Augustine admitted that he did not have a certain answer, but pointed again to apparently similar episodes in the New Testament.

> But if they are puzzled by this circumstance, that Satan asks from God that a righteous man should be tempted; I do not explain how it happened, but I compel them to explain why it is said in the Gospel by the Lord himself to the disciples, "Behold, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat" (Lk 22.31). . . . And when they explain this to me, they explain to themselves at the same time that which they question me about. But if they should not be able to explain this, let them not dare with rashness to blame in any book what they read in the Gospel without offence. (*SermDom* 2.9.33)

The Manichaeans, of course, could point out that the two instances are not the same, because Jesus only expresses knowing what Satan wants: he does not say Satan asked him, nor does he grant Satan's desire. At the same time, he appears to not be in a position to prevent it, with the dualistic inference of that fact. Turning to his other example, the Temptation story, Augustine argued that the Manichaean belief in a docetic Jesus forces them to accept that the divine nature was directly visible to Satan as well as to all sorts of wicked and impure people throughout Jesus' earthly career (*Serm* 12.8–9).

> So when the devil had the audacity to tempt the Lord, what did he see when he saw him? If he saw his body, then the Lord had a body, which these lost souls refuse to admit. But if he didn't have a body, it

> means the divine substance in itself was presented to the eyes of the devil. . . . Why do you falsely object to our scriptures for saying that the devil saw God, and by denying the reality of Christ's body convict yourselves of wishing to parade his divine substance before the devil's eyes? (*Serm* 12.9)

Augustine recognized a possible reply, that the docetic Christ projected an illusory body. But he contended that beings of the same substance must be equally visible or invisible, without distinction.

> They have never dared to say, you see, that Father and Son are not of one substance. . . . We then go on to inquire, This sun up there—does the devil see it, or does he not? If he does, how can the sun be God, since the devil sees it? If he doesn't see it, but bad men see it, again how can that be God, which is seen by those who are not pure in heart? (*Serm* 12.11)

Manichaean devotion to the sun as the embodiment of the divine, he concluded, contradicted their argument against evil beings being able to see God. It is informative to compare the marginal use of the Incarnation in Augustine's argument here with the centrality of the Incarnation in his later anti-Manichaean sermons in the fifth century.[21] This later sharpening of his attention to the Christological differences between Nicene Christianity and Manichaeism parallels the shift in his own Christology, from his earlier didactic understanding of Christ's mission to his later atonement conception of it.

The Manichaeans also found offensive the Old Testament depiction of God as jealous, as exacting vengeance on the third and fourth generation of those who commit sin (Ex 20:5, *Adim*. 7.1), as a "devouring flame" (Dt 4:23–24, *Adim* 13), who desiccates breasts and sterilizes seed (Hos 9:14; *Adim* 25). It is said, "Can evil come to a town without God being its author?" (Amos 2:3–6; *Adim* 26). How can this be reconciled with Jesus' teachings that "Every good tree yields good fruits and every evil tree evil fruits" (Mt 7:17–19; *Adim* 26; cf. *Fel* 2.2, *Acta Archelai* 5, *PsBk* 134.11, 134.17ff.)? In the New Testament God is expressly said to be good (Mk 10:17–18; *Adim* 13), to make the sun shine on both the good and the wicked, and to command forgiveness seventy times seven times (Mt 5:45, 18:22, *Adim* 7.1; cf. *Faust* 33.1; *PsBk* 40.33, 41.1f., 194.16). Augustine held that references to God's jealousy were mere figures of

speech for that aspect of God's will toward human beings that is concerned with their proper conduct, as when Paul says "I have conceived for you a jealousy of God, because I have engaged you to a unique spouse, for you to be presented to Christ as a pure virgin" (2 Cor 11:2; *Adim* 7.4). Augustine argued for the necessity of using such imperfect expressions to convey things that are beyond language; the New Testament quotes such language from the Old Testament approvingly (Jn 2:17, quoting Ps 68:10, *Adim* 11), and the Manichaeans readily took such expressions figuratively when they found them in the New Testament (e.g., Jn 7:38, 1 Cor 3:2, 1 Thes 2:7, *Adim* 25).

God does not punish the children of sinful parents unjustly, Augustine claimed, but only if they persist in the same perversity.[22] As Paul says, God reads the covetousness of people's hearts (Rom 1:24), so God is not cruel, but causes each to be punished for his or her own sins (*Adim* 7.1). That God causes his sun to shine even on the wicked is to be associated with his patience, by which he invites all to repentance (see Rom 2:4); but so that one would not assume that this means that God does not punish at all, the Apostle goes on immediately to refer to those who "accumulate wrath for the day of wrath and the manifestation of the just judgment of God, who renders to each according to his deeds" (Rom 2:5, *Adim* 7.3). When Christ instructs his audience to forgive seventy times seven times, this is in hope of repentance; but God punishes those who do not repent (*Adim* 7.4). Augustine maintained that whenever the Bible associates God with something "evil," it means not sinful evil, but the justice of punishment that the one punished experiences as an "evil," even though it actually involves the good of God's justice (*Adim* 26). Even God willing a sparrow to drop dead (Mt 10:29) is not an evil from the point of view of God, but only for the creature God chastises in this way. So even Gehenna, though bad for the damned, is a good from the vantage point of God's justice. Even Adimantus cited the verse, "Every tree that does not yield good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." Such is the "evil" that God does, Augustine insisted, namely, as chastisement of sinners. The punishment of sin is not an evil fruit, he argued, but the good fruit of justice (*Adim* 26).

Augustine would not acquiesce in the Manichaean implication that God does not punish, that he pardons all and damns none (*si omnibus parcit et neminem damnat*). The Manichaeans themselves said that God has prepared an *aeternum carcerem* for the race of darkness. If the Manichaeans were to reply that these are God's eternal enemies, not the souls of human beings, Augustine reminded them that they do not hesitate to affirm that God punishes

his own unredeemable limbs along with the same race. And why should God not be thought of as a punisher, when Jesus himself declared, "away to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mt 25:41; *Adim* 7.1), and said that he came to bring fire on the earth (Lk 12:49; *Adim* 13.3)? The Manichaeans insisted that Jesus meant something else here than the apparent punitive meaning; but if it meant something else here, why could it not mean something else in the Old Testament? Indeed, Augustine offered, this is the same fire as that mentioned in Lk 24:32, burning the hearts of Christ's disciples, namely, the love of God which consumes the old man and replaces it with the new.

The Manichaeans opposed the portrayal of God in the Old Testament as one who promises to give victory over one's enemies (Lev 26:3–10) to that found in the New Testament, where Paul says that God is not pleased by strife or dissension, but by peace (1 Cor 14:33, *Adim* 20.3). In Isaiah God says, "It is I who makes peace, and creates evil" (Isa 45:7), whereas Christ pronounced a benediction only on peacemakers as "children of God" (Mt 5:9, *Adim* 27). But Augustine pointed out that the Manichaean myth itself is one of combat, where God's love of peace causes him to send out souls to combat outside the realm of light, so that he may have peace, while they are entangled with and polluted by their enemies. While acknowledging God's love of peace, Augustine stipulated that this did not mean he neglects justice, or allows the wicked to triumph over the righteous. Yet Augustine considered all such language of worldly victory over one's enemies as intended only as a metaphorical prefiguration of spiritual triumph over evil (*Adim* 20.3).

Augustine argued that differences in the depiction of God in the Old and New Testaments reflect nuances of emphasis, not radical disjunction. Declarations of God's goodness, which may seem to contradict the description of God as jealous and a flame, nonetheless stand within the same part of the scriptures, the Old Testament (*Adim* 13.4). Likewise, in the New Testament parable of the king who gave a banquet (Mt 22:2–13), the same king calls a man friend, and yet, finding fault in him, has him bound and thrown into outer darkness. Suppose someone were to examine this text with the attitude of Adimantus, find fault with the king for acting thus, and, contrasting it to the God who in the Old Testament is declared good and merciful, reject the New Testament in favor of the Old? Or suppose, he suggested, one were to compare Ezek 33:11, where God says he does not desire the death of the sinner, but his repentance, to Mt 25:41, where God is represented dismissing the sinner to the eternal fire. Would not this comparison lead one to the reverse conclusion to that of Adimantus, accepting the Old Testament's depiction of

God as the true one while rejecting the God of the New Testament as unmerciful and cruel (*Adim* 27)? To the discerning eye, he asserted, all that the Manichaeans condemn in the Old Testament can be found in the New, and all that they praise in the New Testament in the Old as well.

As one might expect, the creation narrative of Genesis offers a major site of interpretive battle. Augustine had worked mostly from his own memory in reporting Manichaean criticisms of Genesis in *Genesis Against the Manichaeans*. His acquisition of Adimantus's work provided additional problems to solve. Adimantus observed that whereas in Genesis God creates the world, Christ is identified as the world's maker in John 1:1–3, John 1:10, and Colossians 1:15–16 (*Adim* 1; *Serm* 1.1–2). Augustine claimed in reply that Christ is the "beginning" in which God made heaven and earth according to Genesis 1:1, citing an extremely obscure remark of Jesus in John 8:25, and relying on a solution well established in the exegetical tradition (*Serm* 1.2). In any case, Augustine believed that references to God in the Old Testament can incorporate the entire Trinity, and that in this case God created by means of his Word, which is the Son. Even in the New Testament some references to creation name God alone as creator; there, too, the role of the Son should be taken as implied, he maintained (*Adim* 1). Adimantus also faulted the idea that God rested on the seventh day, contrasting it to Jesus' express statement, "My Father is still working up to now" (Jn 5:17, cf. *GCM* 1.22.33; *Faust* 16.6). Augustine replied that God's rest refers merely to the transition from the creative to the governance phase of his work (*Adim* 2).

Adimantus likewise faulted the Genesis account of the making of human beings. Contrary to the claim that God himself fashioned humans, Jesus tells people that their father is the devil (Jn 8:44), and refers to them as a "race of serpents and vipers" (Mt 3:7, 23:33). Augustine responded that the characterization of humans in these statements refers to them metaphorically in their condition as sinners, not literally to their parentage or descent, just as when Paul speaks of "children of disobedience" (Eph 2:2). Paul himself confirms that humans are made in God's image (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:7; Col. 3:9–10), to which they can be restored (*Adim* 5). Adimantus argued that the description of God's fashioning of woman and making her an inseparable companion of man runs contrary in spirit to Jesus' commendation of those who leave wife and family for the sake of the kingdom (Mt 19:29/Mk 10:29–30/Lk 18.29–30). Augustine countered that the Manichaean reading makes Jesus contradict himself, for he forbids even divorce, which was permitted by the Law.[23] It is perfectly right that the same God who gave woman can demand that she be

given up, Augustine insisted; nevertheless, he could cite several other New Testament passages where marriage is spoken of favorably, and even used as a metaphor for the relationship between the believer and God (*Adim* 3).

In competitive interpretations such as these, of course, both sides see what they want to see. The Manichaeans found points of contradiction; Augustine identified points of agreement. Neither dealt with the biblical text in its entirety, with both its tensions and its agreements. Neither could allow the text to have a plurality of voices. Both placed demands upon it as scripture determined by the *regula fidei* of their respective traditions, with opposite results. For the Manichaeans, because the inspiration and transmission of the Bible was uncertain, conflicts in the literal sense evoked the need to separate authentic and scripturally worthy material from that which contradicted it. With Manichaean affirmation of the authority of Jesus and Paul, the Old Testament stood on the losing side of this discriminating judgment. For Augustine, the authenticity of the Bible in its entirety was vouched for by the authority of the Catholic Church. Solving apparent conflicts in the text by rejecting parts of it was not an option. Apparent contradictions in the literal sense were to be resolved by resort to some figurative sense that smoothed over the tension, or else should be left unresolved in patient expectation that all would become clear in time.

Augustine found that he still needed to leave unresolved the mysteries of the Genesis creation account, as his attempt at a more "literal" interpretation of it in *Genesis Literally, unfinished* collapsed after he had covered a mere twenty-six verses. He still regarded it as certain that this narrative did not report the "historical" formation of the cosmos, but symbolically outlined salvation history. When he reached the creation of humanity in God's image, therefore, he understood it to refer to the believer's assimilation to the image of God through Christ, the second creation or second birth of a person spiritually, replacing the original carnal one. Modern researchers have long speculated over what dissatisfaction with what he was producing induced Augustine to stop work at this point. In his *Revisions* he said only that "my inexperience in scriptural exegesis collapsed under the weight of the burden." Yet when he picked up the forgotten fragment at this point toward the end of his life, he altered only his interpretation of verse twenty-six, now connecting it "historically" or "literally" to the original creation of humanity. Should we attribute his abandonment of the project, then, simply to his recognition that his attempt at a "literal" interpretation was not sufficiently literal, but still largely allegorical, as had been *Genesis Against the Manichaeans*? Or was

there something particular about the way he had read verse twenty-six that caused him concern? After all, by stating that humans only really come to be in the image of God in their spiritual rebirth, he had duplicated a striking Manichaean motif (see *Faust* 24; *Fort* 16), albeit one rooted in the language of Paul. Perhaps he realized the danger of defaulting to Manichaean themes in areas where he was still not sufficiently versed in how Catholic discourse understood such biblical material.

The Torah Versus the Sermon on the Mount

The Manichaeans insisted that the commandments of the Law could not be reconciled with Christ's moral instruction. Not only was their incompatibility immediately evident to anyone comparing them, they argued, but both Christ and Paul explicitly criticized the Law and declared it void for their followers. Faustus had used the Sermon on the Mount as the template of assessing the true follower of Christ, which he claimed himself to be on the basis of his literal fulfillment of its commands (*Faust* 5.1). He considered any abrogation of this *mandatum Christi* in favor of the Jewish Law to represent a manifestation of "semi-Christianity." Adimantus offered a number of antitheses, contrasting the values of the Sermon with those of the Torah in a manner that could be taken to continue a negative comparison that Jesus himself had initiated in the Sermon itself.

Augustine attempted to answer the Manichaean contrast of Law and Gospel in a variety of forums. In addition to direct replies to the arguments of Adimantus, he composed an entire work in two volumes on the Sermon on the Mount. He agreed that the Sermon on the Mount represented the epitome of instruction on the Christian life (*SermDom* 1.1.1), and showed the superiority of Christ's instruction to that of the Law (*SermDom* 1.1.2). Yet, against the Manichaean view, he insisted that both the Law and the Sermon derive from the same God, and represent stages of instruction according to a progressive dispensation of the one God. So, for example, God permitted polygamy to the Old Testament patriarchs, but now humanity had reached a level of maturity in which monogamy applies (*SermDom* 1.16.49). Similarly, although Jesus instructed his disciples not to kill, he did not explicitly condemn the Old Testament figures for killing in the past (*SermDom* 1.20.64). It remains unclear, however, just what purpose Augustine imagined this evolving ethic to serve.

Nothing could be clearer, the Manichaeans said, than the antithesis between the Law's "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" (Ex 21:24) and Christ's explicit rejection of such an ethic in favor of nonretaliation against evil (Mt 5:38–40, Lk 6:29, *Adim* 8; cf. *Faust* 19.3; *PsBk* 195.16; *Acta Archelai* 44). In the Old Testament, God promises to help the Jews destroy all the people of the land, and commands them to have nothing to do with them (Ex 23:22–24). To this, Adimantus opposed Jesus' command to "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute you" (Lk 6:27–28, *Adim* 17.1; cf. *Faust*. 19.3). Augustine admitted that such passages demonstrate the difference between the two testaments, yet he insisted that they were both given by the same God. The Old Testament command was meant to rein in revenge within just limits, and Christ's command extended rather than contradicted this restraint (*Adim* 8). The command to love one's enemies applied to having patience with those who may be converted, he suggested, while the command to kill one's enemies suited the treatment of those hopelessly carnal. Even Paul delivered a man to Satan, he observed (1 Cor 5:3–5), and the Manichaeans accepted other writings—such as the *Acts of Thomas* and *Acts of Peter*—where the heroes called down suffering and death on the wicked (*Adim* 17.2; *SermDom* 1.20.65).[24] Such killing is only a killing of the flesh, in order to save the soul, he argued, as expressly stated in both 1 Corinthians 5 and the *Acts of Thomas*. In the *Acts of Peter*, Peter paralyzes his daughter by prayer, and causes the daughter of a gardener to die by prayer. Augustine anticipated a counterargument that such things were expedient for the people concerned. But could not the same be argued for those struck down in the Old Testament (*Adim* 17.6)? He suggested that such apparent curses and invocation of harm, found in both the Old and New Testaments, actually functioned as prophecies of what would happen according to God's justice, rather than as prayers asking God to make them happen (*Serm Dom* 1.21.71–72; *Adim* 25). God remains just and a distributor of justice, no matter how much the rules of human conduct change from the Law to the Gospel.[25]

The Old Testament represents the pedagogy of fear, Augustine explained, while the New Testament brings the era of love. Just as wise parents correct their children so that they will not fall into bad ways, so God seeks by his punishment of sinners to warn weak souls from falling among the condemned. God hates the sinner the person has become, not the person as such, for Wisdom 11:25 says of God, "You hate nothing of that which you have made" (*Adim* 17.3). God corrects not only with infirmities and maladies,

but even with temporal death, those whom he wishes to save from damnation. Thus God can take vengeance on people without hating them; whereas the Manichaeans were unwilling to give a piece of bread not only to their enemies, but even to someone who humbly begs it of them (*Adim* 17.4). We miss at this point of Augustine's argument a rejoinder from a Manichaean opponent, who no doubt would draw attention to the difference between a parent threatening a child for the child's own correction (see *Keph* 82) and God killing one person as a lesson to others. No matter what good may come of such an example for others, the person destroyed receives no benefit. Augustine toyed with the idea that the post mortem soul may receive some sort of moral improvement from its mortal punishment—an idea connected to his early notion of spiritual progress outside the body. But he did not develop it. In contrast to Faustus's pacifist literal application of Christ's blessing of peacemakers, Augustine claimed that it refers allegorically to the internal condition of those "in whom all things now are in order and no movement is rebellious against reason, but all things obey the spirit of man as it, in truth, obeys God" (*SermDom* 1.4.11).

The Manichaeans maintained that Christ himself opposed and violated the Old Testament Law. The Law declares a curse on anyone hanged on a tree (Dt 21:23), yet not only was Jesus himself crucified, but he also commanded his disciples to take up their cross and follow him (Mt 16:24, *Adim* 21; cf. *Faust* 14.1, 16.5, 32.5; *Fel* 2.10). For Manichaeans, taking up the cross of Christ involved the recognition of oneself as part of the "cross of light" suffering throughout the world—a recognition essential to the transformation from the old harmful self to the new harmless self.[26] Augustine contended that Jesus spoke not of a literal cross, but of a figurative one, as did Paul when he said we must crucify the flesh (Gal 5:24). The curse of the Law refers to a person's sinful humanity, which is hanged on the cross in Christ *in appearance only*, since Christ did not actually bear any sin; nor was the Lord actually killed, but only his human body was (*Adim* 21).

In another example, the Manichaeans observed that, in open defiance of the Old Testament's sabbath regulations, whose violation demanded capital punishment (Num 15:32–35), Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the sabbath (Mt 12:10–13/Mk 2:23ff./Lk 6:6–10, *Adim* 22; cf. *Faust* 32.5; *Acta Archelai* 44). Augustine responded that God has the authority to command both death and mercy, without having his judgments gainsaid. In any case, he suggested, the sabbath was a prefiguration that, once fulfilled, need no longer be observed (*Adim* 22).

The Manichaeans further argued that Jesus contradicted the commandment to honor one's father and mother (Ex 20:12) when he demanded that his followers hate their father and mother (Lk 14:26, *SermDolb* 13/159A.6), or when, in reply to someone's stated intention to bury his father, he said, "Let the dead bury their dead; but you, go and declare the kingdom of God" (Lk 9:59–60, *Adim* 6). Yet, Augustine pointed out, Christ himself ordered the commandments to be kept, and even cited the commandment to honor one's parents in particular (Mt 19:17–21). As in the case of seemingly contradictory attitudes toward marriage, one should abandon parents only when they oppose the true faith (*Adim* 6).

Above and beyond the opposition of specific rules of conduct, Manichaeans pointed to the antipathy between the Old and New Testaments in the very ethos of religious life they respectively reflected. The Manichaeans contrasted Jesus' call for renunciation of the world and even of self (Mt 16:24–26/Lk 9:23–25, *Adim* 18; cf. *PsBk* 93.11, 167.47, 175.27, 195.8) to the promises made to keepers of the Law by the god of the Old Testament to reward them with worldly benefits (Deut 28:1–6). In the Law, "God" promises to those who keep his commandments rain and crops and prosperity and victory over their enemies (Lev 26:3–10), as well as fecundity (Ps 127:2–4), whereas Jesus instructs, "Take no gold or silver, nor any money in your belts, nor pouch for the road, nor two tunics, nor sandals nor staff, for the laborer deserves his food" (Mt 10:9–10, *Adim* 20), praises those who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom (Mt 19:12, *Adim* 23), and speaks of life in the resurrection as not involving marriage (Lk 20:35–36/Mt 22:30, *Adim* 25). The god of the Old Testament says, "Mine is the gold and mine is the silver" (Hag 2:8, *Serm* 50.1), and "It is mine to give riches to my friends, and poverty to my enemies" (1 Kings 3:13; *Adim* 19), whereas Jesus promises the kingdom of heaven to the poor (Mt 5:3/Lk 6:20), cries out woes against the rich (Lk 6:24, *Adim* 19), and labels wealth "unrighteous mammon" (Lk 16:9, *Serm* 50.1), and Paul calls avarice the root of all evils (1 Tim 6:10, *Serm* 50.1). The values of the Old Testament find reflection in Solomon's advice to "imitate the bee and consider its diligence; it builds its hive and amasses its provisions" (Prov 6:6–8), whereas Jesus tells his followers, "Do not be anxious about tomorrow" (Mt 6:34, *Adim* 24), and condemns the foolishness of the man who stored up material treasure (Lk 12:20), and Paul instructs believers to place their trust in God, not in uncertain riches (1 Tim 6:17–19, *Adim* 20).

Augustine argued that the contrast of these two sets of values was not as great as the Manichaeans wished to portray it. Did not Jesus also promise

the inheritance of the earth to the meek? Jesus and Paul did not disapprove of taking care of the daily needs of life, he insisted (*Adim* 24). Worldly goods are a gift of God, but of a lower rank than spiritual goods, for which the former ideally should be left behind. God claims ownership over gold and silver in order to direct people to its right use in charity rather than vain pursuit of wealth (*Serm* 50.2), or even put to work "making friends" as stated in Lk 16:9 (*Serm* 50.8). Augustine argued that it is not material things in themselves, nor the mere possession of them, that is wrong, but only placing one's trust in them and valuing them more than virtue (*Serm* 50.5–6; *Adim* 20.2). The objects of people's cravings are not bad, he contended, it is their craving of them that is bad. The temporal goods that God bestows are the signs of eternal goods that he will bestow, and are designed to build confidence in God's rewards (*Adim* 20.2). Carnal promises are made to those still carnal, Augustine proposed, and should be understood to signal differential rewards for God's spiritual and carnal children in the world to come (*Adim* 18.1). God is empowered to give different promises and instructions to distinct people (*Adim* 20.1). Yet even Jesus' disciples are promised multiples of the very worldly things they have given up; while even in the Old Testament one can find encouragement to eschew material goods (Ps 143:11–15; *Adim* 18.1). At the same time, Augustine thought he could prove from passages in Psalms, Proverbs, and Wisdom that the term "riches" was often used as a metaphor for wisdom and the other nonmaterial gifts of God (*Adim* 19), as was the case with the "provisions" Solomon recommends we gather and amass (*Adim* 24), and the "gold and silver" of Haggai in the "accustomed figurative way" of prophetic speech (*Serm* 50.11); the same figurative use of such terms could be found in the New Testament, he observed, where the kingdom is compared to a buried treasure (Mt 13:44), and Paul refers to the good foundations of the Christian faith as "gold and silver" (1 Cor 3:12; *Serm* 50.9).

Adimantus contended that when Jesus said the scribes and Pharisees made children of gehenna through their proselytizing (Mt 23:15), he could only have been speaking about the consequences of observing the Law (*Adim* 16.1). Augustine replied that it was the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, and their substitution of their own customs for the Law (Mt 15:3–6), that produced such dire results. In fact, Jesus suggested that the scribes and Pharisees occupied a legitimate position of religious leadership, but abused it; so he affirmed the authority of the Law while condemning the lack of its observance.[27] Against the practice of circumcision (Gen 17:9–14), Adimantus was able to cite Paul's explicit instruction not to circumcise (1 Cor 7:18–19) and his characterization

of the practice as mutilation (Gal 5:12). Augustine sought to persuade his readers that Paul only meant to treat circumcision as superfluous after the coming of Christ (its true meaning being conveyed in Rom 4:11), rather than actually bad (*Adim* 16.2). As with circumcision, so with the observance of the special holy days of the Law criticized by Paul (Gal 4:10–11[28]): the wrong lay in continuing such observances once that which it signified or prophesied had been made manifest (*Adim* 16.3).

The Manichaeans criticized the food customs sanctioned by the Old Testament, such as the rules of kosher (Lev 11, *Adim* 15), or the command to "kill and eat," and to pour the blood out onto the ground like water (Deut 12:15–16, *Adim* 14). Jesus, in contrast, declared that nothing entering into people could pollute them (Mk 7:15, *Adim* 15), and that the heart is burdened by an excess of food or drink (Lk 21:34, *Adim* 14), while Paul even said expressly that it was good not to eat meat or drink wine (Rom 14:21), and warned against partaking of the table of demons rather than of the Lord (1 Cor 10:19–21: "What the pagans *immolant*, they *immolant* to demons and not to God," signifying, Adimantus contended, the killing of animals as itself a wrongful act of sacrifice, *Adim* 14). In response, Augustine attempted to explain the rules of kosher allegorically, signifying different sorts of prohibited human sins, just as Paul interpreted an Old Testament reference to cattle to refer to ministers of the word (*Adim* 14.2), or Jesus told parables involving plants that actually referred to people (*Adim* 15.2). Although he did not try to defend animal sacrifice, Augustine insisted that God did not encourage eating to excess or immoderation in the Old Testament (*Adim* 14.1). Jesus did not mean to criticize kosher rules, but washing customs, when he declared that people could not be polluted by that which enters them (*Adim* 15.2). In any case, since Christ fulfilled all that the Law signified, the individual laws themselves were abolished, while the prophetic meaning of the passages was preserved (*Adim* 15.3). Paul's command of abstinence from meat and wine had nothing to do with the supposed impurity of these things as the Manichaeans believed, Augustine contended, but has as its reason the desire not to scandalize people in the faith who might associate these things with sinful practices. The Apostle himself prophetically warned against the Manichaeans themselves, Augustine claimed, as those who would come prohibiting marriage and abstaining from food (Titus 1:15, *Adim* 14.2), judging what is to be eaten and drunk, and observing new moons and sabbaths (Col. 2:16–17, *Adim* 15.3).

Here again we are witness to two self-contained systems of interpretation, each closed to the alternative readings the other offered. The Manichaeans

had no more reason to heed the convenient harmonizations of Augustine than he had to credit their stark polarizations. From the position of modern biblical studies, one could surely fault the Manichaeans for not having sufficient regard for the continuities between Jewish and Christian values, or seeing the ways in which Jesus and Paul presuppose orientations and attitudes in their Law-based Jewish background for their own religious innovations. From the same vantage point, one could equally fault Augustine for glossing over genuine developments and differences that separated the religious system Jesus and Paul represent from its Jewish foundations, and blinking at points of breakage between them. Whereas modern biblical scholarship would tend to credit some of the contextual explanations Augustine offered that mitigated the contrasts the Manichaeans were drawing, it would cast a much colder eye on his frequent resort to allegorical and figurative readings whenever the literal sense gave him trouble.

Augustine made his harmonization of the Law and Gospel easier by his placement of the locus of morality in the will of the individual rather than in his or her deeds.[29] The performance of external actions is, he maintained, ultimately irrelevant to the character of the immaterial soul (*DQ* 27). With a concessive nod to Manichaean claims to embody the Christian ethic in their deeds (connected to a citation of Gal 5.19–23, see *SermDom* 2.24.81), Augustine maintained that such externals could not provide the basis for identifying the truly holy, since apparently good deeds might be motivated by heresy.

> The question, indeed, is most rightly put, What are the fruits he would wish us to attend to, by which we might know the tree? For many reckon among the fruits certain things which belong to the sheep's clothing, and in this way we are deceived by wolves: as, for instance, either fastings, or prayers, or almsgivings[30]; but if it were not that all of these things could be done even by hypocrites, he would not say before, "Take heed that you do not perform your righteousness before men, to be seen of them." And after prefixing this sentence, he goes on to speak of those very three things, almsgiving, prayer, fasting. . . . But the sheep ought not on this account to hate their own clothing, because the wolves often conceal themselves in them. (*SermDom* 2.24.80)

Any rules of external conduct serve merely as temporary, disposable conditioners of the soul, disciplining its wayward inclination toward material things and preparing it for its ascent back to God. Religious moral codes are

designed to reverse the habits formed in the soul by the misdirection of its will and attention to worldly concerns and interests (*SermDom* 1.12.34). This was a radical stance for a man charged with the duties of a Catholic priest to take. It reflects an ongoing commitment on Augustine's part to a devaluation of the material world that reappears in a variety of forms in several subsequent works. It would take him at one point as far as questioning the ultimate value even of particular meanings of the biblical text (*Conf*, book 13). Was not the Bible, also, merely a disposable instrument of the soul's perfection? Was there a Bible, or a need for one, in heaven?[31]

Augustine's biographer Possidius reported the positive results of Augustine's anti-Manichaean preaching in an incident that he claimed to have observed himself while he still lived in Hippo, before being made bishop of Calama. He related that Augustine had digressed in one of his sermons from the lesson he had started, in order to make some arguments against the Manichaeans (Possidius 15.1–4). His remarks had an effect on a businessman named Firmus who, although a Manichaean Auditor, had been in attendance that day. "He confessed that he had been a Manichaean and had lived in that sect for many years and that consequently he had wasted a very great deal of money on the Manichaeans and their 'Elect,' as they are known" (Possidius 15.5). Since he had been in Augustine's church, we should probably conclude that, like Augustine listening to Ambrose, he was a man already on his way out of Manichaeism at the time. Augustine had brought him to conversion.[32]

Profession of Faith

The very same public rhetorical performances that won the new conversion of others such as Firmus from Manichaeism to Nicene Christianity also reinforced and built up the converted self of Augustine. With every biblical problem he resolved in a manner consistent with his commitment to the Nicene Creed (or its equivalent) and his own theoretical positions, Augustine made the "Catholic" character of his thinking more thoroughgoing and secure. Speaking and writing produced and rehearsed a set of stances ever more intertwined and interdependent through repeated reiteration and refinement. Augustine spoke rhetorically of "profess[ing] with the mouth the faith which we hold in our heart" (*Fid* 1.1); but the speech act of profession itself served to place and anchor particular commitments of faith within his thinking.[33] Such established commitments in turn placed a burden of expectation on

any new reading or idea Augustine experienced. He found his established ideas in ever more passages of the Bible, which in turn presented particular phrasing and imagery that brought new dimensions to the way he expressed and conceived of his ideas. Manichaean discourse supplied another major resource in Augustine's reflections, to the degree that he produced much of his early exegetical work with the Manichaeans as either explicit or implicit foil to his "Catholic" readings. Their specific challenges evoked the particular themes Augustine highlighted and repeated in defining his Nicene commitments, and in this way his "Catholic" self was expressed within an anti-Manichaean framework. To the degree, then, that "Catholicism" is a product of Augustine's intellectual work, it arises with Manichaeism as its vis-à-vis, as the Other from which it takes its differential definition.

The African churches that chose to position themselves in a colonial relationship to the newly defined orthodoxy of Rome, Constantinople, and Alexandria formed themselves into the Catholic Church of Africa at a conference in Hippo in the autumn of 393. Bishop Valerius, as host of this momentous meeting, arranged for his star rhetorician priest to deliver an exposition of the creed (actually, the "Old Roman" creed rather than that of Nicaea or Constantinople)[34] before the assembled bishops, perhaps as much due to his distinctively informed position of having been catechized in Milan as to his rhetorical talents. Augustine subsequently "compressed," polished, and circulated this speech as *Faith and the Creed*. This little work rarely gets attention in modern scholarship as a significant witness to Augustine's own intellectual positions at the time, and for good reason. Before that particular audience, Augustine was not about to be deliberately novel or innovative. He would deliver just what was expected, and perhaps rely more than usual on the ideas of others. In preparing and delivering the talk, however, he also, unavoidably, revealed his own current grasp of the material, whether or not he had made it his own, and made a public avowal of his commitment to it, whether or not it had any active place in how he thought of himself or of what mattered to him from this religious tradition. In short, before the assembled bishops, he subjected himself to a kind of check-up on his indoctrination.

Augustine committed himself to, and defended, the omnipotence of God and what he claimed to be necessarily entailed by it: creation *ex nihilo* (*Fid* 2.2). There can be no eternal material on which God relies for forming the cosmos, nor anything which is the opposite of God, since the opposite of God as Being would be nonbeing (*Fid* 4.7), nor any second independent principle besides God (*Fid* 9.19). Augustine likewise guarded against any implication

from the wording of the creed or scripture that God "is limited as it were by a human form" (*Fid* 7.14), as Manichaeans accused other Christians of believing. In the context of the Hippo conference, he necessarily devoted a significant portion of his talk to Trinitarian exposition, defining Nicene theology over against various "Arian" or "Semi-Arian" (he does not use the terms) forms of faith (e.g., *Fid* 9.18), and made brief reference to Donatist schismatics (*Fid* 10.21). But Manichaeism repeatedly features as the unnamed Other over against which Augustine sets forth the meaning of "Catholic" dogma.

The divine, eternal (or rather, timeless), and uncreated Word—for which Augustine still favored the characterization "power and wisdom of God" he had learned as a Manichaean (*Fid* 2.3, 3.4)—is the one through whom God made all things (*Fid* 4.6). He is uniquely "God of God, Light of Light." By contrast, "We are not light by nature," as the Manichaeans claim, "but we are illumined by that light, according as we are able to shine in wisdom" (*Fid* 4.6). Augustine responded mostly to Manichaean positions in defending the physicality of Christ's full incarnation and human birth, against their criticism of the "sordidness" that would be involved if Jesus passed through "a woman's internal organs (*muliebrium uiscerum*)" (*Fid* 4.10; cf. *PsBk* 120.25, 122.23). He argued that the rays of the sun, which the Manichaeans "adore as actually God," make contact with sewers and other polluted things, and yet are not contaminated by them; how much more would the Word "neither visible nor corporeal" be immune to any pollution of a woman's body with which the assumed man inhabited by the Word had contact during gestation and birth? Even the human soul "is not soiled by contact with the body when it rules and animates the body, but only when it lusts after the perishable goods of the body" (*Fid* 4.10). Even though the unchangeable Wisdom of God "assumed" the human Jesus—body, soul, and spirit—yet, when the latter was crucified, "he was crucified in his human character" alone (*Fid* 4.9). Christ "deigned to be created among men" as "an example of living . . . by which we might reach God" (*Fid* 4.6), and he died on the cross "lest any of us, even if he could shake off the fear of death, should dread a kind of death which men think most shameful" (*Fid* 5.11). Clearly, then, Augustine continued to understand both the incarnation and crucifixion primarily in a pedagogical sense, as he had since his conversion. He could repeat phrasing about the importance of Christ "assuming" a whole man, since if "any part of our nature was unassumed . . . it will have no part in salvation" (*Fid* 4.8), but it did not mean anything in particular to him regarding an economy of salvation. It was merely a stock argument against heterodox Christologies. To the

degree that Augustine actually made use of the idea that the Son "assumed human nature . . . in order to change it for the better" (*Fid* 9.18), he understood that change to be effected by the example Christ set for others to follow.

As Augustine neared the end of the creed in his public exposition, just before a familiar defense of physical resurrection against a typical Manichaean objection that cited 1 Corinthians 15:50 (*Fid* 10.24; cf. *Fort* 19), he departed notably from the creedal text to address some of the issues of anthropology and free will that Fortunatus had raised, taking the opportunity to reiterate the answers he had offered in their debate.[35] He invoked Fortunatus's Pauline passages of inner struggle in order to describe the human condition, in an incipient form of his characterization of the person in the liminal state *sub lege*: who "'groans and travails until now' (Rom 8:22), but has put forth the first-fruits of spirit" (i.e., the rational part or mind of a person), "because it has believed God and already has a good will," so that it may say, "I serve the law of God with my mind" (Rom 7:25).

> But the soul, as long as it desires carnal goods, is called "flesh," and resists the spirit, not by nature, but by the habit of sins (*non natura, sed consuetudine peccatorum*). Wherefore it says, "With my mind I serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin" (Rom 7:25). That habit is changed into a nature in conformity with mortal reproduction by the sin of the first man (*quae consuetudo in naturam uersa est secundum generationem mortalem peccato primi hominis*). Therefore it is written, "We, too, were at one time by nature children of wrath" (Eph 2:3), that is, of the punishment by which we are made to serve the law of sin. (*Fid* 10.23)

Just how an individual's habit can be "changed into a nature . . . by the sin of the first man" is neither clear nor, on its face, intelligible;[36] but, as before, it would appear to involve the punitive condition of mortal physicality, whose nature in some sense embodies and hardens the soul's habit. As a state afflicting the soul, habit takes on the qualities of a "second nature" whose presence the Manichaeans misperceive as an actual (permanent) nature inclined to evil.[37] "The soul is not so speedily subjected to the spirit in order to perform good works, as the spirit is subjected to God to produce true faith and a good will" (*Fid* 10.23). The consequent lag between the spirit/mind's good intention and the soul's responsiveness creates the experience of conflicting wills, according to Augustine. Yet it remains unclear just how he meant his

audience to understand how their sinful habit binds them to the mortal body descended from Adam—if indeed he himself knew exactly what he meant.

Bringing his disquisition to a close, Augustine placed the words of the creed within a process of salvation already familiar to us from the many times he had outlined "believing in order to understand" (he had quoted this favorite expression yet again at the beginning of his talk, *Fid* 1.1), and the concomitant moral reform that purifies the mind for its ascent to God: "These few words are made known to believers, that, believing, they may subject themselves to God, being so subject may live righteous lives, living righteously they may cleanse their hearts, and with a pure heart may *know* what they *believe*" (*Fid* 10.25).

The agency of the individual in his or her salvation remained paramount for Augustine at this time. If we look for God's initiative in the scheme Augustine presented, it is to be found in God's call through Christ *institutionalized in the church and the words of the creed itself.*[38] That may be why Augustine often starts with the individual's faith, with God coming into direct action only as a response.[39] When Augustine takes care to attribute initiative to God, that initiative occurs through a "call" whose exact character can remain rather ambiguous in Augustine's prose. Nevertheless, God's action frames the space of individual free will, calling and then empowering action on the basis of the individual's response of faith. "For even our good works should be attributed to Him, who calls, who commands, who shows the way of truth, who both invites us to will, and supplies the power to fulfill, what he commands (*qui ut et velimus invitat et vires implendi ea quae imperat subministrat*)" (*GCM* 1.22.34). In one of his *Explanations of the Psalms* from this period, Augustine deliberately took a biblical passage that speaks of God repaying one's righteousness (Ps 17:21–22), and systematically qualified in an anti-Manichaean direction how much credit the righteous person deserves. God "showed mercy before I had a good will," Augustine begins, and "by leading me into the open plains of faith, enabled me to act rightly . . . so that there may be for me a broad expanse of good works, resulting from faith and long suffering perseverance" (*EnPs* 17.21). God's initial act of mercy (or calling), probably to be understood here as the temporal Incarnation of Christ and establishment of the instruments of the Church, leads to the individual's response of faith; God then creates the circumstances in which the individual will is allowed to be expressed in action, while the individual perseveres in good willing, producing the good works that merit reward.

While Augustine no doubt saw himself already at the stage of producing

such good works in his intellectual and rhetorical efforts, we may wonder where he thought of himself in the process of working toward understanding what he believed. He remained disturbed by some of the points made by Fortunatus, and especially by the way the Manichaean had called Paul to his side. Augustine thought of Paul as the most philosophical of the biblical writers, the one he naturally turned to in order to find agreement with the Platonists. His reaction to Fortunatus had suggested that he instinctively knew the latter must be wrong in his readings of the Apostle. Yet Augustine had to do the actual work of proving this—to his Catholic peers whose faith might be threatened, to his former friends among the Manichaeans whom he wished to win over, and not least to himself.

CHAPTER 6

The Problem of Paul

DESPITE AUGUSTINE'S LATER attempts to claim a prominent place for Paul in his initial conversion and earliest years as a Catholic, the evidence of his own writings shows incontrovertibly that Paul came dramatically to the foreground of his attention in the mid-390s, as an intense set of exegetical discoveries that R. A. Markus has likened to a landslide.[1] Similarly, Peter Brown sees in this very brief period the "end of a distinctive, more classical view of the human condition to which he himself had been committed at the time of his conversion."[2] The transformation was permanent and profound. Patout Burns speaks for a large consensus when he stresses that "Only in his Pauline commentaries did the characteristically Augustinian themes begin to appear."[3] It would be a fatal interpretive error, therefore, to overlook the circumstances in which this new Augustine emerges. For, as Paula Fredriksen notes, "Augustine's shift to more scriptural thought—or, perhaps better, more scriptural language—can thus be seen in part as an adaptive strategy, and a strategic necessity"[4]—not simply to adopt the biblical language preferred within Catholic discourse, but specifically to plant the Catholic interpretive flag in the contested ground of Paul. Always vaguely aware of the contest over Paul, he had experienced it first hand in his debate with Fortunatus.

Augustine's sudden, intensive interest in Paul after 392 finds no more plausible explanation than as a direct outcome of Fortunatus's effective use of the Apostle in support of core Manichaean teachings.[5] In the words of Paula Fredriksen, "There, before the watching eyes of his own church and its schismatic rival, the Donatists, Augustine had to confront publicly a well-organized Manichaean sect that based much of its dualistic and deterministic

doctrine on the Pauline Epistles. To proceed against the Manichees, Augustine had to reclaim Paul."[6] Similarly, "The undertaking of these projects so soon after the debate suggests," to Malcolm Alflatt, "that that event was at least partly responsible for Augustine's new approach to St. Paul."[7] That he had read Paul at the time of his conversion seems certain, since what he says in *Confessions* 7.21.27 more or less repeats a mention of Paul made at the time in *Against the Academics* 2.2.5. That he already knew something of Paul from his time as a Manichaean likewise appears assured, given the way he handles Pauline texts in *The Morals of the Catholic Church*. But a new set of Pauline passages emerge in the mid-390s, become recurrent reference points of his works from that time, and play a dominant role in shaping *Confessions*;[8] and many of them are just those passages that Fortunatus had deployed against him in support of Manichaean views. If we take *Confessions* as a transparent declaration of the way Augustine thinks of himself privately, then, we must stand astonished at the role Fortunatus played in selecting the specific Pauline themes that shaped who Augustine came to be. If, on the other hand, Augustine crafted *Confessions* primarily as a protreptic with the Manichaeans in mind, it may be that he offered his own persona in the work as a place to replay Fortunatus's favorite Pauline themes in a way that reclaimed them for Catholic identity.

In the years immediately following his eye-opening encounter with Fortunatus, then, Augustine displays a deliberate effort to rescue Paul from Manichaeism for the Nicene world view, and to set exegetical limits on how Paul "must be read with great care, so that the Apostle seems neither to condemn the Law nor to take away the free exercise of human will" (*PropRom* 13–18.1).[9] In the process of doing so, however, he discovered elements in Paul's rhetoric to which, in his intellectual environment, only the Manichaeans gave due attention. It is tempting to see the Pauline text itself as the cause of his exegetical and anthropological reconsiderations. Frederick van der Meer, for example, can speak of the "optimistic convert . . . transformed by his study of the Epistle to the Romans into a man broodingly contemplating the spectacle of sin and grace."[10] Similarly, Patout Burns observes that "Neo-Platonic Christianity had liberated Augustine from Manichean dualism and materialism, but some of its assumptions were gradually undercut in his new situation . . . shattered on the rock of Paul's epistles."[11] But, of course, two centuries of Christian exegetes had managed to read Paul quite comfortably in line with a free will view, and our sense that Augustine *discovered* something others had missed in Paul comes in large part from being heirs to an

intellectual tradition shaped by his success in persuading others that he had grasped Paul's true meaning. He first had to overcome opponents within his own religious community who argued that his exegesis entailed innovation and the introduction of Manichaean readings of Paul.

If the text of Paul itself forced Augustine to read it the way he did, why did he keep changing his reading? Certainly, it is possible that some of his insights emerged de novo from his immediate encounter with the text. But he brought to that encounter prior conditioning and exposure, not only to safely Nicene exegesis such as that of Jerome, but also to the interpretations of the Manichaean Fortunatus and the Donatist Tyconius. Augustine himself and many of his modern interpreters prefer to see any parallels with such heterodox sources as coincidence rooted in the common Pauline text they shared. But against the background of the almost limitless hermeneutical freedom a person such as Augustine enjoyed, historians have much to explain if they refuse to consider the possible relation of his particular interpretive choices to similar readings in his immediate environment.

Fortunatus had closed their debate by stating that he needed to consult with his superiors on subjects that remained obscure to him; Augustine evidently felt the same need, and sought out every possible exegetical resource by which he might make sense of Paul in such a way that he could be clad in a Catholic rather than a Manichaean mantle.[12] He got his hands on the commentaries of Marius Victorinus and, eventually, "Hilarius"[13] (known in modern scholarship as "Ambrosiaster"), as well as the exegetical handbook of the Donatist Tyconius.[14] His companion Alypius undertook the arduous voyage to Palestine in order to obtain copies of the commentaries of Jerome.[15] The following year, Augustine sent another delegate to Jerome to beg for translations of Origen's commentaries (*Ep* 28), but the delegate was diverted and the request never reached Jerome. He also may have obtained a Latin translation of the anti-Manichaean treatise of Titus of Bostra.[16] By the time of the Catholic conference in Carthage in the summer of 394, gathered to further the organizational work begun the previous year in Hippo, Alypius had returned with Jerome's commentaries, and Augustine was prepared to consult in round-table sessions with other Catholic brothers on the interpretive problems of Paul.[17]

His discussions with his colleagues in Carthage yielded the *Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans* (*Expositio quarundam propositionum ex epistola ad Romanos*). This was followed by an *Exposition of the Epistle to the Galatians* (*Expositio epistolae ad Galatas*),[18] and a failed attempt to produce a complete

commentary on Romans, the *Exposition of the Beginning of the Epistle to the Romans* (*Epistolae ad Romanos inchoata expositio*). He also produced short exercises on specific problems that were later incorporated as questions 66–70 of his *Eighty-Three Diverse Questions* (*De 83 diversis quaestionibus*). Around this same time, he also made final additions to *Free Choice* (*De libero arbitrio*) that for the first time gave Paul a significant place in the argument.[19] Examining this set of closely contemporaneous works affords us a clear view of precisely where Augustine positioned himself at the time on a number of interrelated issues for which the Manichaeans served as the primary interlocutors.

Confronting the Manichaean Paul

In the person of Fortunatus, Augustine had encountered and joined an arena of public debate over the legacy of Paul that permeated the Latin West in the second half of the fourth century.[20] The elephant in the room of this intense period of concern and engagement with Paul, Theodore de Bruyn suggests, was the Manichaean Paul.

> The conflict with the Manichaeans may, in fact, have contributed to the "renaissance" of Pauline studies in the latter half of the fourth century . . . frequent recourse to Paul's letters among Manichaeans obliged Catholic apologists to argue for what they held to be the right understanding of Paul's thought. Thus, attention was given to Paul's letters as a whole, and the commentary became a means to set forth an interpretation of Paul's theology which precluded the errors of, among others, the Manichaeans.[21]

Fortunatus had been able to run exegetical rings around Augustine precisely because he had in hand an established reading of Paul, learned from Faustus and other Manichaean leaders, that made effective use of deep complexities in the ideas of the Apostle.[22] We can appreciate the weight and substance of this Manichaean reading by the amount of effort expended in trying to counter it. In certain areas of Paul's thought, Augustine was treading ground practically owned by the Manichaeans.[23] But he had little choice. Since the Manichaeans, "drawing heavily on Paul, had evolved an anthropology that explained sin," Paula Fredriksen explains, "Augustine, speaking to the same issues, would have to draw on Paul as well." The success of his polemical

attack on the Manichaean Paul depended upon the cogency of his own alternative reading.[24]

In Augustine's exegetical efforts in 394–395, he repeatedly revisited the Pauline passages cited by Fortunatus in their debate (Rom 7, Gal 5, Eph 2), particularly the intertextual complex of Galatians and Romans that seemed to support Manichaean rejection of the Old Testament and its law, and that appeared to show Paul characterizing the human predicament in strikingly Manichaean terms.[25] Augustine expressly accepted the Manichaean coordination of these passages as mutually informing (e.g., *ExpGal* 46.1ff),[26] while seeking to safeguard Paul from the appearance that he condemned the Law and denied human free will (*PropRom.* 13–18.1–2, 44.1, 60.15, 62.1–3, 62.13), since both positions seemed to advantage the Manichaeans over the Catholics in their respective claims to the Apostle's legacy.

Behind Augustine's efforts stood the established tropes of late fourth-century Nicene interpretation of Paul, which could trace their antecedents back more than a century earlier to Origen, who had confronted Gnostic readings of Paul similar to the Manichaean challenge in their denial of an absolute freedom of the human will. Augustine's contemporaries and near-contemporaries all toed the free will line,[27] and he initially offered little that was new.[28] This should not surprise us, given both his inexperience as an exegete and the fact that texts such as *Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans* and even *Eighty-Three Diverse Questions* amount to summaries of opinions developed collectively with his Catholic colleagues in Hippo and Carthage. We can understand his reluctance to call the existing lines of interpretation into question, since there seemed such broad consensus on them and they so closely matched the views into which he had been indoctrinated as a Catholic.[29]

We can quickly summarize the broad strokes of this established line of interpretation.[30] In accord with classical views of responsibility and justice, sin or wrongdoing could only be attributed to a person who committed it freely. Outside circumstances and forces are merely presentations to a person's mind, which the latter is free to accept or reject in deliberating choice and action (Origen, *Com. ad Rom.* 8.9–10). Adam's transgression brought with it *mortality* for all of his physical descendants, but *damnation* came only to those souls who imitated him in yielding to temptation (Ambrosiaster, *In Rom.* 5.12). Bodily confinement limits the human soul's freedom (Origen, *Com. ad Rom.* 1.1), yet the soul retains the freedom to incline toward the flesh or toward the spirit (Origen, *Com. ad Rom.* 1.18). As stated in Rom 5:19,

all have sinned, but not all have become habituated sinners (Origen, *Com. ad Rom.* 5.5; 9.41). Sin is only a matter of habit that is perceived as alien and attributed to another wrongly (Titus of Bostra 2.11–12; Pelagius, *Exp. ep. ad Rom.* 7.7, 7.17–20, 7.23). God foreknows who merits to be called to election (Origen, *Com. ad Rom.* 7.8; Pelagius, *Exp. ep. ad Rom.* 8.17, 8.29–30, 9.10, 9.15, 11.15, 12.6). Romans 7 can be viewed as a dramatic retelling of Paul's own life. Paul lived "once without the Law" when he was a child, before the age of discernment (Origen, *Com. ad Rom.* 3.2, 5.1, 6.8). The division of wills indicated by Paul in Rom 7:25 refers to the transitional condition of the redeemed person working toward establishing the new habit of good deeds against the ingrained habit of bad deeds (Origen, *Com. ad Rom.* 6.9–10; cf. 2.7). Once the soul applies its full effort to doing good, it overcomes habit and the power of the flesh (Origen, *Com. ad Rom.* 6.11). God's grace includes the forgiveness of the past sins of those who respond to God's call with faith (Ambrosiaster, *In Rom.* 1.5; cf. Augustine, *ExpRomInch* 6) and the empowerment to perform the good works already willed through that faith (Pelagaius, *Exp. ep. ad Rom.* 9.10).

This line of interpretation provided Augustine with a clear alternative to the Manichaen Paul, and in adopting it he merely joined the existing project to reclaim Paul from Manichaeism. He found the Pauline teaching of salvation by faith, not works, well suited to supplement the interior locus of virtue or vice he already held. He always had recognized a certain degree of luck or fate or fortune in finding the right circumstances to make spiritual progress. But he had downplayed this element of his thinking while he promoted an absolute free will view in opposition to Manichaean "determinism." Moral conduct and good works had always served as little more than handmaidens to the purely intellectual ascent Augustine believed to be true spiritual progress, and he had centered moral value on the inclination and decision of the mind, rather than on any act that may or may not follow from it. His prioritization of the internal over the external therefore prepared him to receive enthusiastically Paul's emphasis on faith over works, which seemed to pair up nicely with the dichotomy of the intelligible and the material. Since he had already decided that people may do bad things with good intentions, and that such situations should be judged by the intention, not the outcome, it cost him little to accept the idea that people may be more or less completely incapacitated actually to do good, even while they direct their wills toward it.

Augustine's own direct experience of Manichaean uses of Paul led him to accentuate and develop certain parts of the existing exegetical tradition,

and to supplement it with the innovative work of the Donatist writer Tyconius.[31] Titus and Ambrosiaster, in explicating Romans, had already taken the position that the Old Testament law revealed to humankind its sinfulness without supplying liberation from that sinfulness (e.g., Titus of Bostra 4.90, 4.95).[32] Only the gift of the Holy Spirit given by foreknowledge of a person's faith, provides such means of liberation, breaking the habit of sin and restoring the effectiveness of the will in action (Titus of Bostra 4.94; Ambrosiaster, *In Rom.* 5.13–15).[33] Tyconius expanded on both of these basic concepts in ways that provided Augustine with most of what he thought he needed to deal with Manichaean attacks on both the Old Testament and the presumption of human moral liberty.

Tyconius started from a point in Paul made much of by the Manichaeans, namely, that "Divine authority has it that no one can ever be justified by the works of the Law," even if some of those justified in the past were doers of the Law.[34] Therefore, dispensational models, by which it might be claimed that the Law justified in its own era, only to be replaced with a new source of justification in Christ, would not work. Citing complementary passages of Romans and Galatians, Tyconius showed that even while the Law multiplied sin, an unbroken spiritual line of descent unfolded from Abraham based in faith and the promise, not the Law. So whoever was saved during the era of the Law was saved not by the Law, or by any sort of works, but by the promise that connected to them through the individual's faith, since the person, "sold under sin, no longer does the good he wants, but the evil he does not want, for inwardly he gives his consent to the Law (*Venundatus autem sub peccato iam non quod vult operatur bonum, sed quod non vult malum, consentit enim legi secundum interiorem hominem*)." Such a person "is vanquished by the other law in his members, is taken captive, and can only be set free by grace through faith (*Expugnatur autem "altera lege" membrorum trahiturque "captivus" neque aliquando liberari potuit nisi sola gratia per fidem*)."[35]

But what did Tyconius understand by "set free by grace through faith"? He defined faith as (internal) acts of the individual: "to have asked and to have seen" that "there was still a remedy" for the human predicament despite the failure of the Law itself to supply the remedy. God's commandments simply identify sins; they do not explain how to keep from doing them. The exacerbating of sin by the Law drives the sinner to the desperation from which the resort to faith comes.[36] "He left it to faith to discover the means," which are people's recognition of their own inability and appeal to God for help. "Therefore anyone who fled to God for refuge received the spirit of God;

and when the spirit of God was received, the flesh was mortified. When the flesh was mortified, the spiritual man was able to do the Law, having been set free from the Law."[37] According to Tyconius, then, God responds to the individual's faith, and when the person has received the spirit as reward for faith, "the spirit does the Law in him, since the flesh which cannot submit to God's Law is dead."[38]

> We were shut up in prison, with the Law threatening death and enclosing us on all sides with an insurmountable wall. The only gate in the enclosure was grace, and at this gate faith stood guard so that no one could escape the prison unless faith had opened the gate for him. Anyone who did not knock at this gate remained within the Law's enclosing wall.[39]

God's grace, therefore, is the enabling help he gives in response to the knock of faith by the individual. "All our work is faith; and to the extent that we have faith, to that extent God works in us."[40] The activation of God's role in salvation depends on the initiative and perseverance of the human individual.

All the same, Tyconius could emphasize the words of 1 Cor 4:7 ("For we have nothing that we have not received"), which Augustine would cite over and over again as he thought through the respective roles of God and the individual in salvation. For Tyconius and the Augustine of this period, that which humans have received they have received through their creation by God, beginning with their very existence, and extending to every virtue they find themselves able to display. Augustine eventually would make a subtle but enormously consequential shift, from seeing faith as such a capacity one owes to God among the other constituents of his or her created nature, to treating faith as an infusion by God of a new and distinct gift at the critical juncture of individual redemption. The latter conception of grace had its only immediate antecedent within Augustine's environment in Manichaean discourse.[41]

Tyconius expressed some trepidation that what he was saying, aimed at correcting those who were overzealous in their assertions of free will, might be taken as "alien doctrines." In understanding the apparent open-endedness of an individual's fate implied in some biblical passages as merely motivational rhetoric, he wanted to be careful not to sound too deterministic about human salvation. He credited God's foreknowledge as the reason why God could promise to Abraham that many in future generations would be saved; God knows those who will exercise their free will in the future toward faith.

The reason why it is "impossible for the person of whom God foresaw, promised and swore that he would obey, not to obey," is due not to God's determination of what the person would do, but to God's infallible foreknowledge of what the person would do by his or her own free will.

Tyconius wished to make the point that faith alone and always had provided the means to salvation, regardless of changes in the external conditions in which human beings had struggled historically against sin to please God—before the Law was given, under the Law, or after the coming of Christ. Building particularly on the foundation laid by Tyconius in his "third rule" of exegesis, Augustine developed his famous four-stage scheme of the human condition—*ante legem*, *sub lege*, *sub gratia*, *in pace*.[42] In doing so, he noticeably shifted the focus of Tyconius's construct. All but ignoring the latter's concern with rationalizing salvation history,[43] Augustine applied the successive stages to the course of an *individual's* salvation.[44]

> Therefore, let us distinguish these four stages of man: prior to the Law; under the Law; under grace; and in peace. Prior to the Law, we pursue fleshly concupiscence; under the Law, we are pulled by it; under grace, we neither pursue nor are pulled by it; in peace, there is no concupiscence of the flesh. (*PropRom* 13–18.2; cf. *DQ* 66.3[45]; *ExpGal* 46.4–9)[46]

The *homo* to which this four-stage progress toward salvation applied was not humankind across history, but the individual in her or her relationship to God. In fact, the way Augustine used this scheme really only works within this personal, individualized sense. He actually rejected Tyconius's central idea of historical continuity, namely, that some were saved by faith (in the promise) even before the coming of Christ. No one was saved before Christ replaced the reign of fear with the reign of love, Augustine asserted (*ExpGal* 44.1–3; cf. 62.5).

According to Augustine, those souls whose turning from God caused their fall received as a consequence an embodiment characterized by mortality, limitation, distractions, and temptations.[47] This bodily condition bombards the soul with its desires, to which the soul gradually yields and forms the habit of serving, for "by sinning we ourselves have increased what we derived from the origin of human sin and condemnation" in the physical body's problematic character (*ExpGal* 48.4). An original unquestioning assent to the

body's demands, *ante legem*, develops into a habit by the time one learns the sinfulness of being oriented primarily to the body in this way. As habit tightens its grip on the person—"the weight of time on the soul"[48]—it becomes petrified to the extent that the person feels incapable of resisting.[49] Augustine explicitly applied this construct to explaining the Pauline language that Fortunatus had cited in support of Manichaean views of the human condition.

> Moreover, Paul calls "the law of sin" the mortal condition which has its source in the transgression of Adam, because of which we are born mortal. And from this falling-down of the flesh, concupiscence of the flesh troublingly entices us. About this concupiscence Paul says in another place, "We were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (Eph. 2:3). (*PropRom* 45–46)

Since habit is a kind of "second nature" (*secunda natura*, *Mus* 6.7.19; *Fid* 10.23; *LA* 3.18.52), Augustine could dare speak of "natural habit" (*consuetudo naturalis*, *ExpGal*. 48), which he thought may be mistaken by the unperceptive for a permanent independent nature, rather than an acquired condition. Augustine considered the same habit to be referred to under the designation of contrary desire of the flesh in Gal 5:17, as well as the contending "death" of 1 Cor 15:54–56.

> This "death," moreover, we have merited by sin, because in the beginning sin was the result of a totally free choice at a time when in paradise no pain from a forbidden delight opposed the good will, as is true now. For example, if there is someone who has never taken pleasure in hunting, he is completely free as to whether he wants to hunt or does not want to, nor does the one who forbids him cause him pain. But if, abusing this freedom, he hunts contrary to the order of him who forbids, then pleasure, stealing unawares upon the soul little by little, inflicts "death" upon it so that if the soul wants to restrain itself, it cannot do so without vexation and anguish, since previously it did not act with full equanimity. Therefore, "the sting of death is sin," because through sin there has come about a delight which can now resist the good will and be kept back [only] with pain. This delighting we rightly call death, because it is the failing of a soul become degenerate. (*DQ* 70)

The individual soul's "habits of the flesh" develop in a kind of collusion with "the natural fetter of mortality, a fetter with which people have been begotten since the time of Adam," with the result that they are "overcome" by sin (*DQ* 66.5).[50] "Therefore prior to the Law we do not struggle," Augustine explains, "because not only do we lust and sin, but we even assent to sin" (*PropRom* 13–18.3).

Romans 5:12–14 and 7:8–9 apply to this *ante legem* phase of human existence, with certain caveats aimed at staving off Manichaean readings. Augustine dealt with Paul's troubling statement that "Death reigned from Adam to Moses *even over those who did not sin* in the likeness of Adam's transgression" (Rom 5:14), by asserting that it refers to those who do indeed sin, but do so prior to awareness of God's will, and so unlike Adam's transgression, which he committed in full knowledge of God's will; "Moses," then refers to existence under the revealed and known law of God (*PropRom* 29). Likewise when Paul spoke of sin being "dead" without the Law (Rom 7:8) and of being himself alive once apart from the Law (Rom 7:9), with the possible implication that the Law was to be faulted as a cause of sin, this had to be reconciled with the apparently opposite sentiments of Romans 5:12–14, by claiming that sin merely was hidden, unknown for what it was, so that it *seemed* dead and the person *appeared* (falsely) to be alive (*PropRom* 37–38; *DQ* 66.4).

To ignorant sinners in their benighted condition the Law arrives as a source of education, initiating the *sub lege* phase of spiritual development, in which they have awareness of moral distinctions and aspire to be good.

> Under the Law we struggle but we are overcome. We admit that we do evil and, by that admission, that we really do not want to do it, but because we still lack grace we are overwhelmed. In this stage we learn how low we lie, and when we want to rise and yet we fall, we are the more gravely afflicted. (*PropRom* 13–18.3–4)

For Augustine, the tension between the pedagogical role of the Law and the still overbearing power of sinful habit explained seemingly problematic statements by Paul concerning the Law that the Manichaeans cited, such as Romans 5:20 ("The Law was introduced that sin might abound") and 3:20 ("Through the Law comes knowledge of sin"). Augustine insisted that "knowledge of sin" must be a good thing here, and therefore must mean awareness of previously unrecognized sin.

> Therefore the Law is good, for it forbids what ought to be forbidden and prescribes what ought to be prescribed. But when anyone thinks that he can fulfill the Law by his own strength and not through the grace of his Savior, this presumption does him no good. Rather it so harms him that he is both seized by a stronger desire to sin, and by his sins is made a transgressor. For "where the Law is not, neither is there trespass" (Rom 4:15). (*PropRom*. 13–18.5–7; cf. *ExpGal* 46.5)

Augustine took the latter words of Paul to mean not literally that no trespass exists, but rather that it goes unrecognized. Echoing the exposition of Tyconius, Augustine explained that God "had given a righteous law to unrighteous people to point out their sins, not take them away" (*ExpGal* 1.2; cf. 24.16). The condition of being aware of sin but unable to resist it under the Law, "serves the purpose of making the soul aware that it is not sufficient in itself to extricate itself from enslavement to sin, so that in this way, with the subsiding and extinction of all pride, it might become subject to its deliverer" (*DQ* 66.1), "so that they might seek grace and not assume they could be saved by their own merits—which is pride—and so that they might be righteous not by their own power and strength, but by the hand of a mediator who justifies the impious" (*ExpGal* 24.12–14). "The Law points out the sin from which the soul in its subservience must turn itself to the grace of the deliverer so that it might be set free from sin" (*DQ* 66.1).

By highlighting Paul's own analogy between an historical era of the Law and the experience of every individual, Augustine moved beyond Tyconius's historical scheme in a way that reinforced the continuing role of the Old Testament law in Christian religious experience in the face of Manichaean efforts to remove it. Manichaeans such as Fortunatus discerned only two phases of the soul's time in this world: *ante gratiam* and *sub gratia*. Before grace, the soul is fragmented and somnambulant; with grace and enlightenment this condition of subjection by evil transforms instantaneously into a "free faculty of living" (*Fort* 16), even if this latter condition contends with continuing opposition from "the flesh." Between the servitude to sin and the empowerment of grace marked by these two phases in the Manichaean model, Augustine added an intervening step involving the Law in a positive role that he had learned how to articulate from Tyconius. "Faith is thus a free decision on man's part, brought about with the help of the Law, to believe in Christ."[51] The Law provides an initial "softening up" of the regime of sin,

bestowing the sort of moral insight that Manichaeans believed, on the one hand, the soul possessed intrinsically, and, on the other, became activated only with grace. Whereas predecessors such as Titus of Bostra, Ambrosiaster, and even Tyconius had circumscribed the role of the Law in a negative way[52]—it *only* provides awareness of sin, not any effective solution to it—Augustine accentuated the positive aspect of this role in a pointedly anti-Manichaean reaffirmation of the Law's value.

By stimulating the person to wish to do good in accord with it, but without providing the capacity to achieve the realization of this wish, the Law prepared the soul for its necessary act of faith by which the latter recognized its weakness and appealed to God for aid. This recognition of dependence, then, was the act of faith that merits God's assistance for some, while its failure to appear in others earned their damnation.[53] Unbeknownst to Augustine, the Manichaean bishop Faustus had already posed an objection to giving the Law such a necessary role in salvation in his *Capitula* (which Augustine had not yet read): were non-Manichaean Christians proposing, expressly contrary to Paul, that one must undergo a preliminary conversion to Judaism and the Law before they could be led to Christ? (*Faust* 8.1). Was one supposed to attempt to implement the Law in his or her own life, even though Jesus and his apostles had ceased to adhere to it? (*Faust* 9.1; 18.2). Augustine implicitly answered "Yes" in some sense to Faustus's rhetorical questions, irrespective of Faustus's observation that, in fact, Christians made no attempt to actually observe the Law's commandments (*Faust* 6.1; 18.3; 19.4–6). By treating the Law not in its specifics, but as the general call to moral conduct, Augustine found a role for it within individual progress toward salvation, and so another way to retain the value of the Old Testament against Manichaean criticism of it.[54]

Augustine cited the whole of Romans 7:5–24 for this second, *sub lege* phase, once again qualifying Paul's wording whenever it swerved too close to sounding Manichaean. When Paul said that with the coming of the Law he died, he meant rather that he *knew* he was dead in sin, and with this knowledge began to "sin with transgression," since the Law informed him what he ought to do, and yet he continued to violate that instruction. Likewise, when Paul said he was carnal, he meant not that he had any permanently carnal nature, but that he (temporarily) consented to the flesh, "not yet set free by spiritual grace" (*DQ* 66.5). In saying "I do not understand my own actions" (Rom 7:15), Paul meant only that he does not approve of them, not that they are inexplicable to his conscious intellect (*PropRom* 43).[55] Most importantly,

in seeking to understand Paul's declaration that "I do not want to do what I do; but what I hate, this I do" (Rom 7:15),

> One must take care lest he think that these words deny our free will, for it is not so. The man described here is under the Law, prior to grace; sin overcomes him when by his own strength he attempts to live righteously without the aid of God's liberating grace. For by his free will man has a means to believe in the Liberator and to receive grace so that . . . he might cease to sin. (*PropRom* 44)

But Augustine faced an unrecognized problem here in accounting for the *agency* of the doing, if the "I" is hating what the "I" is doing. Within the free will model that he had always accepted, such a state was impossible. There could be no action which the mind simultaneously did not want to do, unless one was coerced by another, in which case there could be no moral responsibility. But Augustine could not reify another agency in the self, be it the flesh or sin or anything else, without falling completely into Manichaean anthropology. He had to gloss over Paul's avowal that "it is no longer I that does it, but sin that dwells within me" (Rom 7:17). So he struck an awkward balance between his previous absolute free will claim—in which those who say they do not want to do what they are doing are not being truthful, and do not wholeheartedly want not to do it[56]—and granting some sort of punitive condition that limits the will and puts it in the position of being, in some sense, "defeated" (*ExpGal* 46.5). Hence, Paul spoke retrospectively of his condition prior to grace, rather than of his current state or permanent constitution, when he said, "I see another law in my limbs warring against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my limbs" (Rom 7:23). The interpretive key lay in the words "making me captive."

> If such carnal habit were merely to battle, yet not triumph, there would be no condemnation. Condemnation lies in the fact that we submit to and serve depraved carnal desires. But if such desires abide constantly and yet we do not obey them, then we are not captured and we are now under grace. (*DQ* 66.5)[57]

Augustine attributed such success at moral living to the aid of God acquired by the entreaty of people from their fallen state (*DQ* 66.5; *PropRom* 13–18.7); the "grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord" spoken of by Paul in

Romans 7:25a follows immediately on the cry of *infelix ego homo* of 7:24 (*Mus* 6.5.14; *PropRom* 45–46.2).

Augustine accepted as inevitable that Galatians 5:17–18 should be read in connection with Romans 7, just as Fortunatus had proposed (*Fort* 21). Since Galatian 5:18 says expressly, "If you are led by the spirit you are no longer under the Law," Augustine suggested that the condition described in the previous verse, with spirit and flesh in contention, should refer to the previous state under the Law. Here again, he had to resist the Manichaean reading.

> People think that the Apostle is here denying that we have free choice of the will. They do not understand that this is said to them if they refuse to hold on to the grace of faith they have received, which alone enables them to "walk in the Spirit and not fulfill the lusts of the flesh." So if they refuse to hold on to it, then they will not be able to do what they want. (*ExpGal* 46.1)

Here and elsewhere in Augustine's writings at this time, the expression "grace of faith" (*gratiam fidei*) means the grace of empowerment or enablement of action given by God *in response to* an individual's faith—that is, the grace the person has received by faith (*gratiam fidei susceptam*).[58] It is not immediately clear, however, what Augustine intended by "refus[ing] to hold on to the grace of faith," which would seem to reflect a situation *after* grace has been received, and so constitute a matter of perseverance. Indeed, in *Revisions* 1.24.2, he observed the same problem, and conceded to the Manichaean reading that Gal 5:17 also applies to those under grace, and not just those under the Law, as part of his rethinking of the place of perseverance in the process of salvation. Back in the mid-390s, however, he confined this state of internal conflict to the *sub lege* phase of an individual's development.

> And so he adds most appropriately, "But if you are led by the spirit, you are no longer under the law" (Gal. 5:18), so we may understand that they are under the law whose spirit so "desires contrary to the flesh" that "they cannot do what they want." In other words, they do no keep themselves undefeated in the love of righteousness but are defeated by the flesh contending against them, since it not only "fights against the law of their mind" but also "leads them captive under the law of sin that is in their mortal limbs" (Rom 7:23). For it follows that those who are not led by the spirit are led by the flesh. (*ExpGal* 47.1–2)

Augustine's adoption of the language of "defeat" in connection with the soul's moral purpose took him dangerously close to Manichaean rhetoric. It was no longer for Augustine simply a matter of the soul or mind being unable to move anything outside itself because of resistance ("since it not only 'fights against the law of their mind' . . ."); the soul's debility now entailed for him also a shrinkage of the soul's control over itself ("but also 'leads them captive under the law of sin that is in their mortal limbs' "). He escaped a Manichaean view of the human condition only by asserting that this self-conflicted soul *cannot* successfully act on good will *only until* it squeaks out the one gesture of will still within its power, the avowal of faith, which invites God's aid in successfully breaking the habit of sin and vulnerability to its allure. "For the first time," William Babcock remarks of this material, "Augustine has pictured a human state in which a person must struggle against a self which is not merely resistant to the will, but is actually beyond his own control, which conquers him rather than being conquered by him."[59]

This sharp differentiation of the human condition *sub lege* and *sub gratia* was certainly new in Nicene anthropology and biblical exegesis, and would have been seen at the time as strongly reminiscent of Manichaean views of the irreconciliability of Law and Gospel, despite Augustine's effort to accentuate a positive role for the Law.[60] If we compare this exposition to the one Augustine had composed against Adimantus a year or two before in *Eighty-three Diverse Questions* 49 (see above), the main difference lies—besides its much greater detail and employment of Pauline texts—in the loss of the "naturalness" of the process of education and spiritual progress highlighted in the former version. Augustine could no longer ignore or downplay for the sake of human free will the need for a divine act to empower spiritual progress. To that extent, Fortunatus and the Manichaeans had been proven right, and Augustine's main concern became one of limiting the concession to them. He did this by bringing his emphasis down squarely on the individual initiative of faith. Faith can be initiated and exercised by the individual's free will even in the midst of his or her embodied affliction; in fact, it must be, to be genuinely an act of faith. This necessary human act both retains human moral responsibility and provides the basis for God's just election of the worthy. Augustine left unaddressed at this point how the otherwise disabled will, in all other respects enslaved to sin, finds the resources to exercise faith. Further reflection on this problem would lead him very rapidly to concede even more to the Manichaean conception of grace, effectively undercutting his labor to find a positive function for the Law.

One might imagine that Augustine would take Romans 7:25 ("Therefore I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I obey the law of sin") with what precedes it, as a continuation of the description of the disempowered state of the individual *sub lege*. But Augustine, in line with Origen's identification of this verse as referring to the redeemed person in the process of establishing new good habits against ingrained bad ones (Origen, *Com. ad Rom*. 6.9–10), argued for its relevance to a person *sub gratia*, when "the mortal flesh indeed continues its resistance, though not overpowering a man and taking him captive to win agreement to sin." "Though carnal desires still exist," he explained, "by not consenting to sin he does not serve them who, constituted under grace, serves the law of God with his mind even though with his flesh he serves the law of sin" (*PropRom* 45–46).[61]

Augustine's choice to divide the stages at this point appears a poor one, and he struggled to differentiate the state described by Paul in Romans 7:25 from that of the previous verses, where the mind, in saying "what I do is what I do not want, but what I hate," would seem to be already serving the law of God. But Augustine saw the conflict between the "I" wanting and the "I" doing in that previous verse as a description of a division in the will of the soul itself, whereas he understood 7:25 to express the voice of a unified will against the demands of the flesh. What, then, did Paul mean by "with my flesh I obey the law of sin" under grace? Having conceded to the Manichaeans that Paul speaks here as a person under grace, he had to avoid the implication that a person under grace could lapse in conduct, as part of the continuing dualistic struggle of "spirit" against "flesh" (*Keph* 38, 97.24–99.17; *EpSec* 2). "Since this is now clearly Paul speaking for himself (*ego ipse*), Augustine does not want to suggest that sin is actually being committed," J. G. Prendiville observes. "Therefore he interprets the passage as meaning that, although Paul has evil desires, he does not consent to them."[62] Without consent, no sinful acts actually occur. Concupiscence remains even after conversion and baptism, yet brings no guilt to the person unless consented to and acted upon (*PropRom* 12.9, 39.1; *DQ* 66.2; *ExpGal* 47.2, 48.5). Augustine explained that, "even if desires of the flesh exist in this stage of life on account of the body's mortality, still they do not force the mind to consent to sin. Thus sin no longer 'reigns in our mortal body' (Rom 6:12), although as long as the body is mortal it is impossible for sin not to dwell in us" (*ExpGal* 46.6). He identified the body's service to the law of flesh with penal habit (*poenalis consuetudo*), "when desires arise from it—which, however, we do not obey" (*ExpGal* 46.7).[63] "At present," that is, under grace, Augustine continued, "we do what we want in the spirit,

even though we cannot in the flesh"—but not in the sense that the body does something bad while we as souls want to do something good, for that is the condition *sub lege*, not *sub gratia*. Rather, "we do not obey the desires of sin so as to 'offer our members to it as weapons of injustice' (Rom 6:13), even though we cannot destroy the desires themselves" (*ExpGal* 46.9). The soul has been separated from the flesh's control, and "be there ever so many agitations, the mind which now serves the Law of God and is established under grace does not consent to doing that which is forbidden." Augustine agreed with the Manichaeans that "as long as we are in this life there will be no lack of both the annoyances occasioned by the mortal flesh and some excitations arising from carnal pleasures" (*DQ* 66.7). For that reason, "while we are in this third stage, under grace, we sow in tears as we resist the desires arising from our natural bodies" (*ExpGal* 61.8). Nevertheless, the now enabled will carrying through good works earns salvation (*DQ* 76.1.2; *PropRom*. 52.15; *Simpl* 1.2.3; cf. Pelagius, *Exp. ep. ad Rom*. 9.10).[64]

What did it mean for Augustine to speak of grace, if he considered the punitive condition of the body unchanged, and sin to remain present as a habitual force? Augustine acknowledged the continuing division of the person between good and evil orientations, without offering any explanation why an omnipotent God would not liberate from this condition those who have merited grace by their faith.[65] Grace was not yet salvation; it was merely the aid of God for the individual's own work toward salvation by the good deeds performed following the liberation of the will to a state of effectiveness. Moreover, he did not conceive of grace itself as a miraculous internal intervention by God. From *Eighty-three Diverse Questions* 66, for example, it is evident that he thought of grace primarily in terms of *instruction*, in other words, the knowledge that human endeavor fails to obtain. The limited human intellect cannot by itself come to a sufficient understanding of things to love the things of God instead of the things of this world. The act of faith is a recognition of individual insufficiency and incapacity, and a turning to the authority of the Church. We must not forget that all of Augustine's prior discussion of faith referred to trusting in the authority of the Church to guide moral reform, which in turn would purify the mind so that it could understand and make progress in spiritual discernment. He treated Christ's incarnation as pedagogical; through Christ's authoritative instruction, transmitted by the Church, a person develops "a love for eternal things," so that "the commandments of the Law, which could not have been carried out through fear, are fulfilled through love" (*DQ* 66.6). This love or delight in righteousness

comes from and is sustained by the individual, first as the resort to faith, and then as perseverance in moral and intellectual progress. Augustine continued to talk of the grace of God as constituted of things put in place historically and collectively (our created capacities, the Incarnation, the authority of the Church) to which the person of faith has recourse, rather than as a transformation effected in the individual directly by God.

Augustine next confronted Fortunatus's citation of Rom 8:7 (*Fort* 21), containing Paul's troublesomely dualistic statement that, "The intelligence (*prudentia*) of the flesh is hostile to God; it is not subject to the Law of God, nor can it be" (Rom 8:7).[66] "In case someone should think that another and opposing principle has been introduced," Augustine countered that this hostility of the flesh to God describes a *state* rather than a *nature*.

> To say, "for it is not subject to the Law of God, nor in fact can it be," is analogous to saying, "Snow does not produce heat, nor in fact can it." For as long as it is snow, it does not produce heat; but it can be dissolved and brought to a boil so that it does produce heat. However, when it does this, it is no longer snow. The same is said of the flesh's way of thinking when the soul hungers after temporal goods as the highest goods, for as long as such an appetite is in the soul, the soul cannot be subject to the Law of God, i.e., it cannot fulfill the Law's demands. However, when the soul begins to desire spiritual goods and to despise temporal, then the flesh's way of thinking ceases, and there is no resistance to spirit. For indeed the same soul is said to possess the flesh's way of thinking when it longs for lower things, and the spirit's way of thinking when it longs for higher things. Not that the flesh's way of thinking is a substance which the soul puts on or takes off; rather it is a disposition of the soul itself, and it completely disappears when the soul turns itself entirely to things on high. (*DQ* 66.6)[67]

Against the Manichaean reification of this hostile "intelligence of the flesh," Augustine insisted that Paul means only the habit of thinking in terms of worldly concerns—a manner of thinking inherently hostile to spiritual matters and hence to God. This mentality itself cannot submit to God, but rather ceases to be and is replaced by the properly oriented "intelligence of the spirit."

> For the soul is a single nature, and it has both the intelligence of the flesh when it follows inferior things, and the intelligence of the spirit

> when choosing the superior, just as water's single nature both freezes from cold and melts from heat. And so Paul said that "the intelligence of the flesh is not subject to the Law of God, nor can it be" in the same sense as one rightly says that snow cannot tolerate heat. For snow, once heated, melts and the water becomes warm, so that no one can then call it "snow." (*PropRom* 49)

He had argued similarly in his exposition of the creed the previous year, with obvious attention to Fortunatus's intertextual exegesis of Paul.

> The soul is called "flesh" so long as it desires carnal goods. For part of it resists the spirit, not by nature but by sinful custom and habit. Hence it is written: "With my mind I serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin" (Rom 7:25). This custom has been changed into a veritable natural state in his mortal descendants by the sin of the first man. Therefore it is written: "We too were at one time by nature the children of wrath," that is, of the punishment by which we were made to serve the law of sin (Eph. 2:3). The soul is by nature perfect when it is subject to its own spirit, and follows the spirit as the spirit follows God. (*Fid* 10.23)

But Augustine struggled to apply this model of temporally successive orientations of the same soul or mind to Paul's language of confrontation and conflict, which would seem to require temporal coexistence of the two parties to the conflict.[68] If the "flesh" is simply the individual in his or her sinful state, how could Paul say that one must crucify the flesh (Gal 5:24)? Augustine replied to this problem that "It is indeed by such a cross that the old man is destroyed, that is to say, the ancient life that we have received from Adam in conditions such that that which was voluntary in Adam is natural in us. It is this that the Apostle means by these words, 'We were once by nature children of wrath, as the others' (Eph 2:3)" (*Adim* 21). Even as the "new man" starts to form in the person with the revelation of right and wrong *sub lege*, the "old man"—constituted of the person's entrenched habits—maintains dominance. Their respective places are reversed *sub gratia*, with the "old man" lingering on as a source of tempting irritation, while the "new man" asserts control over it—"l'homme lutte contre la survivance de son passé," as J. N. Bezançon puts it.[69] One experiences the tension of the transition from one set of priorities in the self to a new one, always liable to fall back to old patterns

of thinking.[70] Augustine would come to claim that this scenario is truer to experience (*experimentum*) than Manichaean dualistic models (*Conf* 8.5.10).

Merita fidei

Augustine remained committed to assigning full responsibility for evil to human beings, rather than to some other compelling force. He considered the potential for both virtue and vice to be located in the mental act of decision or consent that constitutes the will. One does not actually have to perform bad actions to incur the sin of them by consenting to the desire to do them and resolving to do them (*ExpGal* 48.3). The will is never coerced, but issues freely from the soul's or mind's consent to sin, due to its misaligned pleasure in the presentation of a sinful prompting (*PropRom*. 27.2, 38.3, 39.2, 44.6, 44.9, 48.4; *Simpl* 1.1.9). In working with Paul's statements, however, Augustine found himself shifting his analysis of the decision-making process away from this classical model of agency, and closer to the Manichaean alternative.

In the classical model, the crucial locus of agency occurred with the mind's assent to some presentation or proposition of fact or action.[71] Everything rests on the mind's intake of knowledge and what it believes to be true and right. Once the mind has committed itself to affirming something as true or right, action immediately follows. The will to act emerges directly from the state of mind. Augustine's efforts to incorporate Paul into this thinking produced a "shift of focus from the intellect to the will"[72] that closely tracks a similar refocusing evident in Manichaean moral discourse. With the latter's concept of two competing minds within the person, there must be a separate locus of agency over which they compete. Augustine found Paul similarly stressing the frustration of the mind in getting action to line up with its intention. Simply knowing the Law does not immediately produce good action, as it should in the classical model of agency. This element in Paul, Patout Burns thinks,"shifted Augustine's attention to the motivation of the will and to a commitment which is not simply provoked by new knowledge."[73]

This reading of Paul, of course, built on Augustine's own struggle with skepticism, with its concomitant questioning of the place of knowledge as a basis for action. Between Cicero and Faustus, Augustine had absorbed the lesson of the skeptical pause, the consideration of how action is to proceed in the absence of the assurance of knowledge. Both his literary and his personal mentors had proposed that choice should be made according to the plausible.

For Faustus, the plausible could be determined in large part by a pragmatic judgment: which possibility yields good action? By his conversion, Augustine had filled the skeptical pause with faith; faith launches the will to action even in the absence of secure and thorough knowledge. In short, faith became for Augustine another term for the plausible that—just as for Faustus—receives its chief value not in its "noetic function" as a set of ideas, but in its attitudinal function as the enabler of moral conduct.[74]

Echoing Tyconius (and Titus of Bostra), Augustine viewed the free act of faith of the human will as a necessary condition of redemption, even though the faith-oriented will cannot achieve any positive result in action unless God responds to it.[75] "For man by free will can believe in the liberator and receive grace, so that, with Christ freeing and giving aid, he does not sin" (*PropRom* 44.3). "Paul does not take away the freedom of the will," Augustine insisted, "but says our will does not suffice unless God helps us" (*PropRom* 62.1). God's merciful call is sent to all, so it creates the possibility for faith in all, which must be either generated or not according to one's own will.[76] Faith itself "obtains" (*ExpGal* 44.4) God's empowering gift of the Holy Spirit; the act of faith is the only "merit" that distinguishes between the elect and damned.

> If he [God] does not choose according to merit, it is not election, for all are equal prior to merit, and no choice can be made between absolutely equal things. But since he gives the Holy Spirit only to believers, God indeed does not choose works, which he himself bestows, for he gives the Spirit freely so that through love we might do good, but rather he chooses faith. For unless each one believes in him and perseveres in his willingness to receive, he does not receive the gift of God, that is, the Holy Spirit, whose pouring forth of love enables him to do good. (*PropRom* 60.8–10)

Augustine, in effect, redefined the will involved in human salvation from *a will to do good* to *a will to depend on God* (cf. *LA* 1.14.30); he could even treat the will to do good as in some sense sinful, since it assumes a self-determination independent of God. For Augustine, faith was the only truly good will attributable to a human being.

Yet faith itself represented for Augustine a response to a prior summons delivered by God, and he considered this the reason that Paul could say in Rom 9:16, "it is not of him who wills nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy" (*DQ* 68.5).[77] On the one hand, these words refer to God's

response to the "great lament and anguish of repentance" of the sinner. "For it is not enough to will except God show mercy; but God, who calls to peace, does not show mercy except the will have preceded, because on earth peace is to 'men of good will' (Lk 2:14)."[78] On the other hand, Augustine maintained, "since no one can will unless urged on and called"—that is, via a presentation to which one may or may not assent—"it follows that God produces in us even the willing itself" (*DQ* 68.5).[79] God stage-manages creation to put before people truthful presentations, without which the individual would not have the option of good choices.

> The nature of grace is such that the call precedes merit, reaching the sinner when he had deserved only damnation. But if he follows God's call of his own free will, he will merit also the Holy Spirit, through whom he can do good works. And remaining in the Spirit—no less by free will also—he will merit also eternal life. (*PropRom* 60.14–15)

In other words, the fact that God calls to begin with proves that credit for salvation belongs to God, rather than to anything the believer does in response to that call.[80] "God produces in us even the willing itself" is one of those handy formulations that Augustine would reuse with a completely new sense within a few years; at this time, however, it means only that God provides the necessary exterior stimulus generically to all, to which any individual may or may not respond, which response is the very act by which one merits salvation.

> In fact, to that prepared feast of which the Lord speaks in the Gospel, not all who were called wanted to come, nor could those come who did come except they were called. Accordingly, neither should those who came give themselves the credit, for they came by invitation, nor should those who did not want to come blame it on another, but only on themselves, for they had been invited to come of their free will. (*DQ* 68.5)

At this point Augustine added another one of those clauses with a promising future: "Therefore, before merit, the calling determines the will," but not in the sense of the idea of a predestined congruent call, to which Augustine had not yet arrived, as once again he made clear: "For this reason, even if someone called takes the credit for coming, he cannot take the credit for being

called. And as for him who is called and does not come, just as his calling was not a deserved reward," referring here to the implication of the Manichaean scenario, "so his neglecting to come when called lays the foundation for a deserved punishment" (*DQ* 68.5). Resisting the Manichaean concept of prior election by grace and the congruent call of the Mind of Light in each successive Church, he contended that "God predestines him whom he knew would believe and follow the call. Paul calls such persons 'elect,' for many do not come, although they have been called" (*PropRom* 55.4–5).[81]

Augustine distinguished between *gratia*, the call (*vocatio*) of God offered to all, and *adiutorium*, God's direct aid to those who respond to the call with faith (*PropRom* 55.4–5; *DQ* 68.4–5).[82] God must initiate things with the call, but the human will is free to respond or not (see *ExpRomInch* 9.3: *vocantem deum non spreverunt*), and this response is what merits grace and salvation (*PropRom* 62.9). "The distinction is not merely terminological," Eugene TeSelle stresses. "Intervening between these two divine acts of *gratia* and *adiutorium* is the decision of faith, man's own decision to believe the promises of God and to rely upon divine help, forsaking the attempt to gain salvation by himself; and aid is given *only* to those who respond to the gospel with faith."[83] Indeed, "belief is our work" (*credimus nostrum est*), Augustine expressly asserts (*PropRom* 60.12), in a turn of phrase that would delight Pelagius, because Paul says "God *works* all things in all," but "nowhere is it said, 'God *believes* all things in all.' " The single act of faith provided by the believer stands between two distinct acts of "grace" by God. "For neither can we will unless we are called, nor after our calling, once we have willed, is our will and our running sufficient unless God both gives strength to our running and leads where he calls" (*PropRom*. 62.3).

In *Eighty-Three Diverse Questions* 68, Augustine linked this three-step pattern (call—response of faith—divine aid) to his already well-developed idea of faith as a necessary prelude to understanding. To his earlier emphasis on the individual's act of faith as the initiative that summons God's aid, he prefixed God's call, whose importance he had only now come to emphasize.

> For the reward of knowledge is paid to the deserving, and such merit is obtained by believing. However, the very grace which is given through faith is given prior to any merit that we might have. . . . Christ has died for the ungodly and for sinners in order that we might be called to faith, not by merit, but by grace, and that by believing we might also establish merit. (*DQ* 68.3)

God issues this initial, unmerited call to all through the event of Christ and the subsequent worldly transmission of the knowledge that comes from it. Only by believing may one start to act in accordance with what the Church teaches, and thus "establish merit" by which one deserves "the reward of knowledge" that leads to understanding, and in this way perfect oneself. The construct is really the very familiar one Augustine set forth in his initial post-conversion compositions, simply overlaid with biblical language and imagery.

> Therefore sinners are commanded to believe in order that they might be purged of sins through believing, for sinners do not (yet) have a knowledge of what they will see by living rightly. For this reason, since they cannot see except they live rightly, nor are they capable of living rightly except they believe, it is clear that *they must start from faith*, so that the commandments by which believers are turned from this world might produce a pure heart capable of seeing God. (*DQ* 68.3)

With these words, Augustine made explicit a connection between the epistemological position that allowed him personally to embrace Nicene Christianity and his newly discovered Pauline theme of salvation by faith. With a single stroke, Augustine had drawn together two originally disparate elements of his unfolding identity into a mutually reinforcing synthesis. The faithful response to God's call that he had discovered at the heart of Paul's teaching on salvation was for him the same attitude of faith prior to understanding as that he had promoted all along.[84]

Eugene TeSelle considers this more developed model something that gradually worked its way into Augustine's thinking from popular pietistic statements of seeking God's help in being moral.[85] Yet it also closely parallels the Manichaean construct of Call and Answer, according to which God initiates a call to which those destined for liberation respond with an answer, establishing a link back to their divine origin. The answer, in turn, enables the infusion of divine gifts which secure the freedom of the soul from further domination by evil, and establish in its place the dominion of the "counsel of life" by which one lives virtuously (see, e.g., *Keph* 122). This Manichaean construct may well go back to the same pietistic models that in a Catholic form legitimized Augustine's reflections. But in the hands of the Manichaeans this constellation of ideas had been developed in the direction of a doctrine of grace at God's initiative, who issued a congruent call that automatically elicited a positive answer intrinsic to the good nature of the soul. Augustine also

held a high opinion of the human soul; but in his case this took the form of believing that nothing other than the soul—such as an independent force of evil—could determine its refusal of God's call. Nor could God's intention to save be thwarted by anything other than a power God himself had granted, such as the God-like liberty of the human will.

Another distinctively "Augustinian" theme came to the fore at this time in his identification of delight (*delectatione*, *ExpGal* 49.6; cf. *DQ* 66.6) as the key motive force of the will. Already present in his earlier either/or model of the soul's orientation, delight took on a new role once he had accepted the persistence of sinful desires even after grace and conversion. He stated that delight in sin could only be silenced by a greater delight in the good. So, "those who are moved by such emotions and yet remain unmoved in a greater love, not only not presenting their bodily members to their emotions for working evil, but not even giving so much as a nod of consent to this, do not do these works and will therefore inherit the kingdom of God" (*ExpGal* 48.3).[86] The positive desires of the spirit govern one's life "if they so delight us that in the midst of temptations they keep the mind from rashly consenting to sin. For we necessarily act in accordance with what delights us more" (*ExpGal* 49.5–6).[87] The soul must be attracted by and take delight in righteousness for a change to be effected, and must continue in this delight to mask the habitual attraction to lesser delights that might turn it away from God again.[88] Titus of Bostra had proposed the same thing in his anti-Manichaean treatise, arguing that sinful habit (*hexis*) could only be displaced by a supervening good passion (*pathos*) that effectively silenced the continuing demands of the flesh (Titus of Bostra, 2.11–12). Yet here again, Augustine had been exposed to a Manichaean antecedent. To characterize the soul or mind's choices, Manichaean rhetoric employed the language of loving, liking, or taking pleasure in the counsels of good or evil respectively (e.g., *EpFund* apud Evodius, *De fide* 5).

