

In philosophiae gremium confugere:
Augustine's View of Philosophy
in the First Book of his *Contra Academicos*

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INTRODUCTION

The systematic classifications of Augustine's works usually put under "Philosophy" the so-called *Dialogues*, which form most of his literary production in the period from the conversion until his ordination to the priesthood (386–391). Although everybody admits that these writings belong to the tradition of philosophical dialogues, there are different opinions about the meaning of "philosophy" in them. According to some, the *philosophia* praised in these juvenile works is the doctrine contained in the *libri Platoniorum*, which enabled Augustine to solve the difficult problems of the bodiless nature of God and the origin of evil. He was "converted" to Neoplatonism in the hope of gaining a rational knowledge of the divine, above the "mythological" speech of Christian faith which was directed to the masses of the *simplices*.¹ Other scholars, on the contrary, think that the "philosophy" mentioned by Augustine in his early writings is nothing but Christian religion, according to a usage already traditional in Patristic literature. In the neophyte's opinion, Christianity represented the overcoming of Neoplatonism and the achievement of the philosophical ideal of the ancients. The philosophy of the *Dialogues* moves on lines drawn by faith and is always guided by the light of Revelation. The character of *Philosophia*, as she appears in some passages of the early works, may be seen as a figure of Christ himself.² Ac-

1. Cf. P. Alfaric, *L'évolution intellectuelle de saint Augustin*, vol. I: *Du Manichéisme au Néoplatonisme* (Paris: É. Nourry, 1918); E. König, *Augustinus philosophus. Christlicher Glaube und philosophisches Denken in den Frühschriften Augustins* (München: W. Fink, 1970); K. Flasch, *Augustin. Einführung in sein Denken* (Nördlingen: Reclam, 1980; Stuttgart: Reclam, 1994²1942).

2. Cf. C. Boyer, *Christianisme et néo-platonisme dans la formation de saint Augustin* (Paris: G. Beauchesne, 1920); R.J. O'Connell, "The Visage of Philosophy at Cassiciacum," *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994): 65–76; G. Madec, "Le christianisme comme accomplissement du platonisme selon saint Augustin," *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 10 (1999): 109–29.

ording to a third class of scholars, the "philosophy" that Augustine develops in theory and practice immediately after his "conversion" in 386 is not a version of Neoplatonism, nor is it synonymous with Christian life. Rather, it is an understanding of faith with the help of Neoplatonic categories. It is a question of cooperation between *auctoritas* and *ratio* based on the principle "*credo ut intelligam*." This intellectual enterprise is distinct from simple faith, but not superior to it.³

It is rightly observed that many interpretations of the young Augustine's philosophic thought start from ideas about philosophy, which are heirs of the scholastic distinction and the modern separation between philosophy and theology.⁴ In general, the deep alterations in the idea of philosophy from the end of the Fourth century of the Common Era up to the present have not been sufficiently taken into account.⁵ In order to understand the kind of *philosophia* to which Augustine applied himself from the retreat at Cassiciacum until the return to Tagaste, we need to pay more attention to the large number of passages in the *Dialogues* where he expressly speaks of the exercise of philosophy, and we must examine with care his "metaphilosophic" terminology.⁶

3. Cf. M.P. Garvey, *Saint Augustine: Christian or Neo-Platonist? From his Retreat at Cassiciacum until his Ordination at Hippo* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1939); F.E. Van Fleteren, "Authority and Reason, Faith and Understanding in the Thought of Saint Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 4 (1973): 33–71; S. Alvarez Turienzo, "Qué *philosophia* practica Agustín en los *Diálogos* de Casiciaco," *Cuadernos Salmantinos de Filosofía* 13 (1986): 5–33.

4. Cf. G. Madec, "*Christus, scientia et sapientia nostra*. Le principe de cohérence de la doctrine augustinienne," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 10 (1975): 77–85; W.J. Hankey, "*Ratio*, reason, rationalism (*ideae*)," in A. Fitzgerald, ed., *Saint Augustine through the Ages: an Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 696–702.

5. These alterations have been emphasized especially by P. Hadot: cf. *Philosophy as a Way of Life. Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. with an introduction by A.I. Davidson, trans. by M. Chase (Oxford-Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1995); *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995).

6. By the adjective "metaphilosophic," I am referring to every statement which directly concerns the nature and value of philosophy. The works preceding the sacerdotal ordination include 120 occurrences of lemmata belonging to the family of *philosophia*. They represent more than a fifth of the total occurrences in the *opera omnia*. In particular, the *Dialogues* of Cassiciacum alone include almost half the total occurrences of the lemma *philosophia*: cf. the graphs in appendix to G. Catapano, "L'idea di filosofia nel 'primo' Agostino," *Atti e Memorie dell'Accademia Galileiana di Scienze Lettere ed Arti già dei Ricovrati e Patavina* 111 (1998–99), parte III: Memorie della Classe di Scienze Morali, Lettere ed Arti: 89–100. I attempt a complete examination of the occurrences from the *Contra Academicos* to the *De uera religione* in my book: *Il concetto di filosofia nei primi scritti di Agostino* (Roma: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, in press).

This article performs such an investigation about the earliest record of Augustine's philosophical activity: the first book of the *Contra Academicos*. The book reports the discussions held in the *schola* of Cassiciacum during three days in November 386, and it seems to have been sent to Romanianus (the dedicatee of the dialogue) before the writing of the other two books which complete the work.⁷ In it, Augustine makes public for the first time the "philosophy" to which he devoted himself after giving up the profession of teacher of rhetoric a few weeks before. Through an analysis of the metaphilosophic passages, I intend to show that such *philosophia* is understood, after the manner of the ancients, first of all as a way of life, and that its specificity lies in the peculiar rôle which Christian faith plays in it. This established, I hope to show that the upholders of the last two explanations listed above are right to some extent, while I will be inclined to reject the first one. In any case, I hope to point out that the young Augustine's reflections on philosophy are rich and articulated from the very beginning, and that they are original enough to be still worth considering.

THE PREFACE (i, 1–4)

The first four paragraphs of the first book of "Against the Academics" constitute a preface to the real dialogue, in conformity with the pattern of Cicero's own dialogues in the same *genre*. Another, much longer introduction opens book II (II, i, 1–iii, 9). The preface is dominated by the idea that *uirtus* cannot by itself snatch man from the vicissitudes of *fortuna* and shelter him in the haven of *sapientia*. A stroke of *fortuna* itself, *uel secunda uel quasi aduersa*, a turn of the wheel, becomes then necessary. What might seem a blind game of fortune, is actually the effect of divine Providence, which uses the events in order to prevent man from devoting himself to mundane affairs, and to allow his return to himself and so his true happiness. A hidden order governs what seems fortuitous, and "chance" is only something whose reason we do not know (cf. I, i, 1, 15–19). According to the first metaphilosophic passage of the book, *Philosophia* promises to show exactly this *sententia*.

7. Cf. *Contra Academicos* I, i, 4: *disputationem, quam inter se Trygetius et Licentius habuerunt, relata in litteras tibi misi*; I, ix, 25: *iam istam ... disputationem terminemus et relata in litteras mittamus, Licenti, potissimum patri tuo*; II, iv, 10: *Post pristinum sermonem, quem in primum librum contulimus, septem fere diebus a disputando fuimus otiosi*. As for the chronology and the historicity of the dialogue, cf. T. Fuhrer, *Augustin, Contra Academicos (uel De Academicis)*, *Bücher 2 und 3. Einleitung und Kommentar*, *Patristische Texte und Studien* 46 (Berlin–New York: W. de Gruyter, 1997. Hereafter: Fuhrer): 3–4, 14–19.

It is this thought, proposed in declarations of doctrines most fruitful and far removed from the understanding of the uninitiated, which that philosophy to which I call you promises to make clear to her true devotees.⁸

Augustine is addressing his friend and benefactor Romanianus, and he is asking him not to be discouraged in life's adversities, but rather to recognize in them the action of Providence (cf. I, i, 1, 23–25).

The *sententia* at issue, therefore, is the doctrine of the secret, providential order of the world, by virtue of which every event suits not only the harmony of the whole, but also the good of the individual. If we take into special account this last aspect, we can, perhaps, clear up the identity of the *uberrimarum doctrinarum oracula* by which, according to Augustine, this *sententia* was expounded. The idea of a providential order of the world, extended to the whole (*pronoia*), was present both in Stoic and in Neoplatonic thought. Augustine may have known it through Cicero⁹ and Seneca (*De providentia*), and he may have found it again in Plotinus' treatise *Peri pronoias* (*Ennead* III 2–3). But the ancients, in general, did not conceive the end of Providence to be the good of the individual, a divine care of every single man. The Christians supposed this to be a biblical doctrine. The Old and New Testaments were, for them, permeated by the idea of a God who takes care of humans. God not only creates humans, but also takes part in their history; God makes an alliance with them and operates to release them from the bondage of sin.

