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**THE NARRATIVE UNITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE'S *CONFESSIONS*:
AUGUSTINE'S JOURNEY TO WISDOM
THROUGH FAITH AND UNDERSTANDING**

MURRAY EDWARD LITTLEJOHN

**A Thesis Presented to the
School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts**

**Department of Philosophy
University of Ottawa**



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*In memory of my father
Daniel Edward Littlejohn
(1908 - 1990)*

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Thank you all for your kindness. May we all meet in the One Light!

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PART I

THE PROBLEM OF THE UNITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE'S *CONFESSIONS*

INTRODUCTION

Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, written around the year 400 A.D., is a classic of western civilization, commonly placed at the very beginning of the development of the genre of autobiography in literary tradition,¹ yet a number of this century's most prominent Augustinian scholars have been compelled to conclude that the work lacks unity and that, however great the Bishop of Hippo's work may be in other respects, it is in fact a "badly composed book."² The problem of the *Confessions'* unity does not arise only under the critical eye of the specialist, however, for the evidence of the work's alleged poor composition seems to pose a problem for all contemporary readers whatever their degree of scholarly sophistication. It is clear to readers that in the first nine books, amidst prayers of confession, repentance, praise and inquiry, Augustine manages to narrate the story of his life, whereas with Books 10, 11, 12, and 13, while sustaining the style of 'confessional address,' the character and subject matter of the work seem to change when the author

¹ Cf. George Misch, *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity*, vol. II (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1973) pp. 625-667.

² Henri-Irénée Marrou in his work of 1938 suggested that Augustine composes poorly. Cf. *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris: Boccard, 1938) p. 61. The phrase, "a badly composed book" is from John J. O'Meara, *The Young Augustine* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1954) p. 13. Pierre Courcelle and A. Solignac are among the eminent scholars who have concluded that Augustine's *Confessions* lacks unity.

presents an in-depth rational exploration of memory, time and eternity, form and matter, and creation.³ The last three books (Books 11 - 13) form a kind of unit in themselves comprising an elaborate exegesis of the beginning verses of the first chapter of Genesis, while Book 10 seems especially incongruous, its discussion of memory fitting into neither the last cluster of books nor the 'autobiographical' portion of the work. What is the relationship of Book 10 to the books which precede and follow it? What is the relationship of the last three books to the first nine books? Thus readers of the *Confessions* detect two points in the work where there is an abrupt and inexplicable break in continuity and for this reason it seems that the work's thirteen books lack unity. Although it may be conceded that Augustine conceived his *Confessions* as a unified whole, his conception of its unity is anything but obvious to contemporary readers and scholars.⁴

For the most part readers have been content to interpret the *Confessions* as a Christian's autobiographical story of conversion and to leave the speculative contents of the last four books of the work to philosophers and theologians. In fact, references to the *Confessions* in popular literature are so commonly restricted to the 'autobiographical' portion that the work has become synonymous with its first nine books.⁵ On the other hand, while

³ These themes coincide with the titles given to Books 10, 11, 12, and 13, respectively, in *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan, (New York: Image, 1960). Henceforth all references to Augustine's *Confessions* will be to this edition.

⁴ In his recently published work, Henry Chadwick writes: "At first sight the structure of the *Confessions* is puzzling. After nine books of autobiography culminating in a deeply touching description of his mother's death and requiem, it baffles the uninitiated that he goes on to speak of memory time and creation". Henry Chadwick, *Augustine, Past Masters* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986) p. 68. The history of this century's scholarship on this question tells a different story and clearly indicates that the scholars who have pondered long and hard share the uninitiated reader's bafflement at the structure of the *Confessions*.

⁵ In fact, some recent editions of the text eliminate the last three books entirely while offering a strained rationale for including Book 10 with the first nine. Cf. E. M. Blaiklock, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine: A New Translation with an Introduction*, (Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983). The translator obviously struggles with the unity and meaning of the work: "The *Confessions* were written at the turn of the century and could themselves be coloured a little by events of the full decade which lies between the events up to Augustine's dramatic conversion, and the reflections and recollections of Book Ten [...] Book Ten seemed to provide a natural conclusion satisfying the modern reader. Some contemporaries might have opted for Book Nine, with the climax of conversion and

some Augustinian scholars with special interests have been content to focus their attention on the philosophical or theological speculation of the last four books, others have felt the need to search beyond the initial impression of discontinuity so as to see the work as a whole. How could a thinker of such great genius, a master of ancient rhetoric, a man who towered over his contemporaries and who for centuries dominated Western thought, when expressing his most intimate and personal reflections on his life and faith, have so faltered in the art of composition as to leave his work marked by radical breaches in continuity?

Yet, what is at stake is not just the literary reputation of a great and influential thinker, nor is it merely the aesthetic integrity of the *Confessions*: at stake is the very meaning of the work. The intuition guiding this present thesis is that the deepest conceptual, structural, and narrative unity of Augustine's *Confessions*, and thus its deepest meaning, have yet to be uncovered. With the assistance of those who have grappled with this problem before me, and from the perspective of contemporary hermeneutics and narrative theory, I propose a theory of the *Confessions* unity and offer a reading which I believe discloses the meaning of the work as a whole.

Part I and Part II of this thesis consists of three chapters, theoretical in nature, reflecting the moments of my methodological approach to the problem of the unity of the *Confessions*. In Chapter One I recount and assess the findings of the century's foremost Augustinian scholars in their attempts to ascertain the truth about the structure of the *Confessions*. These authors bring an unrivaled depth and breadth of scholarship to the

the model demise of Monica. Conversion is not, however, an end but a beginning, and it is better to let the narrative run on. The mystical ponderings of the last three books are, for all that, quite detachable, and it is even a little difficult to probe the writers purpose in placing them thus. They seem laboured in their striving for linkage, and are rather the utterance of the Bishop of Hippo than of the embattled man striving Godwards. We have taken leave to omit them." p. 9.

problem, making particular use of the resources of historical criticism. It is with their work that the classical lines of the debate were drawn, the evidence marshalled, and the theories advanced. Although I must conclude that those who have argued for the *Confessions* unity have failed to present a theory that provides the work with more than a minimal degree of unity, nonetheless the positive contribution they have made to our understanding of the work ought not to be dismissed. Their theories are complementary to the theory of unity presented in this thesis. We can also learn from those who have argued against the unity of the *Confessions*. Not only have these authors assisted us in understanding some of the inadequacies of the theories of unity that have been offered, with some of their negative arguments they have helped to refocus attention on important aspects of Augustine's thought and his *Confessions*. In particular, while we do not agree with John J. O'Meara when he argues that no part of the *Confessions* can be considered autobiographical because Augustine's concern is not with his life story but with the theory of man that his life serves to illustrate, his contention leaves us with several important questions. What exactly is the nature of autobiography, what is the story of a life or a life history? And what is St. Augustine's theory of man? What religion and what philosophy ground that theory? Chapters Two and Three in part respond to these questions.

Chapter Two begins by exposing the positivist presuppositions which underlie O'Meara's conception of the nature of autobiography. It is in the context of the critique of the positivist view of history (W. Dray, A. Danto) and its application to autobiography (B. Lonergan) that the question of the narrative character of history and autobiography emerges. In order to ground a narrative understanding of St. Augustine's *Confessions*, the chapter

moves from the insights of some of those philosophers who first noted the importance of narrative for the writing of history (W. Dray, M. White, A. Danto), through to those thinkers who see narrative history as essentially a 'species of the genus story' and historical understanding as the result of following a story (W. B. Gallie), to those who understand narrative as a 'mode of configurational comprehension' (L. O. Mink) and the human response to temporality (P. Ricoeur).

Ricoeur, who incorporates and develops the above elements in his own account of narrative, provides us with a profound and especially appropriate point of departure for our task as his own three-volume work *Time and Narrative*⁶ is at one pole generated by his reading of Augustine's analysis of time in Book 11 of the *Confessions* and at the other by Aristotle's treatment of plot in the *Poetics*. Ricoeur's view is that human experience is marked by the discordance of temporality which cannot be resolved on a speculative level. Augustine's attempt to do so reveals aporias which Ricoeur characterizes as exemplary. In Aristotle's concept of emplotment, the dynamic operation of putting-into-the-form-of-a-plot, Ricoeur finds the poetic and properly human response to the discordance of temporality. The plots we invent are "the privileged means by which we re-configure our confused, unformed, and at the limit mute temporal experience."⁷ Emplotment is a functional unity in both fictional and historical narratives and this permits us to speak of fictive histories and historical fictions.

Ricoeur articulates his theory of emplotment through an analysis of the threefold

⁶ Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, Trans. by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984) pp. 5-30.

⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. xi.

dynamic of mimesis. His illuminating account of mimesis implies a hermeneutical circle in which what is prefigured in mimesis₁, that is, our pre-understanding of the world of action, is configured in the emplotment operation which constitutes mimesis₂ and refigured in the act of reading, mimesis₃. The act of emplotment of mimesis₂ creates a synthesis of the heterogeneous, combining two temporal dimensions, the chronological, responsible for the episodic nature of narrative, and the configurational which transforms the succession of events into a meaningful, thematic whole, imposes the sense of an ending on an indefinite series of incidents, and creates a new 'narrative' order of time which is the inversion of the natural one, running counter to chronological time by allowing us to read the end in the beginning and the beginning in the end. Thus Ricoeur concludes that the art of narration, reflected in the act of following a story, makes productive the temporal paradoxes that, according to him, "disquieted Augustine to the point of reducing him to silence."⁸ I would argue, however, that while Augustine was brought to silence by the problem of time on the speculative level, he responded to the problem poetically and narratively by producing his *Confessions*, the literary artefact of his self-understanding and self-interpretation.

The fruit of the operation of emplotment is narrative intelligibility, which is present both in the writer's comprehension of his life as a narrative, and the reader's ability to follow the literary artefact of this comprehension. These complimentary arts of writing and reading make use of paradigms at the level of form, genre and type, which are born in the tension between tradition and innovation. They provide both for the emplotment and its reception.

When the 'followability' of the narrative breaks down the problem may have occurred

⁸ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. p. 68

in the author's failure in the art of composition, that is in the emplotment of the narrative, or it may be that the reader's capacity to follow the narrator has been impaired. With regard to the *Confessions*, I would argue that the problem lies with the modern reader's inability to discern the paradigms which have been employed by the ancient author in his task of configuring his life as a narrative whole. To overcome this impairment it is necessary to sensitize ourselves to the cultural situation of the author so as to determine the likely paradigm which his culture offered him for his task.

At this point in our inquiry the question of Augustine's theory of man is of central importance. Chapter Three is dedicated to a historical critical study of Augustine's theory of man and of the way he arrived at that theory of man, so as to ascertain the paradigms of emplotment Augustine employed in writing his life story. I argue that while many scholars have sought to weigh the importance of neo-platonism on Augustine's thought, most have not recognized the role it has played in the composition of the *Confessions*; and R. J. O'Connell who has offered a neo-platonic interpretation of the *Confessions* has erred as to the nature and degree of this neo-platonic influence on Augustine, and so his interpretation betrays the integrity of the text.⁹ Once the way in which Augustine has critically employed the tools of neo-platonic reasoning in his Christian task of 'faith seeking understanding' is clarified, and the paradigms (biblical, philosophical and classical) available to Augustine for the emplotment of his life story become discernible, I am able to present, in Part III, Chapter Four, my theory of the structure of the *Confessions* on the basis of which a unified reading, verifying this theory, is given in Chapter Five. This reading should not be construed

⁹ See my critical assessment of R.J. O'Connell's interpretation of the *Confessions* in Chapter Three of this thesis.

as a mere summary of the content of the books of the *Confessions*: the act of reading complements the configuration, actualizing the story's capacity to be followed. The configurational act of emplotment is a joint work of writing and reading; just as there is a sense in which a written symphony is only music when it is played, so a narrative is only a story when it is read. The text is thus an encoded guide for reading. The meaning or significance of the story wells up from the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the readers, in what Hans-Georg Gadamer has called 'the fusion of horizons'. In Chapter Five I offer my own reception of the work which I believe is true to the text and reveals that the thirteen books of the *Confessions* are in fact a unified narrative.

CHAPTER 1

THE QUEST FOR THE UNITY OF THE CONFESSIONS

1. Marrou's Judgement and Retraction

The great French scholar Henri-Irénée Marrou argued both for and against the unity of the *Confessions* at different points in his scholarly career. In *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*, published in 1934, Marrou was led to his reluctant conclusion that Augustine, a great writer of antiquity, composed poorly.

Un commerce prolongé avec l'oeuvre augustinienne met bien souvent à l'épreuve la patience d'un Français d'aujourd'hui: 'Saint Augustin compose mal,' 'sa composition est beaucoup trop lâche,' telle est la critique qui se formule spontanément. Il faudrait préciser ce qui se cache derrière ce malaise.¹

Marrou was not only speaking for the French thinker of his day, but expressed the suspicions of many scholars the world over. With regard to the *Confessions*, Marrou writes: "Le plan des *Confessions* a lui aussi quelque chose de bizarre. Je ne parle pas du fait que le récit autobiographique se trouve sans cesse coupé par des élévations religieuses."² He astutely points out, "l'entrelacement des deux thèmes du souvenir et de la prière tient en effet à

¹ Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris: Boccard, 1938), p. 61.

² Marrou, *Saint Augustin* p. 63.

l'essence même du livre, où Augustin a voulu confesser à la fois ses déchéances et la gloire de Dieu."³ For Marrou, the work is strange because of the apparently disjointed and incongruous structure, in which a predominantly autobiographical narrative abruptly becomes a philosophical and theological treatise which explores several themes. Marrou writes:

La partie autobiographique qui va jusqu'à la mort de Monique n'occupe que neuf livres sur treize. Avec le livre X nous entrons dans une nouvelle phase, non plus historique, mais dogmatique; saint Augustin n'y raconte plus sa vie passée, il y analyse l'état actuel de sa pensée, la position religieuse qu'il se trouve à occuper au moment où il écrit. Sans doute, on peut estimer que c'est une conclusion naturelle au récit que précède.

Mais cette conclusion prend bientôt un développement inattendu: la 'confession' d'Augustin n'occupe en effet que le livre X; avec le livre XI, l'exposé rebondit brusquement sur un autre terrain; les trois derniers livres ne sont rien autre en effet qu'un commentaire allégorique du premier chapitre de la Genèse. Là encore, sans que rien ne nous en ait prévenu, sous le même titre de *Confessions*, se transmet un traité indépendant qui aurait très bien pu être publié à part [...]⁴

It is interesting that while suggesting Book 10 is a new phase of the work, Marrou indicates that he sees it as being in continuity with Augustine's recounting of his past life, reading it as the author's assessment of his present situation. In Marrou's view the breach in continuity comes between Book 10 and Book 11, with Book 10 functioning as a kind of epilogue to Augustine's autobiographical narrative, giving the reader an account of his interior state of soul at the time of writing. Books 11 to 13 inexplicably veer off into exegesis, which leads one to believe that they are a separate work of Biblical interpretation, complete in itself, but for some inexplicable reason added to the first ten books. For Marrou, it is not the shift to a more rational mode of discourse which signals the breach in the unity of the *Confessions*, but Augustine's venture into a discussion of time and creation within the context of an exegesis of Genesis. The notion that Book 10 is an account of Augustine's present state of soul will be picked up by many writers, and is usually made on

³ Marrou, *Saint Augustin*, p. 63.

⁴ Marrou, *Saint Augustin*, p. 63.

the basis of Augustine's discussion of how he is dealing with sensual temptation and the tendency toward sin (especially pride), which occurs after a long analysis of the faculty of memory. Why Augustine digresses into this discussion of memory in the first place is usually explained, inadequately, by the fact that he has used his faculty of memory so extensively in recounting his past. This does little justice to Augustine's actual excursus on memory and fails to clarify why it follows the narration of his life and precedes the discussion of temptation and sin. Marrou does manage to get beyond the more naive reading of the work which believes that a shift in modes of discourse must signal disunity. In this manner, while having judged the composition bizarre, Marrou has made the first steps toward a discovery of a deeper unity beyond the apparent disunity.

It was only eleven years after the initial publication of his *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* that Marrou saw the need to add the *Retractatio* to the 1949 edition and reverse his early judgement of Augustine's poor composition skills. "Je ne puis relire sans rougir le chapitre que j'ai consacré à la rhétorique chez saint Augustin et notamment à la *dispositio*. 'Saint Augustin compose mal...' (p. 61): jugement d'un jeune barbare ignorant et présomptueux."⁵ The basis for his erroneous judgement of Augustine, Marrou explains, lies in the fact that the art of ancient rhetoric has ceased to be taught in the schools of France. He and other intellectuals no longer know this fundamental technique so that any true communion with the classics is diminished if not compromised.⁶ Twentieth century intellectuals have committed the error of cultural and methodological prejudice by making

⁵ Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Retractatio* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1949), p. 665.

⁶ Marrou, *Retractatio*, p. 665.

judgements about past works based on present standards without first seeking to understand and appreciate the standards and methods of that culture within which the book was written. Immersed in our own naïveté, what would we have wanted of Augustine, asks Marrou: "une composition sèchement scolaire, énonçant bien sagement son but et ses divisions et se tenant, point par point, au programme annoncé? Il eut été trop facile à saint Augustin de me donner satisfaction, mais cela lui eut paru indigne de lui, et de son public."⁷

For Marrou, Augustine's monumental works are products of a literary genius and contemporary thinkers humiliate themselves when making facile criticism. This he compares to a naïve person reproaching Picasso or Braque as if "[ils] n'étaient pas capables de dessiner une guitare selon les lois de la perspective."⁸

Augustine was a great artist who built upon existing rules of discourse, and innovated new rules as well, breaking out of existing molds with which lesser artists of his day were content. It is the arrogance of the modern who, satisfied with a summary initiation into the age and art of Augustine, chooses to judge the innovative master of rhetoric and art with his own insufficient knowledge and appreciation of the ancient art and the genius of Augustine. Marrou's remarks about his earlier judgement read like the humble confession of a man who thought himself master only to discover that he has been a fool and must now learn from the work of the real master.

Je prenais pour impuissance ou indifférence ce qui était discrétion voulue, souplesse calculée, déformation expressive procurée par un coup de pouce adroit; je prenais pour barbarie, ou décadence, le raffinement suprême d'un art, parfaitement maître de ses procédés et en quête d'effets subtils [...] J'ai bien souvent relu, et avec un profit et une admiration sans cesse accrus, ces mêmes chefs-d'oeuvre que j'osais prétendre mal composés, *Confessions*, *De Trinitate*,

⁷ Marrou, *Retractatio*, p. 666.

⁸ Marrou, *Retractatio*, p. 665.

Cité de Dieu: à mieux les pénétrer et les comprendre, j'ai dépouillé peu à peu l'orgueil du moderne, cet orgueil propre au barbare qui méprise ce qu'il ignore; peu à peu je suis devenu sensible à cet art si parfaitement sûr de ses moyens, qui évite tout effet facile et vise à charmer en surprenant.

Marrou does not go into a discussion of the unity of the *Confessions*, but leaves his readers to ponder the notion that Augustine's composition is so refined and of such quality that the unity of his works has escaped the gaze of men of less stature and of other cultural sensibilities. One is left to contemplate Marrou's insight that Augustine composes like a musician. "Il faut lire chacun comme un tout, comme un vaste morceau symphonique dont nul point d'orgue ne vient interrompre le déroulement, et qu'il serait en effet barbare de morceler."¹⁰

One need not look beyond the beginning of Book 1 to discover the fecundity of Marrou's insight. An attentive reading of Book 1,1-5 gives some idea of how Marrou's insight of a musical mode of composition might illuminate a reading of the work. The complex artfulness of the opening address to God evokes the structure of a musical prelude. From the opening sentence in this passage Augustine strikes the thematic notes which will resound throughout the work.¹¹ Marrou, however, does not develop his insight into an account of the unity of the work, leaving the possibility, but no convincing arguments, that Augustine's musical mode of composition leads to the conclusion that the *Confessions* is unified. It is doubtful that this inspired suggestion, on its own, can account satisfactorily for the apparent breaches in the work, with its abrupt shifts in discourse and subject matter, but it could reinforce a theory of unity.

⁹ Marrou, *Retractatio*, pp. 665-6.

¹⁰ Marrou, *Retractatio*, p. 672.

¹¹ For the application of this idea, see my analysis of *Confessions* Book 1, Chapters 1-5 in Chapter Five of this thesis.

2. The Title as the Key to Unity

Some time before Marrou's proposal that Augustine composes like a musician-artist, scholars such as H. Böhmer in 1915 and P.M. Verheijen in 1949 argued that the title '*Confessions*', and the diverse meanings of the term, provides the key to the unity of the work.¹² Other writers who followed have also embraced this approach and it has become, with some variations, one of the standard explanations for the unity of the work, to the point where it is often included in translators' introductions to various editions of the *Confessions*.¹³

Since the title and an element of the concept of 'confession' has been used by so many subsequent writers of lesser depth and intent, it is all too easy for the contemporary reader to lose sight of the semantic richness of the term as Augustine employed it. First and foremost, among the refracted meanings of the term *confessio*, there is implied a God who receives his confession. Augustine's confession would make no sense whatsoever if it were not God who was primarily being addressed. It is this 'before God' stance of the author which not only differentiates Augustine's *Confessions* from works such as the *Confessions* of Rousseau, Wordsworth's *Prelude*, Goethe's *Poetry and Truth*, and even Tolstoy's *Confessions*, but also sets it apart from other works of his own day such as Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, and more importantly from his own earlier accounts of his life as evidenced in the *Soliloquies*.¹⁴ In this earlier work there were a few prayers which might be seen as

¹² Cf. A. Solignac, Introd., *Les Confessions, Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* vol. 13, Trans. E. Trehorel and G. Bouissou, ed. M. Skutella (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1962), p. 19.

¹³ Cf. John K. Ryan, Introd., *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, and Vernon J. Bourke, Introd., *The Confessions*, p. viii.

¹⁴ John S. Dunne, *A Search for God in Time and Memory* (Toronto: Collier-Macmillan Canada Ltd., 1969), p. 47.

embryonic of the more developed and profound style of the *Confessions*, but its structure remained at the literary level of the author's dialogue with himself and in this it is similar to Aurelius' *Meditations*. Yet some twelve years later, Augustine had advanced to the point where he was to design his *Confessions* as an extended confession before God. Thus the work cannot be construed as merely an author's account of an eventful life. While Augustine shares it with the reader, "what really matters to him is the consequence of his confession" before God.¹⁵

In this confession before God, however, "all the shades of meaning of confession were central."¹⁶ Most modern readers of the *Confessions* are accustomed to thinking of the term 'confession' only in the sense of a confession of sins. However, properly situated in its Judeo-Christian context, the term 'confession' has a three-dimensional character referring not only to the confession of sins but also to the confession of faith and the confession of praise.¹⁷ In his confession of sin, the penitent confesses that all of his sins have been against God, even those which have affected his neighbour and the larger community. In the early Church, it was customary for the penitent to confess his sins in the presence of the community, though the details of the sins were not revealed. In the confession of faith, *confessio* takes on the meaning of a profession of faith. According to liturgical custom, the penitent once having confessed his sins would confess faith in word and deed, surrendering himself to the care of the God who led him to confess. The third dimension of confession,

¹⁵ K. Weintraub, *The Value of the Individual* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 24.

¹⁶ Weintraub, p. 22.

¹⁷ Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973), pp. 87-88.

the confession of praise, finds the penitent praising the merciful God aloud as the Psalmist praised the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The confession of praise always goes together with the profession of faith in God as does thanksgiving and blessing.¹⁸ In a number of Psalms, all three meanings of *confessio* are present in the Hebrew poets' address to God and it may well be that such psalms provided a part of the spiritual and literary inspiration which gave birth to the *Confessions*' style of a sustained address to God. Thus in continuity with the Judeo-Christian tradition of which he was an heir, the Bishop of Hippo confesses not only his sins of thought, word and deed, he confesses also his faith and trust in God, and his gratitude and praise of God.

It is proposed that this threefold confession guides the thematic structuring of the work at the microcosmic and the macrocosmic level of the text. The threefold meaning of *confessio* permeates the work at the microcosmic level, present in its opening as well as its closing passage, and is pervasive throughout the work.¹⁹ At the macrocosmic level, the threefold *confessio* accounts for the three divisions of the work. Each section contains all three elements of *confessio*, but places emphasis on the confession of either sin, praise or faith, according to the dominant theme of each section. The dominant theme of the first part of the *Confessions* can be identified as the public confession of past sins before God; Book 10 would be said to constitute an articulation of praise to the God whose power has delivered the sinner from unhappiness to his present state of grace; and finally in the last three books of the work, Augustine confesses or professes faith in the Biblical Creator-God

¹⁸ Léon-Dufour, pp. 87-88.

¹⁹ Weintraub, p. 23.

in the form of an exegesis of the opening verses of Genesis.

In 1930, J. Stiglmayr added his voice to those who argued that it is the title which holds the key to the unity of the *Confessions*.²⁰ He interprets 'confession', more simply, as a sacrifice of praise to God and an avowal of God's mercy.²¹ According to Stiglmayr, such sacrifice of praise is to be found throughout the entire work and unites its three distinct parts. The suggestion is that the autobiography of Books 1 to 9, the assessment of the state of the author's soul in Book 10 and the exegesis of Genesis in Books 11 to 13 are united by virtue of the fact that they all contain this pervasive element of confession as a sacrifice of praise. Each of these sections of the work, while dealing with different subject matter have praise of God resonating through them, as though they were movements within a single act of liturgy. In this allusion to a liturgical style or spirit of composition, Stiglmayr complements Marrou's fecund suggestion that Augustine composed his works as a musician-artist.

Yet how successful are these attempts to ground a solution to the problem of unity in the meaning of the title of the work? It must be conceded that the *Confessions* has some degree of cohesiveness, in spite of the abrupt shift from a narrative to rational discourse in Book 10 and the subsequent shift to exegesis thereafter, given that all thirteen books sustain a profound confessional address to God. One might also agree with the analysis of Böhmer and Verheijen (echoed by J. Ryan and K. Weintraub), that this threefold *confessio* pervades the three divisions of the work and provides some minimal degree of unity and

²⁰ Cf. Pierre Courcelle, *Recherches sur les confessions de saint Augustin* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1968), p. 21.

²¹ Courcelle, p. 21.

coherence.²² Nevertheless, the theory of a direct correspondence between the threefold confession of sin, praise and faith and the three divisions of the book as the key to its unity is not tenable. Even if the confession of a past sinful life is dominant in Books 1 to 9, it is impossible to concede that Book 10, with its elaborate discussion of memory, fits neatly into the scenario and is adequately characterized as a confession of praise to God in the present for His delivering the author from his life of sin. This is not to deny that this element can be found within Book 10, but to suggest that it is the dominant theme stretches the confession insight over more territory than it can cover. The same might be said regarding the suggestion that the last three books, with their elaborate exegesis of the beginning of Genesis and the discussion of philosophical and theological topics such as time and eternity, and matter and form, can be aptly characterized as being a confession of faith.

Stiglmayr's more general thesis that the work is unified because its diverse parts are held together by a sacrifice of praise and an avowal of God's mercy does not grant the work much unity either. One is more justified in saying that the work in its entirety, despite its obvious shifts of modes of discourse and subject matter, has woven throughout its fabric the threefold confession. The question here becomes a matter of the quality and the degree of the unity that the meaning of 'confession' actually confers on the work. It is difficult to see how this account shows the work to be united to a degree that would counter the accusations that the *Confessions* is a poorly composed, disunified work. It still remains to be explained why Augustine abruptly shifts from a narrative discourse of his past life to a rational discussion on memory and his present state of soul (Book 10), and then to an elaborate

²² Cf. Ryan, pp. 29-32, and Weintraub, pp. 22-23.

Scriptural exegesis which extends throughout the last three books. As evocative as Stiglmayr's theory might be, one can ask more specifically how accurate it is to characterize 'confession' so strictly as a sacrifice of praise. While the *Confessions* does evoke this sense of a sacrifice of praise and liturgical act, as Courcelle points out, "ce concept de sacrifice ne me paraît qu'un aspect particulier du concept de confession, qui ne suffit même pas...à rendre compte de la composition de l'ouvrage."²³

3. External Principles of Unity

Some thinkers, rather than seeking the principles of the *Confessions*' unity only in the interior of the work, have searched for an external key to its unity. M. Wundt sees the work as divided into two parts, the first being Augustine's renunciation of sin and the second a profession of faith.²⁴ According to Wundt this two-part division is based upon the two parts of the baptismal catechesis of the Church of Augustine's day. Augustine's basing the *Confessions* on the model of the Sacrament of Initiation is an example of his use of his own life as a pedagogical tool for instructional catechesis. That Augustine was also working on *On Catechizing the Uninstructed* while he was writing the *Confessions* is offered as evidence for this hypothesis.²⁵ In this work on catechesis Augustine argues that the work of the catechist is more smooth and successful if the uninstructed person is led to Christianity by

²³ Courcelle, p. 21.

²⁴ Solignac, p. 19.

²⁵ Courcelle, p. 21.

a path which passes through a series of providential admonitions, miracles or dreams, and terrors and dread that bring him to face the contingency of human life and his own finitude.²⁶ At this point, the catechist has a two-fold task: to show the candidate that God has been with him through all of this personal drama and that the best and surest way to God is through the Sacred Scriptures. The actual instruction of the prospective Christian would then begin with the study and explanation of the book of Genesis. According to Wundt's reading of the *Confessions*, Augustine illustrates the first phases of the catechesis with his own life story, which shows how he was providentially guided to Christian faith and baptism.²⁷ The second part of the work, which properly begins with the exegesis of Genesis, would thus correspond to the second phase of instructional catechesis. From this perspective the entire elaborate work rests upon a program of baptismal catechesis, where the initiate, discerning God's guidance in his life, renounces evil and makes a profession of faith through the exegesis of Genesis.

Though interesting, Wundt's theory is stretched too thin when it is presented as the basis of the structure of the *Confessions*. One can readily agree that Augustine is writing about his life in the hope that it will be helpful to the reader, but it is difficult to believe that such an elaborate account of his life, and the philosophical and theological discourse which follows it, could be solely or even mainly based upon the formula for baptismal catechesis. Augustine does more in the first nine books than recount a story marked by admonitions, signs, dreams and miracles; the second part of the *Confessions*, with its elaborate exegesis

²⁶ Courcelle, p. 21-22.

²⁷ Courcelle, pp. 21-22.

of the opening verses of Genesis and the speculative inquiry within this, transcends the category of profession of faith. It is strained and artificial to suggest that the basic two-part program of catechesis provides the structural basis for the work and is therefore the key to its unity. In any event, it is difficult to account for Book 10 according to Wundt's schema since the analysis found there neither fits into the recounting of a past life of sin and God's providential guidance to conversion, nor is it a part of the profession of faith which begins the instructional exegesis of Genesis.

As if anticipating this last objection, E. Williger, in a critical analysis of Augustine's text, argues that Book 10 is an addition to the *Confessions* and was not included in the original design, but artificially inserted into the work after the initial books had been composed and issued to the public.²⁸ This first edition of the *Confessions*, Williger speculates, was a project designed by the author for the reader's edification and consisted of two distinct parts; the autobiography in Books 1 to 9 and the exegesis of Genesis in Books 11 to 13. The intended goal of edification is said to unite these parts. Williger finds evidence for his position that Book 10 was a later insert to the work from Augustine's own words in Book 11 when he writes:

When shall I suffice to proclaim by the tongue of my pen all your exhortations, and all your warnings, consolations, and acts of guidance, by which you have led me to preach your Word and dispense your sacrament to your people? If I am sufficient to declare all these in due order, the drops of time are precious to me. For a long time I have burned to meditate upon your law, and therein to confess to you both my knowledge and my lack of wisdom....²⁹

According to Williger, Augustine is saying that he has neither the strength nor the

²⁸ Courcelle, p. 25.

²⁹ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 11.2.2, pp. 277-78.

time to continue his chronological autobiography, which he had already concluded prior to Book 10.³⁰ In Book 11, he tells why he has broken off the narration of his life in Book 9, which indicates that Book 11 immediately followed Book 9. Williger also tries to identify where he believes Book 10 has been artificially sutured together with what precedes and follows it.³¹

It is questionable whether the above passage in Book 11 provides evidence that Book 10 was inserted. While it is obvious that Book 10 does not continue Augustine's narration of his life, at least not in the same manner as in the first nine books, it cannot be concluded that because Augustine waited until Book 11 to comment on the fact that he will not be narrating the details of his post-conversion journey to the priesthood, that Book 11 immediately followed Book 9 and that Book 10 was a later addition to the work. It may well be, if a more profound continuity were to be discovered between Books 9 and 10, that Book 11 was the most convenient place to make such an aside without disrupting the flow of the work. Certainly, it would make sense to situate the reader in this manner before entering into an extensive exegesis of Scripture. As well, what Williger interprets as signs of suturing in the text may only indicate the obvious shifting of gears in Augustine's narrative, as he turns his emphasis toward another theme or topic. This need not indicate insertion or even a lack of unity and coherence if a deeper principle of unity can be found. Other thinkers who have entered into this discussion, such as P. Courcelle and J.J. O'Meara, were also convinced that Book 10 was a disruptive insert into the original manuscript, and this became

³⁰ Courcelle, p. 25.

³¹ Courcelle, p. 25.

a key element in their own analysis of the structure of the work. For the moment all that can be said is that it rests with those who embrace this view to produce better evidence and a more credible explanation for this theory.

Other writers have sought to ground the unity of the *Confessions* in a general schema which loosely combines two movements of the work.³² I. Freyer, for example, suggests that the sections of the work encompass the dialectical moments in the well known tension of action and contemplation that has existed in Christian tradition from the time of the Gospels.³³ The narration of Augustine's past is a recounting of the active life of Augustine the seeker, which culminates in his conversion. The narrative then makes the transition to Augustine the contemplative by presenting his reflections on memory, time and creation. H. Kusch sees the work as two phases of the theological theme of the author's transition from *homo vetus* to *homo spiritualis*.³⁴ The *Confessions* is based on Augustine's own spiritual progress, the Pauline 'old man' dying and giving birth to the 'new man'. The views of Freyer and Kusch are no doubt basically correct. It can be said that every Christian's life, and thus story, involves the dying of the 'old man' and the birth of the 'new man'. As well it seems true to say that the last four books of the *Confessions* involves a more contemplative inquiry than the first nine books. However the questions of the exact relationship between the active and contemplative sections of the work and why the contemplative sections of the work deal with a reflection on memory and the meaning of Genesis remain unresolved. As

³² Solignac, p. 19.

³³ Solignac, p. 25.

³⁴ Solignac, p. 19.

they are presented, the problem is that the degree of unity these views grant the *Confessions* is minimal.

Some writers have opted for a single, more all-pervasive theme conferring unity upon the work.³⁵ Among them is P. Cayré, who sees "the deep sentiment of the presence of God in man" as the central theme of the work which binds the diverse parts together in a profound unity.³⁶ Without a doubt, the theme of presence is a dominant one throughout the *Confessions*, as it lies at the heart of Augustine's literary innovation of composing the work as extended address before God. That this theme and literary technique does provide a common stylistic trait throughout the work is true enough, but it is also true that this theme does not provide a unity and coherence that overcomes the apparently abrupt shifts in discourse and subject matter.

4. The Augustinian View of Time and Memory as a Basis of Unity

P. Landsberg and P. Le Blond have put forth more complex theories of unity based on Augustine's own ideas and terminology.³⁷ Landsberg presents a theory of the unity of the *Confessions* based on the threefold schema of time, past, present and future. He argues that this structural framework gives the work a degree of continuity and coherence which has

³⁵ Solignac, p. 19.

³⁶ Solignac, p. 19.

³⁷ Solignac, p. 19.

thus far been overlooked or underestimated.³⁸ In this analysis, the first part of the work is comprised of Augustine's confession to God of his wayward and sinful life. With Book 10 Augustine gives an account of his present state of soul, allowing the reader a glimpse into the heart of the man who confesses to God. Books 11 to 13 also confess to God, but this time in and through the interpretation of the beginning of Genesis. Landsberg sees this final section of the *Confessions* as a prolongation or development of Book 10, whereby a testimony of the author's heart now opens up into a testimony of the state of the author's meditative intelligence.³⁹ While at first it may seem strange that Augustine concludes with an expansive reflection on the first verse of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, Landsberg points out that Augustine had not overlooked the fact that there is an entire theology within this passage, which when united with the analysis of Book 10, provides the basis for an existential philosophy in the profound analysis of memory and time.⁴⁰ He writes:

...les neuf premiers livres des *Confessions* pourraient être intitulés *Memoria*, le dixième *Constitutus*, et la dernière partie *Expectatio*, attente dont le contenu médité ne saurait être que le Dieu révélé par les Écritures, et surtout l'éternité, dont le concept domine, en effet, ces trois derniers livres des *Confessions*. Si, dans un instant de sa vie temporelle, Augustin voulait présenter tout ce qu'il pouvait rendre présent dans ce même instant de l'esprit, cette tripartition était une nécessité. Les *Confessions* donneraient ainsi la somme de la spiritualité d'un instant, au sens qualitatif de ce mot.⁴¹

At least one prominent American scholar, Vernon Bourke, seems to embrace Landsberg's position when he indicates that the thematic title of the work, interpreted as 'profession of faith', together with the Augustinian analysis of time provide the key to the

³⁸ P. Landsberg, "La conversion de saint Augustin," *Supplément de la vie spirituelle* (1936), pp. 32-33.

³⁹ Landsberg, p. 31.

⁴⁰ Landsberg, p. 31.

⁴¹ Landsberg, p. 32.

unity of the work. "Basic to the development of his epic theme and to the structure of this work is the view of time that we find in the eleventh book."⁴² Bourke, echoing Landsberg, explains the structure as follows: "We live and think only in the present; the past is gone and the future is yet to come. But from the fleeting present we may look back in memory (*memoria*) to the past, we may directly observe (*contuitus*) our experience of the present instant, and we may look forward (*expectatio*) to the future."⁴³ In the *Confessions* Augustine looks back from the present to recount his past; in Books 1 to 9 he examines his conscience in his present state as the Bishop of Hippo. Then with an interpretation of the first verse of Genesis, he looks "forward to the ultimate meaning of human life in the divine plan for creation."⁴⁴ With this threefold schema, Bourke concludes that if we move beyond our initial puzzlement we will come to see "the unity of the whole: that Augustine's thought, personal life and his tribulations and successes [...] constitute but a minor though instructive incident in the Christian epic of mankind's life under God."⁴⁵ In this manner Bourke falls in line with Landsberg's position, helping to make of it another standard response to the unity question. Yet, while it contains some truth, this response is unsatisfactory on a number of counts.

Courcelle, commenting on Landsberg's theory, questions how it can be understood that Augustine's exegesis of Genesis corresponds to the author's future.⁴⁶ Even when we

⁴² Bourke, p. viii.

⁴³ Bourke, p. viii.

⁴⁴ Bourke, p. viii.

⁴⁵ Bourke, pp. viii-ix.

⁴⁶ Courcelle, p. 21.

consider Bourke's suggestion that "the last three books look forward to the ultimate meaning of human life in the divine plan of creation", it is difficult to see just how the divine schema for human life is disclosed in the few verses of Genesis Augustine interpreted and again how these opening verses refer to the human future, "the Christian epic of mankind's life under God."⁴⁷ Landsberg does suggest quite rightly that there is a whole theology here in Genesis. But why if he was trying to emphasize the theme of the future Augustine chose this particular passage has yet to be adequately explained.

There is the further difficulty of the first nine books' designation as *memoria*, and Book 10's as *contuitus*, Augustine's examination of his present situation. What is the true relationship between the narrative of the past and the 'present regard' of Book 10, given that the narrative of the past does not bring the author's story to his actual present, the time of his writing the book? Again, why does the author's narration of his past conclude with his conversion and then jump over twelve years to an alleged account of the author's present state? Also, if it is concluded that Book 10 is an account of Augustine's present largely based upon his analysis of his ongoing temptation to sin, how is one to explain the fact that his discussion of memory actually dominates the book? In light of this it seems strange to place Books 1 to 9 under the designation of *memoria*. Thus, while it is no doubt true that in writing the *Confessions* Augustine was conscious of his own analysis of time - that is to say he was aware of himself as looking back from a present viewpoint and recounting his past, examining his present, and anticipating his eternal future with God - too many problems arise when this schema is applied to the particulars of the work for it to function as the

⁴⁷ Bourke, p. viii.

primary basis of the work's unity.

As if to compensate for the inherent weakness of this theory, Landsberg adds that the most profound unity of the *Confessions* does not lie with any logical unity within the structure of the work. In the final analysis, he sees the unity to be of a more interior nature, based on Augustine's subjective stance of confession before God that is sustained throughout the work.⁴⁸ He writes, "enfin, l'unité du livre se réalise de la façon la plus profonde dans l'acte même dont il témoigne. L'unité suprême des *Confessions* est dans la confession. Augustin pourrait parler de n'importe quoi sans détruire cette unité, s'il en parlait dans le même esprit."⁴⁹ The problem with this falling back to 'a unity through intention' or 'a unity of spirit' is that it interprets unity in so broad a sense that it provides very little unity and coherence at all.

It is Le Blond, following Landsberg's lead, who tries to give the tripartite division based on the framework of time a more solid foundation, arguing that Augustine's discussion of memory in Book 10 grounds the unity of the work.⁵⁰ Le Blond sees Book 10 as the gravitational center of the work's unity, interpreting the discussion of memory as an indication that there is, in Augustinian terms, a memory of the past which is in evidence in the first nine books, a memory of the present in Book 10, and a memory of the future in the last three books of the work, which are seen as referring to Augustine's anticipation of future rest in the eternity of God. According to Le Blond, these three different kinds of memory

⁴⁸ Landsberg, p. 33.

⁴⁹ Landsberg, p. 33.

⁵⁰ J.M. Le Blond, *Les conversions de saint Augustin* (Paris: Aubier, 1950), p. 16.

are implicit in Augustine's in his discussion of memory in Book 10. Augustine first discusses *memoria* as a reservoir of past experience, but then moves to a discovery of "la présence de Dieu dans la mémoire."⁵¹ Le Blond astutely notes that Augustine explicitly insists on the concept of memory of the present in his later work *The Trinity*, maintaining that the presence of God is experienced through it. For Le Blond, the memory of the past corresponds to Landsberg's *memoria*, the theme of the first nine books, and the memory of the present corresponds to *contuitus*, Augustine's account of his present state of soul. Le Blond also sees memory as having the future referent corresponding to Landsberg's *expectatio*, the idea of memory referring to an expectation of future eternal rest. In this threefold time frame based upon three dimensions or kinds of memory, Augustine renders his past present, experiences the presence of God in his own present, and anticipates eternal rest in God in such a way that even the future has a kind of presence.

C'est dans les diverses fonctions et l'unité de cette mémoire qu'Augustin a trouvé à la fois le centre et la division de ses *Confessions*: elles sont d'abord évocation du passé, de la lente dialectique qui a fait naître et grandir en lui le sens de la responsabilité, qui a conduit sa réflexion explicite du rationalisme à la foi; elles sont ensuite l'expression du présent, de la présence de Dieu dans cette mémoire qui est identifiée avec la conscience; anticipation de l'avenir enfin, dans la tension vers l'éternité qui sera la révélation du Dieu qu'enseignent les Ecritures et dont l'attente transfigure déjà le monde en un symbole, un sacrement de la gloire future.⁵²

Le Blond surpasses Landsberg in his explanation for the prominence of the elaborate discussion of memory in Book 10, placing memory itself at the forefront of the discussion of unity, as the concept which best grounds Landsberg's theory that Augustinian time forms the basis for the structure of the work.⁵³ Yet Le Blond's account, so closely allied with

⁵¹ Le Blond, p. 16.

⁵² Le Blond, p. 17.

⁵³ Le Blond, p. 17.