Augustine's continuing emphasis on individual agency, combined with an acknowledgment of ongoing temptation even to the person under grace, produced an unusually large place for the concept of *perseverance* in his studies of Paul that also found him placing emphasis precisely where the Manichaeans did. Since the Manichaeans believed that it is only with grace that human agency is born, conversion marks the beginning of the test of human character, rather than its culmination. While Manichaean dualism could account for the phenomenon of people sliding back and forth between the two states of goodness and sinfulness, such moral oscillation would seem to run

contrary to the whole complex of Catholic ideas involving God's election by foreknowledge of those who turn to him with faith. In principle, God's empowerment of the believer should be decisive in forever crippling sin; yet Augustine noted the conditional nature of salvation in Paul.

> Now being opposed by the flesh is not the cause of a person's condemnation, but rather being led by the flesh. And so "*if* you are led by the spirit, he says, you are no longer under the law." For earlier as well he did not say, "Walk in the spirit and *you will not have lusts of the flesh*," but "and *do not fulfill the lusts of the flesh"* (Gal 5:16). Indeed, not having them at all is no longer the battle but the reward of battle if we are victorious by persevering under grace. For only when the body is transformed into an immortal state will there be no lusts of the flesh. (*ExpGal* 47.1–5)

Augustine explained Gal 5:17, with its vivid description of the person as a battleground of conflicted forces, as a description of believers "if they refuse to hold on to the grace of faith they have received, which alone enables them to 'walk in the Spirit and not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.' So if they refuse to hold on to it, then they will not be able to do what they want" (*ExpGal* 46.1). For Augustine, then, the role of the will in personal salvation was eroding forward in time—that is, in the direction of where Manichaeans placed it. No longer conceived as able to refuse sin on its own initiative, and prodded substantially into the act of faith, the will mainly comes into play for Augustine's new thinking in the individual's responsibility for perseverance following grace.

Augustine achieved limited success in his efforts to outmaneuver the Manichaeans on Paul, carefully balancing the demands of the prior exegetical tradition against the need to deal with aspects of the text heretofore favorable to Manichaean claims. In his handling of these texts, Patout Burns thinks, "he bent the Pauline assertions to his own prior understanding of human autonomy"[89]—a prior understanding deeply rooted in the Nicene tradition. In William Babcock's assessment, "Augustine has carefully excluded the merit of works from his theology of grace, but has replaced it, in effect, with the merit of belief,"[90] the *merita fidei* (*PropRom* 62) essential to the Nicene free will position as it had been enshrined by Augustine's predecessors.

Acknowledging that Augustine had developed a "more complicated and elaborate" understanding of the complementary roles of human free choice

and divine aid than he had held before his encounter with Fortunatus, Paula Fredriksen nonetheless maintains that he had yet more ground to yield.

> Augustine in 394 was just as committed to defend the freedom of the will as he had been in 388. The difference between these writings and those from the earlier period lies not in an alteration of his basic position—i.e., that man's will is free—but in the vocabulary by means of which he articulates this position. This change in vocabulary was brought on . . . by the change in the environment of his debate with the Manichees.[91]

Fredriksen touches here on the very process by which Augustine was becoming a different person before the eyes of his personal and literary audience. By taking up new terms and turns of phrase, Augustine deployed a different assortment of rhetorical set pieces from that he had worked with previously, a new discursive apparatus—a new mind, if you will—with which to address the problems with which his particular circumstances confronted him. Fredriksen elaborates:

> The importance of these Romans commentaries lies not in the solution they propose—Augustine moves away from it to a new position within two years—but in the new vocabulary which they provide Augustine. From now on, he conceptualizes the nexus of issues—sin, human freedom, God's *electio*—in a way that can no longer be ordered by specifically philosophical discourse. As his thought continues to evolve, the range of characteristics it can exhibit is in part determined by the Pauline elements that are now part of it.[92]

It is in these terms of the new sources of Augustine's self-expression, and so of his self, that we should understand the widely recognized and remarked upon transformation of Augustine's "thought" that Prosper Alfaric once described as "from Neoplatonism to Catholicism."

Yet Augustine did not merely adopt and repeat the existing Nicene party line. He managed to produce something new. C. P. Bammel has proposed that "If one approaches Augustine's *Expositio quarumdam propositionum* after reading Origen one is immediately struck by the contrast. Here is a writer standing outside the main stream of Greek patristic exegesis, but with his own theological preoccupations which impose a forceful pattern on Paul's

thought."[93] Similarly, Paula Fredriksen observes, "Augustine's suddenly greatly refined view of sin and free will here, much more complicated than that of the writings of only a few years earlier, attests to how hard he had to work to reclaim Paul from the Manichees."[94] Volker Drecoll notes a "definite proximity of Augustine's distinct ideas to Manichaean ideas," albeit rearranged in a way that made key anti-Manichaean distinctions.[95] But had Augustine truly solved the dilemma of Manichaean claims on Paul in a way that supported established Nicene dogma on the means and process of salvation? William Babcock weighs the evidence:

> This solution to the problem of why God's grace comes to some and not to others had its advantages: it preserved the unmerited character of grace in the sense, at least, that God's call comes to all mankind without regard to human worth; it preserved man's freedom in the sense, at least, that man's free response to God's call remains the basis for election or rejection; and it preserved God's justice in the sense that election and rejection rest not upon arbitrary whim but upon human merit. . . . As a solution satisfying Augustine himself, however, it was destined to be short-lived.[96]

Without being able to say precisely why, we observe in Augustine's rapid abandonment of his "middle-period" solution to these issues an indication that it did not work, at least for him. But he believed for a short time that he had successfully defended the free will position to which he felt obligated as a Catholic—a belief he demonstrated by his addition of a final section to his long-belabored work *Free Choice* that reflected the new arguments based in the language of Paul that he had developed.

The Old Paradigm in Crisis

The concept of free will occupied an essential place in the ideological complex that defined the Catholic religious community with which Augustine wished to identify himself. This stress on free will had arisen in the process of defining a Nicene Catholic position on the nature of sin and evil over against Manichaeism and other dualistic or fatalistic traditions. As with any discursive position, it contended with contrary evidence and gaps in its explanatory power; and as the fourth century waned we see this established paradigm

undergoing various ad hoc elaborations and modifications with the apparent intention of maintaining its viability against mounting contrary arguments.[97]

Augustine participated in and embodied this crisis of the old paradigm. In the context of his own struggle with Manichaeism and in light of his close reading of Paul, we see the facile optimism of his initial post-conversion writings slipping away. The darkening of Augustine's vision of the human condition is unmistakable; the easy ascent promised by conversion gradually becomes a long, painful road of exile, with no perfection possible in this life, in this body—something the Manichaeans had been asserting all along.[98] Peter Brown has defined this transformation of Augustine's rhetoric for the current generation of scholarship, pointing to the confrontation of Augustine's earlier optimism with "the burning problem of the apparent permanence of evil in human actions."

> For, previously, he had taken up his stand on the freedom of the will; his criticism of Manichaeism had been a typical philosopher's criticism of determinism generally. . . . This was, of course, a dangerous line of argument: for it committed Augustine, in theory at least, to the absolute self-determination of the will; it implied an "ease of action," a *facilitas*, that would hardly convince such sombre observers of the human condition as the Manichees.[99]

As much as he could, Augustine refused to acknowledge the subjection of the human soul or mind to causal forces. As an intelligible entity, it stood outside the world of causes and effects. It could not be constrained or coerced or limited contrary to its own self-determination. Even its punitive embodiment was only God's way of alerting the soul and calling it back to a proper orientation it must itself choose to restore. Augustine had tried to make Paul's language yield these same tenets, but found instead his own grasp of the issues transformed by what Brown characterizes as a convergence of Pauline language and the evidence of experience.

> For what Augustine could not explain so easily, was the fact that in practice, the human will did not enjoy complete freedom. A man found himself involved in seemingly irreversible patterns of behaviour, subject to compulsive urges to behave in a manner contrary to his good intentions, sadly unable to undo habits that had become established. Thus, when Manichees pointed to the fact that the soul did not, in fact,

> enjoy complete freedom to determine its own behaviour, they could appeal both to the obvious and to the authority of S. Paul. . . . This direct challenge had to be met.[100]

Meeting this Manichaean challenge through the text of Paul, Brown contends, forced Augustine to "open up a new approach to the problem of evil," namely, one stated not in metaphysical but "in purely psychological terms: in terms of the compulsive force of habit, *consuetudo*, which derived its strength entirely from the working of the human memory."[101] Augustine apparently concluded that the free will position needed some such adjustment to surmount the challenge of the Manichaean position and reading of Paul.

The drawn-out compositional history of Augustine's *Free Choice* reflects this growing crisis of the free will paradigm even as he was attempting to provide it with a systematic manifesto.[102] His exegetical work on Paul kept running up against issues of the will, as he attempted to resist Manichaean readings and applications of the Apostle. Having done his best to address those immediate exegetical dilemmas, he now sought to harness that material for his systematic exposition of Catholic views of the will over against the rival Manichaean paradigm. He could no longer proceed in a purely theoretical manner; Paul was now an unavoidable reference point, given the way the Manichaeans grounded their stance on the will in the language of his epistles.[103] Characteristically, when Augustine wished to revisit a problem anew, he restated his basic controlling premises. Such a restatement of premises appears in *Free Choice* 3.16.46–17.49, where he reaffirmed that a will by definition is free and uncompelled, otherwise one cannot speak of it as a will at all, and that if the soul is compelled to sin then one cannot speak of it as sin, since sin is necessarily linked to agency and culpability.[104] That said, Augustine immediately ventured into a remarkable retraction of much of the characterization of the will's freedom as he had outlined it in the previous sections of the work. "By the time Augustine came to complete the third book of the *De libero arbitrio*," William Babcock writes, "the human exercise of moral agency in evil had itself become a problematic point in his thinking," thus undermining his free will argument in the first two books.[105] He explicitly grounded his major concessions to the Manichaean position in the letters of Paul, which suddenly dominate a text from which they hitherto had been almost entirely absent.[106]

In this last section of *Free Choice*, Augustine systematically conceded several of the key points Fortunatus had made about the nature and experience

of sin in the present condition of humanity. He began by accepting the qualification that wrongs can be done in ignorance, without the mind consciously assenting to commit a sin, but rather consenting to the action without realizing it is wrong (*LA* 3.18.51).[107] This concession, while well grounded in the classical forensic tradition (which no doubt facilitated Augustine's acceptance of it), had profound implications for human free will as Augustine previously had represented it. For if humans are not equipped with the knowledge of good and evil, they cannot exercise their free will properly. Yet Augustine held a crucial reservation, maintaining that humans are subject to such ignorance not originally, but only later as punishment for wrong use of free will when they had full knowledge (implicitly, through direct contact with the intelligible world). Thus their initial fall remains a fully culpable act, since committed in full knowledge. This answer presented an even greater problem, however, since it ascribed the human state of ignorance to the punishing God, and hence arguably shifted to God responsibility for the wrong humans do in ignorance following their initial fall.

Augustine's second concession to Fortunatus came when he revisited the issue of the capacity of humans to do the good they actually will to do. He shifted from characterizing the ability to act on a good will as a matter of "difficulty" after the fall, as he did during the debate, to a veritable impossibility,[108] given that people might find themselves forced to do wrong by "necessity," even when they know right from wrong, because "wrong things are done by necessity when a man wills to do right and has not the power (*Sunt etiam necessitate facta improbanda, ubi vult homo recte facere, et non potest*)." He knows this to be true because the passages of Paul cited to this effect by Fortunatus did appear to say so.

> For thus it is written: "The good that I wish I do not do, but the evil which I do not wish, that I do." Again: "To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I do not find" (Rom. 7:18–19). And again: "The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary to the one to the other, so that you cannot do the things that you wish." (Gal. 5:17). (*LA* 3.18.51)

The reader immediately recognizes the precise combination of verses introduced by Fortunatus to prove that the will is not free.[109] Here, as in his Pauline commentaries, Augustine embraced their intertextual relationship, as promoted by the Manichaeans. But he went even further, and did something

no Nicene writer had done before: he accepted the meaning Manichaeans found in them. Accordingly, he had to tread very carefully in isolating that meaning, as a datum, from the larger Manichaean paradigm to which it was attached, appropriating it for and integrating it into his alternative paradigm. Therefore, "These are the words of men emerging from deadly damnation"—a temporary punitive state. "If this were a description of man's nature and not of the penalty of sin, his situation would not be sinful" (*LA* 3.18.51). Free will is retained in this scenario in a prior freely chosen sinful act that has led to this condition, and that prior sin somehow carries sinfulness into this consequent state, despite the fact that subsequent sins are not freely chosen.[110]

This attempt by Augustine to fit the Pauline passages into his larger construct faced certain difficulties. First, Paul does not speak merely of an incapacity to act on a good will; he says also that his body actively does evil (Rom 7:18). What is the agent of this action? Where does this evil will to act come from? Augustine would have to say: from ourselves—since there can be no action without a will to act. But Paul explicitly denies this answer (Rom 7:20). Moreover, Augustine's answer would mean that God has not incapacitated human will completely as a punishment for misusing it, but only the will to do good, while in some way abetting the will to do evil, so that the latter is, in fact, carried out in action. In this way, Augustine had fulfilled inadvertently the Manichaeans' worst caricature of Catholic "semi-Christianity" by turning God into the devil. Furthermore, if the incapacity to do the good that Paul describes was to be understood as punishment from God, this would amount to external constraint, which by Augustine's own definition could not constitute sin. A coerced or constrained soul could neither earn merit, nor incur guilt, given that previously, even earlier in book 3 of *Free Choice*, he had characterized precisely such an idea as an absurd oxymoron ("for if he is necessitated to will how can he will when there is no will?" [*Si enim necesse est ut velit, unde volet cum voluntas non erit*], *LA* 3.3.8). So by Augustine's own logic, "his situation would not be sinful," and this is precisely what the Manichaeans argued, in agreement with classical forensic views.

While conceding the experiential condition of humans in this life with which Fortunatus confronted him, therefore, Augustine explained that condition as a consequence of God's punishment.[111] This position followed from his well-established hierarchical ontology, by which the soul could never be constrained or coerced by that which was lesser or worse than itself, so that if the soul is in any way constrained or coerced, it can only be so by God. Yet Augustine insisted that responsibility still lies with human beings, since

their current state is a consequence of prior sinful actions before they labored under such disadvantages. The soul initially sins in a state of greater vigor (*ualentior*), "but after sinning, having been made weaker (*imbecilior*) as a result of divine law," that is, God's punishment, "it is less able to undo what it has done." As the penalty for its sin (*poena peccati*), the soul no longer has aptitude (*idonea*) for resisting its own wanton movements (*ad opprimendo lasciuos motus suos*, *Mus* 6.5.14). "Because he is what he now is, he is not good, nor is it in his power to become good, either because he does not see what he ought to be, or, seeing it, has not the power to be what he sees he ought to be. Who can doubt that his is a penal state?" (*LA* 3.18.51). The Manichaeans could—because of the dualistic premise of their world view. In the Manichaean universe, the conditions that militate against people doing good exist not because God wishes them, but because they are not completely within God's control. But in Augustine's universe, if the human condition were not a punishment of some sort, if it were "natural" in the proper sense, then the things people do in ignorance or inability to resist temptation would not be sins (*nam si non est ista poena hominis, sed natura, nulla ista peccata sunt*). The Manichaeans concurred: they are not sins. Yet for Augustine they *must be sins*—not only because otherwise an all-controlling God would be responsible for evil, but also because otherwise Christian talk of sin and guilt and punishment would be meaningless.

The Manichaeans indeed contended, as Fortunatus explained, that all of this ignorant and weak-willed evil humans do is not, in fact, sin. It can only be sin when one knows better and can actually act differently, as Augustine would be forced to concede by his own definition of what a truly free will is. So even though Augustine had accepted that people could act out of ignorance and from an incapacity to resist, he had not reconciled this concession with his own definition of sin, which required knowledge and capacity. By his own definition, nothing that people did in their compromised state could be, properly speaking, sin. His confrontation with a Manichaean reading of Paul he found impossible to escape would gradually lead him, inch by inch, to a decreasing forensic interest in human action between a single moment at the beginning of the soul's history on the one side, and on the other a resumption of fully empowered agency bestowed by God in response to faith. Only the will to faith stretches across this void in the history of the soul's will that Augustine held at this time. When that thread of continuity snapped, as it shortly would for Augustine, he avoided a characteristically Manichaean voiding of forensic concern altogether only by focusing all the more attention

on the first choice and first act of an originally wholly free human soul, in what amounts to an antithesis of the Manichaean concept of an original heroic choice of souls to descend to spiritual combat with evil.

From the very beginning of *Free Choice*, Augustine had worked with two categories of "evil": sinful human actions on the one hand, and human experience of punishment on the other—the latter being neither "sin," nor even truly evil (because it is the "good" of corrective punishment; *LA* 1.1.1; cf. *Fort* 15). Yet, as he neared the end of book 3 some seven or so years after starting the project, he shifted a large block of the contents of the first category to the second, retaining in the former only the initial sin of the free soul unencumbered by fallen, material existence. His second category originally had been intended to account for the experience of *suffering*, which in a nondualist monotheistic world must be explained in accord with God's will—hence, for Augustine, as punishment. Now that punishment was to include the suffering of disability of the will, inflicted on the individual for a prior freely chosen sin. Yet even with the transfer of so much of what he had previously categorized as active "sin" to the category of experienced "suffering/punishment," Augustine audaciously refused to rethink the nature of what is involved as anything but "sin."

> All that a man does wrongfully in ignorance, and all that he cannot do rightly though he wishes, are called sins because they have their origin in the first sin of the will when it was free. These are its deserved consequences. . . . We apply the word "sin" not only to that which is properly called sin, that is, what is committed knowingly and with a free will, but also to all that follows as a necessary punishment of that first sin. (*LA* 3.19.54)

"We," of course, do no such thing—neither here today nor in Augustine's time and place. We do not call a prison sentence a crime of the convict. The sinner's reception of punishment is not itself, by any stretch of logic, his or her further sin. So we are left wondering just how Augustine could say such a patently absurd thing. William Babcock notes the difficulty, contrasting what Augustine says here with his basic position in book 1, and remarking that "the whole scheme of sin and penalty now seems to founder on this point."[112] Indeed, Augustine flatly contradicted the essential definition of sin with which he started *Free Choice*, which requires that a person have a free will and know what is right and what is wrong.[113] He had acknowledged then

that people may not always be able to carry through a good intention, or that people might do wrong thinking it to be right. Neither of these conditions, he had maintained then, produces sin. Now he was willing to call all these things "sin" by extending the term to cover not only its forensically valid meaning, but all that follows as a consequence, even though it is the "good" of punishment.

At the same time, he formalized the ad hoc resistance he had shown in the debate with Fortunatus to taking Paul's language of "nature" literally. Fortunatus had pointed out that the definition of a nature, as generally understood in their common culture, involved the permanent foundational character of something. Augustine could only insist that Paul could not have meant that when he said that "we were formerly by nature children of wrath." He now restated that position in *Free Choice*, arguing that "nature" refers not only to one's original nature (which should be, by the normal rules of late antique metaphysics, unalterable), but also to the altered condition in which human beings now found themselves—mortal, ignorant, subject to the flesh. Both of these radical redefinitions of what counts as "sin" and "nature" in Augustine's discussion of free will occur near the end of *Free Choice* because, and only because, of his need to incorporate Paul's views into his argument, juxtaposed with the problem of doing so. He had simultaneously to anchor his position in Pauline scripture, and explain away uses of "sin" and "nature" in that scripture that seemed to support Manichaean positions rather than his own. Having defined terms in line with his own (modified) position, he turned to the very verses Fortunatus had quoted on the issues of will and sin against him (Rom 7:18–19, Eph 2:3) and applied the interpretive template he had prepared (cf. *PropRom* 45–46).

Put in the abstract terms of depriving sinners of the free use of their will, Augustine's proposal can sound reasonably like a punishment, along the lines of a "use it right or lose it" judicial philosophy. It would be a reasonable punishment if the privilege of a free will, wrongly used, was taken away, and the person was confined or restricted as in a prison of the will, *forced to do good, or at least restrained from doing evil*. This is the underlying principle of most penal systems, and was in fact the express position of Manichaeism, namely, that God acts to limit and restrain evil from its former liberty of action (*Keph* 89; *Fort* 34). But when we scrutinize the specific character of the loss of free will Augustine suggested, it loses much of its comprehensible rationale. What sense does it make to force the person who has committed an offense to lose the ability to choose not to repeat it in the future? According to Augustine's

explanation, it would be appropriate for a judge to sentence an adulterer to ten years of committing adultery, or a wife beater to twenty years of beating his wife, and all without any reforming education in right and wrong. "It is just that he who, knowing what is right, does not do it should lose the capacity to know what is right, and that he who had the power to do what is right and would not should lose the power to do it when he is willing" (*LA* 3.18.52). How could Augustine say this and mean it?

He could take such a position only because he believed that actual *sinful actions in this world after the fall of the human soul do not ultimately matter*. The purpose of the punitive condition of humans in this world is to bring the soul to repentance (*LA* 3.20.56, 3.22.65, 3.25.76). The harm done to the world or to other living beings does not matter so long as the soul, through the experience of its compulsive sinfulness, grows disgusted with it and turns to God for release from its condition. So a judicial analogy more apt to Augustine's thinking would be sentencing an alcoholic who caused some harm to drink to excess, beyond the amount he or she wishes, day after day for months on end until the very smell of alcohol repulses the person. For Augustine, it seems, sin was entirely a matter between the individual soul and God. The soul undergoes its experiences in a solipsistic universe where it is alone with God, working out the relationship between the two. God coordinates the interactions of sinners with each other in this world so that any collateral harm caused by this punitive sinfulness effects an appropriate punishment or lesson on the others.

Nothing could be more diametrically opposed to the Manichaean world view, for which the very definition of evil was "that which harms," than this unremittingly stark ascription to God of the human condition of suffering and wickedness. In Augustine's relentless logic, God's omnipotence overrides any other consideration in explaining the problematic human condition that religions of salvation propose to solve. If the human soul craved material existence, God "released" the soul to this experience. If it chose to enter into sinful inclinations, God confined it to sinfulness, until such time as it should seek his aid to escape it. As a consequence of the system of punishment put in place by God, sin actually proliferates and comes to dominate human existence. *The fall of the soul is neither remedied nor mitigated, but rather exacerbated by God's punitive action*. Returning to our analogy of the punishment of an alcoholic, it is as if by the sentence of forced repeated drinking the brain became so debilitated and the body so addicted by the alcohol that the person could no longer do anything else but drink. Most people—Augustine's own

valued *consensus gentium*—would consider such punishment to have gone seriously wrong.[114]

While insisting on God's management of this most unpleasant aspect of human existence, Augustine found a way to acquit God of responsibility for stripping the soul of its ability to do good. Rather, he proposed, God has released the soul to its own devices, and allowed it to forge the chains of its own bondage, namely, the habit of sinful conduct.

> It is not to be wondered at that man, through ignorance, does not have the freedom of will to choose (*non habeat arbitrium liberum voluntatis*) to do what he ought, or that he cannot see what he ought to do or fulfil it when he will, in face of the resistance of carnal habit (*consuetudo*) which, in a sense, has grown practically natural (*quod ammodo naturaliter inolevit*) because of the force of mortal succession (*quae violentia mortalis successionis*).[115] It is the most just penalty of sin that man should lose that of which he was unwilling to make good use, when he could have done so without difficulty if he had wished. (*LA* 3.18.52)

"In effect," William Babcock observes, "he granted the compulsive power of evil on the self. But he construed that power as the deep hold that habit takes upon the soul; and, far from being an alien force, habit (*consuetudo*) is an enslaving disposition that we have forged for ourselves through our own free exercise of will."[116]

Even in his earliest post-Manichaean writings, Augustine had made reference to the "ignorance and moral difficulty" under which humans labor in this world, due to their fall into material embodiment. Seemingly a long-standing notion of his, this sense of things had been submerged beneath the free will idea that he apparently felt the need to enunciate in its most extreme form (as in the earlier portions of *Free Choice*) to counter Manichaean moral fatalism. Now he was beginning to revert to his previous perspective, as the logical consistency and strength of the free will position began to yield to the compelling power of experience and scripture. But he had a problem. If human free will is hemmed in by God as punishment for its misuse resulting in sin, and if this punishment takes the form of releasing individuals to their own habits of sinfulness, then *when* did human beings possess both a perfectly free will and the knowledge of right and wrong that made their transgression culpable?

Augustine had readily adopted the concept of habit to account for the apparent compulsion to sin; but that concept would only work within classical forensic views if the individual human was not only born but reached mature reasoning with his or her full powers of will and mind intact before descending into bad habits. Otherwise, people would not rightly be held accountable for the moral choices that went into forming sinful habits. In his debate with Fortunatus, Augustine clearly expressed this idea of habit formed in this lifetime. But do these habits not start to form well before a person reaches full rational maturity, and is not the body an encumbrance to full knowledge and free action from the moment of birth? Augustine's scenario would seem to depend, therefore, on a preexistence of the individual human soul in full power and knowledge, something that he was not free to assert as "Catholic" doctrine; and that constraint on his explanation forced him to look for another solution entirely within terms that would be embraced as "Catholic." If he wished to take possession of the experience of human disability of which Manichaeism made so much, and attach it to the existing Catholic free will paradigm, he faced the challenge of coming up with some other acceptable account of the before-and-after of the will than that offered by the notion of the preexistent soul he apparently preferred, but upon which he could not insist.

As we have seen, Augustine had long coordinated in some fashion the story of Adam and Eve with the Platonic fall of souls into embodiment. He had treated the biblical story as an allegory for the error each and every soul had made that now found itself embodied. He also had considered the actual historical role of Adam and Eve in determining the mortal nature of the bodies into which souls have come through their individual sinful turn. He had forged the latter link with particular strength under the pressure of his debate with Fortunatus, and it reappeared in *Free Choice* book 3 in his consideration of four hypotheses about the origin of the soul's embodiment.[117] His inability openly to espouse the preexistence of souls in a Catholic community that did not universally endorse the concept caused the Platonic elements of his discourse to atrophy while he continued to develop the way the Eden story was reflected in subsequent human existence. Yet Augustine knew that a literal reading of the Adam and Eve myth as an explanation for the present human condition ran into serious moral objections.

> Here comes in the question which men, who are ready to accuse anything for their sins except themselves, are wont to cast up, murmuring amongst themselves. They say: If Adam and Eve sinned,

> what have we miserable creatures done to deserve to be born in the darkness of ignorance and in the toils of difficulty, that, in the first place, we should err not knowing what we ought to do, and, in the second place, that when the precepts of justice begin to be opened out to us, we should wish to obey them but by some necessity of carnal concupiscence should not have the power? (*LA* 3.19.53)

He replied:

> You are not held guilty because you are ignorant in spite of yourself, but because you neglect to seek the knowledge you do not possess. You are not held guilty because you do not use your wounded limbs but because you despise him who is willing to heal them. These are your personal sins (*ista tua propria peccata sunt*). (*LA* 3.19.53)[118]

In other words, the difficulties into which humans are born are not sufficient to prevent them from freely exercising their wills in the direction of God, that is, in an act of faith.[119] Regardless of what one thought about the reason individual souls now found themselves in mortal bodies made such by the sin of Adam, humans remain *just free enough to be responsible*. God "did not take from them even in the state of ignorance and toil their freedom to ask and seek and endeavor" (*quibus etiam in ipsa ignorantia et difficultate liberam voluntatem petendi et quaerendi et conandi non abstulit*, *LA* 3.20.58). God could create or place human beings in any constraining conditions he wished, so long as his reward or punishment of their conduct was equitable with the limits to their ability.

> That the soul does not know what it should do is due to its not yet having received that gift. It will receive it if it makes a good use of what it has received. It has received the power to seek piously and diligently if it will (*accepit autem ut pie et diligenter quaerat, si volet*). That it cannot instantly fulfill the duty it recognizes as duty means that that is another gift it has not received. (*LA* 3.22.65)

Augustine thus could dispose of the excuse of sinning in ignorance by appealing to Aristotle's dictum that the person is guilty who commits a crime in a state of ignorance for which he is responsible by failing to seek knowledge (*Nicomachean Ethics* 3.5.13–14; cf. *LA* 1.1.2).

"The moral impairments of ignorance and struggle do not unjustly burden the later soul" in Augustine's opinion, William Babcock explains, "Rather, they define the arena in which the soul is now to exercise its own impaired, but not finally ineffective, moral agency for good."[120]

The capacity (*facultas*) to employ one's own will to "advance by means of good studies and piety" is not denied to the soul, Augustine insisted, regardless of its other limitations. "Natural ignorance and natural impotence are not reckoned to the soul as guilt (*reatus*). The guilt arises because it does not eagerly pursue knowledge, and does not give adequate attention to acquiring facility in doing right" (*LA* 3.22.64). Augustine here echoed almost verbatim the words of Fortunatus about human responsibility to pursue and use knowledge, once awakened by the savior's instruction (*Fort* 21).[121] The only difference between the two positions was that Fortunatus maintained that the soul only bears this responsibility from the reception of God's assistance in a simultaneously awakening and liberating grace (cf. *Fort* 20); a mind that can only intend and does not have the capacity to act on that intention is not yet a self.[122] For Augustine, on the other hand, the awareness of right and wrong arrives before grace and liberation, *sub lege*, and so via the moral commandments of the Law, in order first to humble the soul in its inability to act on that awareness, and so prepare it to turn in dependence on God's liberating assistance.[123] At the same time as he was forced to come to terms with Pauline language of moral disability, therefore, Augustine found a way to downplay the degree of this very disability, while reemphasizing human moral responsibility in accord with his Nicene commitments. Paul seemed to retain a good will even in the midst of his complaint in Romans 7 that he was dragged along inside a disobedient body. That freedom of the mind, however cut off from the operation of the human person, suited Augustine's interiorization of selfhood, and provided the only locus of responsibility that mattered to him. As William Babcock characterizes it, Augustine "perhaps implausibly . . . carves out a narrow and yet crucial area of moral agency within the great impairments that afflict human beings . . . and he uses that narrow area to vindicate the scheme of sin and penalty."[124] Augustine recognized that he could not go too far down the road of disabling this interior soul without surrendering its obligation to turn back to God. If the soul were to be considered disabled to the point where it could not bear the responsibility of turning to God, but only passively await God's intervention, the result would be a complete capitulation to the alternative Manichaean paradigm of salvation by grace.

Augustine was not yet ready, therefore, to accept the full incapacitation of the human will prior to God's grace that Fortunatus had described. He presumably had chosen to add his new insights to *Free Choice* rather than put them in some other work precisely because he saw a way in which they could help him salvage—with substantial changes in almost every aspect—his free will position. He still maintained that the will remains free in some essential modicum despite any degree of ignorance or incapacity in its ability to act or even know properly. Any of Adam's progeny is able to transcend the condition in which he or she is born (*proles ejus potuit etiam superare quod nata est*). "If any of Adam's race should be willing to turn to God, and so overcome the punishment which had been merited by the original turning away from God, it was fitting not only that he should not be hindered but that he should also receive divine aid" (*LA* 3.20.55). But if the human soul is in ignorance, how can it know even to turn to God? And if this turning to God constitutes an act, how does it elude the general incapacitation of the will to produce (good) acts? These were problems with his argument Augustine had yet to resolve.

In the sweeping modifications of his positions on human nature, sin, and will in the later passages of *Free Choice*, Augustine already had steered a course dangerously close to the Manichaean view of sin and will, along with the biblical quotes that support it—perhaps precisely in order to argue that even within the Manichaean positions on these subjects, the soul alone remains responsible for sin. He gave the appearance of denying this intent in his *Epistle* 166 to Jerome, where he compared his scenarios in *Free Choice* with a list of possibilities given by Jerome in a previous letter. Observing that Jerome included in his list the Manichaean theory that souls emanate from God, he explained his failure to mention it in *Free Choice*, in part, "because those whom I was opposing held this view." Yet, he offered this reason only as a secondary consideration, and indicated that he did not consider the emanation theory pertinent to his discussion, since the latter concerned not the soul's nature, but the cause of its embodiment (*Ep* 166.7). Later, in *The Gift of Perseverance* 12.29, he specifically stated that he had intentionally structured his exploration of the possible origins of the soul's embodiment in *Free Choice* to include "natural" (i.e., guiltless) causes, not only punitive ones, in order to encompass the Manichaean position, and prove human culpability even within the latter's conditions.

Augustine took advantage of the fact that the background story on the soul's origin was not a matter of Catholic dogma, leaving people free to hold any number of ideas about it. He surveyed four or five such ideas

(*LA* 3.20.56–21.59), giving remarkably short shrift to his own favored view that souls have fallen into embodiment through their own individual sin and guilt, and devoting most of his effort to justifying the soul's responsibility in this life even if it entered its hardships guiltlessly.[125] Augustine may have tailored elements of the scenarios with the Manichaeans in mind. In his debate with Fortunatus, he had indicated that he understood the Manichaeans to teach that souls were sent by divine command into the struggle with evil manifest in this world.[126] Elements of this position, and even of Manichaean imagery known to Augustine from the *Fundamental Epistle*, can be found in the scenario Augustine outlined in *LA* 3.20.57, albeit modified by his own view of the Adamic origin of the mortal body.[127] Yet Fortunatus had emphasized the free choice of souls in their descent; accordingly, Augustine drew up another scenario along these lines (*LA* 3.20.58), signaling his intention to cover the Manichaean position by avoiding any suggestion that the choice was sinful.[128] His goal apparently was to show, or at least claim, that whichever idea one had on the subject, the individual soul still bore full responsibility for its sinfulness, specifically, its failure to resort to faith in quest of God's instruction and aid.[129] Explicitly expressing an open-mindedness on the different conceptions of the soul's entry into embodiment, he asserted, "I am not so interested in the past as to dread as deadly error any false opinion I may entertain as to what actually transpired."[130] Rather, an accurate understanding of one's present condition and path to future happiness held paramount importance (*LA* 30.21.61).

We may account for the odd juxtaposition of free will and vitiated will passages in his discussion, therefore, either as evidence that his own thought was in flux, or that he was consciously performing various possible stances in an exploration of where they may all converge on essential points. I am not altogether sure there is a significant difference, for us as historians or for Augustine himself, between these two possible characterizations of what he was doing. We have seen evidence that he found it necessary to downplay his own prior preferences, because they were not unequivocally accepted as "Catholic." Alert already at the time of his conversion to the difficulties faced by the soul in its embodied state, he was not yet sure whether these needed to be minimized in favor of maintaining a strong free will position, or should be allowed to define the human condition as substantially unfree. All he intended at this point was to cover all possibilities in light of the bottom line of human responsibility.[131] Thus the appearance that Augustine's thought had moved very far forward in the direction of its future positions is somewhat

illusory. He was willing to entertain, in the abstract, the kind of theories about the soul held by the Manichaeans or any other religious group, in order to demonstrate that his position on the soul's culpability for sin still held good under any scenario. He appears to have been working at constructing a "Catholic" self capable of embracing a multitude of views or theories, so long as they served moral and intellectual reform in the direction of the soul's turn and ascent back to God.

We need to attend to how Augustine's mind came to be formed simply by this entertainment of the ideas and phrases of others, both Catholic and non-Catholic. Several different possible positions appear juxtaposed in his rhetoric at the same time, and he put them in dialogue with one another, finding his own views by picking and choosing a line of reasoning that took up one element here, another there, from multiple sources, tested against his supposedly nonnegotiable premises.[132] In this imperfect process, he became attached to this or that idea, which then problematized some of his premises, forcing him to choose whether to retain the idea and rethink the premise, or abandon the idea in loyalty to his original premise. This process went on throughout his life, with periods of varying stability and transformation as he was confronted with new challenges. William Babcock sees the momentary place to which Augustine had come with the third book of *Free Choice* as "fragile and unstable. It involved a delicate balancing act between the counteracting themes of the deep impairment of human moral agency, on the one hand, and the residual agency that we still retain within that impairment, on the other."[133] Yet perhaps it only appears so tenuous in the hindsight of his subsequent changes of mind. While Augustine accepted and appropriated the language of moral disability to be found in Paul, to which Fortunatus had introduced him, he was reluctant to give up his free choice account of evil, primarily for its forensic function as the only possible exoneration of God in a universe his alone to command, yet filled with evil. In fact, he had worked heroically to fix his earlier free will views with crucial modifications that helped to stabilize them by addressing contrary pressures from scripture and experience. Had he really failed in his purpose? Were there really insurmountable contrary data forcing the collapse of the free will paradigm?

In his theoretical explorations in *Free Choice*, Augustine in certain respects was already complicating the clean lines of the solution at which he had arrived in his Pauline commentaries, which displayed cogency and coherence both as a forensic theory and as a reading of Paul. The concept of habit adequately addressed the inner tensions Paul described, if one allowed

in him some vivid hyperbole. There was nothing in Paul or the other New Testament passages cited by Fortunatus that forced an account of the human condition and responsibility different from the one Augustine had reached. There was no inescapable argument that these passages were not referring to the historical advent of Christ as the moment when the world received sufficient notice of God's commands, broadcast through the institution of the Catholic Church, as the call that pricked the conscience of all those of good will toward their resort to faith. Exegetical necessity did not impose another reading by which "grace" had to be thought of as a personal, individual, and supernatural formation of a good will, even though that was the Manichaean view and interpretation of these passages. Hence, it is all but inexplicable why Augustine would, within a scant two years, abandon his perfectly defensible and stable solution to the problem Paul posed to the dogma of free will, and go over to an understanding of the role of grace that in key respects conformed to that of the Manichaeans.

At the conclusion of *Free Choice*, Augustine recouped and modified his earlier position from 1.12.24–13.29, where he had already glanced at the possibility of making an argument without being able to call upon the preexistence of souls, and where he had already enunciated a form of the position that he later heard repeated by Fortunatus in their debate, namely, the human responsibility to use whatever powers God has granted.[134] At that earlier point in his thinking, Augustine denied any significant impediment to the mind's free choice of will. In book 3, he restated his position, making use of Fortunatus's acknowledgment of human culpability even in the face of significant impediments, *provided one has been called* and so endowed with certain virtues and empowerments. Augustine embraced the idea of culpability within whatever restraints the soul finds itself, but skipped over Fortunatus's proviso of grace, and instead lurched back toward rhetoric of the relative freedom of the human will found at the beginning of *Free Choice*. The incongruity suggests that he was actually looking back at book 1 and being influenced by its language, which does not rest well in the context of the last part of book 3, following so many qualifications of that freedom. At the risk of doing Augustine's thinking for him, perhaps he understood himself to have answered Fortunatus's condition with the idea that *God calls everyone*, through the instruments of this call present in the world (the Law and Gospel, preserved in the institutions of the Catholic Church). Strangely, though, that answer, worked out in his Pauline commentaries where his attention had been

drawn to Paul's emphasis on God's prior call, does not feature prominently in *Free Choice*. Did he hold the idea of God's prior call aside as inimical to his purpose in upholding and stressing the place of free choice in determining human fate?

Even within a single work such as *Free Choice*—indeed, even within a few pages toward its conclusion—Augustine appears to offer different positions on the same issue at the same time. No wonder modern researchers have debated the pace of his intellectual development and the degree of continuity in his thought. No wonder they find themselves filling in the gaps for Augustine, seeking a single position that somehow holds all of his statements together. We have no means to ascertain his "true" view at this time, nor whether he held anything like a definite position at all. He could highlight and downplay various strands of argument and emphasis as he found necessary in the rhetorical moment. For this reason, we should not entirely dismiss his later claims that *Free Choice* so profoundly neglects grace because of its anti-Manichaean purpose (*Retr* 1.9.2–4), but rather seek to discern what such a comment means. We should credit Augustine's own acknowledgment that his writings were performances, not confessional displays of his complete state of mind.[135] At the same time, we should not assume the existence of something like a complete, coherent, fully normative state of mind in Augustine, which he selectively revealed in his compositions,[136] but accept the fact that his textual performances were themselves thinking processes in which he mulled over and talked through, *for himself* as much as for his readers, the possible ramifications and implications of various initial ideas, testing his commitment to them in a more fully articulated form. When in hindsight he said that grace is relatively absent from *Free Choice* because of his intention at the time to resist the Manichaean emphasis on grace, this may be taken as much as a report of his state of mind as of his rhetorical strategy. In other words, even as he found himself yielding a larger role to grace in his exegetical works under the pressure of the Pauline passages so effectively cited by Fortunatus, he resisted that development when working more theoretically in *Free Choice*, with the result that the shift toward grace appears more retarded in the latter work relative to the exegetical compositions.

In enunciating the words of *Free Choice*, that was what he was thinking and who he was. He limited the role of grace not just tactically in an argument, hiding his true sentiments, but strategically in the articulation of the position he was willingly to hold publicly as a Catholic. He saw his

emphasis on free will and limitation of the role of grace as who he should be as a Catholic, whatever his idiosyncratic inclinations. He wanted to be taken to be, and in some sense actually be, the person he was projecting in his textual performance. The various inconsistencies and aporias found in his statements indicate the degree to which this "Catholic" self remained a work in progress.

CHAPTER 7

Accused

SOMETIME IN 394 or 395, as Augustine worked intently on finding a "Catholic" Paul, bishop Valerius proposed to his superior, Megalius, bishop of Calama and primate of Numidia, that his priest Augustine be appointed coadjutor bishop in Hippo.[1] We do not know what argument Valerius made for this unusual step. It is possible that his health was failing, since he died within two or three years. It seems likely that he was concerned with retaining Augustine as his successor, and avoiding his cooptation to another episcopate. Members of the educated circle around Augustine had begun to be drawn away from Hippo to various episcopal appointments. Perhaps Valerius had caught wind of similar plans for Augustine while attending the council of Carthage in 394. Whatever the impetus, Augustine had proved himself as a priest, and his rhetorical skill had found good use in his anti-Manichaean tracts and sermons. So Valerius acted to keep Augustine for Hippo. But his suggestion was not received warmly.

Megalius wrote a stinging letter, raising objections to Augustine as a suitable candidate that highlighted lingering suspicions about his Manichaean connections (*Cresc* 3.80.92). A copy of this letter eventually found its way into the Donatist dossier on Augustine, although it is lost to us. All we have is Augustine's dismissive rebuttal addressed to the Donatist bishop Petilian, who had cited Megalius's letter against him: "What the man who was afterwards to ordain me bishop wrote about me in anger, while I was as yet a priest, he may freely seek to use as evidence against me. That the same man sought and obtained forgiveness from a holy council for the wrong he

thus had done to me, he is equally at liberty to ignore" (*CLP* 3.16.19; cf. *Cresc* 3.80.92; 4.64.78–79).[2]

The issues raised in the letter were serious, and took some time to be resolved, since Megalius withdrew his objections and ordained Augustine only in early 396.[3] The "episcopal" or "holy" council to which Megalius made his formal withdrawal of charges would have been the episcopal commission empaneled to investigate them (*in episcoporum concilio probare*, *Cresc* 4.64.79, a more exact characterization than the *sancto concilio* of *LitPet* 3.16.19). When that commission made a determination that the charges and suspicions Megalius had raised had no validity, he accepted its judgment and made his apology. This was perfectly normal procedure for cases such as this. Before the commission reached that finding, however, it conducted an investigation, and would have asked for—or rather demanded—a formal response of Augustine to the charges.[4]

This whole episode of Augustine's career has largely been forgotten, due in no small part to Augustine's success in overwriting it in his own literary self-presentation. Even when responding to references to it made by his various enemies and accusers, he was vague and evasive. As best as we can tell, there were two main suspicions circulating around Augustine's name. The first was that he had fled Africa and assumed a Catholic identity overseas in the face of anti-Manichaean legislation, and was secretly still a Manichaean. The second was that he had transmitted magical materials (a love spell and a piece of ritually charged bread) in his correspondence (*LitPet* 3.16.19; *Cresc* 3.80.92, 4.64.78–79). The same combination of accusations of Manichaeism and magic had led to the execution of Priscillian of Avila a decade before, at precisely the time Augustine opted to convert to Nicene Christianity. So these were far from minor charges. They represented capital offenses, and the threat to Augustine was very real. In Priscillian's case, the path to execution had begun with just such an episcopal investigation.

While proudly reporting Megalius's apology for his accusations, Augustine offered not the slightest clue as to how he had gone about persuading the commission and the primate of his innocence. Augustine must have offered some defense, and, given his predilections and talents, this defense would have taken a polished rhetorical form. Megalius certainly received some sort of argument of innocence before agreeing to make the journey to Hippo to ordain Augustine in 396. But we have no letter or tract on this subject from Augustine's pen. Or do we? Certain peculiarities in the structure and

emphases of *Confessions* raise the possibility that Augustine's most famous work began life as his defense to the charges of Megalius.[5]

While the general tendency in Augustinian scholarship has been to ignore or trivialize the combative conditions in which *Confessions* was written, and to see its inception in a context of triumph and security for Augustine,[6] a few researchers have sought to explain the work against the background of the controversy that swirled around him. Max Wundt proposed that *Confessions* had been written as late as 403 as a direct response to the accusations leveled by Petilian in the preceding years.[7] We see Augustine replying directly to those Donatist attacks in *Explanations of the Psalms* 36(3), apparently originally delivered as a sermon.

> Let them speak against us as they will. . . . We know their slanders, brothers and sisters, well do we know them. . . . They see that they have no case to make, so they turn their tongues against me and begin to slander me, alleging many things they know about, and many others of which they know nothing. What they do know are episodes in my past life; for, as the apostle says, I was once foolish and unbelieving, and useless for any good purpose. In my perverse error I was devoid of wisdom, demented. I do not deny it. And in not denying my own past, I am all the more praising our God, who has forgiven it. . . . You disparage my past life, but what advantage do you gain from that? I take a more severe view of my misdeeds than you do; you have merely disparaged them, but I have condemned them. . . . These are the evil deeds of my past, which they know all about, especially those committed in this city [i.e., Carthage]. Here I lived a bad life; I confess it. . . . But whatever I have been is over and done with, in Christ's name. (*EnPs* 36(3).19)

The shadow of Augustine's past life as a Manichaean surely shows in this impassioned sermon. Wundt notes that Augustine, while speaking of freely confessing his past sins and errors, makes no reference to having done so already in *Confessions*. To Wundt, this omission suggests that Augustine had yet to compose the work. Yet there is a crucial mismatch between the specific questions and concerns he sought to address in *Confessions* and those his Donatist opponents raised, as the continuation of his sermon on Psalm 36 suggests.

> For they jeer, "Who are these? Where do they come from? We know those bad fellows here, but where were they baptized?" If they know us so well they must know that we traveled abroad. They know too that we came back very different from what we were when we set out. No, we were not baptized here, but the church where we were baptized is known throughout the world. Plenty of our brethren know that we were baptized, and some were baptized with us. This is easy enough to check, if anyone in the congregation is anxious on this score. (*EnPs* 36(3).19)

The validity of baptism based on the identity and purity of the baptizer occupied the central place in the Donatist controversy, and enters into the questions raised here about Augustine. But if such an issue had been anywhere in view when Augustine composed *Confessions*, it would be nothing short of bizarre that he referred to his baptism in the latter work only in one terse, three-word sentence, and did not even bother to specify the identity of his baptizer. The mere fact of his baptism, or its ritual validity, clearly was not a main concern behind *Confessions*. While Wundt insightfully grasped the conditions of adversity in which *Confessions* had been originally conceived, he overlooked the fact that such adversity first appeared within the ranks of the Catholics themselves.

That earlier Catholic context of antagonism and suspicion toward Augustine has not been overlooked, however, by Henry Chadwick, who gives close attention to the complex division of sentiment among various parties around and within the North African Catholic Church. The antipathy of the Donatists would have been shared by elements within the Catholic community, Chadwick suggests.[8] Likewise, W. H. C. Frend has noted the difficulty not only Donatists but also older Catholics may have had with the new crop of Catholic leaders coming out of Augustine's circle, many of whom were former Manichaeans[9]—part of "a considerable amount of interconversion between Catholics and Manichees" of concern to Catholic prelates such as Megalius as well as Donatist critics such as Petilian.[10] Augustine's close association with the nascent ascetic movement would only have strengthened such concerns of innovation with a Manichaean pedigree, as figures such as Priscillian and Jerome found in their own experiences of being accused of introducing Manichaean ideas and practices into the Catholic Church.[11] Augustine's "monasteries" at Thagaste and Hippo attracted a large number of Manichaeans, who seem to have been satisfied to find a legal and respectable

form by which to live the same ascetic lives as they had formerly framed in Manichaeism.[12] Questions about the trustworthiness and true motives of these clusters of former Manichaeans may have been part of Megalius's objections to Augustine (*CLP* 3.40.48).

Augustine's *Letter* 38, written in 397 shortly after the death of Megalius, reflects the difficult relationship between these newcomers and the "old school" African Catholics of Numidia. Writing to Profuturus, another former Manichaean from Augustine's center in Hippo and now Catholic bishop of Cirta, Augustine alluded in what appear to be deliberately vague terms to a conversation they had "recently on a certain journey." Profuturus had an issue with another Catholic bishop, who goes unnamed in the letter, but who Augustine indicated would be the presumed primate-designate now that Megalius was dead.[13] Reading between the lines, it is not too difficult to grasp that Augustine and Profuturus had experienced similar suspicions and denigrations from this older generation of Catholic leadership—Augustine from the former primate and Profuturus from the bishop who was now to succeed him. Augustine reflected in the letter on the struggle one may have with feelings of bitterness toward those who have unjustly wronged us, revealing, in the words of Henry Chadwick, that "Megalius's withdrawal and apology for his letter and willingness to consecrate Augustine at Hippo had not wholly healed the scar."[14]

As it was, Profuturus had to contend not only with testy relations within the Catholic leadership, but also with the outright attacks of the rival bishop of Cirta, the Donatist Petilian. When Profuturus died within a year or two of Augustine's letter to him, leadership of the Catholic party in Cirta passed to yet another former Manichaean sent from Augustine's center in Hippo, Fortunatus (not to be confused with the Manichaean of the same name with whom Augustine debated in 392). Petilian, unable to let pass in silence the evident trend in Catholic leadership, wrote *Ad Presbyteros Epistola*, circa 400, in which he denounced the African Catholic Church as a nest of crypto-Manichaeans.[15] Augustine replied, and elicited Petilian's rejoinder in *Ad Augustinum*.[16] Frend suggests that it was primarily by reading Augustine's own works that Petilian "built up a picture of Augustine as a man who had not only once been a Manichee priest but who still remained one at heart, and whose only baptism had been at the hands of a Manichee elect." Ironically, *Confessions* supplied such a picture more than almost anything else Augustine ever wrote (though the charge of a Manichaean baptism appears to be a gratuitous polemical fantasy of Petilian's). Yet Petilian could not have derived

several specific charges from *Confessions*, such as that Augustine "had been forced to flee the country to avoid prosecution on the charge of infamous heresy." For this and other elements of his argument that "Under the smooth disguise of the Christian bishop lurked the Manichee rhetorician,"[17] it seems Petilian had only to revive and touch up the accusations he found ready to hand in the original letter of Megalius.

Augustine's Confessional Dilemma

Is it only coincidence that at the very time that we know he faced accusations from Megalius, and was required to answer them, Augustine devoted considerable attention to the ethics of lying? The historian is obliged to note such correlations if he or she is not to be reduced to merely recounting events as a sequence of inexplicable, isolated acts. Although Augustine had used *mendacium* before as a suitable characterization of opaque material existence,[18] his reflections on the concept took a sudden practical turn precisely in 394/395 and the years that immediately follow. This juxtaposition of ruminations on *mendacium* and *confessio* in the same short period of Augustine's life finds its contextual logic, I would suggest, in the situation of Megalius and the episcopal commission, in which he was trying to decide the extent of his obligation to confess to earthly judges what was in his heart and mind at the time he took certain actions that, on their surface appearance, lent credence to suspicions about his Manichaean ties.

The major piece in his exploration of the issue is the puzzling *Lying* (*De mendacio*), in which he explored the acceptability of lying for a greater good. Several peculiar things about this composition demand our attention. Augustine offered no indication, either in the work itself or in the *Revisions*, of what prompted him to compose it. He did report in the latter work (*Retr* 1.26), however, that he intended *Lying* to be a private exercise, not for any public purpose, and never published it (that is, circulated it for reading and copying by others). At some point, perhaps when Augustine was moving his study to the episcopal quarters after the death of Valerius, he ordered the work destroyed; but this order was never carried out. Augustine only discovered, much to his dismay, that it still existed when the *Indicula* of his works was drawn up in 427. He professed at this later date no longer to recall his purpose in writing it, and characterized it, as he often did of works that were somewhat embarrassing for him, as "difficult to understand." Yet he no longer had

sufficient motivation to suppress it, and found some redeeming qualities in some of its lines of argument (*Retr* 1.26).

In *Lying*, Augustine reviewed various degrees of lying for their possible legitimacy as acts of well-intentioned people. He proposed that a person may lie out of consideration of the good of others, rather than from a will to deceive, so that interiorly the person retains a truthful character, even though externally lying.

> For there is a difference between lying and being a liar. A man may tell a lie unwillingly; but a liar loves to lie. . . . Next to such are those to be placed who by a lie wish to please men . . . (who) would rather please by saying things that were true, but when they do not easily find true things to say that are pleasant to the hearers, they choose rather to tell lies than to hold their tongues. Yet it is difficult for these sometimes to undertake a story which is the whole of it false; but most commonly they interweave falsehood with truth, where they are at a loss for something sweet. Now these two sorts of lies do no harm to those who believe them, because they are not deceived concerning any matter of religion and truth, or concerning any profit or advantage of their own. (*Mend* 11.18)

Augustine placed the speaker in the position of judging what was at stake in the matter at hand, and deciding whether to speak a truth or a falsehood in a particular instance would have any significance, or be morally neutral in its intent. Even less sinful, he imagined, would be those lies that not only do no harm, but actually have benefit (*Mend* 11.18–12.19). As the discussion proceeded, Augustine drew ever closer to his own circumstances, focusing on cases where someone's life may be at stake, where inquisitors reach beyond the proper limits of their business, where screening even a guilty party did no one any real harm. Yet even with all these qualifications, Augustine was reluctant to surrender the ideal of not lying. He settled instead on the permissibility of omitting certain facts in one's confession, rather than inventing complete falsehoods. Failing to supply the truth, he contended, does not constitute lying (*Mend* 13.22)

It is hard not to hear the storyteller of *Confessions* speaking here, telling a story that is *essentially* true, because it is about his inner experiences as he remembers them, but omitting what we might less forgivingly consider crucial details, because what actually happened does not affect the overall truth

of the course his life ultimately took. Augustine was fully willing to confess all of his sinful conduct throughout his life. He had no trouble looking at the personal roots of his commitment to Manichaeism in terms of his own sinful pride. Yet he could not bring himself to confess the sort of thing that others, including those who witnessed them at the time, thought plausible to conclude about his actions. From where he now stood, his reactions to Faustus, his flight from Africa, the course of his gradual conversion, were all providentially guided steps toward his salvation. His motivations at the time were remote and disconnected from the outcomes that followed, and impossible for anyone but God to know fully (see *Mend* 17.36; cf. *Serm* 50.2.3; *Sec* 17). The fact that he had continued to be a practicing Manichaean after leaving Africa was for him a trivial detail, overshadowed by the internal truth of his doubts and reservations. It was the latter that pointed in the direction of his future, while the former marked an identity that was fading away. What good would it serve to rehash the hold Manichaeism had on him at the time and its role in deciding his course of action? He had already openly confessed his Manichaean past. What difference could it make what year, what month, what day had seen his last ritual act as a Manichaean? What did it matter what external pressures lent a hand to the steps toward his conversion? The truth of his soul had already anticipated the conformity of his body by some time. He was not trying to cover up any sin, but he could construct from the past history of sin a more edifying story, something more useful for others, as well as more protective of himself from the illegitimate inquisitiveness of those who presumed to judge him.

Among the things Augustine confesses of his Manichaean past in *Confessions* was his willingness to teach people the rhetorical means to defend someone in court (*Conf* 4.2.2). He had considered it morally wrong to teach people how to accuse falsely, but morally right to achieve someone's acquittal. The crimes screened by the methods Augustine taught at the time would have been precisely those offenses where he considered the state to be reaching beyond its purview or acting unjustly, such as pursuing members of Manichaean cells. Reflecting on such misleading of government agents, he concluded that a lie in such circumstances, "if it should hurt nobody and profit somebody as not to screen and defend any sin, would not be morally wrong" (*Mend* 12.20). He discussed, as he no doubt had among his Manichaean friends, ways of answering investigative inquiries about the whereabouts of someone without actually lying (*Mend* 13.22). The scenario he imagined would not have had much resonance with his Catholic parishioners, who enjoyed the

full backing of the state. It appears to derive, rather, from his experiences among the Manichaean underground. Indeed, if *Lying* had fallen into the hands of Megalius, the primate might well have considered it a handbook for crypto-Manichaeism. The impolitic nature of some of its content may explain Augustine's desire to have it destroyed.

The actual conduct of the biblical heroes, Augustine went on to contend, shows that the seemingly absolute commandments are not so absolute, and sometimes signify a mental state rather than outward action (*Mend* 15.26ff.). So, likewise, the biblical injunctions about lying apply better to the conscience than to the external value of words. "He lies with the heart who approves a lie; yet that man may possibly not lie with the heart who utters other than what is in his mind, in such sort that he knows it to be for the sake of avoiding a greater evil that he admits an evil, disapproving withal both the one and the other" (*Mend* 16.31). Augustine appears to follow this reasoning in *Confessions*, confessing to many minor wrongs in his own conduct, while omitting or explaining away the actions with which we know his accusers such as Megalius were concerned. What greater evil, then, did Augustine mean to avoid by admitting to other, lesser evils? Because Augustine was not, as his accusers claimed, a crypto-Manichaean, to confess things that might circumstantially support such a false accusation would imperil Augustine wrongfully as an innocent man. He considered the conditions of the fallen world to be such that people find themselves, contrary to the ideal of absolute truth, compelled to lie to avoid falling into a graver sin (*Mend* 17.35). One can responsibly take upon oneself the sin of lying when it is necessary to alleviate a greater potential sin, so long as it harms no other, and so long as one is willing to accept the consequences (*Mend* 18.39).

How can we be sure that Augustine was weighing his own predicament in the ruminations contained in *Lying*, not just coincidentally exploring the issue at the time he was asked to answer personal accusations? Augustine seemed to tip his hand to the accusations of Megalius when he distinguished between lying and the sin of bearing false witness. We can only be false witnesses, he maintained, for those who depend on our word, such as a judge needing to make a sound judgment, or a believer relying on us to be taught the true faith. "But when the person who interrogates you or wishes to know anything from you seeks that which does not concern him, or which is not expedient for him to know, he craves not a witness, but a betrayer" (*Mend* 17.36). In answering such a person falsely, he argued, one would not be guilty of bearing false witness, even if guilty of lying. Augustine alluded to a story

about the great Christian master Origen, who purportedly consented to make pagan sacrifices to avoid a threatened rape. Augustine's own situation involved accusations that could easily spiral, as they had for Priscillian of Avila, into an even worse threat to him. Saving one's own life for the greater good, he argued, provides the only clear exception to the admirable ideal of never telling a lie. The good faith of telling the truth is less violated, "when one lies in such sort that he is believed to no inconvenience and no pernicious hurt, with the added intention moreover of guarding either one's life or corporal purity" (*Mend* 20.41). By the principles Augustine himself set forth, therefore, he would be justified in lying to Megalius and the episcopal commission, or at least withholding some things from them, given the grave risk to himself that the charges against him entailed.

One of the talking points of *Lying*, though scarcely the underlying prompt of the work, is Jerome's contention that Paul lied in his letter to the Galatians in presenting as real what was actually a pretended conflict with Peter.[19] Augustine had learned of Jerome's view from the latter's commentary on Galatians, acquired as he sought to build up a library of Catholic Pauline exegesis in the immediate aftermath of his debate with Fortunatus. He objected to Jerome's interpretation of this episode, setting off a conflict that lasted for years. He addressed both *Epistle* 28 and *Epistle* 40 to Jerome largely on this subject;[20] but both letters got into wide circulation before Jerome ever received them, and Jerome would complain bitterly to Augustine about this (*Ep* 72). Augustine, not realizing what had happened with his letters, mistook the basis of Jerome's complaint, and rushed to deny that he had ever published a "book" against him (*Ep* 67.2.2). Only later did he realize that Jerome was referring to his letters, whereas he "had thought that you had heard of something or other absolutely different" (*Ep* 82.4.33)—almost certainly his discussion in *Lying*. Augustine had not published it, nor did he intend to have it published, and this is what he maintained in *Letter* 67, while acknowledging that he had *written* things contrary to Jerome's views.

Augustine's handling of the Paul and Peter incident reported in Galatians highlights a sharp distinction he wished to make between the possible useful lies of ordinary discourse and the sacred text of the Bible, which must be a completely reliable and untainted source of truth. "For I regard it as absolutely disastrous to believe that there is a lie in the holy books, that is, that those men who gave us and put into writing that scripture lied in their books. It is, of course, one question whether good men ought to lie at some time, and it is another question whether a writer of the holy scriptures ought to lie" (*Ep*

28.3.3). Augustine was even willing to entertain theoretically that Paul and Peter could stage a mock fight for pedagogical purposes, as Jerome argued. But Paul could never falsely represent the true nature of their encounter in writing, because his writing was sacred scripture. He returned to this issue in *Sermon Dolbeau* 10/162C,[21] probably delivered in Carthage in 397, once again addressing Jerome's proposition that Paul's rebuke of Peter was staged by the two apostles. He expressed a willingness to accept the suggestion that Peter only pretended to agree with the position of those from James, and so was less than completely forthright in his actions. He could allow this, because Peter did not write an account of the situation, whereas Paul did. The apostles, it seems, could use deception as much as they found useful in their missionary work, so long as they did not write something false about their thinking and intention in scripture.[22] For "we who engage in public debates and write books write in a very different fashion" from the way the scriptures are written. "What of course we would prefer, and this would be our choice between the two options, is that in writing or speaking we should always say what is true, never go wrong. But since this is difficult to achieve, that's why there is this other firmament of the canon" (*SermDolb* 10/162C.15).

Lying also received protracted treatment in Augustine's *Explanation of the Psalms* 5, likewise from the latter days of his priesthood. Lies, like all evils, are rooted in nonexistence, he contended, since to lie is to say what is not (*EnPs* 5.7). Yet he acknowledges that "Many lies admittedly seem to be told for the safety or advantage of someone, and motivated not by ill-will but by kindness." He cited the example of the Hebrew midwives lying to save the male children from being killed on the orders of Pharaoh. "But even such things are praised not because of what happened but for the presence of mind shown. Why so? Because those who lie only in this way will deserve one day to be freed from lying altogether" (*EnPs* 5.7). Augustine went on to draw a crucial distinction between lies of commission and lies of omission.

> But it is one thing to lie, another to cloak the truth, since it is one thing to say what is false, another to keep silent about what is true. If someone, for example, does not want to betray another person even to the death we can all see, he ought to be willing to conceal the truth, but not to tell a lie. This means that he neither betrays nor tells a lie, and avoids killing his own soul for the sake of another's body. But if he is not yet able to do this, then he should tell only those lies which are unavoidable. . . . In this way he will deserve to be freed even from those

> lies, if they are the only ones left, and to receive the strength of the Holy Spirit, through which he may despise whatever has to be endured for the truth's sake. (*EnPs* 5.7)

Similarly, in his *Exposition of the Epistle to the Galatians*, written at this time, he maintained that "Under no circumstances is it lawful to tell a lie, but occasionally it is helpful to be silent about some aspect of the truth" (*ExpGal* 10.4). Likewise, in *Eighty-Three Diverse Questions* 53, from the same period, Augustine explored "by what stages of development one attains to this height and perfection" of being perfectly honest, and refers to "a level of virtue which involves deceiving certainly neither friend nor passerby, though, at times, one's enemy." God makes use of the imperfect who still yield to degrees of deception in order to have those deceived who deserve to be. In Question 60 from the same work, Augustine asserted that all biblical statements to the effect that God or Christ do not know something should be read as meaning that they withhold from humanity knowledge of those things "for their own good, because it serves no useful purpose for them to know." The same view had appeared already in *Genesis Against the Manichaeans*, where he said, "Men will merit that dwelling and transformation into angelic form if, even in this life, when they could hide lies under the garments of skin, they hate and avoid them out of a burning love for truth, *hiding only what their hearers cannot bear*" (*GCM* 2.21.32). Accordingly, in *Explanation of the Psalms* 5, he observed that even Christ concealed the truth when he refused to tell the disciples all that he knew (Jn 16:12), as did Paul when he said the Corinthians were not yet ready to hear all of his teachings (1 Cor 3:1). "From this it is clear that it is not culpable sometimes to keep the truth quiet" (*EnPs* 5.7). As in *Lying*, so here, Augustine painted a scenario that unmistakably resembled his own confessional dilemma about the course of his journey from heresy to orthodoxy.

> "In your sight," the psalmist says, "guide my journey": that is, where no one sees, for other people are not to be trusted whether they praise or blame. They are completely incapable of passing judgment on another's conscience, where someone's path is being guided to God. That is why the psalmist has added, "because the truth is not on their lips." He is referring to those whose judgment is in no way to be trusted, and for that reason we must take flight within, to our conscience, to the place where God sees. (*EnPs* 5.11)

Augustine made it perfectly clear that he considered no one entitled to question or judge the path his life had taken, at a time when his superiors in the Catholic Church were doing precisely that.

This dense set of justifications for lying or withholding truth in certain circumstances, all from the middle 390s, implicitly rests upon even more radical views of what constitutes "truth" that Augustine had been developing for some time. One such view, briefly stated, is that the truth of things resides in one's own conscience, not in external events. Believing it is so makes it so, ethically speaking. Augustine had arrived at the underlying principle of this position, as a development of his skeptical dismissal of knowledge derived from the senses, in *The Teacher*, written several years before the period with which we are now concerned.

> When a question arises not about what we sense before us, but about what we have sensed in the past, then we do not speak of the things themselves, but of images impressed from them on the mind and committed to memory. . . . We carry these images in the recesses of the memory as proofs of things sensed before. Contemplating them in the mind we tell no falsehood when we speak in good conscience. (*Mag* 12.39)

For Augustine, then, the veracity of someone speaking from memory depended not on the accuracy of the memory with respect to the thing remembered, but on the accurate stating of what was remembered.[23] His position reflects his epistemology, by which what is known via the senses remains always uncertain. Whether something really is precisely as it appears to be through the senses, or as it is recalled to be by having those sensory impressions retained in the mind, was in his opinion difficult to establish and ultimately irrelevant. What is "true" about something is what the mind thinks about it, since the mind is superior to sensory experience and has the benefit of its own inherent knowledge to make sense of things. Actual historical time is not as "true" for Augustine as memory and the truth accessed mentally by contact with the timeless intelligible. Conversely, the memory of a thing is not treated as inferior to the thing itself. Instead, it actually takes the place of the thing itself in intelligible experience, where the thing itself never did, and never can, reside.[24]

This idea of the interiority of truth formed an essential underpinning of the truth Augustine would "confess" in *Confessions*. If, from his current

vantage point, Augustine honestly saw his past the way he was describing it, then he was not lying. "For from the sense of his own mind, not from the verity or falsehood of the things themselves, is he to be judged to lie or not to lie" (*Mend* 3.3). Gareth Matthews regards Augustine's conclusions about the interiority of truth to be a "miscarriage" of his inquiry into the ability of people to answer questions about the absent past.

> Augustine is right in thinking that there is no mental mechanism which can give us direct access to absent sensible things. But he is wrong in concluding from this that, when talk turns to such things, we are therefore limited to giving introspective reports on our mental images. In fact the situation is quite otherwise. By making our statements liable to correction from other sources we overcome the imagined limits of mental mechanism and manage to answer questions about the absent things themselves. We need not change the subject unless we want to.[25]

Did Augustine consciously want to change the subject, and deliberately employ an interiorized account of his life in order to dodge inconvenient truths about his actions? Or did his view of the locus of "reality" obscure from him the need to provide any other account of himself than the interior story of his soul? It may be too much to ask that the historian settle this issue in an either/or manner. Both interpretations may be equally true within a circumstance that involves self-deception as much as self-conscious manipulation of the facts. Nonetheless, Augustine made too many precise omissions and happy reconstruals of the past we know that he remembered, from remarks he made in writings before *Confessions*, for us to exonerate him completely from a deliberate effort to tell his story in a way that would best serve his purposes.

In localizing truth in one's memory, Augustine took a position consistent with his early post-conversion works in their valuation of the intelligible and denigration of the material, sensory, and historical; nonetheless, he may have been building on a Manichaean foundation. In explaining his view of sin, Mani wrote in his *Epistle to Menoch* that "actual" sin is a momentary act, not a permanent condition of the self. An act has no abiding existence in time, and after it has taken place, it is relegated to the past, which does not, in itself, really exist. The only lasting presence of "sin," therefore, is in the memory, and any reference to a past sin is to this existing memory of it, not to the act itself which no longer exists (*Menoch* 187). This explanation finds

echoes in several other Western Manichaean texts (e.g., *EpSec* 2), and forms the essential background for Manichaean confessionary practice, the purpose of which was to distinguish one's true character from the momentary error of identification with evil impulses. Augustine essentially agreed with this Manichaean understanding of sin. Past sinful acts do not make one a sinner; rather, it is the abiding misorientation of self that does so.

Yet, characteristically, Augustine did not rest with locating truth merely in the interior of the individual mind or soul. Already in *The Teacher*, he had modified the Platonic theory of the mind's recollection of the intelligible by giving to the intelligible a more active role in illuminating the individual mind. This modification entailed an anti-Manichaean denial that truth itself existed within the individual soul as its own, as part of the continuity of its being with a divine source. Rather, the soul, distinct from the divine, is put in touch with truth, which is ultimately beyond the condition of the soul's individuality. He reiterated this point in *Sermon* 28A/*Sermon Dolbeau* 9, from the mid-390s, where he noted that scripture agrees that "every man is a liar" (Ps 116:11; Rom 3:4). The degree to which one remains a liar marks one's place along the path of ascent to truth (*Serm* 28A.2). People are, in themselves, inherently liars, but become more truthful the closer they approach God who "alone is truthful" (Rom 3:4).

> When will man ever be truthful? "Approach him and be enlightened" (Ps. 34:5). So this is what scripture wished to demonstrate, that every human being, absolutely every single one, as regards being merely human, is a liar. Man is not a liar except from what is his own (cf. Jn 8:44); that is, from the body which consists of earthy matter. For the soul is divine, and with it he is truthful, not a liar. Nor is he able from what is his own, to be anything but a liar.[26]

The integrity of this passage has been questioned, due to the presence of ideas (the divinity of the soul, the stark soul-body dualism) that most commentators consider Augustine to have moved beyond by this time. But we need not let these details distract us from the overall point of view reflected in the passage, which Augustine would persistently maintain and develop throughout his career. The soul's inner connection to its divine creator, nurtured by "participation in truth," radically separates it from the "dark" world of material reality, with all its dubious facticity. To the degree that people are engaged in the concerns of this world, even their own individuality, to that degree

they are entangled in lies. At work here is Augustine's idea of embodiment as individuation and isolation from the source of being, accompanied by the loss of transparency of mind. He identified as the epitome of entrapment in lying the claim that "I am truthful from what is my own."[27] Such claims are "inflated." "For what do you have that you have not received?" (1 Cor 4:7; *Serm* 28A.6). Therefore, the one making such claims remains a liar, and is not yet in a state where God empowers utter truthfulness. Yet utter truthfulness, by its very nature, has nothing to do with events in the "realm of lies" that is this world. To even tell one's own individual story in this world is to be concerned with things that ultimately do not matter. Given this set of priorities, Augustine may be suspected of bearing a certain amount of resentment toward those who inquired into his personal past, dragging him away from the more important task of pursuing ultimate truth. At the same time, we can only wonder what attitude he brought to a demand that he tell the truth within a dimension of discourse he regarded as intrinsically lie-bound.

Augustine's ruminations on lying reveal a self-consciousness about self-presentation, and in the conditions of the time when he enunciated them, we would be hard pressed to propose any other relevant self-presentation he might have been considering than his own. He contemplated the ethics of self-presentation in light of what he knew or presumed to be the expectations of his audience, and with regard to the tacit censorship of the situation—both that imposed by the community that was calling him to account and that he imposed on himself by the gravity of the situation. In preparing to stand before the episcopal commission, he reflected upon his own past actions, speech, and thoughts from the perspective of his examiners, on what would be tolerable and what intolerable for them in his self-disclosure. He had to see himself as others would see him, and censor himself accordingly. "This is just what we imply in 'self-consciousness'," G. H. Mead writes of analogous situations. "We appear as selves in our conduct insofar as we ourselves take the attitude that others take toward us, in these correlative activities. . . . We take the role of what may be called the 'generalized other.' And in doing this we appear as social objects, as selves."[28] After a period focused on other objects such as the Manichaeans, the meaning of scripture, or his sermonic audience, Augustine found himself obliged to turn his attention explicitly to himself, and to consider not something as elusive as who he was, but who he wished to be. He premeditated his self-presentation by reflecting on how others would see and judge it; he took on their role in pre-judging himself. This pre-judgment involved both self-criticism of those past errors and failings that

were speakable in the context of his examination, and silence on those that had to remain unspoken because they were unspeakable, for to speak them would potentially break the tacit limits of his acceptability to the community.

We face in our interpretive situation here an obvious temptation to see in Augustine's considered reflections on lying the careful preparations of a liar, at least so far as he appeared to be rationalizing for himself the virtue of withholding certain inconvenient recollections of his past conduct and motives. But fixating on that aspect of the evidence risks obscuring the higher-order purpose in Augustine's self-censorship, namely, his determination to carry through on his commitment to membership in the community that was now scrutinizing him, and to "perform" as such, to "make" himself the sort of person to pass scrutiny. As Judith Butler observes, "censorship is not merely restrictive and privative, that is, active in depriving subjects of the freedom to express themselves in certain ways, but also formative of subjects and the legitimate boundaries of speech."[29] Augustine faced an unusual amount of scrutiny, even for a candidate for the episcopacy; and it was in this situation that he experienced anew the choice he had made in Milan eight years earlier, and considered with greater maturity of reflection what the choice entailed and required. It was not simply a matter of determining what he could disclose about himself, and what conceal. It was about conforming himself utterly to the sayable as it was defined by the circumstances of the examination he was undergoing at the hands of the episcopal commission, and as would be required in perpetuity thereafter in the highly visible role of a bishop, should he be approved for that post. Judith Butler has remarked on this predetermination of the subject by the limits set on the sayable.

> The question is not what it is I will be able to say, but what will constitute the domain of the sayable within which I will begin to speak at all. To become a subject means to be subjected to a set of implicit and explicit norms that govern the kind of speech that will be legible as the speech of a subject. Here the question is not whether certain kinds of speech uttered by a subject are censored, but how a certain operation of censorship determines who will be a subject depending on whether the speech of such a candidate for subjecthood obeys certain norms governing what is speakable and what is not. *To move outside of the domain of speakability is to risk one's status as a subject. To embody the norms that govern speakability in one's speech is to consummate one's status as a subject of speech.*[30]

The episcopal commission had to consider whether Augustine constituted such a validated subject of Nicene Christian speech, one who would now be authorized to use the Catholic discursive toolkit in the generative production of new formulations that conformed to the tacit rules of orthodoxy, or whether as a "heretic" he breached the acceptable limits of Catholic subjecthood.

The judgment of this question actually did not rest with the episcopal commission, however, but with Augustine himself. He pre-judged the question in such a manner that, when it came time for him to utter his defense, what he spoke could not fail to be accepted by the bishops. He was, after all, a master rhetorician. His censorship was self-imposed, and the limits he set on the public persona of his self-presentation held every promise of becoming limits on the identity he took as his very own, especially given the unique conditions of visibility into which he was entering. "It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection," Michel Foucault has observed.[31] The examination Augustine faced represented one of the distinctive instruments of power, combining hierarchical observation and normalizing judgment in a manner that called forth a self-willed conformity rather than imposing that conformity from without by force. It is in this way, Foucault theorizes, that "Discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise."[32] Despite having the trappings of a judicial procedure, the examination by the episcopal commission furnished Augustine with a disciplinary rather than punitive experience: an opportunity to perform conformity, and to present accepted accounts of his past errors that situated him securely within the persona of the authentic convert. This self-conscious exercise afforded him a self-corrective moment of assessment by which he furthered the making of his "Catholic" self, which we can think of in terms of self-formation as conceptualized by G. H. Mead. "For he enters his own experience as a self or individual, not directly or immediately, not by becoming a subject to himself, but only in so far as he first becomes an object to himself just as other individuals are objects to him or in his experience; and he becomes an object to himself only by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within a social environment or context of experience and behavior in which both he and they are involved."[33] It is in this essential self-making role that the power the episcopal commission represented dispersed itself into Augustine as the apparent object of scrutiny, and through his self-scrutiny endowed him with the status of a point of its iteration. "We must cease once and for all

to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes,' it 'represses,' it 'censors,' it 'abstracts,' it 'masks,' it 'conceals,' " Foucault has argued. "In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production."[34]

Augustine's Original "Confession"

Confessions as we have it today almost certainly is not the address Augustine delivered to the episcopal commission in 395 to answer the charges leveled by Megalius in his letter. It is unlikely that even Augustine would have had the temerity to present them such a verbose opus, laced with childhood reminiscences and innumerable beside-the-point detours. Moreover, *Confessions* contains passages that seem to reflect developments of his thinking that cannot otherwise be documented in his writings of circa 394–396. Augustine had told his story before in much briefer terms, of course, describing the course of his life into and out of Manichaeism (*BV* 1.4; *Acad* 2.2.3–6; *LA* 1.11.22; *UC* 1.2, 8.20; *DA* 9.11). These short narrative passages are consistently built around the same simple thesis-antithesis contrast of Manichaean delusion and Platonic-Catholic enlightenment that shapes the narrative thrust of the bulk of *Confessions*.[35] Yet none of the concerns raised by Megalius are met in any direct way by the reminiscenses of books 1 through 4; nor do books 11 through 13 belong to Augustine's autobiographical narrative. Books 5 through 9 (leaving aside the special problem of book 10), however, address in expansive detail precisely the short period and specific circumstances under scrutiny by the episcopal commission: his Manichaean association and decision to leave Africa in 383, his apostasy from Manichaeism in 384–385, and his conversion and baptism in 386–387. Even if Augustine later substantially rewrote this material, the figures and events with which it deals are the same as those which would have featured in his answer to the bishops; and it would have been impossible for Augustine, having delivered his account to them, to have told a fundamentally different story only a few years later in *Confessions*. Therefore, even if we assume (as we should) that Augustine developed and expanded his initial response in turning it into *Confessions*, we can reasonably draw on this slightly later work for some sense of the account Augustine was prepared to give of himself in answer to the suspicions of his superiors about his Manichaean past and the authenticity of his conversion.

The fresh start Augustine made in his narrative at the beginning of book 5 has been noticed before.[36] At this point in the narrative, the reader encounters a very formal opening, announcing Augustine's intention to "confess" as if for the first time, and giving peculiar emphasis to recounting the events of his twenty-ninth year (November 382–November 383). Why did Augustine treat this year, of all the years, the most formally, as if crucial to his narrative? It was not the year of his conversion or his baptism, not the year he first encountered Ambrose or the Platonic books, not the year of his first Catholic writings or his ordination to the priesthood. It was, however, the year of his flight from Africa, the very action for which he was under suspicion in the eyes of the Catholic leadership before 396, but not after. Indeed, of all the events recounted in *Confessions*, only two things happened in his twenty-ninth year: his well-known close association with the Manichaean bishop Faustus and his departure from Africa to Rome. In the full narrative of *Confessions*, these two events can hardly be considered the climax or focal point. They take their significance, rather, as the starting point of Augustine's defense of his genuine *deconversion* from Manichaeism, to which a genuine *conversion* to Nicene Christianity is added to complete the story of his transformation while out of Africa.

The questions raised by Megalius a decade later about Augustine's motives and actions in 383, therefore, offer the best explanation for the formal and solemn opening statement of book 5 and the expansive treatment of a very short period of time that follows, as well as for the extension of the narrative past his conversion and baptism to cover, at least symbolically, the entire period of his absence from Africa.[37] This was the period his questioners were asking about. Did he leave Africa as, and because he was, a Manichaean? Was his intention to preserve his life, liberty, and religion against the threat of the new anti-Manichaean laws? How could they be sure that when he returned to Africa professing to be a Catholic that his transformation was sincere? Had he not been a close associate of the Manichaean leader himself?

Over decades of study, several researchers have detected elements in *Confessions* that point to an apologetic or defensive purpose. It cannot be said that such a purpose dominates the work as we now have it, however. Rather, the defensive notes found there seem to echo previous recitations of his story where apology was called for. One notes, for example, Augustine's self-conscious remark, hoping as much as predicting that "your spiritual ones will gently and lovingly laugh at me, if they read these confessions of mine" (*Conf* 5.10.20). Augustine usually reserved phrases such as "spiritual ones"

for bishops, and it would not be unreasonable to speculate that Augustine refers here to the episcopal commission. More generally, Augustine appears driven to provide reasons and motivations for his actions that steer clear of any connection to his commitments as a Manichaean. With apparent refreshing candor, he attributed to himself a wide spectrum of selfish, stupid, misguided, and embarrassing intentions that fit fully acceptable models of the pre-conversion self. As a complementary strategy to this effort to explain and excuse himself, Augustine also engaged in strategic omissions, long acknowledged in modern research on *Confessions*.[38] In the words of Morrison, "the establishment of his credentials entailed the suppression of evidence."[39] Adverse conditions, rather than triumphant ones, best explain the particular sort of omissions he made.

A rhetorical apologetic context may account best for Augustine's neglect of chronological order, even when the master narrative sets up an expectation of such an order in the reader. This temporal disorder of the narrative has been noted by, among others, Pierre Courcelle and Joanne McWilliam.[40] McWilliam in particular points to such a breakdown of chronological order in the tangled narrative of books 5 through 8. She ultimately attributes "the constant to-ing and fro-ing . . . the repeated going over well-ploughed ground, the return again and again to the same questions" to "the confusion of those conversion years."[41] But Augustine notoriously employed this sort of seemingly directionless, repetitious, belabored writing style when he was grappling with a problem that put him in some difficulty. The relative narrative cleanness of the first four books, which McWilliam likewise observes, while not completely without temporal disorder, may indicate less fraught compositional conditions.

The most significant reordering of events appears to be Augustine's placement of his "intellectual conversion" in book 7, prior to his "moral conversion" in book 8. There are two reasons why this order should be considered not completely historical. First, while there is no reason to doubt Augustine's exposure to Platonism prior to his conversion, the intellectual content of book 7 has been filled out with ideas and understandings we can observe developing in his writings after his conversion, up to and including his exegetical work on Paul in the mid-390s. So what he presented as reasons leading to his conversion can be identified instead as rationales developed afterward. Second, Augustine had argued repeatedly in his earlier writings that faith in authority must necessarily precede intellectual understanding; and for him faith in the authority of the Catholic Church meant primarily the moral

conversion reported in book 8. In other words, the paradigm of conversion he had himself represented up to this point was of a moral conversion followed by an intellectual one, the exact reverse of the story told in *Confessions*. We can only speculate whether Augustine made this reversal of his story for protreptic purposes when he later fashioned *Confessions* as we now have it,[42] or already in his self-presentation to the episcopal commission, as a way to provide a plausible explanatory context for his conversion and the impression of a stable set of commitments since.

Placing the composition of at least an earlier version of books 5 through 9 at the time of Augustine's late priesthood would serve to explain why these books appear to reflect the earlier theology of that time. Several commentators have noted that Augustine's account of his own agency and will, particularly in the crucial events of book 8, do not correspond to the ideological position on that subject he had reached in his early episcopate, that is, by the time he presumably composed the finished *Confessions* according to the sequence in his *Revisions*.[43] In book 8, the synergistic model of the Pauline commentaries, rather than the grace paradigm of *To Simplician*, controls the narrative. Sinfulness is still an acquired habit; the will to reform still arises from the individual *sub lege*, prior to grace, instead of being given by God.

> For it was no iron chain imposed by anyone else that fettered me, but the iron of my own will. . . . The truth is that disordered lust springs from a perverted will; when lust is pandered to, a habit is formed; when habit is not checked, it hardens into necessity. . . . But a new will had begun in me, so that I willed to worship you disinterestedly and enjoy you, O God . . . but it was not yet capable of surmounting that earlier will strengthened by inveterate custom. And so the two wills fought it out—the old and the new, the one carnal, the other spiritual—and in their struggle tore my soul apart. I thus came to understand from my own experience what I had read, how the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit strives against the flesh. I was aligned with both, but more with the desires I approved in myself than with those I frowned upon, for in these latter I was not really the agent, since for the most part I was enduring them against my will rather than acting freely. (*Conf* 8.5.10–11)

Augustine's "new will (*voluntas nova*)," one notes, begins in him prior to a liberating grace from God, and struggles against the contrary inclinations of

the old will, leading him to commit acts "against my will"—all in accordance with his "middle-period" model, by which the individual's good will to faith and dependence on God appears first ("I willed [*vellem*] to worship you"), before eliciting grace from God.

> I was quite sure that surrendering myself to your love would be better than succumbing to my lust, but while the former course commended itself and was beginning to conquer, the latter charmed and chained me. I had no answer to give as you said to me, "Arise, sleeper, rise from the dead: Christ will enlighten you" (Eph 5:14) and plied me with evidence that you spoke truly. . . . To find delight in your law as far as my inmost self was concerned was of no profit to me when a different law in my bodily members was warring against the law of my mind, imprisoning me under the law of sin which held sway in my lower self. For the law of sin is that brute force of habit whereby the mind is dragged along and held fast against its will. (*Conf* 8.5.12)

The call of God, transmitted through the scriptures, supplies the impetus to the good will's response; yet the latter remains only an intent *sub lege*, until liberated by God's empowerment. Going on to tell "how you set me free from a craving for sexual gratification which fettered me like a tight-drawn chain," he clearly described this grace from God as a response of aid to a faithful longing Augustine already held on his own initiative. He already "longed for you every day and spent as much time in your church as could be spared from my business" (*Conf* 8.6.13) before hearing the story of Anthony, or of the vows of the courtier at Trier, or the famous *tolle, lege* over the garden wall. His mind ordered itself to make an act of will, and "it would not give this order unless it willed to do so (*nisi vellet*)," yet it did not act (*Conf* 8.9.21). It was Augustine who was saying "Let it be now" (*Conf* 8.11.25), who was "bitterly ashamed" (*Conf* 8.11.27). Moreover, despite intervening passages that appear to echo a more direct hand of God in turning Augustine around, he even stressed the proprietary nature of his will in this crucial moment: "When I was making up my mind to serve the Lord my God at last, as I had long since purposed, I was the one who wanted to follow that course, and I was the one who wanted not to. I was the only one involved [*ego eram*]" (*Conf* 8.10.22).[44] The lures of his past lusts "muttered behind my back . . . *as I walked away*," but he could not as yet "bring myself to tear free and shake them off and leap across to that place whither I was summoned, while aggressive habit still

taunted me" (*Conf* 8.11.26). Continence in the form of a womanly figure appeared to him as a revelation "coming to me from *that country toward which I was facing*," beckoned to him, and advised him to "cast yourself" on the help of God, for "he will not step back and let you fall" (*Conf* 8.11.27). When he heard the child's voice reciting "take, read," he turned the words over in his mind, deciding whether or not he should consider them a command of God to which he should respond (*Conf* 8.12.29). Without a doubt, Augustine filled the narrative with the instruments of God's call, but just as certainly he portrayed himself as the agent of his own choices of response, and of his own initiative in the leap of faith. In that respect, he represented God's call in *Confessions* 8 as he had in the Pauline commentaries of his late priesthood, as an offer to which the individual must decide to respond, rather than an overpowering divine initiative, as he came to understand it shortly after becoming a bishop. Perhaps, then, Augustine had structured the story of his conversion given at the time of the episcopal inquiry too closely on the synergistic view of salvation he held at the time to submerge that paradigm successfully when later redacting *Confessions* into the form known to us.[45]

Strategies of Response

In *Confessions*, and presumably in his response to the bishops, Augustine did not try to conceal that he was still formally and publicly a Manichaean when he left Carthage, nor that it was several more years before he was baptized. These were external facts that he was powerless to write over. But he was able to take control of his life story by making it an internal story, a story of his conscience rather than his public face. Only he was in a position to report what he was thinking or what his motives were. No accuser could prove otherwise. So he highlighted the doubts he entertained about Manichaeism even while a member of the community, as well as the new direction taken in the aftermath of his association with Faustus, when his skepticism could scarcely be considered a continuation of full commitment. For these reasons, he was able to suggest, he could not have been a zealous enough Manichaean to have been motivated in his departure from Africa by a desire to preserve his freedom of faith. He was ready to attribute his journey to Rome to any other petty personal motivation, so long as it was disassociated from his Manichaeism.

His close association with Faustus was likewise undeniable, as James O'Donnell has noted.

> This is how people in Africa would have remembered Augustine's relations with Faustus: Faustus arrives with Augustine in the lead among those praising him, later in friendly literary relations with him. . . . There is no visible break with Manicheism before Augustine left Africa, rather the opposite. It was not accidental that Augustine chose, about the time of writing [*Confessions*], Faustus's own treatise for his largest systematic refutation of Manichean doctrines—his own past contained not only Manicheism, but Manicheism as Faustus presented it, and there were suspicions that Augustine was not entirely cleansed of the poison.[46]

Augustine went out of his way to explain that the great amount of time they spent together was devoted almost entirely to secular literary studies (*Conf* 5.7.13). The reader gets the impression that his first substantive discussion with Faustus decisively settled any further interest in engaging him on religious topics. Augustine drained his characterization of Faustus of all the latter's incisiveness evident in his own writings, and obscured the skeptical philosophical underpinnings of his refusal to deal with Augustine's concerns. In associating with "that old snare of the devil," Augustine would have his audience believe he had been in the company of a rather harmless, misguided character, a somewhat guileless entertainer who did not even make a pretense of being a formidable intellect. When readers of his *Confessions* later dug up Faustus's own *Chapters*, Augustine must have been seriously embarrassed over the degree to which he had downplayed Faustus's acuity, and to make up for it threw himself into one of the most monumental refutations of his career.

Augustine echoed the wording of the anti-Manichaean edicts that prompted his flight when he referred to almost dying in Rome, "loaded with all the sins I had committed against you, against myself, and against other people" by his promotion of the Manichaean faith (*Conf* 5.9.16). Yet even though the imperial edict of 383 made his activities as a Manichaean a capital offense, Augustine admitted no fear of the law. He insisted—somewhat defensively, one notes—that his decision to go to Rome was motivated by personal ambition, bigger fees, greater renown, and the all-too-human wish for better-behaved pupils (*Conf* 5.8.14). He was perfectly comfortable accusing himself of the sort of mundane personal faults his parishioners shared—lust, pride, the desire for fame and fortune. He could beat his breast on these matters and find a sympathetic audience. These were the classic themes of conversion accounts. He could even castigate himself publicly for being a blockhead

who could not think his way past Manichaean doctrines. Such humility coming from the would-be philosopher would soften his pretentious image. He could speak of his dread of God's judgment, rather than that of the courts, as an attitude that would find respect with his audience. But to say he fled Carthage because he was unwilling to give up his Manichaean faith, or face the full consequences of it, would be too much. It would play into the hands of his accusers. No, Augustine had to insist that he already had his doubts about Manichaeism when he left, that his conversion to Nicene Christianity was a long time coming. The urgency of his flight from Carthage slipped through in the tale of his abandonment of his mother; but he omitted any mention of the fact that he also left behind the rest of his family, as well as Licentius over whom he apparently had guardianship in Carthage.

It appears that Augustine needed to offer an explanation for why he had not revealed to Ambrose his Manichaean past, or his growing interest and conviction in Nicene Christianity, much sooner than he did. This apparent discrepancy between what he claimed was going on inside him, and the relative distance he kept from Ambrose, he excused by describing Ambrose as too busy to be engaged in protracted discussion (*Conf* 6.3.3–4). He found a way to justify the unusually prominent role of Platonism as a source of intellectual advance—which may have been a separate sore point among some of the more traditional Catholic leaders—by referring to Ambrose's allegorical explanation of God's command to the Israelites to plunder the gold of Egypt, which he interpreted as approval of appropriating from secular and pagan culture everything useful (*Conf* 7.9.15). He wielded Marius Victorinus as a handy double of himself, providing a parallel example of someone already Catholic in his heart, privately and secretly, well before making the public act that let those around him recognize it (*Conf* 8.2.3–5). This other African rhetorician, like Augustine "thoroughly conversant with all the liberal arts" and "widely read in philosophy," had confided privately to Simplician, "I am already a Christian," but the latter replied that he would not count Victorinus among the Christians until he became one openly. Through this episode, Augustine subtly explained himself, acknowledging his need to confess the sluggishness of his conversion, at the same time as he asserted and insisted upon the genuineness and pure motivation of that conversion. If one accepted the tale of Victorinus as true and even inspirational, why should Augustine's remarkably similar story not gain the same credence?

