

THE CONVERSION OF SKEPTICISM IN AUGUSTINE'S
AGAINST THE ACADEMICS

THE CONVERSION OF SKEPTICISM
IN
AUGUSTINE'S *AGAINST THE ACADEMICS*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Augustine's relation to Academic Skepticism through a detailed commentary on the dialogue *Against the Academics*. In it is demonstrated the significance of epistemological themes for Augustine and their inseparability from practical and religious concerns. It is also shown how these issues unfold within the logic of Augustine's trinitarianism, which informs the argument even of his earliest works. This, in turn, demonstrates the depth of the young Augustine's engagement with Christian categories in works often thought to be determined wholly, or almost wholly, by the logic of Plotinian Neo-Platonism.

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A NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

Throughout my commentary I have cited *Against the Academics* according to the standard numbering of the text. This I have done to allow the reader the convenience of using whatever edition or translation he or she happens to have at hand. As a result of this, I hope to allow readers who possess Latin and those who do not to consult this commentary with equal ease. For my own purposes I have relied mainly on the clear and elegant English version of Sr. M.P. Garvey. For purposes of comparison I have also consulted the versions of O' Meara and Kavanaugh as well as the bilingual French/Latin edition of R. Jolivet.

The Conversion of Skepticism in Augustine's *Against the
Academics*

Part I Chapter I- General Introduction

Are we in any way capable of perceiving reality as it is or are we forever locked in our own subjective impressions? Can anything ever be present to us in some fashion that allows us to distinguish that presence from the mere appearance of it? Can thought itself ever transcend its own contingency and mediate to us necessary and true conclusions? These questions exercised thinkers in the past as much as they exercise thinkers today and throughout the extensive history of philosophical reflection both positive and negative answers to them have recurred as perennial possibilities. Indeed, the history of western thought in particular displays not only opposition but creative interaction between Skepticism and the quest for certainty and there is in fact a significant tradition of thought for which Skepticism itself plays an integral role in reason's fullest act of self-appropriation.

The present dissertation seeks to shed light upon one aspect of that tradition by examining an early work of St. Augustine that has received limited scholarly attention yet deals with the question of certainty in an interesting and

original way through a detailed critique of Academic Skepticism. What is more, Augustine's method for showing how reason can appropriate its own foundations reflectively and grasp its own necessity and objectivity is foundational for the subsequent history of reason in the west. Indeed, elements of his epistemology reappear in medieval scholasticism, modern rationalism, idealism, ontologism and the transcendental philosophies of figures like Rosmini and Lonergan. However profoundly these positions may transform what is in Augustine, none are thinkable without him.

Thus, both for its inherent interest and its historical significance, Augustine's treatment of certainty deserves careful reconsideration. This reconsideration will aid in more accurate appraisal of Augustine's relation to the development of modern culture that puts in question the efforts of some to use Augustine in the service of various anti or post-modernisms.

Augustine addressed the challenge presented by the Skepticism of the New Academy with great thoroughness in his dialogue *Against the Academics* as well as in several passages in his other writings. In this and other works he vigorously opposes any effort to deny to human beings a sure foundation in their quest to apprehend the truth. For him

self-consciousness itself reveals this foundation. The fact that mind is, in the final analysis, direct self-presence puts knowledge grounded in introspection beyond the power of appearance and renders it impervious to doubt.¹ On this basis, he proceeded to argue that the Platonic tradition could surmount the challenge of the New Academy, which had raised in a new way the problem of thought's adequacy to being, by showing that self-consciousness itself was constituted by the ideas (*Of the True Religion* XXXIX, 73). Augustine noted that the opposition of being and appearance, on which Skepticism thrived, is operative in any kind of knowledge in which something is known indirectly through the medium of something directly known. Thus, a sensible object external to ourselves is known, not by direct insight but through an image it produces in us, from which we infer the being and nature of that object. While Augustine thought knowledge of this kind entirely adequate to its purpose he also saw that the refutation of Skepticism involved something more than asserting this general fact. It involved cutting out the root of the Academic position by pointing to the direct presence of reason to itself in its own operations. As an example of the direct presence of being to thought, mind's knowledge of itself is, for him, immune to

the critical fire of the Academic Sceptics, who always assume that knowledge is through a medium capable of distorting the object known (*On the Trinity*, XV, 4).² For Augustine, mind does not possess itself through a representation external to mind itself but directly in the reflexive act that constitutes it as mind and cannot in any way be divided, at the substantial level, from its own knowing.³ This means that, unlike representational knowledge of the external world, there is in self-knowledge the identity and necessary relation of knower and known denied by Scepticism.

Thus, against the tendency of ancient Scepticism to posit an absolute divide between subject and object, being and appearance, Augustine points to mind's self-knowing as uniting these oppositions. Moreover, because timeless and necessary truth constitutes the activity of thought revealed in judgement, even the judgement that I exist, this self-knowledge is not barren self-identity but inherently contentful. Mind's awareness of itself is founded on an intellection of the primary ideas about which we cannot be in error.⁴ The act in which mind constitutes itself as mind can be expressed in a judgement in which universal

determinations, such as thought and existence are united with a particular content, itself.

For Augustine, this point is crucial in establishing that self-consciousness knows itself always in relation to what is other than the self and thus knows an objective reality beyond itself.⁵ The being, knowledge and life we directly know ourselves as possessing are also known as surpassing their instantiation in us. In other words, we know ourselves as selves in relation to transcendent principles of judgment distinguishable from our own finitude by their intrinsic universality. This being the case, the mind cannot fall completely out of its relation to being without ceasing to exist as a mind. Indeed, it has within the certainty of its self-knowledge the beginning point of an ascent to what is most certain in itself, the being of God.

In this way, Augustine sought to show that within thought itself lay the mediation between sensible appearance and its inner ground in the divine. Since self-consciousness, as directly self-manifesting, holds together in itself the apparent and the real, the theoretical life can involve more than the mere refusal to assent to appearances. The intelligible light, the bridge by which we

return to our source from the shadows of the cave, is present, sustaining and illumining us even in the very effort to deny it. To return fully to ourselves is to return to this light and since we are present to ourselves by our very nature to return to ourselves is a matter of looking.⁶

Having said this however, it need not be denied that for Augustine Skepticism is not without a positive function. That any Skepticism which seeks to establish a Skeptical discourse (rather than falling into silence) has of necessity a self-overcoming character will be a crucial claim emerging from Augustine's argument. This fact represents both the limitation and the positive contribution of the Skeptical tradition. By undermining the claim of various dogmatisms to offer a certain grasp of our immediate sensuous environment by showing that our relationship to it is entirely mediated, the Skeptics inadvertently pointed to thought itself as the direct self-presence of being. In this way, their position constituted a possible route of return to the wisdom of Platonism insofar as it revealed, through its very denial of the light of truth, the presence of this light in the form of universal and objective laws of thought.⁷ Thus, Augustine can see Academic Skepticism as

moving beyond itself to a knowledge of the ideas and as paving the way historically for the revival of the platonic tradition in the school of Plotinus.

The present thesis will examine the dialectical process by which Academic Skepticism can be converted to the ideas as dramatised by Augustine in the *Against the Academics*. This is Augustine's most detailed treatment of the question and one that, to the end of his life, he regarded as having accomplished its aim (*Retractions* I, 1). Because of this I will focus primarily on this work even though Augustine's argument will be stated more directly and clearly in subsequent works (see for instance *The City of God* XI, 26-27) and indeed will undergo a deepening and refinement as Augustine's reflections on the structure of selfhood mature into their later forms.

This early work and its companions have been dismissed by some as juvenilia.⁸ Nevertheless, they vividly and incisively lay the groundwork for Augustine's subsequent development and in doing so offer reflections of continuing interest to students of Philosophy. Augustine does not respond to Skepticism by demonstrating how knowledge is possible (which presupposes knowledge) but by pointing to what we in fact know. In this task he starts directly with

the awareness the questioner has of himself in his own questioning. Whatever the Skeptic might argue, the activity in which he turns thought against sense and thought against thought is itself something whose presuppositions can be brought to light and reflected upon. In adopting this procedure, Augustine has developed an approach to the problem of certainty that has proved influential beyond the immediate context of his argument with Hellenistic thought and has affinities even to some contemporary treatments of the question.⁹ Indeed, the basic question he is addressing, whether reason can overturn itself as a whole or can only address its limitations in light of what is not limited within it remains a vital one.

I will proceed in what follows to give a detailed commentary on this text. Before doing so it will be useful to consider in some detail the nature of Academic Skepticism in its historical context, particularly its relation to Stoicism. This I will do in the second chapter of this thesis. In the third chapter I will give a general outline of Augustine's thought that will set the interpretive framework for approaching this work. This will allow the reader to keep in view the larger structure of thought animating this work but not spelled out with full

explicitness within it. Having done this I will, in the fourth chapter, explain how I plan to apply this framework to the reading of the *Against the Academics*. Having done this, I will proceed in the second half of my thesis with my commentary and conclude with some general reflections on its significance for contemporary efforts to situate Augustine in relation to modern and post-modern culture.

Part I Chapter II- Ancient Skepticism

The ancient Skeptics had proposed a radical solution to the questions which animated philosophical discussion in the Hellenistic era.¹⁰ This era was characterized by a number of dogmatic philosophical schools which claimed to offer human beings certain happiness in the midst of an unstable and fragmented world.¹¹ The period immediately following the conquests of Alexander and the spread of Greek culture across Asia was one of profound spiritual upheaval. The loss of the political independence of the Greek city-states undermined the traditional civic virtues which had given meaning to the lives of their citizens. In this situation, the speculative daring and profundity of Platonic and Aristotelian thought gave way to a new pragmatic spirit for which the paramount concern was securing individual well being in a vast cosmopolitan empire. Moreover, this spirit was anti-metaphysical in temper and tended to revert to the materialism of early Greek thought (Reale 1985, 8-10). Seeking the immediate good of the individual in his worldly situation, the Hellenistic schools eschewed all idealisms and espoused a rigorous immanentism.¹²

Two of the most prominent of these schools, the Epicureans and the Stoics, sought to liberate humans from

anxiety and disturbance by means of a dogmatic belief in the veracity of sense perception. For the former, clear and veridical sense perceptions were the foundation of an atomic theory that accounted for all things in terms of the fortuitous motion of atomic particles (Armstrong 1981, 133-35). This knowledge was said to liberate us from the anxiety consequent on the belief in our responsibility to divine powers and allow us to pursue the tranquillity that results from the satisfaction of our basic natural needs (Armstrong 1981, 137). In the absence of pain brought about by the fulfilment of these needs, the Epicureans thought they had discovered a limitless good (Reale 1985, 164-171). Moreover, the pursuit of this good was taken to require a withdrawal from all civic life into intimate private associations devoted to cultivating personal happiness (Reale 1985, 120). Thus, the Epicureans found the end of man to lie, not in the theoretical life, but in a *praxis* which aimed at *ataraxia* and *apatheia*, self-sufficiency and freedom from disturbance.

The Stoics too sought freedom from anxiety and disturbance, but rather than doing so by denying divine providence they sought to offer a path whereby human beings could identify themselves directly with the will of God.

The stoic sage, with his imperturbable grasp of sensible objects, was thought to be able to know the rational order expressed in the causal nexus of natural events (Long 1974, 108). With this knowledge, he could live a life perfectly in accord with nature through identifying himself with and submitting to the divine logos (conceived as a fiery material substance permeating the cosmos) that governed all things (Armstrong 1981, 124).

The Stoics, like the Epicureans, sought to ground their claims to knowledge of the cosmos on the immediacy of sense impressions. They held that it was possible to identify a class of self-authenticating perceptions, which they termed cataleptic impressions (Long 1974, 126-7). By means of these self-evident impressions, the wise man could perceive with certainty extra-subjective events and discern through these the operations of the universal reason with which he sought identity himself. A cataleptic impression was defined as one "... stamped and moulded out of the object from which it came with a character such as it could not have if it came from an object other than the one which it did come from" (Cicero *Academica*, 2.18). Thus, the Stoics held that certain sense impressions impressed upon the percipient a form or shape which was the form or shape of an external object.¹³

They held too that these impressions were recognizable as such by their clarity and persuasiveness. If a certain impression had the character of a cataleptic impression, it could compel assent to the objective reality of that which was conveyed in the impression (Reale 1985, 223). On this basis all forms of conceptual knowledge were thought to rest. Secure in his grasp of the physical cosmos the Stoic was secure as well in his grasp of the divine logos, which was identical with it and thus could transcend the limitations of his particular existence through his love of fate.

The Academic Skeptics, however, saw a more direct path to tranquillity, which did not rest on a shaky dogmatic realism. They began from two premises accepted by the Stoics: 1. That the wise man does not assent to opinions but to true knowledge and 2. That true sense perceptions can be distinguished from false by a 'mark' of their authenticity (Cicero *Academica*, 2.40).¹⁴ The Skeptics then pointed out that the Stoics had never been able to give a clear explanation of this mark and could not for it did not exist. Consequently, nothing could be perceived in such a way as to preclude the possibility of error. This being the case, concerning sensible things (the only things considered

real in themselves by the Stoics) it was possible to hold only opinions. Since, however, the wise man did not assent to opinions, it followed that he suspended all assent (Cicero *Academica*, 2.66).

The main effort of the Skeptics went into undermining the doctrine of the cataleptic impression. Here they argued very effectively that no sense perception, no matter how vivid, could guarantee its own correspondence to an external object.¹⁵ As Long puts it: "Sense perceptions do not possess characteristics that mark off one that is certainly reliable from another that is not. In no particular case is any sense impression self-evidently true to the object it purports to represent. It may and often will be true, but it cannot be known to be true" (Long 1974, 95-6). Thus, no matter how many true perceptions we have, the fact that a vivid dream or hallucination can appear to us in such a way that nothing marks it as such precludes us from saying that any one of our perceptions is unmistakably veridical. As far as sense experience is concerned, the true and the false are forever confused and as all other truth claims rest ultimately upon sensation no secure foundation for philosophical knowledge exists. As Sextus Empiricus puts it: "And if there is no presentation capable of judging,

reasoning too would not be a criterion, for reasoning is based on a presentation. And this makes sense, for that which is to be judged must first be presented to someone, and nothing is presented to someone apart from non-rational sense perception" (*Against the Mathematicians*, 7.164.).¹⁶

If this was the case, then the Stoics' own premises committed them to the view that the wise man could not assent to any perception as true (Long, 1974, pp.90-91). The Stoics held that the distinction between the wise and the foolish lay in the fact that the former acted only from certain knowledge and the latter from mere opinion (Zeller 1962, 269-70). If certain knowledge did not exist then it followed that, concerning all things, the wise man must suspend judgement. If he did not but assented rashly, he would expose himself to the possibility of error which would cause him to lose his purchase on that by which he was called wise in the first place; his possession of truth. Thus, if to be a sage it is necessary to be free of all error, then it is necessary as well to suspend judgement.¹⁷

This withholding of assent was thought by all Sceptics to liberate human beings from the fear of error and to bring about a state of imperturbable self-sufficiency and happiness. "The Sceptics hoped to attain a freedom from

disturbance by judging the inconsistency of appearances and ideas, and not being able to do this, they suspended judgement. Being in this suspensive state, freedom from disturbance followed fortuitously, as a shadow follows a body" (Sextus Empiricus *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 12.25).¹⁸ Thus, the Skeptic succeeds by failure. Discovering the inadequacy of all attempts to distinguish being from seeming and the impossibility of judging between rival philosophies and, moreover, knowing the insufficiency of opinion to satisfy our desire for knowledge, he simply renounces the fruit of his search and finds in this renunciation freedom and peace.

In this way, the Skeptics found in their own subjectivity, the suspensive state of thought resting in its own formal self-identity, the abiding term of all discourse (however, they did not go beyond this to ask whether this subjectivity itself was intelligible in itself or whether it too possessed its stability in relation to a prior principle).¹⁹ The Academic Skeptics in particular emphasized the practice of a negative dialectic which could undermine any given content by showing its contrary to be equally plausible. In this practice, the wise man attained inner

freedom from all appearances and impressions and in this negative fashion displayed his will to truth.

In certain Skeptics this doctrine appears to have produced an austere quietism, which led inevitably to the accusation that it was a doctrine that rendered human life impossible.²⁰ After all, the physical necessities of animal life, to which human beings are subject, seem to demand the assent to certain appearances. If I am hungry, I must judge that the object in front of me is edible as opposed to poisonous. Suspension of judgement in this case would result in my starvation. What is more, as individual human beings are, by and large, too feeble to survive in complete solitude. The fact that they must live in society with others also places them in situations where assent to appearances seems unavoidable. How then could the Skeptic's way of life be anything more than an unobtainable ideal?

It fell to the Skeptic Carneades to work out a doctrine of plausibility by which, without giving full assent to anything as true, the Academic Skeptic could nonetheless function as a denizen of the realm of appearances (Hankinson 1995, 111-12). Keeping his mind free from error he could still proceed to make the cave a somewhat comfortable place to inhabit if he were a careful enough observer of the

shadows on the wall. Conceived in this way, the life of the Skeptic could, as far as appearances are concerned, be outwardly indistinguishable from the life of common men and women. Indeed, he could combine his seemingly austere doctrine with the highest degree of worldliness if only he kept himself inwardly free from assent. This could seem a plausible step to take. It is notable, however, that the Skeptics could never quite abandon a concern for the theoretical life. However successful the Skeptic might have been at navigating around the cave he did not seem to have ever wanted to call it home.²¹

How, then, does the Skeptic judge plausibilities? Sextus Empiricus gives a lucid account of Carneades' views on this question. He notes that for Carneades and the Academics who succeeded him it was possible to distinguish among different types of perceptions. These types he describes as follows,

They regard some as simply plausible; some as plausible and tested; and others as plausible, thoroughly tested and uncontroverted. For example, when one suddenly enters a darkened room wherein is lying a coiled-up rope, it is simply plausible that the presentation coming from this is as if it were that from a snake, but to the man who has looked carefully and thoroughly tested the circumstances, for example, by ascertaining that it does

not move, that its colour is of a certain sort, and so on, it appears to be a rope according to the plausible and tested presentation. An example of an uncontroverted presentation is this. It is said that Heracles brought Alcestis back from Hades when she was dead and showed her to Admetus who received a plausible and thoroughly tested presentation of Alcestis. But since he knew that she was dead, his intellect recoiled from assent and inclined to disbelief. So those of the new Academy prefer a thoroughly tested and plausible presentation to a simply plausible one and an uncontroverted, thoroughly tested and plausible one to either of the other two (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 33.226-9).

Depending on the importance of the matter at hand or the urgency of his situation the Skeptic could use any of these criteria. In a matter of little importance, or in an emergency when a careful evaluation was not feasible, he would be justified in acting on the plausible presentation.

If more was at stake then the tested and uncontroverted presentation could be employed. In matters judged to be of greatest importance, the Skeptic would employ the uncontroverted and thoroughly tested presentation (Long 1974, 98).

Thus, in a simple matter, such as eating his breakfast, the Academic could proceed on the plausible presentation

that a plate of eggs lay before him. If it were April first, he might, before taking a bite, test the contents of his plate with his fork to ascertain whether he had been served real food or was being made the victim of a prank. Having done this, he could proceed on the basis of a plausible and tested presentation. Were he still unconvinced, he could consider further the circumstances attending his presentation. Suppose he knew his chef to be a humourless man with no past history of playing practical jokes. Suppose too that the Skeptic was known and feared as a harsh employer whom it did not pay to antagonize. Suppose further that the chef was a needy man with a large family to support who could ill afford to jeopardize his further employment. These conditions would strongly support the accuracy of the tested presentation and would render it not only tested but also uncontroverted by other known facts. Conversely, if he had been warned by a trustworthy source that a particularly subtle trick was being planned this fact would render the tested presentation controverted and the Skeptic would not proceed on it. Beyond this, the Skeptic could go further by thoroughly testing the presentation before him. This could involve, say, performing tests on the soundness of his senses, considering the effects of

lighting and atmosphere, or having someone question him to determine his sanity.

It must be emphasized however that none of these precautions could guarantee the truth of any perception. The possibility of a false perception meeting even the most rigorous evaluation remained. In spite of this, careful observation and experience allowed the Skeptic, as much if not more than any other man, to secure for himself such natural goods as need compelled him to seek. In matters concerning anything beyond sensible experience, such as the nature of God or the happy life, the Skeptics simply opposed all existing views to each other and showed none to be more plausible than the next. It appears, though, that Carneades may well have allowed a judgement of plausibility to be made concerning some matters other than sense impressions, such as courses of action or, indeed the plausibility of Skepticism itself (Augustine, we shall see, takes Carneades to be claiming this) (Groarke 1990, 115).

Thus, Skepticism produced an outlook somewhat akin to modern positivism in its resolute empiricism. It differed however in that it never advocated, as far as we know, a complete immersion in the world of common experience. While recognizing that we are bound by our physical existence to

involve ourselves with the physical realm and all its attendant illusions they did not abandon the ideal of a theoretical freedom from it. This is due to the common ethical concern which, with varying degrees of emphasis, all the Skeptics shared (Groarke 1990, 107-8).²² The Skeptics knew that the good life for human beings was to be found in and through thought as it attained to some stable object above the flux of experience. This is why they refused to give assent to anything in the sensible realm. The fact that they did not find any such object outside of their own subjectivity should not be allowed to obscure the point that Skepticism possessed within its own assumptions both a speculative and practical relationship to the idea of truth and as such possessed an intelligible content.

This is why, for Augustine, Skepticism is a self-overcoming project the immanent critique of which will bring to light the objective truth that it rightly says cannot be identified with the sensible. That Skepticism itself does not come to see this is due to the fact that in freedom from error it thinks it has found our proper relation to the good. Thus, it is as much a problem of will as of knowledge. After all, if the Skeptic possesses the good through suspension of judgement then any further argument

would be beside the point. What else can interest someone who thinks he has the good? To cut away the root of the Skeptical doctrine it is necessary to ask, with Augustine, whether *apatheia* and *ataraxia* properly satisfy the will or are simply goods as limited as any other. It would be no exaggeration to say that the ultimate answer to Skepticism is conversion; for the Skeptic to see what lies before his own eyes requires that he have the will to see it. This will to turn to the light which enlightens every man born in this world, while not, for Augustine, in anyone's power to produce, can nonetheless find its human occasion in the demonstration that the Skeptic does not truly possess the good he seeks and does not realize that if he thinks at all about his own position it is only because of the light that illuminates the wall of the cave. *Against the Academics* is intended to show us how the Skeptic can be turned to see this light.

Part I Chapter III- Elements of Augustinian Thought

It is Augustine's contention that, historically, Skepticism paved the way for its own overcoming in the revival of Platonism (*Against the Academics* III, 3.18.41 40-45). For him, it was evident that the Academics had forgotten (or appeared to forget) the very Platonic doctrine with which they were historically associated. While knowing the negative side of the Socratic dialectic, they sought to stabilize this process through the suspension of assent without seeing the completion of it in the Platonic dialectic. Owing to their dialectical relationship with Stoicism and Epicureanism, which were materialist positions, the Skeptics were forced to take over the assumptions of their opponents in order to achieve a skeptical result. Because of this they did not take sufficient account of the fact that the objectivity of their critique rested, in the end, upon the ideas as the ordering principles of thought and being and the Word as the unity of the ideas (at least as far as their exoteric teaching is concerned).²³

As a Platonist, Augustine thought it possible to know both God and the self through a consideration of what was directly available to the mind in its own reflexive activity. For him, the Skepticism of the Academy, far from

abolishing the quest for truth, actually pointed to the true way of finding it by purging us of a dogmatic reliance on the senses.

The negative result of the Skeptics displayed the nullity of sense experience conceived, in Stoic fashion, as in itself primary. Past this it simply remains to ask how the mind can so dissolve the sensible into pure appearance before seeing that what one has actually uncovered is a knowledge of the absolute priority of the ideas and the derivative character of the sensible.

The Skeptic, then, by turning from appearances toward his own subjectivity, in fact comes closest of all, if he would only see it, to the locus of objective truth. As Augustine says, it is by returning to the inner chamber of the mind that one returns to the realm of spiritual substance in which immutable and incorporeal truth can be perceived (*Confessions* VII, X, 16). Since the process of recollecting this truth is primarily, for Augustine as for his neo-Platonist predecessors, a process of self recollection that turns inward on itself and upwards to its source, some way must be found to turn the soul's attention to itself so that it can perceive its own character and destiny.