The expression *uberrimarum doctrinarum oracula*, is also more naturally related to the Holy Scriptures rather than to philosophic treatises. In the first place, the "oracular" feature of the *sententia* denotes its divine origin. In the second place, if the *oracula* were philosophic writings, why is the *sententia* only "expounded" (*edita*) in them, and still need to be "demonstrated" by philosophy? Finally, great spiritual "fertility" cannot be ascribed to the ancient philosophic schools by Augustine. He criticizes them just because of their practical barrenness in comparison with Christianity.¹⁰

The conclusion that Joseph Gercken drew about this passage, therefore, seems to me correct: "Auch an dieser Stelle zeigt sich wieder einmal, daß die Philosophie auf dem Fundamente der Autorität aufbaut und rationell das, was die Autorität gelehrt hat, durchdringen will, um so dessen Gewißheit zu

8. *Contra Academicos* I, i, 1 (CC 29: 3, lines 19–22): *Quam sententiam uberrimarum doctrinarum oraculis editam remotamque longissime ab intellectu profanorum se demonstratam ueris amatoribus suis ad quam te inuito philosophia pollicetur.* The translation of the quoted passages is that of John J. O'Meara: *St. Augustine, Against the Academics*, *Ancient Christian Writers* 12 (New York-Ramsey: Newman Press, 1951. Hereafter: O'Meara).

9. Cf. Cicero, *Academica* I, vii, 29; *De natura deorum* II, xiv, 37–38; xxi, 56–xxii, 57.

10. Cf. *Contra Academicos* III, xix, 42; *De ordine* II, v, 16; *De uera religione* i, 1–v, 8.

'demonstrieren'.¹¹ The *Philosophia*, to which Augustine calls Romanianus, promises to provide rational evidence of a truth proclaimed by the Holy Writings. Romanianus was particularly sensitive to this promise, because, under Augustine's incitement,¹² he had joined Manichaeism, whose main attraction was the promise of proving truth without faith.¹³ But now Augustine thinks it necessary to start from the *oracula*, because the truth announced by them is very far from the understanding of the *profani*. By *profani*, Augustine means those who are not initiated into the *oracula*, that is to say those who do not know the Scriptures or do not believe in their authority. The believer himself, however, does not immediately *understand* what he believes. He will be able to understand, however, if he lets himself be guided by *Philosophia*.

For these reasons, the interpretation given by J.J. O'Meara of the passage seems to me misleading. He saw in the expression *uberrimarum doctrinarum oracula* a possible reference to Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles*, not only because of the echo of the title, but also on account of the idea of "promise" and the exclusion of the uninitiated.¹⁴ One may object first that neither in the text nor in the context of our passage Augustine speaks of *multi* or *pauci*, but only of *profani* or *ueri amatores* of philosophy. Second, in *De ciuitate Dei* X, xiv (supposing that we can rely upon a text written about thirty years after the *Contra Academicos*) Plotinus is said to maintain that Providence extends as far as worldly things, but there is no mention of a providential action toward the individual man. Third, the correspondence between the title of the *ek logion philosophia* and our sentence is not evident at all: there is no question of a *philosophia ex oraculis haurienda*, but rather of a *Philosophia* which promises to demonstrate a *sententia oraculis edita*. Fourth, the "promise" of philosophy is a *topos* already in Cicero and Seneca.¹⁵

11. J. Gercken, *Inhalt und Aufgabe der Philosophie in den Jugendschriften Augustins* (Osnabrück: F. Obermeyer, 1939. Hereafter: Gercken) 41.

12. Cf. *Contra Academicos* I, i, 3.

13. Cf. *De beata uita* i, 4; *De utilitate credendi* i, 2.

14. Cf. J.J. O'Meara, *Porphyry's Philosophy from Oracles in Augustine* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1959): 172; *idem*, "Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles* in Eusebius's *Præparatio Euangelica* and Augustine's *Dialogues of Cassiciacum*," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 6 (1969): 126. On the subject of the title, O'Meara's conjecture was accepted by Frederick Van Fleteren: cf. Van Fleteren, "The Cassiciacum Dialogues and Augustine's Ascents at Milan," *Mediaevalia. A Journal of Mediaeval Studies* 4 (1978): 81; *idem*, "A Reply to Robert O'Connell," *Augustinian Studies* 21 (1990): 133–134; *idem*, "Background and Commentary on Augustine's *De uera religione*," in "De utilitate credendi," "De uera religione," "De fide rerum quae non uidentur" di Agostino d'Ippona, commento di O. Grassi, F. Van Fleteren, V. Pacioni, G. Balido, N. Cipriani, *Lectio Augustini*. Settimana Agostiniana Pavese 6 (Roma: Città Nuova/Augustinus, 1994): 53.

15. Cf. Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes* III, xxxiv, 84; IV, xxxviii, 83; V, vii, 19–20; Seneca, *Epistulae* V, 4; XLVIII, 11.

A last remark concerns how *Philosophia* is described in this first occurrence of the word. It is already possible to perceive the features of its personification, which Robert J. O'Connell and Pierre Courcelle pointed out.¹⁶ First of all, *Philosophia* is a subject capable of making promises, and then she is a woman who is desired by both true and false lovers.¹⁷

After announcing in general terms the theory of the providential disposition of the apparently unlucky events, from the end of §1 to the beginning of §3 Augustine applies it to the actual case of Romanianus' life story. Being surrounded by abundant riches since he was an adolescent, Romanianus would have fast fallen into the eddies of pleasure, if *fortunae illi flatus, qui putantur aduersi* had not saved him. If his life had been deprived of such difficulties, he would have wholly forgotten the *beata altera uita, quae sola beata est*. Now, on the contrary, thanks to his experience, he thoroughly knows how ephemeral, frail and ruinous the so-called "goods" of this world are. The various shakings (*iactationes*) suffered by Romanianus are the instruments by which the *secreta prouidentia* decided to wake up the divine *quid* which exists in him but is drowsy in the torpor of this life.

The second "metaphilosophic" passage of the book begins with this exhortation to wake up:

Wake up! wake up! I beg you. Believe me, you will be heartily glad that this world has scarcely flattered you at all with its gifts and successes by which the unwary are ensnared. I myself had almost been trapped by these things, preaching them to others, as I did, had not some chest trouble compelled me to give up my profession of windy rhetoric and take refuge in the lap of philosophy. She now nourishes and cherishes me in that leisure which we have so much desired. She has freed me entirely from that heresy into which I had precipitated you with myself. For she teaches, and teaches truly, that nothing whatever that is discerned by mortal eyes, or is the object of any perception, should be worshipped, but that everything such should be contemned. She promises to make known clearly the true and hidden God and is on the very point of deigning to present Him to our view—as it were, through shining clouds.¹⁸

16. Cf. R.J. O'Connell, *St. Augustine's Early Theory of Man, A.D. 386–391* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968) 70; *idem*, "The Visage" 73–74; *idem*, *Images of Conversion in St. Augustine's Confessions* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996) 8, 264; P. Courcelle, *Connais-toi toi-même. De Socrate à saint Bernard*, 3 (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1975): 686.

