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**AUGUSTINE'S CONCEPT OF VOLITION
AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE
DOCTRINE OF ORIGINAL SIN**

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AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE
DOCTRINE OF ORIGINAL SIN**

A Dissertation Presented to the Graduate Faculty of

Dedman College

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in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

with a

Major in Religious Studies

by

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and its Significance for the
Doctrine of Original Sin

Advisor: Professor William J. Abraham
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Augustine has been credited as the inventor of the concept of volition (the will), and yet it is not clear from this claim exactly what his concept of volition is. His understanding of the human person, especially his theory of volition, has had profound implications for much of the theological work which followed. This thesis examines various concepts which influenced Augustine's notion of volition, contemporary ways of understanding volition, and what Augustine himself believed about it. Since the will is central to Augustine's description of the human person and the human condition a careful examination of the concept is necessary to understand Augustine's theological project, especially as pertains to his formulation of the doctrine of Original Sin.

Chapter two looks at contemporary analytic philosophy and some ways in which it approaches volition and the mind and how analytic philosophy might be helpful to current theological work related to understanding the human person. I touch upon key figures in action theory, the mind-body problem, decision theory and agency.

Chapters three and four are an extensive diachronic analysis of Augustine's use of concepts related to volition. I attempt to document the sources which are behind his development of the term, and show how his deployment of volition as a central concept in his anthropology is novel but not without antecedents. I argue that Augustine, contrary to the prevailing opinion, understood the key points of classical philosophy and intentionally rejected several core commitments of the Stoics and Platonists. This rejection was not from a failure on his part to understand what the philosophers were saying, but informed by his theological and anthropological positions. His notion of the will as ruling over the mind is the central point which frequently gets overlooked when people try to read Augustine as a classical philosopher.

In Chapter five I evaluate the commitments which forced Augustine to develop his later doctrine of Original Sin, the antecedent versions of the doctrine found in the Christian tradition, and why his metaphysical, hermeneutic and pastoral concerns of led him to his conclusions. I argue that the doctrine has been mischaracterized and misunderstood by proponents and opponents alike since Augustine formulated it. Finally, I argue that the core of the doctrine does not depend on one particular set of metaphysical principles, or a literal reading of Genesis, but it can be translated into other metaphysical systems by paying attention to the core commitments. I briefly attempt to rehabilitate it for a modern worldview.

Chapter six is an exploration of various different models for thinking about what sin is, and how various atonement theories depend on (or arise from) the different models of sin. I argue that no one model is in itself sufficient. The Christian tradition is wise in not canonizing one, but the open plurality of conceptual models makes room for articulating the Christian theological heritage into different contexts.

The final chapter addresses grief, loss, and how the self is changed through the process of grieving. Since the will is the locus of the self in Augustine's thought, the ability to will correctly is absolutely necessary for human thriving. When we experience profound loss, we also lose our identity in whole or in part—we can no longer will as we did before. Intrapsychic losses, loss of a sense of self, can be healed through narrating new meaning into our lives. Augustine's confessions is an example of his own work at dealing with his changing identity through time.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Augustine

Abbreviation	Title	Date
<i>Acad.</i>	<i>Contra Academicos</i>	386
<i>Ad Parthos</i>	<i>In Epistolam Ioannis ad Parthos tractatus decem</i>	406-407/413
<i>C. Jul. imp.</i>	<i>Contra secundam Iuliani responsionem opus imperfectum</i>	430
<i>Civ.</i>	<i>De civitate dei</i>	413-427
<i>Conf.</i>	<i>Confessiones</i>	398-400/403
<i>De pulch.</i>	<i>De pulchro et apo</i>	381
<i>Div. Quaest.</i>	<i>De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus</i>	388-395
<i>Doctr. chr.</i>	<i>De doctrina christiana</i>	397
<i>Dou. anim.</i>	<i>De duabus animabus contra Manichaeos</i>	392
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>	386-430
<i>Gen. litt.</i>	<i>De Genesi ad litteram</i>	404-414
<i>Gen. Man.</i>	<i>De Genesi contra Manicheos</i>	389
<i>Grat.</i>	<i>De gratia et libero arbitrio</i>	426/7
<i>Grat. Chr.</i>	<i>De gratia Christi et de peccato originali</i>	418
<i>Lib. arb.</i>	<i>De libero arbitrio voluntatis</i>	388/9,395,412
<i>Mor. Man.</i>	<i>De moribus Manichaeorum</i>	389
<i>Nat. grat.</i>	<i>De Natura et Gratia Liber Unus</i>	414-415
<i>Spir. et litt.</i>	<i>De spiritu et littera</i>	412
<i>Solil.</i>	<i>Soliloquia</i>	387
<i>S. Dom. m.</i>	<i>De Sermone Domini in Monte secundum Matthaeum</i>	393/5
<i>Simpl.</i>	<i>Diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum</i>	396/7 (412)
<i>Trin.</i>	<i>De trinitate</i>	399-426/7

Other Authors

Abbreviation	Author	Work
<i>Phys.</i>	Aristotle	<i>Physics</i>
<i>De Caelo</i>	Aristotle	<i>De Caelo et Mundo</i>
<i>Ethics.</i>	Aristotle	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
<i>Ep. Cl.</i>	Gregory Nazianzen	<i>To Cleodnius the Priest Against Apollonarius</i>
<i>De fin.</i>	Cicero	<i>De finibus</i>
<i>Apo.</i>	Plato	<i>The Apology</i>
<i>Protagoras</i>	Plato	<i>Protagoras</i>
<i>PI.</i>	Witgenstein	<i>Philosophical Investigations</i>

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CHAPTER 1:

I have nothing other than desire.

*Nihil aliud habeo quam voluntatem.*¹ What appears to be a throwaway line from Augustine's early work, *Soliloquia* (387), means in its context, "I greatly desire [to be in God's presence] (but have no merit or standing)." Even though it initially appears to be nothing more than pious filler, this line points towards a deeper set of issues with which Augustine was just beginning to wrestle. By the end of his life, Augustine could utter the same sentence and mean, "If I have not my will, I have nothing." The concept of volition, of willing, underwent a profound shift in meaning for Augustine over the course of his life. This shift, because of Augustine's importance as a writer, had a major impact on Christian theology and Western philosophy. The debates with the Pelagians and semi-pelagians, which dominated the second half of his life, started because of his sentence: *Da quod iubes et iube quod vis,*² from the *Confessions* (397-400); this was a pivotal moment, as it was in response to Pelagius that he began to realize the centrality of the concept of volition to the rest of his work and he began to critically reflect on it. However, his intellectual work with the concept had begun even earlier. His conviction that we are inescapably morally responsible for our willed decisions and actions was formulated as early as *De libro arbitrio* (395). All through the Pelagian controversy, Augustine never let go of

1. *Solil.* I.1.5. Nothing else have I than the will.

2. *Conf.* X.29. Give what you command, and command what you will.

his conviction that the will is the locus of our morally significant decisions and actions. He never wavered in his assertion that, unless an act was willed, it could not be a sin. What shifted, however, was his understanding of what the will is, how it operates, and how central it is to human identity. This shift in the concept of the will had profound impacts on his understanding of the human condition and our salvation.

In his formulation of the doctrine of Original Sin, Augustine situated the effect of past sin as primarily a corruption of the will and future sinning as a product of that corruption.³ The impacts of sin on the human person secondarily distort our thinking, emotions,⁴ and bodies. Sin distorts our very nature and the locus of the distortion is our will.⁵ Because the will is so central to a person, the consequence of a distorted will is that the whole person is damaged. The root of the human problem—in Augustine’s interpretation of the Christian heritage—is that we are unable to will, love, or desire correctly. The primal sin of pride, on this analysis, is inordinate self-love resulting from a distortion of the organ which gives rise to love: the will. All of the manifold problems that afflict us flow from this single source. Conversely, our salvation consists in having our wills reordered and corrected. Through coming to will (desire and love) correctly, we become restored to our original wholeness. Any careful analysis of the doctrines of Original Sin and of salvation, as Augustine formulated them, must take into account his understanding of what the will is and how the will operates. If we are to interpret Augustine carefully, we must do the work of carefully excavating the concepts he used in the manner that he used them. We must

3. *Spir. et litt.* 5.

4. The category of emotions is a modern one. Before the nineteenth century the operative categories were appetite, impulse, affection, and passion. Hereafter I will stick to the terms appropriate to the time and figures being discussed.

5. *Civ.* 14.6.

be aware of the inherent ambiguity of the concepts and the changes they underwent—especially through the modern period.

By the early medieval period, Augustine was already seen in the West⁶ as a Doctor of the Church.⁷ His extensive body of writings became a major source for theological and philosophical reflection. Consequently, the concepts he deployed became central to the theological work done by later generations. As volition became a topic for philosophical reflection and Original Sin became a major component of western theology, especially through the medieval period, the deep connection between will and Original Sin became obscured. For thinkers who reduce volition to an aspect of the cognitive faculties, sin became primarily a mental problem (pride is thinking too much of one's self, rather than inordinate self-love). Some thinkers, especially those influenced by the Stoics, tended to lump anything non-rational (distinguished here from the irrational) into the category of the passions, and therefore sub-human.⁸ For those more under Plato's influence, sin is primarily a physical problem: the sinful body is a prison from which the soul must escape. To be sure, Augustine did speak of concupiscence and disordered thinking when talking about sin. These, however, are always as a product of a disordered will rather than

6. By “the Latin world” and “the West,” I mean the Christian theology in the Latin-speaking parts of the empire and the areas whose thought and theological work was primarily influenced by the Latin-speaking theologians. This is a fluid and arbitrary boundary, but it is broadly demarcated by how the various ecclesial bodies understand the importance of Augustine; “the Latin world” considers him to be the Doctor of Grace. Outside this sphere he is a curious—and potentially problematic—figure but not a Holy Doctor of the Church. The development of the concept of the will in the Greek speaking world runs through Maximus Confessor and the Dithelite controversy (Constantinople III, 681). There are surprisingly few documentable connections between Augustine's development of the concept and what Maximus would do in his own work. The differences between Maximus's (“the Greek”) concept and Augustine's (“the Latin”) are profound but well beyond the scope of this project. I will only touch on these difference as necessary to illuminate Augustine's position.

7. For example, Gottschalk of Orabis (d. 876) referred to Augustine as the teacher of the whole Church.

8. The Stoics did not hold to a multi-part soul for humans. Unlike Aristotle—who held that humans have vegetative, motive and rational souls—the Stoics held that the mature human soul is only rational. Michael Frede, *A Free Will: Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 34-35.

as the source of sin. For Augustine, the body should be brought under control, not escaped. Human salvation means being fully embodied and rational, with the body and mind obeying a well-ordered will.

In the following analysis of the sources of Augustine's concept of the will, it is important to keep in mind that Augustine was neither a systematic theologian nor a philosopher. He was a rhetorician, a bishop, and an astute observer of humanity. We cannot expect the kind of clarity or precision from his writings—which have a strong devotional component as well as their theological and philosophical content—that we expect from contemporary analytic philosophers or even the kind of precision and careful use of terms we find in Aristotle. That does not mean that Augustine was a careless thinker. On the contrary, he read philosophy extensively and tried to emulate its style at many points. As I show in chapter 3, he saw what was at stake in several important debates between various schools and he formulated unique and innovative positions as he worked to articulate a Christian response. Most of his writings, however, were intended for the formation of and nurturing of his flock, or they were polemics written in response to the two major controversies of his day: the Donatists and the Pelagians. Philosophy was a tool Augustine used in the service of the truth of the faith, not his primary occupation. By the dawn of the fifth century he was less enamored with it than he had previously been, but he was still willing to plunder it for the treasures it held. That said, he had remarkable precision and consistency in some of his usages of concepts and terms, which we can observe if we read him diachronically and pay attention to his changes in understanding and usage. He did not start his writing career having carefully reflected on volition; he started with his lived experiences and over time reflected on what was going on with him, in Christian scriptures (especially Paul's

letters), and in his flock. As I show in chapter 3, the seeds of the questions concerning the will were planted early in his life but only moved to the forefront of his reflection as time went on.

Albrecht Dihle argues that Augustine invented the modern concept of the will.⁹ Sorabji, likewise, notes that Augustine “did more than anyone to crystalize” the concept of the will.¹⁰ While Dihle undoubtedly pointed out there are several several important issues in the development of the concept of volition in the Latin world, we must recognize that there is no one concept of volition in the West.¹¹ Augustine’s “invention” permanently changed the conversation, but his concept was embedded in a philosophical tradition already deeply resistant to his project. Some of the most clear evidence for this resistance is found not in the Greek philosophers but in Peleagius’s own responses to Augustine, as I will show in chapter 3. Michael Frede helpfully traces many of the antecedent notions and disparate uses of the various related terms but ultimately misses what I take to be one of Dihle’s main points: there is an irreducible distinction between the cognitive and the conative.¹² Mind and will are different things. Neither is the product of, nor reducible to, the other. The will and the mind are deeply related, working together, but they are irreducibly distinct. The lungs and the heart both work to circulate oxygen through the body, but the lungs do not do the work of the heart nor does the heart do the work of the lungs. Dihle’s argument begins with the profound *theological* difference between a Greek

9. Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity*, Sather Classical Lectures (Los Angeles: Univ of California Press, 1982-11-01), 143.; *Ibid.*, 93.

10. Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000-10-26), 404.

11. Richard Sorabji, “The Concept of the Will From Plato to Maximus the Confessor,” in *The Will and Human Action: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Thomas Pink and M.W.F. Stone, London Studies in the History of Philosophy (London: Routledge, 2004), 7.

12. Frede, *A Free Will*.

conception of God (i.e. the Platonic framework as interpreted by Philo) and the Jewish conception of God. By starting with the theological and moving to the anthropological, Dihle highlights a difference in understanding which exposes why the concept of volition was neglected by the philosophers even as the poets struggled to articulate their experiences of the divine and express the human inability to live up to our moral ideals. The presence of antecedent references to volition does not make Augustine's "invention" any less significant.

The elusive concept(s) of volition

The concept of volition—what the will is—is contested. It may even qualify as what Gallie called an "essentially contested" concept.¹³ Moreover, the very idea that there is such a thing as "the will" is frequently rejected *tout court*. The very idea that there is such a thing as a part of the human person—distinct from either the cognitive mind or the affections—that makes decisions, forms intentions, initiates action, or preserves previously-made intentions through future behavior is not universally recognized. In the broad Western culture, we unreflectively assume that when people speak of the will they are not simply being metaphorical but talking about something that we have—a part of ourselves, like our minds. However in specialist circles, the will is nothing more than a vestigial concept that should probably be excised lest it cause future problems. American behavioral psychologist George Ainslie, for example, noted the difficulty we have in articulating a clear concept this way: "The elusiveness of the will as a concept has historically come from the fact that it isn't an organ, but a bargaining situation. Its brittleness comes from the often perverse inventiveness of sequential negotiators—each one the self, evaluating prospects from a shifting perspective—who are trying to maximize their prospect

13. W.B. Gallie, "Essentially Contested Concepts," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56, (1955-1956): 167-198.

in a never-ending prisoner's dilemma."¹⁴ That is, for Ainslie, the will isn't a thing at all. What we call the will is just mental (cognitive) responses to our ever-changing negotiation with the demands life places on us. Whereas Augustine posits that the self is constituted by our continued identity maintained through our volition, Ainslie asserts that the self is nothing but a ceaseless struggle to navigate our needs: the phantasm of enduring identity is nothing more than the product of "perverse inventiveness." Since our desires are fleeting, and always in negotiation with other desires and the external world, the will is—for behavioral psychology—a useless construct that poorly explains the experiences it purports to explain.

In the social sciences, the will is sometimes treated as a projection or an epiphenomenon which arises as an ad-hoc explanation of our experiences of self: "[I]t may be that what people recognize from introspection as effortful decision making and planning—the things that make it obvious to all of us that we have our own will—is actually self-delusional. Perhaps these patterns of thought are the product of control processes occurring behind the scenes, outside awareness, drawing people towards images of who they might be."¹⁵ There is no such thing as the will; it is merely our subconscious mental activity presenting to us the appearance that we have stable identity, stable intentions, or the presence of desire through time. Such activity, conscious or otherwise, is completely reducible to and explainable by psycho-social factors. It may seem as if we are working out the best course of action, but in fact the appearance of such activity is a byproduct of the mechanisms driving our behavior. We need something like a sense of the will to feel like we are in some measure in control of our behavior when, in fact, we are not. In this

14. George Ainslie, *Breakdown of Will* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 161.

15. Charles S. Carver and Michael F. Scheier, *On the Self-Regulation of Behavior* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 60.

framework, a distinct concept for the will is superfluous, probably a delusion, and potentially detrimental to a real understanding of what it means to be human.

If the reality of the will—or at least the usefulness of the concept—is granted, it is usually considered to be part of the mind. The will is rational or cognitive activity. It is decision making, intention formation, or action execution based on knowledge or belief. Neither Plato, Aristotle, nor any of the other Greek Philosophers had need for the concept of the will as distinct from reason. Reason is supposedly sufficient in itself to explain our ability to plan, choose and act. When the will is understood as part of the mind, its function is forming and regulating “appetitive propositional attitudes.”¹⁶ The role of the will is to interpret the appetites to the mind and provide rational guidance to the appetites. A human becomes a person when they reach “the age of reason” and are able to demonstrate the presence of a will by their ability to rationally regulate their appetites and desires.¹⁷ The question of *akrasia*—weakness of the will, incontinence, acting contrary to our intentions or better knowledge—became a deep problem for classical philosophers for whom the will was reducible to the mind.¹⁸ No one would (or could) choose the worse when they know the better—and yet it is not difficult to find people who knowingly choose the worse. Wrong acts were primarily thought of as arising from a lack of

16. Alan Donagan, *Choice: The Essential Element in Human Action*, Studies in Philosophical Psychology (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 141.

17. Notice how this concept of an “age of reason” has become enshrined in various Christian traditions surrounding baptism, confirmation, first communion and other rites.

18. Chapter 2 will engage with contemporary sources in-depth, but clear articulation of awareness of the issues is evident in Peacocke: “We do find *akrasia* especially puzzling when there are no imaginative or perceptual asymmetries: it is hard to understand the man who with two bottles of the same kind of wine in front of him, and with no imaginative differences between the two, chooses the one he believes to be the less good vintage.” Christopher Peacocke, “Intention and *Akrasia*,” in *Essays on Davidson: Actions and Events*, ed. Bruce Vermazen and Merrill B. Hintikka, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 72-73.

information or an inability to regulate the passions. Insanity, ignorance, impulsive passions, or other improper functioning were the normal ways of explaining people doing what they knew to not be the best thing to do. When the will is reducible to the mind, the self is defined by the cognitive acts and the noetic content of a person's mind or understanding.

Even though volition is an unfashionable concept in much philosophy, psychology, and social science, it is a concept which frequently reasserts itself. It persistently keeps resurfacing because it is useful in explaining human behavior and the human experience of making difficult choices and taking difficult actions. The previous quote from Carver and Scheier points out that it seems "obvious to all of us that we have our own will" (page 7) even as they conclude it is just self-delusion. Even unreflective and inarticulate uses of the concept seem to be something more than mere vestigial conceptual leftovers. We keep returning to it because it helps us articulate something about the human experience that Stoic philosophy, modern scientific psychology, and everything in-between has not fully grasped. Lacking the will as a distinct concept results in a lack of a means for explaining truly irrational behavior; this lack is why Augustine throwing pebbles at pigs when he was a young man was such a problem for him later in life.¹⁹ The psychologies available to him were simply inadequate to explain why, knowing better, he chose the worse. Volition has an enduring explanatory power which prevents it from being excised from our conceptual vocabulary, unlike now-defunct concepts such as dephlogisticated air, humors, miasma, or aether.

Because the will has not been given the sustained reflection which has historically been given to the mind (reason, rationality), yet is deeply embedded in the Western conceptual

19. *Conf.* II.4-7.

network, it is inappropriate to speak of “the background music” of the topic. Rather, entering into the topic is like stepping out onto Bourbon Street in New Orleans. Buskers on the corners play guitars or use buckets as improvised drums. Masterfully played jazz saxophone flows out of a small club. The latest electronic pop hit thumps dully from a dance club down the street. All the while confused and lost tourists shout to each other as they try to orient themselves. The background music is a cacophony of competing voices. In getting a handle on the elusive concept, simply pointing to the jazz saxophone and saying, “there is New Orleans,” would be to neglect the richness of the intuition which keeps bringing the concept back—even if, as the behavioral psychologists say, “it is all self-delusion.” In the midst of cacophony, we must begin by simply pointing out various voices and highlighting what we perceive to be the salient issues they raise.

In contemporary English, the root words we draw from are the Germanic *welle* and its antecedent, the Latin *voluntas*. From this we get “will” and “volition” and its adjective form “voluntary.” The basic meaning of the word as a noun is related to desire. This is seen in English in phrases such as “last will and testament,” the document that articulates a person’s desires upon death. That is, a will is a document which expresses the content of a person’s volition. In legal discourse, “of my own free will” means without coercion. An act is voluntary if we choose it free from compulsion. In the philosophical discussion of determinism and human freedom, “free-will” usually means a degree of self-determination which cannot be fully explained by mechanistic causal factors.²⁰ That is, a “free-will” is one which can both form desires (perhaps of

20. I will not be addressing the questions of “free will” in this work, but “the will” as such. Whether the will is free, what it means for a will to be free, what having a “free will” has to do with not being mechanistically determined, and other such questions are far beyond the scope of this project and are amply covered in the existing literature. In the rare instances where necessary, I will touch on the issues in later chapters using the much more

its own choosing) and act upon those desires in ways appropriate to the kind of creature experiencing those desires. A strong-willed person is one who knows what they want and will accept nothing else. All these usages center around the will being the center of desire in a person. What we will is what we desire.

A second usage that is common is the term to denote the ability to resist temptation, that is “will power.” The current behavioral scientific research into “will” focuses on our ability to resist temptation, delay gratification.²¹ Willpower is not about desire formation but rather desire resistance. A strong will is one that is able to be aware of its desires and not succumb to them. An alcoholic has no problem forming the desire for a drink, but resisting that desire is where strength of will is important. Clearly the ability to resist desire and the ability to form intentions and express desire are contradictory concepts.²²

Less common but still in current use is the Nietzschean “will-to-power.” Rather than resisting temptation or expressing a desire, “will-to-power” is an active imposition of one’s desires upon the world, bending the world to one’s will. One can imagine a super-villain in an action movie saying, “bend to my will!” and get a sense of what this concept of will is. Used this

clearly defined concepts of “morally significant freedom” or “ontological freedom,” meaning “able to make genuine decisions (and take action based on those decisions) with moral content” and “not (entirely) mechanistically determined” respectively.

In my translations, I will make careful distinctions between *liber arbitrium* (“free choice”) and *voluntas* (“will”). In a few places Augustine uses the phrase *liber arbitrium voluntatis* (“free choice of the will”), I will draw appropriate attention to this unusual usage.

21. Walter Mischel, *The Marshmallow Test: Mastering Self-Control* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2014).

22. Freud, for instance, rarely used the language of the will, but his deployment of “the superego” mirrored closely how “willpower” would be used. This is an instance of modern psychology dismissing the category of volition and attempting to smuggle it back in under a different name. I read this as evidence that it has pragmatic value even if we overtly reject it. Ainslie, *Breakdown of Will*, 6.

way, the will is more than a strong desire; it is a desire backed up by some energetic force that has the ability to bring about the fulfillment of the desire. The will is not the organ of the desire but the power that brings the desired outcome to reality.²³ Already with these three quick examples, we can see how contested the base concept is in current usage.²⁴

When used as a verb, things get even more complex. “I will” can be as a modal auxiliary to another verb meaning, “I intend to” or “I shall” (especially in American English). Or it can mean, “I desire.” The typical native English speaker taking their first-year of German stumbles over “ich will” not being an expression of intent or futurity but simply of desire. Yet, “I will” in English can sometimes have a component of desire, the difference between an adult who needs milk saying, “I will go to the market this afternoon,” is very different from a teenager who has been told to get milk saying, “I *will* go to the market this afternoon.” The former has a note of desire, while the latter of coerced intention devoid of desire.

As shown by this cacophony, the concept of volition, or “the will,” is underdetermined in contemporary thought. This underdetermination is not limited to contemporary thought. It was as-true in ancient Athens and late-classical Rome as it is now in London or New Orleans. Volition is a fluid concept which shifts over time, depending on cultural conditions, and within cultures it has many different meanings. It is an elusive concept, not because it is self-delusion or simply our ceaseless negotiation with the world around us, but because it cuts to the very core of

23. Christopher Janaway, “Will and Nature,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*, ed. Christopher Janaway, Cambridge Companions to Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 140.

24. Sorabji reduces my taxonomy down to two related “clusters” of concepts: “freedom and responsibility on one hand and will power on the other.” His clusters are correct for the ancient sources he is working with, but not fully adequate to include some modern understandings of the concept. Sorabji, “The Concept of the Will From Plato to Maximus the Confessor,” 7.

what it means to be a person. While there is a inchoate sentiment that we need a concept like volition to account for human behavior, the term is so underdetermined that its meaning is almost void of shared content. Just as in contemporary English we have several words connected to the concept, so did ancient Greek and—to a lesser degree—Latin.²⁵ The various words had different shades of meaning depending on who was using them, when they were using them, and the context in which they were used. A Stoic philosopher and neo-Platonic philosopher writing at the same time may use the same word, but its meaning was profoundly different.

Given how underdetermined the concept is in common usage, it is entirely coherent to say with Dihle that Augustine invented a new concept of volition and to acknowledge that Frede is correct that the antecedent components for thinking about volition in a way similar to Augustine were already present in the ancient and classical traditions. The genius of Augustine's reflection on his own struggles was not that he sought to invent a new concept, but that he was working with existing material. He was committed to what he recognized as the truth of the Jewish scriptures and tried to express his understanding of it in the philosophical idioms and categories available to him. When the existing categories and idioms failed him, he adjusted and redefined them to make them better suit what he was trying to express. Out of this synthesis came something profoundly new, insightful, and which had lasting explanatory power. Augustine was able to synthesize what he found in the Jewish concept of God²⁶ with concepts already

25. These terms are connected to the concept, but not without qualifications that will be spelled out more fully below.

26. I recognize that “the Jewish concept of God” is too simple of an analysis. The canonical biblical material alone provides ample evidence that Jewish thought was very complex internally. For example, the Jerusalem priestly community and the Levite community held different understandings of many issues, and what gets codified into the wisdom literature seems to be an entirely different strain of thought altogether. The canonical material is richly polyphonic, addressing the same question from many different angles and offering differing views. There is no one Jewish understanding of God. Augustine, however, seems to have received the material as a

available in his late Roman world, in order to articulate a new concept of volition. This new concept of divine volition would help translate the message of the God, who created the world as an act of love, into a culture for which God creating arbitrarily seemed absurd. It also helped explain the persistent problems of why we do non-rational (and irrational) things when we know the rational thing to do. The seeds for concepts of volition were nascent in the works of the epic poets and classical playwrights, just as we find the concepts buried in pop songs and sit-coms today. The struggle of knowing what to do but not being able to do it—even when the world does not impede us—is timeless. Artists, if not philosophers, consistently seek to express the truths of lived experiences when theoretical frameworks fail. Augustine’s love of the plays, being moved to tears and laughter by the struggles of imagined people, surfaces several times in his writings. We limit ourselves greatly if research into his theology and psychology looks only at the philosophers he read; we must not ignore how deeply interested he was in the popular culture of his day. Dilhe’s exploration of the concept of volition in the Homeric epics as well as the philosophers is a keen reminder that our concepts may find articulation and clarification in philosophy, but their *ad hoc* and seemingly unreflective use is often illuminating if we pay attention to the insights of the poets. Augustine, the rhetorician, understood that insight comes in many guises.

Augustine’s genius was in his ability to synthesize seemingly divergent concepts into new ones that opened up new depths of articulating human experience. For example, Anders Nygren position that Augustine synthesized the opposing Greek concepts of *agape* and *eros* into the new

univocal whole—or at least presented it to his congregation as such in his sermons. For our purposes here I will treat “the Jewish concept of God” as a shorthand for how Augustine seems to used it.

Latin category of *caritas*.²⁷ Rather than simply seeing Augustine as deploying an existing concept or inventing one, I think it is more apt to say that he synthesized the Christian commitment to God's creative power and freedom with the philosophical categories that dominated his world. Augustine never wrote an extended work on metaphysics, but we can identify his metaphysical influences. Extensive work has already been done in this area.²⁸ In several places, Augustine simply told us who he had been reading; his fondness for Cicero, Seneca, and the Neo-Platonists is well documented. We are not left guessing as to the topics and sources with which he wrestled. These sources were greatly varied and so a brief overview of two related concepts is necessary, namely "nature" and *telos*. In looking at these two concepts, we can come to understand why the philosophers had no concept of volition apart from the mind and why this was so problematic for Augustine.

The concept of nature (*physis*)

In the wake of modern methodological science and its mechanistic view of causality, we rarely speak of a thing's nature. A stroll down the aisle at the grocery store would lead us to believe that "natural" means something unaltered by humans or human technology. This is a lingering connection to the *physis/techne* (natural/artificial) distinction made by Aristotle.²⁹ Other than this fragile connection, the modern concept of nature is very different from the classical one.

27. Nygren was, without question, pointing out this synthesis as a profoundly negative thing in the history of Christian thought, but he recognizes the genius in Augustine's attempted solution to a deeply vexing problem. Nygren frames Luther's work as an attempt to undo the damage done by Augustine's synthesis. "Yet this conception is not merely a compromise between the two rival motifs; it is an essentially new view of love, the idea of Caritas." and "The culmination of Luther's attack on the Caritas-synthesis is reached when he removes love outside the contest of Justification entirely, and opposes the Catholic idea of '*fides caritate formata*'." Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson, One Volume Edition ed. (St. Louis, MO: Westminster, 1953), 476, 716.

28. James O'Donnell, "Augustine's Classical Readings," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 15, 144-175.

29. *Phys.*, Book II.

References to concepts such as “human nature” are conceptual vestigial remains which we translate into sociological, psychological, or biological mechanisms.³⁰ Human nature now, if anything, means human behavior which is all-too common but disagreeable. Human nature, in the contemporary view, is encoded in DNA or inculcated by our culture or perhaps some combination of the two. That is, human nature is a byproduct of the normal mechanisms of the substances involved. Given that the atoms are arranged in a certain way, this substance must be a human. Or—if human nature is encoded culturally, given that the substance of our behavior is our culture—we cannot but behave as we do given how our culture shapes and forms us. The laws of chemistry, biology, and social-psychology are universal laws of nature that cannot be violated. There is an unavoidable mechanical process that arranges atoms into humans, given this particular set of causal inputs. Atoms get arranged in the right order, chemical processes operate in the correct way, society conditions behavior, and a human is formed. Nothing about the substance makes humans to be human; there are only the causal factors and the mechanistic laws of causality, which we call the laws of nature, acting extrinsically to the substance.

The situation could not have been more different for classical antiquity. One of the most common assumptions of classical antiquity was that every living (self-moving) thing has a nature.³¹ A thing is an expression of its nature. There are many different ways of understanding

30. As with volition, I think that the vestigial remains of the concept of things having natures linger because it has explanatory force. If it were simply a dead concept, it would have long since fallen from our vocabulary.

31. *Physis* is the “Greek term for nature, primarily used to refer to the nature or essence of a living thing. [...] *Physis* is defined by Aristotle in *Physics* II.1 as a source of movement and rest that belongs to something in virtue of itself, and identified by him primarily with the form, rather than the matter, of the thing.” William J. Prior, “*Physis*,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

A careful analysis of the relationships between “nature,” (*physis*) “essence,” (*to ti ên einai*) and “form” (*eidos*) in the

what a nature is and how it operates, but it was understood that, for a thing to be a thing, it must have (or partake of or be an instance of) the nature of that kind of thing. What makes a dog a dog is not a dog's genetics, but the fact that this substance has the nature of a dog. On a simplistic reading of Aristotle, for example, the dog-ness of the dog is not encoded in the substance of the dog, but the substance takes on the nature of the dog and expresses dog-properties—some intrinsic to the nature, some accidental. Frede frames it this way, “Perhaps the most crucial difference is that nobody in antiquity had the notion of laws of nature, meaning a body of laws which govern and explain the behavior of all objects, irrespective of their kind.”³² A thing's nature, rather than universal mechanistic laws, determined what kind of thing a thing is and how it exists.

As a brief aside, the importance of this point for Christian theology cannot be overstated. In the main line of Christian theology, what is broken by sin is our nature. Jesus taking on the human nature to redeem it is meaningful only if we understand what is meant by *the* human nature.³³ Christianity claims that in the person of Jesus of Nazareth was found the fullness of both the human and the divine natures. Somehow—and understandings of this vary greatly—this

various Greek philosophers is far beyond the scope of this work. Some use them to mean the same things, others draw technical distinctions between them. This overview is intended to point towards the complexity of the concepts in play, to highlight that the same term may be used as terms-of-art with different meanings in different schools of thought. It is incumbent on the interpreter of Augustine to understand that the conceptual landscape of classical antiquity was vast.

32. Frede, *A Free Will*, 15.

33. Augustine died shortly before Nestorius's monophysite position (Christ having one nature) was condemned as heresy. Of note is the fact that Augustine was the only Western bishop summoned to the synod. While are political factors involving Nestorius's faction harboring Pelagians at play, Augustine was probably summoned because he would have sided with Cyril of Alexandria over Nestorius on theological grounds, rather than because of the political factors. George A. Bevan, “Augustine and the Western Dimension of the Nestorian Controversy,” *Studia Patristica* 49, (2010): 347-352.

union of the two natures saves humanity. This assumes that natures are what make a thing the kind of thing that it is. Gregory Nazianzus wrote, “If only half Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole.”³⁴ The deeply held theological commitment that in Jesus the second person of the Triune Godhead took on the fullness of the human nature cannot make sense if nature is universal mechanistic laws.

The oldest known use of the word *physis* comes from Homer’s *Odyssey*:

Thus while he spoke, the sovereign plant he drew
Where on the all-bearing earth unmark’d it grew,
And show’d it’s *nature* and wondrous power:
Black was the root, but milky white the flower;³⁵

The nature of the plant is connected to the power the plant has and to its appearance. By the time of Aristotle, the concept of nature had grown to mean the source of self-moving and rest.³⁶

To say that something has a nature of its own is to characterize it as one of the origins of change in the world, is to identify it as one of the things from which the changes in the world emerge. [...] Things which have natures are those which ‘drive’ the world, things which activate change rather than merely responding to the activities of others.³⁷

Natured things are living things with internal self-motion. The contrast Aristotle is drawing is to *techne*, that is, things that are made by humans (artifacts, i.e. artificial) that move exclusively

34. *Ep. Cl.*

35. Homer, *The Odyssey*, ed. Theodore Alois Buckley, trans. Pope, 10.302-2-3. Emphasis mine.

36. “It is not unfair to say, therefore, that by the time Aristotle inherited the term in the fourth century, the meaning of ‘physis’ could be described as disorganized at the very least.” W. W. Nicholas Fawcett, “Aristotle’s Concept of Nature: Three Tensions” (The University of Western Ontario, 2011), 20. Fawcett is here magnifying the same kind of cacophony with nature that I am concerning volition.

37. Stephen Makin, “Aristotle: Form, Matter and Substance,” in *The Routledge Companion to Metaphysics*, ed. Robin Le Poidevin and others, (London: Routledge, 2009), 31.

through mechanism. Aristotle also wants to exclude non-living things which may be moved but do not self-move. Stones fall when dropped and fire rises as it warms, but they do not move of their own power. Their motion is not natural to them but accidental.³⁸ How different this is from modern conception of the law of nature known as gravity; gravity is one of the most natural things. But, for Aristotle, a rock falling was not natural (i.e. of its nature) but accidental to its condition.

For the Stoics, nature is a richer concept. Not only do living things have a nature, but anything which isn't the product of human artifice has a nature. Peripatetic philosopher Alexander of Aphrodisias (200 CE) reports derisively that the Stoics believed that "the natures of things are and come to be are different and various, as, for example, the natures of animate and inanimate things are not the same, nor, in turn are the natures of all animate things the same (for the specific differences in the things that exist reveal the differences in their natures)."³⁹ This is in contrast to Aristotle, who held that only living things have natures. For Stoics, the rock falls because it is in the nature of a rock to seek the lowest point. Falling is natural because seeking the lowest point is part of a rock's nature, not because of some external universal law. Other things, such as fire, rise because it is in its nature to seek the higher. All motion can be explained by the various natures of things; any movement at all is because some nature is seeking its rest. But, all natures are ultimately a part of the universal nature. The distinct human nature is part of the nature of the whole. The universe, in contemporary terminology, is one living creature with a

38. David Furley, "Self-Movers," in *Self-Motion: From Aristotle to Newton*, ed. Mary Louise Gill and James G. Lennox, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3.

39. Quoted from David E. Hahm, "Self-Motion in Stoic Philosophy," in *Self-Motion: From Aristotle to Newton*, ed. Mary Louise Gill and James G. Lennox, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 192.

nature—a view which broadly fits under the category of pantheism.⁴⁰ Individual humans each have the human nature, which is part of the universal nature.

It is without question that the mature Augustine was more overtly influenced by the Neo-Platonic worldview than either the Stoic or Peripatetic.⁴¹ We cannot neglect the fact, however, that Augustine read widely and engaged with many different authors. Cicero, in book III of *De fin.*, has Cato praise the Stoics for having developed a philosophy as finely constructed as anything produced by nature; every piece interconnects perfectly. Augustine, who notes his admiration of Cicero, almost certainly read this praise.⁴² While he prefers the Neo-Platonic line of thinking over-against the Stoic in most places, he does engage with Stoic thought in meaningful ways all through his life. Relevant to the concept of natures, Augustine clearly was influenced by the Stoics as shown in *Lib. arb.*, where he distinguishes between natures that merely exist, those which exist and also live, and those which understand—rational minds.⁴³

Plato and the later Platonists did not frequently deploy *physis* as a central conceptual category. Plato has Socrates say in *The Apology* that he has no part in natural philosophy.⁴⁴ This is because of the specific project of the Platonists and their focus on the intellectual rather than the physical. For the Platonists *eidos*, the forms, are ultimate reality. The world of matter, change, and becoming is a second-order which is far exceeded by the intelligible forms. The forms, when combined with Plato's understanding of the soul, do much of the same conceptual

40. Dirk Baltzly, "Stoic Pantheism," *Sophia* 42, (2003): 4-33.

41. Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, 382.

42. O'Donnell, "Augustine's Classical Readings".

43. *Lib. arb.* II.6.13.

44. *Apo.* 19c.

work in Plato's philosophy as natures do in the Stoics. In the *Timaeus-Critias*, however, "Thucydides uses 'human nature' to generalize about the destructive behavior of men in wartime."⁴⁵ While Plato may not have used *physis* frequently, he was willing to put the words in the mouths of some of his characters, demonstrating it was a term with some import to his audience. By the time of the Neo-Platonists, who directly influenced Augustine through the writings of Plotinus, the focus had moved from the forms to the categories of the One, the Intellectual and the Soul. In this system, the One is the source of everything that exists; the Intellectual emanates from the One; the Soul arises from the Intellectual, from which matter and *physis* come. The Soul comes to function in Neo-Platonic philosophy in a similar manner to the cosmic unity in Stoic philosophy.

Teleology

While the concept of a nature is quite diverse in classical antiquity, the concept of *telos* broadly unified classical thought. For pre-modern thought, all actions are purposive; they have a goal: "God and nature do nothing without a reason."⁴⁶ Modern mechanistic science completely rejects any discussion of goal or purpose (for anything other than humans) as merely metaphorical language. After Newton's theory of gravitation proposed universal laws for the motion of matter, philosophy was largely able to continue as before because Newton's laws did not put a decisive end to teleological thinking; it proposed universal mechanisms for motion, but its direct consequences were limited to physical things. The universal mechanism simply became something applicable to all natures—a meta-nature in which all natures participated. This could

45. T. K. Johansen, *Plato's Natural Philosophy: A Study of the Timaeus-Critias* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 23.