The first step in this process is curing the soul of its tendency to confuse itself with the sensible appearances that are the primary object of its attention (*Confessions* VII, I, 2). The mind that does this, through the apprehension of its own true inwardness and hence its immateriality, becomes free to train its eye on the incorporeal realm that lies behind the veil of appearance and is in itself the proper object of knowledge. The catalyst for this movement lies in the questioning subjectivity that seeks the unifying ground of the sheer externality of events in time and space in memory and the unity of memory in God. Thus, in seeking the unity of its experience, the mind discovers its own character as self-presence, the character of matter as the self-external, and the good as the ground of both. This is the basic pattern behind Augustine's many accounts of the ascent to subsistent truth, which move from a consideration of bodies themselves, to the soul which measures and judges them and upward to the divine reason which contains the principles of those judgements.²⁴

The Skeptic, having found the sensible inadequate to the inwardness of thought, has already begun this movement. Moreover, he moves also toward a good beyond the mobility

of sensible nature. However, the soul that seeks its good must know the good it seeks and if it cannot find a true and knowable good among material things it must then ask itself by what measure it reaches this conclusion. It must ask itself what the good and the true are in their logical character. To ask this question is to realize that one has ceased altogether to speak about material things and is moving in the realm of ideas that nothing spatio-temporal can adequately exemplify and to which subjectivity must submit as its own law.²⁵ The discovery that the good and true are, in their primary meaning, super-sensible and immutable completes the movement away from the sensible begun by the Skeptic by attaining a unity prior to the division of subject and object. Thus, both the externality and dividedness of the sensible and the emptiness of thought's formal self-identity (in which the Skeptic would rest) are transcended.

However, this turn to the incorporeal and hence intelligible is in no way possible to one who remains in the grip of materialist illusions. In this way, the Skeptical destruction of Stoic and Epicurean dogmatism can be granted to have a certain positive function. If then, the mind can

be forced to look away from the sensible and into itself, it can discover within itself the truth.²⁶

From Augustine's writings, it is possible to describe with some exactitude the overall structure of this truth. While Augustine is not a systematic writer it remains the case that from the variegated surface of his literary activity we can extract a logico-ontological picture clear in its outline and embracing the self-disclosure of being in both the timelessness of philosophical contemplation and the mutability and contingency of history (which includes personal experience and development).²⁷ As this picture often supplies an interpretive key to passages in works such as the *Against the Academics* it will pay to look at it in some detail in terms of both its objective and subjective aspect keeping in mind how it is determined at all points by Augustine's Trinitarian conception of God and the self.²⁸

How are we to describe this 'Augustinianism'? Emilie Zum Brunn has pointed to what he terms Augustine's 'anagogical ontology'. He says of Augustinian wisdom that "It is not simply a question of understanding a truth given from the point of view of pure speculation, but of acceding to it "with the entire soul"... That is why his ontology is an "anagogy" at the same time, as in the 'Platonist' books.

The "proofs" of "true philosophy", that is to say of platonic thinking taken up by Christian faith, do not only satisfy intelligence, but also help man climb up towards God." (1988, p.4). That is to say, to speak of Augustine's thought is not to speak of some neutral means of attaining to some purely instrumental knowledge but of a quest in which our entire good is at stake. Moreover, it is a knowledge that seeks not disinterested description but union of mind and will with the end sought. Thus, philosophy is not thinking about the divine as one of the possible objects of thought but turning oneself to God in thought and love.

Moreover, it is also an activity that falls within the very dynamic of being's outgoing and return whose structure it uncovers. Simply put, it is the form in which rational subjectivity fulfils the creation's basic urge to re-integrate itself with the primal being, the source from which it has fallen away into inauthenticity and decay. Thought at its highest level, the loving contemplation of God, is the form in which creation fulfils most completely the universal drive of all things to return to their Divine source (*Confessions*, XI, 10). Indeed, created mind functions as the hinge upon which the vast drama of outflow and return moves. In trinitarian terms, we seek in our

thinking to perform that return to our source that is eternally accomplished in God through the reversion of the divine thinking upon the divine being through the unifying activity of the Spirit. This is why, for Augustine, the climax of the Christian salvation story lies in the renewal of the trinitarian image in man through the illumination of the Word and the infusion of the Spirit (*On the Trinity* XIV, 4-5).

Although this is the universal process of all things, rational subjects share in it in a privileged manner. For them, the return is a matter of self-conscious participation and the possibility of perfect re-integration through thought's identity with what it thinks is therefore open. This reintegration of the self is the corollary of the loving attention paid in contemplation to an object that is unity itself. As we think the unity that is God we become unified through the total actualisation and interpenetration of our attention and will. Thus, alone among beings occupying time and space the human is *capax Dei*, able to be raised in a total return to its source.²⁹

The problem for us as human beings lies in the fact that we are neither pure unity nor simple extension but a process, involving memory, attention and will, of bringing

the greatest possible integration to a temporally and spatially distended existence. Unlike the pure self-externality of matter, spiritual existence is a continuum constituted by the faculty of memory (*Confessions* XI, 38). Thus, we have the ability to summon to our attention our existence as a whole and to judge of its character and, because of this, we must at some point raise for ourselves the question of the truth of our existence. However, memory only constitutes us as a continuity of moments. We are not pure unities insofar as we are not fully realized beings in every moment of our existence but actualise ourselves over time (*Confessions* XI, 36). As a result of this we are, in Augustine's phrase, a question to ourselves (*Confessions* X, 33). Our existence has the unity of self-consciousness but we know as well that this very fact presents to us the task of becoming what we ought in truth to be; beings that fully realize our potential for re-integration in the self-knowledge attained through a knowing union with God.

For us, the end of our temporally distended existence is to overcome this distension. Indeed, this is what the gathering and retaining power of memory is always already doing. Its inherent dynamic power is to abrogate the externality of one moment to the next and constitute the

self as self-presence, which in fact is what renders temporality an experiencible and measurable phenomenon (*Confessions* X, 36). Thus, the drive to maximize integration is present in the very faculty that constitutes us as personal identities. As the experience of temporal extension itself presupposes a relation of the eternal and the temporal the soul that experiences itself in time also knows itself as containing a relation to what is prior to time. In the undivided now of memory, it finds its own analogue and its own point of ascent to the unity of God. Indeed, we have in memory's relation to the eternal the inward ground of the unification of the human and divine whose full actuality will be realized in the incarnation, where the outgoing of creation from God and its return are the complete life and movement of one divine/human substance.

The fact is, however, that immersed as we are in the flow of experience the complete self-presence that we seek is beyond our grasp. The simplicity we would attain as the end implicated in our activity cannot be identified with the being that seeks it for the simple reason that if it were it, it would not seek it. We must, rather, seek for something outside of ourselves from which we can attain what

we seek. We must seek within the implicit unity of memory that which transcends memory, the truth in which all that it contains is eternally and substantially expressed.

Clearly, this means seeking to possess something which, possessing in itself the full unity of self-presence, can impart it to others. This is God, from whom we have received such unity as we already possess (*Confessions* XI, 40). The possession of God in knowledge through love grants us also the possession of ourselves (*Soliloquies*, 1.2, 7). In knowing God, truth itself, we ourselves become fully aware. In this light we know both the truth of what we are and the truth of what we have become. In terms of Robert Meagher's useful distinction, we come to know ourselves in terms both of nature and person³⁰ (Meager 1979, 56-57). We know what we are, our nature, for we know that in whose image we are made; to know what true spiritual existence is in its source is to know its finite image. We know what we have become, our person, for in the presence of God all our works are infallibly judged; we know our own personal existence not according to our own partial and self-interested evaluation but as it is in the truth itself. In this way, the full purpose of our existence stands revealed and the basic desire of that existence fulfilled.

As I have said, there are two angles from which this process may be described, the objective or ontological and the subjective or historical. This does not, for Augustine, represent a bifurcation in reality. Augustine's concept of reality remains a unitary one. For him, the subjective and personal dimension is an intensification of being. Being at a certain threshold of unity with itself achieves the awareness of self-presence and the capacity to direct itself freely to a good apprehended as delightful by its own reason. At its maximal point, in God, being simply is the real apprehended in delight. Spiritual creatures, such as human beings and angels, thus imitate the principle itself when they unite in one activity being, living and thinking (*On the Free choice of the Will* II, 51-53). As W.J. Hankey puts it:

God the Father is being as absolute source. His mirror in the human mind is memory in which, from which, and to which all is. The being of the father is uttered and conceived in the Son who is his eternal word; His mirror in the human mind is conceptual thought, the activity of science or wisdom. Because the eternal Word loves the being whose fullness he expresses, and because the Father loves himself imaged in the activity of thought, in their very difference these two are united in an activity of love. This love between the Father and the Son is the person of the Holy

Spirit. His mirror in the human mind
is will or love (1995, 4).

Thus, the spiritual creation is the finite mirror of everything that is contained super-eminently in God and reflects in the mutual implication of its own activities the unity of the objective and subjective in God.

From the objective angle, the process described above may be described as the outgoing of Unity-Being from itself in creative love and the return or reformation of the finite beings so constituted from the formlessness to which all such beings tend (formlessness or the bare appetite for form being the distinguishing mark of created things) (*Confessions* XII, 6). Perfectly simple in its own self-love and self-apprehension (because knowing and loving expressed maximally are one with their object), this principle represents the total and simultaneous actualisation of whatever it can mean to exist. As Augustine says in *Confessions* XIII, 46, God exists "...not merely in some degree since he is Existence." Thus, to say, to exist infinitely, without the limitation of any finite mode, is the essential property of the Divine. As James F. Anderson puts it: "...Augustine's God is *Idipsum* because He *is*, and not conversely. Augustine expressly identifies the so-

called attributes of God with His *Esse*: "that which He has He, and all these are one"...Why? Because there is nothing in Him save *is: non est ibi nisi est* (*Exposition of Psalm CI, 2, 10*). " (1965,33). When, looked at from this ontological angle, as the source of being, God is understood in trinitarian terms as Father, source of the eternal being of the Son and the Spirit, and source, through them, of the creation, formation and conversion of created things.

This mode of simple existence contains within its own apprehension an infinity of possible imitations of itself. To such of these as it wills to exist, it communicates the gift of existence (*Confessions XI, 10*). But to exist as a finite essence means to exist as less than pure existence; existence as such is extraneous to any finite thing. This means that created things both are and are not; they are not being but have being to a greater or lesser degree. All nature and history is reducible to the fact that for any created thing existence is as much an object of desire as it is a possession. All finite existence is in motion to attain the full measure of existence possible to it and in this it reflects its own origin in God (*Confessions XI, 6*).

From the subjective side, this same process can be looked at as the struggle of our minds and hearts to

apprehend and attain a true and stable good. In other words it can be looked at as the quest for wisdom and happiness. Want, whose fulfilment is gratification, is fundamentally the desire to exist that comes from not being that which one could be. Happiness is the state of having the full measure of existence of which one is capable. Rational agents, such as ourselves, both are in some measure, which pleases us, and are not such as our reason can conceive of us as being, which is painful (*Confessions* XIII, 5). Our existence as finite beings is an oscillation between greater or lesser approximations of the good as we conceive it for ourselves.

What is more, we often misconceive this limit such that we often fail to understand how happy we could in reality be. Subjectively, the will is moved to this or that end by the prospect of delight. A rational will, however, must conform its pursuit of delight to the standard of right judgement; I must seek to delight in that which reason judges to be in itself most delightful or I am in a state of contradiction (seeking, by the formal necessity of my will, the highest good, I choose an object which is not the highest good). It is quite possible that, being fallible, I can choose an object, such as physical pleasure, as my highest good when in fact this object does not conform to

what reason itself demands of anything claiming to be the *summum bonum* (*On the Trinity* XIII, 4.7-6.9).

Thus, I face the possibility of not only failing to achieve the good as I conceive it but also of failing to properly conceive of the good. This being the case, any rational agent faces the complex task of correctly determining the nature of the highest good, determining how this good is to be obtained, and habituating itself to the virtuous forms of activity (whatever these may be) that give it the self control to pursue this good once its nature and the way to it have been perceived. In this way we reveal our ultimate goal to be assimilation to the divine Trinity, in whom knowledge is adequated fully to what is and in whom love is in full conformity to what is known.

The good as Augustine conceives it belongs to the inner man and cannot be found in corruptible goods extraneous in a spatio-temporal sense to the self. Augustine does not admit fragility or externality as aspects of the true good. For him, the good must be such as to be enjoyable whenever we will it for as long as we will it. As he says in his *Diverse Questions* (no.35) "Since these things are so, what else is it to live happily but to possess an eternal object through knowing it? For the eternal is that in which alone

one can rightly place his confidence, it is that which cannot be taken away from the one who loves it, and it is that very thing which one possesses solely by knowing it."

It is evident from this that in the activity of cleaving to God in contemplation and love that we truly discover where our good lies. As Augustine says in a particularly striking passage from one of his earliest writings:

Following God is the desire of happiness; to reach God is happiness itself. We follow after God by loving him; we reach him, not by becoming entirely what he is, but in nearness to him, and in wonderful and immaterial contact with him, and in being inwardly illuminated and occupied by his truth and holiness. He is light itself; we get enlightenment from him. The greatest commandment, therefore which leads to the happy life, and the first, is this "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and mind (*The Morals of the Catholic Church*, XI).

Thus, if the end of our existence is love, which in creatures is both need for some object and delight in the existence of that object, then this end can only be fulfilled in loving God and delighting in him. This activity Augustine held to be inclusive of all obligations to others and ourselves as delight in God is inclusive of a

delight in (and in the case of creatures a benevolent care for) all things that reflect the glory of his being.

Unfortunately, even though the incorruptibility and inwardness of the Good would seem to render it the easiest of all objects to attain (after all, what is more under our control than our own attention and will?) the attainment of the highest good is actually of a difficulty many times greater than the attainment of many external goods both unstable in themselves and seemingly at the whim of fortune or the greater power of others.

The real obstacle to our obtaining the good is, in fact, within us. It is not, of course, the case that we are by nature unfit for the good, for we are free and rational beings, or that we are held by some alien power (such as the body), for this controls us only as we love or detest what it delivers to us through the senses. It is rather the case that as persons, as concrete historical subjects, we are alienated from our true good by the dispersal of our attention and will among a multiplicity of sensible objects (*Confessions* II, 1). This dispersal is consequent upon a prideful turning from the unity of the divine towards the self, which has within itself no ground of unity or stability (*On the Trinity* X, 2, 7). Accordingly, in turning

from God or unity we are subjected to the multiplicity and dividedness of external ends and so lose the inward integration we possess only through our unity with God. Through the effort of turning our centre of gravity away from the senses and the imaginative faculty that they feed and towards the light of incorporeal truth we can, to some extent recover a glimpse of our original integrity (this was the achievement of the Platonists), but, as incarnate beings with an innate appetite for ruling a body, we cannot hold ourselves in this state (*Confessions* VII, 23; *The City of God* XXI, 3). In the body, we do not seem capable of keeping our souls unified in contemplation of God but fall into disunity and disarray (and ultimately death). Apart from the body, we seem to lose something equally integral to ourselves and are drawn inexorably back into the divided realm of time and space. With this paradox, the quest to solve the problem of happiness through thought comes to an end.³¹

Augustine inherits from the Platonic tradition the dialectic of poverty and plenty that Plato had described in his *Symposium*. The fact that we are 'erotic' beings places us metaphysically between being and non-being. We are and are not what we are and this is why we are in a state of

becoming. This gap between essence and existence and our awareness of this gap places upon us the task of authoring ourselves that is only truly realized as we attain to a participated divinity through contemplating God. As Augustine says in his very earliest writing "...nequitia (worthlessness) is so called because it comes from "not anything" while its opposite *frugalitas* (frugality) comes from *frux* (fruit). Therefore, in those two opposites, frugality and worthlessness, two things seem to be evident, namely, *esse* (to be) and *non esse* (not to be)" (*On the Happy Life* 4, 30). At their metaphysical core, all of our operations, whether of intellect or will, express the actualisation of form in activity through participation (in greater or lesser degree) in *esse*, or the supreme actuality. In knowing and loving God, we possess this supreme actuality in the form proper to ourselves and through receptivity to eternal truth transcend the limitations of our 'middle state' by being reformed in its image. This reformation, or unification of essence and existence in the creature is the work of love. Insofar as this work is permanently achieved, it is the work of Gods eternal self-unifying love in us. In theological terms, this is the sanctifying activity of the Spirit. To quote *On the Happy Life* again, "This, then, is

the full satisfaction of souls, this the happy life: to recognize piously and completely the One through whom you are led into the truth, the nature of the truth you enjoy, and the bond that connects you with the supreme measure" (*On the Happy Life* 4, 35).

It is always the case for Augustine that the good sought by the will is attained through the apprehension of that Good; indeed the highest Good, God, is an intelligible object possessed in contemplation. The will adheres to God as God is present to the mind. How, then, do we ascend to the knowledge of the divine being which alone can satisfy our desire to fully possess ourselves? For Augustine the divine is revealed with absolute certainty in the mind's consideration of its own faculties and the objects, which must, of necessity, correspond to them. It finds God as the culmination of a reflection upon itself and its powers. In particular, Augustine was struck with wonder at our capacity to render true judgements upon contingent realities in light of necessary and timeless logical, ethical and aesthetic principles.³² Moreover, he was struck by the fact that we could immediately perceive, as if in some spiritual light, the immutable character of such judgements. This light he held to be a radiance of subsistent truth, eternally one

with the subsistent being of which it is the expressed image.

Augustine's characteristic proof, it should be pointed out, begins *a fortiori* from the created world. He holds, on the authority of St. Paul, not that we know God directly but that we know God from created realities. It is from the fact that we form true and necessary judgements that we infer the existence of truth itself. In fact, Augustine's use of this interior proof entails no denial that God can be known from other created things, as numerous passages attest.³³ However, Augustine worked this form of the proof out with much greater detail than any other and averted to it with the greatest frequency. Accordingly, I will examine his account of the mind's ascent to God from this angle.³⁴

According to Augustine there is one utterly indisputable foundation for our ascent to God; the fact that we exist, that we know our existence, and that we love the existence that we know (*The City of God* XI, 26; *On the Trinity* X, 10; *On the Free choice of the Will*, II, 7). This is the knowledge that constitutes us as self-conscious subjects and it could not intelligibly be claimed that we are in error about it. Whoever thinks exists, for thinking is a determination of existence. Since the mind is

presence-to-self, if it is, it is present to itself and thus knows itself. Hence, if any mind is, it knows something, itself. If it is in error about this it is and is therefore not in error for error can only exist in a mind that judges.

As it perceives itself, then, the mind immediately perceives a necessary connection between thought and existence (*The City of God* XI, 26). Indeed, Augustine holds that there is an infinity of knowledge contained in the mind's turning to itself as each act of its reflection can in its turn be reflected upon (*On The Trinity* XV, 4, 21).

Thus, I cannot doubt my own conscious states as being my own conscious states. I must say that they are what they seem to be for they subsist in my very apprehension of them. Apart from my awareness of them, they are not and apart from their being for my awareness, I am not conscious of them. In self-consciousness, being and appearance cannot be intelligibly opposed. This has profound implications for the problem of Skepticism for when the object perceived is my act of perception itself, my perception directly constitutes its object so that it cannot in any way be said to alter or distort something of a different nature than itself, such as may happen when a material object is

transformed into an object of consciousness by being converted into a phantasm or internal image.

What is more, this presence of mind to itself is implicated in all mental acts whatsoever and thus there is no mental act which does not have at least this element of true apprehension. The mind cannot be totally ignorant without ceasing to be as mind because it is constituted by an act of knowledge. Thus, Augustine can say "Therefore, let the mind come to know itself. Let it seek itself, but not as a thing absent. Rather, let the mind fix upon itself the will's intending, by which the mind wandered elsewhere, and let the mind reflect upon itself. In this way, the mind will see that it has never not loved itself, never not known itself" (*On the Trinity*, X 8,11).

It is within this act of self-apprehension that we constitute our relation to the things surrounding us. We know ourselves, for instance, as grasping objects we take to be external through the medium of the senses. But the senses themselves are not adequate to account for this fact. Nothing mediated to us can be present for us except as the senses are present to us in the apprehension of the common sense (*On the Free Choice of the Will* II, 20-37). The eye sees but it does not see itself seeing nor the ear hear

itself hearing. Sense data come to consciousness only in an inner apprehension that the eye sees or the ear hears. But for this inner sense to be present to itself as such requires yet another level of activity. Reason must be present to discern the order and function of the different senses and their relation to the common sense (II, 51-52).

Now reason, in performing this task, knows itself as doing so. It knows both what is below it and itself as distinct from what is below it. It is through this rational faculty then that the mind possesses itself (II, 51-52). The proper function of this faculty lies in the exercise of judgement upon the things we experience. The employment of reason in this way, however, entails yet another faculty above that of judging and this is the receptive faculty of the mind, which receives the imprint of the necessary and immutable principles of judgement. Just as there is no sense without common sense, or common sense without reason, so there is no reason without intellect (II, 110-19).

But even the intellect upon which ratiocination and hence judgement depend is not self-explanatory. Indeed, a startling contradiction presents itself in that the intellect, which claims immutability and self-evidence for the principles it hands down to reason, is merely a faculty

of a mutable and contingent soul (II, 55-56). How is it that a mutable soul can render necessary judgements according to immutable principles? How is it that it can have any notion of the unchanging at all if it itself changes? How are truths, such as those of mathematics, present to all who reflect upon them in the same way even though each soul is particular and contingent? Is it that the intellect depends upon some power yet higher than itself from which flow those attributes of which it can find no source in itself?

Augustine holds that it does. Truth, in itself immutable and timeless, he holds, can emanate only from an eternal and changeless source, God, from whose being it derives these attributes. If our reason can judge of this or that thing that it is true or not true then this is because it knows truth itself and in knowing this knows God who is subsistent truth. Thus, the mind judges inferior realities in accordance with the idea of truth and in doing so conceives of something transcending its own mutability which must be consubstantial with God himself. At the apex of its operations it touches what lies above the human, the eternally begotten truth, which is the express image of its source (II, 153-55). The light shed upon us by this truth permits our judgements to appear as what they are; in so

appearing, these reveal that in the light of which they appear.³⁵

For Augustine, this means that the relation of what is highest to what is lowest is known by reason's capacity to reflect upon the nature of its own activity, for it is in this activity of reasoned judgment that the mind unites the transcendental objects of the intellect with the deliverances of sense in a self-conscious act. In knowing itself and its own operations it knows the principle and the principled in their true relation for its own activity of judgment manifests this relation. The structure of knowing and the structure of being are one and this is known by reason or conscious attention for unlike sensation, common sense or intuition, reason possesses itself as a possible object of its own consideration.³⁶ It is the faculty in which the inter-relation of all faculties is manifest to itself. Moreover, this self-consideration of reason does not depend on images derived from sensation but on concepts per se intelligible and as such is capable of scientific exactitude (*Confessions* X, 17-19).

Thus it is that God's existence is for Augustine as indubitable as our own from the very fact that we are able to doubt it. As he succinctly puts it:

Everyone who knows that he has doubts knows with certainty something that is true, namely that he doubts. He is certain, therefore, about a truth. Therefore everyone who doubts whether there is such a thing as the truth has at least a truth to set a limit to his doubt and nothing can be true except truth be in it. Accordingly, no one ought to have doubts about the existence of the truth... Wherever this is seen, there is light that transcends space and time and all phantasms that spring from spatial and temporal things (*Of the True Religion* XXXIV, 154-55).³⁷

What Augustine is affirming here is that even in such a simple judgement as "I doubt there is any truth" there is an affirmation that truth, the absolute identity of being and thought, is a subsistent reality that sustains and illuminates us.³⁸ Without truth there would be no truths but since there are truths, such as "I doubt", then there must be truth, which is God himself. When I unite reality and idea in a true judgement I only do so on the presupposition that these two are in fact identical; that primal thought is fully adequate to primal being as light from light and God from God and that all finitude is a pale approximation of this unity. Without this first truth, this objective identity of thought and being, the finite approximation of this truth in the particular truths of judgement would be

without any objective basis. But, since I do make particular judgements that are apodictically certain, it must be that there is indeed some absolute realization of the identity of thought and being for I myself, as a mutable being, do not possess the formal property of immutability that I perceive as an attribute of true propositions. Hence, my judgement that any proposition is a truth entails the illuminative activity of an eternal and changeless divine reason, which must be held to exist if any finite thinker exists (and I know with irrefutable certainty that I am such a thinker).³⁹

Thus, if there is a moment of certainty in my knowledge of myself, even in my knowing of myself as not knowing, this is grounded in primal identity of thinking and being in God, who is thus the ultimate ground of my certainty. God is in his own thinking of himself, as indeed the finite subject is qua subject, except with total adequacy. As Gilson puts it:

The creative being is an infinite reality eternally knowing itself in an adequate act... In him, therefore, we should always recognize the presence of this infinite reality, revealing itself, so to speak, to itself, by the integral knowledge it has of itself. Man, made in God's image, is also an intellectual substance, which not only has to express other things in order to know them, but also expresses itself to itself when it would know itself... Thus, every human soul

reproduces on the level of the finite the fecundity of the Divine knowledge: it "expresses" from itself the internal presentation of its own essence, and refers it to itself by an act of will, just as in God the Father generates the Word, and links it to himself by the Holy Spirit (1948, 224-5).⁴⁰

In reflecting on itself and the order of its operations, the Mind has found in God the light of certainty in which this reflection is performed.

