

# Saint Augustine and the Vision of the Truth:

A Commentary on the Seventh Book of Augustine's *Confessions*\*

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## Introduction

In the fifth book of the *Confessions*, Augustine has shown his readers the steps by which he came to abandon his association with the Manichees. For the nine years that he had counted himself a member of the sect he had been willing to assume that he knew that Mani knew the Truth. However, as he had discovered in the affair with the celebrated Faustus, this man, as every other Manichee of his acquaintance, was quite unable to explain Mani's teachings concerning certain natural phenomena (solstices, equinoxes, eclipses and the like), in a comprehensible manner which accorded with the evidence of his senses and the principles of mathematics. But Augustine had long been able to comprehend the account of the same phenomena which he found in the "natural philosophers" though he had hoped all the while that the Manichaean account would prove at least as satisfactory (if not more so) if only it could be explained to him. And thus Augustine — who had now exhausted every conceivable means at his disposal of having Mani's teachings explicated, and who knew that he did not understand what Mani said about these matters — was therefore forced to recognize that he did not actually know, and could no longer see any means by which he might come to know, whether or not Mani actually possessed the Truth that he claimed to hold. And since Mani purported to be inspired by the Holy Spirit in this as in all other matters, Augustine could no longer avoid the conclusion that while Mani might well be teaching the

\*This paper forms a part of a systematic commentary on the first nine books of Augustine's *Confessions* which, when finished, will be the first part of a complete commentary on the whole work undertaken by members of the Classics Department at Dalhousie University. Earlier parts of the commentary on Books I-IX have already appeared or are in press<sup>1</sup> and, as with them, this paper is presented here in the belief that it can stand on its own apart from the larger work.

1. See, Colin Starnes, "Saint Augustine on Infancy and Childhood: Commentary on the First Book of Augustine's *Confessions*." *Augustinian Studies*, Vol. 6, 1975, Villanova University, Villanova, Pa. U.S.A.

A second article, "Saint Augustine and the Theft of Pears: Commentary on the Second Book of Augustine's *Confessions*.", is at present in press with the same journal.

Truth in all that he said, he (Augustine) did not at all know whether this was the case, although he could of course believe it if he so chose. And this, as he tells us, is just what he reluctantly did at the time for want of a better and surer course by which to steer. But the whole attraction of the Manichees from the beginning was that — rather than placing him in the dependent relation of belief on which the Catholics insisted — the Manichees promised to teach him the Truth which he hoped he could then use as an instrument for his own purposes. And yet he had now been forced to conclude that belief was in fact the only relation that he had, or could conceivably have, to the teachings of this sect.

A surer course than the teachings of the Manichees soon presented itself to Augustine in the position of the Academics (the Sceptics) by whom he now began to be attracted. Augustine understood them to teach that all things ought to be doubted and that men were not able to know or grasp any sure and certain Truth. This position contains both a certain knowledge which Augustine accepted and also a judgement which he was to ignore. On the one hand, Augustine was forced to acknowledge the truth of the Sceptics' argument that insofar as man's knowledge depended in a direct way on the senses and experience, then he could in no way aspire to an absolutely certain knowledge such as he desired. For the "certainty" of any knowledge that depends in this way on experience can only be a greater or lesser degree of probability, since experience, which is tied to the senses and thus to the particular, can never rise to that universal grasp of its objects which is required for an absolutely certain judgement. With this consideration in mind Augustine then resolved to break with the Manichees altogether for, insofar as Mani taught that the Truth is to be found in the sensible nature of the universe, Augustine was bound by the logic of the Sceptical position to prefer as the greater truth the more probable account of the sensible nature of the universe. And so in the final chapter of the fifth book he tells us that he then took a closer look at the theories of the "natural philosophers" concerning the body of the world and the whole frame of nature to which the senses of the flesh can attain. And, being convinced anew that the views of no small number of these natural philosophers were indeed more probable than those of the Manichees, he therefore resolved to abandon the Manichees altogether.

On the other hand, because this Scepticism was not a knowledge that all knowledge must come exclusively through the senses and is consequently uncertain — although many Sceptics may have made this judgement and drawn its corollary that the course of

wisdom is to abandon the search for the Truth — Augustine was therefore left free to pursue the search for the Truth on which he had started nine years earlier after reading Cicero's *Hortensius*. However, insofar as he was still determined to know the Truth immediately and directly so that he might use it for his own private ends, so did he remain bound to look for it "outside" of himself in the sensible nature of the universe. But this is just the place that a certain knowledge of the Truth cannot be found according to the logic of the Sceptical position. In the sixth book of the *Confessions* Augustine shows the practical difficulties which he suffered as a result of this contradiction. For, on the one hand he could not rest with the limited knowledge of nature or the enjoyment of its finite goods since he had always before him the idea of the absolute Truth which governs the universe and which is preferable to all created goods. On the other hand, neither could he in any way get beyond this limited knowledge of nature and the limited happiness nature can provide because he remained determined to grasp the absolute Truth immediately and directly which means that it can only be thought of as sensible and therefore subject to the limitations of time and space.

### I.

#### The Way to the Vision: *Confessions* VII,i,1 — VII,ix,15

In the central portion of the seventh book of the *Confessions* where Augustine describes his ascent to the direct and unmistakable vision of the Truth, he includes a chapter in which he looks back over the course of his life and reviews the various stages of error through which he had moved on his way to this vision. The final error which preceded the vision of the Truth and the one into which he fell after he had abandoned the dualistic theories of the Manichees is described in the following way:

"And coming back from there (i.e. the Manichaeian "opinion of the two substances"), it (i.e. Augustine's soul), made for itself a god spread throughout the infinite spaces of all places and him it had supposed to be you, and him it had set up in its heart and again it had become the temple of its own idol, abominable to you." (VII, xiv, 20).<sup>2</sup>

2. *Conf.*, VII,xiv,20 "Et inde rediens fecerat sibi deum per infinita spatia locorum omnium et eum putaverat esse te et eum collocaverat in corde suo et facta erat rursus templum idoli sui abominandum tibi."

Unless otherwise indicated, the translations from the *Confessions* are our own and in every case the Latin text is that of M. Skutella in the Bibliothèque Augustinienne, (hereafter BA), edition of the *Confessions*,

In the first nine chapters of the seventh book Augustine now shows us the precise nature of this view of the Truth which he held as a consequence of his Scepticism. He also shows the arguments by which he came to a rational knowledge of its error. And, since the arguments by which he moved beyond this view are just the ones that moved him to the direct and unmistakable vision and knowledge of the Truth, it is for this reason that he says in the last chapter of the sixth book that, "precisely now" (*iam iamque*), God's hand was ready to snatch him out of the pit. For this erroneous conception of the Truth constitutes the final error on the way to the Truth according to the stages which Augustine lists — from the standpoint of the vision of the Truth — in the text in VII, xiv, 20. We must now try to grasp the precise sense of this error and also explain what connection it has with the Sceptical position that Augustine had adopted.

It will readily be seen that Augustine's Scepticism does not in itself propose or teach any particular view concerning the nature of the Truth<sup>3</sup> and yet, because it does not exclude the possibility of a knowledge of the Truth — and indeed Augustine was moved to adopt this position precisely by his desire for such a knowledge — any man who has arrived at this position will be bound to develop and maintain some definite notion of the nature of the Truth which he will hold in the form of belief. What this notion is for a man in Augustine's position, he shows us in the opening chapters of the seventh book.

Now, if on the one hand Augustine was led by the Sceptics to the recognition that while the senses and experience cannot provide any certain knowledge of the Truth, (though such truth as a man can have regarding the sensible nature of the universe must at least conform to the evidence of the senses), on the other hand the same position both recognized and possessed at least one source of an absolutely certain knowledge in the analytic propositions of mathematics. As we recall from the fifth book, it was as much because of the Manichees' inability to provide a mathematically sound account of the movement of the heavenly bodies as by the fact that their account did not conform to the evidence of the senses, that Augustine first became disenchanted

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Oeuvres de Saint Augustin, volumes 13 and 14, Desclée de Brouwer, 1962. For the sake of convenience, we have reproduced in parentheses the direct Biblical references given in the BA edition.

3. Cicero, for example, makes this point very clear in his discussion of the views of the Academics on the nature of the gods in *De Natura Deorum*, II,i,2.

with their teachings and subsequently abandoned the sect.<sup>4</sup> And furthermore, as he has told us in the sixth book, the consequence of his Sceptical position with respect to the theoretical apprehension of the Truth was that he desired to know the Truth with the same absolute certainty that he knew that seven plus three makes ten and so refused to assent to any doctrine about the nature of the Truth that could not be grasped with the same degree of certainty.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, if on the one hand Augustine had been moved (in practice) beyond the fabulous opinions of the Manichees by the recognition that the Truth must at least conform to the evidence of the senses, on the other hand he had also recognized that insofar as a man could have any certain knowledge of the Truth (such as he desired), then clearly, the Truth must have the same formal character as these mathematical propositions. That is, it had to be both incorruptible, inviolable and unchangeable like the mathematical truths of which he was absolutely certain.<sup>6</sup>

"And I, a man, and such a man, was trying to conceive you the supreme and only and true God, and I believed you to be incorruptible and inviolable and incommutable with all my innermost being, because, not knowing whence or how, nevertheless I clearly saw and was certain that that which was able to be corrupted was worse than that which was not able to be corrupted, and what could not be violated I preferred without hesitation to that which could be violated, and what suffered no mutation I knew to be better than that which was able to change."<sup>7</sup> (VII, i, 1)

4. *Conf.*, V,iii,6 "*Ibi autem credere iubebar, et ad illas rationes numeris et oculis meis exploratas non occurrebat et longe diversum erat.*" See also *Conf.*, V,vii,12 ". . . quae mihi eum, quod utique cupiebam, conlatis numerorum rationibus, quas alibi ego legeram, . . ."

5. *Conf.*, VI,iv,6 "*Tenebam enim cor meum ab omni adsensione timens praecipitium et suspensio magis necabar. volebam enim eorum quae non viderem ita me certum fieri, ut certus essem, quod septem et tria decem sint. neque enim tam insanus eram, ut ne hoc quidem putarem posse comprehendere, sed sicut hoc, ita cetera cupiebam sive corporalia, quae coram sensibus meis non adessent, sive spiritalia, de quibus cogitare nisi corporaliter nesciebam.*"

6. So, in *Contra Academicos*, II,iii,9 Augustine recommends to his friends Romanianus and Lucilianus that they refuse to rest content with any doctrine about the nature of the Truth that does not have the same absolute certainty as these mathematical propositions. "*Sed nunc ambobus dico, cavete ne quid vos nosse arbitremini, nisi quod ita didiceritis, saltem ut nostris, unum, duo, tria, quatuor simul collecta in summam fieri decem. sed item cavete ne vos in philosophia veritatem aut non cognituros, aut nullo modo ita posse cognosci arbitremini. nam mihi vel potius illi credite qui ait, 'quaerite et invenietis', (Mt. 7:7) nec cognitionem desperandam esse, et manifestiorem futuram, quam sunt illi numeri.*"

7. *Conf.*, VII,i,1 "*Et conabar cogitare te homo et talis homo, summum et solum et*

Armed with the knowledge of this truth to which he could have arrived at any time during the years in which he maintained the Sceptical position — but which we presume came to him towards the end rather than the beginning of this period<sup>8</sup> — Augustine was now able to come to the certain knowledge of the falsity of the Manichees' doctrines such as he had been seeking from the moment when he abandoned his association with the sect.<sup>9</sup> For, having come to the recognition that, insofar as a man can have any certain knowledge of the Truth (as the Manichees claimed), then the Truth must be incorruptible, inviolable and incommutable, (which the Manichees denied), he was at last able to see the absolute force of the question which Nebridius used to pose to the Manichees in Carthage when he asked them what the "race of darkness" would have done to God had God refused to do battle with them.<sup>10</sup> Augustine tells us that at the time he and his friends were much struck (*concussi sumus*) by this dilemma. But only after he has come to recognize that the Truth must be incorruptible, inviolable and unchangeable if it is to be known by man, can he see in this question a certain proof of the falsity of the whole fabric of the Manichees' fantastic doctrines which all derive from the imagined opposition of the two principles: God and the "race of darkness" — and it is precisely for this reason that Augustine raises Nebridius' question at just this point in the argument of the *Confessions*. For, as he now sees, it poses a dilemma which utterly

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*verum deum, et te incorruptibilem et inviolabilem et incommutabilem totis medullis credebam, quia nesciens, unde et quomodo, plane tamen videbam et certus eram id, quod corrumpi potest, deterius esse quam id quod non potest, et quod violari non potest, incunctanter praeponebam violabili, et quod nullam patitur mutationem, melius esse quam id quod mutari potest."*

8. We presume that these considerations came to Augustine towards the end rather than the beginning of this (Sceptical) period because he mentions the fact that he came to the knowledge of the error of the Manichees teachings in that part of the *Confessions* (*Conf.*, VII,ii,3 — VII,iii,5) which immediately precedes the vision of the Truth and because in the sixth book he says, of the time of which he is writing there, that he still was not yet certain of the falsity of the Manichee's doctrines (see *Conf.* VI,iv,5).