17. Similar expressions recur in *Contra Academicos* I, i, 3–4; II, ii, 6, and *De beata uita* i, 4.

18. *Contra Academicos* I, i, 3 (CC 29: 4–5, lines 67–80): *Euigila, euigila, oro te; multum, mihi crede, gratulaberis, quod [quid wrongly in the CC edition] paene nullis prosperitatibus, quibus tenentur incauti, mundi huius tibi dona blandita sunt, quae me ipsum capere moliebantur cotidie ista cantantem, nisi me pectoris dolor uentosam professionem abicere et in philosophiae gremium confugere coegisset. Ipsa me nunc in otio, quod uehementer optauimus, nutrit ac fouet, ipsa me penitus ab illa superstitione, in quam te mecum praecipitem dederam, liberauit. Ipsa enim docet et uere docet nihil omnino colendum esse totumque contemni oportere, quicquid mortalibus oculis cernitur, quicquid ullus sensus attingit. Ipsa uerisimum et secretissimum Deum perspicue se demonstraturam promittit et iam iamque quasi per lucidas nubes ostentare dignatur.*

Note in this "early confession" of Augustine,¹⁹ the linking of the "reawakening" of mind, the providential event, and philosophy. Augustine points to himself as a living example of someone who proceeded from worldly vanities to philosophy with the help of an apparently unfavourable event: a bad chest trouble, which compelled him to give up the *uentosa professio* of teacher of rhetoric and enabled him to devote himself full time to *philosophia*.²⁰

The description of *Philosophia* as a woman, already found in I, i, 1, goes on in this second passage. We can notice a transition from desired lover to a mother, who receives Augustine in her lap, feeds and warms him.²¹ In I, i, 4 we find *ubera*, whereas the expression *philosophiae gremium* will recur in II, iii, 7 and *De beata uita* i, 4. In order to mean the "refuge" provided by *Philosophia*. Augustine makes also use of the metaphor of haven, especially in the preface to the *De beata uita* (i, 1–5). Nørregaard,²² Gercken,²³ Maurice Testard,²⁴ and José Oroz Reta²⁵ rightly identified Cicero as the source of the two images. Just before the famous hymn to philosophy which is situated in book V of the *Tusculanae disputationes*, Cicero brought the metaphor of *sinus* near to that of *portus* with reference to his own experience, by playing upon the double meaning of *sinus* as "gulf" and "lap."²⁶ But unlike Cicero, who joined rhetoric and philosophy together instead of opposing them, in Augustine's view, sheltering in the lap of *Philosophia* implies giving up the *uentosa professio* of rhetorician.²⁷

19. Cf. P. Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de saint Augustin* (Paris: E. De Boccard, 1968²): 287.

20. Augustine recalls the episode with similar terms in *De beata uita* i, 4 and *De ordine* I, ii, 5. In *Confessiones* IX, ii, 4, he will tell more exactly that he was at first disturbed by the disease, but then he was even pleased by it, because it provided him a *non mendax excusatio* for giving up the profession.

21. Cf. O'Connell, *Images of Conversion*, 8, 12, 38, 264, 268.

22. Cf. J. Nørregaard, *Augustins Bekehrung*, übersetzt von A. Spelmeyer (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1923): 98–99.

23. Cf. Gercken, 15.

24. Cf. M. Testard, *Saint Augustin et Cicéron*, 1: *Cicéron dans la formation et dans l'œuvre de saint Augustin* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1958) 171.

25. Cf. J. Oroz Reta, "En torno a una metáfora agustiniana. 'El puerto de la filosofía,'" *La Ciudad de Dios* 181 (1968): 836–41; *idem*, "Del puerto de la filosofía al puerto de la muerte," *Helmantica* 20 (1969): 53–57.

26. Cf. Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes* V, ii, 5.

27. Still harder expressions will appear in *Confessiones* IX, ii, 2 and v, 13. About this aspect of Augustine's "conversion," cf. e.g., L.C. Ferrari, *The Conversions of Saint Augustine*, The Saint Augustine Lecture 1982 (Villanova: Villanova University Press, 1984) 1–17; S. Alvarez Turienzo, "Un aspecto de la conversión agustiniana: del modo de pensar retórico al filosófico," *La Ciudad de Dios* 202 (1989): 75–109.

Augustine had been longing to retire from teaching for some time, in order to devote himself fully to philosophy. The need of *otium*, of free time for philosophic speculation and contemplation, was a common idea in Greek-Roman antiquity.²⁸ Romanianus knew and shared Augustine's aspiration to philosophic *otium*, as the plural *optauimus* (l. 73) indicates. In II, ii, 4 Augustine reminds his friend of having often confided to him the wish to go into the *otium philosophandi*, and he recalls the *sanctus huius uitae ardor* which inflamed Romanianus himself. In *Confessiones* VI, xiv, 24 Augustine will mention his own and his friends' plan *remoti a turbis otiose uiuere*. In that *otium*, planned in 385 and failed because of the *mulierculae*, Romanianus himself would have taken part, and, indeed, he *maxime instabat huic rei* and could have endowed it with his fortune. Now Augustine wishes his friend to understand that he finally realized that ideal by retiring at Cassiciacum. In *Retractationes* I, i, 1 he will refer to this period by calling it "the *otium* of Christian life." In the *otium* so attained, *Philosophia* feeds and warms Augustine. Philosophy herself is food and drink for those who hunger and thirst for her.²⁹ In the passage we are inspecting, three other "actions" are ascribed to Philosophy: the release from Manichaeism, the doctrine of detachment from the sensible world, and the promise to demonstrate the true God.

In the first place, Philosophy rescued Augustine from the superstition to which he had led Romanianus. The *superstitio* at issue is Manichaeism.³⁰ In the *Confessiones*, Augustine will call *superstitio*, in an evidently pejorative sense, the religion which he joined for nine years.³¹ A hint at Romanianus' *superstitio* is found in *Contra Academicos* II, iii, 8. The power of philosophy to free man from passions and errors, was a *topos* which Augustine would have found both in Cicero³² and in Plotinus.³³ But how did Philosophy free Augustine from Manichaeism, and in what did that freeing consist? To answer these questions, we must follow the *Confessiones*. In *Confessiones* V, iii, 3–vii, 13, Augustine writes that his interest in Manichaean doctrines was put in a critical position after the reading of many philosophic writings (*multa*

28. About the situation in the Latin world, cf. J.-M. André, *Recherches sur l'otium romain* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1963); *l'otium dans la vie morale et intellectuelle romaine* (Paris: P.U.F., 1966).

29. See *Contra Academicos* I, i, 4; II, ii, 6; II, vii, 18, and III, iv, 7.

30. Cf. e.g., Saint Augustin, *Contra Academicos—De beata uita—De ordine*, texte de l'édition bénédictine, traduction, introduction et notes de R. Jolivet, Bibliothèque Augustinienne 4 (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1939, 1948²): 21, note 2; O'Meara, 171, note 18; Sant'Agostino, *Dialoghi, I: La controversia accademica, La felicità, L'ordine, I soliloqui, L'immortalità dell'anima*, introduzione, traduzione e note a cura di D. Gentili, Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana 3/1 (Roma: Città Nuova, 1970): 29, note 8.

31. Cf. *Confessiones* IV, i, 1 and VI, vii, 12.

32. Cf. e.g., *Tusculanae disputationes* II, iv, 11.

33. Cf. *Ennead* VI 4, 16, 40–44 (Henry-Schwyzler *minor*).

philosophorum). In fact, they provided him with a mathematically exact explanation of heavenly phenomena, which exposed the mistakes of the *fabulae* told in Mani's works.³⁴ Augustine's last hope of saving the credibility of those doctrines was disappointed after the long-awaited interview with Faustus, the Manichaean bishop who was considered the sect's best expert in every branch of knowledge, candidly admitted his complete ignorance of liberal arts. But, if the worldly wisdom of which Mani boasted was false, there was even more reason for regarding his theological doctrine as false as well, starting from the pretension of ascribing it to the Holy Spirit.

The reading of astronomic writings, therefore, was the first step in the liberation of Augustine from Manichaeism by philosophy. Such a liberation had also to replace Manichaean *superstitio* with an appropriate idea of God. This is exactly the third "action" carried out by Philosophy in *Contra Academicos* I, i, 3. In this connection, the *multa philosophorum* were not enough. Those *philosophi*, in fact, as Augustine will say in *Confessiones* V, iii, 3, found out the truth pertaining to the physical world, but they didn't manage to discover the Lord of this world, its Creator, namely the *Verbum* by which God made everything (*Confessiones* V, iii, 5) and which became incarnate in Christ (*Confessiones* V, xiv, 25). In order to rise to that height and to get rid of Manichaean materialism once for all, the idea of God as spiritual substance was needed (*Confessiones* V, xiv, 25). This is what is referred to by the second "action" of *Philosophia* in *Contra Academicos* I, i, 3, namely the doctrine of the total separation from the sensible world. It is not a question of condemning corporeality in itself (this contempt, in fact, would contrast with Augustine's Christian faith and even with Plotinus' doctrine of the positive character of the sensible world),³⁵ but of being aware of the need to set aside any materialistic representation in order to attain a pure idea of God. Only like this, *Philosophia* will be able to fulfil her third "action," the one of *perspicue demonstrare uerissimum et secretissimum Deum*. The "promise" of Philosophy is explained by the fact that she will be able to show the true

34. For a possible identification of the philosophic writings which Augustine read and memorized, cf. A. Solignac, "Doxographies et manuels dans la formation philosophique de saint Augustin," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 1 (1958): 113–48; *idem*, "Introduction aux *Confessions*," in Saint Augustin, *Les Confessions. Livres I–VII*, texte de l'édition de M. Skutella, introduction et notes par A. Solignac, traduction de E. Tréhorrel (†) et G. Bouissou, Bibliothèque Augustinienne 13 (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1962, 1992²): 92–93; Sant'Agostino, *Confessiones*, vol. II (Libri IV–VI), testo criticamente riveduto e apparati scritturistici a cura di M. Simonetti, traduzione di G. Chiarini, commento a cura di P. Cambronne, L.F. Pizzolato, P. Siniscalco (Fondazione Lorenzo Valla: A. Mondadori, 1993): 208; G. Madec, *Saint Augustin et la philosophie. Notes critiques* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1996): 31–36.