Augustine faced the further challenge of explaining away his resignation of his post in Milan and retirement to a country estate in the immediate wake

of a sentence against him back in Africa (*CLP* 3.16.19).[47] In his letters and compositions in the months immediately following this move, he had attributed his retirement to a combination of ill-health and a desire to retire into "philosophy," as well as to intensively study the epistemological issues that his prior skepticism set as obstacles to embracing either Neoplatonic truths or the Catholic moral-cultic community. He told a quite different story in *Confessions*, claiming that he had already resolved all doubts and was fully committed to both before leaving town. Even so, his phrasing points to suspicions and accusations regarding the timing and purpose of his departure from Milan. In order to explain the suddenness of his actions, he related that he had made a decision to keep his planned resignation quiet, shared only among his most intimate associates (*Conf* 9.2.2). He had not wanted to draw attention to his resignation, he claimed, which would have been a self-important gesture a mere twenty days before the school session ended for the harvest break (*Conf* 9.2.3). He emphasized as well the visible symptoms of respiratory problems that would have been evident to anyone near him at the time, and claimed that he had spoken to others about the need for at least a recuperative break from his duties (*Conf* 9.2.4). This had been no politic claim of ill-health, he wished to make clear, but a genuine malady.

Perhaps the most glaring omission Augustine made in *Confessions* regarded the trial and execution of Priscillian of Avila on charges of Manichaeism, immorality, and magic. As Augustine told it, visitors from the imperial court at Trier arrived, inspiring him with stories of ascetic heroism, but apparently failing to mention the event that had just occurred there, and about which the whole Christian world was talking at the time. That Augustine had heard nothing of it is, quite simply, incredible. Priscillian had first faced the charges against him before an episcopal commission, with which he refused to cooperate.[48] He then appealed to the emperor Maximus at Trier. The case thus became a civil matter, and brought into effect the recently enacted anti-Manichaean legislation—the same legislation under which Augustine's name had been included in a list of Manichaeans condemned in absentia by the governor of Africa. News of that condemnation would have reached him only a matter of weeks before he met the visitors from Trier. Priscillian's conviction and execution sent a chill throughout the West. But Augustine made no mention of it in recounting that time. The reader of *Confessions* is to believe that he was totally wrapped up in his own psychological crisis. He could be affected by stories of courtiers becoming ascetics, but not of ascetics being accused of Manichaeism. The close parallel of Priscillian's

case to Augustine's situation is undeniable; his silence on it, therefore, may be telling. Priscillian was the name he dare not speak before the episcopal commission.

Augustine explicitly noted that questions had or might be raised about the truth of his conversion in early August, since he continued to serve in his post for nearly a month. "It may be that someone among your servants, my brethren in the faith, will judge that I sinned in this matter by allowing myself to remain even for an hour in a professorial chair of lying, once my heart was fully intent on your service. I will not argue. But have you not pardoned this sin, most merciful Lord, along with the rest of my hideous, dismal sins, in the water of baptism, and forgiven me?" (*Conf* 9.2.4). Such a charge could only arise in the wake of a claim by Augustine that he had been converted several weeks before, and that it was this conversion that had motivated his departure from Milan. It was essential that he place his conversion at that time and in the role of chief motivator in order to turn away suspicions that his actions had instead been motivated by his fear of the repercussions of the sentence passed against him in Carthage. He admitted, after all, that the dramatic events in the Catholic community of Milan as late as June 386 had left him completely unmoved (*Conf* 9.7.16), as would have been evident to those who knew him at the time. Yet he claimed that only a little more than a month later he had suddenly found the Catholic faith privately, secretly. Where was the proof in observations others might have made of him at the time? With consummate rhetorical skill, Augustine turned the potential question about the lack of outward signs of a change, and the problem of his continuation in his post, into a pious confession that distracted his audience from the real issue. By "confessing" his sin in remaining in his chair of rhetoric, he disarmed the use of that fact as evidence that no "conversion" had yet taken place at the time. Augustine made this set of events conform to the same model used throughout the narrative: he had already become something in his thinking (*cogitatu*) long before he became it publicly in deed (*factum*, *Conf* 9.4.7).

Indeed, Augustine had not informed the city council or the court of his retirement even after the vacation started. Why did he wait until the end of vacation to inform them he would not be returning to his duties? His own compositions from the time suggest that he was unsure of the outcome of his vacation retreat, seeking to resolve certain doubts he had. But none of this is acknowledged in *Confessions*. With the end of the vacation, a decision was forced upon him. He wrote to tender his resignation, suggesting in

Confessions that he gave as his reasons that "I had made up my mind to give myself to [God's] service, and in any case I was unequal to that profession now that I had difficulty in breathing and pains in the chest" (*Conf* 9.5.13). Had he really mentioned his decision to enter God's service in his letter, or was he claiming that as an unspoken motivation? His wording is ambiguous. He also wrote to Ambrose, "notifying him of my past errors and present intention (*pristinos errores meos et praesens votum meum*), and asking his advice as to which of [God's] books in particular I ought to read, the better to prepare myself for so great a grace and render me more fit to receive it" (*Conf* 9.5.13). Whether he stated in this latter letter his intention to be baptized the following spring remains unclear. Perhaps he said no more than that he wished to work toward preparation for baptism. What was essential in any such letter at the time, under the shadow of the warrant for his arrest issued back in Africa, was to abjure Manichaeism as he would have before a court, in order to create the grounds for clemency. Augustine had made an astute move in combining this with a request for the bishop's mentorship in the new faith. Remarkable for the historian is the fact that, although Augustine's collected correspondence begins with other letters written in the autumn of 386 from Cassiciacum, it includes neither of these crucial letters ostensibly declaring Augustine's dramatic change of life and career. It would seem to require a strenuous apologetic effort for us not to conclude that they were phrased in ways inconsistent with how Augustine later wanted these events and himself portrayed. As for the timing of his return to Milan, Augustine made no mention in *Confessions* of the general amnesty (the *vota publica* of Theodosius in honor of his son Arcadius in January 387) that freed him of any anxiety over his legal status and allowed him to emerge from what his accusers seem to have considered his country hideaway. Instead, he asserted, his move had been timed according to the need to enter the names of himself, Alypius, and Adeodatus into the lists for baptism (*Conf* 9.6.14).

Augustine likewise had to come to terms with his earlier writings. He appears defensive about the evidence afforded by the works he produced in Cassiciacum, acknowledging their shortcomings from the hindsight of a more pious, more expressly "Catholic" standard (*Conf* 9.4.7). He rather ungallantly passed part of the blame on to Alypius's editorial suggestions. By completing his narrative at Ostia in 387, he avoided having similarly to account for the predominantly philosophical focus of the writings that continued to come from his pen in the years to follow, and the rather under-developed mastery of Nicene orthodoxy reflected in them. Instead, he mined this material for a

plausible account of the progress of his thought *before* and *toward* conversion, giving the impression that conversion came with the already fully formed grasp of Nicene truth he displayed a decade later. This strategic rewriting of his intellectual development has fooled not a few modern biographers.

Finally, one cannot help wondering if Augustine brandished his mother in *Confessions* as a defensive stick with which to ward off the attacks of his critics. Augustine dwelt at length on Monnica's piety and devotion and confessed his own unworthiness of such a mother, at the same time explicitly suggesting that her special relationship with God formed part of the explanatory context of his own destiny (*Conf* 5.9.17 - 5.10.18), and that her dying commendation of him offered a seal of approval (*Conf* 9.11.27ff.). In a sense, to question Augustine would be to bad-mouth Monnica's boy. He wrapped himself in her mantle, and told his own story as one of reform from egotistical intellectual to simple piety in emulation of hers. He indeed may have come to appreciate the worthiness of a simpler faith like that of his mother, but it was never going to be for him. He remained an inquisitive intellectual out of place among those comfortable with pious platitudes. Yet in *Confessions* he repeatedly contrasted the tardiness of his own conversion, despite his intellectual gifts, with the successful virtue of the uneducated (*indocti*; e.g., *Conf* 8.8.19). He could not possibly have chosen a better way to meet not just the specific charges, but the underlying attitude of suspicion about him, among the older bishops of the African Catholic Church.

Yet the master rhetorical stroke of Augustine's defense was his decision to present his story in terms of God's providence. After all, why inquire into Augustine's motives at all when the result had been his conversion? Clearly, no matter appearances, no matter even his own intentions at the time, or those of others around him, God was directing his steps (*Conf* 5.7.13–5.8.14). He could attribute, for instance, his suspicious sudden departure from Africa in the wake of new severe anti-Manichaean legislation to divine providence: "It was, then, by your guidance that I was persuaded to go to Rome" (*Conf.* 5.8.14). "You knew all along, O God, the real reason why I left to seek a different country, but you did not reveal it to me" (*Conf* 5.8.15). This reemergence of providence to such a prominent place in Augustine's rhetoric, after it had disappeared almost entirely following his very first post-conversion writings, has been linked quite naturally in the minds of many modern researchers to Augustine's discovery of grace and predestination in his response to Simplician in 397 . But a closer reading of his use of the theme of providence in *Confessions* complicates that seemingly obvious connection. Augustine's prior

inclination toward the idea of providence had been temporarily submerged by his strategic stress on a free- will answer to Manichaean fatalism. Yet it started to appear again in his writings around 394 and 395, as he began to qualify his absolute free will position with a more nuanced account of God's call, operating through a variety of environmental influences in an individual's life. It is this "middle-period" theory that operates in many of the providence passages in *Confessions*. This connection of God's call to a broader theme of providence in *Confessions*, therefore, perhaps should be seen as an essential *background* to Augustine's more developed concept of grace and predestination, rather than being a reflection of the latter.

The Performed Self

"The *Confessions* are not to be read merely as a look back at Augustine's spiritual development; rather the text itself is an essential stage in that development."[49] This observation by James O'Donnell would apply just as well to the account of himself that Augustine was forced by circumstances to deliver to his superiors in the African Catholic Church, as it does to the finished *Confessions* composed under the more generous conditions of personal triumph in the years to come. Recovering the adverse conditions in which he had to explain himself and tell a portion of his story allows us to recognize one aspect of the *motivated* nature of that story. In identifying elements of apology and defense in *Confessions*, we access an underlying layer of narrativization in which Augustine offers a selective and *strategic* account of himself. Yet, once Augustine had made such a strategic presentation of self, he had publicly committed himself to it as truth, as an accurate description of a particular selfhood he was claiming to embody. In the dramatic context of a statement to the episcopal commission, he reaffirmed his apostasy from Manichaeism and avowed anew his allegiance to the Catholic Church more publicly, more formally, and with higher stakes than at any time since his baptism. In a manner, the event marks a rebaptism of sorts, as he distanced himself more than before from his past rhetorical profession, and reimagined his path in life as leading to the episcopal calling under scrutiny. He had come a long way from the tears shed when he was forced into the priesthood.

There is a sense, then, in which in coming to talk of himself this way, he came to be this way, at least before the public gaze. He would be expected to manifest behavior consistent with the account he had given of himself, and

this expectation formed a constraining force on his life. The easiest, most efficient way to ensure consistent performance of such expectations is to internalize the characteristics one is committed to display—for Augustine to believe that he was what he had said he was. To the degree that he convinced himself that he had told the truth, he would be inclined to retain this version of himself as an internal portrait that determined his motivations and priorities in his future conduct. This combination of external and internal articulations of power shaped and developed what we conventionally call Augustine's self.

From his recent efforts to interpret Paul, Augustine was able to appropriate the imagery of conflicted wills as a justification of his delay in becoming a "Catholic" within the paradigm of the inveterate sinner that would have been appreciated by Megalius and other "old-school" Catholics. At one and the same time Augustine could confess his past character in the accepted idiom of the Catholic Church, and take control of the key dualistic passages cited by Fortunatus and the other Manichaeans. He deployed those passages (e.g., *Conf* 8.5.10–12) within the paradigm of habit, and situated himself on both sides of his inner division. By attending to Paul's own use of "old" and "new," he gave an arguably better interpretation of the two sides as representing the old self habituated to sin and the new redeemed self emerging. Paul's own rhetoric suggested that these two selves overlap in existence, thus giving the impression of being two separate entities. Augustine understood how the Manichaeans could be misled by this impression, but he had now found the true understanding of the human predicament.

Augustine employed the construct of the new man gradually displacing the old man as the largely unspoken undergirding of his account. Intrinsic to his confessional response to the accusations against him was his acknowledgment of a negative former self, which by the standard trope of conversion entailed no culpability for the positive present self. Conversion narratives model this former self teleologically, as the problematic to which the converted self serves as answer. If Platonism offered a compelling world view, then what it chose to answer must have been the questions the young Augustine was asking. If the Catholic Church provided moral discipline, then this must have been what the young Augustine lacked. His time as a Manichaean must serve as a manifestation of his error and sinfulness, rather than part of his intellectual development, because his current faith constructed conversion as a reversal of values and rejection of prior identity, rather than as a progressive step on the basis of past experiences. Of course, an Augustine more boldly frank

and less consistent than his rhetorical program occasionally stepped forward as narrator, offering the nuances and self-reflective complications that make *Confessions* great literature, instead of a tedious string of pieties. By painting a not altogether unsympathetic portrait of his younger self as a man at least of good intentions and hunger for truth, he asked for understanding of his mistakes and his struggle to let that former self go.

As we have seen, Augustine's overarching strategy for dealing with the inconvenient facts of his actions in leaving Africa and during his time away entailed separating the trajectories of his inner "new man" and his outer "old man," like some sort of quantum double-image. While careful to retain identification with and responsibility for both, he made clear that only the story of his inner self had relevance for assessing his standing with God. By issuing this "manifesto of the inner world,"[50] Augustine was placing himself beyond any human judgment. Because he scrutinized his past feelings with "ferocious honesty,"[51] he confessed all that he believed mattered in the eyes of God. The accidents of external circumstances or the accommodation of the necessary evils of public life are *adiaphora* on the spiritual plane. What was true about himself was hidden within, known only to himself and God—and without doubt known better to God than to himself. His enemies could cast whatever accusations they wished against him. God knew the truth of his character and being, and only God judged who would be worthy of salvation. Augustine would not lower himself to the truths of the external world, or to its petty concerns of what he had done, when, and under what momentary motivation, which may have been unclear even to himself. It was enough to acknowledge that in a given instance his affections and intentions had not been focused on God. Which of the many possible inappropriate affections may have been the object of his misguided will was a trivial point, at best. They were largely interchangeable and even somewhat muddled in the condition of self-disarray they reflected. The truth of himself could not be contained within any such a moment, anyway, but could only be revealed within a narrative with a prescribed tendency and end. What might appear to be missteps or mistakes or errors could be part of God's inscrutable plan for advancing the soul and revealing its always inherent true destiny. For an individual life as for history, the trajectory that has a future holds greater interest than the myriad little details that tend nowhere.

Yet declaring himself to have recognizably arrived at that future came with a cost. To prove his break with his past Manichaean self, Augustine found it necessary to telescope his development in his first decade as a Nicene

Christian into a single point of recreation, and to pretend a static identity maintained ever since perfectly conformed to the model of selfhood approved within the Church. Augustine's repeated *mea culpas* in his confessional speech ring the changes on that favored model of the "Catholic" self. The entire text amounts to an illocutionary avowal of being the person represented there. Henceforth, Augustine had to be that person. Others would hold him to it, and no doubt he felt morally obligated to hold himself to it. His entire self-concept was at stake. It would be unreasonable for others—even the modern historian—to insist that the motives Augustine gave for his actions could not possibly have been present, as *other* motives, along with those derived from his Manichaean commitment or its aftermath that he now chose to downplay. So in offering them Augustine presented truth, even if not the whole truth. Likewise, he could rationalize his omissions by the fact that they did not have the same teleological significance as that which he included. In believing himself to have presented truth, therefore, Augustine became the person whose story he told. He wrote over any former past selves with a new past self, the truthfulness of which depended entirely on its consistency with the self Augustine now was.

As a result of Augustine's masterful self-defense, the episcopal commission exonerated him of Megalius's charges, which the primate himself consequently withdrew formally, issuing an apology to Augustine. Megalius ordained Augustine as coadjutor bishop of Hippo in early 396. These positive outcomes depended on the belief of the bishops in Augustine's account of himself, and his exoneration and promotion were issued on the condition of the truthfulness of that account. Megalius and the other bishops bought into a particular self-presentation Augustine had put forward; and insofar as they represented his chosen community, the chosen locus of his self-identity, he would take their perspective as normative for himself. He would want to live up to the image of himself he had sold them. As a bishop, Augustine was now subject to even higher visibility and greater responsibility to represent in his own person the ideals and values of the Catholic Church. Now very much a public figure, he lived in a permanent and continuous condition of performing Christianness, far beyond anything he had committed himself to by his baptism. He no longer had the luxury of being an ordinary Christian who happened to have extraordinary rhetorical gifts. His options of action narrowed as the clarity of his identity coalesced. He now occupied the paradigmatic place of extraordinary Christian, one of the religious *virtuosi* expected

to set the tone and standard of the "typical" (meaning anything but typical in the usual sense of the word) Christian.

Augustine could have settled down in this new persona handed down to him with the norms of piety familiar to someone like Megalius, composing moral and exegetical sermons, ignoring the Manichaeans now safely confined to his past, and standing his ground on the rather strong coordination of ideas he had already reached. This "middle-period" system of Augustine centered on his belief in an inner self, endowed with a free will yet compromised by habit, that, in turning with faith to God, received the latter's aid to a restored intimacy with the divine. He could have lived out his life as an exemplar of this system.

But this construct of the self and its odyssey began to unravel almost immediately after Augustine had successfully formulated and presented it as the underlying pattern of his own story. He chose to continue engaging with Manichaeism in an effort to win over more of his former coreligionists. Moreover, no sooner had he received ordination than he received a congratulatory letter from his old Milanese mentor Simplician, asking him as a proven anti-Manichaean polemicist to redeem certain passages of Paul from rather convincing Manichaean readings (as well as Old Testament passages from their criticisms). The task proved to be the undoing of Augustine's working system of "Catholic" truth, and of his hard-earned understanding of exactly who he was and how he came to be who he was. He had not reached the end of his story or a definitive truth about himself after all.

CHAPTER 8

Discoveries

AFFIRMED IN THE authenticity of his conversion and conformity, and ordained bishop of Hippo by Megalius himself, Augustine now occupied a place of authority within the Catholic Church, making him both more visible to assessments of conformity and more influential in defining what should count as conformity. A letter of congratulations arrived the following summer from the Milanese priest Simplician, whom Augustine would describe in *Confessions* as someone with whom he had consulted on spiritual matters in Milan prior to his conversion. Simplician expressed appreciation of Augustine's writings (*Ep* 37.1–2), which would have been primarily his anti-Manichaean works, and posed a set of exegetical questions on which he welcomed his opinion (*Ep* 37.3). In reply Augustine wrote *On Various Questions to Simplician* (*De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum*).[1] Why did Simplician, not only Augustine's senior, but in many respects his catechizer, write to Augustine for help with the interpretation of the Bible? A quick look at the questions he asks shows that they all relate in some way to Manichaean interpretation of the New Testament, or criticism of the Old Testament.[2] It would seem, then, that Simplician was turning to Augustine not so much as an expert in the Bible, as an authority on Manichaeism. Put more finely, he had seen some of Augustine's earlier work which showed an informed and effective response to Manichaeism. Could he provide equally useful exegetical answers where the Bible appeared to play into Manichaean hands?

Simplician's two questions on passages from Paul struck right at the heart of Augustine's ongoing struggle to reclaim Paul for a (now qualified) free-will position. We know that Simplician had sought a commentary or at

least sermons on the Pauline epistles from Ambrose; but in that desire he was frustrated, for Ambrose was not ashamed to proof-text Paul liberally while assiduously avoiding the difficulties of the Apostle.[3] Augustine, as an informed former Manichaean, was in the best position to rescue Paul from Manichaean interpretations that challenged Ambrose's free will position.[4] Simplician may have included with his letter a copy of Ambrose's *De Iacob*, in which the bishop had belatedly addressed Paul's rhetoric of a debilitated capacity to resist sin.[5] Yet Ambrose showed no more concern with consistency in this work than he did in his others, contentedly paraphrasing Paul while seemingly oblivious of the cost to his own free will position. Perhaps Simplician hoped for a better defense of that position from Augustine.

Augustine composed his replies over the winter of 396–397, and sent them with the reopening of sea travel the following spring.[6] Numerous modern commentators—and already Augustine himself later in life—have noted that *To Simplician* vividly captures in text a revolution in Augustine's understanding of Paul[7]—"a dazzling exegetical *volte-face*"[8]—entailing a collapse not only of the free will paradigm to which he had been converted, but also of the synergistic model of salvation by faith he had laboriously constructed in the years following his debate with Fortunatus. In his own characterization of what happened, "I strove on behalf of the free choice of the human will, but God's grace conquered" (*Retr* 2.1). The importance of this conquest of grace for the subject of Augustine's engagement with Manichaeism lies in the fact that Manichaeans provided the only precedent for such a reading of Paul in Augustine's world.

Defender of the Faith

By now Augustine's exegesis of Romans 7 was a matter of reflex. When the passage came up, he inevitably saw his task in light of the Manichaean challenge: defense of the Law against Paul's apparent harsh characterization, and of free will against his rhetoric of servitude to sin. Accordingly, *To Simplician* 1.1, on this section of Romans, broke little new ground, as Augustine dutifully reiterated an interpretation intended to safeguard Paul from Manichaean appropriation on these two points.

The Manichaeans took Paul's negative characterizations of the Law[9] at face value as a rejection of Old Testament values, while referring his positive remarks on the Law to the "Law of Christ."[10] The alternative exegetical

traditions adopted within the Catholic Church fared no better in finding a single referent for everything Paul had to say about the Law.[11] In his defense of the Law, Augustine showed his determination to reconcile all of Paul's characterizations of it within a single understanding of the way the Law functioned in God's plan for human salvation. Because Paul had just referred to being released from "the law of death," Augustine suggested, the Apostle wanted to qualify that language, and give credit to the Law in its role of providing the knowledge of sin, without itself supplying the ability to resist sin. For that reason, "It seems to me that the Apostle has put himself in the place of someone who is under the Law, whose words he speaks in his own person" in Rom 7:7–25 (*Simpl* 1.1.1).[12]

> This is why it must be understood that the Law was given not that sin might be instilled nor that it might be extirpated, but only that it might be made manifest. In this way it would make the human soul, seemingly secure in its innocence, guilty by the very manifestation of sin, inasmuch as sin could not be conquered apart from the grace of God, [the soul] would be turned by its uneasy awareness of guilt to a receptivity to grace. (*Simpl* 1.1.2)

For all intents and purposes, Augustine simply paraphrased the Donatist theologian Tyconius here. By supplying accurate knowledge of right and wrong, which is one of the prerequisites of a responsible will, the Law set the either/or of moral decision-making (*Simpl* 1.1.3–4). Sin is not literally dead without the Law and revived by its giving, as Paul seems to say, but rather not known to be sin without the Law and exposed by it (*Simpl* 1.1.4). "But a person uses the law badly if he does not submit to God with devout humility, so that the law may be fulfilled through grace" (*Simpl* 1.1.6). Grace remained for Augustine God's response and aid to an already repentant and faith-filled soul: the Law serves as God's universal call away from sin, providing the opportunity and preparing sinners to desire release from it, and by that desire elicit God's aid.

In facing the challenge posed to free will by Paul's language in Romans 7 and Manichaean use of it, Augustine offered in *To Simplician* a polished summary of the synergistic position he had worked out in the preceding years. Paul's description of a condition of apparent powerlessness does not refer to how God created humans. "For nothing remains of this first nature of humankind but the punishment of sin, through which mortality itself

has become a kind of second nature, and it is from this that the grace of the creator frees those who have submitted to him through faith" (*Simpl* 1.1.11). The reader observes first of all an increasingly abbreviated way of referring to Augustine's theory that a soul bearing individual guilt is bound to a correspondingly punitive body descended from that made mortal by the guilt of Adam and Eve. It is this *state* of the soul's connection to the mortal and recalcitrant body that constitutes the "second nature" of humankind. In this state, the individual can only exercise his or her will in turning to God in despair from moral disability, to which God responds with enabling power. "What in fact is left to free choice in this mortal life is not that a person may fulfill righteousness when he wants to, but that by suppliant piety he may turn to him by whose gift he may be enabled to fulfill it" (*Simpl* 1.1.14).[13] Despite the deep qualification and shrinkage of the will's freedom Augustine had come to accept, he still had not overturned his commitment to the essential role of free will that he had maintained since the time of his conversion; the ability of an individual to act in this world never had been of particular significance for assessing the virtuousness or sinfulness of the individual's internal free choices of will.

Augustine reiterated individual responsibility for forming the *habit* of sin, which he equated with the impression of an opposing force disabling the will postulated by Fortunatus and the Manichaeans. Human beings are not born with a disability of the will, he maintained, but acquire it in the course of their lives by the habit of not using the will correctly.[14] He still saw the constellation of human frailty associated with mortality as the only debilitating condition humans face at birth, which makes them vulnerable to falling into personal sin (cf. *Conf* 2.2.2; 5.9.16; 10.20.29; 13.20.28).[15] When Paul says that no good thing dwells in his flesh, he refers to a *condition* resulting from the combination of this "inherited mortality" with his personal "addiction to pleasure"—mortality being the penalty of Adam's "original sin,"[16] while addiction to pleasure resulted from the habit of repeated sinning (*Simpl* 1.1.10; cf. *LA* 3.20.55).

> With the former we are born into this life, while the latter we augment over the course of our lives. These two things, which we may call nature and habit, create a very strong and unconquerable covetousness once they have been joined together, which he refers to as "sin" and says dwells in his flesh—that is, possesses a certain sovereignty and rule, as it were. (*Simpl* 1.1.10)

To go farther and accept a congenital disability of the will itself would surrender too much to the Manichaeans, those who in Augustine's opinion do not rightly understand Paul's words when he says, "For to will the good is close at hand, but the doing of it is not," by which "he seems to be abolishing free choice."[17] Their error is manifest in that Paul clearly says, "To will is close at hand." So while the will remains free and active, the ability to carry out that will in action is lost as "the deserts of the original sin" (*Simpl* 1.1.11).

Supposedly, then, the soul is unified and reoriented enough *sub lege* to will the good consistently, even though it cannot carry it out in the actions of the punitive mortal body. Then what is the source of the will that does successfully move the body to *sinful* action, even while the soul or mind protests? Augustine argued that when Paul says, "I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate" (Rom 7:15), and "It is not I that do it, but the sin that dwells in me" (Rom 7:17), "He does not say this because he did not consent to committing sin," but is "drawn to do wrong under the mastery of covetousness and by the deceptive sweetness of forbidden sin, although he disapproves of this by reason of his knowledge of the law," and consents to the law's disapproval of it (*Simpl* 1.1.9). But which is it? Does he consent to the sin or to the law that disapproves of it? How can he do both? Presumably, he must consent for an action to be carried out, for there can be no action without the engagement of a will, and the only will available in the human, according to Augustine, is that of the single soul or mind. But when, then, does he disapprove? "He says 'It is no more I that do it' because he has been overcome. It is in fact desire that does it, to whose victory he surrenders" (*Simpl* 1.1.9).

Augustine teetered on the edge of falling into Manichaean characterizations of the human condition he had himself decried, and agreeing to see sinful behavior as coerced. He went so far as to insist that concupiscence *could not be resisted* when grace was not yet received (*Simpl* 1.1.3), so that the reader is asked to imagine that the soul can somehow simultaneously know something to be wrong and yet yield consent of the will to doing it, serving his appetites "like a bought slave" (*Simpl* 1.1.7). Such a condition could scarcely escape being characterized as a person acting *against his will*, which Augustine had sought to avoid since his conversion. "He who is not yet under grace does not do the good he wants but he does *the evil that he does not want*, thanks to the domination of covetousness, which is strengthened not only by the bond of mortality but also by the millstone of habit" (*Simpl* 1.1.11). But how can a person act against his or her will if the person's will is required for any action to occur? How can the soul be on both sides of a choice at the same

time? Augustine appears to have been cornered by the degree to which Paul's language reflected the experiential otherness of sinful desire and impulse on which Manichaeism drew in its theoretical explanation of evil. Did he not simply restate the Manichaean bifurcation of the human will in other terms, providing it with a fig-leaf of orthodoxy?[18]

To safeguard Paul for Nicene Christianity even while making a concession to the sort of human experience highlighted by Manichaeism, Augustine chose to understand the otherness of sinful drives as the result of an alienation and fragmentation of an originally unified self, rather than in the Manichaean manner as the discovery within the apparent self of the presence of an alien other. Nothing in his non-Manichaean sources offered this degree of engagement with the introspective element in Paul's discussion of human sinfulness. Augustine identified signs of this fragmentation of self in people's experience of guilt and self-condemnation (*Simpl* 1.1.12). By emphasizing the fragmentation of the self, he could speak of a person—who is implicitly identified with the will itself—being "overcome" by something else, which is yet nothing else than another part of the person. "Once having identified both wills as his own," William Babcock notes, "Augustine can take over the very Pauline verses that Fortunatus had cited against him and can deflect their Manichaean force by embedding them in a new rendering of the human experience of inner conflict and of the irresistible drag of misdirected desire."[19] The weakness of this reading of Paul comes from the latter's insistence that he—*tout court*—wills the good, and that the blame lies not with him but with sin and the body. The Manichaeans found in Paul's words, "in me, that is, in my flesh," the beginnings of discernment by which one learns to separate one's true identity from its false identification with the flesh.

Augustine thus faced a seemingly insurmountable dilemma. The more he worked with Paul's language, the harder it was for him to impose on it the sort of freely willed responsibility by which the Nicene tradition had come to define itself over against Manichaeism. Paul's location of sinful impulse itself outside his conscious self, along with his repeated declarations of innocence, resisted even Augustine's modifications of the standard Nicene position. He had come face to face with genuine elements and themes of the Christian tradition that Manichaeism had carried forward more energetically—themes of humanity caught in the middle of battles on a cosmic scale between good and evil, overpowered by the enemy, crying out for rescue from powerful and seductive forces of evil external to the self, but invasive of the self's bodily existence. Just as Augustine had sought to support cosmic monism against the

Manichaean dualist metaphysic, so he attempted to assert a self that could only be its own enemy against the Manichaean dualist explanation of the incoherence and inexplicability of a self that does what it does not want to do.

Losing the Will

Something dramatic happened to Augustine as he sought to fulfill Simplician's request for a careful exposition of Romans 7 and 9 that would decisively reclaim Paul from Manichaean claims on him. His own account of writing *To Simplician* portrays the project as a struggle; and the reader—irritated by Augustine's repeated vacillations in the work—comes away with no doubt that it was. "Kinetic, repetitious, fatiguingly dialectical," it provides an opportunity, Paula Fredriksen suggests, "to overhear Augustine as he (literally) thinks out loud."[20] Why did he not merely read into Romans 9 the same position he had already worked out on Romans 7, as he had in *Propositions on Romans*?[21] Why did he even think to reconsider the synergistic model of salvation at which he had so recently arrived? What in his circumstance prompted this change in his position?[22] Whatever the prompt, he determined that a mere repetition of the ideas he had worked out just a couple of years before would be inadequate. As he attempted to line up all of Paul's statements into a coherent position, the old ground slipped out from under his feet, and he found himself staring at a new Paul: the apostle of grace.[23]

Just as with his sudden qualification of free will overnight in his debate with Fortunatus, so his relinquishment of human initiative altogether seems to have occurred "overnight" between the first and second questions of *To Simplician*. In his answer to the first question, while the rhetoric of the will's disability was somewhat heightened in comparison to his earlier writings, he still maintained the same basic model, involving an individual's response of faith to God's call, meriting God's aid. In his answer to the second question, however, we witness a collapse of coherence in this model, and the first emergence of a new understanding. In William Babcock's opinion, "Augustine produced a new interpretation which was clearly shaped in deliberate opposition to his own previous understanding of Paul's text. It amounts to a systematic rejection of the position which he himself had occupied, shattering all his efforts to sustain even the most minimal correlation between God's grace and man's moral worth."[24]

Frequently noted in previous studies of Augustine, his sudden shift in

thinking has been attributed variously to his own conversion experience or darkening introspection, to the text of Paul itself forcing certain readings upon him, or to the inexorable logic of his commitment to divine omnipotence. Modern researchers have shown little inclination to take up the charges of Manichaean influence made by several of Augustine's own contemporaries. Yet that negative assessment of Manichaean influence has relied at least in part on inadequate sources on and understanding of the Manichaean teaching on grace. It remains undeniable, however that, with *To Simplician*, Augustine entered exegetical waters uncharted by any previous Catholic or Donatist commentator, even Tyconius,[25] and passed out of the Christian mainstream. This dearth of plausible antecedents known to researchers, combined with their high regard for Augustine's originality, have led them by default to see Augustine's shift in position largely in isolation from what was going on around him. If either his own self-examination or the self-contained logic of his premises supplied the principal force behind his transformation in the mid-390s, it is astonishing that such personal and private factors led him closer in key respects to Manichaean positions at precisely the time his public life was devoted almost exclusively to combating them, and within the very works through which he conducted that combat.

Two problems beset the remaining commonplace suggestion that Augustine simply discovered what Paul meant. First, such a view tends to imply that Augustine's interpretation of Paul was somehow inevitable to a person reading the Apostle. Paula Fredriksen effectively responds to this assumption.

> Historians will point to Augustine's constant reading of the epistles in these years as an implicit explanation for Augustine's radical new theology of grace as if Paul's augustinianism were there all along, waiting for Augustine, finally, to perceive it. . . . Christian theologians had been reading them for centuries; and Latin commentators in particular, in this century in particular—Pelagius not least of all—turned frequently to Paul; but no one had ever formulated an interpretation like the one Augustine offered in 396. Nor, until 396, did Augustine.[26]

We can see the cogency of this objection in the two key Pauline sentences that would become almost the mottos of the new doctrine of grace: "What do you have that you have not received?" and "By grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from you, but is the gift of God, not because of works."

Neither impels the reading Augustine would come to give it. The first rests perfectly within emphases Augustine had long maintained, connected to the idea of creation *ex nihilo*; any virtues or abilities one possesses come ultimately from God, even if it falls to the individual to use them. The second very solidly agrees with the synergistic model of salvation Augustine had espoused, by which an attitude of faith alone remains within the individual's power, which God in his grace takes as sufficient to warrant salvation. For reasons such as this, William Babcock has seconded Fredriksen's point.

> Simply to point to Augustine's repeated reading of Paul between 394 and 396, however, is not enough to explain the extraordinary shift in Augustine's views that took place during that period: the break with the classical model of self-improvement and moral freedom, the invention of a new Paul. . . . To account for Augustine's break with the classical tradition, it is not enough merely to observe that he read Paul. It was quite possible to read Paul carefully and well—as Origen and many others did—and still draw him into the classical scheme of things human and divine. Why was Paul, for Augustine, a port of exit from rather than an port of entry into the classical tradition?[27]

Babcock's question brings us to the second problem with the idea that Augustine simply read Paul carefully, namely, that it ignores the fact that Augustine was working in a particular context and circumstances. Since nearly everything he wrote in the years immediately before and after *To Simplician* involved an active engagement with Manichaeism, and since *To Simplician* itself was composed with an eye on Manichaean positions, we might plausibly propose that those Manichaean positions supplied Augustine with the primary focus and discussion partner of his ruminations on Paul. He had labored to defend a free-will reading of Paul against only one rival interpretation throughout the previous decade. That rival interpretation had highlighted particular passages of Paul that seemed to undercut free will and stress grace. Now Augustine adopted a new reading of Paul that shifted in the direction of, while not adopting wholesale, the position of his principal hermeneutical nemesis. One can scarcely deny, therefore, the circumstantial case that Augustine's "discovery" of grace owed something to the fact that he had been bombarded with such a reading of Paul for more than twenty years by the Manichaeans.[28]

Yet it is equally difficult to imagine that Augustine intended to

accommodate the Manichaean reading of Paul. Perhaps, then, as in the debate with Fortunatus, Augustine yielded ground to Manichaeism in order to find a more strongly defensible position from which to continue to oppose it. Indeed, far from offering merely an analogous situation, the debate with Fortunatus actually may have provided the direct impetus to much of Augustine's deliberations in *To Simplician* 1.2. Fortunatus had repeatedly charged that Augustine's free-will position was vulnerable to the same criticisms Augustine leveled against the Manichaean position, namely, that God failed to realize his desire to save all because of an opposing will he could not overpower. Just as some fragments of soul eluded liberation at the hands of the Manichaean God due to their corruption by contact with evil, so in the Nicene scenario some souls exercised their free will to reject God's call. In either case, something other than God provided the decisive factor in determining salvation. As expressed by Patout Burns, "the simple dependence of good willing on a vocation does not guarantee the divine sovereignty and control which Paul asserted. If a person can reject the call to believe, then the efficacy of divine mercy itself would be dependent upon autonomous human cooperation. Yet the text seems to exclude a human freedom which could frustrate the divine decision to be merciful and elect."[29] For Augustine, therefore, the issue became one of God's power. No one and nothing could resist God's will, and God could not be *responding* to something initiated by any other and be wholly free; these were in his eyes the very defects in the Manichaean view of God. Working back from Paul's characterization of human debility, Augustine found a rationale within his own Nicene view of God to account for and justify it.

It could not have been an easy move for Augustine to make, considering how severely it undercut the free will defense he had mounted against the Manichaeans for the previous decade. As we have seen, Augustine yielded no substantial ground on the familiar territory of Romans 7, where he had to contend with Manichaean claims that the passage stood in their favor. Instead, the new position arose out of a consideration of Romans 9, a passage that the Manichaeans neglected or faulted rather than claimed.[30] Patout Burns poses the challenges this text presented to Augustine: "Paul seemed to have asserted there that God selects and rejects human persons without regard to their prior actions, that salvation comes from God's mercy rather than from human willing and effort, and that God blocked Pharaoh's access to repentance. These propositions seemed to exclude that freedom which Augustine considered essential to the Christian refutation of Manichaean

determinism."[31] Even though it depicted human powerlessness and the role of grace, however, it did so in terms of an all-powerful, arbitrary, and even evil-producing God that Manichaeans could never accept. In Romans 9, then, Augustine did not face a rival positive use of Paul, but a critique of the passage's portrayal of God. In defending that image of God, I would suggest, Augustine could let go of free will within a larger theological context that was safely anti-Manichaean.

Augustine visibly struggled to understand what Paul meant in Romans 9: How can God have loved Jacob and hated Esau without any reference to their merits, without any legitimate guilt or innocence within themselves? Would this not make God the arbitrary despot Manichaeans found an easy target of attack? By his own later admission, he strove to retain some vestige of a free human will in answering these problems, just as he had a few years earlier when he examined Romans 9 in *Eighty-Three Diverse Questions* 68. Quoting Romans 9:16 ("It is not of him who wills nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy") had afforded Augustine in that earlier composition an opportunity to reiterate the active role of the individual's repentant good will, because God "does not show mercy except the will have preceded," even while noting that salvation still depends "on God who shows mercy and who comes in response to his prayers and anguish" (*DQ* 68.5).[32] Admittedly, "since no one can will unless urged on and called, whether inside where no man sees, or outside through the sound of the spoken word or through some visible signs, it follows that God produces in us even the willing itself." But Augustine still characterized this call as a general one to all, eliciting a freely given positive or negative response. A person can still take credit for responding, even if he or she cannot take credit for being called.

Reviewing Romans 9 again in *To Simplician,* Augustine at first simply repeated his established synergistic theory of salvation. Any talk of good deeds earning "the crown of righteousness" (2 Tim 4:7–8), Augustine maintained, always assumes the background of God's grace: both the "grace through faith" that enables a good will to act, so that "works do not precede grace but follow from it," and the prior grace of "some internal or external admonition" that elicits the free response of faith that makes a good will (*Simpl* 1.2.2). Within the terms of this synergistic model, Augustine appealed to God's foreknowledge: God could love Jacob and hate Esau even before they were born because he knew the kind of people they would respectively become by the action of their own free will (*Simpl* 1.2.4–5). Augustine took it as axiomatic that "No one is elected unless he is different from him who is rejected."

That difference was rooted in whether one believed or not, rather than in any external deed. But was the act of faith itself the basis of merit on which God decides a person's fate, or was faith itself something that God gives by grace? (*Simpl* 1.2.7). Faith, Augustine pointed out, does not arise spontaneously, but only as a response to God's call. So just as the grace of God's aid must precede any good works, so the grace of God's call must precede any good will. "No one believes who is not called. God calls in his mercy, and not as rewarding the merits of faith. The merits of faith follow his calling rather than precede it" (*Simpl* 1.2.7). God's grace is not only in the enabling of the good will turned to him with faith, but also in the call to which the will responds with faith to begin with.

As long as God calls everyone, the outcome of that call in salvation or damnation depends on the freely willed response of faith or lack of the same. In his earlier qualification of free will, Augustine had still insisted that justice demanded a correlation, however much hidden from ordinary judgment, between God's acts of grace and people's worthiness (e.g., *DQ* 68.4–5). In William Babcock's summary of this previous position,

> All men, without regard to merit, receive a divine call (*vocatio*), but not all respond to it. Those who do respond receive the further grace which enables them to love and to do the good; those who do not do not. Here then, in the human response to the divine call—a response which may remain "most hidden" to human eyes—there lies a form of human merit according to which the grace which transforms the will is either bestowed or withheld.[33]

Because the will has been disconnected from its effective ability to move the person to good action, the internal response of the will alone, and not any good deed, forms the basis of election (*DQ* 68.5; *PropRom*. 52.10, 52.12, 52.15, 53.7). God "has willed that the power to will should be both his and ours, his because he calls us, ours because we follow when called" (*Simpl* 1.2.10), that is, not as an automaton, but because we want to. Augustine recoiled from the injustice of election without reference to some merit in the mind and soul of the individual, insisting that "it is absurd to say that he made someone he was going to hate. . . . That he hated Esau is unjust unless the hatred was merited by injustice on Esau's part" (*Simpl* 1.2.8). Although no one can believe unless called, one cannot be made to believe by God against one's free will (*Simpl* 1.2.10). In the saying "Many are called but few chosen" (Mt 22:14), "the

chosen are those who have not despised him who calls, but have believed and followed him. There is no doubt that they believed willingly" (*Simpl* 1.2.10). So even if "It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that has mercy" (Rom 9:16), that does not mean that people need not both will and run. "Esau, then, was unwilling and did not run. Had he been willing and had he run, he would have obtained the help of God who by calling him would have given him the power both to will and to run had he not been reprobate by despising the calling" (*Simpl* 1.2.10).

Fortunatus had contended that Paul, properly read, expounded the idea of a divine call that did more than elicit a response of faith from a free will—a call that actually introduced awareness, agency, selfhood, and responsibility for the first time (*Fort* 21). Now Augustine began to ponder how he could resist such a view in light of Paul's own assertion, "It is God who works in you both to will and to do" (Phil 2:13). It would seem that with such a statement Paul "shows clearly that even a good will itself comes about in us through God's working (*ubi satis ostendit etiam ipsam bonam uoluntatem in nobis operante deo fieri*)" (*Simpl* 1.2.12). If that is the case, then what Paul says in Rom 9:16 ("It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that has mercy") "cannot be taken to mean simply that we cannot attain what we wish without the aid of God, but rather that without his calling we do not will (*sed ideo potius quia nisi eius uocatione non uolumus*)" (*Simpl* 1.2.12). With these words, Augustine appears to draw dangerously near to the Manichaean reading of Paul, according to which the individual human self does not even exist as a willing agent prior to the call and "second birth" performed on us by God. The Manichaeans taught that the soul, while retaining its essential goodness, had shattered into fragments too small to even retain a sense of selfhood. There is quite simply no self there to will. Augustine did not go quite so far, because he left unsaid but assumed that the soul does retain will and agency *directed toward sin*. What Augustine clearly meant was that "without his calling we do not will *the good*." For Augustine, the soul was not fragmented out of its selfhood, but defined and held together as an entity primarily by its sinfulness. It individuated from a greater whole by its fall, and become delineated and framed by its sinful selfhood.

Augustine did not surrender free will entirely, therefore, but only the freedom to will the good. From the very beginning of his explorations of the subject, he had looked to free will primarily for a forensic function, in order to establish the individual's guilt and responsibility for sin that Manichaeism seemed to deny. He could retain this value of free will for his system without

continuing to defend free will in its entirety. He could accept Paul's language of one's disability to will the good, so long as this did not entail denying one's freedom and ability to will sinfully, and so to bear responsibility for sin. He posed, therefore, a very one-sided and disadvantageous sort of freedom. But he could only do so by blinking twice at the words of Paul: in Romans 7, where Paul said it was not he who committed sin, but the sin that dwelt in his flesh, and in Romans 9, where Paul said that God caused certain people to will evil. Yet as the outcome of this selective reading of Paul, Augustine could hold God blameless for human sinfulness, while at the same time making him independent of any factors outside his absolute control in determining the fate of human beings. If God's election of one rather than another depends either on what the person wills or on foreknowledge of what the person would will in the future, that would be a kind of earned salvation for which the individual could take credit. Augustine started to look at the act of faith as a kind of work, too. If God can foresee that one will believe, how is that any different from foreseeing that one will do good works? Correspondingly, if God's prenatal hatred of Esau stemmed from his foreknowledge of Esau's negative response to his call, that still placed Esau's fate in his own hands, rather than God's.

Up to this point in his discussion, Augustine had not moved appreciably beyond his earlier reading of Romans 9 in *Eighty-Three Diverse Questions* 68. In his apparent new desire to purge his position of a level of synergism that offended against God's omnipotence, however, Augustine faced the task of overturning his previous readings of passages apparently favorable to the free-will position he had been promoting for the past decade, such as "Many are called but few chosen." "If this is true, and consequently not everyone who is called obeys the call, but has it in the power of his will not to obey, it could be said correctly that it is not of God who hath mercy, but of the man who wills and runs, for the mercy of him that calls is not sufficient unless the obedience of him who is called follows" (*Simpl* 1.2.13). If everyone must receive a call, in order to either accept it or reject it so that people may be differentiated into the saved and the damned, and God's call cannot be thwarted by any other force in the universe, then somehow God himself must issue the call in such a way that it will be necessarily rejected by some and necessarily accepted by others. "For the effectiveness of God's mercy cannot be in the power of man to frustrate." Therefore, "Those are chosen who are congruently (*congruenter*) called. Those who are not congruently called and do not obey their calling are not chosen. . . . although he calls many, he has mercy on those whom he calls

in a way suited to them so that they may follow" (*Simpl* 1.2.13). This idea of the congruent call represents the real innovation in Augustine's system in his reply to Simplician.[34] In it, we can see yet another way Augustine appropriated a concept from the Manichaeans and redeployed it in a manner that they would have considered reprehensible in its implications.

The Congruent Call

From where did Augustine derive this new radical teaching of the congruent call, by which he sought to reclaim Paul's language of grace within a Nicene position on God's omnipotent and providential control of the universe? It is possible to trace the development of some of the idea's underpinnings in Augustine's earlier work, i.e., in the notions that humans will in the direction of that which delights them, that God knows individual dispositions and what sort of motives will appeal to a given person, and that God ultimately controls whether certain conditions come someone's way or not.[35] Since he already believed that faith comes only in response to God's call,[36] it was only a matter of further emphasis for Augustine to conclude that God actually initiates the turn back toward him.[37] Augustine himself presented the idea as a set of logical steps from his earlier positions.

> We are commanded to live righteously, and the reward is set before us that we shall merit to live happily for ever. But who can live righteously and do good works unless he has been justified by faith? We are commanded to believe that we may receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and become able to do good works by love. But who can believe unless he is reached by some calling, by some testimony borne to the truth? Who has it in his power to have such a motive present to his mind that his will shall be influenced to believe? Who can welcome in his mind something which does not give him delight? Who has it in his power to ensure that something that delights him will turn up? (*Simpl* 1.2.21)

One might suppose, then, that Augustine's desire for logical consistency within his commitment to God's omnipotence, at some point would require him to abandon the notion that the outcome of anyone's salvation could be left to the uncertainties of his or her own will. Thus one might suggest that Augustine arrived at the idea of the congruent call through a logical development of

certain ideas of his own as he sought to perfect an anti-Manichaean position. But I regard such an account to be incomplete.

We must, first of all, carefully define Augustine's new position on the congruent call, in order to identify all of the relevant context of its formation. Patout Burns has cautioned against anachronistic readings of the congruent call in light of Augustine's later theory of internally operative grace. He argues that, at this point of his development, Augustine was simply filling in details between his belief that a person needs some sort of external admonition even to begin to seek the good, and his conviction that human willing is ineffective without divine aid.[38] With the congruent call, God does not move the will itself, but creates a circumstance in which the will responds via self-movement.[39] "Augustine carefully avoided an operative grace in the will which would have destroyed that freedom he had first asserted on neo-Platonic grounds and continued to defend against the Manichees."[40] Burns considers readings of *To Simplician* in light of the issues of the later Pelagian controversy, rather than in the context of his engagement with Manichaeism over the will's freedom, "fundamentally misguided" and prone to "severely distort Augustine's thought."[41]

To understand the congruent call as Augustine himself did at the time, we must recognize that he convinced himself that he had not rendered the soul into a passive automaton. People had gotten themselves into their sinful state, with all that it entailed, even if they were powerless to get themselves out of it. So the damnation of those denied the congruent call was perfectly just, even if determined by God. On the positive side, the soul had within it the capacity to respond—a volubility for faith, if you will—without which even God's congruent call would be in vain.[42] In accord with the standard assumptions of the time about how the mind consents to a presentation in order to generate action, Augustine contended, "The will itself, unless there be something which attracts and delights the soul, cannot in any way be moved. And that something of this sort should present itself is not within the power of man" (*Simpl* 1.2.22). The soul requires a prompting, a presentation, to which it can either assent or not; the will emerges only with this reaction. God makes use of the soul's created dispositions of attraction in reaching and motivating the soul's act of faith.[43] With the congruent call, God does not literally inject a good will into the sinner, but provides the sort of prompting that can evoke the potential good will present within the sinner. Patout Burns therefore considers Augustine's solution in *To Simplician* to have "maintained the integrity of the human will throughout the process of salvation"[44] by

emphasizing that God attracts the soul to faith through the latter's own predispositions. Yet, given that it is not possible for the congruent call to fail to elicit a response of faith, just as the noncongruent call cannot possibly achieve such a response, any talk of the will's freedom within the scenario appears problematic.

Identifying the antecedents of Augustine's new position in his prior ones, therefore, does not supply a sufficient account of what he said in *To Simplician*. The continuities discernible in Augustine's rhetoric only partially mitigate—and indeed may obscure—the dramatic reversal in his theory of salvation entailed by the idea of the congruent call. We must recognize that it was possible for Augustine to walk his free will position off a cliff. For a decade, he had been a partisan of a free will theory of human destiny, a theory that set the fundamental terms of his anthropology and theology. His entire anti-Manichaean argument depended on human responsibility—not just for falling into sin, but for climbing out of it—and the appeal of a God whose wish for everyone's salvation met no resistance other than a person's own willful rejection of it. Augustine had made several adjustments and modifications to the basic paradigm in the face of apparent counter-evidence in human experience and the language of scripture. But with the second question of *To Simplician* this support structure collapsed—or was deliberately dismantled[45]—as Augustine wrenched himself through a paradigm shift to a totally new model of salvation that denied any independent role to the human will in determining one's fate.[46] He subverted the position based on foreknowledge he had worked out just a year or two before in *Free Choice* book 3, namely, that God knows the future without causing it. Since God issues different calls to those to be saved and to be damned, no free response exists to be foreknown and judged. The congruent call is therefore causative, and so completely reshapes Augustine's position on God and humanity in a way that would color his system for the rest of his life.

The various ways God stage-manages the activation of the will do not, in the end, change the deterministic character of the congruent call. Until now Augustine had held that God calls universally, and every soul has the opportunity to respond. Augustine had not previously suggested that a positive response necessarily follows. On the contrary, he had based the entire economy of salvation and damnation on the open-endedness of the soul's response to the call. Now, however, he suggested that the call automatically produces a response—a positive one in the case of the congruent call, and a negative one in the case of the non-congruent call. In fact, then, the non-congruent call is

not really a call at all, but only a pretense of a call. Nor is the congruent call really a call, but an *activation* of the soul's will. It is impossible for the soul not to consent to the congruent call, just as it is impossible for the soul that receives a non-congruent call to have faith. Without the possibility of *choice*, the will is not free, but constrained.[47] One might say that, with the idea of congruent call, the human will still has a role to play, but it is not a free role.

Augustine makes the new scenario perfectly clear through the example of Paul himself, who was effectively called even though his will was turned completely against God (*Simpl* 1.2.22).[48] Gone is the actively yearning will *sub lege* of Augustine's reading of Romans 7, which finds in grace only an empowerment of a will already rightly oriented. Instead, the call initiates the very existence of a conscious good will, collapsing his *sub lege*/*sub gratia* distinction.[49] For if God gives the congruent call, to which the soul responds, what necessary instructional or disciplinary role is there for the Law? Thus, Augustine had discarded one of his most important anti-Manichaean arguments, by which he had sought to justify Catholic retention of the Old Testament. He retained the *sub lege* phase as, at best, a descriptor of the call in process, since it might entail an extended set of influences rather than an instantaneous conversion. But for all intents and purposes, he had laid the groundwork for a shift in how he read Paul in the direction of the existing Manichaean exegesis, by which the presence of a good will within Paul struggling against contrary impulses indicated that he is already in receipt of grace. In the words of William Babcock, "Augustine stands alone among the Latin interpreters of Paul in his discovery of a Pauline theology which cut the nerve of every human effort to achieve the good by striving for conformity with God."[50] We should qualify Babcock's remark with "alone among the *Catholic* Latin interpreters of Paul," since it is precisely among Manichaean interpreters such as Fortunatus and Faustus that we find a similar declaration of human dependence on grace that Augustine, for all his intention to counteract the Manichaean Paul, increasingly adopted.

In the immediate environment in which Augustine was working, only Manichaeism stood for this level of determinism in the reading of the Christian scriptural tradition. Augustine's Manichaean mentor Faustus spoke in terms of "two times of our nativity: one when nature brought us forth . . . binding us in the bonds of flesh, and the other when the truth regenerated us in our conversion from error and our entrance into faith. It is this second birth," he added, "of which Jesus speaks in the Gospel when he says, 'Unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God' (Jn 3:3)"

(*Faust* 24.1; cf. *Keph* 136). He related this new birth to the "new" or "inner" or "heavenly" man whom Paul contrasts to the "old" or "outer" or "earthly" man.[51] Denigrating biological birth, Faustus insisted that "it is when we are converted and brought to a better life that we are formed by God. . . . God makes us new men, and produces us in honor and purity" (*Faust* 24.1). Such statements might appear to be generic pieties were it not for our knowledge of the more specific views that underlie them. As a Manichaean, Augustine had been taught that

> The divine nature (in humans) is dead and Christ resuscitates it. It is sick and he heals it. It is forgetful and he brings it to remembrance. It is foolish and he teaches it. It is disturbed and he makes it whole again. It is conquered and captive and he sets it free. It is in poverty and need and he aids it. It has lost feeling and he quickens it. It is blinded and he illuminates it. . . . It is iniquitous and by his precepts he corrects it. . . . It is unbridled and he imposes the restraint of law. It is deformed and he reforms it. It is perverse and he puts it right. (*NB* 41; cf. *Conf* 7.2.3)

This language closely parallels the description of the activities of the Light *Nous* in Coptic *Kephalaia* from Augustine's time. "When the Light *Nous* comes," Mani instructed his disciples, "it enters into the gates of the body," referring to the sensory organs, and "by its wisdom and awe and diligence shall humble the guards who are set at the body's gates," so that "the gates that had been opened before to the parades of lust," now are shut to such sinful influences. In this way, the Light *Nous* begins to transform the individual, whose "heart and mind follow after" the change of sensory inputs. "So now, because the bolts to the body of the righteous person are in the hands of the Light *Nous* within, he is open [to receiving] all that is pleasing to God," which Mani proceeds to catalogue in the case of each sensory organ (*Keph* 56, 142.12ff.). Mani gave a similar description of a unilateral conquest of the person by the Light *Nous* in *Kephalaion* 38.

> [The Mind of] Light comes and finds the soul . . . [in] the bonds . . . [of] the limbs in the body. He loosens the mind [of the soul and releases] it from bone. He releases the thought [of the soul] from sinew. . . . He releases the insight of the soul from vein. . . . He loosens the counsel of the soul, and releases it from flesh. . . . He releases the consideration of the soul from skin. . . . This is how he shall release

> the limbs of the soul and make them free from the five limbs of sin. . . . He shall set right the limbs of the soul, form and purify them, and construct a New Man of them, a child of righteousness. [And] when [he] fashions and constructs and purifies the New Man, then he brings forth five great living limbs . . . and he places them in the limbs of the New Man. He places . . . love in the mind of the New Man. Also . . . faith he places [in] the thought [of the] New [Man] whom he purifies. His . . . [perfection he places] in the insight of the New Man. His . . . patience he places in his counsel. Also wisdom . . . in the consideration of the New Man. (Keph 38, 96.8–97.4)[52]

Mani called on his disciples to "behold the mightiness and the activity of the Light *Nous*, how vast he is over all the watch-districts of the body. He stays fast in his camp. He shuts off all deliberations of the body from the beguilements of sin. He limits them and distributes them out. He sets them down at his pleasure" (*Keph* 38, 100.1–6). Similarly, in *Kephalaion* 138, Mani explained the function of the Light *Nous* in direct relation to the moral responsibility of the soul, which sins because it "[dwells] in the body of sin" and "finds itself in mixture. Another, namely the Old Man, dwells with it in the [body] and causes it to stumble, in that it compels it to do [what] is not [proper]." It is the Light *Nous* that "bestows the consciousness (*p.r.p.mewe*) of its sin," and "through the consciousness of the *Nous* [it is able] to turn itself from the sin" (*Keph* 138, 341.1–9).

This distinctly Manichaean idea of a grace-bestowed birth of will and responsibility within a formerly wanton creature enslaved to evil had been enunciated in Augustine's presence by Fortunatus in August 392. Quoting John 15:22 ("If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin"), Fortunatus had argued that the soul bears the responsibility for sin only "after the warning of our savior and his sound teaching," upon which it undertakes the obligation to "separate itself from the contrary and hostile race and . . . adorn itself with purer realities" (*Fort* 21).[53] "Hence, it is perfectly plain," Fortunatus continued, "that repentance has been given after the savior's advent, and after this knowledge of things by which the soul can be restored to the kingdom of God from which it has gone forth, as if washed in a divine fountain of the filth and vices both of the whole world and of the bodies in which the same soul dwells" (*Fort* 21). Similarly, in his letter to Augustine, the Manichaean Secundinus would remind Augustine of this fundamental Manichaean teaching, that the soul, by being placed in the

midst of hostile spirits, "begins to be dragged off . . . and consents . . . for it is led by its mingling with the flesh, not by its own will (*non propria voluntate*). But if, after it becomes aware of itself (*cum se ipsam cognoverit*), it consents to evil and does not arm itself against the enemy, then it has sinned by its own will (*voluntate sua peccavit*)" (*EpSec* 2).

Other Nicene leaders besides Augustine noted and commented on the Manichaean teaching on the role of divine grace in initiating the awakening and salvation of the soul. John Chrysostom, in his *Homily on John* 46, reported Manichaean use of John 6:44 ("No one can come to me, unless the Father, who sent me, has drawn him"): "The Manichaeans pounce on this and say that we can do nothing of ourselves. . . . They say, 'If a man comes to him, what need has he of being drawn?' "[54] Similarly, Ephrem Syrus explained that the Manichaeans considered the "pollution of error" to be too great for the human soul to overcome, "unless sweet floods have come from their home a second time" (Ephrem, *Fifth Discourse*, cxviii) in the form of a "power whose nature cannot be overcome by the floods of evil" (Ephrem, *Fifth Discourse*, cii). The Platonic philosopher Alexander of Lycopolis had also complained that the Manichaean teaching on grace threatened to render all exhortation to self-improvement meaningless (Alexander of Lycopolis 16.23).[55] As Henri-Charles Puech explains, the Manichaeans thus diverged markedly from their opponents on the character and role of the will.

> Indeed, the Manichaeans do not construe freedom as a faculty but as a state, which is given or not—the state of the soul that has been freed from contact with the outside world. And they go much further. For them the soul is not free to choose evil if the Νοῦς shows it the good: for such freedom of choice would imply a contradiction within the luminous substance, which being intrinsically good can only incline to the good; and its ultimate consequence would be that God himself can do evil and cause the soul to do evil. But the soul does evil only reluctantly, when it is overpowered by the mixture; given back to its nature, it can only go the way of light. Consequently, the problem of salvation is not a matter of choice and will, but one of weakness or strength: the soul illumined by the Νοῦς resists the darkness; without the Νοῦς, when its consciousness is darkened or lost, it succumbs to the darkness. This makes it clear that redemption does not fundamentally depend on man alone, precisely because the will to redemption depends on the presence in the soul of the ἐνθύμησις

> to life, which is conferred by the Νοῦς. Redemption, then, depends entirely on the Νοῦς.[56]

Whether referred to as the "Light *Nous*" as it is in Greek and Coptic Manichaean literature, or simply as "Christ" as it is in Latin sources on the religion,[57] this "power and wisdom of God" initiates the formation of a functioning, conscious, and responsible self unilaterally, and creates the conditions in which the *enthumēsis* or counsel of life becomes the guiding motive of the human individual.

The counsel of life emerges out of a volubility to good inherent in the soul, which the Manichaeans characterized in terms of a *call* and *response* (in Coptic Manichaean texts, *tōhme* and *sōtme*).[58] God, through his divine and human agents, issues the call summoning the fallen and dispersed soul back to its divine source and home. When this call reaches a responsive element within each soul fragment, it elicits the response which, bonded to the call, forms the essential link that pulls the soul out of its slumbering condition into self-awareness of its nature and destiny, in this way beginning the process of its purification and ascent. Manichaean materialist views of the fragmentation of the soul treat the operations of this call and response at an almost molecular level, describing them as "given" or "appointed" to the "elements" by Jesus in his primordial role as the transhistorical inspirer of humanity.[59] "They are purifiers of the living soul, being helpers and bestowers of consciousness (*p.r.p.mewe*) for it, be it either in . . . the tree [i.e., plants] or in the creation of flesh" (*Keph* 122, 291.20–26). When activated within the human individual, they form the awakened incipient saved self, the "Youth" who mirrors the characteristics of Jesus,[60] otherwise spoken of in Paul's terms of the emergent "new man" within the believer. Despite the language of "call" and "response," there is nothing synergistic in the Manichaean paradigm of salvation. Because of its inherently good nature, the soul responds automatically to the call. In fact, only with its response does it pull together as a coherent soul with a will of its own, distinguished from and resistant to the evil impulses that harass it. Since there is no coherent soul prior to this positive response to the good, one cannot readily speak of a soul refusing the call, although this technicality is not always adhered to in moralizing exhortations in Manichaean literature.

Nevertheless, according to Manichaean teaching, the liberating call does not reach and awaken all souls at once, because souls exist in various conditions of fragmentation and mixture, constantly passing through the recycling process of life and death. The call achieves congruence with souls in different

historical circumstances and stages of spiritual evolution by means of a series of "apostles" sent by God in different times and regions of the earth. Each individual apostle, prior to his human mission, "chooses" a set of souls that will be incorporated within the "church" that apostle will create on earth, and in this way they are set on the active path of liberation.[61] The apostle, and the church which embodies the apostle after his death, transmits the call by which those preselected souls are gathered in.[62] The responsiveness of those who hear the call is determined by whether their souls are among those elected at the inception of a particular apostle's mission. In this way, the particular form of the universal call embodied in a specific apostle's mission will be congruent only with those souls preselected as the target audience. The separate missions of the different apostles are complementary to each other. There seems to be some underlying concept of a timely "ripening" of souls in different regions at different points in world history. Mani, as the last of the apostles, issues a universal call that will eventually encompass the whole planet, and complete the perfection of all souls that either were not suited to the earlier forms of the call, or who progressed only part of the way within those religions.

Augustine's concept of the congruent call, obviously, shares almost none of the specific details of the Manichaean construct, while reflecting largely the same understanding of human dependence on divine grace to initiate a predetermined response of faith. Because he implicitly treated the soul as something of a monad, and unique to humans, his concept of the call possessed nothing of the pantheistic chemistry of the Manichaean model. Yet one cannot say that for Augustine the call elicits the response of the whole soul or self. Just as the Manichaeans did, Augustine posited a set of carnal thoughts and sinful desires that resist the call and the soul's response to it. For the Manichaeans, these resistant forces do not belong to the soul, as demonstrated precisely by their unresponsiveness to the call. But Augustine considered all such resistances to be properties of the soul, in rebellion through the ingrained habit of sinful willfulness. The Manichaeans and Augustine thus described largely the same phenomenological and experiential condition of the soul, but interpreted that condition within their differing models of the limits of the soul within the conflicted person. Similarly, we can easily see a fundamental difference in the character of congruence as conceived respectively by Augustine and the Manichaeans. For the former, the congruence of God's call has everything to do with the irresistibility of God's power,

rather than with an inherent divine goodness in the soul. Nevertheless, both reached the same outcome in a predetermined responsiveness.

Yet another difference between the Manichaeans' congruent call and Augustine's presents the latter with a serious problem of injustice and even incoherence. As a Nicene Christian, Augustine had shed the Manichaean ideas of reincarnation and of a succession of revelations through history, with the result that his concept of the congruent call involves only the single mission of Christ. Consequently, the problem arises that the Christian call does not reach all of humanity in a single generation, and that countless generations of people in distant lands live and die before ever being afforded the congruent call. This puts his concept of the congruent call in danger of being an arbitrary selection of the saved and the damned, rather than, as in Manichaeism, a long-term strategy for reaching the totality of redeemable souls. Augustine's congruent call is neither *universally* nor *ultimately* effective, by the same standards he applied to fault the Manichaean God's failure to redeem all souls. In Augustine's alternative model, God *really* calls some sinners in his mercy, while *pretending* to call everyone. The call that goes out to those he has no intention of redeeming is not a *real* call at all, and this threatens the coherence of Augustine's construct. God could successfully call all if he wished,[63] since no one can be so hardened in character as to be unreachable by God's power. Rather, such hardening appears also to be an act of God, as Paul indicates with the example of Pharaoh (*Simpl* 1.2.15).

Augustine had clearly shown in his earlier works his objection to the idea that any soul God wished to redeem could be lost to him. He repeatedly attacked Manichaeism for limiting God's power in this crucial respect, epitomized in the image of God weeping over those parts of himself he could not retrieve from mixture with evil (*Keph* 58–59). With God defined foremost in terms of ultimate power, it followed by inexorable logic that any soul that is not saved is so because God wishes it to be damned. "The effectiveness of God's mercy cannot be in the power of man to frustrate" (*Simpl* 1.2.13). This assertion of God's ultimate power suddenly eclipsed Augustine's struggle to maintain the free-will position he had learned as a convert. God's willful damnation of the non-elect reflects a degree of mercilessness (*nolle misereri*, *Simpl* 1.2.15) that serves his overall providential governance of the universe. From the Manichaeans' side, it would have appeared that Augustine had ceased trying to refute their caricature of the powerful but not good god of the Nicene Christians, and embraced that figure as the necessary consequence

of a nondualist monotheism, or what I have previously termed a *monothelite* understanding of cosmic order: where only one will dominates the universe.

Augustine himself, it would seem, had difficulty accepting where his argument had led him. As we have seen, whenever he ran up against a dilemma, he characteristically restated the core premises limiting any possible solution. He made just such a telltale regrouping move at *Simpl* 1.2.16: God must be just in all that he does.[64] Any solution to the problem of differential election had to adhere to this principle, and therefore there had to be *something* in the person by which God decided on whom to have mercy. It could not be purely arbitrary. Therefore, he insisted, one must believe that "this belongs to a certain hidden equity that cannot be searched out by any human standard of measurement," even though the traces of God's order in creation entice people to search for an understanding of God's ways. It is only human pride that tries to scrutinize God's mercy and ask on what grounds he chooses whom he will forgive. "He decides who are not to be offered mercy by a standard of equity which is most secret (*occultissima*) and far removed from human powers of understanding. 'Inscrutable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out' (Rom 11:33)" (*Simpl* 1.2.16).[65]

Just as he had explored, at the end of the third book of *Free Choice*, a rationalization of human responsibility regardless of uncertainty over how the soul found itself in its current constraints, so Augustine offered, in *To Simplician*, an account of God's justice regardless of uncertainty over the criterion for election. Everyone shares a common sinfulness, resulting from the inability of each and every embodied soul to resist the inducements of mortal flesh.[66] Since all have sinned and no one deserves salvation, their complete abandonment by God would be perfectly just; even one person called out of billions would count as an act of mercy by God. Augustine asserted that "all men are a mass of sin (*massa peccati*)," building on—and significantly reconstruing—Paul's image of a lump of clay in Romans 9.[67] He had already coined the expression with reference to Rom 9:20–21 in *Eighty-Three Diverse Questions* 68.3.[68] Yet, in that earlier analysis of the Pauline passage, he had continued to speak of individuals rising out of the mass through their faith, and distinguished those whom God hardened because they were unrepentant in their sin (e.g., Pharaoh) from those he redeemed because they "made their lament to the one God" (e.g., the Israelites in captivity, *DQ* 68.4). Now, however, he argued that God acts justly with or without a distinction of faith between the saved and the damned. God creates differentiated humans for their respective roles in the universal order from the single lump of sin that has

come from Adam (*Simpl* 1.2.19).[69] In saying, "In Adam all die" (1 Cor 15:22), Paul made clear that, "all human beings . . . are a kind of single mass of sin owing a debt of punishment to the divine and loftiest justice," because from Adam "the origin of the offense against God spread throughout the whole human race."[70] Therefore, regardless of "whether it be exacted or forgiven, there is no injustice" (*Simpl* 1.2.16).

Augustine spoke as if, once God forgoes carrying out strict justice in universal punishment, anything else he might do escapes assessment in terms of justice. He could harden Pharaoh's heart and spark repentance in the Israelites as he pleased without this in any way representing a response to their differing character or attitudes. "Both the one whom he sustains and the one whom he abandons come from the same mass of sinners and, although both owe a debt of punishment, yet it is exacted from one and forgiven the other." If this arbitrary act of power is disturbing to our conscience (*sed si hoc mouet*), Augustine suggests, Paul's answer is: "O man, who are you that you talk back to God?" (Rom 9:20) (*Simpl* 1.2.17).[71] Augustine might well consider it talking back to God to point out, contrary to his reasoning, that if everyone is equally deserving of punishment, then selecting some for mercy and not others would be, in fact, unjust. As Paula Fredriksen observes, "The question is not, How is God just in condemning someone? Rather, in light of his scrupulously just condemnation of absolutely everybody, the question becomes, How is God righteous in *redeeming* anyone?"[72]

But when pushed to the limits of rational justification, Augustine could always opt to understand God's right to act within an authoritarian ethos, the premise of the absolute right of power, which did not have to answer to any consideration of equity or fairness. Humans and indeed all of creation possess no prior rights that God could violate, since they exist only out of God's gratuitous act of creation. Therefore, as Paul suggests with the analogy of the potter and his pots, God is free of any terms of justice in creating some for salvation and some for damnation from the beginning. The dangerous implication of Paul's analogy reached its full realization in Augustine's exposition: too much stress on humans as *creatures* reduced them to *objects*, mere things that God manipulates free of moral limit or assessment. Needless to say, one could scarcely formulate a view more antithetical to Manichaean conceptions of God's relation to human beings. For the latter, God was God precisely in the ultimate goodness of his relation to other beings. The Augustinian God, in fact, could not be good, because his absolute power and the thingness of everything else emptied the field of his action of any context of relatedness or

ethical significance. To a large degree, the metaphysical framework of Augustine's deliberations placed little importance on any such extrinsic goodness of God, since for it nothing that happened in created reality had any lasting significance, and the intrinsic goodness of God rested entirely in his being, not his doing.

Augustine also risked incoherence with his proposition that God creates those foreordained to be damned as object lessons for those foreordained to be saved. "In making them vessels of perdition," Augustine asserts, "he makes them for the correction of others" (*Simpl* 1.2.18). In other words, only some of those who appear to be human beings are actually human beings; others are simply the living dead.[73] At one and the same time he insisted that God does not create sin (which he hates) and that God created individuals to be the sole locus and agent of sin in an otherwise good creation. It appears incoherent, therefore, for Augustine to use this language of "being made for" alongside his claim that God did not create sin, hates sin, and that all alike are one in that sin. Did humans invent sin, or not? If they did, then how could God be said to make some to be vessels of perdition, rather than that they became such by their actions and invention of sin? Since everyone partook in that sin, how could Augustine say that God made only some to model the consequences of sin? What place remained even for pedagogy, if the ability to will in response to the call is given by God, and if individual humans already were destined either for salvation or damnation? Apparently, Augustine intended such instructive examples to serve as part of the providential coordination of external motivators that, along with other sorts of forces and influences, constitute the congruent call. Yet why does God need to go to all this elaborate trouble to formulate a congruent call if those who receive it were already created for salvation? As subjects of God's irresistible call, what need do they have to learn from the condemnation of others?

Augustine faced other complications of his proposal of the *massa peccati*, as well. God's creation of lives with different destinies from this lump largely replicated his original creation of humanity, in this way obviating the latter and raising the issue of whether he had to adjust his plan in reaction to sin. Inadvertently, Augustine had duplicated the kind of recalcitrant, sinful matter Manichaeism postulated behind creation. Yet, ironically, Augustine almost certainly meant for his mass of perdition to provide a stark contrast to the Manichaean vision of a glorious, heroic collective soul from which all individual souls derive. Further, by his emphasis on the re-creation of humanity de novo from the sinful mass, he echoed the Manichaean account of

the "second birth" by which God awakens souls to true consciousness and responsibility in place of their abortive first birth under the power of evil. Augustine had moved well beyond the external conditions that may limit a person's ability to act upon a willed intention. He had problematized the interior space once inhabited for him by the monadic soul. Through the voice of Paul he had come to recognize the sort of interior division, conflict, and disability that the Manichaeans pointed to as the signposts of the human condition prior to God's enmity-slaying, unifying call to selfhood.

Augustine himself resisted embracing the stark logic of his hypothetical *massa peccati* scenario, and proposed it—at least initially—only as a rhetorical defense of last resort against moral objections to the apparent arbitrariness of God's redemptive grace. He considered any such objections arrogant, and admitted that if he looked for signs of worthiness, he might judge based on such things as relative sinlessness, presence of a keen mind, and cultivation 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." Even heretics, he averred, could be found who live purely, have sharp intellects, and so forth. Human standards of value and worth apparently do not apply (*Simpl* 1.2.22). Yet, because arbitrariness is not rational, and God must act by reason, Augustine assumed that God's election of the saved has more behind it than God's whim. An arbitrary God would render theism itself pointless, since such a being would be indistinguishable from a godless cosmos. An arbitrary cosmos has no need of a theistic explanation. For Augustine, then, one must postulate that some valid reason exists by which God distinguishes, even while admitting that one can never know what it is.

Many summaries of Augustine's position in *To Simplician* overlook the rhetorical nature of his reduction of all humanity to an undifferentiated *massa peccati*, and underplay his retention of the idea of some hidden basis for God's choice of the saved. The former idea had a prominent future in his development of the concept of "original sin," while the latter faded from prominence. But these futures do not correspond to their relative centrality in Augustine's own commitments and self-presentation at the time he composed *To Simplician*. Even though the notion of an *occultissima merita* somewhat undercut his argument for God's complete determination of human fate, Augustine simply had not brought himself to utter consistency in his own positions. The inconsistency derived from Augustine's conflicted commitments to both God's omnipotence and his goodness, with the latter signifying for

Augustine action according to rational principles. He found himself caught in the dilemma of not wishing to declare God either irrationally arbitrary or dependent on people's relative virtue for his management of the cosmos. But logically he had to accept one consequence or the other.

Consequences

Augustine had brought to Africa in 388 the Platonic Christianity of Milan, complete with its Origenist emphasis on free will, and returned to Milan, in his answer to Simplician a decade later, an altered North African Christianity that in crucial respects was no longer recognizable as the faith to which he had been converted. Undoubtedly Simplician was asking for a solution to his exegetical problems consonant with the free-will position prevalent in Milan. His silence upon receiving Augustine's answer perhaps reflects his shock that Augustine chose to go in the opposite direction, toward a vitiation of the will practically indistinguishable to the inexpert eye from the Manichaean view. By his exegetical choice, Augustine set the stage for the Pelagian controversy, in which the Milanese form of Nicene faith reflected in his earlier works did battle with the later African version seen from *To Simplician* and *Confessions* onward.[74]

William Babcock has made the astute observation that the absolute free-will position Augustine espoused in his heady early days as a Nicene Christian was "not deeply embedded in his thought," and that his own sentiment leaned toward the fall of a preexistent soul into real intellectual and moral hardship in this world.[75] Free will offered a temporary, not wholly satisfactory, stop-gap along the trajectory of Augustine's thought on moral responsibility, which Babcock traces in a wide arc from Manichaeism, where the true self can do only good, to the self of the *Confessions* which can do only wrong.[76] "When Augustine relinquished his view (never deeply held) that persons can attain the good 'with perfect ease' simply by willing it, he also lost his argument for the voluntary character of human sin and the moral responsibility of the human sinner. On this score (but only on this score!), he had in effect dropped himself back into the position he had occupied as a Manichee." Babcock identifies this Manichaean outlook to which Augustine returned with his construction of a scenario that implicitly negated a role for the will in sinning *or* repentance, since the scenario he constructed as much foreordained the former as it does the latter. Babcock proposes that "it was just this inability that left Augustine vulnerable to a new (whether a Manichean

or, perhaps, a Tyconian), nonclassical Paul who would draw him away from, rather than confirm his place in, the classical philosophical tradition."[77]

Yet in limiting Augustine's renewed gravitation to Manichaeism to the latter's disconnect of people from the evil they do, Babcock has too easily credited Augustine's own polemical charge that this was the religion's characteristic flaw. He has overlooked a more significant approximation of Augustine to Manichaean views about how salvation works. Augustine himself appears to have been so fixated on his *metaphysical* objections to the intrinsically divine and good soul of Manichaeism that he may not have recognized the degree to which his antidote—emphasizing human dependence on the grace of God—replicated the religion's *soteriological* position. Patout Burns, noting that Augustine had previously "bent the Pauline assertions to his own prior understanding of human autonomy," proposes that with *To Simplician* he arrived at "his first recognition of a divine working which achieves its purpose without independent human consent, a grace which causes a person's assent and cooperation, an operative grace."[78] Augustine's own contemporaries pointed to this innovation in Augustine's discourse, among other things, as a Manichaean intrusion into the Nicene system of Christianity as it had existed when Augustine converted to it. In doing so, they appear to have been well informed—not necessarily about Augustine's motives or priorities, but about the contemporary larger field of discursive traditions within which what he said could be compared and situated. In addition to absorbing from Manichaeism the experiential proof of human moral disability, which began to color his rhetoric in the immediate aftermath of his debate with Fortunatus, he had found it necessary to embrace the Manichaean idea of necessary grace—not as a reward for faith nor even a call to all freely responded to, but as a deterministic election of the saved that provided the will for salvation itself.

Augustine's solutions to the issues of the day—the nature of God and of the soul, the means of salvation, the correct interpretation of scripture—came with tremendous costs, some theological, some personal.[79] Many of these solutions quite simply were not the Nicene positions into which he had been indoctrinated. The themes of human moral disability and the necessity of divine grace bore Manichaean connotations in Augustine's world that no one, he least of all, could ignore. However much he might break them out of that Manichaean setting and reset them within a Nicene frame of reference, he found it impossible to erase their pedigree. They resisted assimilation to their new matrix, and instead altered it to their own flavor.[80] Kam-lun Edwin

Lee has correctly concluded that "Put in historical context, Augustine's doctrine of predestination (and hence, soteriology) is not merely a distillation of Pauline theology"; rather, "the strong determinism (lacking in the teachings of Ambrose and other contemporary Church fathers) in Augustine's mature view of grace emerges out of his struggle with the Manichaean view of the cosmos."[81] Augustine's Christianity was not to be, after all, the Milanese faith to which he initially was converted, but a peculiar hybrid all his own. Above all else, he changed his understanding of the self, redirecting his gaze from the ideal monad of his aspirations of ascent to the shattered reality of fallen being. He had come to see the soul as a disjointed assemblage of isolated impulses, jerking one way and another in thoughtless reaction to every slightly titillating sensation. Apparently abandoning the Neoplatonic idea of a unified soul whose integrity could be compromised only by its own willful orientation, Augustine adopted a manner of speaking about the self heretofore heard only from Manichaeans. The latter alone among Augustine's contemporaries attended to the human experience of internal conflict with a discourse that gave emphasis to the fragmentedness of the self.

Ever since his debate with Fortunatus, Augustine had been trying to take possession of this experience of interior division within an acceptable Nicene interpretation. For the Manichaeans, William Babcock notes, "the internal opposition of self to self represented not so much a conflict within the self as a conflict between two selves struggling for dominance within a single person." One might say, then, that Manichaean discourse "dissolves the very internal conflict it seems to portray, transforming the struggle of the self with itself into a struggle between two selves."[82] That is, Manichaeism *resolves* the experience of divided mind and will with a particular hermeneutic of the self that identifies only some thoughts and impulses with the self. This hermeneutic informs a corresponding technology of the self, yielding second-order commitments that manage conduct. Augustine proposed to identify both sides of the division—indeed all sides of a self broken into countless conflicting impulses—with oneself. In owning the sinful impulses along with the good ones, people must concede that they are themselves sinful, rather than pridefully maintaining their innocence of many of the things that arise within them or come out of them. "It is important to note," William Babcock remarks, "that Augustine does not seek to deny or to avoid the human experience that the Manichees purport to portray and to interpret." He did not seek "to displace one experience and replace it with another, but rather to

construe the same experience in a way that will not draw him back into the Manichaean camp to which he had once himself belonged."[83]

Perhaps more than anything else, he sought to formulate an understanding of salvation that gave no room for human pride (*superbia*). Even the slightest acknowledgeable goodness or turn of will would place credit with humans rather than God. Augustine relentlessly attacked Manichaeism as a religious system in which human beings claimed salvation as a debt owed for the service of their deeds. That debt was earned by the soul within the broad scope of its adventure in time, by its primordial sacrifice before it lost its integrity, which had already set in motion the ultimate resolution of things. The soul of an actual living human being had earned its merit even before it was born into this lifetime. In its born state, by contrast, the individual soul can do nothing until unified and activated by a grace that Augustine perhaps thought could not really count as grace, since it had the character of a reward.

It is against the background of this Manichaean discourse on the self that the will surfaces as a distinct element or phase of human agency in Western thought in general, and Augustine's rhetoric in particular. In the Manichaean conception of the human condition, intellectual assent to a perception or proposition could not be identified with the self's responsibility and agency, as was widely believed in the anthropology of Augustine's age, because such moments of consciousness could not be assumed to belong to a coordinated higher-order system of priorities or plans of action that we call a self. Willing came to the foreground in Manichaean ethical discourse as a separate act of identifying individual moments of intellectual assent as belonging (or not) to a defined, integrated self. Only by willing to act in a certain manner at a certain time does the self claim and release its assenting predispositions over, above, and through the mass of disintegrative random dissents and contrary impulses to which the human person is subjected. The more Augustine learned to speak of the self as a fragmented entity, in his endeavor to reclaim the experience of interior division from Manichaeism, the more the will emerged in his own models of human agency as something distinct from the intellective response of the mind.

The earlier Augustine spoke of willing as the moment by moment impulse to act that follows automatically on intellectual assent. Such an understanding of willing made it impossible to speak of two contrary wills present in the same person at the same time. At most, Augustine could talk about vacillation in the person's willing. But as we follow his language through

his efforts to reappropriate Paul from his previous Manichaean setting, we observe this willing hypostasize into the will, enabling Augustine to identify habit as a kind of persistent willing that directs human action even when the person is trying to act upon other intentions. Eventually, Augustine will not shy away from speaking of two contrary wills, battling for mastery within himself: "two wills, one old, one new, one carnal, one spiritual, waged war upon each other and, by their discord, scattered my soul" (*Conf* 8.5.10).

With such rhetoric, Augustine had acquiesced to the Manichaean division of the human interior, but with the crucial caveat that the bad side of the division was to be regarded just as much oneself as the good side. Only now, with this new approximation of the Manichaean position, could Augustine take up Fortunatus's Pauline citations successfully.[84] His earlier attempts to claim Paul for free will and habit had not proved sustainable. The Manichaeans had highlighted elements actually present in Paul's language that had heretofore been downplayed in the Nicene exegetical tradition. Only now, within a view of the self divided and disabled that had been the hallmark of Manichaean anthropology, did those Pauline texts brought to his attention by his Manichaean opponents stop resisting his reading. By taking responsibility for both sides of the internal division, Augustine moved beyond the Manichaean position in describing his own, and every person's, experience of inner conflict. "It was a story," in William Babcock's opinion, "that he could not (and would not) have told as he did without his own lengthy dalliance in the Manichaean camp and his own penetrating efforts to construe, in alternate fashion, the very type of human experience that lay at the core of the Manichaean view."[85]

Augustine had set out to know the soul, imagining it to be—much as the Manichaeans did—an ideal essence of being that need only be seen in its purity to realize its inherent glory. His conversion to Nicene Christianity did not demand an abandonment of this conception, but his anti-Manichaeism did. As he separated himself from overly exalted estimates of human nature, he borrowed freely everything the Manichaeans said to distinguish the shattered self of human experience from the ideal entity of its myth. This, he insisted, is what the soul is in itself; apart from God, it is nothing. If he could bypass the wide gulf between Nicene and Manichaean metaphysics and theology, he had an opportunity to engage Manichaeism in its pragmatics, in its account of the human experience of bondage and liberation, which he had been able to incorporate within his own emerging system of

rhetoric. From that common discursive ground, he might just be able to build a bridge of conversion.

The Impasse of Discourse

On reaching his new position in writing on Romans 9, Augustine might have been expected to go back to revise his answer on Romans 7 to bring it in line with his new thinking. But he did not, despite the confusion wrought on the reader by the juxtaposition of the two quite different understandings of how salvation works. If it is true that his new reading seems "in deliberate opposition to his own previous understanding of Paul's text," that previous understanding remains embedded in the same composition. How should we explain this eccentric editorial decision?

Since Romans 7 was such a clearly marked battlefield between Nicene and Manichaean readings, perhaps Augustine could not afford to be seen to yield to a more deterministic interpretation at this point in the text. Instead, the new paradigm appears in the safely marginal territory of Romans 9, on which the Manichaeans barely commented at all.[86] In his expressly anti-Manichaean tracts, Augustine continued to maintain what had become for him in other contexts an outdated set of emphases on free will, personal moral responsibility, and a clear distinction between the mortality and limitations of embodiment inherited from Adam and the guilt of personal sin (*CEF* 37; *Faust* 6.3, 16.29, 19.9, 24.2; *Fel*, 2.8–11; *Sec* 5).[87] It is impossible for us to say whether Augustine had a blind spot when it came to the need to reconsider his exegesis of Romans 7 in light of his new thinking in connection with Romans 9, or whether he consciously avoided revisiting Romans 7 for fear that any modification there could be compared directly to Manichaean interpretation of the passage. For the time being, anyway, he managed to insulate Romans 7 from his new understanding of the human condition.

He turned instead to a long intended and overdue project of attacking the Manichaean creation story, as a kind of payback for their criticism of the Genesis account that he had attempted to answer in *Genesis Against the Manichaeans* and *Against Adimantus*. To this end, he composed *Against the Fundamental Epistle* (*Contra Epistulam quam uocant Fundamenti*),[88] a line by line anti-commentary on a text used in the African Manichaean community as a catechetical primer. The little he completed of the intended work is for

the most part a tedious and joyless exercise in petty sniping, largely repeating arguments he had made repeatedly and better elsewhere. He abandoned the project after addressing only a small portion of the Manichaean text.

Augustine's reason for not finishing this project appears fairly transparent from remarks in the text itself. Even as he formulated criticisms of the claims on truth made by Mani in the *Fundamental Epistle*, he expressed himself on the futility of the effort, since he could not expect the Manichaeans to accept the premises of his argument, any more than he accepted theirs. Each community rested upon distinct presuppositions about the nature of reality, God, and humanity, and from a position within either community, it remained impossible even to begin to consider the other's stance (*CEF* 5.6). Their respective historical claims to revelation could not be assessed by reason, for they relied on hearsay and on the authority one was prepared to grant to the claimant. In fact, any narrative of past events, such as a creation story, shared this epistemological dilemma. "For someone who says that Persians and Scythians warred with each other many years ago says something believable, something that we can believe after having either read or heard about it, but not known by experience or apprehension" (*non expertam comprehensamque cognoscere*, *CEF* 12.15). Therefore, Augustine argued, the Manichaeans had no rational advantage over Nicene Christians, as they often claimed, but could only assert and ask for belief in their own claims against the similar claims of their rivals, which Augustine acknowledged to be equally a matter of faith rather than reason. "You have chosen nothing else than to praise what you believe and to mock what I believe. When I in turn praise what I believe and mock what you believe, then what do you think should be our judgment?" *CEF* 14.17).

The discussion between the two communities of discourse had reached an impasse, therefore, since neither could validate its beliefs on the basis of a common ground of reason. The Manichaeans were no more able to avoid the appeal to authority and faith than Nicene Christians; and for that reason the Manichaean pretense to be able to deliver certain knowledge of truth without resorting to authority or faith counted against them, in Augustine's judgment. The Catholic community possessed the virtue of not promising things it could not deliver, but acknowledged from the beginning that the road to truth is a long one, and necessarily started on the basis of faith. Its representatives "invite us first to believe what we cannot as yet see in order that, having been strengthened by faith, we may merit to understand what we believe, when it is no longer human beings but God himself who interiorly enlightens

and strengthens our mind" (*CEF* 14.17). For even if Mani had truth revealed to him directly by the Holy Spirit, this proved and certain knowledge would be his alone, and not shared by all those who only can believe what he told them of this truth (14.18). The Nicene alternative had the advantage of widespread consent among both "learned and unlearned" (14.18).[89]

Augustine himself did not pretend to have already arrived at a truth he could prove over the Manichaean alternative. He did not yet count himself among the "few spiritual men" who "attain in this life . . . the knowledge of purest wisdom . . . in the scantiest measure, indeed, because they are but men, still without any uncertainty" (*CEF* 4.5); rather, "I *expect* (*praesumo*) to attain certain knowledge" by means of the "Catholic" faith, and it is for that reason that he professed the latter (14.17). Since his adopted faith modeled the path to truth better, he maintained, it had a greater prospect of delivering its adherent to truth, even if it may be the same truth as the one at which Manichaeans aimed in their own mistaken way. The impasse between the two communities at the level of discourse might very well obscure shared goals and values, he seemed to suggest.

From the preamble of *Against the Fundamental Epistle* (*CEF* 1.1–4.5), one gets the impression that Augustine set out to write a very different sort of work, but somehow found himself descending into the ugly trenches of polemic and the frustration of discursive impasse all too soon and easily. Before that happened, he held out—at least rhetorically—a rare olive branch, most reminiscent of his open letter to Honoratus, *The Usefulness of Belief*. He still expressed himself with polemical language on the tenets of Manichaeism, but struck a remarkably sympathetic tone with regard to its adherents. "My prayer," Augustine announced at the beginning of the work, has been and is now, that "in refuting and restraining the heresy to which you Manichaeans have adhered perhaps more unwisely than maliciously," that God would grant Augustine himself "a mind that is peaceful and tranquil and that thinks more of your correction than of your overthrow" (*CEF* 1.1). For, as a Manichaean, he had "sought with curiosity, and listened to with attention, and believed with rashness, and persistently sought to persuade those I could, and defended stubbornly and spiritedly against others" the "fictions" and "fanciful legend" that "hold you ensnared and bound by long-standing habit" (3.3). Therefore, he "cannot rage against you at all; for I must bear with you now as formerly was the case with myself, and deal with you with as much patience as those closest to me did, when I erred madly and blindly in your teachings" (3.3). Augustine summoned up the empathy of his own past among them,

dismissing with a grand rhetorical flourish from the "quiet conversation" he wished to have with them all those who did not share this connection, and apparently did not understand the earnest quest for truth that motivated it.

> Let those rage against you who do not know the labor by which the truth is found and how difficult it is to avoid error. Let those rage against you who do not know how rare and arduous it is to overcome carnal phantasms by the serenity of a pious mind. Let those rage against you who do not know the great difficulty with which the eye of the inner self is healed in order that it may be able to see its own sun. (*CEF* 2.2)[90]

Phrase by phrase, Augustine hit his Manichaean cues, from the quest for truth, to the revolution by which the flesh is silenced by serenity, to the cure of perception and the liberation of the inner man, to the infusion of the Light Mind as an interior sun (see, e.g., *PsBk* 173.13–14). Although he could not pass up a chance to remind his readers that the sun in question in not the visible sun to which Manichaeans bow in worship, he appeared intent on invoking a set of themes that crossed the divide between the two religions: "Let those rage against you who do not know with what sighs and groans it comes about that God can be understood to some small degree. Finally, let those rage against you who have never been deceived by the sort of error by which they see that you have been deceived" (*CEF* 2.2). Augustine himself had been "tossed about greatly" until he managed "with the help of the Lord, to conquer the vain images of my mind," and "made myself subject very slowly to the most merciful physician who called and coaxed me in order to wipe away the fog of my mind," so that he was "at last able to see what that pure truth was which is perceived without the recounting of an empty myth" (3.3).