46. *De Caelo*, 271a33. ὁ δὲ θεὸς καὶ ἡ φύσις οὐδὲν μάτην ποιοῦσιν.

be reconciled with the Stoic universal nature. Some early modern thinkers seemed to be aware of the fundamental shift, but they took differing approaches in responding to this shift. Spinoza's pantheism as formulated in *Deus sive Natura* was one such attempt to preserve some aspects of the concept of natures as the fundamental conceptual landscape shifted. His *conatus* ethical doctrine is at once both teleological and mechanistic even as he tried to excise teleology from his own thought since it, "turns nature completely upside down."⁴⁷ But, many philosophers and theologians simply attempted to synthesize Newton's mechanisms into the existing teleological framework. This gambit completely fell apart when Darwin published *Origin of Species* (1859).

Darwin's theory of evolution was so problematic for so many thinkers because it signaled the irrefutable death of teleological thinking.⁴⁸ In Darwin's theory, there is no goal, no purpose to the change in species observable over time. Evolution is not towards anything, it is just a mechanism which generates random changes that may or may not be suited to a given environment. Species go extinct because their nature does not persist even no members of the species do. Species survive only if individuals are well adapted to the environment in which they find themselves and are fortunate enough to have offspring with just the right random mutations that are suitable to future changes to the environment. Evolution is not towards anything; it is just a result of the immediate survival of the individual creature and the potential for reproduction. Humans, in Darwin's framework, are not endowed with a special rational nature

47. Richard N. Manning, "Spinoza, Thoughtful Teleology and the Causal Significance of Content," in *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*, ed. Olli Koistinen and J. I. Biro, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 183-184. See also D. Lachterman, "The Physics of Spinoza's Ethics," in *Spinoza: New Perspectives*, ed. Robert Shahan and J. I. Biro, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978). Monte Ransome Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 24.

48. Marco Solinas, *From Aristotle's Teleology to Darwin's Genealogy: The Stamp of Inutility* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2015), 83.

with a unique goal. Rather, humans are just well suited to a wide variety of environments and able to adapt intellectually instead of physically. To put it in contemporary technological terms: changing software is easier than changing hardware; humans are mostly software and that gives us an evolutionary advantage. Rationality isn't the highest good of our nature; it is just fortunate happenstance that enables us to survive and reproduce. The mechanism, playing out according to the rules of physics and chemistry, is all there is.

Before the modern turn and its rejection of teleology, it was simply taken for granted that all action was purposive. Each nature (or form) has a *telos*—a goal, a place of rest. Aristotle's physics started with the presupposition that rest is the normal state and motion is abnormal. Unlike rest, motion needs to be explained. Motion is understood to be a thing seeking its resting state. Things with natures (living things) seek their rest or completion. An acorn grows into an oak tree not because of the mechanisms of chemistry pushing it along, but because the oak is already in the acorn as a final cause, pulling the acorn to be the completed oak. The oak nature in the acorn substance cannot be at rest until the oak is fully grown. The Stoic understanding of motion and natures extended this beyond living things. Rocks seek the lower point because it is in their nature to be down. Water seeks to be even lower still because it is the nature of water to be as low as possible. Warm water loses heat not because of the mechanics entropy, but because it is the nature of water to be cold. Fire, likewise, is hot because it is fire's nature to be hot. Things seek their rest. Water at rest is both cold and at the bottom. For living things, the final cause, the *telos* of the nature, acts as a powerful force which draws the thing to its rest.

The human nature, like all natures, has a *telos*. The *telos* of the human nature, for Aristotle, is happiness or *eudaimonia*.⁴⁹ Or, to say the same thing the other way around, happiness is “the actuality of a soul with respect to its function.”⁵⁰ A soul is happy when it is doing what is most natural for it—fully expressing its nature. For Aristotle, the human soul is expressing its nature fully when it is thinking. For Plato, approximately saying the same thing, the highest good that humans desire is the contemplation of the eternal forms. For the Platonic and Peripatetic schools, all desire by mature people is for the rational good; no one desires what they perceive to be not good. If a person desires what is not good, it is because they are mistaken about its goodness. What we all want, whether we know it or not, is to spend our time thinking and being ultimately rational. Nothing else will make us happy; nothing else will fulfill our nature.

For the Stoics, the human nature finds its rest in being fully aligned with the nature of the whole, which means being rational rather than impulsive. The goal of Stoic ethics is for humans to align themselves with the expansive operation of the world, living in agreement with how the world works. A naïve reading of this would be that we ought to simply follow our impulses, which is quite the opposite of what the Stoics were claiming. Since human reason is part of our nature, using reason to reign in our impulses is the most proper use of our nature:

[I]n understanding what it is to live consistently with human nature, we have to bear in mind that rationality is the crowning human attribute, but as such an attribute we share with and derive from the universe itself. In other words, our notion of human nature cannot be confined to reflection on the impulse to concern

49. *Ethics*, 1097a30-34; Augustine mirrors this in *Conf.* III.2.3. *Certe omnis homo gaudere vult*. “Surely every man desires to be joyful.” Happiness here is not an affective state, but rather flourishing, being complete. See also *Conf.* VIII.10.23.

50. *Ethics*, 1098a16.

ourselves with health, possessions, and the like: to what we might call the merely human.⁵¹

The Stoic sage would never go on a quest to “find himself” by listening to his impulsive desires. Such impulses are a distraction away from the rational alignment of the human nature with the cosmic nature. Appetite and affection are functions of our immature selves and need to be overcome.

What is common between these three schools of thought is that reason is what makes humans happy. What we ultimately desire is to be rational and being rational is desiring the right things in the right way. To align our nature with the One nature, to live into our *telos*, or however else it was expressed, the ultimate goal of human existence is cognitive activity. Of course this happiness was limited to only those who could afford leisure and were capable of being highly rational. This is not a serious concern since most acorns never sprout, and of those that do, few ever reach maturity. A Stoic sage was as rare as a phoenix. Potentiality is an important category for Aristotle’s teleology, since most things do not reach their *telos*.⁵² Most ancient philosophers held that the mind participates in the one fundamental structure of reality (usually called *logos*) and therefore the mind is able to correctly perceive and understand the world. Since our natures cannot be avoided, we will always choose the act that satisfies our nature.⁵³ Since we correctly perceive the world—the cosmic *logos* and the *logos* in our minds is the same—we can never err

51. Malcolm Schofield, “Stoic Ethics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, ed. Brad Inwood, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 245.

52. Ursula Coope, “Aristotle: Time and Change,” in *The Routledge Companion to Metaphysics*, ed. Robin Le Poidevin and others, (London: Routledge, 2009), 44.

53. ”This opinion results from the common creed of Greek philosophy that nature is strictly ordered by reason and does not admit exceptions to its rules. These [rules] are open to the intellectual understanding of rational beings such as gods and men.” Dihle, *Theory of Will*, 105. Note that Dihle is using the modern concept of nature here anachronistically.

in motion towards the fulfillment of our nature. As Socrates put it: “no man fails on purpose.”⁵⁴

Frede presents it this way:

For Plato and Aristotle willing, as I will call it, is a form of desire which is specific to reason. If reason recognizes, or believes itself to recognize, something as a good, it thinks that it is a good thing, other things being equal, to take this course of action. And, if it thinks that it is a good thing to do something, it wills or desires to do it. Thus it is assumed that there is such a thing as a desire of reason and hence also that reason by itself suffices to motivate us to do something. This is an assumption which is made by Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics, and their later followers. They all agree that reason, just as it is attracted by truth, is also attracted by, and attached to, the good and tries to attain it.⁵⁵

Reason desires the good and is attracted by the good (or goods) just like it is attracted to and desires the truth. Once the mind perceives a good, it pursues it. This is the rational, and, therefore, human thing to do.

This is way of understanding the world is encoded in the Greek language. Greek has several words which could possibly be related to the concept of volition: *boulēsis* (rational desire for the good), *thumos* (high spirit, passion), *thelein* (willing), *thelēma* (the will), and *epithumia* (desire or lust).⁵⁶ Each of these has issues which make verbal and conceptual translation difficult. In most cases, strictly cognitive verbs or nouns are present in the same sentence, keeping the mental aspect forefront.⁵⁷ Latin, on the other hand, was limited to *voluntas* (the will) and *volo* (I want) as the single verb and noun for the concept. The meaning of these terms varied by school. For the Stoics, a wise person could have rational desires, (*boulēsis*) whereas the fool could only

54. *Protagoras*, 352c, 358b-b

55. Frede, *A Free Will*, 20-21.

56. Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, 322.

57. Dihle, *Theory of Will*, 20.

have appetites (*epithymiai*).⁵⁸ For Aristotle and Plato *boulēsis* is a choice which occurs in the rational soul and *epithymiai* are desires formed in the motive or vegetative soul.⁵⁹ The rational soul may form irrational desires if they lack adequate information. But the motive or vegetative souls can only form non-rational desires. Choice, for Aristotle, always takes place in the rational soul. On this analysis, if I am fasting and someone offers me a candy, my reaching out to take it is non-rational; I have chosen to not eat, but in that moment my non-rational overrides my rational—I did not choose to eat the candy, I failed to be rational. Being non-rational is not a choice, it is the absence of choice since choosing is always a rational activity. If I stopped to think, then ate the candy anyways, this would be either a change of my choice (because I came to understand that eating it would be a better good than not eating it, i.e. *boulēsis*) or a non-rational act (a response to *epithymiai*).

For the Stoics, the rational attraction to the good is as compelling for the human as an instinct is for an animal, “but reason having been given to rational beings, living rightly according to nature becomes for them what is according to nature; for reason supervenes as the craftsman of the impulse.”⁶⁰ The good impels people when it is understood in the same way that hunger impels animals. Non-rational animals simply respond to their impulses; hunger and fear cause animals to move. Rational animals have the “controlling power of reason, which makes it possible for this kind of movement to be made not automatically, but selectively.”⁶¹ Ultimately reason is controlled by its perception of the good. When the good is recognized, it becomes the

58. Frede, *A Free Will*, 43.

59. *Ibid.*, 20-21.

60. Diogenes Laërtius 7.86, quoted in Julia Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 91.

61. Brad Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 22.

desire of the mind (*boulēsis*), which is irresistible.⁶² All mature human action is a response to *boulēsis*. Animals and children have *epithymiai*, but adults do not. As such, akratic behavior cannot happen:

If we are impressed by the fact that the Stoics were rationalists, eudaiomonists, and psychic monists, then it will be natural to suppose that all human action, on the Stoic view, is motivated by the agent's conception of the good, as confused or faulty as this conception may be: whatever agents pursue, they pursue *sub specie boni*. This will seem all the more natural when we reflect that the Stoics frequently modeled their views on the Socrates of Plato's dialogues, who expresses views very like the *sub specie boni* rule at several places (e.g. Protagoras 358c); and that Socrates' espousal of it is closely linked to his rejection of the possibility of akrasia, which the Stoics also reject.⁶³

For Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, our rational action can only be explained by our teleological pursuit of some rational good.⁶⁴ Aristotle allowed that we have non-rational action because of the non-rational vegetative and motive souls we each have. But, Plato and the Stoics following him held that any behavior must be in the pursuit of some apparent good. The highest good (contemplation of the forms, or being aligned with the cosmic nature) is the true *telos* of the human nature. When we understand the good, we have no choice but to seek it. We are so moved by this good that we remain in motion until we find it, just as water seeks the lowest point.⁶⁵

62. Ibid., 54. "Presentations are externally caused; impulses generate actions; assent is apparently an unfailing cause of impulses. Man is responsible because of assent."

63. Tad Brennan, "Stoic Moral Psychology," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, ed. Brad Inwood, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 284.

64. Gabriela Roxana Carone, "Akrasia and the Structure of the Passions," in *Akrasia in Greek Philosophy: From Socrates to Plotinus*, ed. Pierre Destree and Christopher Bobonich, Philosophia Antiqua (Boston: Brill, 2007-04-30), 104.

65. James Jerome Walsh, "Aristotle's Conception of Moral Weakness," (1963), 11-12.

Augustine witnessed within himself that humans frequently do act in ways that go against our purported rational natures. We seem to fail on purpose.⁶⁶ The normal rationalist explanation is that error in act must be related to an error in mind or understanding—we simply lack the relevant facts to make the best decisions. For the Stoics, our base impulses (or affections, or passions) win out over-against our reason because we do not align our higher human nature with the cosmic nature. The problem of *akrasia* went against the basic assumptions about human nature. Humans rarely realize the *telos* of their nature of being rational, aligned with the cosmic nature or contemplating the forms. Without a clear conception of will as distinct from the mind, no satisfactory solution was proposed. This is the underlying problem that confounded Augustine, led him to write the *Confessions*, and forced him to entrench so deeply in his fight with the Pelagians. He forged this position in response to what he had been taught by the Manicheans, who were deeply committed to the intellectual being absolutely dominant over the physical and unable to admit the non-rational as anything other than impulses of the physical body. They were unable to provide an adequate explanation for the problem of Augustine's own behavior. The struggle drove him from the Manichaean religion in disappointment.

Augustine began to see hints of a solution in the Christian tradition of his childhood. The idea that God created the world arbitrarily—rather than as a necessary consequence of the cosmic nature, or as an expression of the most rational—was offensive to him as a young man and compelled him to explore other options. It was this same idea, of God creating arbitrarily

66. *Conf. X.23*. Why is it that “truth begets hatred?” Why is your man who preaches truth to men become an enemy in their eyes, even though there is love for the happy life, which is not else but joy in the truth? Can such things be except because truth is loved in such wise that men who love some other object want what they love to be the truth, and because they do not want to be deceived, they refuse to be convinced that they have been deceived? Therefore they hate the truth for the sake of the very thing which they have loved instead of the truth.

rather than necessarily, that became his solution to the problem which so perplexed him: why, when I had better pears at home, did I steal pears and throw them at pigs? Why, knowing better, did I continually do the worse? Why, having the rational human nature, did I behave so against that nature by being irrational. What he ultimately synthesized was a completely different understanding of humanity, one in which the human nature is not primarily rational, but volitional. The opening prayer of the Confessions, *inquietum est cor meum donec requiescat in te*, is a profound rejection of the Stoic, Peripatetic, and Platonic understandings of human nature.⁶⁷ Our nature's rest is not mental, but volitional—our *telos* is not satisfying the mind, but satisfying the heart.

The sources of the concept of the will

Dihle's assertion that Augustine invented the modern concept of the will is an overstatement because there is no single modern concept of the will, as Frede notes. Frede, however, misses the larger scope of Dihle's project, which is to identify the source of a particular notion of the will. Frede falls back into the unspoken assumption that any conversation about the will must really be a conversation about free will. While Frede briefly acknowledges Dihle's point that "will" is not the same concept as "free will" when he says, "It should be clear that in order to have any such notion [i.e. free will], one must first of all have a notion of a will," he loses sight of this point within a page.⁶⁸ Frede reduces the will back into the mind: "one does what one does because something happens in one's *mind* which makes one do what one does. [...] Or at least one has to assume that *there is something going on in the mind* which can be

67. *Conf.* I.1.1. My heart is restless until it rests in you.

68. Frede, *A Free Will*, 7. (emphasis mine).

construed as a choice or decision.”⁶⁹ Frede is focused on the question of free will with such an intensity that he fails to adequately address what Dihle was claiming about the will. What it means for a will to be free is a vast and complicated question that has received a vast amount of philosophical labor. This work has generally presumed that the concept of volition *per se* is settled and simple (i.e. rational desire); philosophers seem far more interested in addressing questions of determinism, moral significance of actions, and concepts of freedom than to ask the underlying question, what is the will?

What Dihle is looking for, in his search for the origins of the concept of the will, is the origin of the *Kantian* concept of the will. For Kant, a person’s will is the locus of their moral activity. The same act can be moral, non-moral, or immoral depending on the disposition of a person’s will. A good will alone yields truly moral acts. It is this concept of the will which impels Dihle’s quest, “Kant’s remark about good will as the only factor in human life which is unconditionally praiseworthy makes no sense whatsoever in Greek ethical thought. All speculation on moral values which has ever been made in Greece presupposed the view that only true knowledge leads to right conduct.”⁷⁰ This is not to say that Dihle started his project with a conclusion as to what the will was and then set about seeking evidence for that conclusion. He was looking for the origins of one specific concept of the will which he mistakenly attributed as the single modern concept of the will. Dihle’s error was claiming that this Kantian concept of the will is the only modern one. In searching for the origins of this particular concept of volition, he was unable to locate clear uses in the Greek philosophical sources. Frede explicitly started

69. Ibid. This all leads to my concern that what is called “free will” really should be called “free mind.” If the will is simply acts of the mind, with no meaningful distinction between mind and will, why not simply discard the obfuscating middle term?

70. Dihle, *Theory of Will*, 37.

without a definite concept of volition and scoured the sources for anything which roughly fit some loosely defined parameters for what volition could be. These are two fundamentally different projects, not addressing the same question. Because they are different, they can work together to help clarify the question of what Augustine's theory of volition is and how it is related to and different from those that came before it. Dihle's error, mistaking the Kantian concept of the will as the only modern concept of the will, turns out to be an illuminating mistake since it provides boundary conditions for the exploration for the origin of one specific notion. This allowed him to identify related concepts and, more importantly, distinguish why they do not directly lead to a concept of the Kantian notion of the will. Dihle knew what for which he was searching, not where he would find it. Frede was looking for traces of something without being clear as to what might leave the traces. To return to the metaphor of the New Orleans cacophony: Dihle was looking for the jazz saxophonist; Frede was looking for proof that people played instruments.

Dihle's conclusion that Augustine's theory of volition is behind the Kantian theory of volition is correct. It would also be correct to say that Augustine's notion of volition helped shape many, if not most, of the modern theories of volition—especially those which make an irreducible distinction between the volitional and the intellectual. It is this insight, that the cognitive and the conative are irreducibly distinct, which is a major part of Augustine's synthesis of the Jewish and Greek systems. Augustine's insight is that God creates simply because God wants to create—this is self-evident in the Jewish view, but absurd to the Greek mind. God creates not because God must, or because it is the most rational thing to do, but simply because God desires to create. By starting his own examination with the theological, rather than the

anthropological, Dihle mirrors Augustine's logic and shows the profound difference between the Jewish and Greek systems and highlights the brilliance of Augustine's synthetic moves.

The gods of classical philosophy create because they must. For Aristotle's unmoved mover, the motion started was necessary because of god's very nature. As god contemplates the truths of god's self, the world naturally comes to be as it is, and could be no other. For the Neo-Platonic, the world of becoming and matter is an overflow of the One; the One does not choose to create, but creation is incidental to their being. For the Stoics, the cosmic nature is perfectly rational. It creates because creating is the most rational thing to do and the world is created in the most rational way. Put in the terms of this analysis, creating is the natural *telos* of god; the cosmic principle has a nature and that nature creates because all things are drawn to their *telos*. Even for Aristotle, the unmoved mover creates because it is expressing its own nature. Recall the quote from Frede above (page 26), "They all agree that reason, just as it is attracted by truth, is also attracted by, and attached to, the good and tries to attain it."⁷¹ The unmoved mover is not just reasonable (i.e. has a rational nature), but is pure reason, therefore presumably eternally self-satisfied. This unmoved mover creates by using pre-existing substance, imposing reason and order on the chaos. Likewise, for the Stoics, the cosmic nature creates by ordering the preexisting matter. The Neo-platonic concept of creation, which we will explore in Chapter 3, is more complicated, but fits this framework well enough to draw a sharp contrast with the Jewish vision of God's creative activity.

The God of the Jewish scriptures chooses to create the world—an act of sheer volition. Creation may be rational, but it is fundamentally God's free expression. God was not compelled

71. Frede, *A Free Will*, 22.

to create, but did so because God wanted to create.⁷² Where as the Greek gods each had a nature with a *telos*, the Jewish God created all natures and therefore is not unwillingly subject to a nature. It is a core tenant of Christian teaching that Christ has the human and the divine nature, so it cannot be improper to speak of God having a nature, but God's nature is not an external thing which imposes a *telos* on God. God's nature is unlike any other nature.⁷³ God's nature is chosen by God and is higher than reason.⁷⁴ The rejection of there being any external (non-self-willed) limitation or compulsion on God comes through most clearly in Augustine's absolute insistence on creation being *ex nihilo*.⁷⁵ God is absolutely distinct from creation. God's nature does not cause God to create; God creates because God wills to create. God wills because God so wills; no reason could possibly be a higher reason.⁷⁶ God creates and loves that creation. It would

72. The idea of God desiring anything is language that is so very foreign to the Greek mind that it undoubtedly sounded absurd in Augustine's time. Even today the doctrine of divine impassibility makes God desiring to create a very problematic claim. We are, and Augustine would have acknowledged as much, at the limit of the ability of language to adequately capture the truth of the matter. His own wrestling with it is evident in *Conf.* I.4.

73. *Mor. Man.* 1. *Subest enim huic verbo manentis in se atque incommutabiliter sese habentis naturae significatio. Hanc nihil aliud quam Deum possumus dicere, cui si contrarium recte quaeras, nihil omnino est. Esse enim contrarium non habet nisi non esse. Nulla est ergo Deo natura contraria.*

For in this signification of the word existence there is implied a nature which is self-contained, and which continues immutably. Such things can be said only of God, to whom there is nothing contrary in the strict sense of the word. For the contrary of existence is non-existence. There is therefore no nature contrary to God. (Translation NPNF) Augustine, "On the Morals of the Manichaeans," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1887).

74. *Lib. arb.* II.

75. *Conf.* XII.3.

76. *Conf.* XII.15.

William E. Mann, "Augustine on Evil and Original Sin," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. David Vincent Meconi and Eleonore Stump, Cambridge Companions to Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 101.

Gen. Man. 1.2.4 *Qui ergo dicit: Quare fecit Deus coelum et terram? respondendum est ei, Quia voluit. Voluntas enim Dei causa est coeli et terrae, et ideo maior est voluntas Dei quam coelum et terra. Qui autem dicit: Quare voluit facere coelum et terram? maius aliquid quaerit quam est voluntas Dei: nihil autem maius inveniri*

be apt to say that God loves creation into existence and that loving and willing are convertible terms when speaking of God.⁷⁷ Augustine's God is not Aristotle's unmoved mover; God is self-moved and chooses freely God's own motion, *Voluntas enim et potentia Dei Deus ipse est*.⁷⁸

Humans can understand the world, not because our reason is the same as the reason which creates the world, but because we are created in the image of God. God created humans in God's own image and likeness—*ut nos probemus, quae sit voluntas tua*—in order that we may might examine what God's will is.⁷⁹ God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts—human reason alone is insufficient to understand the fulness of the world. We are not created with the divine *logos* but by the *logos*—our reason is a copy one generation removed removed from the original. Our reason is sufficient to the *telos* of our nature, but not the same as the divine reason.

With these Greek philosophical and Jewish theological commitments in place, we can begin to understand the synthetic moves that Augustine made which enabled him to say:

potest.

If someone asks, 'Why did God create Heaven and Earth?' It must be said to him, 'God wills it.' Indeed, the will of God is the cause of heaven and earth and therefore God's will is greater than heaven and earth. If, however, he says, 'Why did he will to create Heaven and Earth?' He seeks something greater than the will of God, but nothing greater could possibly be discovered.

Div Quaest. 28. Qui quaerit quare voluerit Deus mundum facere, causam quaerit voluntatis Dei. Sed omnis causa efficiens est. Omne autem efficiens maius est quam id quod efficitur. Nihil autem maius est voluntate Dei; non ergo eius causa quaerenda est.

If one were to ask why God willed to create, one seeks the will of God. But every cause is efficient. Every efficient cause is greater than that which it effects. Nothing, however, is greater than the will of God; therefore no greater cause must be sought.

Compare this with Newton's "for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction" for another indication of just how different the modern understanding of the world is from the ancient.

77. *Conf. XIII.7.*

78. *Conf. XIII.4.* Indeed, God's power and God's will are God himself.

79. *Conf. XIII.22.*

It is in thy gift that we rest. It is there that we enjoy thee. Our rest is our “place.” Love lifts us up toward that place, and thy good Spirit lifts our lowliness from the gates of death. Our peace rests in the goodness of will. The body tends toward its own place by its own [struggle]. A weight does not tend downward only, but moves to its own place. Fire tends upward; a stone tends downward. They are propelled by their own [weight]; they seek their own places. Oil poured under the water rises above the water; water poured on oil sinks under the oil. They are moved by their own [weight]; they seek their own places. If they are out of order, they are restless; when their order is restored, they are at rest. My weight is my love. By it I am carried wherever I am carried. By thy gift, we are enkindled and are carried upward. We burn inwardly and move forward. We ascend thy ladder which is in our heart, and we sing a canticle of degrees; we glow inwardly with thy fire—with thy good fire—and we go forward because we go up to the peace of Jerusalem; for I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go into the house of the Lord.” There thy good pleasure [*voluntas bona*] will settle us so that we will desire nothing more than to dwell there forever.⁸⁰

The Stoic conception of natural *telos*-seeking motion is fully in evidence here. Yet, Augustine completely reverses the concept of the human *telos*. Instead of being moved by our reason, we are moved by our love: *pondus meum amor meus*. Our final rest is not intellectual but volitional:

80. *Conf.* XIII.9.10. (Translation Outler) Augustine, *Confessions: Newly Translated and Edited*, trans. Albert Outler, The Library of Christian Classics, vol. 7 (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, John Knox Press, 1955), 196. Outler’s translation uses curiously modern concepts: “struggle” was “gravity” for *nititur*; “weight” was “mass” for *ponderibus*. This usage is anachronistic and obscures Augustine’s conceptual framework.

In dono tuo requiescimus: ibi te fruimur. Requies nostra locus noster. Amor illuc attollit nos et spiritus tuus bonus exultat humilitatem nostram de portis mortis. In bona voluntate pax nobis est. Corpus pondere suo nititur ad locum suum. Pondus non ad ima tantum est, sed ad locum suum. Ignis sursum tendit, deorsum lapis. Ponderibus suis aguntur, loca sua petunt. Oleum infra aquam fusum super aquam attollitur, aqua supra oleum fusa, infra oleum demergitur; ponderibus suis aguntur, loca sua petunt. Minus ordinata inquieta sunt: ordinantur et quiescunt. Pondus meum amor meus; eo feror, quocumque feror. Dono tuo accendimur et sursum ferimur; inardescimus et imus. Ascendimus ascensiones in corde et cantamus canticum graduum. Igne tuo, igne tuo bono inardescimus et imus, quoniam sursum imus ad pacem Hierusalem, quoniam iucundatus sum in his, qui dixerunt mihi: In domum Domini ibimus. Ibi nos collocabit voluntas bona, ut nihil velimus aliud quam permanere illic in aeternum.

in bona voluntate pax nobis est. The satisfaction of our fundamental desire, the resting of our nature in its *telos*, is our dwelling in the house of the Lord, which is loving God with a good will.

On one hand, the Greek teleological framework is very much on display. On the other hand, Augustine has substituted volition where reason reigned. This simple substitution radically changes the entire conceptual framework. Love, rather than thought, is the human *telos*. *Akrasia*, throwing pears at pigs, ceases to be a problem with wrong thinking, but becomes a problem with wrong loving and wrong desiring. Pride is not thinking too much of oneself, but the love of one's own excellence.⁸¹

The sources of Augustine's concept of the will are varied. Much of it comes from his reflection on the Jewish scriptures and the idea of God who creates absolutely everything, even reason, from nothing. Some negative content comes from his observation that the Greek philosophers were unable to explain human behavior. His seeking an understanding of his own behavior led him to explore several rationalistic systems to his disappointment. At the same time, Augustine absorbed much of the Stoic and Platonic systems into his own thinking, but he repurposes and radically alters them. His synthesis is close enough to the dominant conceptual frameworks that his opponents often do not see how he has shifted the very foundations out from under them.

Summary

The concept of volition is underdetermined in both contemporary and classical thought. Some think it a concept without any explanatory power or a vestige of an outmoded way of understanding humanity. For others it is reduced to being a part of the mind; willing is

81. *Gen. litt.* 11.14.18.

understood to be an activity of rational choice. Yet the concept continues to be used outside of specialist circles as a meaningful, if inarticulate, way of explaining human behavior. Augustine's unique synthesis of insights from the Jewish religious and Greco-Roman philosophic traditions—especially the Stoic, Peripatetic and Neo-Platonic—enabled him to articulate a concept of the human person which replaced reason with volition at the center. In formulating a concept of willing which was distinct from—yet intimately connected with—reason, he was able to articulate a new way of thinking about the human experience which allowed for an explanation for our irrational behavior. Subsequent philosophers and theologians followed his lead in varying degrees. By the medieval period—especially following the thirteenth-century controversy—it was simply taken for granted that the will was a meaningful concept, even if it was so tightly conjoined with reason as to be almost indistinguishable. Late-medieval reflection on the concept caused it to undergo some changes away from Augustine's original framing. With the modern turn away from teleological thinking, and the incumbent loss of the concept of nature. The concept became much more difficult to preserve in anything like the form in which Augustine had developed it.

Since the concept was so central to Augustine's later theological works, as the concept of volition shifted in meaning, interpretation of Augustine became more difficult. Yet, Augustine's influence on theology, philosophy, and Western culture in general remained profound. The concept of volition has never vanished from our conceptual network, but it has been changed many times over. Augustine's formulation of the doctrine of Original Sin is profoundly connected to his concept of volition. Unless we understand Augustine's concept of volition, we will not be adequately able to understand his doctrine of Original Sin.

CHAPTER 2:

Volition in Analytic Philosophy

Dieu veut plus disposer la volonté que l'esprit, la clarté parfaite servirait à l'esprit et nuirait à la volonté.¹

My primary goal for this chapter is to establish a provisional vocabulary to discuss concepts relating to volition in the subsequent chapters. I will explore works in contemporary analytic philosophy to see how different philosophers use terms such as desire, intention, action, will and volition. Through pointing out the complexities of these terms, I want to show that there is no agreed upon definition for many of these concepts and the deeper we dig into this subject, the more elusive it becomes. My secondary goal is to offer my own insights on the topic, which is that volitions—a term I use synonymously with acts of the will—are a basic kind of mental action, of the same status as holding or forming a belief, having a desire, perceiving something, or coming to a conclusion. Volition is involved in a specific class of action—intentional action that requires an agent to overcome what I call dispositional inertia (roughly, force of habit). The self is in part constituted by past acts of the will and the volitional inertia they create. My past choices about what I will do in the future do not determine what I will do in the future, but they do shape it; a primary way this operates is through the idea of the self.

1. God wishes to move the will rather than the mind. Perfect clarity would help the mind and harm the will. Pascal, *Pensées* (234)

Volition is a radically underdetermined concept—it means very different things to different people, especially when referred to as “the will.” Any attempt to retroactively impose a careful and fully developed definition of the concept onto an earlier author would be a dangerous game of eisegesis. The hermeneutical task of finding the most plausible meaning in a body of work should not presume to start with certainty about how terms were used, especially with concepts that are as underdetermined as volition. The problem of careful exegesis becomes compounded over long intervening periods of time because entire conceptual networks change. The word “passion,” for example, used to be a term related to suffering; now, it often has tones of excitement and enthusiasm (another term which has greatly shifted in meaning in the past 200 years). Currently, “Jesus had a passion for the poor,” means something like: Jesus cared for the poor and was concerned with helping them. On the other hand, when we talk about the passion of Christ, it refers to His gruesome death, which was undoubtedly for the poor, but not in the sense intended in the previous example. Terms shift their meaning over time. It is possible to plot the tectonic movements, but being aware of all the shifts (and taking them into account) make the exegete’s task exceedingly difficult.

For contemporary readers of Augustine, the medieval period is both a blessing and a curse given how much the conceptual network shifted during the scholastic period. Thomas Aquinas, for example, devoted volumes to trying to synthesize Aristotle and Augustine. The concept of volition was one of the most fecund topics for Aquinas’ work. After the Council of Trent (1545-1563), Aquinas became enshrined as the teacher of the Roman Catholic Church and his synthetic project became the normative way of reading Augustine in the Catholic Church. Later authors interpreted Augustine through Aquinas’s work, especially where concerning the concept of volition. Since volition is a key concept, deeply connected to Augustine’s concepts of

sin, personhood, and identity, this shift had profound consequences all the way through how people understood what Augustine was saying. This process continues on; many contemporary translations of Augustine into English, for example, assume the Thomistic conceptual framework and this colors our reading of Augustine. Recent reflection on volition, such as the work done by Kant, Nietzsche, and Ricoeur, continued to reshape our understanding of Augustine.

In many Protestant groups, a rationalistic conception of the faith became normative. Some schools of Christian theology shifted their focus to be less about love and more about knowledge, as exemplified by the Protestant emphasis on preaching as the most important aspect of worship. Augustine held that the Stoic ideal of *apatheia* was a denial of the fullness of the human nature as created by God.² Yet, as the reformation gained ground, rationalism and its denigration of both volition and affection became the norm. Johnathan Edward's master-work was a defense of affection—an attempt to restore Augustine's position on the matter in opposition to the dominance of rationalism at the very core of Protestantism. As enamored with Augustine as many of the reformers were due to their focus on *sola gratia*, they seemed to simply have ignored both the centrality of the will and the fundamental goodness of the affections. Grace, for these rationalistic reformers, seemed to be primarily a gift given to the mind: if one just learns the right thing one is saved (or shows that they were predestined to be saved). This is clearly evident in the anabaptist lines which connect the proper giving of baptism with the recipient being of an age and ability to *understand* the gospel.

For both Catholics and Protestants, the conceptual networks have changed to such a degree that any effort to exegete Augustine on his concept of volition must be done with great

2. *Civ.* IX.5.

care. In trying to recover Augustine's own concept of volition, I will take a somewhat counter-intuitive approach. In this chapter, I will explore contemporary analytic philosophy's reflection on the relevant topics in hope of gaining some conceptual clarity. This will establish a vocabulary that will help us explore the conceptual network that surrounds theories of volition. Through developing a robust vocabulary—without attempting to fully determine any one term—we can begin to explore what Augustine may have meant in the relevant passages. In looking critically at how various figures use the relevant terms today, we can start to identify insights and general themes. A shared and sufficiently determined vocabulary will help in identifying Augustine's own use of his terms and, thus, help in coming to a fuller understanding of his concept of volition.

Analytic Philosophy

Along with starting with the contemporary to help clarify the ancient, using the resources and methods of analytic philosophy in a theological project may also strike some readers as profoundly counter-intuitive. For much of the history of analytic philosophy, the entire project has been openly hostile to metaphysics and theology. The early central figures of analytic philosophy, such as Bertrand Russell and A. J. Ayer had no room for anything other than the empirical. Analytic philosophy was, for a period, synonymous with logical positivism. Metaphysical speculation, psychology, and aesthetics were dismissed as being non-cognitive and, therefore, devoid of any real meaning. They were, strictly speaking, nonsense. Even after logical positivism became too difficult to maintain and analytic philosophy turned to linguistic

analysis, the disdain for anything that hinted at metaphysics remained deeply ingrained in the project.³

The linguistic turn, be it to ideal language or natural language, marked a fundamental shift in the way philosophy was conducted in the Anglo-American world. Clarity and perspicuity of thought became the hallmarks of the analytic project. Initially, the goal became a kind of logical atomism, whereby concepts were clarified to their simplest components. Quine's symbolic logic became a kind of *de facto* standard for expressing ideas in the most analytic (and atomistic) way. "Clarity" and "perspicuity," the expressed goals, were often lost behind a veil of symbols, Greek characters and a notation that required specialist knowledge to understand. The impenetrable metaphysical speculation of someone like Hegel was replaced by the impenetrable analytic clarity of pages filled with symbolic logical notation.⁴ This "ideal language" philosophy could not sustain itself for long and the project slowly shifted to a focus on natural language—understanding words and concepts as they are actually used by real speakers of a language. Even after this turn, the drive for clarity often had a countervailing effect. Eleonore Stump, with her typical wit, sums it up this way, "[Analytic philosophy] has been preoccupied with precise definitions of terms, fine distinctions among concepts, and complex arguments for philosophical claims. (It is in consequence also marked by a hunt for counterexamples to someone else's definition, further distinctions lying between things someone else has already distinguished, and

3. These are, of course, over-generalizations. Exceptions such as Strawson's metaphysics exist. They were the the rare exceptions which proved the more general case. P. F. Strawson, *Analysis and Metaphysics: An Introduction to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

4. For two particularly shocking examples see: Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *The Knowability Paradox* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 65.

Ernest Lepore and Kirk Ludwig, *Donald Davidson's Truth-Theoretic Semantics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 82-83.

even more complex arguments showing the invalidity of someone else's complex arguments.)”⁵

In its drive for precision and clarity, analytic philosophy has often sacrificed the latter in order to achieve the former. While this has often been the case, it is not a necessary truth, rather a mark of the temperament of many practitioners of the craft. Some analytic philosophers have been able to avoid the traps of confusing notational precision with actual conceptual clarity. The use of conceptual test-cases to demonstrate the distinction being drawn has become a hallmark of some of the key analytic philosophers. Davidson, at whom we will look below, models this form of clarity quite well, especially in his use of example cases that cut directly to the matter at hand.

As the project has carried on, things which were initially discarded as “non-cognitive nonsense” have been re-established. Several authors have tried to demonstrate that the affections are cognitive, or that they are non-cognitive but truth-bearing and so epistemically important.⁶ Analytic metaphysics is no longer thought to be an oxymoron. Indeed, there are philosophers seriously trying to establish a scientific metaphysics.⁷ Metaphor, analogy, and other uses of language that could not be captured in symbolic logic were readmitted as being useful in articulating propositions, presenting evidence, and making truth claims.⁸ These uses of language became first-order objects of study by analytic philosophers, even as they were being used to further develop analytic arguments. The concept of a paradigm became an object of study as it

5. Eleonore Stump, “The Problem of Evil: Analytic Philosophy and Narrative,” in *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009-04-15), 252.

6. Patricia S. Greenspan, *Emotions and Reasons: An Inquiry Into Emotional Justification* (London: Routledge, 1988), 6.

7. Peter Unger, “The Mystery of the Physical and the Matter of Qualities: A Paper for Professor Shaffer,” in *Philosophy of Mind: Contemporary Readings*, ed. Timothy O'Connor and David Robb, Routledge Contemporary Readings in Philosophy (London: Routledge, 2003), 560.

8. J. M. Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985).

was deployed in the analytic philosophy of science. Not only are metaphor and analogy useful in conceptually analyzing the classical topics, they are interesting objects of analysis in themselves. The horizon of what is permissible to do in an analytic argument opened, and horizon of what could be studied by conceptual analysis opened right along with it.

I do not claim here to provide a full-scale definition of what analytic philosophy is, only that there are certain characteristics which mark philosophy done in an analytic mode.⁹ These include striving for clarity of argument, an openness to criticism, a commitment to avoiding linguistic and conceptual slights-of-hand, and a belief that getting clear on how terms are being used can help resolve or dissolve complicated problems. Perspicuity, parsimony, and humility are the cardinal virtues of the analytic tradition. Pages devoted to how “nothing *noths*,”¹⁰ have no place in the analytic tradition.

Since the turn towards natural language, the re-admittance of metaphysics, and a broadening of what counts as cognitive (or, admitting some non-cognitive content as truth-conveying and meaningful), religion has become a fecund object of study. Philosophy of religion has become not only permissible, but also an active area of research. Recently, analytic theology, (something that would have been considered an oxymoron through most of the 20th century) has become a distinct discipline that has brought together philosophers sympathetic to religious issues and theologians who are willing to deploy the methods and resources of the analytic tradition.

9. For a rich introduction, see Anat Beletzki and Anat Matar, eds., *The Story of Analytic Philosophy: Plots and Heroes*, Routledge Studies in Twentieth Century Philosophy (London: Routledge, 1998).

10. Rudolf Carnap, “The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language,” in *Logical Positivism*, ed. A.J. Ayer, (Glencoe, Il.: The Free Press, 1959).

One of the values of the analytic tradition for a project in historical theology is located in the virtues shared between the two. Clearly understanding the terms used is important. The exegete of distant texts is tasked with a slightly different project than the philosopher in that the philosopher can stipulate how a term ought to be used and the exegete must determine how the term was used. This difference aside, the goal is the same: gain clarity on the concepts at hand, provide ample evidence for the claims being made, present the most powerful evidence against your own claims and respond as well as you can.