35. The most meaningful text, from this point of view, is the treatise *Against the Gnostics* (*Ennead* II 9).

God, provided that her order of fleeing from the sensible world will have been obeyed. The conjunction *enim* which connects the second "action" of Philosophy to the first one, suggests that the full (*penitus*) liberation from Manichaeism depends on the total separation from the corporeal.

Augustine, in fact, found the doctrine which freed him from Manichaeism once and for all in the *libri Platoniorum*. Augustine had already heard Ambrose and Manlius Theodorus say that nothing material should be associated with the idea of God;³⁶ but he found this doctrine amply expounded and demonstrated only in the writings of the Neoplatonists, as is evident from the long account of the effects of that reading in the *Confessiones*.³⁷ This is a well ascertained point in studies of the Neoplatonic influence on Augustine.³⁸ From this point of view, it doesn't matter whether Augustine was influenced more by Plotinus than by Porphyry, or vice versa,³⁹ because the two Neoplatonic thinkers perfectly agreed about the need to rise above the sensible world. It is not wrong at all to maintain, as Prosper Alfarcic did, that in *Contra Academicos* I, i, 3 Augustine thinks of the lessons of Neoplatonism,⁴⁰ or to assert, as Étienne Gilson did, that this book is pervaded by enthusiasm for Neoplatonic philosophy.⁴¹ But Christianity does not therefore fade into the background, as Alfarcic supposed.

It was the Christian God who drove Augustine into the lap of Philosophy. The "truest" God whom Philosophy promises to show him, in contrast with the "false" God of Manichaean superstition, is for him at once the God whom Neoplatonism allows him to think, and also the God revealed by the Bible. Charles Boyer⁴² and Gercken⁴³ explained the superlative *uerissimus* by Augustine's identification of God with the supreme Truth, which made the Logos-theology of the gospel of St John and Plotinus' doctrine of the intel-

36. Cf. *De beata uita* i 4.

37. See *Confessiones* VII, ix, 13–xxi, 27 (esp. x, 16; xiv, 20; xvii, 23; xx, 26).

38. Cf. e.g., G. Madec, "La délivrance de l'esprit (*Confessions* VII)," in "*Le Confessionni*" di Agostino d'Ipbona, libri VI–IX, Lectio Augustini, Settimana Agostiniana Pavese (Palermo: Augustinus, 1985): 45–69; *idem*, *Saint Augustin et la philosophie* 37–44; A. Poppi, "La difficoltà del pensare Dio nel giovane Agostino," *Palestra del clero* 66 (1987): 643–56 (repr. in *idem*, *L'intelligenza del principio. Metafisica e pensiero contemporaneo* [Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1989]: 165–79).

39. The latter is for instance O'Meara's opinion, according to whom our passage echoes the Porphyrian principle *omne corpus esse fugiendum*; which was what Augustine will regret in *Retractationes* I, i, 2 and iv, 3: cf. O'Meara, *Porphyry's Philosophy from Oracles in Augustine* 172–73; *idem*, "Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles* in Eusebius's *Praeparatio Euangelica*" 124, 129.

40. Cf. Alfarcic, *L'évolution intellectuelle* 401, 405.

41. Cf. É. Gilson, *Introduzione allo studio di sant'Agostino*, It. trans. (Genova: Marietti, 1983): 42.

42. Cf. Boyer, *Christianisme et néo-platonisme* 88, 94.

43. Cf. Gercken, 67.

ligible world coincide.⁴⁴ It was especially by these substantially identical views—if we follow *Confessiones* VII, ix, 13—that Augustine was struck when he read the *libri Platoniorum*. He already *believed* God's incorruptibility, but he wasn't yet able to *think* of Him as a bodiless being. As in I, i, 1, here the task of *Philosophia* seems to be that of clearly showing (*perspicue demonstrare*) a truth already held by faith.

Some remarks about the expressions *se demonstraturam promittit* and *quasi per lucidas nubes ostentare* remain to be made. According to O'Meara, "the promise to reveal the secret God and show him appearing through the clouds is very much in accord with the fragments of the *Philosophy from Oracles*—and indeed rather puzzling without such a context."⁴⁵ I am unable to find this interpretation satisfactory, for reasons analogous to those indicated with regard to I, i, 1. Apart from the fact that the affinity with the preface to the *Philosophy from Oracles* seems to me quite debatable, I think that, even if we admitted it, it wouldn't put the meaning of the passage in the right light. The *Deus* whom *Philosophy* promises to show is *secretissimus*, not because He is the object of an esoteric knowledge, but because He is beyond any phenomenon perceivable by the senses. Notice also that in this case there is no mention of oracular knowledge.

I am persuaded, however, by the comparison drawn by Courcelle between our passage and a paragraph of the *Soliloquia*, where a very similar expression recurs.⁴⁶ Addressing Augustine, his *Ratio* says: *Promittit enim Ratio, quae tecum loquitur, ita se demonstraturam Deum tuae menti, ut oculis sol demonstratur* (*Soliloquia* I, vi, 12). First, let us notice the affinity with the text of the *Contra Academicos*. A personified *Ratio* corresponds to the personified *Philosophia*; both of them *promise to demonstrare Deum*; God is compared to the sun (explicitly, in the *Soliloquia*; implicitly in the *Contra Academicos*, as one can infer from the comparison with the clouds that let the light filter). The new element brought by the *Soliloquia* is the specification that God is the object of *mens*, which is *oculus animae*, as it is said below. This helps us to understand that, when, in the *Contra Academicos*, *Philosophy* teaches Augustine to "contemn everything that is discerned by mortal eyes" (*totum contemni, quicquid mortalibus oculis cernitur*), she means

44. Cf. also P. Valentin, "Un protreptique conservé de l'Antiquité: le *Contra Academicos* de saint Augustin," *Revue des sciences religieuses* 43 (1969): 19, 24.

45. O'Meara, *Porphyry's Philosophy from Oracles in Augustine* 173. Cf. also *idem*, "Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles* in Eusebius's *Praeparatio Euangelica*" 129: "Again, as in the shortly preceding preface to the *Contra Academicos* there is emphasis on *promise, demonstration, secrecy*, as in Porphyry's preface. *Per lucidas nubes* is altogether in style of the *Oracles*" (author's italics).

46. Cf. Courcelle, "*Verissima philosophia*," in J. Fontaine-C. Kannengiesser, eds., *Epektasis. Mélanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972) 657, note 31 (repr. in *idem*, *Connais-toi toi-même*, 3: 713, note 470).

that God is “visible” only to the “eye of soul,” that is to say that He is purely intelligible, because He is absolutely bodiless and immaterial.⁴⁷ It is the same lesson that *Ratio* teaches to Augustine in *Soliloquia* I, viii, 15:

Now consider ... something concerning God Himself drawn from that comparison of sensible things, which I will now teach you (*me docente*). God is, of course, intelligible (*Intellegibilis nempe Deus est*) Therefore, just as in this sun one may remark three certain things, namely, that it is, that it shines, and that it illumines, so also in that most hidden God (*in illo secretissimo Deo*) whom you wish to know, there are three things, namely, that He is, that He is known (*intellegitur*), and that He makes other things to be known. In order that you may know these two things—yourself and God—I am going to undertake to teach you (*docere te audeo*).⁴⁸

Such teaching of *Ratio* coincides with a well-known doctrine of Platonic origin: God as the supreme intelligible reality, source of intelligibility for every other thing, like the sun which is cause of the visibility of everything that can be seen. The terminology used by Augustine echoes in particular some sentences of Plotinus’ treatise *On Beauty*.⁴⁹

But we still have to explain why the vision of God is “promised” and why it is mediated *per lucidas nubes*. Here too the *Soliloquia* give us a valuable indication. In the first place, the vision of God presupposes a purification: *oculi sani mens est ab omni labe corporis pura, id est a cupiditatibus rerum mortalium iam remota atque purgata*.⁵⁰ In order that mind may work well, it has to be free from representations of material things, which it derives most of all from the attachment to the corporeal. In conformity with the principle common to Plato and the Physicists, that like is known by like, soul will be able to grasp the spiritual reality of God only if it will put its *own* spiritual nature into action. Augustine himself will confess that he “missed” in his “attempts of ecstasy” (according to Courcelle’s expression), because his mind was not thus purified.⁵¹ So Philosophy “promises” to show God, on condition that her followers fulfil the required purification. Moreover, we notice that the Plotinian topic of *kátharsis* is transformed by Augustine in a Pauline sense. According to *Soliloquia* I, vi, 12–13, the requirements of the purification of *mens* are the three theological virtues specified by St Paul: *fides*, through

47. *Retractationes* I, i, 2, too, confirms that such was Augustine’s mind.