From this starting point, Augustine issued a remarkable invitation. "Let neither of us say that he has found the truth. Let us seek it in such a way as if neither of us knows it. For it is thus that we shall be able to seek it with diligence and harmony, if without any rash presumption we do not believe that we have found it and know it" (*CEF* 3.4). He had often in his earliest post-conversion works characterized his former compatriots among the Manichaeans as people who assumed they had already found truth, and hoped to have them reconsider that premature conclusion. Now he revived that theme, strikingly adding himself again to the community of truth seekers along with them. Himself only *expecting* to attain "knowledge of purest wisdom"

through continued rational analysis of the creedal assertions and other symbolic language of the Catholic Church, he declared his preparedness to follow truth wherever it might lead, even if that was outside the Church. For "if the truth is so clearly proved as to leave no possibility of doubt, it must be set before all the things that keep me in the Catholic Church; but if there is only a promise without any fulfillment, no one shall move me from the faith which binds my mind with ties so many and so strong to the Christian religion" (*CEF* 4.5).

Certainly, at one level, all of this is no more than Augustine using his rhetorical talent to make a pretense of open-mindedness as an opening gambit of debate. But in doing so he invoked a familiar persona that appeared time and again throughout his rhetorical performances: the truth seeker. Augustine signaled that his commitment to Nicene Christianity derived from a prior and higher commitment to Truth, and was in that sense conditional. He found the case for the authority of the Catholic Church provisionally persuasive, but would continue to embrace it only insofar as it provided an avenue to Truth, which transcends and ultimately can dispose of the institutions of the Church. We have observed, in fact, that Augustine pursued understandings of the teachings of the Church that in many ways stretched and strained those teachings in the form they were delivered to him. He believed this rendering of rote belief into particular understandings meaningful to him was both permitted and necessary for drawing closer to Truth. The Church insisted on very little, and Augustine had been free to elaborate his thinking by drawing upon a variety of sources, including Manichaean construals of the human condition and its enunciation in Christian scripture. He had not accepted these new understandings because of their particular sources, but because they appeared to him to be true, regardless of their sources. Often he reworked them extensively, bending them into conformity with the minimal requirements of the Catholic creed. Augustine can be said, therefore, to have invested himself in his rhetorical performance, in some sense really to have meant what he said about his priorities and his intentions, by publicly setting the terms to which he committed himself as a self.

In *Against the Fundamental Epistle*, Augustine appears convinced that he and the Manichaeans he knew both sought a truth greater than either Church, or any Church. The popular fables by which both communities guided their faithful flocks had no lasting significance in themselves, but only in how they transmitted inklings of the deeper things of God by which the soul comes to know what it is, in what condition it finds itself, and in

what manner it may return or attain to the God who is its source. A handful of Nicene Christians understood this, he said; but the Manichaeans to a man seemed to Augustine to have gotten stuck at the surface level of myth. That fact invalidated Manichaeism as a usable vehicle for spiritual advance, in Augustine's opinion, and so helped to situate him firmly on the Catholic side, beckoning to the Manichaeans to cross over. More than any specific detail of the Manichaean myth, it seems, Augustine objected to the limitations of mythological discourse in general—be it Manichaean or Nicene—as a conveyance of ultimate truth. Those who got caught up in such carnal imagery were rightly to be laughed at (*CEF* 23.25). Augustine found the difference in the Catholic resource of allegorical interpretation, which Manichaeans rejected; simply knowing that myth and scripture signal truth in symbols allowed one to look past the words and images for the direct apprehension of truth that must be one's ultimate goal. This gave Nicene Christians the advantage in fulfilling Jesus' command—repeated with such favor among Manichaeans—to "ask in order that they may receive" and "knock in order that it may be opened for them" (23.25; 36.41). They (ideally) recognized that truth transcends mere human discourse and carnal imagery. "For people can produce some reminder by means of verbal signs. But the one true teacher, the incorruptible truth, the sole interior teacher, does the teaching" (36.41). Augustine thus invoked his earlier treatise on *The Teacher*, and at the same time pointed forward to the development of this line of argument in yet another examination of the biblical creation story in books 11 to 13 of *Confessions*, along with that work's further reflections on the earnest if misguided good will and hunger for truth he recalled sharing with the Manichaeans in his time among them.

Against the Fundamental Epistle would not be the work that achieved Augustine's purpose; in it, Augustine approached his task too negatively, trying to break the Manichaeans free of their myth. Such direct assault was unlikely to receive a hearing. A much better approach lay ready at hand. Augustine probably had already drawn up an account of his conversion for the bishops of Numidia in answer to the suspicions about his Manichaean past. In the meantime, he had drawn much closer to Manichaean understandings of how such a conversion could take place, how an old self could be shed and a new self emerge at the initiative of God's saving call. If the respective myths of the Catholic and Manichaean churches could be forgotten for a moment, if their repertoires of concepts and imagery relating to the soul's journey of exile and return could be tapped, shorn of their distinct metaphysical systems, then

perhaps Augustine could demonstrate that all that the Manichaeans experienced most directly, and all that they aspired to in their ascent to God and Truth, could be accounted for best within the new Christianity Augustine had been fashioning. Augustine could offer them himself as an exemplar—not just a "Catholic" self, but a former-Manichaean Catholic self, who by a set of retentions and reversals had embedded Manichaean contact points into the kind of Catholic he was henceforth committed to be.

CHAPTER 9

How One Becomes What One Is

AUGUSTINE HAD A new self to present to the world. Following earlier formulaic summaries of his conversion,[1] as well as what must have been a more self-conscious and crafted account in conditions of adversity, his subsequent vindication and elevation to the episcopate had created the circumstances in which he could and would transform his story into the literary triumph of his *Confessions*. It apparently took him some time to craft this masterwork, completing it at the dawn of the fifth century.[2] He probably began the project after his return from the Catholic council held in Carthage in the summer of 397.[3] His public appearance there, with full episcopal authority in the wake of the death of his senior partner Valerius, and for the moment out of shadow of the suspicions about him, brought his vindication to full realization, and may have given him the confidence to develop his earlier apologia against suspicions of his own Manichaean ties in the direction of an appeal to the Manichaeans themselves. James O'Donnell rightly has cautioned against "the assumption that there lies somewhere unnoticed about the *Confessions* a neglected key to unlock all mysteries. But for a text as multilayered and subtle as the *Confessions*, any attempt to find a single key is pointless."[4] I do not propose that Manichaeism provides such a single key to *Confessions*, unlocking *all* its mysteries. But just as I have suggested that an earlier context of Augustine's need to respond to suspicions about his Manichean ties explains some of the mysteries of the structure, content, and emphases of *Confessions*,[5] so here I wish to explain how a presumed Manichaean audience—whether real or imagined on Augustine's part—serves to resolve many other such puzzling features of the work.

That Augustine intended to provide in *Confessions* a model of conversion for others to follow forms a standard assumption of the vast secondary literature on the work. That the Manichaeans constitute the main foil of Augustine's story in *Confessions* is likewise fairly evident and widely recognized. But only a dozen or so of those who have studied it closely have brought those two characteristics of the work together into the suggestion that Augustine wrote with a Manichaean readership in mind, both to further his refutation of their religion and to offer a protreptic for their conversion.[6] They by no means wish to suggest—nor do I—that Augustine did not have other readers in mind as well; rather, the proposal here is that many of Augustine's rhetorical and compositional choices make best sense as engagement with a Manichaean audience. The most sustained previous argument along these lines has been made by Annemaré Kotzé. Taking her start from C. P. Bammel's observation of the relative lack of concern with Manichaeism in Augustine's Cassiciacum writings at the time of his conversion, compared to the way it serves as a constant reference point for Augustine's reflections in *Confessions*,[7] Kotzé highlights the "constant probing of Manichaean ideas" in the latter work.[8]

> The implications are clear: the conversion is not inexorably tied up with Manichaeism in Augustine's memory. It can be told in different ways to reach different audiences, to counter different sets of belief and if (anti-) Manichaean ideas permeate the conversion narrative in the *Confessions* this has significant implications for how the intended audience of this work is to be seen.

She contends, therefore, that "Augustine's aim in writing *Confessions* was neither to analyse and understand himself nor to create for posterity a portrait of himself or even of his conversion,"[9] but to formulate an appeal capable of bringing Manichaeans to the true faith. Building on some of her key arguments, along with those of others who have made similar proposals, I endeavor in the pages that follow to further expose this Manichaean subtext of *Confessions*.

The polemical setting of Augustine's engagement with the Manichaeans may make it difficult for some to imagine that he could expect them actually to read *Confessions*. By no means do I wish to undo all that has been gained in recent decades by attending to how much polemical discourse serves purposes largely internal to the group within which it is produced. Augustine was no more sparing with insults and taunts directed at the Manichaeans in this

work than in his other anti-Manichaean tracts. But what may we conclude from that, given that several of those tracts were addressed and sent to specific Manichaeans?[10] Augustine's own past (and ongoing) association with actual individual Manichaeans (and former Manichaeans) gives his writings against that religion an exceptional quality in the genre of polemic.[11] As an apostate from Manichaeism, he at least implicitly included his own past self in the company of those he criticized, and with especial explicitness in passage after passage of *Confessions*. If the Manichaeans were prideful, delusional, carnal, chattery, or even insane, so once was he.[12] Erich Feldmann points to Augustine's apparently deliberate parallelism between the "sickness" he diagnoses in himself in *Confessions* book 7 and that still afflicting the Manichaeans in his closing thoughts at the end of book 13.[13] Perhaps, this unique kind of polemic suggests, what cured him of these ills and errors would cure them. After all, as Volker Drecoll has observed, its very character as a protreptic implies that *Confessions* addressed a readership who were, in some sense, unbelievers.[14] We see nothing akin to this rhetorical strategy in Augustine's struggle with other groups he regarded as heretical or schismatic, nor do we find the protreptic elements of *Confessions* particularly targeted at any other unbelieving or schismatic community. Yet, since we know that Augustine read the writings of such Donatist and Pelagian opponents, responded to them, and expected and received answers in return, we have all the more reason to accept that he engaged or intended to engage in a live dialogue and debate with Manichaeans whom he knew personally and with whom he had a past friendship that he actually celebrated in the pages of *Confessions*. However realistic we consider his expectation to reach Manichaeans with his words, we can demonstrate his intention to do so by the manner in which he wrote. Indeed, some of the ways he subtly taunts the Manichaeans in *Confessions* would only be recognized by Manichaean (or former Manichaean) readers, and would be wasted on Catholic readers. We know of at least one Manichaean who did read it—Secundinus—who neither lived in Africa nor knew Augustine personally.

From the opening invocation of God at the beginning of *Confessions* to its closing words, Augustine sent rhetorical signals he knew possessed special resonance for Manichaeans, even if they would pass with other readers for pious and worthy sentiments.[15] Foremost among such signals was his allusion to Matthew 7:7 at both ends of the work, and multiple times in between.[16] Augustine reported elsewhere the Manichaean fondness for the image of knocking and opening, seeking and finding (*ME* 17.31), and frequently invoked it against them for their precocious confidence that they have found

truth already (*Acad* 2.3.9; *Sol* 1.1.3; *LA* 2.2.6; *UC* 1.1; *CEF* 3.4). As in those other instances, he appears to have cited it here to suggest that the quest they once shared must go on, and not stop short amid the errors of the Manichaean faith. Among those errors, as he had often repeated, was the Manichaean conviction that no faith can be expected prior to understanding and certain knowledge of the truth. So, right at the beginning of *Confessions*, he asks rhetorically of God, "Must we know you before we can call upon you?" (*Conf* 1.1.1). After all, as Manichaeans—and particularly those of a skeptical persuasion such as Faustus—cautioned, "Anyone who invokes what is still unknown may be making a mistake" (cf. *CEF* 10.11). But perhaps, as Augustine had long argued, most of all in the anti-Manichaean tract, *The Usefulness of Belief*, "you should be invoked first, so that we may then come to know you. But," he continues, "how can people call upon someone in whom they do not yet believe? And how can they believe without a preacher?" (*Conf* 1.1.1; cf. Rom 10:14). This theme of belief prior to knowledge had always occupied a primary place in Augustine's argument with the Manichaeans; but now (following the insight gained in working out his answer to Simplician) he could present it to them in their own terms, as the substance of God's grace in his call: "this faith which is your gift to me, which you have breathed into me through the humanity of your Son and the ministry of your preacher."

Augustine said that he had himself benefited from the mediation of such a *praedicator*, by which he may have meant sacred scripture, either as a whole or more specifically Paul,[17] thus telegraphing the role scripture will play in shaping both his self-presentation throughout *Confessions* (e.g., in the voice given to him by the words of the Psalms, by the Pauline lens through which he views his own conversion struggle) and particularly the exegetical program in its concluding books (in its allegorical reading of the creation account of Genesis 1). Can we go so far as to imagine that Augustine saw his role in *Confessions* in similar terms, as mediator and *praedicator* of faith to the Manichaeans, all the more so because he made himself a mere mouthpiece for what God had given him to say through scripture?[18] In imagining his earliest childhood, he commented on his struggle to find a way to make himself understood to others (*Conf* 1.8.13); and at the culmination of his narrative, even as he lost his ability to perform his secular rhetorical functions (*Conf* 9.2.4), he found his voice again ("How loudly I cried to you!") in reciting the Psalms, wishing only that the Manichaeans would overhear the scriptural words (*Conf* 9.4.8–11). Similarly, in *Against the Fundamental Epistle*, he suggested that his own course out of Manichaeism and into the Nicene faith involved

being won over "to those divine books that harmoniously sing of him" (*CEF* 3.3). To win over his Manichaean compatriots likewise, he reflected (citing 2 Tim 2:24–25 in support), "it is up to us to choose and desire the better means in order that we may have a way to approach your correction not in contention and jealousy and persecutions but by gently consoling, by benevolently exhorting, and by calmly arguing" (1.1).

In carrying forward this purpose in *Confessions*, Augustine presented himself as an eminently reasonable man, following wherever truth leads rather than judging things by their labels. He portrayed his turn back toward God as one inspired not by this or that religion, but by philosophy, the summons of Cicero (*Conf* 3.4.7), just as he emphasized—perhaps even overcredited—Platonic books as the chief inspiration of the transformation of his thought in Milan.[19] In both cases, his religious associations followed from a prior commitment to the intellectual pursuit of truth, an allegiance "not to this or that school, but to wisdom itself, whatever it might be" (3.4.8). The one shortcoming he identified in Cicero (and in the books of the Platonists) had been made good by the Manichaeans, for though the name of Christ was missing from the philosophers, it was "never absent from [the Manichaeans'] mouths" (3.6.10). With astonishing frankness, he admitted to being, like his fellow Manichaeans, initially repulsed by the Bible when he approached it with an immature pride. He had since learned that, behind a veil of seemingly silly folktales, lay hidden deeper truths (3.5.9), some of which he proceeded to unveil in the last three books of *Confessions*.

Despite the clear differences in the respective theologies underlying his past Manichaeism and his present Nicene faith, Augustine employed in *Confessions* devotional rhetoric practically indistinguishable from that of the Manichaeans. And it was very much to his point that he could quote much of that rhetoric from the Old Testament Psalms, finding passages that echoed the famous hymnic repertoire of the Manichaeans.[20] While there can be no doubt that the Psalms held a special place in Augustine's personal reading, in *Confessions* they served a specific protreptic purpose aimed at the Manichaeans. On the one hand, they demonstrated the remarkably similar devotional spirit underpinning both Manichaean and Nicene theologies; on the other, in certain of their contents they provided valuable corrections of Manichaean errors. Most of all, they supplied Augustine with a script of *confession* by which he could at last achieve the proper degree of compunction that Manichaeism tried but failed to instill in him (cf. *Conf* 5.10.18).

In comparison to his earlier works addressed to the Manichaeans,

Confessions appears to represent a new approach, by which Augustine may have sought to overcome the discursive impasse that had handicapped *Against the Fundamental Epistle.* Before now, he had generally confronted Manichaeism with the wholesale challenge of the completely different premises that operated within the Catholic world view. Since the Manichaeans simply rejected these premises, such an approach gained him nothing. In composing *Confessions*, Augustine advanced on his recognition of impasse by sympathetically reentering the Manichaean world view through his memory of it, and attempting to reason from its own premises to "Catholic" conclusions.[21] "A wholesale challenge," Stanley Fish observes generally of such problems of discourse, "would have to be made in terms wholly outside the institution; but if that were the case, it would be unintelligible." Therefore, "the price intelligibility exacts . . . is implication in the very structure of assumptions and goals from which one desires to be free."[22] Since "two conflicting systems of thought are separated by a logical gap," Michael Polanyi similarly notes, "formal operations relying on *one* framework of interpretation cannot demonstrate a proposition to persons who rely on *another* framework. Its advocates may not even succeed in getting a hearing from these, since they must first teach them a new language, and no one can learn a new language unless he first trusts that it means something."[23] Augustine appears to have recognized the need to step back into Manichaean language and the Manichaean framework of meaning in order to bridge the logical gap he kept running up against in simply bombarding them with Nicene positions. To make himself intelligible to his former companions, Augustine had to speak to them "*from within* a set of interests and concerns," building understanding on the communicative basis emphasized by Stanley Fish, that "a way of thinking, a form of life, shares us and implicates us in a world of already-in-place objects, purposes, goals, procedures, values, and so on."[24] The new potential for such an approach arose out of the recent convergence of Augustine's thinking with that of the Manichaeans on their shared understanding of the human predicament and experience of self, despite the fundamentally opposed metaphysical systems within which the two sides embedded this common apprehension of human existence. His Manichaean past and his established record of anti-Manichaean polemic made Augustine the only person capable of bridging the gulf that separated the Catholic and Manichaean worlds. The manner in which he went about it—blending familiar polemical critiques of Manichaeism with an account of his own self-discovery keyed to Manichaean themes—made *Confessions* "the most idiosyncratic, original and creative of

Augustine's anti-Manichaean polemics,"[25] and perhaps for this very reason it deserves the "supreme place" among his "anti-Manichaean" works.[26]

Captatio Benevolentiae

In a number of ways, Augustine signaled in *Confessions* a diplomatic and strategic affirmation, not of Manichaeism itself, but of those who had been attracted by its most powerful images and themes. He spoke in unabashedly positive terms of his fellow Auditors, and declined to repeat the sort of accusations against even the Elect that he had used in his earliest attacks as a Manichaean apostate. He recalled with sympathy and understanding the sentiments and motives that led him and his friends to embrace this religion, and when he did unleash bitter words against its adherents, he expressly included himself in their company, right up to the moment of his own conversion; following that, his thoughts turned immediately to the anguish he felt that they had not yet followed the transformative experience through which he had passed. Most of all, he affirmed the quest for truth that united his friends and drove them, for a time, into the arms of the Manichaean faith. They were, after all, truth-seekers. "Truth is loved in such a way that whoever loves something else wishes what he loves to be the truth," Augustine empathetically explained, "and because he does not wish to be deceived, neither does he wish to be proved wrong. And so men hate the truth for the sake of the thing they love as the truth" (*Conf* 10.23.34). Expressed thus sympathetically, this natural human weakness nonetheless forms the core of the intellectual and spiritual pride at which Augustine hammered away in *Confessions*, as the foundation of the Manichaean misconception that they were already in possession of the truth.

Augustine similarly showed empathy with the natural and understandable desire the Manichaeans had for a world without punishment, and for a God who prevents rather than inflicts hurt. As a young schoolboy, he wanted his readers to know, he feared the beatings inflicted to discipline him, and first turned to God in prayer to spare him these punishments (*Conf* 1.9.14–15). No one should make light of the child's dread of corporal discipline; and so Augustine sympathized with the tender sensibilities of the Manichaeans who were loath to associate God with violence. Yet, "all the same, we were blameworthy," and needed discipline to correct our course, he insisted. The child's perspective should be shed at some point, Augustine argued, as one matures

and realizes the necessity of discipline and punishment as a corrective to wills not properly aligned to God's will. God, in his providential care, turned Augustine's obstinate neglect of his studies to good purpose, since it provided the pretext by which he learned the necessary role of punishment in driving him toward the good (*Conf* 1.12.19). In this way, Augustine personalized a point he had made theoretically many times before. He wanted his readers to know of God that "you use pain to make your will known to us, and strike only to heal, and even kill us lest we die away from you" (*Conf* 2.2.4).

Likewise, in recounting his youthful love and fascination for the drama of classical mythology and poetry (*Conf* 1.13.20–17.27), Augustine appears to have commented subtly on the emotional appeal of Manichaean myth. He noted the way in which such tales play on emotions and passions, evoking sympathy for fictional characters and imaginary events (cf. 3.2.2–3). "I loved feeling sad and sought out whatever caused me sadness. When the themes of a play dealt with other people's tragedies—false and theatrical tragedies—it would please and attract me more powerfully the more it moved me to tears" (*Conf* 3.2.4). Suggesting a predisposition on his part toward the sort of tragic fables at the center of Manichaean teaching, Augustine made the comparison explicit in *Confession* 3.6.11.[27] There is something compelling in the empathy for the suffering of others evoked by dramatic tales and performances, remotely related to the genuine pity one feels for one's fellow human beings. Augustine thought such sorrow commendable as a well-spring of merciful intentions,[28] yet maintained that human tears and anxiety should be directed at ourselves in our sinful condition, motivating us to reform, rather than wasted on beings who for all we know may never have existed (*Conf* 1.13.21, 3.2.2–4, 4.5.10; cf. 9.6.14–7.15, 9.12.33–13.36). The vivid empathetic imagination of youth also must be left behind in order to advance to mature thinking.

Likewise, Augustine suggested that the sweet bonds of friendship explained the solidarity of purpose, and all the positive feelings, that came out of the Manichaean experience of Augustine and his friends.[29] Indeed, friendship offered a mundane reflection of the soul's quest to return to the unity it originally enjoyed. "The friendship which draws human beings together in a tender bond is sweet to us because out of many minds it forges unity" (*Conf* 2.5.10). Augustine offered rhapsodic recollections of his circle of Manichaean friends, among whom "signs of friendship sprang from the hearts of friends who loved and knew their love returned, signs to be read in smiles, words, glances and a thousand gracious gestures. So were sparks kindled and our minds were fused inseparably, out of many becoming one" (*Conf* 4.8.13). Yet

nothing guaranteed that the solidarity friendship fosters would necessarily lead to good. He used the Pear Incident reviewed in book 2, in part, as representative of the potential joint misguidedness that friendship could bring. He emphatically repeated the claim that he would not have committed the sin alone, but was encouraged in it by the camaraderie of his friends (*Conf* 2.8.16–9.17), foreshadowing the much graver error of urging each other into Manichaeism. They had formed a mutually reinforcing clique of intellectual dilettantes, "seduced and seducers, deceived ourselves and deceivers of others . . . in the company of friends who through me and with me were alike deceived" (*Conf* 4.1.1), "in whose company I loved what I was loving as a substitute for you . . . a gross fable and a long-sustained lie" (*Conf* 4.8.13). Their adherence to Manichaeism had failed to make them any less worldly people (*Conf* 4.1.1). The fulfillment of all that their friendship promised, with its pursuit of truth, could still be realized, however, once set on the correct path.

On the basis of the good intentions evident in those who shared such sensibilities, Augustine even ventured to portray Manichaeism as a reasonable and valued stage in his own spiritual odyssey, even if it had to be left behind in the end. As Robert O'Connell has emphasized, Augustine acknowledged that the Manichaean appeal to reason, and criticism of those who mindlessly yielded to authority, helped him to " 'stand up' on his own intellectual feet," and in several places we can see him "tacitly acknowledging a debt he owed to the Manichees, and to what was valid in the taunts they leveled against the 'blind faith' of African Catholics."[30] "On this issue," O'Connell continues, "Augustine clearly thought the Manichees were closer to the truth than the North African Catholicism he knew" as a child; "this was one of the reasons why Augustine could think of his 'conversion' to Manichaeism as a progressive step."[31] Augustine had struck this note in some of his earliest post-conversion work, but had taken a harsher tone under the scrutiny of representatives from the same form of Christianity he had originally found inferior to Manichaeism. Now he could afford to hint again at his entrance into the Manichaean community as "a *positive* and progressive step: it carried forward the spiritual momentum generated by his reading of the *Hortensius*; it fitted right in with the logic of his 'becoming more erect,' 'rising up' like the Prodigal, in order to 'return' to God. But he accomplished all this precisely by abandoning the 'superstitious' blind-faith religion he had encountered in North Africa's *Catholica*, and stepping upward to a type of Christianity which proclaimed . . . that faith was meant to lead onward to understanding."[32]

Augustine did not shy away from depicting Manichaean beliefs as an advance over the poorly conceived Christian faith of his youth, with its anthropomorphism, its ascription to God of the creation of a substantial evil, and its unsophisticated conception of Christ's incarnation (*Conf* 5.10.19–20). He acknowledged the role of "some kind of piety" (*qualiscumque pietas*) in leading him to reject the crude form of religion he had learned as a child for higher ideas, however short they fell of the more sophisticated teachings of Milan. In short, he justified Manichaeism as an understandable, if ultimately misguided, attempt to know God, "more pious" (*magis pius*) than the common misunderstandings of ordinary Catholics. It was "better to believe" (*melius credere*) such things as the Manichaeans taught than to fail to advance out of the simple superstitions that the Manichaeans critiqued so effectively.[33]

Even Manichaean materialism, though as usual roundly criticized, made a kind of sense to Augustine as a rudimentary stage of thinking about the nature of the universe. As long as the mind depends on the senses, it tends to construct its models of reality on the basis of sensory exemplars. Materialism, therefore, can find its justification within the limits of our embodied condition (*Conf* 7.1.2), until one discovers, perhaps only through divine revelation, a higher order of reality. Augustine conceded that, despite his insistence on withdrawal from the sensory, God could be perceived to some degree through material creation, according to the inductive method embraced by the Manichaeans (alluding to Rom 1:20, in *Conf* 7.10.16, 7.17.23, and 7.20.26). Here again, Augustine wished to suggest the importance of not stopping at this preliminary stage of insight and intellectual progress: one must advance, must ascend, to higher ways of thinking.

But it is in his portrait of the Manichaean leader Faustus that Augustine offered his most bold and remarkable tribute to his past Manichaean associations. His surprisingly positive characterizations of Faustus, delivered with some self-consciousness that he risked offending less open-minded Catholic readers in being true to his positive impressions (*Conf* 5.6.11), make book 5 a fascinating study in nuance.[34] Since God's providence accounted for and mastered all things, every person, and any situation, Augustine thought it justified to speak in positive terms of the essential role Faustus played in leading him to God. He took the risk because he had an important use to make of Faustus—several in fact.

First of all, Faustus served as an example of a good person led astray by heresy, even as Augustine himself had been. Augustine could not and would not be too hard on such people; he understood how these things could happen

from personal experience (cf. *CEF* 2.2). Faustus, admired as a hero and martyr in Manichaean circles, was not beyond hope, he implied. His natural abilities and personal virtues marked him as redeemable. Faustus possessed the foundations of genuine piety (*Conf* 5.7.12), marred only by adherence to a religion that demanded he believe certain specific untenable ideas. In light of Augustine's subsequent narrative demonstration of the relative impotence of knowing the right things, and the primacy of commitment to piety in personal conduct and orientation to God, we can observe how he positions Faustus for potential inclusion among those who, although seemingly "outsiders" to the Catholic Church, are secretly known to God (*Conf* 13.23.33). In service of redeeming the figure of his Manichaean mentor, Augustine appears to have obscured the skeptical basis of Faustus's marginalization of doctrine in favor of an emphasis on practice,[35] and conformed him to the type of the person of simple, uneducated piety, whose success at commitment and embracing self-discipline goaded Augustine as he remained trapped in his intellectual *curiositas* (*Conf* 8.8.19).

At the same time, Faustus's indifference to fine points of Manichaean metaphysics pointed the way along which Augustine wished to call other Manichaeans. If even Faustus, head of the North African Manichaean community, declined to defend some of Mani's ideas, why would Augustine or other Manichaean Auditors continue to adhere to them? What would be truly lost in giving up foolish errors, if they played a minimal role in making virtuous Manichaeans such as Faustus? Perhaps, Augustine hinted, some Manichaeans achieved virtue in spite of, rather than because of, their doctrines. Faustus apparently knew enough to ignore parts of Mani's teachings that could not be sustained rationally; but his misplaced loyalty to the faith prevented him from seeing that all of his spiritual goals could be reached within another faith unburdened by such errors. If other Manichaeans would only emulate Faustus, and not insist on an ideological system that, truth be told, they could not prove to be true, then they could rejoin Augustine in the common quest for truth they formerly shared. In doing so, they would be adopting the very confessional attitude they claimed to be seeking to cultivate. Far from dogmatically asserting Nicene ideology in all its details, Augustine simply pointed out its apparent proof by the constructive change it had worked on him. He appears to have crafted much of the narrative of his own conversion as a vivid demonstration of how the Catholic faith proved itself in his own case by Faustus's own criterion of truth: its effectiveness in transforming him into a self-disciplined, virtuous man.

As unlikely as it may seem, Augustine actually established the character of Faustus as one of the chief heroes of *Confessions*, in a manner that depicted him as far more than an unwitting pawn in God's providence. In declining to delve into Augustine's tough intellectual questions, Faustus displayed *modesty*, the virtuous antidote to the pride that functions in *Confessions* as the quintessential vice. Augustine made it clear that Faustus was the better man in their moment together, because he knew the emptiness of *curiositas* at a time when Augustine himself did not.

> When I suggested that we should consider these problems and discuss them together, he was certainly modest (*modeste*) enough not to undertake the task. He knew that he did not know the answers to my questions and was not ashamed to confess (*confiteri*) it. For unlike many other talkative people whom I have had to endure, he would not try to teach me a lesson when he had nothing to say. He indeed possessed a heart that, though mistaken in its approach to you, was not without discretion. He was not entirely ignorant of his ignorance (*non usquequaque imperitus erat imperitiae suae*), and did not want to enter rashly into an argument which might force him into a position which he could not possibly maintain and from which he could not easily withdraw. . . . I found that his attitude towards all the more difficult and abstruse questions was the same. (*Conf* 5.7.12)

Faustus's piety proved to be more important than the intellectual gifts that Augustine mocked himself for valuing so highly at the time. Faustus's Socratic awareness of his own ignorance, and his modest confession of it, demonstrated exactly the necessary attitude that allowed one to turn to God. "This attitude endeared him to me all the more, for a disciplined, confessional mind is more beautiful than those beauties I desired to know (*pulchrior est enim temperantia confitentis animi quam illa quae nosse cupiebam*, *Conf* 5.7.12). In refusing to engage Augustine on settling picky details of Manichaean doctrine that were holding Augustine back and preventing him from making progress in the faith, Faustus had served a providential role pointing Augustine not merely away from Manichaeism, but ultimately away from his arrogant demand to know completely before he could believe fully and practice wholeheartedly. Through God's providence (indeed "unwittingly and without intending it," because he remained, after all, a Manichaean) Faustus "began to release me from the trap in which I was caught" (*meum quo captus eram relaxare iam*

coeperat), providing the turning point in Augustine's prodigal wanderings away from God, specifically by rebuffing his *curiositas*. As he recollected this in *Confessions, A*ugustine still did not have all the answers he desired, yet he at last had developed a *confitens animus*, a confessional mind that finally had brought him to rest securely in Catholic selfhood.

Faustus, in fact, appears as one of only two named ostensibly uneducated (*imperitus*) persons—the other being none other than Monnica herself—who function in *Confessions* to "thwart the proud" Augustine in all his prideful intellect. A number of other unnamed *indocti* fill out this theme, building a crowd of people around Augustine who achieved results of piety and chastity even without a philosophical insight into the true nature of reality. Augustine's humiliation in the face of the relative spiritual maturity of the uneducated while he dallied reaches its climax in the conversion scene.

> The day dawned when I was stripped naked in my own eyes and my conscience challenged me within: "Where is your ready tongue now? You have been professing yourself reluctant to throw off your load of illusion because truth was uncertain. Well, it is certain now, yet the burden still weighs you down, while other people are given wings on freer shoulders, people who have not worn themselves out with research, nor spent a decade and more reflecting on these questions." (*Conf* 8.7.18)

With his "true heart" (*vero cor*), modesty (*modestia*), potential grasp of piety (*tenere pietatis*), and most of all his awareness of his own intellectual limits (*non usquequaque imperitus erat imperitiae suae*), Faustus functions as a surprising, but not simply ironic, hero of *Confessions*—a role model both for Augustine in the culmination of his story, and for the Manichaeans who would do well to follow his example of humility and open-mindedness.[36]

Speaking Their Language

Augustine wove Manichaean phrasing, imagery, and themes throughout *Confessions* in an evident effort to bridge the discursive divide that had kept his earlier Nicene arguments from receiving a hearing among his former compatriots. He took advantage of the rhetorical and conceptual common ground between Manichaeism, Platonism, and Nicene Christianity (cf. *ME* 3.4–7.12)

to suggest to Manichaean readers the easy prospect of maintaining one's core ethos in the new spiritual setting he represented. For this reason, elements of *Confessions* that have previously been considered signs of Platonic or biblical influence within the work may *also* signal engagement with Manichaean tropes, even while more idiosyncratic elements of the work clearly do so.

The Manichaeans had no exclusive claim on favorite theological tropes, such as "light" and "truth." Yet Augustine made a point of relating how the Manichaeans loved to invoke "Truth! Truth!" (*Conf* 3.6.10), even as he readily took up the word in the pages of *Confessions* as the highest name of God. His identification of God as Truth, and his use even of the favorite Manichaean title *deus veritas* (4.16.31), signaled to his Manichaean readers that he meant to speak of the very same God they intended to invoke, but deeply misunderstood.[37] Similarly, he repeatedly turned to light imagery to represent the nature and action of God, often juxtaposed to darkness or gloom in a fairly obvious appropriation of dualist rhetoric. More specifically, he linked such light imagery to the sudden in-breaking of insight and wisdom that Manichaeans associated with the entrance of the Light *Nous* into the saved: in the key moment of conversion as he read from Paul in the garden, "instantly . . . by a light, as it were, of security infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away" (8.12.29); and further, "wisdom itself pervades me with light, ripping open my darkness" (11.9.11). Alternatively, he conveyed acts of God's grace by repeatedly invoking the characteristic Manichaean motif of God's redeeming right hand.[38] He likewise employed imagery of sealing appropriated from Manichaean rhetoric and ritual,[39] at times in combination with the imagery of light: "The light of your countenance has set its seal upon us, O Lord" (9.4.11). Augustine's description of the crowd of sins vying for his attention with the figure of Continence (8.11.26–27) strongly resembles, and may have been intended to evoke, the Manichaean post-mortem scenario, in which the soul flees the gangs of demons seeking to grasp it and turns to the waiting arms of the female form of its own virtuous ideal.

Augustine appears to have made use of another favorite Manichaean image: the good and bad trees (cf. *Keph* 2 passim).[40] The pear tree of book 2 presents the dilemma of evil, while the fig tree of book 8 offers the solution of faith.[41] With the first tree, Augustine portrayed himself as the typical Adam-Everyman, audaciously seizing the fruit in a pathetic imitation of God's freedom and power, and in the process discovering a knowledge of evil that sets up the precocious Manichaean claim to understand it in the following books. In their affirmation of knowledge as the road to salvation,

Augustine hinted, the Manichaeans repeat the original error of Adam and Eve in reaching for something for which God had determined they were not ready. With the second tree, he depicted himself finding redemption by resolving on faith. The discipline of obedience that comes with it perfects the understanding that proceeds to unlock the mysteries of revelation in the final books of *Confessions*. Through this dual symbolism, Augustine reasserted the traditional orthodox reading of the Eden episode against its Manichaean reversal: the Edenic tree of the Pear Incident revealed no more than the brute fact of evil, and exposed the Adam-like belief of the Manichaeans that they are what God is.

Augustine may have accommodated Manichaean preferences in the order in which he presented his two famous conversions, usually termed "intellectual" (book 7) and "moral" (book 8). Book 7 does indeed find Augustine working his way through a number of new intellectual understandings of the nature of God, evil, and human nature, before book 8 shows him taking the step of embracing the moral authority of the Catholic Church. Yet, immediately after his own conversion, Augustine had argued that faith and reliance on authority necessarily preceded understanding based in reason, and these works themselves reveal him slowly forming a working understanding of the Nicene tenets to which he had committed himself. Indeed, much of what book 7 discusses demonstrably derives from these later post-conversion compositions. So, for example, the bulk of the questions and answers on the nature of evil and the will, recounted in book 7 as taking place prior to his conversion, and providing many of the reasons for that conversion, are actually recastings of material from *Free Choice*, composed between 388 and 395, as Augustine struggled to work out a rationalized understanding of the Nicene free-will position.[42] Similarly, the insights into the divided nature of his self offered in book 8 as reflections at the time of his conversion are actually drawn from his most recent exegesis of Pauline passages to which his attention had been drawn only in 392 by Fortunatus. Why did he displace these later reasoned understandings to a point in the narrative before his submission to the faith and authority of the Catholic Church?

We can find a very likely explanation in his willingness to accede in his discussions with Manichaeans to proceed in their preferred fashion, with reasoned understanding taking precedence. He noted this reversal of procedure to accommodate the Manichaeans explicitly in *The Morals of the Catholic Church*.

> Where, then, shall I begin? From authority or from reason? The natural order is, of course, such that authority precedes reason when we learn something. . . . Hence, it has been most salutarily arranged that authority . . . leads the wavering eye into the light of truth. But since we are dealing with people who think, say, and do everything out of order and above all say nothing else but that reason must be given first, I shall go along with them and undertake what I admit is a defective manner of arguing. For I find delight in imitating, as much as I can, the gentleness of my Lord Jesus Christ, who clothed himself even with the evil of the death of which he wanted to strip us. (*ME* 2.3)

Such an accommodation of Manichaean discursive priorities explains the presence in book 7 of many developments of thought that appear in Augustine's compositions only well after his conversion, in some cases only in the year or two immediately preceding *Confessions* itself. Reversing the priority he gave to faith and authority over reason and understanding at the time of his actual conversion, he constructed in *Confessions* a path to faith and acceptance of authority by way of progressive steps of rationally obtained conclusions, such as the Manichaeans themselves preferred. The demonstrably fictitious reordering of some of his intellectual development, therefore, served a protreptic purpose for Manichaean readers.[43]

Another well-known structural feature of *Confessions* is the series of "ascents" by which Augustine mentally attempted to rise out of the material world and approach the immaterial realm of God. He presented these ascents as the goal of his spiritual development, despite his being officially committed to the very different Catholic goals of physical resurrection and last judgment. Both Platonists and Manichaeans, on the other hand, envisioned ascent of the soul in one form or another to constitute the individual's liberation from this world. Augustine's ascents, then, can be read in light of either Platonic or Manichaean constructs of spiritual goals, and Augustine perhaps intended this dual effect.[44] The first of such attempted spiritual ascents takes a negative form, as Augustine retrospectively reviews in an ascending hierarchy of reality the Manichaean error of finding God either in their mythic fantasies or in material creation (*Conf* 3.6.10). He portrays the second as a positive attempt, using Manichaean categories in book 4 where, as James O'Donnell sees it, "the intellectual effort that produced the *de pulchro et apto* is presented as a first, halting and failed attempt at ascending in the mind

toward the divine source of beauty and order."[45] At that time, Augustine claimed, his ascent was impeded by two key errors, namely, "that he did not know that evil was not itself a substance, and that he thought that the human mind itself was the *summum bonum*." Only with the discovery of alternatives to these ideas in Milan could Augustine attempt new ascents, in 7.10.16 (following resolution of the problem of evil) and 7.17.23 (following discovery of the differentiation of the mind from the goal of its ascent).[46] The theme then achieves its full realization in the "Vision at Ostia," shared with Monnica as a representative of the simple faith of the ordinary Catholic, in 9.10.24–25, before being repeated as a joint ascent between Augustine and his readers in the non-narrative inquiry of 10.6.8–10.27.38. Through this recurring pattern, Augustine perhaps intended to intimate that Manichaeans could realize their aspiration of spiritual ascent to God only as he did, through the Catholic faith with its correction of misconceptions of the nature of both the goal and its impediment.

Another narrative element usually looked at in the context of Platonism, but even more prominent in Manichaeism, is the theme of the scattered and gathered self. Here, too, Augustine appears to have manipulated common ground between the respective systems. Whereas for Neoplatonism the image of scattering was secondary to that of the fall, it held primary place in Manichaean rhetoric about the soul's condition.[47] Likewise, talk of gathering oneself together again pervaded Manichaean salvational discourse. The two-step pattern is unmistakable in *Confessions*, as Margaret Miles observes: "Augustine continuously juxtaposes verbs that suggest a hemorrhage of vital energy with those that indicate an arrest of that flow, a collection or gathering back of the wasted spill."[48] In characteristic Manichaean fashion, he described an investment in worldly attachments as "spilling oneself on the sand" (*Conf* 4.8.13), and remarked that "they that have their joys from without . . . are spilled out on those things that are visible and temporal, and in their starving thoughts they lick their very shadows" (*Conf* 9.4.10). He saw in the act of confession, even as the Manichaeans did, a process of "gathering myself together from the scattered fragments into which I had been broken and dissipated" (*Conf* 2.1.1). Likewise, "through continence we are collected and brought back to the One, from whom we flowed down into the many" (*Conf* 10.29.40). In contrast to the self-collecting Platonism proposes, Augustine agreed with Manichaeism that it is God who "collects" the angelic and human souls that flowed down and spread out (*Conf* 10.40.65). In a line that neither Platonist nor free will Catholic could speak, Augustine called upon God to rebuild

the ruins of his soul and, in a peculiarly Manichaean expression, to make it *spacious* (*Conf* 1.5.6; cf. *Keph* 115, 238.2, 278.22, 279.19, 279.26–28; *PsBk* 18:11).

Augustine described the goal of his aspirations in terms highly reminiscent of Manichaean motifs. The "heavenly calling" summoned him to "that place where I yearn to hear songs of praise, and contemplate your delight" (*Conf* 11.29.39), much as the beings of the Manichaean Realm of Light, "full of music," gaze upon the fair form of the Father (*Faust* 15.5; cf. *PsBk* 199.9–200.18). He would be, just like the final elements redeemed from the eschatological burning earth of Manichaean myth, "purged and rendered molten by the fire of your love" when, from fragments, "I flow together into you" (*Conf* 11.29.39). That end would be a return to one's beginning in proximity to God in the "Heaven of Heaven" (12.9.9–13.16), a remarkable evocation of the Manichaean Realm of Light from which the soul descends and to which it returns, the place from where Augustine—in a poetic recitation closely matching Manichaean hymns regarding the descent of Primal Man, or indeed of all souls—"slid away to material things, sank into shadow; yet even there, even from there, I loved you. . . . I remembered you. I heard your voice behind me, calling me back" (*Conf* 12.10.10; cf. *PsBk* 197.9ff.; 209.11ff.; 54.8ff.).

Yet another dominant motif of the work, perhaps more rhetorically clever than productive, is the recurring reference to food and eating, apparently drawing upon, if not simply mocking, the centrality of meal ritual to Manichaean cultic identity. *Confessions* is "well garnished with a variety of alimentary metaphors," as Leo Ferrari aptly quips.[49] Augustine employed the simile of feeding on the world rather than on God to cover much of his erroneous approach to truth. He used eating imagery to indicate the inability of the Manichaean religion to offer genuine sustenance. Augustine was starving for God (*Conf* 3.1.1), yet they set before him to satisfy this hunger teachings about the sun and moon, rather than God himself. "Yet I ate those offerings, believing that I was feeding on you" (*Conf* 3.6.10). Augustine found himself frustrated in his ambition to advance in Manichaeism; not being an Elect like the ones he served in the sacred meal ritual, he was like the prodigal "debarred even from the husks I was feeding to the pigs" (*Conf* 3.6.11). His failure to advance in understanding, either within or without Manichaeism, left him longing for "the kind of food of which I had perceived the fragrance but which I was not yet able to eat" (*Conf* 7.17.23). He "lacked the strength" to take that food, which he would discover to be Christ, who by his incarnation condescended to human limitations of perception, providing milk for spiritual infants (*Conf* 7.18.24; cf. 13.18.23, 13.22.32). He sought to see past

the "dainty verbal dish" of Faustus's eloquence in order to see "how much knowledge he could provide for me to eat" (*Conf* 5.3.3). What Faustus served him was all presentation, and no substance (*Conf* 5.6.10). He at last found that true food provided by God (*Conf* 9.4.10), "the food of truth" (9.10.24), and drank the satisfying waters from God's fountain (*Conf* 9.10.23).[50] In an possible jab at the Manichaean idea that the Elect metabolized particles of God out of food, God reveals to Augustine that, "I am a great food: grow and you will eat me. You will not change me into you, like the food of your flesh, but you will be changed into me (*nec tu me in te mutabis . . . sed tu mutaberis in me*)" (*Conf* 7.10.16).

Perhaps the controlling theme of confession itself most expressly signals Augustine's adoption of Manichaean discourse, at the same time reconnecting it to biblical prototypes in order to make it part of his Catholic self. Consciously or unconsciously, the high liturgy and drama of the great confession offered by Manichaeans every year at the Bema festival presents an unavoidable context for Augustine's literary performance, even if he may have initially adopted the confessional mode of speech in a judicial setting where it had a distinct relevance.[51] Thus, Augustine, following a self-examination of internal division and conflict, echoed the wording of a familiar Bema confessional recitation.

> Lo, the great physician has come: he knows how to heal all men. . . . Let us not hide our sickness from him and leave the cancer in our limbs. (*PsBk* 46.1–2, 16–17)[52]

> See, I do not hide my wounds; you are the physician and I am sick; you are merciful, I in need of mercy. (*Conf* 10.28.39)

The fact that such imagery was common to both the Manichaean and Catholic discursive traditions was very much to Augustine's point. That Augustine found and made use of biblical rhetoric for his confession, most particularly from the Psalms, indicates the synthetic project by which Augustine intended to demonstrate to the Manichaeans the truly confessional character of both the Catholic faith and its much maligned Old Testament scriptures.

Augustine encapsulated his inability to make progress in the Manichaean faith in his arrogant resistance to a genuine act of confession. Manichaeans practiced confession to the Elect; as a Manichaean, Augustine had found it difficult, if not impossible, to bring himself to such a humiliating

act, and he appears to have had similar reservations about fulfilling the intrusive curiosity of Megalius and the episcopal commission. Quite possibly, he first had employed the confessional device in the latter instance. By confessing to God his actions and their motives, he had subtly lodged a protest against the right of any human tribunal to judge him, even as he acquiesced to provide the episcopal commission the account it demanded of him. But in that very choice of confessing to God what he resisted confessing to his fellow human beings, Augustine may have come to see a fulfillment in his own character of everything that the ideological shift to the Catholic ethos promised. He certainly recognized in his very act of confession to God the antithesis of his defective character as a Manichaean, when he preferred to think of himself as innocent of any fault.[53] Thus he could claim, contrary to extensive evidence in Manichaean texts known to us, that "the confession of sins, this . . . humiliation of the heart . . . is to be found in none of the books of the strangers, not among the Epicureans, not among the Stoics, not among the Manichaeans, not among the Platonists. Everywhere indeed are found excellent precepts for manners and discipline, but this particular thing, humility, is not to be found" (*EnPs* 31.18).

Augustine's refusal to confess to his fellow human being, who was no better than himself, highlights the stark divide between God and soul intrinsic to Augustine's Catholic understanding. He confronted what he regarded as the fundamental Manichaean error of identifying the human soul with God, and the arrogant presumption of goodness that follows from it. It is in this sense that Joseph Ratzinger has insightfully detected Augustine deepening and focusing the concept of confession in comparison to its use in his predecessors. Augustine in a sense reduced the concept to a single point of coordination between confession of sin and praise of God (both acts referred to as *confessio* prior to Augustine), sacrificing self-importance and self-justification to bring to fullest expression the recognition of God's majesty and omnipotence. Augustine saw this "act of truth" as the essence of confession.[54] Despite the earnestness with which Manichaean leaders urged their adherents to confession as a central act of the cultic life of the Manichaean community, Augustine considered his own arrogant self-righteousness at the time to be inherent in Manichaean beliefs about human nature. He concluded that while Manichaean moral aims were noble, they were undermined by the religion's own ideology. He may have seen an opportunity to drive a wedge between these two elements in the religion in a way that would open up the possibility of conversion. Assuming the good intentions of those whom he had known

among the Manichaeans, he endeavored to show them through his own story that their spiritual goals could be reached only by abandoning Manichaeism for a system better suited to make the changes within them necessary for their salvation. He thus applied Faustus's principle of outcome in practice, and offered his own case in proof that the deeds they wished to enact would be better grounded in the Catholic understanding of things.

This self-discovery, as he imagined it, stood at the center of the testimonial he wished to provide in *Confessions*, through what amounted to the synthesis of a new literary genre.[55] He had learned to hate something about himself (*Conf* 8.7.16), to be angry with himself (8.8.19). He redirected the typical Manichaean aversion to evil toward an unmasking of the self that they idealized as divine. By this reversal, he suggested, he had succeeded in stirring himself up to the point where he felt motivated to take the decisive action no amount of Manichaean knowledge had achieved. True confession was "disgust with myself" (*Conf* 10.2.2), and Augustine's confessional narrative is one of self-abasement.[56] From the opening declaration of God's power and humankind's creatureliness, mortality, and sinfulness (*Conf* 1.1.1), Augustine pursued the theme of thwarting the proud. He equated everything that needed correcting in Manichaean thinking with pride: the presumed divinity of the soul, its heroic status as God's helper, its purity from sin, Manichaean claims to know the truth, and their disdain for the ignorant pieties of the Catholics. Within this self-confidant system, they had shut themselves off from God. "Only to those whose hearts are crushed do you draw close. You will not let yourself be found by the proud" (*Conf* 5.3.3).

Tracing the Threads: Books 1–6

A dense set of references at the beginning of *Confessions* places the Manichaeans foremost in Augustine's authorial self-consciousness, long before they make their first explicit appearance in book 3. Already in his opening invocation of God, after citing the Manichaean motto of Matthew 7:7, and referencing his debate with them about the priority of faith over understanding (*Conf* 1.1.1), he interrupts his prayerful summons of God to his confessions by what at first glance seems to be a labored rumination on God's omnipresence, challenging on a Platonic basis the spatial materialistic thinking characteristic of Manichaean theology. The oddity of this digression assumes a different character when compared to the opening of the Manichaean *Kephalaion* 38,

the fundamental Manichaean tract on soteriology, preserved for us in the Coptic version of the *Kephalaia*, but also in closely parallel versions in Parthian, Old Turkic, and Chinese.

> How shall I invoke my God, my God and my Lord, when by the very act of invoking him I would be invoking him into myself? Is there any place within me into which my God might come? How should the God who made heaven and earth come into me? Is there any room in me for you, Lord, my God? (*Conf* 1.2.2)

> A disciple questioned the Apostle, saying to him: You have told us that the Light *Nous* is this one who shall come and assume the saints. . . . I ask you: If then he is a great god, unchanging and immeasurable, how could he come and appear in the smallness of the body? (*Keph* 38, 89.21–34)

Could Augustine have intended to signal an intention to provide an alternative, Nicene-Platonic, answer to this characteristically materialist Manichaean question? The unusually wide circulation of this text suggests its centrality to Manichaean discourse, even as it is key to our understanding of Manichaean teachings on grace. As Mani answers the disciple's question, he explains how the Light *Nous* shrinks itself to the proportions of the human body, enters into it, overthrows sin, and liberates the trapped fragments of soul within it into a spacious condition of freedom and fruitfulness, even while the dark forces of evil remain in the flesh, seeking opportunities to rebel. Similarly, Augustine concludes his introductory invocation of God by stating, "The house of my soul is too small for you to enter: make it more spacious by your coming. It lies in ruins: rebuild it. Some things are to be found there which will offend your gaze. I confess this to be so and know it well. But who will clean my house? To whom but yourself can I cry, 'Cleanse me of my hidden sins'" (*Conf* 1.5.6). Augustine's new insight into grace had provided him with a fresh entry point for dialogue with the Manichaeans, in order to lead them to a Nicene Christianity that, in the form it had taken with Augustine himself, could potentially provide fulfillment of their spiritual aspirations.

Yet, reaching God required a corrected grasp of his nature, which Augustine wove into his initial invocation. God does not move around, nor is one part of him in one place, and another part somewhere else (*Conf* 1.3.3). Most

important, God is not "spilled" or "scattered" throughout material existence, as the Manichaeans appeared to say.

> The vessels which are full of you do not lend you stability, because even if they break you will not be spilled. And when you pour yourself out over us, you do not lie there spilled but raise us up; you are not scattered, but gather us together. Yet all those things which you fill, you fill with the whole of yourself. Should we suppose, then, that because all things are incapable of containing the whole of you, they hold only a part of you, and all of them the same part? Or does each thing hold a different part, greater things larger parts, and lesser things smaller parts? Are you not everywhere in your whole being, while there is nothing whatever that can hold you entirely? (*Conf* 1.3.3)

God must be understood in immaterialist terms, and by a string of attributes antithetical to Manichaean theology: omnipotence, justice, unchangeableness, in need of nothing and so owing no one anything (*Conf* 1.4.4). By defining God in proper terms at the beginning of *Confessions*, Augustine set the stage for the theological arguments of book 7, by which he would map the path from Manichaean error to Nicene truth. But he still had the task of preparing his readers to be receptive to such arguments.

Reiterating a theme of *Against the Fundamental Epistle*, Augustine summoned his readers to common ground within the limitations of human knowledge, momentarily setting aside any certainty about metaphysical truths beyond direct human experience. "I do not know whence I came into this life that is but a dying, or rather, this dying state that leads to life. I do not know where I came from" (*Conf* 1.6.7). Here, too, he may have intended to echo a familiar bit of Manichaean lore, evoking in his readers' minds the lines Manichaean myth gave to Adam as he awoke into life in this world, lamented his state, and sought its cause.[57] In that myth, the transcendent revealer, Christ, appears to Adam and provides the necessary dualistic backstory. Augustine, of course, withholds the quite different answer to which he wanted to lead his Manichaean readers through *Confessions*. Likewise, he was not prepared to commit himself here to whether "infancy was itself the sequel to some earlier age" (*Conf* 1.6.9), that is, whether the soul existed before its embodiment in this life. The Manichaeans asserted that it did, without being able to offer proof; the Catholic Church, seemingly heeding the limits of direct experience, offered no dogma on the question. It was not necessary

to settle the issue, because Manichaeans and Catholics agreed that living beings come from God, regardless of how or why (*Conf* 1.6.10; cf. *Fort* 9–13; *Fel* 2.17–18). As for when—time is meaningless to God. But as far back as Augustine could remember, he was sinful; so it was pointless to speculate about a time when he might have once been innocent (as an infant, in the womb, or in preexistence, *Conf* 1.7.12). If memory makes one who one is in time (see *Conf*, book 10), then all are sinners, and that sufficiently defines the current human predicament.

Augustine's first inquiry into the nature of sin and evil followed in book 2, in the famous Pear Incident. As I have argued elsewhere, the first layer of his analysis of his motivation for stealing the pears represents a very exact rehearsal of a Manichaean reading of the incident,[58] by which his apparent lack of motive illustrated the Manichaean position that evil impulses come from outside the human self as intruders. But, having reviewed this first impression embraced by Manichaeism as the full answer, he proposed in hindsight that *there must have been* a motive of his own, though he had not been conscious of it at the time. With this a priori assumption that the self extends to all human impulses, whether consciously apprehended or not, he anticipated his anti-Manichaean delineation of the self in book 10. Back in book 2, with a deft polemical touch, he identified the motive of his seemingly pointless theft as the arrogance of wishing to be what God is, in this case by asserting one's power (*Conf* 2.6.14). This Adamic grasping at divinity then casts a shadow over the Manichaean conception of the soul's divinity, which represented in Augustine's opinion the chief doctrinal obstacle to their redemption (cf. *Conf* 3.8.16).

Manichaeism had seemed to offer a progressive step in its answer to problems other Christians stumbled over: "the origin of evil, and whether God was confined to a material form with hair and nails, and whether people who practiced polygamy, killed human beings, and offered animal sacrifices could be considered righteous" (*Conf* 3.7.12). Now he had answers to those challenges.

> I did not know that evil is nothing but the diminishment of good to the point where nothing at all is left. . . . Nor did I know that God is a spirit, not a being with limbs stretching far and wide, and having a certain size. . . . I had no inkling of what there could be in us which would give grounds for saying that we are made in the image of God, as scripture rightly says we are. I did not know either that true inward

> righteousness takes as its criterion not custom but the most righteous law of almighty God, by which the morality of countries and times was formed as appropriate to those countries and times. (*Conf* 3.7.12–13)

Augustine had acquired some of these solutions (such as the immateriality of God, the privation theory of evil, and the likeness of humans to God in mind not in body) at the time of his conversion. Others (such as the dispensationalist theory of changing moral standards) he learned only back in Africa.[59] It had taken him a decade to formulate the comprehensive Catholic alternative he now offered to the Manichaean challenge.

He knew that the Manichaeans would be the first to agree that humans are born into a hopelessly compromised condition, dominated by carnal thoughts and drives. Therefore, he could reiterate in narrative form his oft-repeated critique of Manichaean promises of rational and experiential proofs. Augustine and his young friends, fresh off the street as it were, could scarcely have the purity of mind to assess truth. All that they knew came through their senses, and they could only extrapolate from such sensory images in their conception of higher worlds and ultimate principles. Naturally, then, Manichaean materialism would make sense to them, for both it and they were flesh-bound (*carnales*), governed by material reasoning rooted in the body and senses even while condemning carnal conduct (*Conf* 3.6.10). Augustine minced no words: in their naivete they bought into "lies" told by "proud madmen." The Manichaean leaders were "stupid deceivers," too sure of a knowledge they had no right to claim. Yet he and his fellow Manichaean Auditors could only blame themselves for being deceived, because they sought God through the senses rather than the intellect, "living outside, in my carnal eyes, and ruminating within myself only on what I had devoured through them" (*Conf* 3.6.11).[60] Through the ascent motif, he reviewed God's absence from the various levels of created existence in which the Manichaeans considered him invested. God was not to be found in the complete fantasies of Manichaean myth, nor in the material reality of food, plants, or rocks where Manichaean belief placed him. Nor was he in the sun and moon; for all their glory, these too were mere creations. Most important of all, God was not the soul, nor was the soul of the same nature as God, as the Manichaeans maintained. Rather God is the source of life on which the soul itself depends (*Conf* 3.6.10).

For Augustine, nothing differentiated his new faith from his old as much as the Nicene position on the creatureliness of human beings. As a Manichaean, he had imagined that God was "a luminous and immense body, and

that I was a particle of that body" (*corpus esses lucidum et immensum et ego frustum de illo corpore*, *Conf* 4.16.31).

> What could be prouder than my outlandish delusion, whereby I laid claim to be by nature what you are? I was subject to change, as was obvious to me form the fact that I was clearly seeking to be wise in order to change for the better, yet I was prepared even to think you changeable rather than admit that I was not what you are. . . . I was readier to assert that your immutable substance had been forced into error than to confess that my own mutable substance had gone astray by its own will, and that its error was its punishment. (*Conf* 4.15.26)

Augustine thus linked the belief in the divinity of human soul to the failure to acknowledge human culpability for sin, both alike linked to the Manichaean concept of a divine substance capable of being constrained against its will by evil (cf. *Conf* 7.3.4–5). Revisiting an argument made by Fortunatus that Christ bids people to flee evil (*Fort* 20), he posed the moral dilemma entailed in his rejection of a dualist interpretation of this command: "Where could I flee myself? Where did I not pursue myself?" (*Conf* 4.7.12). "Myself flesh, I blamed flesh" (*caro carnem accusabam*, 4.15.26). Characteristic of his approach in *Confessions*, Augustine later analyzed the attractiveness of Manichaean beliefs in terms of immature psychological motivations.

> It still seemed to me that it is not we who sin, but some other nature within us that sins. My pride was gratified at being exculpated by this theory. When I had done something wrong it was pleasant to not confess (*non confiteri*) that I had done it, a confession that would have given you a chance to heal this soul of mine that had sinned against you. On the contrary, I liked to excuse myself and blame this unknown other thing that was with me but was not me. But in truth it was all me. My impiety had divided me against myself, and my sin was the more incurable because I did not consider myself a sinner. (*Conf* 5.10.18)

Augustine committed a "detestable wrong" when, as a Manichaean, his belief that the soul shared the same nature with God suggested "the lie that you were suffering defeat in me" (*te in me . . . superari*, *Conf* 5.10.18) every time he yielded to a sinful impulse. To this apparently passive, victimized deity, he found the only acceptable alternative in the omnipotent God of

Nicene Christianity, who himself overpowers all others, quintessentially in turning the sinner from sin, rather than being carried along at the behest of the sinner (5.10.18).

Astrology had provided Augustine with another self-exonerating theory that he now faulted for shifting responsibility from creature to creator (*Conf* 4.3.4). It also offered the author of *Confessions* an opportunity to turn the tables on Manichaean claims to establish truth by observation and reason. Mani's explanations of celestial phenomena had to be accepted on faith (5.3.6), as Faustus declined to offer proofs of them against the directly observable predictive success of "philosophers" (i.e., astronomers and astrologers) based on purely naturalistic models.[61] And yet, it proved to be a hollow victory for "science," as Augustine had come to recognize the validity of Faustus's argument that "the knowledge of great things is worth little, unless one's life is worthy" (*Faust* 12.1).[62] Augustine turned Faustus's critique of empty knowledge against Mani himself. "Who ever thought of asking some fellow called Manichaeus to write on these subjects?" People could and did acquire true piety without being learned in anything else, and Mani could have been such a person. Or, conversely, "Manichaeus might have been thoroughly conversant with scientific truths, even if a stranger to piety. In fact, however, he was ignorant of them, but still had the effrontery to teach them, and from this it emerges that he knew nothing about piety either; for to profess these theories about the world is a mark of vanity, whereas piety is proved"—even as the Manichaeans themselves taught—"by confession to you" (*Conf* 5.5.8). And if the Manichaeans had taught Augustine that one could believe what Mani said on matters not easily provable by reason because he had been shown to be right on matters that were so provable, then was not the reverse true as well? Once Mani was shown scientifically to be wrong on astronomy, "then by implication his insight into other, more recondite matters could be clearly assessed" (*Conf* 5.5.8), and consequently what he had said on subjects much more central to spirituality could no longer be credited (*Conf* 5.5.9).

Yet, just as Augustine seemed to have the Manichaeans cornered, he turned his argument in a more general direction, critiquing relevance of cosmological and metaphysical details to the pragmatics of piety. In his early post-conversion writings, he had avidly pursued the congruence of "science" and "religion." Now he uncharacteristically maintained that "these matters are not directly relevant to religious doctrine," and that a person "could perfectly well have learned true piety without any such expertise" (*Conf* 5.5.8), proceeding to offer the Manichaean bishop Faustus as both an example of

such a person, and a proponent of the irrelevance of metaphysics (5.6.10–7.13). Speaking broadly of his "Christian brothers," Augustine insisted that "As long as he does not believe anything unseemly about you, O Lord, creator of all things, I do not see that it does him any harm if he chances to be ignorant of the position or condition of a material creature (*situs et habitus creaturae corporalis*)" (5.5.9). Augustine chose his words carefully to build into his allowance very specific Nicene demands of distinguishing creator from creature, even while giving wide latitude to all sorts of models of the cosmos and its workings. By contrast, he attacked dogmatism, seemingly targeting that of his own community: "It does harm him, however, if he thinks his view forms an essential part of our doctrines of piety (*ipsam doctrinae pietatis*), and presumes to go on obstinately making assertions about what he does not know." Reiterating Faustus's reduction of essential religion to the production of piety rather than knowledge of dogmas, Augustine appears to question the importance of many of the dogmatic questions that divided Christians from one another. Possibly, he meant to prepare his readers for the stunning openness with which he would conclude *Confessions*, by which he hoped to bring Manichaeans and Catholics together around a common ethos and spiritual goal.

Both as a Manichaean and as a skeptic, Augustine had held back from commitment and spiritual progress "for fear of believing what was false." "The possibility of healing was, ironically, within my reach if only I had been willing to believe, because then, with a more purified mind, I could have focused my gaze on your truth" (*Conf* 6.4.6). Yet he characterized his position, between the Manichaeism of his past and the dawning Nicene Christianity of his future, as one where certain common assumptions of both faiths stood out clearly: "I always retained belief both that you are and that you care for us, even if I did not know what to think about your substance (*substantia*) or what way would lead (*duceret*), or lead back (*reduceret*), to you" (6.5.8). From this broadly defined common starting point of Manichaean and Nicene belief, he had chosen to assume that what the Catholic Church taught was true, and from that standpoint to begin to work out how it was true in a rationally acceptable way. By the positive course of his narrative, he commended this same course to his readers, who must overcome their reservations. "True, some of its propositions were not demonstrated rationally . . . but I came to see that in commanding that certain things must be believed without demonstration the Church was a good deal more moderate and very much less deceitful than those parties who rashly promised knowledge and derided credulity, but then went on to demand belief in a whole host of fabulous and

absurd myths because they could not be demonstrated" (6.5.7).[63] He went on to reprise his earlier anti-Manichaean observation that people believe many things about far-away places and times of which they have no direct knowledge, even the identity of one's own parents, as well as his argument that the *consensus gentium* concerning the Bible's authority had to be preferred to Manichaean doubts about it (6.5.7). Indeed, he suggested, it is because human beings are weak, "and unable to find the truth by pure reason that we need the authority of the sacred scriptures" (6.5.8). In this way, he foreshadowed for his readers his turn to scriptural exegesis in the later books of *Confessions*, where he would pitch the Catholic creation myth as an allegory containing deep wisdom against the "fabulous and absurd" Manichaean alternative.

Making the Case: Books 7–8

In books 7 and 8 of *Confessions*, Augustine mapped a course of conversion, ostensibly his own, but in fact carefully designed to offer a reasoned case against Manichaeism and in favor of Nicene Christianity that he himself had not yet worked out at the time of his own conversion.[64] At that time, and for most of the subsequent decade, he had steadfastly maintained that trust in authority and preparation through moral self-discipline must precede the development of understanding through reason. By displacing understandings developed after his conversion to an earlier point in his narrative, he subordinated his personal story to the protreptic purpose of *Confessions*, accommodating the Manichaean predilection for prioritizing rational argument. Surreptitiously reviewing the course of his own growing insight as a Nicene Christian up to the present time, he laid out stepping-stones by which the Manichaeans could catch up to him.

He took much of this material from *Free Choice*, whose protracted composition stretched across a good portion of his own development as a Catholic. Its progress had been held up by Augustine's struggle properly to define God in relation to creation. He had been able from the outset to dismiss the idea (which he attributed to Manichaeism) of a vulnerable God as unacceptable and sacrilegious, "no sooner stated than to be condemned" (*Conf* 7.2.3; cf. 10.5.7). A corruptible substance or being could not, by definition, be God (7.4.6). Nor did his God face the tragic frustrations of the Manichaean God, because "your will is not greater than your power" (7.4.6). Yet, even though he had discovered the basic dichotomy between the (immaterial) indestructible

and the (material) destructible, he digressed (that is, in *Free Choice*, book 2) into a conception of a scale of being that still implicitly depended on materialistic thinking.[65]

> From this point, then, where I saw that the indestructible must be superior to what can be destroyed, I should have begun my inquiry by trying to understand where evil resides: that is, whence springs the corruption to which your nature is totally immune. . . . (Instead) I conjured up before my mind's eye the whole of creation: all the things in it that we can see, such as earth and sea and stars and trees and living things that are mortal, and all that we do not see in it, such as the heavenly firmament overhead and all the angels and all the spiritual inhabitants; and my imagination gave form to them also, and arranged them in their due places as though they had been corporeal. (*Conf* 7.4.6–5.7)

Augustine had wasted a great deal of time and effort on such cosmological arguments and inquiries in the years immediately following his conversion, before his attention had focused on what he now regarded as essentials.[66]

Nonetheless, he could readily catalog the problems with his former Manichaean ways of thinking. He attributed dualism to an all-too-human projection onto the cosmos of personal likes and dislikes, bounded by an a priori refusal to ascribe things that displease to God (*Conf* 7.14.20). The Manichaean challenge of offering an explanation for why God chose to create the world when he did, "after incalculable stretches of time," fails to comprehend the timelessness of God (7.15.21; cf. 11.10.12; 11.12.14; 11.30.40). Their confident characterization of evil glossed over the degree to which the experience of evil is relative to one's perspective; in analyzing this problem, Augustine tells his readers, "I found no substance, only the perversity of a will twisted away from you, God" (7.16.22). Augustine considered breaking up the concept of an absolute evil essential to appreciating God's omnipotence, "since apart from you there is nothing that could burst in and disrupt the order you have imposed" on creation (7.13.19). Consequently, it was arrogant of Manichaeans to proclaim of anything that "These things ought not to be," or desire that anything be better than it was (7.13.19).[67]

Augustine's attempted "ascent," recounted in *Confessions* 7.10.16, affirmed the gulf between the created human being, even in its highest and purest essence, and the utterly transcendent God. He discerned "the incommutable

light, far above my spiritual ken, transcending my mind." If his soul were inherently divine, turning within would have sufficed to reconnect him fully to divinity, as even the Platonists suggested. Instead he found that the turn inward formed only the preliminary step to a necessary progress upward toward something greater than oneself.[68] Nor was this "incommutable light" anything to be found in nature or through the senses, "this common light which every carnal eye can see, nor any light of the same order but greater, as though this common light were shining much more powerfully, far more brightly, and so extensively as to fill the universe," as Manichaean materialism and veneration of physical light would suggest. "The light I saw was not this common light at all, but something different, utterly different (*aliud, aliud valde*). . . . It was exalted because this very light made me, and I was below it because by it I was made." Augustine had discovered himself to be far away from God "in a region of unlikeness."

The "ascent" merely reiterates for the reader the same set of points made exegetically by Augustine's reading of the prologue of John, a popular passage among the Manichaeans. Augustine emphasized that despite the passage's clear resonances with Manichaean imagery, it makes clear that "the human soul, even though it bears testimony about the light, is not itself the light." Rather, differentiation of human souls from divinity is implicit in any idea that they need divine aid, that they need the "true light" to "illumine" them and give them "power to become children of God" (*Conf* 7.9.13). Hence, Augustine stressed, he could only make progress toward his desired ascent "because you had become my helper" (*Conf* 7.10.16), which he needed precisely because he was *not* inherently divine. The Manichaeans, however, saw no contradiction in believing in both the soul's divinity and its need of aid from its consubstantial God. But Augustine considered it psychologically impossible to cultivate a confessional attitude of dependence on God as long as one believes oneself to be inherently divine. "The trouble is that they want to be light not in the Lord but in themselves, with their notion that the soul is by nature divine. . . . by their appalling arrogance they have moved further away from you, the true light" (*Conf* 8.10.22).

In addition to setting out the key theological terms of conversion, then, Augustine also outlined the crucial anthropological issues surrounding sin and the will that divided Manichaeans from Nicene Christians. Here, too, he mined the resources of *Free Choice*, anachronistically projecting them back into a fictitious pre-conversion deliberation (*Conf* 7.3.4–5). "I strained to see for myself the truth of an explanation I had heard: that the cause of evil is the

free decision of our will, in consequence of which we act wrongly and suffer your righteous judgment; but I could not see it clearly" (*Conf* 7.3.5; cf. *LA* 1.1). He acknowledged his acceptance of the idea of free will as an intuition, a belief that he held initially without being able to demonstrate it rationally.

> I was as sure of having a will as I was of being alive, and this it was that lifted me into your light. When I wanted something, or did not want it, I was absolutely certain that no one else but I was wanting or not wanting it, and I was beginning to perceive that the root of my sin lay there. Any involuntary act I regarded as something I suffered rather than as something I did, and I judged it to be a penalty rather than a fault.

These words capture the starting point of his discussion in the first book of *Free Choice*. But the more he had worked on the problem after his return to Africa, the more logical difficulties he had encountered.

> But then I was forced to ask further, "Who made me? Was it not my God, who is not merely good, but Goodness itself? Whence, then, did I derive this ability to will evil and refuse good? Is it in me simply so that I should deserve the punishment I suffer? Who established that ability in me, who planted in me this bitter cutting, when my whole being is from my most sweet God? If the devil is responsible, where did the devil come from? If he was a good angel who was transformed into a devil by his own perverted will, what was the origin of this evil will in him that turned him into a devil, when an angel is made entirely by the supremely good creator?" (*Conf* 7.3.5)

Although these questions review some of the key problems he had explored in books 2 and 3 of *Free Choice*, Augustine sharpened them here into recognizably Manichaean phrasing, imitating the polemical questions they pressed upon their Nicene rivals.[69]

As we have seen, the synergistic "middle-period" solution reached at the end of *Free Choice*, as well as in his exegesis of Romans and Galatians, entailed Augustine's substitution of the self-inflicted wound of habit for the Manichaean premise of an alien evil. It was a solution to which he had come in part under the pressure of Fortunatus's attack on free will through the words of Paul. Ascent to God therefore required withdrawal not only from

"the swarms of noisy phantasms" of sensory experience, as he had recognized in 388, but also from "the tyranny of habit" he had come to appreciate following 392. Augustine could now describe himself falling back from the magnetic pull of God's beauty by the weight of "carnal habit" (*Conf* 7.17.23). He could attribute his vacillation, even in the face of authentic knowledge of the good, to a divided will—a will that indeed wills, but not entirely, not wholeheartedly (*Conf* 8.9.21). He suggested to his readers that this divided will could be explained not by an evil nature, but as "the mysterious punishments meted out to humankind, those utterly baffling pains that afflict the children of Adam" (*Conf* 8.9.21). A defect in the single will, in oneself, manifests itself in the sluggish response of initiative straining against sinful habit, giving the illusion of two discordant wills.

Augustine spoke repeatedly in *Confessions* of the human initiative (often his own) of seeking, longing, and crying out for God or for Truth, as well as of delighting in it and believing in it, all prior to the breakthrough of grace that enabled his conversion. He averred that God delivers "the soul that seeks for you" (*Conf* 1.18.28), and referred to "the great depth from which we have to cry to you" (*Conf* 2.3.5). His relationship to God was conditional: *if* he loved God, *then* God would be sweet to him (*Conf* 2.1.1). "You are merciful toward the sins of those who confess to you; you hear the groans of the captives and set us free from the bonds we have forged for ourselves, provided only we no longer defy you in the arrogance of a spurious freedom." Hence it is that "Through loving humility we find our way back to you" (*Conf* 3.8.16). God is "in the hearts of all those who confess you," if only they will "turn back" and see (*Conf* 5.2.2). When Continence beckoned to Augustine in his vision in the garden, she called upon him to take the necessary first penitent step reversing the audacity of self-reliance, to "cast yourself upon God," who in return would provide the strength to achieve his moral reform (*Conf* 8.11.27).

Yet, of course, such acts of faith were preceded by God's call. "Before ever I called you," Augustine recounted to God, "you forestalled me by your persistent, urgent entreaties, multiplying and varying your appeals that I might hear you from afar, and turn back, and begin to call upon you who were calling me" (*Conf* 13.1.1). God's call had been given, unrecognized by Augustine at the time, in the warning voice of his mother (*Conf* 2.3.7). God prodded him at times with punishments (*Conf* 2.2.4). God led Augustine by a secret providence, "bringing my shameful errors round in front of my face, that I might see and hate them" (*Conf* 5.6.11). In the same vein, Augustine characterized the final step of his conversion as induced by a set of external stimuli carefully

orchestrated by God. True, something had been required of Augustine, some initiative of faith. However weak and ill-defined, it opened up the flood of God's aid, because he "has power to do more than we ask or understand" (*Conf* 8.12.30). Nonetheless, because God had choreographed everything that led to Augustine's faithful response, God alone deserved credit, "for you had turned me around to you" (*convertisti enim me ad te*, *Conf* 8.12.30), by first forcing him to face himself and recognize his deficiency and ugliness (*Conf* 8.7.16). Augustine at times could be so bold as to imagine *Confessions* itself serving as a channel for God's solicitous call, awakening the slumbering souls of sinners (*Conf* 10.3.4) and exciting in its readers a love of God (*Conf* 11.1.1).

Augustine seems to have struck the same synergistic balance in the two places in *Confessions* where he drew upon Romans 7 to illuminate his steps toward conversion. In the first of these, in book 7, he highlighted as the chief disparity between the books of the Platonists and Paul the latter's attention to "your gift of grace, so that no one who sees can boast as though what he sees and the very power to see it were not from you, for who has anything that he has not received?" (*Conf* 7.21.27). For Augustine, the Platonists were those who "see where to go, but do not see how" (*Conf* 7.20.26). The "how" is supplied by the incarnation of Christ, the accommodation of human limitation by a divinely initiated condescension of the "power and wisdom of God" to take human form and provide the signposts of moral instruction leading to detachment from this world. "So totally it is a matter of grace that the searcher is not only invited to see you . . . but healed as well, so that he can possess you," placing the individual's choice of will squarely between the prior divine call and the subsequent divine aid to the good will. Even those without the benefit of the Platonic grasp of the nature of reality, the one "too far off to see," may yet follow the instructions of Christ conveyed by the Church, and so "walk in the way that will bring him to the place of seeing and possession." The latter achievement must be distinguished from the mere seeing of Truth. "For even though a person may be delighted with God's law as far as his inmost self is concerned, how is he to deal with that other law in his bodily members which strives against the law approved by his mind, delivering him as a prisoner to the law of sin dominant in his body?" (*Conf* 7.21.27). Only God's healing grace "will free him from this death-laden body." Humans endure the latter justly, because the "ancient sinner" has "persuaded our will to *imitate* his will by which he did not stand fast in your truth (*persuasit voluntati nostrae similitudinem voluntatis suae, qua in veritate tua non stetit*)." The passage never approaches the level of determinism reached in *To*

Simplician 1.2, and shows how Augustine's exegesis of Romans 7 remained firmly fixed in his "middle-period" qualified free-will position.

Recounting in book 8 his response to hearing the story of Victorinus's conversion, Augustine reviewed yet again the implications of Paul's wording in Romans 7, in a way that both evoked and corrected Manichaean readings of it. "I ached for a like chance myself, for it was no iron chain imposed by anyone else that fettered me," as Manichaeans would say, "but the iron of my own will (*mea ferrea voluntate*)." "For desire (*libido*)," he went on to explain, "is produced by a perverted will (*ex voluntate perversa*); when lust is pandered to, habit (*consuetudo*) is produced; when habit is not resisted, necessity (*necessitas*) is produced." Having set the terms for understanding the origin of the human predicament, Augustine apparently felt free largely to affirm the dualist phenomenology of the result. "The enemy had my willing (*velle meum*) in his clutches, and from it had forged a chain to bind me." Picking up Paul's imagery of the "old" and "new man," which the Manichaeans used to exegete the internal conflict of Romans 7, Augustine described his own interior division: "A new will (*voluntas nova*) had begun (*coeperat*) in me, the will to worship you disinterestedly and enjoy you, O God, our only sure felicity; but it was not yet capable of surmounting that earlier will strengthened by establishment" (*Conf* 8.5.10). Undercutting his own temporal correction to the static dualism of the Manichaean model, he indulged the vividness of their dualist reading of Paul: "And so the two wills fought it out—the old and the new, the one carnal, the other spiritual—and in their struggle tore my soul apart. Thus I came to understand from my own experience what I had read, how 'the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit strives against the flesh' (Gal 5:17)." He even gave provisional acceptance to the alienation of identity from the sinful other that Manichaeans found in Romans 7:20: "I was aligned with both, but more with the desires I approved in myself than with those I frowned upon, for in these latter I was not really the agent, since for the most part I was enduring against my will rather than acting freely." By thus adopting the Pauline language of being "not really the agent" of desires of which he did not approve, he stretched his implicit *sub lege* condition as far as he could toward Manichaean discourse, before providing a counterbalancing clarification: "All the same, the force of habit that fought against me had grown fiercer by my own doing, because I had come willingly to this point where I now wished not to be" (*Conf* 8.5.11). Moving on to paraphrase Romans 7:22–25a, he struck the same synergistic balance, noting, "To find my delight in your law as far as my interior man was concerned was of no

profit to me when a different law in my limbs was warring against the law of my mind, imprisoning me under the law of sin which held sway in my limbs" (*Conf* 8.5.12). He identified Paul's "law of sin" as the "brute force of habit" (*violentia consuetudinis*), that drags the mind along involuntarily, but "deservedly so because it slipped into the habit voluntarily." With Paul (and the Manichaeans), he expected that only the grace of God could free him "from this mortal body."

In *Confessions*, Augustine reconstrued the experience of his conversion in Pauline terms that had not been available to him at the time of the actual events. Then, skepticism and uncertainty of intellectual truth offered the primary challenge. Now he understood the conflict to have been one of division within the will, undercutting even the most certain knowledge of truth. His mind was persuaded, but something *else* held him back. "I could form no resolve to enter into a covenant with you, my God, though all my bones clamored for it. . . . To travel—and more, to reach journey's end—was nothing else but to want to go there, but to want it valiantly and with all my heart, not to whirl and toss this way and that a will half crippled by the struggle, as part of it rose up to walk while part sank down" (*Conf* 8.8.19). Dissecting the Manichaean analysis of the human predicament, he discovered evidence that it did not hold up to scrutiny. He observed that he could will his body to do anything he wanted in the Milanese garden (*Conf* 8.8.20). The conflict lay not there, but belonged to the interior of his self. "For in this sole instance the faculty to act and the will to act precisely coincide, and the willing is already the doing" (*ibi enim facultas ea, quae voluntas, et ipsum velle iam facere erat*, *Conf* 8.8.20). He had established the same point in *Free Choice*, where it had served as a declaration of the immunity of the soul from any real impairment, the perfect ease of the will's choice that no material limitations could hinder (*LA* 1.13.29).[70] Now, however, that very ease had evaporated for Augustine, and the soul appeared to hinder itself.

> But it [i.e., the mind] does not will from the whole of itself (*ex toto*), and therefore it does not command from the whole of itself. Inasmuch as it commands it, in so much it wills it; but inasmuch as it does not do what it commands, in so much it does not will it. What the will commands is that the will should exist—not some other, but itself. Hence it cannot be commanding completely (*non plena imperat*). It cannot be what it commands, for if it were complete, it would not command itself to be, since it would be already. This partial willing

> and partial non-willing is not so bizarre, therefore, but a sickness of the mind, which cannot rise with the whole of itself on the wings of truth because it is burdened by habit. There are two wills, then, and neither is the whole. (*Conf* 8.9.21)[71]

In this way, he reiterated his nondualist solution to Pauline language of internal division, while acknowledging the experience that the Manichaeans took at face value.

Against the Manichaeans, he stressed that *the body obeys the mind*, while *the mind disobeys itself* (*Conf* 8.9.21). One therefore could not simply identify resistance with the body, with some other that burdens the innocent soul. The problem was with oneself, one's own mind, or will, or soul. Regardless what one thinks of Augustine's psychological insight here, it serves an immediate function within the larger purpose of *Confessions*. He chose to describe his experience in such a way that the body would be exonerated and the self implicated, because he needed to disallow the alternative Manichaean account of the divided self. Maybe some detail of his experience led him to this conclusion, maybe not. We can never know. But we can recognize that he rendered his experience into a form that effectively countered Manichaeism on its own experiential terms.

> When I was making up my mind to serve the Lord my God at last . . . I was the one who wanted to follow that course, and I was the one who wanted not to. I was the only one involved. I neither wanted it wholeheartedly nor turned from it wholeheartedly. I was at odds with myself, and fragmenting myself. The disintegration was occurring without my consent, but what it indicated was not the presence in me of a mind belonging to some alien nature, but the punishment undergone by my own nature. In this sense, and in this sense only, it was not I who brought it about, but the sin that dwelt in me (Rom 7:17, 7:20), as penalty for that other sin committed with greater freedom; for I was a son of Adam. (*Conf* 8.10.22)

Augustine did not pause to elaborate on the individual's connection to the Adamic sin, since any one of the ways that relationship might be specified would present its own peculiar vulnerability to criticism. He pushed quickly on to argue against a dualist interpretation of internal division by observing

situations where the mind deliberates more than two options, which cannot therefore be attributed to the good and bad mind, and in fact may be conflict between two evil or two good options (*Conf* 8.10.23–24).[72]

Augustine offered his analysis of the human mental interior in refutation of those "who on perceiving two wills engaged in deliberation assert that in us there are two natures, one good, the other evil, each with a mind of its own" (*Conf* 8.10.22). As long as they are determined to hold such views, Augustine prays that God will "let them perish from your presence, as perish all who talk wildly and lead our minds astray. They are evil themselves as long as they hold these opinions. And yet," Augustine immediately adds, "these same people will be good if they embrace true opinions and assent to true teaching, and so merit the apostle's commendation, 'You were darkness once, but now you are light in the Lord'" (*Conf* 8.10.22).[73] In this way, Augustine quite cleverly made the Manichaeans themselves an illustration of the point he never tired of making, that when Paul says the evil mind *cannot be good*, he means that when it becomes good, it is no longer evil, and therefore cannot be identified as the same evil mind it was. Just as snow cannot be hot, because in becoming hot it ceases to be snow, so the Manichaean self will perish in his friends as it did in him, when it changes into a Catholic self. Only the latter, Augustine suggested, had the capability to realize the spiritual goals common to Manichaean and Catholic alike, based upon a true conception of the nature of God and soul that Manichaeism lacked.

"Thus the story that Augustine tells of the breaking of his chains is not a Manichaean—or even a crypto-Manichaean—story," William Babcock rightly concludes. "It was a story, however," he continues, "that he could not (and would not) have told as he did without his own lengthy dalliance in the Manichaean camp and his own penetrating efforts to construe, in alternate fashion, the very type of human experience that lay at the core of the Manichaean view."[74] Yet those efforts cannot and should not be read as if they constituted a personal outgrowth of his past as a Manichaean, as if he came over to the Catholic camp with lingering Manichaean-inspired issues to resolve. Nothing in his early post-conversion works show him chewing over observations of interior fracturing or bondage. He had embraced the "perfect liberty" of the will as the optimistic enabler of his own transformation. No, the problematization of the will is something we can see actually thrust upon Augustine anew by Fortunatus, worked over by him in the immediately following years, and shaped into a new paradigm in *Confessions*, with a present

rather than past Manichaeism as its foil, motivating Augustine to achieve "the displacement and replacement of the Manichaean anthropology" that so evidently shaped the way he reinvented his own inner experience of conversion. His recollection of that experience from the standpoint of his current ideology and concerns created a reality, a "truth" about himself that superseded the actual events more than a decade earlier. He did not so much recall as emplace the Pauline interior division in that experience; he did not read Paul through that experience, he read the experience through Paul.[75]

As Augustine brought his narrative to its climax in the key moment of his conversion, he reported God's call to him—through the child's voice saying "Pick it up and read," and through the text of Paul to which he turns; yet Augustine had to choose to respond. His act of *sortes biblicae* yielded a command to take up a disciplined, ascetic life, "not in dissipation and drunkenness, nor in debauchery and lewdness, nor in arguing and jealousy; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh or the gratification of your desires" (Rom 13:13–14; *Conf* 8.12.29). The researches of Leo Ferrari have raised doubts about whether this passage actually played the role Augustine ascribed to it in his narrative.[76] In any case, it served his purpose in *Confessions*, which we will appreciate fully only if we recall that the celibacy at stake in his decision in the garden was by no means a prerequisite for baptism in the Catholic Church, but a hallmark of Manichaean moral perfectionism. Quite tellingly, Augustine replaces the figure of a beckoning *Philosophia* or *Sapientia*, found repeatedly throughout the works composed around the time of his conversion, with *Continentia* here in *Confessions*, in this way reimagining his decision in the garden as the attainment of the moral goal that Manichaeism set, but could not itself effect. The quite different theological, anthropological, and epistemological terms set by Nicene faith and the Catholic Church had produced the results that Faustus insisted proved the validity of a religious system, while Manichaeism had failed to do so, at least for Augustine. At this crucial moment in his story, he borrowed an image from the Manichaean characterization of grace, perfectly paraphrasing the penetration of the heart by the Light *Nous*: "In an instant, as I came to the end of the sentence, it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled" (*Conf* 8.12.29). It had happened to him only now, not from the teachings of Mani or through the guidance of Faustus, but from God's voice delivered through the Bible—specifically that part of the Bible, Paul, that Manichaeans shared with Catholics.

"If only . . .": Book 9

Gazing back with hindsight over the scene of his conversion, Augustine posed the dilemma of self-interpretation that heretofore had divided the Catholic from the Manichaean account of the self. Was it he or God who acted in that crucial moment, was it an act of free will or a gift of grace? On the one hand, Augustine saw himself as finally acting upon an accumulation of good reasons and inducements. But how did he know for sure the source of that will to act? "But where had my free choice (*liberum arbitrium*) been throughout those long, weary years, and from what depth, what hidden profundity was it called forth in a moment, enabling me to bow my neck to your benign yoke and my shoulder to your light burden, O Christ Jesus, my helper and my redeemer?" (*Conf* 9.1.1). Augustine had no explicit answer to offer, other than an allusion to the favorite Manichaean image of God's right hand: "your right hand plumbed the depths of my death, draining the cesspit of corruption in my heart, so that I ceased to will all that I had been wont to will, and now willed what you willed" (*Conf* 9.1.1; cf. 3.11.19; 6.16.26; 8.1.2). Were the Manichaeans perhaps right on this one thing—not because they were Manichaeans, but because they read Paul? Could it be that human beings are so fragmented and crippled as selves that they are incapable of the good until lifted up and set on their feet as selves by God's grace? Augustine had discovered that the one act of will necessary and possible to the person locked in sin was the denial of one's own will and surrender to God's. How, then, could he any longer make much of the agency of the free will against the Manichaean teaching of grace? Who could dare to be dogmatic about that blink-of-an-eye moment of transformation? Would not taking an unyielding stand on the free agency of the individual be another form of falling into the arrogant self-reliance he had intended to combat all along?

So Augustine yields to Manichaean rhetoric of grace—not just the grace of a general call or the grace of response to the soul's act of faith, but an effective, transformative initiative. Like the architectonic reordering of the self effected by the Light *Nous*, Christ displaced the misguided attachments that Augustine could not find the will to expel: "You cast them out and entered yourself to take their place" (*Conf* 9.1.1; cf. *Keph* 38, 96.7–97.24). Particularly in book 10, Augustine took up the language of grace as God's unilateral initiative in the transformation of the unrepentant sinner. "Though you, O Lord, bless the person who is just, it is only because you have first made him just when he was sinful. . . . I can say nothing right to other people . . . which

you have not first told me" (10.2.2). "You called, shouted, broke through my deafness," he said in praise of God's initiative. "You flared, blazed, banished my blindness. You exuded fragrance, and I drew breath and now I pant for you. I tasted, and now I hunger and thirst. You touched me, and I burn for your peace" (10.27.38).[77] It is in book 10 that he adopted the infamous refrain, "Give what you command, and command what you will" (10.29.40; 10.30.41; 10.31.45; 10.37.60), to the irritation and consternation of his erstwhile free-will allies.

Augustine did not mean to surrender his deep conviction of humans' responsibility for getting into their current predicament, regardless of how much ground he was willing to yield on how they might get out of it. Individual responsibility was the tiny pin of theory that held together his entire construct of God's just dominion of the universe, and he was not prepared to negotiate that with the Manichaeans. He had no doubt that shifting blame for the evil to an alien other undercut the confessional orientation necessary to salvation. It did no good to be angry at sin as some alien intrusion into one's divine perfection; one had to be angry at oneself as the agent of sin. Through the language of Psalm 4:5 ("Be angry and do not sin"), Augustine sought to point out this essential reorientation of sentiment to his Manichaean readers, as Annemaré Kotzé has demonstrated in a close analysis.[78]

Augustine expressed complex emotions in confronting the Manichaeans who were "ignorant of this sacrament,[79] this remedy, and were raving (*insani*) against the very antidote that might make them well (*sani*)." He found himself "provoked with an intense and sharp grief" (*vehementi et acri dolore indignabar*) at the recalcitrance of his erstwhile Manichaean friends, and "pitied" them (*Conf* 9.4.8)—language far removed from the norms of polemic.[80] In a disarming rhetorical master-stroke, he expressed the wish that they would overhear his ruminations on the psalm, while he remained unaware of their presence, so that they could trust the sincerity of his sentiments, and so that that sincerity would not be tainted on his part by polemical self-consciousness (*Conf* 9.4.8). In this clever fashion, Kotzé observes, he "addresses the Manichaeans as directly as possible without completely breaking the prayer stance adopted throughout the rest of the *Confessions*."[81] Conscious of the issue of performing the self, Augustine wanted to assure his readers that he had genuinely internalized these sentiments, and did not merely strategically employ them for effect. He did not want them to think he was trying to persuade them of anything, but only to observe what effect the words of the biblical psalm had upon him. He had truly attained the confessional stance that

the Manichaeans watched for as the sign of a progressing soul, through the worlds of the psalm that called on God to "lead me into spacious freedom" from a condition of constraint. Of course, Augustine was performing just the same, and had carefully chosen his verse to reflect the Manichaean dualistic image of constraint and freedom, confinement and spaciousness.