An overview of analytic reflection on concepts related to volition

The basic distinction on the topic of volition, dating back to the beginning of analytic philosophy, is Wittgenstein's distinction between an action and an event. Concerning actions and volitions, Wittgenstein, in the *Philosophical Investigations* (PI 611-635), raises the concern that "Das Wollen is auch nur eine Erfahrung."¹¹ He is asking: what is our action and what happens to us—a mere event. He thought, at this point, that willing is a passive thing—we experience the feelings of willing, but it would be incorrect to say that we actively will. In the reflections that follow, he lays the groundwork for exploring the differences between what are generally accepted as actions ("trauchen, versuchen, sich bemühen, —zu sperechen, zu schreiben, etwas zu heben, sich etwas vorzustellen, etc.") and our experience of willing something.¹² An action, on this analysis, is something an agent does. This is in contrast to an event, something that merely happens without an agent doing it.¹³ This is seemingly encoded in many languages in the

11. PI 611, "Willing (*i.e. wanting*) is also only an experience." (all translations from German mine, unless otherwise noted)

12. PI 615, "to strive; to try; to force myself—to speak, to write, to lift a thing; to cause myself to imagining something, etc."

13. The problem, to be explored more in depth in the next chapter, is how active or passive willing *per se*

difference between active and passive verbs but, as any student of Latin will recall, deponent verbs look passive but translate into English as active. Most languages, likewise, also use active verbs for non-agent subjects: “the ball rolls down the hill.” Clearly there is a difference between a girl actively causing herself to roll down the hill and a ball passively rolling—blown by the breeze or kicked by the girl. In Wittgenstein’s own example, the self-reflexive “sich etwas vorzustellen” translates into idiomatic English as “to imagine” which hides the more literal, “to cause myself to put forward something.” The line between what is active and passive may be variously encoded in languages, but this is not as clear a means of distinguishing an action from an event as one would like. A ball rolling down a hill is an event. A girl rolling down the same hill—when she causes herself to roll, as opposed to being pushed or tripping—is an action. What makes an action an action? Without giving an answer, Wittgenstein framed the question by asking what is left over when you subtract “my arm going up” from “I raise my arm.”¹⁴

A hard reductionist would say that, on a deep enough analysis, all apparent actions are merely events. Any difference between event causation and agent causation evaporates under careful scrutiny. Given sufficient information about the prior relevant material states and a complete-enough understanding of the laws of physics and chemistry, there is always a causal chain which would reduce the difference between “my arm going up” and “I raise my arm” to zero.¹⁵ This hard material determinism, of course, flies in the face of human experience and goes

is. If willing (wanting) is an experience, then we do not seem to have first-order control over it, any more than we have first-order control over what we see when our eyes (when properly functioning in normal conditions, etc) see when pointed in a general direction.

14. ”Aber vergessen wir eines nicht: wenn ‘ich meinem Arm hebe’, hebt sich mein Arm. Und das Problem entsteht: was is das, was übrigbleibt, wenn ich vor der Tatsache, daß ich meinem Arm hebe, die abziehe, daß mein Arm sich hebt?”, PI 621.

15. For one example, “Hence our bodily movements, being just so many more physical event, must themselves have entirely physical causes. [...] For further light on the workings of individual neural cells we

against the intuitions we have about ethics. If, despite all my apparent labors, I was mechanically determined to write this sentence and I am wrong—about not only the experience but also the reality of freedom—then I lose nothing since all that exists is merely the products of physics and chemistry. The consensus of shared human experience, however, points towards the reality of some degree of freedom—that there are genuine actions which can be distinguished from events. The question before us is: what is the distinguishing factor or factors?

Kevin Magill offers a definition of an action that says, “actions are voluntary behavior, typically purposeful, carried out by individual animals.”¹⁶ If actions are voluntary behavior, this implies the existence of such a thing as volition and begs the question of volition being a constitutive part of action.¹⁷ It also excludes all manner of agent causation by non-animal agents. Lowe, discussed at length below, asserts that all causation is agent causation and it makes little sense in his framework to limit agency to individual animals.¹⁸ For present purposes, I will focus on personal agency and the actions caused by persons.¹⁹ Making volition constitutive of actions

naturally look to their biochemistry, which is ultimately underpinned by the fundamental laws of molecular physics.” Peter Smith and O. R. Jones, *The Philosophy of Mind: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 252.

16. Kevin Magill, *Freedom and Experience: Self-Determination Without Illusions* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc, 1997), 113.

17. Unless you hold that an action can be both voluntary and completely determined, a position known as compatibilism. Space does not allow for an adequate discussion of this topic here, but the literature is vast. Thomas Pink provides an excellent introduction in Thomas Pink, *Free Will: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004-08-05).

18. E.J. Lowe, *Personal Agency: The Metaphysics of Mind and Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.

19. I do not here assume that only humans count as persons, but for simplicity sake I will artificially limit my discussion of personal agency to human persons. Animals which exhibit clear signs of intelligence, such as dolphins and corvids, seem to meet many, if not all of the criteria for being considered persons. The broad Christian tradition has held that angels and demons are non-human persons and that God is tri-personal, three persons in one being. Science fiction books and movies are full of non-humans who are persons. It is not inconceivable that there are non-human persons.

simply ignores the concerns of the large group of analytic philosophers who dismiss volition as being unnecessary furniture in the world. There has been a broad consensus in the analytic tradition that action can be explained without appeal to volition and the preference for parsimony means that explanations with fewer terms are preferable to those with more. Simply saying that actions are voluntary behaviors of individual animals begs the question of volitions being part of the furniture of our world. What does stipulating that actions are voluntary add to the definition that cannot be reduced down to less contentious things, such as belief? In large, the analytic tradition has held that volition may not be reducible to material states, but it is reducible to mental states; therefore, the concept adds nothing not already contained in existing mental states.

For Alan Donagan, the difference between an action and an event is encoded in the beliefs of the person doing the action, “Human actions are those human doings that can be explained by the doer’s propositional attitudes.”²⁰ That is to say, the search for the distinction between action and event has a decidedly epistemic focus. People makes a choices on how to act based on what they believe about the world and what the outcomes of their actions will be. Volition and desire do not enter into the definition of what constitutes an action. They are, rather, merely second-order terms for kinds of beliefs. A ‘doing,’ in Donagan’s conceptualization, is an action if the doer believes that by doing it, a certain goal will be achieved. There is an internal, person-relative, teleological (goal-oriented) quality to actions that are not present in events. These goals, likewise, are products of belief rather than something else, such as desire. The net

20. Donagan, *Choice*, 23. Propositional attitudes here relates to the content of the beliefs of the agent, and their attitude towards them. I believe I can toss this wadded-up paper into the basket across the room; I believe that discarding this paper is a good thing to do; I am disinclined to walk across the room to discard it (a con-attitude, reducible to belief about the tediousness of getting up and walking), so I choose to throw the paper—trying to get it into the basket without needing to walk across the room. My propositional attitude is pro tossing the paper.

result is that the epistemic question is the only one that matters in deciding what is an action and what is an event. Beliefs of a certain kind, and only beliefs, are what distinguish an action from an event.

The introduction of ‘doings’ as a noun here, however, obscures the primary event/action distinction. Rather than answering the question as to what makes an action distinct from an event, Donagan here replaces the term action for the term “doing” and then stipulates that one kind of “doings” are actions—those with a goal. It seems evident that people do act without a goal in many cases. Fiddling with a pen during a boring lecture, for example, seems to be an action that does not have a goal—or even any propositional content associated with it. A twitching finger due to a neurological disorder such as Parkinson’s disease would not be an action, but the same mechanical motions in someone without Parkinson’s—say a student mindlessly tapping on the desk during class—would. The student may not be consciously aware of his acting, but upon asking him to cease the behavior, he would apologize for it. Encoded in this example is the awareness on the part of the student that he was being disruptive, even as he was not conscious of his acting. If the instructor had asked a student with Parkinson’s to not tap on the desk, the whole class would (rightly) side with the student. There is a moral intuition at play in this example, which recognizes that even “mindless” behavior can be acts for which we ought to be held accountable in a way which the same mechanical motion would not be a moral failing for someone else.²¹

21. I do not consider an appeal to moral intuition to be a strong reason in-and-of-itself, but as part of a larger cumulative case it is one important factor to consider. Below I will look at some current philosophic work on affect/emotion and how moral intuition connects with it.

Beliefs (or the absence thereof)—even of the subset here called propositional attitudes—are not in themselves sufficient for distinguishing between actions and events. I may believe both that it is good to be courteous to those around me and that by being quiet and not disruptive I am being courteous; yet, I find myself being disruptive by clicking the cap of my pen during a lecture. My propositional attitude and my choice is to be courteous; my action does not directly correspond to this choice. This might merely be a case of attempting or trying but not succeeding in that attempt. If beliefs were in-and-of-themselves sufficient, there would be no such cases of failures to act when the outcomes are completely within our control. If belief (or propositional attitude) were sufficient for action, then my belief that clicking the pen is disruptive, coupled with my belief that being disruptive is not good, should be enough to ensure that my I avoid annoying my classmates by clicking my pen. Cases of failure where the outcome is not completely in our control—such as driving a golf-ball three-hundred-yards and landing it on a fairway—can still be accounted for in this model because we can be mistaken in our beliefs. The wind may not be blowing in the direction we believe. But some outcomes are so basic, such as clicking a pen, that they seem to be completely in our control. If the outcome is completely within our control, then our beliefs and our actions should directly correspond with each other. Action (or in the case of clicking a pen, refraining from action) requires something more than merely epistemic considerations; beliefs alone do not suffice to distinguish action from event.

One obvious candidate for this “something more,” returning to Magill’s definition earlier, is intentionality. On the surface, it seems that intentionality is just an attempt to reimport volition under a different name—remove the sofa in the name of parsimony and bring back in a chaise

because you still need somewhere to sit.²² It is not as simple as saying that intentions are something that an agent has and volitions are something an agent does. Davidson is quite explicit in his worry about the fact that intentions might be a kind of action. Moore recognizes that volition and intention seem to be conjoined, but avoids reimporting volition by reframing volition as a species of intention; “volitions are simply the last executors of both our more general intentions and the background states of desire and belief that those more general intentions themselves execute.”²³ This move does not address my concern that the sofa was removed as unnecessary but the chaise still fills the space. Audi puts it this way, “I am inclined to believe, then, that to call volitions intentions is to use ‘intention’ in a technical sense and that, far from making the notion of volition more familiar, this makes both volition and intention seem less so.”²⁴ Sneaking volitions in through side door, by identifying them with intentions, may make them palatable to those who simply dislike the term volition due to its unsavory history. But, Audi is right to point out that we use the terms differently. I can intend something, such as sitting down to write for an hour, without the volition to actual do it. Intentions seem to be a much softer category than volitions.

Davidson notices several unusual properties of intentions. First, we can intend to do something and not even try to do it—what he calls pure intending. Second, intentions do not, on

22. Audi provides a clear of example bringing the chaise in, “Talk of the will is liable to unclarity and may enhance the temptation toward reification. Here, I simply take a person’s will, at a given time, to be determined at least mainly by the person’s intentions and dispositions to form them.” According to Audi will is not strictly the same as intention but is determined mainly by them. Robert Audi, “Faith, Belief, and Will: Toward a Volitional Stance Theory of Faith,” *Sophia* (2018), 9.

23. Michael S. Moore, *Act and Crime: The Philosophy of Action and Its Implication for Criminal Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 121.

24. Robert Audi, “Volition, Intention and Responsibility,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 142, 1682.

his analysis, require us to be aware of our own action; “even when we are doing something intentionally, we may not know that we are doing it; this is even more obviously apt to be true of actions when they are described in terms of their unintended consequences.”²⁵ This shift from propositional attitude to intention is an important one. Davidson, here, argues that an agent’s knowledge that she is doing something is not necessary for the doing to be an action, at least not an intentional action. This is a marked shift from the purely epistemic frame of Donagan. The second half of his thought here (intentional acts can have unintended consequences) seems to be obvious. But if reflective self-knowledge—an agent knowing it is acting—is not necessary for an action, is intention? That is, do intentions fit the “something more” required above? Are they what are left over in Wittgenstein’s subtraction? Are all acts, as opposed to events, intentional? The long shadow of the Socratic dictum that “no one acts without a purpose” (explored in chapter 1) lurks in the background.²⁶

Davidson begins by exploring the concept of intending by looking at the possibility of intending to do something without acting. “Pure intending of this kind, intending that may occur without practical reasoning, action, or consequence, poses a problem if we want to give an account of the concept of intention that does not invoke unanalyzed episodes or attitudes like willing, mysterious acts of the will, or kind of causation foreign to science.”²⁷ I will set aside, for the moment, the question of why acts of the will are considered mysterious while thoughts, intentions, memories, and feelings are not.²⁸ A deep worry Davidson has here is that there is an

25. Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980-10-02), 60.

26. The question of intentionality dates back to Wittgenstein’s student, G.E.M. Anscombe. Davidson’s work is part of a long line in the analytic tradition focused on the concept of intention.

27. *Ibid.*, 83.

28. At least *not quite* as mysterious, at a later point he would write, “We should be astonished that there is

infinite regress between acting and intending if intending is an action. If all actions require an intention, but intending to do something is an action, there is no way to start the process of either acting or intending. Davidson settles the issue by stipulating that intentions are properly basic mental acts, like sensation, and this cuts off the regress. This move fails to satisfy Pink:

“Whether they are cognitive ‘besires’—motivating pro attitudes which are beliefs—or mere non-cognitive yens or urges, the causing pro attitudes in terms of which goal-direction action is defined, and out of which it arises as an effect, must ultimately be passions in the following sense. They must be all be pro attitudes which are formed passively or other than through action.”²⁹ I take Pink’s “besire” here to be a fusion of belief and desire. Pink’s point is that since intentions (as understood by Davidson) are fully caused by desires and beliefs, Davidson is consistent to assert that they are not a kind of action, but that they can in turn not cause action.

Pure intendings, that is, intending to do something without actually doing it, are the clearest presentation of another deep issue. Intention without action stands Wittgenstein’s subtraction question on its head. What is left over when you subtract intending to do something from doing nothing? If I can intend to build a birdhouse, to use Davidson’s own example, without ever doing the things required to build the birdhouse, did I really have the intention? On Davidson’s analysis it seems that there was no *real* intention, only the pure intention. If, as Donagan holds, epistemic considerations are the only consideration, there can be no other conclusion. A belief that ‘I will build a birdhouse by not building a birdhouse’ is self-evidently false. What is important for our consideration is that Davidson shifts from the strictly epistemic

such a thing as thought. By thought I mean not only affirmation and denial, but doubt, intention, belief, desire, or the idle contemplation of possibilities.” Donald Davidson, *Problems of Rationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 6.

29. Thomas Pink, “Intentions and Two Models of Human Action,” in *Reasons and Intentions*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 160.

and includes a different category in his analysis: “There must be such rationalizing beliefs and desires if an action is done for a reason, but of course, the presence of such beliefs and desires when the action is done does not suffice to ensure that what is done is done with the appropriate intention.”³⁰ Belief is the most important, but desires are also required for an act to be intentional. This inclusion of a non-epistemic consideration into the calculus is very important and it is what sets Davidson’s analysis apart from a purely epistemic analysis like Donagan’s. An act is intentional only if it was desired, but not all desired actions rise to the level of intended actions. “I want to go to London next week, but I do not intend to.”³¹ As I write this in Lent, I am fasting. I desire ice cream; not only do I not intend to have some, I intend to not have some. Second order desires, such as the desire to maintain my fast, interrelate with my immediate desire for a snack. Beliefs, likewise, such as my belief that maintaining the fast is a good thing to do, are components of the formation and maintenance of the intention. But what the right hand gives, the left takes away and by the end of the essay, Davidson reduces it all back to the epistemic: “Pure intendings constitute a subclass of all-out judgments, those directed to future actions of the agent, made in the light of his beliefs.” On this analysis, human agents have desires, but those desires are fundamentally shaped by the person’s beliefs. It is our judgement about what we believe to be true about the world that gives rise to our intentions.

I cannot fault Davidson too much for, at times, walking back his overt inclusion of desires as constitutive of intentions. Beliefs, the bedrock epistemic category, have historically been a central concern for analytic philosophy. Epistemology, logic, philosophy of science, and

30. Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*, 87.

31. *Ibid.*, 102.

philosophy of language were the primary loci for much of the early analytic work. Consequently, much of the work continues to have an overt bias towards the epistemic categories. Desire being included as a meaningful category in Davidson's analysis of intention is a turning point. By his later work, he is able to widen his horizon more: "Our beliefs may be true or false; what we intend may or may not come about; the state of affairs we desire, hope for, or expect, may or may not be realized."³² The epistemic category maintains place of privilege, but he does expand what he permits to be included in considerations for what contributes to human action. I attribute this to the historical influence of the analytic project and Davidson's own focus within the project. Davidson's project was to provide a description of human action in terms that were coherent within a materialist (modern scientific) framework. Davidson refused to reduce the mental to the material, but the bias against metaphysics, or phenomena not measurable by scientific methods, was the background music of his entire work.

The bugbear lurking in the shadows of the entire conversation is the mind/body problem. That is, how do non-physical things, such as minds, influence physical things. If Newton (via Spinoza) is right, then the physical and the mental (non-physical) can have no interaction. Cartesian dualism, where mind and body are two absolutely distinct things, has always been deeply out-of-fashion (if not simply rejected) in the analytic project.³³ Mental states have been variously understood to be epiphenomena to (the real) physical states of the brain, or emergent properties arising out of complex physical interactions, but rarely attributed any causal power over the physical. Davidson tried to develop a means of explaining how mental events could be

32. Davidson, *Problems of Rationality*, 4.

33. Lowe, *Personal Agency*, 59.

causally connected to the physical by asserting that the mental is a property of the physical, even though all things are really physical. This is not a reduction of the mental to the physical but an assertion that there are not two kinds of things, only the physical—of which the mental is a property. His “anomalous monism” was an effort to save our bedrock experience of feeling that some things are within our control while still holding to the physicalism of mechanistic science. The net result is that mental events are caused by physical events, and mental events cause physical events, but only through causal relationships backed by natural laws, even though there are no natural laws connecting mental and physical events. I cannot see how Davidson’s position is coherent. The solution he offers, of a soft sort of psycho-physical not-fully-determinant (non-strict) set of laws that supervene upon the physical seems to be the kind of metaphysical mumbo-jumbo the analytic tradition started out by rejecting *tout court*. For our purposes, to acquaint ourselves with the concepts, we need not settle the debate here. What is significant for exploring the concept of volition is the question of how immaterial mental events, states, or properties can be causally effective on physical things. How can a thought cause matter to move? Why does thinking, “I should raise my arm” cause my arm to go up? And, in thinking, “I should raise my arm” am I merely acting off the beliefs and desires which I in no meaningful way chose since I am completely passive in their formation? The importance of Davidson’s work was to lay out one possibility for how we can form intentions (that are not a kind of action) from passively formed beliefs and desires, all while staying within the bounds of what is accepted as proper science. His recognition that desire is a factor, marked an important shift for our present task.

Desires, for Davidson, are properly basic mental events. We can form second-order desires about other desires, but typically desires do not need any explanation. We know them because we have them. Pink frames Davidson’s position this way, “Suppose I am deliberating

about an offer which I have been made; and this process of deliberation leaves me forming an increasingly strong desire to accept it. That I form this strong desire to accept the offer, rather than remaining indifferent to it, or forming a strong desire to refuse—this is hardly going to count as an action of mine.”³⁴ Desire formation is not an action and it cannot be intentional in the same way as, say, raising an arm. We can exert some second-order control over our desires, but properly speaking, they are not directly in our control. If I form an intention to lose some weight, the desire for ice cream may come upon me. I can choose to limit the effects of this desire on me by not keeping ice cream in the house, but, at least initially, this is not controlling the desire but rather controlling my response to the desire. Pink describes this understanding of desire formation as a passive mental event and even uses the term “passions” for them.³⁵ Beliefs, likewise, are passive things. They happen to us. We do not choose to believe in the epistemic sense, rather beliefs happen to us due to a host of factors such as prior beliefs, the data of our senses, memories, and so on. I cannot make myself believe that I am a unicorn any more than I can make myself believe that there is such a thing as unicorns.³⁶ I cannot force myself to not believe that there is a keyboard under my fingers at this moment, given all the evidence of my senses. If belief and desire, the two components of an intention in Davidson’s sense, are passive and (on this all-too-brief analysis) primarily externally caused, in what sense can an intention be an action? That is, for all the language of forming an intention, the entire framework seems to require that intentions are not formed by us but as a product of the causal input from passively

34. Pink, “Intentions and Two Models of Human Action,” 160.

35. Ibid.

36. Audi, “Faith, Belief, and Will: Toward a Volitional Stance Theory of Faith”. Audi’s article has a good analysis of various epistemic and non-epistemic uses of “faith” which may be helpful in getting clear on the analytic distinction between a belief in the technical sense and “Belief in God” in the many senses it can be understood.

formed beliefs, passively formed desires, previously (passively) formed intentions, and dispositional states which, as far as I can tell, cannot be anything other than passively formed.

Pink calls Davidson's model the "Voluntariness based model of action" and contrasts it with the "Practical reason-based model of action."³⁷ In the practical reason model, intentions are not the product of beliefs and desires but the product of rational effort. Thinking is an action. Intention formation is a kind of thinking, aimed at forming a goal of another action. The causal regress for intention formation is no more a worry than the causal regress for thinking.³⁸ "For a decision to be taken rationally, it is not enough for the object of the decision to be desirable. There must also be some sufficient chance that taking the decision will lead to the attainment of its object. Reason treats decisions as goal-directed exercises of rationality—as events of exercising reason which are being employed as means to attaining their objects, and so as actions."³⁹

McCann takes a different approach and does not allow intentionality to be reduced to rationality or beliefs and desires, "in themselves, desires and beliefs are not 'practical' in any strong sense; intentions are, for to have an intention is to be committed to act."⁴⁰ McCann works with the distinction between intending and deciding, "[intending] is a state, deciding is an event. It is the mental act by which, in cases of fully deliberative action, reasons and intentions are linked."⁴¹ Ignoring the slip where he calls deciding both an event and an act, it is clear that

37. Pink, "Intentions and Two Models of Human Action," 169.

38. Ibid., 171.

39. Ibid., 172.

40. Hugh J. McCann, *The Works of Agency: On Human Action, Will, and Freedom* (Cornell Univ Pr, 1998-12-01), 131.

41. Ibid., 133.

McCann is not bothered by the regress that so troubled Davidson because the state of intending is irreducible to the antecedent causes; agency simply is. What is left over when you subtract “my arm goes up” from “I raise my arm” is the intention, which is the state caused by taking the act of deciding to raise my arm. Decisions and intentions stand as independent mental entities—connected with, informed by, but not simply part of a passive causal chain of desires and beliefs.⁴²

J. M. Soslke approaches the question from the other direction in an elegant argument:

But consider lactation; in the days following childbirth, milk is produced involuntarily in response to the baby’s cry. But the mother may be deceived, especially if she is sharing a ward with other mothers and new babies. Imagine this scene where the mother is deceived: the cry is heard, the milk gushes forth, but examination reveals that it is not her baby who has cried. The milk stops. or the reverse: cries are heard. The source is believed to be someone else’s baby. No milk. A mistake is realized. The milk flows. The important thing to notice is that, in this example, the response of lactation is both involuntary but also rational, dependent as it is on the mother’s beliefs.⁴³

Belief does not suffice to make behavior voluntary. Involuntary events, such as lactation, can occur in the presence of a belief and a change in belief can change the event; yet the event never rises to the level of a voluntary action. Desire, likewise, does not suffice; a mother can know that her baby is hungry due to her cries, and want to provide milk. But if her body does not respond and produce milk, it seems to be a trying that does not succeed—much like a the paralytic attempting to raise his arm in the standard examples.

42. Ibid., 136.

43. J. M. Soslke, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 30.

Likewise on my analysis, acts of the will, or volitions, may indeed be mysterious, reified, and unanalyzed. That is not a sufficient argument for excluding them from “the furniture of the universe.”⁴⁴ The fact that they are an annoyingly placed ottoman in Davidson’s parlor, one on which he frequently stubs his toe, is not a sufficient reason to completely disregard them as conceptual relics that should be hauled off by Occam’s removal company. Volitions are a first-order part of human existence, alongside belief, experience, memory, affection (emotion or feelings), and sensation. Volitions are not reducible to belief, desire, or pro-attitude because they are a different kind of thing. The experience of willing is not like the experience of the color red. Rather, the experience of a volition is much more like the experience of having a thought or an emotion—it almost seems torturous of language to say “I experience the belief that since James is a bachelor he must be unmarried.” Less so to say, “I experience the emotion of anger.” But, we say “I feel anger,” or “I believe James is unmarried” without needing to appeal to any lower conceptual entity since belief and affection are first-order parts of human existence. The same is true of volition. Trying to explain belief in terms of emotion, or emotion in terms of memory is folly—they are connected and interrelate, to be sure, but they are irreducibly distinct. Volition cannot be reduced to belief, even if beliefs do influence the content of the volition; but the same can be said of emotion.

If I believe that a friend has stolen something of mine, I will be angry. The relationship between the belief and the affection is not mechanistically causal, and the force of the belief in the formation of the affection does not mean that the affection can be reduced to the belief. My intention to confront my friend about the theft depends on the belief that she stole from me, but it

44. Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*.

is not mechanically caused by it, nor can the intention be reduced to a network of relevant beliefs and desires. Affections certainly come into play in both belief and intention formation as cases of cognitive bias clearly show. The decision, which forms my intention to confront my friend, is an act of volition with a practical outcome. Intentions direct my future behavior, but they do not determine it. I can “change my mind;” that is, decide to form a different intention. We do form different intentions—take new decisions—when presented with new evidence (belief) or if our desires change, but we also form new intentions for no discernible reason. I had intended to bring home strawberry ice cream, but instead I picked up salted caramel. There was no new information, I knew the store carried both. No new desires were formed, I typically prefer the strawberry, but today I decided to go the other way. I simply willed one instead of the other.

Buying strawberry ice cream, is my habit. I am disposed to buying this particular flavor rather than, say chocolate. Having routinely bought strawberry for some time, it has taken on a kind of dispositional inertia. I do not have to invest cognitive effort (make a decision) to intend to purchase strawberry. I intend to buy ice cream so I put “ice cream” on my shopping list; I intend to buy strawberry ice cream. It is an intention which requires minimal thought on my part. A network of background beliefs exist in the formation and maintenance of this intention (I believe the store still carries the brand, that they have it in stock, that the store is still in business, and so on) yet I need not be conscious of any of these beliefs when I form the intention to buy ice cream and put it on my list. I am simply disposed to this intention. It has a kind of inertia which keeps it from changing. At some point in the past, however, this dispositional inertia did not exist and I had to come to a decision as to the store at which I would shop, what brand of ice cream, what flavor, and so on. Having formed these intentions, and maintained them for some time, they become a disposition with inertia. Once a disposition has sufficient inertia, we call it a

habit. The act is still intentional, but the conditions for forming the intention are no longer required. The will may not make a new act, but the previous willing is still in effect.

I have slipped from at my lenten fast several times this year. Last night, a Friday evening, I ordered a hamburger without thinking. I frequently order red meat after a hike. I usually abstain from red meat all of lent. These are well-established dispositions with plenty of inertia. Yet, last night, they came into conflict. My wife and I had gone for a lovely hike and, as twilight settled with a mile left before the end of the trail, we saw a small herd of feral hogs—which can sometimes be quite dangerous. Fortunately they wandered off into the woods as we got closer. They remained the topic of our conversation for the remainder of the hike and our drive back to the city. As we sat down for dinner I completely forgot that it was lent, that I was fasting, and I ordered a hamburger. The inertia of my lenten disposition was overcome by the inertia of my post-hike ritual. As the meal was served, I recalled my fast, and after a twinge of shame at my failings and a quick prayer of penance, I ate the hamburger. Dispositional inertia, like physical inertia, is not an absolute. In the presence of resistance, trajectories change.

Volitions—acts of the will—are necessary to account for our ability to change our dispositions. Belief formation is, by-in-large, passive; we come to believe things about the world through our sense perception, the testimony of others, and so on. We do not have first-order control over what we sense or what information is given to us. We do exert second-order control over belief formation; we choose the newspaper that more aligns with our presuppositions, we only listen to people we already believe to be trustworthy. Volitions also contribute to a possible solution to the problem of the self. An enduring sense of self is constituted upon reflection through memory; it is constituted into the future through intention and volition. By choosing to

be the kind of person who buys strawberry ice-cream, rather than chocolate, I am not only taking an in-the-moment decision to buy one flavor over another, but a meta-action which shapes future decision. In choosing to back Manchester City over Arsenal, for example, (a decision which may be made on information in the moment, but backing a team for more than a season or two is not) I am establishing my identity—my self—in terms of something which is not purely cognitive (a claim which undoubtedly would resoundingly be disputed by Manchester City backers). My linking my own sense of self to a larger community is an act of will which has volitional inertia. I am going to support this team through good and bad years.

Reintroducing volition as a first-order mental category, irreducibly distinct from belief, desire, affection and so on, does not solve the mind-body problem. At best it more adequately explains human experience than theories which, in the name of parsimony, reject it. The continual attempts to smuggle it back in under different names show that there is a deep intuition that any theory which seeks to understand human action needs to account for the intentional, and a robust concept of the volition not only meets the needs, but has centuries of reflection behind it.

Summary

The analytic conversation germane to volition centers around philosophy of action and philosophy of mind. The deepest worry is the mind/body problem, which (as I will show in the following chapters) is not a worry for Augustine or any of the ancient thinkers. The concepts of intention, volition, desire, affection, belief, and trying—which are fecund sources of analytic reflection—do seem to be relevant when trying to exegete Augustine's own concept of volition. Volition and the will were discarded categories in the earliest stages of the analytic tradition, but

have reasserted themselves because they have explanatory force and provide avenues to explain the human experience which reason alone cannot.

My proposal is that there is a volitional inertia to our acts of will. They carry forward and shape future behavior without need for being reactivated in each new decision. This inertia presents itself in habits and dispositions, but also is one aspect of the self. I am, in part, who I am because of the decisions I've made about who I will be. This concept will be explored in-depth in the final chapter when I discuss loss and grief.

CHAPTER 3:

Volition in Augustine's Early Works

In this chapter I will explore the concept of volition in Augustine's early writings, using *The Confessions* as an arbitrary stopping point. Augustine says the two things he needed to discover before Christianity would make sense for him were that evil is not a substance and that the mind is not the highest good (*Conf.* IV.15.25). His works leading up to *The Confessions* range from philosophy to a program of liberal arts for Christians and some polemical works related to doctrinal disputes with the Donatists. Volition, when it is a topic of reflection, is almost exclusively found in the philosophical writings. As important as the concept came to be by *The Confessions*, his early explorations of the concept lack the kind of sophistication that it would take on in his final works.

The Confessions, after the opening prayer, begins with Augustine's infancy, which he does not remember. While he does not dwell much on his childhood before he became a youth, Augustine went through the normal process of maturation. The whole of *The Confessions* is about his growth and change. Time and change are important categories for Augustine. He documents in *The Confessions* his intellectual journeys as well as his physical and spiritual journeys. He changed his mind, he came to new understandings, and he developed his positions through the conversations and conflicts in which he engaged. Any attempt to read Augustine's use of certain concepts (such as grace or concupiscence), without taking into account his own

development through time, would be to disregard his own testimony.¹ His concept of volition is no exception. He uses the term as early as *The Soliloquies* (386/7) and was reflecting on it as a meaningful concept by *De libero arbitrio* (388-395). By the writing of *The Confessions* (397-401), it was one of his central concerns. My thesis is that his deployment of the concept of volition may not have been entirely new (I agree in a qualified way with Frede as I explained in chapter 1),² but it was unusual enough that he deployed his full rhetorical acumen to make the concept palatable to the Stoics, the Platonists, and especially the Manicheans with whom he was talking.

He did not use the term with a great degree of frequency in his earliest works. But, as he reflected on what exactly left him dissatisfied with the Manicheans, it came to be the important point of his reflection. His use of the term waxed and waned in his various writings, but it was cemented in them by the time of *The Confessions*. After his initial engagement with Pelagius, the term took on an additional importance in his efforts to explain what beatitude is and how it differs from what the Stoics and Platonists held it to be. The later works on Original Sin, sin in general, love, and how grace works all depend on his understanding of volition. It is, to quote Ogilvie, a load bearing doctrine for him.³ His usage of it as a primary locus of reflection, rather than as an assumed but unanalyzed piece of folk psychology, was novel. He understood that by using the will in the way he did, he was rejecting some assumptions that were deeply held by

1. In the debate between Boyer and Thonnard, whether we should read Augustine in light of (Roman Catholic) doctrine or in terms of his own historical context, I simply side with Thonnard. We read and interpret the sources of our faith most faithfully when we work to understand their context. For a brief introduction to this debate, see Timo Nisula, *Augustine and the Functions of Concupiscence*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae*, vol. 116 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 4.

2. Frede, *A Free Will*.

3. Heather Ogilvie, "Introduction to the Holy Spirit," *Intrepretation of the Christian Witness II* (2008).

most of the philosophic schools of his day. He does not initially deny that reason is the highest good of humanity, but he does claim—quite radically—that will overrules reason. He turns the teleological frameworks explored in chapter 1 on their heads. We are not drawn to the highest goods by our reason coming to understanding that they are good. Rather, we are drawn where the will leads, which may be against our reason. By the turn of the century, he goes so far as to assert that reason is a lower good than love, following Paul’s claim that knowledge puffs up, but love builds up (1 Cor 8:1). It is this move, rejecting beatitude as understood by the philosophers (contemplating the eternal ideas, being aligned with the One nature, etc.), and replacing it with a concept of beatitude in which Augustine held that loving God is our highest and only permanent good, a position that sets him apart from those who came before him. The will, not the mind, is the seat of our happiness. God is not self-thinking thought thinking about itself, as Aristotle believed, but love, as St. John and St. Peter claimed. Our eternal happiness is not to be found in correct understanding or reasoning but correct loving. Moral failure is not caving to irrational appetites, ignorance, or cognitive malfunction; sin is loving the wrong things—or loving things for the wrong ends. Our suffering is because of misplaced love, not stupidity; we do stupid things because we love the wrong things.

Early Works: *sitne aliqua nobis voluntas?*

Augustine’s pre-conversion writings are mostly lost. Given what Augustine himself has to say about them, they may have provided some insight into his early thought on desire. It is not unreasonable to assume that *De pulchro et apto* might have addressed what he originally thought it means to desire the beautiful and the fitting. In all likelihood, however, the works would have been interesting only for what was omitted, rather than what they contained. All his extant works come from after his disillusionment with the Manicheans. The earliest date to around the time of

his conversion to Christianity in 387. The early works are structured in the form of philosophic conversations, emulating the style of the Platonists. They are not, however, limited to Platonic subjects in their content. For example, his ability to draw clarifying distinctions in the mode of the Peripatetic philosophers supports his claims that he had read a wide variety of thinkers.⁴ During his time in Carthage, Rome, and Milan, he was in place to engage with thinkers of many different traditions. It is clear that, in addition to the readings of his youth, he engaged with philosophy wherever he could find it.⁵

In the earliest extant work, *Contra academicos*—a paean to philosophy and wisdom—the concept of volition does not surface. Wisdom, intelligence, and memory take the center stage, especially in book I.⁶ When verbal forms of *voluntas* show up, they simply mean “desire,” except in a few places where its meaning comes across more clearly into English as “intention.”⁷ The Stoic influences in this text are quite evident: reason is the pinnacle of human existence. Even though it was written right about the time of his conversion and filled with references to

4. *Conf.* V.3.3 *Et quoniam multa philosophorum legeram memoriaeque mandata retinebam.*

I read from many philosophers and committed them to memory.

5. *Solil.* I.3.8-I.4.10 seems designed to show his having worked with the Platonists, the Skeptics and the Stoics, to prove to his readers that he had done the work and knew all the relevant authors.

I think King does not take seriously how deftly Augustine is able to work with the various philosophical traditions when he writes, “he therefore chose not to align himself with any school, but to pursue philosophy as a syncretistic amateur, taking truth wherever he might find it. In practice, this meant that Augustine’s initial knowledge of philosophy was derived from the authors he studied in the course of his rhetorical education, Cicero and Seneca above all, in an eclectic mix heavily influenced by stoic doctrines.” Peter King, ed., *On the Free Choice of the Will, on Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), x.

6. A similar collection of three components of the soul will show up in *Trin.* with one major difference.

7. E.g. *Acad.* II.1, *Sive etiam qui error omnium populorum est, falsa opinione inventae a se veritatis, nec diligenter homines quaerunt, si qui quaerunt, et a quaerendi voluntate avertuntur.* “Like the error of all common people, having come upon a false opinion, do not diligently search for the truth—if they search—and even turn away from the desire to search.” or *Acad.* II.5 *nihil voluntate a me factum est.* “I did not intend to do it.” (more literally: nothing from me desired to do it.)

Christian scripture, he is still very much in the grips of Cicero and his love of the ideals of *otium philosophiae*. This desire for leisure, freedom from physical labor, and freedom from familial obligations was inspired in part by the life of Saint Anthony, but even more-so by the Stoic understanding of freedom as outlined in Cicero's *Hortensius*. As discussed in Chapter 1, Augustine had read liberally from the Stoics, the Platonists, and the Peripatetics. While the books of the Platonists were undoubtedly important in his conversion experience and he was deeply smitten by Platonic thought by this point, he was not able to fully excise the Stoic influences. His early works are an attempt to develop a program for a Christianized classical liberal arts education modeled on a Stoic program. Augustine is attempting to synthesize Christian teachings with what would be taught in a typical Roman program. There are works on music, rhetoric, art, and philosophy. In addition to addressing the subjects at hand, he tries to show the superiority of Christianity to the dominant philosophic systems. He abandons this effort within a decade of starting because of what he finds as he digs deeper into the Christian tradition in its own right. A liberal education is a fine thing, better still if it has Christian content, but such an education is inferior to a distinctly Christian program.

By the the *The Soliloquies*—a conversation between Augustine and Reason⁸—his usage of the term ‘volition’ does not appear to have shifted from the Stoic framework. The book starts

8. It is interesting that Augustine, who identifies his own deepest temptation as women, presents Reason as a woman in this work.

Miles makes much of his sex-addiction. This is probably an over-reading of Augustine's own claims. It seems to me that Augustine uses hints of sex to lure his readers into theological conversations. It is an effective and ancient rhetorical device known as “sex sells.” Augustine was faithful to one concubine, his only son's mother, for over a decade. This does not fit the standard diagnosis of sexual addiction. If he were in fact a sex-addict, his reputation would have precluded him from being a Bishop. Hippo was not so large a community that he could have effectively hidden his past. Charges of Manichaeism haunted him for decades, and yet there are no such charges of his pre-conversion sexual escapades. Margaret R. Miles, *Desire and Delight: A New Reading of Augustine's Confessions* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

off in a traditional enough way, focused on knowledge of God: *Deum et animam scire cupio*.⁹ A Stoic, Platonist or Peripatetic would have been comfortable with this line of thinking. When reason presses him on why the only things he wants to know are ‘God and the soul,’ he stays in this place, *Quid enim Deo simile unquam intellexi, ut possim dicere: Quomodo hoc intellego, sic volo intellegere Deum?*¹⁰ God is to be known. But then a subtle shift from the classical position follows. *Quia si aliquid Deo simile scirem, sine dubio id amarem: nunc autem nihil aliud amo quam Deum et animam, quorum neutrum scio*.¹¹ “I love nothing more than God and the soul, knowing neither.” In the humorous exchange that follows, with Reason misunderstanding the distinction between animals (*animal*) and soul (*animans*), the importance of this shift gets buried behind the rhetorical device. God is to be loved, *and can be loved even if not known*. It seems that knowing God causes one to love God, but God can be loved without being known. In the language of Analytic philosophy explored in Chapter 2, desire is not reducible to belief. This is in sharp contrast with the Stoic and Platonic frameworks where, to desire something, one must know it; for only when the good is known as the good can it be desired. Yet, here we have Augustine loving God and the soul without knowing either. The shift, at least with respect to the soul, is minor since it is reason in the soul, not soul *per se*, that Augustine loves. Thus, he can love humans because they have rational souls but need not love everything which has a soul, like

9. *Solil.* I.2.7. I yearn to know God and the soul.

10. *Solil.* I.2.7. What have I ever known which is like God, so that it is possible to say, “Just as I know this, so do I desire to know God.”

The shift from *scire* to *intellegre*, is probably just stylistic, as is the shift from *cupio* to *volo*. I follow O’Donovan and hold that we should take Augustine at face-value when he claims that *dilectio*, *amor*, and *caritas* are all synonyms for Augustine, until compelling evidence to the contrary arises. Oliver O’Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 11.