In his own way then, Augustine has demonstrated Paul's dictum that the invisible things of God are known from the things that are made for from a single indubitable created fact he has shown the necessity of affirming the transcendent source of that fact. Insofar as the being and intelligibility of the imperfect presupposes the perfect he can know that his finite knowledge, limited as it is, depends upon an infinite knower. It remains however, to say something of that dimension of being which Augustine held could never be uncovered in the self-reflection of thought but, as historically mediated, could only be affirmed in faith. This is the intervention of the divine principle in time and space to bring about the return of rational creatures to their source through purging them of their historical accretion of sin and mortality (a movement that

Augustine held was impossible for us from the human side). As well, this intervention of God in our world enabled, Augustine thought, a deeper and more consistent account of the principle itself which, in this action, had decisively revealed itself as revealable through its triune operation of subsisting, revealing, and illuminating.

For Augustine, the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity formed the basis of a radical revision of the structure of thought inherited from the Platonists and which was, broadly speaking, congruous with what I have to this point described. In a sense, the young Augustine was correct to say that in order to become Christians it was only necessary for the Platonists to alter a few phrases. What he came to expound with increasing profundity over the course of his career was just how far reaching in their implications these 'few phrases' were.

Augustine's central message to the adherents of the Classical tradition in philosophy, and indeed his central message to us, is that the eternal Logos has assumed human flesh in order that those who appropriate in faith his redeemed humanity may be taken up into the immutable life of his divinity. The god-manhood of Jesus Christ is, for him as for St. Paul, the only true mediator between the human

and the divine (*The City of God* IX, 17). As the deepest impulse behind the religious practice and philosophical aspiration of the ancient world lay in achieving some mutual co-inherence of divinity and humanity, it was evident to Augustine, as it was to many who moved from classicism to Christian faith, that in Christ the expectation of the nations had been fulfilled. Submission of mind and heart to this utmost revelation of God's nature was, for him, the only path to salvation. Only through his wisdom could our minds properly apprehend reality and only through his humility could our hearts cleave to what is apprehended (*Confessions* VII, 24). He is thus, as Charles Cochrane puts it, the a "...principle of understanding superior to anything existing in the Classical world," and the foundation of a "...new physics, a new ethic and, above all, a new logic, the logic of human progress" (1940, 6).⁴¹

On this basis, Augustine turns the emphasis of the Classical tradition from man's quest for God to a grateful response to God's gracious descent to us. The movement of all created things to their source is completed by the assumption of this movement by the principle itself. In relation to this act of grace towards us, the ascent of the mind to its source is resumed on a stable basis and the

salvation of man as a concrete historical person (both body and soul, sense and intellect) is assured. Thus, our final good is mediated to us by the revelation of God as absolute love in the person of Jesus Christ. The love of God for us, hinted at here and there by the Platonists, revealed to the Jews in the creation story, and made fully known in all its depth in the story of Christ's passion and resurrection, becomes for Augustine the focal point of his thinking.

Indeed, this new emphasis on the co-inherence of man and God in history propels Augustine to a profound reappraisal of what can be said about God in his own eternal nature. The affirmation of God as incarnate in history entailed also the affirmation of the triune character of God's inner life. With equal firmness Augustine insisted on both the doctrine of the incarnation and the orthodox catholic doctrine of the Trinity; that the one divine substance subsisted in three co-equal persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Indeed, he gave the profoundest ancient exposition of this doctrine in his *On the Trinity*.

For Augustine, it was possible in light of the Christian revelation to affirm the possibility of final beatitude for the human person. Specifically, this meant that it was possible affirm that the soul could remain

immutably in a loving contemplation of God insofar as self-knowledge and self-love were comprehended as moments in the divine being itself. A link could be posited between human activity and God's self-activity that allowed for a communication of God's life to us. This was because the doctrine of the equality of the three divine persons entailed that, unlike the Plotinian *Nous*, the divine thought was fully identical with the divine being and that, unlike the Plotinian *Psyche*, the divine life was fully God also.⁴² Thus, the unification of God and man in history brought about in Jesus Christ (and for us through him) is intelligible in terms of what is true in the eternity of the Godhead; that God is fully God even in the otherness of self-expression and that his unity, as comprehensive of difference as such, is comprehensive even of the total distinction of creature from creator.

In this way too, Augustine can give a greater unity and hence reality to the concrete historical person with whom the quest for wisdom begins. Indeed, Augustine can well be taken as the philosophical father of the modern west's concept of a unified personal identity, having its own freedom and authority and this precisely because he integrates all phenomena of conscious life in a single

transcendent God, of which the self is a finite image. Thus, Augustine's human is not divided as in Plotinus between an unfallen *noetic* soul that remains forever above and a fallen historical individual. Intellection, ratiocination and sensation are all acts of a single soul that can both fall from its source and return as a whole.

It is with these insights mediated by the Christian scriptures and the traditions of the church that Augustine ends his search for the knowledge and possession of wisdom, which has now appeared as the finite/infinite correlation of man and God (which is what it has implicitly been seeking along). Of course, this is hardly the end of Augustine's thought. In a way, all we have seen to this point has gotten us simply to the starting line. Augustine's further reflections, though, will now take the form of understanding what is first believed, a process complete only in the soul's final vision of God, in which faith gives way to direct vision.⁴³

Integral to Augustine's coming to this faith was the logic of his own personal development, which he saw in the *Confessions* as embodying an ordered ascent to intelligible being, a realization of his absolute distinction and difference from that being, and a recognition of Christ as

the mediator of that difference. In Platonic terms, this can be described as a movement from the shadows of the cave (Books I-VI) to philosophical science (Book VII) completed by a return to the realm of belief and the senses (Books VII-IX) in order to possess and apprehend more fully the object of that science as revealed in its concrete historical actuality (Books X-XIII).

It will be helpful, then, to conclude this chapter with a short account of the structure and logic of the *Confessions* as it unfolds an anagogic process in which the question of Skepticism plays its own distinct part. This is all the more important in that Augustine's reading and thinking was determined through and through by the demands of his own personal development. What Augustine took from Platonism or Skepticism was no more and no less than what he thought he needed to resolve the tensions in his own existence.⁴⁴

The *Confessions* may be taken as Augustine's account of how the contradictions and paradoxes of the culture of Classical antiquity as he experienced them in his own life drove him to the acceptance of the Christian faith. Simply put, it tells how the demand of Classical reason that humans seek blessedness or integral satisfaction of the human

person could not, in Augustine's mind, be met by that reason on its own terms. Reason can show us the end, show us the need for salvation, but it cannot itself save.

Augustine's discovery of this position proceeds in a number of stages. Reacting against the rigors of a Roman education, which sought through harsh discipline to subordinate the natural will of the child to the formal discipline of grammar and number, He began by assuming the good he sought as identical with his immediate natural impulses and as a boy and as an adolescent immersed himself in physical pleasure and the thrill of erotic passion, experienced directly and then vicariously in the form of theatrical representation (*Confessions* II, 1,2). However, while he took natural impulses as his end Augustine at the same time willed them with a freedom that is prior to all natural determinations; indeed he pursued impulses in the natural order as a way of expressing a freedom prior to all finite determinations of nature. It is not as an animal that he pursued sensible objects but as a free rational agent seeking these objects as a willed good. Thus, he sought satisfaction in a way opposed to natural order through a sexual appetite unrelated to objective natural ends. This phase of his existence found ultimate expression

in the act of stealing for the sake of stealing rather than for any good to be gained from the object stolen (*Confessions*, II, 8). The freedom in which the young Augustine willed nature as his end rendered nature itself irrelevant except as an occasion for freedom.

Augustine, however, quickly found this existentialist form of freedom oppressive and contradictory and experienced the impossibility of fulfilment through natural pleasure. He experienced, especially in his relationship to the theatre, the contradiction discovered in hedonism by Plato; that the hedonist who takes pleasure as the good must destroy the force of rational distinctions by affirming the pain through which the pleasant (in its purely natural form) is always experienced (*Confessions*, III, 2). Augustine recognized the distinction between good and evil as essential to his own rational freedom and recoiled from the confusion of these categories in the life of pure sensationalism. Accordingly, it is with the strictest necessity that Augustine turned from a purely natural freedom to the ideal of wisdom articulated in the *Hortensius* of Cicero (*Confessions* III, 7). In the Classical ideal of wisdom Augustine discovered the notion of a good pure and unmixed with its opposite pain as it is prior to all

sensuous becoming. However, he possessed from this text only the logical notion of the good as self-related and non-finite. As his thinking had as yet not risen beyond sensible distinctions he tried to find the *content* of this notion in some sensible form. Encountering the sect of the Manichees, who worshiped light as the divine, he thought he had found this for light, as Plato recognized, is the closest natural analogue of the good (*Confessions* III, 10).

Augustine was attracted by the Manichees because they seemed to offer a pure science of nature grounded in the logic of contraries. They seemed to him to possess the wisdom described by Cicero. This was because, as dualists, they could explain the conflict of reason and nature in terms of opposed physical principles, light and dark. This distinction of the good substance from the evil seemed scientific to Augustine because it was founded in the law of non-contradiction. Indeed, the very thing he lacked in his period of existentialist freedom was the capacity to distinguish the evil from the good. The Manichees appeared to do this by identifying this purely logical distinction with contrary physical elements. This was the simplest and most direct answer to Augustine's quest. That it was an

incoherent and impossible answer took Augustine nearly a decade to discover.

Augustine was an auditor among the Manichees but never rose to become one of the elect in that sect. Increasingly, he became dissatisfied with it, for when he examined Mani's account of nature in detail he saw that it could not be reconciled with the science of astronomy, which had demonstrated a true power of prediction, which the natural philosophy of the Manichees did not (*Confessions*, V, 8). Accordingly, if he remained with Manicheism as a religious position, it could only be through *believing* Mani over against the more probable accounts of ancient science (*Confessions* V, 6). This contradicted the Manichean claim to offer truth through reason and not authority.

Augustine did not leave the Manichees for he did not find any alternative way of conceiving God or any alternative account of the soul's struggle with evil. Manichean criticism of the anthropomorphism and the inconsistency of the Christian scriptures prevented him from returning to the religion of his boyhood. Nonetheless Manicheism and its spokesmen could not satisfy him on the incoherence of Mani's account of nature. The situation was complicated further for Augustine by hearing the sermons of

Ambrose in Milan. In his exposition of scripture Ambrose was able to expound many apparently crude texts in a spiritual sense, which obviated many of the objections of the Manichees (*Confessions* V, 23). This meant that the Manichees not only did not have the most plausible account of nature but did not have the only plausible account of religion either.

Thus, according to the doctrine of the probable, which he knew from the Academic Skeptics, he was justified in abandoning the Manichees. However, he had also learned from the Skeptics to identify knowledge with certainty, and as he did not possess this concerning the Catholic faith he could not commit himself fully to it. Accordingly, he suspended final judgment in Academic fashion, and on the basis of its greater plausibility enrolled himself as a catechumen without fully committing himself to Christianity (*Confessions* V, 25).

At that point Augustine had achieved the point of suspension between opposed presentations that the Academics thought sufficient to free the soul from anxiety and bring inward peace and freedom. He did not, however, find these goods through the Academic doctrine but only deeper anxiety and uncertainty (*Confessions* VI, 18). Nor was he able to

doubt the truths of mathematics whose objectivity was the very thing that made the accounts of the natural philosophers more persuasive than the fables of Mani. Accordingly, his Skepticism was only of a partial and qualified kind. Nonetheless, he did derive from it principles vital to his liberation from the materialism of the Manichees (even though Skepticism on its own was not sufficient to effect this liberation).

While no longer a Manichee, Augustine was still bedevilled by their materialist conceptions in his effort to conceive of God, his relation to the world, and the origin of evil (*Confessions* VII, 1-6). His fundamental problem was that he sought Cicero's ideal of a pure divine wisdom incorruptible and super-eminently intelligible, which logically had to be prior to sensible nature, within nature itself. No physical thing could answer to the logical character of the good and the true (this latter Augustine surely learned from Skepticism) and this meant that since Augustine was seeking God as a physical thing he could in no way find him.

This dilemma was solved for Augustine when a certain man introduced to him the writings of the Platonists. From these he learned to conceive of God and the soul as

incorporeal substances known to the mind rather than as physical substances known to the senses (*Confessions* VII, 16). Knowing the immutable to be higher than the mutable, and knowing God to be the highest good, he saw that God could not be mutable or divisible and hence could not be material. What is more, he knew from this very thought about the relation of the mutable and the immutable that this relation was actual and that God existed (*Confessions* VII, 23).⁴⁵ This is because he knew his own thought as determined by eternal and necessary categories and so knew it as exemplifying the very relation he was thinking about even in his thinking of it.

This insight into the absolute being of God and the relative being of creatures allowed Augustine to solve the problem of the origin of evil which had plagued him up to this point. He saw that the possibility of evil was contained in the distinction between relative and absolute being and that it was not a physical substance distinct from and opposed to God (*Confessions* VII, 18). It was not a 'something' whose existence required explanation but was rather comprehended through the logical category of privation. What is more, Platonism taught him a conception of divine governance that permitted finite evils as a means

of realizing the infinite good of the whole (*Confessions*, VII, 22). This was sufficient to show Augustine not only that he was not obliged to believe in Manicheism but that Manicheism was false.

However, this was not the end of Augustine's search. The Platonists had taught Augustine how to apprehend the infinite through the finite but this very process presupposed the absolute distinction of the two sides. The knowledge of God acquired through Platonism only served to reinforce his total alienation from what he knew as he had in this knowledge no way achieving permanent union with the good he had seen by liberating himself from the 'habits of the flesh' that divided his mind and heart from God (*Confessions* VII, 24). Indeed, he came to regard the Platonic ascent to truth itself as belonging to the flesh insofar as for him it embodied a prideful self-divinization that exalted the created movement to God above God himself (*Confessions* VII, 26).

It was this pride, and the punishment of sensuality that was its natural consequence whose cure Augustine found only in the humility of God expressed in the incarnation. In Christ, who is God expressed in human form, Augustine found the true pattern and source of the unification of the

finite with the infinite that he had sought and failed to find through his own efforts (*Confessions* VII, 24). He found through the moment of Christian conversion the unification of his divided will that that will could not bring about out of its own division (*Confessions* VIII, 21-28). In this experience he knew the inward movement of divine grace through which the external form of Christ's life could be inwardly appropriated. He thus knew God both in his outward expression and as the immanent movement in which that externality was possessed.

It is possible to see in this long process of conversion just the process of ascent we began this chapter by describing. Augustine himself personally achieved liberation from dogmatic materialism through his inability to find in it goodness or intelligibility and the realization consequent upon this that these objects could only be known inwardly as both in and above an incorporeal soul. This is the same movement he elsewhere describes the history of philosophy as achieving through the succession of Hellenistic positions and their completion in the revival of Platonism. Indeed, it is a universal path of ascent that he saw realized in both personal and cultural history. Moreover, he saw that the full realization of this ascent

could only be accomplished by a *descent* of God to us whose total and universal expression is in the incarnation. This was both his personal realization and the trend of his society at large.

With this in mind it is not difficult to see the analogy between the phases of Augustine's personal history and the stages of philosophic development. The existential freedom of his adolescence has clear affinities to the standpoint of Epicureanism, which sought freedom in immediate natural goods. The Manicheism of his early manhood corresponds logically to Stoicism, which saw the individual as a portion of a universally diffused corporeal divinity.⁴⁶ Augustine's recognition of his inability to find the truth he sought in anything sensible corresponds to Skepticism and it is through Platonism that Augustine understands the positive side of this, that the sensible is in itself not knowable because the true object of knowledge is the intelligible world of which God is the principle and source.⁴⁷

Thus, we now have a context for looking at *Against the Academics*. Understanding the overall place of Skepticism in the ascent from the cave we now have the means to situate the content of this work in Augustine's scheme of knowledge.

Being able to do this will enable a precise formulation of exactly what a work on Skepticism should, in Augustine's mind, say or not say. Accordingly, I will turn next to a consideration of problems specific to the interpretation of this work.

Part I Chapter IV- Reading *Against the Academics*

How might the logic of Augustine's conversion be illuminated through a reading of the *Against the Academics*?

It is my purpose, by means of a commentary on this dialogue, to explicate the necessity of the move from Skepticism to Platonism, both in this text and for Augustine's thought as a whole.

Scholarship on this dialogue is not extensive, no doubt because Augustine has written so much that surpasses it in scope and interest, yet I will argue that a close reading of this work is, in fact, a worthwhile endeavour. Indeed, it is a long overdue endeavour as, until fairly recently, *Against the Academics* has been little read for its own sake and more often resorted to as grist for debates about the historicity of the *Confessions* and other questions about Augustine's development.⁴⁸

Such commentary as exists on this work tends to follow three broad trends. The first is to deny that it has any serious philosophical argument. Peter Brown has already been cited to the effect that *Against the Academics* is the work of an amateur and not vital for an appreciation of Augustinian thought. A similar view of *Against the Academics* is taken by J.J O'Meara. In the introduction to

his translation of this work O'Meara writes "The *Contra Academicos* cannot be recommended as a valuable contribution to the theory of knowledge, nor even as an answer to Skepticism. It is a personal work, written by Augustine to meet his own needs, and addressed to a friend of his" (1950, 18). Augustine himself would never have distinguished the personal from the philosophical in this way and my view is that *Against the Academics* has a great deal of interest to say on precisely those subjects where O'Meara judges it worthless. Moreover, its argument clearly anticipates and indeed illumines later works that are acknowledged masterpieces of Augustinian thought. Indeed, the importance of reading these early works together with his more mature productions lies in the very fact that they often work out in detail issues that are then taken up into more complex wholes. A signal instance of this is the issue of Skepticism, which is treated in great detail in *Against the Academics* and more briefly in later works, such as the *Confessions*, where the results of the earlier discussion are worked into a much more comprehensive argument. Thus, the later and earlier Augustine can be read in a mutually illuminating way that allows for a richer understanding of both, as I hope my commentary will establish.

Other scholars have found interesting philosophical work in the *Against the Academics*.⁴⁹ Usually, however, they have concentrated on particular elements of it such as the epistemological or the rhetorico-dramatic or have tried to read it in terms either of its speculative or its moral and pragmatic content. The most typical approach to this work, exemplified by authors such as Rist,⁵⁰ Kirwan,⁵¹ Bubacz,⁵² and Diggs,⁵³ is to treat it as one would any modern discussion of epistemology, isolating and evaluating its individual arguments to determine Augustine's contribution to the theory of knowledge. Others, such as Heil⁵⁴ and Mosher⁵⁵ deny that this is any part of Augustine's concern. They hold, rather, that his claim is to show the moral and practical limitations of the skeptical position. Augustine Curley⁵⁶ who has written a full commentary on this dialogue, endorses this latter approach but pays more attention to such elements as character, setting and dramatic action.⁵⁷

While much of this is useful, I hope to show that none of these approaches are adequate on their own. Against a purely epistemological reading one must point out that both the *Retractions* and the early *Letter to Hermogenianus* reveal that Augustine's central concern in this writing was to overcome the enervating effect the doctrine of the New

Academy had upon the will to seek truth. Thus, the argument is determined, at least in part, by practical and pedagogical aims. This means that Augustine will be concerned largely with undermining both the internal consistency and persuasiveness of Skepticism as a whole, taken in its both its theoretical and practical aspects. In this way he can fully dispel its hold on the will. His means of doing this, while they certainly include detailed epistemological arguments, include as well dramatic and rhetorical features whose contribution to the overall discussion calls out for elucidation. Indeed, the proper evaluation of Augustine's epistemological claims as epistemology presupposes an understanding of the broad context of his argument, which embraces as well the ontological, the practical and the poetic.

It would be easy enough for Augustine, if he were writing a philosophical treatise on knowledge, to simply explain the ascent to subsistent truth, pointing out the apodictic certainty of each step up the ladder. As he does in many of his writings he could show how the mind uncovers the structure of reality and, hence, the order of knowability through a consideration of its own activities. This would be the proper way of asking how the mind comes to

know, with varying degrees of certainty, the different levels of reality. Indeed, a full Augustinian account of knowledge involves precisely an ascent to God as the beginning and end of all intelligibility and the ultimate foundation of all knowing. The *Against the Academics*, however, does not directly fully explicate this ascent in making its argument. For instance, it barely hints at such crucial Augustinian notions as the dependence of the mind upon the illuminative activity of God and it is necessary to ask why.

The answer to this question lies in the hortatory purpose of this work, explicitly revealed by its dedication to a specific person, Romanianus, whom Augustine is attempting to lead to Philosophy. The intellectual discipline involved in striving to apprehend self-subsistent truth presupposes a corresponding commitment of the will to attain to vision for oneself. The energy for this arduous task can come from nowhere but a prior faith in the possibility of success. Thus, in a hortatory work such as the one we are considering, the primary task will lie in the removal of the impediments to this faith and primary among these is the belief that the mind is inherently incapable of grasping reality. Augustine will not grant to Academic

Skepticism the assertion that the soul, as created light, could dwell in total darkness. Whether the soul sees beyond this or not, ascends to perceive uncreated light as implicated in its inmost activity or remains dispersed in the realms of nature and history, it cannot be excused from making the attempt on the grounds that the eye of the soul is blind. In demonstrating that something is known and that Skepticism cannot coherently deny this, *Against the Academics* removes any obstacle it could put in the way of at least seriously seeking to know God and the nature of the good life. Thus, its argument stops short of a full account of the nature and extent of knowledge and contents itself with demonstrating that there seem to be and in fact are irrefutable instances of knowledge and that there is no internally consistent way of holding otherwise.⁵⁸ In doing the latter, the practical purpose of this work is fulfilled and a beginning point for the subsequent philosophical and theological reflection Augustine would have his readers undertake for themselves is assured.

Nonetheless, it must be emphasized as well that 'fideistic' or 'pragmatist' accounts of this work do not have the whole truth either. For Augustine truth moves the will through apprehension to recognize (and praise) what is.

The will does not decide to value truth as if it could ever really do otherwise. Thus, *Against the Academics* cannot, as Heil and others think, be taken to be arguing that belief is prior to any reasoning at all and that one ought to value reason and the a priori truths upon which it rests out of a previous moral commitment. If one does not wish to go to extremes of this kind, then one must recognize that immediate rational certainties are involved even in the process of recommending beliefs or appealing to the conscience of the reader. Thus, even if Augustine's dialogue is more concerned with moral persuasion and the quest for the happy life than it is with propounding a theory of knowledge, it cannot pursue these aims in any way in the absence of an account of the foundations of rational discourse. It is entirely legitimate to ask whether the pursuit of happiness or virtue is founded on any rational necessity or whether any criterion for certainty exists. *Against the Academics* does not neglect to raise questions of this kind as I intend to argue. Indeed, it raises them precisely because the hortatory and moral aspects of the work require it.