He went on to describe the responsive forces "surging up within me" and "finding an outlet through my eyes and voice" just as they were imagined to do in the Manichaean Elect.[82] This had been made possible, he emphasized, by the empowerment of the Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth—not Mani but the one given already by Christ.[83] The psalm commanded that one turn from falsehood, so Augustine imagined that the Manichaeans, upon hearing its words, might turn from the falsehood of their doctrines, just as he had, to God. "They might perhaps be so shaken as to spew it out, and then you would hear them when they cried to you, because he who for us died a true death in the flesh now interceded with you on our behalf" (*Conf* 9.4.9). Implicitly, he suggested that Manichaeans did intend genuinely to cry to the real God, but had that cry muffled by the false beliefs which held them back from recognizing that the only real evil lay in themselves, in all humankind. "I had already learned to feel for my past sins an anger with myself that would hold me back from sinning again," Augustine says of his moral breakthrough. "With good reason had I learned this anger, since it was no alien nature from a tribe of darkness that had been sinning through me, as they maintain who are not angry with themselves" (*Conf* 9.4.10). By being angry with himself as a sinner rather than loving himself as a cosmic hero, seeing his inner mortal ugliness rather than his inherent divine beauty, Augustine had found a self-conception from which he could confess, and in confessing evoke God's aid.

Augustine had referenced this same self-discovery of inner ugliness in describing the building momentum of his experience in the garden in book 8, employing Neoplatonic imagery of *aversio/conversio*. As Ponticianus spoke to him of the emerging Catholic ascetic movement, Augustine imagined God "wrenching me back toward myself, and pulling me round from that standpoint behind my back which I had taken to avoid looking at myself. You set me down before my face, forcing me to mark how despicable I was, how misshapen and begrimed, filthy and festering. I saw and shuddered" (*Conf* 8.7.16; cf. 8.12.30). Correcting both Platonic and Manichaean conceptions of the divine human soul, *conversio* involved for Augustine not only turning back to God as the divine source of oneself, but at the same moment turning back on oneself to discern the corruption and emptiness of one's

nature. To see God truly required also seeing oneself truly, as *nihil*, negating any assertion of separate will or existence. It is only on the basis of this conceptual background, he suggested, that grace is truly grace, rather than an inevitable justice of what humans would deserve by nature. "For we are not the light which illuminates all men, but we are illuminated by you, so that we who were darkness before can become light in you" (*Conf* 9.4.10). Augustine expressed the belief that this essential change in self-concept would move the Manichaeans from a merely performed to an authentic confession.[84] He equated such an authentic confession with the necessary initiative of faith that would summon God's helping grace. As Psalm 4:1 says, "When I called, the God of my righteousness answered me" (*Conf* 9.4.8); so, he professes to God, "you will answer them when they call out to you" (*Conf* 9.4.9).[85] Kotzé points out that Augustine even appears to suggest that David had the Manichaeans prophetically in mind in Psalm 4.[86]

Augustine, then, appears to have hoped that he himself, as performed in *Confessions*, would serve as God's call to the Manichaeans.[87] "Oh, if only they could have heard me" (*Conf* 9.4.9), "if only they would bring to me those hearts of theirs . . . if only they would say, 'Who will show us good things?' " (*Conf* 9.4.10). Then they would learn not to try to "find their joy in externals" or "lick even the images of these things with their famished imagination," but sealed by the true light of God, they would turn inward. "There within, where I had grown angry with myself, there in the inner chamber where I was pierced with sorrow, where I had offered sacrifice, slaying my old nature (cf. *Fort* 17), and hoping in you as I began to give my mind to the new life, there you had begun to make me feel your sweetness and had given me joy in my heart" (*Conf* 9.4.10). He was "frantic (*frendebum*) at my inability to show it to them" (*Conf* 9.4.10). Yet, at the time when he actually passed through his transformative experience, Augustine reflected, "I could find no way to help those deaf, dead folk among whom I had been numbered" (*Conf* 9.4.11). Why? Because the command to be angry at himself came from the Old Testament, which the Manichaeans rejected. They preferred the New Testament God of love and mercy, disdaining the Old Testament God of anger and punishment. In this way, Augustine argued, they failed to appreciate how the two sides of the same God worked together: his wrath driving humans in fear to plead for the mercy he would so freely give. As a Manichaean himself, Augustine had been "a lethal nuisance, bitter and blind and baying against honey-sweet scriptures distilled from heaven's honey, scriptures luminous by your light; but now to think of the enemies of that scripture caused

me anguish (*tabescebam*)" (*Conf* 9.4.11). Both the psalm he recited in book 9 and the passage of Paul he read in book 8 gave the same command, to sin no more, which was the shared moral goal of Nicene Christians and Manichaeans. Yet the psalm alone stated the means to this end: to be angry at oneself. Paul came first, in order to identify the common goal in the mouth of the Apostle respected by both communities. The psalm followed, in order to signal the point of division that still separated those two communities, which had to be overcome in conversion, and to point forward to Augustine's creative effort in books 11–13 precisely to breach that division by "stirring up love for you in myself and in those who read this, so that we may all say, 'Great is the Lord and highly worthy to be praised' (Ps. 47:2)" (*Conf* 11.1.1).[88]

What am I?: Book 10

The Manichaeans taught that the self emerges and is maintained in the confessional act, the very sort of act that Augustine had not been able to bring himself to perform wholeheartedly when he had been a Manichaean. Now, in *Confessions*, he demonstrated his fulfillment of Manichaean expectations through the agency of the Catholic system. Taking responsibility for his sin within the three Manichaean categories of hand, mouth, and heart ("Who am I and of what sort am I? Is there any evil I have not committed by doing, or if not by doing then by speaking, or if not by speaking then by willing?"),[89] he invoked God's act of grace in similarly Manichaean terms: "But you, Lord, are good and merciful, and your right hand plumbed the depths of my death, draining the abyss of corruption in my heart" (*Conf* 9.1.1). In arriving at the confessional self, Augustine found the ability to achieve the continence that was the hallmark of the life of the Elect, but toward which he had been unable to make progress within the Manichaean system.[90] "By continence," he explained in typically Manichaean images, "the scattered elements of the self are collected and brought back into the unity from which we have slid away into dispersion" (*Conf* 10.29.40).[91] He could not achieve this continence so long as he assumed it came from his own willpower. Continence came to him as an act of grace from God, just as the Manichaeans believed it did, but also just as is said in Wisdom 8:21: "I knew that no one can be continent except by God's gift, and that it is already a mark of wisdom to recognize whose gift this is." What had worked for him in the Catholic ethos that he had not found in the Manichaean alternative? "This was all it was: to refuse

what I willed and to will what you willed" (*nolle quod volebam et velle quod volebas*, *Conf* 9.1.1). Augustine attributed his confessional breakthrough to an adjustment in his orientation to Christ and to God. By accepting that he was not inherently divine—not inherently capable to the same degree as these divine entities, and not in possession of their good will—he had come to recognize his own need for help. He no longer was among those "who look for loftiness in themselves" (*Conf* 9.1.1), but undertook to efface all of himself that was distinctively of himself, rather than of God (*Conf* 10.2.2). Confession offered a tool of this self-effacement: "For when I am bad, confession to you is simply disgust with myself; but when I am good, confession to you consists in not attributing my goodness to myself; because though you, Lord, bless the person who is just, it is only because you have first made him just when he was sinful" (*Conf* 10.2.2). This change of attitude allowed Christ to do his work within Augustine's heart, described in terms strongly reminiscent of Manichaean tropes (cf. *Keph* 38): "It is my delight, Lord, to acknowledge before you what inward goads you employed to tame me, how you laid low the mountains and hills of my proud intellect and made of me an even plain, how you straightened my winding ways and smoothed my rugged patches" (*Conf* 9.4.7). But such strains need not come from Manichaean poetry; the very parts of the Bible that the Manichaeans rejected spoke in these same terms, and Augustine commended to them the Psalms, "sung throughout the world," as the gateway through which they could come to accept the Catholic scriptures.

Such confession did not require vast metaphysical understanding; it necessitated only a grasp of one's immediate situation in relation to God and sinfulness. In searching his memory, Augustine had not been able to ascertain whether he existed before this life, as the Manichaeans and Platonists maintained, though he found reasons to suppose some connection to the immaterial world through the rational faculties with which the mind and soul were endowed. He made much of the etymology of the word for thinking, *cogito*, associating it with the term for assembling or collecting, *colligo* (*Conf* 10.11.18). One draws closer to God, and so closer to being what one is, by collecting fragmented aspects of truth into a unified identity and understanding. The imagery is at one and the same time Platonic and Manichaean. One is the contents of one's memory (10.17.26), properly collected and ordered according to a paradigm of truth.

But, having adopted the Manichaean image of constructing the self through collection of its isolated parts, Augustine undercut it. The memory

has limits that fall short of either God or the full self. Augustine implicitly rejected the Manichaean discourse of remembering one's divine origin, and with it the similar Platonic theme of the recollection of the intelligible. Both concepts tended to make human transcendence too accessible, automatic, and independent. So, even as Augustine described his search for God in terms of ascent, he undermined the very idea of ascent moved by the individual from below. One could not even reach the limits of the self; some part of it remained hidden from one's own gaze, the part from which the perverse will to sin emerges. This interior mysteriousness trumped any indulgence of *curiositas* about the cosmos.

> I am laboring over it, O Lord, over myself. . . . We are not in this instance gazing at the expanses of the sky, or calculating the distances between the stars or the weight of the earth. The person who remembers is myself; I am my mind. It is not surprising that whatever is not myself should be remote, but what can be nearer to me than I am to myself? Yet here I am, unable to comprehend the nature of my memory, when I cannot even speak of myself without it. (*Conf* 10.16.25)

If even knowing oneself poses such challenges, Augustine suggested, who could have the hubris to debate elaborate theories of cosmological and metaphysical order; and who could afford to fixate on such things when the more immediate issue of the self's relation to God pressed so urgently?

In book 10 of *Confessions*, Augustine furthered the qualification of his earlier *sub lege—sub gratia* distinctions, already implicit in *To Simplician*, as he found common experiential ground with the Manichaean characterization of the liberated and effective good will still contending with the resistances of the body.[92] His rhetoric in book 8 of confronting the ugliness in his own soul referred to his state before the transforming grace of God. The faults he discerned within his present self represented the lingering demands of the body for the soul under grace, persisting until it transcends the body "in peace." Before now, Augustine had tended to minimize those lingering bodily nuisances. Suddenly, in book 10, they took on all the vivid self-divisiveness of Romans 7. Augustine described himself even now, under grace, as a conflicted being.

> When at last I cling to you with my whole being there will be no more anguish or labor for me, and my life will be alive indeed, because filled

> with you. But now it is very different. Anyone whom you fill you also uplift, but I am not full of you, and so I am a burden to myself. Joys over which I ought to weep do battle with sorrows that should be a matter for joy, and I know not which will be victorious. But I also see griefs that are evil at war in me with joys that are good, and I know not which will win the day. This is agony, Lord, have pity on me! (*Conf* 10.28.39)

This passage constitutes the first time Augustine treated this Pauline imagery of self-conflict as applicable to the Christian, *sub gratia*, just as the Manichaeans did. For the Manichaeans, the soul that emerges into consciousness with the aid of God's grace marks the first appearance of a self that could enunciate such a conflicted state. For them, evil impulses indeed seemed inexplicable without some source exterior to the redeemed self from which they arise, since they could not come from the rightly aligned consciousness of the awakened soul. Manichaeans premised their regular practice of confession on this continuing condition of conflict after grace, as a ritual that maintained the self against the ongoing onslaught of evil impulses. By adopting their view of the human condition *sub gratia*, Augustine similarly made confession not just a necessary antecedent of conversion, but a permanent condition of the converted self. He had made the Catholic self a confessional self, and thus conformed it to the Manichaean ideal of the perpetually vigilant soul embattled by evil. He waved this congruence of attitude before the Manichaeans' eyes with the classic lines of Manichaean confession: "See, I do not hide my wounds. You are the physician and I am sick. You are merciful and I am in need of mercy" (*Conf* 10.28.39; cf. *PsBk* 46–47; *NB* 41).

Augustine even acknowledged for the first time the possibility of involuntary sin, which he had resisted so long against the Manichaean position. Nocturnal emissions provided the test case, persisting in Augustine although God had granted him the grace of celibacy "even before I was ordained as a dispenser of your sacrament."

> Yet in my memory . . . sexual images survive, because they were imprinted there by former habit. While I am awake they suggest themselves feebly enough, but in dreams with power to arouse me . . . even to consent to something closely akin to the act they represent. . . . Surely this cannot mean that I am not myself while

> asleep. . . . What becomes then of my reason, which enables me to resist these suggestions in waking hours? (*Conf* 10.30.41)

He allowed for a certain degree of clear conscience about such instances, "for the very difference between sleep and waking is obvious enough to convince us that we did not really do the disgraceful thing, even though we are sorry that it was in some sense done in us (*nos non fecisse, quod tamen in nobis quoquo modo factum esse doleamus*, *Conf* 10.30.41). The possibility of such self-exoneration coupled with compunction was precisely what Augustine denied in his earlier defense of free will against the Manichaeans. He had argued that the Manichaean practice of confession necessarily presupposed some responsibility, and had contrasted such a condition to the scenario of the sinful manipulation of an unconscious person, who would be utterly innocent of moral responsibility. He had allowed no room for compunction or regret over that which "was in some sense done in us" without our own conscious agency. But with his analysis of the case of nocturnal emissions, he had—deliberately or inadvertently—stumbled upon the Manichaean understanding of human existence, entailing a struggle to maintain lucidity against the pressing forces of moral slumber, and confessing remorse over failings in this regard (see *Keph* 138).

For a moment, then, Augustine appears to have grasped the possibility that one might confess allowing things to occur within one's person that are not strictly speaking acts of the self. In their own acts of confession, Manichaeans drew their attention to, and sought help in overcoming, momentary, slumber-like lapses of vigilance that permitted sinful conduct to occur. The fact that the person under grace was not immune to such lapses, as Augustine now seemed to recognize, could be taken to support the dualistic notion that God could not instantly and totally defeat evil, but must continue to struggle for mastery over the life of every individual. "Is your hand not powerful enough to heal all my soul's ills, all-powerful God, and by a still more generous grace to extinguish unruly stirrings even in my sleep?" (*Conf* 10.30.42). He rejected the notion: "You are the almighty, able to do more than we ask or understand, and it is no great task for you to make provision that nothing of this kind shall arouse the least sensual pleasure . . . in a person of chaste intention" (*Conf* 10.30.42). Augustine stated with confidence that God would provide this additional gift in due time, furthering his progress toward a fully unified self. God had begun his redemptive work by first curing

Augustine of that most fundamental of misorientations, namely, his desire to vindicate himself from responsibility for sin (through the Manichaean attribution of the impetus of sin to an evil other) and so avoid true confession (*Conf* 10.36.58). That was fundamental; the rest would follow.

Augustine's adoption of this "Catholic" view of the fully and exclusively responsible self, however, came at the price of the full intelligibility of that self. The Manichaeans claimed to know the self thoroughly, to be able to account for its every attribute, and hence to be certain of its inherent goodness. Finding evil to have no place within this good-oriented self, they explained it as other, an inexplicable intrusion into the self's integrity. Rather than adopt the Manichaean alienation of evil from the true self, Augustine resorted to proposing that the self contains unknown depths, deliberately untouched by God's grace, from which sinful impulses may still emanate. Augustine's confession amounted, in the assessment of James Smith, to "a confession of a lack of self-knowledge, a confession of the mystery of his own selfhood."[93] He professed to be an "enigma" to himself, even now (*Conf* 10.33.50), just as he was a "question" to himself as a Manichaean (4.4.9). "Who can map out the various forces at play in one soul . . . ? Man is a great depth, O Lord!" (4.14.22), not simply when wandering in darkness before grace, but also after: "There is in man an area which not even the spirit of man knows" (10.5.7). Even though selfhood resides in the continuity of memory (10.17.26), Augustine found that it, too, was problematic, faulty, fragmented, and unsure. More than anything else, its volume surpassed the grasp of consciousness, so that Augustine was led to confess, "I myself cannot grasp the totality of what I am" (10.8.15). He could not accept the Manichaean solution that what is ungraspable is other. But he was troubled that what is most intimately ourselves can yet be beyond our comprehension. "The self had to embrace the vast areas of darkness for which the Manichean conception had no room," R. A. Markus proposes. "Augustine had come to terms with the layers of shadow impenetrable to the sharp beams of consciousness."[94] The fact that he was as mysterious to himself now as a Catholic (book 10) as he had been as a Manichaean (book 4), however, connected and leveled the rival anthropologies through a common experiential problem, and in this way served to draw his Manichaean readers into the dilemma of selfhood that called into question everything he and they claimed to be and know as selves.

Because he could not fathom all of himself, Augustine was in no position to predict his future conduct or declare his worthiness of salvation (*Conf* 10.28.39). Only God sees the self thoroughly enough to know such things.

That is why God remains inscrutable in his judgments, he suggested, because people remain inscrutable to themselves and cannot know all God knows about them. Implicitly, God still *judges*, still *responds* to what he finds in people, just as God remains for Augustine at this time an *enabler* of inherent human resources, as he was for Manichaeans. Human beings still have within them abilities of which they may not be aware, residues of their good creation that can be activated by God. In time, Augustine would lose his faith in even this modicum of human capacity, and declare people such a mess inside that only God can drag them, practically inert, over the threshold of salvation.

R. A. Markus has identified as decisive in the development in Augustine's thought this insistence on the unity of the self, however unfathomable, by which he "discarded the Manichean conception as intolerably narrow and unable to accommodate either personal responsibility for sinning or the obscure depths within the self in which sin was rooted."[95] But what was the substance of the distinction between these two positions? What consequences unfold from Augustine's choice? The depths in which sin was rooted remained "obscure" for Augustine, impenetrable to human consciousness, conscience, or will. They could not be illuminated or purified. They persisted perpetually as a fount of evil. What value was there, then, in claiming them as one's own? For Augustine, no salutary value at all, only the identification of oneself as guilty, as a sinner, as condemned by God's justice.

If we for a moment set aside the assumption that what the two parties to this debate were describing was meant to be a physical anthropology, and consider them to have been offering *models of selfhood*, of an experience of interiority, then we could say that the Manichaeans had simply chosen an apt modeling of the inaccessibility and irredeemability of a segment of the human composite. Augustine had chosen to frame his model of the self in different terms, while affirming the same characteristics of self as those displayed in the Manichaean account.[96] In Augustine's own understanding, the difference consisted in the Catholic wish for the healing of a damaged self, in opposition to the Manichaeans desire for separation of the pure self from a contaminating presence. What practical difference resulted? For the Manichaeans, the otherness of evil clearly marked its rejection as a possibility of human identity and conduct. In doing wrong, one loses one's humanity, becomes bestial and horrific. The otherness of evil had a motivational function and offered a clear delineation of conduct, by which one "discovered"—that is, crafted by selection, identification, and reinforcement—the true, redeemable self. For Augustine, the ownness of evil was not intended to mitigate its

rejection or to propose it as an acceptable alternative of conduct. Nonetheless, it bound humanity inexorably to evil as a truth about the human character, an identity whose consequences must be exposed, even in its unfathomable depths. For Augustine, sin and nihility stood at the core of the human soul, in light of which human beings deserved and could expect nothing of God. By believing this, Augustine appears to have hoped, Christians would take up the appropriate attitudes toward God that would make them redeemable.

In a certain sense, Augustine hybridized the Manichaean division of interior space with the Plotinian unity of selfhood—both relatively static models—and produced from them his distinctive temporal "fallen" self suffering from divisions within itself until they are healed in salvation. Manichaeism, too, spoke of the fragmented soul as a temporary "fallen" state, but declared that the true fragments were mixed together with false ones. Ideologically, the Manichaean religious system was fundamentally a discursive apparatus for distinguishing the shards of authentic selfhood within the mixture and forming them into a coherent and stable "soul." Augustine shifted this construct into his claim on the total mass of interiority. For him, portions of the self are not only fragmented but also de-natured into something that strongly resembles evil impulses and forces. Manichaeans, he believed, misconstrued what they saw within themselves, at one and the same time giving too much credit to the purity of the "good" fragments and unfairly denying essential parts of themselves as evil and other.

Conclusion: *Confessions* as Self-Performance

In first responding to the charges that his Manichaean past was inescapable, and that he remained one inside, Augustine had confronted the fact that his interiority remained his alone. He could not simply open his mind and heart to the inspection of others so that they would know the truth of his claims to be a Catholic self. In the fallen state, transparency of mind is lost; the realm of lie emerges (*GCM* 2.16.24, 2.21.32; *Sol* 2.9ff; *Mend*). Only his own voluntary confession revealed his inner self to others, unfolded it from "where they cannot penetrate with eye or ear or mind" (*Conf* 10.3.4). Under these conditions, his confession had to be accepted on faith, for others could never be sure that he had told them the truth or that they had certain knowledge of what he had revealed (*Conf* 10.3.4). In the world's terms, then, the revealed self, the performed self, is the only self. One's interiority exists for oneself and

God alone, outside time, beyond engagement with the world's affairs. It may be a powerless self, a self victimized by its conditions to remain mute and passive in the hands of exterior forces. God may still love it and mark it for redemption, even if it can achieve nothing in this life. But in finding agency, in forming a will that by grace or accident finds an avenue of expression in deeds, the self emerges into history and becomes the author of one's visible identity. God may know one's inner truth, but the institutions of society demand a performed selfhood, conformed to exterior models, that nonetheless penetrates and pervades one's interior so that it may be trusted, so that it may be known to be more than *mere* performance.

Michel Foucault has placed great emphasis on the rise of confession as a technique of institutional self-making power in Western civilization. He regards it as one of the most significant traits of the Christian legacy to world culture, ramifying into many other modern discourses of self, identity, and value. Yet the kind of "exhaustive and permanent confession" to which he refers and regards as specific to Christianity was not an element of Christian practice in the time of Augustine.[97] Instead, it was the distinctive practice of the Manichaean community which Augustine imitated literarily in *Confessions*, and would not become a common feature of Catholic practice for several more centuries. Foucault raises as an historical problem the development of this peculiar "government of the living."

> How is it that within Western Christian culture the government of men requires, on the part of those who are led, in addition to acts of obedience and submission, "acts of truth," which have this particular character that not only is the subject required to speak truthfully, but to speak truthfully about himself and his faults, his desires, the state of his soul etc.? How was a type of government of men formed where one is required not simply to obey, but to demonstrate in stating it, that which one is?[98]

He takes particular interest not in how such a technique functioned as a means of domination, but in how it could serve as a "technology of the self" which would "permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on."[99] He sees techniques

of domination and of self interacting and passing over from one to the other, together forming by a "subtle integration" a system of governance.

Augustine recognized that the sifting of his memory and the confession of his past was really something about the present—a stock-taking to discern who he now was, and an opportunity to make himself what he discerned himself to be (see *Conf* 10.1.1, 10.2.2). "In sum," Paula Fredriksen astutely observes, "the conversion account is both anachronistic and apologetic: apologetic personally and publicly, for the convert must explain himself to himself and to his audience (his new group; his old group; an opposing group); anachronistic, because the account rendered in the conversion narrative is so shaped by later concerns. The conversion account, never disinterested, is a condensed, or disguised, description of the convert's *present*, which he legitimates through his retrospective creation of a past and a self."[100] Augustine invents a self in the very act of describing a self that, despite his due regard for its changeableness, purports to be a permanent truth about the self. Or, in the words of R. A. Markus, "The *Confessions* is not only Augustine's account of the journey of his own self-discovery: it is a part, and a large part, of that journey itself."[101]

Augustine disclosed a self in every utterance he made, but especially in the self-reflective act of narrating and describing himself in *Confessions* and in shorter autobiographical passages in other works. Individual acts may provide windows into the interior organization of the self, but through the language of self-description one undertakes to present a summative characterization of the system as a whole from which such individual acts and stances appear. Throughout his earlier writings, Augustine had taken such individual stances, testing them against each other to determine the priorities of his commitments. With *Confessions* he undertook to offer a comprehensive map; so he had best have his interior topography in order.

In this respect, *Confessions* represented a recapitulation of his conversion a decade earlier. It was an actualization of his intentions in converting, a "discovery" within his self of the person he wanted to find there in becoming a Catholic. If conversion amounts to a new-found "certainty that heralds a sense of true self-knowledge," Geoffrey Harpham has contended, then revisiting that event in writing "confirms or actualizes this certainty in a narrative of the self."[102] The linguistic bonds that join our speech acts to our interior thoughts create a two-way channel through which we continuously inform the outside world of what we think ourselves to be within, and simultaneously inform ourselves of what we are willing to be in relation to

others. We form ourselves by entering into lines of discourse going on around us and choosing how we will do so. "The self emerges from, and constantly defines itself through, the conversion of instinct or impulse into language," Harpham suggests.[103] In understanding key Pauline passages not just as exegetical challenges, but as models of his own self, Augustine achieved the conversion that had only been an intention in his actions a decade before. In some sense, therefore, Augustine's conversion had not been the event in the Milanese garden in 386 C.E., but the composition of *Confessions* in the closing years of the following decade. "Language does not provide a document of conversion, nor is it the scene of conversion," Harpham concludes. "Language *is* conversion."[104]

Augustine achieved his formation and disclosure of self only when he passed beyond his preliminary imitation of the community-validated models offered in the heroes of the Catholic Church. That initially adopted "Catholic" self had been only a garment Augustine wore, and he had come to realize that one can achieve a fully authentic new self only by surpassing the models offered by the religion to which one was committed.

> We must obey in full the message which you gave to us through your Apostle when you said, *Do not fall in with the manners of this world*. . . . the next words you spoke were, *There must be an inward change, a remaking of your minds*. When you said this, you did not add "according to your kind" as though you meant us to imitate others who had already led the way, or to live by the example of someone better than ourselves. . . . when he has remade his mind and can see and understand your truth, he has no need of other men to teach him to imitate his kind. (*Conf* 13.22.32)[105]

Augustine realized that, in making his own "Catholic" self, he had made something new. His Manichaean past was part of who he now was, and placed him in the position of reaching back to the Manichaeans in a way no one else could. He offered them a performance of self that incorporated many of the features they took as markers of the true self: oriented away from the world and toward God, seeking truth, struggling with evil, continent, devotional, confessional, dependent on grace. But we must bear in mind that this was a performance of self. In some respects, Augustine was overreaching the comfortable limits of his Catholic self, and would find it necessary to retreat within more traditional boundaries of selfhood endorsed by his Church. Just as it

had taken him a decade to attain to the realization of the self he aspired to be as a Catholic, it would take him decades more to reflect upon and sift the propositions of selfhood he had put forward in *Confessions*, coming to embrace some, reject others, and transform still others into something new again.

Based on its discursive strategy, *Confessions* appears designed to achieve, among other effects, an encapsulation of all that Augustine considered right and redeemable in the *sentiments* of the Manichaeans, while excising through critique (often cleverly as self-critique) the "fables and phantasms" of Manichaeism. Hence the confessional trope by which he contrasted the intention and outcome of Manichaean doctrine and practice; hence all of the Manichaean terminology and imagery, which he readily paralleled to the same sentiments in the Psalms of the Catholic Old Testament; hence the searching engagement with Paul's Manichaean-like self-dichotomies. These compositional elements served to point the way forward to the perfection of Manichaean aspirations through liberation from what Augustine regarded as the retarding elements of the Manichaean world view. Just as Manichaeism had been an advance on the unsophisticated Christianity of Augustine's childhood, so the Nicene-Platonic sophistication of Milan offered an advance on Manichaeism, as a progressive purging of superstitious elements and ideas unworthy of God. Of course Manichaeism had been an advance on the crude, anthropomorphic view of God as inconstant and vengeful. Of course it was in the right in chiding blind, ignorant faith as an end in itself, in criticizing superstitious rites carried into Christianity from paganism. Of course it was wise in its ascetic self-discipline and desire to transcend the lure of the body. It represented an advance over all those aspects of popular Christianity that stemmed from the misunderstanding and bad habits of the mob, who did not know the supernal truths hidden within their own tradition. But the Manichaeans had stopped short. Confident in their reason and ability, they considered themselves already to have arrived at the truth. They did not realize there was further to go. Follow me! Embrace the *Catholica*! Such appears to be the trajectory of Augustine's engagement with possible Manichaean readers of *Confessions*. But if they did try to follow him, if they took him at his word in all the ways he had accommodated their spiritual sentiments, how open would they find the door of the *Catholica*? Could they really get past all of the key differences in how they and Nicene Christians conceptualized the setting and ultimate goal of their religious labor?

CHAPTER 10

Truth in the Realm of Lies

AUGUSTINE'S SHIFT FROM autobiography to exegesis in the concluding sections of the *Confessions* presents a notorious problem. There is no shortage of hypotheses that seek to account for this rather odd compositional move, linking, in Roland Teske's all too apt characterization, "rather strange autobiography and even stranger exegesis."[1] Augustine himself exacerbated the question by providing an unusually taciturn description of *Confessions* in his *Revisions*, in which, stating that his intention had been to "lift up the understanding and affection of people to [God]," he explained the structure simply as, "The first ten books were written about myself; the last three about holy scripture" (*Retr* 2.32.1).[2] In choosing the beginning of Genesis as the subject of exegesis, Augustine retraced familiar ground he had covered in prior efforts against the Manichaeans, as he was drawn once again to the Christian cosmogonic account, despite the fact that no pressing interpretive issue regarding this text troubled the Catholic community. His frequent allusions in the course of his exegesis to Manichaean objections to Genesis, or to alternative Manichaean conceptions of creation, have suggested to many, therefore, that Augustine intended yet another anti-Manichaean defense of the Nicene view of creation.[3] Indeed, a few years later, Augustine would speak of his previous allegorical readings of Genesis, including that in *Confessions*, as intended to be responses to Manichaeans (*GL* 8.2.5). Yet why should such an effort be undertaken here, seemingly appended to a work of a quite different kind? How does it relate to Augustine's purpose in the rest of *Confessions*?

Identifying more of a protreptic than a polemical purpose, researchers such as Catherine Joubert and Annemaré Kotzé have proposed, in the latter's

words, that "Augustine's primary objective in books 11 to 13 is to redeem the story of creation in the sight of his Manichaean reader."[4] An allegorical reading of the text provided more than just a defense against Manichaean criticism of its literal meaning; it also revealed, hidden below its surface, lofty and sophisticated ideas that might prove worthy of Manichaean respect. Here again, Augustine appears to have used his own past sentiments to connect with a Manichaean audience, commenting on his own dislike and lack of appreciation of the Old Testament, both before joining the Manichaeans (*Conf* 3.5.9), and even after his decision to convert to Nicene Christianity (*Conf* 9.5.13), at a point in the narrative where the reader expects him to sing its praises unrestrainedly. Yet, even with such a protreptic theory of Augustine's purpose, as with proposals that envision more of a traditional anti-Manichaean polemic at work, Augustine's project would entail principally an effort to prove the Genesis creation story to be true, by a combination of demonstrating its affirmation by authorities (such as Paul) the Manichaeans claim to recognize, and finding in it worthy spiritual truths by means of allegory.

My proposed reading of books 11–13 of *Confessions*, while acknowledging the complex layering of discursive purpose evident there, highlights a slightly different aspect of Augustine's rhetorical strategy. I agree, of course, that Augustine included familiar responses to Manichaean critiques of Genesis, and in that sense mounted a defense of the biblical text. I also recognize that Augustine did not address Manichaean readers exclusively, but devoted considerable attention to possible objections to his exegesis from within the Catholic community. It is my contention that these two directions of concern belong to a single purpose displayed in his highly eccentric interpretation of the Genesis creation story. For the most remarkable aspect of Augustine's exegetical defense of Genesis is that he defended no particular interpretation at all. He cannot be said to have defended the Nicene or Catholic understanding of Genesis against Manichaean criticisms or alternatives, simply because there was no such thing as *the* Nicene or Catholic understanding of it, beyond the formal commitment to the text of Genesis itself. Nor did he defend the text of Genesis in its literal or historical sense as a true account of creation opposed to the Manichaean alternative.[5] In fact, he largely departed from treating Genesis as about creation at all, preferring to find in it an account of the soteriological re-creation of fallen humanity, while not dogmatically insisting that this represented the sole correct reading of the passage.

In this way, I think, Augustine's extended allegorical exploration of the possible meanings of Genesis connected to the story he had been telling in

the rest of *Confessions* about his own soteriological re-creation, and served to subordinate myth to personal story, cosmogony to eschatology, grand metaphysical axioms to individual pragmatic outcomes.[6] By constantly engaging Manichaean images and expressions for the cosmological and anthropological realities he examined, he demonstrated their interchangeability with perfectly acceptable Catholic discourse derived from the Bible, even while identifying nonnegotiable differences of outlook that currently divided the two communities. Ultimately, he came to relativize the very authority of the biblical text that he insisted Manichaeans must acknowledge, reducing that acknowledgment to a mere formal gesture immediately mitigated by the rich latitude of possible interpretations. In this radical and heretofore underappreciated way, I argue, Augustine signaled a desire to smooth the way for Manichaean conversion to a truly "Catholic" identity.

Augustine's spiritual breakthrough and progress had depended upon his transfer from one ideological system to another, from one that did not work for him to one that did. His basic spiritual intentions and goals had not changed; he had simply found a more effective route to their realization, and wished to point others down the same path. He had told of that path to spiritual success in the previous books of *Confessions*. In adding books 11–13, he revisited the cosmogonic, cosmological, and metaphysical scheme to which he had committed himself in place of the Manichaean one, in order to show in this way, too, that the Catholic way was better—more functional for the desired outcome, more in tune with the values he still shared with the Manichaeans. He returned, in a sense, to the ideological openness proposed by Faustus.[7] Mythic details may or may not be true, but that which successfully grounds practice is to be provisionally accepted as true. Having told his own story as proof that the Catholic way succeeded in grounding his ascetic reform and practice in a way that Manichaeism had not, Augustine summoned the Manichaeans to acknowledge that by Faustus's standard, the Catholic cosmogonic myth deserved a second look.

He had concluded on the basis of his own experience that the Manichaean myth inevitably produced attitudes inimical to spiritual progress, whereas the biblical myth established a set of attitudes that enabled progress. Accordingly, he sought to portray that myth in a manner as appealing as possible to Manichaean sensibilities, often with direct appropriation of Manichaean concepts and imagery. By employing Manichaean motifs to which his audience was favorably conditioned, he set about making the biblical account of creation appeal to them as a viable alternative myth underpinning

their spiritual aspirations. In one such masterful play on Manichaean tropes, after invoking in their terms his true inner self as the speaker ("May the truth, the light of my heart, not my darkness, speak to me"), he summarized the odyssey of his soul in close rhetorical parallel to the Manichaean myth of the descent of the Primal Man into the turbid chaos of the realm of evil. "I slipped down into the dark and was plunged into obscurity. Yet from there, even from there, I loved you. 'I erred and I remembered you' (cf. Ps. 118[119]:176). 'I heard your voice behind me' (Ez. 3:12), calling me to return. And I could hardly hear because of the hubbub of people who know no peace. Now, see, I am returning . . . let no one stand in my path" (*Conf* 12.10.10). Yet he turned the dramatic images to a very personal testimony of the different outlook of a Catholic self, and of the key instrument of that difference: "May I not be my own life. On my own resources I lived evilly. To myself I was death. In you I am recovering life. Speak to me, instruct me. I have put faith in your books. And their words are mysteries indeed" (*Conf* 12.10.10).

It is important to recall that in the *Confessions* narrative Augustine had treated Manichaeism as a step in the spiritual project he shared with his former associates, only false to the degree that one thought that in Manichaeism he or she had already reached Truth itself, when in fact it represented an immature level of understanding. Augustine had discovered that he had further to go, and that Manichaeism had provided merely a way-station. There were genuine elements in it that accounted for its attractiveness, and for its ability to help some achieve a modicum of moral reform. Augustine now had to show how those rudimentary impressions of truth found in Manichaeism by him and his former associates were fulfilled, rather than contradicted, in the deeper meaning of the biblical cosmogonic myth. If he could just get them to exchange the Manichaean myth for this one, everything else they would need to understand would follow. "They may bark as much as they please" against the Old Testament, Augustine allowed, nevertheless, "I will merely attempt to persuade them to be quiet, and so open a way by which your word may reach them" (*Conf* 12.16.23). In this way, he reiterated the intention expressed in *Against the Fundamental Epistle* to "choose and to desire the better means in order that we may have a way to approach your correction not in contention and jealousy and persecutions but by gently consoling, by benevolently exhorting, and by calmly arguing" (*CEF* 1.1). Paul himself, Augustine recalled, counseled that "a servant of the Lord should not be quarrelsome but gentle toward all, docile, patient, and rebuking with modesty those who think differently" (2 Tim 2:24–25). In a very concrete way, Augustine may

have conceived his examination of the biblical creation story in books 11–13 of *Confessions* as the logical sequel and completion of the critique of Manichaean myth in *Against the Fundamental Epistle*; he may have chosen to integrate it into *Confessions* instead because he grew dissatisfied with his inability to maintain his originally benevolent tone amid the pointed polemics of the former work.

Just as Augustine rejected the right of anyone else to judge the state of his own soul, so he questioned any claim to know who was to be numbered among the saved, and who among the damned, despite appearances and associations with one religious community or another. Not even a spiritual person, Augustine insists, "can judge the distinction between spiritual and carnal people. These are known in your sight, our God, but are not yet clearly distinguished in ours by the criterion of any deeds, which might enable us to tell them by their fruits" (*Conf* 13.23.33). This held especially true of the "muddy people of this world" (*turbidis huius saeculi populis*), the "outsiders" (*foris*) of whom it cannot be known "which of them will come from there to be in your sweet grace." After all, within his new understanding of grace, some were set apart by God from the rest of the sinful mass through no merit of their own (*Conf* 13.14.15; 13.17.20), those whom God had already secretly called at the beginning of the world, before the firmament was made (*Conf* 13.23.33).[8] Augustine was ready to credit the good intentions and potential redemption of those former friends with whom he once sought Truth. Now that he had found it, he needed to prove to them not that it was Truth to their error, but that it was that very same Truth they had groped after and dimly discerned together.

Accordingly, Augustine repeatedly summoned his Manichaean readers to live up to their own rhetoric of "seeking and knocking" (*Conf* 11.2.4, 12.1.1, etc.). In place of Faustus's claim to the right to exercise a discerning conscience that rejects whatever offends in scripture, Augustine proposed an interpretive charity by which the scriptures are assumed to be true, and reason employed to discover how it is true (10.3.3–4; 11.2.2–3.5). Just as he denied to anyone the ability to gainsay his testimony to the interior history of his own soul, so Augustine challenged anyone to deny that his insights into the meaning of scripture were truths whispered to his soul by God himself (12.15.18). He even, at times, justified his interpretations with a rhetorical "why not?" (*cur ergo non accipiam*, 12.4.4), asserting reason's right to inform how revelation is true. For those modern interpreters who imagine that Augustine intended to offer a definitive reading of Genesis to counter Manichaean criticism and

the threat of their rival theology, Augustine provided no cover. Certainty and definitiveness were precisely what Augustine did not pretend to offer in books 11–13 of *Confessions*. Instead he presented possibilities, and by their plurality signaled a continuing condition of uncertainty in this world, in whose shadow persons of faith had somehow to find their way.

First Things First: Time and the "Heaven of Heaven" in Books 11 and 12

Following upon his personal story of providential calling and the response of his conversion in books 1–9, as well as his current self-reflections in book 10, Augustine presented himself in book 11 as now properly attuned to God, and finally able to offer his mind and speech to God's service, rather than to his own idle intellectual pursuits (*Conf* 11.2.3). To that end, he returned to the Christian myth of creation, and to the same Old Testament text that he had once found distasteful and unfathomable (3.5.9), yet whose depth of riches he now fathomed in comparison to the "titillating tales" of Mani (11.2.4). These riches would open to the Manichaeans, too, if they would only heed their own slogan, to knock and to seek (11.2.3–3.4; 12.1.1). Augustine's own progress in this regard could serve as the example for his former friends to follow. "If I am to confess . . . everything you have taught me about this question of matter," for instance, "the truth is that earlier in life I heard the word but did not understand it, and those who spoke to me about it did not understand it either" (12.6.6).

By asking the rhetorical question, "What was God doing before he made heaven and earth?" (*Conf* 11.10.12; 11.12.14; 11.30.40), the Manichaeans intended to demonstrate that something must have prompted God to act in a way he had not before.[9] " 'If he was at leisure,' they say, 'and not making anything, why did he not continue so thereafter and forever, just as he had always done nothing prior to that?' " For them, God had created the world in response to the assault of evil, in order to form a battleground on which evil could be caught and defeated in the "middle time" between the past of original happiness in the Realm of Light and the future of its restoration. Ignoring the details of the Manichaean myth, Augustine attacked the premise of the question, namely, that God exists in time and therefore passed long ages in inaction before suddenly springing into creative action.[10] He argued that time itself is the creation of God, and there is no time before this act of creation

(*Conf* 11.12.15), rejecting the Manichaean opinion of time as a primary condition of divine existence and setting of divine action.[11]

Augustine's own apparent interest in the philosophical issue of time, as well as the sort of issues for human discourse it raised, led him into a long disquisition on the subject (evidently based on Plotinus, among other predecessors)[12] that takes up the bulk of book 11, and we should not shy away from concluding that Augustine may well have digressed from his larger purpose in doing so, regardless of the intrinsic interest his ruminations on the subject may hold for modern researchers, and the connections they have discerned to other themes in his works. Yet Augustine tended to go on at length when he struggled over a delicate problem, searching for the right way to establish what might be hard for his readers to accept. So it may be that something very central to his purpose was at stake in the subject of time. Taken in connection with the following books, his exploration in book 11 of the difference between time and eternity may have aimed, in part, at providing a foundation for his later point that all *temporal* things are *temporary*, and are only means to an end, not to be venerated in themselves, but to be *used*. He included all material creation, all human culture and technology, among these mere means to an end, even—most delicately of all, but also most centrally to his following discussion—scripture itself. This relativizing of scripture as a temporary expedient of fallen humanity underlay his "almost anything goes" interpretation of the creation story in books 12–13, as well as the interpretive program he outlined around the same time in *Christian Doctrine*.[13]

In more immediate terms as an answer to Manichaean conceptions of the time-bound nature of reality, Augustine reduced the larger question of the nature of time to one of human *perception* of time. He argued that the sense one may have of an existing past and future is illusory. The past only exists in the present as memory, the future only as expectation (*Conf* 11.18.23).[14] For this reason, talk of the "three times"—a central mythologoumenon of Manichaeism—amounted only to a conventional way of speaking (11.20.26). By implication, what the Manichaeans took to be real—the expanse of time and the mythic content with which they filled it—constituted merely a construct of their own minds, beyond which stood an ultimate reality that they had not yet begun to fathom. This aspect of Augustine's answer, too, reflects his handling of the biblical creation narrative, which he regarded as accommodating the limitations of the human mind by depicting eternal truths as if they were events in time.

By presenting nonmaterialist interpretations of the Genesis account,

Augustine both defended it from Manichaean critique and promoted it as what he regarded as a higher understanding of God's creative processes than that found in Manichaean dualist materialism. The darkness that dominated the scene at the beginning of creation was nothing more than the absence of light, not a self-subsistent substance (*Conf* 12.3.3). The earth without form represented the formless matter of Platonic ontology, only known by a kind of unknowing by which all sensible qualities are mentally stripped from it (12.3.3–5.5), not some seething mass of evil forms (12.6.6).[15] This matter from which God made things is not coeternal with God, nor self-subsistent; it relies for its being on Being itself, which is God. Yet neither does it derive from God's own substance; rather God brought it into existence from nothing (12.7.7–8.8). In response to his knocking on the door of truth, Augustine had learned the inner meaning of the two things existing at the beginning of time in Genesis (12.12.15). The "heaven and earth" that provide the root of the rest of creation in the Genesis account represent the dual source of experienced things—"two realities, one near to yourself, the other bordering on nothingness; one to which you alone would be superior, the other than which nothing would be lower" (12.7.7). In short, the Genesis account reveals a Platonic cosmos, with "earth" standing for the material substrate, and "heaven" the treasury of forms. Time does not enter into the creation account until form and matter come together in the mutable existence of created things, because time is defined by changes of form within matter (12.9.9). In Augustine's opinion, therefore, the Manichaean myth failed to reflect a sufficiently elevated philosophical grasp of reality, with its dramatic account of an active evil and a responsive God before the formation of the world.[16] Even so, Augustine's more "philsophical" metaphysics had a comparably dualistic structure.

Augustine did not leave his metaphysical system at an abstract level of expression, but dressed his presentation of the Platonic realm of forms with the richer, devotional imagery of the Manichaean Realm of Light. He introduced from Psalm 113:16 the expression "heaven of heaven" (*caelum caeli*) for the immaterial realm or entity from which forms spring.[17] It is "some sort of intellectual creature" (*creatura est aliqua intellectualis*, 12.9.9, cf. 12.15.19–20). "Although not at all coeternal with you, O Trinity, it participates in your eternity, largely suspending its mutability through the intense bliss it enjoys in contemplation of you, and by clinging to you with a constancy from which it has never fallen since its first creation, it escapes all the rolling changes of time" (12.9.9). It is at one and the same time a being and a place: a creature who "does not turn away from you or toward itself," and God's luminous

house, in which pure souls and spirits dwell (12.11.12) directly perceiving each other's thoughts (12.13.16), a city[18] which he has "established to last forever . . . yet it is not coeternal with you, for it did have a beginning" (12.15.19). It is "the intellectual order of being which by contemplating the Light becomes light itself," "the rational, intelligent mind of your chaste city . . . our mother, free and eternal in heaven" (12.15.20, with allusions to Gal 4:26 and 2 Cor 5:1). This complex of characteristics interweaves with a Platonic metaphysical foundation vivid elements that cannot be traced to either its supposed biblical proof texts or its Platonic underpinnings, but closely parallel Manichaean descriptions of the Realm of Light,[19] which is both a place and a living being (*Keph* 22, 65.14–66.27; *PsBk* 198.21–201.1), a city (*PsBk* 50.28–29; 53.28; 64.13; 80.29–30; 84.32; 95.28–29; 117.5–6; 136.36–40; 198.8; 200.15;), pervaded by a mind or spirit (*Keph* 3, 24.1–3; 21, 64.16–25; *PsBk* 136.53), the residence of God and of the pure spirits who enjoy blissful contemplation of him, and whom God sets out to protect from evil's assault (*Faust* 15.5; *CEF* 13.16; *PsBk* 203.3–25).[20]

Thus, far from being an anti-Manichaean construct, the "heaven of heaven" draws heavily on Manichaean conceptions of the Realm of Light unparalleled in any other source Augustine had at his disposal.[21] The fact that the concept of a "heaven of heaven" barely appears in any other work of Augustine points up its purely strategic use in *Confessions* as a construct probably intended to appeal to Manichaean readers. Facing down Catholic readers who might object to reading into the biblical text this penumbric divine realm to which the pilgrim soul will return, he indulged in free paraphrases of Manichaean imagery, calling upon God, "the one true and supreme good," to "gather all that I am, my whole disintegrated and deformed self" into his heavenly city, "where are lodged the first-fruits of my spirit, and whence I draw my present certainty, that you may reshape me to new form, new firmness, for eternity" (*Conf* 12.16.23).[22] Indeed, Augustine for once gave rather free rein to expressions of the soul's preexistence in this heaven of heaven, its exile from it, and ambition to return.[23]

Yet Augustine qualified his adoption of Manichaean (and Platonist) themes and images with a series of carefully presented clarifications, whose importance he marked by declaring them interior revelations from God, part of God's call to him to turn back from the darkness to which he had wandered away (*Conf* 12.10.10). He endeavored to make clear that despite all similarity and participation of the soul in divine things, God remains distinct and apart, never changing or responding to events in time.

> Loud and clear have you spoken to me in my inward ear, O Lord, telling me that you are eternal and that *to you alone immortality belongs* (1 Tim 6:16), because no alteration of form, no motion changes you. Nor does your will vary with changing times; for a will that can be sometimes one thing, sometimes another, is not immortal. . . . Loud and clear have you spoken to me in my inward ear, O Lord, telling me that you have made all natures and substances which are not what you are and yet have being; that alone is not from you which has no being. You have told me also that if our will moves away from you who are, toward anything which less truly is, that movement is transgression and sin; but no one's sin either harms you or disturbs the order of your reign at any point, first or last. (*Conf* 12.11.11)

As for the "heaven of heaven," God transcends this, too.

> Loud and clear have you spoken to me in my inward ear, telling me that no creature is coeternal with you, not even a created being whose entire pleasure is in you alone. Drinking deeply from you in unswerving fidelity, such a creature shows no trace of mutability at any point, for it is bound fast by the whole strength of its love to you who are always present to it; and having nothing to expect in the future, nor any memories to relegate to the past, it is neither affected by change nor a prey to a distended consciousness. How blessed is such a creature, if any such there be! Its beatitude is to cling to your beatitude; its blessedness is to have you as its everlasting guest and enlightener. Nothing can I find that I would more readily call *the heaven of heaven*, *which belongs to the Lord* than this your household (*domum*), which contemplates your entrancing beauty, never tiring, never turning aside to any other, a pure mind concordantly united in the stable peace of your holy spiritual beings, the citizens of your city in that heaven above this heaven we see. (*Conf* 12.11.11)

The unmistakable similarity to the Manichaean characterization of the Realm of Light in the "love song" Augustine could recall reciting with them (*Faust* 15.5), or in the *Fundamental Epistle* used as a basic catechetical text of the sect, discloses Augustine's effort here to enrich his philosophical concepts with the devotional imagery of Manichaeism, at the same time finding that same imagery in the Catholic Bible, and correcting any false implications in accordance

with Nicene dogma. In fact, the Nicene clarification he provided in the image of the "heaven of heaven," differentiating it from, and making it dependent on, God, corresponds closely with the core problem he raised with regard to the Manichaean Realm of Light in *Against the Fundamental Epistle* 24.

In this way, Augustine achieved a rhetorical demonstration that, just as Catholic teaching could provide an effective context for the moral reform and self-formation central to Manichaean aspirations, so too it could offer an intellectual and devotional home for all those to whom Manichaeism once appealed. The only shift necessary in one's thinking was recognition that this realm of spiritual beings is not consubstantial with God himself and possesses its immutability not intrinsically, but by its orientation and devotion toward God.[24] Otherwise, let the imagination run wild with whatever glorifying, devotional imagery one liked. Let it be thought of as a heavenly city, full of divine beings, dwelling in light and bliss. Let one think one's original and true home was there, and that one is currently in an exile entangled with evil. Augustine could just as easily interpret the Manichaean mythic universe in terms of his Platonic-Nicene synthesis as he could the Bible itself; indeed, in his opinion it was the main failing of Manichaean leaders, and his chief frustration as a Manichaean, that it was not treated as a "myth" should be, but dogmatically petrified into a misconception of reality. Surely, the gross literalism of the Manichaean tradition was a mistake, and its colorful myth originally meant to be taken as symbolic of pure philosophical truths, just as Augustine had expected when he had kept their company. The Manichaeans should give up this erroneous limitation of their thinking to mythic images derived from the senses. But in giving it up, they would cease to be Manichaeans (*Conf* 12.14.17; cf. *CEF* 23.25), because naked truth would by definition be beyond the material fantasies that distinguish Manichaeans from Catholics. This, then, would be the road to redemption for the Manichaeans—at one and the same time the object of Augustine's anger and his hope.[25]

But Augustine had a problem: he recognized that his own fellow Catholics offered the chief obstacle to making the Bible yield the kind of reading that he hoped would appeal to the Manichaeans. He foresaw their objections to his project of accommodation, and attempted to address them (*Conf* 12.14.17ff.).[26] He imagined these "lovers of the sacred books" to be potentially uncomfortable with the interpretive liberties he took with the text. Robert O'Connell maintains that "the length and intensity of his defense shows that the issue was a burning one for Augustine,"[27] and suggests that he may have gone out of his way to credit Ambrose for his allegorical method (*Conf*

5.14.24–25; 6.3.4–5.8) to forestall criticism.[28] Indeed, in the discussion of Ambrose's allegorical method in book 6, Augustine had emphasized how it had provided an opportunity for him to "knock at the door" of understanding, and how it proved decisive in his conversion to Nicene Christianity. He appears to recapitulate at the end of *Confessions*, therefore, the very means by which he claimed to have been brought to his own conversion: through allegorical solutions to a scriptural authority many—including his own past self—found problematic in a number of ways. At the moment he chose to belabor possible objections to his interpretation from within the Catholic camp, it should be noted, he had as yet proposed no spectacular interpretive innovation, other than the "heaven of heaven" itself, with its echoes of Manichaean imagery. In book 13 he would go much farther in his allegorical liberties with the text, and his rhetorical hand-wringing in much of book 12 may reflect a self-consciousness of going far out on a limb. Indeed, he would balance this venture almost immediately after completing *Confessions* with the massive undertaking of *Genesis Literally*, much as he had attempted to balance the similar allegorical approach of *Genesis Against the Manichaeans* with the incomplete *Genesis Literally, Unfinished*.

Augustine's twofold appeal to Manichaeans and Catholics called for indulgence of his own innovative interpretation of Genesis without insisting that it was the only true reading, or that such a thing as an exclusively true reading even existed (*Conf* 12.18.27; 12.20.29; 12.23.32–32.43).[29]

> What does it matter to me that various interpretations of those words are proffered, so long as they [i.e., the words of scripture] are true? I repeat, what does it matter to me if what I think the author thought is different from what someone else thinks he thought? All of us, his readers, are doing our utmost to search out and understand the writer's intention, and since we believe him to be truthful, we do not presume him to be making any statement that we either know or suppose to be false. Provided, therefore, that each person tries to ascertain in the holy scriptures the meaning the author intended, what harm is there if a reader holds an opinion which you, the light of all truthful minds, show to be true, even though it is not what was intended by the author, who himself meant something true, but not exactly that? (*Conf* 12.18.27)

Augustine did not hesitate to claim for himself this inner light of truth (11.23.30; 12.10.10; 12.26.36; 12.28.38; 12.30.41; 13.18.23; 13.24.36), this voice

of God within (12.11.11–12; 12.15.18). Indeed, he maintained that it manifested itself equally in "all truthful minds," producing a plurality of readings, granting no exclusive authority to any one interpretation. In short, it is a *pragmatic* truth, a functional truth serving as part of God's call to individual souls, and as such taking different forms for different hearers. Usually read as an appeal to his fellow Catholics for exegetical pluralism, Augustine's position at the same time offered a radical invitation to his Manichaean readers. Throughout his discussion of the issue of interpretation, he repeatedly shifted between addressing those who denied the truth of scripture and those who accepted it (cf. 12.14.17, 12.16.23). In doing so, he marked the essential boundary the Manichaeans must cross. The same leap of faith that had brought him to accept the authority of the Church and its scriptures he now required of other Manichaeans. Once he had made that commitment to the truth of what the Catholic Church offered, he had been free to interpret it with great liberty, in light of whatever philosophical or cosmological model he wished to bring to bear. Certainly, the Church set limits to the possible, but there remained wide space for opinion. Into that space Augustine invited the Manichaeans, he and they alike humbly recognizing, in the way that Faustus himself promoted, the uncertainty of human knowledge. "Human thinking employs words in this way; but its attempts are either an ignorant knowing or knowing ignorance (*dum sibi haec dicit humana cogitatio, conetur eam vel nosse ignorando vel ignorare noscendo*)" (12.4.5). Faustus, we recall, received Augustine's praise precisely because "he was not altogether ignorant of his own ignorance (*non usquequaque imperitus erat imperitiae suae*)" (5.7.12).

The Manichaeans needed only to humbly presume the truth of scripture, rather than precipitously fault it, and patiently seek and knock for that truth to make itself plain. The details of exegesis did not matter; scripture had edification as its main purpose, "to promote the love that springs from a pure heart, a good conscience, and unfeigned faith" (*Conf* 12.18.27). If even Catholics disagreed on the meaning of the biblical text, why could not Manichaeans join their company in good faith? Indeed, reason might supply conclusions about God that the Bible itself failed to give expressly, and Christians of good faith could agree on the truth of these extra-biblical ideas, Augustine proposed, even while disputing whether or not they are implied in the biblical text (12.22.31). Augustine, therefore, did not demand adherence to a particular interpretation of the Bible, but only an acceptance of its truth *in some sense*. He set out the nonnegotiable limit of this openness.

> It is one thing to seek the truth about the making of the created universe, and another to inquire what Moses . . . wished his reader or hearer to understand from his words. With regard to the former, I will have no truck with any who think they know things which are in fact untrue. With regard to the latter, neither will I have anything to do with those who think that Moses could have said what is untrue. But as for those who feed on your truth in the wide pastures of love, let me be united with them in you, and in you find my delight in company with them. Let us approach the words of your book together, and there seek your will. (12.23.32)

This passage stands over against his earlier prayer that those who reject the truth of Moses should perish, only to become different persons who embrace his truth (12.14.17). Presuming that they could achieve this change from old self to new self, passing through the nihility of formlessness, Augustine welcomed them into the company of those who seek and knock—a company to which they always claimed to belong. In this spirit, he invoked again the image of camaraderie and unity of purpose he had first celebrated in his description of his time among the Manichaeans in book 4. He and they could recapture that spirit, become again a harmonious collectivity of mind, if only they were willing to do so in the context of the Catholic rather than the Manichaean community.

Augustine could not assert with certainty precisely what Moses intended to convey in the biblical text; he could only insist that whatever it was, it was true. The common quest of all truth seekers, he averred, is to discover the limits of possible interpretations by ruling out readings that would yield untruths identified by reason. To assert any one truth as the text's meaning over any other is proud presumption (*Conf* 12.24.33–25.34).

> Since, then, so rich a variety of highly plausible interpretations can be culled from those words, consider how foolish it is rashly to assert that Moses intended one particular meaning rather than any of the others. If we engage in hurtful strife as we attempt to expound his words, we offend against the very love for the sake of which he said all those things. (12.25.35)

Indeed, if he were Moses, he would have hoped God would inspire in him words that would support diverse visions in his readers (12.26.36), as an

admonitio or congruent call to different individuals, a "fountain for varied thirsts." Naturally, Augustine would exclude the Manichaean cosmogonic construct as an integral system from the "variety of highly plausible interpretations" to which he wishes to extend charitable acceptance. Yet he incorporated large sets of images and themes disarticulated from that system. At the same time, he turned his criticism on the sort of naive understandings of Genesis found among the ignorant sons and daughters of the Church, to which he continued to object much as he had as a Manichaean (12.27.37, 12.30.41). Nonetheless, he declared woe on those, like his past self, who leave the "nest" of Christianity because they object to such naive understandings. Like all mythic discourse, he contended, the biblical text works at multiple levels, sustaining the simple and nourishing the intellectual alike. "Everyone draws for himself whatever truth he can from it about these questions, each a different point" (12.27.37).

Creation and Re-Creation: Book 13

Having considered at length in the previous two books the state of God and his "heaven of heaven" in the timeless realm before creation, Augustine finally began in book 13 to track through the biblical creation story. As throughout *Confessions*, Nicene Christianity, Platonism, and Manichaeism supplied him, as it were, with the three threads that he wove together into a complex tapestry of themes. In the course of his personal narrative, he had both evoked a common ground of imagery and sentiments on which he and the Manichaeans could stand, and at the same time refuted the tenets of Manichaeism unacceptable to Nicene orthodoxy that divided the two communities. Similarly, in his exploration of the biblical creation narrative, Augustine both offered a meeting of minds and revisited his objections to Manichaean views of the creation—both their own understanding of the event and their critique of the account of it found in the Catholic Bible. Underpinning all, he postulated a single Truth, glimpsed in various ways through the obscurities of this world, known perfectly by no one living there—Manichaean, Platonist, or Catholic alike.

For his elaboration of the biblical creation story, Augustine continued in book 13 to mine Manichaean mythic imagery, especially where it intersected with Platonic themes: highlighting the contrast between light and darkness (*Conf* 13.2.3; 13.6.7; 13.8.9; 13.14.15), between soul and body (13.1.1;

13.2.2; 13.14.15), and stressing the soul's affinity to the divine before its fall (13.2.3; 13.7.8; 13.9.10; 13.10.11; 13.13.14; 13.14.15).[30] In other cases, Augustine subordinated Platonic resonances to more dramatic and emotive imagery typical of Manichaean discourse. Just as his characterization of the "heaven of heaven" in book 12 hewed closer to Manichaean descriptions of the Realm of Light than to the Platonic realm of forms, so his description of the unformed mass of corporeal substance in book 13 radically departed from his usual anti-Manichaean concern to deny matter any attributes whatsoever. Relying on the cover provided by the biblical language of primordial dark waters, he characterizes matter as "alive even in its own dark turbulence" (13.4.5), "dark with the unstable flux of spiritual formlessness" (13.5.6). The concession to Manichaean sentiment in almost visceral terms, once again, came with carefully stated anti-Manichaean technical qualifications. Far from being an irredeemably evil and alien substance that espies light and pursues it with hostile intent,[31] this dark, turgid mass was created by God (13.1.1–2.3), and "has the prospect of being converted to him who made it, that so it may live more and more fully on the fount of life, and in his light see light, and so be perfected, illumined, and beatified" (13.4.5).

In a similar fashion, Augustine boldly appropriated the scenario of the Manichaean myth, speaking of an assault of darkness on God's heavenly city that threatened to engulf it.

> An angel was swept away; the human soul was swept away; and they had shown that all spiritual creatures would have been engulfed in darkness, had you not said at that first moment, *Let there be light*, and brought light into being; and had not every obedient intelligence in your heavenly city clung fast to you and found its rest in your spirit. . . . Otherwise the very heaven above our heaven would have been a dark abyss in itself, whereas now it is light in the Lord. (13.8.9)

Here, too, he clarified the mythic imagery with corrections aimed at Manichaean metaphysics, insisting that every level of changeable creation depends entirely in its goodness and illumination on its clinging to the "garment of light" with which God endows it, to cover its own native darkness (13.8.9). The fall and ascent do not involve actual movement through space, but a shifting condition and orientation of the individual soul. In this way, Augustine reduced the cosmic dimensions of the battle against evil to an interior, personal one against evil desires (13.7.8).

Augustine also closely paralleled Manichaean ways of talking about a secondary heaven, which appeared in Manichaeism as the New Aeon, an intermediary light-realm fashioned from portions of light retrieved from the primordial battle without any taint of darkness. Similarly, Augustine spoke of a pure part of creation "raised up without delay," so that it never knew a state of darkness as humans do. In his corrected version of this idea, this pure part of creation did not enjoy its untainted condition because it possessed an immutable nature, but because God deigned to preserve it apart (*Conf* 13.10.11). The Manichaeans included the sun and moon among those portions of light they imagined had been spared mixture with darkness (*Conf* 3.6.10; *Faust* 9.2; 18.5; *Serm* 12.12), and as a Manichaean Augustine had participated in venerating the sun at dawn and other times with prayers and hymns (*Faust* 14.11). Anyone familiar with examples of Manichaean paeans to the sun will recognize Augustine's close approximation of their imagery, albeit built of a kind of pastiche of passages from the Psalms (*Conf* 13.14.15).[32] Yet again, Augustine affirmed and echoed Manichaean devotional language, while interweaving it with denials of specific Manichaean positions, such as the soul's inherent goodness.

At the core of Augustine's correction of Manichaean premises stood his rejection of the notion that the soul shared God's divine nature, or that God brought human souls forth because he needed their help, or indeed that creation itself was a kind of defensive bulwark for God, all of which the Manichaean myth taught (*Conf* 13.1.1). Creation "could be of no profit to you, nor equal to yourself as though proceeding from your own substance" (13.2.2). "It was not need on your part that drove you to make them. . . . it was not as though your own happiness stood in need of completion by them" (13.4.5). For that reason, neither humans nor any part of creation has rights before God—rights to exist, rights to be preserved and saved (13.2.2). The modern reader need only ask him- or herself who in Augustine's world asserted any such thing as Augustine here rejects to recognize that Manichaeism dominates his interpretative concerns. In place of the Manichaean conception of creative necessity, Augustine offered the Platonic vision of an unfolding of creation from the natural bountifulness of its source of being, and a second movement of return by which this unfolding creation finds its perfection in its further conformity to its source (13.2.3).[33]

With this two-step model of development—*formatio et conversio*—Augustine combated the Manichaean notion of the inherent goodness of the soul. Each creature is made and turns back towards its creator for its

completion (*Conf* 13.10.11–14.15). Even though Manichaeans, too, spoke of the soul's turn back and return to its divine source, they valorized the first turn away from God and toward darkness as good and necessary in order to combat the threat of evil. Augustine appears to deliberately negate the *prior* claim on being, existence, and merit suggested by the Manichaean myth of the soul's origin and purpose. As in Manichaean belief, the human soul originally belonged to the "heaven of heaven"; but its turning away entailed not resistance to darkness, but *becoming* darkness (13.2.3). Against the fixed dualism of natures propounded in Manichaeism, Augustine spoke of a fluid dynamic in human nature, such that souls themselves have "become darkness" and need to "become light" (13.10.11). God's spiritual creation was neither luminant in itself nor in possession of a right to be illuminated. Its illumination "could not happen merely in virtue of its existence, for it needed to contemplate the light which would shed radiance upon it, and cling to that. It would thus be indebted to your free grace both for its initial life and for its life in the beatitude which it won by changing for the better in being converted to you, who cannot change" (13.3.4). The soul "cannot illumine itself from its own resources, neither can it slake its thirst from itself. . . . only in your light will we see light" (13.16.19). "All through this section," Robert O'Connell concludes, "Augustine is warding off the danger attacked at the book's beginning: that of conceiving the soul as 'naturally' divine, as the Manichees insist it is. We are not God's own substance . . . our rescue from the darkness into which we have plunged by our sin is not something God 'needs' in order to reintegrate His own Light-substance and therefore perfect His own Being. . . . It is not something due to us, therefore, but 'gift' (*donum*)."[34]

Within such a careful Nicene framing emphasizing the creatureliness of the soul, and its completion of the process of its creation only in its act of *conversio*, Augustine could appropriate from the Manichaeans (via their own citations of Paul) the theme of the second, spiritual birth. He could take up the Pauline contrast of the old man to the new man made so much of by the Manichaeans. He could embrace the argument of Faustus and Fortunatus about when human beings are *really* made in God's image, soteriologically, at the same time reining in the concomitant denigration of original creation. "Augustine stresses God's unaccountable goodness manifested both in creating us in His image, and 're-creating' us, i.e., restoring the image which has been darkened by sin." In doing so, O'Connell believes, "He is speaking, once again, principally to the Manichees, and the first item on his agenda here is 'spiritually' to interpret the troublesome phrase, that man is made in

the image of God."[35] He thus softens the Manichaean theme's dualistic edge by anchoring it to a positive view of the first creation, treating the latter as the ideal creation of what human beings were meant to be—a proleptic and typological pre-creation of what people would potentially become through finally enacting the *conversio* natural to all creation, but tragically delayed in the human case by sin.[36] Hence Augustine had said about one of his pre-conversion attempts at ascent, that God took him up so that "I might see that what I saw existed, and that I, the seer, did not yet exist" (*Conf* 7.10.16).[37]

The underlying premise of the confessional act, that humans are mutable and subject to sin, demanded that Manichaean (and Platonist) views of the inherent divinity of the soul be replaced with the Nicene understanding of humans as fallible creatures (*Conf* 13.2.2). A divine soul, emanated to assist God, and heroically engaged with evil in defense of God, might seem far removed from the broken soul enmeshed in sinfulness incapable of saving itself without God's saving initiative. Yet both images existed side by side in Manichaeism. Perhaps detecting this tension in the Manichaean system, Augustine cut it apart along its weak seam, throwing away the unusable conception of the soul and salvaging the idea of grace for reapplication in a Catholic context. "It appears, therefore," Catherine Joubert concludes, "that book XIII of *Confessions* is addressed, in an implicit but quite real fashion, to the Manichaeans and Neo-Platonists, whom Augustine sought to convert by attracting their good will before reusing (*récupérer*) their theories in order to bring them to the Truth conserved and guarded by the single catholic Church."[38]

As he proceeded with his ostensible exposition of creation, Augustine revealed that he was less concerned to present a "spiritualized" account of cosmic creation than to provide a model of the salvational re-creation of the human person. The necessary turning back of creation to its source for its own perfection comes in the human case not in the initial unfolding of creation, but in the soteriological repentance of the sinner and the conversion of the wayward. In this fashion, the Genesis account of creation served Augustine as a symbolic tale of the formation of the convert, by which those who had "plunged into excess or strayed into far-off regions of unlikeness," and so existed in a kind of formless ugliness, were "summoned back to your unity and received form, and become, every one of them, exceedingly good" (*Conf* 13.2.2). For such a reformed being, its good is to cling to God, "lest by turning away it lose the light it acquired by its conversion, and slip back into the old life, dark and abysmal," just as "we ourselves, who in respect of our souls are also your spiritual creatures, were once turned away from you who are our

light. In that earlier life we were darkness (cf. Eph 5:8), and even now we labor in our residual gloom (*in reliquiis obscuritatis*)" (*Conf* 13.2.3).[39]

In Augustine's immediate environment, the Manichaeans exceeded all other groups in stressing this identification of the moment of redemption as God's true act of creation (*Faust* 24.1). It was they alone who approximated Augustine's parallelism between the primordial mass of creation and the undifferentiated lump subjected to sin from which God called forth self-conscious selves (*Fort* 20–21). So at the very same time as Augustine hedged these themes with anti-Manichaean Nicene correctives, he wove into his exegesis an acknowledgment and appropriation of the Manichaean contention that God's ultimate act of creation occurs in the formation of the human self from the fragmented state in which it exists in this world. Quite clearly, this reading of Genesis reflects back in some way on the personal narrative of his own preexistence and deliverance in conversion, as others have noted before. As with so much in *Confessions*, Manichaeism appears to function here as both a foil and a resource, and therefore perhaps as the setting of the intended audience. By affirming and highlighting the theme of re-creation as true creation, Augustine reinforced the message he was trying to send, that he had followed to completion a path the Manichaeans had only begun. At the same time, he marginalized the issues over cosmic creation, the ground over which so many polemical barbs had been cast between them, finding common ground on the subject of the creation of a self redeemed from its damaged, fragmented, and for this reason sinful state. "For among us, too, God and his Christ created a heaven and an earth. . . . Before our earth was formed by his teaching it was invisible and unorganized, and we were shrouded in the darkness of ignorance. . . . But your mercy did not forsake us in our misery, for your spirit hovered over the water; and you said, 'Let there be light; repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near, repent, and let there be light.' And because our souls were deeply disquieted within themselves we remembered you. . . . Disgusted with our darkness, we were converted to you, and light dawned. See now, we who once were darkness are now light in the Lord" (*Conf* 13.12.13).

Augustine made a point of saying that not everyone within the Catholic Church was capable of grasping these truths. There are, after all, the "carnal" members of the Church, the "earth" to the "heaven" of the "spiritual" members (*Conf* 13.12.13). One should not be dissuaded by the carnal face of the Church from embracing it, he urged. In justifying the coexistence of the spiritual and carnal in the church, however, he did not invoke the terms of the Donatist controversy. Rather than speak of a church embracing both

the morally upright and sinners, he referred to the coexistence of both the spiritually minded, capable of understanding lofty truths, and the simpletons of crude faith. The latter constituted the main subject of Manichaean lampoons in which Augustine himself had indulged back in the day. Now, speaking as the shepherd of a mixed flock, Augustine enjoined his readers to tolerate and encourage such less sophisticated faithful, rather than holding aloof from them (*Conf* 13.17.20–19.25). The Catholic Church possesses basic forms of charity, simple rules of discipline, and so on, all intended as aids to those less developed souls, without losing sight of the higher aspirations of an ascent back to God.

Truth Beyond Myth

In book 12, Augustine had affirmed the rich potential of the biblical text to yield a plurality of meanings suitable for the "call" and spiritual advancement of a variety of individuals. With such a position, he potentially lowered the costs of conversion by rejecting a narrow, authoritarian dogmatism, specifically in the area of scriptural authority so thorny for the Manichaeans. In book 13 he pressed audaciously beyond that accommodation to a more radical stance that, in effect, closed the book on the Bible as a point of division between Catholic and Manichaean, at least theoretically. In doing so, he built on a set of ideas he had enunciated in previous compositions, stretching all the way back to his earliest years as a convert. Forming them into a new synthesis, he read the result into a biblical text that in no fashion can be considered to have dictated or even prompted Augustine's "exegesis." Quite simply, he seized an opportunity that presented itself to his purpose, giving only in appearance an interpretation of a particular Bible passage, but more properly, as Annemaré Kotzé characterizes it, "a meditation on *divina scriptura* as a whole . . . on the very nature and function of scripture."[40]

Robert O'Connell finds Augustine laying the groundwork throughout *Confessions* for the reprise he intends in book 13 of his earlier reflections on mundane and transcendental knowing.[41] In *Conf* 1.8.13, for instance, Augustine had probed the human acquisition of language, emphasizing its material basis in objects and material needs, and its residence in (temporal) memory. Already in *The Teacher*, he had traced the source of all true learning to an interior illumination, indeed an inner illuminator, and as a consequence relegated all exterior means of instruction to a merely supporting role. "Here

it must once again be stressed," O'Connell writes, "that the *eternal* Christ is what Augustine means: the *Verbum*, the *Lumen*, the supernal *Veritas aeterna*, who teaches inwardly. For in the garment of humanity worn during His earthly life, in the Scriptures and the teaching of churchmen even now, Augustine believes that the only service His 'outward' human words perform is that of 'admonishing' us to turn inward to where He, Divine Truth, still illumines our minds." O'Connell traces Augustine's denigration of language and emphasis on the "opacity" of the body demanding this crude tool for sharing (or concealing) thoughts to Plotinus,[42] even if Augustine substituted his distinctive idea of a personal interior illuminator, with its clear antecedent in the Manichaean Light *Nous*, for the Platonic concept of an individual mind's ability to recollect the intelligible. As a consequence of the soul's sin, Augustine imagined, it is forced out temporally and temporarily to exterior means of access to truth: "human words, all the work of communication, symbol, advice and consultation," which, O'Connell notes, "includes the entire regime of scriptural, prophetic, and apostolic authority."[43]

With a complex intertextual exegesis, by which he identified the firmament of heaven spread out overhead in the creation account as the unrolled parchment of the Catholic scriptures, Augustine fixed attention on the membrane, as it were, that separated the Catholic communion from the Manichaean one. As a Catholic, Augustine had committed himself to the idea that the Bible, Old and New Testaments, offered a secure guide to truth, confirmed in its authority by its world-wide dissemination (*Conf* 13.15.16). Moreover, these same scriptures had proved their worth as the instrument of the sort of self-reform Augustine and his comrades had been seeking as Manichaeans. "We know no other books with the like power to lay pride low and so surely to silence the obstinate contender who tries to thwart your reconciling work by defending his sins. Nowhere else, Lord, indeed nowhere else do I know such chaste words, words with such efficacy to persuade me to confession, to gentle my neck beneath your kindly yoke and invite me to worship you without thought of reward" (*Conf* 13.15.17). By Faustus's standard of deeds, of moral outcome, Augustine suggested, the Catholic Bible worked where Manichaean sacred literature had failed in its purpose.

With that orthodox affirmation in place, Augustine ventured to argue, to explain, to insist, that such scriptural authority had only a limited, temporary purpose confined to this fallen world.[44] Purely spiritual beings transcend the scriptures, he surmised, learning truth directly from its source "without the aid of time-bound syllables." Language itself represents a consequence

of fallenness and the loss of that transparency of self that he imagined souls enjoy apart from the lying garment of the body (*Conf* 13.23.34).[45] It is only in and for this world that the scriptures provide a qualified source of truth and inspiration, beclouded as they are by their symbolism and obscurities. Direct inspiration comes from the underlying Word itself, which enters directly into people's minds and attracts their reorientation (*Conf* 13.15.18).[46] Augustine had expressed similar thoughts in *Against the Fundamental Epistle*, saying that "A person, who seeks with great ardor and piously knocks with constant perseverance, quickly finds the truth. For people can produce some reminder by means of verbal signs. But the one true teacher, the incorruptible truth, the sole interior teacher, does the teaching" (*CEF* 36.41). In the same vein, in the dramatic conversion scene in the garden, Augustine reported taking up and reading a single brief passage from Paul: "No further would I read, *nor did I need to*; for instantly, as the sentence ended—by a light, as it were, of security infused into my heart—all the darkness of doubt vanished away" (*Conf* 8.12.29).[47] Augustine captured perfectly, in fact, the core image of self-transformation in the Manichaean tradition, the interior illumination of the Light *Nous*, overthrowing the Old Man and giving birth to the New Man.[48]

In so emphasizing such a direct interior pathway to God, Augustine supplied the context within which he could literally close the very book he was exegeting and defending. Taking his text from God's creation of a firmament dividing what is above from what is below, Augustine explored how something that provides a sense of security and stability for people in this world can, at the same time, ultimately prove an obstacle obscuring their direct view of higher things.

> Moreover, who but you, our God, has made for us a solid firmament of authority over us in your divine scripture (*fecisti nobis firmamentum auctoritas super nos in scriptura tua divina*)? For "the heaven will roll up like a book" (Is 34:4; Rev 6:14), and now "like a skin it is stretched out" over us (Ps 103:2). . . . And you know, Lord, you know (*et tu scis, domine, tu scis*) how you clothed human beings with skins when by sin they became mortal (cf. Gen 3:21). So you have stretched out the firmament of your book "like a skin" (*unde sicut pellem extendisti firmamentum libri tui*), that is your concordant words, which you have placed over us by the ministry of mortal men (*quos per mortalium ministerium superposuisti nobis*) . . . since for those who submit you have firmly established the scriptures' authority. (*Conf* 13.15.16)

In this passage, Augustine signaled the ambivalent character of scriptural authority, by associating it with the "skins" of fallen humanity (by an obvious connection to the vellum of which books were made), and stressing its mediation by the hands of "mortal men."[49] Indeed, "If Adam had not fallen away from you . . . there would have been no need for your ministers to work 'in the many waters'—material and sensory—of sacred acts and words (*non opus esset ut in aquis multis corporaliter et sensibiliter operarentur dispensatores tui mystica facta et dicta*)" (*Conf* 13.20.28). For Augustine, such material and symbolic instruments have no place beyond this obscured and time-bound reality. "Above this firmament are other waters, and these, I believe, are immortal, immune to earthly decay . . . your angelic peoples above the heavens, who have no need to look up at the firmament and learn by reading your word in it; for they behold your face unceasingly and there read without the aid of time-bound syllables the decree of your eternal will" (*Conf* 13.15.18). The inhabitants of heaven, then, have access to a book that is "never closed, never rolled up"—God himself. They dwell above "this firmament which you established over the weakness of inferior beings (*hoc firmamentum . . . quod firmasti super infirmitatem inferiorum populorum*) so that they could look up and know your mercy, announcing in time you who made time (*temporaliter enuntiantem te, qui fecisti tempora*)" (*Conf* 13.15.18).[50] This scripture "remains stretched over your people everywhere until the end of the world," when the saved will see God's eternal Word "as he is." Whereas now, the Word appears "not as he is, but enigmatically (*aenigmate*), in cloud and in the mirror of heaven." "Our vision then, Lord, will be the vision of you as you are, but this is not granted to us yet" (*Conf* 13.15.18).

The set of allegorical images Augustine selected to apply to scripture made it transparent to his readers that the biblical text belonged to the obscurities of this world. He had made much the same point in his first allegorical exegesis of Genesis, in *Genesis Against the Manichaeans*. Already there, God "makes souls become green again by his word," which falls like rain from "clouds, that is, from the writings of the prophets and apostles." Augustine went on to justify this association of scripture with clouds.

> They are correctly called clouds, because these words which sound and pass away after they strike the air become like clouds when there is added the obscurity of allegories like a fog that has been drawn over them. When they are pressed by study, the rain of truth, so to speak, is poured out on those who understand well. But it was not already

> this way before the soul sinned. . . . For the rain from the clouds . . . is necessary for man who is laboring on the earth. After sin man began to labor on the earth and to have need of these clouds. But before sin God had made . . . the invisible creature. God watered it by an interior spring, speaking to its intellect, so that it did not receive words from outside. . . . Rather it was satisfied from its own spring, that is, by the truth flowing from its interior. (*GCM* 2.4.5)

Souls lose this ideal condition in their turn away from God and toward external things. So, "having begun to labor on the earth man had need of rain from clouds, that is, of instruction from human words." Then, just as he would again in *Confessions*, Augustine expresses the wish that those he addresses "would gladly welcome the rain of truth from these clouds," for Christ "promised that, if anyone should drink of his water, he will return to that inner spring so that he does not seek rain externally" (*GCM* 2.5.6). For such external knowledge embodied in the scriptures "will be destroyed. For . . . 'we see now in an enigma, as in a cloud, but then we will see face to face' (1 Cor 13:12)" (*GCM* 2.5.6). Augustine, who spoke already in *Academics* of seeing God *per lucides nubes* (*Acad* 1.1.3), reprised and built on this image in *Confessions*, saying that when he fails to sustain a direct vision of God, and "weakly fall away from its light, those clouds envelop me again in the dense mantle of darkness which I bear for my punishment" (*Conf* 11.9.11).

Since scripture belongs among the temporary expedients of fallen existence, it possesses only relative value, participating as it does in the character of this world by which naked truth is concealed beneath "skins" of obscurity not easily resolved. With the same identification of the firmament with scriptures, Augustine went so far in *Explanation of the Psalms* 103 as to identify the words of scripture, delivered by mortal men, with the "foolishness of our preaching" mentioned by Paul (1 Cor 1:21). "And so God chose mortal creatures, human beings subject to death and destined to die. He employed a mortal tongue and uttered mortal sounds, he employed the ministry of mortal men and made use of mortal instruments, and by this means a sky was made for you, so that in this mortal artifact you might come to know the immortal Word, and by participating in this Word you too might become immortal" (*EnPs* 103[1].8). It serves only to instill faith, and loses its proper function if it instead becomes an obstacle to faith. For "knowledge expressed in apt words, comprising all those *sacramenta* which wane and wax like the moon . . . differs so greatly from the glorious wisdom in which the aforesaid day rejoices

that they are but rulers of the night" of existence in this world—fated as the other spiritual signs, such as prophecy, tongues, and healing (which Augustine likened to stars), to be of no more usefulness in the world to come (*Conf* 13.18.23). That is why scripture says, "the sky will be rolled up like a scroll" (Is 34:4; Rev 6:14), Augustine explained in returning to this image yet again in *Explanation of the Psalms* 93. "The sky, or more properly the firmament, is to be understood figuratively as the book of the law. . . . It is stretched out as a book is unrolled, so that it can be read. But when the proper time has passed, it is read no longer. The law is read now because we have not yet reached that Wisdom who fills the hearts and minds of those who contemplate her; when we come into that presence there will be no need for anything to be read to us" (*EnPs* 93.6).[51]

> Nonetheless, [these *sacramenta*] are necessary for those people to whom your very prudent servant could speak only as carnal, not as spiritual persons, whereas among the mature he speaks wisdom. A sensual person is like a small child in Christ, in need of milk until he is robust enough to eat solid food and his eyes have the strength to stand exposure to the sun. Meanwhile, however, he does not live in a night devoid of all illumination, but must be content with the light of moon and stars. (*Conf* 13.18.23)[52]

Indeed, all the sacraments of the Church—a concept that Augustine uses to cover every instrument of religion—offer only starting points for spiritual progress, and "even though people have been baptized and initiated, and have submitted to these material sacraments, they would proceed no further, did their souls not rise to a new level of spiritual life, and move on from elementary doctrine toward maturity" (*Conf* 13.20.28).

While Augustine considered "the splendors of wisdom and knowledge" to be "fixed and finalized, and not subject to development over successive generations," he noted that "these same realities work themselves out in the sphere of bodily things in a great variety of forms which constantly increase and multiply through your blessing, O God." In this way, "You have made kindly provision for the learning processes of us mortals, so prone to weariness, by arranging that our minds should attain to understanding as one single truth that which is figuratively expressed and enunciated in many different ways through the variations to which corporeal things are subject" (*Conf* 13.20.27). Such reflections on the adaptability of signs to temporal conditions brought

Augustine quite close to the Manichaean doctrine of successive revelations attuned to different audiences.[53] In the biblical account of dry land emerging from the sea, he saw symbolically represented the birth of believers from the mass of unredeemed humanity; and in birds flying over the land from their watery origin (the *volatilia caeli*), he proposed to discern the wide dissemination of scriptural truth through the varying languages and corporeal signs used by its ministers, serving primarily to win conversion, but thereafter in a residual function of edification (13.21.29–30). In what Robert O'Connell characterizes as a "tortured spiritual interpretation" concerning the loose relation of *signa* and *res*, Augustine took God's command that the creatures of the sea multiply to signify divine affirmation of the diversity of interpretive meaning produced by human use of the scriptures (13.24.36).[54] Precisely at a point where we might expect Augustine to defend a biblical command (sexual reproduction) "offensive to the Manichaeans," as Annemaré Kotzé suggests, Augustine chose instead to take the command as a pretext for furthering his mitigation of the "offensiveness" to them of the biblical text as a whole, through the liberal adaptability of possible interpretation, subordinated to the interior illumination of the individual.

Augustine insisted that such interior illumination superseded any external means or instrument of instructions, including scripture itself. By recording God's command to multiply only with respect to sea creatures and humans, Augustine maintained, the Bible meant to indicate the twofold character of interpretation as both materially manifested (through text, speech, or other sign) and internally considered, "for I assume that by this blessing you granted us the faculty and the power both to articulate in various forms something we have grasped in a single way in our minds, and to interpret in many different senses something we have read, which, though obscure, is couched in simple terms" (*Conf* 13.24.37). Whereas things brought forth "according to *their* kind" refers to learning from others through words and examples, God's creation of human beings "according to *our* image and likeness" represented direct contemplation of God no longer mediated by any human or material instrument (13.21.31–22.32).

> A person thus made new considers your truth and understands it. He does not need some other human being to explain it to him so that he may imitate his own kind; you explain it to him, so that he can discern for himself what is your will, what is good and pleasing to you and perfect. . . . He becomes a spiritual person, fit to judge of any matters

> that call for judgment, though he himself is not subject to the judgment of his fellows. (13.22.32)

"Hence it is," O'Connell writes, "that once initiated by the corporeal sacraments, and instructed by the sensible signs appropriate to its fallen state, the soul must progress beyond this stage . . . a 'soul' no longer in need of signs and wonders to establish its faith, nor even of the 'messengers' (*volatilia*) who originally brought the message of Scripture."[55] Looking upon the world of the saved, Augustine declared that "No longer must your ministers work with the methods they used amid the waters of unbelief, announcing their message and conveying their meaning through miracles and signs and symbolic expressions" (13.21.30). In giving humans dominion over the creatures of creation, therefore, God symbolically revealed the place of individual discernment over even the apparent meaning of scriptures (13.23.33). If this were not the case, humans would never advance beyond the simple faith of the ignorant, would never advance from faith to understanding, and would remain like "senseless beasts." Augustine did not reserve this capacity for discernment only to Church authorities, but regarded it as shared by all faithful members of the community. It is difficult to imagine a more radical spiritual individualism than that implicit in Augustine's argument. O'Connell astutely remarks, "The ecumenical interest of such considerations hardly needs stressing."[56]

Augustine cautioned that the empowerment of every believer to discern in what manner the scriptures are true does not amount to a right to judge or dispute that the scriptures are indeed true—a distinction Augustine proved by his symbolic identification of the scriptures with the firmament of heaven which is over human beings, while he associated the varying interpretations of scripture with that part of creation over which God gave human beings dominion.

> Spiritual persons, then, whether they rule or obey, judge spiritually, but not concerning the spiritual knowledge that shines in the firmament of heaven; for it would not be proper to pass judgment on such a sublime authority. Nor do they judge your book itself, even if something there is not clear, because to that we submit our intellects, holding it certain that what is impenetrable to our sight is nonetheless spoken rightly and with truth. (*Conf* 13.23.33)

Beneath that firmament of the scriptural text, however, Augustine considered the various instruments of the Church, both ritual and exegetical, to be human instruments open to change, reform, and reconsideration because they have been placed under human authority and in service of human need (13.23.34). Thus, exegesis is a matter of discussion and argument that "attempts to make plain the meaning of your words, while subjecting itself always to the authority of your books. . . . That all these explanations have to be delivered through the spoken word is due to the needs of that abyss which is this world and the blindness of the flesh, for when people cannot see the truth under consideration, it must be dinned into their ears" (13.23.34).

What point did Augustine have with this elaborate argument over the limited but nonnegotiable authority of scripture, the individual liberty of its interpreters, and the necessity of progressing beyond scripture to direct perception of ultimate truth? Did the wording of the biblical text force or trigger his exegesis? Certainly not. Was he merely defensively shielding his own exegetical liberties with the text? Scarcely. Quite clearly, Augustine needed to defend the authority of scripture itself from challenge—a challenge made incidentally by non-Christian Platonists, but in its most strident form by Manichaeans. Therefore, he said what he said to such readers. Yet, at the same time, he radically qualified the nature of that authority, reducing it in the company of all human discourse and material signs to a mere tool of instruction, to be transcended as soon and as far as possible for a more direct apprehension of reality. With his Platonist and Manichaean audience still listening, what effect could Augustine have hoped or expected his words to achieve? Coupled with his extensive manipulation of Platonist and Manichaean themes throughout his exegesis, Augustine's concentrated affirmation of interpretive liberty and individual insight went a long way toward setting aside the Bible as a dividing point, toward removing the offensiveness of the biblical text at the level of mere *signa*, in order to bring out the vision all three communities shared of a *res* transcending what they agreed to be a dark, ignorant, enslaving existence.

Augustine's program, then, appears to have aimed at an ecumenical—a "catholic"—convergence around the common spiritual goal of the interior journey of return to God, subordinating to it the earthly details of discourse and practice on which people became stuck in their divisiveness. "This," Robert O'Connell suggests, "is why Augustine thought he *must* write his *Confessions*, must bring Christians, Manichees, and Neo-Platonists alike to the

'self-knowledge' which, he was convinced, was his own."[57] It is in this light that we should note Augustine's choice of words when, recapping his predestinarian theme of God's unknowable criteria for calling some to salvation, he says, "These are known in your sight, our God, but are not yet clearly distinguished in ours by the criterion of any deeds. . . . You, Lord, know them already, and have drawn your distinction and issued your call, *before ever you made the firmament*" (*Conf* 13.23.33). God's call of salvation has priority over and transcends the function of scripture in service of that call; scripture must not be an obstacle to the purpose it was created to serve.

Remarkably, then, Augustine treated scripture itself as belonging among things to be used (*uti*) as a means to an end, rather than enjoyed (*frui*) for its own sake—a distinction he employed in his handbook of biblical exegesis, *On Christian Doctrine*. Augustine outlined the distinction in the first book of the latter work, composed around the same time as *Confessions*: "To enjoy (*frui*) something is to cling with love to it for its own sake. To use (*uti*) something is to apply the thing in question to the end of obtaining that which you love, if, that is, it is something that ought to be loved." In providing an example of the difference, Augustine slipped easily into the master narrative underlying *Confessions* itself, as well as his general vision of the journey of his soul.

> Suppose we were wanderers who could not live blessedly outside of our homeland, and being completely miserable in our wanderings and longing to put an end to our misery, we desired to return to our homeland. We would need vehicles over land or sea which we could use to arrive at our homeland, which is to be enjoyed. But if the pleasures of the journey and the very movement of the vehicles delighted us, and we began to enjoy those things that we ought to use, we would be unwilling to end our journey quickly, and, entangled in a perverse sweetness, we would be alienated from our homeland, whose sweetness would make us blessed. Thus in this mortal life, wandering from God, if we desire to return to our homeland where we can be blessed, we should use rather than enjoy this world, so that the invisible things of God may be seen, having been understood through the things that are made, that is, so that we may arrive at eternal and spiritual things by means of corporeal and temporal things. (*DC* 1.4.4)

It has proved all too easy to read this passage within Augustine's notorious denigration of the material world, without coming to full terms with the

exhaustiveness of his category of the merely useful, including, as it did for him, scripture, sacraments, the Catholic Church, even language itself. These were indeed the "vehicles" and the "means" by which he thought we "arrive at eternal and spiritual things"; and this positive assessment of their usefulness and purpose constituted a significant advance over his earlier overstatement that "The entire world, that is, all sensible things (*omnia sensibilia*), are to be condemned" (*ME* 20.37).

Augustine illustrated this liberty to use the scriptures in his own exegetical practice. He claimed the right of interpretation not from his status within the Church, but based on an assumed interior illumination from God that amounted in his view to a complete negation of a separate human will. The narrative of *Confessions* had charted this preparatory self-discipline through which he now could emerge into the liberty of the spiritual person. In giving a rather freestyle interpretation of the true subject of God's command to eat "every seed-bearing plant and every fruit-bearing tree," he said, "I will say it without scruple, because I shall be speaking the truth that is in me by your inspiration, since you have willed me to say what these words mean to me. . . . You are the truth, whereas all human beings are liars. Thus anyone who tells lies is speaking from what is his own; and in order to speak truth, I must speak from what is yours" (*Conf* 13.25.38). Likewise, God himself said to Augustine, "what you say through my spirit I say," implicitly placing such inspired utterances of interpretation at the same level as scripture itself, of which God says similarly, "what my scripture says, I myself say"—both equally qualified as *temporalis* accommodations of eternal truth (13.29.44). One wonders if Augustine truly meant what he said about this liberty of conscience, and intended to extend this same right to all others of good faith. One wonders if he reflected upon its potential implications for the authority of the very institution that he credited with being the conservator of the effective means of spiritual progress.[58] One wonders if he had, in following the logic of his appeal to the Manichaeans, overreached himself.[59]

Conclusion

Augustine continued to engage an imagined Manichaean audience right up to the last words of *Confessions*, in some ways incidentally, in others signaling their centrality to the purposes of the work as a whole. Annemaré Kotzé may well be right that Augustine aimed his odd digression on Pauline texts

regarding material support for the "holy" (*Conf* 13.25.38–27.42) against the ritualized offering of support to the Elect among the Manichaeans.[60] The text of Genesis 1:29–30, featuring God's command of an exclusively vegetarian diet, would not seem to offer good fodder for Augustine's familiar critique that Manichaean dietary restrictions display disdain and ingratitude for God's bounty; in this passage, at least, the Manichaeans momentarily had the God of the Old Testament on their side. Instead, Augustine used the very Pauline texts cited by Manichaeans to authorize lay donations to the Elect in order to stress that the merit of giving food to the holy comes not from what is given (as it is in the Manichaean system, with its theory of the divine substance contained in vegetarian food), but from the worthiness of the recipient as truly "a prophet, or a just person, or a disciple" (13.26.41). Therefore—in a deft twist of the polemical dagger of irony—the "uninstructed and unbelieving" gain nothing in carrying out acts of material support for God's servants, gaining no spiritual fruit (13.27.42), but only feeding "the outer man" (13.26.41). In order to follow Augustine in conversion, Manichaeans would have to give up their sacramental system for the Catholic one.