9. *Conf.*, V,xiv,25 "*Tum vero fortiter intendi animum, si quo modo possem certis aliquibus documentis manichaeos convincere falsitatis.*" Compare, *Conf.*, VII,iii,4 "*Itaque securus eam quaerebam et certus non esse verum quod illi dicerent (the Manichees), quos toto animo fugiebam.*"

10. *Conf.*, VII,ii,3 "*Sat erat mihi, domine, adversus illos deceptos deceptores et loquaces mutos, quoniam non ex eis sonabat verbum tuum, sat erat ergo illud quod iam diu ab usque Carthagine a Nebridio proponi solebat et omnes, qui audieramus, concussi sumus: quid erat tibi factura nescio qua gens tenebrarum, quam ex adversa mole solent opponere, si tu cum ea pugnare noluisse?*"

destroys any and every dualistic position like that which the Manichees taught. For either they must affirm that the "race of darkness" cannot harm God, in which case their whole teaching is shown as a false and execrable nonsense, or else they must affirm that the "race of darkness" can actually harm God, which again reduces their teaching to nonsense for if God is corruptible then, as Augustine has come to know, it would be *impossible* for man to come to any certain knowledge of the Truth such as the Manichees claimed to possess.<sup>11</sup>

As the recognition of the divine incorruptibility literally renders the Manichaeic doctrines unthinkable, so also does Augustine tell us that, at the same time, he gave up as equally false and fantastic what we might call the "theory and practice" of astrology — and this for the same reason. For astrology is only credible to those who hold a dualistic notion of the nature of the universe and who are willing to suppose that the opposition between good and evil as it appears to man must also be reflected in the principles of the universe itself.<sup>12</sup> However, the recognition of the divine incorruptibility has shown Augustine the error of this view and so here too he is now able to appreciate the arguments of Vindicianus and Nebridius which he had heard a long time before<sup>13</sup> and also to recognize, in the incident with Firminus (VII, vi, 8-10), a certain proof of the falsity of the pretensions of astrology — which again is the reason why he raises the question at just this point in the argument of the *Confessions*.

Nevertheless, if on the one hand Augustine had now recognized that the Truth must of necessity be incorruptible, inviolable and immutable if it is to be known by man, on the other hand as he was still determined to grasp the Truth immediately and directly in order that he might use it for his own private ends, so he was bound to think of it as a sensible entity,<sup>14</sup> and was therefore driven

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11. See *Conf.*, VII,ii,3.

12. And so, as Augustine says in the fourth book (*Conf.*, IV,iii,4), the cause of sin (i.e. corruptibility, violability and mutability) is placed on God rather than with the corruptible, violable and mutable creature.

Our argument on this point might seem to be vitiated by the evidence of the Stoics who acknowledged the divine incorruptibility and nevertheless believed in prophesy and divination (see for example Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, II,iii,7 — II,iv,12), but unlike astrology, and according to the Stoics' own view of the matter, (see Cicero's statement in *De Natura Deorum*, II,iv,12), neither prophesy nor divination laid any claim to a certain knowledge of the future which is just what Augustine had come to see as false in the pretensions of astrology.

13. See *Conf.*, IV,iii,4-6.

14. This then is the accusation which Augustine brings against himself in

once again to imagine God, (i.e., the Truth),<sup>15</sup> — this time as an incorruptible, inviolable and unchangeable corporeal substance which is perfused through the spaces of all places.<sup>16</sup> In the fifth chapter Augustine describes this notion of God in the following way.

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the opening lines of the seventh book. *Conf.*, VII,i,1 "*Iam mortua erat adulescentia mea mala et nefanda, et ibam in iuventutem, quanto aetate maior, tanto vanitate turpior, qui cogitare aliquid substantiae nisi tale non poteram, quale per hos oculos videri solet.*" As he says in the same chapter, he was (on this account) quite unable to think of any thing which did not occupy space in the manner of corporeal bodies ". . . *quoniam quidquid privabam spatiis talibus, nihil mihi esse videbatur, sed prorsus nihil, ne inane quidem, tamquam si corpus auferatur loco et maneat locus omni corpore vacuatus et terreno et humido et aereo et caelesti, sed tamen sit locus inanis tamquam spatiosum nihil.*" In part, this statement which rejects the notion of the 'void' (*inane*), is no doubt intended to show the reason why — having come to recognize the immutable nature of God — Augustine could not hold to the dualistic physical theories of the Epicurean philosophy which taught that there were two principles of all things in the universe (i.e., atoms and the void). For a statement of the Epicurean teachings on this matter, see Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, I, 417-420. "*Sed nunc ut repetam coeptum pertexere dictis, omnis, ut est igitur per se, natura duabus constitit in rebus; nam corpora sunt et inane.*" *Corpus* and *inane* are just the two terms that Augustine uses in the text we have quoted above.

15. Because this god, which Augustine worshipped, is the creation of his own imagination, he says in the text from *Conf.*, VII,xiv,20 (quoted above, n.2), that his soul made it (*fecerat*), and it is on this account that he describes it in the same text as an idol (i.e., man made), which is therefore abominable to the true God who cannot be made by man but rather can only be discovered and recognized by him.

16. *Conf.*, VII,i,2 "*Ego itaque incrassatus corde nec mihimet ipsi vel ipse conspicuus, quidquid non per aliquanta spatia tenderetur vel diffunderetur vel conglobaretur vel tumeret vel tale aliquid caperet aut capere posset, nihil prorsus esse arbitrabar. per quales enim formas ire solent oculi mei, per tales imagines ibat cor meum, nec videbam hanc eandem intentionem, qua illas ipsas imagines formabam, non esse tale aliquid: quae tamen ipsas non formaret, nisi esset magnum aliquid. ita etiam te, vita vitae meae, grandem per infinita spatia undique cogitabam penetrare totam mundi molem et extra eam quaequaversum per immensa sine termino, ut haberet te terra, haberet caelum, haberent omnia et illa finirentur in te, tu autem nusquam. sicut autem luci solis non obsisteret aeris corpus, aeris huius, qui supra terram est, quominus per eum traiceretur penetrans eum non dirrumpendo aut concidendo, sed implendo eum totum, sic tibi putabam non solum caeli et aeris et maris sed etiam terrae corpus pervium et ex omnibus maximis minimisque partibus penetrabile ad capiendam praesentiam tuam, occulta inspiratione intrinsecus et extrinsecus administrante omnia, quae creasti.*"

Just as Augustine could not rest content with the limited knowledge of nature (*peritia*) that the natural philosophers or secular scientists immediately profess and possess and which, because of its uncertainty, has nothing directly to do with the Truth that he sought, neither can he rest content with the certainty of a purely mathematical knowledge

“And I set up *in the regard* of my spirit the universal creature, whatsoever in it we are able to discern (such as the earth and the sea and the air and the stars and the trees and mortal animals), and whatsoever in it we do not see (such as the firmament of heaven which is on the top and all the angels and the entirety of its spiritual inhabitants, but yet as if these were bodies, disposed in such and such places according to my imagination). And I made of your creature one great mass, distinguished by the kinds of bodies, either those that were bodies in truth, or those bodies that I took for spirits. And this mass I made huge, not as huge as it was, which I was not able to know, but as huge as it pleased me, yet in every respect altogether finite. However you, O Lord, I imagined encompassing and penetrating this mass in every part, but in every way infinite: as if there were a sea — anywhere and everywhere through an immense infinity only the sea — and that sea had in it a sponge no matter how big, though finite, and that sponge was full in all its parts with the immense sea. Thus I supposed your creature to be finite but filled by you who are infinite and I said, ‘Here is God and here are the things which God created, and God is good and most powerfully and greatly more excellent than these; but however, being good, he created them good and this is how he surrounds and fills them all.’”<sup>17</sup> (VII, v, 7)

Augustine does not tell us the source of this particular view of the nature of the Truth<sup>18</sup> and neither does this matter since it is

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because it has nothing directly to do with the sensible nature of the universe in and about which he was determined that the Truth must be found. It is on account of this latter consideration that Augustine did not fall into the Pythagorean speculations according to which numbers are the essence and truth of things.

17. *Conf.*, VII,v,7 “*et constituebam in conspectu (Ps. 18:15) spiritus mei universam creaturam, quidquid in ea cernere possumus, sicuti est terra et mare et aer et sidera et arbores et animalia mortalia, et quidquid in ea non videmus, sicut firmamentum caeli insuper et omnes angelos et cuncta spiritalia eius, sed etiam ipsa, quasi corpora essent, locis et locis ordinata, ut imaginatio mea; et feci unam massam grandem distinctam generibus corporum creaturam tuam, sive re vera quae corpora erant, sive quae ipse pro spiritibus finxeram, et eam feci grandem, non quantum erat, quod scire non poteram, sed quantum libuit, undiqueversum sane finitam, te autem, domine, ex omni parte ambientem et penetrantem eam, sed usquequaque infinitum, tamquam si mare esset ubique et undique per immensa infinitum solum mare et haberet intra se spongiam quamlibet magnam, sed finitam tamen, plena esset utique spongia illa ex omni sua parte ex immenso mari; sic creaturam tuam finitam te infinito plenam putabam et dicebam: ‘ecce deus et ecce quae creavit deus, et bonus deus atque his validissime longissimeque praestantior; sed tamen bonus bona creavit: et ecce quomodo ambit atque implet ea.’”*

18. It is evident that this is just the notion of the Truth which constitutes

clear that some such notion must be held by anyone who has recognized the unchangeable nature of the Truth and yet is determined that the Truth must be sensible so that he can grasp it directly and use it for his own private ends. It seems altogether likely however that Augustine drew this view from a Stoic source, for this notion of God as an infinite corporeal substance penetrating and ordering every part of the finite universe is identical to the Stoic view of the nature of God as the active (artistic), rational, eternal but corporeal *pneuma* or creative fire<sup>19</sup> which pervades or mixes with <sup>20</sup> the passive corporeal substance of the universe (matter), giving it the determinations of the other elements — air, earth and water<sup>21</sup> — out of which it makes all

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the final error on the way to the Truth according to Augustine's list from *Conf.*, VII,xiv,20. The text is quoted above n.2.

19. For a brief, modern account of the Stoic philosophy, see A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Duckworth, London, 1979, esp. pp. 152-158.

20. A. A. Long states the problem, to which this idea of 'pervasion' or 'mixture' is the answer, in the following way. "According to Chrysippus, *pneuma* interacts with matter by permeating it completely. But both the *pneuma* and matter are corporeal, and it is an elementary principle of physics that two bodies cannot occupy the same space at the same time. How then is it conceivable that *pneuma* can completely permeate matter? The Stoics were aware of the difficulty, and they sought to overcome it by distinguishing between different modes of mixture." (*Hellenistic Philosophy*, p. 158. See also pp. 159-160 for Long's treatment of the Stoic notion of 'mixing'). In our view, Augustine's image of the sea (God), penetrating every part of creation (the sponge), in *Conf.*, VII,v,7 (quoted above n.17), or of the Sun (God), filling the air (creation), without breaking or cutting it, (see *Conf.*, VII,i,2 quoted above n. 16) are both efforts to describe precisely this Stoic notion of bodies penetrating bodies. We have not been able to discover a direct source in the Stoic literature for the images which Augustine uses in the *Confessions*. A collection of texts relating to the Stoic notion of 'mixture' may be found in J. von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, Teubner, Stuttgart, 1964, (hereafter *S.V.F.*), Vol. II, pp. 151-158.

21. The four elements in the Stoic account are earth, water, air and *pneuma*, which latter is alone indestructible (see Chrysippus' account, quoted in *S.V.F.*, Vol. II, #413), and is also called fire or aether and which constitutes the soul or vital force both in the universe as a whole and in all its parts. On these four elements see Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, II,xxxiii, 84 "Et cum quattuor genera sint corporum, vicissitudine eorum mundi continuata natura est. nam ex terra aqua ex aqua oritur aer ex aer aether, deinde retrorsum vicissim ex aethere aer, inde aqua, ex aqua terra infima. sic naturis his ex quibus omnia constant sursus deorsus ultro citro commeantibus mundi partium coniunctio continetur." Further on, Cicero notes that the fire or aether is, in Latin, called "heaven" (*caelum*): see II,xxvi, 91. These four (*caelum, aer, mare, terra*) are just the four elements that Augustine distinguishes in two places in the first chapter: see *Conf.*, VII,i,1 quoted above n.14, and *Conf.*, VII,i,2 quoted above n.16.

things and by which *pneuma* the universe is also rationally and beneficently governed in all its parts. This Stoic conception of the divine thus meets the two essential requirements of the notion of the Truth that Augustine was bound to hold at this stage of his life for it is both corporeal<sup>22</sup> and monistic.<sup>23</sup>

However, while Augustine may have taken this theoretical conception of the nature of the Truth from a Stoic source — as that statement of the nature of the Truth which was most consistent with the requirements of his Scepticism<sup>24</sup> — he could by no means affirm it dogmatically in the Stoic manner or attempt to follow its consequences in his practical activities, for in part he held to his Scepticism precisely because he was unwilling to act on any doctrine concerning the nature of the Truth which could only be believed.<sup>25</sup> And this notion about the nature of the Truth can only

22. See for example Cicero's account of Zeno's physics in *Academica*, I, xi, 39.

23. See Diogenes Laertius' account in *Lives*, VIII, 147. See also the account of the single, immutable, controlling providence in Cicero's *Academica*, I, vii, 29.