11. *Solil.* I.2.7. If I had known anything like God, without a doubt, I would have loved it. However, I love nothing more than God and spirit, knowing neither.

fleas or locusts. He loves the “intelligible majesty of God” (I.5.11), these tentative steps away from the classical position are slight but clear.

The next step in this progression comes when he obliquely references 1 Cor:13:12-13 and discusses reason being akin to the soul’s vision (and reason untrained is destined only to seeing in a mirror dimly). Reason can only operate if three things are in place, the virtues which Paul enumerated: faith, hope, and love; *fides, qua credat ita se rem habere, ad quam convertendus aspectus est, ut visa faciat beatum; spes, qua cum bene aspexerit, se visurum esse praesumat; caritas, qua videre perfruique desideret.*¹² Here we have a linking of *caritas* with *perfruo* and, more importantly, *desidero*. This early linking of desire and love becomes very important in the *Confessions* and into the anti-Pelagian works. A soul that does not both love and desire the promised light will be content with darkness.¹³

By 388, with the beginning of *De libero arbitrio*, the shift becomes more pronounced.¹⁴ *Voluntas* became a primary locus of his reflection and he attributes his rejection of Manichaeism with his coming to recognize the will as a distinct thing, which enabled him to find a solution to

12. *Solil.* 1.6.13. Faith, by which one believes that by turning one’s eyes to it and beholding it one will be made blessed. Hope, by which one anticipates that one will see when one has looked carefully. Love, by which one desires and delights to see.

13. *Solil.* 1.6.12. *Quid, si et credat ita se habere omnia, et se speret posse sanari, ipsam tamen quae promittitur lucem non amet, non desideret, suisque tenebris, quae iam consuetudine iucundae sunt, se arbitretur debere interim esse contentam; nonne medicum illum nihilominus respuit?*

If one believes all this and hopes to be healed, and yet does not love the light, does not desire it, and even chooses to remain in the darkness because it is familiar, won’t it reject the medicine, nevertheless?

14. Book I of *Lib. arb.* was written in 388, work continued on the later books until 395. Since the books II and III were written after 391, I will focus my attention on the earlier part as it shows his development quite sufficiently without confusing the diachronic analysis.

Willson dates books II and II to 395/412. This is a bit later than the consensus, but has no impact on my larger thesis. Kenneth M. Wilson, *Augustine’s Conversion From Traditional Free Choice to “Non-Free Free Will”* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 300.

the problem of the existence of moral evil in a good creation. At this stage, he is unclear where to situate it in relation to the rest of the human person. It is at this time that he begins to wonder how mind, soul, reason, and spirit are all related.¹⁵ Prior to this point, he had used *animus* and *mens* as synonyms. After this point, he starts to use them in more precise ways, more akin to how we use “soul” and “mind” in contemporary English. He is not consistent in this precise usage and he may have a rhetorical reason for this; initially at least, I think he was simply exploring a distinction of which he was unsure. He also makes an implicit distinction between free choice and the will: *quam propria voluntas et liberum arbitrium*.¹⁶ As a master of rhetoric, he gets Evodius to buy into the notion of the will in I.11¹⁷ but refrains from making Evodius aware of this move until I.12. *Nam quaero abs te, sitne aliqua nobis voluntas?*¹⁸ Evodius responds, “I don’t know.” As before, a funny exchange goes back and forth, “Do you want to know?” “I don’t know that either.” I find it fascinating that Augustine inserts humorous moments at these

15. *Lib. arb.* 1.9.19. *Id autem non inveniebamus in corpore: ita cum in animo esse appareret, quid aliud appellandum esset quam ratio, non comperimus; quam postea et mentem et spiritum vocari recordati sumus. Sed si aliud ratio, aliud mens, constat certe non nisi mentem uti posse ratione. Ex quo illud conficitur, eum qui rationem habet, mente carere non posse.*

However, we did not find [the superiority of man to beast] in the body, for it appeared to be in the soul, which we had no other name for than “reason.” Later we recalled that it was also called mind and spirit. But, if reason and mind are not the same thing, it is certain that the mind makes use of reason. From this we concluded that whatever had reason cannot lack a mind.

16. *Lib. arb.* I.11.21 as is appropriate for the will and free choice.

It is important to note that for much of his work, free choice (*liberum arbitrium*) and will (*voluntas*) are distinct things. His larger point in this work is that we can have wills enslaved to our addictions yet still retain some degree of choice in how we work to satisfy our wills. Collapsing this distinction down into “free will” obscures this important distinction and history is littered with volumes trying and failing to understand Augustine because so many translators have treated *liberum arbitrium* as “free will” and *voluntas* as “the will.” At this stage in his reflection, however, Augustine requires that both free choice and the will are somehow involved in enslaving the mind (*mentus*). C.f. *Div. Quaest.* 24, for one of the instances where he uses *libero voluntatis arbitrio*.

17. *Lib. arb.* I.11.23 Evodius says, *ipse inde propria voluntate delapsus sit*, (“thus falling by his own will”) in acknowledging that if people become slaves to their own inordinate desires, they do so of their own power.

18. *Lib. arb.* I.12.25 Let me ask, do we have a will?

important points in the development of his argument. Humor is a rhetorical device intended to draw attention away from the profoundly innovative moves that he is making, to disarm the reader and set them at a disposition to “let’s just see where this goes.” This is exactly what Evodius does here. With Evodius conceding, for the sake of argument, that we have a will, Augustine quickly shifts to the question of what makes a good will good.

Having gotten Evodius to provisionally buy into his innovation, Augustine instantly moves back to more familiar philosophical ground. The highest goods, language which the Stoics would recognize as their own, are those things which cannot be taken from us unless we choose to give them up. Or, in the terms Augustine uses, those that cannot be taken from us against our will. For the Stoics this highest good is perfect reason, knowing the truth and judging the world in accordance with the truth; thus, living according to our true rational nature. Augustine quietly flips the script. A good will is the one thing that cannot be taken away from us against our will. The logic here is very clever. He maintains the underlying eudiamonism, the desire for a good life, which was at the root of both the Stoic and Peripateric schools, but shifts from reason being the secure good to loving one’s own good will as the only thing which is really secure. He then moves from eudiamonism to politics, the proper structure of a society and the place of laws within that society—that is, he moves from concerns which typify Stoic philosophers to a topic very comfortable for Platonic thinkers. He distinguishes between the eternal laws given by God and temporal laws of a society. He argues that temporal laws are only necessary because not all people have good wills. A Platonist would follow this line very easily, since it is modeled on the eternal and temporal distinction that stands behind the world of the forms and the world of appearances. The final step in this movement is when he connects love back to the concept of keeping one’s will good: *Iubet igitur aeterna lex avertere amorem a*

*temporalibus, et eum mundatum convertere ad aeterna.*¹⁹ It is not reason or the mind that is corrected and purified; it is love. The good life consists in ordering our loves towards the eternal. Sin is having our wills ordered towards temporal things rather than eternal. And our mind is not the same thing as our will, since our will is the only thing that can dispose the mind of its rule: *nullaque re de arce dominandi, rectoque ordine mentem deponi, nisi voluntate.*²⁰ The will cannot be reduced to the mind (*mens*). The will has the power to prevent the mind from proper operation. Our loves, our desires, can distort our thinking. Reason, the gold standard of the philosophers, is dethroned in favor of something that his interlocutor was not sure existed a few paragraphs before. Augustine does this from within both Platonic and Stoic frameworks, proving that he was much more than a dilettante in his understanding of the philosophers and their deeply held commitments.

Written in 392/3, *De duabus animabus contra Manichaeos* has a decidedly more cognitive tone. For example, *Mediocrisne negotii tandem vel meriti cognitionem Dei esse arbitramini? Quod enim nobis aliud praemium, quam vita aeterna promittitur, quae Dei cognitio est?*²¹ I attribute this to two things; first, his intended audience are the Manicheans, who would not have followed the logic he used in *Lib. arb.*, and second, his choice of scripture to support his assertion at this point in his argument (John 17:3). John's use of terms related to knowing and

19. *Lib. arb.* I.15.32, Therefore the eternal law commands that we turn our love from the temporal and, it having been cleaned, towards the eternal.

20. *Lib. arb.* I.16.34, Nothing other than the will can dispose the mind of its power and deprive it of its right order.

Notice the use of *mens* rather than *animus*. This distinction becomes increasingly important in subsequent works.

21. *Dou. anim.* I.8, Do you account the knowledge of God to be a small thing? What is our highest good, which gives life eternal, other than to know God?

loving God is quite complex and well outside our scope, but Augustine choose to work with this passage since it worked towards what he was trying to prove. He did his work within terms that the Manicheans would have understood and accepted. The will is, in this work, a movement of the soul (*animus*): *Voluntas est motus animi, cogente nullo, ad aliquid vel non amittendum, vel adipiscendum?*²² He makes this move to set up his point, which is now deeply engrained in his thought, that without the role of the will, there is no sin. Sin is only and always an act of the will. The same act can be sinful or not depending on the state of the will. In this context, which is to refute the Manichean position that there are two gods, one good and one evil (lest the one true God be the author of evil), his task is to establish that creatures can be the author of their sins and that does not imply that their creator is the author of sin, or is otherwise imperfect. The will is deployed not as a topic of reflection, but as a means of establishing his larger point. Since the Manicheans were a form of gnosticism, that is, they held that true knowledge freed the illuminated spirit from the evil of matter, knowledge and reason were esteemed. A concept like volition which was not a movement of the “mind” (*motus animi*) would have sounded like part of the evil body, or un-illuminated spirit, to a Manichean. By claiming that the will is a movement of the mind, Augustine was framing his term in a way that his intended audience could accept. Since *animus* is not identical with *mens* or *ratio* for Augustine, it seems plausible that he is using *animus* in an expansive—and somewhat deceptive—sense in order to frame his argument in terms a Manichean could accept. A Manichean would read *animus* and assume he meant *mens*. The distinctions drawn in *Lib arb.* I.9.19 may be behind his decision to use *animus* in a broad sense and leave the reader assuming *animus* and *mens* are identical.

22. *Dou. anim.* 10.14, (and several other points where he says something almost identical). The will is a movement of the soul (*animus*), constrained by nothing, either for not losing or for attaining something.

In *De genesi ad litteram* (393/394) Augustine links the *imago Dei* directly to the mind. In connecting the *imago Dei* with intellect, volition is not excluded, as Laela Zwollo notices: “the second treatment of the *imago Dei* in the context of original sin, in his exegesis of the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Paradise, involves as well his notions of will *voluntas* and grace *gratia*.”²³ This mention of *voluntas* is important since Zwollo’s work documents the influences of Plotinus on Augustine’s writings—focusing on the intellect as being the highest part of human life in the classical neo-Platonic mode. Zwollo’s case is very insightful, but misses the shift that Augustine makes away from intellect and towards volition. Augustine does not deny that intellect is very important, but to overlook the fact that the will can—and often does—dethrone the mind is to miss the subtle way that Augustine moves into the Plotinian paradigm and subverts it. This is not a simple baptism of pagan concepts, but a wholesale reworking of them with a different *telos*. Plotinus, as Zwollo clearly shows, was a profound influence on Augustine. What Augustine alters from Plotinus is even more important than what he assumes. The *imago Dei* is not a share in the divine intellect, but has a similarity with it.²⁴ Not even the angels have a share in the divine intellect. For Plotinus, the intellectual is one: reason is reason; we can know the *logos* which stands behind all creation because the *logos* in us is the same. Augustine maintains an absolute distinction between creature and creator; our reason has a similarity to the divine reason, but only because it was created that way, not because it participates in the divine reason.

Written several years later, book II of *Lib. arb.* has the same kind of structure as book I, in that wisdom initially takes center stage. As the book progresses, wisdom and reason are highly

23. Laela Zwollo, *St. Augustine and Plotinus: The Human Mind as Image of the Divine*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 159.

24. See also, *Ep.* 187.8.29.

praised. But love and the will, once again, overshadow the mind. It is the will cleaving to the unchanging good, not reason participating in it, that is our beatitude:

*Voluntas ergo quae medium bonum est, cum inhaeret incommutabili bono, eique communi non proprio, sicuti est illa de qua multum locuti sumus, et nihil digne diximus, veritas; tenet homo beatam vitam: eaque ipsa vita beata, id est animi affectio inhaerentis incommutabili bono, proprium et primum est hominis bonum.*²⁵

Turning from this highest good is sin. Why would a will turn from the highest good to a lower good? *Sciri enim non potest quod nihil est.*²⁶ It is not simply irrational, it is far deeper than that. Drawing on the Stoic notion of natures and teleology discussed in chapter 1, Augustine says that a stone's downward movement is natural—and the will is drawn to the object of its love by its nature. The analogy only holds at this surface level because a stone cannot stop its own downward movement. The soul can voluntarily prevent its fall.²⁷

In *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* (388/395) he addressed the question of the relation of the *animus* and *mens* again (q. 7). Here he makes the case that it is correct to say a person is a soul and a body, and in that case the mind is part of the soul; it is also the case that the mind is not identical with the soul since animals have souls, but not reason, therefore no mind.²⁸

25. *Lib. arb.* II.19.52. Therefore, when the will, which is an intermediate good, clings to the unchanging good which is the truth (which is shared and not private, and about which we have said much, but nothing adequate) then one has a happy life. And the happy life is the clinging of the soul, by its affections, to the unchanging good, which is the proper and highest good of humanity.

26. *Lib. arb.* II.19.54. One simply cannot know that which is nothing.

27. *Lib. arb.* III. 1.2. *Verumtamen in eo dissimilis, quod in potestate non habet lapis cohibere motum quo fertur inferius; animus vero dum non vult, non ita movetur, ut superioribus desertis inferiora diligit.*

The two movements are dissimilar in this way, the stone does not have the power to halt its downward movement; the soul is not moved to abandon higher things and love inferior unless it wills so to do.

28. *Div. Quaest.*, 7. *Anima aliquando ita dicitur, ut cum mente intellegatur, velut cum dicimus hominem ex anima et corpore constare; aliquando ita, ut excepta mente dicatur. Sed cum excepta mente dicitur, ex his operibus intellegitur quae habemus cum bestiis communia. Bestiae namque carent ratione, quae mentis est propria.*

In question 8 he discusses the soul's movement. Awareness of the soul's self-movement is connected with awareness of the will and its self-movement: *Nam si volumus, non alius de nobis vult.*²⁹ It seems, but is by no means conclusive based on this evidence, that the will is not here identical with the mind (*mens*) or a motion of the mind. Undoubtedly it is part of the soul. Given that the questions were probably written in order, these would date close to 388, probably before *Dou. anim.* While it is possible that *Dou. anim.* is a shift in his thinking, it seems more probable that the rhetorical context required that he refrain from restating what he had said in *Lib. arb.* and *Div. Quaest.* and just let the reader assume by *animus* he meant the apparent synonyms *mens* or *ratio*.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, by *Div. Quaest.* Augustine sees God's will as the terminus of any line of thinking. When asked, *Quare Deus mundum facere voluerit?* He responds, *Qui quaerit quare voluerit Deus mundum facere, causam quaerit voluntatis Dei. Sed omnis causa efficiens est. Omne autem efficiens maius est quam id quod efficitur. Nihil autem maius est voluntate Dei; non ergo eius causa quaerenda est.*³⁰ He does not here appeal to God's reason, but directly to God's will. Augustine asserts that God's reason and God's will are, in a very strong sense, identical. But it seems significant that after asserting that the will can overrule human reason that he give will the place of privilege in his *nihil maius est.*³¹

Sometimes when speaking of the soul one understands it to involve the mind, as when one says that a man is made of a soul and a body, other times mind is said to be excluded. But when mind is excluded, soul is understood as those things we have in common with animals. Animals lack reason, which is proper to the mind.

29. *Div. Quaest.*, 8. For if we will, no one but us wills.

30. *Div. Quaest.*, 28. Why did God want to make the world? To inquire why God wanted to make the world is to inquire into God's will. But every cause is efficient. Every efficient thing is greater than what it effects. Nothing is greater than God's will; therefore it has no cause to be sought.

31. This is, of course, not the last word Augustine has on the subject. He does say in several places that God creates because God is good. God's goodness and God's will, likewise, can be understood to be identical—but

Other than scattered references and scriptural quotations, in the remainder of the early works volition is rarely discussed. These works are primarily scriptural interpretation, his program of liberal arts, and related to the doctrinal concerns raised by his disputes with the Donatists. When he addresses questions of sin he is consistent to say that the will, not the mind or the body, is the cause. Other than this consistent point, he appears to have set the question of volition aside as settled—saying at one point “we’ve talked about this already.”³²

De doctrina christiana (396-426), written to a Christian audience, begins in a fully cognitive mode; parts read like a standard philosophy text in praise of wisdom. Knowledge is front and center through all of Book I. The only thing which would sound odd to a Stoic is how love takes a pronounced place, especially in the *uti/fui* distinction.³³ Volition does not surface until I.55, when he mentions people have literally sacrificed limbs in order to obtain what they perceive to be a higher good—proving that people love some things more than their body and health.³⁴

only if God wills to be good, otherwise God is controlled by the good, a position he wants to avoid. There is no *urgrund* behind the Triune God which imposes anything on God or forces God to will anything. God’s will is the ultimate cause. C.f. Roland J. Teske, S.J., *To Know God and the Soul* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 159.

32. *S. Dom. m.* II.24.79. *De quo errore in aliis libris et iam disputatum est uberius et, si adhuc parum est, disputabitur.*

Concerning this error, we covered it extensively in other books; and if that was still too little, we will cover it again.

33. *Doctr. chr.* I.7. *Fruī est enim amore inhaerere alicui rei propter se ipsam; uti autem, quod in usum venerit ad id quod amas obtinendum referre, si tamen amandum est.*

To enjoy something is to hold onto it out of love for its own sake; to use something, however, is to apply it in order that an object of love may be obtained—if indeed it is something to be loved.

N.b. In *Trin.* XI, *uti* and *fui* belong exclusively to *volentas*. Augustine does not seem to have reflected on this carefully at this point.

34. *Doctr. chr.* I.55.

For all its early praise of knowledge and reason, the focus of Book I is unquestionably on love. While wisdom is lauded, wisdom and reason ultimately are only things to be used so that we may love the Trinity: *Itaque tria haec sunt quibus et scientia omnis et prophetia militat: fides, spes, caritas.*³⁵ Knowledge is there to serve the Christian virtues. Ultimately Love is the only one which will remain as the others become unnecessary: *Sed fidei succedet species quam videbimus, et spei succedet beatitudo ipsa ad quam perventuri summus, caritas autem etiam istis decedentibus augebitur potius.*³⁶ Love, not reason, is what is permanent for humans. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up (1 Cor 8:1); knowledge which is not in service to love of God is potentially sinful. This is a complete repudiation of the Platonic, Stoic and Peripatetic positions which each situated the human *telos* in reason in their various ways.

Book II lays out a model for how people grow in faith. Augustine delineates seven stages of development: fear, holiness, knowledge, fortitude, resolve of compassion, purification of vision, and wisdom. Wisdom is not known by reason, but by affect, *qua pacatus tranquillisque perfruitur.*³⁷ Wise people are not discerned because of the clarity of their thought, but by the peace their presence brings. He commends philosophy as potentially useful, but worth study only insofar as it is true. Like the fleeing Israelites carrying off Egypt's treasures, Christians should carry away what truth can be found in philosophy, but leave behind the rest.³⁸ Whether this is just what he is commending to his flock, or this is a change in his his fundamental attitude towards

35. *Doctr. chr.* I.90. There are these three things which all knowledge and prophecy serve: faith, hope, and love.

36. *Doctr. chr.* I.91. But faith will be replaced by the sight of visible reality, and hope by true happiness which we shall attain, but love will increase as these pass away.

37. *Doctr. chr.* II.23. [wisdom is enjoyed by those who are] calm and peaceful.

38. *Doctr. chr.* II. 144.

philosophy—which had so enamored him as a youth—cannot be discerned from the evidence here.³⁹ Given his earlier program of a synthetic Christian liberal arts, this marks an unquestionable shift, at least for how he works with his flock, if not for himself.

What is clear from the evidence is that by the dawn of the fifth century, Augustine had moved from the classic position of the philosophers, that reason is the highest human good, which is shared with the eternal divine reason. Cavadini frames it as a rethinking rather than the major inversion I propose, “*De doctrina christiana* presents a cohesive rethinking of Augustine’s earlier philosophical synthesis of Christian doctrine.”⁴⁰ In Cavadini’s assessment, the commitments of philosophy remain largely unchallenged. Instead of being framed in the rhetorical/liberal arts language of *Lib. arb.* they are now framed as being mere objects to plunder so long as they point us towards God’s love. This is correct as far as it goes, but misses the deeper shift which Augustine had already started making by *Lib. arb.* Reason itself—the gold standard of the philosophers—is good only insofar as it points towards and facilitates love of the triune God.⁴¹ God’s will, which is God’s love, is the terminus of any line of questioning. Nothing can be found which is greater than God’s will. The will of rational creatures (humans and angels)

39. Books III and IV do not address the topic at hand. At any rate, consensus (such that it is) is that IV and V were written much later, perhaps 427. For the diachronic analysis undertaken here, addressing IV and V here would divert from our task too greatly. William S. Babcock, “Caritas and Signification,” in *De Doctrina Christiana: A Classic of Western Culture*, ed. Duane W. H. Arnold and Pamela Bright, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 162.

40. John C. Cavadini, “Salvation and Rhetoric,” in *De Doctrina Christiana: A Classic of Western Culture*, ed. Duane W. H. Arnold and Pamela Bright, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 171.

41. “No longer self-deluding and there fore no longer self-defeating, it loves the triune God in whom alone *beatitudo* is to be found; it loves those with whom this love for God can be held in common.” Babcock, “Caritas and Signification,” 149.

is good so long as it is aligned with the love of God. Having left Egypt and plundered it for all it is worth, Augustine pauses to reflect on the journey that brought him to this point.

Summary

Augustine's concept of volition developed through time. It is deeply bound up with his anthropology, that is, with how he understands the body, the soul, the mind, reason, the intellect and memory. His journey started with Cicero and the Stoic conviction that reason is humanity's highest good. His early adulthood is spent reading and digesting the philosophy he could find, seeking beatitude. He understood the soteriological claims of Platonism, Stoicism—that our reason is our eternal good. His sojourn with the Manichaeans was an extension of this search for beatitude. They held, like all gnostic sects, that secret knowledge (*gnosis*) saves. When he discovered that their leaders were less intelligent than he had expected he was so disappointed that he decided to leave the community. His brief flirtation with the skeptics was one step towards his coming to set aside the classical position that reason is humanity's highest good. When coupled with learning the privation theory of evil, we can understand his move away from the classical cognitive soteriology, towards a Christian alternative.

In the initial years after his conversion he had not fully integrated his novel insights. His initial impulse was to develop a christianized liberal arts program—a program he abandoned because it was aimed at the wrong target. If the locus of our beatitude is not in our reason, but in our love, why model an educational program on a system which was designed to train the mind, but ignored the will? By *Doc. Christ.* he understood philosophy to be a resource to be plundered as the Israelites fleeing Egypt. There are good things there, but we should take what is good, and leave.

At no point does he denigrate reason or the mind. Reason is a very good thing, but it is not the locus of our beatitude. We cannot be saved by learning the correct things or by contemplating eternal realities. Our highest good, the one thing we cannot lose, comes from loving God. Knowledge, when it does not puff up, can be an aid in loving well, but it is not necessary to know all truths to love adequately. Along with the philosophers, Augustine had been studying his Pauline epistles.

CHAPTER 4:

Volition in the Confessions and later works

In this chapter I will continue the work started in chapter 3, beginning with *The Confessions* and moving on through the other later major works. As with the rhetorical structure of *Lib. arb.* and *Doctr. chr.*, the later works frequently begin with a focus on the mind, or reason, then quietly move into a discussion of love or volition. This pattern follows his own conversion story. Augustine never denigrates the mind (or reason), he never denies that it is somehow deeply connected to the *imago Dei*. His move is to say that the locus of our fall, and the locus of our salvation reside not in the mind, but in the will. Our beatitude cannot come about from thinking correctly—angels with all knowledge did that and fell—but only from loving God correctly. Knowledge and understanding are good things if they help us to love God more fully, but if they lead us away from God, then they are not good. He wants to know, he uses the full force of his reason to understand, but only in service to loving God more deeply.

The Confessions: *beatae vitae inquisitor ardens*

Augustine started the confessions in 397 and finished writing them in 401. Here he returns, in the opening paragraph, to the question he started in *Lib. arb.*: can we love God before we know God? *Da mihi, Domine, scire et intellegere, utrum sit prius invocare te an laudare te et scire te prius sit an invocare te.*¹ This is, of course, right after he said that our hearts are restless

1. *Conf.* I.1. Tell me that I may know and understand, Lord, which is first, to call upon you or to praise

until they rest in God. The question of our nature and its rest—the Stoic concern—and its connection to mind and heart is set up as the opening question.² Can we know God before we praise God? Can we praise God before we know who it is we are praising? This is not pious filler, but a deep concern. The question that troubled medieval philosophy and modern theology, the relationship between faith and reason, has its roots in Augustine’s query here. Anselm’s formulation of “faith seeking understanding” can trace its lineage directly back to the question as raised in *Lib. arb.* and *conf.* For Augustine, the ultimate solution was to set the question aside in favor of loving God being primary. Faith and reason are products of love—even imperfectly formed love. Knowing well assists in loving well, but knowing alone is never sufficient. Faith is required, but only until our knowing is complete, and knowing is only complete in love. When it comes to God, we love before we know; if we are fortunate we might come to know, but knowing is worthwhile only for the purpose of loving more.

He develops this shift through his often-overlooked infancy narrative. The infant Augustine had volitions, and he indicates here that they were pre-rational, yet real.³ Pre-rational volitions are desires that cannot be examined, communicated or acted upon. His body was

you, and if it is first to call upon you or to know you?

2. This same language appears in Anselm’s *Proslogium* I: *Quid faciet servus tuus, anxius amore tui et longe “proiectus a facie tua” [...] Denique ad te videndum factus sum et nondum feci, propter quod factus sum.* What shall your servant do, anxious in love for you, and cast afar from your face? I was made to see you, and I have not done that for which I was created.

3. *Conf.* I.6.8. *Et ecce paulatim sentiebam, ubi essem, et voluntates meas volebam ostendere eis, per quos implerentur, et non poteram, quia illae intus erant, foris autem illi nec ullo suo sensu valebant introire in animam meam. Itaque iactabam membra et voces, signa similia voluntatibus meis, pauca quae poteram, qualia poteram: non enim erant veresimilia.*

Little by little I began to sense where I was and desired (*voluntates*) to make my desires (*volebam*) known, to those who could satisfy them; I was not able, because these desires were inside me and those around me could not see into my soul. I flailed my arms and legs and made noises similar to my desires (*voluntatibus meis*)—as much as I was able, as well as I could—but they lacked verisimilitude.

incapable of taking action other than flailing, his speech was too limited to communicate, his mind was too weak to know what they were. But he still had will; indeed he thinks he was a willful child. Reflecting on the abuse he suffered in his childhood education, he subverts Plato's paradigm: *Nemo autem invitus bene facit, etiamsi bonum est quod facit.*⁴ This is in contrast with "no one, knowing better, chooses the worse"—the question of *akrasia* discussed in chapter 1. He only studied because he did not want to be beaten. He understood that study would set him up for success, but he still would rather have played ball. Rhetorically, it seems without question that everyone in his audience would understand and relate to his childhood experience. Children know that school is important, but every child has moments when they would rather be playing than studying. This is not simply childhood irrationality, it is connected with the condition of our nature. His claim is theological, reason does not win because it is God's decree that due to error, we make errors: *Iussisti enim et sic est, ut poena sua sibi sit omnis inordinatus animus.*⁵ Here again we see *animus* being used in a vague way, it could be soul, it could be mind. By not using *mens* or *spiritus*, which would be clearer, the question of just how this punishment operates is left open.

After the of the pear throwing incident, and the "chorus of yawns across the centuries," Augustine cements his rejection of the idea that we only ever choose the better when known.⁶

4. *Conf.* I.12. No one does good reluctantly, even if what he does is good.

It is common to translate *invitus* as "unwillingly." I opt to use "reluctantly" here to avoid implying that *voluntas* is what is being considered. His point here is that if we do something "good" but we do not want to do it, it is not good. Being compelled to do a good deed (by force of beatings, in this case) means that the good done has no merit. With a few minor conceptual adjustments, he predicts Kant's position that a good deed is only good if it is done with the correct intentions.

5. *Conf.* I.12. You have commanded it, and it is so, that every disordered mind should be its own punishment.

6. William Mallard, *Language and Love: Introducing Augustine's Religious Thought Through the*

*Ecce cor meum, Deus, ecce cor meum, quod miseratus es in imo
abyssi. Dicat tibi nunc ecce cor meum, quid ibi quaerebat, ut
essem gratis malus et malitiae meae causa nulla esset nisi malitia.
Foeda erat, et amavi eam; amavi perire, amavi defectum meum,
non illud, ad quod deficiebam, sed defectum meum ipsum amavi,
turpis anima et dissiliens a firmamento tuo in exterminium, non
dedecore aliquid, sed dedecus appetens.*⁷

Knowing better, he chose the worse. It was not simply unreasonable, but the unreasonableness was delightful. He loved it. It was desirable because it was undesirable, irrational, and

unexplainable. Why does a man murder? A stoic can only answer, ‘because he covets his neighbor’s property or wife.’ Or, maybe because he was simply cruel—no one would believe such a thing! *Num homicidium sine causa faceret ipso homicidio delectatus? Quis crediderit?*

*Nam et de quo dictum est vaecordi et nimis crudeli homine, quod gratuito potius malus atque crudelis erat; praedicta est tamen causa: Ne per otium, inquit, torpesceret manus aut animus.*⁸

Augustine, parroting Plato’s line, implies that senselessly cruel people are unthinkable—*akrasia* is impossible. Cataline’s reason—lest his hand get out of practice through disuse—is not a reason, it is a further act of cruelty, an acknowledgement of the irrationality of it all. Surely this rhetorical device was intended to make his readers recall the bullies and brutes which everyone has encountered at some point in their lives. Most of us can remember moments when we ourselves have been irrationally cruel. *Quis crediderit? Omnes!*

Confession Story (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Universtiy Press, 1994), 29.

7. *Conf.* II.2.4. Behold my heart, God, behold my heart, which you pitied even in the pit. Behold my heart and let it tell you what it sought there, when I was evil without gain and nothing caused me to do evil but evil itself. It was foul and I loved it. I loved being ruined. I loved my faults. Not why I did them, but I just loved doing them. A depraved soul, falling from your safety into death, seeking nothing from the deed but shame itself.

8. *Conf.* II.5.11. Would anyone murder without reason, just for the delight of it? Who would believe it? It is said there was a man who “was senseless and cruel for no reason.” Yet, he gave a reason, “I don’t want my hand or mind (*animus*) to get out of practice through disuse.”

In spite of all this irrationality, the language of love and desire permeates books II and III. *Quid ego miser in te amavi, o furtum meum?*⁹ *Et quid erat, quod me delectabat, nisi amare et amari?*¹⁰ His language burns, full of references to the slimy desires of the flesh (*de limosa concupiscentia carnis*) and sensual delights. He is in love with the idea of being in love.¹¹ And while he does draw a distinction between what can be translated as love and lust, it does not seem to be a distinction that is very important.¹² He abandons it at many points; *Amare et amari dulce mihi erat magis, si et amantis corpore fruere.*¹³ The terms of desire and the terms of love are deeply interconnected and almost interchangeable. The same terms for loving a lover's body apply to God's love for us; *Hoc enim tu, Domine Deus, qui animas amas, longe alteque purius quam nos et incorruptibilis misereris, quod nullo dolore sauciaris.*¹⁴ Love is what is desired. Desire is what is loved. Love and desire are neutral in themselves, it is their objects which make them good or bad things. God's love for us is pure, because God loves us for God's own sake; our burning for our lover's body is bad because it is not love directed to our eternal good, which is loving God. We suffer when our loves fail, when relationships end, when friends die. God does not suffer.

9. *Conf.* II.6.12. What was it that I, a wretch, love in you, my act of theft?

10. *Conf.* II.2.2. What was there to delight me except to love and be loved?

11. *Conf.* III.1. *Nondum amabam et amare amabam et secretiore indigentia oderam me minus indigentem.* I was not yet in love, but I was in love with love; by a hidden want I hated myself for wanting so little.

This is an interesting detail that I can only acknowledge here, it is very odd that he could hate himself (*oderam me*), when he so strongly asserts in other places that self-love is simply given.

12. *Conf.* II.2.2. ... *ut non discerneretur serenitas dilectionis a caligine libidinis.* I could not discern between the serenity of love (*dilectio*) and the fog of lust (*libido*).

13. *Conf.* III.1. To love (*amare*) and to be loved was sweet to me, all the better if I enjoyed my lover's body.

14. *Conf.* III.2.3. [This mercy] is indeed yours, Lord God; you love our souls (*animas*) with a love deeper and wider than we have for ourselves and you are unchangeably merciful because you do not suffer from sorrow.

After finding Cicero's *Hortensius*, he burned again, this time for God; *Quomodo ardebam, Deus meus, quomodo ardebam revolare a terrenis ad te, et nesciebam quid ageres mecum!*¹⁵ The object of his love was correct; he had identified the correct thing to love, but he did not know what it was he loved, *Deus meus [...] cum te non secundum intellectum mentis, quo me praestare voluisti beluis, sed secundum sensum carnis quaererem.*¹⁶ He loved God as Cicero had shown him to love God, as a philosopher would. But the problem of evil and his attachment to beautiful rhetoric drew him to the Manicheans. He desired God, he even insists that he loved God, but in retrospect he had not identified God. He was still in the snares of the idea that the mind somehow participated in the divine, *non enim noveram neque didiceram nec ullam substantiam malum esse **nec ipsam mentem nostram summum atque incommutabile bonum.***¹⁷ The problem of evil was only one of two errors which trapped Augustine in the Manichean mindset. The second was the underlying assumption that human reason is a share in the divine reason—if we know the right things we can only ever act correctly. The problem of *akrasia* is not simply that we do what we know we ought not do, but that *we rational creatures*—sharing in the divine reason which stands behind all existence—do what we know we ought not do. If reason is what Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics (and it seems the Manicheans) all believed it to be, then *akrasia* is a devastating problem. *Qualis in me tunc erat **nesciente alio lumine illam illustrandam esse, ut sit particeps veritatis, quia non est ipsa natura veritatis.***¹⁸ Human reason

15. *Conf.* III.4.8. How I burned my God! How I burned with desire to fly from earthly things to you, and I did not know what you would do with me.

16. *Conf.* III.6.11. My God, I sought you not according to my mind (*intellectum mentis*), by which you willed to raise me above beasts, but according to my bodily sense.

17. *Conf.* IV.15.25. I had not yet learned nor discovered that evil is not a substance **nor our mind the highest and incommunicable good.** (emphasis mine)

18. *Conf.* IV.15.25. So it was then for me, not knowing that light [my reason] **must be illuminated by**

(*rationalis mens*) is distinct from, and needs the assistance of God's reason, in order to understand correctly. We desire truth, we burn for it, yet we cannot find it on our own. Even with minds illuminated by the divine light, happiness is not secured. Knowledge does not give beatitude: *Infelix enim homo, qui scit illa omnia, te autem nescit; beatus autem, qui te scit, etiamsi illa nesciat. Qui vero et te et illa novit, non propter illa beatior, sed propter te solum beatus est.*¹⁹

Augustine was seeking the happy life, not transitory joy like he saw in the drunks on the streets of Rome and Milan. He was intent on securing happiness which cannot be lost, and while it was clear that he was intelligent and well-read, he could not find it in reason or understanding. The Manicheans could not show it to him in their *gnosis*. The philosophers were better able to explain the physical world, but still beatitude eluded him. Giving up on this quest, he turned his attention to the problem of evil, *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.*²⁰ Whence evil? It could not be from a good God. It could not be second, evil god like the Manicheans claim. It is this line of thinking which leads him to the conclusions he presented in *Lib. arb.*: God is good, immutably so, thus keeping with the position

another light in order to participate in the truth, the truth which is not its nature. (emphasis mine)

19. *Conf.* V.4.7. Unhappy is the person who knows all this and does not know you. Happy is the one who knows you even if he does not know all this. The one who truly knows you and all this is not happier for knowing it, but only happy on account of you.

20. *Conf.* VII.3.5. I intended to discern what I had heard, that free choice of the will is the cause of the evil we do and that your righteous judgment is our suffering. But this I could not clearly discern.

This is one of the curious places where *liberum voluntatis arbitrium* appears.

of the philosophers. But God is good not because God is pure reason, but because God wills to be good.

*Nulla enim prorsus modo violat corruptio Deum nostrum, nulla voluntate, nulla necessitate, nullo improviso casu, quoniam ipse est Deus et quod sibi vult, bonum est, et ipse est idem bonum; corrumpi autem non est bonum. Nec cogaris invitus ad aliquid, quia voluntas tua non est maior quam potentia tua. Esset autem maior, si te ipso tu ipse maior esses: **voluntas enim et potentia Dei Deus ipse est.***²¹

God wills to be good, and God is simply God's will and the power to effect that will.

It is not so for humans, *et tamen non fiebat, faciliusque obtemperabat corpus tenuissimae voluntati animae, ut ad nutum membra moverentur, quam ipsa sibi anima ad voluntatem suam magnam in sola voluntate perficiendam.*²² The soul is unable to will what it actually wills. The body obeys the soul, yet the will cannot be made to will anything.²³ The mind-body problem, which so confounds philosophy after Descartes (as discussed in chapter 2) is nowhere to be seen. It is simply self-evident that the body obeys the soul. The infinite causal regress—an act of the will requiring a prior act of the will—is not the issue at stake. Rather, the problem is that we cannot control what we desire in a first-order manner. Augustine explores the notion that when

21. *Conf.* VII.4.6. For absolutely no corruption violates our God; no will, no necessity, no unforeseen chance. God is what God is, and what he wills for himself is good, and God is goodness itself. Corruption is not good. Nor are you [God] forced to do anything against your will, because your will is not greater than your power. But if it were greater, you would be greater than yourself. **God's will and God's power simply are God.** (emphasis mine)

22. *Conf.* VIII.8.20. Yet it was not done, it was easier for the body to obey the will of the soul that its members might be moved at pleasure, than for the soul by its own will to accomplish its willing.

23. *Conf.* VIII.9.21. *Imperat animus corpori, et paretur statim.*

The soul commands the body and it immediately obeys.

The translations I consulted use “mind” for *animus* here. Ryan's translation, in an interesting shift, used “soul” for *animus* in VIII.8 and switched to “mind” for VIII.9. Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Image, 1960-08-23), 197.

we half-will something, there must be two wills: *Et ideo sunt duae voluntates, quia una earum tota non est et hoc adest alteri, quod deest alteri.*²⁴ This is not the “monstrous” thing he thought it to be a few sentences before, but is a result of sickness: *Non igitur monstrum partim velle, partim nolle, sed aegritudo animi est.*²⁵ The immediate worry is a charge that this is the Manichean position, since he quickly moves to dispute the claim that humans have two competing natures if they have two wills.²⁶ In my reading, the use of the “two will” language is intended to be a foil, and it becomes absurd when he talks about having multiple desires, not just two. The will struggling against itself is not indicative of a plurality of wills in a single soul, but a result of the sickness.²⁷ It is a symptom of the sickness for a soul to be rent asunder by multiple desires for various evils (different manners of murdering someone), it is also a symptom of the sickness for a will to struggle between two goods (reading the Gospels and reading the psalms). The sickness is in the will not being able to decide. So long as the will desires things which will not fulfill its nature, it will be drawn in many directions by whatever catches its fancy

24. *Conf.* VIII.9.21. Therefore, there are two wills, since one is not complete and what the one has the other lacks.

25. *Conf.* VIII.9.21. Therefore, it is not a monstrous thing to partly will and partly not, it is a sickness of the soul.

26. Judith Chelius Stark, “The Pauline Influence on Augustine’s Notion of the Will,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 34, no. 4 (12-1989), 356-357.

Judith Stark sees Augustine’s conversion experience as being facilitated by his reading Paul, but notes the Neoplatonic influences. She concludes that Augustine deploys Paul’s letter to the Romans as a rhetorical device to the intended audience of the Confessions, fellow clergy. Paul’s words are the starting point, but he quickly moves beyond what he finds in them, “Augustine used Pauline language and concepts to analyze and interpret his own conversion, while at the same time plumbing the depths of the paradox of will far more thoroughly and extensively than seen in Paul’s Epistles.”