48. Trans. by T.F. Gilligan, in Saint Augustine, *The Happy Life—Answer to Skeptics—Divine Providence and the Problem of Evil—Soliloquies*, The Fathers of the Church 5 (New York: CIMA Publishing, 1948): 361–62.

49. Cf. Plotinus, *Ennead* I 6, 8, 1–6; 21–27.

50. *Soliloquia* I, vi, 12.

51. Cf. *Confessiones* VII, x, 16 and the commentary by Madec in Sant’Agostino, *Confessioni*, vol. 3 (Fondazione Valla): 204–06, who cites *De quantitate animae* xxxiii, 75 and *De moribus* I, vii, 12.

which soul believes what it cannot see yet; *spes*, which sustains it in its endeavour for recovery; and, finally, *caritas*, which makes it love the promised light and prevents it from being satisfied with the darkness where it lived so far. The act of "promising" itself demands of the one to whom the promise is made an attitude of trust and hope, and a desire for what is promised. The "promise" of Philosophy is to show what is not seen yet but is already believed, which accords with what we noticed above at *Contra Academicos* I, i, 1.

Finally, of what are the *lucidae nubes*, through which Philosophy "suddenly" (*iam iamque*) "deigns" to show God a symbol? The image would seem to suggest a mediated, somehow "filtered" vision of God. The problem is to understand to what such a mediation refers. Further, we will need to understand the link between the evidence (*perspicue*) of the promised vision and the indirectness of the imminent one. It looks as if the promise of Philosophy is to show clearly that of which she now allows only glimpse. So it is as if the present, mediated vision is a sort of advance payment made in security for the future, full vision. One may wonder whether this relationship between the present and the future, or between the near future and the remote one, has an eschatological meaning.

Augustine might be referring to the inevitably partial and indirect character of the knowledge of God which is possible in this life. Such knowledge would be only a pledge of the direct vision which the blessed will enjoy *post mortem*. The vision *per lucidas nubes*, then, would be equivalent to the vision *per speculum in aenigmate* of *I Corinthians* 13, 12, which is compared to the vision *facie ad faciem* in the future life.⁵² But the point of view of the young Augustine does not seem to be eschatological. In the *Retractationes* he will often repent having made statements opposed to the Apostle's teaching and this seems to be one of those errors.⁵³ The neophyte's confidence in attaining the beatific vision of God already in this life (even if only for short moments) has been emphasized by many studies of Cassiciacum dialogues.⁵⁴ Some passages of the dialogues are unequivocal. In *De ordine* II, xix, 51, for instance, Augustine says that the soul, which will have completed the *curriculum studiorum* constituted by liberal arts and culminating in philosophy,

52. An explanation of this kind is suggested by O'Connell, *Images of Conversion* 141; cf. also *ibid.*, 266.

53. Cf. *Retractationes* I, ii; v, 3; xiv, 2.

54. Cf. e.g., M. Löhret, *Der Glaubensbegriff des hl. Augustinus in seinen ersten Schriften bis zu den Confessiones* (Einsiedeln/Zürich/Köln: Benziger, 1955) 53–61; Van Fleteren, "Authority and Reason" 56–57; *idem*, "Augustine and the Possibility of the Vision of God in This Life," *Studies in Medieval Culture* 11 (1977): 9–16; *idem*, "The Cassiciacum Dialogues"; N. Cipriani, "Il rifiuto del pessimismo porfiriano nei primi scritti di S. Agostino," *Augustinianum* 37 (1997): 113–46.

will see God. In *Soliloquia* I, vii, 14 *Ratio* specifies that *fides* and *spes* are indispensable even after attaining the vision of God, because soul, for the whole of this life, will always stay under the influence of the senses and the trouble of body.

So the "promise" of Philosophy, according to the young Augustine, is not destined to be fulfilled in the life to come. What then do the "shining clouds," which make the vision of God still defective, symbolize? I conjecture that they refer to the gradual training which the inner eye has to undertake, in order to get accustomed to sustain the dazzling light of the intelligible sun. Thus we have to do with Plato's famous analogy of the Cave (*Republica* VII 515 c–516 b). The unchained prisoner will see at first the shadows of the things, then their reflections in the water, and finally the things themselves. Afterwards he will proceed from these things to the light of the stars and of the moon, and lastly to the light of the sun and to the sun itself. In plain terms, the ascent of soul from the sensible world to the intelligible one as far as the idea of the Good⁵⁵ must be gradual. True *paideia* will undertake this gradual climb through the training of the disciples.

A passage of the *Soliloquia* proves that Augustine knew this doctrine of Plato well. In *Soliloquia* I, xiii, 23, *Ratio* divides the *amatores sapientiae* into two classes, according to their capability for grasping the *lux ineffabilis et incomprehensibilis mentium*. The first class is made up by people whose mental eye is so sound and strong that they are able to stare immediately at the intelligible sun without being blinded. They don't need cure or education, but only an *admonitio*.⁵⁶ The other class is made up by people who are not able to see the intelligible sun immediately and, as a consequence of disappointment, run the risk of going back to darkness. They need to exercise their sight and to keep their desire kindled:

They are, therefore, first to be trained, and, for their own good, their love is to be restricted and nourished. First, they should be shown (*illis demonstranda sunt*) some things which do not shine with their own light, but which may be seen only by means of light, such as a garment or a wall or something of that kind. Then, they should be shown something which, though it does not shine with its own light, yet glitters more fairly by means of that light, such as gold, silver and the like, which yet are not so radiant as to hurt the eyes. Then, perhaps, this earthly fire should be carefully shown them (*demonstrandus est*), then the stars, then the moon, then the brightness of the dawn and the splendor of the whitening sky (*fulgor, et albescentis caeli nitōr*). It is through these things that, each one according to his strength growing more proficient, either

55. According to Plato, this ascent is the "true philosophy" (*Republica* 521 c).

56. On the topic of *admonitio* in Augustine's early writings, cf. J. Morán, "La teoría de la 'admonición' en los Diálogos de san Agustín," in *Sirenas augustinianas P. Victorino Capánaga oblatas curauit edendas* I. Oroz Reta, II: *Philosophica* (Madrid, 1968 = *Augustinus* 13): 257–71.

through all the steps or leaving out some of them, sooner or later he will behold the sun without flinching and with immense delight. Some such thing is what the best teachers do for those who are most desirous of wisdom, but who, though indeed they see, do not see clearly. For, it is the duty of good education to arrive at wisdom by means of a definite order; without order this is a matter of chance hardly to be relied upon.⁵⁷

Augustine then asks his *Ratio* to prescribe him the exercises that he himself needs in order to see the light. *Ratio* answers:

There is only one thing that I can command you—I know no more. These things of sense must be forsaken entirely (*penitus esse ista sensibilia fugienda*), and, as long as we bear this body, we must have care lest our wings be entangled by their sticky lime, as we need whole and faultless wings to fly from this darkness to that light. For, that light does not even deign to show itself to those who have been shut up within this prison of the body (*quae se ne ostendere quidem dignatur in hac cauea inclusis*), unless they are strong enough, after breaking and destroying their prison, to take wing into their own lofty realm. And so, when you shall have become such a man that no earthly thing whatever delights you, believe me, at that very moment, at that point of time, you will behold (*uidebis*) what you desire.⁵⁸

The resemblance with Plato is evident. No doubt Augustine received and appropriated the principle of a gradual ascent to the vision of God, especially for a soul coming from darkness. That was, in fact, the starting-position of Romanianus and Augustine themselves. It was impossible for them to direct their gaze on the mental sun immediately. They were obliged, for a time, to be satisfied with contemplating the light filtered by a veil of *nubes*. In other words, they had to practice with patience the *exercitatio* constituted by the *disciplinae*, whose *spectamina*, as it is said in *Soliloquia* I, viii, 15, are intelligible only because they are lightened by the supreme Intelligible which is God.⁵⁹ The function of the *Disciplinarum libri*, which the young Augustine was planning to compose, was to be that of *per corporalia ad incorporalia quibusdam quasi passibus certis uel peruenire uel ducere* (*Retractationes* I, vi). And that was the same teaching we find about *Ratio* in *Soliloquia* I, xiv, 24 and about *Philosophia* in *Contra Academicos* I, i, 3.