24. The compatibility of the Stoic theology with a Sceptical position was evidently felt by Cicero as well as by Augustine. At the end of *De Natura Deorum* (III, xi, 95) Cicero says "*Haec cum essent dicta, ita discessimus ut Velleio Cottae disputatio verior, mihi Balbi (who speaks for the Stoics), ad veritatis similitudinem videretur esse propensior.*" Solignac in *BA* 13, p. 579, n.1, notes a possible connection between Stoicism and the notion of God which Augustine is describing. The connection between this view of God and the Stoic notion has been noted by others as well: see for example G. Verbecke, "Augustin et le stoicisme", in *Recherches Augustiniennes*, I, Paris, 1958, pp. 67-89, and pp. 78-80. Testard in *Saint Augustin et Cicéron*, I, *Etudes Augustiniennes*, Paris, 1958, p. 117 also notes the resemblance between the view of God which Augustine describes in these chapters and the views of the Stoic spokesman, Balbus, in Book II of Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*. See also O'Connell, *Saint Augustine's Early Theory of Man*, Belknap/Harvard, Camb., Mass., 1968, pp. 97-99, and his article in *Augustinian Studies*, Vol. I, 1970, Villanova, Pa., U.S.A., "De Libero Arbitrio I, Stoicism Revisted", where he gives us by far the best account of the logic of Augustine's adherence to the Stoic view as of the reason why he was forced to abandon it for Neo-Platonism.

25. Thus, as Augustine tells us in *Conf.*, VI, xvi, 26, while on the one hand his Scepticism led him to adopt the Epicurean Philosophy as the most likely course by which he could be guided in his practical activities (although he had to reject their explanation of the nature and activities of the Gods), on the other hand, as we now propose, the same Scepticism made him adopt the Stoic conception as the most likely theory about the nature of God (although he could by no means follow the practical consequences which the Stoics drew from this view). Briefly put, the Epicurean theology teaches the existence of Gods who have no relation to the affairs of this world while the Stoic practical philosophy teaches the necessity of a total involvement in the world.

be believed for, on the one hand, inasmuch as the *pneuma* or incorruptible God is held to be corporeal, it cannot be known with any more certainty than the probable knowledge that the senses and experience can provide and so it must finally be believed. And, on the other hand, insofar as the corporeal nature of the universe is held to be ultimately incorruptible (in its *pneumatic* form), this can in no way be grasped by the senses, and so again it must be believed.

At this point in his argument Augustine tells us that he then directed all his attention to the effort to discover and understand the cause of evil and in these chapters (iii-vii), he describes the unsuccessful attempts which he made at the time to resolve this "problem". If we are to understand what he took from the *libri Platoniorum* (VII, ix, 13), and how he came at last to the vision of the Truth, we must be very clear as to why this "problem" appears. We may begin by recalling that, for the dualist position of the Manichees, there was, strictly speaking, no "problem" of evil. Since, on their account, any evil that a man did was not held to be his own responsibility, as if he had willed it, but rather it was supposed to have been willed by the evil principle over which he had no control.<sup>26</sup> Such a view gratifies the natural man's determination to insist on his own innocence over against the universe — but it can only do this at the cost of supposing that God is corruptible.<sup>27</sup> And this Augustine was no longer willing to assume as he now knew that it was not possible to have any certain knowledge of the Truth unless the Truth was understood to be incorruptible. But if God is incorruptible and is not opposed by any evil principle, then the only source of the manifest evil and corruption in the world must lie in man himself. From this there arises, of necessity, the recognition of the freedom of the will (on which the Stoics particularly insisted), and as Augustine tells us he then tried to understand the origin of evil in terms of this notion.

"And I exercised my effort to understand what I heard,<sup>28</sup> that the free decision of the will was the cause of our evil-doing and

26. See *Conf.*, V,x,18 for a very clear statement of this Manichaean position: see also *Conf.*, IV,xv,26 and *Conf.*, V,x,20.

27. See *Conf.*, VII,iii,4.

28. A. Solignac, following P. Courcelle, understands this phrase to refer to the sermons of Ambrose: see BA 13, p. 148 and, for Courcelle's argument, *Recherches sur les Confessions de Saint Augustin*, new ed., Editions E. de Boccard, Paris, 1968 pp.99-100 and pp. 106-120. It is of course possible and indeed certain that Augustine did hear from Ambrose that the cause of evil is to be found in the free decision of the will. Thus, Courcelle tries to show that Augustine could have heard certain sermons

thy just punishment the cause of our sufferings, but I was not able to see this clearly. Thus, while trying to raise the aim of my mind out of the deep I again fell back, and trying often I fell back again and again. For this lifted me up to your light, that I now knew that I had a will as surely as I knew that I was alive. Thus when I willed or nilled something, I was most certain that it was I and not another that willed and nilled, and here, as I now saw, was the cause of my sin."<sup>29</sup> (VII, iii, 5)

From this we can see that the man who has come so far as to recognize the necessity of the divine incorruptibility must also be brought by this recognition to recognize his own free will — from which position he now can and must also acknowledge and confess his sins if he wishes to do the Truth. And so, as Augustine says, he was freed from the error of the (Manichee's) dualist position where a man does not recognize or confess his own sin but prefers to suppose that god suffers evil rather than that man does it.<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, as Augustine tells us, he then found that he was unable to discover any answer to the question which he could not avoid asking concerning the origin of evil. The text we have translated above continues in the following way:

"However, what I did against my consent, that I seemed to suffer rather than to do, and that I judged not to be my fault

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of Ambrose from which he could have taken this notion which Ambrose in turn could have taken from the Neo-Platonic sources, but this laboured argument is as superfluous as it is inconclusive. This is what Christianity teaches, but as we have seen, such a view is also the inevitable consequence of the notion that God is incorruptible, inviolable and immutable and it is therefore common to every position which has come so far as to recognize the divine incorruptibility. But this is true of Christianity, Platonism and Stoicism. At this point in his argument we argue that Augustine has in mind the Stoics as those from whom he heard that the cause of evil lies in the free decision of man's will since, of these three (Christianity, Plato and the Stoics), it is only the Stoics who teach the notion of an incorruptible and corporeal God such as Augustine is describing and in terms of which he was unable to discover the cause of evil.

29. *Conf.*, VII,iii,5 "*Et intendebam, ut cernerem quod audiebam, liberum voluntatis arbitrium causam esse, ut male faceremus et rectum iudicium tuum ut pateremur, et eam liquidam cernere non valebam. itaque aciem mentis de profundo educere conatus mergebar iterum et saepe conatus mergebar iterum atque iterum. subleuabat enim me in lucem tuam, quod tam sciebam me habere voluntatem quam me vivere. itaque cum aliquid vellem aut nollem, non alium quam me velle ac nolle certissimus eram et ibi esse causam peccati mei iam iamque advertebam.*"

30. *Conf.*, VII,iii,5 "*His cogitationibus deprimebar iterum et suffocabar, sed non usque ad illum infernum subducebar erroris, ubi nemo tibi confitetur, dum tu potius mala pati quam homo facere putatur.*"

(*culpa*) but my punishment, which punishment I immediately acknowledged that I did not unjustly suffer since I thought you to be just. But again I said: "Who made me? Was it not my god who is not only good but the Good itself? From what source then does it come to me that I can will evil and nill good? So that there might be a just reason that I suffer punishment? Who placed this in me and grafted on to me the branch of bitterness since I was wholly made by my most sweet god?"<sup>31</sup> (VII, iii, 5)

If we are to understand Augustine's efforts to resolve this question and his inability to do so in terms of the notion of the Truth which he held at the time, we must be very precise about the origin of this problem itself. Now the important point to recognize here is that for the Stoics — who developed the practical consequences of this notion of the Truth — there is, strictly speaking, no problem of evil. Insofar as a man is simply willing to believe in such an incorruptible god, this problem does not and cannot present itself (except inasmuch as it is raised by a polemical attack on this belief). For in terms of this belief a man must affirm that evil and corruption simply do not exist. And while he is bound to acknowledge his sufferings as a just punishment for his sinful acts — since this "evil" can come from no other source: neither god nor any other principle — he acknowledges his sin in such a way that he altogether ignores his own evil nature. For what he confesses is not a sinful nature but sinful acts — moments in which he contravenes the divine order of nature and which, of the class of things "done against his consent" (see above, VII, iii, 5,), he cannot know and is satisfied to discover in the breach. And thus, by the simple expedient of resolving not to complain against the universe on account of his sufferings, he tries to establish his own innocence over against the universe even while he makes for himself a charter to pursue his worldly ambitions as he pleases, without having to bother to come to a knowledge of the Truth. Thus the Stoics taught that the sage or wise man may freely plunge himself into his worldly pursuits, confident that nothing that he does can in any way harm the universe as a whole or disturb its divine government, if only he is willing to acknowledge any failure in his worldly ambitions as an evidence that he has contravened

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31. *Conf.*, VII,iii,5 "Quod autem invitus facerem, pati me potius quam facere videbam et id non culpam, sed poenam esse iudicabam, qua me non iniuste plecti te iustum cogitans cito fatebar. sed rursus dicebam: 'quis fecit me? nonne dues meus, non tantum bonus, sed ipsum bonum? unde igitur mihi male velle et bene nolle? ut esset, cur iuste poenas luerem? quis in me hoc posuit et iniecit mihi plantarium amaritudinis, cum totus fierem a dulcissimo deo meo?'"

the divine order and to accept the suffering which is consequent on this failure as a just punishment which he must "stoically" endure.<sup>32</sup> In short, by this will to suffer what cannot be avoided, the man who believes in such a notion of the Truth tries to abolish his own evil nature by abolishing evil altogether for it is just his will not to regard the manifest suffering and corruption in the world as an evil but only as a just punishment. And thus, through his will to suffer he tries to maintain his own sovereign independence over against the universe by absolving himself of any responsibility for coming to know the Truth. However, as Augustine will show, it is precisely this failure to seek the Truth that itself constitutes the evil of man's nature as it manifests itself in this stage of his life.

Insofar as a man is willing to believe in such an incorruptible but corporeal god there is therefore no problem of evil. But Augustine was prevented from adopting this Stoical position by his Scepticism. And thus, because of his continuing determination to know the Truth and his refusal to rest in any moment which depended upon belief, the manifest evil and corruption in the world then constituted a problem which arises from this very notion of the nature of god — and it is a problem which Augustine could neither tolerate, ignore nor understand.

He could not tolerate the manifest evil and corruption in the world because, as he had by now come to know, the incorruptible was infinitely preferable to the corruptible<sup>33</sup> and it was this that he desired to possess in the form of a certain knowledge of the Truth. But because he was determined to get "beyond" the perishable, neither could he allow, (in the Stoic manner), that evil and corruption simply do not exist. For in this case he would have to deny the existence of the very thing which he sought to escape.

"Where then is evil and whence and how did it steal into the world? What is its root and what the seed of it? Or is it altogether not? Why then do we fear and beware of that which is not? If we fear on no account this fear itself is evil — this fear by which the heart is tormented and distressed for no cause; and so much the greater is the evil as that which we fear is not and yet

32. For an appreciative account of the Stoic ethics, see A.A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, pp. 179-209.

33. *Conf.*, VII,iv,6 "Sic enim nitebar invenire cetera, ut iam inveneram melius esse incorruptibile quam corruptibile, et ideo te, quidquid esses, esse incorruptibilem confitebar. neque enim ulla anima umquam potuit poteritue cogitare aliquid, quod sit te melius, qui summum et optimum bonum es. cum autem verissime atque certissime incorruptibile corruptibili praeponatur, sicut iam ego praeponebam, poteram iam cogitatione aliquid adtingere, quod esset melius deo meo, nisi tu esses incorruptibilis."

we fear it. Therefore either there is evil which we fear or this is evil, that we fear."<sup>34</sup> (VII, v, 7)

Finally, because he was determined to know the Truth, Augustine was bound to look for a rational explanation for the source or cause of evil and for the same reason he was haunted by the fear of death and could not rest until he had found such a rational account.<sup>35</sup> But there can be no rational explanation of the cause of evil and corruption in terms of such a notion of the nature of the Truth. For where God is held to be both incorruptible and corporeal in precisely the same respects, then either one must affirm with the Stoics that there is no evil and that God and his creation are both absolutely good, which is to deny the evident corruption of the corporeal and the sensible; or else one must acknowledge the existence of evil and corruption in the sensible which is then to deny the omnipotence and incorruptibility of

34. *Conf.*, VII,v,7 "Ubi ergo malum et unde et qua huc inrepsit? quae radix eius et quod semen eius? an omnino non est? cur ergo timemus et cavemus quod non est? aut si inaniter timemus, certe vel timor ipse malum est, quo incassum stimulat et excruciat cor, et tanto gravius malum, quanto non est, quod timeamus, et timemus. idcirco aut est malum, quod timemus, aut hoc malum est, quia timemus."

35. *Conf.*, VII,v,7 "Taliaolvebam pectore misero, ingravidato curis mordacissimis de timore mortis et non inventa veritate; stabiliter tamen haerebat in corde meo in catholica ecclesia fides Christi tui, domini et salvatoris nostri, (II Peter 2:20) in multis quidem adhuc informis et praeter doctrinae normam fluitans, sed tamen non eam relinquebat animus, immo in dies magis magisque inbibebat."

It is of course on just this point (death), that the practical consequences of the contradiction of the Stoical position are most sharply felt. As Augustine did not ever 'become' a Stoic he does not describe this business but we note that of all the 'things that happen against a man's consent', death itself is the one thing that everyman knows he must 'stoically' endure and which gives the lie to the whole position. This contradiction may be stated in many ways, but to follow the argument we have already put forward, we may say that while the Stoic tries to maintain his own sovereign independence or identity over against the universe through his will to suffer, he must do this in the knowledge that the last thing he has to suffer is his death, which is just the dissolution of this identity and independence. By his willingness to identify the incorruptible Truth with the corruptible world a man sanctifies his worldly activities and frees himself from the necessity of seeking the objective Truth. But the consequences of this ignorance cannot be ignored for they reappear in the necessity that in the end the same man must acknowledge that corruption or death is the final and absolute Truth of the world. And thus, this doctrine which begins by promising to free man from the fear of death, ends up by teaching that death is the absolute and final truth of the universe. On a cosmic scale, this is just what is reflected in the Stoic doctrine of the cyclical conflagration of the universe.