27. Qinn takes a slightly different reading, but also concludes that the talk of the two (or multiple wills) is not intended to be understood literally. “The entitatively one will is operationally two, harboring two offsetting volitional inclinations.” John M. Quinn, OSA, *A Companion to the Confessions of St. Augustine* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002), 449.

and by whatever habits it has. The inability to decide, the symptom of the sickness, is due to the fact that the primary object of the will is not loving God. This sickness of the will turns out to be the result of the first sin. The cure for this sickness is Christ, who focuses the will and restores unity to the soul.

Returning to his narrative from his reflection on the will and nature, Augustine says, *Sic aegrotabam et excruciar accusans*.²⁸ *Aegroto* is a somewhat unusual word in Augustine's writings, appearing fewer than ten times in the *Confessions* and only a dozen times in all of *Civ. Dei* (with most of those coming in two paragraphs on horoscopes and divination). It is not insignificant that the kind of sickness that is caused by a divided soul is the same that he describes in such vivid detail in the lead-up to the climactic conversion story. The moment of conversion promptly follows. *Tolle, lege* does not lead him to new knowledge, but a change of love. In the final chapter of Book VIII, the language *voluntas*, which was center in the previous chapter, vanishes. *Mens* and *animus*, likewise, are absent. *Nescio* (I don't know) and *corde* (heart) become the center. The sickness of the will, being unable to love with a unity of will is healed when he prays *Ecce modo fiat, modo fiat*.²⁹

The anti-Pelagian Writings: *hoc est ergo gratiam Dei ponere in lege atque doctrina.*

The next turn comes when Pelagius reads *O amor, qui semper ardes et numquam exstingueris, caritas, Deus meus, accende me! Continentiam iubes: da quod iubes et iube quod vis*.³⁰ No one can be content unless God gives it, Augustine wrote. This disquieted Pelagius

28. *Conf.* VIII.11.25. Thus was I sick and tormented.

29. *Conf.* VIII.11.25. Behold, let it be done, let it be done!

30. *Conf.* X.29.40. O Love, which always burns and nothing can extinguish; O love, my God, set me alight! You command continence: give what you command and command what you will.

greatly. Intellectually, Pelagius followed Augustine onto Augustine's own turf almost completely. Pelagius accepts the existence of a will and seems to understand Augustine's position that it is mind independent. It seem likely that Pelagius formed his own understanding of the will from Augustine's argument in *Lib. arb.*—which he read and quoted. Pelagius agrees with Augustine completely that sin is a product of the will, that if it is not willed, it cannot be a sin. If Pelagius had never read *Lib. arb.* he might never have developed his position that humans are fully culpable for their acts because they will them. If this is as far as Pelagius had gone, Augustine would have appreciated his name being used to support Pelagius' work. The next step that Pelagius took, however, was a step too far. Not only are all our sins ours because we will them, any good that we do is also only ours because, those too, are entirely willed by us.

Between the writing of *Lib. arb.* and when Pelagius read *Conf.* a shift had taken place in Augustine's theology, promoted by Augustine's meditation on 1 Cor. 4:7: *What do you have that you have not received?* All that we have is a gift from God. The start of his reflection on this is evident in the passages of the Confessions where he discusses creation *ex nihilo*. All things that exist do so because God wills them to be. Pelagius agrees with this as a basic principle—indeed he insists upon it. It is in how this goodness is connected to our own condition that the difference arises.

Peleagius's central argument is that God gave human nature the capacity, the will, and the power to act. The nature which all humans share is God's gift to humanity and it is good. The will to act in accordance with God's decrees is part of that nature, which is the primary way God's grace comes to us. Like most of the other fathers, Pelagius held that reason is the locus of the *imago Dei* in humanity. Lacking any visible weapons like claws, God gave us "better interior

weapons of reason and judgment.”³¹ The will is the ability to freely decide, this freedom is a very high good, almost as important as reason. Reason rules the will, “where we see willing and refusing, choosing and rejecting, we understand the functioning of the freedom of the will, not the forces of nature.”³² Pelagius presents a kind of modified Stoicism; one in which our reason is still the defining mark of our nature. It is the role of the will to obey and act upon the decisions of reason. Any act we take is, by definition, a rational act; it may be ill-informed, but its goodness or evilness is entirely up to our cognition’s prompting our behavior. Training in reasoning and virtue when we are young can shape a person’s entire life, “literary pursuits are better implanted in young minds. The first things established in the mind tend to be firmly embedded in a person’s disposition.”³³ God’s grace, for Pelagius, is three things; the first is our nature, the second is an erasing of debts, and the third is supplementary cognitive content—information, or beliefs. Jesus’s example and the teachings of scripture supply all that is needed for one to live a holy life. While we need to be born again, according to Pelagius, this is a forensic declaration of righteousness, not a change in our fundamental being. Our nature is not damaged; it cannot be healed. Our wills are not things which could be damaged, our problem is ignorance.

Up to this point Augustine’s arguments had been to convince people that there is such a thing as the will, and that the will is the locus of our beatitude. When his dispute with Pelagius starts, that question is settled: there is such a thing as a will and it is not insignificant in Pelagius’

31. Pelagius, “Letter to Demetrias,” in *Theological Anthropology*, ed. William G. Rusch, Sources of Early Christian Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 41.

32. *Ibid.*, 49.

33. *Ibid.*, 51.

understanding of the human person. Pelagius agrees that the will is what makes an act good or evil. They agree that our nature is created by God and because it is created by God, it is good. What Pelagius does not follow in Augustine's argument is the claim that the mind is dethroned by the will—that reason alone is insufficient for our ability to live moral lives. Pelagius holds on to the classical position that reason is our *sumum bonum*. He rejects, for two reasons, the notion that if the will is distorted in some way, then reason is crippled as well. First, the will simply cannot be distorted because it is part of our nature, which is given by God and therefore good; natures cannot change. Second, even if an individual will were corrupted, that does not cause damage to the nature in which we all share—that is simply not how natures work.

Key points of Augustine's own line of reasoning are very evident in Pelagius' argument; God is the author of our nature, our nature is good, volition is a major component of human action, and sin is directly connected to volition—if we do not will it, it cannot be a sin, evil is a privation of good and literally no-thing. The latent Stoic assumption, that natures are immutable, is the first obvious difference. The second assumption, and a rejection of Augustine's explicit position in *Lib. arb.*—that reason always rules over will—is the main source of conflict. If we can reason correctly, and our natures are intact, then sin is always and only an irrational choice. If we simply gain the right knowledge, we will live sinless lives. It is possible that there could be people who do not need Jesus' atoning work to be saved; with proper training, there could be a person who lives a sinless life. Pelagius asserts this only as a theoretical possibility, but even the possibility is simply out of the question for Augustine; *all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*.

Prior to Pelagius, Augustine has very little to say about our natures; in *Simpl.* I.11 he says, *Non enim est haec prima natura hominis sed delicti poena, per quam facta est ipsa mortalitas quasi secunda natura.*³⁴ The concept surfaces in a broadly Stoic way in *Lib. arb.* as mentioned above. These usages, in general, seem to be unreflective uses of the term. Pelagius responds in a work entitled *De Natura* and makes the concept the centerpiece of his reflection. Since evil is a privation of good, and not a substance in its own right, it cannot be something that damages a good thing, like a nature. Evil cannot be an efficient cause which is greater than the cause of our nature. In almost every way, Pelagius is simply playing back Augustine's own position, with minor modifications. The three points of difference are the rule of reason over the will, the primacy of reason, and the immutability of the human nature.

In *Simpl.* mortality was a kind of second nature (*mortalitas quasi secunda natura*). Augustine sees that this simply will not address his deepest worry, that no one can be saved apart from Christ. Pelagius had assumed Augustine's framework and shown it to have what Augustine found to be a disastrous consequence. Augustine's found the solution in Pelagius's use of "nature." The kind-of second nature becomes the condition of our nature. What was an odd semi-Stoic reference becomes the centerpiece of his entire anthropology. Augustine cannot let go of his position that all sin is caused by acts of will. Since (1) the will is the seat of love, (2) our beatitude—our nature's telos—is loving God, and (3) our will is also what causes us to sin, then a change to our will causes a change to our very nature. Sin is not only transgressing the law, it is also the punishment for that transgression, the natural (in several senses of the term) consequence of the first sin was a fundamental distortion of our nature. Adam's sin did not only

34. *Simpl.* I.11. Nothing remains of this first nature but the punishment of sin, through which mortality has become a kind of second nature.

cause Adam's death, it broke the human nature in such a way that the very thing which enabled it to satisfy its telos permanently malfunctioned. We can no longer love what we need to love to be happy because our nature—the thing that defines what it is for us to be happy—is damaged. Since happiness is now impossible, we die. Death is not natural (proper to our nature), but a result of the condition of our nature not seeking its telos. Willing, however, is primary to our nature, a point he belabors to Julian. *Motus animi quid est, nisi motus naturae? Animus enim sine dubitatione natura est; proinde voluntas motus est naturae, quoniam motus est animi.*³⁵

The question of what exactly grace assists is central to both Pelagius and Augustine. Both acknowledge that existence is a kind of grace and our nature is also a kind of grace, since both exist *ex nihilo* and by the will of God. But this cannot be the kind of grace which saves us from the consequences of sin in the world. Pelagius exact position is difficult to discern, since most of our access to his writings are through quotations in Augustine's work and Augustine accuses Pelagius several times of changing his position to suit his audience. In *Grat. Chr.*, Augustine defines Pelagius' position as recognizing that grace is involved in the existence of our nature (what would come to be known as natural grace in the medieval period). This is insufficient for Augustine since this is exactly what is damaged. The grace in question is the grace which saves, not that which is due our natures.³⁶ Our wills are part of our nature, the actions we will properly belong to us. On these two points they agree. For Pelagius the grace needed to save is cognitive, we simply need to learn the right things and then—because reason is our highest good—we

35. *C. Jul. imp.* V.40. Is the movement of the soul anything but a movement of nature? The soul is undoubtably natural, and so the movement of the will is natural, because it is a movement of the soul.

36. I will address this claim in Chapter 5. For now, suffice it to say that God would be unjust to create a nature with a telos that could not possibly be satisfied.

automatically will do the right things. Our problem is ignorance, the solution is saving knowledge given by God. Augustine's response is clear:

In his omnibus non recessit a commendatione legis atque doctrinae, hanc esse adiuvantem gratiam diligenter inculcans, et hoc exsequens quod proposuerat, cum diceret, "sed in Dei esse adiutorio confitemur". Denique Dei adiutorium multipliciter insinuandum putavit, commemorando doctrinam et revelationem, et oculorum cordis adaptionem, et demonstrationem futurorum, et apertionem diabolicarum insidiarum, et multiformi atque ineffabili dono gratiae coelestis illuminationem: ad hoc utique ut divina praecepta et promissa discamus. Hoc est ergo gratiam Dei ponere in lege atque doctrina.³⁷

Augustine is not denying that grace exists in the law and teaching, but rather identifying that the law and teaching are insufficient for saving us. Prophets taught, the law was given, and yet sin persisted. The law and doctrine are useful for revealing our sin, but they do not (and cannot) heal the damage done by sin. Without a fundamental change, a change in our very nature, we cannot be saved from death. It is not enough for wisdom to be given, it must be loved: *nec solum revelatur sapientia, verum et amatur.*³⁸ *Qua gratia agitur, non solum ut facienda noverimus, verum etiam ut cognita faciamus; nec solum ut diligenda credamus, verum etiam ut credita diligamus.*³⁹ The will is not the instrument of the choice of the mind, but rather the locus of love. Grace may impart new information, but that is secondary to restoring the ability to love.

37. *Grat.* I.7.8: In all this, he never gets beyond commending the law and doctrine. This is how he inculcates what the help of grace is, and this way elaborates what he means when he says, "but we acknowledge the grace in the help of God." He thought the help of God could be framed in many ways, by commending teaching, revelation, opening the eyes of the heart, showing the future, pointing out diabolical snares, and illuminating the manifold and ineffable gifts of heavenly grace. The purpose of this help is to show divine teaching and promises to us. This is just locating God's grace in law and doctrine!

38. *Grat. Chr.* I.10.11. Not only in having wisdom revealed, but by loving truth.

39. *Grat. Chr.* I.12.13. By this grace, God not only makes us know what we ought to do but also do what we know, not only believe what we should love, but love what we believe.

De Trinitate

In the introduction to Edmund Hill's translation of book IX of *Trin.* Hill offers a diagram in which he seeks to describe the soul and its movement towards or away from God. In it he distinguishes *mens*, *animus* (rational souls), and *anima* (irrational souls). He situates *mens* as the upper part of *animus*. At the top of the chart is God, below it in descending order are *sapientia* (contemplation of eternal truths) and *scientia* (action; knowledge of temporal things) both are relative to *mens*.⁴⁰ Fair enough, as far as it goes, but it completely neglects *voluntas* and love; this seems odd since the first analogy of the Trinity given is love and the second explicitly includes the will.

Augustine follows a similar rhetorical strategy to the earlier works, starting with a broadly cognitive framework and then deftly moving to a volitional frame. He shifts his usage of *mens/animus* from the distinction established in *Lib. arb.* He explicitly focuses on *mens*, rather than letting *animus* carry double-duty. Even with this shift, he is not entirely consistent in how mind and will are related, *et cum tantum se vult esse, quantum est, par menti voluntas est, et amanti amor aequalis*.⁴¹ This is not a claim of identity of will and mind. He is making the claim that in the special case of self-love there is an analogy between will and mind like that between love and lover (will:mind :: love:lover). In the Godhead, there is a kind of analogy between

40. Augustine, *The Trinity*, ed. John E. Rotelle, O.S.A., The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, vol. V (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991), 261.

41. *Trin.* IX.2. Since it desires itself to be, as much as it is, **the will is equal to the mind** and love equals lover. (emphasis mine)

Hill translates the bolded section "will exactly matches mind here." Which gives a kind of identity that is not intended by Augustine. Augustine would never assert that "the Father exactly matches the Son," but would insist on a deep equality between them. If Augustine's analogy is to make any sense and be consistent with the Nicene *regula fide*, then we cannot go with Hill's translation.

lover, beloved and love and the three persons of the Trinity. This is an attempt to create an analogy that gives insight into God's unique unity, not a robust description of man's psychology. He is looking for something which has a rare kind of unity that all people can recognize. When a person loves herself, the lover, the beloved and the love have a kind of unity that gives us a conceptual model for gaining insight into the Trinity.

A second shift comes in the next paragraph, *mens enim amare se ipsam non potest, nisi etiam noverit se. Nam quomodo amat quod nescit?*⁴² In *Sol.* Augustine claimed he loved God without knowing God. Again, this passage comes in the middle of an argument about the unity of the three persons of the Godhead, not an articulation of human psychology. He rejects the argument that the eye sees without being seen as not a fitting analogy since the mind is immaterial. If there is one thing the mind knows, it is itself.⁴³ He deals with this more fully in the next book where he clarifies what he means. You cannot know something of which you know nothing, but by yearning to know it, you have a kind of love for it. Knowing God, the infinite, is impossible in an absolute sense, but we can know God in sufficient enough ways to love God.

This first model was a rough proposal, which he recognizes as inadequate: *Nunc ad ea ipsa consequenter enodatus explicanda limatior accedat intentio.*⁴⁴ So he changes the analogies to a psychological model of intellect, memory and will. Will is distinct in that it does not know many things, but is there for us to use or enjoy things: *Duobus igitur horum trium, memoria et*

42. *Trin.* IX.3. The mind is not able to love itself unless it knows itself. How can it love what it does not know?

43. Freud, and all modern psychology, completely reject this premise. Augustine has to develop a rather ad hoc argument to get around the Delphic oracle to Socrates. Again, his goal in this chapter is to develop an analogy for the diversity and unity of the Godhead, not to articulate a psychology or epistemology.

44. *Trin.* X.1.1. We must go on now to remove some of the knots and polish some of the roughness out of our first draft presentation of these matters. (Translation Hill) Augustine, *The Trinity*, 300.

*intellegentia, multarum rerum notitia atque scientia continetur; voluntas autem adest, per quam fruamur eis vel utamur.*⁴⁵ The *fui/uti* distinction of *Doctr. chr.* returns here. It is the will, not the intellect, which is responsible for the ways we love things and it is the will which is the nexus of the sin which comes from loving things in the wrong way. In this development in his psychology, *mens* takes on the role held by *animus* and *intellectus* becomes the locus of reason. *Haec igitur tria, memoria, intellegentia, voluntas, quoniam non sunt tres vitae, sed una vita; nec tres mentes, sed una mens, consequenter utique nec tres substantiae sunt, sed una substantia.*⁴⁶ Other than perhaps as a rhetorical move, I can discern no reason for this change in the way he uses *mens*, *animus*, and *intellectus* here. Even though the terms change, he still holds that the will is something different than reason, and that the will is uniquely the locus of our sin and our beatitude.⁴⁷

City of God

De civitate Dei (413-427) consumed the remainder of Augustine's life. The intended audience of this book was the cultured elite who were blaming the troubles facing the Roman empire on the Christians. Rome had been sacked by the Visigoths in 410 and blame fell on the Christians since they had been turning people away from the Roman gods who had protected the city for centuries. The early books were focused on his task of showing that even when the Roman gods were worshiped Rome still suffered, especially from moral corruption and internal strife. The last set of books focus on the Christian way of understanding the world and do so

45. *Trin.* X.10.13. Two of these three—memory and the intellect—contain facts and knowledge about many things; the will however is there to love or use them.

46. *Trin.* X.11.18. These three (memory, intelligence and will) are not three lives, but one life; nor are they three minds, but one mind, and consequently not three substances, but one.

47. I will address Book XI in the next chapter.

through a kind of running scriptural commentary. The middle books are the ones relevant to our task, especially books XI-XIV.

In his mature writings, Augustine is even more careful with his terms surrounding the mind than before.⁴⁸ In the earlier books, and even the opening chapters of XI, he has a greater emphasis on the role of reason than in the anti-Manichean writings, but again, his primary audience is not other Christians, but the pagans who blame Christians for the crisis in Rome. God's will, however, takes center stage at the start of Book XI. God creates all that is, including time, because God unchangeably wills it; his fundamental position, established as early as *Div. quae.*, that God's will is the terminus of any line of questioning, remained unchanged through the years.

As with *Lib. arb.*, after demonstrating that he can play the philosopher's game as well as they do, he quietly leads the reader onto his home turf. The move to place knowledge as being subservient to love comes in XI.7: *Quoniam scientia creaturae in comparatione scientiae Creatoris quodam modo vesperascit, itemque lucescit et mane fit, cum et ipsa refertur ad laudem dilectionemque Creatoris; nec in noctem vergitur, ubi non Creator creaturae dilectione relinquitur.*⁴⁹ Knowing without loving God is a dim endeavor. Yet, here knowledge is a necessary component of our beatitude, if we do not know that our beatitude is secure—if we fear it might be lost—then we cannot truly be happy.⁵⁰ All the speculation on angels is not for nothing; he uses

48. *Civ.* XI.3. *Sed quia ipsa mens, cui ratio et intellegentia naturaliter inest...* But according to the mind, in which the reason and intellect naturally reside...

49. *Civ.* XI.7. This knowledge of creatures is growing dim compared to the knowledge of the Creator; when knowledge is directed towards the love of the creator it dawns and is made morning. The night does not fall when the creature does not relinquish love for the creator.

50. *Civ.* XI.13.

them as a case to prove that being incarnate is not in-and-of-itself a bad thing, and that being rational is not in-and-of-itself an unqualified good thing. Angels rank above humans because they are rational and without bodies, yet some angels fell due to their misuse of their wills. All humans are fallen, but not due to our bodies, but our wills. A good will and rightly ordered love in an embodied creature is better than a corrupt will that loves incorrectly in a purely rational creature.⁵¹

Book XIV, however, details the case in an extraordinary way. In explaining that “the flesh” as used in scripture does not lead to Manichean conclusions, he makes the case that all sin originates in the mind, the body is prone to death because of the state of the soul. His quest for the *summum bonum* is front and center:

Quisquis enim hoc quod diximus prima fronte inspicit, vel non recolens vel minus advertens quemadmodum Scripturae sanctae loquantur, potest putare philosophos quidem Epicureos secundum carnem vivere, quia summum bonum hominis in corporis voluptate posuerunt, et si qui alii sunt, qui quoquo modo corporis bonum summum bonum esse hominis opinati sunt, et eorum omne vulgus, qui non aliquo dogmate vel eo modo philosophantur, sed proclives ad libidinem nisi ex voluptatibus, quas corporeis sensibus capiunt, gaudere nesciunt; Stoicos autem, qui summum bonum hominis in animo ponunt, secundum spiritum vivere, quia et hominis animus quid est nisi spiritus? Sed sicut loquitur Scriptura divina, secundum carnem vivere utrique monstrantur.⁵²

51. *Civ.* XI.16.

52. *Civ.* XIV.2. On the one hand, he may certainly suppose that the Epicurean philosophers live according to the flesh; for they place man’s highest good in the pleasure of the body. And he may suppose that the same is true of the other philosophers who hold in some way that the good of the body is man’s highest good. And he may also suppose that it is true of the common people: of those who subscribe to no doctrine, who do not practice any kind of philosophy, but who, having a leaning towards lust, know no delight except that derived from the pleasure which they receive through the senses. On the other hand, he may suppose that the Stoics, who place man’s highest good in the mind [*animus*], live according to the spirit. For what is man’s mind if not spirit. In fact, however, it is clear that all of these live according to the flesh in the sense intended by Divine Scripture when it uses the expression. (Translation Dyson).

Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. R. W. Dyson, trans. R. W. Dyson, Cambridge Texts in

The Stoic life of reason is no different than the Epicurean pursuit of bodily pleasures or the uneducated person's proclivity to lust. The body follows the soul. The affections also follow the will. If the will is bad, the affections will be too: *Interest autem qualis sit voluntas hominis; quia si perversa est, perversos habebit hos motus; si autem recta est, non solum inculpabiles, verum etiam laudabiles erunt. Voluntas est quippe in omnibus; immo omnes nihil aliud quam voluntates sunt.*⁵³ *Recta itaque voluntas est bonus amor et voluntas perversa malus amor.*⁵⁴ The words "will" and "desire" function in both scripture and secular authors as interchangeable terms.⁵⁵

How different is man in his fallen state from the natural state. In *Conf.* VIII.8.20 Augustine believed that the body simply obeyed the will. By *Civ.* XIV mind and body all rebel against the will: *Ipsa namque invito et animus plerumque turbatur et caro dolet et veterescit et moritur, et quidquid aliud patimur, quod non pateremur invito, si voluntati nostrae nostra natura omnimodo atque ex omnibus partibus oboediret.*⁵⁶ Perhaps he was simply realizing what age does to a body, or maybe there is a theological basis for this move. The evidence is unclear. What is clear is that the body, which is a good, does not always do what the will desires. Charges of latent Manicheanism are simply unfounded. The good life—beatitude without fear of loss—which he sought since first reading Cicero in his teen years, cannot be found on Cicero's Stoic terms. The

the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 582.

53. *Civ.* XIV.6. The state of the human will is what is important, if it perverse, the emotions will be perverse; if it is righteous, the emotions will not only be blameless, but truly praiseworthy. The will is involved in all of these, because all of them are nothing other than willings.

54. *Civ.* XIV.7.2. A righteous will, then, is a good love and a perverse will is an evil love.

55. *Civ.* XIV.8.2.

56. *Civ.* XIV.15.2. Even against his will his mind is often troubled; and his flesh endures pain, grows old, and dies and suffers all manner of things which we should not suffer against our will if our nature were in every way and in all its parts obedient to our will.

mind, as good as it is, falls to the will. Only in uniting our will with the divine will can we be given our eternal happiness. The failings of the body, so evident to the Stoics and Platonists, are only symptoms of the deeper problem. The soul is damaged, and that damage is located in our will, the thing which gives us our identity and makes us who we are. Our healing can only come through a healing of the will, which must come from outside of us. No knowledge can solve this problem. Wisdom, which is clinging to the Truth in love, saves. Truth is not something we can possess, it is not a thing in the mind, Christ alone is Truth and Wisdom. We cannot master Christ, we must be mastered by Christ through conformity of our will to Christ's.

Summary

Augustine's early-life story is the search for beatitude, a search that was frustrated because none of the answers he was given actually worked. The more he pursued happiness the more he became frustrated. Neither crass hedonism, nor the mysteries of the Manicheans, nor the philosophers were able to explain why enduring happiness eluded him. His search was primarily in focused on the life of the mind. Augustine's understanding of the Stoic, Peripatetic and Platonic philosophies went beyond idle curiosity and a dilettante's reading. He clearly understood their commitments, including the role of reason and the impossibility of *akrasia*. Their theories were unable to explain his lived experiences. The Christian framework, as he eventually came to understand (and extend) it, was able to better articulate an answer to the question of why people do evil, why we experience evil, and what evil is. He became convinced that beatitude comes not from knowledge—whether contemplation of the forms or mysterious *gnosis*—but from love. Beatitude is not found in the mind, but in the will; not in the understanding, but in the heart. It was through learning that evil is not a substance and that the mind is not our highest good that he came to have his conversion experience: *non enim noveram*

*neque didiceram nec ullam substantiam malum esse nec ipsam mentem nostram summum atque incommutabile bonum.*⁵⁷ The history of Augustine studies has focused so much on the first half of this sentence that the profound importance of second has been lost.

Early after his conversion, before he had fully integrated his insight, he sought to develop a Christian liberal arts education. He abandoned this project because he came to believe that it could not be done. The underlying assumptions of classical antiquity were irreconcilable with his novel theological insights. After abandoning this early project, he proceeded to develop a powerful counter-theory in which he deployed the full force of his rhetorical powers to subvert and replace these deeply held assumptions. His strategy to bring people to the Christian understanding was to appear to begin on standard ground, get the reader to buy into a position just outside the philosophic framework being explored, then use that as an entry point into presenting his position in a very compelling way. Trained philosophers would recognize the smuggled premise, but his audience were not typically trained philosophers, but those who had absorbed the popular versions of philosophy through cultural osmosis. He was successful because his case was compelling and seemed to explain something the philosophers could not—and had the weight of his episcopal authority behind it.

Volition, a part of the soul (*animus*) which is distinct from the mind (*mens*) or reason (*ratio*), was the key to his argument (In *Trin.* he changed terminology and volition was part of the mind, but distinct from the intellect). His rhetorical efforts depended on the vague uses of these terms in Latin as they function as synonyms in non-technical usage. He was able to

57. *Conf.* IV.15.25. I had not yet learned nor discovered that evil is not a substance **nor our mind the highest and incommunicable good.** (emphasis mine)

leverage this ambiguity to shape his arguments to his various audiences. For his Christian audiences, he simply appealed to scripture to establish his concept of volition. For others, he used *animus* in a vague way, letting them think he meant *mens*; in claiming that the will is a movement of the *animus*, it could initially be understood to be something like a decision or a choice based on information.

As he developed this completely novel soteriology, one that situated beatitude in the will clinging to God (the only real immutable reality) rather than the mind participating in reason (what various schools of philosophy held to be the immutable reality), he found himself deeply at odds with those who still assumed the primacy of the mind. His Christian interlocutors held, following most of the fathers, that the *imago Dei* was located in reason;⁵⁸ his pagan opponents held that reason was simply One. Pelagius and Julian both accepted the reality of the will, but denied that it was anything other than an aspect or servant of the mind. Since sinning is always connected to the will, and the will is part of the mind, proper education is all that is necessary to keep one from sinning. Pelagius could claim that it was conceivable (but very improbable) for a child to be properly educated young enough to avoid sin. This implied to Augustine that there could possibly be people for whom Christ was unnecessary. The doctrine of Original Sin, in Augustine's final development, was his attempt to articulate a position in which it is impossible

58. Augustine sometimes explicitly links *imago Dei* and the mind as well, appealing to Paul: *Sicut enim non solum veracissima ratio, sed etiam ipsius Apostoli declarat auctoritas, non secundum formam corporis homo factus est ad imaginem Dei, sed secundum rationalem mentem.* (*Trin.* XII.7.12)

It is evident, not only by true reasoning, but also by the authority of the Apostle, that man was made in the image of God not in the body but in the rational mind.

Augustine has to follow the clear words of St. Paul here, he cannot allow himself to deviate from the authority of the Apostle. His primary goal in this chapter is to prove that the image of God is not found in the body. As with the other cases, he quickly moves from *mens* to *voluntas*.

that Christ would be unnecessary for any conceivable person. His concept of the will as the locus of our highest good and our sin, developed decades earlier, was used as a primary component of the mature form of his doctrine of Original Sin.

Augustine read and understood the classical philosophy. he was not a dilettante. He overtly rejected the assumptions that human reason and the eternal *logos* are one; he overtly rejected that our beatitude lay in contemplation of the forms. Later readers of Augustine who have tried to reconcile Augustine with Plato, Plotinus or the Stoics have missed this point and have broadly concluded that he was just bad at philosophy. This is to ignore Augustine's own words where he rejects these key premises. He did not start with this rejection, rather it took time for him to articulate what he was exploring in his early works. By the *Confessions* it was a major part of his thought, one which he would alter, but never abandon, through the rest of his life.

The change from reason to will as the highest good of humanity and the ability of the will to dethrone reason are at the core of his theological commitment to a robust doctrine of Original Sin. There are other commitments distinctly Christian commitments which factor in as well. I will explore these other commitments and the doctrine as a whole in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5:

non morior necessitate peccati, sed oboedientiae voluntate

This chapter will attempt to rearticulate Augustine's doctrine of Original Sin paying careful attention to his concept of volition, our highest good being a union of the human will with the divine will through love, and the role of nature and *telos* in his metaphysics. Recent scholarship is clear that Original Sin is not a concept which was new with Augustine; many of the fathers in both East and West held that all humanity shares *penalty* which results from Adam's sin, if not in the *guilt* itself.¹ What is distinct about Augustine's presentation is not that all humans suffer death because of some primordial event, but with his understanding of what that event actually was, how the penalty damages us, and his linking of the penalty with a concept of non-personal guilt. There are two outcomes from his final position which the catholic Church does not accept: damnation of unbaptized infants and a strong form of predestination. While he vigorously defends his position, at times he acknowledges how problematic it is—almost like he is trying to convince himself and can see no other alternative given the logical corner into which he has painted himself.²

1. Wilson, *Augustine's Conversion*, 93.

2. It is not my intent to defend Augustine's doctrine in its final form, only to faithfully articulate it in light of his concept of volition as explored in the previous chapters.

The mature form of Augustine's doctrine of Original Sin is Augustine's attempt to secure one basic theological commitment: apart from Christ, no one can be saved. For Augustine, it is not even conceptually possible that anyone can be saved apart from Jesus' work in the world. Augustine is so committed to this position that he is willing to accept a consequence of this commitment that most Christians find morally repugnant: unbaptized infants suffer eternal damnation. He fully understands how repugnant this consequence is, but it is the price he thinks he must pay to secure the absolute necessity of Christ for our salvation.³ At times, he even seems to recognize that his retreat to God's justice and the mystery of the divine will offer only shallow consolation to those who, like him, are deeply committed to God's unwavering goodness and love for God's own creation.⁴ The official doctrinal position of the Church, while following Augustine's line of reasoning most of the way, never fully embraced some of his conclusions. The doctrine of limbo, for example, was one way the Church tried to hold the necessity of Christ

3. To soften this, because he recognizes how repugnant this outcome is, he claims that infants suffer the least amount of pain in hell.

De pecc. meri. I.16.21 *parvulos sine baptismo de corpore exeuntes in damnatione omnium mitissima futuros.*

Children who leave the body without baptism will have the mildest damnation of all.

4. At other times, he simply calls those who disagree with him stupid. *Lib. arb.* III.23.69: *Quamquam isti calumniosi, et talium quaestionum non studiosissimi examinatores, sed loquacissimi ventilatores, etiam de pecorum doloribus et laboribus solent minus eruditorum sollicitare fidem, cum dicunt: Quid etiam pecora vel meruerunt mali, ut tanta patiantur incommoda, vel sperant boni, quia tantis exercentur incommodis?*

These slanderers, who are not serious inquirers into such questions, but mere windbags, often disturb the faith of those who are less educated by bringing up the pain and suffering of animals. "What evil have animals done," they ask, "to deserve such suffering? What good can they hope for to justify such pain?" (Translation Williams), Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1993), 117.

in one hand and God's goodness and justice being discernible by us with the other.⁵ Augustine was simply unwilling to make such compromises. *Extra ecclesia nulla salus*.⁶

Augustine is not the first person to articulate the doctrine. Tertullian, two centuries earlier, was already committed to something which could easily be recognizable as very close to Augustine's (pre-412) position.⁷ F. R. Tennant documents latent traces of the doctrine as early as Alexandrian Judaism; Philo of Alexandria had all the component parts, but "they as yet await gathering together into a single generalisation."⁸ As Wilson has shown, both the term "original sin" and the basic concept that somehow humans are born in a different state than they ought to be, was the normative position of the ante-Nicene fathers.⁹ The ante-Nicene fathers held that humans (even innocent children) die and are not supposed to and this situation is somehow because of the reality of sin. Human death is caused by the sin in which we all share. Augustine is the first person to develop the doctrine and deploy it as a major component in a larger

5. If our conscience is of any value, if our moral intuitions count for anything, then we must be able to at least have some inkling of what is good and what is not. The damnation of infants who have no personal sin seems unjust. This appeal to moral intuition does not depend on our consciences being fully formed or without err, but "close enough." A doctrine of total human depravity that renders the conscience completely incapable of discerning good from evil seems, at this stage, fundamentally incompatible with the presuppositions of this argument. It is no surprise that the theological systems in which total depravity is a commitment, doctrines such as limbo are completely unnecessary.

For a rich discussion of this idea, see Eleonore Stump, "The Mirror of Evil," in *God and the Philosophers: The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason*, ed. Thomas V. Morris, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 238-240.

6. Apart from the Church there is no salvation.

Yet, not simply so: *quam multae oves foris, quam multi lupi intus; et quam multae oves intus, et quam multi lupi foris!* *Ioannis*, 45,12. Many sheep are outside and many wolves inside; and how many sheep are inside, and how many wolves are outside.

7. Wilson, *Augustine's Conversion*, 57.

8. F. R. Tennant, *The Sources of the Doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin* (New York: Schocken Books, 1903), 142.

9. Wilson, *Augustine's Conversion*, 62, 93.

theological system. The systematic formulation—and a deepening of the commitments—came about because Pelagius, as shown in chapter 3, accepted much of Augustine’s conceptual framework, especially as related to Augustine’s novel deployment of the will as a reason-independent part of the soul. With only minor adjustments to Augustine’s system, Pelagius concluded that it was possible—but very unlikely—that a person could be saved without Christ. Claiming that infants are damned if they are not baptized was Augustine’s definitive way of asserting that there is no salvation—not even as a conceptual possibility—apart from Christ.¹⁰

The doctrine of Original Sin is not the same as the story of the first sin.¹¹ The story of the first sin—Adam and Eve in the garden with a talking serpent and a tree whose fruit grants knowledge of good and bad—need not literally be true for the doctrine of Original Sin to be the correct description of the human condition.¹² In his early commentary on Genesis (*De Genesi Contra Manichaeos*), he commends a spiritual reading, pointing out the logical problems of having light created on the first day but the sun, moon, and stars on the fourth. By his later “literal” commentaries, he shifts his perspective a bit. He no longer insists on a spiritual (or allegorical reading) and instead claims that the correct way to read them is as historically

10. Alistair C. Stewart, “The *De Peccatorum Meritis* and Augustine’s Rejection of Pre-Existence,” *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 34, (1988), 276-266.

11. *C.Jul.imp. V.40*

12. *De Gen. ad Lit. I.18.36. Non enim ad hoc ipsa Dei Sapientia nostra infirmitate suscepta venit ad colligendos sub alas suas filios Ierusalem, quemadmodum gallina pullos suos ut semper parvuli simus; sed ut malitia infantes, mente pueri esse desinamus.*

And so let us never think in a literal-minded, fleshy way of utterances in time through these days of divine works. The reason, I mean to say, why the very Wisdom of God took our weakness upon herself and came to gather the children of Jerusalem under her wings as a hen gathers her chicks was not that we should always remain little children, but that while being babies in malice we should cease to be childish in mind. (Translation Hill) Augustine, *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees; Unfinished Literal Commentary on Genesis; the Literal Meaning of Genesis*, ed. John E. Rotelle, O.S.A., trans. Edmund Hill, O.P., Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, vol. I/13 (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2002).

figurative. His later position is that historical events are also figurative. Just because they are figurative, that does not mean they are not historical as well. Rejecting the historicity out-of-hand is folly: *Mirum est autem, et vix ferendum, quemadmodum velint homines paradisum figurate dictum, et nolint etiam figurate factum.*¹³ Even in these so-called literal readings, the literalness does not trump our reason. If something is obviously a parable, there is no need to insist that it actually happened—as with the story of the good Samaritan.¹⁴ He insists that we must not start with the assumption that everything we do not understand is a parable. We should, on his later position, assume these stories are historical since we do not have defeating evidence.¹⁵ Scripture is to be understood and held to be literal and figurative unless it is absurd to be understood that way. If a literal reading is absurd, allegorical and spiritual reading are perfectly licit.

13. *Gen. ad Lit.* VIII.5.10. It is a wonder, and hardly bearable, how some want paradise to be a figurative story, and do not want it to be a figurative fact.

That is, it is a story which contains a deeper truth, but is also rooted in a historical event. The tree of life is both a tree and a symbol of Wisdom.

14. *Gen. ad Lit.* VIII.7.13. *Sed hoc modo acciperemus et quatuor haec flumina, si caetera quae de paradiso narrantur, non proprie sed figurate accipere ulla necessitas cogeret: at nunc cum primitus proprie res ipsas intellegere ratio nulla prohibeat, cur non potius auctoritatem Scripturae simpliciter sequimur in narratione rerum gestarum, res vere gestas prius intellegentes, tum demum quidquid aliud significant perscrutantes?*

But in this way [i.e. literally] we should accept these four rivers, even if necessity requires us to take the other things told about paradise in a figurative sense. But since nothing presently prevents our reason from understanding them in a proper, literal sense, why not carry on and accept the authority of scripture according to the story concerning the things done, and later seek after what else they might signify?

That is, the literal should be held so long as it is not contrary to reason. When it is, then we can give a figurative reading. If something is *obviously* a parable, then we must take it figuratively. But if we can take it literally, we should, unless some reason prevents us.

15. In light of modern scientific discoveries, I think Augustine would have come to read these stories as non-historical, given the method he defines in *Gen. ad Lit.* VIII. There is no possible way the four rivers ever converge at a single source, the story must be figurative without also being historical. His rejection of the eight-thousand year histories of the Egyptians (which are impossible on the Biblical timeline), for example, seems another instance of something he would have agreed to, if he had the evidence we do today.

At its core the doctrine is a profound rejection of *gnosis*—saving knowledge—which stood at the heart of the Manichean religion he had explored as a young man. Gnosticism, in a textbook definition, is any religion or philosophy marked by (1) an ontological dualism in which good and evil are opposed substances or powers that eternally struggle against each other; (2) creation is the product of this struggle and (2a) physical matter is a result of evil; (3) the immaterial (soul, mind, or spirit) is good and must escape from imprisonment in matter through learning/remembering *gnosis*—secret knowledge (4) that is available only to certain people. Augustine’s mature position rejects each point in this definition, and yet a very common criticism of the doctrine of Original Sin, as he formulated it, is that it is all a kind of gnosticism—remnants of his Manichean sojourn. Any charge of latent Manicheanism simply does not understand Augustine’s position, Manicheanism, or both.¹⁶

In conflating the doctrine of Original Sin with the story of the first sin, much ink has been spilled over how patriarchal the doctrine is since it lays the blame of all human problem on a woman—and therefore all women are to blame for humanity’s problems. The doctrine of Original Sin, as formulated by Augustine, does not suffer from this criticism; careless exegetes through history are responsible for this corruption of Augustine’s position. The story of the first sin in Genesis focuses the blame on the serpent. The woman is the victim of the serpent’s deception and the man willingly went along with the woman. There are three participants in the story, each has a different degree of willingness. The woman is deceived more than she is willing—her error is primarily cognitive, but not entirely so. The man’s error is primarily

16. Julian of Eclanum—Augustine’s friend, Bishop Paulinus of Nola’s son—leveled this charge frequently. In Julian’s case it seems to have been a personal attack since he knew that Augustine was sensitive to this particular charge.

volitional but ill-informed due to the woman's testimony. The serpent's error was profoundly volitional. But all that misses the point, which is the story opens a discussion and provides a etiology for the ideas behind the fundamental question: whence evil? The story might be patriarchal—and unquestionably has been interpreted in patriarchal ways throughout history—that does not imply that the doctrine of Original Sin is patriarchal. In fact, I hold that the doctrine is a bulwark against patriarchal thinking: no one escapes the damage of sin, all stand in need of salvation.¹⁷ Everyone, women and men alike, are damaged and distorted in such a way that death is inescapable. Shifting blame is the first manifestation of the consequences of sin; Adam blames God for making the woman who led him to sin. The relationship between God and humanity was distorted before God could even point out what had happened; death is not a curse given by God, but a consequence of the act taken by man.