A more adequate commentary, such as is proposed here, would relate all these elements to both the practical

context of this writing and the presupposed anthropological and theological framework which underlies its specific arguments (which I have described in Chapter III). I will show that it is unnecessary, indeed un-Augustinian, to ask whether this text is primarily a moral critique, an epistemological argument, an exhortation to the philosophical life, or a demonstration of the vanity of human wisdom that points to faith.⁵⁹ The full Augustinian position, present at least in its essentials from the time of his conversion, cannot be reduced to such one-sided oppositions. The encounter with Skepticism is a moment in the larger dramatic structure of Augustine's story and, insofar as this story has a philosophical logic to it, the question of Skepticism occurs within an unfolding dialectic which takes up both the speculative and the practical, both knowledge and will.⁶⁰ Augustine's dynamic account of personality and its self-realization in self-knowledge by its own inner weight moves beyond skeptical quietude towards a standpoint which involves both truly knowing the object of love and truly loving what is known as lovable. For this reason, a proper reading of this dialogue requires a standpoint as comprehensive as Augustine's own, and, to the extent that this is lacking to the modern scholar, its

meaning will be reduced to whatever his or her own viewpoint regards as primary. In this sense, to read Augustine well it is necessary to engage the whole shape of his thought.

What, in fact, is most urgently required in the reading of this or any other work of Augustine, and what has received inadequate attention from scholars who have looked at *Against the Academics* is the extent to which Augustine's trinitarianism determines the shape of his argument. Augustine thinks out of a logic for which being, thinking and willing are mutually implicating moments in the divine life and in its created image, the human soul. This triune structure is woven so deeply into his thinking that it is almost second nature to him and is operative even where he is not directly advertent to it. It is frequently for lack of an adequate appreciation of this trinitarian context that the commentators I will look at interpret *Against the Academics* in a one sided and distorted fashion. As a strict Trinitarian, Augustine would not, indeed could not, separate ontology, epistemology and morality in the way many interpretations of *Against the Academics* imply. As we shall see, it is his claim that the very inseparability of thinking from being and willing renders Skepticism untenable.

With these considerations in mind, it becomes possible to formulate the questions necessary to approaching *Against the Academics* properly. By moving back and forth between the details of the text and the Augustinian position as a whole, I hope to be able to determine the precise limits and particular aim of this work. Thus, my commentary will be an attempt to produce a convincing account of a particular text by reading it in relation to a presupposed framework, a framework for which moral, rhetorical, and epistemological concerns are never pursued in simple isolation from each other.

The crucial text for understanding this framework is the *Confessions* for it is here that Augustine lays out the logic of the soul's ascent towards re-integration with its principle, as well as how this logic moved him at every point in his own development as an individual.⁶¹ The vision of truth in which this culminates, and the acceptance of Jesus Christ as the way to the full possession of that truth, stand outside *Against the Academics* as that to which its rhetorical and argumentative strategies are ordered. With this in mind, it is possible to accurately determine the dialectical function of Augustine's arguments as one of purging the reader of false assumptions that block the

soul's ascent to knowledge of self and God. Proceeding in this way, a comprehensive view of this work emerges such as has not been achieved by commentators who have read it as an isolated treatise or moral exhortation.

In addition to this, I hope to fully understand and integrate Augustine's own view of his Cassiciacum writings with the argument of this dissertation. Of these he states: "The books that I wrote there were indeed now written in your [God's] service, and attest my discussions with those present and with myself alone before you. But they still breathe the spirit of the school of pride, as if they were at the last gasp" (*Confessions* IX, IV, 7). This challenges the interpreter to show the sense in which *Against the Academics* serves Augustine's new Christian standpoint even as it sums up the old Platonic one.⁶² Why, at this particular point in his life, did Augustine think that he was serving God by composing philosophical dialogues in the Platonic style?

I will show that this style of writing was in fact entirely appropriate to Augustine's position in the weeks before his baptism. At the threshold of entering the Catholic Church himself, Augustine occupied himself in demonstrating the role of Platonism in leading to that

threshold. As one commentator has said: "But all of the dialogues and the letters to Nebridius have the latter (the sacraments of the Church) as their one aim. Each intends to show, by reason alone, how our nature, according to our own logic, leads inexorably to the recognition of the need for the mediation of Christ, which is to say, to the doors of the Church" (Starnes 1990, 252). This Platonism does both by means of its own positive contributions and by pointing beyond itself to what it cannot find from its own resources, the true unity of the finite creation and God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Of this latter, however, it cannot directly speak for it belongs to the standpoint of faith that Augustine will appropriate through his initiation into the Catholic Church. Accordingly, during his catechumenate, Augustine does not directly expound those aspects of the Christian faith that transcend general philosophical wisdom but writes in a manner that puts more emphasis on what unites Christianity to Classical thought than on what divides them while at the same time showing how he has passed from one into the other. By this means he can show his non-Christian reader that whatever he may gain from submitting to the church, he need not, in doing so, sacrifice such genuine insight as he already possesses. How

this transitional character of *Against the Academics* determines its interpretation and overall significance in the Augustinian corpus I intend to show in my commentary.

Part II Chapter I- Epistle to Romanianus

This epistle stands as a general introduction to the problems of truth and happiness, which will be the subject of the first book. While addressed to Romanianus in particular, it points to common human experiences to which philosophical contemplation provides the only possible solution. The parallels drawn between Romanianus' and Augustine's experience reinforce this. For Augustine too has experienced the falsity and insecurity of finite goods and the torment of a will divided between the desire for a true and stable good and the habits of the flesh, sensuality and pride. These are fundamental experiences of alienation from which a desire for wisdom is born. Augustine would suggest that despite variety of time, temperament, and place, human experience is always one. Beneath the surface, everyone's problem is the same; the recovery of an integrated will amid a plurality of possible finite ends. The solution, too, is the same; the knowledge and possession of an object which can integrate the will and communicate to it its own permanence. This is one of the major themes dealt with later in the *Confessions*. In this work, Augustine brings Romanianus' attention to that period of his life which he will later cover in Book VI of *Confessions*,

his occupancy of the chair of rhetoric at Milan. He intimates that Romanianus now finds himself in the same position as Augustine did then, which is essentially the problem described above. This being the case, Augustine calls his attention to the solution he has himself found, which is the only solution any human could find, knowledge of the immutable and intelligible God who is self-subsistent truth.

Nonetheless, Augustine is still addressing an individual. In spite of the universality of the experiences to which he points, it is manifestly the case that many people never come to any clear awareness of their fundamental condition. The insight and nobility of spirit which can condemn its own existence and seek to transcend it can also seem an accident of character and personal history. The external events which can jar someone to the consciousness of their need for wisdom can seem, to our perspective, entirely fortuitous. In Romanianus' own case, receptivity to what Augustine is teaching him seems predicated upon the misfortunes he has suffered. The inner movement of the soul towards wisdom is mediated through external events (one might recall Augustine's own happening upon the writings of St. Paul, or the hearing of the voice

in the garden) that may not, at the time, reveal their full significance. It is Augustine's belief that Romanianus may be at some such juncture and that at this point his council may well be telling.

In this light, there is considerable interest to Augustine's remarks about virtue and fortune. It was a widespread belief in the Classical world that opposed to reason and virtue was an unpredictable power of fortune, which held partial sway over events in nature and history.⁶³ In Rome, this force was deified as the goddess Fortuna. It played a role in the historiography of both Greece and Rome and in philosophical discourse revealed itself as the principle of necessity, which opposed the self-diffusion of the divine to finite beings. This 'power' placed an inherent limit on the perfectibility of things. This residual dualism in the Classical tradition tended to limit the aspirations of human beings to knowledge and happiness.

It also manifested itself in various cyclical doctrines of eternal recurrence according to which an eternal soul ascended and descended ceaselessly between imprisonment in the body and the discarnate freedom of pure thought. In popular discourse, however, fortune often took on quasi-personal characteristics. A tiny minority of select

individuals, 'chosen' by fortune, combined a capacity for personal excellence with a luck that provided them with opportunity and success. Thus, the success of an Octavian, say, which seemed to depend in equal measure on brilliance, decisiveness and sheer luck, received a kind of explanation.

Behind all these attitudes lay the fundamental conviction that a surd and irrational element, both inwardly and outwardly determined the limits of what virtue and wisdom can aspire to.

Augustine, however, will have none of this. He promises Romanianus that philosophy will show him that virtue and fortune, reason and necessity are not opposed principles. A rational providence arranges all events down to the most minute detail and is not limited by any principle external to itself. External fortune is providence acting in a manner only partly visible to us. Therefore, the events in Romanianus' life are appropriate to the totality of which it is a part (1.1.2,15-25). But for Augustine, what governs this totality is more than the external rational necessity advocated by Stoicism. It is a personal force to which Romanianus stands in relation as an individual. Indeed, Augustine would say that wisdom itself has condescended to raise Romanianus to a unique relation to

itself through its arrangement of external events and its secret inspiration of the inner man (even acting through the prayers of Augustine and his friends). A participation in the total standpoint of this personal providential power is promised to all lovers of wisdom. Raised to this awareness, Romanianus will be reconciled to his external lot by seeing it as a manifestation of the rational principle he seeks to possess. As providence is attuned to the highest expression of his own rational nature, in coming to understand and love it, Romanianus will come to the knowledge and possession of his true self. This will, in turn, free him from his alienating involvement with external goods at the mercy of corruption and change.

In this way, Augustine dissolves the seeming paradox that the virtue and wisdom needed to lift a man above fortune seem to be themselves dependant on luck. Wisdom itself is a gift of God, to be sought with prayer, as are the external circumstances which allow for its attainment. God chooses the wise for wisdom. The response of Romanianus, and indeed all of us, should be gratitude and astonishment at the sheer gratuitousness of our relationship to wisdom. Without putting it in expressly Christian terms, Augustine is already in this work firm in his conviction

that it is by a timeless election that wisdom lifts certain people into a particular relationship to itself. Man depends entirely upon the mercy of God and not upon fortune or fatal necessity.

Augustine continues his argument by applying these reflections to Romanianus' own situation. In what way can the workings of providence be glimpsed in his own life? Augustine's answer is that the loss of his worldly prosperity has removed the very thing that prevented him from engaging in the rational examination of life which is the pre-requisite of philosophy (1.1.2). Romanianus' greatest need is to gain the ability to judge dispassionately the various goods present to him according to their intrinsic worth. Habituated, however, to the immediate possession of whatever finite goods he desired, he could not, in his former circumstances, have possibly gained this kind of reflective distance. His will was too directly given over to them for his mind to judge properly of their quality. His present circumstances, however, allow just such a judgement to take place and this for two reasons. Firstly, deprived of the immediate possession of wealth and honour his will is less strongly determined by its immediate surroundings and correspondingly freer to attach itself to

other objects (1.1.2, 50). Secondly, it has forced Romanianus to recognize something about the nature of the goods he once possessed; his loss of them has revealed their inherent unreality, the fact that being created from nothing, the will can have no stable relation to them (1.1.2, 55). Thus, Providence has worked to liberate Romanianus from the illusion that he was in possession of his true good. Rather than being a calamity, his misfortune should truly be regarded as a call from God to recollect the true relationship between particular goods and the good itself apprehended by wisdom.

Augustine expands this point by noting that Romanianus has partly known all along that his true good did not lie in wealth and social influence. By the 'divine' element within himself he has always preferred justice to power and generosity to possessiveness (1.1.3, 60). This element is the light of eternal reason by which are discerned the principles of conduct Romanianus exemplifies. Why is it that, despite his involvement in various external goods, he has never abandoned this internal standard in favour of them? If these latter were truly his good why would he not sacrifice his principles for them instead of sacrificing them for his principles? If the wealth he possesses is not

more valuable to him than the manner in which he exercises stewardship over it, then is it not the order of soul which can exercise a just dominion over temporal goods which is his primary desideration and not the goods themselves?

Augustine would argue that the loss of Romanianus' temporal goods would, if he were to consider it closely, reveal to him that what he has lost was of lesser value to him than what he still possesses, and cannot not possess for as long as he wills to possess it (1.1.3, 65). Thus, he must awake to himself and recognize that he is being called to the enjoyment of that within him (and above him) which remains above all change and is the true measure of what is changeable.

If he turns to philosophy, Romanianus can rest assured that, like Augustine himself, he will glimpse the true and hidden God, the principle of being and intelligibility seen through the 'bright clouds' of created things (1.1.3, 75).⁶⁴ He will see that sensible things do not meet the mind's own criteria of knowability or desirability. Both mind and will are oriented towards the eternal and incorporeal ground of the world of sensible change. Romanianus should wake up to the superior reality of that by which he judges particular things such as his actions or those of others. These

thoughts have already freed Augustine from his contradictory and unsatisfying pursuit of mundane success and the superstition of Mani. When they have won over Romanianus as well he will see that he has, in fact, been truly fortunate in not becoming a victim of his success.

Augustine continues by informing him that this is the life to which his son Licentius has already begun to devote himself. Here he very pointedly holds up the son as an example for the father, inverting the natural order of generations. Romanianus must now go back to school with his own child to have his heart and mind remoulded by wisdom. He must return to the helplessness and receptivity of an infant and feed upon her breast (1.1.4,80). Age and preparation do not matter; wisdom picks out its followers from young and old alike for it is prior to all natural determinations and this is why it can only be approached in the humility which can submit to being born again as her child. Whether Augustine has explicitly in mind or not Christ's saying "The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" what he recommends to Romanianus here is certainly in the same spirit. It is his hope that his patron will not stand idly by while the generation younger than his own already begins to enjoy true happiness but be stirred to

emulation what Licentius, and another young pupil of Augustine's, Trygetius, have already accomplished (1.1.4, 85).

These youths, Augustine tells us, have been, even as he had been, won over by a reading of Cicero's *Hortensius* (1.1.4, 95). With him, they seek the possession of a stable object of knowledge outside of the mutability of nature, which can be found only in God and his wisdom. Later, the dialogue will reveal differences in their characters which are only hinted at here. Licentius, an aspiring poet, has a less stable grasp on the new life than does Trygetius, who has returned to Augustine from a stint in the army. No doubt this is indicative of the fact that, as a poet, the soul of Licentius is still partly held by the realm of appearances, whereas that of Trygetius, who has been engaged practically in public service, has in this realm gained some incipient relation to an objective order beyond his own will. Wisdom calls whom she will, differences of temperament and background are not utterly cancelled but given a certain limited scope.

The theme they will begin by discerning, the nature of the happy life, has, in reality, been the subject of Augustine's dedication. However, the Skepticism which

Augustine will be critiquing might appear to Romanianus as a way out of his dilemma for it too promises to teach detachment from finite goods and tranquillity of soul. Thus, it will be necessary for Augustine to bring to Romanianus' mind the true nature of the independence and superiority to fortune that he seeks in his distress. Thus, we turn to the first book of the dialogue.

Part II Chapter II- The Argument of Book I.

Against the Academics does not begin with the question of whether we can know the truth. Rather, it begins with the question of whether we ought to know the truth (1.2.5). Is it desirable that we should know the truth? Are we responsible for knowing it? Is it our highest end and our gravest obligation? The bluntness of Augustine's question confronts us right at the beginning with its radical character. Truth is introduced here not as one of a series of goods finite in itself so that the question of whether we can know is like asking whether truffles are on the menu or whether we shall be forced to settle for meaner fare. Rather, the epistemological question is put in the context of what we ought to pursue as human beings totally and without reservation. It is put in the context of the question of the good so that the question of knowledge becomes the question of whether we can fulfil our ultimate end.⁶⁵ In this way, Augustine begins with the assumption that the question of truth and the question of the good are inseparable and that reason and will are intrinsically related.

Augustine's linking of truth with obligation wins the immediate assent of his audience. Trygetius responds

enthusiastically that Truth ought to be pursued and obtained and Licetius, who will represent a qualified Skepticism, does not dissent (1.2.5). Thus, the question will be addressed by all on the common presupposition that the question of truth is a final and exclusive moral concern. It will be a question, ultimately, of whether we can do what we ought to do. Accordingly, theoretical reflection on knowledge takes its origin from theoretical reflection on the good. This is because the truth is sought and all seeking is an activity of the will. This being so, seeking of the truth must be set in motion by the will's object, the good.

Augustine's next question concerns the relation of truth and happiness, which is here quietly linked to the obligatory. He asks "...if we can be happy while not apprehending the truth, do you consider the apprehension of the truth to be necessary" (1.2.5, 5)? Augustine is here narrowing down the nature of the 'ought' of his opening question, implying that what is obligatory for us is our well-being. The concept of goodness or rightness is given a particular content for us by the concept of happiness. Thus, the question of whether we ought to know resolves into the question of whether the truth will make us happy. The

wellspring of action is delight and we must ask if what delights us most is the truth if we are to know whether we ought to will to know it. Will is a primordial fact of human existence and all questions theoretical and practical resolve themselves into the question of its inherent teleology (one might say, and this would be entirely Platonic, that man, while a rational animal, is just as primordially an erotic animal).⁶⁶ The question then would be whether we are most fitted to know and love what is universally and without restriction. If we are to seek the truth, it is because it is our good and, as the good for human beings is happiness, truth must be for the sake of happiness.

At this point there is a break in the argument indicating that the scope of the question has now been circumscribed and its most basic elements pointed to. These elements are: 1. the obligatory or the good, 2. truth and 3. happiness. The beginning of this argument posits these three principles in their implicit unity. In the subsequent debate, these elements will fall into opposition and distinction out of which an explicit consciousness of their unity will begin to re-emerge.⁶⁷ Indeed, it is precisely

because of this fall into division and the impossibility of remaining in it that this unity will be fully manifest.

Thus, we now have a context in which the epistemological problem can be raised and so can make a new step in the inquiry. This is marked by an intervention on the part of Alypius, who offers to referee the debate rather than take any direct part in it (1.2.5, 10). For taking on this practical role he offers, appropriately, a practical justification. Affairs in the city will force him to be absent and this will cause greater inconvenience if he is taking one side in the discussion. As referee, however, he can hand over his role to another with little interruption (1.2.5,10). This fits well with Augustine's immediate purpose, which is to have Trygetius and Licentius debate the question at hand. Also, it shows that reflection on the good presupposes some practical realization of the good in human life as its beginning point. As an official of the Roman State, Alypius is related in an immediate and unreflective way to the good as a practical aim. His interest is in *doing* the good even in the context of a discussion of the good. This doing of the good is in fact the foundation of the civilized order in which we have the freedom and leisure to

inquire about the world. The thing we seek is already, in an implicit way, given in the context in which we seek.

Augustine elicits agreement from Trygetius to the proposition that if truth is to be sought it is for the sake of happiness. At this point, the first division occurs, for Licentius goes further and states that the search for truth is carried on for the sake of happiness and that the happiness sought is to be found in the very activity of seeking (1.2.5, 15). Thus, the fundamental unity that marks the beginning of the discussion, that truth ought to be known for the sake of happiness, here divides into two possibilities based on two distinct relations to the truth, possessing and seeking. Our relationship to the end can have two forms, the beholding of it and the seeking of it and these are distinct though interrelated aspects.

Trygetius responds by asking for a definition of the happy life that he might know what to respond (1.2.5, 20). Augustine answers by offering a traditional definition, probably deriving from Cicero but traceable to a number of other sources. The happy life, he says, is the life lived in accordance with the best element in us, which is further defined as the ruling element in the human person, the mind (1.2.5, 25-30).⁶⁸ This is acceptable to all present and

indeed, would not really be at issue in the debate with the Academics, who placed the happy life in the mental activity of *epoche*. Accordingly, the discussion can proceed on a basis of common agreement about the nature of the happy life. The difference will emerge over a question unsettled in this definition, i.e., in which activity of the mind does the happy life reside, the activity of seeking to know the truth or the activity of beholding it? Mind, as we experience it, has a number of activities as it has a number of objects and it must be ascertained which of these offers the highest fulfilment.

Having thus defined the question we have another dramatic pause. Augustine expresses his eagerness to see Trygetius and Licentius defend their respective positions on such an important topic (1.2.6, 40).⁶⁹ Licentius slyly suggests that an important subject ought to be discussed by important men but Augustine responds that the discussion of such topics makes important men out of those who are not (1.2.6, 45). Thus, Augustine's immediate purpose is to elicit the truth from within the minds of his students, to make them philosophers by bringing them to a recollection of the wisdom that lies *within them*. The role of the teacher is not to give answers but to induce the student to be

gripped and transformed by the question. It is this that makes an important man.

Augustine now elicits from Trygetius his argument for the view that happiness must lie in the possession of truth. For Trygetius, happiness lies in the perfection of wisdom which is the beholding of truth. One who is searching for truth, however, is lacking in that for which he is seeking and is to that extent imperfect. As he who is not perfect cannot be happy, he who in seeking the truth lacks the perfection of what he seeks cannot be happy and so, we cannot be happy simply in seeking the truth (1.3.7, 5). Trygetius, then, bases his position on the view that all motion presupposes a prior perfection that is the terminus of that motion. The movement of the mind towards truth points to the fullness of truth of which it is the absence and this fullness is the *telos* that gives the movement its reality and meaning. By this logic, the search for truth, as presupposing a privation, is not the good but a motion consequent on the absence of the good and so cannot be identical with happiness, which is the possession of the good.⁷⁰

Licentius responds by revealing his position to be based not on argument but on the authority of the Ancients,

particularly Cicero. Eliciting from Trygetius the admission that Cicero, the father of Latin philosophy, was wise; Licentius points out that it was Cicero's view that nothing could be perceived with sufficient clarity to justify affirmative judgement and that there was nothing left for the wise man to do but search for the truth diligently (1.3.7, 20). This search could secure liberty from the evil of error if not knowledge of the truth. For Licentius, wisdom achieves all it can and all it need achieve in the critical overturning of any and all fixed judgements for this is how the ancients, who are called wise, conceived of it.

At this point Trygetius declares that he would like to retract a point incautiously conceded (1.3.8). Augustine grants this as an act of justice presupposed in the process of dialogue (1.3.8,30). Philosophical dialogue aims at truth and this entails the freedom to assert or retract whatever is required to attain this end. To restrict this freedom would be an act of injustice undermining the basic moral presupposition at the root of all discourse. Thus, a justice related to its end governs philosophical dialogue and Licentius readily concurs in this fact. Again, it is indicated by this that inquiry into truth assumes a

practical context in which ideas of truth and justice are objectively present.

Alypius now interrupts to hand over the role of referee to Augustine as the time has come for him to depart (1.3.8, 40). Alypius' departure coincides with Trygetius' declaration that the point he has rashly conceded was that Cicero was wise (1.3.8, 45). Authority, it seems, has left the room with Alypius! All that follows will now be said in the freedom offered by philosophy and the authority of Cicero himself, creator of the very language of Latin thought, will no longer be decisive in settling the question (1.3.9, 60).

This marks the point at which Augustine's students turn inward towards a fuller comprehension of the good itself and away from the immediate form of the good present in the culture of the Roman State.⁷¹ Ancient Rome offered its citizens a concrete realization of the good through world government. To be involved in the practical life of that state was to be in direct possession of one's end as human. This understanding was enshrined in the Latin classics, such as Cicero and Virgil, in which Augustine is educating his students. In this dialogue, there is a movement from an implicit relation to the good as enshrined

in the authority of this moral tradition to a free and inward apprehension of it through reflection on its true content. Accordingly, thought about the good takes its beginning from tradition that is then deepened and clarified through dialectic. This is why throughout Book I Ciceronian definitions form the beginning point of the ascent to wisdom, however much they might be transformed in the final result.⁷²

Trygetius then asserts yet another aspect of the freedom inherent in philosophical discussion, the freedom to move from point to point in the light of reason alone without external constraint. Accordingly, Trygetius demands what is now due to him from Licentius, an account of how an imperfect man can also be happy.

Licentius responds by drawing a distinction between the perfection of a creature and perfection as such, which can only be predicated of the divine. Truth, he says, is the possession of God and perhaps of the soul that has become God-like through liberation from the body and its dependence on sense-knowledge. For embodied human souls, however, perfection cannot be the fruition of knowledge, which is divine, but can only lie in the restless aspiration for what it cannot possess (1.3.9, 70). Whoever aspires with all

possible zeal to know the Truth has human perfection and hence happiness. Licentius even holds out the hope that the avid seeker for truth may merit for himself the vision of it after death (1.3.9,70).

Trygetius responds by asserting this fixed dualism of finite and infinite perfection to be untenable (1.3.9, 75). As rational beings, the perfection which can fulfil us is perfection pure and simple, not some finite perfection whose finitude we know (the way a pig is content in simply thriving as a pig). The basic problem is that, whether or not human knowledge has finite limits, human desire has none. It is of its nature infinite and any limit upon it concerning what it can attain creates a desire for what is beyond that limit. Because of its *amor*, the finite subject cannot simply rest in its own finitude for it has an orientation to infinity within it; its desire for what is whole and complete in itself. Indeed, it knows itself as limited precisely by its intimation of the unlimited. Thus, the self, as a process of ceaseless self-transcendence cannot but seek beyond its own finitude towards the absolute. Our hearts are restless till they rest in God (*Confessions*, I, 1).