God.<sup>36</sup> Augustine could not accept the former and would not allow the latter, for in either case he would have to abandon any hope of coming to a certain knowledge of the Truth.

Now this desire for the knowledge of God, which prevented Augustine from adopting a Stoical position and on account of which he found himself caught on the horns of this painful dilemma,<sup>37</sup> must not be attributed to any superior piety on his part. For the Stoic's belief in such an incorruptible but corporeal god and his own refusal to believe in this god are merely the two sides of the same coin and both alike exhibit the fault of this age (*iuventus*), which consists in the refusal to seek the objective, universal Truth. By their willingness to believe in such an incorruptible but corporeal god, the Stoics seek to establish their own innocence in the universe and thus "free" themselves to pursue their immediate worldly interests, while Augustine's refusal to believe arises from his determination to scorn his worldly interests until he knows the Truth which he nevertheless desires only so that he can put it to the service of his own private ends. But because of this determination, he could only recognize a truth which can be grasped immediately and directly and so was bound to imagine god as corporeal and sensible and it is just this that prevents him from coming to the certain knowledge of the Truth which he desires.<sup>38</sup>

36. *Conf.*, VII,v,7 "Unde est igitur, quoniam deus fecit haec omnia bonus bona? maius quidem et summum bonum minora fecit bona, sed tamen et creans et creata bona sunt omnia. unde est malum? an unde fecit ea, materies aliqua mala erat, et formavit atque ordinavit eam, sed reliquit aliquid in illa, quod in bonum non converteret? cur et hoc? an inpotens erat totamvertere et commutare, ut nihil mali remaneret, cum sit omnipotens? postremo cur inde aliquid facere voluit ac non potius eadem omnipotentia fecit, ut nulla esset omnino? aut vero existere poterat contra eius voluntatem? aut si aeterna erat, cur tam diu per infinita retro spatia temporum sic eam sivit esse ac tanto post placuit aliquid ex ea facere? aut iam, si aliquid subito voluit agere, hoc potius ageret omnipotens, ut illa non esset atque ipse solus esset totum verum et summum et infinitum bonum? aut si non erat bene, ut non aliquid boni etiam fabricaretur et conderet qui bonus erat, illa sublata et ad nihilum redacta materies, quae mala erat, bonam ipse institueret, unde omnia crearet? non enim esset omnipotens, si condere non posset aliquid boni, nisi ea quam non ipse condiderat adiuveretur materia."

37. *Conf.*, VII,vii,11 ". . . quae illa tormenta parturientis cordis mei, qui gemitus, deus meus! et ibi erant aures tuae nesciente me. et cum in silentio fortiter quaererem, magnae voces erant ad misericordiam tuam, tacitae contritiones animi mei. tu sciebas, qui patiebar, et nullus hominum. quantum enim erat, quod inde digerebatur per linguam meam in aures familiarissimorum meorum! numquid totus tumultus animae meae, cui nec tempora nec os meum sufficiebat, sonabat eis?"

38. *Conf.*, VII,vii,11 "Totum tamen ibat in auditum tuum, quod rugiebam a gemitu cordis mei, et ante te erat desiderium meum et lumen oculorum

Knowing that he did not know the Truth, Augustine refused for these reasons to act on any doctrine which demanded belief. And yet driven by the now terrifying fear that he might die before coming to a knowledge of the Truth, he tells us that amongst the various doctrines about the nature of the Truth which depended on belief he daily preferred the Catholic faith to any other,<sup>39</sup> (i.e., the Stoic), as the most probable account both of the nature of the Truth and of the way to it — the more so since he now saw that it too affirmed that God was incorruptible, inviolable and immutable.<sup>40</sup>

Augustine's situation was now totally intolerable and altogether unstable. For, by his determination to know the incorruptible Truth, he was prevented from resting in any position which depended on belief. And yet, so long as he refused to relinquish his proud and arrogant aim of grasping the Truth immediately and directly so that he might put it to the service of his private ends he was bound to conceive of God as a corporeal substance and this notion was just what prevented him from coming to the certain knowledge of the Truth which he desired. There is only one

*meorum non erat mecum*, (Ps. 37: 9-11) *intus enim erat, ego autem foris, nec in loco illud. at ego intendebam in ea, quae locis continentur, et non ibi inveniēbam locum ad requiescendum, nec recipiebant me ista, ut dicerem: 'sat est et bene est', nec dimittebant redire, ubi mihi satis esset bene. superior enim eram istis, te vero inferior, et tu gaudium verum mihi subdito tibi et tu mihi subieceras quae infra me creasti. et hoc erat rectum temperamentum et media regio salutis meae, ut manerem ad imaginem* (Gen. 1:26) *tuam et tibi serviens dominarer corpori. sed cum superbe contra te surgerem et currerem adversus dominum in cervice crassa scuti mei*, (Job 15:26) *etiam ista infima supra me facta sunt et premebant, et nusquam erat laxamentum et respiramentum. ipsa occurrebant undique acervatim et conglobatim cernenti, cogitanti autem imagines corporum ipsae opponebantur redeunti, quasi diceretur: 'quo is, indigne et sordide?' et haec de vulnere meo creverant, quia humiliasti tamquam vulneratum superbum*, (Ps. 88:11) *et tumore meo separabar abs te et nimis inflata facies claudebat oculos meos.'*

39. See *Conf.*, VII, v,7 and VII, vii,11.

40. *Conf.*, VII, i,1 "Non te cogitabam, deus, in figura corporis humani, ex quo audire aliquid de sapientia coepi; semper hoc fugi et gaudebam me hoc repperisse in fide spiritualis matris nostrae, catholicae tuae; sed quid te aliud cogitarem non occurrebat." The sense of this remark at this point in the argument is that if God is limited by the shape of a human body his substance cannot be infinte and incorruptible. See also *Conf.*, VII, v,7 and *Conf.*, VII, vii,11 "Iam itaque me, adiutor meus, (Ps. 17:3 & 18:15) illis vinculis solveras, et quaerebam, unde malum, et non erat exitus. sed me non sinebas ullis fluctibus cogitationis auferrī ab ea fide, qua credebam et esse te et esse incommutabilem substantiam tuam et esse de hominibus curam et iudicium tuum et in Christo, filio tuo domino nostro, atque scripturis sanctis, quas ecclesiae tuae catholicae commendaret auctoritas, viam te posuisse salutis humanae ad eam vitam, quae post hanc mortem futura est. his itaque salvīs atque inconcusse roboratis in animo meo quaerebam aestuans, unde sit malum . . ."

possible resolution of this dilemma which is consistent with his desire for a knowledge of the incorruptible Truth and this is: that he give up the notion of a corporeal god. And thus Augustine tells us that he was moved by the Truth itself to abandon this final error<sup>41</sup> and so did he at last come to the direct and unmistakable vision of the Truth which he describes in VII, x, 16 — VII, xvi, 22.

In a final chapter (VII, ix, 13-15), before he describes this vision of the Truth, Augustine makes his famous reference to the "books of the Platonists" — the *libri Platoniorum* — by which as he says he was "admonished" and thus assisted to come at last to the vision of the Truth.<sup>42</sup>

Modern scholarship has produced an immense literature on this subject all of which aims at discovering precisely which "books of the Platonists" Augustine read in order to determine precisely what he took from them. The diligent work of these scholars has produced a profusion of texts, which show possible correspondences between this passage in the *Confessions*<sup>43</sup> and this or that Platonist source. But whatever the particular source or sources which any of these scholars promote, almost all are agreed<sup>44</sup> that

41. This is the final error on the way to the vision of the Truth in the sense that it constitutes the last and only error that a man can hold who has come so far as to recognize the divine incorruptibility. It is of course by no means necessary that any man move beyond this error to the vision of the Truth, but 'beyond' this error there lies only the vision of the Truth.

42. *Conf.*, VII,x,16 "Et inde admonitus redire ad memet ipsum intravi in intima mea duce te et potui, quoniam factus es adiutor meus." (Ps. 29:11).

On this *admonitus* see Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, art. "*admoneo*" = "to bring up to one's mind . . . by influencing more directly the reason and judgment; while in *adhortor* the admonition is addressed immediately to the will." See also *Conf.*, VII,xx,26 where *admoneo* is again used in the same sense.

43. See also *Conf.*, VII,x,16; VII,xx,26 — VII,xxi,27; VIII, i,2; VIII,ii,3. These discussions generally include the two other brief accounts of the effect of the *libri Platoniorum* which are found in *Contra Academicos*, II,ii,5 and *De Beata Vita*, I,4.

44. Before the *Enneads* of Plotinus came to be widely known through the translation begun in the mid-nineteenth century (notably, that of M. N. Bouillet, *Les Enneades de Plotin*, 3 vols., Paris, 1857-1861), Harnack supposed that the *libri Platoniorum* referred to the works of *Plato*: see A. Harnack, "Die Hohepunkte in Augustins Konfessionen" reprinted in *Aus der Friedens und Kriegsarbeit Reden und Aufsätze*, Vol. III, Giessen, 1904, pp. 51-79. Harnack's assumption has now been replaced for a century by the supposition that Augustine actually means the books of the *Neo-Platonists*. This supposition has held such sway for the past century that it is now taken for a knowledge although it is not in fact supported by anything other than circumstantial evidence; not a single instance in all these parallels and reminiscences in the Neo-Platonic literature indisputably

by the *libri Platoniorum*, Augustine intends certain Neo-Platonic treatises, either of Plotinus himself or of one or another of his disciples, imitators or translators.<sup>45</sup>

We shall not involve ourselves in this discussion since, for the purpose at hand, our main contention with regard to this matter is that the search for these "sources" is both superfluous and misleading.<sup>46</sup> It is superfluous since it is clear that in order to understand Augustine's argument in the *Confessions* he himself did not think it necessary for the reader to know the precise content of these works and he describes this content solely in terms of

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proves that Augustine had in mind any Neo-Platonic source when he speaks of the *libri Platoniorum* however likely this may indeed be.

45. For a brief, clear and comprehensive account of the history of these efforts see R. J. O'Connell, *Saint Augustine's Early Theory*, pp. 6-10. In addition to this work, other treatments of the question may be found in Courcelle, *Recherches*, pp. 99-174; J. J. O'Meara, *The Young Augustine*, Longmans, Green, London, 1954, pp. 131-155; M. Pellegrino, *Les Confessions*, Editions Alsatia, Paris, 1960, pp. 162-173 and O. du Roy, *L'Intelligence de la Foi en la Trinité selon Saint Augustin*, Études Augustiniennes, Paris, 1966, pp. 61-88. Most of these works contain extensive bibliographies on the question as do A. Solignac's comments in the 'Introduction' pp. 100-112 and 'Notes Complémentaires', #23-26, pp. 679-693 in BA 13. Solignac discusses the Neo-Platonic 'circle' at Milan in a lengthy and useful study in his 'Notes Complémentaires', #1, BA 14, pp. 529-536.

46. Although the precise identification of the *libri Platoniorum* is not important for our interpretation of the *Confessions*, it is perhaps time to reconsider the view that Augustine might actually be referring to some Platonic texts. The evidence in favour of this view may be summed up in the following way:

i) There is Augustine's clear and unequivocal statement that the books of which he is speaking were written in Athens: see *Conf.*, VII, ix, 15. "*Et dixisti Atheniensibus per apostolum tuum, quod in te vivemus et movemur et sumus* (Acts 17:28) *sicut et quidam secundum eos dixerunt, et utique inde erant illi libri.*"

ii) In the passage in the *De Beata Vita*, (I,4) where he speaks of this incident, Augustine says, "*Lectis autem Platonis paucissimis libris . . .*" (emphasis ours). Modern scholarship has been to some trouble to try to show that this *Platonis* is really a copyist's error for *Plotini* (notably in the effort of P. Henry, *Plotin et L'Occident*, Louvain, 1934, pp. 82-89): Courcelle in his *Recherches* takes the reading *Plotini* for granted as do many others and O. du Roy, in *L'Intelligence* says "P. Henry . . . a établi la leçon *Plotini*" comme absolument sûre." (p. 69, n.1). This "absolute certainty" is not the case and the position of O'Connell in *Saint Augustine's Early Theory*, is much better considered: "The manuscript tradition presents strong arguments for a copyist's error at this point; it seems so probable that the original reading was *Plotini* that one may safely take it as practically certain." (p.6). However plausible, it remains a supposition that *Plotini* is the correct reading, but the main point we would emphasize is that it is not necessary to entertain this reading in order to make sense out of Augustine's

analogous teachings from the Scriptures. And it is misleading because it is just this method of working from clues in Augustine, to the discovery of his sources and thence back to Augustine with a presumably enlightened view of what Augustine taught or held, that has led to a number of seriously strained and misleading interpretations as Augustine's works are themselves distorted to

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reference to the *libri Platoniorum*.

iii) In *Conf.*, VIII,ii,3 Augustine says "*Ubi autem commemoravi legisse me quosdam libros Platoniorum, quas Victorinus quondam, rhetor urbis Romae, quam christianum defunctum esse audieram, in latinam linguam transtulisset . . .*". In relation to this text it is generally supposed that these *libri Platoniorum* are the very same books to which Augustine refers in *Conf.*, VII,ix,13 but there is no necessity for such an assumption. And moreover, it is also supposed that the "books of the Platonists" which Victorinus translated refer to the translation of certain Neo-Platonic works. However P. Hadot who has done a most careful study of the question in *Marius Victorinus, Recherches sur sa vie et ses Oeuvres, Etudes Augustiniennes*, Paris, 1971 pp. 201-210 is unable to determine, either from Augustine or from any other source, the content of the (lost) *libri Platoniorum* of Victorinus.

iv) In the *De Civitate Dei* in a passage which is somewhat too long to reproduce here (VIII,ix-xii), Augustine speaks of the knowledge of God which Plato possessed, in exactly the same terms as he describes the vision of the Truth which he derived from the *libri Platoniorum* in the *Confessions*. Here we find precisely the same parallels which Augustine draws between the Scriptures and the "books of the Platonists" in the *Confessions* and in this text from *De Civitate Dei* he refers explicitly to the *Timaeus* in which he says he found these teachings (at least in part), and which he could have read in the Latin translation of Calcidius (this work has been edited recently by J. H. Waszink, *Platonis Timaeus a Calcidio translatus commentarioque instructus*, Corpus Platoniorum Medii Aevi, Plato Latinus, Leyden, 1962). Of course this passage from the *De Civitate Dei* does not prove that when Augustine says in the *Confessions* that he read the *libri Platoniorum* he intends that he read certain Platonic texts, however the similarity of this text with the passage from the *Confessions* does at least establish that he could certainly have derived the vision of the Truth from the reading of certain Platonic works and indeed as he makes clear in *De Civitate Dei*, VIII,xii, Augustine regards Plato as the epitome of all those who have come to this knowledge of the Truth.