The historic opposition to the doctrine dates back to before its initial articulation; indeed its mature formulation is a result of Pelagius and Julian's rejection of the core commitment. This opposition has continued unabated until the present. Books such as Danien Shroyer's *Original Blessing* continue to make the case that the doctrine is not only incompatible with Jesus' teaching, it is also morally and spiritually harmful.¹⁸ Conflating, as so many authors do, the doctrine of Original Sin with the story of the first sin, she claims that, "Because all the semen in the world was in Adam (bless his heart, or, as my friend said, bless Eve's), then all of humanity was present in the Garden. Because we all share in Adam's semen, we also share in Adam's

17. See *De. Trin.* XIII.7.12. for one example where he makes it clear that women and men alike possess the image of God.

18. Danielle Schroyer, *Original Blessing: Putting Sin in Its Rightful Place*, Kindle ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).

punishment.”¹⁹ And, “if we are taught to see our bodies as the source of our sin nature, it’s not particularly easy to appreciate them, much less to know what to do with them. When we believe our bodies are created good, we can choose to live into them as a natural part of human life blessed by God.”²⁰ Setting aside, for the moment, the fact that Augustine consistently (after his conversion to Christianity) held that our bodies are good and sin is not our nature but a privation of good in our nature—what is at stake for Schoyer and all those who came before her, is God’s goodness in creating humans.²¹ If we are created evil, or if our nature is evil, then God must be evil. But God is good, therefore our nature must be good. Augustine resoundingly agrees with this point: God is good, all that God creates is good, humans, as created by God, are good—even our bodies.

James Boyce, at the end of *Born Bad* (in which he defines Original Sin as the single doctrine that shaped western culture) offers what he intends to be a word of hope:

If the West is ever to move beyond original sin, history suggests this will not begin with the discarding of the doctrine’s view of human nature, which is now so ingrained that even atheists promulgate it. Rather, it may involve rejecting the caricature of a God who can only be at home in a sanctified soul or lost paradise. As the present environmental crisis brings the question of salvation once more to the fore, perhaps it is time to complete the journey that Western people embarked on when God was exiled to heaven. Freedom from the bondage of original sin has not come from

19. Ibid., 774/2481 Kindle.

20. Ibid., 1789/2481 Kindle.

21. Diarmuid O’Murchu, *Beyond Original Sin: Recovering Humanity’s Creative Urge* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2018), 13-17. O’Murchu bases his critique of the doctrine, in large part, on evolutionary biology. Given the evidence for evolution, the story of the primordial sin simply cannot be true. “A growing body of anthropological and paleontological evidence shows that when humans remain very close to the natural world—to the earth, soil, and land—they tend to get it right (never perfect).” Primitivism (as with Rousseau) is the optimal environment for human thriving.

throwing off the chains of religion, but it might yet come by bringing grace back to earth.²²

Boyce traces the doctrine through the middle ages. Only Celtic Christianity, on his reading, was able to escape the toxic poisoning by which the doctrine which corrupted the western mind. Every conceivable problem in the west owes its blame to Augustine's tragic invention. The reformation, on his analysis, is a competition to see who can double-down the hardest on their commitment to the doctrine. Even contemporary atheists are so steeped in it that their very atheism is a product of Augustine's innovation. Boyce's analysis of the doctrine and its consequences for all Western culture is entertaining, but not novel.

Albert Outler connects the rejection of the doctrine back to what he calls the "Enlightenment Credo," which serves as the background music of all modern thinking, including liberal Protestantism. He identifies this credo in 4 points:

- (1) Man is not natively depraved.
- (2) The end of life is life itself; the good life on earth instead of the beatific life after death.
- (3) Man is capable, guided solely by the light of reason and experience, of perfecting the good life on earth.
- (4) The first and essential condition of the good life on earth is the freeing of men's minds from the bonds of ignorance and superstition.²³

22. James Boyce, *Born Bad: Original Sin and the Making of the Western World* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2015), 197.

23. Albert C. Outler, *Psychotherapy and the Christian Message* (New York: Harper Chapel Books, 1954), 39.

The influences of the Enlightenment and modernism on Boyce and Schroyer are clear.²⁴ In keeping with the humanism of the early Enlightenment, the call *ad fontes!* is on display in their tacit appeal to Stoicism. The Stoic assumption that human reason is the same as the eternal reason (*logos*), sharing the same light, stands at the center of the modern project. We can understand the world because the *logos* in us simply is the one *logos*. Superstition is that which keeps us from fully using our reason, and if only we would throw off the chains of superstition, we could—of our own power—perfect life on earth. The relentless optimism in the goodness of humanity is tempered only by the restraining power of superstition, first and foremost the superstitious belief that we are somehow broken at the core of our nature. The saccharine inspirational office poster slogan, “Whether you think you can or you can’t, you are right,” is the extreme form of this line of thinking. We are held back only by our belief that we are somehow naturally damaged in such a way that our reason does not operate correctly, or that we are “naturally evil.” This is a point repeatedly made by Pelagius and Julian. If we believe we are naturally evil, then we have an excuse to not try to be good, and we can simply say with a shrug, “I was born this way.”

In spite of the continual opposition to the doctrine, key figures in the Church have insisted that it is a bedrock commitment. John Wesley, perhaps with a bit of homiletic hyperbole, framed his position this way:

But here is the shibboleth: Is man by nature filled with all manner of evil? Is he void of all good? Is he wholly fallen? Is his soul totally corrupted? Or, to come back to the text, is “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart evil continually?” “Allow

24. “Almost every Enlightenment thinker recognised the unreasonableness of the doctrine of original sin, at least as it pertained to guilt. What rational person could believe that the guilt of one man had been passed on to everyone else?” Boyce, *Born Bad*, 101.

this, and you are so far a Christian. Deny it, and you are but a heathen still.²⁵

Luther was primarily focused on what he called *peccatum radicale* (root sin)—a pervasive distortion of the person which kept them from loving God. In his Commentary on Romans, he affirmed the Augustinian notion of Original Sin, including it being (but not limited to) a distortion of the will. The 20th Century analytic philosopher Peter Geach held that the doctrine is so important that it transcends all other epistemic considerations: if we reject the doctrine we reject Christianity *in toto*. Any counter-claim must be rejected, “if we accept [the doctrine of Original Sin], there is an end of the matter; we must hang on to that truth though one claiming the authority of the apostle, or an angel, should teach us otherwise.”²⁶

What is at stake? Why does one doctrine divide Christianity so deeply? Both the defenders of the doctrine and those who find it abhorrent appeal to the absolute goodness of God in their position. Both sides insist that the opposite side somehow forces the conclusion that God is unjust or the author of evil. What is at stake is how we understand who God is and what God has done for us. Is this another game of theological ping-pong? It cannot be ping, therefore it must be pong?²⁷ Either Christ (here understood as dying and rising with Christ in baptism) is not

25. John Wesley, “Original Sin,” in *Works II*, ed. Albert Cook Outler, (1759), 183. Wesley, quite unfortunately, uses the language of nature in a sense which is betwixt and between the classical and the modern. Augustine would have flinched at how quickly Wesley was to say our nature is evil rather than being corrupted, sick or broken. Wesley was a product of his time and was using the term in the manner encoded in the standard Anglican sermons and the vernacular of the people. As Augustinian as Wesley is in many respects, this misuse of the term “nature” clouds what Augustine was trying to say.

26. Peter Geach, *Providence and Evil: The Stanton Lectures 1971-1972* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 85.

27. Basil Mitchell, “How to Play Theological Ping-Pong,” in *How to Play Theological Ping-Pong: And Other Essays on Faith and Reason*, ed. William J. Abraham and Robert W. Prevost, (New York: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990).

necessary for salvation or unbaptized babies suffer damnation, however mild it may be? The Church sought other solutions, alternative courses. The medieval distinction between our natural and super-natural *telos* is one attempt to find a middle ground.²⁸ Unbaptized infants enjoy their natural *telos*, happiness, but not the super-natural *telos* of the beatific vision—happy beggars content with meager scraps, for want of a little water and a few words excluded from the heavenly banquet.²⁹

If we accept the Enlightenment credo then there is nothing wrong with humanity. Death is simply a fact, it is as natural as gravity; everything decays. We can overcome disease, famine, and war by careful use of our reason; if we capture all knowledge in encyclopedia (or wikipedia), build really sophisticated artificial intelligence systems, and conduct all the right experiments, then we can prolong human life and provide for human flourishing. We may even be able to reach a point where we can upload our consciences into computers and retain a kind of immortality (so long as we can power those computers). The modern Christian position is that God gave us our reason, we should use it. If God did not want us to split the atom, why can the atom be split? If the *imago Dei* is reason, then we must use our reason—not because it is the *telos* of our nature (such old fashioned ways of thinking)—but because reasoning is how we partake of the divine nature.

The post-modern rejection of the Enlightenment credo came about in response to the horrors of the Second World War. Our reason gave us the ability to completely erase a city with

28. This move necessitated a new metaphysical category: the super-nature, which is unique to humans. Nothing else in all creation has both a nature and a super-nature. This is not the space to explore all the cycles and epicycles proposed.

29. ST Ap I.1.1-2.

one bomb. Science gave us mechanized death, the ability to murder on a scale and with such precision as had never before been seen. The fourth point of the Enlightenment credo was revealed for what it was: more damn superstition. It is superstition to think that we can ever be freed from superstition; instead, we must retreat into our relative positions and hope our superstitions are more useful than the superstitions of the other tribes. Truth is what our friends let us get away with saying.³⁰ Man is not naturally depraved, just incurably trapped in meaningless relativity. The modern project is doomed because we are stuck in our own isolated, parochial, and contextually bound ways of thinking. Objectivity is an absurd fantasy. But even here, reason is still the *summum bonum*, just one without much in the way of *bonum*.³¹

The Pelagians rejected the doctrine not because of their acceptance of the Enlightenment Credo,³² rather they formulated their position with a theological commitment to God's goodness and the consequent goodness of God's works in creation. God is just. God created us with a *telos* of eternal beatitude; were that beatitude naturally impossible, God would be unjust. Therefore, our *telos* must be completely within the power of our nature. If we say that we are not able to avoid sinning because our nature somehow demands that we sin, then God (as author of our nature) is responsible for our sin—God made me this way! We are fine, Pelagius says, we just need to follow the example of Christ, study the law, and quit making excuses for our bad behavior. God has graciously given us everything we need in our nature, and supplemented it

30. Richard Rorty said, "Truth is what your contemporaries let you get away with saying," but this fails to fully capture the tribalism inherent in relativism. Rorty would be completely indifferent to what, for example, Tibetan monks were saying about philosophy.

31. Even Lacan's denial of a highest good is connected with the analysts knowing of the fact that there is no such thing. Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), 300.

32. Although they did hold the first element and Augustine accused them of holding the third.

with the grace of teaching in Christ and scripture—grace upon grace. Asking for more is spurning the excellent gifts already given. Any sin you make is yours and yours alone because you freely chose it; you may have made a habit of a particular sin, but that was your choice. The contemporary Pelagian line, as articulated by Boyce and Schroyer, simply repeats this exact line of thought.

The commitments restated

Augustine is very consistent in several key points after his conversion to Christianity and these form the core of the doctrine of Original Sin. These are: (1) all that exists is willed by God, and good; (2) creation is *ex nihilo*; (3) sin requires free creaturely volition and the punishment for sin is a deep distortion of volition; (4) human death is unnatural and a result of sin; (5) death is only defeated by Christ and this salvation is mediated only by the Church. These five key commitments, and the extensive network of claims they entail, taken as a whole lead Augustine to develop what would become his final version of the doctrine of Original Sin. Points one and three are directly connected to his understanding of volition and the similarity between divine freedom and creaturely freedom. Any attempt to come to terms with the doctrine of Original Sin must take into account Augustine's intentional move to reject the classical position that reason is the highest good of humanity. Our beatitude, happiness or *eudaimonia* resides not in the mind but in the will, not in contemplation but in loving. When our ability to will (desire, love) coherently is damaged, then our very nature is damaged and death ensues. Augustine's position is that we deserve this death because the damage went not to an individual but to our very nature, to the part of our nature which uniquely made our *telos* possible. The will is the seat of the self, it is what makes a human or angelic agent different from, for example, a chemical agent. Unable to

become what we were intended to become—eternally connected to God—through an act of rebellion, we inevitably wither on the vine, starved from the nourishment we need.

First and foremost is that all that exists does so because God has created it. God creates because God wills to create, and there can be no cause which stands behind this fact. God's will to create is the the terminal answer to any line of questioning. God's goodness is unquestionable, and whatever God creates is good. If it exists it must be, in an absolute sense, good. Existing things can be evil in a relative sense; a mosquito may be evil in that it bites me and causes an itchy blister or Zika infection. The evil of the bite or the disease is relative to my own thriving, not an absolute evil. Indeed, for the mosquito, biting me and getting nourishment from my blood is a good. Evil is only a privation of good, a lack where there should not be a lack. Absolute evil cannot exist since it would be the absence of all existence. In the non-relative sense, a thing is evil insofar as it deviates from the will of God. Humanity is good. The human nature is good since it is created by God. As created by God, humanity is a good thing—this point cannot be over-stated.

Second, all that exists (other than God's self in the Trinity) has been created by God *ex nihilo*. Anything that is created from nothing can return to nothing. The classical distinction between material and spiritual, with material prone to decay and spiritual not, does not hold. Spiritual things, such as natures and souls are not immutable. All created things have their existence from nothing, by the will of God. Everything is prone to decay, to slide back into nothingness, unless God wills to keep it in existence. The Stoics, Plato, and Aristotle are wrong: neither souls nor reason are immutable or immortal; they are created things like anything material. A soul's unendingness is not proper to the soul, but comes about because God wills to

keep them in existence forever. Likewise, natures are created from nothing and there is no logical necessity for them to be unchanging. This position probably sounded like, “2 only equals 2 so long as God wills 2 to equal 2,” to most of Augustine’s contemporaries. Spiritual things cannot change, they held, that is what it means to be spiritual rather than physical. Augustine completely rejects this premise; anything that exists is created by God from nothing and therefore can, if God wills, be subject to decay. To a modern scientific mind, where a thing’s “nature” is at best a weak metaphor for tendencies of things the human mind distinguishes into categories, especially post-Darwin, changing natures is far less controversial. Pelagius’ position was much closer to the commonly held assumptions about the immutability of spiritual things than Augustine’s radical *ex nihilo* commitments. The gnostic framework depended deeply on the classical position. Augustine’s rejection of gnosticism (especially in its Manichean form) is why he insists so strongly on even spiritual things being created *ex nihilo*.

Third, an event can only be sinful if it is done voluntarily.³³ In the language of analytic philosophy explored in chapter 2, it must be an act not an event. The will must, at minimum, assent to the act. An involuntary event—something done under compulsion or accidentally—cannot be a sin. It is not enough to know that an event is not good for it to be a sin. If Adam had been sleeping under the tree of the knowledge of good and bad, snoring with his mouth open, and a fruit fell into his mouth, it would not have been a sin. Reason is not a necessary component in sin. Infants might sin even before they have an adequately developed reason.³⁴ Reason informs

33. *Doub. Anim.* X.14 *Non igitur nisi voluntate peccatur.*

Sin is nothing if not of the will.

34. Augustine vacillates on how much infants can sin, he implies his behavior as an infant was sinful in *Conf.* but walks it back by *De pecc. mer.*

the will, but it does not rule over it. Our volitions are shaped by, but not determined by, our beliefs about the world. The will can—and frequently does—dethrone reason. We do unreasonable things, things which we believe we ought not do, with a startling frequency. But sinfulness and unreasonableness are not identical, something can be unreasonable but not sinful, or sinful but not unreasonable. Failing to balance my checkbook correctly due to an arithmetic error is not a sin; the same error on my tax forms, when done with the intent of defrauding the government, certainly is.

Fourth, human death is not natural. The human nature was not supposed to include death. There is nothing natural about humans dying; only sin could bring about death. *Corpus igitur animale, in quo primum hominem Adam factum esse dicit Apostolus, sic erat factum, non ut mori omnino non posset, sed ut non moreretur, nisi homo peccasset.*³⁵ At a time when life expectancy was in the 30s and most children died in infancy, this was a radical claim. Every person alive was profoundly surrounded by the the evidence that human death was not merely inevitable, as it is for us today, but also almost as close as our own breaths. The Christian claim that humans are destined to live forever—as humans, not disembodied spirits—sounded no less absurd in the Fifth century than it does today. The doctrine of the resurrection of the body was an affront to Platonic, Stoic, and Gnostic thought. The ante-Nicene fathers held the belief in a literal bodily resurrection for all believers with remarkable consistency. Unending embodied human life is, in this framework, natural. Death is not natural. A theological shift took place in the medieval period, which posited that unending embodied life was not the primary nature but a super-natural

35. *Civ.* XIII.24.6. The animal body, as the Apostle says, in which the first Adam was made, was not made in a way that it could not die at all, but could not die unless man sinned.

Augustine quoted 1 Cor. 15:44ff right before this line.

grace given to the primordial parents. That is, the medievals claimed that our nature is mortal, but Adam would not have died because our nature was augmented by an additional infusion of grace which conferred immortality. This supernatural augmentation was lost in the fall. There is none of this line of thinking in Augustine's work. For Augustine, as for the ante-Nicene fathers, death is contrary to our nature.

Embedded in this logic is the notion that God owes to creatures what is due their nature.³⁶ If God creates a nature with a *telos* (and a nature without a *telos* is an absurdity), then God owes it to that thing the satisfaction of its *telos*. This is not an external constraint on God's justice, but how God's justice is made manifest. Not every acorn becomes an oak; the acorn is thing with the oak nature, not the oak nature itself. God does not owe perfection to the individual acorn, but were it impossible that *any* acorn could become an oak, then God would be unjust towards the oak nature. The human nature, with the *imago dei*, is only satisfied by union with the divine. This union is analogous to the union between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit; it is a union of *charitas*. The rest for Augustine's restless heart is to be found in loving God without worry of losing that love, which means it must be unending. Since this *telos* is the *telos* of the human nature, and humans are embodied, then this love must be embodied, with everything that entails.

The role of volition in the doctrine of Original Sin

In one attempt to make his case that God is just in creating humanity as he did and that humanity (not God) is to blame for the fall, Augustine evaluates the reason and will of Adam. Here he makes a peculiar connection between wisdom and volition: *Tunc enim homo incipit aut*

36. Randal S. Rosenberg, *The Givenness of Desire: Human Subjectivity and the Natural Desire to See God* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 99.

*stultus esse aut sapiens, ut alterum horum necessario appelletur, cum iam posset, nisi negligeret, habere sapientiam, ut vitiosae stultitiae sit voluntas rea.*³⁷ He will return to this connection in *Civ.* In this place, he is making the assertion that Adam could not be called either wise or foolish because he was too new to be held to such standards. He uses infants as his example: *Non enim quisquam ita desipit, ut stultum appellet infantem, quamvis sit absurdior si velit appellare sapientem.*³⁸ Wisdom and folly are not binary states, there is a spectrum between the two—and they are categories which only apply to certain kinds of creatures. For an act to be a sin, it must be done by the will. It must be voluntary and intentional. It can be based on correct or incorrect information—its cognitive status is secondary to its volitional status. It must be an act of willing that goes a different way than what God has willed. Even contemplating sinful acts is a mild kind of sin.³⁹ Knowledge is useful insofar as it leads to love of eternal things, but eternal life does not come from knowledge.⁴⁰

The core of the argument comes when Augustine poses the rhetorical question, *cur aliis peccatis sic natura non mutetur humana.*⁴¹ If the first sin was so powerful as to break the very nature of all humanity, why does not each and every sin committed by individual likewise damage our shared nature? Adam and Eve, taken together,⁴² were uniquely connected to our

37. *Lib Arb.* III.24.71. Only when one is capable of having or or neglecting wisdom do we begin to call them either wise or foolish; only then is the will guilty of viscious folly.

38. *Lib arb.* III.24.71. Indeed, no one would be so stupid as to call an infant foolish, but it would be even more absurd to call one wise.

39. *De Trin.* XII.12.18.

40. *De Trin.* XII.14.21.

41. *Civ.* XIV.12. Why do other sins not change the human nature?

42. *Civ.* XIV.12. *illa duorum primorum hominum* (these two first humans); It is not just Adam, but Adam and Eve together who constitute the whole of human nature and the first sin.

nature and the sin they committed was unique as well. This sin changed our nature *ut tantae corruptioni, quantam videmus atque sentimus, et per hanc subiaceret et morti*.⁴³ This sin was turning away from the goodness God had given in favor of their own will, *non eius a quo creata est facere voluntatem*.⁴⁴ Since the will is the locus of the self and the primordial couple was the fullness of the human nature, the damage to the self became the damage to the human nature. The misuse of the will created a distortion in the will, which made willing impossible. Desire was not yet in opposition to the will when the sin was committed. *Ubi praesertim nondum voluntati cupiditas resistebat, quod de poena transgressionis postea subsecutum est*.⁴⁵ The consequence of this particular sin, the natural outcome (to intentionally misuse the term here) is that the very human nature becomes bent and unable to obey itself. *Denique, ut breviter dicatur, in illius peccati poena quid inoboedientiae nisi inoboedientia retributa est?*⁴⁶ The consequence of disobedience of God is that the self is disobedient to itself. Death is the ultimate disobedience to self and to God. We were supposed to live forever; yet, we turned away from God and away from life.

I have been translating *poena* as “consequence.” “Penalty” or “punishment” would be more typical choices.⁴⁷ Augustine does use the forensic language of justice and guilt—and talk a

43. *Civ.* XIV.12. So that all the corruption which we see and feel, and through which we are also subject to death.

44. *Civ.* XIV.12. To not do the will of Him by whom they were created.

45. *Civ.* XIV.12. At that time desire did not oppose the will, that arose later as the penalty for the transgression.

46. *Civ.* XIV.15.2. What, to put it bluntly, is a more fitting consequence for this punishment of sin of disobedience than disobedience?

47. Adam Ployd, “*Non Poena Sed Causa*,” *Augustinian Studies* 49, no. 1 (2018): 25-44. Augustine begins reflecting on the forensic definition of *poena* in the Donatist controversy. Even in this early reflection, *poena* seems to have more the flavor of “what happened” than “the punishment assigned.” As Ployd notes (38) the scriptural question centered around Matt. 5:10, “Blessed are those who suffer persecution for the sake of righteousness.” The

lot about sex—in the remainder of *Civ. XIV*, but even then “consequence” seems to me to be a fair reading of what he is trying to say. The consequence for sin is sin. By choosing death (turning away from life), we die. Since he is working at the conceptual level of the nature of humanity, it ceases to be entirely coherent to say that the natural outcome of the distortion of the nature is death. He is striving to maintain fidelity with the scriptural and apostolic tradition, so he is using the terms found there. In discussing how some philosophers have achieved apparent mastery over their sexual urges, he makes the curious claim, *tamen cohibendo et repugnando modificantur, non est utique sanitas ex natura, sed languor ex culpa*.⁴⁸ The opposite of nature here is guilt. What should be easy and natural (a stone falling) is painful and weary due to guilt. Augustine dwells on sex because it is the clearest example—to him—of the way we struggle against our very selves. If we were as we ought to be, sex would neither be exceedingly attractive nor repulsive. Our inordinate appetites for sex in his main example, but also for food, serve as stand-ins for our inability to control our ability to be alive. Our nature has a *telos*, that *telos* is life, which requires union with God. Our free choice to break that union with God by an act of disobedience, results in our inability to be obedient to ourselves. This consequence is a kind of abandonment, letting us do what we have chosen to do: *Fortasse respondeat Deum ad ista non cogere, sed dignos deseri tantum deserere. Si hoc dicit, verissime dicit*.⁴⁹ The

question in play in this dispute was the *causa* (for the sake of righteousness); the *poena* (martyrdom and suffering persecution) was granted. From Augustine’s perspective, the *poena* was the legal consequence of the schism; and since that consequence was just, the *causa* the Donatist claimed was not correct—they suffered, but not for the sake of righteousness. At this stage I just want to point towards the need to do a fuller study of Augustine’s development of the concept of *poena*. My intuition is that it is a softer term than how it translates into English, but I do not have space to marshal the necessary evidence at this point. My larger argument does not hang on this atypical translation, but is strengthened by it.

48. *Civ. XIV.19*. This is change by restraint and opposition, it is not a healthy thing from nature, but one weary from guilt.

49. *Nat. grat. 23.25*. Perhaps he might respond that God does not compel them to these [sins], but just

punishment of the first sin is that God does not restrain us from the consequences of our decision. *Non ei dicimus “mortem corporis ad peccatum valere”, ubi sola vindicta est - nemo enim peccat corpore moriendo -, sed ad peccatum valet mors animae, quam deseruit vita sua, hoc est, Deus eius, quae necesse est mortua opera faciat, donec Christi gratia reviviscat.*⁵⁰ The *poena* is abandonment of the soul to death, not imposing capital punishment. By willing something other than life with God, we lose life with God, which is life itself: *id est, quia non morior necessitate peccati, sed oboedientiae voluntate.*⁵¹ We die because we will to be apart from God and death is the inevitable consequential outcome.

Restoration comes neither from a forensic declaration of “not guilty” nor from the imparting of information, but from a restoration of the will to its proper orientation. To be sure, Christ does grant the forensic declaration and remove the penalty, and Christ’s life does provide information about God and God’s love for humanity, but it is through the reorientation of the will back to its natural *telos* that we are ultimately healed. Not through imitation but through new-birth to a new nature; we die to Adam’s nature because what else can we do with it? We are born into Christ’s nature through the waters of baptism. In this light, Augustine’s insistence that we die with Adam, not through imitation but through birth, makes sense; *Non imitationem imitationi,*

abandons those who deserve to be abandoned. If he says this, he speaks the truth.

50. *Nat. grat.* 23.25. We do not say, “the death of the body prevails to death.” It is only *vindicta*. No one sins by dying the death of the body. But the death of the soul leads to sin because it deserts its life—that is its God—and necessarily produces dead works until the Grace of Christ revivifies it.

Vindicta is the root of the English, “vindication.” It was a ceremonial act by which someone wrongly enslaved was set free. Teske translates it, “since it is merely punishment.” This is a very odd word choice and I am not able to make much sense of it. Augustine, *Selected Writings on Grace and Pelagianism*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Roland Teske, S.J., The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2011), 335.

51. *Nat. Grat.* 24.46. That is, I do not die because of the necessity of sin, but because of the obedience of the will.

*sed regenerationem generationi.*⁵² The cure for Adam’s disobedience (which resulted in his death) is Christ’s obedience unto death (which resulted in new life). Augustine here is referencing Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:22). Jesus’s “not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42) is the ultimate act of obedience—willing self-death in order to defeat death.

The doctrine of Original Sin in the Late Modern context

The two main critiques of the doctrine of Original Sin are, (1) that it depends on a literal, factual reading of Genesis 3 and (2) that it is profoundly unjust, since people are punished for things they did not do.⁵³ Along with this is a rejection of the core assumptions that are behind the doctrine, especially the notion that death is not natural (appropriate to the human nature).

Does an Augustinian doctrine of Original Sin require a literal Adam and Eve? As discussed in chapter 1, the entire conceptual basis which enabled the development of Augustine’s concept of volition and his version of the doctrine of Original Sin has been rejected by modernism. According to modern science, the concept of “nature,” as in the thing which makes something what it is, is a historical relic. Stones “fall” because bodies with mass warp space-time in such a way as to cause mutual attractions; there is no “nature” to a stone other than the fundamental forces which are common to everything. Likewise, there is no human nature. DNA encodes information necessary for cells to manufacture proteins, and living things with similar enough DNA patterns can interbreed, but that’s a far cry from the classical concept of a nature. The idea that the human nature can be damaged is a relic upon a relic.

52. *C. Jul. imp.* II.190. [Paul was not contrasting] imitation with imitation, but rebirth with birth.

53. Alistair McFadyen, *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 18.

Augustine never settled on an answer to the question of how human souls propagate.⁵⁴ He rejected some theories and held others provisionally. In attempting to understand how Augustine can assert that Adam's sin somehow impacted all humanity, many later commentators latched onto *Civ. XIII.3: In primo igitur homine per feminam in progeniem transiturum universum genus humanum fuit, quando illa coniugum copula divinam sententiam suae damnationis exceptit.*⁵⁵

This sentence, taken in isolation gives rise to readings such as Charles Warren's:

Human nature in its entirety, according to Augustine, existed in Adam. By means of sexual procreation, this same human nature that was in Adam is individuated and transmitted to every member of the human race. Thus, every human born of the sexual union between parents is born with this one corrupted human nature. Each individual at birth, therefore, stand before God both guilty of that first sin in Adam and subject to its penalty, death.⁵⁶

The "in Adam" is not unique to Augustine; he is using Paul's language (1 Cor. 15:22). Augustine speculated on the manner of the propagation of the soul using the biological knowledge he possessed. We cannot expect Augustine to have had the same level of knowledge of scientific biology that we have today. Anachronisms aside, most of these criticisms are based on a dubious reading of what Augustine actually wrote. In *Civ. XIII.14*, he makes the statement *sed iam erat natura seminalis, ex qua propagaremur*⁵⁷ *Seminalis* is an adjective modifying *natura*, it is the nature which is propagated. The language of seed (semen) is drawn from Paul's usage in 1 Cor.

54. William P. O'Connor, "The Concept of the Human Soul According to Saint Augustine" (Catholic University of America, 1921), 71.

55. *Civ. XIII.3*. In the first man, therefore, there existed the whole human race which was to pass through the woman into her progeny when that conjugal pair received the divine sentence of its own damnation. (Translation Dyson) Augustine, *City of God*, 543.

56. Charles E. Warren, *Original Sin Explained?* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), 15. Nowhere in this is Schroyer's absurd claim that Augustine held that "Because all the semen in the world was in Adam..." Schroyer, *Original Blessing*, 774/2481 Kindle.

57. *Civ. XIII.14*. But the seminal nature from which we were to be propagated already existed.

15:44, which in-turn reflects Jesus's statement that "unless a grain of falls into the earth and dies, it remains but one grain" (John 12:24).⁵⁸ That is to say, what is important for Augustine is that the nature is shared—the mechanisms of how the soul is passed is an open question for Augustine. The soul individuates; the nature unites. The nature, which underlies individual the souls and bodies, is shared by all humans. The creation of the soul is, on every theory he does not reject, distinct from the creation of the body. The human nature is instantiated in both body and soul. Souls and bodies are distinct to the individuals; the nature is common. It is this nature that is damaged; this damage impacts the souls and bodies. So, the mechanics of the propagation of the soul are only his speculation on how the damage to the nature can be shared, not his dogmatic commitment.

The semen/propagation worry is not the real issue and can easily be addressed by a careful exegesis of the texts in question. The mechanics of how the transmission of a nature takes place will always be bound up with the metaphysical and scientific assumptions of the relative context. Augustine was using a variation of the Stoic metaphysics of natures and an understanding of biology and reproduction common to his age. His anthropology—the uniqueness of the human nature, the role of volition in that nature—was different than any of the other systems of classical antiquity, but this anthropology was intelligible within metaphysical categories of his age. Soul, nature, body, and so on were all recognized categories—as they broadly are today.

58. John's Gospel was certainly written after Paul's letters, the language of grain and seed (semen) is quite common in Jesus' teaching and it seems probable that John and Paul were thinking of similar seminal (pun intended) statements by Jesus in using this language.

The question of the mechanics of propagating is secondary. The deeper problem for Original Sin in the late-modern era is that of the metaphysical category of nature. In a culture for which “natural” means “not created by humans,” does Augustine’s framework hold? Given our current knowledge of evolutionary biology, the age of the world, the impossibility that a literal Adam and Eve were the first humans, does make any sense to assert that we are all distorted by sin in such a way that we cannot repair that distortion of our own power? Do we need saving or can we simply fix ourselves through careful use of our reason? The development of the Augustinian concept of Original Sin arose because of a set of deeply personal experiences, which was epitomized for him in the pear throwing incident. We do evil, destructive things for no reason—there is simply no explaining why; only the experience that we do them. Reason alone is insufficient to explain our behavior, as are passions, desires, and appetites—animals have those and do not seem to do evil in quite the way we do. Yet, this deeply personal reflection has important doctrinal significance.

Those theologians and cultural theorists who are quickest to dismiss Original Sin as nonsense in the face of evolutionary biology are also usually very quick to appeal to the *Imago Dei* as something intrinsic to being human. In my assessment, there is no evolutionary basis for appealing to the *Imago Dei*. The same biological arguments that remove the foundation for Augustine’s formulation of the doctrine of Original Sin also remove the foundation for the *Imago Dei* being a property shared by all members of the set “humans.” If there is no human nature, nothing which defines what it means to be a human, only individuals who share similar-enough patterns of DNA to be artificially lumped into a purely conceptual category of “human”, then any talk of *Imago Dei* is nonsense, as would be discussion of human rights and a whole host of other

topics we take for granted.⁵⁹ If only that which is biologically propagated is real and person-constituting, identifying the “human genes” reduces us down to a tiny fraction of our DNA. Someone who is missing one of those genes, or has them in a variant form, is not a human (e.g. Downs syndrome). This seems wrong to me on theological and moral grounds.

Outside of evolutionary biologists and philosophers in very defined discussions, most people, most of the time, talk as if there is something more to humanity than a few genes which distinguish us from bonobos and that “human” is a meaningful category. We act as-if there is a human nature. That we cannot, according to the method of modern science, identify what constitutes that nature does not displace the fact that even the most hardened biologists seem to act as-if ducks are a thing with a duck nature, oak trees are those things that have an oak tree nature, and humans have the human nature. When shown a duck and asked what it is, a biologist will say, “a duck” not “an organism that has DNA which falls within the parameters to be categorized as an instance of *Anas Platyrhynchos*.” This acting as-if may simply be cognitive malfunction, but it seems radically counter-intuitive for us to say “there is no duck, only individuals who approximate some arbitrary standard of what we call a duck.”

59. “From these remarks it will be seen that I look at the term species as one arbitrarily given, for the sake of convenience, to a set of individuals closely resembling each other, and that it does not essentially differ from the term variety, which is given to less distinct and more fluctuating forms.” Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, 1886 British ed. (1886), 52.

Darwin titled his book *The Origins of Species* and reduced the concept of species to a collection of similar individuals. There are no natural kinds in Darwinian evolution, only individuals who happen to share enough traits to be lumped into conceptual kinds “for the sake of convenience.” For a careful philosophical engagement with the subject see: Michael Ruse, “Biological Species: Natural Kinds, Individuals, or What?,” *The British Society for the Philosophy of Science* 38, (Jun, 1987): 225-242. Ruse argues for species being more robust than *Lockean* natural (conceptual) kinds, but not *Aristotilian* natural (essential) kinds.

There is something about being human that we can identify without being able to fully articulate the set of requirements that must be satisfied for an organism to be a human. Whatever this is points towards what Christians—following the classical philosophers—called the human nature. The metaphysics of this need not be settled for it to be an operating assumption of the Christian framework. We can appropriate what is useful and helpful in contemporary philosophy and science—we can plunder Egypt to use Augustine’s metaphor—without deeply tying our faith to the current scientific paradigms or metaphysical frameworks. The core commitments that go beyond what science theorizes (we are created in the *Imago Dei* and our nature is not as it ought to be) do not conflict with these scientific claims, they expound upon them and point towards an inadequacy in them.

It is conceivable that we can reformulate Augustine’s deep insights within a more contemporary scientific worldview. I have pointed towards the need to reclaim “nature” as a meaningful category in Chapter 1 and in the proceeding few paragraphs. There was, as I showed in Chapter 1, not a single concept of nature in the late-classical world. The Stoics and the Peripatetics viewed the concept in very different ways, Augustine was more in line with the Stoics in his usage but, after Anselm, the Church went with a more Aristotelian understanding of the term.

The second issue, that it is immoral of God to punish individual humans for the sin of someone else, is much more difficult to solve. Clearly, Jesus held that God does not punish people for their parents sins, but he made that assertion in the context of a culture in which it was widely believed that God did, in fact, punish multiple generations for ancestral sin. A Christian must believe that Christ’s teaching is the fullness of the revelation of God and so we cannot

believe that God does punish children for their parents sins. On the other hand, the notion of punishment is never simple. Is it punishment to allow someone to experience the consequences of her actions? Her children? The Sabbath and Jubilee year system in Leviticus (Lev. 25) seems to be designed to prevent transgenerational poverty. If your father gambled away the family farm or sold you into slavery, then you would be freed on the Sabbath year and the farm would be returned to your family on the Jubilee—consequences could be transgenerational, but never absolutely so. One of the early attempts on Jesus' life was when he proclaimed a year of Jubilee (Luke 4:17-30). God seems to understand the reality of, and limit the damage from, transgenerational sin.

Augustine and the fathers before him were attempting to articulate and define, in the metaphysics and science of the day, the Christian commitment to claim that there is something fundamentally wrong with humanity and the result of that wrongness is death. The language of punishment for sin was codified into the Church's doctrine because of how the Genesis 3 was translated and understood by the earliest generations of Christians. Sin, the tradition held, was the source of the problem. Christ removes sin, thus solving the problem, saving us from death. Augustine was working to articulate his commitment to the claim that only Christ can save us from death and Christ is necessary, not just expedient, for that salvation. His work engaged with the science, metaphysics, and theology of his day—without being bound to it. His genius was proposing a different path for thinking about what the human person is, moving from “thinking being” to “volitional and thinking being.” This shift offered a solution to some of the deep problems in philosophical anthropology (*akrasia*) and enabled him to articulate a Christian position that could stand against the philosophical traditions of his day. A similar project could be

pursued today that takes the best from contemporary science and philosophy and works to articulate core Christian commitments in light of how we understand the world today.

Is this a kind of essentialism? Am I implying here that there is an essence to either Christianity or humanity? Yes to both. I am not asserting that any one person can fully articulate what those essences might be, only that they are important and theologians have a duty to try to articulate them within the current context. There is such a thing as humanity which can be distinguished from the non-human; there is such a thing as Christianity which can be distinguished from the non-Christian. Does one group have a monopoly on the definition? No, that is contrary to Augustine's move to remove reason from the throne in favor of love.

The doctrine of Original Sin reflects the Christian commitment that God is the one who saves us from the consequences of those actions which lead us to death. When understood as punishment, it seems deeply unjust and contradicts Jesus' statements about the sins of the father being visited on the son. When death is understood as a necessary consequence rather than a punishment, the question shifts from justice to compassion. If we are aware that we are all in this together and none of us can save ourselves, then we can be quick to forgive, slow to anger, and merciful to those who hurt us. That is, we can be like God.

Summary

If the will is a distinct part of the human person and it is the locus of love and the locus of our sense-of-self, then damage to the will is a damage to the very self. If a person cannot love correctly and our nature is only satisfied by loving the one thing that cannot be taken from us against our will, then the inability to love that one thing is a horrendous curse indeed. If the curse is thought of as a penal punishment then God does a wickedness to us. If, instead, that curse is

the natural consequence of loving ourselves in God's place, then God is not the author of the punishment and can be understood to limit the harm of the consequence of our own actions.

Augustine held to a literal Adam and Even later in his life (but not in his earlier writings) not because he had an inerrantist understanding of the role of scripture, but because there was not sufficient evidence to necessitate a symbolic reading. By his own standards, given what we know today about biology, he would readily accept a non-literal reading. His commitment was first-and-foremost to the absolute necessity of Christ for human salvation, mediated through the sacraments of the Catholic church. No human is able to save themselves from the damage of sin and its consequences, which is death. God, intervening in history through the person of Christ, is the only thing that can undo what we have done to ourselves. He used the metaphysical and scientific categories of his day, modified based on his own work, to formulate the doctrine of Original Sin. The metaphysics and science deployed are not the important part of the doctrine, they are how he sought to articulate the deeper commitments.