The third passage I shall discuss follows immediately. Augustine uses Licentius, the son of Romanianus whose education supervises, as an example of conversion. Like his teacher, Licentius was “converted” from the temptations of youth to philosophic life:

57. *Soliloquia* I, xiii, 23 (Gilligan's translation, 374).

58. *Soliloquia* I, xiv, 24 (Gilligan's translation, 375).

59. Cf. also *Soliloquia* II, xx, 35.

Our Licentius shares with great enthusiasm this way of life with me. He has been so entirely converted to it from the seductions and pleasures dear to youth that I feel confident in daring to propose him for his father's imitation. I speak of philosophy from whose breasts no age can complain that it is excluded. And so that I may incite you all the more eagerly to cling to her and drink of her—although I have long been aware of your great thirst for her—I have decided to send you a foretaste. It will, I hope—and I beg that my hope be not in vain—be sweet, and, as it were, an enticement to you.⁶⁰

In this short presentation of Licentius' as a philosophical *exemplum*, Augustine assembles two typical traits of the ancient idea of philosophy: philosophy as a way of life and the "conversion" from earthly pleasures as a condition of entering it.⁶¹ The expression *in philosophia uiuere* will recur in II, ii, 4, where Augustine will remind Romanianus that he often confided to him his own persuasion that no life was happy, *nisi qua in philosophia uiueretur*. The need of philosophy in order to be happy was also a standard protreptic topic, widespread in ancient philosophic literature. Seneca, for instance, took the idea for granted.⁶² Quintilian mentioned the *topos* as one of those most employed by philosophers. He specified, however, that it is not logically evident and needs to be proved.⁶³ The possibility of coming to philosophy at every age was well-known in Hellenistic and Roman thought.⁶⁴

As for the second characteristic of Licentius' philosophical *exemplum*: the *conuersio* from a life given to pleasures, Gercken reduced it to purification as a preparatory condition to philosophy, which is found in many parallel passages in the whole philosophic production of the early Augustine.⁶⁵ Gercken pointed to the adjective *totus*, which denotes the need to devote *all* of oneself to the search for truth.⁶⁶

60. *Contra Academicos* I, i, 4 (CC 29: 5, lines 81–88): *In hac [sc. philosophia] mecum studiosissime uiuit noster Licentius; ad eam totus a iuuenalibus inlecebris uoluptatibusque conuersus est ita, ut eum non temere patri audeam imitandum proponere. Philosophia est enim, a cuius uberibus se nulla aetas queretur excludi. Ad quam auidius [auuidius wrongly in the CC edition] retinendam et hauiriendam quo te incitarem, quamuis tuam sitim bene nouerim, gustum tamen mittere uolui. Quod tibi suauissimum et, ut ita dicam, inductorium fore peto, ne frustra sperauerim.*

61. Cf. e.g., A.D. Nock, *Conversion. The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), esp. Ch. XI; Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, *idem*, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*

62. Cf. Seneca, *Epistulae* XVI, 1; XC, 1.

63. Cf. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* V, xiv, 13.

64. Cf. the famous sentence of Epicurus' in *Epistulae ad Menoeceum* 122.

65. Cf. Gercken, 86–87, who cites *Contra Academicos* III, xvii, 38; *De beata uita* i, 4; *De ordine* I, ii, 4; iv, 10; II, xvi, 44; *Soliloquia* I, xiv, 24; *De uera religione* iii, 3.

66. Cf. Gercken, 85–86 who cites *Contra Academicos* I, ix, 25; II, iii, 8, and III, xx, 43. Therese Fuhrer noted also *Contra Academicos* II, i, 2; ii, 5; *De moribus* I, xvii, 31; *Confessiones* VI, xi, 19; cf. Fuhrer, 127. The comprehensive character of the philosophic life had been often repeated by Seneca, e.g., *Epistulae* XVII, 5; LIII, 8; LXXII, 3.

Augustine ends the preface to book I by introducing the figure of Trygetius, the young man engaged in discussion with Licentius. Trygetius is returning from the military service, which was providential for him, because it wiped out his annoyance for liberal arts and made the young man extremely eager for them.

A very few days, therefore, after we had come to live in the country, when I was exhorting and encouraging them to the pursuit of study and noticed that they were more prepared than I had expected and full of enthusiasm, I decided to find out what ability they had for their age, especially since the *Hortensius*, a book of Cicero's, seemed already for the most part to have won them over to philosophy.⁶⁷

In Cassiciacum *ager*, so, Augustine urged the two boys to the *studia*. Looking at the context, we may suppose that those studies were exactly the liberal ones; however, they were not for their own sake, but were propaedeutic to philosophy.⁶⁸ Having noticed that the young men were well-disposed, Augustine wanted to test their philosophic aptitude by engaging them in a *disputatio*.

The merit for Licentius and Trygetius' bent for philosophy is ascribed to Cicero's *Hortensius*, the same protreptic work which first lighted the love for wisdom in Augustine's heart when he was a student.⁶⁹ We are informed by other passages in the *Contra Academicos* that Cicero's dialogue was well-known to Augustine's pupils.⁷⁰

THE FIRST DAY OF THE DEBATE (ii, 5–iv, 10)

The debate between Licentius and Trygetius starts from the problem of the relationship between happiness and truth. Trygetius defends the thesis that one cannot be happy without finding truth. Licentius, on the contrary, maintains that the simple search for truth is enough to live happily. Romanianus' son quickly puts his opponent on the ropes, by making him acknowledge that Cicero was a wise man, and so compelling him to consider Cicero's opinion authoritative, according to which "*nihil ab homine percipi posse, nihilque remanere sapienti, nisi diligentissimam inquisitionem ueritatis*" (I, iii, 7). Trygetius, then, asks whether one is allowed to retract rash premises.

67. *Contra Academicos* I, i, 4 (CC 29: 5, lines 93–98): *Pauculis igitur diebus transactis posteaquam in agro uiuere coepimus, cum eos [sc. Licentium et Trygetium] ad studia hortans atque animans ultra quam optaueram paratos et prorsus inhiantes uiderem, uolui temptare pro aetate quid possent, praesertim cum Hortensius liber Ciceronis iam eos ex magna parte conciliasse philosophiae uideretur.*

68. Cf. *Contra Academicos* II, iii, 8.

69. Cf. *De beata uita* i, 4; *Confessiones* III, iv, 7–8; VI, xi, 18; VIII, vii, 17.

70. Cf. *Contra Academicos* III, iv, 7; xiv, 31.

Augustine answers that such retractions are not only not forbidden, but rather, heartily urged, in his school, because the reason for discussion should not be the childish ostentation, but the wish to find out truth (*inueniendi ueri cupiditas*). Licentius then allows Trygetius to reconsider his opinion about Cicero.

Licentius, too, remarked: I think we have real progress in philosophy when a disputant thinks little of victory as compared with the discovery of what is just and true.⁷¹

Licentius' words should not be interpreted as expression of a mere personal opinion, but as acceptance of a basic principle of the *schola* which Augustine collected at Cassiciacum: the primacy of truth above the success one could attain through dialectical skill. It is a principle which Augustine often expressed by the antithesis between *gloria* and *ueritas*, and to which he recalled his pupils whenever he realized that they had distanced themselves from it.⁷² The subordination of the art of speech and discussion to the ideals of justice and truth, against the vanities for which it was usually employed, was suggested to Augustine by the *Hortensius*, and it coincided, in fact, with his first "conversion" to philosophy.⁷³ As a teacher of rhetoric, too, Augustine always hated the use of his discipline for vain and immoral aims.⁷⁴ There was all the more reason for him to assert the primacy of truth when Augustine had given up rhetoric as a profession and the ambitions connected with it, and devoted himself to the *inquisitio ueri*.

Having received from Licentius permission to go back to the premises rashly conceded to the opponent, Trygetius recants his assertion that Cicero was a wise man. Licentius, then, presses a rhetorical question, appealing to Cicero's unquestionable authority as initiator and improver of philosophy among the Latins: "So, Cicero was not a wise man, Cicero, who not only was the first to treat of philosophy in the Latin tongue, but who brought that process to perfection?"⁷⁵ The strength of Licentius' objection is so great, that Trygetius is obliged to admit again that Cicero was a wise man, even though he specifies that this is not a good reason for accepting all his opinions.