Of course none of this evidence, either item by item or taken as a whole, is conclusive and it is certainly not our intention to argue for a "Platonic" rather than a "Neo-Platonic" interpretation of the content of the *libri Platoniorum*. Instead, our main contention is just that Augustine himself does not regard a precise knowledge of the content of these books as essential to the understanding of his argument in the *Confessions*. However, in the light of the massive interest that has been focused in recent times on the Neo-Platonic side of the question it does seem germane to review the evidence on the other side if only to illumine the continuing uncertainty about this issue which probably cannot be finally and certainly resolved in this external manner with the available evidence.

accord with the presumed "source" which is supposed to explain them.<sup>47</sup>

As Augustine could have come to the direct and unmistakable vision of the Truth from an understanding of any number of ancient texts (either Platonic or Neo-Platonic or indeed, as he himself makes clear, from an understanding of either the Old or New Testaments),<sup>48</sup> we shall not try to determine which texts he read. Rather, confining ourselves to the argument of the *Confessions*, we shall bring this whole long process of coming to know the Truth to its proper term and try ourselves to see the same Truth which Augustine saw. To this end we must follow behind Augustine as closely as possible.

We begin by noticing that he prefaces his entire remarks about the *libri Platoniorum*, their teaching and the vision of the Truth to which they led him, by the assertion that what he learnt from them did not in any way cure his pride. But rather, belonging themselves to the economy of pride, they served in the end to show him the distinction between pride and humility,<sup>49</sup> between presumption and confession,<sup>50</sup> between the unbegotten Word and

47. All of these misinterpretations turn in some form or other on a confusion of Neo-Platonism and Christianity. For a brief history of the century-old controversy that has raged over this matter see J. J. OMeara's account in the introduction to Augustine, *Against the Academics*, Ancient Christian Writers Series, Vol. 12, Westminster, Md., U.S.A., 1950, pp. 19 ff. and also his remarks in *The Young Augustine*, pp. 131-155.

48. Although the major Scriptural texts which Augustine uses to explain the content of the *libri Platoniorum* are from the Prologue to the Gospel of John, (and thus from the New Testament), it is clear that those parts of the Johannine text which he says accord with the teachings of the books of the Platonists are just those which John himself draws from the Old Testament (Genesis and Psalms in particular). This is because this vision of the Truth is just that knowledge of God which the natural man can achieve by the exercise of his own proper (rational) powers and as such it is common to all mankind. In the *De Civitate Dei*, VIII,ix, Augustine says that all mankind can acquire this knowledge and cites the wise men amongst Libyans of the Atlas, Egyptians, Indians, Persians, Chaldeans, Scythians, Gauls and Spaniards as examples of peoples who he has heard are reputed to have come to this knowledge. Nevertheless, Augustine uses the Johannine text from the *New Testament* for a purpose since John also proclaims what the *libri Platoniorum* do not in any way contain and what cannot be discovered by the exercise of man's natural powers namely, that "*The Word was made flesh and came to dwell among us.*" (Jn.1:14).

49. *Conf.*, VII,ix,13 "*Et primo volens ostendere mihi, quam resistas superbis, humilibus autem des gratiam . . .*" (1 Ptr. 5:5, Jas. 4.6).

50. This whole topic is taken up again after the description of the vision of the Truth in *Conf.*, VII,xx,26 where it is discussed in terms of the difference between presumption and confession. "*In quos me propterea, priusquam*

the way of the Word made flesh.<sup>51</sup> Now the full sense of this distinction is only made clear in the sequel, but what we must not fail to notice is that he places the entire discussion of the vision of the Truth in the context of this distinction. In other words this true vision of the Truth itself belongs to the economy of pride. It is with this in mind that we must try to interpret the text from the last sentence of chapter vii to the first sentence of chapter ix where Augustine says:

- vii “And these things [the difficulties he suffered in his effort to know the Truth resulting from his attempt to hold the notion of an incorruptible but corporeal god], grew out of my wound (*vulnere*) because *you have humiliated the proud like a wounded man* and by my tumor (*tumor*) I was separated from you and by a great swelling of the face (*nimis inflata facies*) my eyes were closed.<sup>52</sup>
- viii You indeed, O Lord, *you remain in eternity* and not *in eternity will you be angry with us*, because you had mercy on dust and ashes<sup>53</sup> and *in your sight* it was pleasing to reform my deformities. And by internal torments you drove me on so that I might not be able to bear it until you were certain to me (*certus esses*) through an interior sight. And my tumor (*tumor*) subsided under the secret hand of your medicining, and that troubled and darkened sight of my mind was healed *from day to day* by the burning salve of salubrious griefs.

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*scripturas tuas considerarem, credo voluisti incurrere, ut inprimeretur memoriae meae, quomodo ex eis affectus essem et, cum postea in libris tuis mansuefactus essem et curantibus digitis tuis contrectarentur vulnera mea, discernere atque distinguerem, quid interesset inter praesumptionem et confessionem, inter videntes, quo eundum sit, nec videntes, qua, et viam ducentem and beatificam patriam non tantum cernendam sed et habitandam.”*

51. *Conf.*, VII, ix, 13 “... *et quanta misericordia tuae demonstrata sit hominibus via humilitatis, quod “verbum tuum caro factum est et habitavit”* (Jn. 1:14) *inter homines, . . .*” The distinction between eternal Truth, the unbegotten Word (which the books of the Platonists teach), and the way to the Truth which only appears to man through the Word made flesh, the begotten Word, (which the books of the Platonists do not teach), is just the burden of this chapter.

52. This image of a fat and pampered flesh which occludes the vision of a spiritual Truth was already used by Augustine to describe his condition in the moment of the ‘awakening of subjectivity’ in *Conf.*, II, iii, 8.

53. Recall the opening lines of Augustine’s confession of his life in *Conf.*, I, vi, 7 “*Sed tamen sine me loqui apud misericordiam tuam, me terram et cinerem, sine tamen loqui, quoniam ecce misericordia tua est, non homo, inrisor meus, cui loquor.*”

ix And so, first, wishing to show to me how *you resist the proud but give grace to the humble*, and with what great mercy you have shown to men the way of humility, that *your Word was made flesh and dwelt* amongst men, you procured for me through a certain man, inflated with monstrous pride,<sup>54</sup> certain books of the Platonists, translated from the Greek tongue into Latin . . ."<sup>55</sup> (VII, vii, 11 — VII, ix, 13).

At the end of chapter vii, Augustine distinguishes between (1) the wound — *vulnus* — (i.e., original sin), by which he was actually separated from God and (2) the *tumor* — (i.e. the swelling of his face) resulting from his arrogant "puffed up" efforts to pamper the flesh by insisting on a corporeal, sensible god, which had heretofore occluded his vision of the Truth. Now the teachings of the *libri Platoniorum* do cure this latter and so to speak "local" swelling inasmuch as they do lead him to the direct and unmistakable (certain) vision or knowledge of God.<sup>56</sup> But the more deep-seated and original wound (*vulnus*) remains by which Augustine, the particular individual, continues to *be* separated from God even when he has come to the certain knowledge of God. And, as Augustine will show,<sup>57</sup> this wound by which he is separated from God can in no way be cured by the teaching of the *libri Platoniorum* since they do not know or proclaim the Word

54. Courcelle supposes that this man was Flavius Mallius Theodorus: see *Recherches* pp. 153-156 and also pp. 281-284 where he tries to resolve certain difficulties in this attribution which is not now widely accepted.

55. *Conf.*, VII,vi,11 — VII,ix,13 "*Et haec de vulnere meo creverant, quia humiliasti tamquam vulneratum superbum*, (Ps.58: 11) *et tumore meo separabar abs te et nimis inflata facies claudebat oculos meos.* (viii) *Tu vero, domine, in aeternum manes et non in aeternum irasceris nobis*, (Eccli. 18:1; Ps.84:6) *quoniam miseratus es terram et cinerem, et placuit in conspectu tuo* (Ps.18:15) *reformare deformia mea. et stimulis internis agitabas me, ut impatiens essem, donec mihi per interiorem aspectum certus esses. et residebat tumor meus ex occulta manu medicinae tuae aciesque conturbata et contenebrata mentis meae acri collyrio salubrium dolorum de die in diem* (Ps.60:9) *sanatur.* (ix) *Et primo vovens ostendere mihi, quam resistas superbis, humilibus autem des gratiam* (1 Ptr. 5:5; Jas. 4:6) *et quanta misericordia tua demonstrata sit hominibus via humilitatis, quod verbum tuum caro factum est et habitavit* (Jn. 1:14) *inter homines, procurasti mihi per quendam hominem inmanissimo tyfo turgidum quosdam Plataniorum libros ex graeca lingua in latinam versos, . . ."*

56. See *Conf.*, VII,x,16 — VII, xvi,22. See also *Conf.*, VII,xvii,26 "*Sed tunc lectis Platoniorum illis libris posteaquam inde admonitus quaerere incorpoream veritatem invisibilia tua per ea quae facta sunt intellecta* (Rom.1: 20) *conspexi. . ."*

57. This is the burden of *Conf.*, VII,xvii,23 — VIII,xii,29 which treats of the movement from the vision of the Truth to Augustine's conversion, which is the beginning of his reformation and rebirth (as a 'spiritual' rather than a 'natural' man).

made flesh.<sup>58</sup>

Nevertheless Augustine holds that by the secret workings of divine providence he was in the end led to seek and grasp the cure for this deep-seated wound just because he did not look for it until he had actually seen the Truth. And thus he came to know the inadequacies of this vision by suffering the consequences of the pride which it does not cure but rather aggravates.<sup>59</sup> Thus it was through the inadequacies of the "books of the Platonists" and not by their teachings that he was finally brought to recognize the want of health and sanity which had arisen from his fundamental wound. And from this recognition he was in turn moved to seek a cure for this condition which, as he argues in the sequel, cannot be found apart from Christ — the Word made flesh. However, while the teachings of the *libri Platoniorum* left this deep-seated and radical wound untouched, they did indeed cure his immediate deformity or tumor and enabled him to come to the certain knowledge of God.

## II.

The Vision of the Truth: *Confessions* VII, x, 16-VII, xvi, 22.

It only remains now to explain what Augustine took from these books and also what he did not take from them. What Augustine

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58. In this chapter (*Conf.*, VII, ix, 13-15), Augustine merely states what he found and what he did not find in the "books of the Platonists". And what he did not find is any proclamation of the Word made flesh.

59. This position is stated by Augustine with great precision in *Conf.*, VII, xx, 26 "*In quos (the 'books of the Platonists'), me propterea, priusquam scripturas tuas considerarem, credo voluisti incurrere, ut inprimeretur memoriae meae, quomodo ex eis affectus essem et, cum postea in libris tuis mansuefactus essem et curantibus digitis tuis contractarentur vulnera mea, discernere atque distinguerem, quid interesset inter praesumptionem et confessionem, inter videntes, quo eundem sit, nec videntes, qua, et viam ducentem and beatificam patriam non tantum cernendam sed et habitandam. nam si primo sanctis tuis litteris informatus essem et in earum familiaritate obdulcuisses mihi et post in illa volumina incidissem, fortasse aut abripiissent me a solidamento pietatis, aut si in affectu, quam salubrem inbiberam, perstissem, putarem etiam ex illis libris eum posse concipi, si eos solos quisque didicisset.*" Note here, in comparison with the text from *Conf.*, VII, vii, 11 — VII, viii, 12, that the healing hand by which Augustine's wound (*vulnere*) is actually cured is connected with the Scriptures as opposed to the "books of the Platonists."