Arriving at the part of the creation story that Manichaeans criticized for depicting God discovering only after the fact that he had made good things (*Conf* 13.29.44), Augustine wasted little time rebutting them, but instead took the opportunity to mark the goodness of creation as another nonnegotiable term of conversion.

> They say that you made such things as the heavens and the constellations under the compulsion of necessity (*necessitate compulsum*), and that these had already been created somewhere else and by some other power. You, they say, merely assembled them, fitted and welded them together when you were laboriously constructing the ramparts of the world after vanquishing your enemies, to barricade them in and ensure that they would never again rebel against you.[61] Other things, such as all the animals, and the minutest life forms, and everything that clings to the soil by its roots, they do not believe you made or even put together at all.[62] A hostile intelligence, some other nature not created by you and working against you, spawned and shaped them in the lower regions of the world.[63] (13.30.45)

Those who think such things are, of course, mad, Augustine asserted, using the familiar polemical pun on Mani's name; their outlook must change in

the process of coming into God's saving grace. But he found equally at fault those (even within his own community) who embraced the goodness of creation but lacked that edge of dissatisfaction that might direct them toward something higher (13.31.46). Building closely on 1 Corinthians 2:11–12, Augustine contended that only the spirit given by God enables a person to discern God, either in his own person or as he is manifested through his creative works. This kind of knowing does not derive from people's own resources, nor should it be based upon one's own likes and dislikes (as he believed to be the case in Manichaean dualism) (13.31.46). Augustine took both the Manichaean misjudgment of material creation as evil and the sensual love of creation found in non-religious people as examples of flawed relationships to God and the world. True discernment, he believed, belongs only to the one who sees the creation as a lower degree of, and pointer to, that same Being that only God fully possesses.

In summarizing his allegorical interpretation of Genesis 1, Augustine reiterated his reading of the narrative of material creation as a symbolic account of God's spiritual re-creation of the fallen soul into something that could be called a living soul for the first time, through its separation from the surging mass of the abyssal waters representing the damned. Under the secure firmament of the scriptures, Augustine reaffirmed, God kindled the lamps of the star-like saints, through whom God "drew forth sacraments from corporeal matter, palpable miracles and doctrine in harmony with your overarching scripture, all designed to instill faith into unbelieving Gentiles, though apt to shed their benediction upon the faithful as well" (*Conf* 13.34.49).[64]

> Then you gave form to the believing soul, the soul truly alive because by robust self-control it had reduced its impulses to good order. Its mind was now subject to you alone, and needed no human norm to imitate, for you made it new after your own image and in your likeness, and subordinated its rational activity to the sovereignty of intellect, as woman is to man. (13.34.49)

By making the verity of his conversion to a Catholic self a matter between him and God alone, which no one else could legitimately question or judge, Augustine established a precedent, which the protreptic purpose of *Confessions* suggested should be applied in every like case. So, too, no one would have a right, or occupy a sufficiently informed position, even to question or judge the conversion of those Manichaeans who might follow him into the

Catholic faith. Naturally, they would need to make the necessary changes in key areas that would truly and genuinely signify that they had "ceased to be Manichaeans." Yet they would be free to continue to hold many of the same values, seek many of the same spiritual goals, as they always had, provided they conceded what Augustine wished them to consider a modest number of crucial reorientations. Rhetorically, Augustine drew quite near to suggesting that a few surface gestures of conformity, "a change of a few words," were all that was required. But in reality, Augustine probably suspected that the alterations in their self-understanding that he insisted upon, however few in number, would cut the heart out of the Manichaean system. By smoothing the path for them with his rhetorical skills of persuasion, Augustine would cause them to cease to be Manichaeans almost before they realized it.

In his closing prayer, Augustine expressed uncertainty at the success of what he had attempted, and wondered aloud at the limitations of his ability to lead anyone to the profound truths he had sought to expound. "What human can empower another human to understand these things?" In the face of doubt over any discursive argument he had made, and the potential futility of words themselves, he returned to that favorite appeal the Manichaeans themselves had made so effectively to him a quarter of a century before. Rhetorically placing himself back in their company, he called for a genuine effort at the quest for truth they had claimed to want, now directed not to the authorities of the Manichaean or any other community, but to God himself. "Let us rather ask of you, seek in you, knock at your door. Only so will we receive, only so find, and only so will the door be opened to us. Amen" (*Conf* 13.35.50).

Conclusion

The Augustinian-Manichaean Dialectic

"It is not easy to do justice to the opponents of St. Augustine," W. H. C. Frend once said.[1] He spoke at the midpoint of the last century, during which more historically conscious ways of reading Augustine gradually gained ground on synthetic, theologically expository approaches to his body of work, bringing with them a growing awareness of the complexity of his non-Catholic intellectual contacts and debts. His engagement with the Platonic tradition has been one of the most prominent areas of discussion. Increasingly, recognition of his borrowing from the Donatist Tyconius has entered the picture. Appreciation of the place of Manichaeism in his thought has lagged behind, except as a constant foil of his early career, the path not taken. Only now, following the phenomenal growth that same century saw in our information about Manichaeism, have we arrived at a point where we can not only do justice to the Manichaeans as Augustine's opponents, but also make informed inquiries about their possible role in shaping his ongoing formation as a leading representative and point of articulation of the emergent Nicene orthodoxy of the late antique Catholic Church.

As Peter Brown has stressed, Augustine's development in his first decade as a Catholic was far more complex than "a sloughing-off of 'Neo-Platonism' and the discovery of some 'authentic' Christianity."[2] Whatever post-mortem standard we might want to apply to the quality of Augustine's Christianity has no historical value. He was, in fact, constantly at work *inventing* a Christianity for himself that—given who he was, or rather what he turned out to

be in terms of historical importance—has been widely adopted subsequently as the standard of what Christianity ought to be. But in his own lifetime, we are dealing with a much more circumstantial adaptation of Milanese Nicene Christianity to a new local environment. This was an African environment, with all that entailed. Most important with regard to Augustine's role in its formation, it was an environment of confrontation with Manichaeism, its rival claims on the Christian tradition, and the particular challenge it posed on deep and abiding questions about human nature, the character of evil, and the meaningfulness of existence.

In choosing the Nicene Christianity of the Catholic Church over Manichaeism, Augustine, who was committed "never to depart from the authority of Christ," decided in favor of one set of continuities within the Christian tradition over another. Catholics and Manichaeans had constructed distinct religious systems by sifting in different ways the diverse elements of the Christian movement, and they were differentiated as communities by the divergent choices they had made about which elements to highlight and which to subordinate. Manichaeism kept alive aspects of early Christianity that the "orthodox" tradition had come to neglect. I have found reason to propose that some of these neglected aspects of the tradition were reintroduced to its still forming orthodox mainstream through Augustine, because his attention had been drawn to them by his Manichaean opponents, no matter how much he thought he had purified the insights of their Manichaean form of presentation. It is true that the system Augustine developed could not be more different from Manichaeism in many of its core valuations, and was formulated by making key inversions of Manichaean views. Yet many of its constituent parts, while fully Christian, had passed through a Manichaean reformulation through which Augustine had been introduced to them, and many of his more celebrated ideas—the fragmentedness and disability of human will, the centrality of confession to defining the self in its relation to God, the necessity of divine grace—are arguably rather direct borrowings from the Manichaean faith that have only been rationalized within their new setting by Augustine's inventiveness.

Johannes van Oort has rightly cautioned that "similarity in thought and even terminology can it itself provide no conclusive proof of derivation," particularly when Augustine's Nicene faith and Manichaeism had common antecedents in the Judeo-Christian tradition, whose particular themes could run in parallel channels independently of direct exchange.[3] That is why it is insufficient simply to compare Augustine's rhetoric with Manichaean material and

note similarities. Beyond that, we must find evidence of an actual ongoing exchange of ideas in Augustine's own signals of attending to Manichaeans and Manichaeism as he creates novel formulations with either a temporary or a lasting place in his discursive repertoire. The signs, nonetheless, appear prominently and repeatedly, indicating that the Manichaeans constituted "a real and powerful force" in Augustine's world and sphere of concern, even "a most dangerous force."[4] Perhaps Augustine even distorts our sense of the objective degree of danger they posed to eventual Catholic ascendancy by the evident extent of subjective danger they posed *to him*. Nor was this danger limited to a past association he could not deny but longed to cast off. It arose also, perhaps even more, from the continuing threat to his "Catholic" self of a living alternative paradigm of selfhood, sufficiently coherent and independent of mainstream Christian criteria of assessment to be unassimilable. After all, Augustine could hope to subjugate the positions of his Donatist and Pelagian rivals by appealing to a common set of authorities and nonnegotiable creedal *symboli*. Manichaeism made itself vulnerable to similar subjugation only to the degree that it invoked those same shared reference points. Largely, however, it remained stubbornly other, resistant, challenging, and therefore "dangerous."

Augustine could never afford simply to reject or refute the Manichaeans. The strength of their position, coupled with his own past and ongoing personal and intellectual connections with them, produced a complicated relationship between the two nemeses. "For it would be naïve," Peter Brown asserts, "to expect that, faced with a sect with whom he had always had a peculiarly intense relationship, liable to be confronted in a man such as Fortunatus, with living reminders of his own past as a Manichee, Augustine would develop only those parts of his system that directly contradicted his opponents. Far from it; by a subtle attraction of opposites, the Manichees would succeed in bringing to the forefront of Augustine's mind certain problems that the Platonists of the time had failed to answer."[5]

Augustine found that he could not rest content within the form of faith to which he had converted, because it had not yet been endowed with answers to the sort of questions Manichaeism brought to the marketplace of late fourth-century religion. James O'Donnell captures perfectly in one sentence what I have sought to demonstrate through the length of this book, when he says, "When in after years Augustine would be accused of retaining a Manichaean outlook, the justice of the charge would lie in the way he remained in the power, not of the answers the Manichees offered, but of the questions (e.g., *unde malum*) on which they insisted with such effect."[6] When the

received positions of the Catholic Church came up short in addressing such questions, Augustine did not generate new answers out of whole cloth. He mined resources shared by Catholics and Manichaeans, so that his answers would appeal to both. While holding on to Nicene premises, he selectively plundered the Manichaeans' own ideology and rhetoric, rediscovered its deep biblical roots, and affirmed even over Nicene constructs the central Manichaean tenets of the fragmented, disabled self and the necessity of grace to salvation. Without returning to Manichaeism, Augustine chose to respond to certain prompts with which the religion confronted him in a way that allowed him to rediscover some of the riches of the Christian tradition that had been largely downplayed by an emerging orthodoxy defining itself over against Gnostic and Manichaean varieties of Christianity. At the same time, he made other choices that substantially silenced aspects of the Christian tradition that he found no longer compatible with the system he was helping to build and promote as Catholic truth.

In this study, against the background of Augustine's own Manichaean past, we have seen Manichaeism serve as a foil to Augustine's articulation of his Catholic commitments, and then as a challenge to weak points and unresolved tensions in those commitments. We have seen Augustine grapple with the realization that Manichaeism, despite its metaphysical errors, possessed a "better" reading of Paul at the level of personal experience than that found in Nicene exegesis, and then deal with the ripple effect of his new readings of Paul throughout his ideological system. Along the way we have delineated the sometimes surprising debt Augustine owes to the figures of Faustus and Fortunatus. By raising for Augustine a skeptical doubt about basing spiritual progress on certain knowledge, and proposing in its place a pragmatic criterion of truth in effective moral outcomes, Faustus bestowed upon Augustine the principal theme of his efforts to persuade Manichaeans to follow him in conversion. By refusing to debate on the basis of philosophical premises and their logical entailments, and offering instead an insightful set of biblical arguments, Fortunatus dealt a fatal blow to Augustine's facile philosophical religion, and thrust him headfirst into the world of scriptural authority, from which he emerged a changed person. Throughout, we have seen Augustine reach out to Manichaeans, seeking to cajole, persuade, berate, challenge, and admonish them in the direction of Catholic truth. They always remained significant others to Augustine, persons whose conversion would reinforce Augustine's own, and whose failure to convert would leave a scar on his Catholic self. But because all that he wrote to Manichaeans and addressed in their

terms was read by his fellow Catholics as well, this Manichaean-tinged discourse came to have a prominent place in determining the very definition of a "Catholic" self in his own time and in the centuries to come.

The paradigm shift treated in this study has been commented upon and analyzed many times before. In attempting to bring something new to the subject, I have sought to propose not a *cause* of the shift, but a *context* for it. I am not suggesting that the presence of the Manichaean mission in North Africa and Augustine's contacts with it caused the changes in his understanding of the human relation to God. I am arguing that such a set of circumstances provides the most relevant context for understanding what was involved, what was at stake, in Augustine's change of thinking. The Manichaeans were holding down one side of a discourse on the subject of the human condition in which Augustine decided—for historically irretrievable reasons—he had to participate. Starting from a position closest to the established Nicene line, he adjusted that position in ways that yielded ground while providing a position more defensible in light of aspects of human experience to which his opponents drew attention. He had been able to cull from other Catholic anti-Manichaean writers the idea of habit as a perfectly satisfying account of the same experience of internal resistance as that to which the Manichaeans applied their dualistic construct. Yet he rapidly and inexplicably shifted to a position much closer to that held by the Manichaeans, hardening and reifying mere habit into something fundamentally disintegrative to human moral agency. No other force or factor in his environment shows any vital connection to this shift of position—no other group or faction with which he was in contact, nothing else he was reading, no dramatic social, political, or religious setback—except the very Manichaean community with which he was most engaged in debate and conflict at this very time.[7] I have sought to understand the evident pervasiveness of this context—what some have characterized as Augustine's "obsession" with Manichaeism—within the hypothesis that he had the goal not only to perfect the paradigm delivered to him, and build up its defenses against the Manichaean challenge, but also to appeal more effectively to the Manichaeans whom he wished to win over to it. Whether primarily a matter of defense or appeal, this historical situatedness set many of the terms of the ideology Augustine molded and passed on to the future. His choices made in the face of the Manichaean challenge have had consequences for subsequent Christian and Western thought and practice, conducted largely in the absence of a Manichaean counterpoint.

In shedding light on Augustine's relation to Manichaeism, we have

brought the nature of the Manichaean religion into sharper focus as well. We have found an earnest contender for the mantle of the Christian tradition, a biblical and devotional faith intent upon assessing the universe more in moral than in metaphysical categories, understanding God in terms of an unqualified goodness rather than of an uncompromised power. We have found reason to question Augustine's full grasp of the religion he dabbled in for a decade and left behind as unsatisfying; we have observed him discovering new things in Manichaeism as a Catholic, and, perhaps inevitably, through the distorting lens of the emphases and concerns of his new faith. We have been able to discern in the Manichaeism with which he grappled a faith organized around a constant sifting of the self, self-scrutinizing and deeply confessional, while powerfully affirming of the dignity of the true self it claimed to discern among the fragments of selfhood that constitute the typical human being. Perhaps most importantly, we have discovered in the Manichaeans the proponents of grace, the preservers of a crucial strand of the Christian tradition that Nicene orthodoxy had all but abandoned in defining itself over against Gnostic and Manichaean varieties of fatalism. If Augustine had never encountered the Manichaeans of his native Africa, there is no reason to believe he ever would have become the Doctor of Grace.

First as a Manichaean, and then as a Catholic confronting Manichaean opponents, Augustine had been exposed to that religion's idea of grace in the emergence of the self, as a kind of creation of identity out of a subhuman raw material, and its emphasis on conversion as the creation of the able, responsible, redeemable self by God's saving initiative. This was being born of God, not of men. For the Manichaeans, it entailed the collecting and awakening of something already there, already good, and its fortification by an infusion of consubstantial divine qualities. In picking up this assuredly Christian theme from the Manichaeans, Augustine changed many of the values involved. In Augustine's universe, where no evil could be powerful enough to say no to a genuinely good will, human incapacity could only be explained by a disturbing truth about the soul's wantonness. The depraved soul offers practically no usable raw material on which God can build. Human beings are redeemed only by an act of re-creation that at last makes us something worthy and good after the completely abortive prior creation that is the stuff of human history. Within this shared theme of *salvation as re-creation of the self*, then, Augustine and the Manichaeans replay their different characterizations of the original creation—for the Manichaeans arising out of the intrinsically good resources of God, for Augustine summoned forth by God out of nothing.

In crediting his engagement with Manichaeism for much of Augustine's transformation in the decade following his conversion, I reject the plausibility of an Augustine imagined to owe all that he became to his isolated exploration of the implications of Nicene Christianity (or, for that matter, Platonism). Nothing in that existing orthodoxy need have led him to the changes and modifications that transpired as he simultaneously reinvented both the faith and the self that sought to embody it. Isolating Augustine's development from its larger environment, or even more radically denying any development at all, runs the risk of falsifying history in a very significant way, by ruling out methodologically the possibility of identifying prompts in that environment for Augustine's rhetorical and intellectual movements. Treating Augustine's language and self-presentation in such isolation also practically guarantees that we will not understand fully what he means by any of it, because we have left out of the picture the immediate context and discursive partners of his communication. It cannot be stressed too much that what we have in Augustine's compositions is principally communication to those in his immediate environment, intended to achieve certain immediate effects, to position him among a set of discourses, and to support by defense or improvement those positions with which he chose to identify.[8] His Manichaean past and his anti-Manichaean present together set the context in which certain kinds of problems harassed him, and in which only certain kinds of answers could carry lasting conviction. In arguing this, I can do no more than any historian who lays before his or her audience two juxtaposed sets of data, demonstrates their temporal correlation, and proposes that they help to explain and contextualize each other; for the crucial actions by which they arguably were connected took place in the private choices of a human mind that history can never see directly. Yet, demonstrably, Augustine was engaged almost exclusively with Manichaeism as the primary alternative world view to his own in the decade we have considered, and refers to its tenets directly or obliquely in nearly every work.

While we do not know, and can never know, the inner workings of Augustine's mind and his private motives, we know quite a lot about what he did discursively to position himself in his immediate religious environment. Even though he spoke within a limited repertoire of religious terminology and images reused over and over again, we can track changes in his positions through the rise and fall in his use of certain expressions, in how terms change their definitions and associations, in the way he revisits and reshapes his analysis of key issues, in the impact of newly discovered biblical passages

on the matters to which he connected them. From an analysis of such dynamic in his discourse, we know for a matter of fact that Augustine changed his public stance on the soul's relative disability, progressively from one of relative freedom, to one that limited that ability to appeal for God's aid, to one of utter depravity and wantonness in the absence of God's grace. We know that in the same development he successively redefined God's grace from an assistance delivered to the appealing soul, to a universal call that could potentially prompt the soul's appeal, to a unilateral irresistible divine initiative that invented the appealing soul. We know with equal certainty that this development of position was mapped out on successive interpretations of the language of Paul, which had never been read as Augustine finally came to read it by anyone before him within the tradition he claimed to represent; nor is Paul's language necessarily best read as Augustine came to read it. We further know without question that both the conclusions about the soul's relationship to salvation mediated by grace to which he came, and their authorization by the words of Paul, were stances held before him only by the Manichaeans. This convergence of his thinking with characteristically Manichaean positions did not go unnoticed by Augustine's contemporaries, with dire consequences for the rest of his career.

When Julian of Eclanum some years later accused Augustine of still being a Manichaean, his charge missed the mark in important ways. Augustine had not reverted to Manichaeism—either in its normative form or in his partial understanding of it—as he modified the received Nicene tradition. Instead, Augustine had taken individual insights and points of emphasis in the Manichaean system and transplanted them, in isolation, into the Nicene system. The context of the latter fundamentally changed the implications of these isolated Manichaean concepts and emphases, in what it is fair to call a decidedly un-Manichaean or even anti-Manichaean direction, and they became increasingly reconstrued as Augustine abandoned his efforts to win over Manichaeans through thus addressing their concerns. He pursued his career more and more apart from such protreptic considerations, with growing hostility to the Manichaeans as recalcitrant heretics.

In stopping this study at the dawn of the fifth century, we have reached only the beginning of the emergence of many of the Augustinian ideas most often discussed in connection with his Manichaean past: original sin, sexual concupiscence as the essence of transmitted sinfulness, predestination and the grace of perseverance, the concept of the two cities. Yet it gives me pleasure to pause at this point, as at a kind of pinnacle bathed in light before a

long descent into the shadows. In the concluding books of *Confessions* Augustine offered a remarkable program of religious openness, on a par with Mani's own universalist vision of spirituality. The historical consequences of its failure were immense. It failed not just ultimately, but immediately. For all the energies of tact and wit and insight and consummate rhetorical skill that went into it, the appeal to Manichaeans so subtly woven into the work did not achieve its intended results. Manichaeans did not flock to Catholic baptismal waters in any great numbers. Augustine saw at most a handful of additional converts join his peculiar circle of Manichaean expatriates. We can gauge how this failure affected him only by the sharp turn his approach to the Manichaeans took in the decades following his completion of *Confessions*. Yet this change in tone may reflect equally the tremendous backlash he faced as his rise to prominence as a Catholic leader sparked attacks on his innovations as Manichaean in their inspiration. For either reason, and almost certainly for both, he abandoned nearly all accommodation to Manichaean modes of thinking, and began deploying the diverse arsenal of polemical arguments he had developed over the previous decades in a willy-nilly fashion, without concern for coherence among them. James O'Donnell says of this hardening of the later Augustine, "The man . . . who had written the *Confessions* . . . was no longer the man *of* the *Confessions*, and that was Augustine's tragedy."[9] He grew harsh in tone and bitter in action. Ultimately, he turned to coercion.

Augustine's appeal to the Manichaeans failed for a number of reasons, not the least because, at some level, he did not really mean it. Despite his rhetoric, he was not truly inviting them to a completely open quest for truth—just as the Manichaeans were not, with their apparent affirmation of prior traditions. He demanded their acknowledgment of a few minimum a priori truths, and he knew full well that these were the very ones that would make them cease to be Manichaeans: a monistic, providential universe rather than a dualistic, agonistic one; an omnipotent God rather than an empathetic one; a created soul rather than an emanated one; sin as a self-inflicted wound rather than a victimizing imposition. Augustine was counting on the shared pragmatics of the spiritual path to bring the two traditions together: confession, devotional prayer and hymn, asceticism, the moral authority of Jesus and Paul. Such techniques of self-formation could be shared between clearly distinct theoretical systems.[10] He perhaps hoped that Faustus's criterion of truth—that which issues in successful spiritual progress is true—would prove compelling to those who had once placed such trust in Faustus. But the fact remains that he never truly understood Manichaeism in the way

those who remained loyal to it apparently did. He never "made progress" in it to the point where he could identify himself with what it held important and meaningful. For this reason, all those who labor in Augustinian studies must come to realize that they cannot understand Manichaeism through Augustine's eyes. As knowledgeable of it as he was from his own past association, and as much as we unavoidably depend on him for details of the North African form of this religion in his time, he reported it too much through the lens of his own failure to make it his own, to make it work as religions work for those who identify with them and adhere to them. At its core, it remained for him a "Persian fable"—inarticulate in its abiding otherness.

Augustine did not succeed in crafting a true hybrid of the two world views, therefore, and it is almost certain he never intended to do so. Indeed, when certain Manichaean constructs were torn out of the web of interconnected meaning provided by the Manichaean system as a whole, and fitted to Augustine's Catholic system, they yielded a frightful caricature of the Manichaean God, an anti-God from their perspective, perversely creating and damning arbitrarily myriads of powerless creatures. This was a being the Manichaeans could neither understand nor empathize with. It possessed for them all the alienness of evil. It was a God who in their eyes operated with schoolyard values, demanding submission and obedience rather than goodness. Augustine's universe was governed by power rather than virtue; indeed, virtue was defined as whatever the most powerful being dictated. For Manichaeans, it appeared to lack a moral center, and that meant it bordered on atheism. They denied the title "God" to something that was simply the most capable bully; the latter description was more apt for the devil. In the final analysis, the Manichaeans saw in the God Augustine was offering them the devil disguised as a being of light.

Augustine's Catholic Self-Making

We are conditioned to think of the actors in history as stable identities with substantial continuity of character and purpose. We want to fix Augustine in our catalog of such figures, and it offers a convenient shorthand to account for his statements and "thought" as the product of psychological predispositions to see things a certain way. Even when it comes to suggesting Manichaean influence on his thought, it has often been assumed that it must have implanted itself into his "subconscious" when he was a young adherent, lain

dormant in his mind while he seemed to embrace Nicene orthodoxy, but eventually worked its way back to the surface almost against his will. The course I have charted in this study gives a slightly different picture—one unabashedly reliant on the surface of Augustine's self, that is, the one actually accessible and assessable to historical analysis. Augustine appears to have been able rhetorically to shed one self and adopt another with relative ease. Lingering echoes of peculiarly Manichaean discourse that appear in his earliest post-conversion works rapidly faded as Augustine began to study and absorb the established paradigms of the Nicene world view. He learned to talk the talk, and in doing so came to embody the sort of Christianity to which he had been attracted in Milan.

In his first years as a Catholic, Augustine asserted on faith many things that were only rote recital for him, with no comprehensible meaning that he could reason through and explain. Later he found the means to do so. Continuities in Augustine's terminology, favorite imagery, and most of all reference points in the *symboli* of the Nicene tradition obscure developments in the content and meaning he poured into such markers. Augustine usually could, and we usually can, see a logical progression in how subsequent ideas and conclusions build on earlier views. But the continuity is a developmental one, a continuity of commitment that channeled the productivity of his discourse into limited acceptable channels of expression. Concepts that he early mouthed performatively, as an illocutionary mark of community allegiance, he later incorporated into the system of his own understanding, because, like any convert, he constantly worked under the pressure of living up to his commitments to those mere phrases. In his early writings, they served as little more than place-holders—labeled spaces to be filled in later, rationalized and operationalized.

The zealousness of the convert reflects the work in process of imposing new patterns of thought and conduct, the repetitious display of which in speech and behavior anchors them as habits. Forming a new self always involves overwriting a previous self embedded in existing patterns of thinking and doing. As a trained rhetorician, Augustine had always manifested his commitments through acts of public speaking. He had been active in arguing the Manichaean case to the people he met in Carthage, and as a Catholic he turned the same abilities against the Manichaeans. But it was as a writer that Augustine most effectively enunciated his commitments. As he later admitted, he thought as he dictated, working out the implications of one commitment for other investments of self. His self was formed in the compositional

process. Augustine did not compose his works in the manner of private meditations or diary-keeping. Every one of his compositions was a performance in the presence of stenographers. He also delivered his works before audiences large and small. With such public acts of selfhood, Augustine bore a greater burden of consistency and coherence than most people. Any inconsistency or incoherence in the set of ideas and dispositions toward the world that he wished to promote would be manifest for everyone to see in a way that quieter and more private acts of commitment were not. By putting himself out there as a public paradigm of the Catholic self, Augustine came under pressure to display a fully integrated, stable identity.

But in seeking a Catholic self that could be stable because it had resolved all the issues of identity it might confront, Augustine discovered that he needed to change and develop the faith to which he had been converted. His early articulations of that faith had been premature, and had to be qualified and modified to better address the problems that the Manichaeans raised about understanding the human condition. With his commitments so much on public display, Augustine had to effect these changes in full sight of his audiences, while contending for the most part that the new set of positions were the same as—or at least in close continuity with—the previous ones. In this respect, Augustine had to play the illusionist. But after a number of such deft performances, the transformation he was working on the received form of Nicene Christianity became undeniable. Augustine fooled few of his contemporaries, but apparently a number of modern interpreters, and perhaps at times himself.

Circumstances forced Augustine to a confessional moment before his seniors in the North African Catholic community, providing an unusual, heightened examination of conformity prior to assuming a position of leadership. In addition to their scrutiny of him, Augustine carried out a self-scrutiny, and specifically one that carefully considered their gaze, their standards of assessment. He undertook the exercise of taking the view of others with respect to himself, and considering who he should be to win their approval and to continue within the community he had chosen. The suspicion of his superiors in the Catholic community about his Manichaean ties forced his initial "confession" upon him; but, based upon his subsequent actions, it seems that he gained from that experience an insight into the possible place of the act of confession itself in bridging the gap between his new and old communities. Such acts of confession were rare among Catholics, but a central facet of Manichaean religious practice. By finding a confessional voice in the words of

the biblical Psalms that so closely paralleled Manichaean devotional rhetoric, Augustine identified confession as the quintessence of the spiritual goals shared by Catholics and Manichaeans, and in some sense realized in himself. He began to think of the course of his religious wanderings as providential, not just of God's salvation of him personally, but also of a way God was opening for all Manichaeans to follow him into the Catholic Church.

Perhaps this self-image as a man of destiny emboldened him to experiment with the borderline between the two communities, searching for a useful point of entry. All we know for certain is that he took up various Manichaean images and concepts and interpretive perspectives, separating them from the larger interlocking Manichaean discursive system, and finding a way to employ them within a Nicene framing. He did so, not in some theoretical tract, but in the personalized setting of his own story, a story in which he identified all the essential changes that must be made from a Manichaean to a Catholic self, while illustrating in countless ways how similar the two could be in their goals, their concerns, their experiences, and their self-expression. Augustine made his appeal to the Manichaeans personal (in a way he never would in his polemics against the Donatists and Pelagians), not simply because he shared a past with them, but because he continued to be personally engaged and invested with them. They were his friends—now alienated, but still significant in a way no other opponent or "heretic" could be. He went so far, then, as to create a protreptical paradigm that he was willing to embody himself, and that we know as the Augustine of *Confessions*. By pretending that all that he had done to modify the Nicene positions he had received at his conversion—all the ways he had found to address peculiarly Manichaean concerns and solve uniquely Manichaean objections, all the ways he had learned to accommodate his language and self-expression to capture and scrutinize Manichaean experience—had already informed his original decision to convert, he created in *Confessions* a new conversion, a "second conversion," with a fresh set of markers and components and expectations that were not explicit in his initial conversion. Augustine changed the terms of what it meant and would mean to be a Catholic self.

Is there, perhaps, something more than protreptic strategy behind this anachronistic displacement of his intellectual development in the narrative of *Confessions*? Could Augustine subtly, symbolically, have meant to suggest that there had been in his life *two* conversions to Nicene Christianity, separated by a decade in reality, but compressed into a matter of months in his idealized narrative? That in some sense he had gone through such a progressive

conversion over the course of his first decade as a Catholic is a conclusion well-supported and widely shared in modern analysis of his career. But was Augustine himself aware of it? By critiquing the limitations of his early thinking as a Catholic under the guise of his pre-conversion thinking, did he mean to suggest that his true, full conversion had occurred a decade into public profession of a Catholic identity? As his insight into the implications his Nicene faith would have for him deepened, he had gone from rotely reciting disjointed and juxtaposed Nicene phrases to operationalizing them in an increasingly tightly bound system of ideas. He had gone from wearing his faith like a new suit that took some getting used to, to possessing it as a second skin. In the process of integrating the separable parts of Nicene teaching into a rationalized, usable system, he had at the same time fashioned a frame within which the disparate elements of his own being could become a self—a Catholic self. Stripped, however temporarily, of his enamorment of big metaphysical questions, he had discovered a more essential self encapsulated in a set of attitudes and orientations that did not depend so much on one cosmic myth or another, as they relied on a more concretely rooted understanding of one's own place in utter dependence on God.

The Augustine of *Confessions* is no more or less the "real" Augustine than any other of his purposeful rhetorical performances. It is one of many performances of self that Augustine adopted as a stance of self-representation in the context of particular problems and conflicts he wished to engage. We have seen a series of such high-visibility performances of normative selfhood, reiterating in different forms the commitment of his baptism: (1) his debate with Fortunatus, with its give-and-take forcing him to resort to previously neglected resources within the tradition he meant to defend; (2) his delivery of a lecture on the Nicene creed to the bishops assembled in Hippo to form the Catholic Church in North Africa, in which he sought to isolate the crucial either/ors of Nicene commitment against the Manichaean alternatives; (3) his defense before the episcopal commission responding to Megalius's charges, producing suitably conformed discoveries of Catholic truth within the interior monologue of his soul; (4) the publication of *Confessions* itself as a *publicatio sui*,[11] a positioning of himself precisely in his peregrinations and faultiness as a paradigm of conversion. The articulation of his commitments would continue to be in flux, and with each new Augustine his past would be reread as tending towards what he would become. In *Confessions*, he read his original—genuine, if somewhat naive—commitment to be a Catholic through the lens of what Nicene faith had come to mean for him, and largely

only for him, a decade later. Even this retrospective self by which he read his present into his past should be understood as a self that he intended to be, was committed to being, rather than one fully achieved. Through speaking it and performing it, he sought to inscribe it on his person. As Wolfgang Iser has argued, "The literary work is to be considered not as a documentary record of something that exists or has existed, but as a reformulation of an already formulated reality, which brings into the world something that did not exist before."[12] We may need to consider carefully, therefore, the degree to which Augustine's "process of retrospective reinterpretation" in *Confessions* was "actually constitutive of" his conversion, as Paula Fredriksen, James O'Donnell, and James Wetzel among others have suggested.[13]

Those he summoned to emulate his new Catholic self included both Manichaeans and Catholics, both of whom in their own way had stopped short of the full realization of their relationship to God. Both Manichaean fantasy and Catholic unrationalized faith represented the stunted spirituality of the *imperiti* and *indocti*. In what appears to have been very deliberate phrasing, Augustine credits the Platonists as those who "see the goal" (even though they do not see the way), while Catholics are those who "see the way"—we look in vain for him to add "and the goal" (*Conf* 7.20.26–21.27). One vital continuity persisted for Augustine, therefore, from the heady days of his conversion: his confidence that Platonism most directly grasps the nature of the ultimate goal toward which the soul gropes. Religious systems, shrouded in mythic images and focused on modifying conduct in this life, provide the necessary self-purification and -ordering to make one better able, in concert with sight of the goal philosophy supplies, to reach "the country of blessedness, which we are meant not only to perceive but also dwell in." In humbling himself to the authority of the Catholic Church, Augustine adopted one such "way that leads there" whose *imperiti* and *indocti* appeared to be successfully making progress. Yet he suffused his allusions to the goal scattered throughout the text with a Platonic vision that would have been lost entirely on those very paragons of simple piety. He wrote for someone else.

Indeed, it is inexcusably proleptic to identify those who "see the way" in *Confessions* 7 simply as Catholics, as I have just done. At this point of his narrative, Augustine, while increasingly sure that Platonists see the goal, is still searching for those who see the way, and he finds the first inkling of it in "the venerable writings of your spirit, especially the apostle Paul" (*Conf* 7.21.27). Paul, we recall, formed the bridge of common authority recognized by Catholic and Manichaean alike. Augustine attested that either form of religious

practice could produce the rudiments of piety in others, even if not in himself. Moreover, he identified as Paul's specific addition to the Platonic vision of the goal—the crucial factor in Paul that proved effective for Augustine's own self-transformation—the insight of grace, quoting Romans 7. We know, of course, that this was a retrospective discovery, forced in fact upon him by Fortunatus, and gradually domesticated by him into something workable within a Nicene framework. He produced in himself, then, a truly "catholic" self capable—he believed—of appealing to Manichaeans and Catholics. He saw the concept of grace as far more than a merely workable addition to the Nicene faith; he saw it as something that brought out core implications of the Nicene world view, and whose full meaning, in fact, could only be realized within that world view. In its more humbling ideology of human creatureliness and sole responsibility for sin, Augustine saw the Catholic way more effectively conditioning the soul to recognize its dependence on God for attaining its spiritual goal. In *Confessions*, therefore, Augustine built a case that the Catholic system fulfilled Faustus's criterion of truth—that it worked, and theoretically could be a just-so story that accomplishes its purpose in making a properly oriented self. But Augustine had also worked to make the point that story matters, that the Manichaean story did not work, and could not work, while the Catholic one does, because only the latter positions the self properly in relation to God.

Augustine had come to ideas that only a few years earlier had been literally unthinkable for him. He had developed and deployed them as necessary in particular contexts, and had not necessarily integrated them into a coherent system coordinated with all his other commitments. Several of the key insights that emerged in his writings at the end of the fourth century lay more or less dormant as he turned to other concerns. Patout Burns has drawn attention to this striking fact of Augustine's theological labors. "He reached a new understanding of Romans in his response to Simplician's questions. . . . He then used that reading to shape the narrative of conversion in the *Confessions* but otherwise said almost nothing about it for the next twenty years."[14] This oddity of Augustine's rhetorical persona serves to remind us of its performative, strategic, and circumstantial character. Even he, who more than most writers of his age self-consciously built up a body of work, deployed specific tracts for immediate purposes, to specific audiences, in response to current issues. He did not go looking for a new reading of Paul to be enshrined permanently in Christian dogma. He found his way to such a new reading with an immediate task at hand. He often (though not always) made

this clear in his own review of his body of work, his *Revisions*, in which he frequently explained away apparent inconsistencies in his views by reference to the particular opposition he had in mind in a particular work, and to the manner in which he adjusted his stance to engage or resist a particular alternative ideology. This rhetorical bobbing and weaving in the ring with various opponents complicated what otherwise he wished to present as a fairly linear course of development across time. At the end of his life, the performative twists and turns averaged out to a theological mean that he could construe as the fixed center that he consistently stood for; but not even Augustine wished to imply that this center was fixed within his mind from the beginning and merely drawn upon overtly as circumstance warranted. Like so much else of the self, the full grasp of understanding emerged for Augustine out of unknown depths beyond all anticipation or control.

The Manichaean-Augustinian Self

Krister Stendahl has pointed to the idea of the introspective conscience as a defining characteristic of Western civilization traceable to Augustine.[15] Augustine did not invent the notion of interiority itself, which was already a commonplace of ancient philosophy in its recognition of an interior realm of thought and intention distinct from, and potentially constrained by, exterior conditions. But Augustine appears to provide the historical moment when this prior sense of interiority gained the greater complexity of the introspective conscience—a sense of interior deliberation and conflict that breaks apart the previously assumed unity of mind and agency, knowing and willing.

Albrecht Dihle has credited Augustine, therefore, as "the inventor of our modern notion of will," with its introspective and self-examining qualities distinct from cognition.[16] What brought Augustine to this invention? How did someone so steeped in the classical tradition wander away from the simple identification of agency with knowledge? Was it simply a product of his own self-analysis? Was it an inevitable understanding of Paul? I have proposed instead that his struggle with the Manichaeans over the question of human responsibility for sin gave a peculiar focus to the subject of human agency, isolating a distinct function of will from the soul's identification with mind, even if the Manichaeans themselves fell short of codifying that isolation terminologically.[17] The Manichaeans problematized the unity of human agency both by proposing a conflict of identity in mind itself (in speaking of "two

minds" within the individual), and by pointing phenomenologically to an experience of the mind's "I" knowing what to do, but finding itself unable to effect it. In these ways, they complicated what the culture around them largely took to be a fairly linear and straightforward relation between knowing and responsible intent.

Augustine, converted to a Nicene free will position, had every reason in the world simply to reject the Manichaean arguments, and at first he did. The free will position merely carried forward the "common sense" view of his culture regarding the unproblematic relation of knowing to agency. But his defense of this position against Manichaean objections required him to delve into those complicating factors his opponents raised, leading to an increasing prominence of willing over thinking in his analysis of agency. Therefore, Manichaean views of the issues shaped the emergence of a distinct concept of the will in Augustine, even though he initially employed the concept in defense of a position antithetical to theirs.

Moreover, Augustine gradually yielded ground to the Manichaeans on the state of the will in human experience, until he reached a position on this question practically indistinguishable from theirs. We can speculate on personal and psychological reasons why Augustine may have modified his views; and we can work out a logical development by which reversing himself on the freedom of the will aligned his views of human agency better with some of his other theological priorities, such as the omnipotence of God. But two other factors play a more evident and demonstrable role in changing his stance on the will. The first is the way the Manichaeans used the words of Paul in tandem with their analysis of the limits of human agency. Since Paul was a contested authority between Manichaeans and Nicene Christians, Augustine labored over the Apostle's words both to reinforce the Nicene claim on him, and to claim his authority in support of Nicene positions. But of course he could have persisted in ignoring the Manichaean readings of Paul, and in insisting upon free will meanings for what he said, as he initially tried to do. All his predecessors in the Nicene tradition had done so. It is somewhat ironic that Paul's apparently monadic "I" of the mind in Romans 7, which accords so well with Augustine's initial post-conversion confidence in the unity of the self, should become the textual locus of his acceptance of the Manichaean view of internal division. For the Manichaeans, the "I" of Paul's mind spoke as the unified self following grace, newly emerged from and even now opposed by the alien "flesh." Augustine did not break up this monadic "I," but absorbed into it the contrary inhibition of the "flesh" as equally constitutive

of the self. He did so not because Paul said so, nor because he directly experienced the other of the flesh as self, but because ideologically it had to belong to the self to rule out dualism and safeguard his belief in personal responsibility for sin.

A second factor, then, proves indispensable to understanding Augustine's shift of position on the will, namely, his ongoing engagement with Manichaeans as the conversation partners of his exploration of this subject. And since he conducted that conversation not in an open-ended dialogue, but within a polemical and protreptical program, we probably should not think that Augustine was persuaded or convinced by Manichaean arguments, but that he shifted positions strategically both to shore up the Nicene position on stronger discursive ground and to appeal better to Manichaean sensibilities for the purpose of winning their conversion. This adjustment in his stance on the will was made easier for him and for his Nicene compatriots by being rationalized through the words of Paul, that is, by convincing himself and others that this was Paul's teaching on the will, rather than that of the Manichaeans.

The Manichaean connection makes Robert Bernasconi's modification of Dihle's hypothesis especially significant, when he suggests that Augustine's originality lies not necessarily in inventing the concept of the will *tout court*, but especially in discovering or inventing "the will in conflict with itself."[18] Bernasconi contends that "The will appears as a faculty distinct from intellect and from desire only when in conflict with itself. That is to say, it shows itself only when it is split."[19] This insight accords with the historical emergence of talk of a will in the debate between Manichaeans and Augustine over the possibilities of such internal conflict. Patout Burns has suggested that one can correlate "this Augustinian variation on the traditional dualism of body and soul . . . with certain of his concerns and interests. The most obvious of these was his concern to avoid and to refute Manicheism."[20] As Burns notes, "Augustine's anthropological innovation began as a reaction against the passivity and impotence of the Manichean Light trapped in darkness."[21] Yet in the process of its development, Augustine made it increasingly able to displace the Manichaean alternative by absorbing into it more and more of the Manichaean modeling of the experience of interior division and disability. It would be a mistake to take Augustine's "phenomenology" of this will in conflict in book 8 of *Confessions* as based on his pure and nonideological observation of his own psychology. To do so would be to ignore the degree to which he strategically, even daringly, invoked Manichaean characterizations of interior struggle as self-fragmentation, as conflict between two identities, minds,

and wills, before wrestling this "monstrosity" into a Nicene comprehension of the phenomenon within a single, responsible, sinful soul. He validated the interior experience the Manichaeans highlighted in order to integrate it into the Nicene paradigm. Augustine's conclusion about the self-defeating character of the single soul derived not from self-observation, but from theological commitments—specifically, the necessity of ruling out dualistic solutions by which some "other" could intrude between God's command and the soul's responsibility to obey.[22]

The will emerges into discourse as a distinct locus of selfhood only with a recognition of a problem, a gap, between impulse and action. Only when action is not taken as an automatic outcome of some previous mental event, only when there is a sense of resistance to or insufficiency of reason can the will be introduced as the something else that connects or fails to connect what one thinks to what one does. For the early Augustine and his predecessors, it was the most obvious thing in the world that the human mind wills freely. There could be no doctrine of grace—no need for a doctrine of grace—so long as the mind's freedom was simply common sense. First, the identification of an individual person with an individual mind had to be problematized, a gap had to be opened between thought and act and a distinct trigger—the will—identified between them. Manichaeism contributed to late ancient thought this complication of theories of action, necessary for bringing the will to light. This move toward introspective complexity is one of the most lasting contributions of Manichaeism to Western civilization. It permeates our literature, art, and psychology, and provides a recurrent critique of human hubris and ambition. Even as Augustine struck a seemingly fatal blow to dualism by insisting that his self stood on both sides of the conflict between good and evil, he acceded to a new kind of interior division "that cut right through the subject itself," presenting in "two synchronic movements" both "the broadening of the self and its new interior breakdown."[23]

Augustine's *anti*-Manichaean choices in adapting Manichaean prompts arguably have made an even more profound mark on the modern soul and its introspective conscience. The domain of the soul expanded under Augustine's gaze relative to the Manichaean view of it, and took over vast territories previously ceded to the non-self. The emotions and the erroneous reasonings of the person now became part of the soul, where before they had been almost chemical properties of the body. Augustine's confession was precisely confession of being this material, taking ownership of characteristics that sap and undermine what one strives to achieve. He accepted responsibility even for

that apparently within him that he could neither know nor understand. Augustine said that he became a mystery to himself, and that he recognized that there must be parts of himself inaccessible to his own scrutiny; and yet he accepted this alienated self/other as himself. The Manichaeans differed precisely on this point: they were unwilling to take ownership of something unintelligible to their mind and unreachable to their observation or control. We are left to ponder the implications of Augustine's innovation. What does it mean to be what is outside of one's own awareness and self-consciousness, to rest passively on the tip of an unfathomable iceberg? If the body does it, then whatever it is inside that prompts that action, it is one's own self, Augustine insisted against the Manichaeans. He decided upon this broader definition of self not on the basis of any analysis of or insight into the human experience (which he agreed did not extend far enough to reach the unfathomable prompts of our own sinfulness), but on the a priori demand that humans be responsible so that neither God nor the devil is.

The Manichaeans appear by comparison at one at the same time both more severe and more tolerant of the human condition. They demanded the total alienation and disavowal of all within us that is contrary to our set purpose. They insisted on labeling these opposing drives as other. And yet this very stringency meant freeing the individual from responsibility for all that is unfathomable within us. There are things that we think and do that are utterly abhorrent to us, and seem to well up from nowhere our consciousness can reach. How, then, can we track and eradicate aspects of our person beyond our conscious sense of self, and therefore how can we be held accountable for that which is beyond our own understanding of ourselves? Harry Frankfurt pinpoints this philosophical problem in his analysis of self-identification.

> Now why may a desire not . . . be an event in the history of a person's mind without being that person's desire? Why may not certain mental movements, like certain movements of human bodies, in this sense belong to no one? . . . A person is no more to be identified with everything that goes on in his mind, in other words, than he is to be identified with everything that goes on in his body.[24]

But a person takes possession of an adventitious passion, Frankfurt goes on to explain, by providing it with meaning, construing it to have a natural place in his or her experience, rationalizing it in connection with internal motives, and integrating it as part of one's self-understanding. One need not approve

of the passion in order to integrate it into oneself; and in doing so, one may then come not to approve of him- or herself in some fundamental way, as Augustine expressed ideologically when he spoke of the essential nihility and perversity of the human self. Does separating such bad impulses out as alien to our true self help the confessional self to define and reinforce its commitment to the good, as the Manichaeans suggested, or does it, as Augustine concluded, only remove the anxiety over goodness that might motivate self-disciplining?

If we regard Augustine as most Catholic where he takes a stance at odds with both Manichaeism and Platonism, then we should pay especial attention to his negation of the self in contrast to the divine self of the other two traditions. Mani and Plotinus both saw the dark, negative aspects of the self as other and alien to our true divine selves. Augustine went so far in his reversal of this outlook as to see in the human self the negation of God. He assimilated evil to the self, and defined the self over against God. While both Manichaeism and Platonism decried the isolating individuation of the soul from its monistic root, Augustine reversed the values on the image, and declared human selves to be nothing else than this blank space of differentiation with no root of its own. The self needed to be brought into greater proximity to the root of being by being drawn away from its own foundation in nothingness. Augustine's critical fixation on what he regarded as the prideful view of the soul as divine made it impossible for him to understand the Manichaean doctrine of grace that, like his own construct, saw an emergence of true selfhood only around the gravity of God. He could not appreciate the Manichaean discourse of dependence on God's intervention when it was combined with a myth of the soul's divine origin and necessary role in protecting and aiding God. For him, the self could not be ennobled and made aware of its utter incapacity at the same time. Its abjectness must reach to its very core. The more Augustine isolated the sole truly free choice of the soul in its perverse *aversio* from God (whether in heavenly preexistence or in Eden), the sharper his formulation came to be as an antithesis of the Manichaean soul, whose one totally free choice (*arbitrio*), prior to mixture with evil forces, had been its heroic self-sacrifice in defense of God's Eden-like realm of light (*Fort* 11).

Even as Augustine rhetorically negated the self, made it rootless and worthless in itself, he constructed a kind of self to which he could commit and through which he could manifest a conformed Catholic soul. He developed, on the basis of existing Nicene views of the created nature of the soul and its propensity to sinfulness, a radical insistence on sacrificing the self,

denying the value of everything that came from its own inherent resources. The soul of itself can only do wrong, everything good is given it to do from elsewhere. This necessary self-sacrifice in order to sufficiently come to see and proclaim the majesty of God constitutes the "act of truth" that Joseph Ratzinger sees at the heart of Augustine's deepening of the confessional gaze, in which the self is something over against God, to be negated in the fulfillment of its self-discovery.[25] "And that is," Michel Foucault thinks, "the deep contradiction, or, if you want, the great richness, of Christian technologies of the self: no truth about the self without a sacrifice of the self. I think that one of the great problems of Western culture has been to find the possibility of founding the hermeneutics of the self not, as was the case in early Christianity, on the sacrifice of the self but, on the contrary, on a positive, on the theoretical and practical, emergence of the self."[26] Such a possibility turns out to have been the path not chosen by Western culture in its rejection of the Manichaean option. The Manichaeans believed in and experienced the emergence of a self rich in its natural endowments, catalyzed by the inflow of spiritual grace. Augustine became convinced that all such positive assessments of the soul's natural endowments—be they Manichaean, Pelagian, or Donatist—produced a misplaced self-confidence and pride in one's being that detracted from rather than fostered spiritual progress. The strength of his voice carried his view forward at the expense of the alternatives.

The Manichaean and Augustinian conceptions of the self each codify a feeling about the self that arises within all of us from time to time. It is in the nature of religious systems to translate experience into concepts and categories by which we can become objects to ourselves within larger webs of meaning. Such conceptual reification of experience permits the self-manipulation by which adherents make themselves embodiments of the system to which they belong, more or less conformed selves whose self-image says "yes" to some impulses and "no" to others. In other words, part of the work of religion is to supply the machinery by which people relate to themselves as self-governing participants in communal identities. G. H. Mead has spoken in terms of the individual as a carrier of institutions through the organization within the self of attitudes in relative conformity to the expectations of one's social associations.[27] I have spoken of a "Catholic self" as a label for the intention carried by Augustine's commitment to become a member of the Catholic Church and to embody in himself the outlook and values that defined that community.

Yet Augustine, no more and no less than other adherents of religions in human history, was not the sort of passive receptacle that ideological and

practical systems necessarily posit as their ideal carriers. As Judith Butler has observed, systems of power suffer from a vulnerability connected to their dependence on individual adherents and participants for their persistence. "One speaks a language that is never fully one's own, but that language only persists through repeated occasions of that invocation. That language gains its temporal life only in and through the utterances that reinvoke and restructure the conditions of its own possibility." A space of possible variation thus opens up within the process of a religious discourse finding a "site of reiteration" in an individual such as Augustine within the "dynamic and promise" of the "peculiar bind" of his agency, which simultaneously depends on discourse to set the terms of its existence while it has the capacity to alter those very terms. "The possibility remains to exploit the presupposition of speech to produce a future of language that is nowhere implied by those presuppositions."[28] In his quest to understand what he had committed himself to believe, Augustine produced performative misprisions of the resources of his tradition, in a manner that many of his peers considered to be simply wrong. Precisely through his failure exactly to reproduce the tradition as he received it, Augustine achieved the significance he now has for the tradition. "By understanding the false or wrong invocations as *reiterations*," Butler emphasizes, "we see how the form of social institutions undergoes change and alteration and how an invocation that has no prior legitimacy can have the effect of challenging existing forms of legitimacy, breaking open the possibility of future forms."[29]

In a manner only more historically visible and consequential, not fundamentally different from others, Augustine played out the dialectic formation of self between the matter of his own individuality and the form that sociality attempted to impress on it. He changed in his own person the very definition of a Catholic self, as part of the dialectic G. H. Mead has explored between the social individual and the society constituted of such individuals.

> Persons of great mind and great character have strikingly changed the communities to which they have responded. We call them leaders, as such, but they are simply carrying to the *n*th power this change in the community by the individual who makes himself a part of it, who belongs to it. The great characters have been those who, by being what they were in the community, made that community a different one. They have enlarged and enriched the community. . . . They represent, in their personal relationships, a new order, and then become representative of the community as it might exist if it were fully developed along the

> lines they have started. . . . The very definition of genius would come back to something of the sort to which I have been referring, to this incalculable quality, this change of the environment on the part of an individual by himself becoming a member of the community.[30]

For good or ill, Augustine fundamentally changed the emerging Catholic community by becoming a Catholic, by his abilities as a Catholic leader in his native North Africa, by bringing to that leadership complicated and controversial personal and intellectual associations that colored his priorities as a Catholic.

What would become of this Catholic self Augustine had developed hand-in-glove with the fashioning of his polemical response and apologetic appeal to the Manichaeans? In certain respects, the understanding of self that Augustine had achieved at the end of the fourth century makes perfectly predictable many of his responses to Donatism: from his rejection of the human capacity to distinguish the saved from the damned, to his attack on the spiritual arrogance of proclaiming oneself pure and worthy, to his insistence that the Church contained persons of very mixed merit and ability, to his deep qualification of the ritual ideologies embedded in sacramental issues, to his readiness to make use of scriptural insights emanating from Donatist circles. It likewise makes perfectly understandable many aspects of his role in the emergence of the Pelagian controversy: from his insistence on human incapacity and the necessary role of God's initiative of grace, to his revolt at the idea of souls meriting salvation by their ascetic achievements, to his confidence in his reading of Paul, to the progressive darkening of his view of the human condition. But as his circle of those with whom he engaged changed and expanded, the formulation of his self shifted. The Manichaeans became more remote to him as significant others in his life, even as accusations of his own Manichaean inclinations led him to sharpen the differentiation of his own positions from the source of many of their most powerful elements, in order to defend what he regarded as his most important insights against the anti-Manichaean fervor of his later opponents. But that is a story for another day.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. It is important to note that such comments are invariably made in a critical context, as failings in his intellect or flaws in his system leading him away from what the author considers the proper form of Christian faith.

2. I choose the phrase "rhetorical output" deliberately, to encompass the variety of Augustine's works, some more formally literary than others, including not just treatises, finished and unfinished, but also transcripts of debates and sermons, and letters.

3. "Augustine as a Catholic presbyter and bishop came to learn aspects of Manichaeism which had been beyond the reach of Augustine the Manichaean Hearer" (Coyle 2001, 56).

4. O'Donnell 2001, 204.

5. Coyle 2003, 22.

6. *Faust*, *Fel*, *NB*, *Sec*, all probably composed between 401 and 405.

7. Possidius's list does not follow chronology, nor does it match the order found in Augustine's *Retr* (which is not necessarily strictly chronological either).

8. Possidius treats the two treatises *ME* and *MM* as a single work in two volumes, as does Augustine himself in *Retr*, even though each volume retains a distinct title. *ME* was begun while Augustine was still in Rome in 387–388, but not finished until circa 390, after *GCM*.

9. Possidius does not list *UC* under this name among Augustine's anti-Manichaean works, but does list there an *Epistula ad Honoratum*. *UC* indeed takes the form of an extended letter to the Manichaean Electus Honoratus, and Julian of Eclanum so refers to it in *Iulimp* 5.26. *UC* also appears under its proper title in another part of the *Indiculum*, in the category of *contra paganos*, despite the fact that it is addressed to a Manichaean. This would not be the only instance of a single work being listed in more than one place under different titles in the *Indiculum* (*Faust*, for instance, is listed in two places under two titles). Nonetheless, some researchers (e.g., Bochet 2004, 133–37) have argued that the *Epistula* mentioned as an anti-Manichaean work is not *UC*, but Augustine's *Ep 140*, otherwise known as *De gratia noui testamenti*, even though the latter work, too, is listed also in another part of the *Indiculum*. I leave aside here the question of whether *Ep 140* is itself a work with an anti-Manichaean agenda (for which Bochet 2004, 137–54, makes the most developed case); in any case, *UC* is such a work.

10. Largely completed before the debate with Fortunatus, but apparently supplemented with additions at its end following that debate in autumn 392.

11. Although treated by Possidius as a transcript (*acta*), *Fort* is actually a "compressed" summary of the debate, edited by Augustine himself from the transcript, whose full version is unfortunately lost.

12. Actually composed gradually, begun in Rome in 387–388 and completed in Hippo circa 395. The first book initially circulated separately. Possidius retains the original and full title of the work: *Unde malum et de libero arbitrio*.

13. The analytical categories of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary effect of speech-acts were first proposed by Austin 1975.

14. Clark 2004, 145.

15. Ibid., 157.

16. William Babcock writes that the task of the historian of religion can be conceived "as an effort to take seriously the specific forms in which doctrines were stated and the specific issues to which they were meant to respond so that those forms and issues stand out as clearly as possible." Among the purposes to which such an analysis might be put, Babcock sees value in recovering "the theological questions surrounding a particular statement of doctrine," so that they "can be . . . posed again for new consideration" (Babcock 1973, 2).

17. Boisser 1888; 1898, 291–325.

18. Harnack 1895.

19. Loofs 1897, 266ff.

20. Gourdon 1900.

21. Thimme 1908.

22. Alfaric 1918.

23. Madec 1989, 13 and 22.

24. Harrison 2006, 7.

25. Gilson 1929, 310–11; cf. Madec 1996, 69–70; Harrison 2006, 18.

26. Van der Meer 1961.

27. Southwold 1979, 635.

28. Mead 1934, 142.

29. Butler 1997, 14.

30. Ibid.

31. Foucault 1986, 42.

32. Hefner 1993b, 120.

33. Swann 1983; Mauss 1998, 55.

34. Bakhtin 1990, passim.

35. See Foote 1951.

36. "And if someone desirous of learning these things should fall in among either bishops or priests, or such prelates or ministers of the Catholic faith who avoid laying bare the mysteries generally or, content with simple faith, have no concern to know loftier things, let him not despair that knowledge of the truth is present where not all who are asked can teach and not all who ask are worthy to learn" (*ME* 1.1).

37. Bertrand has remarked on Augustine's anti-Manichaean writings that "From the animosity he put into these, may be judged to what extent Manichaeism filled his thoughts, and also the progress of the sect in Africa" (Bertrand, 247). Decret makes the case that Manichaeism posed more of a threat to Catholics in Africa than in Italy, due to the weaker position the Catholic Church held amid the greater Christian diversity of the region. This had the effect, Decret believes, of diverting Augustine from his preferred intellectual inquiries to polemics (Decret 1978, 42–44).

38. "Augustine's critique of Manichaean philosophy, occupying a substantial portion of his early writings, displays all the stridency and attention to detail that one would have expected from a former devotee" (Wetzel 1992, 88).

39. At this time Augustine believed that the sacraments (principally baptism) heal humans by repairing the damage done to the mind and will, allowing them to reason within proper terms

for the first time, and are thus the "remedy" to the "madness" of Manichaean thinking, which is rooted in willfulness, i.e., projecting onto the cosmos one's own likes and dislikes.

40. Pine-Coffin translation, used here for its vividness.

41. "Hence, he would rather start with reasoning instead of the Catholic authority (*mor.* I.ii.3). Addressing them with gentleness and understanding (*Secund.* i; *fund.* ii, iii), Augustine wanted to create room for honest exchange (*fund.* iii), hoping that he could dissuade them from Manichaeism (*fund.* xliii) and even invite them to conversion (*Secund.* xxvi; *mor.* I.xxxv.77; II.xvi.51)" (Lee 1999, 8).

42. Ranging from *Sol* 1.12.20, where Augustine reflects on his desire to work with his friends for knowledge of God and soul, and to do the best he can to persuade them to pursue it, even if they believe they have already discovered it (in Manichaeism), to *NB* 48, where he prays, "Grant that through our ministry, whereby you have willed that this cursed and most horrible error be refuted, others be liberated just as many have already been liberated."

43. *Pace* Frend 1953, 24.

CHAPTER 1. THE TRUE RELIGION

1. In *CLP* 3.25.30, Augustine says that he returned to Africa after the death of the emperor Maximus, which occurred on 27 August 388. He would have returned sometime in September, before the close of the safe sailing season.

2. As recalled in *CD* 22.8.48: "There are surely only a very few at Carthage who know about the healing of Innocentius, sometime counsellor of the vice-prefecture. But I was present as an eye-witness; for when I came with my brother Alypius from overseas, when we were not as yet ordained though already servants of God, Innocentius entertained us, and we were staying in his house at the time. The counsellor was a most devout man, and it was a very religious household."

3. On the anti-Manichaean legislation, and its culmination in the crackdown on Manichaeism in Carthage in 386 , see BeDuhn 2010, 136–44; on Augustine's Manichaean bishop, Faustus, falling prey to it, see BeDuhn 2010, 132–33.

4. *Cod. Theod.* 16.5.18, 17 June 389, extracted from a willing Theodosius within four days of his arrival in Rome by the local Catholics, seizing a rare opportunity to reverse the city's notorious laxity in enforcing the new Catholic order. Theodosius had arrived in Rome on 13 June, accompanied by none other than Messianus, the former African proconsul who had actually enforced earlier anti-Manichaean edicts, as *comes rei privatae* (see *Cod. Theod.* 4.22.3 and 11.16.20, both issued on 14 June 389).

5. On Priscillian and the role suspicion of Manichaeism played in his conviction and execution, see Burrus 1995.

6. In addition to Severus in Milevis and Possidius in Calama, Alypius became bishop of Thagaste, Evodius bishop of Uzalis, and Augustine, of course, bishop of Hippo. Other bishops came out of Augustine's second community in Hippo.

7. See Coyle 1978, 66ff.

8. "Come now, O wretched mortals, take heed that the wicked spirit may never foul this habitation, and that, intermingled with the senses, it may not pollute the sanctity of the soul and becloud the light of the mind. This evil thing creeps stealthily through all the entrances of sense: it gives itself over to forms, it adapts itself to colors, it sticks to sounds, it lurks hidden in anger and in the deception of speech, it appends itself to odors, it infuses tastes, by the turbulent overflow of passion it darkens the senses with darksome affections, it fills with certain obscuring mists the paths of the understanding, through all of which the mind's ray normally diffuses the light of reason."

9. It should be noted that the earliest pieces of Augustine's correspondence might be better characterized as letter fragments, since many of them give the impression of being extracts of passages Augustine thought worth retaining, and lack normal epistolary framing or references to ordinary matters. Likewise what remains evidently represents a fraction of his correspondence, and he frequently refers to other letters we do not possess.

10. It should be remembered that Christ was as central to Manichaeism as he was to Nicene Christianity.

11. On the place of the *nous* in Manichaeism, see the essays in van Tongerloo and van Oort, 1995.

12. Indeed, Manichaean Christology provided the initial bridge necessary for Augustine's synthesis of Nicene Christianity with Platonism, the latter of which he viewed as deficient in its lack of a place for Christ. Manichaeans agreed with Nicene Christians on the need for divine intervention and aid. In particular, Manichaeism emphasizes that the world requires the intervention of Christ as *instructor* and *revealer*, just as Augustine understands Christ's role in his initial years as a Nicene Christian. Thus, Augustine can say that "the wisdom and power of God, which is called the only-begotten Son, *signified* (*indicauit*) the liberation of human beings when he took humanity upon himself" (*DQ* 11). Nicene Christianity traditionally placed its emphasis elsewhere, on the directly salvific effect of Christ's incarnational assumption of humanity and/or atoning death.

13. Cf. *Ord* 2.5.15–16.

14. TeSelle 1970, 132. Paula Fredriksen remarks that "This allegiance to a contemplative life informed chiefly by the philosophical ideals of classical antiquity provided Augustine with a temporary buffer between himself (and his still-emerging Neoplatonic sensibilities), and the tumultuous world of the late fourth-century North African church. His adherence to this life style—a new thing in his homeland, something he and his friends were importing from Italy—accounts for his delayed reaction to North African Christianity and its culture" (Fredriksen 1979: 64).

15. He sent copies, "finished and corrected," circa 390–391, to one Celestine, perhaps a deacon in the church of Rome and later to become bishop there, and later asked for them to be returned, along with Celestine's opinion of them and a report of any use to which he had put them in combating the Manichaeans of Rome (*Ep* 18.1). He apparently also sent copies of all his early writings to Romanianus, who appears to have lived in Italy at this time (*Ep* 31).

16. The flattering designation was coined by Paulinus of Nola in a letter to Augustine preserved in the latter's collected correspondence (*Ep* 25.2).

17. On the Incarnation as an uncomprehended *symbolus*, see *QA* 33.76. On Augustine's initial attempts to reconcile the Incarnation with the unchanging shared nature of the Trinity, see *Ep* 11.

18. "His whole life on earth as a man, in the humanity he deigned to assume, was an education in morals; he showed how the body can serve the soul when the soul is subject to God" (*VR* 16.32). Through "that assumption of the man . . . we are taught a certain discipline for living and given an example" (*Ep* 11.4), and "whatever has been done through that man he assumed has been done for our instruction and information" (*Ep* 12.1). Cf. *DQ* 25, in which Augustine states that the cross was a tangible lesson to the believer not to fear death. Augustine offers nothing in this early period that would indicate any understanding of Jesus' death as atoning in character.

19. Augustine acknowledges having trouble grasping what resurrection means in a way compatible with his assumptions about the soul's character and destiny; he prefers the Platonic scenario of a return of the soul to its original disembodied and static state (*QA* 33.76; cf. *Acad* 2.9.22; *Ord* 1.8.23–24; *Sol* 1.2.4, 1.6.12–1.7.14, 1.13.23). The soul free of the body would manifest its inherent likeness to God in its immortality, and even in a certain kind of immutability characteristic of the intelligible (*IA* 10.17; *Liber XXI sent.* 19). "All authentic value begins only when the

soul takes its distance from the mortal body and its defilement, learns to hold body and bodily creation in contempt and to reserve its love for its own true, incorporeal self" (*QA* 33.73; cf. *Ord* 1.1.3). An incremental incorporation of Nicene dogma might be suggested by his remark that "in its own time and order the body will be restored to its pristine stability . . . the body . . . will be vivified and will be cleansed completely" (*VR* 12.25). But that this is simply rote repetition of a formula is made probable by his remark in the contemporaneous *Mus* 6.5.13: "when this body will have been restored to its former stability, in its own time and order. And this its resurrection is salutarily believed before it is fully understood (quae resurrectio eius antequam plenissime intellegatur, salubriter creditur)." A couple of years later, Augustine is still willing to say that the wise person or sage achieves ascent to God perhaps already in this lifetime, and certainly immediately after death, as a pure soul divested of the limits of body (see *UC* 11.25). In the *Revisions* he corrects this to a future physical resurrection of the dead (*Retr* 1.13.2).

20. In *Acad* 2.2.4, Augustine says that the Trinity "is as yet conceived by me in faith rather than understood by reason." In his early writings, Augustine preferred to understand the Trinity as *principium*, *intellectus*, and *ratio* (*Ord* 2.5.16, 2.9.26), a construct equally in line with Neoplatonic and Manichaean models (see *Faust* 20.2). Manichaean theology was also homoousian in character and Trinitarian in expression (see *Conf* 3.6.10; *CEF* 8; *Faust* 20.2, and the many hymnic examples in the Coptic *PsBk*.).

21. Augustine considers the Platonic intelligible world to be the reality expressed behind Christian language of the Kingdom of God (*Acad* 3.9.20, 3.19.42). Augustine reveals his synchronic conception of the "two worlds" and of the possible passage of the soul from the one to the other most clearly in *Ord* 1.11.32. In *Retr* 1.3.2, he would correct this view with the orthodox teaching of the eschatological future kingdom; but at the time he had not yet either understood or committed himself to the diachronic structure of the non-Manichaean Christian view of salvation.

22. Bourdieu 1990, 57.

23. Harrison 2006, 114.

24. Harrison 2006, 12. She contends that *VR* "is a reminder that Augustine's Christian faith in this early period was far from being the naive and somewhat embryonic substance that his critics sometimes maintain." Her facile equation of those who see development in Augustine's thought with "his critics" is telling.

25. See BeDuhn 2009b; 2010, 106–34.

26. See Sedley 1989. The Academic Skeptics under Philo of Larissa had rejected and reversed the traditional priority of authority to reason found in the philosophical schools (*Acad* 1.3.7; cf. Cicero, *Academica* 2.3.7–9; 2.18.60).

27. See Wetzel 1992a, 83.

28. Cf. *Acta Archelai* 15.

29. Augustine would regret these words later (*Retr* 1.12.3), since they either conceded too much to Manichaean concepts of progressive revelation, or betrayed a lingering presence of those concepts in his own thinking at the time.

30. Cf. *Ep* 11.4, where Augustine says of the Incarnation: "that assumption of the man has brought it about that we are taught a certain discipline for living and given an example of doing what we have been commanded under the majesty and clarity of certain principles. . . . We had first, therefore, to be shown a certain norm and rule of discipline. This was done through that divine dispensation of the assumed man." And likewise, in *Ep* 12.1: "whatever has been done through that man he assumed has been done for our instruction and information." On the basis of such evidence, Georges Folliet concludes, "Il semblerait donc, à s'en tenir à ce texte, que dans la pensée d'Augustin, à cette date, le *salut*, apporté à l'homme par le Fils de Dieu, se réalise sur le plan de la connaissance ou de la pédagogie, et non pas sur celui de la rédemption. D'autres textes,

antérieurs à 391, nous paraissent confirmer cette position (Folliet 1987, 211). He goes on to cite parallels in *Acad* 3.19.42, *QA* 33.76, and *VR* 16.30–32.

31. Yet elsewhere Augustine can refer to them as healing means provided by God, which he is not at liberty to detail to the unbaptized Romanianus (*VR* 16.30).

32. See Decret 1978, 48–49.

33. See BeDuhn 2010, 98–102.

34. One needs the authority of "great and peerless souls," whom "we believe have actually seen and are still seeing these things" (*QA* 33.75).

35. Cf. *Ord* 2.15.42: "nothing which the eyes beheld could in any way be compared with what the mind discerned."

36. Both this passage and the one quoted below also from *MM* 11.22 appear to be paraphrases of the same Manichaean text Augustine seems to be quoting or paraphrasing in *NB* 41. The text in question may be Mani's *Treasury*.

37. It is important to note that Augustine proposes that the soul *would be* saved by nature *if* the Manichaeans denied that it was mutable. He does not say that they actually hold such a position.

38. Cf. *MM* 11.23: "He is not incorrupt when his part is corrupted, nor unchanged when there is change in any part, nor uninjured when he is not perfect in every part, nor free from want when he is busily endeavoring to recover part of himself, nor quite whole when he has a weak part, nor perfectly happy when any part is suffering misery, nor entirely free when any part is under bondage."

39. Primary Manichaean texts recovered in the last century largely confirm Augustine's characterization of a defensive scenario, although we find in the narrative some references to an "ordering" of the realm of darkness so that it will not again seek to invade the light realm, which might have provided the basis for the explanation Augustine heard.

40. E.g., *PsBk* 117.5–6: "I knew not how to fight, for I am of the city of the gods"; cf. Alexander of Lycopolis 3.5.19ff.; Ephrem, *Second Discourse*, xlvii.

41. At the same time, Manichaean views of the material world were not as negative as they are often portrayed in modern secondary literature, and Augustine regularly criticizes the Manichaeans precisely for investing the world with a divine presence beyond what its creaturely character deserves. The same dual polemic against both Manichaean condemnation of aspects of the world as evil and the religion's belief that divinity inhered in other aspects can be found in Priscillian of Avila's criticism of Manichaeans; see Burrus 1995, 72–73.

42. For a thorough analysis of the place of *superbia* in Augustine's thought, see Torchia 1987.

43. *Pace* Harrison 2006, 231, whose selective editing of an extended passage in *VR* 14.27–28, involving a very large omission of intervening material, yields a distorted representation of Augustine's discussion. The omitted material includes the following: "if it is not by the exercise of will that we do wrong, no one at all is to be censured or warned. . . . Therefore, it is by the will that sin is committed. And since there is no doubt that sins are committed, I cannot see that it can be doubted that souls have free choice in willing."

44. Cf. *DQ* 24, where Augustine argues that both committing sin and acting rightly necessarily depend on the free will of the agent.

45. *Ne hoc quidem dubitandum video, habere animas liberum voluntatis arbitrium*.

46. So he can exhort Romanianus to "turn your attention . . . for God helps such men" (*VR* 10.20; cf. *Retr* 1.12.4). Cf. *Mus* 6.15.50, where Augustine describes temperance as "this activity whereby the soul, with the help of its God and Lord, extracts itself (*extrahit*) from the love of an inferior beauty by fighting down and killing its own habit that wars against it (*dabellans atque interficiens aduersus se militantem consuetudinem suam*)."

47. This "naturalistic" assessment of death stands in some tension with his (tactical?)

affirmation of the Manichaean view that death does not come from God (*VR* 11.22). He is able to reconcile the two positions through his concept of *ex nihilo*: God, as source of being, cannot cause nonbeing, but can "release" things from his sustaining power, allowing them to shed their form and subside back into nothingness.

48. See Wetzel 1992a, 56.

49. On the gradual emergence of this doctrine within Christianity, and its adoption by Nicene Christians, see May 1994. For an overview of this theme in Augustine's anti-Manichaean polemics, see Torchia 1999.

50. See R. Brown 1978, 319–21.

51. Séjourné 1951, 255.

52. Augustine wavers between regarding nothing as literally nothing and treating it as formless matter. Even several years later, he will say, "if someone should mention that matter from which the body comes, it is correctly termed 'nothing' because it lacks all form" (*DQ* 54).

53. See the criticisms of creation *ex nihilo* as an acceptable explanation of the fall offered by R. Brown 1978, esp. 319–21.

54. "Wickedness (*nequitia*) derives its name from nothingness (*ne quidquam*)" (*VR* 11.21), one of Augustine's more notoriously specious etymological rationalizations, effectively captures one of his controlling concepts.

55. Harrison 2006, 34.

56. Ibid., 91.

57. As noted also by Harrison 2006, 49.

CHAPTER 2. MYTH AND MORALS

1. See Teske 1991a, 12 and 12 n27. Augustine continued to use the dialogue form for his more private intellectual studies such as *Music* and *The Teacher*.

2. "Although whatever I discussed in earlier books in which I showed that God is the supreme good and the unchangeable creator of all changeable natures and that no nature or substance, insofar as it is a nature and substance, is an evil, was intentionally directed against the Manichaeans, yet these two books very manifestly were published against them in defense of the old law which they attack with the vehement intensity of frenzied error." Augustine appears here to acknowledge that *GCM* was completed prior to the equally explicitly anti-Manichaean *MM*, and so to the redaction combining *MM* and *ME*, in which *GCM* is referred to as a previously completed work: "In other works I think I have sufficiently shown how we can counter the ignorant and impious attacks which the Manichaeans make against the Law, called the Old Testament, and by which they become inflated with empty boasting amid the applause of the ignorant" (*ME* 1.1; see Coyle 1978, 66ff.). This is one of many pieces of evidence that the order of *Retr* is not strictly chronological.

3. Teske 1991a, 5, speaks appropriately of Augustine intending a "a two-pronged counterattack upon the principal snares by which Manichees try to entrap the ordinary believers of the Catholic faith."

4. On the dating of these works followed here, see BeDuhn 2010, 351–52 nn 9–10. J. Kevin Coyle has convincingly demonstrated that Augustine had already completed the first thirty chapters of *ME* in Rome, and added the prologue and last five chapters after his return to Africa in order to align it better with the polemical theme of *MM* (Coyle 1978, 66ff.; note editorial references to the two volumes in *ME* 34.75; 35.80). Since Augustine refers in *ME* 1.1 to "other books" he had already written treating questions of scripture, which can only be the two volumes of *GCM*, the final redaction of *ME* and *MM* must have followed the composition of that work.

5. Their position "does not consist in a wrong interpretation of the writings of the Old Testament," but in "rejecting and detesting them" (*GL* 8.2.5; cf. *Faust* 8.2, 14.1, 22.3–6; *Ep* 237). For Manichaean criticisms of Genesis, see *Conf* 3.7.12; 11.10.12.

6. *nihil esse perniciosius, quam quidquid ibi est accipi ad litteram, id est, ad verbum; nihil autem salubrius, quam spiritu revelari*.

7. Teske 1991b, 142.

8. See Brisson 2004.

9. *In Epicteti encheiridion* 27; see Stroumsa and Stroumsa 1988, 40–41. It should be noted that the Manichaeans readily agreed that earlier myths had such symbolic meanings (see, e.g., Alexander of Lycopolis, 10), but contended that Mani's role as the ultimate *hermeneutēs* meant that his own teachings were literal and transparent.

10. See Cameron 1999 79. Augustine had yet to learn the elaborated four-fold method of interpretation enunciated in Greek Christianity (see his references to it in *UC* 3.5–8; *GLimp.* 2.5; *GL* 1.1.1). He became aware that what he was practicing was a distinct "allegorical" method only after the fact, when his African readers labeled it as such and requested more literal exegesis from him (*GLimp.* 2.5; *Retr* 1.17).

11. Teske 1991a, 27.

12. This remains true for Augustine throughout his life as, for example, in his certainty that there were no actual trees in Eden (*GL* 8.4).

13. Cf., *Mag* 9.25: "things signified are of greater importance than their signs. Whatever exists on account of something else must necessarily be of less value than that on account of which it exists."

14. Cameron 1999, 74.

15. Ibid., 75. For Manichaeans, in contrast, the material continuity of all reality explained how signification occurred by a conjunctive theory of signs. Human intelligence could extend beyond the limits of the senses by reasoning inductively from the sensory to the supersensory dimensions of reality.

16. See C. P. Mayer 1969/1974 for the Neoplatonic background of Augustine's theory of signs.

17. Cf. *BV* 8: " 'Nothing' is everything which is flowing, dissolving, melting, and so to speak always perishing" (*nihil est enim omne quod fluit, quod soluitur, quod liquescit et quasi semper perit*).

18. Cf. *Ep* 13.2: "Whatever is not intelligible cannot be understood." The idea was present in Ambrose's catechetical instruction: "The creature cannot be the reality, but only a likeness, which is easily destroyed and changed" (*De Mysteriis* 4.25).

19. In response to the charge that Old Testament heroes must therefore have ignorantly acted out rituals that were meant only to be symbols, Augustine qualified his position to the extent of suggesting that part of the signifying value of the rituals could be perceived only in acting them out (*DC* 3.6.10; *Faust* 16.23).

20. E.g., Plotinus, *En* 1.6.

21. He cites Ephesians 5:31–32 on Gen. 2:24 in *GCM* 2.13.18; later, in *Adim* 12.5 and *Faust* 12.29, he would appeal to 1 Cor. 10:4 as his interpretive charter.

22. This image of unsatisfied hunger would become one of Augustine's favorites in retelling his experiences among the Manichaeans in the *Confessions*. One imagines his little circle of former Manichaeans in Thagaste enjoying the cleverness of this slap at the food-centered ritual system.

23. See Vannier 1990, 421–22.

24. In fact, some criticisms of Gen 1–3 he takes up only a few years later in *Adim* fail to be treated in *GCM*, perhaps suggesting that he had to be informed or reminded of them by exposure to Adimantus's treatise after he had completed *GCM*. On Augustine's learning more about Manichaean positions through his polemical work against them, see Coyle 2001.

25. See Vannier 1990, 424. A. W. Matthews notes that, "*De Genesi Contra Manichaeos* is Augustine's earliest attempt at systematic exegesis of Scriptures. The methods he uses are to be continued in his years as priest and as bishop. . . . His method chosen for any particular interpretation seems to depend upon the point he wishes to win over his opponents. . . . It is the most influential single study he makes before his ordination in forming his early system. His views of man, creation, and sin are, at the time of his ordination, based largely upon his exegesis of *Genesis*" (Matthews 1980, 61–62).

26. E.g., Origen, *Homilies on Genesis*, *Homilies on Leviticus*; Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron*; Ambrose, *Hexaemeron*, *On Paradise*; Gregory of Elvira, *Homilies*. For the full spectrum of possible sources for Augustine's exegesis of Genesis, see Torchia 1999, 17–21, 35–38; Zacher 1961. On Origen in particular as one of these sources, see Heidl 2003, 77–163; Teske 1992, 179–85.

27. On likely traces of Ambrosian exegesis in Augustine's early works, see Courcelle 1968, 92–106.

28. "Here, Augustine's 'spiritual exegesis' permits him to take extraordinary liberties with what is often the most obvious meaning of the scriptural text" (O'Connell 1963b, 11).

29. On the reliability of Augustine's reports of Manichaean views on Genesis in *GCM*, see Maher 1944 & 1945.

30. He says he will interpret Genesis literally "unless no way out is given for what is written to be understood reverently (*pie*) and worthily (*digne*) of God" (*GCM* 2.2.3). The same principle is enunciated in *DC* 3.10.14: "Whatever cannot be referred to virtuous behavior or the truth of faith you should understand to be figurative."

31. *Nullo modo ergo verbis dici potest, quemadmodum deus fecerit et condiderit caelum et terram et omnem creaturem quam condidit, sed ista expositio per ordinem dierum sic indicat tamquam historiam rerum factarum, ut praedicationem futurorum maxime observet.*

32. The conception of God as creator and orderer, in itself, did not distinguish the Nicene position from the Manichaean one; see, e.g., *ME* 10.16.

33. Supposing there to be some truth in the narrative, however much distorted, the Manichaeans raised the narrative question: what should we think about the two beings contending for Adam and Eve's adherence—the one desiring to keep them from the knowledge of good and evil, the other seeking to lead them to this very knowledge? A being who wishes to keep people in ignorance of the most fundamental moral distinctions can only be an evil being, while the serpent who undermines the thralldom of ignorance in which this so-called "God" holds the primordial parents plays the role of a liberator and enlightener. For that reason, as Augustine reports, "They believe that the serpent was Christ, and they imagine that some god of the nation of darkness, as they say, gave that commandment as if he begrudged men the knowledge of good and evil" (*GCM* 2.26.39; cf. *PsBk* 57.7–10).

34. That is, that it tells the story from the perspective of "one of the princes of darkness" (*Faust* 15.8), the "demon of the Jews" (*Faust* 18.2; cf. Ephrem, *Against Mani*, xci), or Satan (*Keph* 2, 21.15–23; 65, 159.108; *Acta Archelai* 15.8–11).

35. See May 1994.

36. Cf. *Conf* 11.12.14.

37. Similarly, he interprets human dominion over animals as an allegory for the soul's mastery over the senses and impulses, being careful to clarify that "the impulses of our soul are not alien to us," as they are conceived to be in the Manichaean system (*GCM* 1.18.28).

38. The Manichaeans likewise criticized the anthropomorphic feature of God resting after completing creation. "They say, 'What need did God have for rest? Was he perhaps tired and worn out by the works of the six days?' They also add the testimony of the Lord, where he says, 'My father works up to now,' (John 5:17) and by this they deceive many of the uneducated, whom they try to convince that the New Testament contradicts the Old Testament" (*GCM* 1.22.33; cf.

Adim 2). Augustine leans on previous Christian commentators in arguing that the verse of Genesis does not mean what it appears to mean, and that God never actually rests.

39. See *DQ* 51 from this time. Citing 2 Cor 4.16 and Col 3.9–10 on the "outer" and "inner" man and the "old" and "new" man, Augustine explores whether God is responsible for creating both. He asserts that the "outer" and "old" man, as the body, is in God's image insofar as it is exists, and so is good, whereas the "inner" and "new" man, as the soul, is even more in God's image in that it partakes of wisdom as well as being.

40. See O'Connell 1978, 53–54; cf. *DQ* 47.

41. See, e.g., Plotinus, *Ennead* 5.8.4: "for all things are there transparent . . . everything and all things are clear to the inmost part to everything; for light is transparent to light. Each there has everything in itself and sees all things in every other."

42. See Teske 1991a, 38.

43. See Bammel 1989 for Origen's adoption of this interpretation from earlier Jewish and Christian sources, and for attacks on this interpretation among other Christian writers.

44. Characteristic of Augustine in transition, we see in *GCM* the awkward juxtaposition of the "historical" sense of the Adam and Eve story prevalent in Christianity (involving a Middle Platonic idea of a primordial fall of the soul, *GCM* 2.8.10) with an allegorical reading that takes it as merely prefiguring the experiences of the individual soul (in line with the Neoplatonic view of the transtemporal fall of souls, *GCM* 2.14.21). But the same ambiguity is present in Origen's handling of the material (Bammel 1989).

45. See Matthews 1980, 180.

46. Attempts to find Augustine's later ideas about the fall and original sin fully and firmly in place in his early work stand or fall on his exegesis in *GCM*. Carol Harrison acknowledges that in his early writings Augustine refers to the Eden episode "usually in passing, as an established part of Christian doctrine," and that even going over it in detail here, "he does not attempt to elaborate on it in anything like the same manner as later on" (Harrison 2006, 94). But why should we think he is holding some of his ideas on this passage back in a work specifically dedicated to it? If they are not pertinent here, where? Harrison concedes that the passage is interpreted in what she terms "existential" language, "couched in terms of being and experience, rather than in scriptural or technical, doctrinal terminology" (Harrison 2006, 94), but does not acknowledge that Augustine himself (e.g., *GCM* 2.2.3; 2.12.17) expresses ambivalence and uncertainty about reading the fall with the degree of literal historicity that his later ideas would require.

47. In the roughly contemporaneous *Mus*, for example, Augustine refers repeatedly to the soul turning from God as an individual act, just as turning back to God is also (*Mus* 6.5.13–14; 6.13.39). Harrison tends to read the idea of a temporal change in the human condition into passages of *GCM* where Augustine refers only to a symbolic analogy between what is described narratively in the Eden story and what is perennially true of the human soul in its engagement with the body and the senses. Cf. e.g., Harrison 2006, 179 with the actual passages in *GCM* 2.18.27–20.30. The comparative passages she cites from *VR* 20.39–40, likewise, make no reference at all to Adam and Eve and the fall, but simply speak in present terms of perennial issues of the soul turning toward or away from God. Part of the confusion stems from Augustine wavering between two different scenarios of the soul's relation to the body, one of which involves a positive relationship wherein the soul is meant to manage material creation, while the other envisions the soul being connected to the body only as punishment. The same tensions can be seen in Platonism (see Dillon 1980, 1996).

48. Hence one cannot treat the terms of the narrative as though they meant the same thing as they do in non-mythic discourse. "For a proper expression is one thing, and a figurative expression, such as the one we are now considering, is quite another" (*GCM* 2.12.17).

49. It can be challenging to sort out Augustine's ambiguous references to "the soul," since

he can be referring rhetorically to a particular individual soul, or to the typical soul as a possession of every individual, or to an original (singular) soul from which individual souls derive. In his early works, Adam can *represent* either the original soul or the typical soul allegorically, but Augustine as yet has no idea that Adam's own soul *was* an original soul from which all individual souls derive. That additional step marks a fusion of horizons between allegory and history that emerges gradually in Augustine's repeated employment of Adamic tropes.

50. This identification probably derives from Ambrose, *Paradiso* 15.73 (Weber 1996, 403–4).

51. Cf. this interpretation to the exegetical principle of Plotinus, *Ennead* 3.5.9, quoted above.

52. *Etiam nunc in unoquoque nostrum nihil aliud agitur, cum ad peccatum quisque delabitur, quam tunc actum est in illis tribus*. Augustine affirms neither that a real serpent interacted with Eve in Eden, nor that the serpent *is* the devil; rather, the serpent *signifies* the devil, who is never actually said in Genesis to be inside the garden, Augustine thinks, because the latter symbolizes the intelligible realm of "happiness" from which the devil had already fallen (*GCM* 2.14.20).

53. *nam ideo haec scripta sunt, ut iam talia caveamus*.

54. Teske's translation, "was prefigured," assumes a typological reading of real past events, whereas Augustine's language signals rather an allegorical reading of a narrative.

55. See, e.g., his *Ep* 166 to Jerome on this problem, dated to circa 415.

56. In *Ep* 166, Augustine wished to defer to Jerome's position that newly created souls are connected to bodies at birth, and was probing that position within the terms of justice. Jerome's position, just like Augustine's early and preferred one positing a preexistent soul, imagined separate trajectories for soul and body brought together at birth. On Augustine's long- continuing disjunction between soul and body, and location of the self entirely in the former, cf. *Sermon Dolbeau* 13 (159A).4: "The soul is left with its garment, and it's a garment that will only be doffed with death. Now the person, that is, the soul, is under pressure from close quarters, from the feebleness of its own flesh. . . . when the flesh is being tortured, there is a hammering on the door of the soul from the closest possible quarters."

57. See Koenen 1978, 159–61, 160 n25. This scenario represents a viable free will position, as Koenen explains: "Nevertheless nobody is punished for the sin of his forefathers. For when a soul falls from heaven, it gets exactly the body which corresponds to its state of mind and disposition. Each gets the body it deserves due to the sin committed in the preexistent life. No person is held responsible and punished for sins which he did not commit himself" (160).

58. Carol Harrison insists that, "We can therefore see a well-worked-out theory of the fall of Adam and Eve, of why it happened, and of what it tells us about the relation between God and man, as early as 388/9" (Harrison 2006, 174). In so far as this is true, the "theory" referred to can *either* be Augustine's understanding of the Eden episode as an allegory, in which the actions of Adam and Eve refer by analogy to certain dangers every human soul faces, *or* his understanding of the narrative as a symbolic account of the soul's fall into embodiment and the limitations and difficulties that come with it. Both of these alternative allegorical interpretations had currency in Augustine's writings at the time. The one thing the referenced theory *cannot* be at this time is an interpretation that takes the narrative literally as a record of actions taken by genetic ancestors of humanity, whose consequences have infected human nature (i.e., for Augustine at this time, the soul) with original sin ever since. Not only has this idea not yet occurred to Augustine, but it is antithetical to the very location of meaning as Augustine currently understands it.

59. He acknowledged that the allegorical method was not widely recognized among the leadership of African Christianity: "And if someone desirous of learning these things should fall in among either bishops or priests, or such prelates or ministers of the Catholic faith who avoid laying bare the mysteries generally or, content with simple faith, have no concern to know loftier things, let him not despair that knowledge of the truth is present where not all who are asked can teach and not all who ask are worthy to learn" (*ME* 1.1).

60. By the time he wrote *GL*, the "literal" sense for Augustine meant something far different from what it meant to the Manichaeans, or what modern interpreters mean by that term (Teske 1991a, 17–18 n39). By then, he had adopted the typological approach of the Donatist Tyconius as less fanciful and therefore more literal than the allegorical method of Ambrose (see Fredriksen 2008, 158–64). Yet in his theological speculations for more elite consumption, he would continue to employ allegory unrestrainedly, as he would in the idiosyncratic reading of the creation story in *Conf* 11–13.

61. Both public opinion (e.g., as reported by Jerome, *Ep* 48) and government policy (e.g., as evident in *Cod. Theod.* 16.5.7, 16.5.9) displayed this tendency to associate ascetic behavior of any kind closely with Manichaeism. In the campaign against Priscillian of Avila in the 380s, his opponents cited ascetic practices and private reading circles as the hallmarks of Manichaean groups operating at the fringes of Christian community life (Burrus 1995, 94ff.). On the history and nature of the controversy of asceticism, see Hunter 2007.

62. A similar, and more successful, assimilation of monastic organization of the ascetic life occurred among Manichaeans in regions of Asia where they came into contact with Buddhist monasticism.

63. See BeDuhn 2010, 188–90, and further below.

64. See Jerome, *Epistle* 39.6.

65. Jerome also struggled against the association of ascetic practices with Manichaeism; see, e.g., his *Epistle* 22.13. He only exacerbated this situation with his overly strident *Contra Jovinianum* (393), in which he was taken as attacking marriage. Augustine, more attuned to what was necessary to differentiate Nicene from Manichaean asceticism, temporized in his *The Good of Marriage*.

66. On background on the rise of ascetic communities in the West due to Athanasius's sojourn there and the circulation of his Life of Antony, see Coyle 1978, 208–36. Although in the *Confessions* Augustine acknowledges awareness of experiments in emulating Eastern asceticism in Gaul, he studiously avoids mentioning anything outside Italy in *ME*, perhaps out of concern for any association with Priscillian of Avila.