Landsberg's, crumbles beneath the weight of some of the criticism raised against Landsberg's theory. Le Blond's attentiveness to Augustine's text on memory uncovers a more profound basis for the 'past, present and future' structure of the *Confessions*, and while he points out what may be the strategic importance of memory of the past and memory of the present for the unity of the book's design, the absence of an account in the text of twelve years between Augustine's conversion and his authorship of the work still remains unexplained. Nor is it satisfactorily explained how Book 10 is to be considered an account of the author's present. That memory dominates the first part of this book is obvious, but what this extensive analysis of memory has to do with the *Confessions* as a whole is not. Why does the recounting of his past end with his conversion and then jump to the account of his present state of soul? If memory is the key to understanding the relationship between the first and second part of the work, it still needs to be explained why Augustine does not extend his narration of the past into the present. Augustine's unique concept of a 'memory of the present' is extremely important for a proper understanding of Book 10, and indeed for the entire *Confessions*, but Le Blond does not develop this line of thought enough to fully grasp its significance for the problem of unity. Le Blond's account also submits to the same criticism raised against Landsberg by Courcelle, regarding the problem of seeing Augustine's exegesis of Genesis as corresponding to the designation of future. Even if Augustinian memory can be extended intelligibly into a notion of a memory of the future, it is not made obvious how this is accommodated by an extended interpretation of Genesis.

5. Negative Conclusions

This placement of Book 10 and memory at the forefront of the discussion did not impress Courcelle, who revived Williger's theory that Book 10 was a later addition to the work inserted after the original *Confessions* had been completed.⁵⁴ Courcelle's own theory of the work's structure builds on Wundt's earlier thesis that Augustine makes use of his own life as a pedagogical tool for the instructional catechesis of his readers. He agrees that the autobiographical portion of the work conforms to what was then a first phase of catechesis, with the exegesis of Genesis corresponding to the second phase. Courcelle's innovation is his argument that it was the exegesis of Genesis which was of prime importance for the author, the autobiography secondary.⁵⁵ He maintains Augustine was trying to present as quickly as possible his own story, that is, the steps which led to his conversion to Christianity, in order to get on to the matter which was of real importance to him, the detailed explanation of Christianity based on the Sacred Scriptures beginning with Genesis.

Courcelle detects expressions of Augustine's desire to hurry his work along as early as Book 3. Augustine was unable to do so, to the extent that in Book 9 he had begun to panic about the matter.⁵⁶ In Book 11 Augustine was more relaxed, having finally reached the real matter at hand, the process of exegesis by which one can come to know the God of the Scriptures.⁵⁷ In his relaxed mood, however, Augustine takes a great deal of time getting to the first verse of Genesis and once again begins to worry about the progress of his work. The end result was that Augustine did not manage to get beyond the beginning

⁵⁴ Courcelle, p. 25.

⁵⁵ Courcelle, p. 23.

⁵⁶ Courcelle, p. 24.

⁵⁷ Courcelle, p. 24.

passage of Genesis and was forced to present his work to the public in an uncompleted state.⁵⁸ Yet Augustine's contemporaries who read this initial version of the *Confessions* responded better to the autobiographical portion of the work and began to request that the author write something about his present situation; according to Courcelle, this prompted the writing and insertion of Book 10 into the *Confessions*. While such an insertion may have satisfied Augustine's reading public, this could not but throw whatever remained of his original design for the *Confessions* even further off its intended course.

The speculation that Book 10 was not a part of the original *Confessions* would support Courcelle's initial hypothesis that the structure of the work is a simple two-part division based on the phases of the Christian initiation program of his day. Book 10 would interrupt this programmatic division of providential conversion story and exegesis. Courcelle accepts Williger's argument that Book 10 is a later addition, developing it by arguing that there is a stylistic symmetry between the prologue of the first part (Book 1) and the prologue of the second part of the work (Book 11).⁵⁹ This is not, however, convincing evidence that Book 10 was inserted. Rather, the fact that the themes and language of the *Confessions*' opening passage are echoed in similar passages throughout the entire work only underlines Marrou's observation about Augustine's musical style of composition. It may be that there is a particularly strong parallel of structure between the opening of Book 1 and that of Book 11 and this may even signify the beginning of a new phase of the work, but it does not prove that Book 10 is a disruptive insert, nor is it proof of Courcelle's hypothesis

⁵⁸ Courcelle, pp. 24-25.

⁵⁹ Courcelle, p.26.

concerning the work's structural design.

Courcelle's arguments that Book 10 is an addition are finally not convincing. The conjecture that Augustine would have written Book 10 in response to readers requesting that he write about his present situation seems puzzling when the contents of Book 10 are considered. It remains to be explained how Augustine's elaborate analysis of memory could have been undertaken for any such purpose, and it is difficult to imagine how readers seeking to learn about Augustine's post-conversion life could have been satisfied with Augustine's account of his present struggle against sinful temptations. Surely if Book 10 were written in response to such a request it would have taken on a more consistently autobiographical form and stood in greater, and certainly more obvious, continuity with the narrative of the first nine books.

Courcelle would argue that Augustine was such a bad writer that he could not follow through adequately on his design and compose a work based upon the simple two-fold structure of conversion story and exegesis, with the former but a brief preamble to the latter. However that may be, it taxes credulity to be told not only that Augustine wrote a compulsively long story of his conversion when he had set out to write a short one, but that in this same work he planned to give a detailed exposition of Sacred Scripture and managed only to get through a few lines of Genesis. If this argument were at all convincing Augustine would compose poorly indeed.

In the face of implausible arguments and in the absence of any historical evidence of a 'first edition' of the *Confessions* without Book 10, the hypothesis of Courcelle and Williger must be rejected. The failure to support the claim that Book 10 is a later addition

further weakens the theory that the key to the unity of the *Confessions* is to be found in the two-fold structure of catechetical instruction. Courcelle's speculation brings us no closer to establishing whether or not the *Confessions* is a unified work.

Having surveyed the long discussion on this matter, the astute Augustinian scholar A. Solignac could not advance beyond Marrou's initial conclusion that there is not much more than a psychological unity to the work.⁶⁰ Solignac does find a general thematic unity within the *Confessions*, in its division between the unconverted Augustine in Books 1 to 8 and the converted Augustine in Books 9 to 13, but in the end his appeal for the unity of the *Confessions*, like that of Landsberg before him, rests only on a unity of spirit or intent. He writes, "...on peut légitimement préférer voir dans le *Confessions* une unité plus 'intérieure' que logique: unité d'esprit et d'intention plus que suite cohérente et progressive de développements; ce point de vue paraît plus conforme à la manière d'Augustin et le mieux justifié par les textes eux-mêmes."⁶¹

J.J. O'Meara will not disagree with the conclusion that there is but a minimal degree of unity to be found in the *Confessions*.⁶² In fact O'Meara sees the search for unity as an exercise in futility, brought about by the desire of scholars to reach a conclusion other than the one to which the known facts inevitably lead. The facts, as O'Meara sees and interprets them, are that the work is divided into two very loosely connected parts; the first nine books dealing mainly with his conversion and the last four books with his present life, in which he

⁶⁰ Solignac, p. 20.

⁶¹ Solignac, p. 20.

⁶² John J. O'Meara, *The Young Augustine* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1954), pp. 1-19.

discusses his spiritual struggles against sensual temptations and expounds on the beginning of Genesis. O'Meara points out that Augustine "combines all these various parts rather awkwardly, merely placing them in succession one after the other [...] the result is a badly composed book."⁶³

In addition to stressing the 'fact' that the loosely related texts are poorly sewn together, O'Meara argues that even that part of the *Confessions* which scholars have been most comfortable with, and which they generally characterized as autobiographical, is not autobiography or even "partial autobiography."⁶⁴ O'Meara holds to a definition of autobiography which excludes 'confessions' on the basis that they frequently present "only a selection of incidents or a period from the author's life, and the selection or period is determined by the author's purpose or the theme which he wishes to illustrate."⁶⁵ For O'Meara, Augustine does not narrate his life story, but selects from his memories those events which help to illustrate the theory of man which he believes to be the truth of his own life and that of Everyman.⁶⁶ O'Meara argues that "the story of mankind was the story of Augustine," the central point being that, out of alienation and indigence, everyone must make the journey of conversion to the Christian faith under the guidance of Providence.⁶⁷ The story of Augustine concludes "with the challenge to accept or reject Christ and this

⁶³ O'Meara, p. 13.

⁶⁴ O'Meara, p. 18. To fully grasp the narrative unity of the *Confessions* it will be necessary to critique O'Meara's position on this point in Chapter Two.

⁶⁵ O'Meara, p. 2.

⁶⁶ O'Meara, p. 6.

⁶⁷ O'Meara, p. 2.

challenge is the 'dénouement' of the story.⁶⁸ Significantly, O'Meara adds that "what follows afterwards can be of little significance beside the great thing that has happened to him in his life."⁶⁹

With this conclusion, O'Meara is in radical disagreement with Courcelle's attempt to minimize the importance of the conversion narrative, though he is in agreement with Wundt's theory that the *Confessions* is based upon a two-fold program of catechesis.⁷⁰ O'Meara, however, would urge Wundt on to the further insight that in the *Confessions* there is not so much a question of "a technique in instruction and explanation as a theory about life in general and Augustine's life in particular," and thus it is the conversion narrative which is of prime importance.⁷¹

This, then, is the relationship between the important paradigmatic narrative of conversion depicting what ought to be the typical path and proper end of Everyman, and the rational explanatory discourse of the later books - that is, if Book 10 is excluded. O'Meara sees Book 10 as a breach in this loosely related structure, agreeing with Williger and Courcelle that it is a later addition.⁷² For O'Meara, as well, this disruptive insertion of Book 10 is explained with the conjecture that there was a public demand for an account of Augustine's present life with which the good Bishop complied by writing Book 10 and inserting it in its present position.

⁶⁸ O'Meara, p. 12.

⁶⁹ O'Meara, p. 12.

⁷⁰ O'Meara, p. 17.

⁷¹ O'Meara, p. 17.

⁷² O'Meara, pp. 15-16.

If there is any unity in the *Confessions*, it lies, to the exclusion of book ten, in the contrast between the search for Truth under the guidance of Providence in the first part of the work, and the enjoyment of Truth in the Scriptures in the third part. This contrast is the theme of the *Confessions*, the first part of which - seeking for truth under the guidance of Providence - is of primary importance within the *Confessions* itself and essential for the proper understanding of the second.⁷³

O'Meara judges that the elaborate quest for a more profound principle of unity is a result of scholars' reluctance to face the fact of poor composition.

Scholars have been unable to believe that Augustine could be content with this. They admit that, for all his training in rhetoric, he was not very good at planning a book: we have only too many instances of his failures in this matter. But they will not believe that that could be true of the most famous and lauded of his works, the *Confessions*. In not believing they at once deny the evidence of their senses and forget that Augustine had no expectation of producing what has come to be regarded as a masterpiece. He meant it as a work of edification, and he had no scruple in including at the end of the main work his efforts to comply with some requests.⁷⁴

With this conclusion, the debate has come full circle, to Marrou's initial judgement that the *Confessions* demonstrates its author's poor skills of composition.⁷⁵ After this long search for a principle of unity operative in the work, it is possible to conclude that scholars have not moved far beyond what might be termed a 'minimalist' position. While a number of theories provide some basic insights, no theory grants a unity to the work strong enough to overturn the initial judgement that it is poorly composed. While the unique style of the *Confessions* - an extended confessional address to God - would seem to indicate that at some level Augustine perceived the thirteen books as unified, the prevailing view of the work continues to be that it consists of three loosely related sections: it is part conversion story, part scriptural exegesis, with a rather obscure middle section allegedly about the author's

⁷³ O'Meara, pp. 17-18.

⁷⁴ O'Meara, p. 13.

⁷⁵ A number of years after this initial phase of discussion, R.J. O'Connell reappraised the question from the perspective of a general hypothesis he holds on the thought of the early Augustine. His theory will be dealt with in Chapter 3 and in the footnotes in Chapter 4 on specific interpretations of the *Confessions*.

present life at the time of the writing of the work, described by some as a late addition inserted to comply with reader request. If O'Meara were to have his way, even the long-held notion of the autobiographical nature of the work would be dispelled and the *Confessions*' privileged place at the beginning of that genre withdrawn. This is how things stood after a half century of research, O'Meara suggesting that further inquiry would be futile. Ironically it is O'Meara's own insight into the importance of Augustine's theory of man for understanding the work that provides a significant clue to the profound conceptual and structural unity that the *Confessions* indeed possesses.

PART II

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR A UNIFIED READING OF THE *CONFESSIONS*

CHAPTER 2

THE RECOVERY OF THE CONFESSIONS AS AUTOBIOGRAPHY

1. O'Meara's Analysis of the Nature of the *Confessions*

In stressing the importance of the role Augustine's theory of man played in the composition of the *Confessions*, J.J. O'Meara has provided an important clue to the resolution of the problem of the work's unity. However, before this insight can guide the reader to a unified reading of the *Confessions* it must be extracted from its place in O'Meara's own analysis, for he is mistaken with regard to what Augustine's theory of man is and the manner in which this theory was employed in the composition of the work. These mutually supportive misconceptions combined to distort O'Meara's understanding of the *Confessions* and prevent his discovering its true unity. Before raising the question of the exact nature of Augustine's theory of man, it is important to disentangle O'Meara's web of misconceptions concerning the nature of the *Confessions* so as to properly understand how this theory is essential to grasping the work's profoundly unified structure.

According to O'Meara, the *Confessions* is not even autobiography in part because it makes use of the author's "life and confession of faith in God as an illustration of his theory

of man".¹ This trait of using one's life to illustrate a theory of man, he argues, is characteristic of most, if not all of the works which fall under the literary category of 'confession'. Confessional works are "rarely full autobiographies" and "frequently they present only a selection of incidents or a period from the author's life, and the selection or period is determined by the author's purpose or the theme which he wishes to illustrate."² As the originator of this genre, Augustine is viewed as having produced the confession *par excellence*. His goal being the illustration of a theory of man "which he believed to have been verified in his own life", Augustine "chooses from the memories of his life only those that illustrate that theory."³ When he "has no memory of a particular point which is useful for his theory" O'Meara argues, "he conjectures with easy probability what must have happened."⁴ As a result, the *Confessions* is "not wholly a purely personal history; it is in part typical."⁵ Thus, it "must not be regarded as being fully autobiographical even for any period or section of Augustine's life."⁶

While in general the exclusion of the *Confessions* from the genre of autobiography is made on the basis that Augustine selected and presented the events of his lived life according to a theory of man, O'Meara reveals more of what lies behind his characterization of the nature of the work when he expresses concerns for its historical veracity, which he

¹ O'Meara, p. 18.

² O'Meara, p. 2.

³ O'Meara, p. 6.

⁴ O'Meara, p. 18.

⁵ O'Meara, p. 18.

⁶ O'Meara, p. 6.

believes to be a consequence of the kind of work the *Confessions* is. First of all, concern is expressed that, because facts are selected from Augustine's past on the basis of how well they suit the purpose of illustrating a theory of man -- "not all the facts, not necessarily all the important facts even, of Augustine's life are related: many are forgotten and many would not fit into the pattern of his theory."⁷ A second concern is the fact that "the events even as given are presented as seen by the writer at the time of composition and not always as they seemed when they occurred."⁸ A third concern, following upon the second, is that "there is appended, to the relations of facts many moral disquisitions which again are aimed at interpreting the facts in the the light of later beliefs rather than in the light of Augustine's view at the time."⁹ Finally, "appended to all this", O'Meara concludes, the reader of the *Confessions* has to contend with "a rhetorical fondness for overstatement on the one hand and understatement (manifesting itself in deliberate vagueness both in recollection and language) on the other, and the employment of extraordinary means such as dreams, visions and voices for the furtherance of his arguments especially at a crucial juncture."¹⁰

Having expressed these concerns, however, O'Meara must then immediately concede that the *Confessions* indeed "gives a true account of Augustine's life up to the time of his conversion."¹¹ After all "what is rhetorical is not necessarily false", and scholars know that where the contents of the *Confessions* can be corroborated from other sources, the facts of

⁷ O'Meara, p. 18.

⁸ O'Meara, p. 18.

⁹ O'Meara, p. 18.

¹⁰ O'Meara, p. 18.

¹¹ O'Meara, p. 19.

Augustine's life in the first nine books are confirmed to be true.¹² In fact "one of the strongest reasons for believing in the historicity of the *Confessions* is precisely the fact that it is dominated by this theme (of conversion); for the very first extant work of Augustine, written within a few months of his conversion, is likewise dominated by it."¹³ The facts of the earlier accounts of the conversion verify the events recorded later in the *Confessions*. As well, when the *Confessions* is more carefully examined, it can be concluded that "where Augustine has recourse to conjecture, he conjectures with reserve", and "if he does examine events in the light of recent beliefs and add a moral lesson, he is both conscious of what he is doing and occasionally reminds the reader of it."¹⁴ Any use Augustine makes of rhetorical techniques in composing the *Confessions* was expected by his reading public who would not have been misled by this writing style. Indeed, O'Meara concludes, it would have been dangerous for Augustine "to put things at their lowest, to attempt to deceive his many friends and enemies", all of whom would have been among his readership and would have, in varying degrees, known the facts of the Bishop of Hippo's life.¹⁵

Given his own conclusion concerning the historical veracity of the facts contained in the *Confessions*, why does O'Meara conclude that the work cannot be considered an autobiography? Put another way, how is it that O'Meara can say that "the *Confessions* gives a true account of Augustine's life up to the time of his conversion" and hold as well that the

¹² O'Meara, p. 19.

¹³ O'Meara, p. 13.

¹⁴ O'Meara, p. 19.

¹⁵ O'Meara, p. 19.

work is not even partial autobiography?¹⁶ When O'Meara judges the account Augustine gives of his life in the *Confessions* as being true he seems to say that the facts presented are true, and to this extent give us a true account of Augustine's life, but this does not qualify the narrative as autobiography.

Three factors can be isolated in O'Meara's analysis which form the basis for his exclusion of the *Confessions* from the autobiographical genre. Firstly, it appears that the very fact that Augustine has selected events from his life is reason to exclude it. Secondly, O'Meara stresses the significance of the events being recounted not as they seemed to the author at the time of their occurrence but from the point of view of how the events seemed "to him in retrospect at the time of writing" and this, he suggests, sets the *Confessions* apart from autobiographies.¹⁷ Thirdly, because the selection and retrospective representation or recounting of the past is accomplished in accordance with a theory of man that the author holds to be the truth of human life, the work must be distinguished from autobiographical works. For O'Meara these factors are incompatible with autobiography and actually speak of another type of writing where the author makes use of his life in order to promote a theory of man. This theory is reinforced and even confirmed in O'Meara's mind by what he considers Augustine's theory of man to actually be. If this theory of man is solely based on the concept of Christian conversion, here viewed somewhat statically as the experience which leads to Baptism in the Catholic Church, then the Bishop of Hippo might be seen as placing the details of his life at the evangelical and proselytizing service of his Church,

¹⁶ O'Meara, p. 19.

¹⁷ O'Meara, p. 6.

producing an edifying work designed to win converts to the truth illustrated therein. Augustine is thereby seen as having had no intention of writing an autobiography.

While in the course of his analysis O'Meara does not manage to give a positive description of autobiography, his assumptions about the properties of true autobiography can be deduced from the above. It would seem that an autobiography is written with the goal of telling the 'whole truth' about one's entire life, which is equated with telling the 'whole story' of one's life, and the impression is given that this means the recounting of every past event from the perspective of how each was experienced at the time of its occurrence. Thus both selection and a retrospective evaluative recounting from the author's present is prohibited in works of autobiography. As well, O'Meara cannot envisage any way in which a theory of man and its paradigms could legitimately influence the structure and composition of a work of autobiography. The question is, to what extent can the above be considered an accurate description of the autobiographical genre? In fact, O'Meara's assumptions concerning autobiography are inaccurate and do not stand the test of critical analysis.

2. A Critical Approach to Narrative Autobiography

It goes without saying that the production of an autobiography of the sort O'Meara has in mind would require a phenomenal memory. Though such a task may seem accomplishable at first, this uncritical impression is incorrect. It is actually impossible to recount the 'whole story' of one's past, nor does an autobiographer attempt to do so in the manner suggested. Evaluative selection is inherent in any definition of autobiography just as it must be included

in the very notion of historiography. Autobiography, like all historiography, never does, nor claims to, tell the 'whole story' if we mean by this a recounting of all the events of a person's life or of any historical happening. Histories and autobiographies are retrospective, value-laden inquiries which always necessitate selection and value judgement on the part of their authors. The problem in understanding this basic truism involves the failure to distinguish between history and written histories or in this case a man's lived life and his autobiography.

History is an ambiguous term and there is a sense in ordinary usage where history "seems to include the total human past so that everything a person does, it may be claimed, whether significant or not, 'passes into history'."¹⁸ Yet history which refers to the process of recounting the historical past means something quite different. Such 'history' does not refer to a recounting of the total human past but rather to the recounting, the explaining and the understanding of memorable events, those events judged by the human community as important. History is best defined as the recounting of the *significant* human past.¹⁹ Even when a significant event has been selected, it is also necessary to select from the dense interrelationship of facts within this event, in order to include those facts which are the important and relevant ones for understanding the event. To refuse to 'select' is to refuse to write 'historiography' in any meaningful sense of the term. Thus, "the offering of a narrative as a history carries with it the implication that an appropriate and responsible standard of importance has been applied."²⁰ The crucial consequence is that a work of

¹⁸ William Dray, *Philosophy of History* (Toronto: Prentice Hall, 1964), p. 27.

¹⁹ Dray, *Philosophy of History*, p. 27.

²⁰ William Dray, "History and Value Judgements" in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 4, ed. Paul Edwards (MacMillan, 1967), p. 27.

history can be judged not only on the basis of whether all the statements it makes are true but also whether all the significant facts have been included in the historical narrative. If any important facts have been left out of the narrative, even though all the facts contained within it are true, the narrative must be judged to be false on the basis that it distorts what actually occurred by what it fails to recount.

Also inherent in any definition of history is the fact that history is a retrospective enterprise; it is always a *recounting* of the past from the *perspective* of the present. Positivist thinkers lost sight of the retrospective character of historiography when they embraced the idea that the history of an event is nothing less than a complete description of the event, a complete record of everything that happened in the exact sequence of its occurrence. As A.C. Danto argues, the only writer who could possibly fulfill the positivist mandate for historiography would be an Ideal Chronicler who could witness and instantaneously transcribe events producing an alleged 'absolute chronicle'.²¹ Yet there would be one class of description unavailable to the Ideal Chronicler but which is characteristically the province of historians: the retrospective description of the event. The historian's goal is historical understanding, a kind of understanding that can only be attained after the event has occurred. Danto writes: "The whole truth concerning an event can only be known after, and sometimes long after the event itself has taken place, and this part of the story historians alone can tell."²² The historian's knowledge of how an event has turned out assists him in his task of determining which facts are to be included in the historical narrative.

²¹ Arthur C. Danto, *Analytic Philosophy of History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 151.

²² Danto, p. 151.

These fundamental facts of the necessity of selection and the retrospective character of historiography are no less true in the specific case of 'personal history' or autobiography. This is made clear by Bernard Lonergan in his analysis of the production of autobiography in the ideal case where a daily diary has been kept. Here selection according to a criterion of importance necessarily takes place at all levels of production, even in the initial process of maintaining a daily diary.

Day by day one records, not every event that occurred -one has other things to do - but what seems important, significant, exceptional, new. So one selects, abbreviates, sketches, alludes. One omits most of what is too familiar to be noticed, too obvious to be mentioned, too recurrent to be thought worth recording.²³

Thus even at this level one does not record the 'whole story', that is, every event in a single day, but rather one judges and selects in order to include only those events which seem significant at that time. Yet an autobiography is not the sum total of those events judged as important and described the way they seemed on the day of their occurrence. In fact the diarist's day-by-day account of events and his judgement of their significance must be relativized, as what was present becomes past and what was once distant future becomes the new horizon from which to look back upon his life, judging and interpreting events from a perspective unavailable at the time of the composition of the diary. Lonergan continues:

Now as the years pass and the diary swells, retrospect lengthens. What once were merely remote possibilities, now have been realized. Earlier events, thought insignificant, prove to have been quite important, while others, thought important, turn out to have been quite minor. Omitted earlier events have to be recalled and inserted both to supply the omitted context of the earlier period and to make the later events more intelligible. Earlier judgements, finally, have to be complemented, qualified, corrected. But if all this is attempted, one has shifted from keeping a diary to writing one's memoirs. One enlarges one's sources from the diary to add to the diary all the letters and other material one can acquire. One ransacks one's memory. One asks questions and to meet them one starts reconstructing one's past in one's imagination, depicting to oneself now this now that former *Sitz im Leben*, to find answers and then ask the further questions that arise from these answers. As in interpretation so here too there gradually are built up contexts, limited nests of questions and answers, each bearing on some multi-faceted but determinate topic. In this fashion the old, day-by-day organization of the diary becomes quite irrelevant. Much that had been overlooked now has been restored. What

²³ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 182.

had merely been juxtaposed now is connected. What had been dimly felt and remembered now stands in sharp relief within perhaps hitherto unsuspected perspectives.²⁴

Yet a memoir so described is but a second stage in the progression toward an autobiography. The new horizon of the memoir provides the autobiographer with a more complete and critical retrospective vision of his life. In the last phase of the production of an autobiography, the amended material becomes the critical source from which further selection and structuring of events into a life story will take place. This time one event may be chosen and recounted in full detail because it is judged to be richly typical, evoking a whole period in the author's life or illustrating the many events which were like it in nature or kind, while other events will only gain mention and still other events, judged insignificant or redundant, will not be included at all. Having re-enacted in his imagination and re-evaluated the events of his past life there emerges, according to Lonergan,

...a new organization that distinguishes periods by broad differences in one's tasks and problems, and in each period distinguishes contexts, that is, nests of questions and answers bearing on distinct but related topics. The periods determine the sections, the topics determine the chapters of one's autobiography.²⁵

Lonergan's mention that the periods and topics determine the sections and chapters of one's autobiography makes it clear that what is implicit in his account is the fact that autobiography is story. What must be explored further is this narrative character of autobiography and the operation that transforms lived life and the data of diaries and memoirs into a story. To this end it is helpful to look at the philosophical discussion of the role of narrative in history, moving from a view of history that excludes narrative to the

²⁴ Lonergan, p. 182-3.

²⁵ Lonergan, p. 183.

conclusion that history is essentially narrative.

3. Narrative, History and Autobiography

In Anglo-American philosophical circles, critical discussion of narrative arose in the context of an ongoing inquiry into the nature of explanation in history. The parameters of this philosophical discussion of history were set by Carl Hempel's 1942 article "The Function of General Laws in History", in which the author sought to apply the methodological reforms of the Viennese positivists to history.²⁶ For historiography to be considered scientifically legitimate, it must conform to the methodology, standards, and goals of the natural sciences, thereby making the deductive-nomological model of explanation the only acceptable one. Thus it is alleged that "general laws have quite analogous functions in history and in the natural sciences".²⁷ However, since historians are concerned with unique and specific events and the actions of goal oriented agents, and make little or no mention of law governing explanations, the prescriptive demands of the proposed model were broadened slightly so as to minimize the discrepancy between the model and the actual practice of historians. It was suggested that within the umbrella of the deductive-nomological model historians offer "explanation sketches" which, without explicitly appealing to laws, implicitly refer to them. Thus it is upon these laws that the historian's work of explaining events

²⁶ Carl Hempel, "The Function of General Laws in History" (1942), reprinted in *Theories of History*, ed. Patrick Gardiner (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1959), pp. 344-56.

²⁷ Hempel, p. 335.

properly rests.²⁸ The boundaries of the model were further widened by Patrick Gardiner who, seeking to take account of the predispositions of historical agents to act in certain ways under specific circumstances, broke with the strict idea of 'natural law governing regularity' and introduced the phrase "law-like explanations".²⁹

It was with William Dray's work, *Laws and Explanation in History*, that the monolithic pretension of the 'covering law model' was finally destroyed. Attentive to the actual practice of historians, Dray argued that explanations in history are a "logically miscellaneous lot" and that there is no justifiable argument for advancing one model to the exclusion of another.³⁰ When trying to determine the cause of an event the answer need not follow a pre-determined logical structure, nor even the application of a causal law. Cause can have a number of different meanings for historians and they choose, on the basis of inductive as well as pragmatic criteria, the causal explanation among the possible explanations that best explains the event in question. Beyond showing that explanation in history is in no way limited to the 'covering law', and that even a causal explanation need not appeal to general laws, Dray presents another alternative type of explanation he terms "rational explanation." This type of explanation is applicable to those cases where historians seek to explain "the actions of those individuals who are important enough to be mentioned in the course of an historical narrative" (his emphasis).³¹ Dray does not stray completely into the idealist

²⁸ Hempel, p. 351.

²⁹ Patrick Gardiner, *The Nature of Historical Explanation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), pp. 83-99.

³⁰ William Dray, *Laws and Explanations in History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 85.

³¹ Dray, *Laws and Explanation*, p. 118.

theory of empathy whereby the historian would empathetically relive, rethink, or reenact the thoughts, conceptions and intentions of the agent so as to understand his actions. Rather, Dray grounds R.G. Collingwood's ideas of 'reliving', 'rethinking', and 'reenacting' in a logical analysis whereby the historian enters into a "reconstruction of the agent's *calculations* of means to be adopted toward his chosen end in the light of the circumstances in which he found himself" (his emphasis).³²

Not only did Dray's work break up the 'covering law' model, by showing that the idea of historical explanation must be expanded to include a number of acceptable types, but it also had the effect of refocusing the attention of philosophers on the actual practice of historians. Features that a Hempelian would have viewed as a meaningless vestige of a prescientific discipline might now be examined for their positive contribution to the nature of history. That history was most often presented to the public in narrative form increasingly made narrative a topic for critical examination. While at first narrative might have been dismissed as a non-essential feature of history, a concession to the reading public, the sugar coating on the pill of hard scientific historical research and data, the question arose whether narrative itself had explanatory power and, more radically, whether history is essentially narrative. The first substantial considerations of narrative in history were published almost simultaneously by Morton White, A.C. Danto and W.B. Gallie.³³

Staying well within the framework of the scientific view of causation, White's work is

³² Dray, *Laws and Explanation*, p. 122.

³³ Morton White, *Foundations of Historical Knowledge* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965); Arthur C. Danto, *Analytic Philosophy of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965); W.B. Gallie, *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964).

the most cautious in what it grants to narrative. While narrative is seen as "the typical form of discourse employed by the historian", what makes a narrative explanatory is the causal connections it makes.³⁴ Thus a simple chronicle can be distinguished from an explanatory narrative; the former merely the listing of one thing after another with no causal assertions made by the chronicler while the latter is characterized by the causal links the historian makes between incidents and events.

Danto directed his attention toward the linguistic structure of "narrative sentences", sentences which are characteristically employed by historians and reveal much about the nature of history. Given what we have seen of Danto's emphasis on the retrospective character of history, it is clear that there can be no history of the present, something which an Ideal Chronicler would produce. Lacking retrospective, such a chronicle would not contain "narrative sentences", that is sentences which make use of past tense verbs as they redescribe earlier events in the light of later ones. Indeed the historical significance of the earlier event can only be ascertained by the historian in the light of latter events. For example, it might have been chronicled at the time of its occurrence that in 1717 some people witnessed the birth of a baby. Years later a historian could determine the historical significance of that birth and redescribe the event as follows: In 1717 the author of *Rameau's Nephew* was born. Narrative sentences then "refer to at least two time-separated events though they only *describe* (are only *about*) the earliest event to which they refer" (his emphasis).³⁵ Thus, Danto's analysis implicitly refers to three temporal moments: the

³⁴ Morton White, *Foundations of Historical Knowledge*, p. 4.

³⁵ Danto, p. 143.

earlier event described with reference to the later one, the later event, and the time of the narrator who retrospectively refers to both of these earlier events.

A number of important consequences follow from Danto's study of 'narrative sentences.' It is apparent that when a description of an event is transformed by a subsequent event the empirical notion of causality is turned on its head for here it is a latter event which transforms an earlier event into a cause. As well, since the historical significance of an event can only be understood retrospectively, the explanation of an event cannot be limited to the historical agents' reasoning at the time of an event's occurrence. Finally it is clear that narrative sentences are concerned only with the past. It is the past, not the present or the future, that is the true object of history. This refutes two erroneous views of history: that of the positivists whose erroneous ontology of time leads them to conceive of history as a series of 'past presents', and those speculative philosophies of history which seek a knowledge of the whole of history, the future as well as the present and the past.

The weakness in Danto's account of narrative in history is that it does not move beyond its primary focus on narrative sentences to discuss how these sentences form the narrative whole of the work of history. He writes that "any narrative is a structure imposed on events, grasping some of them together with others, and ruling some out as lacking relevance,"³⁶ but he does not move to explore the mechanism of this narrative structuring which, at least in part, grounds the historian's criterion of selection.

It is with W.B. Gallie's work that the relationship of narrative discourse as a whole to

³⁶ Danto, p. 132.

history is explored. Gallie's more radical narrativist thesis proclaims that history is a species of the genus story. What is sought in the writing and reading of history is first and foremost an understanding of an event and this is gained by following the story. When a narrative is ideally formulated it is *self-explanatory*. That is to say the event is rendered intelligible just in the following of the story itself. What has been referred to as explanation in history comes into play, Gallie contends, when the followability of the story breaks down or becomes difficult to follow. At this point there is a need for an explicit type of explanation just in order to ensure that the story is followable. The radical shift from previous positions where explanation is the goal of history is made clear when he writes: "whatever understanding and whatever explanations a work of history contains must be assessed in relation to the narrative form from which they arise and whose development they *subserve*." (my emphasis)³⁷ For Gallie it is narrative which is the essential feature of history, while explanation is born within and subservient to narrative discourse. To grasp how a historical event is rendered intelligible is to grasp what it means to follow a story.

Every story describes a sequence of actions and experiences of a number of people, real or imaginary. These people are usually presented in some characteristic human situation, and are then shown either changing it or reacting to changes which affect that situation from outside. As these changes and the character's reactions to them accumulate, they commonly reveal hitherto hidden aspects of the original situation and of the characters: they also give rise to a predicament, calling for urgent thought and action from one or more of the main characters. The predicament is usually sustained and developed in various ways that bring out its significance for the main characters. Whether or not the main characters respond successfully to the predicament, their response to it, and the effects of their response upon the other people concerned, brings the story to within sight of its conclusion.³⁸

When one reads a story, one is drawn into the flow of events, experiences and reactions, and follows a series of surprises and contingencies toward a conclusion. Gallie

³⁷ Gallie, p. xi.

³⁸ Gallie, p. 22.

explains that the position of the reader following the story is similar to the spectator watching a cricket match. Every spectator knows the basic rules and has some sense of the purpose of the game and is able, with varying degrees of appreciation according to the expertise of the observer, to follow the game through all of the good and the bad plays, the errors, successes and failures of the players, all of which lead to the inevitable, but not predictable, conclusion of the game. There are minimum conditions required to follow a story but beyond this a story can be followed to greater or lesser degrees with no criteria for "completely following".³⁹ The reader's intellectual interests are sustained by the anticipation of the promised but open conclusion and his aroused feelings of sympathy and aversion orient or direct him to follow events across contingencies. The story is intellectually satisfying when the conclusion is found to be acceptable, meaning that it was demanded by the actions and chain of events that preceded it and these actions and events were in turn demanded by it. At the same time the conclusion, because it is emotionally satisfying, can properly be called a climax.

Gallie stresses the continuity between story and history when he bases historical understanding on narrative interest, that is the process of following a story, but on the epistemological level he emphasizes the radical discontinuity between story and history. Narrative history is about concerns, events, and past actions which can be ascertained on the basis of records, documents and testimony. As such written history is about "some major achievement or failure of men living and working together, in societies or nations or any

³⁹ Gallie, p. 33.

other lastingly organized groups."⁴⁰ History, then, is a true story and, ideally like all stories, it is self-explanatory. From the context of the more radical narrativist position it becomes clear that the question of historical explanation has been recast, as here one discovers *why* an event has happened when one discovers *what* it is that happened. To tell what has happened is to tell why.

Gallie's approach to narrative understanding based on the phenomenology of following a game makes good sense if the outcome of the story is unknown to the reader. History is written, however, after events have unfolded, after the conclusion is known. In this sense, according to Louis O. Mink, history "is not the writing but the rewriting of stories."⁴¹ What historians seek is a retrospective intelligibility. In this case a story is followed so that the events may be comprehended as a "pattern of relationships".⁴²

Mink seeks to build on the strengths and avoid the weaknesses of his predecessor's accounts, thus he accepts the retrospective character of history as well as the fact that historians offer whole narratives as the end product of their work. However Mink radicalizes the narrativist thesis by conceiving narrative form as a cognitive instrument.

In a 1965 article Mink mounted his own attack on the covering law model of historical explanation, outlining a number of key discrepancies between the prescriptive demands of the model and the understanding evident in works of history. He is led to the conclusion that historical understanding is a completely different type of human understanding than that

⁴⁰ Gallie, p. 65.

⁴¹ Louis O. Mink, "Philosophical Analysis and Historical Understanding", *Review of Metaphysics* 20 (1968): p. 687.

⁴² Mink, "Philosophical Analysis", p. 688.

which is found in the natural sciences. Historical understanding is based on an act of synthetic judgement whereby the historian "in a single act of judgement" "sees together" that which is experienced *seriatim*, thus converting an "indigestible heap of data" into an intelligible whole.⁴³ For the scientist the fruit of his research can be presented in detachable conclusions but for the historian it is the whole narrative which is the vehicle through which his understanding is expressed. Thus, stories do not exist ready-made in reality nor are narratives merely the connecting together of the sum of chronological episodes. There is an episodic dimension as well as a non-chronological dimension in stories, constituted by a configurational act of reflective judgement whereby diverse events in time and space are "grasped together" in a meaningful narrative "whole".⁴⁴ In succeeding articles Mink explores this insight in greater detail.

Mink defines all comprehension as the act of "grasping together in a simple mental act things which are not experienced together [...] because they are separated by time, space, or logical kind".⁴⁵ This ability is necessary for all human understanding. Mink stresses that "it is not a theory of knowledge at issue here" as comprehension is not knowledge, nor even a condition of knowledge.⁴⁶ Rather, comprehension is a process in which facts, or elements of knowledge are converted into understanding. Theories of knowledge have neglected a basic fact of human experience and that is that "experiences come to us *seriatim* in a stream

⁴³ Louis O. Mink, "The Autonomy of Historical Understanding", in *Philosophical Analysis and History*, William Dray, ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 185.

⁴⁴ Mink, "The Autonomy of Historical Understanding", pp. 160-92.

⁴⁵ L.O. Mink, "History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension", *New Literary History* (1970): 541-58, cf. p. 547.

⁴⁶ A true scientific theory and one that has been proven false are both instances of comprehension. "It is by reference to standards other than comprehension that we must decide what is true and what is false." Mink, "History and Fiction", p. 553.

of transience and yet must be capable of being held together in a single image. The faculties of memory, imagination, and conceptualization all serve the function of grasping together or comprehending."⁴⁷ According to Mink there are three modes of comprehension and each mode is ideally suited to certain objects of understanding. In addition to the configurational mode there is the theoretical mode, characteristic of science, which comprehends objects in terms of a general theory, and the categoreal mode, characteristic of philosophy, which comprehends objects in terms of type within the context of an overall conceptual system.⁴⁸ When an author composes a story, extracting meaningful totalities from the scattered and diverse events they belong to in reality, he is employing the "configurational" mode of comprehension by which he comprehends by seeing-things-together in "a single, concrete complex of relations".⁴⁹ This particular mode of comprehension is best characterized by the composing and the understanding of narratives and is optimally suited for the comprehension of historical events, which is why the business of historiography is so preoccupied with the writing and the understanding of narrative synthesis.⁵⁰ It is towards this goal of narrative or configurational comprehension that the historian cultivates the "specialized habit of understanding which converts congeries of events

⁴⁷ Mink, "History and Fiction", p. 547.

⁴⁸ Cf. Mink, "History and Fiction", pp. 547-52.

⁴⁹ Mink, "History and Fiction", p. 551.

⁵⁰ The appropriateness of configurational comprehension to history is clearly illustrated by Mink in the following example. "Thus a letter I burn may be understood not only as an oxidizable substance but as a link with an old friend. It may have relieved a misunderstanding, raised a question, or changed my plans at a crucial moment. As a letter it belongs to a kind of story, a narrative of events which would be unintelligible without reference to it. But to explain this, I would not construct a theory of letters or of friendships but would, rather, show how it belongs to a particular configuration of events like a part of a jigsaw puzzle. It is in this configurational mode that we see together the complex imagery in a poem, or the combination of motives, pressures, promises and principles which explain a Senator's vote, or the pattern of words, gestures and actions which constitute our understanding of the personality of a friend." It is clear that only configurational comprehension could render intelligible the historical meaning of the burning of a letter. Mink, "History and Fiction", p. 117.

into concatenations and emphasizes and increases the scope of synoptic judgement in our reflection on experience."⁵¹

For Mink history and fiction are in close relationship to each other for they are both products of the configurational mode of comprehension. Neither merely relates a succession of events; both "body forth" an ensemble of interrelationships of many different kinds as a single whole. Yet while fiction affords aesthetic and emotional satisfaction, history also makes an additional claim to truth, and this claim is a more complicated than it may seem. At the level of data and evidence certain disputes about truth claims can be at least resolved in principle. Yet an event under the same or different descriptions may belong to a number of different stories and have varying significance. A fact or event cannot dictate how it will be used in the historian's narrative. As well, since narrative form in history is the product of an individual's imagination, there is no clear criterion for the preference of one narrative account over another. Nor can an account, at the level of narrative, be confirmed or disconfirmed as would be the case in science. There is indeed a paradoxical tension in every historical narrative: "as historical it claims to represent, through its form, part of the real complexity of the past, but as narrative it is a product of imaginative construction, which cannot defend its claim to truth by any accepted procedure of argument or authentication."⁵² Obviously, while this raises epistemological questions, according to Mink, any further discussion on the objectivity and truth of history must take this new perspective of narrative understanding as its fundamental point of departure.

⁵¹ Mink, "The Autonomy of Historical Understanding", p. 191.

⁵² Mink, "Narrative form as a Cognitive Instrument," p. 145.

4. Paul Ricoeur on the Narrative Function

To turn to Paul Ricoeur's reflection on narrative and history is to step outside the philosophical tradition of the preceding thinkers and listen to a philosopher whose tradition is based in phenomenology and hermeneutics, but who is nonetheless in dialogue with Anglo-American philosophy. While Ricoeur's contribution to this discussion of history and narrative is situated within broader philosophical concerns than that of the previous philosophers, it can also be said that his treatment of narrative and history is in critical continuity with the radical narrativist views of Gallie and Mink, making their key ideas of 'followability' and 'narrative configuration' important features of his own account. Ricoeur's discussion of the function of narrative serves to critically recapitulate and deepen the insights introduced by the previous thinkers.⁵³

The fundamental insight which guides Ricoeur's inquiry is that the narrative activity of human beings is a response to the experience of discordance in human temporality. Appropriately, his recent major work, *Time and Narrative*, was generated by a reading of two classic philosophic texts: Augustine's analysis of time in Book 11 of the *Confessions* and Aristotle's treatment of plot in the *Poetics*.

In the *Confessions*, Augustine discovers that not only is eternity beyond the grasp of his finite comprehension, but time itself, which he experiences and is immersed in, proves to be an enigma. One thinks one knows what time is until one tries to answer the question

⁵³ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen Blamcy and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). It is not possible to do justice to the scope and subtlety of Ricoeur's thought on 'time and narrative' within the context of the project of this thesis. While I give a relatively detailed sketch of his basic theory of narrative as it pertains to history, it is nonetheless a sketch, and one that is drawn from the perspective of the special interests of this thesis.