The logic of this saying of Augustine about the providential timing of his discovery of the *libri Platoniorum* — (i.e., that he read them before he had been "tamed" by Scripture) — has the following sense. Either of the two consequences which he lists here could indeed have resulted if he had not first come to the vision of the Truth but had instead determined to accept the doctrines of the Catholic Church without having come to the certain

took from the teaching of these books can be stated quite simply. So far we have seen that Augustine had already come to the recognition that if a man could have a certain knowledge of the Truth, then the Truth must needs be incorruptible, inviolable and immutable. But now, starting from this certainty and assisted by the teaching of the books of the Platonists, he turns away from the effort to apply this hypothesis to the explanation of the sensible and corporeal universe (to what is "below" and "outside of" the mind that recognizes the axioms of any science or knowledge), and instead turns to the investigation of the conditions that are necessary if this hypothesis itself is to be true. Thus, starting from the certainty that if the Truth is to be known it must be incorruptible, and moving "inwards" and "upwards" in terms of its own logic (i.e., the logic of this hypothesis),<sup>60</sup> he comes to the recognition that if the Truth is to be incorruptible, inviolable and immutable then it *must* also be incorporeal — otherwise the problem of evil returns and one must say that either the Truth itself is the cause of evil and corruption or else that evil and corruption do not exist. The absolute necessity of the divine incorporeality is then just what Augustine learned from the "books of the Platonists",<sup>61</sup> and in the instant that this is recognized the

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knowledge of God. For, apart from the certain knowledge of God and the consequent knowledge of the distinction between Platonism and Christianity (which Augustine has yet to show), just such a confusion of the two positions would indeed be possible to such a man as Augustine who insisted above all else on knowing the Truth.

60. *Conf.*, VII,x,16 "Et inde admonitus redire ad memetipsum intravi in intima mea duce te et potui, quoniam factus es adiutor meus (Ps.29:11). intravi et vidi qualicumque oculo animae meae supra eundem oculum animae meae, supra mentem meam lucem inconmutabilem, non hanc vulgarem et conspicuam omni carni nec quasi ex eodem genere grandior erat, tamquam si ista multo multoque clarius claresceret totumque occuparet magnitudine. non hoc illa erat, sed aliud, aliud valde ab istis omnibus. nec ita erat supra mentem meam, sicut oleum super aquam nec sicut caelum super terram, sed superior, quia ipsa fecit me, et ego interior, quia factus ab ea."

The same process is described again in somewhat more detail in *Conf.* VII, xvii,23 in which the main point is once again the mind's consideration of what the nature of the universe and its principle must necessarily be if (and since) the mind is able to make correct judgments concerning things that are subject to change.

61. In *Conf.* VII,ix, 13-14 Augustine expresses this recognition of the divine incorporeality in the Scriptural form where it appears as the teaching that the principle of the world is the divine, unbegotten Word of God (i.e., what is by nature, incorporeal). See also *Conf.*, VII,xx,26. "Sed tunc lectis Platoniorum illis libris posteaquam inde admonitus quaerere incorpoream veritatem invisibilia tua per ea quae facta sunt intellecta (Rom.1:20) conspexi et repulsus sensi, quid per tenebras animae meae contemplari

hypothetical character of the whole argument immediately dissolves into an absolute and unmistakable knowledge or vision of the existence of the objective, universal Truth. For once it has been recognized that the Truth must be incorporeal for logical reasons, then the principle or reason of the world cannot be immanent in it (in the manner of the Stoic notion of God). And moreover, because of the manifest existence of the corporeal, sensible world, the existence of its incorporeal and incorruptible principle is necessarily established for finite thought which has finally discovered the point at which thought and being are necessarily united. Thus we may say with Augustine who both asks and answers:

“ . . . Is Truth then nothing at all since it is not diffused through finite or infinite spaces of places?’ And you called out from far off: Verily indeed, *I AM THAT IS*. And I heard, as one hears in the heart, and there was absolutely no ground whence I might doubt; indeed I might more easily doubt myself to live than that the Truth was not, which is seen *having been understood through those things which have been made*. ”<sup>62</sup> (VII, x, 16).

In short, the existence of the incorruptible and incorporeal God as the absolute principle of the corruptible and corporeal universe is established of necessity for finite thought through the existence of the world. And once seen, the existence of this first principle can only be called into question by doubting the existence of the creatures through which it is revealed. But this is impossible, as Augustine says here, since this would require that the questioner should, in one and the same activity, doubt that he questions or exists.

Now such a vision does not in itself reveal anything directly about the inner nature of God but only that HE IS as the absolute unity of thought and being and this is just the sense (i.e., the contrast between the existence of God which is known in the vision and the inner nature of God which is not), of the passage in VII,x,16 where we find Augustine saying:

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*non sinerer, certus esse te et infinitum esse nec tamen per locos finitos infinitosue diffundi et vere te esse, qui semper idem ipse esses, ex nulla parte nulloque motu alter aut aliter, cetera vero ex te esse omnia, hoc solo firmissimo documento, quia sunt, certus quidem in istis eram, nimis tamen infirmus ad fruendum te.*”

62. Conf., VII,x,16 “*Numquid nihil est veritas, quoniam neque per finita neque per infinita locorum spatia diffusa est?’ et clamasti de longinquo: immo vero ego sum qui sum. (Ex. 3:14) et audivi, sicut auditur in corde, et non erat prorsus, unde dubitarem faciliusque dubitarem vivere me quam non esse veritatem, quae per ea, quae facta sunt, intellecta (Rom. 1:20) conspicitur.*”

"You are my God  
 For you I long *day and night*  
 And when I first came to know you,  
 You raised me up so that I might see  
 That what I was seeing, is,  
 And also that I was not yet one who might see it.  
 And you beat back the weakness of my sight,  
 Shining with tremendous force upon me,  
 And I shook all over with love and dread . . ." (VII, x, 16)<sup>63</sup>

Augustine has now brought this whole long process of coming to see the Truth to its proper conclusion and he ends this first division of the first part of his *Confessions*<sup>64</sup> with a description of the consequences of this vision as they illumine the true nature of creation. For even though the inner nature of God is not seen in this vision, there are some certain conclusions regarding the nature of the created universe which do follow from the vision.

Chief amongst these are the absolute dependence of all creation on its principle and the distinction that must be drawn between the manner in which all things exist *qua* creation, "outside" of God in time and space, and the different manner of their existence "in" the principle, (this "different manner of existence" is the sense of the *aliter* of VII, xiv, 20 and VII, xv, 21). It is by means of these corollaries to the vision that Augustine is enabled both to resolve the problem of evil and to establish the difference between the substance of God, and of all else that depends upon God.<sup>65</sup>

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63. *Conf.*, VII,x,16 "Tu es deus meus, tibi suspiro die ac nocte (Ps. 42:2) et cum te primum cognovi, tu assumsisti me, ut viderem esse, quod viderem, et nondum me esse, qui viderem, Et reverberasti infirmitatem aspectus mei radians in me vehementer, et contremui amore et horrore: . . ."

64. The first part of the *Confessions* consists of the so-called 'autobiographical, section in Books I-IX. According to our interpretation, the first division of this part extends from the first beginnings of the individual in *primordia et infantia* to the vision of the Truth and thus includes everything from the first to the seventh book. The second division of this part is contained in the eighth book and deals no longer with a problem of knowledge but with the problem of will, culminating in Augustine's conversion in the garden. And finally, the third division, which shows the unity of the two previous mementos and treats of the exterior life of the Christian in the world, is contained in Book IX.

65. This distinction between the substantial nature of God and the substantial nature of creation is especially the burden of *Conf.* VII,xv,21 but is also the meaning of the passage in *Conf.* VII,x,16 where Augustine says; "Et inveni longe me esse a te in regione dissimilitudinis, tamquam audirem vocem tuam de excelso: 'cibus sum grandium: cresce et manducabis me. nec tu me in te mutabis sicut cibum carnis tuae, sed tu mutaberis in me'." It should be

Because Augustine merely develops the corollaries to this vision in these chapters (VII, xi, 17-VII, xvi, 22), we can do no better than to echo his own words to conclude this section of our commentary. He says:

- xi “And I looked closely at the rest of things below you and I saw that they neither are absolutely nor are they absolutely not: they are indeed, because they are from you, however they are not because that which you are, they are not. For that truly is which remains unchangeably. *For me then to inhere (inhaereo), with God is the good*, since, if I will not remain in him, neither will I be able to remain in myself. He however, *remaining in himself renews all things*, and *you are my Lord, since you do not need my goods*.
- xii And it was made manifest to me that those things are good which are yet corrupted, which things would be able to be corrupted neither if they were the highest good, nor if they were not at all good; because, if they were the highest good, they would be incorruptible, if on the other hand they were not at all good, there would not be anything in them which could be corrupted. For corruption harms, but except it can diminish the good, it can do no harm. Therefore, either corruption harms nothing, which cannot be, or what most certainly is the case, all things which are corrupted are deprived of good. However, if things shall be deprived of all good, they shall altogether not be. For if they will be and they are not able now to be corrupted, they will be better because they shall remain incorruptibly. But what is more monstrous than to say that, having lost all good, they are become better? Therefore if they will be deprived of all good they shall be altogether nothing: thus, so long as they are, they are good. Therefore, all things that are, are good and that evil, of which I was seeking whence it was, is not a substance, for if it were a substance, it would be good. For either it would be an incorruptible substance, indeed the greatest good, or else it would be a corruptible substance, which, except it were good, could not be corrupted.

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remembered that Augustine has already brought this distinction to the reader's attention in Book IV where he criticizes his interpretation of Aristotle's *Categories*. According to the view which he held at the time he read them he understood Aristotle to be teaching that there was no distinction between the divine and the created substance: see *Conf.*, IV, xvi, 28-29. The reason for this criticism which was not clear in the fourth book has now become evident through the course of Augustine's argument.

Therefore I saw and it was made clear to me, that you have made all things good and that there are absolutely no substances which you have not made. And because you have not made all equal, therefore are there all things, because one by one they are good and all things together are very good, since our God made *all things very good*.

- xiii And for you there is absolutely no evil. Not only for you but neither for the whole of your creature because there is not anything without, which might break in and corrupt the order that you have placed in it. But in the parts of this creature, because certain ones to certain others do not agree, they are thought to be evil; but the same things themselves agree with other things and are good and in themselves to themselves they are good. And all these things which do not reciprocally agree amongst each other, agree with the lower part of things, which we call the earth, having its cloudy and windy heaven congruent to it. Let it now be far from me that I should say: "These things ought not to be", since if I saw these things only, I would desire certain better things, but now even for these things alone I ought to praise you since they show that you are to be praised, these things of the earth: dragons and all deeps, fire, hail, snow, ice, the force of the wind, which things fulfill your word, mountains and all hills, fruitful trees and all cedars, beasts and all cattle, reptiles and winged flying things; kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all judges of the world, young men and maidens, old men and children praise your name. And also indeed from the heavens they praise you, they praise you, our God, in the heights all your angels, all your hosts, the sun and the moon, all the stars and light, the heaven of heavens and the waters, which are above the heavens, they praise your name. Now I was not desiring better things, because I was considering all things, and the higher things are indeed better than the lower, but that all things are better than the higher things alone I decided on in a more sane judgement." (VII, xi, 17-VII, xiii, 19)<sup>66</sup>

66. Conf., VII, xi, 17-VII,xiii, 19. "Et inspexi cetera infra te et vidi nec omnino esse nec omnino non esse: esse quidem, quoniam abs te sunt, non esse autem, quoniam id quod es non sunt. id enim vere est, quod incommutabiliter manet. mihi autem inhaerere deo bonum est, (Ps.72;28) quia, si non maneo in illo, nec in me potero. ille autem in se manens innovat omnia; et dominus meus (Wis.7:27) es, quoniam bonorum meorum non es. (Ps.15:2). (xii) Et manifestatum est mihi, quoniam bona sunt, quae corrumpuntur, quae neque si summa bona essent, neque nisi bona essent, corrumpi possent, quia, si summa bona essent, incorruptibilia essent, si autem nulla bona essent, quid in eis

In comparison with this more sane (*saniore*) judgement, Augustine now reviews the four stages of erroneous judgement ("non est sanitas", VII, xiv, 20), through which he moved from the moment of his birth on the way to the vision of the Truth.<sup>67</sup>

xiv "There is no sound reason in those to whom some part or other of your creature is displeasing, just as there was none in me when many of the things which you have made were displeasing. And because my soul did not dare to allow that my God should be displeasing to it, it would not allow that anything which was displeasing to it should be yours. And from there it had gone to the opinion of the two substances