Given the profound changes in our understanding since Augustine's time, it is not surprising that later authors would reject Augustine's metaphysics and the doctrine of Original Sin along with them. Evolutionary biology in its most rigorous form, for example, makes the idea of a shared human nature which can be damaged seem absurd.⁶⁰ It also makes other key Christian commitments, such as the *Imago Dei*, equally absurd. Once metaphysical concepts such as natural kinds are reintroduced, then any work which reestablishes the coherence of the

60. It is more plausible for something like Original Sin to be genetically encoded than for the *Imago Dei* to be a sequence in our DNA. The idea of a "selfish gene" comes to mind. I have not encountered anyone defending Original Sin as a gene sequence, but I can conceive of an argument for propagation along those lines which would sound like some of the more simplistic interpretations of Augustine.

Imago Dei also opens the door to a coherent formulation of a claim that whatever identifies our “natural kind” is somehow damaged.

Original Sin was not novel to Augustine, neither in name nor in concept. Once the Church started baptizing infants it became necessary to explain how the act could be saving if children were innocent. Augustine systematized the concept and deployed his novel anthropology—which situated the will as something distinct from the cognitive faculties—in articulating his experiences of sinning. The inability to love correctly unless we have experienced God’s love—that is, God’s very self—was a profound move which articulated an insight which was nascent in earlier Christian writings. St. John’s gospels and epistles pointed towards it, as did Paul’s letters, but Augustine recognized how the *Imago Dei*, love, and the core of the human self were all connected, and how deeply that was damaged by sin.

CHAPTER 6:

Conceptual Models of Sin

The purpose of this chapter is to explore various conceptual models for what sin is, consider how these various models relate to both volition and Augustine's doctrine of Original Sin, and offer some constructive proposals for seeing the various models as meeting the needs of various communities in their contexts. I propose that each model of sin is useful on its own in some circumstances, but when taken together they form a richer concept that illuminates the depth of the human condition. Theologies which focus on one model to the exclusion of all others constrain themselves and deny the fecundity of the concept in the tradition. Sin is a polyphonic concept; no one metaphor or definition captures all the insights people have had through the ages as to what sin is, what it does to the human person, and how Christ overcomes it.

Introduction

While teaching an undergraduate introduction to religious studies course, a student asked me, "is smoking weed a sin?" He was probably assuming there was a clear yes-or-no answer to the question. In the moment, it was an opportunity for me to probe some assumptions and dislodge some categorical sclerosis. What is a sin? What does it mean for someone to sin? John Wesley, drawing on many earlier definitions, said in one sermon: "By sin, I here understand outward sin, according to the plain, common acceptance of the word; an actual voluntary

transgression of the law; of the revealed, written law of God; of any commandment of God acknowledged to be such at the time it is transgressed.”¹ For a sin to be a sin, it must be a violation of the written law of God, that law must be known by the person committing the sin, and they must intend to break that law. Since marijuana does not get a mention anywhere in scripture, smoking it clearly is not a violation of a written law of God; therefore, it cannot be a sin. On this definition of sin, the easiest way to ensure that people are not condemned for their sins is to simply ensure that no-one knows what the written laws of God are—ignorance would be eternal bliss. With this glib comment in place, the class—other than those who were relieved that their recreational activities were suddenly licit—erupted into profound disagreement with me.

My thesis for this chapter is that sin is not a simple concept. There are many models that seek to describe what sin is. None of the models are fully adequate. Each points towards one aspect of the concept. Taken together as a network of descriptions that reinforce each-other, these various model point towards something which cannot be captured by any one model. In this chapter I will explore some various models of sin in light of Augustine’s theory of volition and the doctrine of Original Sin as articulated in the previous chapters.

The Church never canonized a doctrine of atonement. Scripture and the writings of the fathers spelled out many different understandings of what the work of Christ in the world accomplished and by what means. While there were ecumenical councils dedicated to very specific theological problems, what Christ’s work accomplished was never one of the issues. The

1. John Wesley, “The Great Privilege of Those That Are Born of God,” in *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology*, ed. Albert Cook Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1991), 186.

varied models of atonement each address a different understanding of the problem. The problem, in each case, was sin. If sin is ignorance, then Christ's work is education; if sin is pride, then Christ's work is humility; if sin is having offended a superior, then Christ's work is satisfaction; if sin is a debt, then Christ's work is paying for the debt; if sin is our being held hostage, then Christ's work is paying our ransom. Jay Sklar points towards the polyphonic nature of the concept when he writes, "The Old Testament has over fifty different words or phrases to describe sin, wrongdoing and guilt."² The complexity becomes compounded with the process of hellenization and the importation of Greek and Roman concepts of sin and moral failing. Christianity arose in this context of radical conceptual plurality. The Church responded by developing a sweeping network of metaphors and analogies to explain how Christ addresses this radical plurality of describing the problem.

Each understanding of sin—and each proposed theory of atonement—is contextually bound. Anselm's satisfaction theory is almost incoherent in a democratic society, which holds that all people are created equal. Language of "washed in the blood" is repulsive and disgusting to many middle-class twenty-first century people. Blood is the stuff of horror movies, not polite religion. I have served churches where "the bloody hymns" were strictly forbidden—all urban and younger. I have also served churches for which the blood hymns were their heart language—all rural and older. The model of sin that predominates a community's discourse shapes how they understand what Christ did for humanity. Communities that view sin as a contagion or pollution tend to favor the language of being washed in the blood. Communities that view sin as illicit behavior—rule breaking—are more drawn to language of forgiveness and pardon. Most

2. Jay Sklar, "Pentateuch," in *T & T Clark Companion to the Doctrine of Sin*, ed. Keith L. Johnson and David Lauber, (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 3.

communities hold to an unreflective mix of several different conceptions of sin and freely intermix them and their related models of atonement/healing/restoration. This is not a criticism, but a realization which predates the Church. Sin is profoundly complex and ultimately inexplicable. The only way to discuss it is through a wide variety of metaphors and models. These models can reinforce each other or they can compete with each other. Yet, even when they disagree with each other, they are all helpful when taken together. The fecundity of the network of concepts is its strength.

As discussed in Chapter 5, Augustine closely linked his version of the doctrine of Original Sin to a Stoic concept of natures. When this metaphysical position became unintelligible in the light of Darwin's theory of evolution, a common position was simply to reject the doctrine of Original Sin *tout court* rather than seeking to understand why Augustine defined the doctrine in the way that he did. By not canonizing a theory of atonement, which would have in turn canonized a theory of what sin is, the Church left open the possibility that changes in the cultural context, philosophy, and science could be incorporated into the very central doctrines of the faith: Christ died to save us from the consequence of sin, which is death. By not providing an analytic definition of sin, or even a definition of death, the core commitment could be retained and re-articulated in the idioms and categories of the day.³ The doctrinal restraint of the early Church was very wise.

The following analysis is not exhaustive; every time I have thought that I had the list completely buttoned-up, another metaphor surfaces in a hymn or conversation. This speaks to the

3. Notice how Paul shifts his understanding of what constitutes death in his epistles. Augustine works with various definitions of death in *Civ.* as well.

depth of the problem, sin goes to the very core of what what it means to be human. It also speaks to the absolute necessity of Christ; if sin were simply not obeying known rules, like Pelagius held, then Pelagius' exhortation would have been appropriate. But since sin is so much more, exhortation can never be enough; neither teaching nor discipline will overcome the problem.

Sin as missing the mark

The most common terms for sin in the Greek New Testament derive from the *hamart*-root. The term derives from archery and means to try and miss, to fail.⁴ Luke, in particular, favors this term.⁵ Given the Stoic and Peripatetic conception of the human person discussed in chapter 1, this usage should not be surprising. We cannot, on the Greek concept of rationality, fail on purpose. Failing is unintentional (non-volitional), the product of cognitive malfunction, or a lack of skill for the task. If sin is simply trying and failing, like an archer not hitting his target, surely it cannot be the same as a moral failing. If the question is simply one of preparation and needing more practice, how can we hold the person culpable? Only a tyrant would punish someone for trying their level best and not succeeding, right?

The case is not quite so clear-cut, as Peiper points out:

The *first* possibility of making a false step is an “artistic error” in the strict sense, that is the failure to get “just right” whatever goal the artist has in mind: the marksman fails to hit the bull’s-eye, the surgeon nicks and organ essential for life, the engineer’s calculation of a bridge’s tensile strength prove to be wrong. The *second* ever-present possibility for making a false step in the realm of art and manufacture consists in the dilemma that one might reach the goal set for oneself, perhaps brilliantly, but at the same

4. C. Clifton Black, “Synoptic Gospels,” in *T & T Clark Companion to the Doctrine of Sin*, ed. Keith L. Johnson and David Lauber, (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 61.

5. *Ibid.*, 63.

time, *for that same reason*, will have violated the universal goal of existence as a whole.⁶

Some “missings of the mark” have disastrous consequences. We hold engineers and surgeons to a standard higher than a child launching an arrow at a target in the backyard. Some “missings of the mark” actually hit the mark at which the shooter aimed, but in doing so have profound moral consequences. Oppenheimer’s bomb succeeded in its stated goal of creating a nuclear blast and the larger goal of ending the war, but was this the target at which he should have aimed?

Sin, on this analysis, is not simply missing *a* mark, but missing *the* mark. There is an extrinsic standard of evaluation. The mark at which the Christian aims is the *telos* for which we were created: life with God. Pieper makes the claim that “sin is a human *doing*, an *act* of man; and this not primarily a *condition*, although the use of the word to describe a condition is not unknown.”⁷ I think it is apt to say that sin is both the act of missing *the* mark and the condition of being oriented to the wrong mark. Original Sin is the condition of being mis-oriented, which results in infinite numbers of instances of the mark being missed. Volition primarily impacts the condition, but can also impact the act. If I refuse to practice archery and yet go bow-hunting wild boar, I can only blame myself for always missing—and I would rightfully be held culpable, if I unintentionally wounded someone with an errant arrow. Trying and failing, is not the same thing as trying and succeeding at the wrong task; yet, both are ways in which we do actually miss the mark.

6. Josef Pieper, *The Concept of Sin*, trans. Edward T. Oakes, S.J. (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2001), 25.

7. *Ibid.*, 29.

Sin as contagion

Cornelius Plantinga uses the language of contagion to describe sin, “In the works of Athanasius, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and in classic Protestant confessional literature, corruption—an unhappy cluster of spiritual perversion, pollution, and disintegration—represents one of the two components of original sin (the other being guilt).”⁸ When sin is understood not as acts but as a disease that infects people and spreads itself, the restorative metaphors tend to be medicinal. Sin causes acts that are themselves sinful—they propagate the contagion. Acts are important on this metaphor because of how they spread sin, not because they themselves are the problem. When sin is understood to be a contagion, the focus is on keeping the community safe. Patrick McCormick defines a slightly different model of sin as stain that is close enough to my model of contagion to draw a parallel. In his understanding, this tends to be a more primitive concept of sin. “We see in [Lady MacBeth’s] unconscious and desperately futile scrubbing some mirrored echo of a sense memory within ourselves and our consciousness, a remainder of evil’s contaminative and deadly power pre-dating the ethical or legal notion of sin and guilt.”⁹ I do not think that it is accurate to say that it is primitive, just deep. If someone were to hand me a lump of some mysterious soil and tell me it was uranium, I would instinctively drop it and quickly wash not only my hands but my entire body. This is not because I have a primitive reaction to the

8. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way it's Supposed to be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 29. Aside from disintegration, I do not see these as dominant themes in Augustine’s hamartiology. Plantinga reads Augustine through Luther and it is not difficult to see how he arrives at this conclusion. Augustine’s position that sin is a privation of the good, a disintegration of what ought to be integrated, has some resonance with the notion that sin is a contagion or pathogen which kills its host by robbing it of life. Sin is always self-defeating since it destroys what it needs to survive.

9. Patrick McCormick, C.M., *Sin as Addiction* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989), 38.

dangerous effects of radiation but because I believe it to be harmful and I desire to live, so I take an intentional action to preserve my life.

The communal aspects of the idea of sin as a contagion are very important. The community responds to an infectious health crisis; when the Zika virus was being spread in the southern parts of the United States, mosquito eradication efforts were stepped up, education programs put into place, and health care workers were trained. It was as if the community had a sense of self-identity and self-preservation. That is, communities have will. Communities act volitionally and sin can impact a community's orientation.

Impurity is a driving theme through the Levitical laws. Impurity in this context has to do with ritual impurity, not moral righteousness. "Defilement often occurs in this model when persons have touched or been touched by something forbidden. Violations of taboos normally take place through some form of unlawful touching. Secondly, the one who has sinned must be isolated from the camp lest it or someone else be defiled by contact with him/her."¹⁰ The guiding question is who can enter into the tabernacle and perform the priestly duties. Over time, the conceptual distinction between the ritual purity laws and the legal code were collapsed and impurity became conflated with sinfulness (e.g Eph. 5:5). The later Christian distinction between the ceremonial law (which does not apply to Christians) and the moral law (which does) is an attempt at restoring this distinction. The language is not tidy and in Leviticus 5:3 uncleanness and guilt are connected; this example, however, is unusual. Ezek. 44:23, quoting Lev. 10:10, explicitly connects cleanliness with the holy and the unclean not with the sinful but the common.

10. Ibid., 41. Notice, however, that McCormick shifts briefly back into the language of "unlawful." Violating a taboo and violating a law are different categories within his framework, yet even when these frameworks are deployed, slips like this happen because no one model fully captures the 'naughtiness' of sin.

The unclean or impure in the Levitical code seems to be things which tend towards death or trigger disgust (blood, rot, insects). Insects are not sinful, and touching them is not a moral failing, but eating them is a sign of desperation and marks one as being outside the community.

Holiness is a related but distinct category. Things are holy not because of their purity but because of their purpose. The blood used in the sacrificial system was holy, but in any other context was profoundly impure. Holiness is not a normal state of being; it is being set apart for the use in things related to God. Holy things can only be handled by people who are trained and properly cleaned because holy things can kill if mishandled (Num. 4:15). A profane thing is one that ought to be holy but is not treated with its due respect; rather, it is treated as a common thing. Common things are not bad—most things are common—holy things are rare. People who have handled impure things should not handle holy things not because it might damage the holy thing but because it might kill the person who has traces of impurity on them.

Purity is generally a binary concept; either a thing is pure or it is adulterated. Holiness is a spectrum. Israel is a holy land, but Jerusalem is the holy city in the land. The temple mount is holier than the rest of Jerusalem. And, the temple itself is a concentric set of steps of ever-increasing holiness until the holy-of-holies in the center. But even then, the ark that is contained in the holy-of-holies is holier than the room. Purity and holiness are related primarily in the fact that the impure can be harmed by proximity to the holy; purity is enforced to keep people safe from the damaging effects of profaning holy things.

Most of these distinctions have been lost through time. My point here is simply that the contagion model of sin is frequently connected with Levitical purity and holiness codes; yet, that connection is less clear than it initially seems if sin is primarily understood to be rule breaking.

We do not avoid touching corpses because it is against the law but because it tends towards death. Every civilization needs undertakers; it is not an unlawful profession. However, it is one which prevents ceremonial participation and the handling of holy objects. We eschew normal work on the Sabbath not because a rule says we must but because the Sabbath is holy and profaning it violates its holiness. Rules spring up to enforce holiness and to ensure purity, not the other way around. When the rules to enforce holiness become the priority, the distinctions between the holy, the common, the profane, and the accursed collapse into the foreign categories of the lawful and unlawful. All the models are necessary, but they are not interchangeable. Concepts from one model cannot be easily picked up and moved to another without careful work of translation. Taking the Levitical codes—a holiness code and a purity code—and enforcing them as a legal system is a symptom of misunderstanding what the Levitical codes was about.

Sin as unbelief, misidentifying God

In John's Gospel, sin is primarily understood as unbelief or rejection of Christ. "In the Gospel of John, the primary sin we witness is the rejection of God's Revelation in Christ. Sin, therefore, is tied to revelation rather than the more usual moral categories we find elsewhere in the New Testament."¹¹ Sin is directly linked to the revelation of God in Christ. The imagery of light and dark is well documented in John's gospel. Christ is the light; choosing to remain in the darkness is sin. Behavior takes a back-seat to recognizing who Jesus really is and worshiping him. Those who more correctly identify Jesus are praised; those who do not know who he is are dismissed.

11. Gary M. Burge, "The Gospel and Epistles of John," in *T&t Clark Companion to the Doctrine of Sin*, ed. Keith L. Johnson and David Lauber, (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 79.

John's guiding metaphor is blindness and ignorance and seems, in places, to reject sin as being a behavioral category. "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). Jesus rejects the entire framework which connects behavior and punishment, his healing takes place so that God might be seen and known.¹² Sin is not the cause of his physical blindness, spiritual blindness (refusal to recognize Jesus is God) is the sin. Jesus sends the man to the pool of purification and the temple elite—connecting sin with seeing and being seen.

John's emphasis on the universality of sin as a paralyzing condition in the world is clear. He sees that the foundational problem is the world's refusal to believe in Jesus as John 9 illustrates dramatically. The critical problem with the Pharisees is not that they have sinned but that their disbelief is an expression of sin so profound that it places them in judgment.¹³

Original Sin could be understood within the Johannine framework as the inability to see and believe the work of God in the world by our own power. Jesus' execution is the most profound and overt rejection of God's love possible; the resurrection is God's decisive "yes, even still" to our "no." The problem is not individual sins or actions which miss the mark but that we cannot and will not see who God is and how God relates to the world. We refuse to recognize God's goodness and love even when it is on public display. The question is one of Jesus' identity and God's identity. Thomas, the doubter, is the only one who falls to his knees and says, "My Lord and my God." Even the title of "messiah" falls short of Jesus' persistent "I AM" statements. Its not that rabbi, messiah or prophet are incorrect, but they are inadequate to the claims Jesus

12. Burge translates Jesus response, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but so that the work of God might be displayed in his life, we must do the work of him who sent me while it is still day." I cannot comment on the validity of the translation, but it seems more in-line with John's theology than the more standard reading. Ibid., 87.

13. Ibid.

makes about himself and demonstrates through His works. Israel's sin was not breaking the rules, breaking the terms of the covenant, or even violating the holiness code but failing to recognize who God had always been through the history of all time and of Israel. In yearning for a messiah, they failed to see how God was always active and restoring them to life in each moment. Asking, "what must I do to be saved?" is to fail to recognize God's ever-active work of salvation.

It is not that sin is ignorance; rather, it is an inability and a refusal to recognize the truth. The inability to recognize the truth can be encoded in the systems that arose to protect the covenant. The levitical purity and holiness codes, which were codified and extended into Pharisaic Judaism, became an oppressive system that hindered people from coming to understand the truth of God's ever-active love for God. When St. Paul writes that the law is unto death, this is what he means. When the law—which ought to be life-giving—prevents us from recognizing God's love, it kills.

Sin as rule breaking

The most basic definition of sin, in the late-modern Western way of looking at the world, is doing what is forbidden. This is Wesley's 'intentional violation of a known law of God.' McCormick calls it "Sin as Crime."¹⁴ Sin is a forensic and penal category. A crime has been committed, the act must be punished to deter the criminal from committing a future crime. The criminal is not impure or unholy but simply criminal. There is no scientific test that can measure holiness, but we do have DNA and CCTV to demonstrate guilt. Crimes may be against society or against God. A sin is a specific kind of crime; it is a crime against God. God has established clear rules; we are to obey them. If we do not, we are to be punished. Punishment is sometimes

14. McCormick, *Sin as Addiction*, 54.

understood as a debt owed to the person harmed or to society. Sin incurs a penalty of debt that is owed to God. In the Anselmic model, this debt is infinite due the infinite distance between the creature and creator and only God can pay an infinite death.

In such a forensic framework, God is viewed as judge and warden. Sin is personal; an individual's own actions are the ones that matter most. Punishment is likewise personal and individualistic. Consider the flood of the Noah story. If seen as a means of cleansing the world from a contagion, the flood can be understood as an act of mercy—the world was so polluted that only a fresh start with a healthy remnant could bring about life as God intended. When seen as a punishment for the evil done by humans and angels, the flood is a punitive action by a God who could think of no other means of punishing (or, maybe, rehabilitating) the planet. Each individual person deserved the death they suffered because, “every thought of their hearts was only evil continually.” (Gen 6:5)¹⁵

McCormick's assessment of this model is clear:

The limits of the juridical and individualistic models of sin are numerous. Among others, the arid legalism and juridicism of traditional moral theology suffers from an alienation from a sound theology of grace, an unawareness of the pervasive and disintegration power of sin as a state, and an ignorance of the liberating and reconciling God of scripture.¹⁶

The traditional distinction between venial and moral sins mirrors the misdemeanor and felony distinction. The system talks of rehabilitation but punishment is the predominant theme; death

15. In the documentary hypothesis theory, the Noah story is frequently used as a pedagogical device because it is so easy to tease apart the two main strands. The different conceptions of God, humanity and sin are all evident in this one story. Is it punishment or cleansing? Yes, both. The redactors who gave us Genesis in the current form understood that one model is insufficient to capture all that is going on in this deceptively simple story.

16. *Ibid.*, 64.

and being thrown into the trash heap is not the inevitable outcome, eternal hell is the punishment. The law functions to convict in two senses: it makes us aware of our short-comings and it stands in judgment pronouncing a verdict of guilty. And, it is your fault—you are to blame for your actions; you must suffer the punishment.

It is hard to find anyone currently defending a notion of sin as crime in academic work. Yet, it seems to be the most common model on-offer in popular discourse. Even careful authors slip back into it from time to time. I cannot find a good theory as to why this is the case other than it is easy, it matches what we know from our daily lives. In a democratic civil polity there is a vague sense that we shape the laws, but we act as if the law is defined by “the man” or “the elite” or “the politicians” rather than the people. The law is extrinsic; it is to be obeyed. Likewise, sin is breaking an extrinsic law established by God. There is no questioning the law; it just is what it is. Legalism and the demands of obedience are easily understood concepts. This forensic model dominates every-day theological discourse because it is what we know best, not because it is an accurate presentation of what scripture actually says.

Covenant breaking

A much more rich model—one that takes into account the way the law operated in the Hebrew Bible—is the idea of covenant. God established explicit covenants with Noah, Abraham, Israel, and Moses. For our purposes here I will speak as if the Abrahamic, Israelite, and Mosaic covenants are the same, acknowledging that they are distinct but similar enough to have a kind of unity of purpose that is to redeem the world. A covenant is a treaty or a contract. There is a set of terms of the covenant that both sides must agree to and obey. There are consequences if one side

breaks the covenant. In the covenant with Noah, God sets a bow in the clouds, pointed upwards, to indicate that, if God failed to keep his side of the covenant, God would be accountable.

The ancient near-eastern model for a covenant was a vassal treaty; after a war, the losing party would serve as a vassal state to the victor. The vassal would pay tributes, support the endeavors of the victor, and swear loyalty. The victor in turn would provide protection, and oftentimes economic integration, to the vassal state. The language of the preface to the Ten Commandments reads like a vassal treaty: I will be your king and you will be my people. That is, the Ten Commandments were given as the agreed-upon framework between the Israelites and God. They were not established as a legal code but rather as the conditions of a defined relationship.

Unlike the notion of sin as rule breaking, a covenant is a bi-lateral arrangement and not individualistic. The biblical covenants are between God and all creation (Noah), or the descendants of Abraham, or Israel. Individuals may fail to keep the terms of the covenant, such as profaning the sabbath, but that does not break the covenant. When Israel as a whole ceases to keep the terms of the covenant (not following the Jubilee year system, allowing for trans-generational poverty), then the prophets start warning that God will respond to the breach of covenant. The terms may be externally defined, but they are not one-sided rules. Individual breaches of the terms points towards a deeper systemic problem; however, the covenant is not with individuals, but the community. Sin, in the covenantal model, is not an act by an individual but a propensity by a community to break the covenant.

Individual acts are sinful insofar as they indicate a failure of the community to inculcate the values of the covenant. All sin is properly societal, since an individual's behavior is the

product of the society's willingness to tolerate the covenant being ignored. Rules are enforced to ensure that the covenant is preserved. Failure to attend to the ceremonial duties, which inculcate the values of the covenant, are equally as sinful as breaking the rules. That is, there is no real distinction between the moral and ceremonial laws of the Torah; they are all the terms of the covenant between God and Israel when properly understood. The so-called ceremonial laws serve to form people into the kind of people who are faithful to the covenant.

Sin as violating nature

Thomas Aquinas gave one definition of sin as, “To sin is nothing else but to hang back from the good that belongs to one by nature.”¹⁷ Given the profound shift in the concept of nature from the medieval to modern period (discussed in chapters 1 and 5), talk of sin as a violation of nature can seem absurd now. If the laws of physics cannot be broken and something is physically possible, how can it violate nature? Thomas held an Aristotelian notion of natures, which function teleologically. Hanging back from the good that belongs to one by nature is to not pursue the *telos* of your nature, to miss the mark by aiming at the wrong mark. Aquinas was shaped by Augustine’s understanding of human nature and the human condition, but the Stoic and Platonic metaphysics in Augustine’s framework was replaced with Aristotle’s categories and logic. Thomas held to a much more cognitive understanding of the human person, in which the will is part of the faculty of the mind.¹⁸ Sinning is not breaking a rule, or violating a law of nature, but violating the natural order; since the nature of a human person is to be in union with God, not seeking union with God is sin.

17. ST. I/II 109.2. ad 2.

18. Thomas’ anthropology on this topic deserves a full-scale volume. This claim is much too simplistic, but is accurate enough for the topic at hand.

This is conceptually very close to “missing the mark” by misidentifying the mark. If we orient ourselves towards a lesser *telos*, then we may achieve the chosen *telos* but still not satisfy our natural *telos*. Frustrating our nature’s desire to be with God is sin. In Thomas’ understanding, our union with the divine is through contemplation of the divine. If God is *actus purus*, and that act is eternal thinking, then participation in the divine life is a cognitive endeavor. This sharply contrasts with Augustine’s view that God’s will is the cause of God’s reason. God’s *actus purus* (to translate infelicitously between frameworks) for Augustine would be loving, not thinking. Creaturely participation in the divine, for Augustine, is through loving God and creation as God loves and with God’s love via the Holy Spirit. To reference the Johannine model above, Augustine would say that Thomas has inadequately identified God by situating the divine life in the cognitive rather than the volitional.

The model of sin as violation of nature is not limited to pre-modern metaphysics. For example, Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki defines sin as "rebellion against God, rebellion against creation."¹⁹ Within the panentheistic view of process metaphysics, the line between creation and God is meaningless and anything which is harmful to creation is likewise harmful to God. Process metaphysics is a complicated topic and beyond the scope of this work, but it is broadly teleological only in respect to the actions of personal agents. Natures are not a part of the Whiteheadian and Bergsonian relational ontologies, but nature as a whole is construed as being a synonymous term with creation. Rebellion against God and creation is a distortion of the kind of

19. Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1994).

relationship we ought to have with everything in which we are in relation (that is, with everything, to greater or lesser degrees).

Sin as relationship breaking and disordered love

The great commandment is to love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself. Within this commandment is a plurality of relationships. We stand in relationship to ourselves, to our neighbor, and to God; our neighbor stands in relationship to us and to God; God is in relationship with us and our neighbors. Loving God is our natural state, but this relationship is distorted by sin. Relationships are rarely unidirectional. Even the weakest form of relationship, position, is bi-directional. I am to the west of my computer monitor, which is to the east of me. The proper relationship between persons—created and divine—is love. The three persons of the Trinity stand in loving relationship with each other, so much so that Augustine used the language of "lover, beloved, and loving" to help explore the idea of the Trinity. If the union which describes the depths of the divine life is one of loving relationship, and God loves the world (John 3:16) to the point that the fullness of God is love (1 John 4:16), then the model for the proper relations between persons is the inner life of the Trinity. To love is to act as the divine acts, and if the love with which we hold one another is given by the Holy Spirit, then when we love God and one another, we participate in the divine life.²⁰

Augustine deploys this language freely, to the point that he sounds very much like Plotinus and Porphyry. He freely admits to his neo-platonic influences, but John, much more

20. *Ad Parthos*, VII.5. *Iam videte quia facere contra dilectionem, facere contra Deum est. [...] Quomodo non peccas in Deum, quando in dilectionem peccas?*

Now see that what is done against love is done against God. [...] How can you not sin against God when you sin against love?

than Porphyry, is the primary source for his reflection on how we share in the divine life through love. The open question is what exactly is love. For Augustine, the distinctions between *charitas*, *delige*, and *amor* are simply stylistic. They all point towards the same deeper reality. In John's Gospel, Jesus hints that there is a distinction between *philiros* and *agape* in his questioning Peter, which Peter fails to grasp (John 21:15-17). Here I can only point towards the question. Any full articulation of what constitutes love must take into account how God stands in loving relationship towards the world.

God respects our agency, our freedom to make morally significant decisions. God lets us experience the consequences of our free decisions, even when those decisions lead to our destruction. God also seems to work to limit those consequences, and works to undo them without overriding our agency. God works to redeem us from our own failings, but only if we choose to allow God to redeem us. At the same time, God seems to recognize that our decisions harm not only ourselves, but others and God works to mitigate the consequences from destroying others. For example the jubilee year, which undoes the effects of a parent's poor choices, mitigates the effects of trans-generational poverty.

Sin, in this model, means not letting people have their agency, preventing them from experiencing the consequences of their actions and letting the consequences ripple further than they ought. The co-dependent spouse who covers up his wife's alcoholic behavior is failing to be loving by not letting her experience the negative impacts of her drinking. He may think that loving is "helping" her by covering up the problem, but in fact this only serves to compound the problems. The over-protective parent who does not let her child play a sport she enjoys lest she get hurt is similar, in denying the child her agency in order to "protect" her, the parent keeps the

child from doing something which would provide the daughter enjoyment and a sense of purpose. The risk injury is mitigated, but the risk of a lack of meaning and self is far greater.

Loving as God loves is difficult, context relative, and hard work. It is self-giving, but not self-abnegating. Loving requires, in modern psychotherapeutic terms, healthy boundaries and a deep respect for the agency and selfhood of the other. In becoming fully human the second person of the Trinity did not cease to be fully divine. The divinity of Christ did not obliterate the humanity of Jesus. Love of God, love of self, and love of neighbor are not in competition, but are parts of a whole. Proper love of self does not obliterate love of neighbor, nor does love of neighbor insist on the loss of self. People with weakened senses of self are prone to allow themselves to be absorbed into another or try to create their own self by absorbing and controlling others. A healthy self-love, which is rooted in an identity of being loved by God and worthy of being loved, is part of the commandment to love God and neighbor as self. The commandment to take up our cross, a willingness to die, can seem on its surface like a willingness to self-abnegation only if it is not paired with the resurrection. Without the resurrection, death is only senseless. With the resurrection, death is given meaning and that meaning is that death is that which is overcome.

The call to "bear your cross" is sometimes imposed on victims of domestic abuse. This is a perversion of Jesus' mandate. We bear our crosses because that death gives us life. Persisting in, and thereby condoning, an abusive situation is not love which resists hate, but a resignation to hate. Turning the other cheek does not mean submitting to death with no hope of resurrection, rather it is a forceful rejection of hatred by showing its weakness. Love which gives of itself to the point of self-abnegation causes the self to disintegrate. Love which gives of itself but

maintains its identity has a boundary which does not corrupt. Christ's body was placed in the tomb, but did not experience corruption, it was pierced, but did not decay. The cross did not obliterate Jesus' identity, the cross revealed Jesus' true identity. The model of love which Jesus showed gives of itself, but does not lose self in that giving. Sin, in this light, is disordered love which results in the loss of self.

It is possible to love God in a disordered manner. A person can be fully obedient to the law but love God in such a disordered way as to not know who God is. In the parable of the talents, the servant who was given the least amount to look after buried it in the ground because he knew the master was cruel and unjust. Nothing in the rest of the story indicates such a thing of the master. If the master symbolizes God in this parable, then the servant correctly identified the master in the sense that he could pick God out of a line-up, but failed to identify the master's personality. Instead of realizing the master was kind, he "knew" the master to be cruel. The relationship was disordered because the love the master had for the servant was not recognized. Obedience and prosperousness were not the standards, but a proper relationship.

In this light, Augustine can say, *Dilige, et quod vis fac.*²¹ If done in love, it can only be good, and only the good can properly love. Something can be a sin or a act of piety based entirely upon a persons's intent and disposition. Me dancing with one person may not be a sin, simply for enjoying the dancing. But the exact same act of dancing with someone different may

21. *Ad Parthos*, VIII.8. *Dilige, et quod vis fac: sive taceas, dilectione taceas; sive clames, dilectione clames; sive emendes, dilectione emendes; sive parcas, dilectione parcas: radix sit intus dilectionis, non potest de ista radice nisi bonum existere.*

Love and do what you will, if you remain silent, remain silent by love; if you cry out, cry out by love; if you admonish, admonish in love; if you spare, spare by love; let the root of whatever you do be love, only that which is good will spring from this root.

very well be a sin if there is lust in my heart. The physical motions did not change, but my intention was different, and what is a joy-filled expression with one person can be lust-filled and sinful with another.

This model of sin is deeply relative and contextual. Laws and terms of a covenant are much cleaner. Sin as a distortion of love requires that one sees clearly the model of proper and healthy love as presented in Christ. It cannot be taught in simple Sunday School lessons and it is easily distorted into libertinism by replacing the model of love with any number of alternatives.

Sin as systematic injustice

The model of sin as distorted love is radically individualistic, contextual and relative. At the other end of the spectrum is the concept of sin as systematic injustice. In this model, the systems by which the economic, political, and cultural spheres of the world operate are inherently oppressive towards some, if not all people. Sin is identified with racism, sexism, classism, hetero-normativism, and countless other intersectional topics all which serve to preserve the institutions and structures which dominate our world.

Any given person may be racist or sexist, but that is far less of a concern than the systemic racism which makes people act in racist ways. That is, we cannot blame a person for being racist because they are a product of the culture, media, and economic system which turns people into racists. Sin is not primarily an individual concern, but rather a product of the mechanisms which serve to preserve and consolidate power into the hands of those who benefit from the racist system.

The Jewish prophetic literature, especially Amos and Hosea, view the sins of Israel as systemic. The rich work to institutionalize poverty, consolidate power, and amass wealth at the

expense of enslaving most of the rest of the population. Individual sin is complicity in the systems which perpetuate the injustice. Taking advantage of privilege, consciously or not, is contributing to the shared sin of all those who benefit from the systems which keep others oppressed.

In this model, salvation is liberation from the systems which cause oppression. Individuals are not saved, societies are. One person leaving the oppressed class due to good fortune or chance and entering the empowered class is not liberation. Liberation takes place when the dynamics which preserve the power-structure collapse. Jesus calling for the Jubilee year, proclaiming an end to transgenerational poverty, and a massive redistribution of wealth is the model for what liberation and salvation mean. Salvation as a future hope in which people get rewards in the after-life are seen as tools of the system to placate the oppressed masses (Marx's "opiate of the masses"). Rather than an eschatological salvation, present liberation and establishment of justice is seen as the work of Christ in the world.

Summary

There are many models for what sin is in scripture and the traditions of the Church. No one model is adequate to the task of explaining what is wrong. Each is helpful in some way, but lacking in others. A robust understanding of sin requires a synthetic integration of the various models, acknowledging that they conflict with each other in some ways (Is sin individual? Is it corporate? The best answer is yes, it is always both individual and corporate). These inherent contradictions point towards the deep absurdity of sin. It is ultimately irrational and unintelligible, but we are able to conceive of it because we experience it. We experience its

effects in small and immense ways—a stolen wallet, a terrorist attack, thousands of children starving to death each day, systematic racism and genocide.

Different communities gravitate towards different models based on their own psychological, spiritual and material needs. We are impoverished if we narrowly focus on one and exclude the others. The Church was wise to never canonize a theory of atonement, likewise it was wise to never define sin too carefully, allowing new understandings to arise to meet the needs of new contexts.

CHAPTER 7:

The Pastoral Dimensions

This chapter will look at the narratives of loss and grief in Augustine's *Confessions* and provide a model for doing pastoral care with persons who are grieving, given the concept of volition explored in the earlier chapters. I will draw on sources in contemporary psychology and pastoral care studies as well as the insights I have gained over several years as a practitioner of pastoral care, working with hundreds of people as they grieve various losses. This chapter is a project of integrating the pastoral and the theological. This chapter is descriptive rather than exegetical in that I will look at Augustine's own grief responses and freely apply categories foreign to Augustine's own thought retroactively on his self-analysis. This chapter is also prescriptive in that there are some useful insights in Augustine's conceptual development which have helped me as I have worked with people who are grieving. That is, I think there are categories that may be foreign to contemporary practitioners of pastoral care found in Augustine's thought which are helpful and should be recovered.

Introduction: Grief defined

Grief is a complex spiritual and physical response to a loss. Grief is a person's healing process, the healing requires the whole person—body and soul—to be involved.¹ It is almost an

1. This definition of grief is unashamedly theological as it is aimed at the practitioners of pastoral care. With some minor translations (e.g. soul to mind) it can be adapted for use in a secular context. Much of what is articulated here can easily be adjusted to suit several faith traditions, but it is overtly Western Christian in this

universal experience; most people have experienced some kind of loss which has triggered grief responses. Grief-inducing losses are not limited to the death of a close family member but also include a huge number of kinds of events such as the loss of a job, undergoing a serious illness (loss of health), loss of bodily function, a material loss (such as a house fire or precious memento), loss of social status, or loss of identity (intrapsychic loss). This list is by no means exhaustive, but intended to point towards the vast array of types of losses which trigger grief responses. My thesis for this chapter is that most kinds of grief-inducing losses have a component of loss of self-identity, and this is seen in Augustine's descriptions of his own responses to the losses he describes in *The Confessions*. Since the will and the self are deeply connected concepts for Augustine, as shown in chapter 3-5, there is a deeply volitional aspect to grief. Losses are painful because, in a very profound way, they challenge our very sense of self. Complete healing requires the healing of the whole person.

Most losses have a component of being an intrapsychic loss; losses that disturb the very sense of self and require a reconfiguring of the self, its plans, desires, and intentions. In addition to using narrative to create meaning in the loss and subsequent recovery process, narrative helps create a new sense of self. Healing requires that a person successfully integrates a loss into her self-narrative, the story she tells herself and others about who she is. Spiritual healing requires that a person integrates her own story into a larger story, specifically into God's story.² Francis Schüssler Fiorenza goes so far as to say that, "contrary to popular understanding, experience is

presentation.

2. Judith C. Hays and Cristina C. Hendrix, "The Role of Religion in Bereavement," in *Handbook of Bereavement Research and Practice*, ed. Margaret S. Stroebe and others, (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2008), 338.

primarily an act of interpretation.”³ That is, even “bare” experiences come pre-loaded with an interpretative framework. The experience of grief and grieving are contextually bound and situated within a person’s self-narrative. Schüssler Fiorenza’s distinction between a narrative and a chronicle is helpful. Chronicles are lists of events, narratives take those events and construct, through the hermeneutical work of the narrator, meaning. Our lives have meaning because they can be situated in a narrative; without a narrative tying the whole together life is just “one damn thing after another.” Losses can disrupt the narrative and introduce a sense of meaninglessness. Healing involves creating new meaning from past experiences. In Christian theological language, Christ did not obliterate the history and meaning of Israel but gave it new meaning by showing anew who God had always been through all Israel’s experiences. The new-birth experience is not an obliteration of the past person, but a restructuring of the self through a new interpretation of life based on a new fulcrum experience.

Losses are spiritual in the sense that they involve the soul. This is probably obvious to anyone who has experienced grief and does not hold to a strongly materialist metaphysics. In Augustine’s framework the mind and the will are both involved, as are the affections and passions. Grief is psychological in both the ancient and modern senses. It is psychological in the ancient sense in that grief impacts the entirety of a person’s soul. It is psychological in the modern sense in that a complex interaction of mental states (thoughts and emotions) and biochemical reactions take place.⁴ Augustine was clear that the soul rules over the body, but—especially in his earlier works—did not seem to recognize how much impact the body had upon

3. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1984), 296.