'what is time?' At first it seems difficult to grant time existence; the past 'was' and the future 'has yet to be', while the present can be subdivided between the past and present until nothing remains. Yet time exists, for we speak about it and even measure it. How can time be said to exist? Ricoeur notes that in responding to this question Augustine's analysis leads him through a series of enigmas. The resolution of one enigma opens up a larger enigma which must be puzzled through. Augustine's ultimate solution to the problem of time is for Ricoeur the supreme enigma, for here the soul is said to distend itself as it engages itself. Time, Augustine concludes, is a matter of the soul's activity. The past, present and future can be said to have existence in a threefold present: the present of things past through memory, the present of things present in attention, and the present of things future in expectation. Ricoeur writes:

Augustine's inestimable discovery is, by reducing the extension of time to the distension of the soul, to have tied this distension to the slippage that never ceases to find its way into the heart of the threefold present--between the present of the future, the present of the past, and the present of the present. In this way he sees discordance emerge again and again out of the very concordance of the intentions of expectation, attention, and memory.⁵⁴

In Ricoeur's judgement, the aporias created by Augustine are of an "exemplary character." He writes: "My thesis is that the genuine discoveries of the phenomenology of time cannot be definitively removed from the aporetic realm that so strongly characterizes the Augustinian theory of time."⁵⁵ Thus the human experience of time is marked by discordance and attempts to resolve the problem of time on the speculative level, be it Augustine's, Husserl's or Heidegger's, leads to the discovery of new enigmas.

⁵⁴ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 21.

⁵⁵ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 83.

The human response to the temporal character of existence and the aporias it raises in speculative thought is the poetic act of narration. As Ricoeur often asserts: "Time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience."⁵⁶ It is in the telling and following of stories that human beings make sense of lives that are marked by temporal experience. Thus, Aristotle's *Poetics* does not resolve the problem of human temporality but responds productively to it. "In short," Ricoeur writes, "the art of narrating, reflected in the act of following a story makes productive the paradoxes that disquieted Augustine to the point of reducing him to silence."⁵⁷

According to Ricoeur, events are structured into narratives by an act of emplotment which he sees in terms of the Aristotelian concept of *muthos*.

Aristotle means more than a structure in the static sense of the word, but rather an operation (as indicated by the ending -sis as in *poiesis*, *synthesis*, *sustasis*), namely the structuring that makes us speak of putting-into-the-form-of-a-plot (emplotment) rather than of a *plot*. The emplotment consists mainly in the selection and arrangement of the events and the actions recounted, which make of the fable a story that is complete and entire, with a beginning, middle, and end.⁵⁸

Ricoeur articulates his own theory of emplotment through an analysis of the entire dynamic of mimesis, which involves three operations he terms *mimesis*₁, *mimesis*₂, and *mimesis*₃. Thus three senses of the Aristotelean concept of mimesis are identified: *mimesis*₁ refers back to the familiar pre-understanding at the level of action; *mimesis*₂ refers to the realm of poetic composition, or the configuring operation of emplotment proper; *mimesis*₃

⁵⁶ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 70.

⁵⁸ Paul Ricoeur, "On Interpretation", in *Philosophy in France Today*, ed. Alan Montefiore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 177.

refers to the act of reading. Mimesis₁ and mimesis₃ are the two sides of mimesis₂, which is the pivotal moment in the dynamic and must be understood in terms of its faculty of mediation. Thus mimesis₂ must not be abstracted from the mimetic process as a whole, as the structuralists have in attempting to develop a science of the text. In contrast, Ricoeur outlines the task of hermeneutics:

to reconstruct the set of operations by which a work lifts itself above the opaque depths of living, acting, and suffering, to be given by an author to readers who receive it and thereby change their acting [...] Hermeneutics [...] is concerned with reconstructing the entire arc of operations by which practical experience provides itself with works, authors and readers.⁵⁹

The heart of Ricoeur's theory of narrative is found in his exposition of the dynamic inter-relationship of this threefold mimesis. Mimesis₂ is the pivotal moment of emplotment but this "composition of the plot is grounded in a pre-understanding of the world of action, its meaningful structures, its symbolic resources, and its temporal character."⁶⁰ The relationship of mimesis₁ and mimesis₂ was inherent in the Aristotelian idea of plot as an imitation of action. The symbolic articulations of action are the bearers of temporal elements "from which proceed more directly the very capacity of action to be narrated and perhaps the need to narrate it." All human access to action is under a description, and articulating and understanding actions requires an aptitude for identifying "symbolic mediations of actions."⁶¹

At the level of its meaningful structures the intelligibility engendered by emplotment is first of all anchored in the human capacity to utilize the conceptual network which

⁵⁹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 53.

⁶⁰ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 54.

⁶¹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 54.

distinguishes action from physical movement. An emphasis is placed on 'network' for what is implied by action is the complex interrelations and interactions of agents with motives and goals, acting and suffering in circumstances not of their own making but which nonetheless are a part of their practical field. Amidst the contingencies of circumstance, helped or hindered in the interaction with others, an action leads to a conclusion bringing about a change in fortune toward happiness or misfortune. When one responds to questions about an action, terms within the conceptual network are employed and to employ any one is to be able to link it with others of the same set. The competency of this relation of intersignification as a whole and each term within the set is called the practical understanding.

The question of the relation of mimesis₁ and mimesis₂ is a question of the relation between the practical understanding and narrative understanding - for Ricoeur a relation of presupposition and transformation. Narrative does presuppose a familiarity with the above terms of action such that the minimum narrative sentence is an action sentence. It is said that "in the final analysis, narratives have acting and suffering as their theme."⁶² Yet narrative is not reducible to a semantics of action for it adds to the conceptual network of action discursive, syntactic features "whose function is to engender the composing of modes of discourse worthy of being called narratives."⁶³ Ricoeur borrows from semiotics the notions of 'paradigmatic' and 'syntagmatic' order of discourse to assist in understanding the distinction between the semantics of action and the rules for composing a plot.

⁶² Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 56.

⁶³ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 56.

The paradigmatic order is the level of the semantics of action. Within this order all the terms of relations of intersignification are synchronic, in that they are perfectly reversible. However the syntagmatic order of the text implies the irreducible diachronic character of the text. To understand a narrative is not only to master the network of the semantics of action but to master also the rules governing the diachronic level of the narrative – that is to say, the rules which govern the ordering-of-the-events, the interconnecting of action sentences, into the total action constitutive of the narrated story. It may be said that to understand a narrative one must not only master the semantics of action but also the grammar of emplotment. Ricoeur sums up the two-fold relation between narrative understanding and practical understanding:

In passing from the paradigmatic order of action to the syntagmatic order of narrative, the terms of the semantics of action acquire integration and actuality. Actuality, because the terms, which had only a virtual signification in the paradigmatic order, that is, a pure capacity to be used, receive an actual [effective] signification thanks to the sequential interconnections the plot confers on the agents, their deeds, and their sufferings. Integration, because terms as heterogeneous as agents, motives, and circumstances are rendered compatible and work together in actual temporal wholes. It is in this case that the two-fold relation between rules of emplotment and action-terms constitutes both a relation of presupposition and one of transformation. To understand a story is to understand both the language of "doing something" and the cultural tradition from which proceeds the typology of plots.⁶⁴

This brings the discussion through to the threshold of mimesis₂, for this passage from the paradigmatic to the syntagmatic constitutes the transition from mimesis₁ to mimesis₂.

With mimesis 2 one has arrived at the "kingdom of the *as if*," the realm of composition or configuration, the Aristotelian *muthos*, or the 'organization of events'. Mimesis₂ must be understood in terms of its operational dynamic and its role as intermediary between the mimetic operations which precede and follow it.

Plot is said to mediate in three ways. First, plot is a mediation between incidents and

⁶⁴ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, pp. 56-7.

individual events and the story as a whole. A plot draws a meaningful story from a diversity of events; it transforms events into a story. Even the most simple story is always more than just the enumeration of events in serial order, for a story always organizes events into an intelligible whole so that one may discern the 'thought' or the 'theme' of a story. "In short," Ricoeur writes, "emplotment is the operation that draws a configuration out of a simple succession."⁶⁵ Secondly, plot brings together heterogeneous factors such as agents, goals, means, interactions, circumstances and unexpected results. This is why Ricoeur characterizes the configuring operation as concordant discordance, and believes that this feature "in final analysis constitutes the mediating function of plot."⁶⁶ Thirdly, plot mediates in terms of its temporal characteristics which allows plot to be called "a synthesis of the heterogeneous."⁶⁷

It is in regard to its temporal features that it becomes clear that plot not only reflects the Augustinian paradox of time but resolves it in the poetic mode. The act of emplotment combines in variable proportions two temporal dimensions: a chronological dimension, which is responsible for the episodic character of narrative, and a configurative dimension, through which plot transforms events into stories. Here Ricoeur borrows directly from Mink in describing the configurational act as "grasping together," drawing a temporal whole from the manifold of events.⁶⁸ More than merely reflecting the paradox of temporality, the act

⁶⁵ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 65.

⁶⁶ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 66.

⁶⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 66.

⁶⁸ Ricoeur follows Mink, in stressing the kinship the act of emplotment has with the Kantian conception of the operation of judging. He writes: "It will be recalled that for Kant the transcendental meaning of judging consists not so much in joining a subject and a predicate as in placing an intuitive manifold under the rule of a concept. The kinship is greater still with the reflective judgement which Kant opposes to the determining one, in the sense that it reflects upon the work of thinking at work in the aesthetic judgement of taste and in the teleological judgement applied to organic wholes. The act of emplotment has a similar function inasmuch as it extracts a configuration from a succession." Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 66.

which mediates between event and story and "extracts a figure from a succession" productively responds to the paradox bringing to the problem of temporality the solution of the poetic act itself.

Borrowing from Gallie's account of the 'followability' of a story and wedding it to Mink's insights, Ricoeur notes that the configurational act reveals itself to the reader or listener in the story's capacity to be followed. The reader is able to move forward over contingencies and, guided by expectation, arrives at fulfillment in the acceptable though not predictable conclusion of the story. This conclusion provides the point of view from which the story can be seen as a whole. One is said to understand a story when one knows why the successive episodes have led to the conclusion.

Thus "it is this followability of the story that constitutes the poetic solution to the paradox of distension and intention. The fact that the story can be followed converts the story into a living dialectic."⁶⁹ The dialectic tension is found in the temporality of the episodic dimension of plot, which draws narrative time in the direction of the linear representation of time, and the temporality of the configurational dimension of plot, which presents temporal features directly opposed to those of the episodic dimension. The episodic dimension of plot draws narrative time in a linear direction in three ways. Firstly, answering the question 'then what happened' by saying 'this and then this' indicates that the phases of action are in an external relation. Secondly, the episodes narrated are an open series of events permitting an 'and so forth' to be added to the 'then, and then'. Thirdly these episodes follow one upon the other according in the irreversible order of time common

⁶⁹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol 1, p. 67.

to the world of physical and human events.

The configurational dimension of plot presents temporal features which oppose the temporality of the episodic dimension in three ways. First, "the configurational arrangement transforms the succession of events into one meaningful whole" and it is "thanks to this reflective act" that "the entire plot can be translated into one 'thought,' which is nothing other than its 'point' or 'theme.'" This point or theme is by no means atemporal, rather "the time of 'the fable and theme' is the narrative time that mediates between the episodic aspect and the configurational aspect."⁷⁰ Secondly, "the configuration of the plot imposes the 'sense of an ending' on the indefinite succession of incidents" and it is from the vantage point of the "end point" that the "story can be seen as a whole."⁷¹ It is in the retelling of stories that this structural function of closure is discerned. Ricoeur notes that once a story has been followed initially and the ending is known one no longer follows the story over contingencies and surprises to an anticipated conclusion, but rather one apprehends well known episodes as leading to a well known end. A new quality of time emerges from this narrative understanding.

Thirdly, in its repetition a story is governed as a whole from its ending and in this there is constituted a new narrative order of time which seems to run the reverse of the natural order of time, as though recollection brings about an inversion of time. He writes: "In reading the ending in the beginning and the beginning in the ending, we also learn to read time backwards, as the recapitulation of the initial conditions of a course of action in its

⁷⁰ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 67. Ricoeur borrows the expression from Northrope Frye.

⁷¹ Ricoeur, *Time And Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 67. The phrase "sense of an ending" is borrowed from Frank Kermode's work of the same title.

terminal consequences."⁷² It is in light of these temporal features characteristic of narrative time that Ricoeur can conclude that the act of narration reflected in the act of following a story makes productive the paradoxes that disquieted Augustine.

However, the human mimetic activity does not culminate with the composition of stories, for the writing of stories implies its compliment, the reading of stories. Ricoeur calls attention to two complimentary features that ensure the continuity of the process which joins mimesis₂ to mimesis₃: the question of schematization and the character of traditionality characteristic of the configurational act. With Mink, Ricoeur has noted the affinity of the configurational act of 'grasping together' with the Kantian understanding of the work of the productive imagination.⁷³ In a similar way that the productive imagination "connects understanding and intuition by engendering syntheses that are intellectual and intuitive at the same time", "emplotment [...] engenders a mixed intelligibility between the point, theme or thought of the story, and the intuitive presentation of circumstances, characters, episodes, and changes of fortune that make the dénouement."⁷⁴ In this way one can speak of a schematism of the narrative function and a typology of emplotment paradigms which in turn are constituted within a history that has all the characteristics of a tradition.

In writing stories, writers have recourse to a tradition of plot paradigms which are part of a common cultural heritage. This tradition is not a static deposit of plot structures but

⁷² Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 67-8.

⁷³ Ricoeur writes: "This latter must be understood not as a psychologizing faculty but as a transcendental one. The productive imagination is not only rule-governed, it constitutes the generative matrix of rules. In Kant's first *Critique*, the categories of the understanding are first schematized by the productive imagination. The schematism has this power because the productive imagination fundamentally has a synthetic function. It connects understanding and intuition by engendering syntheses that are intellectual and intuitive at the same time." *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 68.

⁷⁴ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 68.

an evolving, living tradition where classic emplotment paradigms give way to new variations and innovations, generated by the productive imagination.⁷⁵ Western culture is heir to various narrative traditions (Hebrew, Greek, Roman, Christian, Celtic, Germanic, Icelandic and Slavic) which form a body of literary plot types for historians and writers to employ in their task. In the reception of these traditions, paradigms have been solidified at the levels of form, genre and type but also by way of the productive imagination operative in the production of individual works variations and new forms evolve so that types have slowly been innovated –invented in a tension with the preceding standard paradigm, but becoming in time, standard options in the narrator's process of emplotment. Thus, paradigms function as a basic grammar that governs the compositions of new works just as the grammar of language governs the construction of wellformed sentences but not their variety, content and the context within which they are used. Ricoeur writes: "Rule governed deformation constitutes the axis around which various changes of paradigm through application are arranged. It is this variety of applications that confers a history on the productive imagination and that, in counterpoint to sedimentation, makes a narrative tradition possible."⁷⁶ At the basic level of plot types, besides the epic, which is the dominant narrative form, Ricoeur follows Northrop Frye's delineation of four other fundamental plot types: romance, tragedy, comedy and satire.⁷⁷ This schematism and typology of plot paradigms marks the transition between mimesis₂ and mimesis₃, for these paradigms both

⁷⁵ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 68; cf. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 158-239.

⁷⁶ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, p. 70.

⁷⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 68; cf. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 158-239.

condition reader expectation for the reception of the literary work and provide the pool of paradigms which writers will employ in their task of emplotment.

It is in the hearer or the reader that the traversal of mimesis reaches its fulfilment as "narrative has its full meaning when it is restored to the time of action and of suffering in the world of mimesis₃."⁷⁸ It is with this third representative stage that mimesis₂ is brought back to its first level of intelligibility as mimesis₃ "marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader: the intersection, therefore, of the world configured by the poem and the world wherein real action occurs and unfolds its specific temporality."⁷⁹

The act of reading takes up again and fulfills the configurational act by which the details of action are 'com-prehended' and 'grasped together' in the unity of the plot. It is clear that schematism and tradionality are "categories of the interaction between the operations [opérativité] of writing and reading."⁸⁰ The received paradigms structure readers' expectations, furnishing guidelines for the encounter of text and reader, and so govern the story's capacity to be followed. The act of reading, which complements the narrative's configuration, actualizes the story's capacity be followed. The configurational act of emplotment is a joint work of writing and reading. Borrowing the central insight from the work of aestheticians like Roman Ingarden and the reception aesthetics of Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss, Ricoeur understands the act of reading as the necessary complement of the text in that the "written work is a sketch for reading."⁸¹ The reading

⁷⁸ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 70.

⁷⁹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 71.

⁸⁰ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 76.

⁸¹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 77.

or reception of the narrative work is "an intrinsic component of the present of actual meaning of the text."⁸² As a piece of music is only music when it is played, narrative emplotment is only a story when it is read.

When an aesthetics of reception raises the problem of communication it must also address the problem of reference. What is communicated by the work beyond the sense of a work is "the world it projects and that constitutes its horizon."⁸³ In turn, readers receive a story according to their own receptive capacities, which are defined by a situation, and this is "both limited and open to the world's horizon." It is in this sense that mimesis₃ is defined as the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader. A writer, living and suffering, is oriented within a world horizon and brings to language his experience. "What a reader receives is not just the sense of the work, but, through its sense, its reference, that is, the experience it brings to language and, in the last analysis, the world and the temporality it unfolds in the face of this experience."⁸⁴ The situation is even more complex in that reading raises the problem of the fusion of the horizon of the text and that of the reader, the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader. But it is the potential of this intersection of worlds to lead to a fusion of horizons in which the world of the text, a text which refers to the real world of action as apprehended through the refiguration of mimesis₂, is seen *through* or opens out beyond the familiar horizon of the reader's own world. With their fused horizons, the two worlds are understood as one.⁸⁵

⁸² Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, 77.

⁸³ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 77.

⁸⁴ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 78.

⁸⁵ Cf. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, pp. 77-82.

Ricoeur's account of mimesis reveals a hermeneutic circle which is by no means vicious. We have seen that mimesis₁ governs our preunderstanding of human actions through the semantics of action, symbolic mediations and the prenarrative resources of human action. This preunderstanding begs to be rendered fully intelligible by means of the narrative configurational operation characterized by mimesis₂. Thus that which was presignified at the level of mimesis₁ is resignified at the level of mimesis₂. As mimesis₁ calls for mimesis₂, so mimesis₂ implies and is fulfilled by its complement mimesis₃. Here the reader, grounded in his own horizon within the world of action, actualizes in reading the intelligibility mediated by the text. With this we have arrived again at the world of action, for the reader, whose understanding of reality is shaped by the works he has read, is in turn compelled to understand events he is witness to in his own temporal experience.

If we now return to our discussion of historical understanding and narrative, we can see from the perspective of the configurational operation of emplotment (the schematism and traditionality proper to mimesis₂) that in fulfilling his task the historian may choose one of several plot types as an overall paradigm for the emplotment of an event, according to what kind of story he judges is appropriate to the event. Emplotment already marks the transition from narrating episodes to narrative explanation. Thus, when some event is judged and narrated as a tragedy, these events are seen as a particular and unique instance of a traditional plot configuration.

In his analysis of this act of "putting-into-the-form-of-a-plot" Ricoeur has moved away from Aristotle, arguing that emplotment is a functional unity in both fictional and historical

narrative, its common goal being to mark, order and clarify human temporal experience.⁸⁶ Aristotle thought that because history reports what actually happened it is by nature too episodic to be considered within the requirements of his *Poetics*.⁸⁷ With Mink, Ricoeur holds that history is more than episodic, it is also configurational. It is thus permissible to speak in terms of a 'poetics of history,' whose "three or four levels of conceptualisation...are intrinsic to historical understanding" and it is "by these procedures, [that] events are properly transformed *into* history."⁸⁸ "That there is more fiction in history than the positivist conception of history admits" does not mean that historiography need not abide by the rules of evidence which it shares with the sciences.⁸⁹ Ricoeur explains:

However fictional the historical text may be, it claims nevertheless to be a representation *of* reality. In other words, history is both a literary *artifact* (and in this sense a fiction) and a representation *of reality*. It is a literary artifact insofar as, in the manner of all literary texts, it tends to assume the status of a self-sufficient system of symbols. It is a representation of reality insofar as the world that it depicts - and which is the 'world of the work' - claims to hold for real events in the real world.⁹⁰

From this perspective, before articulating the ramifications of this study for our understanding of autobiography, we might briefly raise the question of the relationship between narrative and life or reality. As we have seen, Danto has seen narrative structure as "imposed" on reality. Mink, arguing against Barbara Hardy's view that human beings "dream in narrative, day-dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe,

⁸⁶ Ricoeur, "On Interpretation", pp.176-7, and Paul Ricoeur, "The Narrative Function" in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 274-296.

⁸⁷ Cf. "On Interpretation", pp. 178-82. Here Ricoeur writes directly on the problem of extending the Aristotelian notion of plot to historiography.

⁸⁸ Ricoeur, "The Narrative Function," p. 251.

⁸⁹ Ricoeur, "The Narrative Function", p. 289.

⁹⁰ Ricoeur, "The Narrative Function", p. 291.

doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative."⁹¹ asserted that "stories are not lived but told. Life has no beginnings, middles, and ends [....] There are hopes, plans, battles, and ideas, but only in retrospective stories are hopes unfulfilled, plans, battles miscarried, battles decisive, and ideas seminal."⁹² Indeed, Mink's account grants little if any intelligibility to lived life, indicating that it is through the act of configurational comprehension that narrative imposes form and order upon events. The two sides of the debate as to the relationship of narrative to life are set up with Mink arguing on the side of 'discontinuity', believing that "Narrative qualities are transferred from art to life,"⁹³ and Hardy arguing on the side of continuity, believing that "narrative, like lyric or dance, is not to be regarded as an aesthetic invention used by artists to control, manipulate, and order experience, but as a primary act of mind transferred to art from life."⁹⁴ David Carr and Alasdair MacIntyre have argued and marshalled evidence for the continuity between life and narrative.⁹⁵ MacIntyre argues that human action has "a basically historical character. It is because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is appropriate

⁹¹ Barbara Hardy, "Towards a Poetics of Fiction: An Approach Through Narrative", *Novel*, 2 (1968), p. 5.

⁹² Mink, "History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension", p. 557-8.

⁹³ Mink, "History and Fiction as modes of Comprehension", p. 557-8.

⁹⁴ Hardy, p. 5.

⁹⁵ Cf. David Carr, "Narrative And The Real World: An Argument For Continuity" in *History and Theory*, Vol. XXV, No. 2, 1986, 117-31; "Life and the Narrator's Art" in *Hermeneutics and Deconstruction*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman and Don Ihde (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 108-21; *Time, Narrative, and History* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986). Developed within the phenomenological tradition, Carr's work on this topic seeks to show that historical and fictional narratives reveal themselves to be extensions and configurations of reality's primary features. Its point of intersection with the present study concerns the issue of the inherent narrativity of lived life and narrative structure, an unresolved debate that does not decisively affect the outcome of the present study. And Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), Chapter 15, pp. 204-25.

for understanding the actions of others. Stories are lived before they are told -- except in the case of fiction."⁹⁶ To Mink's contention that life has no 'beginnings, middles, and ends' MacIntyre argues that birth and death certainly imbue life with a narrative character.

To return to Ricoeur, it must be said that he seeks to strike a balance between the above views, and critics like Carr might say that the outcome is ambiguous or even deceptive.⁹⁷ Ricoeur wants to avoid the temptation of saying that "narrative puts consonance where there was only dissonance."⁹⁸ This view charges interpretation with a kind of "violence," for replacing the dissonance of reality with the consonance of narrative, overlaying reality with a literary artifact or fiction. But such a view misses the properly dialectical character of the relationship between temporal experience and narrative. On the one hand temporal experience itself cannot be reduced to "simple discordance"; the paradox of time, whereby *distentio* and *intentio* confront each other at the heart of human experience, must be preserved.⁹⁹ On the other hand, "emplotment is never the simple triumph of 'order,'" as there is operative within every emplotment structure "the fundamental dialectic of discordant concordance."¹⁰⁰

But having overcome the view of a "violence of interpretation" one must not succumb to the view of a "redundancy of interpretation." Ricoeur writes that "This would be the case if *mimesis*₁ were itself a meaning effect of *mimesis*₃. *Mimesis*₂ would then only restore to

⁹⁶ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 212.

⁹⁷ For all of his talk about "pre-narrative structure," Carr thinks that "in the end for Ricoeur narrative structure is as alien from the 'real world'" as it for thinkers like Mink. Cf. Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, p. 14-5.

⁹⁸ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 72.

⁹⁹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 72.

¹⁰⁰ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 73.

mimesis₃ what it had taken from mimesis₁, since mimesis₁ would already be a work of mimesis₃."¹⁰¹ Even though human experience is always mediated at the level of mimesis₁ by symbolic systems which already include what might be termed 'pre-narrative' narratives, one must not be led to the mistaken belief that there is in the circle of mimesis a redundancy of interpretation. Ricoeur insists that "action is in quest of narrative" and so one is forced to speak of a "pre-narrative quality of experience."¹⁰² Everyday life ought to reveal to us that lived events themselves, have a pre-narrative or quasi-story character for we can recognize a sequence of episodes in our lives as having the quality of "[as yet] untold" stories which "demand to be told."¹⁰³ Reality, full of human action and interaction, is also pregnant with "potential stories" demanding to be emplotted by a narrator.

Real events remain for Ricoeur the raw material of full story narratives. It is plot which "mediates between event and story" or, put another way, "the plot is the set of combinations by which events are made *into* a story or - correlatively - a story is made out of events."¹⁰⁴ And what is so fruitful about this act of emplotment, according to Ricoeur, is the *intelligibility* which it confers upon events. In this act a narrator makes into an intelligible whole "those ingredients of human action, which in ordinary experience, remain dissimilar and discordant."¹⁰⁵ Thus, with Mink, Ricoeur stresses that no action is ever a beginning, middle or end except when it is put into the form of a plot and retrospectively

¹⁰¹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 73-4.

¹⁰² Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 74.

¹⁰³ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 74.

¹⁰⁴ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, p. 161-8. In this line of argument Ricoeur is following Hayden White. Cf. Hayden White, "The Structure of Historical Narrative", *Clio I* (1972), pp. 5-19.

¹⁰⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 67.

inaugurates a story, contributes to the development of a story or concludes a course of action in a story. However it cannot be concluded from Ricoeur's analysis that there is utterly no narrative intelligibility at the level of lived events, as events possess a pre-narrative character, and as potential stories they have a latent intelligibility which is actualized in the act of configurational comprehension that is emplotment. Thus Ricoeur's insistence that stories proper do not exist in reality and that an event is a beginning, middle or an end only when it has been emplotted must be held in tension with his notion that "experience is an inchoate narrativity [...] that constitutes a genuine demand for narrative."¹⁰⁶ Ricoeur poignantly concludes: "We tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated. This remark takes on its full force when we refer to the necessity to save the history of the defeated and the lost. The whole history of suffering cries out for vengeance and calls for narrative."¹⁰⁷

Ricoeur's work on the narrative function in human life culminates our study of recent philosophical reflection on the narrative character of history. With the assistance of Dray and Danto we have been able to overcome positivist misconceptions about the nature of history. In order to write history at all one must necessarily select, according to some criterion of importance, from events, facts and data, what will be included in the account which seeks to explain an historical event. The naive notion that a work of history is an account of the total past has been exposed as a positivist illusion. Furthermore, Danto has clarified the properly retrospective character of history. What is true of history in general

¹⁰⁶ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 74.

¹⁰⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 75.

is true of the specific case of a personal history: Lonergan's description of the process of writing an autobiography reveals how retrospective selection according to a criterion of relevance is operative at each stage of production.

Danto's analysis of 'narrative sentences', and the work of Gallie, Mink and Ricoeur have served to explicate the narrative character of history. Gallie identified history as a species of the *genus* story which shifted the philosophical discussion from *explanation* in history to historical *understanding*, that understanding which is the product of successfully following a story. Mink identified narrative form as a cognitive instrument, each narrative being the product of the configurational mode of comprehension. Ricoeur situates the philosophical discussion of narrative within the larger issue of human temporality. Narrative is the human response to the discordance of temporal experience, thus it is in the composing and reading of stories that human beings make sense of what they live in a way that shapes their future actions. Ricoeur grounds his discussion of the production of narrative in the Aristotelean concepts of *mimesis* and *muthos* choosing to speak of emplotment, an operation which has a configurational as well as a linear dimension. The writer makes use of emplotment paradigms in the production of the historical narrative.

Both Mink and Ricoeur make it clear that stories do not emerge simply as a result of the historian's process of retrospective selection but rather that the selection process itself is an integral part of the larger act of configurational comprehension and emplotment. While some might debate whether the narrativist analysis is applicable to all historiography, there is little doubt that it is an account that is appropriate to a more narratively based type of historiography such as autobiography. With autobiography, the author retrospectively

selects events in the process of comprehending his life configurationally and emplotting his life in the form of a life-story narrative. Human beings are story telling animals; we all tell our life stories, largely in oral form, to our friends, our wives and husbands, our children, and, if we are unfortunate and have serious problems, to our psychologists.¹⁰⁸ Each person's life is marked by the discordance of temporal experience and calls for the human response of narrative. This is precisely why stories play such a large role in our lives. If the goal of narrative historiography is historical understanding, the goal of autobiography is historical self-understanding. This is the outcome of the configurational self-comprehension which renders the author's life an 'intelligible whole' through its transformation into an emplotted life story. Thus an autobiography, while being a representation of lived reality, is the literary artifact of a person's configurational self-comprehension.

5. Self-understanding, Emplotment and Theories of Man

In light of this critical perspective on autobiography it is clear that much of O'Meara's concern for the historicity of the *Confessions* is unfounded. The features he attributes to autobiography reveal a lack of understanding of the distinction which exists between lived life and the narrative history of that life. The *Confessions* is no different than any other autobiography in that it is the product of its author's retrospective evaluative selection, comprehension and emplotment of his life. While it is a representation of reality, it has

¹⁰⁸ Roy Schafer has discerned that narrative is such an important element in psychoanalysis that he describes psychoanalysts as "people who listen to the narrations of analysands and help them to transform these narrations into others that are more complete, coherent, convincing, and adaptively useful than those they have been accustomed to constructing." Roy Schafer, *The Analytic Attitude* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 240.

fictional elements by the very fact that it makes use of emplotment paradigms. As the historical-literary artifact of the author's narrative understanding of his life, autobiography, by necessity is interpretative.

Perhaps O'Meara would now counter that the most important element in his argument has been overlooked. Even if he were to admit that he has been naive in his consideration of certain features of autobiography would he not now argue that granted that selection and emplotment has legitimately taken place in the composition of the *Confessions*, because it has occurred according to, or based on, a theory of man, it is therefore "not a purely personal history; it is in part typical", and so still falls outside the category of autobiography.¹⁰⁹ Yet need the *Confessions* be excluded from autobiography because its author employed a theory of man in the composition of the work? Again it must be argued that this is not the case.

In fact this question should be reversed. If all autobiography is the product of the author's attainment of historical self-understanding, could such understanding ever be attained without recourse to a theory of man? Like all understanding, narrative self-understanding is never achieved in a vacuum, but is mediated by a culture which has an overall world view, one or more competing theories of man, and a variety of "knowledge" which is pretheoretical consisting of "interpretative schemas, moral maxims and collections of traditional wisdom that the man in the street frequently shares with the theoreticians."¹¹⁰ Every man, in some sense and degree, understands his life in terms of

¹⁰⁹ O'Meara, p. 18.

¹¹⁰ Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday-Anchor, 1969), p. 21.; also for a critical account of the sociology of knowledge see Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday-Anchor, 1966).

such theories and interpretative schemas and he may even build upon and develop these theories, or innovate new theories of man and his world, which further guide and inform self-understanding. This is not to suggest that all or most autobiography is an instance of the author's explicitly delving into the larger question of the meaning of human life at the level of his own life, but every author in recounting his life story is guided either consciously or unconsciously by a theory of man which helps confer some degree of retrospective meaning to his life and assists him in his configurational comprehension of his life. A theory of man may be said to influence the writing of an autobiography in a weaker or stronger sense. In the weaker sense, all autobiography is influenced by a world view and some theory of man, however vague and unconscious the influence, and however implicit it is in the narrative. Other autobiographies are going to be influenced by a theory of man in the stronger sense, the author consciously appealing to one or more theories of man in order to gain self-understanding. Such an autobiography, as in the case of a religious autobiography, might even be written from the point of view of the question: 'what is the meaning of life?' Thus, it can be concluded that autobiography is always a synthesis of the particular life of the individual and a theoretical (theory of man) and paradigmatic (employment paradigms) dimension, which is a result of the author's comprehension and employment of his life, informed by one or more theories of man.

One more characteristic of autobiography must be mentioned before returning to Augustine's *Confessions*. Ricoeur writes that, "we tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated."¹¹¹ While every person's life is significant and

¹¹¹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 75.

so everyone's story deserves to be told, most people do not actually write their autobiography, and when they do, it is not simply because the author desires to tell his story. When people write for the public at large they do so usually because the author discerns, with a prospective readership in mind, that his life or some aspect of his life is significant enough to be recounted and offered to the public. The decision to write and publish an autobiography is made on the basis of a person's intellectual, artistic or political contribution, fame or notoriety, or some other aspect which makes the person's life interesting. Again, the autobiographer does not attempt to narrate the 'whole story', but rather the 'relevant story': that part of his life which he judges to be significant and of interest to others. Thus artists, politicians and philosophers who write their autobiography, recognizing that their lives are of interest to the public because of who they are and what they have done, judge that what is of importance in their life story are those events, people and ideas which have influenced their lives as artists, politicians and philosophers. R.G. Collingwood succinctly makes this point when he writes: "the autobiography of a man whose business is thinking should be the story of his thought."¹¹²

6. Is the *Confessions* the Story of Augustine's Conversion?

Bringing this critical perspective to bear on O'Meara's view that the *Confessions* is based solely on the Christian theory of man, as exemplified in the archetypal crises conversion illustrated by paradigmatic biblical stories such as the parable of the prodigal son, the

¹¹² R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1978), p. vii.

conversion of St. Paul and extra-biblical stories of conversion, it could be concluded that the *Confessions* is a religious autobiography: the work of a religious man who emplotted his life in light of the self-understanding he attained through the meaning his conversion gave to his existence. Augustine was not molding his life story to the outline of a theory of man for evangelical and pedagogical purposes. Rather, he arrived at a narrative understanding of his life informed by a theory of man and its paradigms which he discerned as the true interpretive key to his life. Believing this theory of man is the universal truth of human life, Augustine recognizes the effaciousness of his narrative self-understanding, and thus shares his story with his reading public. Following this line of thought Ricoeur characterizes the *Confessions* as the story of Augustine's life emplotted as a journey to Christianity, the journey paradigm having been borrowed from the Classical world where it originated in such works as Homer's *Odyssey*.¹¹³ Augustine's innovation on this classical plot paradigm is to shift the journey from the narration of a geographic movement from place to place back to the point of narrative's beginning, to the narration of the author's personal interior journey from existential state to existential state (childhood, adolescence, Manicheanism, Skepticism, Neoplatonism) until he finally arrives at the Christian state of the author's present.

While there seems to be much to support this interpretation of the *Confessions*, it is only partially correct. If Augustine's point of view in writing the *Confessions* was strictly a post-conversion one, the first nine books fall neatly into the category of religious autobiography. The importance of the author's point of view and his retrospective evaluation, selection and interpretation of past events in light of his present self-

¹¹³ Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative Time", in *On Narrative*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 182.

understanding in the process of writing autobiography is particularly clear in the case of religious autobiography, written from the perspective of religious conversion. Conversion is "a transformation of the subject and his world;" for the convert it is as if he were seeing himself and his world in its true identity and order for the first time.¹¹⁴ The subject who has experienced conversion cannot help but see his past, experience his present and anticipate his future in light of the great event of his conversion.¹¹⁵

When Augustine emplots his life from the point of view of his Christian conversion, the resultant life story becomes a powerful fusion of the personal and the archetypal. So personal and so grounded in the author's subjectivity is the *Confessions*, that W.B. Barrett has identified the Bishop of Hippo as one of the forefathers of twentieth century existentialism. "In the *Confessions*", Barrett writes, "he gives us a revelation of subjective experience such as even the greatest Hellenic literature does not, and could not, because this interiorization of experience came through Christianity and was unknown to the earlier Greeks." Where Plato and Aristotle had asked the question, "What is man?", Barrett continues, "St. Augustine [in the *Confessions*] asks, Who am I? - and this shift is decisive."¹¹⁶ Yet, so archetypal are the first nine books of the *Confessions* (and the biblical paradigms which have informed its emplotment), and so subtle a reader of the human psyche is its author, that the story told is also that of Everyman. Thus many readers have been inclined to say with St. Teresa, "When I began to read the *Confessions*, it seemed to

¹¹⁴ Lonergan, p. 130.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Lonergan, who writes: "Conversion, as lived, affects all of a man's conscious and intentional operations. It directs his gaze, pervades his imagination, releases the symbols that penetrate to the depths of his psyche. It enriches his understanding, guides his judgements, reinforces his decision" (p. 131)

¹¹⁶ William Barrett, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (Garden City, New York: Double Day Anchor Books, 1962) p. 95.

me I saw myself in them,"¹¹⁷ or with Petrarch. "I account myself to be reading the narrative not of another man's pilgrimage but my own."¹¹⁸

If it is correct to interpret the *Confessions* as the emplotment of Augustine's life as a journey to Christian conversion, the book has been reclaimed for autobiography; yet the problem of its unity remains unresolved. While it is plausible that Augustine should have written his life story from a post-conversion perspective, the theory leaves the relationship of the last four books to the 'autobiographical' ones unexplained, and leads to the conclusion that the *Confessions* is structurally incoherent.

Such an interpretation, however, is incorrect. O'Meara's assumptions about Augustine's theory of man and the paradigms which informed the work's composition are only partially true. Thus, while his insight about the importance of the theory of man for ascertaining the structure, theme and meaning of the work is invaluable when coupled with a critical understanding, his thesis about the nature of Augustine's theory of man undermined his attempt to understand the work. This question of Augustine's theory of man and the paradigms of emplotment operative in his autobiography, once clarified, will provide the answer to the question of the unity and meaning of the *Confessions*.

¹¹⁷ St. Teresa of Avila, *The Collected Works Of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies Publications, 1976), Chapter 9.8, p. 73.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Roy W. Battenhouse, "The Life of St. Augustine", in *A Companion to the Study of Augustine*, ed. Roy W. Battenhouse (New York: Oxford, 1955), p. 186.

CHAPTER 3

THINKING JERUSALEM BY WAY OF ATHENS: AUGUSTINE'S CHRISTIAN APPROPRIATION OF NEO-PLATONISM AND THE EMPLOTMENT OF THE CONFESSIONS

1. Augustine's Post-Conversion Programme: Wisdom Through Faith and Reason

Augustine is clear in his earliest post-conversion work about his theory of man and what he thinks his own life, and all human life, is about. In *Answer to Skeptics*, written at Cassiciacum in 386, he gives an explicit account of his post-conversion situation and the Christian task he sees before him.

And now - that you may grasp my whole meaning in a few words - whatever may be the nature of human wisdom, I see I have not yet understood it. Nevertheless, although I am now in my thirty-third year, I do not think I ought to despair of understanding it some day, for I have resolved to disregard all other things which mortals consider good, and to devote myself to an investigation of it. And whereas the reasoning of the Academics used to deter me greatly from such an undertaking, I believe that through disputation I am now sufficiently protected against those reasonings. Certainly, no one doubts that we are impelled toward knowledge by a twofold force: the force of authority and the force of reason. And I am resolved never to deviate in the least from the authority of Christ, for I find none more powerful. But, as to what is attainable by acute and accurate reasoning, such is my state of mind that I am impatient to grasp what truth is - to grasp it not only by belief, but also by comprehension. Meanwhile, I am confident that I shall find among the Platonists what is not in opposition to our Sacred Scriptures.¹

¹ Augustine, *Answer to Skeptics*, Trans. Denis J. Kavanagh, O S A, S.T.M., in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, Vol. 5, ed. Ludwig Schopp (New York, The Catholic University of America Press Inc., 1948). The Latin text of this passage clarifies the point that will be argued here. In the first sentence Augustine writes: "Sed ut breviter accipiat omne propositum meum, quoquomodo se habeat humana sapientia, eam me video nondum percepisse." *Corpus Christianorum; Series latina XXXIX*, Avrelii Avgvstini, Contra Academicos, XX, 43, p. 60. The word *propositum* in the above context is better translated by the more programmatic English terms 'project' or 'plan' than 'meaning'.

In this passage, Augustine has delineated the elements of his post-conversion programme, and the method which will guide him to a theory of man; an exploration of each of these provides the key to understanding the profound structural unity of his great work of autobiography.

What must first be noted in this revealing passage which outlines Augustine's whole programme is that while already a convert to the Christian faith, Augustine has not yet perceived wisdom, but rather continues to seek it and counsels himself not to despair of reaching this goal. *Wisdom* is the goal he has set for himself and it is in *quest of wisdom* that he has turned from all the good things which preoccupy mortal men. Secondly, Augustine is confident that he has discovered the way which leads to wisdom, that way being precisely the twofold path of *faith* in Christ and His authority and the *understanding* of that faith by reason. From the Augustinian point of view, *faith* and *understanding* are integrally bound together; truth is apprehended not just by *believing*, but also by *understanding*. Thirdly, the reasoning in which Augustine has placed his confidence, and which he believes will be compatible with the Christian faith, is the philosophy of the Neo-Platonists. Any attempt to understand Augustine's theory of man and the paradigms which guided Augustine's emplotment of his life in the *Confessions* must begin with an analysis of these elements of his life quest and the method of the programme described above.

In the *Confessions*, written a decade after *Answer to Skeptics*, Augustine describes with passionate eloquence how he was awakened to the 'love of Wisdom' on reading Cicero's *Hortensius*, a work which spoke the praises of the philosophical life.² In retrospect,

² *Confessions*, 3,4,7, pp. 81-2.

Augustine judged this event to be of profound significance, and claimed that from that day forward wisdom became his goal. This goal was a personal one, for the true philosophical life in Augustine's terms was never the mere speculative pursuit of a detached reasoning which seeks a knowledge of nature, but rather a reasoning that concerns itself with responding to the deeply human and ultimately personal question 'Who is man and how can man be happy?'³ While Augustine gives various definitions of wisdom throughout his many works, it is always closely identified with the knowledge which confers happiness upon the human subject, and as such it is the goal of all true philosophy. In Augustine's judgement "no one has any right to philosophize except with a view to happiness."⁴

All men desire happiness,⁵ yet they are unable to attain that goal so long as they seek it in a disoriented fashion, in physical pleasure and the possession of things. No perishable thing or fleeting pleasure can satisfy man's desire for happiness, only that which is permanent, eternal, and immutable can confer the beatitude man longs for. In short, the wisdom man longs for is a knowledge of God. Yet how is one to arrive at this goal? Philosophy claims to be 'the love of Wisdom', but does philosophy itself have the way to wisdom? The answer for the post-conversion Augustine is that to attain wisdom, reason has need of faith and faith, of reason.

³ E. Gilson writes: "He [Augustine] was concerned most of all with the problem of his own destiny. For him, the important thing was to strive for self-knowledge and to learn what must be done in order to be better and, if possible, to be happy." Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine*, Trans. L.E.M. Lynch (New York: Octagon Books, 1983), p. 3.

⁴ Augustine, *City of God*, Trans. Gerald G. Walsh, S.J. & Daniel J. Honan, in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, Vol. 24 (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1954), 19.1.2, p. 187.

⁵ Cf. *Confessions*, 10.20,29; also *Trinity*, 13.8,11, and 13.20,25.