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*corrumperetur, non esset, nocet enim corruptio et, nisi bonum minueret, non noceret. aut igitur nihil nocet corruptio, quod fieri non potest, aut, quod certissimum est, omnia, quae corrumpuntur, privantur bono. si autem omni bono privabuntur, omnino non erunt. si enim erunt et corrumpi iam non poterunt, meliora erunt, quia incorruptibiliter permanebunt. et quid monstrosius quam ea dicere omni bono amisso facta meliora? ergo si omni bono priuabuntur, omnino nulla erunt: ergo quamdiu sunt, bona sunt. ergo quaecumque sunt, bona sunt, malumque illud, quod quaerebam unde esset, non est substantia, quia, si substantia esset, bonum esset. aut enim esset incorruptibilis substantia, magnum utique bonum, aut substantia corruptibilis esset, quae nisi bona esset, corrumpi non posset. itaque vidi et manifestatum est mihi, quia omnia bona tu fecisti et prorsus nullae substantiae sunt, quas tu non fecisti. et quoniam non aequalia omnia fecisti, ideo sunt omnia, quia singula bona sunt et simul omnia valde bona, quoniam fecit deus noster **omnia bona ualde.** (Gen.1:31). (xiii) Et tibi omnino non est malum, non solum tibi sed nec universae creaturae tuae, quia extra non est aliquid, quod inrumpat et corrumpat ordinem, quem inposuisti ei. in partibus autem eius quaedam quibusdam quia non conveniunt, mala putantur; et eadem ipsa conveniunt aliis et bona sunt et in semet ipsis bona sunt. et omnia haec, quae sibimet invicem non conveniunt, conveniunt inferiori parti rerum, quam terram dicimus, habentem caelum suum nubilosum atque ventosum congruum sibi. et absit, iam ut dicerem: 'non essent ista', quia etsi sola ista cernerem, desiderarem quidem meliora, sed iam etiam de solis istis laudare te deberem, quoniam laudandum te ostendunt **de terra dracones et omnes abyssi, ignis, grando, nix, glacies, spiritus tempestatis, quae faciunt verbum tuum, montes et omnes colles, ligna fructifera et omnes cedri, bestiae et omnia pecora, reptilia et volatilia pinnata; reges terrae et omnes populi, principes et omnes iudices terrae, iuvenes et virgines, seniores cum iunioribus laudent nomen** (Ps. 148:7-12) **tuum.** cum vero etiam de caelis te laudent, laudent te, deus noster, **in excelsis omnes angeli tui, omnes virtutes tuae, sol et luna, omnes stellae et lumen, caeli caelorum et aquae, quae super caelos sunt, laudent nomen** (Ps.148:1-5) **tuum:** non iam desiderabam meliora, quia omnia cogitabam, et meliora quidem superiora quam inferiora, sed meliora omnia quam sola superiora iudicio saniore pendebam."*

67. For the fourfold division of this text which we make and its correspondance with the four 'ages' of man through which Augustine moves on the way to the vision, see our article "Augustine on Infancy and Childhood: Commentary on the First Book of Augustine's Confessions", in *Augustinian Studies*, Vol. 6, 1975, pp 16-18.

but it found no rest and was raving. And coming back from there it made for itself a God spread throughout the infinite spaces of all places and him it had supposed to be you, and him it had set up in its own heart and again it had become the temple of its own idol, abominable to you. But after that you ministered to the needs of my head unbeknownst to me and you closed *my eyes so that they might not see vanity* and I rested from myself somewhat and my insanity was put to sleep; and I awoke in you and saw you to be infinite in another way (*aliter*), and this sight was not derived from the flesh." (VII, xiv, 20)<sup>68</sup>

Finally, in the last two chapters of this description of the vision, Augustine concludes by drawing out its consequences with regard to the nature of created substance — which is to say, of all that is not of the same substance as the principle.

xv "And I looked back at the other things and I saw that they owe to you that they are, and that in you are all finite things together, but differently (*sed aliter*), not as if in a place, but because you are holding all in hand in the Truth, and all things are True insofar as they are, neither is falsehood anything except when one imagines to be, what is not. And I saw that they do agree not only each to their own places but also to their times, and that you, who alone are eternal, did not begin to work after innumerable spaces of times, because all spaces of times, both those which have passed by and those which are yet to come, would neither go nor come except by your working and remaining.

xvi And I knew by experience that it is not to be wondered at that bread is offensive to the distempered palate, which bread is pleasant to the sound one, and that light is odious to sore eyes, which light is amiable to clear eyes. Even so does your justice displease the iniquitous, as do the viper and little vermin, which things you have created good and

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68. *Conf.*, VII, xiv, 20. "*Non est sanitas* (Ps.37:4 & 8) *eis, quibus displicet aliquid creaturae tuae, sicut mihi non erat, cum displicerent multa, quae fecisti. et quia non audebat anima mea, ut ei displiceret deus meus, nolebat esse tuum quidquid ei displicebat. et inde ierat in opinionem duarum substantiarum et non requiescebat et aliena loquebatur. et inde rediens fecerat sibi deum per infinita spatia locorum omnium et eum putaverat esse te et eum collocaverat in corde suo et facta erat rursus templum idoli sui abominandum tibi. sed posteaquam fovisti caput nescientis et clausisti oculos meos, ne viderent vanitatem,* (Ps.118:37) *cessavi de me paululum, et consopita est insania mea; et evigilavi in te et vidi te infinitum aliter, et visus iste non a carne trahebatur.*"

fit for the lower parts of your creature to which also the iniquitous themselves are fit insofar as they are dissimilar to you, though fit also to the higher parts inasmuch as they can come to be similar to you. And I sought out what iniquity might be, and I did not find any substance, but a turning from the highest substance, you, O God, into lower things, a perversity of the will throwing away its *inner parts*, while swelling up outwardly." (VII, xv, 21-VII, xvi, 22)<sup>69</sup>

### III.

After the Vision: *Confessions* VII, xvii, 23-VII, xxi, 27

In the five final chapters of the seventh book Augustine concludes his treatment of the vision of the Truth. These chapters are of the greatest importance to the understanding of Augustine's argument for in them he shows both the necessary failure of this vision in its own terms — that is, its failure to establish its possessor in a right relation to the Truth known — and also the logic whereby the Christian doctrine — that Jesus Christ is the Son of God — presents itself as the only solution to this impasse. In this argument Augustine therefore establishes the difference between Christianity on the one hand and on the other, "Platonism" (or more generally, the true knowledge of the Truth to which the natural man can arrive by the exercise of his own proper powers). It is in terms of these considerations that Augustine moves beyond Platonism and starts on the path that eventually leads to his total renunciation of the natural man. This movement itself constitutes the content of the eighth book culminating in his conversion and issues beyond this in his rebirth as a spiritual man through the baptism of the Church. However, before he can lead us to this conclusion he has first to show the inadequacy of the vision of the

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69. *Conf.*, VII,xv,21-VII,xvi,22. "Et respexi alia et vidi tibi debere quia sunt et in te cuncta finita, sed aliter, non quasi in loco, sed quia tu es omnitenens manu veritate, et omnia vera sunt, in quantum sunt, nec quicquam est falsitas, nisi cum putatur esse quod non est. et vidi, quia non solum locis sua quaeque suis conveniunt sed etiam temporibus et quia tu, qui solus aeternus es, non post innumerabilia spatia temporum coepisti operari, quia omnia spatia temporum, et quae praeterierunt et quae praeteribunt, nec abirent nec venirent nisi te operante et manente. (xvi) Et sensi expertus non esse mirum, quod palato non sano poena est et panis, qui sano suavis est, et oculis aegris odiosa lux, quae puris amabilis. et iustitia tua displicet iniquis, nedum vipera et vermiculus, quae bona creasti, apta inferioribus creaturae tuae partibus, quibus et ipsi iniqui apti sunt, quanto dissimiliores sunt tibi, apti autem superioribus, quanto similiores fiunt tibi. et quaesivi, quid esset iniquitas, et non inveni substantiam, sed a summa substantia, te deo, detortae in infima voluntatis perversitatem proicientis *initima sua* (Eccli.10:10) et tumescentis foras."

Truth and the manner in which this limitation can be overcome through Christianity.

So far we recognize that Augustine had come to a certain and unmistakable knowledge of the Truth. And though he was assisted to it by a reading of the books of the Platonists, this knowledge is in no way the exclusive possession of the Platonists since Augustine allows that all natural men can in principle arrive at this vision in all times by the exercise of their own proper powers.<sup>70</sup> But true and certain though this vision may be (it is certain in the sense that it is not a knowledge about which it is even possible to be mistaken just because it is unhypothetical), Augustine nevertheless immediately finds himself faced with a problem which he describes in the following way:

“And I wondered that I now loved you and not a phantasm instead of you, and I did not persist in the enjoyment of my God but on the one hand I was being ravished to you by your beauty and on the other I was soon ripped away from you by my weight, and I fell down into these lower things with groaning; and this weight was the usage of the flesh. But with me there was the memory of you and not in any way was I doubting that there existed one to whom I should cohere but that I was not yet a one who might cohere; for *the body which is corrupted, weighs down the soul and the earthly habitation presses down the mind musing on many things . . .*” (VII, xvii, 23)<sup>71</sup>

Armed with the memory of this vision, Augustine goes on to recollect the various considerations by which he ascended to this knowledge of the Truth in the first place. But the memory of the vision is not the same thing as the vision itself and he concludes the chapter with a lament which is the same one that he has already raised in chapter x. Here he says:

“Then indeed I saw your *invisible parts, which have been understood through those things which have been made*, But I did not have the strength to fix my gaze on them and my infirmity being beaten back, I was returned to any customary thoughts,

70. St. Paul teaches the same in Rom. 1:18-20 and Augustine uses this passage frequently in these chapters in the seventh book; see *Conf.*, VII,x,16; VII,xvii,23 (twice); VII,xx,26.

71. *Conf.*, VII,xvii,23 “*Et mirabar, quod iam te amabam, non pro te phantasma, et non stabam frui deo meo, sed rapiebar ad te decore tuo moxque diripiebar abs te pondere meo et ruebam in ista cum gemitu; et pondus hoc consuetudo carnalis. sed necum erat memoria tui, neque ullo modo dubitabam esse, cui cohaererem, sed nondum me esse, qui cohaererem, quoniam corpus, quod corrumpitur, adgrauat animam et deprimit terrena inhabitatio sensum multa cogitantem, . . .*” (Wis. 9:15).

carrying with me nothing but a memory of things to be loved and the scent as it were of things desired which I was not yet able to eat." (VII, xvii, 23)<sup>72</sup>

In short, the problem with this vision is just that it is only a vision. It reveals to man the absolutely certain knowledge of the existence of the first principle or *summum bonum* which consequently becomes the absolute end of all his desires. But, having once generated this desire for God which can by no means pass away or be displaced, since the externally abiding existence of this principle is just what is certainly known, this knowledge in itself, *qua* knowledge, does not in any way give man the power to adhere to the object of his desire but rather brings to light with the utmost clarity, the separation of man from God. This separation can be viewed in two ways, and Augustine treats of both.

On the one hand, considered as a knowledge possessed by a subject, the vision merely illuminates the absolute distinction between the individual who possesses the vision and the divine principle which is the object of his knowledge. Insofar as God is certainly known as the object of the man's knowledge, the man is negatively defined by his separation from the object of his knowledge — i.e., he is not the object which he knows. And thus, in just the degree that he is an independent subject, knowing God as object, Augustine says of the moment after he had come to this vision, that he also discovered that he, the particular man existing in time and space, at once found himself afar off from God in a region of utter unlikeness, (" . . . *et inveni longe me esse a te in regione dissimilitudinis* . . ." VII, x, 16).<sup>73</sup> The very vision which brings this distinction to light cannot in itself overcome the division in which the knowing individual is separated from the object of his knowledge and desire. For while in the vision, all particular things

72. *Conf.*, VIII, xvii, 23 "*Tunc vero invisibilia tua per ea quae facta sunt intellecta (Rom. 1:20) conspexi, sed aciem figere non evalui et repercussa infirmitate redditus solitis non mecum ferebam nisi amantem memoriam et quasi olefacta desiderantem, quae comedere nondum possem.*"

73. The discovery that the world is not an adequate resting place or home for the soul of man is consequent on the vision of the Truth. Thus Augustine only speaks of the world as a *regio dissimilitudinis* after he had seen the Truth. See, *Conf.*, VII, x, 16 "*O aeterna veritas et vera caritas et cara aeternitas! tu es deus meus, tibi suspiro die ac nocte. (Ps. 42:2) et cum te primum cognovi, tu assumpsisti me, ut viderem esse, quod viderem, et nondum me esse, qui viderem. et reverberasti infirmitatem aspectus mei radians in me vehementer, et contremui amore et horrore: et inveni longe me esse a te in regio dissimilitudinis, tamquam audirem vocem tuam de excelso: 'cibus sum grandium; cresce et manducabis me. nec tu me in te mutabis sicut cibum carnis tuae, sed tu mutaberis in me.'*"

are seen as they are in the principle, they are seen there apart from the categories of time, space and motion — this is the sense of the *aliter* of VII, xiv, 20 and VII, xv, 21. And yet the man who has the vision is just a particular, corruptible individual existing under the conditions of space and time and as such he has no part in that all-encompassing unity which is revealed in the vision. And thus the very starting point of this whole long process of coming to know the Truth (i.e., the particular individual who is desirous of being united with the principle), is just what is now surely excluded from such a unity and the man is left with nothing but the certain knowledge of his separation from God and the recognition that the world is no adequate resting place or proper home for his soul.

On the other hand, insofar as the individual has risen to a thinking activity and actually enjoys the vision of God, he is, *qua* knower, in a unity with God. But here again the same problem reappears from the other side. For the individual who is actually knowing God is not simply or totally a pure intellectual activity and as such beyond the constraints of time and space. Rather, he is a rational animal, and while he may rise to this rational activity after much effort, he cannot long stay in this state because he is, and continues to be, an animal also. The usage of the flesh, (the *consuetudo carnalis* of VII, xvii, 23) — hunger, fatigue — will and must assert itself. And such demands, which cannot long be ignored, are the weight by which the man is ripped away from the intellectual activity of contemplation and turned again to his involvement in the world. The actual vision — as distinct from the mere memory or recollection of it — can of course be regained. But only at the cost of the same immense and lengthy labour by which it was generated in the first place and this requires a congeries of circumstance, (freedom from interference, provision of external necessities, etc.), which nature and human society can only rarely provide and then to but a few.