71. *Contra Academicos* I, iii, 8 (CC29: 7, lines 34–37): *Et Licentius: Non paruum in philosophia profectum puto, inquit, cum in comparatione recti uerique inueniendi contemnitur a disputante uictoria.*

72. Cf. *Contra Academicos* II, vi, 15; III, ix, 18; xiv, 30; *De ordine* I, x, 29–30. About the antithesis *gloria/laus/uictoria-ueritas*, Fuhrer cited Cicero *De oratore* I, xi, 47; *Academica* II, xx, 65; *Minucius Felix* XIV, 2 and Jerome *Adversus Pelagianos* I, 22 Moreschini: cf. Fuhrer, 171; cf. also *ibid.*, 144.

73. Remember how the episode is narrated in *Confessiones* III, iv, 7.

74. Cf. *De ordine* I, x, 30; *Confessiones* IV, ii, 2.

75. *Contra Academicos* I, iii, 8 (CC29: 8, lines 47–48): *Ergone Cicero sapiens non fuit, a quo in Latina lingua philosophia et inchoata est et perfecta?*

So Licentius follows with an appraisal of Cicero's rôle in the history of Latin philosophy. Cicero himself understood his philosophical activity as a service done to his fellow citizens so that they would have philosophic language at their disposal.⁷⁶ Licentius appeals to Cicero's meritorious work in order to prove that he was *sapiens*. There is a subtle play upon words in his objection to Trygetius, which becomes clear if we take into consideration the etymological definition (taken from Cicero himself)⁷⁷ of *philosophia* as *amor* or *studium sapientiae*. It will appear later in the text (II, iii, 7; III, ix, 20), but it works in the minds of the talkers of Cassiciacum from the very beginning.

Trygetius, however, counterattacks. He tells Licentius that, by now, he has shaken off the yoke of authority, which his friend would like to use against him:

As for you, Licentius, I wish you would concede to me—for I have through that freedom which especially philosophy promises to win for us, thrown off the yoke of authority—that the man who still seeks truth is not perfect.⁷⁸

In the case in point, the authority is that of Cicero. Nevertheless Trygetius' statement seems to have a wider meaning; it seems to oppose in general terms the release promised by philosophy to the *iugum auctoritatis*. Such an antithesis may sound very strange in the mouth of a pupil of a teacher, who is known for his theory about the positive function of *auctoritas* with regard to knowledge. "Se ... si pone a mente l'importanza che l'*auctoritas* ha sempre avuto per Agostino, come momento necessario al processo del sapere, non si può non restare sorpresi dall'apprezzamento che Agostino riserba all'ardimento con cui Trigezio ha saputo liberarsi dal peso dell'autorità, e proprio dell'autorità di Cicerone."⁷⁹ In I, ix, 24, in fact, addressing Licentius, Augustine recalls Trygetius' reaction with the following words: *Cui loco tu cum molem auctoritatis obiceres, modeste aliquantum Ciceronis nomine perturbatus tamen se statim erexit et generosa contumacia in uerticem libertatis exsiluit.*

Perhaps, however, Augustine's praise of Trygetius' attitude will no longer surprise us, if we take into account the following points. In the first place, as

76. Cf. Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes* I, iii, 5; II, ii, 5; *De natura deorum* I, iv, 7–8; *De divinatione* II, i, 1; ii, 4; ii, 5–6.

77. Cf. Cicero, *De legibus* I, xxii, 58; *De officiis* II, ii, 5; Boethius, *De differentiis topicis* 2 = Cicero, *Hortensius* fr. 93 Grilli.

78. *Contra Academicos* I, iii, 9 (CC29: 8, lines 60–63): *Tu autem, Licenti, uolo uel nunc mihi concedas—iam enim libertate, in quam maxime nos uindicaturam se philosophia pollicetur, iugum illud auctoritatis excussi—perfectum non esse, qui adhuc ueritatem requirat.*

79. F. Chiereghin, *Fede e ricerca filosofica nel pensiero di S. Agostino* (Padova: Cedom, 1965) 33.

Nørregaard⁸⁰ and Gercken⁸¹ opportunely noticed, in these passages the authority at issue is not the divine but the human one. Augustine developed a distinction between two kinds of authority in *De ordine* II, ix, 27. There he clearly says that, while divine authority is *uera, firma, summa*, human authority *plerumque fallit*. In the field of human opinions, Augustine never upheld the principle of authority. The *auctoritas* of the *sapientes*, according to him, was of value only if, and to the extent that, it was able to help men in finding out truth. In the second place, it is clear from the context that Licentius was making an unfair use of Cicero's authority, because he was not using it in order to bring helpful factors to the debate, but only to defeat his opponent. Trygetius' reaction, therefore, was understandable and correct. In the third place, Cicero himself censured the people who worried about knowing his opinion on every question and gave up the use of their own judgement.⁸²

For these reasons, Augustine's appreciation of Trygetius' reaction has to be understood not as indulgence of the pretension that we can do without any authority, but as the teacher's approval of a pupil who feels bound to place truth before any human opinion, however authoritative it is. This was, after all, the fundamental lesson which Augustine got from the reading of the *Hortensius*.⁸³

THE THIRD DAY OF THE DEBATE (vi, 16–ix, 25)

The remaining occurrences of metaphilosophic terms in the first book of the *Contra Academicos* are situated in the paragraphs which report the third day of the discussions. At the end of the second day, Trygetius asked Augustine to intervene in the debate and defend the idea of *sapientia*, since both the definitions suggested by the young man (*recta uia uitae* and *uia recta, quae ad ueritatem ducat*) had been rejected by Licentius. Now Augustine replies to the invitation, by suggesting the definition of *sapientia* given by the ancients (*prisci homines*): *rerum humanarum diuinarumque scientia*.⁸⁴ But Licentius finds fault again. If everyone who knows divine and human things were *sapiens*, we would be obliged to admit that even the fortune-teller Albicerius, who gave incredibly precise responses in Carthage for many years, was *sapiens*. It was well-known, however, that he was a shameless and dissolute person.

80. Cf. Nørregaard, *Augustins Bekehrung* 131.

81. Cf. Gercken, 40.

82. Cf. Cicero, *De natura deorum* I, v, 10. Cf. also *Tusculanae disputationes* V, xxix, 83.

83. Cf. *Confessiones* III, iv, 8.

84. It was a Stoic definition (cf. *SVF*, II, fr. 36), which Augustine probably knew through Cicero. Cf. Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes* IV, xxvi, 57; *De officiis* I, xliii, 153; II, ii, 5. Seneca (*Epistula* LXXXIX, 5) criticized the addition about the knowledge of the causes (notice that in Augustine's definition there is not such addition).

Augustine's reply includes the following sentence: "And therefore, some philosophers say with great justice that such knowledge can be found only in the wise man, who should hold that which he defends and admits not only certainly, but also unshakeably."⁸⁵ Augustine states more exactly that by *scientia* he does not mean ordinary knowledge, but a *comprehensio* such that its possessor can never be wrong, nor can he wobble under the blows of the opponents' criticism. As some interpreters have noticed, we have to do here with a Stoic meaning of the term *scientia*.⁸⁶ The *philosophi*, who maintain that such *scientia* may be found only in the *sapiens*, are the Stoics.⁸⁷

The reason why *scientia*, that is stable knowledge, may be found only in the *sapiens*, is, according to our text, that the clear awareness of one's theoretical and practical ideas is not enough to be a wise man. Absolute certainty about their validity is needed as well. One needs to know the grounds of his ideas, the *causae*, as Cicero said.

The sentence at issue is the first attestation of the term *philosophus* in Augustine's works. Here it means, as we have seen, pagan thinkers (the Stoics). This meaning will be invariable every time Augustine uses the word in the plural. Moreover, nobody, as far as I know, has noticed that this is another case in which a word belonging to the family of *philosophia* is joined to a word belonging to the family of *ueritas*: the adverb *uerissime*, whose superlative degree should be noticed. We already found a similar link in I, i, 1; I, i, 3, and I, iii, 8. The link *philosophia-ueritas* will recur as a *Leitmotiv* all along the work. Augustine doesn't mind acknowledging that ancient philosophers were able to say something absolutely true.