It is clear that as early as *Against the Skeptics* and certainly in the *Confessions*, Augustine was convinced that man cannot attain wisdom through his own unaided efforts, but needs divine assistance. Augustine was personally acquainted with the futility of trying to attain happiness outside the authority of Christ. Having awakened to the love of wisdom, Augustine recounts in the *Confessions* his various attempts to arrive at his goal. First he embraced the Manichean religion, which promised wisdom but failed to live up to its claim that its religious doctrine could be understood by reason. In his despair Augustine fell into academic skepticism, which offered those who embraced this point of view whatever peace it was possible to attain in this life. This too failed to satisfy the longing of his restless heart, and his search continued. Thus, in his own life Augustine was confronted with the scandal of the many philosophies. While philosophy identified itself as 'love of wisdom', the various schools were in conflict as to the character of wisdom and the way to attain it. How could reason alone bring one to wisdom when it could not even resolve the disputes among these different schools of philosophy?

Even when Augustine came upon the first-rate philosophical works of Neo-Platonists like Plotinus and Porphyry which helped him overcome his attachment to a materialist world-view and directed him toward a path of moral purification, Augustine had again to face the serious limitations of philosophy in the quest for wisdom. If such philosophers could by reason alone discern the direction in which wisdom was to be found, they could not provide the pilgrim with the moral strength to meet the ethical demands of the journey. The philosophers seem to be naive to an aspect of the human condition which Augustine knew all too well from his own experience: man's moral bondage to sin. It does little good for

Plotinus to point the way to wisdom and direct men to rise above the flesh and the passions if man has not the moral strength to follow this good advice. According to Augustine, the only path to wisdom is by way of faith in the authority of Judeo-Christian revelation which provides the truth free of error in the person of Christ who is the Wisdom of God, the Light of the mind, the strength of human will and the source of all the graces necessary for the pilgrim of wisdom to attain his goal. While Augustine's quest for wisdom was ignited by philosophy, his search led him to the conclusion that a conversion to wisdom must be first and foremost a conversion to Christ.

In converting to the Judeo-Christian faith, Augustine was entering a religion that had its own tradition of wisdom.⁶ In the early evolution of the concept in ancient Israel, wisdom was first identified with the everyday practical knowledge necessary for personal and communal well-being. Increasingly wisdom was elevated, becoming associated more and more with the sphere of the Divine. In Christianity, the Wisdom of God is identified with the Christ of faith. Beyond the affirmation of the quest for wisdom and the identification of Wisdom with the Christ of faith, Augustine could also detect the elements of his two-phased programme in the Scriptures. In the writings of the prophet Isaiah, Augustine took to heart the admonition that, "Unless you believe, you shall not understand."⁷ He could also pray along with his Church, "Give me understanding and I shall keep Your Law, yes, I shall observe it with all my heart."⁸ Faith here is not understanding, but is rather the necessary

⁶ *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, edited under the direction of Xavier Léon-Dufour, translated under the direction of P. Joseph Cahall, S.J. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967), pp. 577-9.

⁷ *Isaiah* 7:9.

⁸ *Psalms* 119:34; also cf. *Proverbs* 2:11 and 4:5,6.

though not sufficient condition for gaining understanding, and understanding, in turn, nourishes faith and the Christian moral life. Thus, the Judeo-Christian journey does not culminate in faith; faith is required for the advancement to understanding and the attainment of Wisdom. He writes: "Understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore seek not to understand that thou mayest believe, but believe that thou mayest understand [...] We believed that we might know; for if we wished first to know and then to believe, we should not be able either to know or to believe."⁹ The Scriptures confirmed Augustine's view that faith is not knowledge but leads, through understanding, to an experience of that knowledge which confers happiness. Thus, in the journey to Christian Wisdom, reason has need of faith and faith has need of reason. This is why, according to Augustine, while Jesus called people first to faith, "He did not say 'This is eternal life that they may *believe*,' but, 'This is eternal life that they may *know* thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent."¹⁰ This knowledge will only be perfectly attained in the afterlife in Christ, but begins in this life and for the man of faith who seeks the Wisdom of God, Augustine reminds his readers, there is the guarantee of Jesus himself who said, 'Seek and you shall find.' He continues: "Now we cannot say that we have found something which is believed but not known, nor can anyone become fit to find God unless he has first believed what we will afterwards come to understand."¹¹

⁹ Augustine, In *Joannis Evangelium tractatus*, 29,6, and 27,9, as translated in E. Przywara, *An Augustine Synthesis* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1945), p. 58.

¹⁰ Augustine, *The Free Choice of the Will*, Trans. Robert P. Russell, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, vol. 59 (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1968), p. 113 (my emphasis).

¹¹ Augustine, *The Free Choice of the Will*, p. 113.

It was natural for Augustine to turn to philosophy to reason his way to the understanding of the faith, for according to him, Christians and philosophers seek the same goal, that is, the happy life.

Listen first to the common aim of all philosophers [...] *It is characteristic of all philosophers that, through their study, inquiry, discussion, their very life, they have sought to come to possess a happy life.* This alone was the cause of philosophizing. Furthermore, I think that even this search the philosophers have in common with us. For if I should ask you why you believe in Christ, and why you have become Christians, every man will answer truthfully by saying: for the sake of a happy life. *The pursuit of a happy life is common to philosophers and to Christians.*¹²

Augustine also recognized that Christianity did not exclude philosophizing, noting that St. Paul himself, in his Letter to the Ephesians, reminded the Athenians that even some of their own claimed that we live, move and have our being in God, and in doing so recognized a compatibility between Christianity and certain philosophies.¹³ In his early work, *Divine Providence and the Problem of Evil (De Ordine)*, Augustine notes that "the Greek word from which the term, philosophy, is derived is in the Latin tongue called *the love of wisdom*," and argues that "indeed whosoever thinks that all philosophy is to be avoided wishes nothing else than that we do not love Wisdom."¹⁴ He goes on to remind Monica that the Scriptures "instruct us to avoid and to scorn the philosophers *of this world*, not just philosophers."¹⁵ This being the case, Augustine employed the reasoning of Neo-Platonism which had earlier helped him overcome his materialism, and made it possible for him to perceive the spiritual truth of Judeo-Christianity.

¹² Augustine, *Sermon*, *Patrologia Latina*, 38, 809, as translated in Anton C. Pegis, "The Mind Of Saint Augustine", *Mediaeval Studies*, Vol. VI (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1944), p. 10 (Pegis' emphasis).

¹³ *Confessions*, 7,9,15, p. 170; cf. *Acts* 17:18.

¹⁴ Augustine, *Divine Providence and the Problem of Evil (De Ordine)*, 1,11,32, in *The Fathers of the Church*, trans. Robert P. Russell O.S.A. (New York: CIMA Publishing Co., 1948), p. 271.

¹⁵ Augustine, *Divine Providence and the Problem of Evil (De Ordine)*, 1,11,32, p. 271 (my emphasis).

It is clear from what Augustine has stated about his post-conversion programme that careful consideration must be given to the influence of Neo-Platonism on his thought. Yet equal attention must be paid to the way in which Augustine has altered Neo-Platonism to make it more suitable to the content of his religion. To this end we will briefly present the essentials of the Plotinian world-view to prepare for an evaluation of Augustine's reception of this philosophy.

2. The Plotinian Paradigm of Emanation and Return

Neo-Platonism is a powerful reasoning tool and as a system of philosophy it offered a total view of the world.¹⁶ The entire Plotinian universe is the result of a timeless emanation;¹⁷ the logical generation of all reality from the One, which is the first and highest principle, absolutely transcendent and beyond all thought and being and yet omnipresent throughout all that emanates from it. No activity can be attributed to the One, for activity would imply a distinction between an acting agent and the object acted upon. The One is perfect in unity and fullness and neither seeks, possesses, nor lacks anything.¹⁸

Thus not by act, will, or thought, the One in its perfect fullness and maturity emanates, overflows, or radiates Being, Mind, or *Nous*, the begotten of the One.¹⁹ While

¹⁶ For critical presentations of Plotinus' philosophical system, cf. A. H. Armstrong, *Plotinus* (London: G. Allen, 1953); Emile Brehier, *Philosophy of Plotinus*, Trans. Joseph Thomas (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958).

¹⁷ Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), 5.1.6, p. 374.

¹⁸ *Enneads*, 5.3.13-17, pp. 395-400.

¹⁹ *Enneads*, 5.9.1-14, pp. 434-42.

the One overflows into Being or *Nous*, the One is in no way diminished in this process and is not less than it was to begin with, but the *Nous* itself is inferior to its begetter. This metaphor of emanation introduces the other elements of the Plotinian universe without recourse to any idea of a willful creation, which is utterly incompatible with the notion of the One. Rather the *Nous* proceeds by logical necessity from the One, without the One's willing or choosing to bring it forth. The *Nous*, eternally subsisting intellect or thought, is characterized as immediate apprehension, a timeless, contemplative thought, whose object of knowledge is both the One and itself. As the self-subsisting knowledge of all that is intelligible, the *Nous* has within it all the multiplicity of intelligibles, though it itself is a unity. *Nous* corresponds more or less to Plato's realm of ideas. With *Nous* there is for the first time Being. The *Nous*, both subject and object of knowing, eternally shares in the fecundity of the One from which it emanated.²⁰

In its timeless and eternal present, and in its own perfection and fullness, the *Nous* overflows and brings forth, in the emanation process, Soul. It is the Platonic and Stoic World-Soul that Plotinus incorporates into his world-view here, but while the Soul is one and indivisible, there is a higher and lower element of the Soul posited here. The former looks upward to the *Nous* and the latter looks downward to the material world of nature. In this way the higher soul comes in no immediate contact with the material world, but dwells near to the *Nous*. The ideas which are in the *Nous* are not themselves in contact with the material world either (though the material world owes all its reality to these ideas), so

²⁰ *Enneads*, 5,9,7, p. 439.

Plotinus posits the reflection of these ideas in the World Soul.²¹ The lower Soul, on the other hand, is the very soul of the phenomenal world. There is a chain of imprinting or illuminating of the ideas which takes place from the *Nous* to the Higher Soul and from the Higher Soul to the One. In this way the higher and the lower Soul form the link between the spiritual and the sensual world. It is from the World-Soul that individual souls proceed. The individual human soul largely consists of two parts, a higher part which faces the *Nous* and a lower part which is connected directly to the body. In the Plotinian system as in the Platonic, the soul pre-existed before its fall into the body and so will survive the body's death.

The material world is below the soul and is a product of emanation; as such it too has its origins in the One.²² However, Plotinus uses the image of radiating light which grows gradually darker and darker as it gets further from the Source of light, indicating that matter is to be seen in terms of a privation of light. By virtue of the fact that matter has form, it is dimly illuminated. According to Plotinian thought, matter is the principle of evil and at its lowest it is unilluminated privation, lacking all quality, and thus is the radical antithesis of the Good, the Source of all light. Plotinus, who spoke of "the repugnance of Matter," considered matter evil.²³ It may be added that if matter is evil then the body is evil as well. The soul, being spirit, and by virtue of its having emanated from the One, is a being that has a right to claim divinity.

²¹ *Enneads*, 4,8,7, p. 363.

²² *Enneads*, 3,9,3, p. 253.

²³ *Enneads*, 2,4,1-16, pp. 105-118.

In a sense, Plotinus' world is a world without beginning or end, in which everything has emanated by necessity: the multiple particular material things from the reflections of the ideas, individual souls from the World Soul, the World Soul from the *Nous* and the *Nous* from the One, which is first cause and highest principle, absolutely transcendent and beyond all thought and being, yet omnipresent in all that emanates from it.

Paralleling this emanation from the superior to the inferior is a yearning and striving for the lower to return to the higher. At its lowest, the soul is contaminated by its contact with the body; the union of the soul and body is viewed as a fall. The soul, forgetful of its divine origin, falls in love with itself, leading a life of self-obsessed involvement in materiality, the unfulfilled slave of its dis-oriented passions. Yet it is not completely sunk in materiality and iniquity, for its higher element remains in the intelligible realm, uncontaminated.²⁴ The task of the individual is to recognize what he truly is, a fallen soul using a body. The soul is an immortal and intelligible substance, which is to say that it is divine, ultimately begotten from the unbegotten One.²⁵ Each person must become what he truly is, his higher soul. As a result of the soul's fallen state, the task of becoming what it is in truth is an ethical task which involves the soul in turning away from its self-obsessed involvement with the outer material world, a turning inward and then an ascent with the ultimate aim of eventual union with its source, the One. This journey, which begins with an ethical turn from the exterior to the interior and then moves from the inferior to the superior, takes

²⁴ *Enneads*, 4.8.8, p. 363-4.

²⁵ *Enneads*, 4.7.10, pp. 353-4.

place in a series of stages in which the soul raises itself to an awareness of its own natural divinity.²⁶

The journey begins with the soul's gradual liberation from its enslavement to the sensual by a process of catharsis or purification. Through the practice of the virtues, the soul overturns its disoriented relationship with the body and material things, exercising its natural dominion over the body in order to rule it, rather than to be ruled by it.²⁷ In the second phase the soul must rise above sense perception and turn toward the *Nous* through the practice of philosophical dialectics, by which it reflects upon what is real, the essence of things.²⁸ The third phase in the soul's ascent finds it moving beyond discursive thought to attain union with the *Nous*, though the differentiation between the contemplator and that which is contemplated remains, so that the soul retains self-consciousness.²⁹ The journey does not end here however; there is a final phase in which the soul ascends to an ecstatic union with the One, momentarily realizing its divinity beyond subject-object duality in the dissolution of all distinctness between the soul and the One.³⁰ Such a union, however, cannot be complete and lasting this side of death while the soul is still united with the body, it is rather a momentary one which may be achieved a number of times in the course of a lifetime.³¹ Plotinus' description of this event of union with the One is, of course,

²⁶ *Enneads*, 1,6,8-9, 62-3.

²⁷ *Enneads*, 1,2,3, p. 32-3.

²⁸ *Enneads*, 1,3,2-4, pp. 37-9.

²⁹ *Enneads*, 6,7,20, p. 578.

³⁰ *Enneads*, 6,9,9, p. 622-3.

³¹ *Enneads*, 6,9,10, p. 623-4.

necessarily vague, and with words he can only evoke the mystical event whereby the soul grows one with the light and is "raised to Godhood, or better, knowing its Godhood."³² After the still-embodied soul's ecstatic union with the One, it returns to a more normative consciousness, though with the newly acquired knowledge of the experience of Divine splendour in which it rightfully shares, recognizing the omnipresence of the One in all that is. The soul then strives to live a virtuous life, free of material encumbrances, perhaps making the journey of ascent a number of times, but looking forward to that time when it will be free of its body and the union with the One will be complete. The philosophical life is aptly characterized by Plotinus as the "passing of solitary to Solitary."³³

3. Augustine the Neo-Platonist?

Augustine's use of Neo-Platonist philosophy must be seen in the context of his post-conversion programme outlined in *Answer To Skeptics*. One must take seriously Augustine's own account of his intellectual-spiritual quest, for his thought is consistent with the project he outlined in 386 at Cassiciacum. In ignoring this account, a number of thinkers have inevitably fallen into error and taken up positions which cannot be substantiated.

A positive result of the controversy early in the century begun by P. Alfarić's indefensible view that Augustine had not converted to Christianity in 386 but only to Neo-Platonism, and was thus engaged in revisionist history in the *Confessions*, was that it renewed

³² *Enneads*, 6,9,9, p. 623.

³³ *Enneads*, 6,9,11, p. 625.

scholarly appreciation of the importance of the Neo-Platonist influence. In time attention was focused on the nature and degree of the influence of Plotinus and Porphyry.³⁴

In the early 1960s Robert J. O'Connell wrote of his conviction that the dominant influence on Augustine's early thought, including the period in which he wrote the *Confessions*, is Plotinus and more precisely the *Enneads* VI, 4-5 on the "Integral Omnipresence of the Authentic Existent."³⁵ He speaks of influence here in the strongest sense, for Plotinus is thought to be crucial "to the eventual structure of Augustine's Christianity."³⁶ O'Connell writes:

My exact contention here is that the *Enneads* provided the early Augustine with a comprehensive philosophic matrix, an intellectual frame. So promising did Plotinianism appear to him that it inspired a "confidence" that all he deemed valid in the other influences shaping his mind could find a natural place within that matrix. Occasionally, they might have to be reinterpreted to fit the matrix. Occasionally, too, he is clearly conscious that the opposite might be true: the contours of Plotinianism might require adjustment in order to accommodate some insight coming from another source. As time goes on and his development proceeds the matrix itself is more severely tested. At points, it breaks under the strain, though Augustine is not always conscious of the break.³⁷

Differing from the earlier contention that Augustine had retrospectively proclaimed himself a Christian in the *Confessions*, O'Connell claims that Augustine adopted the Plotinian philosophical system in a manner that makes it the "central source" of his "thought world."³⁸ O'Connell argues that from 386 to 391 Augustine viewed man as a pre-existent fallen soul, in line with the Plotinian theory of emanation, the soul's task being to return to its origin. It is argued that, like Plotinus, Augustine viewed the soul as divine. Although after 391

³⁴ For a survey of the scholarship on the influence of Plotinus and Porphyry cf. Solignac, "Introduction et notes aux *Confessions*" in *Les Confessions* (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1962), pp. 100-12 and 682-9.

³⁵ Robert J. O'Connell, *St. Augustine's Early Theory of Man, A.D. 386-391* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 35.

³⁶ O'Connell, *Early Theory of Man*, p. 4.

³⁷ O'Connell, *Early Theory of Man*, p. 4.

³⁸ O'Connell, *Early Theory of Man*, p. 5.

Augustine had begun to modify his early post-conversion views, O'Connell suggests that his early adherence to the theory of the soul's 'fall and return' "might still provide powerful and troubling illumination" for the understanding of his *Confessions*.³⁹ According to O'Connell, when the *Confessions* is read in the light of the Plotinian thought-world of the soul's pre-existence and fall into the body and subsequent journey back to the intelligible world, it tells the story of the archetypal journey of man as a soul in odyssey or "*peregrinatio*," an "ambiguous term which can mean either 'wandering' or 'pilgrimage', depending on the direction of its movement away from or back to God."⁴⁰ O'Connell thus searches the *Confessions* for evidence to support the idea that Augustine saw his life as that of a soul which, having fallen from a pre-existent life in a divine spiritual realm, is searching for the way back to its rightful place. While there is little or no evidence in the *Confessions* to support the fallen soul theory, one can detect the Plotinian influence in Book 10 with its paradigm of a soul's path of interior ascent.⁴¹ Thus O'Connell is on the right track in exploring the impact of Plotinian reasoning on Augustine's thought and the structure of the *Confessions*. Nevertheless, he errs with regard to the nature and degree of Plotinus' influence on Augustine's thought and his theory is unconvincing when applied to the *Confessions*.²⁴

³⁹ Robert J. O'Connell, "Augustine and Plotinus: A Reply to Sister Mary Clark", in *International Philosophical Quarterly* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1972) p. 604. Since the publication of his work on the *Confessions* O'Connell has sought to stretch his theory across Augustine's entire intellectual history. Cf. *The Origin Of the Soul in St. Augustine's Later Works* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1987).

⁴⁰ Robert J. O'Connell, *St. Augustine's Confessions: The Odyssey of Soul* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 186.

⁴¹ O'Connell, *St. Augustine's Confessions*, pp. 120-34.

With regard to O'Connell's specific thesis that Augustine embraced the theory of the pre-existent fallen soul, it must be said that while it is true that Augustine considered it a *possible* theory, it is another thing to suggest that he held this theory for any length of time after his conversion to Christianity and it stretches credulity to argue that this theory was central to his self-interpretation. As Portalié points out, "Augustine [...] never admitted a previous life, whose sins were being punished in the present one."⁴²

In Augustine's work of 395, *On the Free Choice of the Will*, he acknowledged the theory of the soul's pre-existence as one of four possibilities, but by 406, in *Literal Commentary on Genesis*, he indicates that he does not favour this theory.⁴³ As Mary T. Clark states, it is "out of character to have structured the *Confessions* upon this theory as though it were a fact; still more improbable that, had he done this, he would have omitted any mention of his mistake in 426 [*Retractions*] when he had definitely rejected the theory."⁴⁴

It is ironic that O'Connell, while trying to bring Plotinus' thought to bear on Book 10 of the *Confessions*, refuses to acknowledge the importance of Augustine's innovation of the Platonic theory of reminiscence which makes it clear that Augustine did not hold the Platonist doctrine of the soul's pre-existence at the time he composed the *Confessions*.⁴⁵ Augustine did not fail to adapt Plotinus on this important point of difference and so it

⁴² Eugene Portalié, S.J. *A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine*, Trans Ralph J. Bastian, S.J. (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1975) p. 104.

⁴³ Cf. *The Free Choice of the Will*, III,20,55, and *Literal Commentary on Genesis*, VI,9,15. Mary T. Clark has drawn attention to these texts in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, XI, (Fordham University Press: New York, 1971) pp. 427-439.

⁴⁴ Clark, p. 434.

⁴⁵ While it is true that Augustine did not explicitly speak of the 'memory of the present' in the *Confessions* Book 10, it will be made clear in Chapter 5 of this thesis that this concept is implicit in the text, as indeed it is implicit in Augustine's theory of knowledge.

cannot be argued that the Plotinian paradigm of the soul's 'fall and return' has been uncritically appropriated as the structural basis for the *Confessions*. This explains why O'Connell is not convincing in his attempts to find in the first nine books of the *Confessions* evidence which would support the interpretation of the work along the lines of the fall of a pre-existent soul.⁴⁶ Finally, it must be said with Clark that since "we are dealing with a man who is always frank about his failings; the absence from the *Retractions* of what Fr. O'Connell alleges to have characterized the thinking of the early Augustine is very damaging to Fr. O'Connell's thesis."⁴⁷

The general weakness of O'Connell's proposal is that it depicts Augustine as hermeneutically naive. One is asked to believe that Augustine had so little understanding of the basic thought world of the Christian church of his day that he imposed the Neo-Platonic matrix onto Christianity rather than adapting the philosophy to his new-found faith - this in spite of the fact that there were other prominent Christians (Bishop Ambrose, for instance) who by example would have provided guidance to a new intellectual convert as to how Neo-Platonism could be orthodoxically employed in the service of understanding Christianity. The problem with O'Connell's theory is not the contention that Neo-Platonism provides the philosophical structure for the content of Augustine's Christianity, but that, because he is so preoccupied with how Neo-Platonism influenced Augustine's Christianity, he does not recognize how Augustine's Christianity influenced his Neo-Platonism. O'Connell sees all the influence moving in one direction and

⁴⁶ In the course of the reading of the *Confessions* in Chapter 5 of this thesis I will refer to O'Connell's interpretation of several key passages to show that they do not in fact support the hypothesis he argues.

⁴⁷ Clark, p. 437.

he does not appreciate how Augustine has altered the structure of his philosophy to suit the content of his religion. O'Connell too readily has Augustine's Christianity suffering for the sake of his philosophy, seeing too much naivete in Augustine's reception of Neo-Platonism and depicting him as lacking an awareness of the bounds of Christian orthodoxy. The truth of the matter we believe is as Grandgeorge concludes: "In so far as his philosophy is in agreement with his religious doctrine, St. Augustine is unreservedly Neo-Platonic, but whenever a contradiction presents itself, he does not hesitate for a moment to subordinate philosophy to religion, reason to faith."⁴⁸

Augustine did not accept the whole of the Plotinian system and project it onto Christianity. In fact, when he did any projecting, it entailed the projection of basic Christian concepts onto Plotinus, as will shortly be evident. This confirms that Augustine's thought was firmly entrenched in a Christian world view and that, true to his word in *Answer To Skeptics*, Christian revelation was his authority. For all intents and purposes, O'Connell's argument amounts to saying that Augustine's authority was Plotinus, but the texts themselves do not bear this out. Against O'Connell we must endorse the judgement of A.C. Pegis who writes: "Whatever St. Augustine may find in Plotinus, can it be denied that the Augustinian program at Cassiciacum is growth in understanding *WITHIN* the truth that he has come to possess through faith?"⁴⁹

The lesson to be learned from those thinkers who have overestimated the influence of Plotinus' philosophy on Augustine's thought is that, while the influence of Plotinus must

⁴⁸ M. Grandgeorge, as quoted in Portalié, p. 97. It is interesting to note that Portalié is in agreement with this judgement against those scholars of the day who exaggerated the influence of Neo-Platonism. Cf. 97.

⁴⁹ Pegis, "The Mind of St. Augustine", p. 3.

be taken into full account, one must be attentive to the religious content Augustine received from his faith and how at key points he critically altered the structure of the philosophy to suit the content of the religious truth he had embraced as his authority. When he was aware of conflict between his religion and his philosophy, it was always the latter he adapted to the former. With this in mind let us consider Augustine's Christian reception and employment of Neo-Platonist philosophy, being attentive to how it influenced his understanding of his faith and how he adapted it where he deemed it necessary.

4. Neo-Platonism in the Service of Christian Understanding

What is known historically about Augustine's encounter with Neo-Platonism is that around the summer of 386 he was introduced to certain texts by a proud man whom he chooses not to name.⁵⁰ For several decades Milan had been growing as a center where Christianity encountered Neo-Platonism. In the middle of the century, a professor of rhetoric who embraced Neo-Platonism converted to the Christian faith. Marius Victorinus had translated Plotinus and other Neo-Platonist thinkers into Latin, making it accessible to those with less scholarly backgrounds. Victorinus, whom Courcelle calls the founder of Christian-Neo-Platonism, in turn was friends with a priest named Simplicianus who was the spiritual adviser to Bishop Ambrose, the Father of the Church who most brought Neo-Platonism to bear on his theology.⁵¹ Ambrose and other Christians of the day saw the Neo-Platonists as an

⁵⁰ Cf. *Confessions*, 7.9.13, p. 168.

⁵¹ P. Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de saint Augustin* (Paris: Editions E. de Boccard, 1968), p. 170.

intellectual elite whose reasoning provided insights into the structure of the spiritual realm.⁵² Augustine was soon to echo this sentiment in *Answer to Skeptics*, when he praises the Neo-Platonists for not being philosophers of 'this world' but of the 'intelligible world'.⁵³

What must be kept in mind is that he was introduced to Neo-Platonism in the living witness of Ambrose and other Christians influenced by the philosophy. In the words of Hans Urs von Balthasar:

As early as the Cassiciacum writings Augustine is fully conscious of himself as a Christian and a believer and, as Courcelle showed, it was in Ambrose's sermons in Milan and in his contacts with the Christian Neo-Platonists, the priest Simplicianus, that he became acquainted with Plotinus. The two things come into his field of vision simultaneously, philosophical form and the content it frames and structures, Christian teaching; both are equally strongly attested by the early writings.⁵⁴

Thus, prior to his contact with the texts themselves, at the same time that he was absorbing Ambrose's Christian thought through the latter's sermons, Augustine was receiving many of the ideas of Neo-Platonism filtered through the mind of a mature Christian pastor.⁵⁵ It is clear that there was no way that he could have approached the Neo-Platonist texts without Christian ideas. Ultimately, it was the homilies of Ambrose, the witness of men like Victorinus, and the wise advice of priests like Simplicianus which prepared Augustine for the

⁵² Cf. R. Holte, *Béatitude et sagesse: Saint Augustin et le problème de la fin de l'homme dans la philosophie ancienne* (Paris: Etudes augustiniennes, 1962) p. 111-164.

⁵³ Augustine writes: "The truest philosophy, in my opinion - has been crystallized through multifarious disputes throughout many centuries, because the times did not lack men of the utmost discernment and industry who, in their disputation, continued to teach that Aristotle and Plato blend and chord in such a manner that to the inattentive and unskilled they seem to be out of harmony. For, it is not the philosophy of this world - the philosophy that our sacred mysteries rightly detest. It is of the other world, the intelligible world - a world which even the most acute reasoning would never lead souls blinded by the multiform darkness of error and smeared with so much grime from the bodies. Human reason would never lead such souls to the intelligible world if the most high God had not vouchsafed--through clemency toward the whole human race--to send the authority of the divine intellect down even to a human body, and caused it to dwell therein, so that souls would be aroused not only by the divine precepts but also by divine acts, and would be thus enabled to reflect on themselves and to gaze upon their fatherland, without any disputatious wranglings." *Answer To Skeptics*, 3,19,42. p. 219.

⁵⁴ Cf. Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Volume II: Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, Trans. Andrew Louth, Francis McDonagh and Brian McNeil C.R.V., Edited by John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), p. 96.

⁵⁵ For a discussion of Ambrose's Neo-Platonism cf. P. Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions*, p. 312-82.

appropriation of Neo-Platonism in the Christian task of understanding faith.

Augustine's own accounts of his encounter with Neo-Platonist texts are written from a post-Christian conversion perspective. Thus whatever occurred in the months between Augustine's first contact with the texts and his post-conversion reflections on this encounter can only be surmised. Even the texts themselves are unspecified, leaving scholars to speculate by reading back from Augustine's work what these texts may have been. While there is diversity of opinion among scholars as to the actual texts Augustine read and which were most influential, it is safe to assume with Solignac that the few texts he had contained the essentials of Plotinian thought.⁵⁶ No doubt Augustine pored over these texts in this period, and their major effect, as recounted in the *Confessions*, was to enable him to overcome his attachment to a materialist world-view, to offer insight into the nature of evil which as a Manichean he had previously thought of in terms of a dualism of good and evil substances, and to provide some description of the structure of the spiritual universe. As Solignac has pointed out, the accounts of his first contact with Neo-Platonist writings in his earlier works, *Answer to Skeptics* and *The Happy Life* have the enthusiasm of a fresh discovery.⁵⁷ Thus these accounts are more emotional and effusive in their praise of the

⁵⁶ "...Restent donc Plotin et Porphyre. C'est ici que les spécialistes se divisent: le P. Henry pense qu'il s'agit du seul Plotin; W. Theiler, au contraire, soutient que toute l'information néo-platonicienne d'Augustin vient du Porphyre; P. Courcelle estime qu'il faut parler de l'un et l'autre, de même que J. J. O'Meara qui croit cependant l'influence porphyrienne prépondérante. Il semble que l'opinion de Courcelle soit la plus proche de la réalité, bien que de nouvelles recherches, toujours plus précises et sans doute aussi plus étendues, soient encore nécessaires pour élucider une question qui gardera toujours un fonds d'obscurité.

Etant admis qu'il emprunte à la fois à Plotin et à Porphyre, il reste à déterminer les traités ou ouvrages de ces deux auteurs que put lire Augustin [...] En ce qui concerne Plotin, il a lu sûrement les traités: I,vi *Du Beau*; I,viii *De l'origine des maux*; V,ii *De la genèse et de l'ordre des êtres qui viennent après le Premier*. Sûrement encore les traités III,ii et III,iii [...] qui ne forment en réalité qu'un seul traité *De la Providence*. Très probablement les traités V,iii *Des trois hypostases connaissantes*; VI,vi *Des nombres* et VI,ix *Du bien et de l'Un* [...] La liste n'est d'ailleurs pas close; en tout cas, ces traités contenaient l'essentiel de la pensée plotinienne.

L'utilisation de Porphyre est plus malaisée à contrôler en raison de la disparition de la plupart des textes [...] M. Courcelle croit relever des indices d'une lecture du *De regressu animae*, du traité *De l'unité de la doctrine de Platon et de celle d'Aristote*, ainsi que *La philosophie des Oracles*. M. O'Meara est de même avis." Solignac, pp. 110-111; also Cf. pp. 682-689.

⁵⁷ Cf. A. Solignac, "Introduction aux *Confessions*" in *Les Confessions* (Desclée de Brouwer: Bruges, 1962), pp. 103-4.

Neo-Platonists themselves. The account in the *Confessions* is necessarily going to reflect a more mature perspective born of Augustine's reflections in the intervening years. This more weighed account focuses on the ideas he received from them, ideas which have been of enduring value to him and which he saw as compatible with Christian revelation. We have stressed that the *Confessions*, like all autobiography, is a retrospective understanding and emplotment of one's life. This less exuberant depiction of his encounter with Neo-Platonism reflects his self-understanding at the time of writing and reveals his mature evaluation of the event.

It is immediately apparent that Augustine read the doctrine of Creation and the concepts found in the Prologue of the Gospel of John into the *Enneads*, making him overly optimistic about the compatibility of that philosophy with Christianity. It is this reading of Plotinus through a Christian lens which will cause difficulties with Augustine's use of Neo-Platonism in his Christian task of understanding faith since it means that there were some differences between the two world views of which Augustine was unaware. In the *Confessions* Augustine writes of his encounter with Neo-Platonism and how he discovered in Plotinus' *Enneads* the three Christian notions: God the Father, the Divine Word of God and creation.

In them I read, not indeed in these words but much the same thought, enforced by many varied arguments, that 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him nothing was made'.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ *Confessions*, 8,9,13, p. 168.

Gilson writes: "That Augustine found them there is an incontrovertible fact. That they were not there is hardly more controvertible."⁵⁹ There is no creation in Plotinian philosophy nor can it be said that the One and the *Nous*²⁴ correspond to the Christian God and His Word, the second person of the Trinity.

Augustine's claim that the One and the *Nous* correspond to the Christian God and the Word of God, the second person of the Christian Trinity, overlays an important theological difference between Christianity and Neo-Platonism. The Judeo-Christian scriptures record that God revealed on Sinai that He is the eternal pure act of existing, "I Am Who Am."⁶⁰ There is nothing above God in the Judeo-Christian universe and the first principle is Being. Augustine accepted these principles; as Gilson writes: "What makes the greatness of St. Augustine in the history of Christian philosophy is that, deeply imbued with Neo-Platonism as he was, he yet never made the mistake of devaluating being, not even in order to extol the One."⁶¹ This important point of departure makes Augustine's philosophy and theology radically different from that of Plotinus: "A theology of the One differs on every point from a theology of Being; a doctrine where the first three universal causes do not share in the same being (*ousia*), is in every respect other than a doctrine where the three divine persons are one single being, one single God."⁶² This divergence from Plotinus' actual doctrine of the One means that "no two metaphysical statements can have the same

⁵⁹ Etienne Gilson, *God and Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), p. 49.

⁶⁰ *Exodus*, 3:14.

⁶¹ Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), p. 31.

⁶² Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), p. 70.

import in the doctrines of Augustine and Plotinus.⁶³ A metaphysics of the One cannot be a metaphysics of Being, as the One produces that which is other than itself, *Nous* which is Being. Given Augustine's Judeo-Christian adaptation of Plotinus, in which the dissociation of the One with Being is corrected, there is still another critical point of difference between the two perspectives.

Perhaps due to the manuscripts of Plotinus then available to him, Augustine seemed not to know that Plotinus' system of philosophy was based on emanation and so was unaware of at least a potential point of conflict which might arise between Neo-Platonism and the Judeo-Christianity view of creation. It is clear that Augustine himself realized that there could be conflict between creation and emanation, as indicated by his text against an emanationist thinker known as Vincentius Victor.⁶⁴ He does not, however, attribute this doctrine to Plotinus.

To the extent that the terms creation and emanation are metaphors that speak of the origin of material and spiritual reality it can be said that they are not dissimilar. In fact, if creation is restricted to the absolute position of Being, then it could be said that in Plotinus there is creation. The *Nous* depends totally on the One, and the One remains transcendent to the *Nous*, just as created things depend totally on God, but God remains totally transcendent to what he has created. In Judeo-Christianity, however, God is the Creator who in freedom, out of His goodness, wills to exist that which did not exist. God, who is Being and Beatitude, willed that there be creatures who could participate in His Being and

⁶³ Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, p. 70.

⁶⁴ Cf. *De natura et Origine Animae Libri IV*, trans. J. Plagnieux and F.-J. Thonnard, in *Oeuvres de saint Augustin*, vol. XXII (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1975), 3,3,3.

His Beatitude. There is no necessity involved here. God did not have to create nor did creation take place without his knowledge. Nothing was generated from God that He was not aware of and did not will. Creation is, in this sense, an act and an event. God, who is Being, is the Cause of all that is; there is no higher principle than this as the will of God has no cause other than itself. This is not the case with Plotinian emanation. Not only is Being the result of something above it, the principle which produces is not conscious of the production. Plotinian emanation occurs by necessity and not by the loving will of the Principle. There is no freedom in Plotinian emanation and this fact means that it differs dramatically from the concept of Judeo-Christian creation.

One aspect of the conceptual meaning of the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* emphasizes this difference. When something is created from nothing it would have to be a result of the will of the first principle. That which is made out of nothing was not generated from something and did not generate itself, nor did it flow from God's own substance. It would seem that in a special way this must involve the will of the principle who produces it 'out of nothing'. God had to will that it exist. Furthermore the God who made (willed) 'heaven and earth' also said (willed) 'Let there be...' the variety of existing things. 'Create' in this sense can only signify an act by which God has freely produced that which exists without any other cause.

Augustine's faith told him that creation meant freely to produce beings out of nothing. He grasped as well that in a Judeo-Christian metaphysics Being is indeed the first Principle. On these points, consciously or unconsciously, he modifies Neo-Platonism to suit

the demands of the Christian context⁶⁵ Nevertheless a problematic tension arises, from Augustine's use of reason which had its home within a system of emanation in order to understand Judeo-Christianity, so marked by the doctrine of Creation. In Plotinus the soul need only recognize itself as divine and reclaim its rightful place in the spiritual realm from whence it proceeded. In contrast, Augustine's task was to understand how a finite, contingent creature of "borrowed existence" could reach by reason the transcendent God, who is separated from him by an infinite "metaphysical chasm."⁶⁶ He thought he found a clue to the answer to this problem when he continued to read the *Enneads* through Christian eyes, and saw another point of convergence between the two systems, this time concerning their view of man and man's relationship to the transcendent God. He writes that in the *Enneads* he discovered "the soul of man, although it gives testimony of the light, is not itself the light, but the Word, God himself, is 'the true light, which enlightens Everyman that comes into the world.'"⁶⁷ With an insight generated by this decidedly Christian reading of the *Enneads*, Augustine began to resolve the problem.

If God is the light that illumines every soul then, as Gilson puts it, "this constant presence of the divine light in their souls [is] an always open way to the Christian God."⁶⁸ In his view, given that there is so much agreement between Neo-Platonist philosophy and Christianity, might not Plotinus provide the paradigm for the working out of this problem?

⁶⁵ Nevertheless we will see in Chapter 5 that his description of creation employs some of the images of procession borrowed from Plotinus, and his understanding of Judeo-Christian creation, which has an implicit 'existential' ontology, bears the marks of his 'essentialist' Neo-Platonist tools.

⁶⁶ Gilson, *God and Philosophy*, p. 54.

⁶⁷ *Confessions*, 7,9,13, p. 168.

⁶⁸ Gilson, *God and Philosophy*, p. 55.

Could created man reach the Creator-God by a comparable journey of the soul from the exterior to the interior and from the inferior to the superior? Augustine thought this to be the case, embracing this paradigmatic journey of the soul's self-discovery and ascent through reasoning.

In Augustine's thought the soul's paradigmatic odyssey becomes in Christian terms his journey of understanding through memory to the Wisdom that is Christ, the strength of the human will and light of the mind. In adapting this paradigm Augustine inevitably inherited several elements of the Neo-Platonic view of man. The Platonist definition of man as a soul using a body provides an orientation to Augustine's Christian anthropology, psychology, and metaphysics and through him would influence Christian thought for centuries. He did not actually hold this definition literally but rather embraced its 'spirit' taking it "as a forcible expressions of the transcendent superiority of the soul over the body."⁶⁹ Yet even when taken in this limited sense, the Platonic notion of man "deeply influenced the noetic of Saint Augustine."⁷⁰ Thus while he wrote that "any attempt to separate the body from human nature is foolish,"⁷¹ in embracing the spirit of this Platonic view of man Augustine inherited the spirit of its anthropological dualism, which became a heavy burden for future Christian thought. Such a Platonist dualism is not compatible with Biblical anthropology, and while Augustine continued to express his conviction that man was

⁶⁹ Gilson, *The History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, p. 74.

⁷⁰ Gilson, *The History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, p. 74.

⁷¹ Augustine, *De Natura Et Origine Animae Libri*, 4.23, p. 577.

a unity of body and soul, "he had difficulty in embodying this conviction in the conceptual structure at his disposal."⁷²

Like Plotinus, Augustine sees it as necessary for the soul to turn away from its confused self-involvement, and enter into a process of moral purification, but this is made possible by the grace of Christ. So begins the journey of self-discovery and understanding, moving from the exterior to the interior and from the inferior to the superior, in order to come to the knowledge that confers happiness on the questing soul. This journey moves through memory itself, a movement from the lowest instance of memory at the level of sensation, to the highest memory of all, the memory of God. Memory thus cuts through all the dimensions of Augustine's thought, (anthropology, epistemology, and theology), and lies at the heart of his self-understanding. Both Augustine and Plotinus recognize the role of forgetfulness in the soul's self-centered, fallen life of iniquity, agreeing that the soul's recognition of its true nature takes place through memory. Yet a profound difference between the two approaches emerges with this analysis of forgetfulness and of the role memory plays in the reorientation of the soul. As in all Platonism, in Plotinus the soul has forgotten its own divinity and its rightful place as a part of that divinity. Memory is a source of the soul's reorientation, in that the soul remembers its past existence before its fall into the body, remembering its true nature as a result. Radically departing from this view Augustine's analysis of the the role of memory in the life of the soul is situated within the overall context of the Biblical fall and redemption of man; the mechanism of 'forgetfulness' and 'recollection' serving to explain the interior, spiritual ramifications of man's fall at the

⁷² R. A. Markus, "Marius Victorinus and Augustine" in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, Ed. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 356.

level of the life of the soul. In Augustinian thought what the soul has forgotten is not its divinity but its very nature as the spiritual higher part of man; the recovery of this awareness is the beginning of the soul's path of ascent through memory, which culminates in an experience of the presence of God. Thus while Plotinus thinks in terms of the emanation and return of a 'fallen soul', Augustine thinks within the anthropological framework of biblical creation, the fall and subsequent salvation of mankind in Christ. For Augustine, the concept of 'fall' is understood through the anthropological story of Adam and Eve and is articulated in the Christian doctrine of Original Sin, which Augustine did much to shape.

While Augustine most strongly explicated this Christian doctrine in the polemical context of the Pelagian controversy, it is clear that by 396, and certainly at the time of his composing the *Confessions*, both the doctrine of original sin and its counterpart, the doctrine of grace, are foundational to his anthropology and soteriology and central to his self-understanding.⁷³ The *Confessions* was written shortly after Augustine's first articulation of his approach to original sin and grace in *De Diversis Quaestionibus ad Simplicianum Libri Duo* and both these works are, in their genre, a full expression of his anthropology and soteriology, containing all the important elements of these doctrines expressed in the later

⁷³ Portalié finds evidence as early as 393 that indicates Augustine had begun formulating his theses on original sin, citing in particular two passages from the work *De diversis quaestionibus LXXXIII*: "When our nature sinned in Paradise"; on the mass of perdition: "We are all made from the same clay, which is the mass of sin..." However in 393 Augustine was still working out the problem of the will at this time, wrongly attributing the beginning of salvation exclusively to freedom of choice. The weight of scholarly opinion, and a close reading of Augustine's work *De Diversis Quaestionibus Ad Simplicianum Libri Duo* confirm that Augustine had already come to his mature doctrine of original sin and its counterpart, the doctrine of grace, at this early stage of his development. Cf. *Les deux livres à Simplicien sur diverses questions*, trans J. Boutet, Oeuvres de saint Augustin, vol. 10 (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer et Cie, 1952) pp. 442-509; and E. Portalié, pp. 181-4 and P. Courcelle, p. 27. At the very beginning of his episcopacy Augustine formulated his mature system in response to a question Simplicianus posed concerning chapter IX of St. Paul's Letter to the Romans. Portalié writes: "The reply [...] constitutes a true key to the Augustinian system because of its accuracy, its fullness, its clarity, and especially because of the rational explanation it gives to the dogma."

p. 182. Paul Ricoeur also recognizes the significance of this work of 397, noting that it already contains the essence of the Augustinian argumentation even though "it precedes the first anti-pelagian treatise by fourteen years." Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection: I", trans. Denis Savage, in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974) p. 306.

works. As Paul Rigby asserts: "His system rests upon two pillars: the doctrine of original sin and the doctrine of grace. The former is not derived from the latter. Rather the two doctrines are the face and counter-face of the same truth drawn from the same experience."⁷⁴ This is precisely what the *Confessions* reveals, both in its content and structure. Augustine need not look further than his own life experience to discover verification of the Biblical truths of the 'fall of man' and the Pauline theology of grace. It is by reflecting deeply on his existential experience of his own life which brought him to an understanding of the truth of these doctrines, which is why they became key to his self understanding and narrative self-interpretation in the *Confessions*.