Trygetius points to this fact by noting the basic contradiction in saying that one can be happy in the seeking of what one desires; one's want is for the object and not for the seeking of it (1.3.9,75). Thus, one cannot be fulfilled and hence happy unless one possesses that which one seeks, for the object is the very point of the seeking.

If knowing the truth is truly impossible then it makes no sense to seek it and one ought to forgo the effort entirely. It should be noted that even Licentius posits a final correspondence of search and object as somehow presupposed in the act of searching, however vaguely he has articulated this (1.3.9, 70). That he has done this surely indicates that he recognizes already the good of pure seeking as merely limited and relative only to the evil of involvement in the passions. Ultimately, if a man does have a desire for truth which he cannot fulfil there is no use in saying that this is the happiness of a man for this sort of happiness is indistinguishable from frustration. The happiness of a man, as Licentius describes it, is in fact unhappiness insofar as it posits a desire that cannot be fulfilled yet is a genuine desire.⁷³

At this point, though, Licentius still shows some confidence in his position. He asserts again that the end

for man is to search passionately for the truth and to achieve this to the highest degree possible is to achieve a goal that cannot be gotten beyond (1.3.9, 80-85). To do this is to achieve human happiness for it is to fulfil the entire potency with which we have been endowed by nature. He adds, moreover, that a man is either happy or unhappy and asks who would call a man searching for the truth unhappy (1.3.9,80-85). Again he points out that his view corresponds directly with the definition of the happy life proffered by Augustine for, after all, anyone who is searching for the Truth is being governed by his reason in doing so and is thus living in accordance with his own ruling principle (1.3.9, 90).

Augustine's young pupils have now succeeded in carving out their respective positions and offering principled arguments on their behalf. The essential question between them is whether human beings can, in this life, have any share in the perfection of the Divine life or whether we can have only the bare aspiration for this and nonetheless remain content. Trygetius is the first to attempt to move the argument forward. Realizing that error has been agreed by all to be a misfortune he attempts to argue that error is the privation of knowledge and that he who does not know is in error. Since a man who is seeking for Truth does not

know that for which he seeks, it follows that he is in error concerning it and is therefore unhappy (1.4.10). Thus, Licentius is incorrect to say that we can be happy in seeking the Truth.

Logically, this is the next step forward in the argument since, if happiness lies our relation to truth, error must be that state which divides us most completely from the possession of happiness. Accordingly, if Licentius cannot distinguish the ignorance of the Skeptic from error he cannot claim that we can happy without possessing the truth. Yet this will in fact create an opportunity for Licentius later in the dialogue. If knowledge of truth is the good and error is the privation of that good then it might appear that we possess the good in being free from error. Accordingly, the *apatheia* of the Skeptics can appear to be our true relation to the good, a point Licentius will take up and which will be finally refuted to Augustine's satisfaction in the third book. There it will become apparent that *epoche* does not in fact free us from the fear of error.

Licentius is initially stymied by this move. At first he attempts to answer Trygetius by pointing out that a man who is searching for truth is not in error because freedom

from error is that for which he is seeking (1.4.10, 5). Trygetius easily counters this by pointing out that if someone is seeking not to be in error then he must be in error since he must be in whatever condition he is seeking the negation of if he is *seeking* the negation of it (1.4.10, 10). He may not wish to be in error but nor does any rational creature and the simple wish not to be wrong does not mean one is not wrong.

While Licentius hesitates as to what to respond to this Augustine intervenes in the argument. He points out that Licentius needs to define error, which ought to be easy enough for him since he seems to be deeply entangled in it (1.4.10,10). Augustine is here hinting that Licentius' difficulty in answering stems from his having acceded in a definition of error that is itself erroneous. Were he to examine his situation at this point he would immediately see what he has in fact done in committing an error and see his way out of his difficulty. This problem concerning the nature of error will in fact lead Licentius to bring out fully the inner logic of his position, which is why Augustine urges him to consider it.

Trygetius, though, interrupts confidently with his own definition, the one on which his argument to this point has

been based. Error, he says, is always to seek and never to find. It is a mere negation, like ignorance, which the one who seeks is seeking to overcome (1.4.10,10). Thus, it is that very absence of perfection which is the presupposition of all motion and if the wise man is seeking to be free from it then he can only be happy if his liberation is total and Licentius' position is incoherent. This is entirely of a piece with what Trygetius has been arguing throughout.

At this point Licentius requests a postponement of the argument to allow him to collect his thoughts and a general recess is agreed on. Augustine halts an attempted resumption of the argument by the two pupils and the entire party retires to the baths until the next day (1.4.10, 20-2).

The discussion is resumed the following day. In the meantime, Licentius has been able to reflect and locate the error that had caused him to misunderstand the nature of error. He points out that error, properly defined, is the approval of a falsehood as a truth (1.4.11, 35). Thus, it is not the simple privation of knowledge. Its source is in a positive act of the will: the act of judging a falsehood to be true (1.4.11, 40). Licentius does not mention the possibility of judging a truth to be false. On this basis,

it is easy to see that one who is seeking the Truth is entirely free from error because he has not yet made a judgement upon it. In fact, he can guarantee himself permanent freedom from error by never rendering a judgement at all. Thus, by locating the error that divides us from our end in the will, Licentius thinks he has shown that it is in our power to possess our end through an act of the will; the *epoche* of the Skeptics. As the Hellenistic philosophers in general held, it is in our own power to be free because it is by our own power that we are unfree.

Licentius further buttresses his position by showing how the mere quest for truth can make us happy. Seeking diligently for the truth produces in us a state of *apatheia*, a tranquillity of mind that comes with withdrawal from the passions. He points out that all present have in fact been experiencing this tranquillity over the past two days through engaging in a philosophical discussion that has activated what is Divine within themselves. This they have experienced without finding any resolution to the question being discussed (1.4.11, 45-50). Thus, without actually finding the Truth, they have experienced a share in the *apatheia* of God through a withdrawal from the body and its passions.

Licentius then proceeds to dissect the definition of error given by Trygetius according to the principle that a true definition will include the entire range of phenomena that falls under a particular term without including phenomena that do not fall under that term. He will show that Trygetius' definition covers many things that cannot be called errors and fails to cover things that are manifest errors. Thus, suppose a man who was not seeking the answer concerning the time of day responded, casually and incorrectly, that it was night (1.4.11, 55). The man was not 'seeking and never finding'; he was not seeking at all yet it is clear that he erred in making a snap judgement. Further, suppose a man were heading to Alexandria along the correct road and died before reaching his destination (1.4.11, 60). He was always seeking and never finding yet he was no more in error than the previous man was correct.

Trygetius answers feebly that the man can't always be searching (1.4.11,60). Licentius replies that this is so; there are limitations of time and natural necessity that prevent one from giving all one's time to searching for truth. But even though this is the case, one can take the 'always' of Trygetius' definition to denote the seeker's will to search for truth at every moment possible and if he

does this assiduously who can say he is in error if he does not attain his goal (1.4.12, 65-75)? Consequently, Licentius asks if the issue between them has not been resolved for the man seeking for truth is not in error while he seeks and is happy in governing his life according to reason (1.4.12, 80). This, Licentius thinks, entirely answers the argument of Trygetius that the man seeking for the truth would be in error and in seeking not to be in error would be unhappy in not achieving his goal.

The next section of the argument resumes the question of the nature of wisdom. Its concern will be to use the art of dialectic to clarify what we mean when we talk about wisdom and it will carry us to the end of the first book. Trygetius reintroduces this question because he perceives an inadequacy in the definition used up to this point that has lead to the impasse in the discussion. What he wants is an understanding of wisdom that will settle the question of the relation of the activity of thought to its end by adequately clarifying what that end is. This would serve to clarify the extent to which our intellectual life exemplifies his basic metaphysical principle; that becoming is for the sake of being and imperfection presupposes a prior perfection that it strives to attain.

His difficulty will lie, on the one hand, in the abstract universality of definitions; the forms through which he seeks to apprehend wisdom will seem external to its content. Thus, Licentius will at several points be able to point to some aspect of wisdom not included in the definition or to something included in it that is not a true aspect. On the other hand, there is a one-sidedness to his position, as defined to this point, that Licentius will also be able to exploit. Trygetius' emphasis on being as the end of seeking seems to lack concreteness as it does not comprehend a knowledge of the way to that end. Accordingly, it does not comprehend our relation as subjects to the good we seek. Licentius, for his part begins from the side of the subject seeking the good but does not know the end sought as related positively to that subject. Rather, he seeks an immutable end in the seeking itself through *apatheia*. This too is an abstraction from the whole nature of wisdom that Trygetius will in his turn show to be contradictory.

As we shall see, this entire section of the argument contains a distinct echo of Jesus' statement in *John 14,6*, that he is "The way the truth and the life." The crucial question here is the nature of the true life and the

relation of this life to the truth and the way to the truth. Licentius has placed the true life in the way itself while Trygetius has placed it in the possession of the end. Christ, though, reveals himself as both the end sought and the way to the end and he is the one because he is the other. He who lives in Christ lives the true life because he lives in the true way to the true end, the Word of Truth that radiates into the multiplicity of time and space in order to recollect all things into its primal simplicity. Christ, then, is the definition of wisdom that the interlocutors are seeking, he who unites all the elements they are seeking to relate. It is he they are trying to recollect as they try to bring to mind what wisdom is out of their implicit knowledge of it as it is in him that the contradictory aspects of their positions are reconciled.

We begin, though, with an ascent from what is implicitly present to us concerning wisdom, that it is connected to life, and move from there to a more and more adequate conceptualisation of it. The process is one of recollection through definition and the discussion will be very much concerned with the difficulties attendant on bringing out in the dividedness of language the simplicity of what is contained in the memory. A series of definitions

will be offered, each one of which will seem to be inadequate to our sense of what wisdom is as a whole owing to the many-sidedness of the words we employ to bring it out. At one point, Trygetius even admits defeat on this point and renounces the dialectical process altogether. Nonetheless, with the intervention of Augustine, more and more precise definitions are offered and until the unrecollected knowledge of that has been guiding the discussion throughout will be brought to light. Indeed, Augustine will intimate that enough has been said in principle to settle the question under discussion, though he does not directly do so.

Trygetius begins this section of the discussion by asking Licentius if he thinks that wisdom is the right way of life. (1.5.13) This definition is also Ciceronian but Licentius immediately dismisses it as laughable. His objection is fairly simple. If wisdom is the principle of life then it is the means of avoiding the negation of life, death. But if this is so wisdom will be any means of avoiding death, even something as mundane as avoiding a road frequented by bandits (1.5.13, 10-15). Now, one might say that it was some part of wisdom to behave prudently with respect to one's physical safety, but would one call a man

wise simply because he looked both ways before crossing the street?

The problem here is that Trygetius' definition contains an element of imprecision, for life can refer to physical life (as Licentius takes it here), intellectual life, or the combination of the two. What, in this context, does Trygetius mean by life? Trygetius tries to say more clearly what he means and proceeds to define wisdom as the right way of life that leads to truth (1.5.14). By this means he has linked wisdom to an immanent movement toward an end (life) and identified that end with the apprehension of what is (truth). Thus, he already is beginning to know wisdom as comprehensive both of an object (being) and of the activity (loving apprehension) in which we possess that object.

His new definition, though, is still problematic. What does Trygetius mean by truth? Does he mean any truth? When Venus tells Aeneas to follow a certain path to find some object she has told him about is the path that leads to the truth concerning which she spoke wisdom (1.5.14, 25)? After all, the road on which he placed his foot was a way that lead to the truth, one moreover that concerned his survival. If Trygetius is not speaking in this physical sense about wisdom what is he speaking about? What is the truth to

which the right way of life leads and what sort of a way is it? No doubt, these are absurd construals of what Trygetius is trying to say but his definition must become more precise still in order to exclude them.

Licentius, moreover, is happy to point to an element in both these definitions that supports his overall position. In both cases Trygetius has spoken of wisdom as a way to the end rather than the end itself and if wisdom is indeed a way of some kind then anyone who is on this way is in possession of wisdom (1.5.14, 30). Thus, the man who is seeking the truth is wise already in the seeking of it for wisdom is the way and he is on it. From this it follows clearly that the man seeking the truth is happy for no wise man is unhappy and the man on the way to truth has wisdom and is wise. If wisdom is indeed connected with life then it is present in the very process by which we seek it for life is in its essence process.

At this point Trygetius throws up his hands. His failure to adequately define wisdom has soured him on the process of dialectic altogether (1.5.15). A false infinity now seems to cling to the whole endeavour. After all, if some words were not immediately clear definition would be impossible. The process of saying what we mean would be

endless as one definition would ever entail another and clarity about what we mean would reside at some infinite vanishing point we could never attain. Why, he might ask, couldn't wisdom be one of those simple indefinable notions? Indeed, as something so primary it would be a very good candidate for such a notion. Trygetius now holds it to have just this character and his effort to express it in the ambiguity and unclarity of human language has simply opened the way for the sophistical manipulation Licentius has engaged in (1.5.15, 50). Accordingly, Trygetius asks for no more requests for definitions or for Augustine to intervene in the argument (1.5.15, 50).

At this point Augustine orders a pause in the debate owing to the lateness of the hour (1.5.15, 55). He mentions that most of the day had been spent in ordering the affairs of the farm and in reviewing the first book of the *Aeneid* (1.5.15, 55). The mention of Virgil's epic at this point is of some interest. In the art of poetry there is a synthesis between the word, the idea, and its moving image, the sensible. Virgil, for instance, can be read as employing the medium of language to evoke sensible images of intelligible truths, thus uniting thought, speech and sensation. In his difficulty concerning how to articulate

what Wisdom is Trygetius has come to despair of this unity of what is inward with its external expression. The two sides for him simply fall into a division of the unity of thought and the multiplicity of language in which the one is inadequate to mediate to us the other. But speech, for human beings, is crucial both to articulate for us the pure content of thought and to communicate this thought to others. This latter is particularly crucial in that the quest for truth is communal; the sharing of knowledge through teaching and dialogue is a necessary element in our own ascent to truth in a way analogous to sensible experience. Thus, while Augustine would never simply equate thought and language (there are for him pure concepts prior to any given language, as he points out in *Confessions X, XII*), it is nonetheless the case that it is in and through speech that we come to the purely ideal. This being the case, we must strive as best we can within the limitations of language to bring before our explicit consciousness the true forms of things through the purgation of dialectic. This, if one might be so bold, is the highest and most difficult form of *poesis* and a task we cannot evade if we seek to raise our minds to knowledge of God. Nor is it necessary to despair utterly of our ability to do so for the

thing we seek in trying to define wisdom is within our memory, else we could not even know the inadequacy of the definitions we have been using.

The discussion resumes again the next day. Augustine and his companions reassemble at daylight. An attempt is made by Augustine to move the discussion forward on the basis of another Ciceronian definition of wisdom. This time, Wisdom is defined as knowledge of human and divine matters (1.6.16, 15). Thus, Wisdom is now said to have something to do with the knowledge of what pertains to God and what pertains to human beings. There is a distinct intimation here of the characteristic Augustinian fusion of self-knowledge and knowledge of God but we still have only a vague approach to the nature of wisdom. As it stands, the definition fails to make clear what 'matters' pertaining to the human and divine it has knowledge of and Licentius will again exploit this ambiguity. On the positive side, though, it does clarify to some degree the kind of truth the wise are seeking. Indeed, it points towards the terminal point of the ensuing discussion; that wisdom lies in the unification of human and divine knowledge realized in Christ. This will appear fully when, at the end of the dialogue, Augustine introduces the doctrine of the incarnation. In the first

book, however, wisdom will appear as the inward unity of the mind with its principle in which knowledge of both is comprehended. At this point the wisdom Augustine seeks is the mind's inner communion with the Eternal Word. Yet even this is surpassed in the end by our incorporation into Wisdom as fully actual in the incarnation.

Licentius' response to this new definition is to continue the process he has engaged in up to this point. He attempts to nullify the definition given by showing that it covers phenomena not proper to wisdom. In this case, he claims that the definition of wisdom as knowledge of human and divine matters would include men who are disreputable and unwise, such as the diviner Albicerius (1.6.17, 20). This man was both uneducated and dissolute yet had an uncanny ability to answer questions concerning matters of which he had no apparent means of obtaining knowledge. For instance, he was able to locate a missing spoon on Licentius' behalf even though far away at the time (1.6.17, 25). Before even being asked he could say what object was missing, where it was and to whom it belonged. As well, he confronted a young boy over the theft of some coins before anyone was aware they were missing (1.6.17, 30). When asked by a certain Flaccianus, who was in the process of buying a

farm, what business he was engaged in, Albicerius responded in detail and even gave the name of the farm (1.6.18, 35). Finally, he was able to directly read the mind of another man and tell him what line of Virgil he was thinking of, reciting it fluently even though he possessed no knowledge of literature (1.6.18, 40).

Now, Licentius claims that according to the definition offered by Augustine this Albicerius must be considered wise (1.6.18, 50). After all, he has spoken truly of things pertaining to human beings such as coins, spoons, farms and even thoughts. What is more, he appears to know these things with an immediacy that transcends normal human perception. His knowledge is not subject to the ordinary limitations of nature and thus partakes of the nature of the divine. Albicerius pronounces on human matters through a knowledge that is divine (hence he is called a diviner) and hence possesses wisdom. But can one really call such an ignorant and immoral man wise?

Trygetius replies that neither the form nor the content of Albicerius' knowledge is wisdom. Firstly, he points out that Albicerius does not possess knowledge per se. Appealing to the doctrine of the Stoics, he points out that knowledge is not simply a matter of saying or holding

something true but of holding an objective truth with a firm and unalterable persuasion grounded in scientific knowledge (1.7.19). Knowledge is a matter both of content and mode of apprehension. Merely guessing something to be true, for instance, is not knowledge even though the man who guesses holds exactly the same thing as a man who holds something through a settled habit of scientific knowledge. Thus, if knowledge is a stable relation to objective truth grounded in an indefectible habit of right reasoning, Albicerius cannot be considered wise.

According to Trygetius this goes for all such people who, like Albicerius, depend on a special talent for guesswork or intuition (1.7.19, 15). Experience teaches that astrologers, augers, *oneiromancers* and diviners are often fallible and uncertain and this was certainly the case with Albicerius. This being so, their successful predictions cannot proceed from a grasp of things in their relation to necessary principles and so cannot be called knowledge but only true opinion. If their grasp of phenomena were scientific, it would be have the stability of timeless and necessary knowledge and they could be neither hesitant nor fallible. As this is not the case, it cannot be that they

possess the truths they possess in the manner proper to the wise.

Trygetius claims not only that Albicerius lacks a subjective relation to wisdom, but also that he does not know the proper objects of wisdom. Not only does he not 'know', but the things he claims to 'know' are not 'human and divine matters' (1.7.20, 25). Albicerius is able to answer questions about spoons, farms, money and other forms of external property. He can make inspired guesses about external objects of sense but the human matters that are the object of wisdom are not external things that can be divided from us by fortune but what is proper and inward to the human soul. Albicerius' gift does not permit him to withdraw from external things and to reflect upon the soul itself and the good that is intrinsic to its own activity. Thus, he does not know the cardinal virtues by which the soul orders itself to its own proper end nor the principles of number, logic and aesthetics that lie behind the arts of grammar, music and geometry. Thus, while he may be able to guess what line of verse another man is thinking about, he cannot himself compose verses or teach the art of versification (1.7.21, 50). He does not know these arts in their principles and so has no true mastery over them.

The above facts show that Albicerius has some limited mastery over the mutable phenomena of nature but does not know the necessary rational structure that underlies both the phenomena themselves and the possibility of our apprehending them. This is because this structure is universal and intelligible rather than particular and sensible; it presupposes the discovery of intelligible reality and its distinction from external nature. Albicerius, not having made this move, does not know the true inwardness of the soul as prior to its outward activities and so does not really know the nature of the human.

Not knowing of human matters, Albicerius does not know of divine matters either (1.8.22). Not knowing the necessary principles that are most inward to the soul's activities he does not know the light of eternal truth in which we know them. As eternal truth is a radiance of the divine being we do not know the divine separately from our reflection on eternal and necessary truths. So, if Albicerius has no true knowledge of what is proper to the human soul he has no true knowledge of what pertains to the divine (1.8.22, 10). Being ignorant of 'human matters', he is ignorant of divine matters as well.

This argument recapitulates the characteristically Augustinian movement from the externality of sensible things through the inwardness of self-knowledge to God. Its equation of wisdom with self-knowledge in the knowledge of the divine expresses philosophically what is present in the somewhat vague and external definition of Cicero. Trygetius has here reached the inward character of wisdom that the discussion has been seeking all along as it has found in the knowledge of God an activity in which the soul is immediately its own end and hence free. What now remains is to purge the Ciceronian definition of its of its imprecision and bring out the fundamental agreement of Licentius and Trygetius on the character of wisdom. After this, it remains to ask whether wisdom so understood can be predicated of human beings and what our finite relation to it can be.

The final stage of the first book begins with a direct challenge to Licentius. Trygetius asks him if he holds the wise man to be seeking anything but knowledge of human and divine matters (1.8.22, 15). Licentius responds that the wise man seeks knowledge of divine matters and of virtue, which is divine in us (1.8.22, 15). Trygetius then asks if Albicerius knows of the divine matters for which the wise

man only seeks (1.8.22, 15). Licentius responds that by linguistic convention we must say that he did for a diviner by definition knows divine matters but he denies that he knows divine matters as they concern the wise (1.8.22, 20). By this, Licentius indicates that the definition of Cicero requires some further precision to exclude people like Albicerius. Trygetius' speech has already laid the groundwork for this, which will presently be made explicit.

Trygetius now puts the definition of wisdom to one side and asks directly whether Albicerius knows the truth (1.8.23, 25). Licentius replies that he does. Trygetius then asks whether Albicerius, who knows the truth, is better than the wise man, who does not (1.8.23, 25). Licentius answers that he is not because, even though he 'knows' he does not know the things of true value which the wise seek without ever finding (1.8.23, 30). There are truths which it is more worthy to seek and never find than to find many truths of a lesser kind. This implies that there are matters concerning God and human life which concern the wise in particular and others that do not and Trygetius tries once again to bring out what these are (1.8.23, 35). Returning to the definition of wisdom he adds a qualification that brings into focus the distinction between

Albicerius and the wise man that Licentius has wanted him to express.

If Licentius has objected to the definition up to this point on the grounds that people we would not call wise have some kind of knowledge of human and divine matters perhaps it should be said that wisdom is the knowledge of human and divine matters that pertains to the happy life (1.8.23, 35). Licentius immediately agrees that this is the distinction he has been looking for. Whatever Albicerius may or may not know about human and divine things the exercise his abilities does not make him a happy man. As such, he falls outside the definition of Wisdom as it now stands.

This definition brings to light more fully the nature of wisdom by reuniting the question of knowledge with the question of happiness. Trygetius has been concentrating on the question of what it is for the wise to know and what it is that the wise know. Licentius resistance to his argument has focused on the problem of happiness. Leaving the will out of account, Trygetius has been unsuccessful in clarifying to Licentius' satisfaction the distinguishing feature of the knowledge of the wise for he has left open the possibility of calling a miserable man wise. It contributes nothing to happiness to be able to find spoons,

if one is inwardly disordered by the passions. The knowledge sought by the wise must be of such a kind as to render our will satisfied and ordered by its stability and completeness. It must have certain characteristics from the point of view of the subject that seeks it that render it beyond all question and without qualification desirable. In short, it must be the *summum bonum* that is the proper object of the will.

In a way Trygetius has been saying just this, only he has not made it fully explicit. He had disputed the wisdom of Albicerius on the grounds that his so-called knowledge (which he does not grant is even really knowledge) was concerned only external things and not what is inward or proper to the soul itself. Simply put, Albicerius' divination does not lead us inward to knowledge of the soul and upward to God. As the soul is its own most immediate concern and its true good is achieved only in the knowledge of an infinite and eternal good (God), any knowledge which does not terminate in knowledge and possession of God cannot make us happy in the full sense. Thus, self-knowledge in knowledge of God is the activity that is most essential and proper to us. Trygetius has failed only in not making clear that happiness is the subjective state we are in when we are

fully engaged in doing what is most proper for us to do. When the soul is in full possession of the end of its characteristic activity, happiness is the satisfaction that it then experiences. Consequently, it discovers in this very activity what pertains to the happy life and so, knowledge of what is proper to us is at the same time knowledge of what pertains to happiness.

