

What is Augustinian 'Sapientia'?

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'Sapientia' Augustine defines as the science of the divine and eternal, distinguishing it from a 'scientia' which is about the changing and corruptible.¹ In Aristotelian concepts the one is the highest science of the theoretical understanding, knowing the necessary and true; while the other, serving the practical understanding, is about that which can be other than it is.² This division is made in relation to the primary and pervasive division of the powers of the soul into the cognitive and the moving or appetitive.³ It looks therefore also beyond this opposition of the powers to an activity in which they would be united.⁴

The primary object of this science is God, whom it knows principally in three ways.⁵ Its knowledge is first through the relation of creatures as effects to God as cause. This divine causality is discovered to a thought itself unstable by the instability of the creatures. This first reflection yields only the knowledge that God is none of the creatures.⁶ The divine immutability is not itself disclosed. The second level of the science considers the pure relation of time to eternity and in this relation knows the creature not as mutable only but as primarily two opposed immutable beings — a pure self-identical thought and the pure self-identity of endless matter or extension. Determinate creatures also are not unstable merely but have the primary character of self-identity.⁷ The creation so stabilized is for a subject itself self-identical — for the self-consciousness which knows memory, understanding and will as immutably triune.⁸ At the third level the science knows also the creation thus self-identical and the 'imago dei' in man as having their truth in the revelation of God in Christ. With this transition the subject of the science is no longer rational self-consciousness in abstraction but man as restored to integrity as a member of the 'civitas dei'.⁹ The 'sapientia' which in the other

1. *De Trin.*, XIII, i.

2. Aristotle, *E.N.* VI; *De Trin.* IX, x.

3. Aristotle, *De Anima*, 432a15-17.

4. Aristotle, *De Anima*, 414b20 foll.; the opposed cognitive and moving powers are implicit in the δρεπτικόν; prior to this potentiality and comprehending the division is the νοῦς ἐνεργεῖδ (430a23-25).

5. As the present argument will show from *Conf.* X-XIII.

6. *Conf.* X.

7. *Conf.* XI-XII.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Conf.* XIII.

forms was a human wisdom has thus become divine wisdom. In this the individual participates not through the unstable and transitory forms of image, language and sacrament only but as object of the immutable divine predestination.¹⁰

The Augustinian 'sapientia' passes through the first two levels as through they were Platonic 'hypotheses' or stepping stones to the third. What would be their status from the standpoint of the third, which they serve to bring into view, Augustine does not have need to consider. In this sense his 'sapientia' may be thought incomplete: the mediation through which a knowledge of this science is possible is external to it. The way to the science is lost in the result. The later history of Augustinianism is essentially about this completion. In this history the most radical difference occurs between those who saw the completion of Augustinianism in an integration with the Neoplatonism of Proclus and Dionysius¹¹ and those who brought it together with Cartesianism in the seventeenth century.¹² In the first case one attended to the relation of the first level to the whole, in the second one approached the whole through the second level — through the radical separation of thought and matter. To a Platonized and a Cartesian Augustinianism may be added as a third the standpoint in general of historical scholarship where philosophy has been humanized and knows neither a Neoplatonic nor a Cartesian mediation between God and creation. Augustinian 'sapientia' appears therefore to this third standpoint more as a mixture of religion and borrowed philosophical concepts than as a strict and unified science.¹³

To separate the original Augustinian 'sapientia' from this history is not without difficulty. The purpose of the present paper is to indicate how an access to it is possible which is not external to the movement of Augustine's thought. Although Augustine's philosophical theology might be elaborated as he had need to respond to Donatists, Pelagians and other heretical positions, it was not by such occasions that he was moved to its discovery. His 'sapientia' is an 'intellectus fidei' in the strictest sense. The faith to which he came by his conversion had no deficiency for him as to its content. He was impelled to think what he believed in order that he might have the true content, not through what was mu-

10. The argument of *Conf.* XIII terminates in this knowledge.

11. Notably Eriugena. The synthesis of Augustine and Dionysius there accomplished dissolves in Cusanus.

12. Descartes, Malebranche, Leibniz and others.

13. For a logical exposition of the third level of the 'sapientia' one can refer only to Hegel. Philosophy after that time has known only historical, temporal spirit, and for that reason can regard the Augustinian science only from without and in its parts.

table and corruptible in the soul, as fact, image and language,¹⁴ but through the relation of the immutable image of the Trinity in the soul to its completion in the original. The formal deficiency of faith presented him anew with impediments he had known before his conversion, how the truth of the scriptural revelation might be separated from the ambiguity and uncertainty of language. His conversion was the removal for him as an individual of these impediments, that is, of more abstract relations of his soul to God for which the revelation of the divine nature in Christ was as incredible myth.¹⁵ The 'intellectus fidei' has the same purpose, only now to know the subsumption of the same abstract relations under the concreteness of the revelation universally or for thought. The 'intellectus fidei' is thus nothing else than a reflection on the conversion. It has the same content and moves through the same stages. The one provides therefore to the student of Augustinianism a wholly intrinsic criterion of the other. The argument is the strongest assurance that one has hold of the original Augustinian 'sapientia'.