The last interesting passage is situated at the end of the book: "And now, let us finish, as I said, this discussion, and, above all, Licentius, let us send a record of it to your father. I have already made him really interested in phi-

85. *Contra Academicos* I, vii, 19 (CC29: 14, lines 5–8): *Vnde uerissime a quibusdam philosophis dicitur in nullo eam posse nisi in sapiente inueniri, qui non modo perceptum* [this variant seems to me more suitable for the general meaning of the passage than the reading *perfectum*, which was adopted by Green in CC] *habere debet id, quod tuetur ac sequitur, uerum etiam inconcussum tenere*. The modern editors ascribe this reply to Trygetius, by reading at the beginning of the paragraph *Hic ille: Primo, inquit, ego scientiam non appello etc.*, whereas some manuscripts attribute it to Augustine, by reporting the reading *Hic ego: Primo, inquam, scientiam non appello etc.* This variant was defended by Jean Doignon in "Leçons méconnues et exégèse du texte du *Contra Academicos* de saint Augustin," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 27 (1981): 74–78. His arguments seem to me satisfactory; therefore I ascribe our sentence to Augustine and not to Trygetius.

86. Cf. Sant'Agostino, *Dialoghi*, I, 49, note 31; Flasch, *Augustin*, It. trans. *Agostino d'Ippona. Introduzione all'opera filosofica* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1983): 26, note 25.

87. Cf. *SVF*, II, fr. 294; III, fr. 213 and 552.

losophy.⁸⁸ Augustine has recapitulated the state of the first three days of discussion and urged his pupils to put an end to the debate. *Vt dixi* refers to the invitation to close the discussion. *Quam ob rem* concerns the reasons which Augustine has adduced in order to justify his invitation.

This sentence corresponds exactly to what Augustine told Romanianus at the end of the preface: *Nam disputationem, quam inter se Trygetius et Licentius habuerunt, relatam in litteris tibi misi* (I, i, 4).⁸⁹ The aim of sending Romanianus the transcript of the dialogue between Trygetius and Licentius is the same: Augustine hopes to attract his friend toward that *philosophia* in which he and his pupils already live *studiosissime*. He counts especially on the effectiveness of the example which the son sets to the father (lines 53–55; cf. I, i, 4). But a protreptic value should also be ascribed to the conclusion which the debate between Licentius and Trygetius has achieved: the need of searching for truth with all one's strength in order to be happy (lines 46–49). *Philosophia* reveals itself to be, above all, a search for truth. It was in order to test his pupils' disposition for that search—a disposition encouraged by the reading of the *Hortensius*—that Augustine engaged them in a debate.⁹⁰ Notice that *studia* (line 53; cf. I, i, 4, line 95) and a certain way of life (line 54; cf. I, i, 4, line 1) are linked to *philosophia*. As in the preface, a providential help is needed for the acceptance of philosophy (lines 52–53: *Sed adhuc quae admittat [sc. ad philosophiam] quaero fortunam*).⁹¹

CONCLUSION

Let me sum up the features of the idea of philosophy which have emerged from my analysis. In the first place, we have seen that most of Augustine's statements about philosophy are situated in a preface which has a protreptic function and includes autobiographic excerpts. The philosophy to which Augustine calls his friend Romanianus promises first of all to demonstrate a doctrine which has a biblical origin: that the providential disposition of the

88. *Contra Academicos* I, ix, 25 (CC 29: 17–18, lines 50–52): *Quam ob rem iam istam, ut dixi, disputationem terminemus et relatam in litteras mittamus, Licenti, potissimum patri tuo, cuius erga philosophiam iam prorsus animum teneo.*

89. This correspondence by itself is enough for making plausible the assumption that there Augustine did not mean the whole *disputatio* of the *Contra Academicos*, but only that one which forms the first book of the work.

90. Cf. I, i, 4; ix, 25. About the idea of philosophic discussion as *exercitatio animi*, cf. H.-I. Marrou, *S. Agostino e la fine della cultura antica*, It. trans. (Milano: Jaca Book, 1987) 255–76, esp. 265; Löhrer, *Der Glaubensbegriff*, 58, note 5; O. du Roy, *L'intelligence de la foi en la Trinité selon saint Augustin. Genèse de sa théologie trinitaire jusqu'en 391* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1966) 173–74, note 1; Fuhrer, 179 and note 8.

91. About the need of the favour of *fortuna* in order to reach *sapientia*, cf. parallel passages and bibliography in Fuhrer, 63.

events is for the good of individuals. Soon *Philosophia* assumes the traits of a motherly figure, in whose lap Augustine has taken refuge after giving up his profession, and from whom he gets nourishment and warmth. She has freed him from Manichaeism by teaching him to contemn sensible things, and she gets ready to make him discern the true God with the eye of mind. In the life devoted to philosophy, Augustine has the young men Licentius and Trygetius as fellows. He tries to educate them to intellectual and moral lives, by encouraging them towards the study of liberal disciplines and training them in discussions on philosophic subjects.

The two boys are the protagonists of the debate reported in the book, and the remaining metaphilosophic statements arise within their discussion. Licentius acknowledges that what is worthy in philosophy is not the glory of victory but the discovery of truth. On the other hand, Trygetius asserts the primacy of truth against the unfair use of Cicero's authority made by his opponent. This doesn't prevent Augustine, of course, from appealing to the wisdom of ancient philosophers who were able to reach some important truths.

Can we bring all these characteristics, with which philosophy shows itself in the earliest part of Augustine's literary activity after his conversion, back to a unitary idea? We can say that philosophy, according to him, is basically a way of life, one which occupies the whole of the philosopher's existence. It needs *otium*, time free from professional engagements and other cares which may distract or prevent reflection. It involves so deep a change in one's routine, that the coercive strength of a "stormy" event often is needed to enter it, an event of a kind which could compel us, even in spite of ourselves, to give up the kind of life we lived before.

The new kind of life which philosophy represents can be defined as the search for truth above every other thing. Surely it is not sheer chance that Augustine's first "dialogue" concerns the problem of arriving at truth. The reason for philosophizing is itself at stake. The great "promise" of philosophy, in which Augustine places his trust, is to manifest the truth and to free us from error. Augustine has already experienced this liberating power of philosophy, chiefly thanks to the *libri Platoniorum*, whose reading has begun satisfying the desire of wisdom instilled by Cicero's *Hortensius*.

The truth for which philosophy searches is a "scientific" truth, in the Stoic meaning of the word *scientia*, that is certain and demonstrated knowledge. Augustine gives at least two examples of truths which philosophy tries to know scientifically: the providential order of the events, and God Himself. We have to do with truths which are hidden, because they are spiritual. The difficulty in knowing them depends mainly on the fact that one must disregard all that is perceived by the senses. This implies first of all the purification of heart, the moral detachment from worldly things, and then the

exercise of mind, achieved through orderly discussion and the study of the liberal arts.

Conversion, purification, and mental exercises are constituents of the ancient idea of philosophy. Augustine actually describes *philosophia* by means of ideas and images taken from protreptic literature, Platonic tradition, the Stoics and Cicero. Nevertheless, the truths about which he cares very much—Providence and the *uerissimus Deus*—belong to biblical-Christian revelation. They are truths in which he already believes, but which he wants also understand in a way adequate to reason. What shines here is the comparative newness of Augustine's idea of philosophy, whose main task is the rational understanding of Christian faith. The clearest formulation of this scheme is found in a text dating back to the same months of the Cassiciacum period. Augustine assigns to the "true and genuine philosophy," as its sole duty, the explanation of the mystery of the Trinity.⁹²

Of the three theories about the nature of the "philosophy" in Augustine's juvenile writings, which I have listed at the beginning of my paper, it seems to me, therefore, that the more correct is the third one, which looks upon philosophy as a form of *intellectus fidei*. However, it is important to notice that this connection between reason and faith is included in a general idea of philosophy as a way of life devoted to the search for truth. It is the merit chiefly of the upholders of the second theory to have shown that the young Augustine already regarded Christianity as the positive accomplishment of that ideal. On the contrary, the first theory, that is the identification of *philosophia* with Neoplatonism, has to be substantially rejected. It is undeniable that the Neoplatonic doctrines play an important rôle in the "philosophy" understood by Augustine. This philosophy, however, is a model of thought and life which transcends any particular philosophic school, even though it assimilates some of their teachings. In this sense, we can say that the first book of the *Contra Academicos* already contains *in nuce* the main constituents of the idea of philosophy that Augustine will develop in the following forty years of his intellectual activity.⁹³

92. Cf. *De ordine* II, v, 16. For the interpretation of this difficult and famous passage, see Catapano, *Il concetto di filosofia*, ch. 3, n° 68.

93. I am deeply grateful to Professor Wayne J. Hankey for reading a draft of this paper and correcting my English. Without his help, this paper would have been much rougher than it is. Of course, this does not mean that he agrees with it.