Augustine saw his years prior to conversion as having been lived in bondage to sin in a society which was communally marked by the same effects of original sin as he was personally. He experienced his nature as fallen, his free will as paradoxically enslaved. He knew well his many sins, and probed the mystery, along with St. Paul, of why he did not do the things he wanted to do and did the things he did not want to do. In Book 8 of the *Confessions* Augustine writes that in his search for truth he had arrived at the painful place where he saw the truth before him but had not the moral strength to embrace it. Understanding of his condition - the human condition in its state of fallen nature - could be found in the narrative of the primordial fall of man in Genesis.

⁷⁴ Paul Rigby, *Original Sin in Augustine's Confessions* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1987) p. 7. Rigby argues against the position of Athanasius Sage who held that Augustine's doctrine of original sin derives from his doctrine of grace both in terms of time and experience. Sage maintained that the latter doctrine was articulated some sixteen years earlier than his mature statements on original sin, which were expressed when his doctrine of grace was threatened by the Pelagians. I am in agreement with Rigby against those who have neglected or failed to recognize the significance of original sin and grace on Augustine's thought at this point in his life. The reading of the *Confessions* in Part III of this thesis reveals the foundational importance of these doctrines in Augustine's thought and self-interpretation at the time of the works composition. Cf. A. Sage, "Péché originel: naissance d'un dogme" in *Revue des études augustinienne*s (1967) 13:211-48 and "Le péché originel dans la pensée de saint Augustin, de 412 à 430," in *Revue des études augustinienne*s (1969) 15:75-112.

Man was made in the image of God and prior to the fall had superior gifts of nature and grace. In their original state Adam and Eve lived in the peaceful love of God, "their calm turning away from sin which, so long as it lasted, kept evil of every kind from saddening their lives."⁷⁵ Death and suffering were unknown because man had yet to turn away and cut himself off from the source of life.⁷⁶ Man enjoyed this life not by anything which he himself possessed but by virtue of the gift of God, and it is therefore not surprising that so much was lost in the prideful act of the first sin.

The cause of the act of disobedience by which man fell is to be found in man's will, as he had all the gifts of nature and grace to observe the commandment. It was man's pride, born from the desire for autonomy and higher rank in the created order, which turned him away from the happiness to which he should have clung and made him indulge in the conceit of taking delight in himself.⁷⁷ It was the hidden desire and delight in the self that preceded the temptation of the serpent; man is thus solely responsible for his fall. The fact that man immediately sought to lay the blame outside himself reveals the inner depth of will from which the act sprang. The creature accuses himself trying to excuse itself before the

⁷⁵ Saint Augustine, *City of God*, Trans. Gerald G. Walsh, S.J. and Grace Monahan, O.S.U., *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, Vol. 14, (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1952), 14,10, p. 374.

⁷⁶ Cf. Augustine, *City of God*, 13,20, p. 330.

⁷⁷ He writes: "Moreover, our first parents only fell openly into the sin of disobedience because, secretly, they had begun to be guilty. Actually, their bad deed could not have been done had not bad will preceded it; what is more, the root of their bad will was nothing else than pride. For, 'pride is the beginning of all sin.' And what is pride but an appetite for inordinate exultation? Now, exultation is inordinate when the soul cuts itself off from the very Source to which it should keep close and somehow makes itself and becomes an end to itself. This takes place when the soul becomes inordinately pleased with itself, and such self-pleasing occurs when the soul falls away from the unchangeable Good which ought to please the soul far more than the soul can please itself. Now, this falling away is the soul's own doing, for, if the will had merely remained firm in the love of that higher immutable Good which lighted its mind into knowledge and warmed its will into love, it would not have turned away in search of satisfaction in itself and, by so doing, and have lost that light and warmth." *City of God*, 14,13, p. 380.

Creator.⁷⁸ Since this sin was grounded in the creature's free choice, it is man who has cut himself off from happiness he enjoyed; he is the cause of the just punishment he suffers afterward.

Happiness was the gift of God to man in the order of creation but man's sinful will plunged him into a disordered relationship with God and created things. Augustine refers to two consequences of the original sinful act. Prior to the fall, God had excluded ignorance and concupiscence from man's nature; after Adam's exercise of his evil will man's 'fallen nature' was marked by these two consequences.⁷⁹ No longer did man have ease of knowledge and mastery of the soul over the body; he must now strive laboriously to emerge from ignorance, and the flesh wages war with the spirit. These two effects flow directly from the original sinful act and are so identified with it that they must themselves be considered original sin. Thus each individual born inherits a fallen nature marked by the effects of the evil act of the first man, and each individual sin of every person has its root in Adam's first sin.⁸⁰ It is not the case that man is born innocent, and then afterwards strays into bondage to sin. Man's will is marked by an anterior bondage which is prior to any individual sin he himself has committed.

While man's fall occurred through a simple exercise of his will, his desire could do nothing to restore the created order. Having lost the superior gift of nature, man is reliant on God for the grace, understood as "the sum-total of God's free gifts," which makes it

⁷⁸ *City of God*, 14,14, p. 384.

⁷⁹ For a discussion of original sin and its consequences, cf. Portalié, pp. 207-13, and Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine*, pp. 148-52.

⁸⁰ On the transmission of Original Sin, cf. Portalié, pp. 208-13.

possible for man in his state of fallen nature to restore himself to a proper relation to God and the created world and thereby obtain salvation.⁸¹ In man's original state, nature and grace were not distinguished, but after the fall man's fallen nature is in need of a re-creation, which is something that only God can accomplish. Man begins to receive grace at the moment he first comes to believe; faith is the first gift of grace and all good works flow from it.⁸² The source of this grace is Christ, the Word through Whom all has been created and is now renewed. Christ, born poor to show man the path of humility, redeemed man through His sacrifice and provides him with the grace and moral strength to restore a proper relationship to the order God has willed.

In the course of the reading of the *Confessions* in Part III it will be clear that the doctrines of original sin and sanctifying grace were foundational to his theory of man when Augustine wrote his autobiography and are at the heart of his self-understanding and thus inform the emplotment structure of the work. Not only are there frequent direct references to original sin and the parable of the prodigal son (as well as other key parables such as 'the parable of the Good Shepherd which emphasize the theme of straying and return), the redemptive event of Christ's life and death and the necessity of grace to overcome anterior bondage and habitual sin, but the entire structure of the first nine books of the *Confessions* is informed by the paradigms of 'the fall', prodigal wanderings, and the deliverance from

⁸¹ E. Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine*, p. 152.

⁸² Cf. *Les deux livres à Simplicien sur diverses questions*, in *Oeuvres de St. Augustin* (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer), 1,2,2, p. 445.

bondage by the grace of Christ, the conversion paradigms inherent in the stories of St. Paul's and St. Anthony's and Victorinus' conversion.⁸³

For Augustine the concept of fall does not mean the fall of the pre-existent soul from its place within divinity into the body but refers to the primordial fall of man, the sin of the first man which is the root of the moral impotence of all subsequent generations. Therefore in Augustine the notion of forgetfulness and remembering does not have recourse to the theory of the soul's pre-existence; nor does the soul remember itself as divine, or possess a right to the happiness it seeks; nor can the soul attain happiness without Divine assistance, which is the grace of Christ. When the soul finally draws close to Wisdom and momentarily attains what it longs for, Augustine, unlike Plotinus, does not see the soul as losing self-conscious subjectivity. Neither is the soul's self-conscious subjectivity lost in the eternal beatitude of the Christian afterlife. Augustine's use of Neo-Platonism in his account of the soul's journey to Wisdom is succinctly characterized by Aquinas' overall judgement that "Whenever Augustine, who was imbued with the doctrines of the Platonists, found in their teaching anything consistent with faith, he adopted it; and those things which he found contrary to faith he amended."⁸⁴

True to his word it is that Augustine perceived his task as 'thinking Jerusalem by way of Athens', and in his works following his conversion he left no doubt that the authority lay with Jerusalem. Augustine asks the citizens of Athens if anyone hungry for wisdom can afford to refuse the certainty offered in the promise and the authority of God. The citizens

⁸³ It is this orthodox influence of the Judeo-Christian doctrine of original sin and that of the Pauline theology of grace on Augustine's thought and the structure of the *Confessions* that has been underestimated by O'Connell.

⁸⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Vol. I, Pt. I, qu. 84, art. 5, Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1947) p. 427.

of Jerusalem, who stand firm on the authority of Christ, he implores to pick up the truly Christian task of understanding faith, and directs them towards what he thought to be the best philosophy Athens had to offer a thinker of his day: Neo-Platonism. When one has weighed the influence of Plotinus on Augustine's thought, recognizing how it has shaped his understanding of Christianity as well as how Augustine had modified this philosophy when it was necessary to do so to make it suitable to the content of the revealed religion he had embraced in faith as his authority.

PART III

TOWARD A UNIFIED READING OF THE *CONFESSIONS*

CHAPTER 4

THE JOURNEY TO WISDOM THROUGH FAITH AND UNDERSTANDING AS THE PLOT OF ST. AUGUSTINE'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

At Cassiciacum Augustine makes it clear that his personal goal, even after his Christian conversion, is Wisdom. The path to Wisdom lay in faith and the understanding of faith through Neo-Platonic reasoning. Over a decade later, when Augustine composed his *Confessions*, he judged that his entire life could best be comprehended as a quest for Christian Wisdom. This was the truth of his life as Augustine interpreted it. The *Confessions* was written from the perspective of the author having attained to some degree an experience of that goal which he had so ardently sought. Thus the *Confessions* is the literary artifact of Augustine's configurational comprehension and narrative emplotment of his life as a quest for Wisdom. The work then is not an autobiographical account of Augustine's life written strictly from a post-conversion perspective but rather from the perspective of an experience of Christian Wisdom and the anticipation of eternal beatitude in the future life of spiritual union with God.

Overall selection and emplotment of the work is based on Augustine's innovative use of the classical plot paradigm of heroic odyssey or quest narrative.¹ Augustine has taken the quest story of the hero's geographical journey back to his homeland and innovatively adapted it to emplot his own journey first to faith, and then through understanding to Wisdom. The theme of odyssey was a common one, and in the process of comprehending and emplotting his life, Augustine transformed it into a new paradigm of odyssey for a new age: a heroic Christian epic, a spiritual *Aeneid* to take the place of the old world heroic epic he had rejected.² In the climax of the work, which occurs in Book 10,27,38, Augustine attains Christian Wisdom in the presence of the God who has providentially guided him to Himself, giving the pilgrim a foretaste of his longed for destination that will only be permanently attained in the afterlife.

This overall emplotment of Augustine's life as the story of his quest for Wisdom has within it two ingredient paradigms of journey which inform the narrative comprehension of his life. The journey to Wisdom first entails the journey to faith in Christ. The seeker of Wisdom must embrace the authority of revelation as his guide and receive from Christ, who is Wisdom, all the graces needed to attain his goal. Thus the argument that Augustine's quest is Wisdom does not undermine the importance of his Christian conversion, neither in his own life or in the *Confessions*. Those thinkers who have detected the Biblical

¹ Harold Hagendahl examines the impact of classical literature and culture on Augustine in his study *Augustine and the Latin Classics* (Goteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1967).

² Certainly, Augustine's training in rhetoric suggests that he was immersed in the works of Virgil throughout his youth. While the adult Augustine strongly repudiated the classical world there can be little doubt that he was so imbued with Virgil and with the archetypal journey illustrated in the *Aeneid* that the transformation of this paradigm of quest became a structural basis for the emplotment of his life. Even if Augustine were hostile to the old classical cultural tradition, this would not inhibit his use of such a fundamental paradigm for the emplotment of his life, nor his presentation of it to the public.

paradigmatic stories of conversion guiding Augustine's own recounting of his journey to conversion to Christ are correct in the context of the dominant theme of the first nine books. The parable of the prodigal son was of particular importance for Augustine in this regard, the son's aimless wandering and self-indulgent life paralleling his own wandering search for satisfaction and his search for Wisdom which led him to a market place of religions and philosophies, none of which could deliver what they promised. Just as the prodigal son had to make his way back to his father's house and humbly submit himself to his father's mercy and forgiveness, Augustine had to abandon his rebellious life of self-indulgence and submit himself in faith to the authority and mercy of Christ. This parable illustrates the Christian notion of *peregrinatio*, the soul's wandering away and pilgrimage to God. This and other Christian parables and stories of conversion informed the emplotment of the first nine books.

The influence of the paradigm of the prodigal wandering and humble journey of return must be seen in the context of the foundational role the doctrine of original sin and its counterpart the doctrine of grace played in Augustine's self-understanding and the subsequent structuring and emplotment of his autobiography. While Books 1-9 can be seen as a journey to faith, within this part of the *Confessions* there are two ingredient movements. The whole concept of 'confession' in Augustine's *Confessions* presupposes the human experience of fault, bondage, and the grace of conversion. Augustine knew well the Christian belief that every individual's personal sin is original sin in that it is the product of an anterior bondage which is the effect of the first sin, concupiscence and ignorance. Augustine thus situates the sinful orientation of his boyhood and youth within the context

of his birth and infancy, showing that infants are not born innocent but are marked from the outset by the effects of the first sin. The many sins of his disoriented youth, the *peregrinatio* of his prodigal wanderings, are rooted in having been born into sin.

Augustine's disoriented wandering was only interrupted by the great event of his awakening to the love of wisdom upon reading Cicero's *Hortensius* as recounted in Book 3. At this point Augustine begins to search out the way, through trial and error, to truth, wisdom, and happiness. Having recognized the necessity of faith in Christ, he was unable to embrace the truth he longed to embrace and suffered the indignity of the moral impotence of the human will. Only God's gift of the grace of Christ could break the chains of sin, the first link of which was the anterior bondage, joined link by link by Augustine's own habitual sins. When, as recounted in Book 8, Augustine received in his moral conversion the grace to embrace in faith the truth and authority of Christ, the path to wisdom through understanding lay open to him. Not only did he know the path to wisdom but he now could name the wisdom he sought: Christ, the Word and Wisdom of God. Thus, while Augustine is clearly making the point that Christian faith is the all important first condition for the attainment of Wisdom and the decisive turning point in his own life, it is nonetheless the end of the first phase and the beginning of the second in the overall journey to Wisdom. Book 9 serves the larger narrative of Augustine's odyssey to Wisdom by bridging the two phases of the journey: it functions as a *dénouement* to the narrative of Augustine's journey to faith and foreshadows the journey of understanding Augustine through memory that Augustine embarks on in Book 10.

This second phase, in which the pilgrim of Wisdom gains an understanding of the Christian faith through Neo-platonist reasoning, introduces the second ingredient journey paradigm in the *Confessions*, the soul's journey from the exterior to the interior and from the inferior to the superior, which for Augustine is a journey through *memory*. Therefore Book 10 is not a breach in the unity of the *Confessions*: as a journey through understanding it illuminates the first nine books and is integral to the unity, and to the full meaning of the entire work - the autobiographical account of Augustine's personal quest for Wisdom.

The *Confessions* is held together from Book I through Book 10 by Augustine's overall emplotment of his life as a *quest for Wisdom*, but this emplotment paradigm contains within it two ingredient paradigms: Augustine's journey to Christian faith (Books 1-9), and his journey of understanding through memory to Wisdom (Book 10). The remainder of the work (Books 11-13) is a dénouement in the form of an in-depth reflection on the opening verses of Genesis, making it clear that the God of Christian Wisdom is the Creator-God of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, and situating Augustine's personal story within the universal story of the creation of all things. Every individual's story is a part of the larger divine-human drama which unfolds between *Genesis* and *Revelation*, the beginning and end of all things. Thus to perceive the unity of the work as a quest for Wisdom, it must first be grasped that the overall emplotment is the product of two ingredient paradigms which are synthesized by Augustine to form the whole paradigmatic quest for Wisdom. No single ingredient paradigm suffices to interpret the whole; attempts to do so lead to the fracturing of the *Confessions'* unity and the loss of the true theme and meaning of the work.

The narrative structure that has been explicated here in general terms and that is demonstrated in the reading presented in Chapter 5 is outlined in some detail in the following diagram. Here we can see the movement of the journey plot from ingredient paradigm to paradigm: it is an epic divided into several parts, moving from an initial phase of disorientation into orientation; then beginning a search for the path, a search which is in effect a journey to faith; continuing with a journey through memory to wisdom; and at last entering a final phase of the journey - life in the service of Wisdom.

Augustine's Journey to Wisdom

[PRELUDE] [DISORIENTATION] [ORIENTATION] [JOURNEY TO FAITH] [TRANSITION]			
TO THE JOURNEY			
life as a search for happiness and rest	man's orientation to sin	discovering the goal: true wisdom	searching for the true path to wisdom
			dénouement of the journey to faith, & prefiguration of the journey to wisdom
Book 1, ch. 1-5	6-7 8-20	Book 2-3, 1-3	Book 3, 4
Introduction	birth & schooling infancy	the stolen fruit incident	the awakening to wisdom
		the Manichean years	philosophical problems: materialism & the problem of evil
			Neo-Platonism & the resolution of intellectual problems
			Christian conversion experience
			the Ostia
			Book 7, 8-21
			Books 6 & 7, 1-7
			Book 8
			Book 9
[JOURNEY OF UNDERSTANDING] [TRANSITION] [LIFE IN THE SERVICE OF WISDOM]			
the interior ascent to Wisdom through memory		dénouement of the journey through memory & transition to the life of wisdom	
		interpretation of the Book of Genesis	
Book 10, 1-5	6 7-27	28-43	Book 11
prelude to the journey	the journey from the exterior to the interior: creation & the man of judgement	the soul's ascent through memory to wisdom	time & eternity: the interpretation of "in the beginning"
		battle between spirit & flesh	matter & form: the interpretation of "heaven & earth"
			the informing/ conversion of matter: interpretation of "let there be light"
			Conversion of life: the anticipation of the Eternal Sabbath Rest in union with God
			Book 12
			Book 13, 1-6
			7-38

CHAPTER 5

THE CONFESSIONS AS ST. AUGUSTINE'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL JOURNEY TO WISDOM

1. PRELUDE TO THE JOURNEY: Life as a Search for Happiness and Rest (Book 1 [1-5])

The 'musical' style of composition that Marrou remarked upon is in evidence at the very beginning of the *Confessions*. Book 1 opens with a five chapter 'prelude' which introduces the reader to the central theme of the entire work: the author's confessional journey to wisdom. At the same time we are introduced to the participants in this epic, their identities and their relationships. The basic relationship is itself the motivation for undertaking the journey: the relationship of Augustine as Everyman, a finite, sinful creature, to his infinite merciful Creator. Attention is first placed on God, who is addressed: "You are great, O Lord, and greatly to be praised: great is your power and to your wisdom there is no limit." (1,1,1, p. 43)¹ Man, who is but a part of God's creation, is that creature who "bears about within himself his mortality," and "who bears about within himself testimony to his sin" and "testimony that you [God] resist the proud." Here Augustine alludes to the fall of man and

¹ In this chapter all references to the *Confessions* will be given in parentheses after the quotation. Where no reference is given, the reference is the same as the last reference cited.

the doctrine of Original Sin. Pride is the source of Original Sin and thus of man's sinful orientation, and mortality is its consequence. Yet this creature of sinful orientation wishes to praise God and this very desire is aroused by God Himself, for it is God who calls man to union with Himself.

In his fallen, mortal, sinful state man is restless, rebelliously seeking happiness on his own terms, yet called by the true nature of his being to rest in God. Man is made for God: his only rest and happiness is in Him. In one of the most oft-quoted passages of the *Confessions*, Augustine articulates the theme of the entire work:

You arouse him to take joy in praising you, for you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you. (1.1.1)

This restlessness, in its negative aspect, is our unhappiness with our sinful pseudo-autonomy; in its positive aspect, it is the Creator God who stirs man to the recognition that his true joy is to be found in Him. The sadness of man's empty life and the joy of His praise both provide the stimuli for a searching journey which ultimately culminates in the union with God in the afterlife, anticipated by Augustine at the close of Book 13.

Thus from the outset Augustine introduces the overall narrative paradigm of journey or odyssey. Augustine goes on to pose a series of rhetorical questions which expose the paradox of a journey that is begun before man is certain of his destination. Which comes first, Augustine asks: to call upon God or to praise Him, to know Him or to call upon Him? It is in pondering these questions that Augustine reveals to the reader his path to wisdom: the sure path to beatitude is by faith in the God of Judeo-Christian revelation. For it is by

faith that one consciously knows what one was seeking in obscurity.² While faith is a gift of God, faith is revealed by the ministry of preachers and must be embraced by a personal conversion of life.

Augustine extends the theme of calling upon God into a reflection on the nature of God, and in Chapters 2 and 3 explores God's omnipresence. God is present in all that he has made, and Augustine recognizes that he would not exist if God were not within him.³ In light of this immanence, Augustine asks a question that will be answered in Book 10, where Augustine recounts his journey through the faculty of memory: "Where can I go beyond heaven and earth, so that you may come to me, my God?" The path Augustine seeks, which will lead him to an experience of the presence of God within man, he will find within his soul: it is memory, which takes him from the exterior world to the interior of his soul and there from the inferior to the superior, finally to encounter the Light, the Glory and Wisdom of God.

In Chapter 3 Augustine is awed by the immensity of God as he ponders the paradoxical tension between immanence and transcendence. In Chapter 4 he attributes to God characteristics which by necessity must be paradoxical and metaphorical.⁴ The fifth and concluding chapter of the 'prelude' brings the address back to the theme of rest and the

² "Lord, let me seek you by calling upon you, and let me call upon you by believing in you, for you have been preached to us. Lord, my faith calls upon you, that faith which you have given to me, which you have breathed into me by the incarnation of your Son and through the ministry of your preacher." I,1,1, p. 43.

³ "Therefore, my God, I would not be, I would in no wise be, unless you were in me. Or rather, I would be not be unless I were in you, from whom, by whom, and in whom are all things." (I,2,2, p. 44)

⁴ Some of these characteristics that Augustine applies to God are shared by Plotinus' description of the One; others are strictly Judeo-Christian (as even R.J. O'Connell is forced to admit, listing two paragraphs of images which are strictly Biblical). It is arbitrary and unconvincing to lay all the stress upon only the first class, as O'Connell does, with the dismissive comment that "the years have added to his store of Biblical imagery" (p. 40). The only argument offered is his unwarranted assumption that omnipresence can be understood only within a Plotinian framework (p. 39). Cf. Robert J. O'Connell, *St. Augustine's Confessions: The Odyssey of Soul*, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass., 1969).

relationship of the narrative's protagonists. Aware of the predicament his sinful wayward will has left him in, Augustine realizes his need for Divine mercy and assistance in finding the rest he desires:

Who will give me help, so that I may rest in you? Who will help me, so that you will come into my heart and inebriate it, to the end that I may forget my evils and embrace you, my one good? What are you to me? Have pity on me, so that I may speak.... Unhappy man that I am, in your mercy, O Lord my God, tell me what you are to me. Say to my soul: 'I am your salvation.' (1.5.5, pp. 45-6)

The other side of the question of what God is to Augustine is what Augustine is to God. Personalizing Psalm 8, Augustine asks,

What am I myself to you, that you command me to love you and grow angry and threaten me with mighty woes unless I do?

The God whom Augustine addresses is the Creator God of the Bible.

The insight of his relationship to God brings with it the full recognition that man's proper address to God is *necessarily* confessional, that this is the *truth* of their relationship. It is a threefold confession of sin, faith and praise. Augustine concludes his prelude prayerfully acknowledging God as his salvation and himself as a sinner.⁵ It is in faith that Augustine speaks out in confession before his God. The prelude, like the work itself, is a confessional prayer. In it the elements of Augustine's self-understanding, the major themes and the structure of the work have been presented to the reader. The account of Augustine's life is to be narrated as a confessional journey to the happiness that is wisdom through faith and understanding. That he saw presents himself as a traveller and his life as a journey was not a mere 'way of presenting' his life, an effective literary device; it is the

⁵ "Too narrow is the house of my soul for you to enter into it: let it be enlarged by you. It lies in ruins; build it up again. I confess and I know that it contains things that offend your eyes. Yet who will cleanse it? Or upon what other than you shall I call? [...] I believe, and therefore I speak out." 1.5.6, p. 46.

understanding of what his life really was.

2. DISORIENTATION: Man's Orientation to Sin

(Books 1 [6-20] to 3 [1-3])

Birth and Infancy (Book 1 [6-7])

Aware that in his confessional honesty he may be mocked by men, Augustine makes it clear that while his work is to be read by men it is not man who is addressed here but the merciful God. In beginning his life story proper in the narration of the story of his infancy, boyhood and youth, Augustine acknowledges that the effects of Original Sin were operative in his life from the very beginning.⁶ This theme reaches its climax in his analysis of the paradigmatic event of the 'stolen fruit' in Book 2, chapter 4.

Augustine confesses that he cannot recall from memory the details of his birth and infancy, so what he does know he knows from the testimony of his parents and from observing other infants, including his own child.⁷ He acknowledges that God is the source of all goodness in human life, and it is He who provides for the infant through parents and nurses. Though God "cried out" to him by what He provided, all Augustine knew was how to seek the satisfaction of his needs (1,6,7, p. 47).

Before furthering this description of the evidence in infancy of fallen human nature,

⁶ "For in your sight no man is clean of sin, not even the infant who has lived but a day upon earth." (1,7,11, p. 49 and cf. *Psalm* 51).

⁷ Augustine had a son, Adeodatus, in 372. He was the child born of his thirteen year relationship (371 - 384) with an unnamed woman referred to in the *Confessions* 4, 2, 2, p. 94. Augustine was faithful to this woman throughout this relationship though they never intended to marry. The pregnancy was unwanted but the child much loved. A son of great promise, Adeodatus was very talented and a participant in Augustine's early dialogue, *On the Teacher*. He died in 388 at the age of seventeen.

Augustine pauses to consider whether he has actually started his life story at the beginning. He ponders whether he existed in any way prior to his infancy. Neither human testimony nor his own memory can attest to another age which some have conjectured preceded this earthly existence.⁸ Thus Augustine proceeds to confess only that which he knows, that his infancy, while lost to his memory, was marked by the effects of original sin. While custom proclaims infants innocent, it is clear to Augustine that the infant is absorbed in the pursuit of self-gratification to the point of forcing his will as much as possible upon others. "Thus it is not the infant's will that is harmless, but the weakness of infant limbs." (1,7,11, p. 49)

Augustine concludes this reflection on infancy by praising God for the good of life and confessing the evils he must have committed. It is clearly important to him that this period of his life be included, and not only because from the point of view of emplotting his

⁸ Augustine writes: "O God, in your mercy, tell me, your wretched servant, whether my infancy followed another age of mine that was already dead. Or was it that time which passed in my mothers womb? Of that time something has been told to me, and I have seen pregnant women.... Was I anywhere or anyone? I have no one to tell me this, neither father nor mother could do so, nor experience of others, nor my own memory" (1,6,9, pp. 47-8). It is significant that Augustine says that his faculty of memory is of no assistance in recalling such a pre-existence, since for Platonists it is memory which gives access to an awareness of a pre-existence of the soul.

O'Connell argues that this passage supports his theory that Augustine believed in the pre-existence of the soul. He makes the presumption that "Augustine's question is calculated to keep the question very much alive." But the structure of the text indicates the opposite. Augustine raises the issue in the context of knowledge of his origins, well aware that the theory of pre-existence of souls is thought by some to be plausible. While he has no memory of his prenatal life, birth and infancy, he believes this on the strength of the testimony of others and his own observation of others. No such testimony or evidence is available in the case of the pre-existence of the soul. By paralleling the necessity of belief regarding our own birth with belief in the pre-existence of the soul O'Connell sets up a comparison not made by Augustine. It is furthermore invalid.

Since pre-existence is not within the realm of human knowledge Augustine gives it little weight and it certainly does not become a key element of his own world-view and self-understanding. O'Connell appears to have more invested in the question of pre-existence than Augustine has. His readiness to speculate about the author's intentions leads him to project his own views onto Augustine's text. Contrary to what O'Connell contends, the text itself is neither ambiguous nor provocative. He believes the question is left open on the basis of how Augustine's reference to "first being":

for my first being (*primordia*) AND my infancy which (*quae*: both of which) I do not remember. (Book 1,6,10)

However, the word 'primordia' and the context of the sentence does not support the interpretation he gives it. "First being," as indicated by the sentence which follows it, refers here to human life within the womb: "You have endowed man so that *he can gather these things concerning himself from others*, and even on the words of weak women believe much about himself" [my emphasis]. As Augustine makes clear 'first being', like prenatal life and infancy, can be gathered from the testimony of others, "even the words of weak women." And rather than keeping the question open, Augustine closes it rhetorically by asking: "Do you command me to praise you and confess to you only what I know?" That Augustine believes that this is precisely what God demands is indicated by his response: "I confess to you, O Lord of heaven and earth, and I utter praise to you for my first being and my infancy, which I do not remember." Cf. O'Connell, *The Confessions*, p. 41.

life story it makes sense to start at the beginning. Here Augustine is emphasizing the importance of his doctrine of original sin for understanding the human situation, for his own self-understanding, and thus for the reader's understanding of what will follow in his *Confessions*.⁹ Augustine has experienced the truth of this doctrine in his life; it is as foundational to his anthropology and to the emplotment structure of the *Confessions* as is the doctrine of grace.

Schooling (Book 1, 8-20)

In passing from infancy to childhood Augustine moves from the more privatized world of the infant into "the stormy society of human life" (1,8,13, p. 51). Augustine's first experience of the hypocrisy of that society occurred during early schooling. That Augustine should recount this period in such scornful and ironic detail, from the vantage point of a mature man in his mid-forties, testifies to how negative and absurd he found the experience.¹⁰ Augustine recounts that what his well-meaning parents intended through his education was that he attain the unenlightened goal of riches, honours, and fame in the world that their son would eventually come to reject. He readily confesses that he sinned by writing, reading and thinking less than was required, for his God-given abilities more than matched the demands of his work; all would have been accomplished if his wayward will was not distracted by the

⁹ In this section Augustine has argued that there is no period of human life that is free of sin and therefore innocent. He concludes: "But, see, I now set aside that period. What matters that now to me of which I recall no trace?" (1,11,12, p. 50) O'Connell suggests that this last sentence is a further reference to this period of the soul's alleged pre-existent life. But again, the context of this sentence obviously indicates that the period referred to is, indeed, Augustine's infancy, that which he has just finished speaking about. The paragraph begins, "...this age I do not remember to have lived, which I have taken on trust of others..." and concludes as above. Cf. O'Connell, *The Confessions*, pp. 42-3.

¹⁰ "O God, my God, great was the misery and great the deception that I met with when it was impressed upon me that, to behave properly as a boy, I must obey my teachers." 1,9,14, p. 51.

love of play.¹¹ What so irked Augustine was the hypocrisy involved in his being punished for succumbing to the very weaknesses adults themselves are prone to: "the difference is that the trivial concerns of adults are called business, while such things in children are punished by adults" (1,9,15, p. 52).

Though detesting his schooling Augustine was on the way to becoming a cultured man imbued with a knowledge of the Classics. It is important to note that mention of Aeneas' wanderings at this point in the text indicates that from his youth Augustine was aware of a work which no doubt provided him with an instructive model for a narrative understanding of his life, namely the journey epic of wandering and return. Also important for understanding the emplotment paradigm of the *Confessions* is the Biblical story of the prodigal son to which Augustine alludes and likens his early life.¹² It is significant that reference to this Biblical story should come so early in Augustine's narration of his life: in fact this parallel is meant to characterize a period of disorientation that includes both his infancy and his youth. His journey will only discover its proper orientation with an awakening that begins his intellectual conversion.

Overall, Augustine's account of his schooling exposes the irony in the relationship between his teachers and himself and the inherent hypocrisy of the social world children are

¹¹ The mature Augustine realizes that whatever he learned could now be put at the service of God and thus regrets that he didn't learn as much as he could have: "I sinned, O Lord my God, by going against the commands of my parents and of those teachers. Later on, indeed, I could put to good use the learning that they wanted me to acquire, no matter with what purpose in my regard. I was disobedient, not out of a desire for better things, but out of a love for play." 1,10,16, p. 53.

¹² A parallel is drawn between Augustine and the prodigal son, contrasting their rebellious lives with the perfect fidelity of the Son of God. "I was far from your face in the darkness of my passions. Not on foot, and not by distance of place do we depart from you or return to you. That younger son of yours did not look for horses or chariots or ships; he did not fly away on visible wings; he did not make a journey on foot, so that by living a prodigal's life in a far country he could waste the substance that you had given him as he started out. For you were a loving father because you gave this to him, but still more loving when he came back in want. Therefore, he departed from you by lustful affections, that is, by darksome affections, and this is to be far from your face." (1,18,28, p. 61)

expected to integrate themselves into, Augustine is exposing the fact that the same sinful nature which is apparent in the behaviour of children is carried over into adult life, and is built into the very structures of society and disguised by norms and mores of acceptability. Nevertheless he was praised and only encouraged to continue on this sinful path:

! did not love you, and I committed fornication against you, and amid my fornications from all sides there sounded the words, "Well done! Well done!" Love of this world is fornication against you, but "Well done! Well done!" is said, so that it will be shameful for a man to be otherwise. (1.13,21, p. 56)

At the conclusion of Book 1 Augustine summarizes the dynamic of his disoriented life: "But in this was my sin, that not in Him but in his creatures, in myself and others, did I take pleasure, honor and truths. So it was, that I rushed into sorrow, conflict and error" (1,20,21).

Augustine's Sixteenth Year: The Incident of the Stolen Fruit (Book 2)

Book 2 is devoted to recounting his sixteenth year, a year which brings Augustine to the furthest reaches of disorientation and a year in which an event occurred that upon later reflection became paradigmatic in exposing the true nature of this sinful disorientation. This was a year marked by "carnal corruptions"; Augustine recounts a year in which the "madness of lust" plunged him into a "whirlpool of shameless deeds." (2,2,2 p. 65) Augustine laments that his parents did not secure a marriage for him so that his passions might be properly channeled. Monica is given credit for warning her son against fornication and adultery, but the wayward Augustine took these as "only a woman's warning" and was "ashamed" to bother with them. (2,73,7, p. 68) Unchastened, Augustine rushed headlong with his friends into sinful acts, boasting of the very things that he would later be ashamed of.

It was with a group of his peers that Augustine took part in an event which dominates Book 2. What may at first seem to the reader to be little more than a destructive adolescent prank is revealed to be of great consequence for understanding not only Augustine's life but man's sinful orientation. Augustine describes the event thus:

In a garden nearby to our vineyard there was a pear tree, loaded with fruit that was desirable neither in appearance nor in taste. Late one night - to which hour, according to our pestilential custom, we had kept up our street games - a group of very bad youngsters set out to shake down and rob this tree. We took great loads of fruit from it, not for our own eating, but rather to throw it to the pigs; even if we did eat a little of it, we did this to do what pleased us for the reason that it was forbidden. (2,4,9, p. 70)

Why, Augustine ponders, did he and his companions steal this fruit? Usually such thefts are the product of an inordinate desire to gain some "lower good": this is the soul's attempt to appease itself apart from God.¹³ The stealing of the fruit had no such purpose; there was no good sought, no cause for Augustine's evil but evil itself. Augustine stole "to enjoy the actual theft and the sin of theft" (2,4,9, p. 70).

What was the enjoyment of this act of sin? The enjoyment was that of a "deformed liberty" delighting in itself (2,6,14, p. 73). Thus in the theft of the fruit there is exposed the naked act of turning away from God, which is a perverse imitation of the true liberty of God. The irony is that the will's perverse celebration in itself is senseless and void, for there is no peace and happiness to be found in sin. In seeking life for itself the soul finds a monstrous life that has more in common with death.¹⁴

Augustine uses this story as the paradigmatic sinful moment in his life. Well aware

¹³ He writes: "Thus the soul commits fornication when it is turned away from you and, apart from you, seeks such pure, clean things as it does not find except when it turns to you. In a perverse way, all men imitate you who put themselves far from you, and rise up in rebellion against you. Even by such imitation of you they prove that you are the creator of all nature, and therefore that there is no place where they can depart entirely from you." II,6,14, p. 73.

¹⁴ "Behold, your servant flees from his Lord and follows after a shadow. O rottenness! O monstrous life and deepest death! Could a thing give pleasure which could not be done lawfully, and what was done for no other reason than that it was unlawful?" (2,6,14, p. 73)

of its obvious Biblical parallel Augustine alludes with great power to the "anthropological myth par excellence," the Adamic story.¹⁵ In both stories there is a garden, a tree and the fruit of the tree. There is also a social aspect to the breaking of the prohibition in both stories. In the Adamic story the serpent, the symbol for the 'already there' of evil, tempts the woman and she the man. In Augustine's story there is the social pressure of his peer group and the pleasure they received in committing the evil act together. In both narratives humans are involved in a proud exercise of free will. And where human conceit sought autonomy and more life, death is the reward.

Thus for Augustine the story of the stolen fruit exposes the evil basis of all his other sinful acts; it is meant not only to conjure up in the reader's mind the Adamic story, but to show that the Biblical narrative contains the truth of the human situation. He knew that the meaning of the Biblical narrative of mankind's first sin was the truth of his own existential reality. This incident and its analysis concludes his account of his infancy, boyhood and youth, up until the time Augustine moves to Carthage to renew his studies.

3. ORIENTATION: Discovering the Goal - True Wisdom

(Book 3 [4])

The Awakening to the Love of Wisdom and the Beginning of the Search

Until this point in his life Augustine understands his life through the paradigmatic Biblical stories of the prodigal son and Adam and Eve in the garden. To this point his life has been

¹⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) p. 232.

marked by radical disorientation: his parents and teachers directing him in the pursuit of empty goals, his own indulging in evil inclinations. But now his life was about to receive its first true positive orientation towards the only worthy goal.

After the idleness of his sixteenth year, Augustine moved to Carthage to further his studies. His life of debauchery continued alongside his education, and as a man of culture he grew in his love of the theatre, being moved by the classic dramas. Yet it was in the "ordinary course" of his studies that Augustine came upon a work that would give his life direction. Amidst the disorientation of his sinful wanderings devoid of any true meaning, Augustine awoke to the love of Wisdom through Cicero's *Hortensius*. Though now lost, the *Hortensius* celebrated philosophy as the love of wisdom. This event is presented in the *Confessions* as the most significant moment of his early life; it is not so much surpassed as fulfilled in the chain of events which would lead directly to his religious and moral conversion, and ultimately to his attainment of an experience of Eternal Wisdom. He writes:

This book changed my affections. It turned my prayers to you, Lord, and caused me to have different purposes and desires. All my vain hopes forthwith became worthless to me, and with incredible ardor of heart I desired undying Wisdom. (3,4,7, p. 81)

Augustine, then nineteen and a student of rhetoric, recounts that he was impressed "not by its way of speaking but rather by what it spoke." (3,4,7, p. 81) This learning was not simply utilitarian, serving only to sharpen his wit and tongue: its content was profound and profoundly effected him. In his newly aroused desire for Wisdom, Augustine recounts:

I began to rise up, so that I might return to you [...] How I burned with desire to fly away from earthly things and upwards to you, and yet I did not know what you would do with me. For with you there is wisdom. Love of Wisdom has the name philosophy in Greek, and that book set me on fire for it. (3,4,8, p. 81)

But Augustine relates that while impassioned for wisdom, he did not yet know the

path to it, what true wisdom was, or how God, who *is* Wisdom, would lead him to Himself. What Augustine learned at this point was that philosophy worthy of the name had Wisdom as its goal. He parallels Cicero's refutation of false philosophers in the *Hortensius* with the warning in the Christian Scriptures against "philosophy and vain deceit."¹⁶ While some pseudo-philosophies could lead people astray and sully the name of philosophy, the goal of wisdom which is the pursuit of true philosophy was the truly honourable and desirable life.

Augustine writes, "I was stirred up and enkindled and set aflame to love, and pursue, and attain and catch hold of, and strongly embrace not this or that sect, but wisdom itself, whatsoever it might be." (3,4,7, p. 81-2) As influential as Cicero's treatise was, this philosophy lacked the name of Christ. Even now Augustine intuitively grasped what was to come to pass in his life; he strongly suspected that it was only through faith in Christ that he would find the true wisdom he sought.¹⁷

Whatever was lacking in this experience, it was here that the seeds of Augustine's intellectual conversion were planted.¹⁸ His desire for wisdom would co-exist for over a

¹⁶ Cf. *Colossians* 2:8.

¹⁷ He writes: "In so great a blaze only this checked me, that Christ's name was not in it [...] whatever lacked this name, no matter how learned and polished and veracious it was, could not wholly capture me." (3,4,8, p. 82) Cf. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967). On the prominence of Christ and His relationship to wisdom in the popular culture of the period Brown writes: "In an age where only the writings of adults have survived, it is extremely difficult to grasp the nature of the 'residual' Christianity of a young man. One thing however, was certain: a pagan wisdom, a wisdom without the 'name of Christ' was quite out of the question. Paganism meant nothing to Augustine [...] The 'name of Christ' was applied to the Christian like a vaccination. It was the only guarantee of safety. As a child Augustine had been 'salted' to keep out the demons; when he had suddenly fallen ill, as a boy, he would plead to be baptized. These Christian rites, of course, might influence a grown-up man's conduct as little as the possession as a certificate of vaccination; but they expressed a mentality that has cut off, as positively 'unhygienic', the pagan religion of the classical past." (p. 41).

¹⁸ To borrow from Bernard Lonergan's analysis of conversion, it might be said that here we have the beginning of the process of Augustine's intellectual conversion. The process begun here develops deep within Augustine alongside the more shallow pursuit of worldly success, pleasure, fame and fortune. The process of intellectual conversion leads Augustine to two further conversions, moral and religious conversion and these three conversions lead Augustine to the experience of Wisdom, the fulfilment of his heart's desire which was awakened on reading Cicero's *Hortensius*. On intellectual, moral, and religious conversion, cf. *Method in Theology*, chapters 1,2, and 4 respectively.

decade with the shallow desire for pleasure, fame and fortune; while these continued to exert their influence at the surface of Augustine's life, determining what he would study, where he would live and who he would seek as his wife, wisdom was his heart's deepest desire and provided an orientation at the profound level of his interior life. No matter what mistakes Augustine would make in his search for wisdom, his life now has a worthy goal: it was to wisdom that he would eventually devote his life.