The *Confessions* until the end of the ninth book treats of the conversion of Augustine, how from an immediate natural harmony of infancy there was formed in him a dualism of the ideal or rational and the sensuous, how by way of Manichaeism and scepticism he at length discovered in Platonism a principle in which the terms of this division were unified for him. The intuition of this unity was divided, however, from the way to it, and his conversion was incomplete until he knew the end and the way to it through the division of the finite to be united in the Triune God whose nature was revealed in Christ.¹⁶ This knowledge he had through faith as baptized and received into the spiritual community of the Church. If this knowledge as through the medium of image and language as resting on authority was not fully his own, he knew it as realized in the vision and discourse with Monica and her death.¹⁷ This knowledge was complete as to its content but defective in form, having only a factual and transient certainty. The impulse to think what he believed was from the need to overcome this defect and know his faith as necessary and true for thought.¹⁸

14. *De Trin.*, XIV, ii-iii.

15. *Conf.* VI, iv.

16. *Conf.* VIII, xii, and from this beginning the formation in IX of the 'fides' which he then seeks to understand.

17. *Conf.* IX, viii foll.

18. The 'intellectus fidei' would change only the form of the objective content: note 14 above. Medieval theologians after Anselm acquiesced in less, as for other reasons did philosophical Augustinians in the seventeenth century. Only on the ground of a further logical revolution "lässt

The argument of Books X to XIII of the *Confessions* passes through the same stages as occurred before in the course of Augustine's conversion from Platonism to Christianity. The Platonism by which he then learned to think an immaterial substance freed him at once from the materialistic dualism of the Manichees and from the scepticism which remained with the difference of the universal from sensible particulars. How from an immediate knowledge of the unity of the ideal and sensible worlds he moved to the knowledge of a mediated relation is a question of some difficulty, to be answered briefly as follows. The movement of his thought to Platonism was mediated not, as with the Neoplatonists, by the opposition of unity to plurality but by the opposition to universal being of an infinite extension or matter.¹⁹ The unity underlying this division the argument of the tenth and eleventh books will show is not immediate. There is thus in Augustine's Platonism from the first the ground of a criticism of that of the Neoplatonists. For the same reason he read into the 'libri Platonici' more of Christianity than was there.²⁰ The One and the divine λόγος were for him drawn into a mediated and Trinitarian relation.

But then in the account of Platonism in Book VII there occurred also a sorting out of these discordant logical elements. There, as elsewhere, Augustine marvels that Porphyry should fall from a knowledge of the true God to the worship of demons, that is, that he not be able to hold the finite in a simple relation to its divine principle.²¹ He tells in Book VII how from this plurality he went more deeply into himself.²² In this movement he found the deeper division of the finite he missed in Porphyry. At the same time through this reaction there was formed in himself that separation of a free self-consciousness from the sensuous and dependent in his soul out of which his conversion was to take place.

The argument of Book X reviews this experience of Platonism. The question is asked how God is in the soul. The response converts this question into the question how the soul is in God by effecting a Platonic dissolution of all that has in it a concealed otherness and instability. The presence of God is first sought through other effects than the rational soul itself which makes the inquiry.²³

sich die wahrhafte Überzeugung . . . gewinnen, dass der Inhalt der Philosophie und der Religion derselbe ist, abgesehen von dem weitem Inhalt der äussern Natur und des endlichen Geistes, was nicht in den Umkreis der Religion fällt," Hegel, *Ency.* 573.

19. *Conf.* VII, i.

20. *Conf.* VII, ix.

21. *Ibid.*; *Civ. Dei*, X, xxxii.

22. *Conf.* VII, x: "Et inde admonitus redire ad memet ipsum intravi in intima mea duce te . . ."

23. *Conf.* X, vi.

To it they reveal through their mutability an underlying immutable cause. It is then asked how the cause itself is in the soul. In the pure potentiality of the rational soul which Augustine calls memory, where it is free of all the instability which relation to what is other brings.²⁴ This is the simple inwardness before all form and determination which can receive the Neoplatonic intuition of the One. But the finitude which has been removed from this relation of the soul to God recurs as a falling away to the sensible world. In this worldly relation of the soul Augustine finds a three-fold structure: the three temptations of sensuality, curiosity and pride.²⁵ The soul is immediately seduced by the sensible, looks vainly for the universal and true in an endless particularity, or in pride reverts from this externality to itself as end. These temptations which together make up the whole temporal interest of the soul are here simply other than its relation to God. That the human be not merely other but grounded in the divine relation requires the mediation revealed in Christ.²⁶ So Augustine concludes the tenth book.