67. The controversy to which he refers came on two fronts. The first was the anti-asceticism of church leaders in Spain and Gaul—such as Ithacius of Ossonuba—responding to Priscillian of Avila and other popular ascetics such as Martin of Tours (see Burrus 1995). The other was the Italian anti-ascetic movement closely associated with Jovinian of Rome (see Hunter 2007). Of course, these were local varieties of widespread resistance to the rise of Christian asceticism in the fourth century, whose African component is poorly understood.

68. See note 4 above. The first nine chapters of *MM* have a quite different theme, more closely related to the issues of *LA* book 1, and so probably date back to Augustine's Italian period.

69. Perhaps in his complaint about the sharp boundaries of the two professions of Elect and Auditor in Manichaeism we catch echoes of the daunting prospect that kept the young Augustine from "making progress" in Manichaeism. "The apostle says that the inward man is renewed day by day that it may reach perfection; and you wish it to begin with perfection!" (*ME* 35.80).

70. See Decret 1978, 30–31.

71. Cf. *ME* 33.71: Nicene ascetics "bear in mind, 'To the pure all things are pure,' and 'Not that which enters into your mouth defiles you, but that which comes out of it.' Accordingly, all their endeavors are concerned not about the rejection of kinds of food as polluted, but about the subjugation of inordinate desire and the maintenance of brotherly love."

72. Augustine argues that it is gluttony, not meat and wine per se, that Paul means to target in the passages Manichaeans cite in justification of their prohibitions (e.g., Rom. 14.21: "It is good, brethren, neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine"). It should be noted that he cites in this

context the passage (Romans 13:14) that he would feature so dramatically in his own conversion story in *Confessions*.

73. "For sometimes so much is brought that it cannot easily be eaten up by a few; and as it is considered sacrilege to give what is left to others, or, at least, to throw it away, you are obliged to eat to excess, from the desire to purify, as you call it, all that is given. Then, when you are full almost to bursting, you cruelly use force in making the boys of your sect eat the rest. So it was charged against someone at Rome that he killed some poor children, by compelling them to eat for this superstitious reason. This I should not believe, did I not know how sinful you consider it to give this food to those who are not Elect, or, at any rate, to throw it away. So the only way is to eat it; and this leads every day to gluttony, and may sometimes lead to murder" (*MM* 16.52). Although Augustine had his doubts about the story's veracity, that did not prevent him from using it for rhetorical purposes, with free exaggeration (when he described the event more carefully elsewhere he referred to the death of a single boy, not multiple children).

74. Augustine concedes that the Manichaeans give money to indigents instead, but objects that this will not help someone who is not near where food can be purchased.

75. See BeDuhn 2001.

76. In *MM* 16.50, Augustine reported the Manichaean idea that "all souls of animals come from the food of their parents," and teased that it follows from such a theory that meat contains soul, and so should be consumed as part of the same liberating function performed on plants. The Manichaeans did not dispute that animals were animated by soul, but maintained that this soul already departs the creature at the point of death and could not be drawn directly from its meat. To refute this, Augustine identified animals that live only on meat (even without drinking water, another soul source, *MM* 16.50).

77. Working with the Manichaean notion that the presence of the divine soul in food is revealed by "the beauty of the color, and the sweetness of the taste" not present is rotten foods, Augustine counters by showing how the same bright colors found in flowers and fruits are found in things rejected by the Manichaeans (e.g., blood, wine, milk), or things otherwise abhorrent to people (such as dung, diseased people, etc.) (*MM* 16.39). Likewise with smell and taste, or with a combination of all three sensory detections (*MM* 16.40). Augustine mockingly suggests that the Manichaeans should consume many more things that can be shown to be brighter, or more perfumed, or sweeter than the things allowed to them by their diet (*MM* 16.42). To the Manichaean claim that the divine element gradually leaches out of things after they have been killed, as in the rotting of plants and meat (*MM* 16.43), and that the increasing potency of wine over time through fermentation reflects likewise the shift in proportion between the departing good and the remaining evil (*MM* 16.44), Augustine answers that aging is considered good in some things, such as the ripening of plucked fruit, the aging of meat and wine, making raisins from grapes, and so forth. Likewise wood and brush as it ages and dries ceases to produce (evil) smoke but makes a cleaner (good) flame (*MM* 16.45). In the same vein, the Manichaean idea that rubbing and stirring things releases light is contradicted by the processing of honey, etc., and music, considered by the Manichaeans to "come from the divine kingdom" is produced by plucking at animal gut strings or blowing through animal bone pipes (*MM* 16.46). Manichaeans also say cooking drives the light out, but many things become brighter and sweeter and smell better for being cooked (*MM* 16.46–47). What is more, Manichaean practice sometimes stands at odds with the principles they espouse, for example in their use of vinegar and cooked wine (*MM* 16.47).

78. An excellent brief treatment of Augustine's differences with the Manichaeans on this issue can be found in Miles 1995.

79. Note Augustine's addition of a pear to the story; see Shanzer 1996 on the proverbial

status of the pear as the cheapest and most common of fruits, and, of course, the pears of *Conf* book 2 (on which, see BeDuhn 2010, 38–40).

80. The Manichaeans apparently permitted the killing of any creature understood to be not an "animal" reproduced sexually, but some sort of cellular growth from something else. Augustine had different ideas from theirs on which creatures might belong to the latter category (*MM* 17.61–63). Among those creatures not reproduced sexually, Augustine included frogs, bees, and beetles (bees, he held, were born from the carcasses of cattle, while beetles came from balls of mud). The Manichaeans apparently disagreed, regarding such creatures as sexually reproduced (and so not to be killed), while they considered "lice, bugs, and fleas" to be growths from the human body, and so not properly "animals." Animals were linked in Manichaean mythology to a retributive structure in the cosmos: "The story, then, is that the heavenly princes who were taken from the race of darkness and bound, and have a place assigned them in this region by the creator of the world, have animals on the earth specially belonging to them, each having those coming from his own stock and class; and they hold the slaughterers of those animals guilty, and do not allow them to leave the earth, but harass them as much as they can with pains and torments" (*MM* 17.60).

81. "Moreover, when you are so eager in your desire to prevent the soul from being confined in flesh by conjugal intercourse, and so eager in asserting that the soul is set free from seed by the food of the saints, do you not sanction, unhappy beings, the suspicion entertained about you? For why should it be true regarding wheat and beans and lentils and other seeds, that when you eat them you wish to set free the soul, and not true of the seed of animals? . . . For you hold that it keeps confined the soul which will appear in the offspring, and you avow that the soul of Manichaeus himself is thus confined. And as your Auditors cannot bring these seeds to you for purification, who will not suspect that you make this purification secretly among yourselves, and hide it from your Auditors, in case they should leave you?" (*MM* 18.66).

82. See BeDuhn 2010, 188–90.

83. Even though Augustine's later view of original sin amounts to the same thing.

84. Augustine articulates a rudimentary concept of differential reward among the saved that fits his hierarchical viewpoint. With his acute awareness of the vast differences among people, and deprived of the Manichaean belief in reincarnation by which contemporary differences reflect different stages of progress toward a common identical reward, Augustine naturally imagines that the better sort of souls achieve greater intimacy with God than lesser beings do.

CHAPTER 3. PERFECTING THE PARADIGM

1. An extant letter of Nebridius to Augustine (*Ep* 5) hints that Augustine had complained of too many demands on his time in his home town. Nebridius extended an invitation to Augustine to retire to his estate near Carthage, but Augustine did not take him up on the offer.

2. "In Numidia in the 390s the Donatists were still the established Church. When Augustine arrived in Hippo, the Catholics were an insecure minority there" (Markus 1970, 111).

3. Babcock 1979, 55.

4. As suggested by O'Donnell 2005, 24–25. Augustine's letter to Valerius mentions him sending "brethren" to negotiate with the bishop a delay in assuming his duties (*Ep* 21.4), suggesting that he was either in hiding in Hippo or had left town altogether. Of course, the letter itself suggests that Augustine was elsewhere in the immediate aftermath of his ordination. O'Donnell draws attention to what appears to be a confirming comment in *Ep* 22.9.

5. Nor does he in *Confessions*, though the latter work continues its narrative for several months after the baptism, reporting activities both in Milan and in Ostia.

6. See Alfaric 1918, 525–26. Such a view was shared by his initiator Ambrose. Augustine would later attack Porphyry and Iamblichus for ascribing efficacy to ritual action.

7. In *Retr* he ascribes the shortcomings and failure of exegetical projects even several years after his ordination to his inexperience with scripture (e.g., *Retr* 1.18)

8. Coyle 2001, 51–53, regards Augustine's experience as a Manichaean as the primary source of his knowledge of the New Testament in his early post-conversion compositions, particularly those composed in 386–387 in Cassiciacum and Milan. While he regards the Manichaean character of New Testament citations in the *ME* and *MM*, begun in 388, as equally certain, he thinks the nature of the works might conceal from us a possible increased facility with scripture Augustine was gaining at the time, since he has no reason to cite anything not accepted by the Manichaeans.

9. "Les travaux rédigés de part et d'autre de la date de l'ordination presbytérale (391) ne manifestent pas de changement d'orientation théologique, encore moins quelque crise intellectuelle ou spirituelle" (Madec 1998, 79). Cf. Fredriksen 1979, 74: "This abrupt change in Augustine's personal circumstances did not correspond to an equally abrupt change in his thought. The broad outlines of his intellectual program remain the same before and after his ordination." Fredriksen goes on to note certain initial shifts pointing to Augustine's future priorities, however.

10. "Even though in 391 the newly ordained Augustine probably felt that this was the moment to relinquish his preoccupation with the Manichees—one which was beginning to verge on obsession after a continuous stream of works directed against them over the past four years—it seems to have taken another year or so before he finally felt he could concentrate on other things" (Harrison 2006, 129); yet Harrison acknowledges that Augustine's exegetical work on Paul in large part continued this anti-Manichaean program.

11. See BeDuhn 2010, 63–69. He does seem to have put energy into stopping popular Catholic practices that were targets of Manichaean criticism. He wrote to bishop Aurelius of Carthage, proposing the suppression of *parentalia* banquets in honor of martyrs (*Ep* 22), and personally put a stop to the rowdy way such a banquet in honor of the martyr Leontius had been traditionally held in Hippo (*Ep* 29).

12. Evans 1982, 12.

13. "Nothing is easier, my dear friend, than to say or even to think that one has discovered the truth. How difficult it really is you will, I trust, recognize from this letter of mine" (*UC* 1.1).

14. "Truth is far removed from the minds of vain men who have gone too far among worldly concerns and, falling, think there is nothing beyond what they perceive by the senses. . . . Even when they endeavor to withdraw from the senses, they carry with them the impressions and images received from the senses, and think that by their death-dealing and fallacious rule the ineffable sanctuary of truth is to be rightly measured" (*UC* 1.1).

15. Decret 1978, 75–76.

16. Augustine conceded counter-examples where people taken to be one's parents turned out not to be the actual parents (Greek and Roman folklore was full of such stories).

17. Such bald assertions of Nicene primacy throughout the world were not only historically inaccurate, and not based upon any direct knowledge on Augustine's part, but also did not go uncontested at the time. The Donatist Cresconius, for instance, refuted such claims on Augustine's part, citing numerous Christian sects besides the Catholics, and noting lands still untouched by any form of Christianity (*Cresc* 4.61.75). At the time Augustine advanced his claims, Manichaeism had far outpaced Nicene Christianity in its spread into Asia, while Donatists far outnumbered the Catholic party in Africa.

18. He goes so far as to remark that, even if popular consensus does not hold up to close scrutiny as a valid criterion of truth, should we err in following it, "we may seem to err with the human race itself" (*UC* 7.15).

19. See BeDuhn 2010, 232–34.

20. Cf. *EnPs* 8.6, where Augustine speaks of those "who forbid us to believe in things beyond our experience, while themselves promising certain knowledge. . . . It is not that the promise of knowledge is reprehensible in itself, but rather that they think that the step of faith can be bypassed. Yet it is precisely by taking this step that the ascent may be made to any form of real certainty. . . . From this it is clear that they do not possess even that knowledge which they promise, while scorning faith, because they are completely unaware of the step which is useful and necessary as a means to it." And further, 8.8: "Whether it is wisdom or the very name of Christ which he gives the impression of upholding, nonetheless, it is from the step of this very faith that he mounts his attack on that truth which he is so ready to promise. It is crystal-clear that he does not have the truth, for by attacking the first step, which is faith, he proves he has not the faintest idea how to climb up to it."

21. Cf. this whole part of Augustine's discussion with *DQ* 48: "Three classes of things are objects of belief. First there are those things which always are believed and never understood, e.g., history, which deals with events both temporal and human. Second, there are those things which are understood as soon as they are believed, e.g., all human reasonings either in mathematics or in any of the sciences. Third, there are those things which are first believed and afterwards understood. Of such a character is that which cannot be understood of divine things except by those who are pure in heart. This understanding is achieved through observing those commandments which concern virtuous living." This construct put many of the core creedal statements of the Church, involving the historical events related to Jesus, in the category of beliefs that Augustine had no prospect of deepening with understanding, and we can observe a corresponding neglect of them in his first post-conversion decades.

22. Decret 1978, 72–78.

23. The suggestion that *Ep* 140, addressed to a person named Honoratus, is that second treatise and is addressed to the Manichaean Honoratus, requires too many hypotheticals to be easily accepted, and directly contradicts *Retr* 1.13.8. Augustine's last great nemesis, Julian of Eclanum, met the Manichaean Honoratus in Carthage many years later, apparently learning from him details of Manichaean belief he would use in his argument that Augustine had imported a substantial amount of it into his own Catholic thought (*Iulimp* 5.26).

24. Bochet 2001, 40.

25. Decret 1978, 81.

26. Alfaric (1918, 117, nn5–7) accepted Augustine's claim as accurate, as does Decret (1978, I.81–91, 324–36, II.259ff.). E. Waldschmidt and W. Lentz (1926, 75) and W. Bang (1925, 55) were among the first to raise doubts (but see already F. C. Baur, 1831, 164–65), followed somewhat later by J. K. Coyle (1978, 42–43 n184) and U. Bianchi (1988); cf. Drecoll 1999, 190, n115. An excellent survey of the issue with particular attention to Augustine's testimony is now available in C. G. Scibona 2011. H.-C. Puech goes too far in seeking to reduce the Manichaean position to the familiar terms of a spirit vs. matter dualism, and dismissing language that attributes will and activity to evil as either hyperbole or meant to refer to the good soul in its corrupted state under the influence of evil matter (1979, 53–54).

27. Coyle questions the accuracy of Augustine's two-soul presentation (1978, 42–43 n184), and in the same vein is R. Ferwerda's attempt to identify Augustine's polemical motives in representing the Manichaean view in terms of two souls, and to explore the background of such ideas in philosophical and religious thought (Ferwerda 1983). U. Bianchi, in a probative study (1988), has demonstrated from Augustine's own testimony that he was aware that the Manichaeans themselves did not employ the term "soul" to refer to the evil force. Exonerating Augustine's testimony on this and other aspects of Manichaeism by proposing local variation within North African Manichaeism compared to other Manichaean sources (e.g., Scibona 2011, 381 and 386), while not improbable in itself, comes a bit to easily and circularly as a solution.

28. One of the most puzzling remarks in *DA* occurs when Augustine states that, "The character and the cause of this commingling I had not yet heard" by the time he left the sect (*DA* 12.16). Is this a rhetorical ploy to avoid having to digress into a consideration of the Manichaean mythic scenario? Or could it really be the case that Augustine had never heard, or had never understood himself to have heard, such an explanation? Since he certainly knew the primordial myth of the attack of evil on the Realm of Light and God's "necessary" defensive response of sending forth the souls to be absorbed by darkness, the only way to make sense of his statement is to suggest he is referring to some other phase in the process of "mixture." He quite often seems to conflate the primordial "leap" of the collective soul into combat and mixture with evil with the subsequent "fall" of individual souls under evil's domination, when they actually become involved in sinful conduct. Perhaps he means to refer to this subsequent "mixture" as something he had not had fully explained, and this explains his confusion elsewhere. The Manichaean account of this secondary "fall," subsequent to the primordial mixture, is apparently provided in Mani's *Letter to Menoch*: "The first soul which flowed from the God of light received that fabric of the body so that it might rule it with its own reins. 'The order came; sin revived' (Rom 7:9), which seemed captive; the devil found his own limbs, he seduced the matter of concupiscence in it, and through that he fell."

29. Supposed "natural" evils, such as fire's harm to living things, are not forensically evil, because something can only be evil if it is freely responsible for choosing its harmful conduct. It cannot be held guilty of what it did, not freely, but by the necessity of its intrinsic nature (*DA* 12.16). Augustine retracts this argument in *Retr* 1.14.5, acknowledging that there is such a thing as guilt by origin, rather than only guilt by free committal, effectively conceding the Manichaean position and throwing away his entire free will argument, which he had long since given up by that time.

30. The limits of Augustine's constraining premises can be mapped by where he cuts off a possible line of enquiry by declaring the idea impious.

31. Babcock 1994, 182.

32. Decret 1978, 91.

33. Babcock 1994, 182.

34. This conclusion was readily used against Augustine by the Pelagians as supporting their view and against his own later thinking. See *Retr* 1.14.6.

35. Babcock 1994, 182.

36. Wetzel 1992a, 89–90.

37. See BeDuhn 2010, 85–87.

38. Bianchi comments on this passage, "Le manichéen n'expose pas ici une doctrine des deux âmes, mais une doctrine des deux esprits, qui se combattent pour contrôler l'âme, selon un *topos* qui, *mutatis mutandis* pour ce qui concerne les ontologies respectives sous-jacentes (dualistes ou non-dualistes) est commun aux grandes religions de l'époque" (Bianchi 1988, 311–12 n5).

39. "Since the nature of souls is the same, why are the wills (*uolantates*) of men different? Diverse sense impressions give rise to diverse desires in souls; diverse desires, to diverse means of getting; diverse means of getting, to diverse habits; and diverse habits, to diverse wills. Now the order of things produces the differing sense impressions—a hidden order, to be sure, but nonetheless a true and determinate order submitted to divine providence. Therefore one should not think, because there are differing wills, that the natures of souls are different, since even the will of one soul varies with the changing of time. Indeed, at one time the soul longs to be rich; at another time, contemptuous of riches, it desires to be wise. Even in the desire for temporal things, at one time the business world pleases a given man, at another time a military career pleases him" (*DQ* 40).

40. It is striking that he seems completely unaware of the role of key passages from Paul in Manichaean exposition of their view of the conflicted self. Instead he refers to Manichaean

citation of a couple of passages from John (John 8:44 and 8:47), dismissing them as hyperbole intended to emphasize a point through dramatic exaggeration that the Manichaeans mistakenly take literally (*DA* 7.9). The Manichaeans could cite biblical authority in support of their view of the soul's predicament in the words of Paul in Romans 7:16–20 (as Augustine acknowledges, and tries to deal with, in *Retr* 1.14.2).

41. In asserting that seeing God is good, Augustine ignores the consensus of his culture that seeing God or a god would leave a person burned to a crisp.

42. Decret 1978, 86–87, emphasizes Augustine's convenient assumption that Manichaeans would acknowledge the legitimacy of his definitions and premises.

43. *Retr* 1.14.2–4.

44. Wetzel 1992a, 91. Wetzel, building on Babcock 1988, 33, sees Augustine deliberately framing *DA* in terms acceptable to a wide consensus of late antique opinion, avoiding reliance on any specifically Platonist position (92–93).

45. See his use of this argument in *Fort* 20, discussed in the next chapter.

46. See Babcock 1988, 36–38, esp. 38, on the significance of Augustine's exploration of different degrees of compulsion: "Given his example, he no longer needed or employed the idea that we can escape our servitude to lust 'with perfect ease' (*De lib. arb.* 1.13.29) in order to establish the free exercise of will. The difference between the two persons bound in chains, one unwillingly, the other for purposes of deceit, is . . . the presence or absence of complicity at the beginning, in bringing about the situation and in initiating the sequence of events in which resistance is impossible. . . . If there is complicity at the start, a subsequent set of forced actions can still be interpreted as the agent's own and therefore as sin." Babcock thinks this exploration forms a prelude to his shift of free will to Adam alone. Yet it is perfectly at home with Augustine's earlier view of *all souls* as originally, individually, implicated in a fall into the material, the realm in which they are now overcome by desires rooted in the senses. With the harmonization of the idea of the fall of the soul with the free will position, Augustine has modified the latter in such a way as to give free rein to the sense of difficulty in reascending that he expressed in his earliest works. This difficulty of the soul is embodiment, which is the punishment aspect of what we regard as evil.

47. Wetzel 1992a, 90.

48. Articulated powerfully in Faustus's sweeping judgment that all other religions are merely versions of the "Gentile" outlook that ascribes both good and evil to God (*Faust* 20.3).

49. "Augustine assumes that the Manichees, no less than he, would find a universe stripped of its ethical dimension far from congenial. Presumably they would admit, as he does, that souls fall under divine judgment and are punished or rewarded in accordance with their state of virtue, or their conformity with the eternal law" (Wetzel 1992a, 90). Missing from such assumptions is a perspective that takes dualism seriously and removes it from the setting of a monothelite cosmos presupposed by nondualist monotheism.

50. Evodius, in his *De fide contra Manichaeos* 5, quotes passages from Mani's *Treasury* and *Fundamental Epistle* that explicitly ascribe sin to the individual soul that lapses after having been awakened and reformed.

51. Wetzel 1992a, 91–92.

52. Ibid., 93.

CHAPTER 4. FORTUNATUS

1. The rank of *presbyter* in the Manichaean Church had a higher standing than its Catholic namesake, and was equivalent to that of a Catholic bishop. In theory, Fortunatus was one of only

360 presbyters in the Manichaean hierarchy; but we have no means to ascertain whether this ideal number was adhered to in the face of local leadership needs.

2. Frend 1954, 861.

3. "Prominent set-piece debates with Manichaeans were initiated by their opponents, who sought through such high-profile encounters to stop the success of the Manichaeans' proselytizing efforts" (Lim 1995, 71).

4. Alflatt 1974, 123.

5. Secondary literature sometimes suggests more than this, that they were close friends. But Possidius is our only witness to a previous acquaintance between the two (Augustine says nothing about it), and even he does not imply as much. His claim that Fortunatus knew Augustine is part of a polemical portrayal of Fortunatus as fearful of going up against the formidable Augustine. Any actual delay or reluctance on Fortunatus's part in agreeing to the debate is more likely to have been due to a consideration of exposing himself to the penalties of the anti-Manichaean laws in such a way as to bring an end to his mission to Hippo.

6. *Pace* Teske 2006, 137, who states that "In the present work we have the stenographic record of the lively discussion." Augustine's later debate with the Manichaean Felix is similarly abbreviated. On Augustine's redaction of the transcripts of his debates with both Fortunatus and Felix, see Erler 1990, 296.

7. In the only controlled comparison we can make of a stenographic transcript to Augustine's edited version of the same event—the transcript of the Conference of Carthage compared to Augustine's *Breviculus conlationis cum Donatistis*—Augustine's version represents approximately 20% of the length of the original (according to Tilley 1999, 38).

8. See BeDuhn 2010, 106–34. The later debate of Felix with Augustine occurred under much more constrained conditions, and did not allow Felix the same degree of prepared self-presentation.

9. Coyle 1978, 78. On Augustine's embarrassing self-contradiction here of the accusations he tried to make in the *MM*, see Coyle 2003, 12–13; Decret 1970, 44–47. Had Fortunatus read *MM*? He could not have more effectively refuted it in one fell swoop. Augustine's effort to leave some room for doubt by claiming in reply to Fortunatus that he was not privy to Elect conduct behind closed doors sounds disingenuous, following his extensive review of Elect misbehavior in *MM* (on this point, see Erler 1990, 299–300); likewise, the value of his point that as an Auditor he had never actually been present at the sacred meal of the Elect evaporates once it is remembered that Catholic catechumens were likewise barred from observing the eucharist.

10. See BeDuhn 2010, 132–33.

11. The phrasing alludes to 1 Tim 6:16, and is found also in *Faust* 20.2. Fortunatus may be directly dependent on Faustus here, as he is with the general thrust of this creedal statement.

12. Fortunatus substitutes "I am the door" from Jn 10:9 in place of "the life" in 14:6.

13. Decret 2004, 55–58.

14. Fortunatus employs the eminently safe description of the Son as "like" the Father, in line with the cautious creeds of the mid-fourth century with which many Christians—Donatists and Catholics alike—were most familiar and which they considered still in force. It was only in the following year that the Catholic bishops of Africa formally agreed to adhere to the creeds of Nicaea and Constantinople. The Manichaeans not only embraced the stronger expression "of the same substance" (*homoousios*) found in those latter creeds, but had actually been instrumental in introducing it into theological discussions in the years leading up to its adoption into the Nicene creed (as Arius had pointed out in his letter to bishop Alexander of Alexandria).

15. As with his careful Christological wording, so on this point, too, Fortunatus appears to be emulating the Creed of Sirmium's conservative stance on defining the Christian faith.

16. Cf. Fredriksen 2008, 148–49: "For Manichees, the New Testament was more like orthodoxy's apocrypha: It was not itself canonical, and thus in this sense it was not authoritative. . . . Manichaean missionaries prided themselves on *not* arguing from authority. . . . In the course of this debate, however, whether for strategic reasons or out of genuine conviction, Fortunatus appealed conspicuously and continuously to scripture, and he drew attention to this fact."

17. Augustine's attempt to confine the debate to philosophical *notiones communes* reflects the approach taken in the anti-Manichaean treatise of Titus of Bostra, books 1 and 2 (in books 3 and 4, Titus turns to debates over the Old and New Testaments, respectively). Several elements of his argument in the debate suggest his possible acquaintance with this work.

18. On Augustine's expectations that Manichaeans would prefer an argument based on reason, see de Mondadon 1911, 229–30.

19. When he feels the debate slipping out of his control on the first day, he reminds his opponent, "That we should discuss on rational grounds the belief in two natures has been made obligatory by those who are hearing us" (*Fort* 19). Fortunatus concedes that his line of argument on the first day had been intended to adhere to this topic, a matter of "substances" not human agency (*Fort* 21).

20. As Fredriksen observes, Fortunatus "reveals how much more attuned to the biblical culture of the average North African Christian audience he was than Augustine. The whole time that Augustine had been in Italy, acquiring his cosmopolitan panache and his sophisticated philosophy, Fortunatus had been at work proselytizing North Africans. The subtext of Augustine's initial attack—Manichees are bad philosophers because their myth violates the (philosophical) idea of divine impassibility—mattered much less to their audience, Fortunatus apparently knew, than did establishing a position on the authority of the gospels and of Paul" (2008, 150).

21. See van Oort 2008, esp. 116.

22. This opening premise had been unveiled by Augustine in *GCM* 1.2.4: to explain God's will to create the world by reference to an external impetus or stimulus, as the Manichaean myth did, is to say there is a force greater than God, to which his will reacts. Such a notion is incompatible with the attribution of omnipotence to God. Manichaeans did not dispute this incompatibility, and did not attribute omnipotence to God.

23. This theodicy by the soul's choice to descend was a commonplace of scenarios of the soul's descent in late antiquity, derived from Plato's "Myth of Er" (see esp. *Republic* 617e), and essential also to Augustine's own free-will position regarding the fall. To deny to Fortunatus the use of this argument, Augustine had to emphasize that the soul descended at God's command in the Manichaean myth. Fortunatus forestalled this line of attack, however, by analogizing all souls to Christ. Augustine could not claim that in the Manichaean scenario the soul descended unwillingly by command without accepting the same involuntary character for Christ's entry into the world.

24. For Fortunatus, the words of Phil 2:5 (*hoc sentite in uobis, quod et in Christo Iesu*) are essential for the meaning of what follows, and indicate that the incarnation was *ut similitudinem animarum nostrarum ostenderet*. While Augustine quotes this passage over two hundred times in his works, he includes the *hoc sentite* clause in only seven of those instances, and only once before 412 C.E. (*DQ* 71.3; later appearances are in *CSA* 8.6; *JohTrac* 47.13, *Serm* 144.3.4; 264.3; *Max* 1.5, *Spec* 25). O'Donnell remarks, "the possibility of deliberate avoidance should be kept in mind" (1992, 2: 427). See Verwilghen 1985, 101–2.

25. Fortunatus paraphrases a combination of Mt 15:13, 7:19, and 3:10. On this passage, see Decret 2004, 58–60.

26. "Augustine had first of all to shrink the range of evil to its human and its moral form so as to eliminate any kind or force of evil that might require us to posit another, non-moral source to account for its existence. In this regard, he relied on an argument that he had used before and

that would remain a cornerstone of his theology (*C. Fort.* 15; cf. *De lib. arb.* 1.1.1; *Conf.* 7.3.5): there are, he insisted, only two kinds evil, sin (i.e., moral evil committed by moral agents) and penalty (i.e., the punishment that God justly imposes in response to sin). The second, precisely because it follows from and gives expression to the divine justice, needs no theodicy. Thus the shape of Augustine's arguments puts all the pressure on the first of its two elements; and, on this score, Augustine faced a double problem. He had, on the one hand, to establish the claim that the evil that persons do is specifically moral evil, of which they may rightly be counted the moral agents and for which, therefore, they are justly subject to penalty. But, on the other hand, he had to argue that, even though human beings are capable of (moral) evil, they nevertheless came forth good from God and do not implicate God in evil as the maker of the makers of human sin and wretchedness (*C. Fort.* 15, 20; see also *De duab. an.* 7.9–8.10). The answer, on both counts, seemed to lie in freedom of the will (*C. Fort.* 15, 17)" (Babcock 1988, 31–32).

27. It is essential to keep in mind that the fall and consequent punishment of humans, for Augustine at this time, is no more or less than embodiment and the vulnerability to sensory and material allures that embodiment entails. It is a condition of difficulty and propensity to (sinful) habits; yet the soul's will remains free.

28. Fredriksen 2008, 142.

29. Cf. *Keph* 23, 67.23–26: "[The] First Man came forth against it, [he kept] it apart from the house of the living. He prevented it."

30. Zycha's critical edition, based on five manuscripts dating as far back as the tenth century, breaks the quote here at the end of verse 7, with *et cetera usque ad id quod scriptum est*, then completing the quote with verses 16b–18. Other manuscripts provide the entire passage, and it is so given in the *PL*. It might be asked whether the abbreviated quote, if original in *Fort*, reflects a scribal edit of Fortunatus's fuller quote, or whether Fortunatus himself skipped over verses 8–16a as less pertinent to his point.

31. Alflatt notes that before the exchange on Ephesians 2, Fortunatus had cited scripture four times to Augustine's single reference to a passage from the Psalms. He speculates that at this point of the debate Augustine realized he could not yield the biblical text completely to his opponent, and so made a pro forma effort at engaging him on scriptural ground (Alflatt 1974, 125–126).

32. "We believe . . . that Christ the savior came from heaven to fulfill the will of the Father . . . to free our souls from the same enmity, this enmity having been slain, which if it had not been opposed to God could neither be called enmity where there was unity, nor could slaying be spoken of or take place where there was life" (*Fort* 17).

33. Cf. Alflatt 1974, 126.

34. "It is difficult not to believe that this was a deliberate ploy by Augustine, who had been placed in a difficult position through the use of Scripture by Fortunatus (especially the Ephesians passage), to bring the debate to an end for the day, with his opponent compromised in the eyes of many of those present" (Alflatt 1974, 127). On Manichaean textual criticism of the New Testament, see Decret 2004, 61–63.

35. Decret 1970, 218, speculates that some of Augustine's allies in the crowd seized the opportunity to break up the debate in order to extricate him from the difficult position he was in. Despite the call to return to arguments based on reason, Augustine clearly prepared scriptural arguments for the second day. Cf. Decret 2004, 7.

36. Alflatt 1974, 129–30.

37. Indeed, Cicero's *Hortensius* treated this topic, describing habit (*mos*) becoming a second nature from which philosophy could free the individual (frgs. 66ff. Grilli; MacKendrick 1989, 110; cf. *De finibus* 5.25.74). Titus of Bostra 2.12 anticipates Augustine in employing habit as an anti-Manichaean alternative explanation of the experience of resistance to the good will.

38. On the manner in which the debate with Fortunatus forces these two key additions to

Augustine's rhetorical armory, here distinct but later synthesized as parts of his qualification of his free-will position, see Rutzenhöfer 1992, 56–57.

39. Some of them (e.g., bishop Valerius) knew Greek, and possibly could rehearse Augustine in some arguments known to them from Greek sources (e.g., Titus of Bostra) that Augustine himself could not access due to his language limitations.

40. "Augustine recognized that his position also committed him to defending the claim that freedom of will is itself a good, i.e., that it should have been given to human beings by God rather than withheld. He argues this point in *De lib. arb.* 2, and especially in 2.18.47–19.53, a portion of the treatise written after the debate with Fortunatus and perhaps as late as 395" (Babcock 1988, 51n8).

41. Babcock 1988, 32.

42. See Decret 1970, 290–91.

43. "The essential characteristic of a wanton is that he does not care about his will. His desires move him to do certain things, without its being true of him either that he wants to be moved by those desires or that he prefers to be moved by other desires. The class of wantons includes all nonhuman animals that have desires and all very young children. Perhaps it also includes some adult human beings as well. In any case, adult humans may be more or less wanton" (Frankfurt 1988, 16–17). Crucially, "Nothing in the concept of a wanton implies that he cannot reason or that he cannot deliberate concerning how to do what he wants to do. What distinguishes the rational wanton from other rational agents is that he is not concerned with the desirability of his desires themselves. He ignores the question of what his will is to be" (17). For that reason "they fail to satisfy an essential condition for the enjoyment of freedom of the will" (19), since freedom of the will should mean that one "is free to will what he wants to will, or to have the will he wants" (20), but a wanton lacks this self-defining interest in wanting to will some things rather than others.

44. Augustine's divergence from this tradition in arguing that pardon implies guilt has been noted by Koenen 1978, 157. In this connection, it bears noting that Fortunatus invokes not only the question of outright competence, but also the language of diminished culpability and mitigated liability. He employs language of an individual being coerced, of being in the position of a slave, or of not having full knowledge of the facts—all familiar from Roman legal discussions of reduced guilt and lessened punishment (Robinson 1995, 20–21).

45. Robinson 1995, 16. Cf. Ambrose (himself a former lawyer, judge, and governor), *Paradiso* 6.31: "The man who does not know good and evil differs in no respect from a little child. A judge who is just does not consider a child to be guilty of a crime. The just Creator of the world would never have found fault with a child for his lack of knowledge of good and evil, because a child cannot be charged with a violation of the law."

46. Fortunatus has put his finger on the key weaknesses of Augustine's position at this time as outlined by Wetzel 1992a: the divinely ordered universe fails to contain a prompt for the soul's deviation, which is as inexplicable as the atomic "swerve" postulated in Epicurean metaphysics. Robert Brown argues that the causelessness and inexplicability of the evil will must be accepted as the only account that makes Augustine's free will solution to the problem of evil work. But Augustine himself resorted to several other theories that sought to make the evil will explicable in terms of various underlying causes, all of which Brown contends fail (R. Brown 1978).

47. Fredriksen 2008, 151; cf. Leroux 1996, 301, and Dillon 1996, 330 for Plotinus's accord with this consensus.

48. The God of the Manichaeans does not provide an opening for evil, nor does he cause even the evil of punishment, which Augustine ascribes directly and unapologetically to God. The punishment of the sinner, in the Manichaean view, is nothing other than the entanglement with evil itself from which the soul fails to extricate itself when summoned to do so by God. Since such

a soul has violated its own nature, and become so conditioned by its constant contact with evil that it no longer realizes that its suffering is not its natural and necessary state, it goes on suffering forever, believing that it can aspire to nothing better.

49. His phrasing alludes to Rom 7:20.

50. Babcock 1988, 32. Babcock addresses this approach to moral agency more theoretically at the beginning of his article: "we might say that an action will count as a person's own . . . when it stands in some recognizable continuity with the dispositions, inclinations, motivations, aims and intentions of the person acting. . . . To count an action as the agent's own, then, we must be able to say that, in some sense (and, psychologically speaking, the sense may be extremely complex), it is the sort of thing we would expect this person to do. It is continuous with the person's dispositions, inclinations, etc." (29). In other words, "continuity with a person's character counts for and not against considering an action the person's own" (50–51 n2). "Since the Manichees identified what we would call the 'self' with the good soul, they obviously exempted the self from agency in or responsibility for evil" (51 n4).

51. This issue of the experiential reality of evil is phrased by Cress 1989, 118, as follows: "how can an overt deliberate action which is consciously felt and consciously executed and perhaps bitterly regretted be an instance of a negation of being, an instance of non-being? After all, it is something real. It is experienced as something real." In other words, the nerve-carried impulse to strike someone is an existent whose *absence* is good, rather than itself being a lack of something. Likewise, the nerve- carried sensation of pain is an existent ennervation whose *absence* is good. Conversely, a virtuous impulse or a pleasurable sensation also exist as goods, just as their opposite impulses and sensations exist as evils. Good does not always coincide with an existence or presence, nor evil always with an absence.

52. Babcock 1988, 30. In the opinion of Alflatt, "the most basic question posed by Fortunatus still has not been answered. Why did a totally untrammelled free soul ever fall into sin? Whether men fall individually or whether the race fell in Adam, this question remains equally vexing" (Alflatt 1974, 129). It seems to have occurred to Augustine that the problem needed further examination, and he attempted to address it in *LA* 3.20, 3.24–25.

53. Cf. *DA* 12.16–18. Augustine's apparent redundancy in returning to the point in *DA* 14.22 reflects, I would argue, his addition of material to *DA* that he considered successful in the debate with Fortunatus.

54. Babcock 1988, 32.

55. Fredriksen 1979, 99 and n41.

56. Bammel 1992, 349. Fortunatus's interpretation of 1 Tim 6:10 closely matches that found in *Menoch* 175 and further elaborated in *Menoch* 187, although the Latin translation of *Menoch* reads *concupiscentia* in place of *cupiditas* in the quotation of the verse given in *Fort* 21. In *Menoch*, Mani explains that lust differs from other sins in being "natural," rather than "actual," and therefore serves as the instrument through which natural evil achieves sinful effects in human action.

57. Cf. *EpSec* 2: *At si, cum se ipsam cognouerit, consentiat malo, et non se armet contra inimicum, uoluntate sua peccauit*.

58. This passage was also known to Augustine (*NB* 42; *Faust* 21.16), but not quoted or discussed in *CEF*. Evodius comments, "Mani himself could not deny that souls, even those which according to him belong to the substance of God, sin by their own will." Augustine notes the apparent contradiction of the above passage with the more deterministic statements of Mani (*NB* 42).

59. E.g., *ME* 21.39: "man is conformed to whatever he loves."

60. In agreement with Rom. 8.6 in place of Vulgate *sapientia* at 8.7; Augustine still retains the Manichaean text in *PropRom* 49, perhaps suggesting that he is looking at the transcript of the debate. The Manichaean Felix quotes this same passage against Augustine (*Fel* 2.2).

61. The words "and death" are added here from Rom 8.2; Fortunatus omits *quae est in membris meis* (probably as an abbreviation of redundancy). On Paul's complex use of "law" in both positive and negative contexts, see the extensive discussion among early Christian writers, including Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 52.1; Origen (who insists this the Mosaic law is not meant in Rom 7:23), *Commentary on Romans* 3.19; John Chrysostom (who while generally holding that all references to "law" are about the Mosaic law, e.g., *Homily on Romans* 7.12, explains the "law" of 7:23 as simply sin itself, which is here called a law "from the strict obedience yielded to it by those who comply with it"), *Homily on Romans* 7.22–23 (similarly, the "law of spirit" as simply the spirit itself , *Homily on Romans* 8.2); Theodore of Mopsuestia (who acknowledges a variety of uses, determined by the associated terminology), *On Romans* 7.22–23.

62. The last clause conflated from Gal 6.14. According to Felix (*Fel* 2.2), Paul speaks of this same force in the equally intimate 2 Cor 12:7–9, when he says: "A goad of the flesh has been given to me, an angel of Satan which strikes me day and night. Because of this, three times have I prayed to the Lord that it might be removed from me. And he has said to me: 'My grace is sufficient for you, because virtue is proved (*probatur* in place of *perficitur*) in infirmity.' "

63. Alflatt 1974, 128.

64. Stendahl, 212.

65. Alflatt 1974, 121, who continues, "Between two and three years of the period preceding his ordination in 391 had been spent at Thagaste, but, despite the relative seclusion in which he lived there, much of his time seems to have been occupied with affairs other than the study of Scripture. Apart from one scriptural work, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, there is nothing in his writing of this time to suggest that he was able to make any deep study of the Bible."

66. "Augustine here concedes a point to Fortunatus to the extent that he now gives a qualification of his previous strong assertion of free will" (Bammel 1992, 349; cf. Babcock 1988, 33).

67. Babcock 1988, 39–40.

68. Alflatt 1975, 171.

69. For his previous allegorical use of the Eden story, see, e.g., *GCM* 2.2.3ff; *VR* 20.38.

70. Alflatt 1975, 172.

71. Fredriksen 1979, 78–79 n64.

72. Accordingly, Fredriksen 2008, 146, translates *necessitatem* in the above passage as "binding constraints."

73. Similarly, Wetzel 1992a, 97, places on Augustine's rhetoric in the debate a definitiveness it cannot bear.

74. Babcock notes even with regard to the more worked-out position of *LA* 3.18.52 that, "apart from the addition of the notion of carnal custom, Augustine is simply restating his earlier listing of the penal effects of cupidity (*De lib. arb.* 1.11.22), now schematized under the two headings of ignorance (the cognitive effects) and difficulty (the conative and emotive effects)" (Babcock 1993a, 228–29 n11).

75. Cf. *Mus* 6.11.33, where Augustine says that the soul's delight in carnal things "strongly fixes in the memory what it brings from the slippery senses. And this habit of the soul, made with flesh through carnal affection, is called 'flesh' in the holy scriptures. . . . 'In mind I serve the law of God, but in flesh the law of sin' (Rom 7:25)." In other words, the presence of mortal flesh (descended from Adam and Eve) puts the soul in a situation in which sinful habit may be formed, since memory is itself part of our physical apparatus (cf. the remark of Fredriksen quoted at the end of note 82 below).

76. Cf. Origen, *C. Celsum* 3.69: "many men have become evil by upbringing and by perversion and by environment, so that in some people evil has become second nature." But, Origen goes on to say, this is not hard to change; one need only submit one's will to what pleases God. It lies entirely within one's own free will to choose the good.

77. He had written previously that evil habits obscure human minds (*ME* 2.3), but can be overcome in this life when one turns to God (*ME* 22.40). Habit, freely acquired by repeated indulgence, leads to vice in the soul and increased moral difficulty (*VR* 20.39).

78. Introducing an analogy he would use repeatedly in the years to come (Cf. *SermDom* 2.24.79; *PropRom* 49; *DQ* 66.6), he asked his audience to consider how we distinguish snow from water, even though they are in some sense the same thing, named differently in one state than the other. Likewise, he argued, things described in the Bible as bad, even bad "by nature," receive these labels in reference to their current state, not their permanent nature. The proof of his claim, he suggested, is found in the words "make the tree good" (Mt 12:33), as if it could be changed. "Who can make a nature? Therefore if we are commanded to make a tree either good or evil, it is ours to choose what we will" (*Fort* 22). By this nice piece of overnight exegesis, he disposed of Fortunatus's use of the other, more dualistic uses of the image of the two trees in the Bible.

79. Fredriksen 2008, 147.

80. Babcock 1994, 184.

81. Prendiville 1972, 70–71.

82. Thus, one must be careful about the ambiguity of saying things such as "People now have a type of will, Augustine says, that is different from what Adam's had originally been. . . . Its debility is an effect and consequence of Adam's fall" (Fredriksen 2008, 147). It is not the type of will that has changed, but its circumstances. As in Plotinus, only the immediate presence of material reality makes possible the errant choices of the soul: "matter, invading the soul's domain, and as it were forcing it into narrower bounds, does not permit all her powers to be actualised, but filches away a part and makes it evil" (*En* 1.8.14; cf. 1.8.11–12; 3.1.8–9). In an anti-Manichaean vein (Burns 1988, 15), Augustine had been gradually moving away from attributing sin to the lure of material creation through the senses (still prominent in his rhetoric in, e.g., *LA* 1.4.10, 1.8.18, 1.15.32f; *QA* 33.71; *VR* 3.3). It became increasingly important to him to locate the impetus to sin entirely within the free human will (*GCM* 2.14.20–15.22; *LA* 2.20.54; *DQ* 21) as an anti-Manichaean stance. Nevertheless, to characterize habit as somehow directly the product of "Adam's fall" would necessitate a view of souls developing habits over multiple lifetimes. Augustine has no such view in mind here, quite clearly citing the formation of habit in one's present (embodied) lifetime. Fredriksen is more precise a few pages later: "For everyone after Adam, then, the soul is connected with the sort of flesh (that is, mortal flesh) that facilitates the formation of habit" (2008, 152; cf. note 75 above).

83. Wetzel, for example, is premature in saying of the Augustine of 392 that he "seems to have cut his losses on the problems surrounding voluntary sin by excluding it from the fallen world" (Wetzel 1992a, 97–98). Not yet.

84. Babcock resists the suddenness of the development, criticizing Alflatt for overlooking the evidence of *DA* that Augustine had already "come to the very brink" of the shift that comes out into the open on the second day of the debate (Babcock 1988, 51 n12). But this assumes that Augustine had completed *DA* before the debate, which cannot be proven. More probably, since all of the key ideas Augustine deploys on the second day of the debate are concentrated in the last sections of *DA*, and represent a significant departure from the positions taken earlier in the treatise, they constitute additions made in the debate's aftermath. Otherwise, it is hard to explain why Augustine did not use them on the first day of the debate.

85. Wetzel 1992a, 96, speaks of Augustine's "arguments lagging behind his insights," which is another way of saying that Augustine deployed rhetoric to which he was not yet prepared to give any functional meaning in his overall system. Much of such rhetoric was dropped immediately, while that for which he later found a place in his system is credited anachronistically as an insight.

86. Wetzel 1992a, 95, notes the dramatic shift of direction without attributing it to any

particular circumstance, and seems to accept, 96, the traditional assumption that *DA* was completed before the debate with Fortunatus.

87. Allegorical in that the "fall" of Adam and Eve signifies the fall of the individual soul from the intelligible to the material; historical in that their fall led to the material and mortal state of the bodies into which souls fall.

88. E.g., Babcock 1994, 183–84.

89. Prendiville 1972, 29, 76–77.

90. *Ord* 1.1.3, 1.3.6; *QA* 33.71; *Mus* 2.8.15; 5.5.10; *GCM* 1.22.34, 2.19.29, 2.21.31, 2.22.34; *MM* 19.70; *VR* 3.3, 4.6, 34.64, 35.65, 46.88.

91. Prendiville speaks of his early "optimistic view that habit alone stands between God and the soul" (Prendiville 1972, 56).

92. Cf. *Fid* 10.23: the habit of sinners (*consuetudo peccatorum*) has turned into a natural state (*in naturam uersa*).

93. Wetzel 1992a, 97.

94. "When habits of the flesh and our sins have begun in some manner to war against us and make difficulty for us, who are striving for better things, some foolish persons, out of the most obtuse superstition, suspect the existence of another kind of soul that does not originate from God" (*DA* 13.19). See Babcock 1988, 39.

95. Wetzel 1992a, 96.

96. Gilson 1960, 22, calls it "the most profound and most constant element in his metaphysical thought." But, as O'Donnell notes, "The immutability of God can scarcely be called a Christian doctrine, in so far as there is little explicit Christian scripture to warrant such an assertion," and the various texts Augustine cites in support of the idea "do not themselves compel such a doctrine unless there is already a predisposition in that direction" (O'Donnell 1992, vol.2, 394).

97. On Fortunatus's refusal to give in to Augustine on this point, see Erler 1990, 304–305.

98. Decret 1970, 209–12, 217–19; 1991, 82.

99. Three possibilities: Fortunatus had cited this text in a portion of the debate edited out by Augustine; Augustine was quoting from memory; Augustine had the *Fundamental Epistle* in his library already at this time. On Augustine knowing more about the fine points of Manichaean teaching than he expressly revealed, see van Oort 2008.

100. *Lucis uero beatissimae pater sciens labem magnam ac uastitatem quae ex tenebris surgeret aduersus sua sancta inpendere saecula nisi aliquod eximium ac praeclarum et uirtute potens numen opponat quo superet simul ac destruat stirpem tenebrarum.*

101. Cf. *Conf* 7.2.3: "If they admitted that your nature . . . is incorruptible, then all these assertions of theirs are false and should be rejected with horror. But if your substance is corruptible, then this is self-evidently false and should be abhorred at first utterance" (*prima voce abominandum*)."

102. A point rightly stressed by Decret 1970, 260. Cf. *PsBk* 205.8–9: "That which the Living Ones took [therefore] was saved: they will return again to that which is theirs."

103. His conception of the Incarnation, in other words, is analogous to his understanding of the embodiment of the soul, which remains entirely separate from the body it uses, unless it yields to undue involvement in the body's business. But whereas the created soul is liable to such a fault, the divine Word is not. He alludes to this distinction again in *Conf* 7.2.3, where he attacks Manichaean Christology by arguing that if, as they maintain, the Word is of the same nature (*ex una eademque substantia*) as the soul, then the Word must be as liable to corruption as the soul, despite the Manichaean claim that it must be "free, pure, and unscathed if it is to help." On Augustine's early Christology, see Dobell 2009, 75–107. This way of viewing the Incarnation blocked for many years any significant engagement on Augustine's part with the more dramatic

and tragic elements of Christian mythology, and made it difficult for him to give the cross a place in either his Christology or his soteriology.

104. Augustine was familiar with this answer, which he had heard promulgated for the first time in Carthage in the winter of 388–389, as he tells us in *MM* 12.25 (also 15.36). God voluntarily chose to subject a part of himself to evil, motivated precisely by his goodness with the intention of pacifying evil and in this way improving its condition of strife and lust. Fortunatus's statement that the intention of God was to set a limit to evil should probably be taken to reflect the fuller answer Augustine reports in *MM*, and to imply restraining evil from being even worse than it is. Although we do not have this proposition in so many words in primary Manichaean texts, it is consonant with characterizations there of concrete steps of pacification and ordering brought to the realm of darkness by the powers of light.

105. Plato, *Philebus* 23c et seq; Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 64; Numenius, fr. 11 des Places: "The first god, existing in his own place, is simple and, consorting as he does with himself alone, can never be divisible. The second and third gods, however, are in fact one; but in the process of coming into contact with Matter, which is the Dyad, he gives unity to it, but is himself divided by it, since Matter has a character prone to desire and is in flux." For Mani, Numenius's second and third gods would be the Primordial Human and its "garment," separated from each other in contact with evil Matter.

106. See BeDuhn 2010, 98–102. Augustine had entertained such notions of the soul's descent as prompted by a divine will to order and govern the cosmos—found also in Plotinus (e.g., *Ennead* 4.8.3.25ff.)—in his earliest post-conversion writings (e.g., *QA* 36.81), but apparently found that it put the onus too much on God, as he believed it did in its Manichaean version.

107. Fredriksen 1979, 88 and 94 n24. She adds that Augustine provides here "an early example of the sort of unscrupulously aggressive behavior that Augustine comes to direct against his ecclesiastical opponents" (88). Cf. Erler 1990, 298.

108. Including Alflatt 1974, 132; Teske 2006, 137. Fredriksen 2008, while more nuanced in her notice of the strengths of Fortunatus's arguments, still declares Augustine the "undisputed winner of this debate" (150). Rutzenhöfer 1992, 65–67, while characterizing the end of the debate as a "capitulation," expresses puzzlement as to why Fortunatus would yield, given the consistency of his defense to this question throughout the debate, and the failure of Augustine to marshal any new arguments against it.

109. Decret 1970, 325–27; 1978, 367.

110. Decret 1978, 217–18, 367; 1970, 43–44, 325–27; 2001, 57.

111. *Et sequenti tempore de Hipponensi civitate profectus ad eamdem amplius non remeavit* (Possidius, 6).

112. Fredriksen 1979, 88.

CHAPTER 5. THE EXEGETE

1. Yet, the Manichaean target of both *UC* and *DA* may have led Augustine to make arguments primarily on the basis of reason, neglecting scriptural arguments because he thought Manichaeans put little stock in them. Prior to his debate with Fortunatus, Augustine appears to have understood the Manichaean stance toward the Bible to be primarily critical. While aware of the authority Paul carried with the Manichaeans (*ME*, *GCM*), he shows spotty familiarity with their actual exegesis of this material, even as he displays a fairly thorough knowledge of their criticism of specific passages as interpolations. Hence, his view of the Manichaeans as relatively uninterested in a positive use of scripture may reflect more the attitude he had as a Manichaean than the outlook of many of his fellow Manichaeans.

2. *Sed quoniam ad scripturas iterum confugisti, ad eas ego descendo*.

3. The thirty-two *EnPs* sections dated to this period far outnumber the other sermons from his time as a priest, and show continuity in his biblical preferences from his pre-ordination works. The Psalms, then, formed his primary entry into the rest of the Bible during his priesthood, by way of finding intertextual connections between the former and the latter.

4. Fredriksen 1979, 82–83.

5. Fredriksen 1995, 304, quoting *PropRom* 13–18.1.

6. Babcock 1979, 56. Allgeier 1930 argues that Augustine's turn to biblical exegesis, and even the particular premises and emphases of his approach to exegesis, are prompted primarily by his conflict with Manichaeism. Cf. Drecoll and Kudella 2011, 119–33.

7. Possidius names five anti-Manichaean sermons delivered by Augustine as a priest (391–396). Two of these sermons are unknown to modern scholarship, the other three are (1) De "In principio fecit deus coelum et terram" (Sermon 1), (2) De eo quod in Aggeo propheta scriptum est "Meum est aurum" (Sermon 50), and (3) De eo quod in Iob scriptum est "Uenerunt angeli" (Sermon 12). Albert de Veer has reviewed the scholarship on the date and interrelationship of these three sermons, as well as their function as responses to Adimantus's *Antitheses* (de Veer 1969). Augustine explicitly says that some of his sermons responded to the latter work (*Retr* 1.22.1). Coyle 1978, 16, has identified Sermon 2, on Gen. 22.1, as an additional sermon belonging to this anti-Manichaean set from Augustine's period as a priest. The only other sermons generally regarded as preserved from the period of Augustine's priesthood are 20, 252, 273, and 353; see Verbraken 1976.

8. See Rondet 1960. Possidius reports that of these thirty-two, eight were delivered publicly: 18, 21, 25, 26, 29, 30, 31, 32. Hebgin and Corrigan 1960, 17, place the commentaries on ten other psalms during Augustine's priesthood: 37, 54, 56, 63, 94, 97, 100, 101, 145, 148. Only a handful more would be produced in the subsequent decade, before Augustine resumed the project in several blocks of work. Of course, in the meantime, he drew heavily on the psalms in the composition of his *Conf*, on which see Knauer 1955 and Bochet 2004.

9. *Adim* is a collection of separately composed responses to individual criticisms made by Adimantus, and Augustine describes a disorganized genesis of the work in *Retr* 1.21.1. There Augustine reports that a copy of Adimantus's *Disputationes* "came into my hands," perhaps deliberately vague to avoid stating that it had been in the possession of some former Manichaean who joined his monastic community at Hippo. His wording might suggest that he had not been familiar with the work earlier when he was himself a Manichaean, despite the central place Adimantus played for his Manichaean mentor Faustus (see *Faust* 16.31). For an insightful analysis of the arguments of the Manichaean Adimantus to which Augustine responds, see Baker-Brian 2003, and for a systematic study of Adimantus's work based on Augustine's evidence, see Berg 2010.

10. In both *Retr* 1.21 and *CALP* 2.12.42 he admits that he never completed the work, and left some sections of the *Antitheses* unanswered, although some of them were taken up in his *Sermons* (e.g., *Serm* 1, 50, 153, 182).

11. Indeed, Augustine would not successfully complete another expressly anti-Manichaean work between *DA* in 392 and *Conf* in 401. He abandoned incomplete several such efforts in the intervening years, e.g., *Adim*, *CEF*.

12. Cf. Ephrem, *Second Discourse*, l; *Fourth Discourse*, lxxxvi; *Hymn. c. haer.* 50.3, 51.14. Augustine cites 2 Cor. 3:2–3 ("written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God; not on tables of stone, but on the fleshy tables of the heart") as a verse used by the Manichaeans and interpreted as rejection of the Old Testament (*Faust* 15.4). For other references to Manichaean criticism of the Old Testament, see *Faust*. 4.1, 6.1, 10.1, 15.1, 18.2, 21.5, 22.2–5, 32.4; *Adim*, passim, *BC* 25.33.

13. Augustine alludes to the Manichaean observation that Jesus calls the Torah "your law," indicating that it is not the Law of Jesus' God (cf. *Faust* 16.13). Faustus denies that Jesus came to fulfill the Law, since the Law itself forbids any addition or alteration to it (Deut. 12:32, *Faust* 17.2).

14. Such Manichaean objections included asking why God would want humans to be ignorant of the difference between good and evil (*GCM* 2.26.39), and why God could not find some other way of sealing Abraham's righteousness than the bloody rite of circumcision, with its prurient association with sex (*Faust* 6.3). They questioned why Moses cursed those, such as Christ and all the crucified martyrs (including Mani), who were hung on a tree (*Faust* 14.1; 16.5; 32.5), likewise cursing those who are childless, as Christ and Mani were (*Faust*. 14.1; 32.5). They faulted its condemnation of the harmless veneration of the sun and moon (*Keph* 65.159.4; *Faust* 14.1), while it affirmed animal sacrifice (Titus 3.48). Decret suggests that the amount of effort Augustine gave to defending the Old Testament reveals its tenuous place in the hearts and minds of African Christians generally (Decret 1978, I.95, II.73 n16; he cites in particular the large section devoted to this topic in *CR*). Others have seen African Christianity as particularly attuned to Old Testament sensibilities (e.g., Frend), and it must be kept in mind that Augustine's outlook did not necessarily correspond with that of the average parishioner. The energy he gave to it may reflect only the degree to which it was a problem *for him*, or within the sort of intellectual circles from which he came.

15. Augustine did not know at this time that the Manichaeans rejected Jn 5:46 as an interpolation—a fact he learned when he read Faustus's *Capitula* several years later (*Faust* 16.1–2), and responded to vigorously (*Faust* 12.3; 16.11; 17.3; 19.7).

16. On criticism of his allegorical interpretations of Genesis, see *Conf* 12.14.17ff.

17. He states in *Retr* 1.18 that he had previously not considered himself prepared to exegete the Old Testament passages "according to the letter (*ad litteram*), that is, according to their historical character (*secundum historicam proprietatem*)," but now felt compelled to attempt "this very laborious and difficult work" in *GLimp*. He reduced the scope of the project from the full creation account of Gen 1–3 covered allegorically in *GCM* to just the hexaemeron of Gen 1. Nonetheless, he could not make the project work. "My inexperience in scriptural exegesis collapsed under the weight of the burden. And before I finished one book, I gave up the labor that I could not sustain." Allegory was easier; besides, it was more intellectually respectable.

18. See Baker-Brian 2003.

19. The quotation of Paul is inexact, and even Augustine has trouble identifying it. He tentatively suggests it is meant to represent 1 Cor 2:6–8; the allusion also shows verbal similarities with Rom 8:38 and Eph 6:12.

20. Such as the suggestion that the angels were bringing Satan in as a prisoner, or that God had specifically invited the bad angels, with Satan as their leader, to visit him that day (*Serm* 12.7).

21. E.g., *Serm* 72A, 92, 159B (*SermDolb* 21),182, 237, 238; *JohTrac* 8.

22. Augustine, a big fan of numerology, suggests that the reference to third and fourth generation is symbolic of the time between Abraham and Christ (*Adim* 7.2).

23. He wonders if they will reject the latter passage as inauthentic, which he bitingly insists is their custom for dealing with passages he thinks they cannot otherwise explain.

24. On Manichaean use of the apocryphal acts literature, see *Faust* 22.79.

25. Cf. Augustine's defense of God's cursing of Cain, *Adim* 4.

26. On this subject, see Faustus's citation of Eph 4:21–24, Rom 6:4, and Rom 7:22–26 in *Faust* 24.1; cf. *Faust* 20.2; Evodius, *De fide* 34; Decret 1978, 97–98.

27. Later, Augustine would be forced to refine this answer, in light of Faustus's criticism that the hypocrisy of non-Manichaean Christians lay precisely in failing to observe the Law despite affirming its authority.

28. Adimantus has a variant text here, which Augustine quotes as: *Dies observatis, et sabbata,*

et solemnitates; timeo vos, ne frustra laboraverim in vobis. Augustine's own text of Paul read: *Dies observatis et annos, et tempora; timeo vos, ne frustra laboraverim in vobis.*

29. Augustine inherited this orientation toward assessing morality by intention rather than action from his classical education; see, e.g., Seneca, *De beneficiis* 2.31.

30. This is the standard triad of good deeds for the Manichaean layperson; see BeDuhn 2000, 33–40.

31. See Chapter 10 below.

32. There is even more to this remarkable twin of Augustine; Possidius reports that Firmus was likewise forced into the priesthood against his will, somewhere outside Africa, a few years later (Possidius 15.7).

33. Hence, he advised the members of his church in Hippo to "recite the creed daily" (*Serm* 58.11). Just as the bishop delivered (*traditio*) the creed, the adherent was to render it back reiteratively (*redditio*), cultivating a common set of discursive speech and thoughts.

34. The creedal text on which Augustine bases his exposition is the "Old Roman" one in use in Milan, rather than that of either Nicaea or Constantinople, and may have been based on his notes from his own catechumenate in Milan (see Kelly 1960, 172–73). It is noteworthy, then, that this community that was organizing itself as "Nicene" as well as "Catholic" did not actually have possession of the creed of Nicaea, or its Constantinopolitan revision.

35. Fredriksen 2008, 153–54, notes the connection to the debate with Fortunatus.

36. Just as when he says, "The death of the soul is to depart from God. This first sin committed in paradise is related in the sacred books" (*Fid* 10.23), it remains obscure whether he means this in the "historical" sense, or as an allegorical description of the fall of each individual soul. At this same time he also maintains that "The human individual has been made in God's image and likeness, something which *each* has corrupted by sinning" (*EnPs* 4.8), so that God can only be described as extending punishment to the children of sinners *if* the children themselves persist in sinning; each is punished only for his or her own individual sins (*Adim* 7.1).

37. Elsewhere at this time he wrote that "These sins are called natural which we necessarily commit prior to the mercy of God, after we have fallen into this life by the sin of free choice" (*GLimp* 1.3). The terms "natural" and "necessary" are interchangeable for Augustine, but he uses them freely of "second nature" states such as rigidified habit.

38. Cf. *Mag* 14.46, where Augustine states that "we are admonished through human agency and by external signs to be inwardly converted to him [Christ] and so to be instructed . . . so that now we should not only believe but also begin to understand."

39. "My God does not come to men and women," he declares, "unless they cleanse the way of faith by which he may come to them" (*EnPs* 17.31). "He laid down the spotless road of love so that by it I may come to him, as spotless too is the road of faith by which he came to me" (*EnPs* 17.33). It is "by the humility of repentance"—not by either a redemptive act of Christ or a grace of God—that sinners "recover their exalted rank" (*quae poenitendi humilitate altitudinem suam recipit*, *LA* 3.5.15; cf. *Fid* 4.6).

CHAPTER 6. THE PROBLEM OF PAUL

1. Markus 1990c, 223. He goes on to say, "we must certainly distinguish sharply between the Paul he had met before 395, the Paul who had made it possible for him to deal with moral evil and had furnished him with concepts that could be wrested from the Manichees without bringing about a collapse of his Neoplatonic sense of a moral and rational cosmic order, and the Paul whom he met in his rereading of the Pauline letters, and now especially of Romans and Galatians. . . . This is the rediscovery that Augustine himself singled out as a literally catastrophic

turning point in his Christian career. . . . We need to come to grips with the Paul who brings about the intellectual earthquake that shook Augustine's mind out of the mold into which it had begun to settle before the mid-390s" (Markus 1990c, 224). Likewise, Fredriksen remarks, "Augustine's interpretation and use of Paul in the period 386–388 is inconsistent with the overwhelming importance he attaches to the Apostle in Conf. VIII. Paul scarcely appears in the Cassiciacum dialogues; and where Augustine does cite him extensively, in de moribus ecclesiae (c. 388), it is to reclaim him from the Manichees, the target of that treatise's polemic" (Fredriksen 1986, 20–21). Most strikingly, *DA* features none of the Pauline passages on the old man/new man conflict or internal division that Manichaeans cited as the basis for their dualistic anthropology. Augustine was not ignorant of Manichaean use of Paul on this subject (cf., e.g., ME 19.36), but apparently saw no reason to bring biblical exegesis into a question that he preferred to explore within philosophical discourse, precisely as he wished to conduct the debate with Fortunatus.

2. P. Brown 2000, 497.

3. Burns 1980, 49.

4. Fredriksen 1979, 84.

5. "Augustine was not discovering Paul for the first time in the mid-390s. . . . But now Augustine obviously felt the need to take a new, closer look at Paul, probably in no small measure because of the Manichaean challenge he now faced directly" (Fredriksen 1979, 103–4). Cf. Allgeier 1930, 2–3; Pincherle 1947, 85.

6. Fredriksen 1986, 22. Cf. Fredriksen Landes 1982, ix: "Arguments against Manichaean determinism drawn largely from a philosophical defense of free will and individual virtue would be of little worth before such an audience, and such an enemy. To reclaim Paul, Augustine would have to make his case exegetically." Similarly, Harrison 2006, 122, speaks of the "pressing need he evidently felt to refute the Manichees—to use their foremost authority against them, and to reclaim Paul for Catholic Christianity," although she highlights *ME* as already part of that program.

7. Alflatt 1974, 133.

8. E.g., 1 Cor 4:7 and Rom 7:22–25; see Babcock 1979, esp. 57–58.

9. "Both lines of argument stand in connection with a broad resistance to Manichaean thought (Beide Argumentationsziele stehen im Zusammenhang einer umfassenden Abwehr manichäischer Gedanken)" (Drecoll 1999, 187). Following a detailed analysis of how the selection of verses and principal themes of his exegesis reflects engagement with Manichaean use of Paul, he concludes that Augustine's "exegesis of Paul cannot be classified as principally unpolemical. The exegesis of Paul and the linked elaboration of the concept of grace in close dependence on Pauline terminology are thus not to be seen as a more or less 'chance product of his ordination to the priesthood,' but is motivated in regard to its content by Augustine's continuing engagement [Auseinandersetzung] with Manichaeism on the basis of the Manichaean employment of Paul" (198). Harrison, crediting the same engagement with Manichaeism, argues for an opposite outcome, driving Augustine farther into an absolute free will position that temporarily submerged prior emphases on providence and grace (Harrison 2006, esp. 130–32); but this interpretation cannot be sustained in any sequential analysis of Augustine's works.

10. Van der Meer 1961, 577.

11. Burns 1980, 29–30.

12. "Taking the issues that the Manichees had set—the origin of evil, the status of the Law, the character of the Old Testament's god, the role of the will and the flesh in both sin and salvation—Augustine began an intensive project of exegesis. His goal was to interpret Paul's letters in such a way that he could defend the goodness of the created order and of the Old Testament (and thus the goodness of its god) while using Paul's own words in defense of the freedom of the will" (Fredriksen 2008, 156).

13. This is the name to which he attributes a quote from the *Ad Romanos* of "Ambrosiaster" in *CDEP* 4.4.7.

14. For his likely dependence on Victorinus, see Plumer 2003, 7–33. Bastiaensen 1996, on the other hand, finds practically no parallels to Victorinus, but substantial connections to Ambrosiaster. On the uncertainty of how early he had access to the commentaries of Ambrosiaster, see Souter 1927, 198; Pincherle 1947, 121ff.; TeSelle 1970, 158; Plumer 2003, 53–56.

15. Alypius's trip was timely for this purpose, even if already planned in response to the invitation Jerome had extended in 392 to bishop Aurelius of Carthage to send someone to copy his commentaries (*Dvijak Ep* 27.3). Jerome's commentary on Galatians was in Augustine's hands by 394–395, when he wrote to Jerome expressing his concern about one of the positions the latter takes (*Ep* 28).

16. Ries 1988, 187; Carrozzi 1988, 21–22, 28; but Pedersen 247 and n169 is unpersuaded. Stroumsa and Stroumsa 1988, 43, note the wide circulation and great influence of Titus's work in the late fourth century. The existence of a Latin translation has not been proved.

17. Burns finds evidence in the framing of the Pauline commentaries and in Augustine's own characterization of the circumstances of their composition that "He was moved to consider these themes by the questions of his associates rather than being led by his own desire to explain the difficult passages" (Burns 1980, 30). He notes that Augustine took up the problem of Rom 9 "three times, but only under questioning, never spontaneously" (Burns 1980, 37). Plumer's stress on the dialogical and pastoral character of Augustine's commentary on Galatians (Plumer 2003, 71–88), as well as the expository notes on Romans, can be understood as evidence that he was responding to questions about Paul being pressed upon him by his Catholic colleagues, some of whom would have read the transcript of his debate with Fortunatus or even have been in the audience.

18. That Augustine's commentary on Galatians contains a clear, if implicit, anti-Manichaean purpose, while serving at the same time other needs, has been asserted by Plumer 2003, 63 (but see his caution, 68), and Mara 1985, 100. It seems highly likely that he undertook the exposition of this particular Pauline epistle simply because he had the highest concentration of sources on it in the commentaries of Marius Victorinus, Ambrosiaster, and Jerome (by comparison, for Romans he had only the commentary of Ambrosiaster).

19. All that Augustine tells us is that he completed *LA* while still a priest, so by circa 395. In what follows, I also adduce parallels from book 6 of *Mus* for the central issues and concepts, as well as the use of Paul, characteristic of this period, which in and of themselves seem to indicate that its revision (to which Augustine refers in *Ep* 101) probably should be placed at this time.

20. P. Brown 2000, 144; Souter 1927.

21. de Bruyn 1993, 15. Pelagius, in his commentary on the letters of Paul, mentions Manichaeans more than any other opposing group, except "Arians" (Souter 1922, vol. 1, 67).

22. The best introduction to this subject is Decret 1989.

23. "In this particular arena, Paul served as the apostle of dualism par excellence" (Fredriksen 1979, 104).

24. Fredriksen 1979, 105.

25. Alflatt notes that "it is highly significant that in these subsequent works he uses the very passages brought against him by Fortunatus as the ground of his argument" (Alflatt 1974, 133), and proceeds to detail their intertextual connections in Augustine's exegesis, before concluding: "The three texts, by this time, clearly have become closely associated with each other in his mind, and each can play an important role in explicating the others." He goes on to document Augustine's extensive use of the same combination of passages in his anti-Pelagian writings: 133 and n91.

26. This requires Augustine to take "spirit" in Gal 5:17 as referring to the individual soul or mind (*mens*), as the Manichaean interpretation does (see *De anima et eius origine* 4.22.36).

27. See Pelikan 1971, 280–84; Wiles 1967, 94–99.

28. TeSelle 1970, 164–65.

29. Thus, even without direct exposure to Origen's exegetical works, Augustine had been exposed to Origen's core concepts, due to the latter's influence on the Milanese Nicene community, and as a consequence shared several of Origen's key metaphysical and anthropological assumptions (see Bammel 1992, 348; Altaner 1967a). Heidl 2003 has made a case for Augustine's direct knowledge of some of Origen's works.

30. The following summary owes something to Grech 1996 and Burns 1979.

31. On the key place of Tyconius in Augustine's exegetical development, see Fredriksen 2008, 157–63; Babcock 1982 and 1979; Pincherle 1947, 178ff, and already Pincherle 1925. Augustine may have perceived a kindred spirit when he read Tyconius criticize those who "want to understand before they believe and make faith subject to reason," as well as Tyconius's stress on the need to have faith and wait for reasons to unfold as they surely will.

32. Titus of Bostra 4.90, 4.95; on Ambrosiaster, see TeSelle 1970, 158–60.

33. TeSelle 1970, 177.

34. Babcock 1989, 20–21.

35. Ibid., 26–27.

36. Ibid., 31.

37. Ibid., 28–31.

38. Ibid., 30–31.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid., 34–35.

41. Tyconius addresses Ephesians 2:8–10, which Fortunatus had quoted against Augustine's free will argument ("By grace you were saved through faith; and this is not your doing. It is God's gift, not the result of works, lest anyone claim a glory of his own. For we are his handiwork, created in Christ"). He understands the grace referred to here as the enablement God bestows on the person who has taken the initiative of faith, rather than using the reference to creation as an opportunity to expound his concept of faith as a capacity people have in their very nature from the gift of God's creation.

42. On the possible influence of Ambrosiaster on this construct, see Drecoll 1999, 153.

43. Not so in his first allusion to a four-stage scheme of human history—apparently not yet of the individual's development—in *DQ* 61.7: "given the entire life span of the human race, this period in which the grace of Christian faith is given is the third period. The first is before the Law, the second, under the Law, and the third, under grace . . . there yet remains a fourth period in which we shall achieve the abundant peace of the heavenly Jerusalem." This earliest form of the scheme appears to be a direct borrowing from Tyconius, although Pincherle 1947, 124–25 and TeSelle 1970, 160 discern a similar construct in Ambrosiaster.

44. See Fredriksen 2008, 165. He had previously spoken of the analogy of individual interior experience to exterior salvation history in *DQ* 49, which his biographer Possidius identified as an anti-Manichaean tract intended to respond to Adimantus's criticism of Old Testament sacrificial practices.

45. "Prior to the Law we live in ignorance of sin and as followers of carnal desires. Under the Law we now live forbidden to sin, and yet, overcome by sin's habits, we sin because faith does not yet assist us. The third phase of life is when now we trust fully in our deliverer and do not attribute anything to our own merits, but, by loving his mercy, we are no longer overcome by the pleasure of evil habit when it strives to draw us into sin. But, nonetheless, we still suffer from its attempted seductions, although we are not betrayed to it. The fourth phase of activity is when there is absolutely nothing in man which resists the spirit, but all things, joined and connected harmoniously to one another, maintain unity by a steadfast peace" (*DQ* 66.3).

46. Burns sums up the scheme succinctly: "By applying the Pauline division of the ages of humanity to the life of an individual, Augustine developed a sequential explanation of the process of salvation. Mortality causes concupiscence which takes its toll of sin and establishes customs. Moral education brings a person into an internal crisis which disposes him to respond to the gospel. Through faith in Christ, a person merits the gift of the Spirit by which the law is fulfilled. The merits of a good life earn an eternal reward" (Burns 1980, 35).

47. The latter element of the scenario is often overlooked. For Augustine at this time, human souls are precisely those souls that have fallen, whereas unfallen souls are angels (*LA* 3.5.14–15), who are angels and unfallen precisely because as souls they have freely willed to continue to adhere to God (*LA* 3.11.33–12.35). Souls receive the (physical) body of sin/death because they have sinned as souls—otherwise, they would not be on earth in bodies at all. Therefore, it is unnecessary for Augustine to posit that all souls sinned in Adam in order to justify their fallen condition. They sin individually in the intelligible realm by turning from God, and the sort of embodiment that Adam received for the same kind of sin conveniently supplies, by physical reproduction, the receptacles into which these other fallen souls subsequently descend. The construction is deeply Origenist. See Bammel, 1989, 83.

48. "L'habitude c'est le poids du temps sur l'âme qui voudrait ne vivre que dans l'instant présent" (Bezançon 1965, 151).

49. Similarly, in *Mus* 6.5.14, the soul "sins in its strength, but after sinning, having been made weaker as a result of divine law, it is less able to undo what it has done. 'Unhappy man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord' (Rom 7:24–25)."

50. Memory shaped by the sensory experiences of the body is called "flesh" or "the habit of the soul made with flesh," and this is what Paul refers to as the locus of serving the law of sin in Rom 7:25 (*Mus* 6.11.33). Similarly, in *LA* 3.20.57, he speaks (under the hypothetical supposition of the preexistence of the soul) of souls sent to animate and govern "the body which is born under the penalty of sin of the first man, that is, mortality."

51. Fredriksen 1979, 146.

52. Even with the relatively more positive purpose of the Law emphasized in Tyconius (Fredriksen 2008, 162–63).

53. Bammel suggests that the heightened break between existence *sub lege* and *sub gratia* "may be influenced both by Augustine's own conversion experience and also by the Manichaean view of the complete disjunction between law and gospel" (Bammel 1992, 352). The "conversion experience" to which Bammel refers is, of course, that described in *Conf*, which itself may have been constructed by Augustine with an eye on Manichaean views, in which case the two bases Bammel identifies for Augustine's stress on the in-breaking of grace may be collapsed into one: the Manichaean emphasis on grace.

54. Fredriksen 1988, 90–91, highlights Augustine's apparent concern to identify the old and new covenants as working together for a salvational purpose, and to not permit a reading that might involve a dismissal of the Law as worthless. Cf. Fredriksen 1979, 123. On the radical shift entailed in Augustine's reading of Paul on the Law, see Stendahl, 206–7.

55. Manichaeans pointed to the inexplicable character of evil impulses as evidence of their alien nature, as they did to Augustine in interpreting for him his experience of the theft of the pears (*Conf*, book 2; cf. BeDuhn 2010, 38–40).

56. "If we do not have the will, we may think we will but in fact we do not" (*LA* 3.3.8). People who claim to be willing something they are not achieving may in fact not really be fully and wholeheartedly willing it (*LA* 1.14.30). Augustine will make good use of this idea in *Conf* book 8.

57. Augustine incautiously takes up the language of battle to his own detriment. Under the

Law, he says, the mind is "defeated" in its resistence to sin (*ExpGal* 46.4), and so is held guilty of transgression, since the lust of the flesh leads it captive into consenting to sin (*ExpGal* 46.9). But under grace there is no condemnation, "because the penalty is visited not on the one engaged in battle but on the one defeated in battle" (*ExpGal* 46.9). This martial analogy fails miserably, partaking in the same problems as those that beset generally his position that the state of human suffering and debility constitutes a punishment. Defeated troops are subjugated and imprisoned by the enemies against which they fought (here, sin), not by the one who sides with them in the contest (God) as in Augustine's rather tortured analogy. The Manichaeans made extensive use of the battle analogy, arguing that the defeated soul deserves sympathy and if possible rescue, not condemnation, from the God who sent it forth to battle evil.

58. The expression occurs thirteen times in *ExpGal*, marking its presence as a new part of Augustine's intellectual toolkit. Harrison completely misconstrues how Augustine uses this expression, and insists that already in his exegetical works on Paul prior to *Simpl* "faith is a gift . . . grace which enables them to believe" (Harrison 2006, 136).

59. Babcock 1979, 61.

60. Bammel 1992, 352.

61. Cf. *Mus* 6.11.33: "The flesh struggles against the mind, hindering its efforts to ascend to spiritual things. This is the meaning of the verse, 'In mind I serve the law of God, but in flesh the law of sin.' But when the mind is raised to spiritual things and is fixed there stably, the force of even this habit is broken, and being gradually repressed, is destroyed. For it was greater when we were following it; and when we restrain it, it is not entirely nothing, but it is certainly less. And so by firmly removing ourselves from every wanton motion, wherein lies the fault of the soul's essence, and with a restored delight in . . . reason, our whole life is turned to God." This passage shows how seamlessly Augustine could insert his prior optimistic and naturalistic views of human endeavor and ascent into the *sub gratia* phase of his new construct. The soul, "with the help of its God and Lord, draws itself away (*extrahit*) from the love of an inferior beauty, by subduing and killing its own habit that wars against it" (*debellans atque interficiens aduersus se militantem consuetudinem suam, Mus* 6.15.50).

62. Prendiville 1972, 79–80.

63. Similarly, the "law of sin" is "carnal habit" (*PropRom* 45–46).

64. See Drecoll 1999, 175, 180.

65. At this point in the development of his thinking, Augustine only asserts, without offering an explicit reason for, the delay in fully liberating the saved. An implicit rationale may be found in the following passage. "But these desires arise from the mortality of the flesh, which we bear from the first sin of the first man, whence we are born fleshly. Thus they will not cease save at the resurrection of the body, when we will have merited that transformation promised to us. Then there will be perfect peace. . . . For free will existed perfectly in the first man; we, however, prior to grace, do not have free will so as not to sin, but only so much that we do not want to sin. But with grace, not only do we want to act rightly, but we can; not by our own strength, but by the help of the Liberator. And at the resurrection he will bring us that perfect peace which follows from good will." (*PropRom*. 13–18.10–12). Augustine, therefore, connected the delay between grace and peace to the opportunity the person has under grace actually to perform good works, and by this means merit the final peace of salvation. Cf. *ExpGal* 38.3: "Such a person is called into the liberty of grace . . . (and) by means of that very grace begins to have merit."

66. Augustine quotes the text as it was given by Fortunatus in the debate.

67. Augustine had used the analogy of snow and water to dissolve apparently dualistic oppositions in Paul's rhetoric as early as his debate with Fortunatus (*Fort* 22), and reused it in *SermDom* 2.24.79.

68. Even when "Christ is in you," he adds, the body continues to make its demands on the

soul: "it disturbs the soul with the need for physical things and induces it to desire earthly things through certain agitations arising from that need" (*PropRom* 49).

69. Bezançon 1965, 150.

70. Fully aware that Manichaeans explained relapses into sin by the dualistic presence of the "old man," or "sin dwelling in us," Augustine moved to disallow any such excuse. Once it has entreated God in faith and received election, the soul is restored to a condition in which it can resist any temptation it chooses. "Even though certain fleshly desires fight against our spirit while we are in this life, to lead us into sin, nonetheless our spirit resists them because it is fixed in the grace and love of God, and ceases to sin. For we sin not by having this perverse desire but by consenting to it (*non . . . in ipso desiderio pravo, sed in nostra consensione*). Relevant here is what the same Apostle says: 'Do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies, so that you obey its desires' (Rom 6:12). Thus here he shows we still have desires but, by not obeying them, that we do not allow sin to reign in us" (*PropRom* 13–18.8–9).

71. Plumer 2003, 214 n237.

72. Burns 1980, 36.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid., 35.

75. See Drecoll 1999, 176.

76. "Once God calls, a person may accept or refuse the invitation [Prop. 52.10, 52.15, 54.13]. The subsequent gift of the Holy Spirit must be held and exercised by personal decision [Prop. 52.15]. The person whom God hardens by withdrawing his mercy has merited this punishment by an earlier rejection of the divine call [DQ 68.4–5; Prop. 54.8–9, 54.12, 54.16]. The justice of the divine election, the mercy and punishment, is firmly grounded in the foreknown human response to the call to faith" (Burns 1980, 39).

77. Similarly, Jerome, commenting on Eph 2:6–7 ("For you have been saved by grace by means of faith, and this is not from yourselves, for it is the gift of God, not from works, that no one may glory."), invokes Rom 9:16, and comments, "And this faith itself is not from yourselves but is from him who has called you. . . . It is not that human free will is removed . . . the very freedom of the will has God as its author."

78. In the *Retr*, Augustine changes his reading to give God the initiative. "God's mercy precedes even the will itself, and in the absence of this mercy, 'the will would not be prepared by the Lord' (Prov 8:35). To that mercy belongs also the very calling, which precedes faith as well" (*Retr* 1.26).

79. Cf. *EnPs* 5.17: "in order that they may become righteous, their calling comes first. It depends not on merits but on God's grace. . . . God's good will precedes our good will, in order that he may call sinners to repentance. . . . They were called, then came and, until they were led right through to their goal, endured all things manfully."

80. "Still, the decision to believe is not so autonomous that it cannot be attributed to the divine mercy. No one can believe unless he is admonished and called to do so [DQ 68.5; Prop. 54.3]. Nor has the sinner any good merits which earn the vocation [DQ 68.3; Prop. 52.14, 53.2]. Rather, if God withheld the call each one would perish in his sins [DQ 68.5]. Augustine argued that faith depends on God's mercy rather than on human willing, because without the vocation which divine mercy gives, human efforts would be futile [DQ 68.5; Prop. 54.1–4]. By a similar argument, Augustine attributed good works to God, whose gift makes such performance possible [Prop. 52.6, 53.5–7, 54.1–4, 56.2]" (Burns 1980, 39).

81. In an addition he made to *Free Choice* around this time, Augustine carefully addressed the possible predeterministic implications of God's foreknowledge, and argued that knowing that something will happen and causing it to happen are quite different things, and should not be confused with one another (*LA* 3.2.4–3.3.8). He left no doubt that he had Manichaean objections

in mind—responding, he said, to those who are too quick to excuse their sins instead of confessing them, who hold the opinion that there is no providence, who deny that there is any divine judgment, and who "deceive human judges when they are accused" (*LA* 3.2.5). Fortunatus had raised God's foreknowledge as a problem for the Genesis creation scenario, since it would seem to place responsibility with God for pursuing a course of action that he knew in advance would result in the sinful fall of humankind (*Fort* 28). Augustine argued that God uniquely exempts the human will from his otherwise omnipotent causative role in the cosmos—necessarily so, since otherwise the fact of punishment evident in the human condition would be unjust, because not the consequence of a free choice of the individual (*LA* 3.4.11, 3.10.29).

82. TeSelle 1970, 177.

83. Ibid., 162. Fredriksen 2008, 167–68, makes an important observation about how the verbal tenses in the Latin text of Rom 9:15 (quoting Ex 33:19: "I will have mercy on whom I will [already] have had mercy, etc.") provided Augustine with the before-and-after of God's two distinct interventions in *PropRom* 61.

84. Cf. *ExpRomInch* 1.1: "not that human beings, being just, believe; but that, justified through belief, they begin to live justly (*non, quia iusti erant homines, crederent, sed credendo iustificati deinceps iuste vivere inciperent*)."

85. TeSelle 1970, 164–65. He attributes to the commentaries of Ambrosiaster the decisive role in making such ideas more than mere pieties for Augustine.

86. "For the Law was not being fulfilled because there was not yet any love for righteousness itself—a love which would possess the mind by an inward delight, lest the mind be drawn to sin by the delight of temporal things" (*DQ* 66.6).

87. He gives as an example the beauty of a woman luring us to fornication contrasted with the beauty of continence—an image he reuses in *Conf* 8.11.27.

88. Augustine explains that "a movement of the soul (*motus animae*), conserving its force and not yet extinct, is said to be in the memory. And when the mind is intent on something else, it is as if that previous movement were not in the mind and were lost, unless before it dies away, it be renewed by some affinity (*uicinitate*) to something similar," i.e., some other stimulus to which the person is exposed (*Mus* 6.5.14). He seems to be carefully phrasing a general theory that could be applied to either positive or negative cases. For memory as a repository of sinful habits, restrained and destroyed by fixing the mind on spiritual things, see *Mus* 6.11.33.

89. Burns 1980, 37.

90. Babcock 1979, 64, who continues, "he has maintained at least this minimal correlation between God's grace and man's merit as a safeguard against the spectre of an arbitrary God whose grace is given to some and withheld from others for no discernible reason at all."

91. Fredriksen 1979, 172.

92. Ibid., 173.

93. Bammel 1992, 351.

94. Fredriksen 1979, 121 n9.

95. Drecoll 1999, 197–98.

96. Babcock 1979, 64–65.

97. This characterization of the circumstances of *Free Choice* makes use of Thoman Kuhn's model of paradigm change.

98. On this preliminary darkening shift in Augustine's thought, see the excellent exposition of P. Brown 2000, 139–50. Echoing Manichaean teaching, the only "unforgivable" sin is despairing of the hope of salvation (*ExpRomInch* 14).

99. P. Brown 2000, 141.

100. Ibid., 142.

101. Ibid.

102. For an analysis of earlier portions of *LA*, see BeDuhn 2010, 269–85.

103. On the late date of these additions, see Pincherle 1947, 93–94, 111 n29. In earlier sections of book 3, also written in response to Fortunatus's arguments, he had addressed the problem of God's apparent responsibility for human sin arising out of his foreknowledge (see *Fort* 28), either of specific sins humans would commit (4–11) or of the vulnerability humans would have to evil if given free will (12–15).

104. Pincherle 1947, 93–94, 111 n29, and TeSelle 1970, 156, also suggest a seam at this point of *LA* 3.

105. Babcock 1993, 226. Babcock identifies Augustine's engagement with Manichaean thought as the decisive motive in shifting his position.

106. He had cited 1 Cor 6:3 in *LA* 3.9.28 and 1 Cor 3:17 in 3.14.40. From this point forward, however, he cites Paul six times: 1 Tim 6:10 in 3.17.48; 1 Tim 1:13, Rom 7:18, and Gal 5:17 in 3.18.51; Eph 2:3 in 3.19.54; and Rom 1:22 in 3.24.72.

107. He defines the ignorance under which he believes humans suffer as "not seeing the sort of person one ought to be." He cites 1 Tim. 1:13, "I obtained mercy because I did it in ignorance" (not specifically cited by Fortunatus) which he matches to Ps 25:7, "Remember not the sins of my youth and of my ignorance."

108. Cf., "the great difficulty and close attention (*magna difficultate atque attentione*)" of *Mus* 6.5.14, which was probably redacted in the post-debate period.

109. Noted already by Alflatt 1975, 171.

110. For just how Augustine sees this carrying forward of sinfulness from the prior free act to the consequent constrained ones, see 3.19.54, discussed below.

111. See Drecoll 1999, 195–98.

112. Babcock 1993, 229.

113. Citing Augustine's radical extension of the category of sin in *LA* 3.19.54, Babcock comments, "But just here the critical question arises once again. Since sin in its derived and penal sense is not sin 'committed knowingly and with free will,' since it is not the expression of an unimpaired moral agency, there is reason to ask whether it genuinely counts as specifically moral evil for which we may legitimately be held liable to punishment" (Babcock 1993, 229).

114. See the similar analogy used by O'Connell 1987, 24.

115. I.e., the violent clamor of the physical body and its effect on the soul.

116. Babcock 1993, 228.

117. The problematization arose because he was momentarily adjusting his fall-of-the-soul scenario to other, more "historical" ideas of the connection between later humans and Adam and Eve that were pressed on him, literally overnight in the midst of his debate with Fortunatus, as possible answers to the challenge of Paul's language being cited against him. He was inclined to go along with such "popular" expressions as suitable to the audience, even while privately retaining his own more allegorical understanding of the relationship. When he returned to the problem in *LA* 3, therefore, he had to follow through on this possible alternative and see to it that it would lead to the same conclusion as his preferred scenario. He struggled to make it do so, and in *Conf* he remains noncommittal on either a historical collective preexistence in Adam, or a spiritual individual preexistence in the intelligible realm (*Conf* 10.20.29). O'Connell 1987, 65–72, likewise concludes that Augustine was being forced to take into account alternative ideas of the origins of the soul's association with the body and with sin prevalent among Catholics who do not necessarily share his Platonic thinking. But since Augustine appears to entertain such an alternative, at least at the level of his surface rhetoric, already on the second day of his debate with Fortunatus, I cannot agree with O'Connell that the exploration of alternative scenarios was an addition later than the rest of the argument of the second half of *LA* 3. Such a redactional explanation for the "shifts of argumentative register, inconsistencies, inner contradictions, and

repeated self-corrections" (O'Connell 1987, 66) of the last part of the work is unnecessary, because Augustine was simply a messy writer who often was talking through various lines of argument as he dictated his works. He did not compose something perfectly clear and orderly and then mess it up by sloppy additions. Rather, he did not polish the work enough to clean up all of its literary problems.

118. Cf. *LA* 3.20.58: God "would not lay the ignorance or the difficulty to the charge of the negligent or of those who wished to defend their sins on the ground of their infirmity. But he would justly punish them because they would rather abide in ignorance and difficulty than reach truth and a life free from struggle by zeal in seeking and learning, and by humility and prayer."

119. "Man's incapacity for the moral life is no longer the insuperable matter it was just a paragraph earlier" (O'Connell 1987, 30). Yet Augustine is careful not to contradict himself. The person is in ignorance about what is right, but may still know he or she is in ignorance; the person is incapable of doing actual good deeds, but is able to confess this inability.

120. Babcock 1993, 229–30.

121. "This is the sin of the soul, if, after the warning of our savior and his wholesome instruction, the soul shall not have segregated itself from its contrary and hostile race, adorning itself also with purer things. Otherwise, it cannot be restored to its own substance. For it is said: 'If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin. But now that I have come and spoken, and they have refused to believe me, they shall have no excuse for their sin' (Jn 15:22). From which it is perfectly plain that repentance has been given after the savior's advent, and after this knowledge of things by which the soul can, as if washed in a divine fountain from the filth and vices of the whole world as well as of the bodies in which the same soul dwells, be restored to the kingdom of God from where it has gone forth" (*Fort* 21).

122. Hence, I cannot agree with Babcock's assessment that the Manichaean dualist construct of identity and will "to all intents and purposes, eliminated the moral dimension of evil . . . and undermined their own talk of sin as well as of repentance" (Babcock 1988, 32). Babcock merely rephrases Augustine's own polemical claim here. It is not the moral dimension of the issues, but the forensic one that Manichaeism eliminates. Their discourse on moral responsibility displaces culpability as the central concern, and seeks to motivate moral action based on identification with the good divine nature, and put comparably less stress on self-reproach and fear of punishment. In Augustine's opinion, this was not an effective basis for moral reform.