Once Trygetius replaces 'what is proper to us' with 'what pertains to the happy life' the ground of his agreement with Licentius becomes clear and Augustine's students achieve a common understanding of the nature of wisdom. They can agree that the wise man seeks to know those human and divine matters that are proper to the happy life (that knowledge of God and self in which the soul is in full and inward possession of its end). The remaining ground of their disagreement is whether humans can achieve this state under the conditions of mortal life. Can we in fact be wise?

Simply knowing what wisdom is in itself does not immediately answer this question for it is possible to ask as well whether wisdom in itself is wisdom for us and by implication whether happiness in itself is happiness for us. What is our relation as finite beings to these universal

qualities? Here again Licentius and Trygetius divide for the former maintains still that our proper finite relation to an infinite good is one of desire or seeking and in this seeking there is a relative happiness (1.8.23, 40, 45).

Thus, Licentius ends by reasserting the absolute distinction between humanity and the divine. Wisdom, on the divine side, is the fullness of self-knowledge and, on the human side, the bare aspiration for this knowledge. The human, then, is a sheer nullity in the face of the divine; the absolute gap between divine fullness and human emptiness constitutes both the distinction and relation of the two sides. On this basis, we can claim no share in the light of truth beyond our desire for its presence.

When challenged by Trygetius to explain how it is that the wise man does not waste his time in seeking what he cannot find, Licentius responds by stating the positive side of this Skepticism. Although we cannot possess knowledge, as this properly belongs to the divine, we can express our aspiration for it practically by freeing ourselves from the sensible appearances that divide us from it (1.8.23, 50). This we can do by withdrawing from the disturbance of the passions and by nullifying all that appears to us as truth through the practice setting all appearances against each

other. This, for us, is wisdom (which for Licentius exists apart from knowledge of the truth) and if we practice it assiduously in this life we may hope for some fuller share in wisdom after death has liberated us from the body (1.8.23, 55).

As Trygetius casts about for a response to Licentius Augustine intervenes to bring the discussion to a close. He sums up the course of the discussion, noting the progression from the question of the relation of truth and happiness, through the question of wisdom's relation to authority, to the debate on error and the attempt to inwardly recollect the definition of wisdom. He declines to directly settle the debate on wisdom although he does say that it could be settled in a very few words. He regards what has transpired as an adequate exercise for the two youths and wishes to send a copy of the debate to Romanianus as he will be all the more powerfully incited to philosophy when he reads it.

He ends with the promise to prosecute the Academics in another discussion and the company exits for the mid-day meal.

What has this discussion accomplished and how is it related to what is argued in the two following books? Book I is clearly marked off from books II and III by the fact

that the latter two books are marked off by a separate epistle to Romanianus. What relation does it bear to the whole? What does it accomplish in and of itself?

The chief point to be made in this regard is that Augustine is indeed true to his word that the central question of the nature of happiness, whether it consists in seeking or possessing the truth, can be settled in a few words. The argument of the dialogue *On the Happy Life* can be taken as Augustine's demonstration that happiness consists in the possession of the truth. In this work, Augustine employs the metaphysical categories of being and non-being to show that the activity of wisdom is the highest degree of reality and hence the true good of the soul; to be happy, one must know wisdom in the positive sense. In this respect, one can see the significance of the placement of *On the Happy Life* between Books I and II of *Against the Academics*. It answers the question of the logical nature of the good, which can clearly be distinguished from the mere negative freedom of Skeptical *apatheia*. With this in mind, the question whether a finite mind can have any relation to this good, whether it can achieve the positive knowledge of reality that would make it more fully real, can be taken up in the subsequent books.⁷⁴

Thus, the first book can be taken to anticipate the critique of the practical claims of Academic Skepticism carried out at the end of the dialogue. Whereas in the third book Augustine's focus will be on showing that the Skeptics do not even possess the good they think they possess, here he has raised the question for the reader of what the actual nature of the good is and anticipated the answer he will develop in *On the Happy Life*. In this way, he has situated the question of Skepticism within a broader inquiry into the fundamentals of ethical enquiry whose fuller development will reveal the inadequacy of the Skeptical conception of the good life. However, as his immediate purpose is the examination of Academic claims on their own terms he pursues this not in *Against the Academics* but in another work. Nonetheless, he has provided enough hints in this preliminary discussion to show the acute reader that humans cannot be fulfilled in the mere seeking of knowledge even if it is more germane to his final critique of Skepticism to show, as he will later, that in the suspension of assent the Skeptics do not even achieve the good they think they do.

Having in this way raised and implicitly resolved the issue of what the good is Augustine can now turn to question

of whether, as individuals, we have any grounds for believing that we can or cannot hope to possess this good. One possible ground for believing we may not lies in the claim of the Academics that the mind is intrinsically incapable of apprehending truth as it has no means of distinguishing a true apprehension as true. Accordingly, the rest of *Against the Academics* will be taken up with the question of this is in fact a true or even coherent claim.

Part II Chapter III- The Second Epistle to Romanianus

The second book of *Against the Academics* is, like the first and unlike the third prefaced by a dedicatory epistle to Romanianus. This marks the second and third books as a separate unit that will deal more specifically with the arguments of the Academics themselves. In the course of the second book the argument will shift from the hands of Licentius and Trygetius to Augustine and Alypius, who will clash directly over the Academic argument. The purpose of the epistle is again to explain the moral goal of the following books, which is to cure Romanianus of despair over finding the truth. Augustine also promises another work, dealing with the nature of true religion, which will cure Romanianus of any false conceptions he may have on this subject (Augustine is here referring to Manicheism). By way of encouragement, Augustine recounts for Romanianus his own path to wisdom, culminating in his conversion to Christianity through encountering the writings of St. Paul. Having diagnosed the obstacles preventing the soul from returning to itself, he expresses the hope that Romanianus will turn his immense natural gifts to philosophy and so find true blessedness.

Augustine begins his epistle by examining those aspects of the human condition that block, in most cases permanently, the development of a true philosophical spirit. Indeed, it is just because we are divided from the wisdom that is our true essence that the arguments of the Academics hold many in their grip long after they have served their historical function of combating dogmatism. The Academics seem plausible precisely because of the rarity and difficulty of attaining knowledge. In order to loosen their hold somewhat, Augustine will explain what he thinks the condition of the human soul is and how the limitations that make the pursuit of wisdom difficult are no permanent obstacle to it.

Augustine gives four reasons why the pursuit of wisdom is difficult and it is best to understand these as all flowing from the first one he states (2.1.1, 5-15). The first is well known to Romanianus. The necessities of life and the compelling character of our finite interests rivet our attention on what is external to ourselves and habituate us to the realm of appearance. Secondly, should the soul find itself at leisure to pursue knowledge of itself it will find within itself a certain dullness and sluggishness. It finds the greatest difficulty in conceiving of what is non-

sensible because it has little familiarity with this realm. Now the light that illumines our intellects is in one way nearer to us than the light of the sun is to our eyes. Unfortunately, for the reason just mentioned it is vastly more difficult to bring to our attention. Consequently, the soul can despair of ever transcending the veil of appearance as the Skeptics themselves did. Alternatively, the soul may take sensible imaginings garnered from its experience and put them in the place of intelligible truth. In this way, it will be blocked from re-ascent by the illusion that it possesses what it seeks, as Augustine himself was when he took the fantasies of the Manichees for reality.

Thus, limitations on both the keenness of our minds and the strength of our wills cause the soul to miss what ought to be most intimate and present to it, itself and God. The fact that these limitations involve both intellect and will together is a theme that is woven throughout this epistle. Augustine persistently points to the co-inherence and interdependence of these faculties in addressing Romanianus' situation and presents his own salvation as a Christian as involving an integration of knowledge and will unavailable from Classical philosophy.

This can be seen in Augustine's subsequent remarks to

Romanianus. He emphasizes to his patron that the quest for wisdom must begin with prayer. Both Romanianus and Augustine on his behalf must invoke the power and wisdom of God (again, will and knowledge are linked) that the Christian mysteries reveal as the very Son of God (2.1.1, 25).

As well as invoking the grace of God, Augustine calls on Romanianus to employ his natural gifts of intelligence and character. Romanianus has, at various points, shown flashes of this natural strength. Vestiges of the original and innate power of the soul remain operative in him and periodically manifest themselves in acts of remarkable self-control and flashes of powerful insight (2.1.2, 40). These signs of the soul's true power give great hope as being signs of Romanianus future escape from the body and return to his heavenly origins. The grace of God will not allow what has begun in Romanianus to fail to come to fruition (2.1.2, 45). Thus, having shown both strength of will and power of intellect, Romanianus has it within himself to overcome the first two obstacles to coming to philosophy.

Having noted that Romanianus has shown traces of 'power and wisdom' and shown intimations of the divine image in him, Augustine turns to treating the same theme in his own

life. He has himself, through coming to Christianity, begun to attain the wholeness of heart to cleave to what his mind knows as wisdom and indeed to perceive wisdom more deeply.

He begins by calling to mind what he owes to the generosity of his patron. He recounts Romanianus' support for his education, continued in spite of Augustine's determination to go to Rome against Romanianus' advice (2.2.3, 5-25). This could well have seemed like stubbornness and ingratitude on Augustine's part but Romanianus showed great character in not taking it ill. Indeed, he was willing even to put his considerable income at the disposal of Augustine and his friends in a scheme to found a philosophical community (2.2.4, 40). Accordingly, Augustine owes it to Romanianus that he has now escaped the superfluous desires and the burden of professional and social responsibilities and is now able to return to himself by seeking truth most eagerly. He owes it to Romanianus as well that he is in some measure finding it and is able to live in hope of coming to its supreme degree (2.2.4, 25).

Augustine continues his epistle by recounting the progress he has made since Romanianus' departure from Italy.

Both he and his friends had thought their desire for wisdom unsurpassable until they encountered certain books (those of

the Platonists) only a few drops of which were sufficient to inflame them far beyond what they could previously have imagined (2.2.5, 45-55). The wisdom of these books succeeded in making honor, pomp, fame and mortal desires seem empty yet Augustine still 'stumbled' and 'hesitated' until he took up the Apostle Paul (2.2.5, 60). Seeing that the great deeds of the Apostles could not be opposed to true wisdom, he read all of Paul with the greatest care. Upon reading Paul, he found that the light of philosophy appeared then so great that if he were to show it not only to Romanianus but to his opponent as well the latter would forsake all his wealth on its behalf (2.2.6, 70).

There are a number of significant points to be made about this account, which corresponds to that given in *Confessions* VI, VII and VIII. Most significantly, it mirrors in autobiographical terms the argument of *Against the Academics* itself. It begins with the seeking for wisdom, moves to the discovery of the true object of wisdom, God, and concludes with the way to a stable unification with that object through the manifestation of wisdom in time and space. As we shall see, Augustine's dialogue recapitulates this pattern, beginning with a seeking after wisdom (Book I), moving through a critique of Skepticism that uncovers

intelligible truth (Books II-III) and ending with a reference to the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. The end point in each case is an integration of knowledge and will that brings the soul into unity with itself and God.

In *Against the Academics* the principle of this unification is Christ, who objectively unites the human and divine and mediates this unity to us. Thus, in this epistle, it is when Augustine reads the Apostles and studies Paul that he finds the wisdom pointed to by the Platonists actual in the world. Through Christ, the Apostles not only point to heavenly realities but to the active embodiment of them. They show the universal reconciled with the particular. As wisdom actualized, they are the endpoint of the philosophical quest which therefore finds its completion in the Christian religion. Accordingly, to move Romanianus to philosophy is, after the incarnation, to move him to Christianity as well.

It can be seen then, that there is an anagogic structure common to this epistle, *Against the Academics* as a whole and to mature works such as the *Confessions*. This structure embraces the beginning point in the universal practical reason of the Roman State, a Skepticism that seeks an inward freedom from what is external in this order

through the quest for wisdom, the discovery of the true object of this wisdom in Platonism and the recognition that the path to the stable possession of this wisdom is Christ. In historical terms, this is the movement from Stoicism through Academic Skepticism to Neo-Platonism and then Christianity. In autobiographical terms, this is Augustine's movement from the official culture of the Roman State imparted by his teachers, through the *Hortensius* Cicero, to the books of the Platonists and finally to his conversion to Christ.⁷⁵ In *Against the Academics* it is the structure of the work as a whole and is reflected as well at various points within it.

Having laid this movement out for Romanianus, Augustine turns not to his own situation but, indeed, to that of his adversary. The purpose of his remarks is to point out to Romanianus the fact that the implicit relation of every human soul to wisdom is prior to all social and personal barriers. It unites us in a common bond even with those who externally oppose us. Thus, even his adversary, if shown the light Augustine has seen and hopes to bring Romanianus to, would embrace wisdom as a passionate lover (2.2.6, 7). He would abandon his resorts, orchards, banquets and performing troupes. Indeed, already within the life he is

living there is a seed of beauty which can blossom into wisdom. Though hindered and obscured by vices and false opinions it is there nonetheless displaying itself in the order and civility he keeps in his entertainments (2.2.6, 75). This betrays a feeling for beauty which, if not true beauty of spirit, contains a real but implicit consciousness of intelligible reality. Were this consciousness to become aware of itself, true wisdom would blossom in his soul.

In this passage Augustine is drawing a clear parallel between the situation of the adversary and that of Romanianus. In the epistle to the first book Augustine had described how Romanianus was partially free in the midst of his wealth in that he knew that wealth as valueless apart from the measure of justice. He knew that it was valuable only in relation to a standard prior to it and that he knew this standard in the inwardness of his own soul. Likewise, the adversary knows his pleasures as valuable only in relation to principles of taste, order and civility. This is not true detachment but recognizes a standard within the soul by which external things are judged the fuller knowledge of which could flower into true detachment. Thus, though both Romanianus and his adversary have lost their own true inwardness in the pursuit of external goods, their

souls are already in part in possession of themselves in the virtue they display in the employment of these goods. Were they more fully to know these virtues of the soul as in truth the end of their actions they would find true liberation and inward freedom.

Augustine expands his point by recounting a fable. *philocalia*, the love of beauty, and *philosophia*, the love of wisdom are, he says, sisters (2.3.7).⁷⁶ These two loves are similar in name because they are of the same family and share the same father. The first is the daughter of beauty, the second of wisdom. As wisdom and beauty are in truth convertible terms, they are in fact sisters (2.3.7, 5). As the love of beauty is more concerned with the order of sensible things, she flies lower than her sister and is easily trapped below while her sister, occupied with intelligible things, flies above. Nonetheless, philosophy ought never to despise *philocalia* as both love what is in some sense superior to the sensible and indeed, she does on occasion stoop to rescue her sister from the bird-lime of sensible things (2.3.7, 10).

Augustine's meaning in this fable is that the love of beauty bears a clear relation to philosophy in that it concerns the relation of the material to the intelligible

that is sensible beauty. Philosophy, which embraces the whole range of reality, is of course more comprehensive and is able to know its own priority to what is below it (the love of beauty cannot simply of itself judge its relation to other loves). Nonetheless, it shares a certain ground with those lower loves that it encompasses and transcends.

Philocalia, one might say, concerns itself with a certain kind of beauty whereas philosophy is concerned with the beauty of wisdom which embraces the beautiful over its entire range of meanings. As such, it understands what philocaly loves even as it loves more than philocaly can attain.

Augustine then mentions that he has had Licentius compose a poem on this very allegory (2.3.7, 15). This is quite apt in terms of what we have seen of Licentius to this point. Licentius is a lover of verse and music. He is entranced by the ordering of sound according to principles of number whose order manifests beauty. The allegory he is versifying in fact explains to him the place of his own art in relation to wisdom as such, both in its positive role and its inherent limitation. Licentius, then, is practicing a purified poetry that knows its own dependence on a knowledge higher than itself if it is to know itself as having any

relation to truth.

In Retractions I, III Augustine refers to this section as "a silly and absurd quasi fable" and objects to it on the grounds that *philocalia* is concerned either with trifles in no way akin to philosophy or is concerned with the true beauty of incorporeal wisdom, in which case it is identical to philosophy itself and not its 'sister'. Augustine's problem here is that he holds the beauty appreciated by the adversary, essentially the love of fine dinners and fancy houses, to be too superficial to bear comparison to the love of wisdom. It would banal in the extreme to identify the love of true beauty with taste in design or social elegance.

At the same time though, he tries to link this shallow form of love with philosophy, which he cannot do if indeed it is concerned only with empty trifles. This causes the elderly Augustine to deny any relationship between sensible and intelligible beauty altogether and identify the love of beauty with the love of incorporeal truth. *Philocalia* and Philosophy, he says, "are identical in incorporeal things".

This response strikes the present writer as equally dubious. Augustine has shown that, at very least, those arts, like poetry, which involve a relationship of the sensible to numerical order, manifest an intelligible beauty

within the sensible and thus mediate the passage from one order of reality to the other. Accordingly, they are not caught within the opposition between philosophy and the superficial materialism of the adversary and there seems no reason to deny a love of finite beauty that is related to yet distinct from philosophy. Of course, this would not save Augustine's overall point in this passage, which is that the Adversary's elegant tastes bear a relationship to wisdom. The passage remains unsatisfying, even if Augustine's strictures on it also give one pause.

Augustine continues by pointing out that the adversary, even though he is a lover of false beauty, would upon seeing the real thing, even for a moment, embrace Romanianus as a true brother (2.3.7, 15). Wisdom implicitly unites all people prior to their immediate distinction and its self-manifestation in the world the ground for realizing our inherent brotherhood. Thus, if Romanianus were even to hear the voice of philosophy without seeing its face he would not despair even of his adversary as such men as he can easily escape their cages as others look on in astonishment (2.7.3, 20).

Augustine then turns to Romanianus himself admonishing him to come to himself once again. He need not fear the

lack of training such as his son Licentius is beginning to possess. Romanianus' natural abilities will compensate for this (2.3.8, 30). It remains though, to address the two remaining obstacles, Skepticism and false religion, which may still prevent Romanianus from coming to himself. It may still be the case that He either despairs of ever finding the truth or thinks he has found the truth when he actually has not (2.3.8, 30). He may fall victim to either Skepticism or dogmatism and Augustine must now address these two concerns. If Romanianus is hindered by the first of these obstacles, then perhaps he will be aided by the discussions between Augustine and Alypius in the following books (2.3.8, 35). In them, he will discover that Augustine's view that wisdom can be found is more plausible than the view that it cannot. That Augustine's view is not only plausible but also true will be seen when Romanianus has given himself completely to philosophy (2.3.8, 40). Thus, the demonstration of the implausibility of the Academic doctrine will liberate Romanianus to ascend to the actual perception of intelligible truth, where he will see this doctrine to be false.

As for the second problem, Augustine promises to deal with it in a subsequent treatise which will cast out any

superstition which has attached itself to his mind (2.3.8, 40). By this, Augustine is referring to the possibility that Romanianus remains under the influence of Manicheism. Accordingly, Augustine will, at a subsequent date, supply a treatise outlining the nature of true religion.

Augustine concludes his epistle by noting that he is, at present engaged solely in purging himself of false opinions and is in this, at least, better off than Romanianus (2.3.9). The only matter in which he envies him is that he shares the company of a mutual friend, 'his' Lucillianus (2.3.9, 50). Romanianus, he says, should not be jealous if he, Augustine, calls Lucillianus his. In the friendship they mutually share, what belongs to each one belongs to all so that in saying 'my Lucillianus' Augustine calls him 'Romanianus' Lucillianus' as well. To both of his friends, he declares that they should take care never to think they know anything but what they know in the same manner as truths of mathematics (2.3.9, 55). Thus, whatever is said to be known is known in the same way as $1+2=3$ or $2+3+4=10$.⁷⁷ He then warns Romanianus that he must equally never think that he cannot know the truth or that the truth cannot be known. He quotes *Matthew 7,7*. "Seek and ye shall find" as lending divine authority to the view that truth can

be known 2.3.9, 60). Augustine then closes by promising to turn to the matter at hand as his introduction is in danger of exceeding its proper measure. This, he says, would be a grave error as measure is itself divine (2.3.9, 60).

In these concluding comments Augustine points forward to the argument of Book III by emphasizing the standard of certainty for true knowledge. This, he holds, lies in the pure content of the mind as opposed to sense knowledge. Thus, he emphasizes that truth must be known in the manner of mathematical truths, where the mind is reflecting directly on what is present to it in its own acts of reflection. Augustine joins this consideration with the injunction from *Matthew* to reinforce the point that God can be known and possessed because as Subsistent Truth he gives himself to be known and possessed both inwardly to the mind and outwardly in the words of scripture. Indeed, if we turn from the external voice of authority to the inwardness of our minds we will find that the very activity of thinking is a revelation of God's eternal being and truth. This revelation is, he says in the fourth *Epistle to Nebridius*, as certain as the activity that reveals it. Indeed, he will elsewhere say that it is even more so (*Confessions* VII, X).

This epistle lays out in a highly condensed form much of philosophical and theological framework presupposed by the argument of the work. For this reason, a close reading of it confirms the general approach taken in this dissertation which sees the dispute with Academic Skepticism as unfolding within a broader argument whose terminus is intellectual perception of God and recognition of Christ as the way to the Good so perceived. In this second epistle, Augustine situates the problem of Skepticism within the dynamic of his own intellectual and spiritual development in a way that dovetails nicely with the fuller account given of the same matters in the *Confessions*. Thus, Augustine himself points to a context outside of his dialogue that is crucial to understanding it. As it is in the *Confessions* that he gives the fullest account of this context it is to this later work that we must turn for the fullest illumination of it. At this point though, we must turn to the argument of Books II and III.

Part II Chapter IV- The Argument of Book II

The second book of *Against the Academics* opens with Augustine and his students reviewing the second, third and fourth books of the *Aeneid*. This activity, intended by Augustine as a suitable diversion, so enflames Licentius with a passion for poetry that Augustine decides to rein him in by resuming the question of Academic Skepticism (2.4.10, 5). Accordingly, as the day dawns brightly enough to seem suitable to enlightening their minds, Augustine meets with Alypius and his two students to begin the discussion after some practical matters have been attended to (2.4.10, 10).

This short passage once again raises the question of philosophy and poetry. The portrayal of Licentius, in fact, illustrates the interest in the relation of sensible beauty to wisdom discussed in the second epistle. Throughout *Against the Academics*, Augustine attempts, without simply suppressing the impulse, to lead Licentius from poetry, which is external speech ordered by number, into the inward measure of that speech, the principles of number within the soul known by philosophy. This is precisely the movement he has said is open to the adversary of Romanianus. Thus, even as there is a path for Romanianus and Trygetius from an involvement in practical affairs into a reflection on the

principles of action, there is for Licentius and the adversary a path from aesthetic pleasure to the principles of beauty. Both paths lead into the timeless principles embedded in memory from which we apprehend God as the light of eternal truth.

The discussion itself begins with a review of the content of Book I that Alypius had missed during his period of absence (2.4.10, 15). When this is accomplished, Licentius asks Augustine to review the doctrine of the Academics so that he might not miss anything important to the position he is trying to defend. Augustine replies that he will do so all the more gladly as Licentius will eat less while pondering the subject (2.4.10, 20-25).

Licentius responds that he is not so sure of this as he has observed his father eating all the more heartily while deep in thought and has noted that he himself did not neglect eating while absorbed in poetry (2.4.10, 25). He then asks how it is that the body can be so involved in eating while the conscious attention of the mind is engaged elsewhere (2.4.10, 30).

Augustine responds by asking him to attend instead to the question he has raised about the Academics. Licentius not only ponders measures while feasting without measure but

raises questions without measure as well (2.4.10, 35)! Here Augustine points to the connection he is trying to draw between philosophy and the arts. Licentius, as an aspiring artist, is concerned with ordering objects external to the soul according to a measure known within the soul. His activity though, is not ordered directly to his own good but terminates in an end outside the self, a poem. Augustine seeks to draw him into a more inward relation to the principle of measure by instilling in him a temperate appetite and a respect for the order and measure of discussion. Thus, from the desire to make according to a measure, Licentius must come to be within himself measured.