But how is a knowledge of this mediation possible? The eleventh book begins the answer which is developed and completed in the remaining two books. First one must know time and all the mutable content measured by time as from an immutable divine causality. The soul itself and the world which tempts and seduces it must be brought under this absolute identity, that then as products of this eternal causality they may bear its image, as they maintain their self-identity more and less adequately in the face of division and otherness. God is known through this reflection as not simple unity only but as returned to himself out of his division as a Trinity of equal terms. This knowledge is for the rational soul as it allows the infinite unity of the moment and the divided moments of past and future to coalesce in it in one vision, within which is contained both the intelligible and the sensible creature as separated in the argument of the previous book.²⁷

The twelfth book begins a comment on God's work of six days and his rest on the seventh. The reduction of the two worlds to the divine eternity in the previous book has made possible a reading of these chapters by an understanding itself stabilized by that contemplation, which has separated its pure self-identity from the realm of the three temptations. The subject which reads the inspired text is the 'imago dei' in man which knows in a divine light. So far as the text can be read in this light, which enlightens

24. *Conf.* X, xxv.

25. *Conf.* X, xxx foll.

26. *Conf.* X, xliii.

27. *Conf.* XI, xxviii-xxix.

all men, agreement can be expected in what is essential among interpreters — among themselves and with the truth Moses originally received and expressed. Various interpretations there will be, but such as see differently the order and connection of the same universal truth.²⁸ The argument has passed from the first to the second level of Augustine's 'sapientia'.

In the divine eternity, as the argument of Book XI has shown, the difference of the two worlds is absolutely united. In God difference and division are in the relation of the persons of the Trinity. The creation bears in all its parts the likeness of its Trinitarian origin. For this second level of the science this likeness is greater or less according as the creature holds more purely to its self-identity in its division and return to itself.²⁹ The first of creatures logically for this standpoint are the opposed identities of thought which rests in its simple universality and abstract matter or extension. These elementary creatures are separated from all fully determinate individual creatures. God created the heaven and the earth, the intelligible and the material creature generally, then the many creatures in their kinds. Man he created not in his kind, as with other creatures, but after his image and likeness. Man is neither an abstract, universal creature, nor a limited creature only. In him there is the immutability of the elementary creatures and the corruptibility of the determinate embodied creatures.³⁰

Man may be thought to have held first to God and not to have fallen into the opposition of his intelligible to his sensible and corruptible nature.³¹ But in truth to this second level of Augustinian 'sapientia' the fall is as necessary to its completion as with the first. The thirteenth book treats the return and restoration of man to the divine rest. In that return the science itself is transformed and comes into agreement with the Christian revelation. In its second form the 'sapientia' knows the negative and divided as reduced to identity. The relation of the creature to God is through its self-identity, in which its negativity has been stabilized and grounded. God declares all his creatures to be good as in this relation. So far as they are, they are good. The creation is the best of possible worlds.³² But in it there is a hidden negativity which appears in the fall of the rational creature. The restoration therefore cannot be a return merely to the unfallen state but must comprehend this negativity.

God created heaven and earth, separating them from their iden-

28. *Conf.* XII, xxx.

29. *Conf.* XII, vi-ix.

30. *Conf.* XIII, xxii.

31. *De Gen. ad Litt.*, VIII, xiv foll.

32. *Conf.* XII, xxviii.

tity in the eternal world. But it is said also that the spirit moved over the waters.³³ The earth and its many creatures are not only stabilized in their self-identity and difference from God, but in relation to God their finitude and negativity is also altogether exposed and comprehended. In this concrete vision of the material creation is given an image of the restoration of the rational human creature. The abstract identity of the 'imago dei' and the negativity and corruptibility of the fallen state are not only divided from each other but this division is comprehended in their relation to God.³⁴

The integration of these moments at the point of their explicit division and contrariety was before for Augustine accomplished in his conversion. In the 'intellectus fidei' it is the completion of the contemplation of creation, in which the divided moments of the 'imago dei' and its fallen state and of the opposed material and intelligible creatures pass into the relation of the spiritual community — the 'civitas dei' — to the full revelation of the Trinity in Christ.³⁵

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33. *Conf.* XIII, ix.

34. *Conf.* XIII, xxxv.

35. *Conf.* XIII, xxxvi-xxxviii.