In this search for authentic wisdom Augustine naturally turned to the Scriptures to seek further enlightenment.¹⁹ However, he was repelled by his first introduction to the Judeo-Christian scriptures, which he found crude in their style of discourse and "unworthy of comparison with the nobility of Cicero's writings" (3,5,9, p. 82). Augustine lacked a critical hermeneutics which would unlock the meaning of the Scriptures, and this illustrates that while reason needs revelation, revelation has need of reason in order to be understood. He continued to think highly of the name of Christ, and while being repelled by his first encounter with the Christian Scriptures he became susceptible to the Manichean overtures and so fell in with this group who always had some form of the name of Christ on their lips.²⁰

In this, however, there was a great irony, for while having been set afire for the love of Wisdom Augustine found himself believing in the fables of Mani: "while actually receding

¹⁹ Cf. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, "Above all the Christianity of the fourth century would have been presented to such a boy as a form of 'True Wisdom'. The Christ of the popular imagination was not a suffering Saviour [...] He was, rather, 'the Great Word of God, the Wisdom of God.' On the sarcophagi of the age, He is always shown as a Teacher, teaching His Wisdom to a coterie of budding philosophers. For a cultivated man, the essence of Christianity consisted in just this. Christ, as the 'Wisdom of God', had established a monopoly in Wisdom; the clear Christian revelation had trumped and replaced the conflicting opinions of the philosophers." p. 41-2.

²⁰ On Augustine's encounter with Manicheism, cf. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, pp. 46-60; also cf. O'Meara, *The Young Augustine*, pp. 61-105.

from the truth," he thought he was moving towards it. Book 3 ends with a foreshadowing of Augustine's eventual conversion to the Christian faith. Augustine's recounts how his distraught mother had a dream which she interpreted as Divine assurance that her son would eventually share her faith.²¹ As well, concerned for her son Monica sought the advice of her Bishop and was assured that "it is impossible that the son of such tears should perish" and that her son would "find out by reading the character of his error" (3.12.21, p. 92).

4. JOURNEY TO FAITH: Searching for the True Path to Wisdom

(Books 3 [5-12] to 8)

While his awakening to wisdom gave him the orientation of a positive goal, which in his youth he had lacked, Augustine had still not found the path that would lead him there. Books 4 to 7 recount Augustine's struggle to discern the false path from the true. He had still to exhaust his attachment to worldly pursuits and ambition and work through the errors of Manicheanism, astrology, materialism, and philosophical skepticism. The search for wisdom during this period leading up to his Christian conversion led Augustine onto many false paths, not the least of which was the Manichean heresy.

The Manichean Years (Books 3 [5-12] to 5)

From the age of nineteen to twenty-eight Augustine adhered to the Manichean sect,

²¹ She dreamt that she was standing upon a wooden rule, literally the rule of Christ, and a young man (a heavenly messenger) said to her: "Where you are, there also is he." Telling her to look around she turned to see her son standing on an identical wooden rule.

becoming a "seducer" rather than a teacher of truth. His life in Carthage was divided between the teaching of the liberal arts and the propagation of the superstition of his religion - "proud in the one, superstitious in the other, and everywhere vain" (4,1,1, p. 93). Beside the name of Christ, two other aspects of the Manichean religion attracted the young Augustine: the promise that their religion could be explained through reason²² and the lack of moral rigour Manicheanism demanded.²³ Bad conscience could be alleviated by the shifting of guilt onto the primordial "darkness" that is in eternal struggle with the principle of light.

These years were not solely devoted to seeking an understanding of his Manichean religion. Augustine's narrative recounts a life rich in experience. It was early in this period that Augustine began to live with the woman who would be his devoted companion for some thirteen years. The two had a son, Adeodatus, who while unwanted at first was much loved and appreciated. As well, early in his Manichean experience he became close friends with a childhood companion whom he converted to his religion. Augustine describes the joys of this friendship and the sorrow he experienced when it was painfully torn from him upon his friend's illness and death. The evidence of the impact of this experience is revealed by the

²² The Manicheans made a great show of refuting the canonical Scriptures by alledging that they could not stand the test of reason. While embracing the name of Christ, the Manicheans could also explain Augustine's initial problem understanding Scripture, for they claimed that all errors and difficulties in the Christian Scriptures were a result of Jewish tampering. The fact that the Christian religion has its roots in Judaism was dismissed as a Jewish plot to undermine the truth of the true Christian Gospels. Mani had produced a version of the New Testament which supported his religious philosophy. The chief problem with the Jewish scriptures was their claim that the material world was created good by the Creator God. Mani taught that there were two independent first principles, one good and one evil. The evil principle is the producer of matter which is intrinsically evil while the good principle produces all that is good, such as the human spirit. Since the human being has a soul and body, there is a struggle between them, a reflection of the cosmic struggle between the good and evil principles. The spirit spoken of here, as with the human soul, is not a purely spiritual substance but rather, tenuous matter. This permitted Augustine to maintain the materialist world view to which he had grown increasingly attached throughout his youth. Manichean dualism relieved him of most of his moral responsibility for his reprehensible behavior. The Manicheans apparently had a ready answer to the problem of evil, a problem which had perplexed and preoccupied the young Augustine.

²³ The religion had two orders of adherence: the Elect, the strict observers who practiced asceticism and celibacy, and the Mere Hearers, of whom much less was demanded. Augustine was one of the latter.

fact that years afterward he describes his sorrow and grief in vivid detail (4,4,7-8,13, pp. 97-100). While the solace of other friends eventually restored and revived him, this existential encounter led him to a confrontation with the meaning of life and love. Augustine learns that created things ought not be loved as an end in themselves for "they are but shifting things"; all things must be loved in God, for "in him they stand firm; else they would pass and perish" (4,12,18, p. 104). Like many thinkers of depth and sensitivity before and after him, the constant passing away of all things haunted him: a sense of mortality pervaded his existence, "for most heavily there weighed upon me both weariness of life and fear of dying" (4,6,11, p. 99).

It is significant that at this moment Augustine reiterates the theme of his life story in the context of the divine and human drama of sin and redemption. He alludes to the theme of the first part of the *Confessions*, his self-indulgent wanderings and the bitter fruit of unhappiness that is the result of the improper love of created things against the divine order. At the same time he anticipates the theme to be taken up in Book 10, the interior journey of understanding whereby Augustine discovers the indwelling presence of the Creator God.²⁴ It is significant to note that Augustine situates these reflections on the impact of his friend's death in the light of the redemptive event of the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ. Again a contrast is made between his prodigal wanderings and

²⁴ "He [God] did not make all things and then leave them, but they are from him and in him. Behold where he is: it is wherever truth is known. He is within our very hearts, but our hearts have strayed far from him. 'Return, you transgressors, to the heart,' and cling to him who made you. Stand fast with him, and you will in truth stand fast. Rest in him, and you will truly have rest. Wither, upon what rough ways, do you wander? Wither do you go? The good you love is from him, but only in so far that it is used for him is it good and sweet. But with justice will it become bitter, if you, as a deserter from him unjustly love what comes from him. Wither do you walk, farther and farther along these hard and toilsome roads? There is no rest to be found where you seek it: seek what you seek but it lies not where you seek it." 4,12,18, p. 105-6.

Christ's humble life of perfect fidelity.²⁵ Book 4 concludes with Augustine recapitulating the theme of his prodigal wanderings and bids his readers to make the journey of return from the life of turmoil to the peace of God and his eternity.

Augustine's intellectual life continued with the writing of his first work, *On the Beautiful and the Fitting*, which he dedicated to Hierus, a famous orator from Rome whom he admired and sought to emulate. As the powers of his intellect grew, so did the demands of reasoning; he held the Manicheans to the promise that their religion withstand the test of reason. He had already read many philosophical writings and found them to be much more probable when compared to the writings of Mani. (5,3,3, p. 114-5) The confrontation and Augustine's final disillusionment with the Manichean religion came when Faustus, a purportedly wise Bishop, visited the city and, despite eloquence and good intentions, was unable to respond to Augustine's problems and objections. (cf. 5,6,10 to 5,7,13, pp. 119-122) Augustine writes: "My ears had already had enough of such things. They did not seem the better to me because better expressed, nor true because eloquent, nor was his soul wise because he looked that way and had a suitable flow of words." (5, 6,10, p. 119) Ironically, Augustine's reasoning skills and education were so superior to the Bishop's that Faustus became his student, leaving Augustine to conclude that if this man could not satisfy the demands of reason, neither could any other Manichean. Though he had truly abandoned all hope that Manicheanism was 'the way' he sought he did not, for want of anything better,

²⁵ From heaven, Christ came forth, born of a Virgin, incarnated in mortal flesh, "lest it remain forever mortal," he "cried out by words and deeds, by death and life, by descent and ascension, crying out for us to return to him. And he departed from our eyes, so that we might return into our own hearts and find him there." (4,12,18, p. 105) Augustine admonishes unrepentant man: "Even now, after the descent of life to you, do you not wish to ascend and to live? But how can you ascend when you have set yourself up high and have placed your mouth against heaven? Descend, so that you may ascend, so that you may ascend to God. For you have fallen by ascending against God" (4,12,18, p. 105). Clearly, this Christian paradigm is the dominant influence on Augustine's life and thought, and subsequently on the emplotment of the *Confessions*. The two pillars of Augustine's thought are evident: sin and the redemptive grace of the Christ event.

entirely abandon all his Manichean beliefs.²⁶ The Manichean explanation of evil as the combat of two opposing substances, which permitted him to maintain his materialistic world-view, sustained its hold on him.

In the aftermath of the Manichean failure and now under increasing pressure from his mother to convert to Catholicism, Augustine took leave of his native Africa, enticed to the city of Rome not so much by the greater financial prospects promised to him by friends as by the hope of having a better quality of student. Augustine fell seriously ill soon after his arrival, and the way he recounts this event in his life reveals not only how far he was from the path he sought, but the price of this failure. "I was on the verge of going down to hell, carrying with me all the sins that I had committed against you, against myself, and against others, many and great they were, and beyond that bond of original sin, in which we all die in Adam. You had not yet forgiven me any of them in Christ." (5,9,16, p. 124) Once again this reveals the dominance of a Biblical anthropology on Augustine's self-understanding.

Despairing of finding a satisfying truth, Augustine began to read the works of the skeptical philosophers of the Academy, thinking they might be "wiser than the rest" (5,10,19, p. 126). For a time he agreed with them that "all things are doubtful" and "that no truth can be apprehended by man." Immersed in skepticism, Augustine continued to cling to his long-held materialist view that "anything not a body was nothing whatsoever" (5,10,19, p. 127). There is no doubt that throughout Augustine's struggle, it was materialism that was the main philosophical obstacle preventing him from proceeding to faith and then on to wisdom.²⁷

²⁶ He writes: "But since I despaired of making progress in that false doctrine, I now began to hold in a more loose and careless manner those very tenets with which, if I came upon nothing better, I had resolved to be content." 5,10,18, p. 126.

²⁷ Augustine writes that materialism "was the greatest and almost the sole cause of my inevitable error" (5,10,19, p. 127).

Materialism prevented Augustine from thinking of God in any other terms than as a "vast corporeal body," and he could not think of himself except in terms of his own material body. Materialism also bound him to the conception of evil as an objective substance, and since a good God could not create an evil nature Augustine could not help but appeal to the Manichean dualism of primordial substances. Finally, materialism prevented him from grasping the spiritual meaning of the Christian Scriptures, which led Augustine to the second intellectual barrier obscuring the path to faith and understanding.

Thus he was trapped by materialism and the fact that he lacked also the hermeneutical tools to unlock the meaning of scriptures. He writes: "those two masses weighed down on me, caught fast and as it were suffocated, as I lay thinking only of corporeal things. Beneath them I gasped for the pure, clear air that is your truth, but I was unable to breath it in." (5,11,21, p. 128)

After only a year in Rome, where Augustine had been financially cheated by students, Augustine accepted a position in Milan. It was in this city that the knot of Augustine's philosophical and theological confusions would be slowly untied. Here he was introduced to the first element that would assist him in resolving these difficulties; Augustine came into contact with Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, "a man famed throughout the world as one of its very best men" (5,13,23, p. 130). As rhetorician Augustine was at first more interested in the bishop's masterful eloquence, but the content of that was spoken was to have its impact. Augustine knew now that the Catholic faith could be defended against Manichean attacks, and he also witnessed the method of allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament, which rendered intelligible difficult passages of Scripture that had formerly repelled him.

But "while the Catholic position did not seem to be overthrown, neither did it appear to be the victor" (5,14,25, p. 131). Augustine began to believe all the more that "the philosophers ... held much more probable opinions," and with the skeptics Augustine "doubted everything and wavered in the midst of all things" (5,14,25, p. 131). Yet again he confesses that he could not totally embrace this philosophy, because it too had not the name of Christ.

While at the end of Book 5 Augustine has not yet found the path that would lead him to the destination his life was now turned to, he was now under the influence of the Catholicism of Milan. He was content to remain a catechumenen in the Catholic church of his parents "until something certain would enlighten me, by which I might direct my course" (5,14,25, p. 132). A book which began with Augustine's encounter with Faustus, a false teacher, concludes with his entering the sphere of influence of Ambrose, a profound spokesman of the true faith.

Philosophical Problems (Books 6 and 7 [1-7])

Book 6 recounts a year of intense struggle which brings Augustine closer to the path he will eventually follow. After a reiteration of the theme of prodigal wanderings and a frustrated search for God, the narrative is picked up with the arrival in Milan of Augustine's mother, whom Augustine portrays in his narrative as the embodiment of God's love for him. He recognizes that his spiritual fate was mysteriously bound to his mother's prayerful intercession, and he alludes once more to the confidence she had in her vision, that he would eventually convert to the true faith. In Milan she impressed Augustine and Ambrose with her humble service to her faith. But Augustine could still not follow her, and when Ambrose

himself congratulated him for such a mother, Augustine could only add: "but he did not know what sort of son she had for I doubted all things, and I thought that the way of life could not be found" (6,2,2, p. 135). Nonetheless, Augustine was now well under the influence of both, for his mother and the towering patristic figure of Ambrose were the two most important figures of his early life.

The impression made upon Augustine by the example of Ambrose was tremendous, not only in his celibacy, but even in his contemplative style of reading, which Augustine had witnessed in church. While Augustine contrasts himself with Monica in respect of faith, he contrasts Ambrose's depth of contemplative searching of the Scriptures for meaning with his own hasty, shallow attempt.²⁸ Now Augustine was exposed to hermeneutical approaches which took him beyond the surface of the text.

Though from the time of Ambrose's influence Augustine preferred Catholic teaching, he remained troubled over the matter of certainty. He recognized that belief played a different role in Catholicism than it did in Manicheanism where followers were asked to trust in absurdities while being promised certain knowledge. But like one who has experienced a bad doctor fears to place himself in the hands of even a good one he was reluctant to put his faith in another religion. This recognition leads to a discussion of the function of belief in human life. Not only did Augustine realize that a strict sceptical perspective was absurd,²⁹ but by this point in his life he had come to a fundamental faith in the existence

²⁸ He writes: "Rash and irreverent had I been in that I talked about and condemned things I should have inquired into and learned about" (6,3,4, p. 137). It was from Ambrose that Augustine inherited the interpretive rule of thumb "The letter kills, but the spirit quickens" (6,4,6, p. 138).

²⁹ Against the radical sceptical position, Augustine asserts that everyone believes in countless things of which they have no direct knowledge; things which have taken place in their absence, historical events, things told to them by reliable persons... etc. Cf. 6,5,7, p. 139.

of God and His governance of human affairs that could not be dissolved by skeptics.³⁰ At this point he had already begun to understand the role faith and the authority of Sacred Scripture play in the economy of salvation: "Since we were *too weak to find truth by pure reason* ... we needed the authority of Holy Writ" (6,5,8, p. 139). He had come to believe that: unless it were God's will that people seek him through the Scriptures they would not have attained the prominence they held. While the style of Scripture had before seemed crude, this simplicity now seemed providential.³¹

However his respect for faith and Scripture had grown he continued to walk "the broad way of the world" unable to move beyond his longing for honours, wealth and the status of a good marriage. He reflects that his situation was worse than that of a drunk for in the morning a drunk wakes up sober while he could not escape his delusions. In hopes that her son would regulate his life by marrying, Augustine's mother had arranged a marriage she thought proper to his station, and so the woman he had lived with for over a decade was torn from his side, leaving him deeply wounded.³² More a "slave to lust" than a "lover of marriage" Augustine procured yet another woman while waiting for his young bride-to-be to come of legal age (6,15,25, p. 154).

By the opening of Book 7 Augustine had entered his thirty-first year of life. With the

³⁰ "Sometimes I believed this more strongly and at other times in a more feeble way. But always I believed both that you are and that you care for us, although I did not know either what must be thought concerning your substantial being or what led up to you or back to you." 6,5,8, p. 139.

³¹ "To me, that authority seemed all the more venerable and worthy of inviolable faith, *because they were easy for everyone to read and yet safeguarded the dignity of their hidden truth within a deeper meaning, by words completely clear and by a lowly style of speech making itself accessible to all men* ... Thus it can receive all men into its generous bosom, and by narrow passages lead on to you a small number of them, although these are more numerous if it did not stand out with such lofty authority and if it had not attracted throngs into the bosom of its humility" (My emphasis - 6,5,8, p. 140).

³² He writes: "The woman with whom I was wont to share my bed was torn from my side as an impediment to my marriage. My heart still clung to her: it was pierced and wounded within me, and the wound drew blood from it." (6,15,25, p. 153)

increase in years he was mired ever deeper in the problem of his materialist world-view, which hampered any significant progress on the way to wisdom. He could not move beyond thinking of himself as merely a material body, and though he never fell into anthropomorphism he was condemned to think of the God he had come to believe in terms of material reality. Evil too, as we have seen, was conceived in terms of the Manichean primordial substances in eternal struggle one with the other. Now, when he thought about it, he had come to see that the argument Nebriedius had proposed at Carthage years before against this postulate was a simple and sound refutation. The Manichean postulate of a hostile dark nation in struggle with God conflicts with the truth of the incorruptible nature of God. If God is incorruptible, which must be conceded by all, what harm could God suffer if he refused simply to contend with the evil darkness? But the resolution of dualism raised an even greater problem, for now Augustine had no explanation for the existence of evil.³³

Augustine knew as certain as he was alive that he had a will; he was as certain that it was he alone who willed or refused to will and had begun to see that therein lay the cause of his sin. Yet since God who is absolute Good made all things good, "whence then comes it, then, that I will evil, and do not will the good?" (7,3,4, p. 160). How did evil creep into the world; what is its seed; what kind of existence does it have; why does it exist and why did God permit it to exist? These questions he asked over and over but was blocked from gaining the insight that would answer them.

Having finally accepted a full refutation of the Manichean religion and being unable to make any farther progress on his two greatest problems, materialism and evil, Augustine

³³ "I strove to understand what I often heard, that the will's free decision was the cause of our doing evil, and that your just judgement was the cause of our suffering evil, but this I could not discern clearly" (7,3,5, p. 160).

sets out to resolve what he can resolve. When consulted by a man concerning astrology, Augustine offers a simple and sound argument against it. Consulted by Firmius on a point of astrology, Augustine understood that persons born on the same date and at the same time would share the same fate, since their astrological charts would be identical. Yet such a victory over error was overshadowed by the lack of clarity he had on the dominant problems he faced.

Neo-Platonism and the Resolution of Intellectual Problems (Book 7 [8-21])

Just when Augustine had reached his limits in resolving his two great problems, he was introduced "by means of a certain man puffed up with most unnatural pride" to "certain books of the Platonists that had been translated out of Greek into Latin" (7,9,13, p. 168). These gave him a new intellectual horizon which brought the necessary insights he would need to overcome the problems which blocked his progress. We are left to speculate why this person is left anonymous as well as the circumstances which precipitated this introduction to the works of the Platonists;³⁴ Augustine deemed it unnecessary to give these details, or to record exactly to which texts he was introduced. From a literary perspective, however, this omission is intelligible, since it avoids overshadowing the significance of the insights the texts contained and the role they will eventually play in his thought. As the Bishop of Hippo he does not want to direct his reader's attention towards Platonism, but

³⁴ Perhaps as Courcelle suggests, in light of his unflattering characterization, Augustine did not name the man as he was still living at the time of his writing. Cf. P. Courcelle, *Les lettres grecques en Occident de Macrobe à Cassiodore*, 1948, pp. 126-128. Perhaps there is something in Courcelle's speculation that Augustine was prompted to get a hold of Platonist works by the decidedly Platonic tone of some of Bishop Ambrose's sermons. P. Courcelle, *Recherches sur les 'Confessions' de S. Augustin*, pp. 133-138, and especially p. 86. It may be as Brown has suggested, that when Augustine and his friends expressed a desire to retire to a contemplative community life that someone thought they should be put in touch with the right books to read and contemplate. P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: a biography*, (Faber & Faber: London, 1985) p. 94.

towards the truths themselves, which are placed in the context of the Christian revelation they will soon come to serve.

In the aftermath of his encounter with these texts Augustine sought to attain to wisdom through Plotinian meditative experimentation. Once introduced to Neo-Platonism, Augustine, who was not yet a convert to Christianity, took as an admonishment the Neo-Platonic directive to enter within oneself, and tried through philosophy alone to reach wisdom and the happy life.³⁵ He emphasizes that he could not have done even this if not for the aid of the God to whom he now confesses. What he discovered above his mind was an "unchangeable light" unlike any real or imagined physical light as it was of an entirely different nature; his relation to it was that of finite creature to eternal Creator.³⁶ That he was only able to grasp that there was something there to be seen Augustine came to see as God's plan:

When first I knew you, you took me up, so that I might see that there was something to see, but that I was not yet one able to see it. You beat back my feeble sight, sending down your beams most powerfully upon me, and I trembled with love and awe. (7,10,16, p. 171)

While Augustine's language here is perhaps necessarily ambiguous the key to understanding this experience of being "beaten back" lies in his ontology. Unlike in Neo-Platonism where it is thought that the soul has the natural claim to divinity, Augustine discovered in his experience not a sameness but a difference of nature that is the ontological chasm between creature and Creator. He writes: "I found myself to be far from you [God] in a region of

³⁵ "Being thus admonished to return to myself, under your leadership I entered my inmost being. This I could do for you became my helper" (7,10,16, p. 170).

³⁶ The Bishop of Hippo explains with due reference to his cognitive theory and theology: "It was above my mind, because it made me, and I was beneath it, because I was made by it. He who knows the truth, knows that light, and he who knows it knows eternity. Love knows it, O eternal truth, and true love, and beloved eternity! You are my God, and I sigh for you day and night!" (7,10,16, p. 171)

unlikeness [...] From afar you cried to me, 'I am who am.'" (7,10,16, p. 171) To approach this God, the self-subsisting act of being and the cause of all existing things, is to experience that one is a finite and radically contingent creature before the Creator. Indeed, Augustine learned that all creatures can only be said to exist in that they come from God, for only that Being which is the immutable, self-subsisting act of being can be said to truly exist.³⁷ In this existential experience one recognizes no natural right to approach God, indeed one is terrified by the gulf which exists between creature and Creator.

However this experience failed him, Augustine understood that he had now been shown that there was something to be searched for, though he still lacked the grace to attain to it. At the same time, Augustine's study and experiment with Plotinian contemplation also brought him to the insights that resolved the problem of evil and the chronic materialism that had plagued him his whole life. Having now overcome the great barrier of materialism, Augustine saw clearly the solution to the problem of evil. While the immutable being is Goodness itself, even that being that suffers corruption is good: what is supremely good, Augustine argues, does not suffer corruption, but what is not good at all could not be corrupted. To suffer corruption is to suffer damage and to suffer damage is to be deprived of some good. If they were to be deprived of all good they would be absolutely nothing, that is they would not exist at all. "As long as they exist," he writes, 'they are good. Therefore, whatsoever things exist are good.' (7,12,18, p. 172) Augustine now overcomes his

³⁷ Augustine grants only a quasi-existence to created reality for its being is utterly contingent and derived. He writes: "I beheld other things below you, and I saw that they are not altogether existent nor altogether non-existent: they are, because they are from you; they are not, since they are not what you are. For that truly exists which endures unchangeably. 'But it is good for me to adhere to my God,' for if I do not abide in him, neither will I be able to abide in myself. But he abides in himself, and he renews all things." (7,11,17, p. 171) Augustine would learn from Judeo-Christian revelation that God created all things *ex nihilo*, and thus things participate in being having been created by God, but they also participate in non-being having been created out of nothing.

problematic ways of thinking of evil, and recognizes that evil is not a created substance. He continues:

But evil, of which I ask 'whence is it?' is not a substance for if it were a substance it would be good. Either it would be an incorruptible substance, a great good indeed, or it would be a corruptible substance, and it would not be a corruptible unless it were good. Hence I saw and it was made manifest to me that you made all things good, and that there are no substances whatsoever that you have not made.

Evil is nothing. With this insight, not only was Augustine freed from the manichean fiction of a primordial 'evil substance' but he was also freed from the desire for better things. While each thing is good each thing is not equal and this causes the unwise to consider certain things evil in comparison to others. Now Augustine had gained an appreciation for creation as a whole, considering the greater design more than the fixation on certain aspects: "No more did I long for better things, because I thought of all things, and with a sounder judgement I held that the higher things are indeed better than the lower things, but that all things together are better than the higher things alone" (7,13,19, p. 173). The Book ends with Augustine turning again to the Scriptures hoping to gain more insight into his situation. Augustine now had something more than just the abstract goal of wisdom, for in his experiment with Neo-Platonic ecstasy he had had a kind of experience which had given him the certainty that there was indeed something to be attained. But while having a brief glimpse of the "invisible things, understood by the things which are made," Augustine confesses: "I was unable to fix my gaze on them. In my frailty I was struck back, and I returned to my former ways" (7,17,23, p. 176). Reason alone was not sufficient for Augustine's attainment of wisdom.

Christian Conversion (Book 8)

Book 8 recounts the final painful stages of Augustine's moral conversion to the Catholic faith. Having overcome the great intellectual barriers to his progress, he now found himself in a torturous situation. Having had insight into the spiritual world, his old worldly goals had been relativized, and he no longer had any rapport with them. He now accepted intellectually the truth of the Catholic church, but found himself unable to personally embrace what he knew to be true. Though no longer a man inflamed by the desire for worldly success, he was still a slave to the love of women. Augustine choose the "softer place" of Christian married life rather than celibacy, though it was not his true vocation.³⁸

It was in the midst of this paralysis of his will that Augustine was visited by Simplicianus, an old and wise priest who was none other than the spiritual director of Ambrose himself. Augustine confided the long story of his prodigal wanderings and difficult journey of clarifying the path to wisdom he sought. Simplicianus immediately affirmed his good fortune in having come upon the philosophy of the Neo-Platonists. He then no doubt strategically told the struggling seeker in detail the conversion of his friend Victorinus, who was none other than an orator of renown and the translator of the Neo-Platonist works Augustine had read. Here was a man whom Augustine could not help but admire, who had all the world had to offer, and who chose to walk the humble path of Christian truth before which Augustine hesitated. Augustine describes his bondage as a kind of paralysis brought about by the opposition of two wills within himself.

³⁸ He writes, "for this one thing I was tossed all about in other ways: I was faint and I wasted away with withering cares. For in other matters, which I had no wish to endure, I was forced to adapt myself to that conjugal life which I had given myself to and by which I was therefore restricted." (8.1.2, p. 182)

Thus did my two wills, the one old, the other new, the first carnal, and the second spiritual, contend with one another; and by their conflict they laid waste my soul. (8,5,10, p. 189)

Augustine comments that it was from his own existential experience that he came to understand the meaning of St. Paul's inspired remark "the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh." (8,5,11, p. 189) Augustine was indeed experiencing the pain of the new man being born.

Augustine's deliverance "from the fetters of the desire for concubinage" and "worldly concerns" begins with a visit by Ponticianus, a fellow African who occupied a high office in the court of Milan. When this devout Christian discovered a copy of St. Paul's letters on a games table, he told Augustine and Alypius the story of the conversion of St. Anthony, a monk of the Egyptian desert and the father of all monks. This was the story of a young man of means who took to heart a Scripture passage he heard in church commending one to sell all that one has to live a life of poverty and holy renunciation: the young man did just that, living as a contemplative in the Egyptian desert. Realizing that all this was new to his attentive listeners, Ponticianus told them of the monastic movement noting that there was a monastery at Milan itself under the care of Ambrose. He continued to narrate another story to his wrapt listeners, this time concerning how the story of Anthony transformed the lives of two of his friends, when they happened upon it by chance. Not only were they converted, renouncing the world and its vanities, but their fiancées as well, and all took up the celibate life of dedicated service to the Church. Both Augustine and Alypius were deeply impressed by the story of Anthony and further moved when told that this same story had transformed the lives of two of Ponticianus' friends who were converted, renouncing the world and its vanities, as did their two fiancées.

As this story was being narrated, Augustine was brought to self-confrontation, no matter how he tried to fight it. He could not run or divert himself from the self-examination he had avoided for so long, as it was God's will that he find his "iniquity" and "hate it" (8,7,16, p. 193). The more he heard how others had surrendered themselves to God's healing grace, the more he was filled with self-hatred. The incident causes Augustine to reflect bitterly on the path he had walked since he had first heard the call of Wisdom:

Many, perhaps twelve, of my years had flown by since that nineteenth year when by reading Cicero's *Hortensius* I was aroused to a zeal for wisdom. Yet still I delayed to despise earthly happiness, and thus devote myself to the search. For the bare search for wisdom, even when it is not actually found, was preferable to finding treasures and earthly kingdom and to bodily pleasures swirling about me at my beck. But I, a most wretched youth, most wretched from the very start of my youth, had even sought chastity from you, and had said, "Give me chastity and continence, but not yet!" (8,7,17, pp. 193-94)

There were no more excuses left, no more questions for Augustine to resolve, only the naked self rebelling against his very health and happiness; clinging to a life that is misery, decay, and ultimately death. He intellectually accepted the way that he should walk and now had knowledge of other men who had done what he himself ought to do. As they move from the house to the garden, Augustine cries out in his anguished state to Alypius, asking what is wrong with them that the unlearned rush to embrace truth while they "wallow in flesh and blood." He turns at this moment of the narrative to reflect upon the problem of the "two wills," one seeming to oppose the other. Why can he not do what he wants to do, and is compelled to do what he does not want to do? Not, Augustine argues, because of two wills, but because of incomplete will: what is only partly willed does not materialize. It is anathema, Augustine points out, to say that in the act of deliberation there are two wills

operative based on the natures of two minds as the Manicheans had.³⁹ Augustine confesses that it was both he who willed it and he who did not.

I neither willed it completely, nor did I refrain completely from willing it. Therefore, I was at war with myself, and I was laid waste by myself. This devastation was made against my will indeed, and yet it revealed not the nature of a different mind within me, but rather *the punishment of my own nature*. Therefore, it is no more I that did it, but *sin that dwells in me, sin that issues from punishment of a more voluntary sin, for I was Adam's son*. (8,10,22, p. 198 - my emphasis)

Leaving Alypius behind, Augustine moves deeper into the garden as his internal struggle intensifies, his torment becoming physically manifest. It is not by accident but by providence and certainly it is narratively a propos that this scene of agony should take place in a garden. It is the positive counterpart to the earlier event of the fruit stolen from the neighbour's garden, the paradigmatic event of the reality of sin. While the fruit tree in the garden alluded to the garden and fall of man in Genesis, here there is allusion to the agony of Jesus at Gethsemane, he who was soon to grant the grace of strengthening Augustine's will.

Hearing what he thought might be the voice of a child from a nearby house "chanting and repeating over and over, 'Take up and read. Take up and read'" Augustine tried to recall some children's game that made use of such a phrase, but he could remember no such game (8,12,29, p. 202). With a continence now altered as though by intuitive recognition of God's intervention in his life, he recalled the voice of Scripture that had spoken to St. Anthony, saying "Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure

³⁹ There is no struggle in each person of a good and evil will that reflects a universal conflict of good and evil substances. In deliberation of all evil choices one may indeed be torn between many bad acts, and the same situation exists when one's will is torn or divided between many good choices, until one choice is made of the whole will. It was a similar situation that existed within Augustine with regard to his moral struggle to embrace with his whole will the truths of the Christian faith: "when eternity above delights us and the pleasure found in a temporal good holds us fast from below, it is the same soul that wills this course or that, but not with its whole will. Therefore, it is rent asunder by grievous hurt as long as it prefers the first because of its truth but does not put away the other because of habit." (8,10,24, p. 199)

in heaven, and come, follow me." Anthony took this as a personal call, a call which brought him to conversion and revealed to him the road he must walk. Augustine took the chant he had heard as the command of God to open the Scriptures and read the first thing he happened upon. His eyes fell upon the Pauline text that would mark his final passage of religious and moral conversion to Christ: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in strife and envying; but put you on the lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences" (8,12,29, p. 202; cf Romans 13:13, 14). With this text Augustine experienced the personal call of Christ, and through His grace his religious and moral conversion were made complete. There was no need for him to read further, for he knew from then on that he would not struggle again as he had. He recounts: "Instantly, in truth, at the end of this sentence, as if before a peaceful light streaming into my heart, all the dark shadows of doubt fled away" (8,12,29, p. 202). Augustine informed his friend Alypius what had occurred, and applying the sentence which followed that which Augustine had read, "Now him that is weak in faith take unto you," also converted Alypius to the Christian faith. The two converts went to inform Augustine's mother of the great event that had taken place and she praised God for fulfilling her prayers beyond her hopes, for now her son would stand on that same 'rule of faith' that she herself stood, and in light of this he intended to forsake all plans for a wife and any ambitions of this world.

Augustine recounts that with this great moment he has for the first time stepped onto the true path to the wisdom he longed for: he had suffered in his waywardness and had now experienced conversion to faith in Christ, the authority upon whom his quest for wisdom would now rest. He now lacked nothing that would prohibit him from finding what he

sought, for he had the Master's promise, "Seek and ye shall find."

5. TRANSITION: Dénouement of the Journey to Faith and Prefiguration of the Journey to Wisdom

(Book 9)

Book 9 opens with the exultant Augustine giving praise to the God who delivered him from the slavery of his wayward will to rebirth as a servant of God. His early reference to himself as the "son of your handmaid" is poignant in a Book which is dominated by the new convert's thankful praise and his tribute to his mother, who laboured to bring him to this spiritual rebirth. He reflects on his wayward path and his slavery to his rebellious will, and in light of his rebirth into the true life of liberty as a servant of God he can now state the human good succinctly. "This was the sum of it: not to will what I willed and to will what you willed" (9,1,1, p. 205). Now Augustine can only marvel at how through God's mercy and grace all that he feared to lose has been put aside, his mind now free "from the gnawing cares of favour-seeking, of striving for gain, of wallowing in the mire, and of scratching lust's itchy sore" (9,1,1, p. 205-6).

With his intellectual, religious and moral conversion complete, Augustine is now prepared to break with the career through which he had formerly sought his worldly success. So as not to betray humility, Augustine chose to "gently withdraw" his services from the "language marts," so as to devote himself totally to contemplative study. Suffering from a respiratory problem, after the seasonal break Augustine could appeal to health reasons for resigning his position. Augustine relates to us how his friends fared vis à vis their own

progress toward their common goal. For a vacation period of some four months, he and his companions retired to Vercundus' country estate at Cassiciacum for a grace period of great creativity as the community of thinkers explored further understanding on matters of philosophical and theological import. Augustine reminds his readers of the works produced there and how they bear witness to the thoughts of this period.⁴⁰ As his time at Cassiciacum came to an end, he wrote to Milan to inform the city that they would have to find another "seller of words" and he requested from Ambrose Scripture passages that might assist him in preparation for his baptism.⁴¹ He was joined in baptism by his friend Alypius and his son Adeodatus. Augustine recounts that at this time he never grew tired of meditating on the theme of man's salvation as expressed in the Scriptures and the liturgical prayer of the Church. His bitter tears at the unrepentant sinner had been replaced by the joyous tears of the convert, who was growing daily in the truth he had embraced. He often wept amidst the praying community as God's truth was distilled in his heart, "and from that truth holy emotions overflowed, and the tears ran down, and amid those tears all was well with me" (9,6,14, p. 214). The bitter tears of the unrepentant sinner have been replaced by the joyous tears of the convert who was growing daily in the truth he had embraced in faith, confident in redemption, and affirmed in this by the vibrant Christian community in Milan.

Augustine narrates that shortly after his baptism a number of his friends resolved to

⁴⁰ I have argued in chapter 3 of this thesis for the importance of these early post-conversion works for understanding the narrative structure of the *Confessions*. Augustine's directing of his readers to these works here, as well as his emphasis on how graced this period was, would indicate that he considered these works important. The works of the Cassiciacum period are *Against the Academics*, *On the Happy Life*, and *On Order*. Nine letters to and three from Nebridius have survived.

⁴¹ Ambrose suggested the Books of the prophet Isaias, which Augustine later speculates was because this prophet most clearly foreshadows the Gospels and the Lord's calling to the Gentiles. At the time, however, Augustine did not have this insight into the relevance of the good Bishop's suggestion and he did not come to any understanding of "the first lesson" in the book. At this we see the new attitude born of Augustine's faith. Rather than being thrust into confusion and doubt by this initial lack of understanding of the text, Augustine confidently decided to "put it aside to be taken up again when I was better accustomed to the Lord's mode of speech." (9,5,13, p. 213)

live together in a Christian community, discerning that they could best be of service if they returned to their native Africa. In the course of their journey home, in the city of Ostia, Augustine's mother died. Without embarrassment, before God and man, Augustine mourns his mother, who brought him into the world in physical birth, and with greater pains labored to bring him to spiritual birth. Augustine takes the time in his narration to render homage to his mother, remembering her as a Christian woman who was led by God to maturity in the faith and to a foretaste of eternal Wisdom. Augustine then turns to the relation of an experience he and his mother shared just prior to her death, which he takes particular care to recount and understand. Augustine recognizes that in the course of a discussion he and his mother had by mystical means moved along the path that he will embark upon in Book 10 with the assistance of Neo-Platonic reasoning. In a passage influenced by the Neo-Platonic paradigm of the soul's journey from the exterior to the interior and from the inferior to the superior, foreshadowing the path he will follow in Book 10, Augustine sees the merciful Lord granting him and his mother, by grace alone, a glimpse of Christian wisdom and the foretaste of eternal happiness:

When our discourse had been brought to the point that the highest delight of fleshly senses, in the brightest corporeal light, when set against the sweetness of that life seemed unworthy not merely of comparison with it, but even of remembrance, then, raising ourselves up with a more ardent love to the Selfsame, we proceeded step by step through all bodily things up to that heaven whence shine the sun and the moon and the stars down upon the earth. We ascended higher yet by means of inward thought and discourse and admiration of your works, and we came up to our own minds. We transcended them, so that we attained to the region of abundance that never fails, in which you feed Israel forever upon the food of truth, and where life is that Wisdom by which all these things are made, both which have been and which are to be. And this Wisdom itself is not made, but it is such as it was, and so it will be forever. (9.10.24, pp. 221-22)

Here we have the two Christians caught up in an experience which takes them from the created world to the realm of the transcendental where they are granted a foretaste of the wisdom they both serve and seek. Augustine's mother will soon experience the abundant

joy of eternal beatitude of wisdom, the reward of the faithful Christian in the afterlife. For his part, in this experience Augustine has mystically encountered the path that he will consciously pursue in Book 10.

This mystical event serves the narrative in two ways. It functions as a *dénouement* to the journey to faith that Augustine has travelled from the moment of recognizing his true goal, the wisdom that confers happiness - indeed, that he has travelled from the very beginning of his life in the period of the soul's wayward disorientation. But it is also a prefiguration of the journey of understanding through memory which he is about to embark upon. Augustine has now found not only the way to wisdom but the strength to walk it.

Augustine concludes Book 9 by praying for his mother (calling her by name for the first and only time in this work), and for his father as well, bidding his readers also to remember his parents in prayer: "Remember Monica, your handmaid, together with Patricius, sometime her husband, by whose flesh you brought me into this life." This remembrance brings Augustine's recounting of the events of his worldly life to a fitting conclusion. The plot of his autobiography is about to shift from a journey which recounts events to a journey which recounts interior progress.

6. JOURNEY TO WISDOM: The Journey of Understanding Through Memory (Book 10 [1-27])

Prelude to the Journey (Book 10 [1-5])

Assured now of the path to wisdom, confident in the authority of Christ and strengthened morally by grace, Augustine embarks on his contemplative interior journey of understanding,

stating in a spirit of joy and hope that "I shall know you, my knower, I shall know you, 'even as I am known'" (10,1,1, p. 229). He is now able to turn away from all the other things in his life which he realizes should not be wept over and, quoting the Psalms and the gospel of John, he trusts that the man who "loves" and "does truth" will come into the light. "Therefore," he writes, "before you, O Lord, am I manifest, whatever I may be" (10,2,2, p. 229).

It is clear that Augustine's journey in understanding continues the author's narrative as a confession before God and man. Augustine expresses concern over how men will receive his words, praying to God that they interpret him correctly to the benefit of all, no matter what the reader's situation may be – believer or non-believer (10,3,3, p. 230). Augustine again makes it clear that he sees his own life and the lives of his readers as a journey and continues by marking the importance of narrating his life as a confession, for it is in this way that his life can serve as a source of enlightenment in the journey that all must make.

Such is the benefit from my confessions, not of what I have been, but of what I am, that I may confess this not only before you in secret exultation with trembling and in secret sorrow with hope, but also in the ears of believing sons of men, partakers of my joy and sharers in my mortality, my fellow citizens and pilgrims with me, those who go before me and those who follow me, and those who are companions on my journey. (10,4,6, p. 232)

Then once again he indicates that he is confessing an odyssey of discovery which begins with the mystery of his own self.⁴² Man's ignorance is contrasted with God's knowledge, but Augustine believes if he clings to the path of truth his ignorance will be dispelled.

⁴² In the *Soliloquies* Augustine writes: "O God, always one and the same, may I know myself, may I know Thee." (St. Augustine, *Soliloquies*, in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, Vol. V., trans. Thomas F. Gilligan, [New York, CIMA Publ. Co., Inc., 1948], p. 381) It is in the spirit of this prayer and the conviction that self-knowledge will lead to knowledge of God that Augustine begins his journey of understanding here. Augustine embraces the wisdom of the Socratic dictum "Know thyself!"

Let me confess, then, what I know about myself. Let me confess also what I do not know about myself, since that too which I know about myself I know because you enlighten me. As to what I am ignorant of concerning myself, I remain ignorant of it until my 'darkness shall be made as the noonday in your sight.' (10,5,7, p. 233)

The Journey from the Exterior to the Interior: Creation and the Man of Judgement (Book 10 [6])

After the five chapter prelude of Book 10, chapter 6 begins the narration of Augustine's journey of understanding proper in one of the more eloquent and conceptually rich sections of the *Confessions*. Here Augustine delineates the journey he has made from the exterior world of material creation to the interior world of his spiritual soul in his search for the beatifying knowledge of God. The truths he uncovers in this chapter he is able to state outright, albeit poetically; each of these basic truths is a hard-earned product of Augustine's years of post-conversion inquiry.⁴³

As a Christian convert Augustine now knows without doubt that he loves God, for "By your Word you have transfixed my heart, and I have loved you" (10,6,8, p. 233). It is by way of the question "what is it that I love when I love God?" that Augustine's begins his journey from the exterior to the interior and from the inferior to the superior. Augustine responds to this question through a dialogue with creation. "My question was the gaze I turned on them," Augustine writes; "the answer was their beauty" (10,6,9, p. 234). Augustine asks earth, wind, sky, and stars and all creatures therein, but they all respond "We are not the God whom you seek" (10,6,9, p. 234). Then to all things perceived Augustine asks, "Tell

⁴³ This is verified by the fact that many of his works of pure inquiry both pre-dating and post-dating the *Confessions* record his struggle to clarify them. Here in the *Confessions*, so as to preserve the narrative character and continuity of this second phase of his journey, Augustine must avoid entering into too detailed an analysis of the points of understanding he uncovers, for this would inhibit the natural 'followability' of the narrative. Augustine, the narrator, must strike a balance between the narrative of inquiry and discovery and the analytic details of the inquiry he is emplotting. He has thus placed the conceptual details of years of reflection at the service of a configurational comprehension and narrative emplotment of his life as a quest for Wisdom. It is beneficial for us therefore to refer from time to time to several of Augustine's more analytic works so as to provide further clarification of the points he is making and to also show the conceptual depth of the analysis which grounds Augustine's narrative journey in the *Confessions*.

me of my God! Although you are not he, tell me something of him!" "With a mighty voice" all these things cry out, "'He made us.'" (10,6,9, p. 234) Thus the very existence of things reveals God as Creator.