Augustine then proceeds to lay out for all concerned the nature and history of the Academic doctrine. In this account, Augustine emphasizes the relation between the Academic doctrine and Stoicism. He points out that the Academics held that knowledge was not possible in matters pertaining to philosophy and that, according to Carneades other matters were of no account (2.5.11). This conclusion they derived from the doctrine of the Stoics themselves. In particular, they made use of the criterion of Zeno for this purpose (2.5.11, 10). As mentioned in Chapter II, Zeno the Stoic had claimed that "Truth that can be apprehended is

impressed on the mind by what it comes from in such a way that it couldn't be from something other than what it comes from". The Academic Skeptics employed disagreements among philosophers, illusions, dreams, madness, fallacies and sophisms to show that nothing in our experience could satisfy this criterion (2.5.11, 15). Since they shared with the Stoics the view that the wise did not assent to opinions, they drew the conclusion the wise could never assent to anything as true (2.5.11, 20).

This conclusion raised the objection from many quarters that the wise man of the Academics, giving assent to nothing, would be incapable of action and derelict in his duties (2.5.12). Augustine notes that it was at this point that the Academics introduced the notion of the 'truth-like' as a guide to action (2.5.12, 25). The truth, however, they held to be inaccessible owing to either natural obscurity or resemblances between things. The wise man, though, could still express his wisdom in an activity characteristic of himself, the suspension of assent (2.5.12, 30).

In this short history Augustine covers the basic points that I have spelled out in detail in Chapter II of this dissertation.

Alypius thanks Augustine for instructing Licentius in

this matter and asks if he might continue by explaining the relation between the new Skeptical Academy and the old academy of Plato (2.5.13). Augustine agrees that this is a highly relevant issue but asks if Alypius himself might expound this matter as he is quite fatigued from his previous talk (2.5.13, 50). Alypius agrees to this and, after a break for the mid-day meal, begins to answer the question of the origins of the New Academy. This is apt dramatically for Alypius will represent the Academic position in the ensuing argument. What he will give then, is an account of the emergence of Hellenistic thought from the standpoint of that thought itself.

He begins by pointing out that the Academic argument was directed not so much against the older philosophy of the Hellenic world as against the Stoics. Alypius credits Zeno with raising a new question concerning the criterion of true perception which had not been clearly raised by previous thinkers (2.6.14, 10). The change in the direction of the Academy, Alypius says, was prompted by the need to address this new challenge and the response offered to it was not, he thinks, entirely out of line with older thought. Socrates and Plato had clearly warned against the danger of false assent even though they had not clearly addressed the

question of when we could know the truth had been perceived (2.6.14, 15). Zeno's definition of a true perception as one having no marks in common with the false, when thought together with the older suspicion of assent to opinions seemed in the new context created by Zeno's question to necessitate a Skeptical result (2.6.14, 20). Accordingly, Arcesilaus, upon hearing the doctrine of Zeno, launched the attack upon it outlined above.

Alypius continues by stating that the notion of the Old and New Academies being in conflict arose from the personal ambition of a certain Antiochus who sought to make a reputation for himself through philosophical controversy. It was he who first expounded the view that the doctrines of the New Academy were in conflict with those of older philosophers, men of great renown to whom all owed their trust (2.6.15). In keeping with this, he devised many arguments against the Academic position. In particular, he attacked the notion that the Academics could identify something truth-like without knowing the truth (2.6.15, 35). This, Alypius thinks, is an adequate account of the origins of the New Academy for Licentius' needs.

This account brings out briefly but accurately the nature of the shift in philosophical thinking between Plato

and the Old Academy and the rise of Hellenistic thought. It locates this shift in the new concern apparent in Zeno with the relation of the individual subject to truth. The new question for him was not simply what made objective reality in itself knowable but how the individual in his own self-consciousness was related to that reality. How was truth inwardly appropriated and how could we know when we had appropriated it? How could we know, from the side of the subject, when knowledge was actual? This was different than the questions which animated Plato and Aristotle and the response of the Academy to it was to declare the question unanswerable and to take up from older philosophers those elements of their positions which had Skeptical implications, in particular, the Platonic suspicion of sense knowledge. In the context of Hellenistic thought, they thought this the best way to preserve the spirit of the old philosophers against a dogmatic empiricism.

The history and nature of the Academic doctrine having been briefly sketched, the discussion is resumed. After a brief hesitation, Licentius accepts the position just outlined as his own after which Augustine proceeds to question him. He begins with a simple and apparently artless question, do the Academics seem to Licentius to be

speaking the truth (2.7.16, 10)? Alypius alerts Licentius to the trap contained in this question by laughing out loud, who then asks that the question be repeated (2.7.16, 10). Again, Augustine asks if it seems to Licentius that the Academics speak the truth (2.7.16, 10). Licentius responds by sidestepping the contradiction contained in asserting that the doctrine that truth cannot be known is true. He responds by saying that he does not know whether it is the truth but finds it the most plausible of any he knows. In Academic terminology, it is the most 'truth-like' position and thus the most worthy of credence (2.7.16, 10).

Here Licentius has made the standard Academic response to the charge of performative self-contradiction, which had often been leveled by the Stoics and Epicureans.⁷⁸ A great deal rests on this question for the Academic must give some account of why one ought to adopt Skepticism as a position.

By what criterion should one decide to be a Skeptic if one must avoid saying that Skepticism is true? The only answer the Academic can give is to put Skepticism itself in the class of things about which one can make judgments of plausibility and Licentius shows sufficient awareness of the nature of his position to be able to make this move.

Augustine now begins to probe this notion of 'the

truth-like' further. Again, he leads with an apparently artless question. Suppose, he asks, that a man unacquainted with his father were to remark, upon seeing his brother, that they looked remarkably alike, would this not seem foolish (2.7.16, 20)? Licentius does not initially see the implication of this question. Augustine spells it out by noting that it seems an exact parallel to the Academic claim to know the 'truth-like' without knowing the truth. How can one compare the likeness of one thing to another if one does not know both terms being compared?

At this point Licentius backs down and asks Augustine if he is prepared to declare victory. Augustine responds that Licentius should hold his ground as he is the one being trained in argument (2.7.17, 25). Licentius answers that he can hardly defend the Academics not having read them, to which Augustine replies that the first Academics had not read the Academics either (2.7.17, 30). Licentius, he says, should now proceed on his own capacity for insight into the subject itself and not throw over the argument after a few simple questions. Licentius, it seems, would much prefer the spectacle of Alypius arguing with Augustine than being a party to the debate itself. Indeed, he would much enjoy reading over the entire thing at his leisure even though the

spectacle of debate affords more direct pleasure (2.7.17, 40-45).

Augustine does not immediately reproach Licentius for privileging pleasure over his own instruction. That Licentius has an inordinate love of spectacle and indeed for the external forms of things in general has been alluded to at a number of points. Augustine's approach to the problem here is to remind him of what is truly at stake in the discussion by mentioning his absent father, Romanianus. Far from being an entertainment, the discussion is ordered to the salvation of an individual known and loved by all present. It is related not just to the good directly available from the discussion itself but also to practical charity. The presence of Romanianus enjoying the good of discussion along with his friends is a good greater than the good achievable without him. Accordingly, Licentius speaks for everyone present when he invokes God on his father's behalf as the power to whom all good is possible (2.7.18, 50-55).

This short episode highlights the contrast between the Christian context of the present discussion and the spirit animating the discourse of the Academics. Licentius' statements in Book I had placed the good in the withdrawal

from passion achieved in the search for truth. Here, however, he is brought to see something of the finite character of what he, in common with the Academics, is seeking. What he has sought as the good to this point does not embrace desire for the good of other human beings which we must fulfill by active engagement on their behalf or, where this is not possible, by prayer to the source of all good for all things, God. Thus, there are for all members of the discussion, true goods which cannot be attained by the achievement of *apatheia* through discussion but must, ultimately, be sought from some source higher than the soul itself.

When the discussion resumes Licentius responds to Augustine's question by saying that the man who said his brother resembled his father would not be simple minded if he knew of Romanianus' appearance by hearsay (2.7.19, 70). He would be foolish if he said that he knew that his brother resembled Romanianus but not at all foolish if he followed the rumor as plausible (2.7.19, 75).

Augustine responds to this by examining the problem more closely. Is not the man who says that Romanianus resembles his son on the basis of hearsay judging the truth of what he has heard? Isn't he saying something like 'how

true the rumor is that Romanianus resembles his son'? How can he do this if he has not seen Romanianus (2.7.19, 80-85)? Augustine's point here is that the statement 'Romanianus resembles his son' can, in this context, only mean 'Romanianus is said to resemble his son'. It is not the resemblance that is the object of perception but the report of the resemblance. Hence, on no basis can the man in question say that he perceives the resemblance of Romanianus to his son as plausible only that, for whatever reason, he trusts the report of it.

Trygetius now interjects by pointing out that the Academics themselves would never have judged anything plausible on the basis of rumor (2.8.20). Augustine replies that this makes matters worse for them as the Academic would then be saying that the son of Romanianus resembled his father on the basis of neither direct sight nor trustworthy report (2.8.20, 5). How, then, could he say an impression was 'truth-like' if he neither knew the truth nor had access to it second hand? By what measure could he judge any of his perceptions 'truth-like'?

These questions force Trygetius to draw a crucial qualification. He notes that the Academics in fact used the word 'plausible' rather than 'truth-like' specifically to

exclude any notion of likeness (2.8.20, 15). They did not regard impressions as plausible because they resembled impressions known to be true but simply because they seemed true. Thus, it is not as if the Academics claimed access to some truth they thought their sensible experiences resembled. Rather, some of these experiences seemed to them more subjectively convincing than others for whatever reasons. This, for the time being, circumvents the objection that knowledge of the plausible presupposes knowledge of the true. In the third book, Augustine will in fact argue that judgments of plausibility presuppose the grasp of an objective measure as a term of comparison but he will do so only after the critique of Skepticism has uncovered the distinction between the intelligible and the sensible and the measure of all judgment, the idea of truth, emerges as the standard even of Skeptical discourse. For now though, as the argument has not transcended the sensible level, Trygetius is entirely correct. The Skeptics have not been shown to require sense perceptions that are true to employ as a standard against which to measure perceptions that are plausible so long as they avoid the notion of 'likeness'.⁷⁹

These formalities being satisfied, Alypius challenges

Augustine to reveal the position he is arguing from. What or who is he defending from the Academics? On what are his own views based (2.9.22)? Augustine's reply to this question marks the point at which the argument gets serious. He announces that the preliminary exercises he has engaged in are now ended. The following discussion will be neither exercise nor sport but will concern what is most pressing, the true way of life and true good, which involves the apprehension of truth (2.9.22, 10-15). For the soul to regain its homeland it must triumph over both fallacious arguments and the passions to become wedded to moderation (2.9.22, 10-15). Augustine does not want argument for argument's sake especially among people who have lived so intimately together (2.9.22, 25). He also informs Alypius that he is having the debate recorded both to preserve it against the weakness of memory and as an aid in the education of Licentius and Trygetius (2.9.22, 25).

Augustine then lays out the point from which he wishes the discussion to begin. He professes himself willing to begin from the same point as the Academics themselves. He does not assert that he knows anything. Indeed, he asserts that he has found the Academic position persuasive in the Academic sense (2.9.23, 30-35). It has seemed to him

subjectively persuasive and this has prevented him from searching for the truth with due diligence.⁸⁰ To resume his search he must become as subjectively persuaded that truth can be found as the Academics are subjectively persuaded that it cannot. At very least, he must show that by its own criterion of plausibility, Academic Skepticism cannot be the correct position to follow.

Thus, without claiming that he has a direct perception of the truth Augustine will try to settle the question on a practical level by showing that the Academic doctrine is groundless and does not subjectively convince. At this stage in the argument, it is Skepticism's plausibility that is in question. This is the standard that Augustine initially sets for his argument although in Book III he will be trying not only to meet this standard but also to surpass it (indeed, to meet this criterion is precisely to show how it is surpassed, as we shall see). Besides this, he says he has nothing to defend (2.9.23, 30-35). At this point, he simply wants to see if Skepticism is plausible, that is, if it holds up under scrutiny and can therefore convince. If it cannot, it follows by a necessary disjunction that it is believable that truth can be found and the obstacle to pursuing wisdom presented by the Academic doctrine is

removed.

Alypius is satisfied to proceed as Augustine's interlocutor and asks simply that all verbal controversy be avoided. He complains that Augustine has violated this principle in his questioning of Licentius for he has attempted to derive knowledge of truth from the phrase 'truth-like' when this was merely a term for the subjectively convincing (2.10.24,10).

Augustine responds by asserting that he has no intention of using verbal quibbles to score debating points. He fully agrees with Cicero that this is contrary to the true spirit of discussion (2.10.24, 15). However, both Cicero and the Academics were careful in the words they chose and if they chose the word 'truth-like' then this choice must be significant. Augustine says that, in fact, he takes it as a clue to their true meaning. For him, the word 'truth-like' is a sign to the perceptive reader that the Academics actually do possess truth and adopt the mask of Skepticism to conceal this truth from the uninitiated (2.10.24, 15). He declines, though, to discuss the matter at this point. At present, he is concerned with the explicit arguments by which they sought to overcome dogmatism. If indeed they maintained these seriously, he is ready to argue

with them on that basis (2.10.24, 25).

The next day, the discussion is resumed in the early evening after a day spent attending to domestic concerns. Augustine begins by recalling Licentius to the question of the truth-like or plausible. He points out that what the Academics describe by these terms is what impels us to act on the basis of opinion (2.11.26). Indeed, whether we are Academics or not, we frequently act upon the 'truth-like'. For instance, if the evening weather is fine and clear, we do not say that we know what it will be like in the morning.

However, we easily believe that it will be fine and frequently act on this assumption (2.11.26, 25). It is the Academic view that the conduct of life requires no beliefs that are not of this kind. Thus, quite apart from whether we possess the truth, we can act upon experience without knowing of any intrinsic necessity to the things we experience. It seems to us that what has happened reliably in the past will happen as well in the future and experiences that have this persuasive quality for us are those we call truth-like (2.11.26, 25).

As Augustine begins to raise again the question of Cicero's use of truth-like, Licentius interrupts with a sudden change of opinion. Augustine's use of the order and

regularity of experience to illustrate the notion of 'truth-like' has jarred him into a reflection on experience that causes him to abandon his Skepticism. He now holds that plausibility of sensible experiences must be understood in relation to bedrock certainties about that experience. Indeed, he now holds we possess truths by which we measure the 'truth-like'. The example he gives of this is his certain belief that a tree cannot turn silver (2.12.27, 10).

This is an interesting point for it can be argued that the possibility of experience, upon which the Academic depends as much as anyone, must rest on the self-identity of natural substances. To be predictable, their behaviour must flow necessarily from their intrinsic character. If reality is stable enough to make experience and belief possible, an unchanging Logos must be immanent within it. This must be the stable ground of change in nature or there would be no nature about which to have beliefs. This being so, we can say that we know that trees do not turn silver because the only sufficient reason for the fact that they never do is that, by nature, they cannot.

Accordingly, Licentius can now say that we can judge the relative uncertainty of different impressions because we have certain ones to compare them to. The 'truthlike' does

after all presuppose the true and if the Academic denies the latter he must also deny the former. If they do deny it, then they are left without a criterion for action and consequently would have no answer to the Stoic objection that the Skeptic would do nothing.

Licentius, however, is not given the opportunity to develop this line of argument. He is immediately rebuked by Alypius for dismissing Carneades so lightly after having been his partisan. He points out that Licentius' change of opinion is itself indicative of the truth of Skepticism as showing the instability of all thought (2.12.28, 25). Moreover, Licentius has gone beyond the bounds of the argument in speaking of truths at all. As the question now concerns the suitability of following the plausible whether or not there is truth, it matters little what Licentius thinks that he knows about trees (2.12.28, 30).

Although Alypius does not respond directly to Licentius argument about natural substances, it is significant that the subsequent critique of the Academic doctrine does not return to any form of it.⁸¹ Augustine's concern will be with what thought can think about itself and what it can know from thinking about itself. In this he will take up the Skeptical standpoint that refuses to assume

a starting point outside the thinking subject and argue from within its own categories.

Accordingly, he will not argue from our putative knowledge of natural substances. This would be valid only if it could be known when our impressions correspond to these external substances, which is precisely what the Academics deny. It would be fine to say that if there were a tree before me and I understood what a tree was I could say that I knew the tree could not turn silver. The Academic could still ask if I ever could know when I was truly perceiving a tree and by what criterion I knew that my notion of the tree corresponded to the tree in itself. As soon as I say I know *this* tree cannot turn silver, the Academic can point to the division between the form and the instance I bring under it and ask by what criterion I know that the two correspond.

Indeed, if, as was the case for the Hellenistic systems that followed after Aristotle, one begins philosophically with thought's thinking upon itself it becomes very much a question how the externality of nature is comprehended in this relationship.⁸² A gap seems to open between the self-certainty of the individual's consciousness of himself and the mediated representations of sense knowledge where

external substances can, in principle, diverge from the images in which they are present to us (as in, for example, hallucinations). Augustine does not try to resolve this problem the way the Stoics did, by trying to find indubitable instances of sense knowledge. Rather, he accepts the new standpoint of Hellenistic thought and seeks to show that it subverts itself from within. This being the case, he does not pursue the line suggested here by Licentius and takes his argument with the Skeptics inward into the identity of thought with itself, that is, into the very point from which the Skeptics begin.

Alypius however, takes a more rhetorical tack in his response to Licentius and this leads Augustine to step in on the latter's behalf. He takes Alypius to task for intimidating Licentius rather than addressing his claim that Carneades did not speak well in saying that he followed the 'truth-like' (2.13.29). Alypius responds by asking Augustine to fully explain the relevance of his inquiry, which to him seems pointless (2.13.29, 5). In this way, he challenges Augustine to clarify why the Academics need to possess some truth to be able to characterize perceptions as 'truth-like' when they did not explicitly depend on any notion of

likeness in their explication of this point (as Trygetius has pointed out).

Augustine responds by that he will indeed return to this question at a later point but that for now it is necessary to put all playfulness aside and agree upon the terms for the following day's discussion (2.13.29, 10). Accordingly, he asks Alypius whether he thinks the Academics concealed a definite view of truth from the ignorant multitude or believed what their writings overtly expressed (2.13.29, 20).

Alypius responds that he will not recklessly assert what they did or did not have in mind (2.13.30). For himself, he is convinced that the truth has not been found and cannot be found. This is both his own ingrained opinion and the explicit teaching of great philosophers whose authority we are bound to respect (2.13.30, 25). Thus, he himself is in agreement with the Academic doctrine as publicly expressed, whatever they may or may not have held in private.

Augustine expresses satisfaction with this response and says that he would have asked Alypius to speak for the Academic position whatever his own view in order to explore fully the question (2.13.30, 30-35). It is all the better

though that this is Alypius' own view as now the question can be worked out fully with both parties defending their own positions.

As for the question itself, Augustine defines it in the following manner. The Academics, he says, hold it to be plausible that nothing can be perceived and that assent should never be given (2.13.30, 40). If Alypius can make this view hold Augustine will gladly yield. If, on the other hand, Augustine can demonstrate that it is more plausible that the wise can attain the truth and that assent need not always be withheld then Alypius will have no grounds for refusing to come over to change his position and reject the Academics. All present agree to this and the stage is set for the subsequent discussion (2.13.30, 40).

The argument in Book II covers ground that had largely been covered by earlier critiques of Skepticism. The objection that the Academic could not determine what was plausible without being able to determine what was true had been levelled by the aforementioned Antiochus (Reale 1985, 354). Augustine does not pursue this objection fully here and only returns to this point at the very end of the dialogue. Nonetheless, that the Skeptic requires true knowledge to render judgements about what is plausible is a

point that will in fact be established to Augustine's satisfaction in Book III. It is important to note, however, that without the Platonic distinction between the sensible and the intelligible this point cannot be successfully established. Thus, Antiochus' insight cannot attain its true force until Academic Skepticism has been examined and critiqued in light of Augustine's Platonic ontology and epistemology. Then it will be seen that what the Skeptic possesses in his notion of the 'truth-like' is the idea of truth itself which is very light that constitutes our ability to think anything at all.

Thus, Augustine anticipates the conclusion of his argument by raising what had been a standard objection to Academic doctrine. As well, he lays down the standard by which Skepticism itself must be judged. For the Academic doctrine to be 'truth-like' it must be subjectively persuasive. This it cannot be if it is not coherent in itself and is contradicted by experience. Thus, in the third book, Augustine will show that Skepticism is not believable both because it cannot be stated without immediately contradicting itself and because we seem to ourselves to know things that Skepticism cannot articulate intelligible grounds for doubting as they are presupposed in

the ability to doubt itself. For this reason, Skepticism cannot seem plausible and so fails its own criterion of judgement. Having clarified these points we can now move to Book III.

Part II Chapter V- The Argument of Book III

The third book of *Against the Academics* is prefaced by a brief resumption of the discussion of *Fortuna* that occupied the opening epistle to Romanianus (3.1.1-3.3.5). In general it concerns the seeming paradox that the wisdom that raises us above fortune is itself a gift of fortune. The freedom for self-activity from external necessity is the common concern of all the philosophical schools, Academic and non-academic, the dispute being whether this freedom lay in the acquisition of Truth or in the suspension of judgement concerning it (We have seen this question argued in Book I). All are agreed that this is the proper aim of human life, however fragile might be the possibilities for its realization.

Here Augustine is pointing to the common ethical framework for the following discussion. Both Augustine and the Sceptics seek a common freedom in which the soul is the object and end of its own activity and in this they take up the common Aristotelian tradition for which the highest activities are those that are most immediately their own end, as in *praxis*, and, more rarely but more perfectly, *theoria*. Augustine would have Licentius and Trygetius and, more obliquely, Romanianus, take up this task of liberation

with all seriousness and seeks in the discourse that follows to show that it is neither necessary nor possible to rest in the partial liberation of Skeptical indifference and that the soul that seeks itself can and must go beyond this. At the same time it is recognized that the Skeptic can be shown this in terms of his own concerns and the positive content of his own position.

Augustine's critique of the Academic position proceeds in two phases. From 3.3.5 to 3.511 Augustine engages in the dialectical refutation of the skeptical argument, that is, he seeks to undermine its internal consistency. This section, then, is in dialogue form. Having accomplished this task, Augustine switches to the style of direct address in order to develop thematically a account of our basic forms of knowledge which even a Skeptic would be forced to acknowledge (3.10.23-3.14.30) and to demonstrate the impossibility of realizing the practical ideals of Skepticism (3.15.34-3.16.36).

I will now proceed to focus on the first phase and expound Augustine's account of the internal incoherence of Skepticism. His basic argument will be that if, as it must, Academic Skepticism claims to be a form of wisdom, that is, a valid reflection on our epistemic and moral condition,

then it is in the hopeless position of trying to claim that it possesses this wisdom without 'knowing' it: that it is the case and can be validly affirmed to be the case that no concept can be connected to an objective state of affairs and that happiness lies in the *apatheia* consequent upon realizing this. Augustine contends that the appearance of contradiction here cannot be resolved and that Skeptical arguments are performative self-contradictions.⁸³

He proceeds by a pair of assumptions crucial to Skepticism. These are as follows: 1. Wisdom must be conscious of itself as wisdom and 2. knowledge, if it exists, must be of the true and not of the false. Now any Skeptic who holds that his position is a product of critical reflection upon our epistemic condition and what can be hoped for within it must hold that he possesses a description of that condition which corresponds or seems to correspond to what that condition is; that is, he must claim that he possesses wisdom.⁸⁴ If not, his Skepticism cannot be distinguished from the simple ignorance of a fool. Skeptical ignorance is not 'simple ignorance' but ignorance derived from an account of our epistemic condition that is accurate. Now to know our condition is to know our knowledge of our condition, one cannot know without knowing

that one knows by knowing one's own knowledge. Thus, a wise man must know himself as wise and if a Skeptic claims to be such a man and not a fool then he must also claim to be conscious of his own wisdom as wisdom, that is, he must know the wisdom whereby he is wise.

The second presupposition, that knowledge is of the true and not of the false, is in fact the linchpin of the Skeptical position. The Skeptic claims that perception is impossible just because, while the true and the false are distinct in themselves, they cannot be distinguished in our experience. If this were not the case, and knowledge was of the false and the true equally, this confusion would present no obstacle to our knowing anything. Thus, since, according to the Skeptic, one must distinguish the false from the true in order to know and this cannot be done, knowledge is impossible and judgement must be suspended.