Thus, on the one hand the man finds that he is unable to escape from the conditions of time and space into the realm of pure intellectual vision in anything other than a temporal sense (the moment of estatic vision); while on the other hand, having come to a sure and certain knowledge of the existence of the Truth and of the relation of all created particulars to that Truth, he now discovers that the very conditions of his actual, concrete existence are precisely what are excluded from this unity. These are the necessary and inevitable consequences of this vision and ones which derive from its own logic. And, as this is the vision or knowledge to which all men can arrive by the exercise of their own

natural powers, so is this conclusion the condition in which all natural men will find themselves who have gone so far as to come to the vision of the Truth.

Now in order to understand the process by which Augustine was enabled to pass beyond the limitations of the Ancient World — i.e., the limitations of the natural man — we must finally consider the nature of the two possible attitudes that the natural man can take to this condition which is revealed in the vision of the Truth. To do this we must retrace our steps to a chapter which we earlier glossed over (VII, ix, 15), in order to show what it is that Augustine says that he found in the *libri Platoniorum* but did not take from them.

Using the words of St. Paul in Romans 1:23, Augustine tells us that in addition to the notion of the incorporeal Truth, he also found in the books of the Platonists that the glory of the incorruptible God was changed into idols (*idola*), and various likenesses (*simulacra*), into the imitation of the image (*similitudinem imaginis*) of corruptible man and birds and quadrupeds and serpents, which they (the Platonists) made of the glory of the incorruptible God and worshipped in his stead. Such teachings Augustine says he found in the books of the Platonists and also he tells us that he did not feed on these things nor turn his mind towards them.<sup>74</sup>

What Augustine is referring to here is the sinful response of the individual who has actually come to the vision of the Truth and who, discovering his separation from the Truth, nevertheless remains determined — according to the usage of the natural man — to use the Truth which he knows for his own private ends. For, while the man who has actually seen the Truth can no longer be

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74. Conf., VII, ix, 15 "Et ideo legebam ibi etiam immutatam gloriam incorruptionis tuae in idola et varia simulacra, in similitudinem imaginis corruptibilis hominis et volucrum et quadrupedum et serpentium, (Rom.1:23) videlicet Aegyptium cibum, quo Esau perdidit primogenita sua, quoniam caput quadrupedis pro te honoravit populus primogenitus, **conversus corde in Aegyptum** (Acts 7:39) et curvans imaginem tuam, animam suam, ante imaginem vituli manducantis faenum (Ps.105:20). inveni haec ibi et non manducavi. placuit enim tibi, domine, auferre **opprobrium** (Ps. 118:22) diminutionis ab Iacob, ut **maior** serviret **minori** (Rom.9:13), et vocasti gentes in hereditatem tuam. et ego ad te veneram ex gentibus et intendi in aurum, quod ab Aegypto voluisti ut auferret populus tuus, quoniam tuum erat, ubicumque erat. et dixisti Atheniensibus per apostolum tuum, quod in te **vivemus et movemur et sumus** (Acts17:28) sicut et quidam secundum eos dixerunt, et utique inde erant illi libri. et non adtendi in idola Aegyptiorum, quibus de auro tuo ministrabant, **qui transmutaverunt veritatem dei in mendacium et coluerant et servierunt creaturae potius quam creatori.**" (Rom.1:25)

determined that the objective universal Truth must accord with the desires of his particular nature in the manner in which Augustine imagined various notions of his own making to be the Truth while he was on his way to the vision. Nevertheless, unless he will now give up the claim to know the Truth as it is active in the world (i.e., in time and space), he remains bound by the logic of his immediate and sinful nature to imagine himself as the mediator of the Truth to the world. After all, he does actually know the Truth which most men do not, and if not through him (and other *sapientes*), then through whom shall the Truth which abides above the world be also present in it? In short, the wise man now seeks to use the wisdom and knowledge which he undoubtedly possesses for that old and hateful purpose which Augustine has shown to be present in man even from his infancy and first beginnings: namely, to acquire power and authority for himself in the society of man.<sup>75</sup>

Such an effort in the man who has actually come to the vision of the Truth he censures as presumptuous.<sup>76</sup> And the presumption arises from this, that he who does indeed know the Truth (i.e., the existence of the Truth in which all particular things are contained in principle), now pretends that he knows all other things as well and with the same certainty. For, starting with the unhypothetical knowledge of the Truth, the man now pretends and presumes both to know and judge the necessity of the things in the world (i.e., in time and space). But such a knowledge is by no means given in the vision of the Truth which shows the necessity and interrelation of all created things only as they are present in the principle (i.e., apart from the conditions of time and space and motion). But their existence apart from or "outside" of the principle has always been and continues to be assumed with the result that the knowledge of all created things as they exist in time and space remains and must remain hypothetical — even after the vision of the Truth.

The presumed knowledge of the necessity of the things in the world can therefore only be created and maintained in the imagination of man where his own determination of the necessity of all things as they are in the world is taken as the absolute truth. Thus, in Paul's statement (Rom 1:23) which Augustine quotes, we have: 1) the Truth of all created things as they are in principle, 2) created things as they exist "outside" of the principle (in time and

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75. On this matter see the article "Augustine on Infancy and Childhood: Commentary on the First Book of Augustine's *Confessions*", in *Augustinian Studies*, Vol. 6, 1975.

76. See *Conf.*, VII,xx,26 — VII,xxi,27.

space) as the image of their absolute existence in God, and finally, 3) the likeness of this image created in the vain imagination of man, whereby he presumes to know and order created things as they exist in the world. And this, his creation, is what is worshipped instead of the glory of the incorruptible God. And so indeed is the wisdom of the wise turned into folly.

Augustine tells us that shortly after he had come to the vision of the Truth, he himself had begun to move down this road. "For I now began to wish to seem wise and, full of my punishment (i.e., Augustine was "full of" the certain knowledge that the natural condition of man which he can in no way overcome is just to be separated from the God he desires to embrace), I did not weep; on the contrary moreover I was puffed up by my knowledge" (VII, xx, 26).<sup>77</sup> Augustine did not long remain on this road<sup>78</sup> for reasons which he soon puts before us, and indeed, that he fell into this position at all is attributed to the wholly erroneous view of the nature of Christ which he held at the time and which he tells us about in VII, xix, 25.

However, we should note in the sentence we have just quoted, that Augustine does allow that the natural man can have a non-presumptuous attitude to the Truth known. For, having discovered the Truth and his separation from it, Augustine concedes that the man can adopt a pious rather than a presumptuous attitude by weeping for his condition which is in Truth lamentable. Now Augustine himself soon came to this position through the discovery of the true content of the Christian teaching which he tells us about in the last chapter of the seventh book — and this we know because in the first chapter of the eighth book we already find him saying:

"But there is another kind of impious ones [i.e., other than those who make idols in the vain imagination of their hearts rather than seeking the invisible Truth which is there to be found through the creature], *who, knowing God have not glorified him as God, nor were thankful*. In these also was I fallen, but your right hand picked me up and having been carried off from there you placed me where I might get well, because you have said to man: *behold, piety is wisdom, and: do not wish to seem wise, for those affirming themselves to be wise have become fools.*" (VIII,i,2)<sup>79</sup>

77. *Conf.*, VII,xx,26 "*Iam enim coeperam velle videri sapiens plenus poena mea et non flebam, insuper et inflabar scientia.*"

78. Because he did not long stay on this road, Augustine said in *Conf.*, VII,ix,15 that he did not eat or give his mind to these things which he found in the *libri Platoniorum*.

79. *Conf.*, VIII,i,2. "*Et est aliud genus inpiorum, qui cognoscentes deum non*

Now we may observe that while this piety or fear of the Lord — this humble repentance of man's sinful and separated state — is indeed the only true response to the relation which the natural man can discover that he naturally has to the Truth known,<sup>80</sup> it, in itself, does nothing whatsoever to overcome his separation from that Truth. And so, even in adopting this right relation to the Truth, the particular individual must, so far as his own powers are concerned, remain separated from the divine principle which is the object of his desire. He may in fact be enabled ultimately to embrace God — as Augustine himself had desired ever since he first came to the notion of God through reading Cicero's *Hortensius*<sup>81</sup> — but if this desire is to be realised, if this hope is to be fulfilled, it is now absolutely certain that the man cannot bring it about by the exercise of his own proper powers. If the deed is to be done it can only be done by divine agency: and if done, it can only be received by man as an absolutely unmerited gift.

"Wisdom is the fear of the Lord" — is then the highest and the only absolutely true relation which the natural man can have to the Truth known. And it is at just this point — which is, as one might say, the end (in the logical sense of the word) of Antiquity — that the Christian doctrine, preached and heard, presents itself as the only solution to the impasse of the natural man (the desire to be with God on the one hand and the acknowledgement of his own sinful nature as the obstacle to this union on the other hand), and as determining necessarily the sole course which a man can follow if he is to remain in a right relation to the Truth.

What prevented Augustine from giving his mind to the presumption of the Platonists, according to which a man imagines that because he knows the Truth he also knows all other things as well and is therefore the mediator of the Truth to the world — justifying God to the world — what prevented Augustine from this presumption is the altogether accidental circumstance, as seen from a purely finite point of view, that he had heard of another Mediator.<sup>82</sup> A Mediator that is, in whom and through whom it was

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*sicut deum glorificauerunt aut gratias egerunt. (Rom.1:21) in hoc quoque incideram, et dextera tua suscepit me (Ps.17:36) et inde ablatum posuisti, ubi conualescerem, quia dixisti homini: ecce pietas est sapientia et: noli velle uideri sapiens, quoniam dicentes se esse sapientes stulti facti sunt. (Job28:28)."*

80. In *Conf.*, VII,xx,26 and VII,xxi,27 Augustine speaks of this true piety as 'confession' which is the opposite of 'presumption'.

81. See *Conf.*, III,iv,8.

82. It is of course accidental from a human point of view that Augustine was born within the orbit of the Christian world as it is accidental that Monica was a Christian and Augustine raised in a Christian family. Here

said that God justifies the world to himself so that man can actually live with God as in his proper home.<sup>83</sup> But this is just what the natural man desires and what he certainly cannot have even when he presumes to mediate the Truth to the world — for in this case he knows that he actually lives in a *regio dissimilitudinis* which is not and cannot be a proper resting-place for his soul.

Thus Augustine could not give his mind to this moment which he says he found in the *libri Platoniorum*. Instead, he was forced to enquire more closely into what exactly was taught about the Mediator, Jesus Christ. So, turning once again to the Scriptures and especially to the writings of Paul, he discovered the error of the Photinian Christology which he had formerly assumed and which he described in VII, xix, 25. From Paul he learned that not only was Christ understood by the Church to be fully man with a rational soul and body, as Augustine himself had long recognized as the necessary condition of Christ's activities in the world,<sup>84</sup> but he also discovered that this same Christ was acknowledged as the Truth in person, co-eternal with God and in short the very same Truth to which he had come through the teaching of the books of the Platonists.<sup>85</sup> But here, rather than merely possessing the Truth in the form of a knowledge or vision with no way of making it his home, there was graciously offered to man as well, the way to the Truth so that he might come in the end to live with God as in his proper home. And so Augustine concludes this book with these words:

"It is one thing from a wooded height to see the homeland of peace, and not to find the way to it and in vain to try through ways impassible, surrounded by fugitive deserters, beseiging and lying in wait with their chief, the lion and the dragon: and it is another thing to hold the way leading there, which is protected by the care of the heavenly general, when there is no practice of robbery by those who have deserted the heavenly army, for they avoid this way as if it were a punishment. These things were gotten into my innermost being in a wonderful way when I used to read the least of your apostles; and I had considered your works and dreaded exceedingly." (VII, xxi, 27)<sup>86</sup>

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we should recall great importance that Augustine places on role of the preacher (*praedicans*) which he raises in his introduction to the work in the first chapter of the *Confessions*: see *Conf.*, I,i,1.

83. See *Conf.*, VII,xviii,24 and VII,xx,26.

84. See *Conf.*, VII,xix,25.

85. See *Conf.*, VII,xxi,27.

86. *Conf.*, VII,xxi,27. "Et aliud est de silvestri cacumine videre patriam pacis et

Precisely because Christianity presents the only possible means of accomplishing the fundamental desire of the natural man to live in the perpetual enjoyment of God; the natural man who, like Augustine, has both heard and understood the promises of the Mediator, Jesus Christ, can in no way ignore them or remain indifferent to him.

Having come so far, the natural man has gone as far as he can go in the pursuit of a knowledge of the Truth. And yet out of this conclusion a new beginning is generated which centers on the will. For, having come so far the only question that remains for the natural man is whether he will will his separation from God or, for Augustine and those who have heard the "good news", if instead they will will the overcoming of this separation through Jesus Christ. In the eighth book Augustine therefore leaves behind the account of this lengthy pursuit of a knowledge of the Truth which occupied him from the moment of reading *Hortensius* and instead he turns to a consideration of his will in relation to the conclusion he has just reached. And indeed the various moments of his relation to this Mediator constitute the whole content of the remainder of the *Confessions*.

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*iter ad eam non invenire et frustra conari per inopia circum obsidentibus et insidantibus fugitivis desertoribus cum principe suo leone et dracone, et aliud tenere viam illuc ducentem cura caelestis imperatoris munitam, ubi non latrocinantur qui caelestem militiam deseruerunt; vitant enim eam sicut supplicium. haec mihi in viscerabatur miris modis, cum minimum apostolorum tuorum legerem, et consideraveram opera tua et expaveram."*