Augustine now turns the question on himself and asks "Who are you?" (10,6,9, p. 234). Augustine writes that he is a man composed of two substances: the body or the outer man and the spiritual soul or the inner man. Having searched in vain "through bodily things," Augustine asks whether he should have sought God without through the body or within through the soul (10,6,9, p. 234). The inner man is the superior of the two; ironically, it has been the inner man who all along has been searching for God in the world through the body.

Better indeed is that inner being. For to it, as that which rules over the things and passes judgement upon them, all those bodily messengers reported back answer of heaven and earth and all things that are in them, as they said: 'We are not God!' and again, 'He made us!' The inner man knows such things through the ministry of the outer man. I, the inner man, know these things; I, I, the mind, by means of my bodily senses. I asked the whole fabric of the world about my God, and it answered me, "I am not he, but he has made me!" (10,6,9, p. 234)

It is clear that Augustine identifies himself most deeply with the soul, indicating that man is best understood as a soul using a body. He will return to this insight, but first wonders why if the beauty of all creation proclaims that all things are not God it does "not speak the same to all men" (10,6,10, p. 234).

His answer raises the issue of what it means to be a "man of judgement." Distinct from all other creatures, who also see creation, man has the ability to judge, for man is that creature endowed with reason, which has "been placed in judgement over the senses and their reports" (10,6,10, pp. 234-35). But what accounts for the fact that while man can pass judgement on the things of the world, all men do not inquire and receive the same answer

from their encounter with creation? The answer involves Augustinian anthropology and epistemology, which Augustine succinctly encapsulated in the conclusion of chapter six. It is through the love of the things of the material world that man becomes enslaved to them and in this "subjection they cannot pass judgement on them" (10.6,10, p. 235). Augustine continues:

Nor do things answer those who ask unless they are men of judgment. They do not change their voice, that is, their beauty, when one man merely looks at them and another both looks and questions, so as to appear one thing to this man, another to that. It appears the same to both: it is silent to one, but speaks to the other. Nay rather, *it speaks to all, but only those understand who compare its voice taken in from outside with the truth within them.* Truth says to me: 'Your God is not heaven and earth, nor any bodily thing.' Their very nature proclaims this. Men see that the world is a vast mass, smaller in any part than in its whole. But I say to you, O my soul, that you are already my better part, for you quicken the body's mass and give it life, and this a body cannot give to a body. But *your God is for you even the life of life.* (10.6,10, p. 235 - my emphasis)

To better understand Augustine's insights in chapter 6 we might pause here to refer to several of his more analytic works. When Augustine poses the question of his identity in chapter 6, the answer is immediately accessible to him. In other writings, he insists that the soul's identity should be immediately transparent to itself, as an integral part of a fundamental first certitude. First of all, beyond a doubt, a person knows that he exists.⁴⁴ That one exists is the one fact not subject to doubt. Augustine later writes in *City of God*:

Certainly one who does not exist cannot be mistaken. I exist [...] Even in error, I should have to exist in order to be in error. There can be no doubt, therefore, that I am not mistaken when I know that I exist. In the face of these truths, the quibbles of the skeptics lose their force. If they say: 'What if you are mistaken?'-well if I am mistaken, I am. For, if one does not exist, he can by no means be mistaken. Therefore, I am, if I am mistaken.⁴⁵

More than just the certitude of his existence, in the apprehension 'I exist' one should

⁴⁴ Cf. Augustine, *The Happy Life*, trans. Ludwig Schopp, in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, Vol 5, (New York: CIMA Publ. Co. Inc., 1948), 2,7, p. 51. This insight was the starting point for his argument against Academic skepticism, a philosophical error that he himself had embraced (Cf. 5,10,19, pp. 126-127).

⁴⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, Trans. Gerald G. Walsh S.J. and Grace Monahan, O.S.U., in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, Vol. 14 (Catholic University of America Press: Washington, 1952), 11,26.

also immediately grasp that his 'being' is that of a thinking substance. Even when 'doubting' a person should recognize not only that he exists, but that he lives and understands and so is living the life of a mind or soul. In the *Trinity* Augustine writes succinctly of these elements, which comprise this first certitude in the light of the Socratic precept that self-knowledge is a key prerequisite for the acquisition of wisdom.

Let not the mind then add another thing to that which it knows itself to be when it hears that it should know itself. For it knows with certainty that these words are said to itself, that is, to itself that is, lives, and understands. But a corpse also is, and a beast also lives, but neither the corpse nor the beast understands. It, therefore, knows that it is, and that it lives in such a manner as the understanding is and lives [...] And no one doubts that no one understands who does not live, and that no one lives who is not. Therefore, it follows that whatever understands also is and lives, not as a corpse is which does not live, nor as the soul of a beast lives which does not understand, but in its own proper and more exalted manner [...] Moreover, they know that they will, and they likewise know that no one can will, who is not and who does not live and similarly, they refer the will to something which they will with that will. They also know that they remember, and they know at the same time that no one would remember unless he both was and lived.⁴⁶

Thus, at the very moment the soul knows it exists, it also knows itself as living and understanding; it knows itself as living the life of a mind or soul. This is all a part of the soul's first certitude: its own self-transparent identity that it exists, lives, and knows. As a thinking substance the soul should always be present to itself, the recognition of its nature a simple exercise of consciousness so reflexive and instantaneous that it would be nearly effortless; self-recognition would seem to be the soul's privilege by virtue of its very nature. The soul should be totally transparent to itself for "nothing can be more present to itself than itself."⁴⁷ How then could Augustine have previously mistaken himself for a material body alone? How is it possible that man can be confused about his self-identity when it is a matter of reflexive self-apprehension?

⁴⁶ St. Augustine, *Trinity*, 10,10,13, p. 307.

⁴⁷ *Trinity*, 10,10,16, p. 310.

According to Augustine, this lack of recognition is a result of the soul's systematic ignoring of itself and its role in human life, and this unmindfulness results in a chronic 'forgetfulness'. It is not a matter of the soul's total ignorance of itself, but a matter of the soul's ignoring itself and in the state of forgetfulness not recognizing the role it plays even in the most basic of human cognitive operations, that of sensation. In Augustinian thought even the most basic and lowest level of human knowing, sensation, is an act of mind.

Ironically it is forgetfulness at the level of sensation, the lowest level of the soul's activity that the force of habit grounds the soul in the misapprehension that it too is nothing but a material thing. To grasp how this is, we must familiarize ourselves with the Augustinian view of sensation. We have noted that true to his Neo-Platonic philosophical heritage, Augustine tends to see man as a soul using a body: a superior spiritual substance united to an inferior material substance. Agreeing with the Neo-Platonist tenet that 'the lower or inferior cannot act on the higher or superior', a material substance cannot act on a spiritual substance; Augustine explains sensation in terms of the soul's activity, and he characterizes it as a particular instance of the soul using the body. Rather than sensation being a passion undergone by the soul, sensations are themselves actions of the soul. Augustine explains this activity of the soul by expanding his basic theory of how the body and soul are united. The soul is the life of the body vivifying it at all times by its omnipresence or 'vital attention' within.⁴⁸ Having a natural desire to care for the body, the soul is aware of everything which takes place in the body's parts. When a modification occurs as a result of the material world acting upon the body's sense organs, the soul is

⁴⁸ Cf. Gilson's explication of 'vital attention' in *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine*, pp. 48-9.

attentive to the modification and correspondingly increases its attention to that sense organ.⁴⁹ Aware of modifications of the sense organs, the soul instantaneously produces a spiritual image out of its own spiritual substance. The soul, Augustine writes, "fastens together their images which it has made out of itself, and forces them into itself."⁵⁰ In this process the soul spiritualizes the material world, so to speak, by giving the corporeal "something of its own essence."⁵¹ In giving of itself to form the image, the soul retains the part of itself, the 'mind' or the 'understanding,' "by which it may freely judge of the species of these images."⁵²

The spiritual soul judges sensation according to the eternal ideas or forms. The images formed are stored in the memory and can be recalled by the soul. The soul can also distinguish the incorporeal likeness within itself from the corporeal object external to it. The ironic misapprehension whereby the soul 'confuses itself with the nature of external material objects occurs when the soul "binds itself with a love so strong as even to regard itself as something of this kind [...] as a body [...] and thus it is made like them to some extent, not in reality but in its thought."⁵³ In the soul's obsessive experience of the sensible, its nature becomes overlaid with images of the corporeal, making it possible for the soul's own self-misapprehension. Having grown accustomed to sensible things or bodies and thinking of them with love, the soul has become "incapable of being in itself without the images of those

⁴⁹ The soul does not receive sensation of physical objects ready-made, nor can it bring corporeal bodies, "which it has loved outside of itself through the senses of the body [...] into itself as though into the country of incorporeal nature" (*Trinity*, 10,5,7. p. 302).

⁵⁰ *Trinity*, 10,5,7, p. 302.

⁵¹ *Trinity*, 10,5,7, p. 302.

⁵² *Trinity*, 10,5,7, p. 302.

⁵³ *Trinity*, 10,7,10, p. 304.

things."⁵⁴ Augustine continues:

From this arises its *shameful* error, that it can no longer distinguish the images of sensible things from itself, so as to see itself alone. For they have marvelously cohered to it with the glue of love, and this is its uncleanness that, while it endeavors to think of itself alone, it regards itself as being that without which it cannot think of itself.⁵⁵

What the soul has fallen into is the grave error of materialism, a kind of philosophical error which has sin at its root, and which prevented Augustine from finding truth for so many years.⁵⁶ Augustine has understood his error in the context of the life of the soul in which materialism is the wayward soul's punishment for apostasy from its proper place in the Divinely ordered universe. There can be no doubt that materialism is the gravest of philosophical errors for Augustine; it is a sin against the spiritual and thus is a sin against God and against man's own nature.

The soul's forgetfulness at the level of the sensible is actually the end result of a chain of deliberate, rebellious 'turning away', a self-induced forgetfulness which began with the higher and went to the lower, and then from the interior to the exterior. Forgetfulness is the condition of man living a life of 'sin orientation' due to his fallen nature, the result of original sin. At its profoundest level, forgetfulness is the result the rebellious soul's seeking its autonomy, turning away from God, and thereby entering into a state of the forgetfulness of the presence of God within itself. When the soul begins to live out of this illicit desire "it is turned away from Him, is moved, and slips into less and less, which it considers is more

⁵⁴ *Trinity*, 10,8,11, p. 305.

⁵⁵ *Trinity*, 10,8,11, p. 305.

⁵⁶ We are permitted to speak of sin here, for it is Augustine himself who describes his error in terms of shame and uncleanness, an ancient symbolism long used by man to express his experience of fault. See P. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. by E. Buchanan (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), cf. Part I.

and more."⁵⁷ This is a result of the fact that man is marked by the inability to be sufficient unto himself. In its radical insufficiency, the soul through "its need and want [...] becomes excessively intent upon its own actions and the fickle pleasures which it gathers through them. The trouble in the life of the soul begins when, out of its own rebellious volition, it "wishes to appropriate [...] material] things to itself, and to be like Him but not by Him, but by its own self to be what He is."⁵⁸ By thus desiring to seek knowledge from these things that are without, the nature of which it knows and loves and which it feels can be lost unless held fast by devoted care, the soul loses its security.⁵⁹ It is not that the soul is ignorant of itself, but that in its obsession with material things it ignores itself to the point of self-forgetfulness.⁶⁰

The ramifications of the wayward soul's intense attachment to sensible things can only be seen in light of Augustine's theory of sensation, for it is in this context that the mechanism of the soul's alienation from its true nature is clarified. This initial forgetfulness begins the process which culminates in the soul's forgetting its own nature; unmindful of its own role in sensation it mistakes itself for a material thing, becoming as it were stranded outside itself, unable to apprehend its own nature as a spiritual being. Augustine makes

⁵⁷ *Trinity*, 10,5,7, p. 301.

⁵⁸ *Trinity* 10,5,7, p. 301.

⁵⁹ *Trinity* 10,5,7, p. 301.

⁶⁰ Augustine likens the situation to that of a man with several areas of expertise. One does not say that such a man "is ignorant of grammar when he is not thinking of it, because he is then thinking of the art of medicine" (*Trinity* 10,5,7, p. 301). The man certainly knows grammar but his attention is directed elsewhere. When he seeks his knowledge of grammar he does not search for it as though it were absent, or something he does not know, but rather he recalls it to mind from his memory and becomes conscious of his grammatical knowledge. Analogously, when the soul turns its attention towards sensible things it does not think of itself. The soul's situation, however, is more complex than the example of the knowledgeable man, for when the wayward soul obsessively turns its attention to sensible things "the force of love is so great that the mind draws in with itself those things upon which it has long reflected with love, and to which it has become attached by its devoted care, even when it returns in some way to think of itself."

clear that as long as the soul lives in subjection to material things it cannot judge that all of creation points beyond itself to the One who is the source of all. Creation speaks to everyone that it is not the source of its own beauty and truth, but those who rebelliously are seeking their own autonomy and are immersed in forgetfulness cannot hear creation speak of its higher source, because they do not even recognize their own superiority over material things.

The soul's fall into error about its own nature is not a result of total ignorance. Augustine writes that "those who regard the mind as a corporeal substance do not go astray because their mind is lacking in knowledge, but because they add those things without which they are unable to conceive of any nature."⁶¹ Having grown attached to the corporeal, the soul judges that which is "without bodily phantasm as nothing."⁶² This last phrase echoes Augustine's commentary on his own chronic materialism in the *Confessions*.⁶³

The Divine order still exists, but the soul's relationship to that order has become perverted. We have seen above that Augustine has summarized this sinful orientation succinctly in the *Confessions* Book 10,6, when he writes: "through the love for such things, they become subject to them, and in subjection they cannot pass judgement on them [...] as that which rules over" the world of bodies (10,6,10, p. 235). At the level of sensation the soul has become dominated by that which it should dominate. Its true nature, spirit, is still the same, only the soul has ceased to think of itself, and recognize its own nature and its

⁶¹ *Trinity*, 10,7,10, p. 304.

⁶² *Trinity* 10,7,10, p. 304.

⁶³ There he writes that he was so gross of heart that he had no idea even of his own self, and thought that whatever was not "extended over, or diffused throughout, or compacted into, or projected up to definite measures of space, or did not or could not receive something of this kind, was completely non-existent." (7,1,2, p. 158)

superiority to the material world.

In its alienation, the soul's rebellious life is not a happy one. In deliberately seeking its own self-sufficiency against the proper natural order the soul plunges itself into a life of constant need and unrelieved indigence, seeking satisfaction in ways that prohibit it from ever being satisfied.⁶⁴ The soul is driven on in an insatiable hunger from thing to thing: each thing attracts it and incites its desire, but none ever satisfies it, leaving the soul in an unhappy delirium, where moving from abyss to abyss it experiences the emptiness of each thing in turn. The force of its misguided love draws the corporeal into itself according to the mechanism of sensation described above, by making out of its substance the image of the corporeal.⁶⁵

Yet, if the soul were to think of itself at all, it would know itself as a living thought, regaining its reflexive self-transparency. The goal is to 'know thy self', so that the soul "might consider itself and live according to its nature, that is, that it might desire to be ruled according to its nature, namely under Him to Whom it must be brought into subjection, and above those to whom it must govern."⁶⁶ The soul must live in the light of self-knowledge and take its place in the Divine Schema. It is essential for the well being of the soul to consider itself, to take account of its nature, and to live in light of that self-knowledge. Augustine bids the soul recover from its delirium of forgetfulness and to 'recollect' or 'recognize' its proper relationship to material things, including its own body. If forgetfulness

⁶⁴ Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine*, p. 99.

⁶⁵ Cf. *Trinity* 10,8,11, p. 305; and 10,6,8, p. 302.

⁶⁶ *Trinity*, 10,5,7, p. 301.

is the result of the soul's perverse and alienated relationship with the world, itself and God. then memory must be the key to the situation's reversal, and the key to the soul's understanding itself and its place in Creation. This is precisely why Book 10 is dominated by an analysis of memory: memory is the avenue the soul must travel to gain understanding.

It is clear then that in chapter six Augustine has touched on the profound truths of man's identity, and in his description of 'the man of judgement' and his ill-fated counterpart he has succinctly captured the conceptual content of his developed analysis of the the human condition and the role that forgetfulness and remembering play in the life of the soul and its ramifications on how one lives and understands oneself. Now that Augustine has firmly grasped his identity as a spiritual soul, he has a command of his powers of judgement: Augustine recognizes that it is through the inner man that he will make his journey of ascent to God. Thus the stage is set for the interior journey to understanding that Augustine will now retrace.

The Soul's Ascent through Memory to Wisdom (Book 10 [7-27])

Thus in chapter 7 the soul begins its journey to understanding by re-cognizing itself as the master of sensation. It discovers a power in itself by which it not only vivifies the body but "gives sensation as well to my flesh [...] commanding the eye that it should not hear, and the ear that it should not see, but giving to the first power so that I [the soul] may see by it, and the power so that I hear by it, and singly to each of the other senses powers proper to their organs and purposes" (10,7,11, p. 235). Every soul must recognize with Augustine that "I, who am one single mind, perform these diverse things through the senses" (10,7,11, p. 235).

When the soul recognizes itself as the power of sensation, it can recognize its superiority over the material world and the body and can break the cycle of self-seeking consumption of images, trying to find satisfaction in that which is inferior to itself. The soul can recognize that sensation, while being its lowest activity, is also a highly spiritual activity, and that far from being a slave to sensation the soul is its master.

This realization is decisive for the soul's journey, for with the recognition that the soul itself creates sensations comes the possibility of reversing the soul's mistaken relationship with the sensible world. The soul thus awakens from the sleep of forgetfulness by *remembering, bringing to consciousness, or re-cognizing* its correct relationship with the corporeal. It can finally begin to liberate itself from the many delusions concerning its self-identity and find where the path to truth rightly begins. The soul has learned that when it is commanded to know itself, "it should not seek itself as though it were to be withdrawn from itself, but it should rather withdraw what it has added to itself." The soul can thus liberate itself from its self-delusion and regain its reflexive knowledge of its own spiritual nature - that reflexive knowledge which Augustine exhibits in Book 10, chapter 6, of the *Confessions* when he immediately identifies man as the composite of a material body and spiritual soul, with the latter the higher part.

Augustine recognizes that God is not to be found in the physical universe, but confidently affirms that "by my soul itself will I ascend to him" (10,7,11, p. 235). Yet in its search for the source of truth and beauty the soul must move beyond the mere power by which it vivifies the body, for this power of vivication is also possessed by animals: if it were by this power that one could find God "the horse and the mule in which there is no

understanding' would likewise find him" (10.7.12, p. 235). Augustine recognizes another power of the soul, that by which the soul is not the slave but the master of sensation, yet it is not by this power that he can arrive at God, for it too is shared by animals. "Therefore," Augustine resolves, "I will pass beyond this power of my nature, and ascending by steps to him who made me, I come into the fields and spacious palaces of memory, where are treasures of countless images of things of every manner, brought there from objects perceived by sense" (10.8.12, p. 236). It is by memory - to this faculty of the soul - that Augustine will make his journey of ascent through understanding to God.

With chapter 8 Augustine recognizes that along with being master of sensation, the soul is the master of sense memory and is able to call forth various memories more or less at its bidding. "Certain things come forth immediately," Augustine writes, while "certain other things are looked for, and are rooted out as it were from some deeper receptacles" (10.8.12, p. 236). Augustine notes the way memory searches itself for a particular memory sought, flushing it out, as it were, from its hiding place in the "great cave of his memory" (10.8.12, p. 236).

In his exploration of the contents of sense memory Augustine discovers that "all things are kept distinct according to kind"; the images of the external world are stored in the memory according to the particular sense through which the soul has perceived the object. When calling a memory to mind, the particular image is recollected in its distinctness, so that if one is calling forth a visual memory, the mind is not suddenly flooded with the memories of sounds. Augustine thus shows the link between the soul's perception of the external material world and the fields of sense memory which are contained in the soul's own vast

internal depths: "The things themselves do not enter there, but the images of things perceived by sense are kept ready there for the thought of one recalling them" (10,8,12, p. 236). Augustine admits that the actual mechanism by which the soul forms the spiritual images of the external world remains a mystery to him. "Although it is apparent by which senses they [sensations] are seized and stored away there, who can say how these images are formed?" (10,8,12, p. 236). While the mechanism is unclear, the results are obvious, for Augustine discovers within himself all that he has experienced of the exterior world that has not yet been buried by forgetfulness. There too Augustine discovers memories of himself as an actor in the external world, recollection of the setting and the feeling of his actions (10,8,14, p. 237). He also discovers the power to recall memories of things he has experienced or accepted on trust of others; he also has the power to use his imagination to "combine one and another of the likenesses of things, whether things actually known by experience or those believed in from those I have experienced, with things past, and from them I meditate upon future actions, events, and hopes, and all these again as though they were actually present" (10,8,14, p. 237).

Having explored the breadth of his sense memory, Augustine marvels at its immense capacity and its superiority over all it can contain for it is by the soul's faculty of sensation and memory that it is able to experience the external world at all. The irony astonishes Augustine when he considers how those who lack judgement get caught outside themselves, enamored with the majesty and power of created things and bypassing the profound depths of their own nearly unfathomable powers of soul:

Amazement seizes me. Men go forth to marvel at the mountain heights, at huge waves in the sea, at the broad expanse of flowing rivers, at the wide reaches of ocean, and at the circuits of the stars, but themselves they pass by.

In recognizing the soul and its powers Augustine has been rescued from entrapment in the external and has begun to discover its inner life and power.

Continuing his interior inquiry in chapter 10, Augustine discovers a higher memory when he finds he has knowledge he could not have acquired from the sensible world. In his memory he has a knowledge of concepts such as "essence," "cause," "unity" and "mathematical ideas" as well as abstract criteria of judgement. He has stored all these things in memory not just in images, but as the things themselves. Augustine sees that learning itself is a kind of remembrance. When something is learned it is not a matter of giving credence to another's heart but recognizing within himself the very thing communicated by the teaching. When a truth is uttered Augustine can say it is so precisely because it is already within his memory "but so removed and pushed back as it were in more hidden caverns that, unless they were dug up by some reminder, I would perhaps have been unable to conceive of them" (10,10,17, p. 240).⁶⁷

In chapter 11 Augustine moves further to the learning of intellectual things, which is

⁶⁷ With this insight into the phenomenon of the already-there of truth, Augustine has taken us to the threshold of what he develops elsewhere as his theory of the 'Inner Master' and illumination. Though not explicitly presented there, the substance of this theory is narratively presented in the *Confessions*. Both these metaphors communicate the fact that all truth is bestowed upon the soul by the ever-present God, whom Augustine discovers at the end of his journey as within and above his soul. By the first metaphor, Augustine grasped that one only recognizes the truth of what someone else teaches by already having the truth within: the teaching is a reminder of what is already there, the truth taught by the "Inner Master". "Now He who is consulted and who is said to 'dwell in the inner man,' He it is who teaches us, namely, Christ, that is to say, 'the unchangeable Power of God and everlasting wisdom.' This is the Wisdom which every rational soul does indeed consult" (*The Teacher*, trans. Robert P. Russell, O.S.A., in *The Fathers of the Church* [Washington: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1968], p. 51). Compare this to Plato's classic discussion of learning as a function of the reminiscence of a previous existence in the *Meno* (*The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. B. Jowett [New York: Bantam, 1986], pp. 207 ff.).

Augustine's theory of illumination explains how it is that man has concepts of a non-empirical origin. The elements in the theory consist of the Divine Light that illumines, the intelligible truths that are illumined, and the mind of man which knows these truths. It is not clear that Augustine succeeded in understanding the precise mechanism of illumination, but what is important is the meaning of the metaphor and how it functions in his thought. (Cf. Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine*, p. 81.) His theory, which rests on the eternal presence of God above the soul, explains the knowledge of truths by which judgements are made, without recourse to the Platonic theory of reminiscence and its doctrine of pre-existence. The soul does not remember knowledge of ideas from its pre-existent past, but knows them in the present through the presence of God within itself. This is exactly what Augustine discovers at the end of his journey: not only that God is the source of truth, but God is truth itself, which is the light and wisdom of God. (Cf. *Trinity*, 14,15, p. 441)

a matter of acts of thought by which we gather together things that memory has contained in a scattered way, and bring them together so that they will easily occur to a mind already in some way familiar with them. If he ceases to recall these things even for a short moment they recede into memory, but they can be recalled again, collected together or 'recollected'. Chapter 12 explores an instance of intellectual memory, mathematics. Augustine distinguishes mathematical concepts as communicated with words from the mathematical ideas themselves: the words used to communicate these concepts are distinct from the ideas themselves, and these are found in memory itself.

In chapter 13 Augustine notes that he retains all these things in his memory, and retains as well how he learned them. Even fallacious arguments he has heard are remembered, along with the distinctions he has made between true and false doctrines. He can remember having made these distinctions in the past and at a future date he will remember remembering it: Augustine has memories of his memories.

Chapter 14 raises the paradox that memory does not retain the affect of the remembered event; it retains the having experienced joy but not the joy itself. Augustine is exploring the different manner in which the memory retains experiences, by contrast with the "manner in which the mind itself has them at the time it experiences them." This is to note an element of distance introduced by recollection, "after the fashion in which the power of memory retains memory itself" (10,14,21, p. 242). But is this distance the distance from the reality of joy? Augustine argues that we could not speak of joy meaningfully were it not for the presence of the true concept of joy, which innately resides in memory.

Chapter 15 considers the same problem - the problem of the reality of memories,

which do not have the immediacy of "the things themselves" - in a somewhat different context. Augustine asks, does the image that is recalled by the name 'pain' have any reality? His answer is that it is the indwelling reality of the image that memory retains that makes it possible to speak about pain: "if its image were not present in my memory, I would not know what word to use, nor could I distinguish it from pleasure when discussing it" (10,15,23, p. 244).

The next chapter introduces the problem of forgetting, raised by the previous chapter. If the word 'pain' can be used because of the actual presence of the idea of pain in the memory, surely this position is overturned by the case of the forgetfulness, for the idea of forgetfulness involves the very absence of the original. Isn't forgetfulness, then, a condition of memory involving pure absence? Augustine notes that in some way forgetfulness too is present through its image, just like every other concept: "Yet in some manner ... if forgetfulness is retained in memory not through itself but through its image, surely it was itself once present so that its image might be acquired" (10,16,25, p. 246). Though the presence of forgetfulness is not totally clear to Augustine, even this problematic case does not demonstrate that memory involves absence.

By chapter 17 Augustine's path to self knowledge and the search for the 'knowledge which beatifies' has led through sensible memory to intelligible memory and the development of memory from merely a memory of the past to 'the already-there' of intellectual ideas. The soul's journey to knowledge is far from over and the profoundest truth lies ahead.

What then shall I do O you who are my true life, my God? I will pass beyond even this power of mind which is called memory, desiring to reach you, where you may be reached and to cling to you where you may be clung to. (10,17,26, p. 246)

But Augustine does not move beyond memory, but to a higher level of memory.

Even beyond memory will I pass, so that I may find you - where? O truly good and certain delight, so that I may find you where? If I find you apart from memory, I am unmindful of you. How then shall I find you if I do not remember you? (10.17.26, p. 247)

With these questions Augustine has prepared the reader to understand the profoundest level of memory, and he continues this through an analysis of the phenomena of losing and finding things and forgetting and recollecting a name.

In chapter 18, alluding to the Biblical parable of the woman who had lost the drachma, Augustine compares forgetfulness and remembering to losing and finding a lost article. He notes that when he searches for something the image of that which he has lost is retained in his memory, since if it were not he would neither be aware that he had lost something (and not search for it) nor recognize the item as the one sought for when it is found.⁶⁸

In chapter 19 Augustine discusses the example of a forgotten name. One searches one's memory in order to remember the name and as names come before the mind all those not associated with the person in question are rejected until the name that we recognize as familiar to it is found. Thus Augustine concludes:

If it had been wiped out of the mind, we would not remember it even when reminded of it. For we have not as yet completely forgotten what we still remember to have forgotten. Therefore, what we have completely forgotten we cannot even look for if it is lost. (10.19.28, p. 248)

There would be no search if the soul were completely ignorant of or had totally forgotten

⁶⁸ As various objects are presented to him as candidates for the lost thing, a person is able to identify whether or not it is what he is seeking. "Unless I remembered it," he writes, "whatever it was, even if it were brought to me, I would not have found it because I could not identify it" (10.18.27, p. 247). The memory of the thing is the basis for the initiation of the search and for its recognition once found.

that which has been lost or momentarily forgotten.

The paradigm Augustine has exposed in the phenomenon of forgetting and remembering is operative at a larger level of human life, discussed in chapter 20. Augustine notes that when he seeks God he is seeking "the happy life." Indeed, this is what all men will to have. The question is how it is that they seek it. He knows that he does not possess it until he can say "Enough! It is there." Does he seek this life as one who seeks to learn something unknown, that is, that he never knew or that he has forgotten so completely that he doesn't even remember that he has forgotten it? All men desire happiness because it must be the case that they possess it in some manner. Augustine is perplexed as to what this manner might be:

Concerning this knowledge I am perplexed as to whether it is in memory, for if it is there, then all of us have already been happy at some period, either each of us individually, or all of us together in that man who first sinned, in whom we all died and from whom we are all born in misery. Of this last I do not inquire, but I inquire whether the happy life is in the memory. (10,20,29, p. 249)

Augustine here confronts the problem of whether the soul has retained a memory of some forgotten period in which it was happy. Having raised the question, he points in the direction that his own understanding would lead if he were to inquire. Rather than the recollection of an individual happiness each of us has experienced in the past, by virtue of our inherited fallen nature we experience the loss of the happiness that we now long for. Yet unless we knew happiness we would neither love it nor seek it, and this would not be the case if it were totally unknown: "unless we knew it, we would not love it" (10,20,29, p. 249). Men would not long for happiness, writes Augustine, "unless the very thing for which this is the name were retained in their memory" (10,20,29, p. 249).

Chapter 21 asks about the nature of this memory of happiness, considering in turn whether it is a sense memory, an intellectual memory, a memory of practical knowledge, or a memory like the memory of particular joys. It is unlike all these things in its universal and unchanging presence in the soul. Although there is an analogy between the remembrance of joy and the remembrance of the happy life, they are distinct in that the former is variable and connected to any number of life experiences while the latter remains constant and is therefore connected to something other than this, and so is a memory of something deeper.

Chapter 22 underlines the distinction just suggested between two types of joy. It is the distinction, Augustine stresses, between genuine and false happiness: "This is the happy life, to rejoice over you, to you, and because of you: this it is, and there is no other" (10,22,32, p. 251). But having defined happiness he notes that all men obviously do not rejoice over God, can we still say that all men seek the happy life, which is to rejoice in God? This Augustine addresses in chapter 23. Doesn't the fact that men take their joy in lesser things show, in effect, that they have no memory of this true happiness? Or is this fact to be explained otherwise, by man's fallen nature, by the Pauline anthropology that Augustine cites: that "the flesh lusts against the spirit, the spirit against the flesh" (10,23,33, p. 251). Yet every man can agree that they would prefer joy in truth to joy in falsity. "In fact," Augustine writes, "joy in truth is the happy life" (10,23,33, p. 252). Even men who deceive others do not want to be deceived themselves; thus they too love truth. They would not love this happy life of joy in truth unless "there was some knowledge of it in their memory" (10,23,33, p. 252).

When we ask why are men unhappy we are asking why do they not rejoice in truth?

"It is because they are more strongly taken up with other things, which have more power to make them wretched, than has that which they remember so faintly to make them happy" (10,23,33, p. 252). This indeed was Augustine's own situation during his period of disorientation. He asks the further question why men seem to hate both the truth and those who preach it. They misguidedly hate the truth for the love of the object of their misguided desire, which they desperately want to be the truth. While they hate the fact that the truth reveals to themselves the falsity of their choices, they obscurely love the truth, because while they are turned away from the truth, the soul is never hidden from it, for truth is everpresent in all the soul's judgements and all that it knows. No matter how wretched man's soul it still prefers joy in truth rather than falsity and thus happy will it be "when no obstacle stands between and it shall find joy in that sole truth by which all things are true" (10,23,34, p. 253).

In chapter 24 Augustine looks back on the progress he has made in his interior journey: "Behold how far within my memory have I travelled in search of you, Lord, and beyond it I have not found you. Nor have I found anything concerning you except what I have kept in memory since I first learned of you" (10,24,35, p. 253). What has always been in Augustine's memory is the everpresent God as truth. The truth through which all other truths come to be and upon which all else is contingent is God Himself. Augustine writes,

Wheresoever I found truth, there I found my God, truth itself, and since I first learned about you, you abide in my memory, and I find you there when I recall you to mind and take delight in you. (10,24,35 p. 253)

Here Augustine alludes to his theory of the Inner Master. It was the Inner Master, the presence of God himself, who makes truth knowable to the soul, a presence whether recognized or not.

That God dwells within man's memory as an everpresent presence has been recognized. In chapter 24 Augustine raises the question as to where within memory God abides. In answer Augustine recounts his long journey from the outer to the inner and from the inferior to the superior, finally to arrive at the Highest. Having moved beyond sense memory, affect memory, the memory or recognition of the mind, for God is not found in images of reality or affections of a living thing, nor is God the mind itself, for God is the lord of the mind. God is eternal and immutable and above all things, but God has chosen to dwell in memory and it is from memory that the soul has learned of God. This learning of God is the highest level of learning as recollection or recognition, for the soul recognizes the 'already there' of the everpresent God. God has always been present to the soul, but the soul has ignored this presence choosing to preoccupy itself with the ill-fated project of seeking happiness in the world of things where it cannot be found. It is through the faculty of memory that the soul has re-recognized the presence of God, which is learning at its highest level, and it is in memory that God can be recalled to mind.

Truly you dwell in my memory, since I have remembered you from the time I learned of you and I find you there when I call you to mind. (10.25.36, p. 254)

In chapter 26 Augustine ponders where he might find God that he might learn to know him. "You were not in my memory before I learned to know you." The presence of God is within man but neither the soul of man nor the faculty of memory contain God. It is through the memory of God that God is in memory; God does not dwell in memory as

though he were in a place."⁶⁹ Augustine writes, "Where then have I found you, if not in yourself and above me?" (10,26,37, p. 254). God is to be found in Himself, discovered by passing through what is most profound in man. When it is said that God dwells within the memory of man, it is the memory of the present which brings recognition of this presence - the transcendent presence, light of the soul, truth of all truths, source of all created things. When the soul has made the journey through memory, having conquered its alienation and returned to its interiority, there it recovers consciousness of the Presence of God, a Presence never truly absent, but forgotten by the soul in its distracted, rebellious consciousness.

God is omnipresent to all things, but man, the thinking creature, must turn from himself to God so as to be with He who is present to all. Man is the creature whose desire will not let him rest until he recognizes the presence which calls his wayward soul to God, to become conscious of His Presence. In remembering God, as Augustine will say elsewhere, the soul is "reminded that it should turn to the Lord as to that light by which it was touched in some way, even when it was turned away from him."⁷⁰ So too the soul recognizes the source of its own life, for "as the life of the body is the soul" so the "blessed life of a man is God."⁷¹ Yet it is only by making the journey within and then beyond his deepest part that man will recognize His presence, for the almighty God is more inward than his inmost self, and superior to his highest being. God is discovered as the very life of the

⁶⁹ There is no place, both backward do we go and forward, and there is no place. Everywhere, O Truth, you give hearing to all who consult you, and at one and the same time you make answer to them all, even as they ask about varied things. You answer clearly, but all men do not hear you clearly. All men ask counsel about what they wish. Your best servant is he who looks not so much to hear from you what he wants to hear, but rather to want what he hears from you. (10,26,37, p. 254)

⁷⁰ *Trinity*, 14,15, p. 440.

⁷¹ *City of God*, Trans. Gerald G. Walsh, S.J., and Daniel J. Honan, in *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1954), 19,26, p. 245.

soul, the nourishment of the inner man, the Truth of all truths, whose hidden presence called the soul out of its ignorance and slavery to the discovery of that for which the soul longs: the happiness of joy and rest in Wisdom.

The splendor of the truth is everywhere present and it is the grace of memory, a metaphysical and trans-psychological memory, a memory verified by God, which calls the soul to reach out for Him. It was forgetfulness of God which initiated the soul's inattention and misplaced, unfulfilling love of sensible things, and it is the memory of God which is its salvation and happiness. When the soul finds God in what can only be understood as a 'memory of the present' it has returned to the One who never abandoned it and who was always present, beckoning and waiting. The soul is always lamentably late in its return from misplacing its love in that which was below it.

One of the most famous passages of the *Confessions* sums up this theme of the presence of God within the forgetful soul. In fact, it climaxes the entire work, which is revealed as the soul's journey of faith and understanding, a journey culminated in the experience of Wisdom and Truth as the soul arrives at its source and ultimate end:

Too late have I loved you, O Beauty so ancient and so new, too late have I loved you. Behold, you were within me, while I was outside: it was there that I sought you, and, a deformed creature, rushed headlong upon these things of beauty which you have made. You were with me, but I was not with you. They kept me far from you, those fair things which, if they were not in you, would not exist at all. You have called to me, and have cried out, and have shattered my deafness. You have blazed forth with light, and have shone upon me, and you have put my blindness to flight. You have sent forth fragrance, and I have drawn in my breath, and I pant after you. I have tasted you, and I hunger and thirst after you. You have touched me, and I have burned for your peace. (10,27,38, p. 254)

With this great recognition of the Eternal, the soul's odyssey through memory arrives at its culmination point: but as understanding, the attainment of the knowledge which confers happiness, is momentarily achieved, Augustine's autobiographical narrative begun

in Book 1 also arrives at its fitting climax. For it is no coincidence that this famous address to God recapitulates the narrative paradigms of Augustine's journey to faith and his soul's journey to wisdom through memory. Augustine searched outside of himself among the many truths hawked in the marketplace of man. He, and within him his soul, sought and clung to the many pleasures, slipping into less and less until materialism was his second nature. Cleaving to creation, Augustine was slow in looking to the source of all truth, thinking himself to be a material thing. Neo-Platonic inspiration helped to awaken him from his unhappy delirium of ardent materialism and the Scriptures led him to belief in the God who lovingly guides the pilgrim soul to Himself. The journey to God is a journey of the soul coming to understanding by experiencing the presence of He in whom one has faith, Who was always present, calling and waiting for the soul's recollecting and turning to Him. Thus the story of Augustine's life must be the story of Augustine's soul as well.

7. TRANSITION: Dénouement of the Journey through Memory and Transition to the Life of Wisdom

(Book 10 [28-43])

The remainder of Book 10 functions as the necessary dénouement to the autobiographical journey that has led Augustine first to faith in Christ and then to the wisdom that is the indwelling presence of God. Once Augustine's soul has attained to this final phase Augustine's narration of the twofold pilgrimage ends; the soul gives itself to God, recognizing that the complete union of beatitude cannot be had this side of the grave. The soul's experience of God in rising to the Eternal and transcending itself has been momentary; there

is an inevitable falling back into the struggle of life, the daily warfare of 'flesh against the spirit' that the Christian spiritual life entails. Thus in the aftermath of the great event of having had an experience of the God so ardently sought, Augustine concludes Book 10 with a reflection of his own ongoing struggle against sin, which is a matter of maintaining a right orientation in relationship to created things and the God who created them.

It is this section that most commentators have latched onto as the *raison d'être* for Book 10's inclusion in the *Confessions*, arguing that the Book is characterized as Augustine's bringing the reader up to date as to his current situation. But in reality it is now clear that this part of Book 10 describes the aftermath of Augustine's journey, the ongoing struggle of every Christian to live in right orientation with God and created things; that is to say not to succumb to the disorientation that is the result of turning away from God and rebelliously loving created things as a good in themselves. This misplaced love is 'sin-orientation', which is the disorientation that man's fallen nature is prone to and the disorientation that Augustine suffered and described in such vivid detail in the first nine Books of his autobiography.

Everyone who like Augustine has converted to the faith and made the interior journey to understanding must now struggle to keep his orientation in life and continue to deepen his knowledge of the truth of his path. The possibility is always present as a form of temptation that one could turn away from God and use his powers of soul for his own satisfaction: conversion and understanding, Augustine reminds us, is an ongoing process. Augustine presents his temptations in a hierarchy which begins with sins of the senses, ascends to sins of the mind, and ends with pride, that sin which is the secret source of all

the other sins. Pride blocks the path to faith and understanding, the path shown by the Christ of Christian faith who did not cling to his divinity but was born poor and humble, showing man the way.

8. LIFE IN THE SERVICE OF WISDOM: Augustine's Interpretation of the Book of Genesis

(Books 11-13)

When the *Confessions* is read as Augustine's life story recounted as a journey to Wisdom through faith and understanding, the last three Books unfold as a dénouement in the form of an extended meditation on the creation of the universe. Why should Augustine choose to conclude his life story with a reflection on the meaning of the opening verses of Genesis? A number of reasons are apparent.

Firstly, from a strictly narrative perspective, in these last books Augustine is situating his own life story in the universal context of the creation of the universe. In the Judeo-Christian tradition everyman's story takes place within the larger framework of the beginning and end of all things, narratively speaking between the books of Genesis and Revelation. Secondly, in light of his historical affiliation and then repudiation of the Manichean heresy, Augustine desires to demonstrate the unjustifiableness of Manichean attacks on Judeo-Christian Scriptures, particularly those focusing on the first verses of Genesis. In doing this Augustine gives a profound demonstration that his own hermeneutical difficulties have been overcome and he points the way to the proper interpretation of Scripture. Further, having been influenced by the philosophy of the Platonists, Augustine is directing a message both

to his Catholic readership and to potential Platonist thinkers. To the former Augustine is showing the usefulness of the Greek philosophy, when critically appropriated, for understanding the Catholic faith. To the latter he is pointing out that the Catholic faith is the sure path to Wisdom they seek, and that this Wisdom is the Christ of Christian revelation, the Divine Word through which all things have been created. In this regard Augustine, it must be said, saw the proper understanding of creation as a real challenge to himself.⁷² The understanding of creation brings him the opportunity to understand further the creative Word, the wisdom he experienced in Book 10, as well as the nature of the created world of which he is a part. The challenge he was faced with was the impossible task of doing justice to the Judeo-Christian Biblical doctrine of creation, grounded in an existential ontology, through his Neo-Platonist reasoning tools, grounded in its essentialist ontology. Augustine, at least unconsciously, recognized the difficulty, returning to his task of understanding again and again seeking to satisfy the demands of his task. Finally, it can be said that the meditation on Scripture is an activity appropriate to the life of wisdom, that is, a life of right orientation lived in the aftermath of the experience of wisdom Augustine had attained in Book 10.⁷³

Time and Eternity: The Interpretation of "In the Beginning" (Book 11)

The opening of Book 11 finds Augustine once again reflecting on the meaning of 'confession'

⁷² He approached this task of understanding the opening verses of Genesis in five of his works, which span the breadth of his life. *On Genesis Against the Manicheans*; *The Literal Interpretation of Genesis (Incomplete)*; the *Confessions*; *The Literal Interpretation of Genesis*; and *City of God*.