4. Judith McCoyd, L. M. and Carolyn Ambler Walter, *Grief and Loss Across the Lifespan: A Biopsychosocial Perspective*, 2nd ed. (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2106), 6.

the soul. Given what we know how about how chronic pain can trigger depression, it is clear that we cannot simply assume Augustine's entire framework. Likewise, recent research, showing that emotional/mental pain activates the same regions of the brain as physical pain and that analgesics having measurable effects as anti-depressants, makes it clear that any any pastoral approach to grief must take the body into account.⁵

The conceptual transition from passion to emotion is recent and it is important in an exegetical project to maintain fidelity with the author's concept.⁶ For this chapter, however, I will generally treat them as functional synonyms. The language of passions has some advantages when working with grief, since it is clear that they are passive; we experience them and are not in control of them. Emotion, etiologically, has a similar background (we are moved by them), but they tend to operate in a more active manner in contemporary usage. For example, it is not uncommon to hear people say things like, "choose happiness." There is also some pastoral benefit in the quaintness of speaking of passions rather than emotions. "Being emotional" and "being passionate" are culturally loaded phrases, the former usually being seen as weak and negative and the latter as powerful and positive. When working with many men from the Silent and Baby Boomer generations, I often experience some initial resistance to the idea that our emotions are God-given and good. When I speak of Christ's passion, how we suffer grief, and give men permission to encounter their feelings, I generally have been able to communicate the concepts in ways that using the language of emotion fails.

5. Ole Köhler and others, "Inflammation and Depression: Combined Use of Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors and Nsaids or Paracetamol and Psychiatric Outcomes," *Brain and Behavior* 5, Issue 8, (August 2015).

6. Susan James, *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003-06-30), 4.

The cognitive impacts of the grief from a profound loss are well-documented.⁷ When I journey with people who have lost a loved one, one of the very first things I say is, “expect to have grief brain.” Memory, cognitive functioning, spatial reasoning, and even language comprehension all show marked decline in the first several months after a major loss. It is not unusual for these effects to last years, especially in the case of a traumatic loss. Since spiritual leaders are usually consulted before professional therapists in times of grief, it is vital that pastors understand the importance of normalizing the unexpected experiences of those who are grieving. Assuring people that the memory loss is normal and short-term reduces the griever’s anxiety and consequently improves their ability to heal. Hallucinations, especially hearing the dead person’s voice or seeing them “from the corner of my eye,” are also very common. When a pastor lets a grieving spouse know to expect these kinds of things early in the grieving process, she helps the griever know that the upcoming time is not normal time—the normal rules do not apply. When asked if I believe in ghosts, for example, I say, “many people I know and love have reported hearing and seeing things which don’t make any sense to me, but I trust that they are telling me the truth. No one has ever said they were harmed by what they saw or heard.” I have never seen a ghost. But, I have heard my dead grandfather’s voice reassuring me in a difficult time. At a distance of a decade, I can say that it was probably a hallucination. However, in the moment, nothing would have convinced me that I had not heard him. Knowing to expect these kinds of events and that they are at worst benign and are potentially helpful reduces anxiety, normalizes the experience, and helps open grievers to letting go of the “oughts” and relax into

7. Charles A. Hall and others, “Cognitive Functioning in Complicated Grief,” *Journal of Psychiatric Research* 58, (November 2014): 20-25.

the “is.” Put another way, it helps reduce denial, which opens the door to making new meaning, which helps restore the self.

Grief is a profoundly physical process as well. A person in grief typically burns more calories at base-load than in normal times. Many people report being having no desire to eat at all, while others report an excessive craving for salty and fatty foods. In the period right after a major loss people often report being clumsy, shaking, having lower reaction times, and lower visual acuity. Grief disrupts sleep cycles; insomnia and hypersomnia are common. In the moments after a loss, being weak-in-the-knees or losing the ability to stand is not at all uncommon. Even so-called autonomic functions like respiration can be interrupted; loss can literally take your breath away. Again, normalizing these experiences, and joking about eating an entire tub of ice-cream in one sitting, helps break through the denial by reminding us that we can barely control our own bodies, we cannot control the universe.

Healing is a painful process, be it a broken bone or a broken heart. The whole person—soul and body—must be involved in the healing. The human person is self-healing and heals well in the right conditions. Doctors, therapists, and pastors must work together to create the right conditions. Bones must be set and assisted by casts or splints or surgery involving screws and plates. Pus must be drained from wounds. Souls, likewise, need to be oriented and signs of infection or blockage purged. David Kessler describes grief like a river, when we let our bodies and souls do the work of healing, we just flow downstream and healing happens. When it comes to grief, however, we are conditioned to fight the activity of healing. Our “choose happiness” culture that denies the reality of death, punishes any negative emotion, and acts as if tears are a problem to be solved (rather than a sign of healing actively) encourages us to swim against the

current. “Choose happiness” makes the problems worse. “The river of grief will take you to healing and a new place with that person, but society tells us to fight the current—or that you can only have three days in the river.”⁸ Time heals wounds and does wonderful things in our soul.⁹ Tears can be a curious kind of pleasure for those in grief. Augustine clearly understood the role of time and tears in the process of healing from loss.

Episodic losses in the *Confessions*: The death of his friend

In his late 20s, Augustine started to teach in his home town and became friends with an unnamed man he had grown up with but had not been close with as a child. His friend had been nominally a Catholic but not particularly involved in the faith. Augustine was by this time already a hearer in the Manichaeans. Augustine got his friend to come along with him in his Manichaean sojourn. This friendship was profound and the two were inseparable. The late-classical understanding of male friendship was quite different than the contemporary American model. Male friendship was a profound good that transcended the kind of relationship men had with their wives.¹⁰ The closest relationships men had were with their friends. He was, in Augustine’s words, as close as Augustine’s own soul. *Mecum iam errabat in animo ille homo, et non poterat anima mea sine illo.*¹¹ Indeed, he felt as if they were one soul in two bodies.

8. David Kessler, “Love, Grieve, Live—but Don’t Suffer,” <https://memoria.com/en/stories/healing-around-grief> (accessed April 15, 2019).

9. *Conf.* IV.8.13. *Non vacant tempora nec otiose voluntur per sensus nostros: faciunt in animo mira opera.*

Time does not take a vacation, nor does it roll at leisure through our senses; it does wonderful works in the soul.

10. Augustine’s engagement to a child almost 30 years his junior gives some indication as to why this may be. The late-classical model of marriage had far more to do with property rights than with companionship.

11. *Conf.* IV.4.7. This man wandered with me in soul, and my soul could not be without him.

His friend took ill and almost died. While on his deathbed, unconscious, he was baptized as a Catholic. It was not uncommon to delay baptism until later in life in case one were to commit a sin, it was easier to have earlier sins absolved by baptism than through post-baptismal penance. The friend briefly recovered and in that short window Augustine mocked his friend for having been baptized a Catholic unawares. The friend had been told of the baptism and chastised Augustine for making fun of something so sacred. The wound of that betrayal stung Augustine to the quick. His plan was to wait for his friend to get better then convince him that Catholic Christianity was nonsense. The fever returned and the friend died. Augustine was heartbroken and his words resonate across the centuries: *Quo dolore contenebratum est cor meum, et quidquid aspiciebam mors erat; [...] Et oderam omnia, quod non haberent eum.*¹² And, *Factus eram ipse mihi magna quaestio et interrogabam animam meam, quare tristis esset et quare conturbaret me valde, et nihil noverat respondere mihi.*¹³ In times of profound grief, we become a mystery to ourselves. It seems our own souls are torturing us. Things we loved and cherished before now fill us with indifference or we hate them because of the memories they draw out in us. This mysteriousness is the result of a loss of meaning and a loss of our own identity. When we no longer are who we were (or thought we were), it comes back around to a loss of our selves, what we willed and loved no longer exists. In this intrapsychic sense, who Augustine was died along with his friend. The Christian language of death and rebirth comes into play when grief is understood in this way.

12. *Conf.* IV.4.9. My heart was made dark from sorrow, and wherever I looked was death. [...] I hated everything because they did not have him.

13. *Conf.* IV.4.9. I became a profound puzzle to myself, and I asked my soul why it was so sad and why it afflicted me so harshly; it could not answer me.

In Augustine's context, men crying was not quite the sign of weakness that it is today. That does not mean that Augustine did not ponder the role of weeping. In one place he says, *Solus fletus erat dulcis mihi*.¹⁴ A few sentences later he asks, *an et fletus res amara est et prae fastidio rerum, quibus prius fruebamur, et tunc ab eis abhorremus, delectat?*¹⁵ Weeping is sweet sometimes and unbearable at others. There is a kind of pleasure found in weeping that defies easy explanation. Earlier, he had commented on how he liked to cry at dramas in the theatre. The tears of grief, however, are not quite the same as the tears brought about by a sad movie. The sweetness of tears comes from the fact that they are doing something; they are not an entirely passive thing. Tears can be healing; a dubiously sourced "Jewish" proverb is that "what soap is for the body, tears are for the soul." The questionable attribution aside, there is wisdom in the notion that tears are cleansing.

Augustine, with the loss of this friend, had several identifiable losses. The first was this friend whom he loved greatly—as if they were the same soul. He also lost the illusion that his friend and he were quite as close as he had thought. The friend seems to have just gone along with Augustine's Manichaean explorations and remained a latent Catholic. The wound to Augustine, that his friend had not turned his back on his childhood faith, is profound. He was not who Augustine thought he was.¹⁶ The friendship may not have been as tight as he thought; the two souls may not have been one. There was a sense of identity between Augustine and his

14. *Conf.* IV.4.9. Only weeping was sweet to me.

15. *Conf.* IV.5.10. Or is weeping both a bitter thing and a loathsome thing that delights, which at first we delighted in and now we shudder at.

16. This seems to be something of a pattern in Augustine's life. It happens again with Alypius in *Conf.* VI.12.21. That he recalls these stories of "betrayal" so vividly after his conversion speaks to his not fully having come to terms with the fact that people might disagree with him even as they love him.

friend; that identity was damaged in the baptism and was destroyed at his death. This damage to Augustine's sense of shared identity is typical of an intrapsychic loss.¹⁷ If my friend is not who I thought my friend to be, then our friendship is not what I thought it to be and I am not who I thought myself to be. Augustine never quite articulates a position that selves are relationally constructed, but in several key spots in the *Confessions* he points in this direction. The loss of a close friend was a kind of death to himself, at least a major aspect of himself.

The Kübler-Ross model of the stages of grief has undergone a lot of criticism in grief theory.¹⁸ Despite its shortcomings, it remains a helpful way of thinking about how people progress through a loss. Rather than thinking of them as distinct stages, they are helpfully understood as patterns. They are not usually linear or tidy. When seen as linear stages, people worry that they are "grieving wrong" when their experience does not match the defined stages. I like to think of the stages as variations on a theme in a musical fugue. Usually, one is in the foreground, but others may come in and out as the piece progresses. Someone may have come to a place of acceptance and then have a triggering event that recalls to mind a powerful memory and suddenly the anger or depression resurfaces. In this event, Augustine is in denial when his friend briefly recovers: he denies that the baptism was actually meaningful; he denies that his friend really disagrees with him. He does not seem to suffer a profound denial stage when his friend actually dies. Anger and depression are the major themes.

17. Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs: Resources for Pastoral Care* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1983).

18. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five States of Loss* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005).

Another major criticism of the Kübler-Ross model is that it neglects the cultural contexts that surround responses to loss. In early twenty-first-century America, death happens sequestered away in hospitals. Corpses are quickly moved to the hospital morgue, then to the funeral home. If the casket is open at the funeral, typically it is only before the service. Anglo families rarely observe the actual burial.¹⁹ Death happens in private and is not discussed outside very tightly confined situations. Augustine's context was strikingly different; death was an every-day event. Grieving and mourning were public. Denial seems to be much more of a problem in the late-modern context than classical antiquity. Augustine's lack of a strong denial stage fits with his cultural context.

In journeying with someone who has lost a close companion, either through a disagreement which ends the relationship or through death, it is important to remind the grieving person that they are still of value and that they exist because God loves them into existence. At this stage of his theological development, loss was only evil to Augustine. His very self-identity was fragmented and disrupted by the betrayal and death of his friend. The death of his friend, of course, was not in Augustine's control. The next loss, however, was far more in his control.

Dismissing Adeodatus' mother

The next major loss was when Augustine sent away his son's mother upon his engagement to be married. Augustine never reveals Adeodatus' mother's name, but he seems to have been faithful to her for many years. Concubinage was licit and not profoundly dissimilar to how unmarried couples are seen in the broader North American culture now. Adeodatus' mother

19. I have conducted or assisted with over 100 funeral services in the past five years; at only two anglo services the family remained for actual burial. Of the non-anglo services, 100% remained for the burial. At an Ottawa service I was privileged to assist with the family members each helped place soil on the casket.

was was not, in Monica's opinion, marrying material. The girl²⁰ to whom Augustine was engaged was a heiress who would secure the family's social and economic future. It was no small thing for Augustine to send Adeodatus' mother away. She vowed to never take another man and she left their son with Augustine as she returned to Africa. The language Augustine uses to describe the separation is powerful, *Nec sanabatur vulnus illud meum, quod prioris praecisione factum erat, sed post fervorem doloremque acerrimum putrescebat et quasi frigidius, sed desperatius dolebat.*²¹ Legally and sacramentally, the line between concubine and wife was very clear; emotionally, it was as painful as a divorce.

The grief of divorce is very much akin to the grief of a death. The Christian language of two-becoming-one in a marriage is very apt. In late-classical Rome, divorce could be a literal death sentence for a woman, if her birth family refused to take her back. While this case was Augustine dismissing a concubine and not a divorce, the emotional effects would be the same. He ended a relationship, and discarded her, because Monica found someone "better" for Augustine. Clearly, Augustine loved Adeodatus' mother.²² He thought better of her than he did of himself, when he took another lover as a stop-gap to tide him over until his fiancé was old enough to marry. Here, Augustine does not commend his own grief response, but rather he holds

20. She was only 10 at the time of the engagement.

21. *Conf.* VI.16.26. My wound that had been made by the cutting away was not yet healed. After intense fever and suffering it putrified, and was like a freezing, but suffered desperately.

22. I think he does not name her for the similar reasons as to why the friend in the previous example was unnamed, out of respect for the surviving family. She was probably still alive and he did not want to deepen or re-open the wound by having her name be tabloid fodder, so-to-speak. The alternative explanation, that she is so unimportant as to not even merit a name, seems to me, to not accord with the impassioned language of suffering he uses to describe the split.

it up as an example of just how sick his soul was. He cut himself off from a person he loved in favor of financial security and took another lover as a short-term outlet for his libido.

In grief, we seek to soothe ourselves. Food, in my experience, is one common method people use. I had advised people to be aware of our prosperity to use food to self-soothe dozens (if not hundreds) of times, but when my own father died I went and ordered a plate of chili cheese fries for dinner. I knew that this was simply self-soothing behavior and that I did not need the fat and salt, but my body simply overrode my reason. We call it comfort-food for a reason. Alcohol, drugs, and sex are common ways people try to reduce the pain associated with a loss. I do not find the case that Augustine was a sex addict to be all that compelling; he seems genuinely grieved at having to send away Adeodatus' mother. He seems to have been faithful to her for years—perhaps shaped by his father's infidelity against Monica. His behavior does not fit the pattern of sex-addiction. His taking another concubine is not commendable behavior, but it is not uncommon at all. Rebound relationships are all-too-common and are a form of self-soothing.

When a relationship ends, a person's self-identity must be renegotiated. People who are "dumped" for another person often quickly seek revalidation by moving into a new relationship quickly. The identity change that comes about from "part of a couple" to "the one who was dumped" can be deeply traumatic. Feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy are very common. Any plans the person had for the future together suddenly cease. Augustine's conversion from a kind of philosophic life of leisure with a Christian veneer to a rigorous Catholicism was facilitated because his self-identity was so disrupted by his sending away Adeodatus's mother.

Retirement from teaching

The loss of a job, no matter how it happens, can be profoundly painful. Augustine documents his job changes, moving from Hippo to Carthage, Rome, and Milan because these teaching posts serve to shape his identity. His post in Milan was one of the highest in the entire Empire. His entire life was centered around his professional pursuits. He was a professor of rhetoric, very much in the public eye, when he made the decision to leave his post. He debated waiting until the break to take his leave. Difficulty breathing and speaking afforded him an honest excuse to leave before the end of the term. So, with a few weeks left in the term, he resigned his post and ceased being a professor of rhetoric.

Men in particular, but much more commonly with women now also, tie their identity to their occupation. We are what we do. The first question that gets asked at an introduction in our culture is “what do you do?”²³ Augustine operated in the middle-class of Roman society, not landed but free and educated. He was not required to do manual labor, but his livelihood depended on patrons, fickle wealthy students, and teaching positions given as political favors. Giving up teaching and breaking off his engagement was a profoundly risky thing to do. He downplays the significance of these decisions, but they are identity re-forming. It seems evident to me that the decision to leave his teaching position was a necessary step in his conversion. In the moment, he thought he was pursuing a life of philosophy and leisure aided by patrons. Profound shift in identity—conversions—rarely happen suddenly; the groundwork must be prepared. Augustine, by telling his loss history and situating his step-wise conversion in the

23. Unless you happen to be United Methodist Clergy, then “where do you serve now?” is first.

context of many major losses, is signaling the role of deaths in his rebirth. The loss of his job, even though it was self-imposed, is still a kind of death-to-self which made room for the creation of a new identity.

Verecundus and Nebridius

In the middle of book IX, Augustine drops in a short passage about two friends in Milan who became his patrons. Verecundus was married to a Christian woman but would not be a Christian himself because he felt he could not do it properly since he was married. Verecundus let Augustine and his cohort live in his house, while they remained in Milan. After Augustine left for Milan, Verecundus took ill, was baptized, and died. The circumstances are similar to his unnamed friend, but the response is very different. Augustine—not yet baptized—rejoices that his friend found his leisure, the kind of leisure that Augustine was searching for in his move to Cassiciacum. Verecundus could not join the life of contemplation with Augustine because of his marriage.

Earlier (*Conf.* VIII.6.13), Verecundus and Nebridius had been mentioned as close friends and fellow professors; the context of their introduction was Augustine learning about Anthony and the desert fathers. Augustine had not yet heard about Christian monasticism and its ties with both Milan and Africa. Ponticianus—a fellow African—came to visit and introduced them to the life of Anthony, the monastery in Milan, and a story of the sudden conversion of some of the Emperor's special guard and their fiancées. This story made a profound impact on Augustine, Nebridius, and Verecundus. It is from Ponticianus that Augustine gets the idea to start his own ascetic community. While Augustine and Nebridius were planning their new celibate vocation together, Verecundus was already married. Verecundus seems to have yearned for the life of

leisure and philosophy that the Christian ascetic ideal provided, but he could not give up his marriage. Augustine had already decided to end his engagement by this point. They all remained friends, even as they pursued different vocational paths.

The death of Verecundus split Nebridius, *Angebatur ergo tunc ipse, Nebridius autem collaetabatur*.²⁴ Grief is not simple. Things can make us happy, even as they induce great pain.

Several funeral liturgies acknowledge this entangled emotional state:

Friends, we have gathered here to praise God
and to witness to our faith as we celebrate the life of *Name*.
We come together in grief, acknowledging our human loss...²⁵

Nebridius was grieving his own loss and celebrating his friend's eternal rest. When working with grieving individuals, it is important for pastors to understand that our emotions are exceedingly complicated. The "ought to" concerning how people feel is much less important than how they actually do feel. Laughter is perfectly appropriate at a funeral. What appears to be relief might really be relief or it might be denial. Statements such as, "mother is in a better place," may work as a self-soothing mechanism for a short period, but if it is just a mechanism of denial, it will eventually fail. The Christian witness is that mother and Verecundus are really in a better state, but we cannot use that truth to stop-up our feelings of loss and sadness even as we celebrate their rest. The pastoral role of helping people situate the loss into a narrative cannot go too quickly to the end; the loss must be felt before it can be narrated, if the loss is to have meaning—a loss denied cannot ever really be transformed into resurrection. If Christ had not died, then Christ cannot be resurrected.

24. *Conf.* IX.3.6. Though [Verecundus' death] strangled him, Nebridius rejoiced with us.

25. "A Service of Death and Resurrection," United Methodist Hymnal, 871.

Nebridius would go on to become a Bishop in the Church. Augustine here mentions that, at this point, Nebridius held to the Docetist error that Christ was a phantasm and did not have real flesh. Christ, according to the Docetists, was not human and could not really die. The Docetic denial of death and the refusal to believe that someone we love is really gone stem from the same psychological need for us to maintain the world as it is, to give ourselves the illusion that we are in control. The orthodox position, that Christ was fully human and fully divine and really died, is pastorally important. Christ's real death enables us to situate our losses into the divine narrative and give them real meaning.

Our emotions have a degree of self-regulation. We can only grieve and cry so much before we exhaust ourselves. Children at funerals are excellent examples of this. One moment a child will be crying beside the casket, a few minutes later they will be playing hide-and-seek amongst the tombstones, and then a few minutes later crying again. As we exhaust our ability to cry, we need to give ourselves sabbath; children do this instinctively. A well executed funeral creates space for both laughter and crying, giving people permission to feel what they feel, in the quantity that they are able to feel. Each funeral, however, is different. There is no one formula for how much laughter and how much room for expressing sadness is appropriate. Each person's emotional coping range varies and is deeply contextual. Most of us would not cry over spilling milk, but in times of profound stress seemingly unimportant things like spilt milk can reduce us to tears. A pastor needs to be aware of the things that reduce her emotional coping range (overwork, lack of sleep, poor diet) and actively pursue self-care to expand that range (prayer, meditation, exercise, time with friends). Likewise, a pastor needs to recognize the factors which have reduced the emotional coping range in others and help them expand their own as well. This requires taking the whole person, body and soul, into account. Nebridius wanted a life of leisure

for himself so he could pursue a life of the mind, but that was impossible until he came to understand the importance of Christ's body.

Death of his parents

Augustine's father dies with hardly a mention. Patricius appears to have been an abusive man with a fondness for fornication.²⁶ He seems to have been better after his baptism, but—in sharp contrast to the effusive praise he has for his mother—Augustine's silence about his father speaks volumes. Monica's death took place less than a week after he had a profound experience. The experience came about as part of a conversation with her as they looked out over Ostia and mused about what eternal life would be like. They started with sensual things, moved on to celestial, and came to wisdom itself. Monica concluded the conversation by saying she found no delight in this life, *Quid hic facio?* What am I doing here?²⁷

Physical life ends. The Christian hope is in resurrection. Monica knew that her life was short. When people are dying, especially in prolonged hospice situations, it is not uncommon for people to wait to actually die. I dread January 2nd because people hang on through the holidays and let go after they are over. Sometimes, people wait for a child to arrive and die moments after the awaited child shows up. Other times, they wait for everyone to leave so they can die alone. Pastorally, it is important to give family members permission to not wait at the bedside. I have witnessed several instances where the family kept vigil bedside for days and only when everyone left to shower and eat did the person finally let go; they wanted to be alone. Monica had intended to die in Africa and be buried with her husband. As she lay dying the question of her burial

26. *Conf.* IX.9.19.

27. *Conf.* IX.10.26. This phrasing seems to be a north-African idiom that Augustine recorded literally, he would never let such a barbarism leave his own lips, but it accurately captures Monica's manner of speaking.

comes up and she assures Augustine that God will sort it all out in the resurrection. Monica's identity was located relative to God's; her body was unimportant in the near-term and long-term God would provide.

When she died, Augustine did the most humane act possible: he closed her eyes. There are certain moments when a pastor invades the physical space of other people in very peculiar ways. Baptism and Ash Wednesday are moments when there is physical contact of a very intimate kind, unlike any other, between the pastor and the parishioner. Touching another person on the face is a powerful thing and should not be done in a clinical manner. Every Ash Wednesday, I am astounded at the degree of trust people place in me as my finger imposes ashes on their foreheads and I remind them that they are dust and to dust they will return. Closing a person's eyelids after they die is a moment that acknowledges the change from a person to a corpse. It must be done with the most tender of care. It is a holy act. It is this act which reduces Augustine, a 33 year old man, to a puddle of tears. Adeodatus collapsed into a storm of tears for his grandmother. The gathered group silenced his wailings.

It is interesting to note that Augustine cried, tears welled up and flowed until he could cry no more. Adeodatus wailed and had to be silenced. Augustine does not denigrate the role of emotion, but he approves of the gathered group curtailing his son's cries. I've watched as wailing daughters were dragged from hospital rooms by well-meaning family. In that first moment after a death, the personalities of those gathered are most evident. The caretakers will not cry; they will go into action soothing others. The organizers will go search for a nurse or doctor. The achievers will be on the phone, calling the appropriate people, reporting the news. Augustine reports that in the days following that he was struck by how sad he really was, and this sadness induced shame

which he describes as a double sorrow: *Et quia mihi vehementer displicebat tantum in me posse haec humana, quae ordine debito et sorte conditionis nostrae accidere necesse est, alio dolore dolebam dolorem meum et duplici tristitia macerabar.*²⁸ The latent Stoicism, the desire to be free from our passions still lingered. He had not yet learned that such feelings are given by God and are good, helpful for our healing.

The pastor is present in death to bear witness to the goodness of God in the midst of the death. We pray; we remain calm. Our job is to hear the cries, to acknowledge them, and to let them happen. At Monica's death, after quieting Adeodatus, the group started canting Psalm 101, a Psalm which addresses apostasy and deceit. In the middle of it is the line: *oculi mei ad fideles terrae ut sederent mecum ambulans in via immaculata hic mihi ministrabat.*²⁹ Perhaps, this is the line which drew them to select this psalm. Singing forces us to regulate our breathing. When something takes our breath away, song can help restore it.

Once again Augustine speaks of his love for his mother as union, as with his unnamed friend.³⁰ Augustine's relationship with his mother would be branded as "enmeshment" by contemporary family systems theorists. The Augustinian self is created in the relationships of love, but the self is also somewhat obliterated in those relationships. With his friend, Augustine thought the union was closer than it really was. Augustine expected his friend to give himself and

28. *Conf.* IX.12.32. But I knew what it was I crushed down within my heart. Because it distressed me greatly that these human feelings had such sway over me, for this needs must be according to due order and our allotted state, I sorrowed over my sorrow with an added sorrow, and I was torn by a twofold sadness. (Translation Ryan). Augustine, *Confessions*, 225.

29. Ps 100:6 (Vulgate numbering). I will look with favor on the faithful in the land, so that they may live with me; whoever walks in the way that is blameless shall minister to me (Ps 101:6 NRSV).

30. *Conf* IX.12.30. *quae una facta erat ex mea et illius.*
One [life] had been made out of hers and mine.

his own opinions over to Augustine's greater intellect. With his mother, the dynamic was more complicated. Augustine went along with the plans for the arranged marriage, to a point. He also lied to Monica about his leaving Hippo to go teach in Carthage. Monica seems to have been able to impose her will on Augustine, as he tried to impose it on others. A healthy understanding of love and boundaries is important—love is giving of self, but the self is not obliterated. God loves me; I do not vanish into God's love as a drop of wine in the sea. The union created by healthy love maintains the boundaries of the individual but unites in purpose, even if that purpose is simply enjoying each other's company.

At thirty-three years old, Augustine became a an orphan. His mother's death changed his identity yet again. We know that our parents will (hopefully) die before we do. Monica's death was sudden but not entirely unexpected at fifty-six. The loss of the last surviving parent, the moment someone becomes an orphan, can be quite traumatic for some people. More than once I have said, "you are an orphan now," to someone who already had grandchildren and have seen them sigh and thank me for giving a name to how they felt. Our cultural idea of an orphan is of a child, but the reality of being an orphan, or the oldest surviving member of a family (especially for people who grew up as the youngest child), can mark an important turn in a person's identity.

The pastoral role

The role of the Christian pastor is distinct from the secular therapist. Pastoral care is not psychotherapy; it is care for the soul. There are many ways in which pastoral care looks similar to the kinds of things that go on in a therapist's office, but there are important ways in which they are different. One of my ministries is helping people in my congregation by convincing them that

seeing a therapist in no way conflicts with Christian doctrine.³¹ An adjunct to this ministry is making suggestions as to which therapists would be a good fit for the parishioner in question. A pastor who understands her own limitations is wise to keep good relationships with therapists in her area and to know them well enough to be able to recognize when a parishioner may or may not benefit from a therapist's particular style or method.

There are many similarities between the role of the pastor and the role of the therapist. Both the pastor and the therapist must be careful listeners. The single most healing act for those who are grieving is telling their stories, creating the space necessary for meaning to emerge from the loss.³² I once sat silently and listened to a widow tell her story for ninety minutes. In the entire time we were together I may have said ten sentences, six of which were leading questions. At the end of our meeting she thanked me for giving her such wise advice and helping her see everything in a new way—I had not done any of that. I listened, made eye-contact, nodded in understanding and had tissues available should she need them. Her healing came, in my theological language, from the work of the Holy Spirit via her telling her story. A less overtly theological way of saying the same thing is that simply telling her story helped her articulate and understand what she was experiencing. Telling the story helps the griever to place their pain into a larger narrative in which the loss and suffering have meaning. When meaning is created, a new sense of self emerges. Those in the earliest days of grief are usually unable to begin developing the narrative that provides their loss and pain with meaning. Soon after a loss the most important thing is for the pastor to do is provide comfort and assurance that things will be alright, not now

31. Hays and Hendrix, "The Role of Religion in Bereavement," 342.

32. Cristopher G. Davis, "Redefining Goals and Redefining Self: A Closer Look At Posttraumatic Growth Following Loss," in *Handbook of Bereavement Research and Practice*, ed. Margaret S. Stroebe and others, (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2008), 310.

but eventually. After the initial waves of pain pass, then the work of integrating the pain into a narrative can begin.

Along with helping people tell their stories, it is important to normalize the experiences. The symptoms of grief, especially “grief brain” can be terrifying—especially in cultures which deeply connect intelligence with an individual’s value. In my stock grief talk, I always say, “you are not going crazy, it is not early-onset Alzheimer’s, it is just grief brain. Write things down, take good notes, and be patient with yourself.” In a group setting, there is a collective sigh of relief when I say this. Each person’s grief process is unique, but there are several major themes which run through most of them. Learning that what she is experiencing (the physical and spiritual symptoms) are common, is quite often enough to lessen the fear and anxiety and make the healing process much easier.

Like a good therapist, the pastoral role when dealing with the grieving includes being self-aware. Am I crossing my arms because I am chilly or because I am uncomfortable with what is being said?³³ Am I handing this box of tissues because his tears make me feel vulnerable?³⁴

The pastor must know what is a real threat and what is not—a shepherd who sees wolves where

33. Understanding body language is important. Being aware of your own body and what you are communicating is a hard skill to learn, but one which serves the pastor well. Being able to accurately read the body language of another is very important. People doing pastoral care must stay abreast of evidence-based research into body language and not fall back on old tropes. For example, crossed arms are less about being closed to what is being said than being uncomfortable; we cross our arms to self-comfort, to literally hug ourselves, not to create a barrier between ourselves and the speaker.

34. As a general rule, I never hand anyone tissues, as it signals that I am uncomfortable with tears. I remind myself frequently that I am not allergic to tears; they will not harm me. In my office, I have two boxes of tissues near where others sit (one on my desk, the other on a bookshelf). When I lead group sessions, I have a box on the floor between every other chair, so that each person has easy access should they want them. People may take a tissue if they want but not because I force one on them. This may seem like a trivial detail, but it is one way I signal that I am not afraid of emotion and will not demand that you suppress your emotion when in my presence.

there are only scrub bushes will stress the sheep. The pastor must be a non-anxious presence, especially in high-stress situations. Anxiety is both contagious and addictive. Emotions are God-given and good, but a wise pastor knows which emotions are hers and which belong to the others involved in the situation. In the moment of profound loss, it is natural for a pastor to want to project her own losses onto the situation, but the last thing a family witnessing the death of a loved-one needs is for the person who is there to be helpful inflicting her own emotional baggage on the grieving family.³⁵

A parishioner in tears is almost never a threat. Emotions are not a problem to be solved. Emotions, even the unpleasant ones, are given by God for important reasons. Anger, sadness, disgust, and fear are part of the grace God gave us in our nature. We ought to be afraid of things which can harm us. We ought to be disgusted by things which can make us sick. We ought to be angry at injustice. We ought to be sad about losing things we care about. Beatitude, happiness, is God's desire for us, but, at least for now, all our emotions are necessary for our thriving. Our culture, especially the Silent and Baby Boomer generations, internalized the message that men are allowed only a handful of emotions: happy, work, sports, and drunk; anything else is a failure of manhood. The pastor's role in helping people who have limited themselves to a narrow emotional vocabulary expand that range cannot be over-stated. Many people need explicit permission to feel what it is that they actually feel—that is, to acknowledge and respond to their actual feelings, not what they have internalized that they ought to feel. The Psalms, especially the

35. Every pastor who works with grief and trauma needs a therapist, a covenant group, a spiritual director, and a pastor.

ones which are not printed in most hymnals, are exceptionally useful in helping people see that the full range of human emotions are important, God-given, and not a sign of weakness.³⁶

The pastor has a duty for reproof, admonition, and discipline that the therapist does not.³⁷ When there is a relationship of mutual trust and love between pastor and parishioner, the pastor can express herself openly in a way that the therapist cannot. The pastor can guide a person through the grieving process; when done well, the pastor journeys *with* the griever. “One of the greatest needs a person has in times of loss is the need for love, support and companionship.”³⁸ This means that the pastor must be emotionally vulnerable and yet remain a non-anxious presence. “Research has indicated that it is not the theoretical basis of the therapeutic work which matters most but the fact that the client has a positive relationship with the counsellor.”³⁹ The image of the detached therapist, even one who engages in active-listening does not fit with the kind of engagement that a pastor can have when working with grieving parishioners. It is important that the pastor be able to be in touch with her own grief history and understand her own patterns of grief and not impose those on the parishioner. Each person’s grief is their own alone; yet, there are patterns which are quite common.

The therapist brings an objectivity to the relationship that the pastor cannot. A pastor lives and journeys with her congregation. The therapist is an outside consultant whose lack of a

36. The most common spiritual discipline I recommend to people is praying through the Psalms. I encourage people to let themselves feel what the psalmist felt; anger, hatred, sadness, joy and contentment are all found in the psalms.

37. Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1983), 207.

38. Brenda Mallon, *Dying, Death and Grief* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2007), 31.

39. Ibid.

shared-history can be a great advantage. I do not think a therapist can be objective in a strong sense, but a therapist can bring a level of objectivity that can help the griever in their work of constructing new identity and meaning through the loss in a way that a pastor cannot. The pastoral relationship, because of its long-term ongoing nature, tends to be identity preserving rather than identity reforming. The grieving process is about identity reformation; a change has taken place in the world, we must change along with it. When trying to convince people to use a therapist I often use the analogy of a coach; the therapist is like a coach who is called in to help with a specific issue in need of some training. A casual golfer may spend a few sessions with a coach to improve his grip or follow-through. In the same way, a therapist can help someone after a loss evaluate her own patterns of grieving and help her reshape her behavior.

The way a person grieves is typically established at a very early age. Early losses, such as a middle-school crush rejecting an request for a date, establish patterns which do not change much through a person's life. If you used food to self-soothe in your teenage years, you will probably use food to self-soothe later in life. Pastors who have served a community for a long time may be able to discern patterns from their parishioner's minor losses and be able to anticipate how they will respond to a major loss. People grieve in their personality. Children who act out after the loss of a parent typically had acted out in similar ways before the loss of their parent; grieving does not change your personality, it makes it more evident.

Many losses are accompanied by guilt and shame.⁴⁰ When a parent loses a child, no matter what age the child is, there is usually a sense of, "I ought to have..." When it comes to our

40. I do not have space to articulate the distinction between guilt and shame here; broadly guilt is the sense that "I **did** something wrong" and shame is "I **am** something wrong." Shame is about identity, guilt is about behavior.

children, we think we ought to be in control of the universe. Parents are supposed to protect their children, yet we are incapable of doing so. Likewise, long-term care-givers frequently report that they pray or think, at some point in the process of care-giving, “God, please let them die soon.” The guilt they feel from wanting to be freed from the task of care-giving can be overwhelming. I have found that, pastorally, if I raise the issue before the parishioner and offer a word of forgiveness, there is frequently a visible sigh of relief and tears of healing. “If you ever prayed that they would just die so you could be free from it all, I want you to let go of any guilt you carry about that. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. God knows your burdens and how hard you worked taking care of them, you did a good job, and your efforts were appreciated. Those moments when you were exhausted, those are nothing you should carry as guilt.” Occasionally someone will say, “no, I never had those thoughts.” To which I say, “wonderful, I know that a lot of people struggle with it. I’m glad you didn’t have that.” However, for the large number of people that do, my confessing on their behalf and offering pardon preemptively is a model of God’s prevenient grace. Guilt and shame disrupt healing. Shame serves to preserve negative aspects of a person’s self-identity. The unique pastoral role of saying words of forgiveness can be profoundly important.

The role of the pastor is not the role of the therapist, but the two can work together to help people heal after a loss. Grief is not a mental health condition. Grief is not depression. Grief is a response to a loss. Sadness is a normal part of grief. A pastor should be able to recognize symptoms of depression and be quick to suggest that people who exhibit signs of depression discuss it with their physicians.⁴¹ If the sadness is normal sadness and does not meet the

41. “Depression Basics,” <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/depression/index.shtml> (accessed May, 2019).

definition of depression, the pastor should assure the person that sadness is God-given and part of the healing process; “it hurts so much because we love so much.” Situating sadness in love and in the light of our larger theological commitments helps create meaning in the loss and restores a sense of self in the midst of chaos.

Summary: volition and the narrative self

Augustine identified being human with being the kind of creature who is able to love.⁴² The fullness of human existence is found in loving well. Loss is painful because every loss is double: there is the loss itself and how that loss changes our identity. When we lose something we do not love, there is no pain, no grief. Loving properly unites the lover and the beloved into a new thing without the original things being obliterated. *The Confessions* was novel in that it was the first western autobiography. In it, Augustine not only chronicles the events that happened in his life but uses them to define the meaning of his life up to that point. He uses narrative to articulate what was important and why. The loss narratives serve to show how his self-identity was stripped away in preparation for his conversion; he had to die to himself before he could come alive in fullness to God. A key insight found in *The Confessions* is that our identities are established in narrative form and are created relationally through what we love. Meaning is made through the stories we tell ourselves about who we love and how.

The loss narratives in Augustine’s confessions are all situated near (both before and after) the conversion narrative. These losses mark important turning points in his understanding of the

42. *Conf. XIV.7. Nam cuius propositum est amare Deum et non secundum hominem, sed secundum Deum amare proximum, sicut etiam se ipsum: procul dubio propter hunc amorem dicitur voluntatis bonae.*

When a person’s purpose is to love God, not in the manner of humanity, but that of God, and to love his neighbor as himself, he is beyond all doubt that he is said to be of a good will.

meaning of his life. The pastoral role is one of bearing witness to the pain of loss. We cannot fix someone who is grieving because grief is not a problem to be fixed, it is a necessary process of healing. A pastor can provide comfort, guidance, and assurance—healing will take place, if we trust that God is working through the pain to bring us to a place of wholeness and health. In the depths of a broken heart, this can be a difficult message to convey. Sometimes, the only thing we can do is silently sit beside someone and be a physical representation of God’s calm, quiet, assuring presence. If the griever has a heart language—as Augustine and Adeodatus did with the Psalms—stepping into that heart language can help God be seen through the darkness.

The pastoral non-anxious presence must be present and authentic, but it also must be wise enough to communicate in the language of the person in crisis. I cannot count how many times a hospital chaplain or well-meaning friend has come into a room and started using their own faith language—completely blind to the fact that not all Christians use the same words or concepts to convey the truth of the Gospel—and bewildered or enraged the friend they were there to help. A loving pastor will listen first, discern the heart language being spoken, then step in and use that language. A person in grief does not need a theology lesson; it is almost never the time to engage in a lesson (for some people, theological conversations are their heart language, but those people are rare indeed) or debate. Love people where they are. Grief brain makes the translation process difficult; take that task off her plate.

Loving well is hard work. It involves maintaining our identity as we help others to shape and form their own identities. The tasks of story-telling and listening to the stories of others are central to the care of souls. When we listen to others with open hearts, we can discover the meaning in their lives. It is a precious gift to give someone back the meaning they thought they

had lost from their own life. The pastor must not impose her own meaning on someone else's life but help them find it. Creating space for the construction of story, narrative which gives meaning, creates the space for healing through grief.

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