123. Cf. *EnPs* 6.5: " 'Turn, Lord, and rescue my soul.' In the act of turning itself, the soul prays that God may also turn to it, as scripture says, 'Turn to me and I shall turn to you, says the Lord' (Zech 1:13). Or perhaps, 'Turn, Lord' is to be understood to mean 'make me turn,' since the soul in the very act of turning experiences difficulty and hardship. For our *conversio*, once completed, finds God ready and waiting . . . but while we are turning ourselves, that is, by a change of our old life we are refashioning our spirit, we find it a tough and uphill struggle to twist ourselves away from the gloom of earthbound desires, back to the serenity and tranquility of the divine light." Also *EnPs* 25(2).11 (in an explicitly anti-Manichaean context): "You turned to God to be enlightened, and by turning you became full of light; you were made luminous by that act of turning. . . . Do not think that you yourself are the light; no, he is the light."

124. Babcock 1993, 230. Cf. Fredriksen 2008, 168: "By preserving this thin sliver of human initiative—the elected sinner's response to God's call—Augustine likewise preserved God's justice . . . (and) provided a morally coherent explanation of the reason for divine discrimination."

125. Augustine recaps four possibilities in *LA* 3.21.59: propagation from parents, newly created for each body, preexistent and divinely sent into bodies, or "gliding in of its own accord"; and he refers back to "four opinions" in *Ep* 166.7. But his detailed discussion is a bit more complicated than that, and not always clear on whether a punitive or natural state is involved: (1) the "traducian" scenario deriving all souls from the original (fallen) soul of Adam and Eve, generated

like all other traits through physical inheritance, and so in the limiting conditions of fallenness, but not necessarily bearing individual guilt (*LA* 3.20.55), espoused by the lingering followers of Tertullian (see Babcock 1993, 229 n12); (2) only briefly mentioned, the idea of a single original soul whose sinful fall passes to all souls derived from it (*LA* 3.20.56); this could be taken as a restatement of the traducian view, with the addition of clear guilt for all derived souls, but also would apply to an allegorical reading of the Eden story, and a possibly nonmaterialist understanding of how souls derive from the original one; (3) the idea that souls are created individually as each body is born (*LA* 3.20.56), and have the obligation to overcome the limiting conditions which the body inherits from Adam's sin; (4) the scenario of preexistent souls being sent by divine command to govern bodies already vitiated by Adam's sin (*LA* 3.20.57), in which, likewise, the guiltless soul has the obligation to overcome its conditions; (5) the scenario of preexistent souls choosing to enter into bodies of their own accord (*LA* 3.20.58), which Augustine studiously avoids stating in terms of fall and sin. Therefore, only the second and most briefly mentioned scenario entails explicit individual culpability through the collective presence of all souls in an original sinning soul (and, indeed, this scenario appears to have been Augustine's own view). He conceded that, "None of these views may be rashly affirmed" (*LA* 3.21.59).

126. Cf. *Menoch* 186: "the first soul which flowed from the God of light received the fabric of the body so that it might rule it with its own reins," and so limit the actions of evil matter.

127. "Their mission is to govern well the body. . . . They are to discipline it with the virtues, and subject it to an orderly and legitimate servitude. . . . When they enter this life and submit to wearing mortal limbs, these souls must also undergo forgetfulness of their former existence and the labors of their present existence. . . . The flesh coming from a sinful stock causes this ignorance and toil to infect the souls sent to it . . . and the blame for them is to be ascribed neither to the souls nor to their creator. . . . he has given them the insight which every soul possesses, that it must seek to know what to its disadvantage it does not know. . . . By the law without and by direct address to the heart within, he has commanded that effort be made, and has prepared the glory of the blessed city for those who triumph over the devil. . . . No little glory is to be gained from the campaign to overcome the devil. . . . Whoever yields to love of the present life and takes no part in that campaign can by no means justly attribute the shame of his desertion to the command of his king. Rather, the lord of all will appoint his place with the devil, because he loved the base hire wherewith he bought his desertion."

128. "But if souls existing in some place are not sent by the Lord God, but come of their own accord to inhabit bodies, it is easy to see that any ignorance or toil which is the consequence of their own choice cannot in any way be ascribed as blame to the creator. . . . He would not lay the ignorance or the difficulty to the charge of the negligent or of those who wished to defend their sins on the ground of their infirmity. But he would justly punish them because they would rather abide in ignorance and difficulty than reach truth and a life free from struggle by zeal in seeking and learning, and by humility in prayer and confession."

129. "The exploration of various possibilities in De lib. arb. . . . simply shows that the same conclusions follow from any of them" (Burns 1980, 23 n41).

130. Thus, attempts to see Augustine committed to a traducian "original sin" model already at this point of his career (e.g., Fredriksen 2008, 170–71, standing in here for a very broad swath of Augustinian studies; contrast Fredriksen 1979, 168) are severely anachronistic, and do not sufficiently attend to how he can use "nature" and even "our nature" as a shorthand reference to the physical nature of the body, without committing himself to a particular view of the soul's separate origin and responsibility for sin. In *Simpl* 1.1.10, distinguishing between *tradux mortalitatis* and *adsiduitas voluptatis*, he remarks, "With the former we are born into this life, while the latter we augment over the course of our lives. These two things, which we may call nature and habit, create a very strong and unconquerable covetousness once they have been joined together, which

he refers to as 'sin' and says dwells in his flesh—that is, possesses a certain sovereignty and rule, as it were." Cf. *EnPs* 7.9: "the lowest part of the human body and also the region where the pleasure of sex dwells, by which human nature is passed on from generation to generation through a succession of offspring"; *DQ* 66.5: "for the habits of the flesh have prevailed, as well as the natural fetter with which we have been begotten since the time of Adam"; *PropRom* 45–46.7: "Paul calls the law of sin the mortal condition which has its source in the transgression of Adam, because of which we are born mortal. And from this falling-down of the flesh, concupiscence of the flesh troublingly entices us. About this concupiscence Paul says in another place, 'We were by nature children of wrath . . .' " (note Augustine's implicit acceptance of Fortunatus's understanding of "nature" as a reference to the physical body, not the soul). He described his previous position, which he was now prepared to repudiate, in *Ep* 166 to Jerome, circa 415: "each soul is, according to the deserts of its actions in an earlier state of being, enveloped in the body allotted to it in this life," and, consequently, "to 'die in Adam' means to suffer punishment in that flesh which was derived from Adam."

131. *Free Choice* continues with a series of responses to miscellaneous Manichaean challenges Augustine can anticipate to his position. (1) How can suffering and death be God's punishment for sin, when infants and animals, who are completely innocent, undergo these same afflictions? (*LA* 3.23.66–69); (2) As Fortunatus had argued, how could the good soul turn to sin and evil if left to its own devices, unless by coming into contact with an evil alien to its very nature? (*LA* 3.24.72); (3) If Adam fell because of the devil, why did the devil fall? (*LA* 3.25.75–76).

132. I agree with O'Connell 1987, 23ff., therefore, that Augustine is much clearer in hindsight about what he was doing in *LA* 3 than his presentation in that work itself evidences. *DP* simplifies, as any brief summary does, and gets to the essence of the project in this section of *LA* 3, telling us more the intention than the execution, which O'Connell and others agree is cloudy at best. Yet one must also consider the possibility that this clarity of intention was one achieved only in hindsight. Nevertheless, I consider it clear in *LA* itself that Augustine prefers the punitive explanation of the present human condition over the natural one, which he entertains hypothetically to show how the soul would still be guilty under its terms. The latter demonstration fails because in order to make it work, Augustine has to contradict the acknowledgment of precisely those conditions of disability he is trying to explain. Because Augustine cannot make all of these loose ends tie together, he appears to be vacillating about his own position on all of the essential issues. This state of logical disarray prefaces his radical rethinking of the whole problem in the coming two years.

133. Babcock 1993, 230.

134. Ibid., 227.

135. A point made well by Madec 1989.

136. It is important to note that in *Retr* Augustine himself is not so much making the claim—as Madec's central argument would have it—that he privately held his later ideas but for various reasons did not reveal them, as he is asserting that his earlier writings themselves actually mean the same as his later views. Harrison is closer to this latter position.

CHAPTER 7. ACCUSED

1. Augustine's biographer Possidius says that Valerius had received the tacit support of Aurelius, bishop of Carthage, for Augustine's ordination, and popped the idea to Megalius during a visit of the latter, along with other local bishops, to Hippo (*Vita* 8.2–3). Perhaps this occurred on the return of the bishops from Carthage in 394; or perhaps there was a small local conclave in lieu of the canceled full council in 395. Possidius omits all reference to Megalius's initial opposition

to Augustine's promotion. Possidius himself succeeded Megalius as bishop of Calama (but not as primate, a position that passed to the next most senior bishop in Numidia) in 397.

2. The letter would continue to cast a shadow over Augustine's career. It was introduced into evidence by Petilian once again at the Conference of Carthage in 411, to challenge Augustine's credentials as a validly ordained bishop (*Gesta Coll. Carth.* 3.234–47; *Brev. Conl.* 3.7.9).

3. This date has prevailed over 395 since the arguments of Trout 1991.

4. Cf. the episcopal investigative commission formed to look into charges against Priscillian and Instantius at Bordeaux a decade earlier, reported by Sulpicius Severus, *Chronicle* 2.49: "Instantius was enjoined to plead his cause; and after he was found unable to clear himself, he was pronounced unworthy of the office of bishop."

5. For a complementary treatment of this subject, see BeDuhn 2008.

6. E.g., the proposal of Madec that Paulinus of Nola had requested such an account from Augustine (Madec 1996, 76). But Paulinus's request was for a life of Alypius, whom he knew personally, not of Augustine, whom he did not know. Although he congratulated Augustine on his elevation to the episcopacy, and congratulated him on some of his writings, his interest in him was not as intense as often supposed, as attested by Augustine's complaint (*Ep* 42 and *Ep* 45) that Paulinus does not answer his letters. Indeed, during the crucial period of the composition of *Confessions*, Paulinus was simply not in the picture as an active correspondent of Augustine's, having failed to send letters in the summer travel seasons of 397 and 398 (see McNamara 1964, 147–52, on the generally cool relationship between Augustine and Paulinus).

7. Wundt 1923, esp. 166–78. More recently, Hombert has revived Wundt's hypothesis in part, highlighting the same verbal parallels between *EnPs* 36 (3) (which now is more securely dated to 403) and *Conf* book 10, along with additional parallels in books 10–13 to works composed circa 403, and suggesting a protracted composition of *Conf* book-by-book stretched from 397 to 403 (presumably *not* motivated initially by a defense against Donatist attacks, as Wundt would have it), with Augustine rapidly composing books 10–13 in the latter year (Hombert 2000, 9–23). The parallels evinced, however, cannot be shown to necessarily precede similar material in *Conf*, nor to require composition simultaneous to *Conf*, so Hombert's argument cannot rule out the alternative scenario that the cited parallels echo *Conf* shortly after its completion when similar subjects or biblical texts come up for discussion.

8. Chadwick 1993, 27–28. He cites the full set of Donatist material familiar from Wundt's argument, but by adding a reference to *Ep* 38 to Profuturus of Cirta he shows that he is also thinking of criticism internal to the Catholic community. Cf. Chadwick 1994.

9. "It was not by any means unknown for Catholic clergy and laymen to be secretly Manichees. Conversion from Catholicism to Manichaeism and vice versa . . . was not rare at this time" (Frend 1952, 256–57; cf. P. Brown, 163).

10. Frend 1952, 236; cf. Frend 1954, 864–65. The connection did not begin with Augustine's generation. A presumably (proto-)Catholic bishop (probably of Thagaste, but possibly of a neighboring town visited on pilgrimage) consulted by Monnica in the mid-370s had been raised as a Manichaean (*Conf* 3.12.21). On the pervasiveness of crypto-Manichaeism in the Catholic Church, see Stroumsa 1986, 1983a.

11. Suspicions about Jerome had reached a critical point at just this time, with the circulation, beginning in 393, of his *Contra Jovinianum*, with what many considered excessively ascetic stances reminiscent of Manichaeism.

12. Not all of these "conversions" would have been immediate or complete, and many of these individuals maintained an interest in the sort of texts and ideas that led Priscillian to the executioner's block. See, e.g., *Ep* 64.3.

13. This would presumably be Crescentianus, who is identified as primate of Numidia in the acts of the Council of Carthage on 28 August 397. But his claim to the position was disputed.

14. Chadwick 1994, 159 n48.

15. Petilian appears to have been spurred on in his attacks by the opportunity afforded him by the arrival in Africa of fresh anti-Manichaean legislation, *Cod. Theod*. 16.5.35 issued in Milan in the name of the emperors Arcadius and Honorius on 17 May 399 to the military vicar of Africa, a man with the intimidating name of Dominator.

16. See Courcelle 1968, 238–45; Decret 1978, 7–8.

17. Frend 1952, 256.

18. Already in *Sol*, Augustine had considered the entire material, sensory world the realm of *mendacium* (*Sol* 2.9ff.), and in *GCM* had viewed the fall as the loss of the transparency of being that leaves no space for deception, and entering into the opaque embodiment (the "coverings of lying," *cooperimenta mendacii*) of separation and lies (*GCM* 2.16.24). He quotes John 9:44, and remarks, "The one who speaks lies speaks 'of his own'. . . . Whoever, therefore, is turned away from that Truth, and turned toward himself . . . is darkened over with lying." This same transparency of being by which each other's thoughts would be directly known would be restored in the ethereal, angelic bodies made of light that the saved would possess after the resurrection (*DQ* 47).

19. See Cole-Turner 1980.

20. *Ep* 28 can be dated to 395, contemporaneous with *Lying*, and before the episcopal commission had cleared Augustine and Megalius had approved his ordination to the episcopacy. It was composed after Alypius had been made bishop of Thagaste (*Ep* 28.1.1), but before Profuturus had been named bishop of Cirta (*Ep* 71.1.2). Alypius's ordination occurred in 394 or 395, and Profuturus's while Augustine was still a priest. Augustine had asked Profuturus to carry the letter to Jerome in Bethlehem. Profuturus apparently canceled his journey when he was called upon to become bishop of Cirta (*Ep* 71.1.2), and the letter was passed on to another, apparently less reliable messenger.

21. Hill 1997, 167–79.

22. Interestingly, Augustine takes 1 Cor 7 as another example of a Pauline passage he would not wish people to read as less than forthright. Some, it seems, had suggested that Paul's affirmation of marriage was only a concession to human weakness, and that his own clearly stated preference for celibacy should be understood to be the rule he wants followed (*SermDolb* 162C.14). Such an interpretation had been offered by the Manichaeans (*Faust* 30)—and by Jerome. Cf. *SermDolb* 12/354A.8, from the same period, where the same possible argument is vetted.

23. G. Matthews 1972, 172.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., 174.

26. Hill 1997, 54 n3, questions a section of the text ("that is, from the body which consists of earthy matter. For the soul is divine, and with it he is truthful, not a liar"), which is omitted in a quotation of this part of the sermon by Bede, as "a clause which cannot possibly have been spoken by Augustine, but which must represent the marginal comment of a misguided copyist, whose bad theology was that of what one may call a coarse Platonist." For this use of Jn 8:44—originally spoken about the devil—as the definition of human lying as speaking from one's own resources, see also *Serm* 166.3. Augustine's reading of this verse has been colored by Plotinus's emphasis on individuation and self-reliance (or, for Augustine, *proprium*) as the key to turning from God and falling into time and matter (Plotinus, *Ennead* 6.4–5).

27. He perhaps intends to sum up in this phrase the entire Manichaean claim to know from one's own intrinsic insight as a divine soul, and to be able to establish truth by means of human reason, rather than by submission to belief. That the Manichaeans are in mind here is supported by allusions to the characteristically Manichaean presumption actually to help God, even to save Christ crucified in all of creation, by which they "set their hearts on his banquet" (Prov 23:3; *Serm* 28A.5) and, by approaching God's table with pride rather than humility, "attributing

more to yourself than you know you are worth—that's the deceitful life, that's hypocrisy, that's boastfulness, not obedience. . . . 'For whoever thinks he is anything, when he is nothing, is deceiving himself' (Gal 6:3). Will you really pay back such a great man as that from your own means. . . . will you really prepare the same sort of things from your own resources? Yes, you're stretching yourself, a pauper, against a rich man, and not rather restraining yourself in your thoughts, so that he may recognize you as needing assistance, and not find you deserving damnation. Who is this great man, whom you are seeking, it seems, to provide for from your own resources. . . . Who is he—do you want to know? 'If you fix your eye on him, he will nowhere appear' (Prov. 23:5). . . . He will remain hidden, you see, he won't show himself; you won't grasp him, won't understand him. Acknowledge yourself as being less than he is, in order to be able to understand him as greater than you" (*Serm* 28A.6–7).

28. Mead 1964, 284.

29. Butler 1997, 132.

30. Ibid., 133.

31. Foucault 1979, 187.

32. Ibid., 170.

33. Mead 1934, 138.

34. Foucault 1979, 194.

35. A similarly short account appears in *Against the Fundamental Epistle* 3.3, but now framed in heightened devotional rhetoric similar to that which appears in *Conf*, of God's call of his soul and healing of his error. The date of *Against the Fundamental Epistle* thus forms part of the evidence that should be considered in determining when, and therefore under what circumstances, Augustine first began to tell his story this way.

36. O'Donnell 1992, Vol. 2, notes several signs of a compositional seam here: "This is the most formal preface since Bk.1. . . . And the first appearance in the text of *confessiones* referring to the present work" (281); "The renewed emphasis on *confessio* is one sign among several that a hinge in the work's structure has been reached. Where the first four books have carried us through some twenty-eight years, the next five will cover the five years 383–7 " (281). He identifies a number of echoes of phrasing and repetitions of key biblical citations found at the very beginning of the work, which lead him to conclude that "there is a new beginning here" (290–91). Another distinctive literary feature is the use of imperatives addressed to God in prayer (281). Yet O'Donnell does not entertain the possibility that such characteristics are indications of a shorter original version of the *Conf*. "There is no evidence that the work ever circulated in a form other than the one we have" (O'Donnell 1992, vol. 1, xxxii). Knauer 1955, 153 also notes an independence in this part of the *Conf*: "Die fünf Bücher 5–9 sind also durch Psalmzitate in ihren Prooemien innig miteinander verbunden und sie werden dadurch deutlich gegen den ersten Teil der Konfessionen (1.-4. Buch) und die vier folgenden Bücher (10–13) abgegrenzt."

37. On the need to account for the entire period of absence from Africa, see Wundt 1923, 178.

38. Courcelle 1968, 41–43, 188–201; A. Matthews 1980, 8–9.

39. Morrison, 10. He cites the rhetorical advice of Quintilian, one of the sources of Augustine's own rhetorical training, that one use indirect response to accusations when it is dangerous to speak frankly (*Institutes* 9.2.65–66). Morrison further comments, "Augustine's suppression of evidence indicates that he also considered the *Confessions* a work of art, if not also of artifice, and one designed to attest his spiritual authority" (Morrison, 18).

40. Courcelle 1968, 43–46; McWilliam 1990, 18.

41. McWilliam 1990, 18.

42. See Chapter 10, below.

43. Lekkerkerker 1942, 131; Bolgiani 1956, 70–71; Prendiville 1972, 82; Drecoll 1999, 2.

44. To be sure, Augustine stresses here that the will was his alone primarily against the Manichaean alternative, rather than against a role of God in it. But that he could do so in such broad terms suggests all the more that he did not have in mind a carefully crafted account of grace in line with the position of *To Simplician* 1.2.

45. Two considerations offered by Prendiville urge continued caution about attributing passages showing "middle-period" synergistic content (which he acknowledges to be present in *Conf*) to a time before the ideological revolution of *Simpl* 1.2. First, Augustine's anti-Manichaean purpose in *Conf* may have prompted him to retrench from a position (such as that of *Simpl* 1.2) that yielded so much to Manichaean views (Prendiville 1972, 81). Second, Augustine continued to use rhetoric more aligned with his earlier views on habit and will than with the predestination position of *Simpl* 1.2 in the years following the latter's composition (82–83). Indeed, we should not forget that even *Simpl* 1.1 retains the earlier view juxtaposed to the development of 1.2, and we cannot count on Augustine consistently applying his new, momentary insight in situations where other considerations and tropes may prevail. There is a delay, for instance, in bringing his use of Rom 7 in line with the new position taken on Rom 9.

46. O'Donnell 1992, 2: 300.

47. BeDuhn 2010, 219–20.

48. On the shadow of Manichaeism hanging over the death of Priscillian of Avila, with its associations of social marginality, secret society, and sorcery, see Burrus 1995, 49, 65–69, 95–98.

49. O'Donnell 1985, 82.

50. P. Brown 2000, 162.

51. Ibid., 165.

CHAPTER 8. DISCOVERIES

1. The work is listed in *Retr* first among those written after he became coadjutor bishop of Hippo, and is described as having been composed at the beginning of his episcopate in *PS* 1.4.8 (*scripsi in ipso exordio episcopatus mei*).

2. The six questions of *Simpl* book 2 all concern passages from the books of Samuel and Kings that fall under Manichaean critique of the religious sensibilities they convey, and indeed this appears to be the only thing they have in common: 1 Sam16:14 ("And there was an evil spirit of the Lord in Saul"); 15:11 ("I regret having made Saul king"); 28:7–19 (paraphrased as "the unclean spirit that was in the necromancer was able to bring it about that Samuel was seen by Saul and spoke with him"); 2 Sam 7:18 ("King David went in and sat down before the Lord"); 1 Kings 17:20 ("O Lord, witness of this widow . . . you have acted badly by killing her son"); 1 Kings 22:19–23 (paraphrased as "the spirit of lying" in the prophets "by which Ahab was deceived"). None of these passages had been addressed in Augustine's answer to similar criticism of the OT in *Adim*, which Augustine never completed but probably put into circulation nonetheless. It is possible, therefore, that Simplician knew *Adim* as well as the *Disputations* of Adimantus, and was asking about a section of the latter work Augustine had not covered.

3. See Ambrose, *Epistula* 7 (37).

4. Burns 1980, 44 n193, and Drecoll 1999, 207–8, emphasize that *Simpl* can only be properly understood against the background of Augustine's confrontation with Manichaeism.

5. Fredriksen 1979, 116.

6. He sent *Simpl* off before he learned of Ambrose's death (April 397) and Simplician's ordination to succeed him. So the work probably went out with the first ships of the season. Augustine was packing up at the time for an extended lecture tour of the Carthage churches through the summer.

7. The fact that Augustine apparently composed the text in sequence from beginning to end (at least in book 1), as he often did other compositions, augments its value for observing an actual development or change mid-performance, as it were, for all intents and purposes analogous to his mid-debate adjustment of position against Fortunatus.

8. Fredriksen 1995, 307.

9. He is acutely aware of Pauline passages taken by the Manichaeans decisively to associate the Law with evil: Rom 5:20, 2 Cor 3:6–7, 1 Cor 15:56, Rom 7:4–6 (*Simpl* 1.1.15).

10. "But it may be replied"—e.g., as it was by Faustus (*Faust* 19.2–3)—"that here the apostle is speaking of another law, the law of Christ, and not the law which was given to the Jews. . . . That is the unspeakably blind perversity of the Manichaeans" (*Simpl* 1.1.16). Cf. Bammel 1992, 354 n53.

11. On this tradition, initiated by Origen, see Roukema 1988. Augustine's commentary on Galatians follows this tradition, for which it is probably dependent on Jerome's commentary (Bammel 1992, 353, who does not rule out the possible influence of the commentaries on Galatians of Marius Victorinus and "Ambrosiaster").

12. Augustine finds proof that Paul is speaking in character, rather than of himself, throughout Rom 7, in his statement that, "I lived without the Law once"; since Paul himself was born under the Law, he must be speaking in the voice of the human race (*Simpl* 1.1.4). Later, Augustine would repudiate this idea that Paul spoke in character, rather than of himself personally (*DEP* 1.8.13–14).

13. Cf. *PropRom* 61.6–7: "Therefore God did not elect those doing good works, but those who believed, with the result that he enabled them to do good works. It is we who believe and will, but he who gives to those believing and willing the ability to do good works"; also *PropRom* 52.3: "each man turns himself (*convertat*) to the aid of the liberator, even if the Devil himself, who wants to hold man forever in his power, fights against him."

14. The universality of sinfulness results from the common propensities of fallen embodiment found in all people, rather than from individual responsibility for the initial fall of Adam (Burns 1980, 42).

15. See TeSelle 1970, 158–59. "Mortality," the "second nature" of humans, does not mean for Augustine merely the burden of death, but the burden of physicality itself, with its dependence on the sensory world through which the will falls into the habit of being misdirected from its proper, intelligible object of desire, which Paul calls a "law in my limbs" (*Simpl* 1.1.13–14).

16. *peccatum originale*: the expression appears here for the first time in Augustine, according to the order of his works in *Retr*; cf. *Conf* 5.9.16. In both works, the term refers only to Adam's sin resulting in the mortality of the body, and does not yet bear the meaning of Augustine's later idea of collective responsibility in Adam's sin.

17. "Augustine could not assert a transmission of guilt by the flesh in the midst of his controversy with the Manichees" (Burns 1980, 42 n182).

18. "Mais ce combat du bien et du mal, cet assaut que se livrent en l'homme deux principes adverses qui le déchirent, n'apparaissent-ils pas comme une simple intériorisation du dualisme cosmique des manichéens, qui s'appuyaient précisément sur ces textes de saint Paul? Combien paradoxale est alors cette analyse d'Augustin, à l'époque même où il combat avec tant d'acharnement les ouvrages manichéens et les sectateurs qui professent à Hippo! Certaines formules sur la passivité avec laquelle l'âme est entraînée au mal par une force qu'elle ne paraît pas capable de vaincre, offrent parfois une analogie troublante avec les expressions manichéennes" (Bezançon 1965, 148).

19. Babcock 1994, 186.

20. Fredriksen 2008, 175.

21. "But that mercy was given to the preceding merit of faith, and that hardening [of Pharaoh's heart] to preceding impiety, so that we work both good deeds through the gift of God and

evil through his chastisement. Nevertheless, man's free will remains, whether for belief in God so that mercy follows, or for impiety followed by punishment" (*PropRom* 62.12–13*).*

22. One possible conversation partner for Augustine in working out his position on Rom 9 was the tract *De inductione cordis pharaonis et de vasis honoris et contumeliae*, dated to the 390s, for which Pelagius has been proposed as a possible author. Rufinus had begun translating Origen around the same time. Such works definitely were part of the controversy that prompted Simplician's questions to Augustine, even if Augustine himself did not have access to them.

23. "If we are to attain a better mapping of Augustine's thought, perhaps we ought to attend to the discontinuities between these Pauline legacies, and especially to the discontinuity that Augustine himself saw as a watershed, his rereading of the Pauline corpus in the mid-390s. Those years between 395 and 400 . . . are as obscure as they are crucial. It is here, in this brief spell, that we need to look for a Paul who engendered a despair in Augustine's mind on the other side of which Augustine would find another Paul, a new Paul who could give him a new hope" (Markus 1990c, 225).

24. Babcock 1979, 65. Similarly, Fredriksen 1988, 94: "Augustine repudiates precisely that exegesis of Romans 9 that he had so painstakingly worked out such a short time earlier."

25. Babcock 1979, 67–74, responding to Pincherle 1947, 185–88, who had argued for an ongoing role for Tyconius in these further developments of Augustine's thought. The matter is reviewed also by Fredriksen 1988, 99–101. She concludes that Tyconius's position more closely matches Augustine's in his earlier *PropRom* than in his later *Simpl*. Babcock 1990, 254–55, points to *DC* 3.33.46 for Augustine's most direct summary of how he understood Tyconius's view, and to *Simpl* 1.2.5 for his implicit rejection of that view, which also entailed a rejection of his own duplication of Tyconius in *PropRom* 60. "Those who have seen in the *Liber regularum* an anticipation of Augustine's mature doctrines of grace and election are, I believe, quite wrong" (Babcock 1982, 1213–14).

26. Fredriksen 1988, 102. Unfortunately, Fredriksen appears largely to abandon this insight in a later publication, where she attributes Augustine's exegetical shift to the close attention he gave to Paul's letter to the Galatians in composing a commentary on it (Fredriksen 2002, 94).

27. Babcock 1990, 256–57. He also points out that arguments that emphasize Augustine's discovery of new relevant biblical texts (such as the persecuting Saul/Paul of Acts, suddenly changed by God's hand), need to account for the fact that Augustine already knew such texts and had integrated them into his earlier position, before reusing them in light of his new theories (Babcock 1990, 256).

28. W. H. C. Frend suggests that Augustine's "early manhood as a member of a sect permeated by ideas of Grace and predestination" helps to explain his reaction to later Pelagianism, and notes Fortunatus's use of Eph 2:1–18 in support of "the necessity of prevenient grace for personal salvation" (Frend 1953, 25 and 21).

29. Burns 1980, 39.

30. Rom 9 appears scarcely at all among Manichaean NT references, and several verses contain the kind of content they typically identified as interpolations. Augustine reports that they regarded Rom 9:20 as such an interpolation (*DQ* 68.1); Fortunatus, however, makes use of it in their debate (*Fort* 26).

31. Burns 1980, 37. On the difficulties of Rom 9 for the exegetical tradition prior to Augustine, see Wiles 1967, 99–103.

32. Cf. *PropRom* 60.9: God "elects faith (*elegit fidem*)."

33. Babcock 1979, 62–63.

34. Innovation does not imply an absence of prior groundwork, whether conceptual or merely rhetorical. For example, in *PropRom* 47.55, Augustine says, "For not all who are called are called according to purpose, for this purpose pertains to the foreknowledge and predestination of

God. Nor has God predestined anyone except the one whom God has foreknown would believe and would follow the call." We do not find here as yet a differentiation of two calls, but a single call that God knows will serve a purpose in some cases and not in others. By this construct, God's justice is preserved in that he issues the call to all, despite foreknowing that it will be to no purpose in some cases. The innovation of the congruent call in *Simpl* destroys this rationale.

35. Burns 1980, 42–43; TeSelle 1970, 179.

36. See *PropRom* 61.2; *ExpRomInch* 9.6; *DQ* 68.5.

37. Drecoll 1999, 245–46, emphasizes this continuity with Augustine's previous anti-Manichaean exegesis of Paul.

38. Burns 1980, 43.

39. Ibid., 41 and n177.

40. Ibid., 44.

41. Ibid., 44 n193. His minimization of *internal* admonition in Augustine's construct at this time has been criticized by, among others, Katayanagi 1990.

42. "In the early dialogues, the Pauline commentaries and especially the *Confessiones*, Augustine presumed and asserted that the human spirit is endowed with an inalienable desire for God as the source of its life and happiness. This drive toward God may be distracted and perverted into the quest for human and corporeal satisfactions, but it perdures and serves as the foundation of the working of the grace which calls, moves and guides a person in the way of salvation" (Burns 1980, 184).

43. See Burns 1980, 50–51.

44. Ibid., 184–85.

45. Fredriksen 2008, 175.

46. Drecoll 1999, 244–47, wishing to avoid characterizing the change as a "break" in Augustine's thought, points to a parallelism between Augustine's shrinkage of the will's range of action down to the single free act of faith in his previous anti-Manichaean exegesis of Paul, and the shrinkage here in *Simpl* of the degree of self-initiative in the act of faith—in both cases motivated by anti-Manichaean concerns.

47. Nor could the will be reclaimed in Augustine's new theory as it was in Manichaeism, by asserting that its necessary response is determined by its inherent nature, rather than by constraint. For, in Augustine's construct of the congruent call, the common goodness of their created nature does not produce a common positive response, nor does the common sinfulness of their "second nature" determine a common rejection of the call.

48. Fredriksen 1988, 102, suggests it was not Paul's theology in the passages supposedly under discussion but his (auto)biography that provided the theoretical key to Augustine's discovery of the congruent call: Paul's self-characterization in Galatians (see *ExpGal* 7–9), 1 Tim 1:13, or Tit 3:3, or the Acts narrative of Saul intent on evil up to the very moment that God stepped in on the road to Damascus (cited in *Simpl* 1.2.22; on the prominence of this in Augustine's works at this time, see Ferrari 1982). Babcock is dubious, and sees Augustine's use of the Saul episode as illustrative of a position he has come to on other grounds, rather than as something that induced him to come to that position (Babcock 1990, 256).

49. Augustine phrased the point even more explicitly a number of years later: How could Paul have a good will, desiring to do good though unable, in the midst of his persecution of Christians, which was broken only with God's call (*PS* 1.4.8)?

50. Babcock 1982, 1210. He continues, "It is not that persons cannot, from their own resources, know the good; nor is it that they do not wish to avoid the evil. The role of the law, after all, is precisely to bring the knowledge of sin; and to know sin is to know that it ought to be avoided. But Augustine could find nothing in Paul to suggest that a person has the power to translate a knowing of the good into a doing of the good."

51. See Rom 6:6, 7:22; 1 Cor 15:47–49; 2 Cor 4:16; Eph 2:15, 3:16; 4:22–24; Col 3:9–10; cf. *PsBk* 3.31; 46.18; 88.2; 150.29;167.23–24. He also cites Paul's use of the image of spiritual birth or rebirth negating the characteristics of our physical birth in 1 Cor 4:15; Gal 1:15–16, 3:27–28, 4:19; Eph 4:22–24; Col 3:9–11.

52. Cf. *Keph* 86, 215.1–4: "Understand this: The soul that assumes the body, when the Light *Nous* will come to it, shall be purified by the power of wisdom and obedience and it is cleansed and made a new man"; *PsBk* 173.13–22: "O *Nous* of Light, sun of my heart . . . light to my soul. You are my witness, that I have no comfort except you. . . . The lamp that you kindled, I have not allowed it to go out through the oil of faith. My man that is within me is like you in his image. My man that is outside me receives grace through your word. My spirit is your lodging, my soul is your place of rejoicing." Cf. also Alexander of Lycopolis 24.35: "They say that [the *nous*] is added later and belongs to the things which enter from outside and join in."

53. These "purer realities" with which the soul is to "adorn itself" probably refer to the five "gifts" or "graces" of the Light *Nous* mentioned in Keph 38.

54. Cf. *Keph* 9, 40.32–33: "Then, when [he receives] the right hand, the Light *Nous* shall draw him to him, and cause [him] to approach the church." John Chrysostom reads the verse in the manner of the earlier Augustine, regarding the act of drawing as divine aid given to one who already wills to come: "In reality, this does not take away free will from us, but shows our need for help, because he was pointing out here that it is not anyone who happens to do so who comes, but that it is a person enjoying the benefit of such help."

55. He draws on the *argos logos* ("lazy argument") deployed by Platonists against Stoic determinism, asking: What is the use of education, when we could become good even when asleep? Or what is the point of exhorting the auditors to moral improvement, if moral perfection could be bestowed on them even while they are whoring? Augustine, of course, runs afoul of this argument with his ultimate predestinarian position.

56. Puech 1968, 299.

57. In the technical theology of the Coptic *Kephalaia*, the Light *Nous* is an emanation of Jesus, an aspect of his soteriological role concretized in a distinct entity. Otherwise, the Light *Nous* is associated with Jesus in a triad that also includes the Light Virgin. The consolidated and simplified identification of the Light *Nous* and Jesus in the Latin Manichaica is found already in the Greek text of Alexander of Lycopolis 4.7.14.

58. For call and response as the two constituents of the counsel of life, see *Keph* 16, 54.9ff.; 18, 59.29f.; 19, 63.2f.; 28, 81.1ff; 72, 178.1f; etc.

59. See *Keph* 16, 50.1–5; 16, 54.9–55.10; 19, 61.25–30; 28, 81.1–6; 72, 178.1–5.

60. See *Keph* 7, 35.27–34; 19, 61.25–30; 38, 92.7–8.

61. *Keph* 1, 10.8–11.2; 1, 11.35–12.8; 9, 40.24–33; 90, 224.28ff.; *Hom* 3.24–28.

62. This striking parallel to Augustine's own distinctive emphasis on the church as the embodiment of Christ's pedagogical incarnation and the call of God deserves further exploration.

63. *si uellet etiam ipsorum misereri, posset ita uocari, quomodo illis aptum esset, ut et mouerentur et intellegerent et sequerentur.*

64. Cf. Tyconius 3.9, where faith is defined as knowing that God is just.

65. This merely repeats what he had already argued in *DQ* 68: "By all means he has mercy on whom he wants, and he hardens whom he wants, but this will of God cannot be unjust. For it springs from deeply hidden merits, because, even though sinners themselves have constituted a single mass on account of the sin of all [*generale peccatum*], still it is not the case that there is no difference among them. Therefore, although they have not yet been made righteous, there is some preceding thing in sinners whereby they are rendered worthy of righteousness, and again, there is some preceding thing in other sinners whereby they are worthy of obtuseness" (*DQ* 68.4).

66. "At this point . . . Augustine continued to rely on the inevitable consequences of

mortality and concupiscence to make all humans guilty of personal sin" (Burns 1980, 42). Burns suggests that Augustine was held back from the idea of transmission of guilt through descent because it would play too much into Manichaean hands (Burns 1980, 42 n182). But note that the idea of the inevitability of sin due to embodiment with its attendant limitations and concupiscence which Augustine holds at this time is actually the view of the Manichaeans, whereas his later idea of original sin is antithetical to it.

67. The Pauline image also attracted the attention of "Ambrosiaster," who makes a similarly eccentric reading of Paul's neutral image of raw material in a negative direction. Ambrosiaster writes earlier than Augustine, and it has been argued (by e.g., Buonaiuti 1917, 1927; Bastiaensen 1987, 1996) that Augustine depends on him. We must wait some years, however, for Augustine clearly to tip his hand to Ambrosiaster for his connection of the *massa* of sinful humanity to Paul's statement that all have sinned in Adam (Rom 5:12, according to the Latin; cf. Ambrosiaster, *Comm. in Rom.* 5.12). In *Simpl*, Augustine does not invoke Rom 5:12, but 1 Cor 15:22 ("In Adam all die"), and this is an important difference in what the two attribute to the connection of subsequent humans to Adam. For Augustine, it is not yet "original sin," but only the mortal and debilitated physical condition. Therefore, the contrary position contends that Ambrosiaster and Augustine made parallel independent developments of Paul's own language, with *massa* appearing instead of *consparsio* at Rom 9:20–21 in some mss. known to them (explicitly attested in Augustine's case, *Ep* 186.19). For a succinct review of the debate with key references, see Fredriksen 1999. Buonaiuti 1927 also proposes some influence of the Manichaean concept of a final "lump" (Greek *bōlos*; Latin *globus*) of evil at the end of salvation history. But the connection is debatable: despite the similarity of the image, we have no evidence that Latin Manichaeans or their texts ever used the term *massa* for this concept (the Latin version of the anti-Manichaean *Acta Archelai* does, however); and it is an eschatological entity, not a primordial one as the *massa* is for Augustine; for background on the Manichaean concept, see Decret 1974; Bennett 2011). Such an influence might explain, however, why Augustine jumps to the assumption that Paul's *massa* is sinful, rather than neutral and undifferentiated—an assumption that is "surely mistaken" (Bammel 1992, 355). It directly contradicts Paul's assertion in Rom 9:11 that before they were born Jacob and Esau had done nothing either good or evil.

68. "Therefore, given that our nature sinned in paradise, we are formed through a mortal begetting by the same divine providence, not according to heaven, but according to earth, i.e., not according to the spirit, but according to the flesh, and we have all become one mass of clay, i.e., a mass of sin (*Ex quo ergo in paradiso natura nostra peccavit, ab eadem divina providentia non secundum caelum sed secundum terram, id est non secundum spiritum sed secundum carnem, mortali generatione formamur, et omnes una massa luti facti sumus, quod est massa peccati*)." For earlier references to Paul's image of a lump of clay, cf. *DQ* 51.1, 67.4.

69. Augustine claims to find his whole theory already laid out in Ecclesiasticus (Ben Sirach) 33:10ff. (*Simpl* 1.2.20).

70. Augustine's position here appears to reverse what he said in *LA* 3.19.53, where he insisted that our mortal condition is not for condemnation but for correction. In either case, the way that "the origin of the offense against God spread throughout the whole human race" has as yet nothing to do with collective participation in Adam's sin, but the difficulties of resisting sin in the debilitated and sin-prone flesh descended from Adam. "Mankind is a *massa peccati* not because it has inherited sin from Adam, but because it has inherited the flesh of sin, mortal flesh, death" (Fredriksen 1979, 168). Although Augustine can speak in this context of "original guilt" (*originali reatu*, *Simpl* 1.2.20), this is not yet a fully developed traducian "original sin" as Augustine would come to formulate it in later years. He had not yet settled on the theory of the derivation of all individual souls from Adam and Eve on which his later "original sin" concept depended.

Instead, while carefully avoiding a definitive position on the soul's origin (*LA* 3.21.59, circa 395; *Conf* 10.20.29, circa 401; *Ep* 143, circa 412), he had tended to imply that the individual soul's sin is punished by being conjoined to a mortal and troublesome body physically descended from Adam and debilitated by the latter's sin, hence by a kind of providential convergence between the individual's sin on the one hand, and Adam's sin on the other. He expressly repudiated this construct only in *Ep* 166 to Jerome, circa 415, where he characterized it as the position that "each soul is, according to the deserts of its actions in an earlier state of being, enveloped in the body allotted to it in this life," and that, consequently, "to 'die in Adam' means to suffer punishment in that flesh which was derived from Adam." He goes on to state in the latter letter that he is now reluctantly inclining toward the traducian view.

71. Augustine's dismissal of the demand to understand God's ways comes as an ironic reversal of his own insistence four years earlier that, if Fortunatus could not meet that demand, then his beliefs were indefensible, at which time Fortunatus had been the one to quote Rom 9:20.

72. Fredriksen 2008, 180.

73. Augustine missed an opportunity to ease the moral pressures on his scenario by proposing that the damned are mere physical entities drawn from Adam's physical offspring, without souls, and that only the saved possess souls. In a loose sense, this is the implication of the Manichaean proposition that a conscious soul only coalesces in those called to salvation. Otherwise, in countless physically human individuals and a myriad other living creatures, fragments of soul never coalesce into consciousness, and must be purified chemically through natural processes, rather than through thinking, learning, adhering to pure conduct, and performing ritual operations.

74. On the role of Augustine's *Simpl* in sharpening the issues and possibly evoking the response of Rufinus of Syria in Milan, see Bonner 1970; Bammel 1992, 356–65.

75. Babcock 1990, 258.

76. "Augustine could imagine a soul, a 'self,' responsible only for its good or only for its evil. What he could not imagine—and could never fully grasp—was a soul, a 'self,' responsible equally for its good and for its evil. At this crucial point, he was never a full participant in the classical tradition" (Babcock 1990, 259).

77. Babcock 1990, 261.

78. Burns 1980, 37.

79. "Augustine was aware of the theological cost of his new conviction that grace—the grace which transforms the will from the evil to the good, enabling the new self to defeat the old—is in no sense a reward for merit, not even the minimal merit of belief. If, apart from grace, there is no relevant moral difference between Jacob and Esau, how can election be just? Augustine has literally left himself without response. . . . Augustine has, in effect, sacrificed both man's freedom and God's justice on the altar of the sheer gratuity of God's grace, unqualified by even a residual correlation with man's merit" (Babcock 1979, 66–67).

80. "Manichaeism, on both the doctrinal and the practical side, followed like a shadow in the footsteps of orthodox Christianity, which very often could only overcome it by absorbing and making its own some of the Manichaean fundamental conceptions" (Buonaiuti 1927, 126). Augustine's adoption of a Paul-based emphasis on the morally compromising burden of the flesh and the soul's inability to direct itself without the self-forming agency of God's grace provides one of those "significant and instructive instances," referred to by Buonaiuti, of Catholic adoption of Manichaean elements and emphases. "When we reflect that . . . the great crises of Catholic theology have always been connected with the breaking-out of new controversies on the question of Grace," Buonaiuti observes, "we are tempted to conclude that the triumph of orthodoxy over dualism was more apparent than real, and that perhaps the very vitality of

orthodoxy is due mainly to the leaven which the opposite system has added to its organism, and to the survival in Christian thought and life of but slightly disguised Manichaean premises" (Buonaiuti 1927, 127).

81. Lee 1999, xii.

82. Babcock 1994, 182.

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid., 186.

85. Ibid., 186–87.

86. See note 30 above.

87. Burns 1980, 48–49.

88. As in BeDuhn 2010, I continue to use the familiar English title "Fundamental Epistle," even though it should be rendered more properly as "The Epistle (which is called) On the Foundation."

89. Augustine had made much the same move of merely leveling the field of competition in the dual works *ME* and *MM*, by demonstrating that Manichaeans were no better or worse in living up to their ideal moral codes than the Nicene Christians whose moral lapses they so facilely criticized.

90. Cf. *Sol* 2.23: the soul must be "exercised" before it can gaze upon the "sun of truth."

CHAPTER 9. HOW ONE BECOMES WHAT ONE IS

1. O'Donnell suggests that "the pattern of words that appears in the *Confessions* had been taking shape in Augustine's texts for years before this text was actually written. The *Confessions* offer no unedited transcript, but a careful rhetorical presentation" (1992, vol. 1, xxx). He identifies the following rehearsals of *Conf* material: *Acad* 2.2.3–6; *BV* 1.4; *LA* 1.11.22; *UC* 1.2 and 8.20; *DA* 9.11; *CEF* 3.3 (O'Donnell 1992, vol. 1, li–lvi).

2. For a good summary of the arguments on the date of *Conf*, see Solignac 1962, 45–54. We have no sure information about the process or time involved in producing the *Confessions*. Besides the brief notice he gives it in *Retr* 2.6, where he lists it as the sixth work among those he wrote after becoming a bishop, Augustine mentions the *Conf* in *Faust* 1.1 (referring to *Conf* 5.10), *GL* 2.9.22 (referring to *Conf* 13.16), and *CLP* 3.17.20 (referring to *Conf*, book 4). All three works are generally considered to date to the first years of the fifth century.

3. The evidence of the "Dolbeau Sermons" suggests that Augustine spent most of the summer in Carthage and preached extensively in the churches around the city, working out some of the key ideas that would shape *Conf* (P. Brown 2000, 447–55).

4. O'Donnell 1992, vol. 1, xxiii.

5. At the same time, the hypothesis of an earlier draft, composed with a different purpose, helps to account for much of the multilayering to which O'Donnell refers.

6. Gibb and Montgomery 1927; Allgeier 1930; Pincherle 1930, 144–45, Perler 1931; Adam 1958; Vecchi 1965; O'Connell 1968, 16, 79; Tavard 1988; Feldmann 1990; Joubert 1992; van Oort 1995, 2002; Drecoll 1999, 255ff.; Kotzé 2004.

7. See Bammel 1993, 11.

8. Kotzé 2004, 213.

9. Ibid., 3.

10. *Acad* and *VR* to Romanianus, *UC* to Honoratus.

11. "The influence of the warm reception and genuine friendships Augustine found in Manichaeism must never be underestimated in what I see as a lifelong preoccupation with Manichaeans, i.e., real friends who may have remained Manichaeans" (Kotzé 2004, 90).

12. See the analysis of this anti-Manichaean vocabulary of *Conf* in van Oort 1995, 60–62.

13. Feldmann 1990, 889890.

14. Drecoll 1999, 267.

15. Cf. Kotzé 2004, 220: "the whole of the prologue of the *Confessions* is so strongly dominated by 'Manichaean concerns' that one cannot but see this as a significant indication of who a very important segment of the intended audience of the work may be." Similarly, van Oort 1995 adduces several examples of phrasing drawn from the Manichaean rhetorical repertoire both in the prologue and at key points throughout the work, of which in some cases "they alone would have heard the polemic wordplay" (67). O'Donnell 1992, vol. 2, 23, while not considering Manichaeans as necessarily an intended audience, sees the prologue scripted with a "polemical purpose" to affirm Nicene theology in the face of the Manichaean alternative.

16. *Conf* 1.1.1; 6.4.5; 6.11.18; 6.11.20; 11.2.3; 11.22.28; 12.1.1; 12.12.15; 12.15.22; 12.24.33; 13.38.53. See the discussion of Augustine's use of this verse in *Conf* in Kotzé 2004, 134–47.

17. Thus Fredriksen 1995, 309 n27, on the reference to *praedicator* in *Conf* 1.1.1, citing parallel uses in *Conf* 10.23.34 (where Paul is "homo tuus verum *praedicans*") and *Simpl* 1.2.22 (where on the road to Damascus Paul is "repente ex evangelii mirabili persecutore mirabilior *praedicator* effectus est"). Christ has also been suggested as the referent of the term.

18. See Joubert 1992, 98; Kotzé 2004, 122. If Paul indeed plays the role of Augustine's prototype in *Conf*, as many have suggested, then our question may be answered in part by *Conf* 13.13.14: "Paul himself, even Paul . . . does not consider himself to have laid hold on his salvation already . . . (but) he calls to those deeper in the abyss than himself . . . 'You stupid Galatians! Who has bewitched you?' But he calls to them no longer in his own voice. In your voice he calls to them."

19. I find myself in agreement with Cary 1994, 78: "For more than a century now Augustine scholars have worried that the *Confessions* was a kind of cover-up which underplayed the neo-Platonist motives in Augustine's conversion. This worry has things all backward. The *Confessions* is a far more neo-Platonist work than the Cassiciacum dialogues, just as it represents a more deeply orthodox form of Christianity. . . . At Cassiciacum he was not a very well-informed Catholic, but he was not a very well-versed Platonist either."

20. On the decisive discursive role played by the Psalms in *Conf*, see Knauer 1955.

21. Joubert 1992, 100–101, similarly connects Augustine's rhetorical strategy in *Conf* with the generous tone he takes toward the Manichaeans in *CEF*, and refers to his new approach as one of "seduction" (102).

22. Fish 1980, 354–55.

23. Polanyi 1958, 151.

24. Fish 1980, 303–4.

25. Fredriksen 1995, 309–10.

26. Chadwick 1990, 204.

27. "The fables of schoolmasters and poets are far better than the snares then being set for me; yes, verses, songs, and tales of Medea in flight are undeniably more wholesome than myths about the five elements being metamorphosed to defeat the five caverns of darkness. . . . When I sang of Medea in her flying chariot I was not vouching for any of it as fact, nor, when I listened to someone else singing of it, did I believe the story, but I did believe the Manichaean lies." On the dramatic shedding of tears in connection with the Manichaean mythic drama, see *Keph* 58 and 59.

28. But the highest form of mercy does not depend on sorrow and grief, Augustine makes clear, for God shows mercy while being untouched by sorrow (*Conf* 3.2.3), contrary to the Manichaean characterization of God as a being who most emphatically feels our pain.

29. Cf. Kotzé 2004, 199–202.

30. O'Connell 1996, 8.

31. Ibid., 83 n.12; see also O'Connell 1994a, chapter 6.

32. O'Connell 1996, 52. He goes on to analyze Augustine's exegesis of the Prodigal Son episode in *Quaestiones Evangeliorum* 2.33, from circa 400, where the prodigal is depicted remembering the *mercenarii* who served in his father's house, whom Augustine identifies with those preachers of Christ motivated by selfish ends (Phil. 1:12–19). Even as Paul forgives them their motives, since Christ is still preached, so Augustine seems to appreciate the same positive outcome of Manichaean activity, despite the misguided ideology to which it is wedded (O'Connell 1996, 52–53). This is all tacit in Augustine's text, but O'Connell is of the opinion that Augustine's liberal stretch of the biblical passage suggests that he is up to something like this.

33. He recaps this advance at the beginning of book 7. "I was no longer representing you to myself in the shape of a human body, O God, for since beginning to acquire some inkling of philosophy I always shunned this illusion" (*Conf* 7.1.1). But Manichaeism had only taken him one step toward the truth. For "even though I was no longer hampered by the image of a human body, I was still forced to imagine something corporeal spread out in space" (*Conf* 7.1.1). He had to advance beyond this second misconception as well.

34. For background, see BeDuhn 2010, 106–34. One should not be misled by Augustine's reference to Faustus as a "snare of the devil" into thinking that he has a fundamentally negative view of the man. He can call even so positive a figure as Marius Victorinus the "devil's tongue" prior to his conversion (*Conf* 8.4.9). He considers such epithets fitting for anyone, however gifted, who employs those gifts outside the Catholic communion.

35. See BeDuhn 2009 and 2010, 111–31.

36. Contrast the rather dismissive reduction of Faustus's abilities to "a certain eloquence" in *UC* 8.20, as well as the considerably harsher tone taken in *Faust*. Against these treatments, the much more positive characterization in *Conf* stands out clearly, and Augustine certainly had some purpose in it.

37. *Veritas* recurs 152 times in *Confessions*, and various cognates an additional 200 times (Ferrari 1990, 10).

38. *Conf* 3.11.19: "You stretched out your hand from on high and pulled my soul out of these murky depths"; 6.16.26: "Already your right hand was ready to seize me and pull me out of the filth, yet I did not know it"; 8.1.2: "Into that error, too, I had formerly blundered, but your right hand grasped me, plucked me out of it and put me in a place where I could be healed"; 9.1.1: "But you, Lord, are good and merciful, and your right hand plumbed the depths of my death, draining the abyss of corruption in my heart"; 10.41.66: "I have called upon your right hand for saving help"; 11.29.39: "your right hand upholds me"; cf. *Faust* 15.5; *CEF* 11.13; *EpSec* 1; *PsBk* 67.14–16; 69.5–7; 94.2; 108.17–19; 112.26–27; 153.4; *Keph* 9 passim; 58, 148.18–20; 90, 226.7–11.

39. In an ironic twist, he explains his adherence to Manichaean ideas by telling God, "You had not yet set a guard over my mouth or a chaste gate at my lips to keep my heart from straying into evil talk, and from making excuses for itself in its sins" (*Conf* 5.10.18). Here he treats Manichaean ideology as itself as violation of the religion's "seal of the mouth." Really to keep the seal, he implies, Manichaeans must jettison their false beliefs and find their way to a better ideological underpinning for their well-intentioned piety.

40. See Ferrari 1979; Suchoki 1982.

41. W. O'Brien 1978, 56–58.

42. E.g., compare *LA* 2 to *Conf* 7.17.23. Augustine slips in his narrative retrojection of this material back to his pre-conversion period when he says that as he pondered these issues, he persisted steadfastly in his faith in Christ "as I found it in the Catholic Church" (*Conf* 7.5.7). He is actually reviewing his initial post-conversion efforts to rationalize the teachings he had received, among them, as he says here, the free-will position of Ambrose. The same slip recurs in 7.7.11:

"You allowed no flood of thoughts to sweep me away from the faith whereby I believed that you exist, that your essence is unchangeable, that you care for us humans and judge our deeds, and that in your Son, Christ our Lord, and in the holy scriptures which the authority of your Catholic Church guarantees, you have laid down the way for human beings to reach that eternal life which awaits us after death. These beliefs were unaffected, and persisted strong and unshaken in me as I feverishly searched for the origin of evil." These anachronistic passages contradict *Conf* 7.18.24, where Augustine reports that he had not yet embraced Christ.

43. It remains a question whether it originated in such a purpose or merely was retained for it. Conceivably, the reordering of his story originated in the different context of Augustine's defense before the episcopal commission in 395 C.E., as a way of offering a persuasive account of his own intellectual motives for conversion. Book 7 itself, with its series of reasoned steps of intellectual progress toward truth, may have been modeled in part on Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate* 1.1–14.

44. The ascent theme was a favorite of Augustine's, particularly in his earlier writings; see *QA* 33.70–79, *LA* 2.15–34, *Ord* 2.28–44. He was to use it again as a structuring device in his *GL*, composed immediately after he completed *Conf*.

45. O'Donnell 1992, vol. 2, 255.

46. Ibid., 255–56.

47. E.g., *Keph* 72, 178.13–23; *Faust* 24.1.

48. Miles 1992, 93.

49. Ferrari 1978, 6. He finds 150 words connected with the acts of eating and drinking in the work. Food is referred to 31 times; thirst 14 times; eating 40 times; ruminating 4 times (3.6.11; 6.3; 10.14.22; 11.2.3); vomiting (the errors of the Manichaeans) twice (7.2.3; 9.4.9).

50. Ferrari convincingly demonstrates that the shift that occurs in the *Conf* narrative from the imagery of solid food (only repeated after the conversion in 10.6.8 and 10.27.38) to that of drinking water from the font of God (9.10.23, 10.27.38, 11.2.3, 12.10.10, 12.11.13, 13.13.14, 13.17.21) occurs with the conversion, and is connected to Augustine's association of the mastication of solid food with working over ideas and texts in this world, whereas water enters us without any needed processing, a direct infusion of truth (Ferrari 1978, 10–11).

51. Adam 1958, 7: "Was Augustin als manichäischer Katechumen Jahr um Jahr hat wiederholen müssen, das hat er in den Konfessionen auf seine christliche Existenz übertragen. Er hat sogar ein anderes kennzeichnendes Stilmittel des manichäischen Denkens dabei übernommen; die überquellende Bildhaftigkeit, die in keiner seiner übrigen Schriften in gleicher Weise festzustellen ist." This view has been disputed by P. Brown, 2000, 173 n1, Ries 1976, 229–30, and O'Donnell 1992, vol. 2, 7.

52. Jesus, too, is "the physician of the wounded, the redeemer of living souls, the path which the wanderers seek" (*PsBk* 2.24–25); likewise the Light *Nous* is "the physician of souls" (*PsBk* 40.13), and is addressed with the words, "Be not far from me, O physician that hast the medicines of life . . . do thou heal me of the grievous wound of lawlessness" (*PsBk* 152.22–23).

53. Thus it was not the Manichaean per se, but Augustine as a Manichaean, who "had no understanding of submission" and "could never comprehend" the need for confession (correcting the more sweeping characterization of W. O'Brien 1978, 56). Whether or not the Manichaean doctrine of the otherness of evil inevitably creates a problem for its deeply confessional tradition of practice, it did so for Augustine.

54. Ratzinger 1957.

55. Kotzé, seeing the need to confirm the work's protreptic purpose by demonstrating its adherence to an existing protreptic genre, remarks that the novelty of the *Confessions* lies not so much in its genre, but "more the voice or the timbre" by which introspection carries so much of the weight of protreptic appeal (2004, 31).

56. See Drecoll 1999, 316.

57. See Cumont 1908, 42–49; Jackson 1932, 249–54. The stark contrast between the negative assessment of life suggested by these lines, and the glowing description of the child's nurturance in the lines that follow, show I think that he is somewhat artificially adopting rhetoric that connects with Manichaean sentiments.

58. BeDuhn 2010, 38–41.

59. His defense of the patriarchs exercises him the most here (*Conf* 3.7.13–9.17), as he continues to add ancillary arguments, such as God's right to supersede the very laws he has given to govern a particular time and place (*Conf* 3.8.15, 3.9.17). The extent of his discussion suggests both that this is new material in his thinking, and that he is not yet completely resolved on its satisfactoriness. Note that this dispensationalist defense of the patriarchs as indeed righteous in their deeds runs contrary to his new theory of salvation by grace. He had yet to integrate these two parts of his thinking.

60. This image strikingly parallels Manichaean treatment of the role of the senses in feeding a person's internal state, either for good or ill, depending on whether the regime of light or darkness had control (*Keph* 56, 142.12ff.).

61. See O'Laughlin 1992.

62. Just how recently Augustine had come to Faustus's position is evident from O'Laughlin 1992 and 1999. Augustine declares the worthlessness of astronomy/astrology for spiritual development in *DC* 2.29.46, circa 396–397, in a direct reversal of its paramount value for displaying the order of God's creation in Augustine's Italian compositions of a decade earlier. He was now prepared to see it as another form of venerating creation rather than the creator (*DC* 2.21.32–22.33).

63. *quia demonstrari non poterant*. Augustine refers to the Manichaean position that only certain kinds of knowledge are susceptible of rational, empirical proof, and if a school or sect has a consistent record of being right about such things, it is to be believed in those areas of knowledge not empirically demonstrable, such as history, the very example Augustine adduces here.

64. See Cary 1994, 75.

65. For the background in Augustine's previous work to the flawed digression that makes up the bulk of book 2 of *LA*, see Cary 2000, 95–104.

66. He reviews as well the other challenges to God's omnipotence raised in reality by his Manichaean opponents, and rhetorically by his interlocutor in *LA*: was God constrained to use recalcitrant material in creation that led to evil? Was he not powerful enough to purge the material of all recalcitrance? Could he not produce a new, perfect material from which to create?

67. Taken to this extreme, of course, Augustine's affirmation of divine omnipotence leaves little room for the characteristically Christian view of the world as fundamentally broken and dominated by forces at odds with God, for which the Manichaeans had provided a metaphysical rationale. Apparently thrown out with any hint of dualism went also any eschatological edge by which the world as it was could be critiqued (see *Fort* 16; *Faust* 20.3; *Fel* 1.19).

68. See the discussion of this theme in Cary 2000.

69. Perhaps intended as well to pick up (from *Conf* 1.6.7) the echo of the bitter questions uttered by Adam on his awakening by the grace of Christ in the Manichaean version of the Eden story.

70. This point goes back to Epictetus, *Discourses* 4.10.16: "There is nothing easier to manage than a human soul. What is needed is to will, and the deed is done, success is achieved."

71. Augustine's conceptual toolkit let him down here, because he did not know how to distinguish a first-order volition (to embrace the Catholic faith) from a second-order volition (to so order his commitments that he embraces the Catholic faith); see Frankfurt 1988, 159–76. In this analysis, Augustine could not arrange himself into the sort of person who would actually act on

the impulse to convert, because he as yet lacked the second-order volition that made embracing the Catholic faith more vital to his identity than other second-order programs of identification (e.g., acquiring certain knowledge of the nature of reality, pursuing the ambition of professional advancement) or other immediate impulses (e.g., lust). He lacked *wholehearted* commitment to a Catholic self.

72. But this line of argument trivializes moral conflict by equating it with simple indecision over choices. As James Wetzel has astutely observed, Augustine appears to confuse indecision with weakness of will, even after so carefully isolating weakness of will as distinct from not knowing what to do (Wetzel 1992a, 131–32). In doing so, Augustine largely vacates the chief insight gained from his extensive confrontation with Manichaean models of the divided self.

73. Similarly, in 12.14.17, he prays that God will "kill" those who are enemies of God's word (i.e., the Bible), "For my love of them demands that they be killed to themselves in order to live to you." Such rhetoric should be compared to Augustine's references to slaying his old self (*Conf* 9.4.10). At this point, his language is metaphorical.

74. Babcock 1994, 186–87. Cf. Drecoll 1999, 301–306.

75. Already Alfaric 1918, 392, noted the "doubly tendentious" nature of Augustine's conversion account, filtered through Romans 7, and at the same time working to turn away Manichaean interpretations of the internal conflict Paul described.

76. Ferrari 1980 and 1987.

77. Yet even here, vestiges of synergism remain. It is only when Augustine reacts and responds ("I drew breath . . . I tasted") that the connection is made, reorienting his desires away from the world and toward God.

78. Kotzé 2004, 97–115.

79. In this context, *sacramentum* evidently refers to the recitation of the Psalms, which as part of the Old Testament were rejected by the Manichaeans.

80. Kotzé 2004, 97, concludes that, due to Augustine's language of emotional investment, "the passage cannot rightly be called anti-Manichaean."

81. Ibid., 97.

82. See BeDuhn 2000, 88–117.

83. See Kotzé 2004, 107–9, including her citation of O'Donnell 1992, vol.3, 97 for Augustine's tendency to use the term *paracletus* only when engaging with Manichaeans.

84. Kotzé puts her finger on the link between the ideological and the affective shift Augustine promotes here. Augustine sees Manichaean confessional practices undermined by an ideology that seemingly absolves the individual of moral responsibility. "He implies here that real repentance depends, firstly, on a real anger at yourself for your own responsibility in sinning. Secondly, it depends on a true conception of what evil is . " (Kotzé 2004, 110).

85. It is quite clear that such passages reflect Augustine's "middle-period" synergistic model of salvation, rather than the new conception of grace he developed in 397. Although Kotzé cites the Manichaean Call-Answer construct in connection with such passages, she seems not to notice that Augustine's use of the motif attributes the initiating call to the human sinner, rather than to God, thus reversing the Manichaean scheme, as well as his own new theory of grace.

86. Kotzé 2004, 104, pointing to Augustine's remark, "It was addressed to the kind of people of whom I remembered that I had been one (*Talibus dicitur qualem me fuisse reminiscebar*)" in 9.4.9.

87. Kotzé 2004, 173–81, makes the case that the way stories of conversion serve to inspire Augustine's own conversion in book 8 should be taken as indicative of the role Augustine hoped his own *Conf* would play. Cf. Joubert 1992, 88: "A qui lit les *Confessions* avec attention, il apparaît de façon tout à fait claire que le projet de saint Augustin est de convertir un ou plusieurs groupes de personnes."

88. As Kotzé observes, "breaking down Manichaean resistance to scripture is one of Augustine's central objectives in the *Confessions*" (103).

89. See BeDuhn 2010, 46–51; BeDuhn 2000, 33–40.

90. Like the Manichaeans, he broadened the meaning of continence beyond sex to cover a self-defining restraint in all interactions of the soul with the world. In examining his efforts at this broader continence, he examines the temptations that come through each of the five senses (*Conf* 10.30.41ff.), the "gates" through which evil may enter the mind according to Manichaean teaching; see *Keph* 56, 138.20–139.15; BeDuhn 2000, 50; BeDuhn 2001, 15–16.

91. *per continentiam quippe conligimur et redigimur in unum, a quo in multa defluximus*.

92. "By this book I am confessing to you who I am now, not what I once was" (*Conf* 10.3.4).

93. J. Smith 2000, 137. This mysteriousness of one's own self (as well as the self of others) is a theme already in *Sol* 1.3.8.

94. Markus 1990a, 915.

95. Ibid., 921.

96. Harry Frankfurt explores these alternative self-interpretations, noting how a person may provide a passion he or she experiences with meaning, or rationalize it in terms of personal motives, and in this way take possession of the adventitious passion and integrate it as part of one's self-understanding. On the other hand, someone, in professing ignorance as to the source or cause of a passion, may state something "genuinely descriptive," and "may appropriately convey his sense that the rise of passion represented in some way an intrusion upon him, that it violated him" (Frankfurt 1988, 62–63).

97. Foucault 1999, 125. Foucault notes the lack of such a formal practice in the early Christian centuries (155).

98. Ibid., 154.

99. Ibid., 162.

100. Fredriksen 1986, 33.

101. Markus 1990a, 916.

102. Harpham 1988, 42.

103. Ibid., 48.

104. Ibid.

105. Quoted by Harpham 1988, 46.

CHAPTER 10. TRUTH IN THE REALM OF LIES

1. Teske 2000, 29. For a still useful brief review of proposals for the underlying unity of the work, see Solignac 1962, 19–21. Grotz 1970 offers a more comprehensive survey of 35 theories, and makes the point that, for a theory of the unity of the *Conf* to be plausible, it must explain not only why Augustine turns to exegesis, but why specifically exegesis of the creation story. Thirty years later, Holzhausen 2000, 519, can affirm the consensus opinion that the thirteen books do form a unity, while conceding no consensus exists on just how they do so (cf. Feldmann 1994, 1144–50; Steinhauser 1992).

2. Does the terseness of his remarks have something to do with the defensiveness reflected in his comment that it had given pleasure to many brethren, even though it apparently failed to affect some others the way he expected it to when he was composing it? *Interim quod ad me attinet, hoc in me egerunt cum scriberentur et agunt cum leguntur. Quid de illis alii sentiant, ipsi uiderint.*

3. E.g., O'Donnell identifies both Augustine's long disquisition on time in book 11, and the conclusion of his Genesis exegesis in 13.28.43–30.45, as written against the Manichaeans (O'Donnell 1992, vol. 3, 252, 343). Mayer 1974, vol. 2, 151, concurs on the target of book 11.

4. Kotzé 2004, 221; cf. Joubert 1992. Already Gibb and Montgomery 1927, 332ff., identified Manichaeism as the primary target and foil of Augustine's exegesis here.

5. See *Conf* 13.34.49: "We have also examined, according to the figurative understanding, those things you willed either to happen in such an order or to be written in such an order (*Inspeximus etiam propter quorum figurationem ista vel tali ordine fieri vel tali ordine scribi voluisti*)."

6. In this way, his project parallels his "de-mythologizing" of Manichaean cosmogony and cosmology in the lost *De pulchro et apto* (see BeDuhn 2010, 98–102), with the difference that, instead of translating myth into a "scientific" or "philosophical" account of the world, in *Conf* he translates it into a "psychological" account of personal reformation. I do see a way, therefore, to answer the question posed by Joubert: "si, comme nous l'avons vu, Augustin a écrit le livre XIII dans le but de convertir ses anciens amis manichéens, comment aurait-il pu en même temps en faire le sommet de son autobiographie? Est-il vraiment possible de faire converger ainsi deux directions aussi différentes l'une de l'autre qu'un développement apologétique à l'adresse de détracteurs et l'histoire d'une vie destinée à tous les lecteurs?" (Joubert 1992, 114). The answer I develop here fleshes out Joubert's own answer, in that we both point to Augustine's conviction that the Catholic Church can be the place of spiritual development, as for himself, so for those he calls to follow him. My reading of the overall plan of *Conf* sees Augustine vaunting not so much the superiority but the *familiarity* of the Church's spiritual riches to a Manichaean audience (i.e., breaking down the appearance of a wide disparity of spiritual values between the two communities), at the same time that he does advance the superiority of its "catholic" openness and what he at least wishes to present as a relative absence of dogmatism (i.e., the quest for truth the Manichaeans were on can go forward much as before, as the Church requires only a few gestures of conformity that are not such severe obstacles as the Manichaean might think).

7. See BeDuhn 2010, 111–31.

8. We will come back to the significance of his choice of words here.

9. Cf. *GCM* 1.2.3. See Peters 1984.

10. Characteristically, Augustine expands upon the basic Manichaean criticism by raising other philosophical issues he sees related to it, but derived from other, non-Manichaean sources and positions. This habit of taking on all the potential challenges that occur to him on a particular question obscures the Manichaean impetus for a particular inquiry.

11. Augustine draws on Plotinus for his position on the temporary nature of time (O'Connell 1964, 356–58).

12. See Teske 1996.

13. For a close analysis of the connections between Augustine's hermeneutic in *Conf* 11–13 and that expounded in *DC*, see Bochet 2004, 94–106.

14. Intriguingly, Mani takes the same position on the nonexistence of past or future sin, except in the mind, in *Menoch* 187.

15. "In earlier days I heard it mentioned, but failed to understand what it was, when people who were equally devoid of understanding told me about it, and I pictured it to myself under innumerable forms of all kinds. . . . My mind passed in review disgusting, hideous forms, distortions of the natural order, certainly, but forms nonetheless. . . . What I thus imagined was not formless in the sense that it lacked all form, but formless only by comparison with other things of fairer form" (*Conf* 12.6.6). He goes on to describe his intellectual breakthrough, involving the Platonic idea that mutability involves the change of something into something else by passing through a return to its root material formlessness, rather than that something completely ceases to be and is replaced by some other. Forms come and go, but the material substrate remains.

16. "Who, except someone who wanders amid the foolish notions of his own mind and is whirled about by his fantasies—who, I ask, except such a person, will tell me that when all form is diminished and reduced to nothing, and that all that remains is the formlessness through which

a being passed as it was changed from one form into another, any temporal succession can still be found? Such a thing is entirely impossible, because there is no time where there is no variation or movement, and no variation where no form exists" (*Conf* 12.11.14).

17. At a purely exegetical level, the concept solves a problem presented by mention of two creations of heaven, in Gen 1:1 and 1:6–8. See the definitive study of Augustine's concept in Pépin 1953.

18. Employing for the first time the civic image employed by Manichaeism that would become the dominant structuring metaphor of his *City of God* (see van Oort 1991).

19. Pépin 1953 already struggled to make a historical case for Augustine's access to the sources he posited for the concept. Teske 2000 is more successful in tracing some of the more abstract characteristics of the concept to Plotinus. But neither researcher provides a convincing source for the more poetic and picturesque quality of Augustine's description. Simply pointing to biblical phrases he has stitched into his description settles nothing, because one needs to account for the template guiding this accumulation of passages. Why does he combine these particular features into the concept? That is where the existing Manichaean imagery of the Realm of Light supplies the missing background—again, not because Augustine has a lingering adherence to or fondness for such imagery from his past, but because he seeks to engage a Manichaean audience in his exploration of the possibilities of the biblical text.

20. Augustine could still recite from memory the detailed descriptions of the realm of light he had recited in the hymns he performed as a Manichaean (*Faust* 15.5).

21. Joubert 1992, 87, stresses the way in which the "heaven of heaven" concept counters Manichaean materialistic conceptions of the Realm of Light with a spiritual, nonspatial reality. Such a reading, in my opinion, undervalues the vividness of Augustine's description of what is far from an abstract concept for him.

22. Augustine again uses the Manichaean imagery of the scattered and gathered self. The Manichaeans taught that one's good thoughts, words, and deeds journeyed ahead to heavenly liberation, and there awaited the arrival of the whole liberated soul. Augustine alludes to the same idea at the culmination of his ascent in *Conf* 9.10.24, and looks forward to the time when he will catch up with these first-fruits of the spirit. Since one's "light-twin" remained in the light realm, always looking upon God's face (see the allusion to Mt 18:10 in *Conf* 12.15.21), it provided inspiration and information to help one on the path to rejoining it; hence Augustine "draws" his "present certainty" from this abiding connection to the "heaven of heaven."

23. See Teske 2000, 41–43.

24. Augustine also seems intent on depicting this realm/being/set of beings as secure in eternal association with God by its/their own act of adherence to him, the failing of which directly accounts for those fallen beings who do not enjoy this secure state. No external force threatens or causes separation; it is entirely within the will of the creatures of this realm.

25. "I regard with intense hate all who attack the scriptures," Augustine swears. "If only you would slay them with a two-edged sword" (probably meant to refer to the twofold testament) "that they might be enemies no longer. How dearly would I love them to be slain in that respect, that they might live in you" (*Conf* 12.14.17). Such rhetoric must be compared to Augustine's self description in *Conf* 12.10.10: "Let me not be my own life; evil was the life I lived of myself. I was death to me, but in you I begin to live again. . . . I have believed your scriptures."

26. He portrays them rejecting a Platonic interpretation of the opening verses of Genesis, and asserting that "heaven and earth" are just what they appear to be, the constituent parts of the material world (*Conf* 12.17.24), perhaps differentiated into visible or invisible things, or else refer to the raw material of creation alone, from which heaven and earth proceed to be made (*Conf* 12.17.25).

27. O'Connell 1964, 361.

28. Ibid., 344.

29. See Joubert 1992, 87.

30. Cf. Ibid., 90–94.

31. One should recall that Augustine had repeatedly insisted that in desiring the light, the "evil" of the Manichaean myth demonstrated (at least to his satisfaction) that it could not be evil at all.

32. "In the morning I will stand and see my God, who sheds the light of salvation on my face, who will breathe life even into our mortal bodies through the spirit who dwells in us and has been mercifully hovering over the dark chaos of our inner being. By this we have received, even on our pilgrim way, the pledge that we are children of light already. Saved only in hope we may be, but we are at home in the light and in the day. No longer are we children of the night or of darkness, as once we were. But you alone distinguish between us and the night-born in this present uncertainty where human knowledge falters, for you test our hearts, and call light 'day' and darkness 'night.' Who but you can tell them apart? Yet what do we possess that we have not received from you, since from the same lump you have formed us for honorable service, and others for common use?"

33. On this theme: Vannier 1991b.

34. O'Connell 1964, 364.

35. Ibid., 363.

36. Notice how Augustine avoids the story of the fall by ending his exegesis at Genesis 2.4, so that he does not ruin the prolepsis of the eternal sabbath. As ideal creation, the first creation story in Genesis provides an allegory of salvation history and its eschatological conclusion, before the second creation story offers an account of why the ideal was not realized already at the beginning of time.

37. *Tu assumpsisti me ut viderem esse quod viderem et nondum me esse qui viderem*. The translation is that of O'Connell 1964, 328.

38. "Il apparaît donc que le livre XIII des *Confessions* s'adresse, de façon implicite mais bien réelle, aux manichéens et aux néo-platoniciens qu'Augustin voudrait convertir en attirant leur bienveillance avant de récupérer leurs théories pour les amener à la Vérité conservée et gardée par la seule Eglise catholique." (Joubert 1992, 98).

39. Cf. *Conf* 13.14.15: "We too were once children of his wrath [Eph 2:3]; once darkness [Eph 5:8], the remnants of which we carry in body, which is dead because of sin [Rom 8:24], but hope on until day dawns and shadows disperse." O'Donnell regards allusions to Eph 5:8 "a Leitmotiv of Book 13" (O'Donnell 1992, vol. 3, 348).

40. Kotzé 2004, 246–47.

41. O'Connell 1964, 362. For a thorough analysis of this theme in Augustine's work, see Cary 2008.

42. He cites *Ennead* 4.3.18.9ff., and compares it with *GCM* 2.5–6.

43. O'Connell 1963b, 17.

44. Bochet 2004, 51, points out that he had already worked out this position in *DC* 1.35.39–39.43

45. Cf. *Fid* 2.4: "But there is a vast difference between our minds and the words with which we try to show what is in our minds. We do not beget verbal sounds but make them; and in making them we make use of the body as material. Now there is a great difference between mind and body. . . . What else are we trying to do but to bring our mind, as far as it can be done, into contact with the mind of him who listens to us, so that he may know and understand it? We remain in ourselves and take no step outside ourselves, but we produce a token whereby there may be knowledge of us in another. . . . We do this with words and sounds and looks and bodily gestures . . . But we cannot produce anything exactly like our minds, and so the mind of the

speaker cannot make itself known with complete inwardness. Hence also there is room for lying." He goes on to say that God overcomes this problem through begetting his "Power and Wisdom," the Word, who illumines the minds of believers.

46. Cf. Bochet 2004, 17: "Augustine pense l'Écriture comme une médiation nécessaire, mais provisoire: elle est une première kénose du Verbe et a pour finalité de restaurer la relation de grâce entre l'homme et Dieu, c'est-à-dire de rendre l'homme . . . apte à se laisser à nouveau enseigner intérieurement par Lui."

47. *Nec ultra volui legere nec opus erat. Statim quippe cum fine huiusce sententiae quasi luce securitatis infusa cordi meo omnes dubitationis tenebrae diffugerunt.*

48. E.g., *Keph* 138, 341.17–23: "[The soul's] teacher, furthermore, who teaches it and casts repentance into its heart, that is the Light *Nous*, the one [that] comes from above and that is the ray of the holy illuminator, that comes and shines for the soul and purifies and cleanses it, and [shows the way] to the land of light, from which it has come forth in the beginning."

49. In *GCM* 2.21.32 these skins obscure the accessibility of another's thoughts, and make lying possible. Cf. his similar triangulation in *EnPs* 103(1).8 of the firmament, scripture, and the skins given to Adam and Eve; for all three, he says, the image of skins indicates their mortality, i.e., their temporariness.

50. Cf. Bochet 2004, 29: "Dans cette interprétation, l'Écriture apparaît comme une médiation nécessaire aux hommes, mais provisoire: elle est adaptée à leur condition temporelle, mais perdra sa raison d'être dans l'éternité."

51. On the parallels between *EnPs* 93 and 103, and *Conf* 13, see Bochet 2004, 25–31.

52. Cf. *DQ* 81.1–2, where Augustine identifies scripture as "milk" for little children, "expressed through the movements of bodies in time, characterized by authority and belief, producing in those who use it well "an intellectual grasp of immutable wisdom" that in turn leaves behind the stuff of children's instruction. He makes clear that he has the Bible in mind by specifying that this "authoritative record (*auctoritate*) of transient events" is "the record of the things carried out by God in time for the salvation of men—or to be carried out and now proclaimed as future," which is possessed by believers (*DQ* 81.1).

53. He describes God "sending laborers into your harvest where others have toiled over the sowing; different workers you send to sow new crops, which will be reaped at the end" (*Conf* 13.18.22). He probably means by this invocation of New Testament imagery to reapply the Manichaean conception of successive revelations to the progressive revelation of biblical scripture, particularly between the Old and New Testament revelations.

54. O'Connell 1964, 367–68.

55. Ibid., 366–67.

56. Ibid., 367 n99.

57. Ibid., 369.

58. So Phillip Cary observes with studied understatement that Augustine's "inwardness" of truth, "this strand of Augustine's Christian Platonism which stands in some continuity with the motives of his Manichaean optimism" regarding the potential intimacy of the soul with the divine, "also stands in tension with the insistent externality of the Catholic tradition: its emphasis on Scripture and sacraments, the authority of the visible, institutional Church" (Cary 1994, 78–79).

59. Bearing in mind the strategic nature of Augustine's argument in *Conf*, we note that he compensates for the implicit radicalness of this position already in the Proemium of *DC*, attacking those "who exult in a special divine gift, boasting that they can both understand and teach the sacred scriptures" without a systematic approach informed by rhetorical analysis, a position that could bring them "to the point of not wanting even to go to church to hear the Gospel" and to the expectation "to be caught up to the third heaven . . . and there to hear secret words

which man may not utter" (2 Cor 12:2–5), or even "to see the Lord Jesus Christ there and to hear the Gospel from him, rather than from men here on earth. Let us guard against such extremely proud and dangerous temptations."

60. Kotzé 2004, 240–44.

61. *et hoc non de tuo, sed iam fuisse alibi creata et aliunde, quae tu contraheres at compaginares atque contexeres, cum de hostibus victis mundana moenia molireris, ut ea constructione devincti adversus te iterum rebellare non possent.*

62. *alia vero nec fecisse te nec omnino compegisse, sicut omnes carnes et minutissima quaeque animantia et quidquid radicibus terram tenet.*

63. *Sed hostilem mentem naturamque aliam non abs te conditam tibique contrariam in inferioribus mundi locis ista gignere atque formare.*

64. Augustine makes the side observation that God provided for his ministers on earth to be supported by the faithful, who thereby earn a reward in heaven—a reduction to simple practicality of the elaborate Manichaean ideology around the alms offered to the Elect.

CONCLUSION

1. Frend 1954, 859.

2. P. Brown 2000, 140.

3. Van Oort 2010, 544.

4. Ibid., 545.

5. P. Brown 2000, 141.

6. O'Donnell 1992, vol. 2, 185.

7. Even if we posit that much of the transformation arose within a certain sort of logical analysis internal to Augustine, it would be implausible to suggest that he would be unaware that his revisions were moving him in the direction of the Manichaean position on this particular subject and its relation to Pauline authority. Indeed, the proof of his awareness is to be seen not only in his use of the exact combination of Pauline verses with which Fortunatus had confronted him, but also in his immediate action of composing a protreptic aimed at the Manichaeans that built upon some aspects of his new accommodation of their understanding of the human plight.

8. This is not to deny that some of what Augustine composed he did chiefly for his own intellectual entertainment. He was far from a perfectly focused and disciplined social agent.

9. O'Donnell 2005, 79.

10. See Foucault 1997, 268.

11. As Tertullian said the Greek word for confession signified, *On Repentance* 10.

12. Iser 1978, x.

13. Wetzel 1992b, 129; see O'Donnell 1985, 82; Fredriksen 1986.

14. Burns 1994, 326.

15. Stendahl 1963.

16. Dihle 1982, 144.

17. The various terms they bring into the discussion could be broken down in a Dihle-like fashion in order to argue that they had not arrived at a single, distinct concept of will. But conceptual innovation typically involves this sort of terminological lag, where existing terms get stretched in their connotation or coordinated to designate collectively something for which a proper term has yet to be recognized.

18. Bernasconi 1992, 58.

19. Ibid., 62.

20. Burns 1984, 15.

21. Ibid., 24.

22. "When Augustine himself set his account of 'two conflicting wills within one man' against the Manichaean interpretation of the phenomenon as revealing 'two natures of two minds, one good, the other evil' (VIII.x.22), he accused the Manichaeans of distorting the phenomenon (VIII.x.24). . . . However . . . there is no pure experience of the will to be identified. The experience itself was 'produced' in, and to an extent by, a theologically informed context" (Bernasconi 1992, 63–64).

23. Stroumsa 1992, 30–31.

24. Frankfurt 1988, 61.

25. Ratzinger 1957.

26. Foucault 1999, 180.

27. Mead 1934, 211.

28. Butler 1997, 140.

29. Ibid., 147.

30. Mead 1934, 216–17.

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Text: CSEL 41.
English Translation: R. P. Russell, *The Christian Combat*, Fathers of the Church 2. New York: Catholic University of America Press, 1947.

Acad: *Contra Academicos*. (*Against the Academics*)
Text: CCL 29.
English Translation: John J. O'Meara, *St. Augustine, Against the Academics*, Ancient Christian Writers 12. New York: Newman, 1951.

Adim: *Contra Adimantum Manichei discipulum*. (*Against Adimantus*)
Text: CSEL 25.1
English Translation: Roland Teske, *The Manichean Debate*, Works of Saint Augustine, I/19. Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2006, 176–223.

BC: *De bono coniugali*. (*The Good of Marriage*)
Text: CSEL 41.
English Translation: Roy J. Deferrari, *Saint Augustine, Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, Fathers of the Church 27. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1955, 9–51.

BV: *De beata vita*. (*The Good Life*)
Text: CCL 29.
English translation: Ludwig Schopp, *Writings of Saint Augustine*, Vol. 1, Fathers of the Church 1. New York: Catholic University of America Press, 1948.

CALP: *Contra adversarium legis et prophetarum*. (*Against the Adversary of the Law and Prophets*)
Text: CCL 49.
English Translation: Roland Teske, *Arianism and Other Heresies*, Works of Saint Augustine I/18. Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1995.

CD: *De civitate Dei*. (*The City of God*)
Text: CCL 47–48.
English Translation: Henry Bettenson, *Augustine: City of God*. New York: Penguin, 1972.

CE: De consensu euangelistarum. (*The Agreement of the Evangelists*)
Text: CSEL 43.
English Translation: Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series 6. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997.

CEF: *Contra epistulam Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti*. (*Against the Fundamental Epistle*)
Text: CSEL 25.

English Translation: Roland Teske, *The Manichean Debate*, Works of Saint Augustine, I/19. Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2006, 234–67.

CLP: *Contra litteras Petiliani*. (*Against the Letters of Petilian*)
Text: CSEL 52.
English Translation: Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series 4. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997.

Conf: *Confessiones*. (*Confessions*)
Text: CCL 27.
English Translation: Maria Boulding, *The Confessions*, Works of Saint Augustine I/1. Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1997.

Cresc: *Ad Cresconium grammaticum partis Donati*. (*To Cresconius*)
Text: CSEL 52.
French Translation: G. Finaert, *Traités Anti-Donatistes, Volume IV: Contra Cresconium Libri IV, De Unico Baptismo*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1968.

DA: *De duabus animabus*. (*The Two Souls*)
Text: CSEL 25.
English Translation: Roland Teske, *The Manichean Debate*, Works of Saint Augustine, I/19. Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2006, 117–34.

DC: *De doctrina Christiana*. (*Christian Doctrine*)
Text: CCL 32.
English Translation: R. P. H. Green, *Augustine. De Doctrina Christiana*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.

DEP: *Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum*. (*Against Two Letters of the Pelagians*)
Text: CSEL 60.
English Translation: Roland Teske, *Answer to the Pelagians, II*, Works of Saint Augustine I/24. Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1998, 116–219.

DP: *De dono perseverantiae*. (*The Gift of Perseverance*)
Text: PL 45
Translation: J. A. Mourant and W. J. Collinge, *Four Anti-Pelagian Writings*, Fathers of the Church 86. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1992.

DQ: *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*. (*Eighty-Three Diverse Questions*)
Text: CCL 43a.
English Translation: Boniface Ramsey, *Responses to Miscellaneous Questions*, Works of Saint Augustine I/12. Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2008, 31–157.

EnPs: *Enarrationes in Psalmos*. (*Explanations of the Psalms*)
Text: CCL 38–40.
English Translation: Maria Boulding, *Expositions of the Psalms*, Works of Saint Augustine III/14–17. Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2000– .

Ep: *Epistulae*. (*Letters*)
Text: CSEL 34, 44.
English Translation: Roland Teske, *Letters 1–99*, Works of Saint Augustine, II.1. Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2001; Roland Teske, *Letters 100–155*, Works of Saint Augustine, II.2. Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2003.

ExpGal: *Expositio ad Galatas* (*Exposition of the Epistle to the Galatians*)
Text: CSEL 84
English Translation: Eric Plumer, *Augustine's Commentary on Galatians*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

ExpRomInch: *Epistolae ad Romanos inchoata expositio* (*Exposition of the Beginning of the Epistle to the Romans*)

Text and English Translation: Paula Fredriksen Landes, *Ausgustine on Romans*. Chico: Scholars Press, 1982, 52–89.

Faust: *Contra Faustum Manicheum*. (*Against Faustus*).
Text: CSEL 25.1.
English Translation: Roland Teske, *Answer to Faustus a Manichean*, I.20. Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2007.

Fel: *Acta contra Felicem*. (*Against Felix*)
Text: CSEL 25.2.
English Translation: Roland Teske, *The Manichean Debate*, Works of Saint Augustine, I.19. Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2006, 280–316.

Fid: *De fide et symbolo*. (*Faith and the Creed*).
Text: CSEL 41.
English Translations: J. H. S. Burleigh, *Augustine: Earlier Writings*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953, 349–69; R. P. Russell, *Faith and the Creed*, Fathers of the Church 27. New York: Catholic University of America Press, 1955, 311–45.

Fort: *Acta contra Fortunatum Manicheum*. (*Against Fortunatus*).
Text: CSEL 25.1.
English Translation: Roland Teske, *The Manichean Debate*, Works of Saint Augustine, I.19. Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2006, 145–62.

GCM: *De Genesi contra manichaeos*. (*Genesis Against the Manichaeans*).
Text: CSEL 91.
English translation: Roland J. Teske, *Saint Augustine On Genesis: Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichees and On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book*, Fathers of the Church 84. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1991.

GL: *De Genesi ad litteram*. (*Genesis Literally*).
Text: CSEL 28.1
English Translation: John Hammond Taylor, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Ancient Christian Writers, 41–42. New York: Newman, 1982.

GLimp: *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber*. (*Genesis Literally Unfinished*)
Text: CSEL 28.1.
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GPO: *De gratia Christi et peccato originale*. (*The Grace of Christ and Original Sin*)
Text: CSEL 42.
English translation: Roland Teske, *Answer to the Pelagians I*, Works of Saint Augustine I/23. Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1997, 391–448.

Haer: *De haeresibus*. (*Heresies*)
Text: CCL 46.
English Translation: Roland Teske, *Arianism and Other Heresies*, Works of Saint Augustine I/18. Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1995.

IA: *De immortalitate animae*. (*The Immortality of the Soul*)
Text: CSEL 89.
English translation: Ludwig Schopp, *Writings of Saint Augustine*, Vol. 2, Fathers of the Church 2. New York: Catholic University of America Press, 1947.

Iul: *Contra Iulianum*. (*Against Julian*)
Text: PL 44.
English Translation: Roland Teske, *Answer to the Pelagians II*, Works of Saint Augustine I/24. Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1998, 268–536.

Iulimp: *Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum*. (*Against Julian Unfinished*)
Text: PL 45.
English Translation: Roland Teske, *Answer to the Pelagians III*, Works of Saint Augustine I/25. Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1999.
JohTrac: *In Johannis evangelium tractatus*. (*Treatise on John*)
Text: CCL 36.
English Translation: John W. Rettig, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Fathers of the Church 78–. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1988–.
LA: *De libero arbitrio*. (*Free Choice*)
Text: CCL 29.
English Translation: J. H. S. Burleigh, *Augustine: Earlier Writings*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953, 106–217.
Mag: *De magistro*. (*The Teacher*)
Text: CCL 29.
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ME: *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae*. (*The Morals of the Catholic Church*)
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Mend: *De mendacio*. (*Lying*)
Text: CSEL 41.
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MM: *De moribus Manichaeorum*. (*The Morals of the Manichaeans*)
Text: CSEL 90.
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Mus: *De musica*. (*Music*)
Text: PL 32.
English Translation: Ludwig Schopp, *Writings of Saint Augustine*, Vol. 2, Fathers of the Church 2. New York: Catholic University of America Press, 1947.
NB: *De natura boni*. (*The Nature of Good*)
Text: CSEL 25.2.
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Ord: *De ordine*. (*Order*)
Text: CCL 29.
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PropRom: *Expositio quarundam propositionum ex expistola ad Romanos* (*Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans*)

Text and English Translation: Paula Fredriksen Landes, *Augustine on Romans*. Chico: Scholars Press, 1982, 2–49.

QA: *De quantitate animae*. (*Quantifying Soul*)
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Retr: *Retractationes*. (*Revisions*)
Text: CCL 57.
English Translation: M. I. Bogan, *Saint Augustine, The Retractations*, Fathers of the Church 60. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1968.

Sec: *Contra Secundinum Manicheum*. (*Against Secundinus*)
Text: CSEL 25.
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Text: CCL 41.
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Text: CCL 35.
English Translation: Jon Jepson, *St. Augustine, The Lord's Sermon on the Mount*, Ancient Christian Writers 5. New York: Newman, 1948.

SermMai: *Sermones A. Mai*. (*Mai Sermons*)
Text: *Miscellanea Agostiniana*, Vol. 1. Rome: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1930, 285–386.

Simpl: *Ad Simplicianum*. (*To Simplician*)
Text: CCL 44.
English Translation: J. H. S. Burleigh, *Augustine: Earlier Writings*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953, 376–406.

Sol: *Soliloquia*. (*Soliloquies*)
Text: CSEL 89.
English Translation: J. H. S. Burleigh, *Augustine: Earlier Writings*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953, 23–63.

UC: *De utilitate credendi*. (*The Usefulness of Belief*)
Text: CSEL 25.1.
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VR: *De uera religione*. (*True Religion*)
Text: CCL 32.

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PRIMARY: MANICHAEAN

CMC: *Cologne Mani Codex*

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EpSec: *Epistle of Secundinus*

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PsBk: *Psalm Book*

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