⁷³ For a discussion on the organization of a life of wisdom, as a life devoted to 'seeing God more clearly' after having attained an awareness of God's inner presence, cf. Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, pp. 115-26.

and thereby situates these last three Books within the theme and genre of the whole work.⁷⁴ First and foremost it is God's will that Augustine confesses, not so that He may learn something, for just as He knows man's needs before they are expressed He also knows man's sins before they are confessed. Thus Augustine informs his readers that having "recounted many things" before God he does not intend to recall the remaining post-conversion events of his worldly life. He states that time is too precious to him to declare all of God's graces in his life, especially those which guided him to the priestly and episcopal ministry. Having recounted his journey to Wisdom it is more proper for him to be guided by his ardent desire to meditate on Sacred Scripture.⁷⁵ That part of Scripture most fitting is that which would situate Augustine's life story within the narrative framework of the beginning and the end of all creation. "Let me confess to you whatsoever I shall find in your books [...] from that beginning, wherein you made heaven and earth, even to an everlasting kingdom together with you in your holy city" (11,2,3, p. 279).

The Manicheans' questions resurface in the *Confessions*, but here they are the occasion for a deeper exploration of the issues beneath the anthropomorphic projections of the heretics. The focus of his inquiry is still the Biblical text itself - "Let me hear and understand how in the beginning you 'made the heavens and the earth'" (11, 3, 5, p. 279) - but here Augustine provides an introduction to the Manichean questions, indicating that

⁷⁴ "Why then do I set out in order before you this account of so many deeds? In truth, it is that you may learn to know these matters from me, but that I may rouse up towards you my affections, and those of other men who read this, so that all may say: 'The Lord is great, and exceedingly to be praised' (11,1,1, p. 277).

⁷⁵ "For a long time I have burned to meditate upon your law, and therein to confess to you both my knowledge and my lack of wisdom, the first beginnings of your enlightenment and the last remains of my darkness [...] On nothing else would I want these hours to flow away which I find free from need of replenishing my body and my mental powers and the demands of such service as we owe to other men, and such as we do not owe but yet render." (11,2,2, p. 278) This desire is exactly what we might expect Augustine to have in light of his writings on the proper moral order of life.

because 'the heavens and the earth' are subject to change and variation they "cry out that they have been created" and that before this they "did not exist in such a way as to be able to make" themselves (11,4,6, p. 280). Mutability is that characteristic which separates Him who is divine, eternal, and uncreated from that which is created. "Whatever has not been made, and yet exists, has nothing in it which was not previously there, whereas to have what once was not is to change and vary." (11,4,6, p. 280.) They exist simply and profoundly because God has willed that they exist, and they exist that they might rejoice in God's glory and live the life of beatitude. God made them good and beautiful but compared to Him, "they are neither good, nor beautiful, nor real." (11,4,6, p. 280.)

According to Augustine reason and Revelation are in agreement on these points. However, one could ask Augustine why there is a need for revelation when "self evidence is the voice" with which nature speaks. Augustine might respond that while it can be deduced from nature that 'the heavens and the earth' have been made by God, Scripture indicates further how things have been created ex nihilo: not as an artist who "creates" by "transforming a body into another," for all the materials of the artist have been created by God. No thing is co-eternal with God and nothing exists that was not made by him. Moreover, everything exists for no other reason except that God exists and willed it thus. "You spoke, therefore, these things were made, and in your word, you made them." (11,5,7, p. 281)

This Word is unlike the human word whose syllables sound and pass one after the other in temporal succession for this would imply that "there was already some corporeal creature by means of whose temporal movement that voice would run in time" and "there

would already be time and change, and neither true eternity, nor true immortality" (11,6,8, p. 282). The Word of God is that "which is spoken eternally and in which all things are spoken eternally" once and forever. (11,7,9, p. 283) This is 'the Principle', 'the Beginning' in and through which all things were made. He who asks 'What was God doing before He made heaven and earth?' and 'why did he suddenly decide to create' does not grasp the difference between the eternity and immutability of God and the temporality and mutability of man and must "awake and realize that he wonders at falsities." (11,10,12, p. 285) In the *Confessions* Augustine succinctly reiterates what he has argued in his earlier works on Genesis: the point is that there was no 'time' when God did not create and then did create heaven and earth, for time is a creature and not coeternal with God. Nor was there a change in God's will, for His will belongs to His substance; there can be no change in it, for if anything appeared in God's substance that was not previously there it could not truly be called eternal. (11,10,12, p. 285; 11,13,15, p. 286)

"In the beginning" must be understood, as much as possible, in the context of God's eternity, so as to avoid the anthropomorphic confusions of the Manicheans. "They attempt to grasp eternal things, but their heart flutters among the changing things of past and future." (11,11,13, p. 285) The interpretation of the opening phrase of the Bible is the problem of man, the time-bound creature, trying to understand God's eternity.⁷⁶ It is just this difficulty that leads Augustine into his famous reflections on time.

"If no one asks me," Augustine writes, "I know; if I want to explain it to someone who does ask me I do not know." (11,14,17, p. 287) One time is compared to another and

⁷⁶ Augustine's expresses the difficult task that confronts man with great eloquence. (cf. 11,11,13, p. 285.)

measured, in a manner that it can be said that one time is this long and another time shorter or longer. But when one turns to examine time itself, its nature is strange indeed. As long as time is passing, it seems it can be perceived and measured, but when one thinks of the past, present, and future, time seems to have no existence, as no time is ever "wholly present." The past and the future are not present to us as the past has already been and the future has yet to be. The present is always being filled by the future and it is instantaneously emptying into the past. The present can always be subdivided into past and future, and both of these seem to have no existence. Where then does time exist?

Augustine's solution to the problem is to conclude that time is a matter of the soul's activity, not something outside of it that can be examined. The past, present, and future are non-existent when they are spoken about in a naive way. It can be said that there are three times, the present of things past, the present of things present, and the present of things future. "These three are in the soul, but elsewhere I do not see them: the present of things past is in memory; the present of things present is in intuition; and the present of things future is in expectation." (11,20,26, p. 293) Time is nothing more than a distension of the soul. When reciting a psalm, the mind extends over its entirety with expectation. Once begun, attention is actually present as memory lengthens and expectation shortens throughout the process until expectation is exhausted. (11,28,37, p. 301) In a similar manner, Augustine sees man's whole life as a kind of distension or distraction. Distended in time and distracted by material things, man lives a life "dissipated in many ways upon the many things." (11,29,39, p. 302) Augustine's hope is in Christ, who in his divine and human nature is the mediator between the One and the many. He looks forward to his salvation beyond

all time and change, when he will be no longer distended over things which pass away, nor "torn asunder by tumult and change" but at peace contemplating that which neither comes nor goes.

Thus in contrast to his own circumstance, Augustine marvels at the thought of a mind who could know all past, present and future times in that he knew a familiar psalm. However, where God's knowledge is concerned this analogy breaks down, as His knowledge has nothing to do with expectation of words to come and memory of those past. God is truly eternal: "Just as in the beginning you have known heaven and earth without change in your knowledge, so too 'in the beginning you made heaven and earth' without any difference in your activity." (11,31,41, p. 303). In trying to fathom God's eternity, Augustine's analysis comes up against the limitations inherent when a radically contingent, mutable, and temporally bound creature tries to understand the mode of duration of the Creator, who is Being, eternal and immutable. Yet, while an understanding of eternity almost escapes us entirely, Augustine's analysis reveals the ontological chasm which exists between creature and creator. Thus when time and eternity are being compared it must be grasped that the comparison is between "two heterogeneous modes of duration founded upon two modes of heterogeneous being".⁷⁷

Matter and Form: The Interpretation of "Heaven and Earth" (Book 12)

With Book 12 Augustine turns to discuss what it was that was created: 'heaven and earth', and in doing so comes to an understanding of the nature of created things in terms of form

⁷⁷ Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine*, trans. L.E.M. Lynch, (New York: Octagon Books, 1983) p. 191.

and matter. He begins by exploring a suggestion made in an earlier work⁷⁸ that a distinction be made between two heavens: 'the heaven of heavens', refers to the spiritual realm or spiritual creatures, and 'the heavens' refers to the material sky. Augustine interprets the 'heaven' of verse 1 as the 'heaven of heaven', a fully formed spiritual matter, and 'the earth' as an absolutely formless matter which will become corporeal creation. Augustine thinks that earth's formless condition is conveyed through the images in verse 2. "Assuredly, this earth was invisible and without order, and there was I know not what profound abyss, upon which there was no light, because there was no form in it." (12,3,3, p. 306). The Scripture, Wisdom 11:18, is appealed to as affirmation of his interpretation that before God formed this unformed matter "there was no separate being, no colour, no shape, no body, no spirit."⁷⁹

Here Augustine is concerned that the nature of formless matter be understood. Unlike darkness, which is merely the absence of light, formless matter is not the absence of form, which means nothing, for it is not absolutely nothing. (12,3,3, p. 306). "There was not absolutely nothing; there was a certain formlessness devoid of any specific character." In trying to grasp the nature of formless matter Augustine realizes he is attempting to know it by what it is not. It is not the matter of bodies, nor a sensible thing, for what is invisible and unordered cannot be seen. Augustine tries to conceive of the formless by divesting the corporeal world around him of every remnant of form, but it is easier "to conclude that it lacked all form than to conceive of something between form and nothing, neither formed

⁷⁸ Cf. *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis* (incomplete).

⁷⁹ "For your almighty hand which made the world of matter without form." *Wisdom*, 11:18.

nor nothing, an unformed 'near-nothing'" (12,6,6, p. 307). Examining the mutable world around him Augustine is convinced that the transition of bodies from form to form is "through something formless and not by means of absolute nothing" (12,6,6, p. 308). Formless matter is thus viewed as the very basis of the mutableness of all things; it is mutability itself. "The mutability of mutable things is itself a capacity for all the forms into which mutable things are changed. What is this? Is it mind? Is it body? Or is it a variety of mind or body? If it could be said 'a nothing-something', 'an is-is-not', I would say that it is such. Yet it already somehow existed, so that it might receive these visible and ordered forms." (12,6,6, p. 308) As a 'near-nothing', 'an is-is-not', 'a something-nothing', and the basis of change, this matter must be seen as having a wretched existence, as it is farthest away from the eternal and immutable God, who is Being. "So much more distant is anything from you, insofar as it is more unlike you, and this distance is not of place." (12,7,7, p. 308).

Since everything that God has made is good, Augustine must affirm that formless matter is good. This is difficult when Augustine can grant it only a quasi-existence. It is far easier to see that 'heaven' (as the 'heaven of heaven') is good than to see how the 'earth' (as formless matter) can be good. These two things are quite distinct in his mind, and he cannot conceal his view that matter is a wretched and inferior thing which, while not nothing, is far from the goodness of God and close to nothing "...two beings, one near you, the other near to nothingness, one to which you alone would be superior, the other to which nothing would be inferior." (12,7,7, p. 308-9) Yet, formless matter is something in that it can be given form, and it is in this capacity alone that it both exists and is good. (Interpreting the image of 'darkness upon the deep' he writes: "that entire abyss was close to non-being, since

it was still altogether devoid of form. Still it was already something that could be given form." (12,8,8, p. 309) Augustine has fallen into a real problem at this point in his analyses. He holds that everything that is, is good in so far as it is. However his reasoning leads him to the position that a being is good and exists only through its reception of form. Matter differs from nothingness only by virtue of the form it receives but having received form it is no longer matter but formed creation. This is indeed an impoverished conception of matter. St. Thomas will say that God does not create matter and form but 'substances'.

The ghost of this 'near-nothing' haunts the corporeal world. By virtue of its being formed this mutable world stands firm, but being based upon this 'near-nothing' it is not firm.⁸⁰ While formless matter is the very mutability of the visible world, the creation of formless matter out of nothing did not occur within time, for "where there is no form, no order, nothing comes or passes away" and "where this does not take place [...] there are no days and no change of time." (12,9,9, p. 310)

In contrast to the 'earth' which is first formless matter and then formed into the visible world, the 'heaven of heavens' refers to a spiritual matter which is fully formed from the moment of its creation. This spiritual creature is mutable by its nature, as it is not co-eternal with God, but it is immutable in that upon its creation it did not fall, or turn away from God but clung to Him in eternal contemplation, avoiding the consequences of its mutability. Augustine writes: "it is yet a partaker of your eternity, and because of its most sweet and happy contemplation of you, it firmly checks its own mutability [...] without any

⁸⁰ "Out of this unordered and invisible earth, out of this formlessness, out of this almost-nothing, you made all things, of which this mutable world stands firm, and yet does not stand firm, in which mutability itself is apparent, in which tracts of time can be perceived and numbered off. For tracts of time result from the changes of things, according as the forms, for which the aforesaid invisible earth is the matter, are varied and turned about." (12,8,8, p. 309-10)

lapse from its first creation, it has clung fast to you and is thus set beyond all the turns and changes of time." (12,9,9, p. 310. While not eternal itself, it does not fall into the order of time.

The image of 'turning away' introduces a moral dimension into Augustine's discussion as actual mutability becomes a matter of a creature's wilful rebellious self-assertion and lack of chaste fidelity to the Creator. Augustine makes this clear when he contrasts the happy life of the faithful heavenly creature⁸¹ with his own life which, as a result of a rebellious free will, turned away from contemplating God and is living the full consequences of mutability, distracted, dissipated, and distended in the order of time.⁸² The result is that the soul is on pilgrimage and must return and cling to God in contemplation, but 'heaven' is not on pilgrimage because it never turned away from God, but has unceasingly clung to Him.

Augustine's analysis has led him to conclude that there are two very different creatures who, for different reasons, are immune to time; the 'heaven of heavens' and formless matter. One has been so formed that, without any interruption of its contemplation, without any interval of change, subject to change yet never changed, it enjoys eternity and immutability. The other was so formless that it could not be changed from one

⁸¹ The heavenly creature, "delights in God alone, and who with most persevering chastity, drawing its nourishment from you, has nowhere and never asserted its own mutability and with you yourself everpresent with it, to whom it clings with all its powers, having neither future to look forward to nor transferring to the past what it remembers, is neither altered by any change nor distended in any times. (12,11,11, p. 311)

⁸² "I fell away to those material things, and I became darkened over, but from there, even from there, I loved you. I went astray, but I did not forget you [...] let me not be my own life: badly have I lived from myself: I was death to myself: in you I live again." (12,10,10, p. 310) It is clear that this passage recapitulates the dynamic of the plot of the *Confessions*: Augustine's sinful orientation, based on a fallen nature, has him living the unhappy life of disorientation. He turns away from God in a bid for autonomy and tries to replace his longing to know and love God with the misplaced love of material things. In this going astray Augustine did not forget God, who is everpresent to the soul and calls each prodigal son to the recognition of His presence within man and the true happiness of the life of the ongoing contemplative recollection of the presence of God; the true happy life of man.

form to another. But you did not abandon this second being to remain formless. (12,15,16, p. 313)

Thus far the impression may have been given that creation involves a temporal sequence whereby the creation of formless matter takes place prior to the formation of matter. This however is to reintroduce the inappropriate notion of time. Where formless matter is concerned there is no time, for there are no changing forms, so it is not in time that formless matter precedes the formation of matter. If 'in the beginning' is to be interpreted as meaning 'at first' there can still be no sequence; 'at first' God made the entire universe, matter and form. The making of formless matter is logically rather than temporally prior to the making of formed creation; it is prior to it in the order of causality. Creation is simultaneous, but because two different things can not be spoken of at the same time the Scriptures necessarily speak as though there were a lapse of time; this, however, is 'narrative time', not actual time. Augustine has recourse to an analogy to aid in understanding this point. The relationship between matter and form is similar to that between sound and melody: formless sound is not prior in time to a melody but both are uttered simultaneously; rather, sound is prior in origin because sound is made so that there may be melody rather than vice versa (12,29,40, p. 331).⁸³

Augustine believes that correct reasoning has led him to a number of truths upon which his interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2 is based. 'In the beginning', is best understood as

⁸³ Augustine summarizes his position by means of an analogy: "By this example, let him who can understand how the matter of things was first made and called heaven and earth, because heaven and earth were made out of it, and that it was not first made in time, since the forms of things give rise to times. It was formless, and now, in tracts of time, it is perceived together with them. Yet nothing can be told of that matter, unless it is described as prior in time. It is the lowest thing in value, for things formed are obviously superior to things without form. It is preceded by the eternity of the creator, so that that from which something would be made would itself be made from nothing." (12,29,40, pp. 331-2)

'in the Word and Wisdom of God'; God Created 'heaven' and 'earth', is to say that all natures were made *ex nihilo*, 'heaven' indicating a completely formed spiritual creature and 'earth' a formless corporeal matter from which the visible world would be formed. Every mutable being suggests a formlessness which is capable of receiving form and is the basis of its changeableness. That being which clings to the immutable form, though it is itself mutable, suffers no temporal change. Due to its utter lack of form, the near-nothing formless matter cannot have changes in time. Since of all formed beings, nothing is closer to formless or unformed being than earth and the deep, these images are effective in indicating the concept of formless matter. God made all things, both that which is created and formed and that which is capable of being created and formed, and every being that is formed out of that which is without form is itself first unformed and then formed (11,19,28, p. 320). In Book 12, chapter 28, Augustine repeats in a less tightly rhetorical passage this litany of reasoned truths. Augustine will summarize and recapitulate his basic interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2 throughout the remainder of Book 12. He admits that other interpretations are possible than the one he has proposed, so long as the interpreters are faithful to the text and do not themselves claim to have the only true interpretation, on the basis that it is what the author of the Scriptures had in mind.⁸⁴

Augustine spends much time towards the conclusion of Book 12 laying out a critical approach to interpretation of the Biblical texts.⁸⁵ Augustine's reflection on interpretation, reveals a profound grasp of the hermeneutical situation of an interpreter before the text he

⁸⁴ Cf. 12,18,27; 25,34; pp. 319-327.

⁸⁵ Cf. 12,25,34; 31,42; pp. 325-32.

desires to understand, and rather than revealing a theoretical primitiveness shows him to have critical insight which actually anticipates some aspects of contemporary hermeneutical thought. With contemporary thinkers he would judge as truly naive the standard modern conception of interpretation which understands texts as historically limited creations, and therefore sees any interpretation which is not strictly limited to the intention of the author and the meaning of the text within its own contextualized world-view as illegitimate and unsophisticated.

Well aware that the Scripture's authorship was attributed to Moses, an historical person distant in time and culture from his own era, Augustine argues that the text permits a plurality of meanings that go beyond its historical situation and the intentions of its author.⁸⁶ Anticipating those critics who would say to him that Moses could not have meant what he has understood, Augustine comments that Moses' words are true but they are legitimately interpreted in different ways.

The problem is not just that it is difficult to say confidently what Moses did indeed intend, nor is it that the author's own meaning is of no importance; it is rather that one has no choice but to understand in a way that goes beyond this limited meaning. Augustine believes that God leads people to understandings which are no doubt beyond what the earthly author has understood. Thus he argues against the 'intentional fallacy' which holds

⁸⁶ The content of Augustine's discussion is not dissimilar to the contemporary thought of a hermeneutic thinker like Gadamer. Indeed, his ideas seem to foreshadow contemporary discussions. "Every age has to understand a transmitted text in its own way, for the text is part of the whole of the tradition in which the age takes an objective interest and in which it seeks to understand itself. The real meaning of a text, as it speaks to the interpreter, does not depend on the contingencies of the author and whom he originally wrote for. It certainly is not identical with them, for it is always partly determined also by the historical situation of the interpreter and hence by the totality of the objective course of history [...] Not occasionally only, but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive, but always a productive attitude as well." Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 263-64.

that the meaning of a text is restricted to its author's intention.⁸⁷ Concludes Augustine:

While every man tries to understand in Holy Scripture what the author understood therein, what wrong is there if anyone understand what you, O light of all truthful minds, reveal to him as true, even if the author he reads did not understand this, since he also understood a truth, though not this truth? (12,18,27, p. 320)

The source of all truth is Christ, the Interior Master, who illuminates the mind and leads interpreters to a plurality of true meanings according to their life context, their own world-view, however simple or sophisticated.

Thus, for Augustine, the Christian needs not only to be acutely sensitive to the sense of the Scriptural text and the meanings which may have been intended by its writer, the Christian must be critically aware of the knowledge of the reason and science of his own world. Scripture will not conflict with reason and science, and indeed the interpreter must bring his reasoning to the task of understanding Scripture. Moreover Christians ought to know what reason and science have shown to be true for when they make nonsensical claims about the world and defend them by appeals to Scripture, this only weakens the credibility of the writers of the Scriptures, who are then thought to be unlearned by some. Augustine believes profoundly that there is a compatibility between revelation and the philosophy that the 'light of the mind' reveals to be true. Reason can be a tool for understanding the full depth of revealed truth. Where there is no conflict between the truth of revelation and the truth of reason, one must bring the best reasoning tools and full knowledge to the task at hand. One must bring one's own world-view to bear in interpretation. Having critically grounded his interpretation of the Scriptures against those who might say that Moses could

⁸⁷ Augustine writes: "...anything which you yourself by those words were about to reveal to later readers, even though he through whom they were spoken perhaps had in thought but a single meaning among the many that were true [...] Whether you uncover the same meaning to us as to the servant of yours, or some other meaning on the occasion of those words, you will still nourish us and error will not delude us." (12,20,43, p. 333)

not have had his views on form and matter in mind when he wrote the text, Augustine moves on to consider the third verse of Genesis: "And God said, 'Let there be light.'"

The Informing of Matter: The Interpretation of "Let There Be Light" (Book 13 [1-6])

Augustine's extensive discussion of matter and form sets the stage for his discussion of the second logical moment of creation, the informing of matter. In Book 13 of the *Confessions* Augustine gives his first indication of how matter is formed and what the relationship is between the first and second logical phases of creation. First Augustine affirms the concept of creation of the world out of nothing by the free loving will of a Creator-God, rejecting the idea that the world is an emanation of the divine substance and thus in some way equal to it by virtue of its origin. (13,2,2, p. 336) "Your creation subsists out of the fullness of your goodness, to the end that a good that would profit you nothing, and that was not of your substance and thus equal to you, would nevertheless not be non-existent, since it could be made by you." While rejecting emanation here, Augustine's conceptual depiction of the creation and formation of matter has some of the imagestic elements of the Plotinian paradigm of emanation. The creation of formless matter, both spiritual and corporeal natures, is depicted as an outward movement of formless dispersion, "a running off", a movement away from God "into unlikeness" while the formation of matter is depicted as a returning to, or a conversion back to God as a result of being called by His eternal, efficacious Word.

What claim on you had heaven and earth, which you made in the beginning? And those spiritual and corporeal creatures which you made in your Wisdom, that on it might depend even things inchoate and formless, each in its own genus, whether spiritual or corporeal, running off into moderation and unlikeness, far distant from you -the formless spiritual being, more excellent than if a formed body, the formless corporeal being more excellent than if

there were nothing whatsoever - and if formless things might thus depend upon your Word, let them tell me what claim they had on you unless they were recalled by the same Word, to your unity and given form and, from you, the one and supreme good, would all be very good (13,2,2, p. 336).

That which is created in these two movements of creation has no claim on the Creator, for that it exists at all and is formed is purely a matter of the Creator's free will and love; it is not by any virtue of creatures themselves. Formless corporeal matter would not exist at all if it were not created out of nothing and it would remain in its formless near-nothing state if God did not recall it to Himself and 'inform' it. "What claim did corporeal matter have upon you, merely to be invisible and without form, since it would not even be such except that you made it? Hence since it did not exist it would have no claim on you to exist" (13,2,2, p. 336).

Neither does inchoate spiritual creation have any claim on God for it too was created out of nothing and would be left dispersed, and "darksome like the deep" were it not converted by the same Word which brought it into existence. Where spiritual matter is concerned 'conversion' is a matter of enlightenment. Spiritual matter is "enlightened by him and made into light, although not equal to the form equal to you, yet conformed to it". In terms of corporeal matter this conversion or calling back is a calling of matter to conform to the likeness of the eternal ideas within the Word. There is an 'idea', 'form' or 'essence' in the mind of God of all things that have been made and formed. Once it is formed it exists in the world but it is still also an idea in God's mind.

Just as corporeal formless matter exists in some way but cannot then be said to have beauty until it is converted and conformed to the likeness of the divine ideas, formless spiritual matter exists but cannot be said to be wise until it has been enlightened. It is this

enlightenment that is referred to in verse 3 of Genesis: "And God said, 'Let there be light.'" God made spiritual matter and then converted it to be the light that it is, and it owes its existence and its happy life to its conforming to the will of God. To remain happy, abiding in the will of God, it must adhere to Him "lest by aversion from [God] it lose the light gained by conversion, and fall back into a life similar to the darksome deep" becoming darkened and dispersed once more. Augustine emphasizes that creation is not motivated by any need on the part of the Creator. God is goodness in Himself and nothing would be lacking even if these things did not exist or remained without form.⁸⁸

It is clear here that Augustine sees creation as a making and a perfecting of that which was made. While it can be agreed with Augustine that God created freely and in the fullness of His goodness, the question might be raised as to why God needed to perfect what he has made. In Augustine's description of creation thus far it would seem that the first logical moment of creation somehow cannot be called good, and was in need of perfecting. Again, Augustine can affirm matter is good only to the extent that it is capable of receiving form. It is called life in that it has existence but this life is not the same as the life of happiness and beauty which Augustine can affirm to be good. The life of verses 1 and 2 need be "converted to him by whom it was made". For Augustine this is why the Spirit of God was borne over the water so that what has been merely made can become what it is willed to be. All the emphasis regarding creation is placed on the second moment, the informing of matter, not on the first moment, the creation of formless matter ex nihilo out

⁸⁸ "These things you have made, not out of any need, but in the fullness of your goodness, restraining them and converting them to a form, although not as if your joy were to be fulfilled by them. To you who are perfect, their imperfection is displeasing, and therefore they are perfected by you and are now pleasing to you. However, this is not as if you had been imperfect and were made perfect by their perfection" (13.4.5, p. 337).

of nothing. Creation becomes identified with the 'informing of matter'; 'creation out of nothing' is but a prelude to this.

The Necessity of Man's Conversion: The Anticipation of the Eternal Sabbath (Book 13 [7-38])

The image of the movement of matter outward away from God and its conversion back to God in His informing of matter becomes a powerful metaphor by which we understand man's volitional 'turning away' from God, the shadowy existence of man lived in his sinful orientation, the necessity of his conversion to God, and the true life of light and love which awaits man upon his conforming to the will of God for him. "For we also, who are spiritual as to the soul, being turned away from you, our light, were sometimes darkness in this life." (13,2,2, p. 336-7) Man like all creation must be converted for to exist is not to exist happily. It remains for man to be converted to him by whom it was made, and more and more to live by the fountain of life, and in his light to see light, and to be perfected, and enlightened, and made happy.

Augustine's study has revealed in a "dark manner" the Trinitarian God of his faith here in the opening verses of Genesis: the God of his faith is the creator God the Father and the Son is His Word in and through whom all things were made. The Spirit of the Christian faith was believed to be the Spirit who was "borne above the waters." "Behold the Trinity, my God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, Creator of all creation!" (13,5,6, p. 338). Man's sinful orientation is described as the lust which drags man downward to the abyss while the love of God, poured into man's heart through the Spirit provides the counter-

orientation which lifts man up to the life he must lead in order to be happy. Unlike that spiritual creation which clung to God from the outset in love and fidelity, man fell away and in doing so fell away from the rest in the unchangeable Creator to a life of restless indigence: "for our sins were upon us, and we departed from you into the darksome deep, and your good Spirit was born over us to bring us help in due season season - and you justified the ungodly." (13,34,49, p. 368.) The Spirit of God is that Gift of God, and it is in this gift that we rest and have our joy in God. "Our rest is our peace" (13,9,10, p. 341). For man, "peace is in a good will," and this is the key to understanding man's restlessness and lack of peace, for man's will has been in rebellion against God and thus ironically against man's own rest and peace. Augustine employs the metaphor of a weight to explain man's situation. According the physics of the ancient world (Aristotelean especially) every body is drawn to a given place according to its weight, and once there it would have come to rest.

My love is my weight! I am borne about by it, wheresoever I am borne. By your gift we are enkindled, and we are borne upwards. We glow with inward fire, and we go on. We ascend steps within the heart, and we sing a gradual psalm. By your fire, by your good fire, we glow with inward fire, and we go on, for we go upwards to 'the peace of Jerusalem', for 'I am gladdened in those who said to me, we will go into the house of the Lord.' There will goodwill find us a place, so that we may desire nothing farther but to abide therein forever.

All along man, victim of his rebellious will, has been working against himself in his desire for his natural place of rest. His misplaced love has been borne of an ill will. Man cannot choose otherwise than to love, thus the moral question is, what is it that man ought to love? To will other than the proper object of love is to suffer the unhappy fate of unfulfilled desire. Since, as Augustine informed his readers in Book 1, chapter 1, "our heart is restless until it rests in you," ill will condemns man to a life of ongoing restlessness.

Like all of creation, recalled to God in conversion from its formless state, man must

be converted so as to live in right orientation to his creator. An object is without rest when it is not in its proper order, but comes to rest when it is set in due order. Man is without rest until proper order is restored in his life, and he wills what ought to be willed and loves what ought to be loved, for in this is his rest and his happiness. All through Augustine's life he was borne by the weight of his love. Marked by original sin, from his earliest years he sought satisfaction, and was encouraged to seek it, in things not worthy of his love. A victim of fallen nature, he worked against his true nature, the life of beatitude which God intended and continues to will for man. In recognizing his goal in life as wisdom, Augustine began a reorientation process in search of that knowledge which would bring him true happiness. In this search, he discovered the necessity that his fallen will be strengthened through divine grace so he might wholly will that which he sought. His conversion to Christ was that event by which he gave himself over to the loving Creator, so that he might become what God intended and proceed on the inward journey through memory to the experience of wisdom. Having achieved that experience, Augustine's journey is culminated in one sense, but has begun in another. The life of wisdom lies before him. His task is to live in fidelity to God in the service of the Wisdom he has experienced, the Wisdom who is the Beginning of all things and is Augustine's end. The wisdom that Augustine so ardently sought and experienced in Book 10 is here clearly identified as Christ the Word of the eternal God, the "Beginning of our Wisdom" (cf. 13,5,6, p. 338). The life of wisdom is a pilgrimage which involves an ongoing ascent, a deepening of understanding of the Wisdom experienced again and again. It is apparent in this ongoing process that the life of Wisdom here on earth does not involve a complete rest, but is subject to the same slippage that temporal beings and

their experience are subject to. The life of wisdom involves the ongoing moral vigilance in order to maintain right orientation, and work of deepening the experience and understanding of Wisdom.

Augustine's final happiness and rest is the beatitude of Eternal Sabbath rest in personal union with the Eternal God, which will occur for the faithful upon the death of this life. Having come to believe in this Triune God through the testimony of the Sacred Scriptures and the witness of this Truth in the transformed lives of the faithful; and having gained an experience of God in his ascent of understanding through memory and thereafter having lived a life of faithful service to God and His Wisdom; and finally having deepened his knowledge of Wisdom and learned much about his God through the study of the Word of the Sacred Scriptures, Augustine's heart, never to be fully happy and at rest in this material, temporal world, looks forward to the final fulfilment of his desire for happiness and rest, when God is known face to face, and not as "through a glass darkly." Then will man's life be like those celestial creatures who never succumbed to prideful rebellion. They do not have to read to know God's Word:

They always behold your face, and, without any syllables of time, they read upon it what your eternal will decrees. They read your will; they choose it; and they love it. They read forever, and what they read never passes away. For by choosing and loving, they read the actual immutability of your counsel. Their book is never closed, nor their scroll folded up, because you yourself are this to them, and you are this for eternity. (13,15,18, p. 346)

Augustine affirms his belief founded on the Scriptures that the seventh day of creation has no end for it is the Sabbath rest of God, and just as God rested upon having fulfilled his works of creation so too will man rest in God "on the sabbath of eternal life" (13,36,51, p. 369).

In the last chapter of the *Confessions* Augustine brings the narrative of his journey

to Wisdom to closure, in a masterful summation of what Augustine has come to understand of the Wisdom he has experienced in this life, which he continues to serve, but to which he looks forward in the ultimate fulfilment of his heart's desire, beyond all time and space in union with the God. Recalling his journey from the exterior to the interior and the inferior to the superior this 'man of judgement' who is also a 'man of wisdom' notes the truths he has discovered: man sees the things that God has made because they exist, but their existence is due only to the fact that they are seen by Him who made them; we see the existent external world outside of ourselves, and within ourselves we judge the goodness of what has been made according to the ever-present Truth which dwells within us; since God is transcendent to all time, there was no time when things were not made and then made nor was there change in God's will in this regard; as a result of the Spirit of God operative in our hearts, bringing us to conversion to the will of God, we are moved to do good when in former times we had forsaken God, and following our own will were moved to do evil; even our good deeds lived in a life of service to Wisdom are not eternal, and the rest we experience in the life of Wisdom on this earth is but a prefiguring of the life promised and hoped for in God, the Eternal Wisdom - therefore after our good works "we hope to find rest in your [God's] great sanctification; God is the Good itself, in need of no good, and is forever at rest for 'your rest is yourself'." (13,38,53,p. 369)

The *Confessions* concludes on the same thematic chord upon which it began, with Augustine contemplating the great mystery of the journey that began with his restless heart searching for that for which it longs: the knowledge of the Eternal God who is man's source

as Creator and his end as his Wisdom - the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.

What man will give it to a man to understand this? What angel will give it to an angel? What angel to man? From you let it be asked. In you let it be sought. At your door let us knock for it. Thus, thus it is received, thus it is found, thus it is opened to us. (13,38,53, p. 370)

Who can bestow upon another the great mystery which began with God's call to man through his ever-present presence within man. Yet He is hidden from man because man has turned away from Him. The very desire to seek God is from God; the very question of man's identity and relationship to God is fuelled by the presence of God to man. Before man asks who he is, the question has already been posed by God in man's very existence. Man's unhappiness, the result of his forgetfulness of God's ever-present presence within himself, fuels the journey to the knowledge of God, which has already been known obliquely, or no search would be begun. Who can search for what is wholly unknown? The question of man, and the question of God implicit in it, has been posed to man by God Himself. Just as man is from God so too is the question - indeed, man's very existence is the question. Thus just as the question is ultimately from God, so the answer must be sought in God. Augustine bids the reader to knock at "the door" that is God for the answer to his life, as he has done, for it is thus that the answer "is received", that the answer to man's life "is found" and "the door is opened" to man. The narrative of the *Confessions* concludes with allusion to the Biblical text Augustine referred to in Book 1, Chapter 1:

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8).

Augustine's life, as his narrative attests, is a lived verification of the promise Christ has made to man. It remains only for his readers to embark, if they have not already done so, upon their own journey to the Wisdom they too long for.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have sought to show the profound unity of the *Confessions*, grounding my reflections in a theory of narrative. Augustine was by no means naive with regard to the potential and power of narrative, his own life having been profoundly affected by the narratives he read and heard. In Augustine's analysis of the act of reciting a Biblical canticle, as Ricoeur points out, "The entire province of narrative is laid out [...] in its potentiality, from the simple poem, to the story of an entire life, to universal history."¹ Augustine responded to the aporias revealed in his philosophical speculations on time and the problem of human temporality through narrative activity, producing the first work of autobiography, innovated both from the epic paradigms he had absorbed through his classical education and, most importantly, the diverse types of Biblical narratives with which he was intimately familiar. Augustine saw his whole life as a journey, which in the end can be recognized as a pilgrimage to the God who created him. The journey and its various phases are paradigms of emplotment through which Augustine has comprehended his life as an intelligible whole. The *Confessions* is indeed a narrative whole: it is the narrative of a long journey to Wisdom, comprising a period of disoriented wandering, a re-orientation, a journey to faith and the

¹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, p. 22. Augustine writes as follows: "What takes place in the whole psalm takes place also in each of its parts and in each of its syllables. The same thing holds for a longer action, of which perhaps the psalm is a small part. The same thing holds for a man's entire life, the parts of which are all the man's actions. The same thing holds throughout the whole age of the sons of men, the parts of which are the lives of all men." (11,28,37, p. 301)

true path, a journey along that path to an experience of wisdom, and a continuation of that journey in a life of devotion to wisdom. Augustine, inheritor through Original Sin of a fallen nature, lived his early life as a prodigal wanderer; a man living in solidarity with sin. The narration of his wanderings culminates with the event of the stolen fruit, which becomes the paradigmatic moment of this phase of his life. When Augustine happens upon Cicero's *Hortensius* his life is given its first positive orientation, for he has awakened to the love of wisdom and is turned to a conscious search for the path that may lead him to it. Led down the false paths of Manicheanism, Skepticism, a semi-Epicurean perspective, astrology, and Neo-Platonism, Augustine finally discovers the true path to wisdom in a conversion to Christianity and a life lived in the saving solidarity of Christ. In Book 9, where Augustine mystically experiences with his mother the path of interior ascent that he will consciously follow in his post-conversion journey to wisdom, a transition has been made from the emplotment of the first nine Books as a Prodigal Son's journey of departure and return and the Plotinian-influenced journey of understanding in Book 10.

Rather than being a breach in the work, Book 10 continues Augustine's search, begun with his awakening to wisdom in Book 3. Book 10 is characterized by the same overall journey paradigm operative in the whole work: here Augustine's journey is the Christian version of the Plotinian paradigm of the soul's odyssey from the exterior to the interior and from the inferior to the superior. Having introduced this second phase of his overall journey to wisdom with a reiteration of his intention - a confession to God - Augustine moves on to recount his journey from the exterior world of material bodies to the interior world of his soul. The soul's faculty of memory is the inner path by which the soul may ascend to

experience the presence of God within itself: within memory the soul ascends through the various levels of memory finally to arrive at the highest, the 'memory of God', the recognition of the presence of God within. In this experience of the presence of the God who is Wisdom within himself, Augustine's long odyssey has come to a fitting climax.

But this experience of Wisdom is not the end of Augustine's journey; what lies before him now is the 'life of wisdom'. Though the journey has climaxed, it can also be thought to continue. The challenge for Augustine is to live his life in light of the wisdom he has experienced: to live in 'right orientation', according to the plan of God. Conversion in all its dimensions, intellectual, moral and religious, is ongoing. In this regard, one must turn one's mind to the deepening of that knowledge which is worthy of the life of Wisdom. This is Augustine's path in the concluding books of the *Confessions* where he not only situates his life story within the context of universal history, but he deepens his understanding of God and man through his exegesis of the opening verses of Genesis. Even with the attainment of an experience of Wisdom, man's restless heart remains restless until it comes to full beatitude in the joy of union with God in the Eternal Sabbath rest; earthly happiness being but a prefiguration of the eternal happiness that awaits the 'man of wisdom'.

Many of the theories of unity we have reviewed in Chapter One may be seen as complementary to this one, but neither individually nor collectively can they account for the *Confessions'* unity.² For example, without a doubt the 'confessional' aspect of the work

² This judgement holds for the views expressed by Emmet T. Flood in a more recent article, which was published after my thesis was drafted. His essay, while "not intended as a solution [...] nor even as a contribution [...] except in passing," to the problem of the *Confessions'* unity, does address the problem of the "integrity" of the work "indirectly" (p. 141). The perspective of his inquiry is generated from P. Ricoeur's reflections on Augustine's analysis of time and eternity and its relevance for the first nine books of the work (Cf. *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, pp. 22 - 30, especially p. 29). Flood argues that "the superintendent principle of its construction is its narrative form" (p. 141) and has discerned a dimension of the overall theme of the work - "temporality and eternity" as seen in the quest of the mutable creature for

provides some thematic unity, but by itself it cannot account for the shifts in subject matter from one phase of the text to another. While one cannot possibly come to an understanding of the *Confessions* without properly grasping that it is essentially a prayer - a sustained confession before God - it is the journey paradigm that reveals the full meaning of this theme, for the God to whom Augustine confesses is the Wisdom he so ardently sought and found.

Crucial to grasping the perfect continuity which exists between the autobiographical account of Augustine's journey to faith (Books 1-9) and Augustine's narrative of his soul's interior journey to Wisdom (Book 10) is a proper estimation of Augustine's Christian use of Neo-Platonism, which permits one to understand the Augustinian view of man that is the

permanence. I am in agreement with these insights concerning the importance of narrative and the importance of the theme of temporality and eternity in the broad thematic sweep of the work. However, Flood fails to identify the central narrative theme of Augustine's quest for Wisdom which grounds the more generalized theme of the creature's desire for rest in the Creator. The theme of the dialectic of time and eternity does indeed permeate the work but it is narratively anchored in, and explored through, Augustine's narration of his awakening to, search for, and attainment of wisdom, and the ongoing life in the service of Wisdom.

Failing to identify the central theme of wisdom, which unites Augustine's religion with his philosophy, Flood does not identify the importance to the narrative of Augustine's awakening to the 'love of wisdom' (Book 3,4) in the transition in the first nine books from the theme of man's fallen nature and the disoriented wanderings (Books 1,6-7, to 3) to the subsequent, increasingly oriented, search through the 'false paths' until the 'true path' to wisdom is discovered and pride is overcome and the way of humility is embraced in graced conversion to Christ. Not seeing the significance of the central theme of wisdom, he sees too much of a circular pattern in the first nine books (cf. p. 151), depicting Augustine as having completed the story of his life to date and as already having arrived at the knowledge that he only attains through understanding in his interior journey of ascent through memory, narrated in Book 10. As well, Book 10 is homogeneously classified with the last three books, and all four are said to complement the journey of faith "by the hope of seeing God in a final Vision." (p. 151) The second ingredient paradigm is thus not grasped in its true significance nor is the climax of the *Confessions* (10,27) identified - here Augustine experiences what he and Monica had attained through mystical means in Book 9 and what he looks forward to obtaining fully toward the close of the *Confessions* in the Eternal Sabbath rest.

Memory is of course a precondition of the possibility of Augustine's writing his autobiography (it is implicit in the configurational operation of emplotment just as it is operative in Augustine's reciting a psalm as is indicated in Book 11,28) but more than this it is the path of understanding to Wisdom. It is this fact which accounts for its central role in the *Confessions* and the place and importance of Book 10 in the overall narrative design of the work. Finally, concerning the last three books, while Augustine's exegesis reveals 'in a dark manner' the Trinitarian God in the Creation of the world, these last books do not so clearly outline a pattern of ascent in the manner of Book 10. Rather, here in the study of the Word of God in Scripture as proper to the life of wisdom, Augustine deepens his understanding of God, man and all of creation, spiritual and corporeal. In this deepening of wisdom the themes of eternity and temporality, the immutability of God, the immutability by participation of 'unfallen' spiritual creatures and the mutability of man and all material creation is explored. Within this exploration of the meaning of the first verses of Genesis, understanding light is cast back upon the first nine books as Augustine gains greater understanding of mankind's situation. Cf. Emmet T. Flood, "The Narrative Structure of Augustine's *Confessions*: Time's Quest for Eternity," *International Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. XXVII, No. 2 (June 1988), pp. 141-162.

basis for the interior journey. While writers like O'Connell have overestimated the influence of Neo-Platonism, mischaracterizing the entire meaning of the journey, other writers have not taken it into account, and failed to recognize the journey at all.

We have seen that Augustine's theory of man has been a key in assisting us to grasp the paradigms that may be discerned in the work itself. With this in mind it must be stressed that while narrative 'confers intelligibility' onto human temporal experience, it is not the source of the meaning it finds. Augustine's life was a search for the answer that would give his life meaning, and this he found; but his life has meaning - indeed has ultimate meaning - not because he narrates it; the narration was his way of understanding the meaning his life had.

The recovery of the unity of the *Confessions* is not merely the establishment of a literary fact: rather, it is the recovery of the meaning of the work. It has been reported that Ludwig Wittgenstein judged the *Confessions* to be "the most serious book ever written."³ Certainly in its moral and intellectual honesty before God it established a standard rarely attempted let alone attained. The work harkens back to an age when philosophy was far from an academic exercise, but rather a means to the most worthy goal, human happiness. It is a literary, philosophical and religious classic. It is also a profoundly unified drama of the life of a sinful man in his relationship to the God who calls all humanity to union with Himself.

³ In *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. Rush Rhees (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 90.

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