Augustine thinks these two concessions, which any Academic must make, are sufficient to wreck the Skeptical position. His argument, stated at 3.3.5.15-25, is straightforward. Suppose a man possessed wisdom and did not merely seek it. In other words, suppose he had learned what wisdom is. In doing so he has learned either something, a falsehood, or nothing at all. Now a man who has learned

wisdom has not learned nothing for wisdom is not nothing or there would be no difference between being wise and not wise. Nor has he learned a falsehood for a falsehood cannot be learned (i.e., is not a genuine discovery). In learning wisdom, then, the wise man has not learned nothing, nor a falsehood, but has learned something, the wisdom whereby he is a wise man and not a fool. Thus, if he is wise and knows wisdom he must perceive the wisdom he possesses to be wisdom. But if he claims that the content of his wisdom is that nothing can be perceived he is claiming to perceive and not perceive at the same time and in the same respect. Either he is wise and knows his wisdom, in which case his wisdom is not true wisdom, or he is not wise at all and cannot claim to know whether perception either is or seems to be impossible or not.

Augustine, then, has shown that the reflexive character of wisdom, that it is of necessity self-knowing, refutes the claim that wisdom lies in non-perception and the suspension of assent. He has also shown that even the supposed wisdom of the Academics must be 'about' something; that it must make some claim about our epistemic state and thus that we must know something to be the case. After all, the Academic is not claiming that he personally has never known anything

but that it is not possible for anyone to know anything. Thus, Augustine has shown the key assertion of the Skeptics to be inherently contradictory; that one can, at the same time and in the same respect be both ignorant of truth and wise. Once the law of non-contradiction is admitted, and the Skeptic must admit it if he says the true and false are distinct, it becomes evident that he cannot claim at one and the same time to perceive and not perceive (since he claims that the content of his wisdom is that nothing can be perceived, he cannot claim this as wisdom unless he claims to perceive it).

Alypius, however, does not back down. He claims that the wise man only seems to himself to be wise through knowing wisdom on the grounds of plausibility (3.3.5.25-27). Augustine counters that this only deepens the problem (3.3.5.35-40). If it seems to the Skeptic that he knows wisdom it does not seem to him that he does not know it. This means that it will seem to him that he knows something. But Skepticism, if it is accepted as plausible, must be accepted on the grounds that it seems to be the case that nothing can be known. Thus, the contradiction remains; the Skeptic seems to himself to know that his position is true while at the same time his position states that we do not

seem to ourselves to know anything. If we seem to ourselves to know something, Skepticism will not seem to be the case. But this means that Skepticism fails its own criterion of judgement; it will no longer appear plausible, and since the Skeptic follows what is plausible, his own position commits him to cease being a Skeptic.

Augustine has now shown two things: 1. that one cannot be wise and ignorant at one and the same time and in the same respect and 2. that one cannot appear to oneself to be wise and ignorant at the same time. Implicitly, he has shown the dependence of appearances on the ideas and that any assertion of an appearance entails the assertion of an intelligible content that governs that appearance. There cannot be mere 'seeming' without the objectivity of the ideas implicated in that 'seeming'. As the impossible cannot seem to be, this includes at very least the law of non-contradiction that governs our conception of what can be or not be. The next part of the argument will show Alypius that this has been uncovered.

First, though, Augustine introduces a dramatic interlude marked, as is frequently the case in this work, by a break for lunch. When the interlocutors return Licentius is once again longing to write poetry and earns an extended

rebuke from Augustine, who expresses the wish that he might master versification to the point of surfeiting on it (3.4.7,5-10). At any rate, he says, Licentius should at least confine himself to singing his own verses rather than passages of Greek Tragedy whose meaning he does not comprehend (3.4.7,10). With that, he sends Licentius off to get a drink and invites him to return should he find that Philosophy and the *Hortensius* still mean something to him (3.4.7,15). Licentius quickly does so and when he returns the discussion is resumed.

This brief interruption is initially a bit puzzling and Curley's commentary brushes it aside with two sentences of summary (1997, p.101). However, as Augustine's general theme here is the relation of appearance and reality a reference to poetry, which makes use of images and appearances, seems reasonably apt. Augustine is, perhaps, admonishing Licentius to chasten his attachment to the external sensuous form of poetry, an attachment revealed by his love for Greek verses whose meaning he does not comprehend, and attend instead to what philosophy is saying about the dependence of sensible appearances on the ideal. At very least, he should exercise himself in composition as opposed to recitation as this will force him to concentrate on the meaning of his verses and

move him beyond their mere sound. This seems consistent with the advice Augustine has already given him in Book II.

Alypius does not yet see this crucial point uncovered by the previous discussion. He still thinks that no knowledge claim is involved in the assertion that the Skeptic merely appears to himself wise and that the open investigation he engages in has no inherent content. This is because he still holds to a greater separation of being and appearance than Augustine and does not see that the ideas in their objectivity are implicated in the positing of any appearance. Thus, he still thinks that Augustine's objection can be avoided by speaking in terms of appearances. This is crucial to his defence of Skepticism for the Academics claim that pure appearance can be present to our consciousness without a grasp of the real. Indeed, through our dependence on the senses, it is all that is present to us.

This problem appears in Alypius' inability to comprehend the question with which Augustine resumes the argument at 3.4.9.60. Augustine asks Alypius a simple question, does it seem to the wise man of the Academics that he knows wisdom; that is, does it seem to Alypius that the Academic is an instance of a wise man who knows wisdom?

Alypius, not getting the sense of the question, answers that it seems to the Academic that he knows wisdom. Augustine, however, is not asking whether the wise man seems to himself wise but whether what he seems to himself to be is a wise man. Thus, it is irrelevant whether he thinks himself wise or merely opines that he is wise or whether Alypius thinks or opines the same of him. His question, rather, is, what is a wise man and what does a man who claims he is an instance of a wise man claim that he is? The clear answer is that he appears to himself to be a man who knows what wisdom is. To be wise is to know wisdom and if I seem to myself to be wise then I seem to myself to know wisdom. Alypius finally grasps the distinction and the argument proceeds as follows. The Academic seems to himself to be an instance of the wise man yet claims that he knows nothing. Yet a wise man must know wisdom (for this is the definition of wisdom) and wisdom cannot be nothing for nothing cannot be known. Nor can it be a falsehood for there can be no knowledge of the false. Therefore, either wisdom is nothing and the Academic is no different from the fool, or there can be knowledge of the false, in which case the grounds for Skepticism disappear, or the Academic is not the wise man reason

describes and if he claims to be such a man he contradicts himself (3.4.10.85-100).

Thus, Augustine has shown that for the Skeptic to claim that he seems to himself wise involves combining two ideas, wisdom and ignorance, which cannot be combined either in reality or in appearance. Thus, in saying that he seems to himself wise the Skeptic is positing a contradictory appearance. What is more, this argument has brought to light something which will be thematically elaborated in the subsequent discourse; that the Skeptical argument assumes an intellectual intuition of the ideas. To seem to himself to be anything at all, the Skeptic must grasp the intelligible character of what he appears to himself to be. Thus, if he says to himself "I seem to myself to be a wise man" he has grasped an essence of which he holds himself to be an instance. Appearance depends upon form as that in relation to which it is defined. Seeming cannot be without the form of what seems. This is because what appears, appears to be. Appearances are conditioned by the laws of identity and non-contradiction and all other notions contained in idea of being. To appear as anything they must appear as conditioned by forms that, as the ground of the possibility of any appearance, cannot themselves be appearances. Thus,

the Skeptic cannot coherently claim that the power of appearance is universal for some objective content must condition any appearance and be present to any mind that beholds and judges it. In this case, we can see that if the Skeptic claims that he is wise in being ignorant and that the wise man is he who knows wisdom, then he is combining in his judgement ideas which cannot in fact be combined in either appearance or reality and thus his views have no claim to our assent as either true or plausible.⁸⁵

Thus overcome dialectically, Alypius falls back on a final argument. The refutation of Skepticism, he says, proves the instability of all argumentation and hence confirms Skepticism. The Skeptic is the victor even in defeat (3.5.11). Like Proteus, he cannot be captured for if he wins he wins and if he loses he wins as well! This argument appeals to the subjective fact that one can be entirely convinced of the validity of an argument and then be convinced of the converse with no difference in the degree or quality of the conviction. One is every bit as convinced now as one was then and thus the experience of feeling convinced contains within itself no guarantee that it is unalterable. Thus, Alypius has been convinced of the truth of the Academic position and is now equally convinced

of the converse. This brings home to him that his sense of conviction is not a stable basis for judgement for it possesses no mark of its own permanence. Alypius may well have the same experience tomorrow with the argument of Augustine that he has had today with the argument of the Skeptics. Thus, he cannot trust in the stability of discourse and must suspend judgement unless a 'Divine Spirit' intervene to bind Proteus and stabilize the mind in Truth.

This is an interesting and subtle move on Alypius' part and Augustine does not directly answer it at this point. On one level, of course, he need not since the immediate question concerns what seems most plausible and at this point Augustine's view seems to be in the ascendant. However, I do not think Augustine simply desires a dialectical victory of this kind but to establish some genuine philosophical conclusions as well. Alypius' question does merit an answer and to answer it fully it will be necessary to show, as Augustine will in his lengthy discourse, that the life of the mind cannot be understood as a pure becoming but must have some stability even in its changes in order for it to change. Thus, while appearing to dismiss this argument out of hand, he will in fact spend the

greater part of the rest of the work answering it by showing what every mind must always know even in the process of changing its mind. Thus, while the dialectical overcoming of Skepticism he has pursued to this point has been adequate to the argument as it has so far developed, Augustine will now remove even the abstract possibility of his argument being overturned by showing with apodictic certainty that the mind knows what it cannot in any intelligible sense be wrong about. He will show that the dialectic he has been engaged in can transcend the mutability of competing discourses, in which what is won today may be lost tomorrow, because that very mutability depends on an unchanging principle. the knowledge that is constitutive of the experience of subjectivity itself.

First however, Augustine sums up what has been accomplished to this point (3.5.12). He holds in common with Alypius the view that the Wise Man is he who knows wisdom and that one ought to assent to truth if one perceives it. At minimum, he thinks he has established that Skepticism seems implausible; it appears not to be the truth and the issue is whether one ought to assent to this appearance and reject Skepticism. Thus, the question of assent will be crucial to the remainder of the discussion.

He next notes with approval Alypius' reference to a Divine Spirit who can stabilize the protean character of discourse and notes for Licentius' benefit that Proteus is the poetic image of truth (3.6.13-3.6.13,15). He is the image of images, the representations of sense and imagination which yield no criterion of certainty.⁸⁶ The aid of this Divine Spirit, who surely is Christ the eternal Word of Truth who illumines all finite intellects and is the power from whom all certainty radiates and in whom all discourse is stabilized, is invoked by Augustine to aid in what remains of the argument. This is quite apt for the fact that the mind is receptive of this eternal light is the only possible basis for its coming to know. Thus, both Augustine and Alypius point to the same source as the solution to the fundamental dilemma and agree on a religious receptivity to divine self-communication as necessary to the liberation from error.

We will now proceed to an examination of Augustine's concluding address. Having shown the Skeptical position to be, or at least to appear to be, incapable of coherent statement, Augustine can then proceed to a positive description of the basic content of self-consciousness; that is, he can describe what knowledge is inherent in the

structure of any subjective experience and thus demonstrate that the Skeptical denial of knowledge is impossible and contradictory above all because we are inescapably knowers if we exist as self-conscious beings at all. Thus, he demonstrates what any and every one of us must at any time know. He does not, and need not, go any farther than this in his argument for the root of Academic indifference to claims concerning God, the soul, or the nature of the good life lies not in anything specific to inquiries into those objects but in a general denial that thought can be adequated to being either through the medium of sense or through rational discourse. To cut this root, as Augustine does here, by showing that being and thought belong together in the reflexivity of consciousness, is thus entirely adequate to the task of defending the pursuit of wisdom from the Skeptical challenge. Moreover, this discourse will perform the task of demonstrating the unalterable stability of the principles of dialectic on which Augustine's assertion of the incoherence of Skepticism rests and thus will answer the concern of Alypius that the unrevisibility of Augustine's argument be shown.

Augustine's speech begins with a rhetorical appeal concerned with undermining an aspect of the psychological

appeal of Skepticism, the fact that, as not specifically denying the claims of any of the dogmatists, the Skeptic seems to avoid the enmity of the differing schools and win a qualified approval from all (3.7.15,27-3.8.15). For some then, Skepticism might seem a way to the honour of general approbation. Augustine points out that even on this base level the appeal of Skepticism as an attitude fails (3.8.17, 5-15). Like the bat in Aesop's fable who will not declare himself a beast or a bird, the Skeptic will wear out the patience of all sects because his openness to all views is equally closedness to each one in particular. The Skeptic will listen to all but learn from none. The dogmatists will see in each other a potential convert but in the Skeptic an outsider to all philosophical conversation to be consigned to whatever limbo awaits those who will not participate seriously in the quest for truth. As well, an ignorant man, such as Augustine at this point claims to be, can as easily win the same honour for he at least is teachable and does not hold the absurd position that the Wise Man is not even aware of his own wisdom (3.8.17, 25-35).

Augustine next moves the argument from the love of honour which, we assume, would motivate the fashionable fellow travellers of the New Academy, into the realm of

reason itself, where the Skeptics will fare no better (3.9.18-3.9.18,5). He will now employ argument to reach those convinced of the truth of Skepticism rather than persuasion directed at those who follow it for more spurious reasons. He begins by pointing out the clear dependence of the Skeptical argument on the criterion of Zeno. The Skeptics say we must suspend judgement because all perceptions have marks in common with the false and what has marks in common with the false cannot be perceived (3.9.18, 10-15). Suspension of judgement is justified by the fact that we have no perceptions that meet the criterion of Zeno so that if Skepticism as understood by the New Academy has a rational justification it is committed to the assertion that this criterion is true and can be seen to be true, that is, it must be an object of perception. If, to use the terms of the previous argument (here given scientific precision), the Academic knows himself as wise through recognizing his own ignorance, he knows this through the form of truth by which his ignorance appears as ignorance and so knows the very principle of scientific discourse.

Thus, if the criterion of Zeno is not known to be true and it is not known whether there can be true perception of what has marks in common with the false, then the Skeptics

have given no grounds for the suspension of judgement. If, however, they affirm that the criterion is true because they perceive it to be true then they are claiming that there is an instance of true perception.

In thus using Zeno's criterion against him the Skeptics have played directly into his hands. If they say that the criterion is true and that nothing can fulfil it they are claiming a true perception. If they deny that the criterion is true, then they must say that what has marks in common with the false can be perceived and that the possibility of error is no barrier to perception in which case Skepticism would appear unjustified. It is not open to the Skeptic to deny the possibility of perception without claiming to perceive the standard by which he renders this judgement; if one says that nothing is a true perception one is saying that there is a form of which there are no instances. This form must be perceived to be the form whose possible instantiation one is investigating. There can be no investigation of the problem of knowledge that does not perceive the terms of the problem; that does not have a notion of truth and a criterion by which this notion can be seen to be or not be instantiated. One is already a knower in the very asking of the question of whether one can know.

All that is open to the Skeptic at this point is to suspend all judgement on the question of Zeno's criterion as affirming or denying it creates an impossible dilemma.⁸⁷ In the next section of the argument though, it will be seen that Zeno's criterion is in fact an analytic truth whose negation is unintelligible and which therefore cannot have marks in common with the false. It is an instance of itself which every thinker must affirm to be true, the Skeptic included.

Before moving to his analysis of Zeno's criterion Augustine marks the transition in the argument with another rhetorical interjection (3.9.19-3.9.21). He points out that the Academics would do better to say that a man cannot be wise than to say that wisdom lies in not knowing wisdom. He insinuates a certain deceptiveness on their part in attracting followers with the name of wisdom but nothing of its substance. Those attracted by the promise of wisdom, he says, will surely react with anger when they realize that what the Skeptics offer is its very negation.

Augustine now resumes his argument, addressing his discussion of Zeno's criterion directly to Arcesilaus, founder of the New Academy and most rigorously consistent of the Academics (3.9.21, 55). Zeno, as we have seen, says that

an appearance can be apprehended if it appears in such a way that it in no way resembles a falsehood and hence cannot be confused with one. The Skeptics accept this criterion and employ it to undermine the Dogmatists by showing that none of our perceptions in fact appear in this way. The form of the Skeptical argument is to state what the form of a true perception would be and deny the instantiation of this form.

Thus, they posit truth as the adequation of subject to object and self-evidence as the criterion of this adequation and deny that any of our perceptions exemplify this.

Augustine's response is to point out again the self-contradictory character of this position. The Skeptic cannot assert Zeno's criterion and deny its instantiation because the criterion is a signal instance of itself (3.9.21, 70). The Skeptic is committed to saying that the criterion is true or he cannot use it against the Stoics. Indeed, the untruth of the criterion, were such a thing thinkable, would constitute a powerful argument against Skepticism.⁸⁸ Thus, he must admit that he perceives it to be the case and that the criterion itself meets its own demand.

What is more, the Skeptic is required to do this by the truth of the criterion itself for in its bare essence it simply states the analytic truth that the true is not the

not true and that it cannot be perceived where it cannot be distinguished from its negation (3.9.21, 80). Since truth is not its own negation a true perception is distinct from a false one and to judge our perceptions true or false we must be able to perceive this distinction. Thus, it is strictly unintelligible to deny the truth of Zeno's criterion for it is true in virtue of the terms of which it is composed. There is no possibility of it being false or of enunciating any falsehood that resembles it and thus it cannot be a mere appearance and our knowledge of it can only be a true perception. In analytic self-evidence we have a mark that distinguishes the true from the false such as the Skeptics had denied existed, for such truths appear to us only in virtue of their being truths.⁸⁹

On the deepest level though, truths such as the criterion of Zeno are invulnerable to the power of appearance because they represent one of the fundamental conditions for there being appearances about which we can be mistaken, like the truth, adverted to directly in Augustine's later writings, that if I am deceived then I must exist to be deceived. Certain facts must hold about any world in which I can take the apparent for the real and thus there must always be some things about which I cannot

be mistaken. Thus, in any world in which I can make a mistake, it must be the case that the true is the true and not the not true. The criterion of Zeno is indubitably perceived because it is one of the conditions for the possibility of error. If one held it to be illusory or doubtful one would be exemplifying the very truth being negated or doubted for it can only be untrue that the true is not the not true if the true is not the not true.

It is the case, then, that before one can even frame a doubt about anything one must know at very least the idea of truth. Every doubt is limited by the conditions of its appearance and universal doubt is a strict impossibility.⁹⁰ Academic Skepticism cannot say a true perception is one having no marks in common with the false and that there are no instances of true perception without falling into immediate self-contradiction for the former is both asserted to be and is an instance of true perception.

Having dealt with the pure Skepticism of Arcesilaus, Augustine now turns to the 'probabilism' of Carneades (3.10.22). Carneades, as we have noted, fathered a modified Skepticism that allowed greater space for a practical knowledge of the world of ordinary experience. However, he proclaimed himself indifferent to this realm and the

qualified knowledge possible within it while also proclaiming himself Skeptical about all matters discussed by philosophers i.e. all 'meta' statements of universal validity that do not refer directly to specific sense data. Thus, what is of real concern to philosophers cannot be spoken about and what can, in a highly qualified way, be spoken about is of no concern. What we have in this account then, is an effort, reminiscent of the early Wittgenstein, to limit all claims of philosophical transcendence over ordinary experience while retaining in a purely negative way our freedom from it.

But it is not difficult to see the problem with positivistic positions of this kind. Reason cannot limit itself in this way without violating the very limits it is seeking to establish (3.10.22, 15-25). If it is to define itself as limited to a plausible knowledge of experience and nothing more then it must make a universal claim about itself that is not grounded in sense experience or judgements of plausibility but in its own knowledge of itself. Thus, Carneades has limited reason in the way he has by making use of the criteriology of the Stoics whose validity, we have seen, is essential to the Academic project. He has used intelligible knowledge in order to

limit reason simply to plausible judgements of sense experience in a way that decisively undermines itself.

Accordingly, Carneades' attempt to limit the scope of Skepticism to ultimate questions such as are addressed in philosophy while allowing ordinary judgements cannot be sustained. It is interesting to note, though, that Augustine says of him that he 'slept more lightly' than any of the other Skeptics and actually interjects a short soliloquy in which Carneades converses with himself (3.10.22, 5-15). In this soliloquy he represents him as 'waking up' and noting the evidentness of certain facts of experience (i.e. that he is a human being and not an insect). Not wanting Chrysippus the Stoic to use these facts against him, he calculates that if he limits his interest to matters about which philosophers inquire it will not matter if he appears ignorant in not affirming what is evident to all ('stumbles in broad daylight'). Those 'of divine eyes' who know what intelligible truth is and have penetrated the veil of the senses (the 'shadows of the ignorant') will not be able to betray him to 'the blind' (the Stoics) by showing that there are philosophical truths of which Carneades is ignorant. Thus, Carneades will seem greater in his ignorance of higher things than his opponents are in knowing everyday things.

Since 'the blind' cannot penetrate the senses (the shadows which Carneades can point to as hiding the truth) to the intelligible level where Skepticism stands refuted and the truths of philosophy stand revealed, it will appear that *epoche* will be the relation of the wise to all philosophical questions, whatever is the case with ordinary knowledge.⁹¹

If this indeed was Carneades' position it makes a concession that will be important for Augustine's overall argument. Over and above the fact already adverted to that Carneades cannot consistently maintain his restriction of Skepticism to objects that transcend direct experience, his apparent admission that Skepticism cannot overturn certain kinds of knowledge claims allows Augustine to ask whether these might form the basis for the development of genuine philosophical knowledge. Indeed, in works where he traces the ascent to the vision of truth he uses the most basic and simple truths as his starting point. In this work, though, he is simply interested in showing what is, in point of fact, indubitable and so in the next portion of the work he brings to the fore the richness of the ordinary knowledge the light sleeping Carneades has all but admitted.

The argument to this point has been most directly concerned with attacking the Academics from within their own

assumption and convicting them of performative self-contradiction, i.e. of saying that wisdom and ignorance can exist in the same subject at the same time and in the same respect, that Zeno's criterion can ground a Skeptical result without being perceived to be true, that reason, an intelligible object, can define itself as only capable of plausible judgements of sense experience and so on. This in itself is adequate to fulfil Augustine's practical aim of showing Skepticism to be implausible and thus no moral barrier to initiating the quest for wisdom for, until the Academics put forward a self consistent account of why we must suspend assent, we need not worry about them if we do not happen to want to be Skeptics (he will show in the last section of the argument why we should not want to be Skeptics).

Augustine, however, has been somewhat unobtrusively accomplishing more than this. Throughout his dialectical refutation of Skepticism, which comprises his argument with Alypius and his consideration of the Skeptic's use of Stoic criteriology, he has also been indicating to the reader clear instances of knowledge that every subject possesses qua subject, such as the idea of truth, without which no Skeptic could even pose a doubt to himself.⁹²

In the next section of the work Augustine will bring this element of his discussion directly to the fore (3.10.23-3.14.30). He will sketch a positive description that will show the kinds of knowledge implicit in any mental act whatsoever, including the act of doubting or suspending judgement itself. This will show Academic Skepticism to be not only internally inconsistent in its existing formulations but to be inherently incapable of any coherent statement and to be directly refuted by experience. Having shown Skepticism to be inconsistent he will now show it to be false (of course, he has implicitly been doing this all along and is now going to play his hand directly). In doing this, he will simply be building on what has, in principle, been admitted by Carneades who found himself unable to doubt that he was a human being.

Lying behind this structure in Augustine's argument is, I think, Plato's account of the ascent to knowledge given in the image of the line. Academic Skepticism, after all, emerges out of the Platonic school and, to Augustine's mind, assumes a Platonism within its own argument. Indeed, the Skeptics begin with the Platonic category of appearance, understood in opposition to true being, which they then regard as universally operative in all acts of human

cognition. Augustine's critique of Skepticism's internal inconsistency seeks to show that the Skeptic's assertion of the universality of appearance must involve a grasp of something beyond appearance if he is to think his own position. This something is the idea of science itself, which is the basis for asserting its own absence.

Thus, if one takes as a starting point Arcesilaus' view that he seems to himself to know nothing, not even his own ignorance, one can, according to Augustine, demonstrate a knowledge in this by showing that the very appearance of ignorance as ignorance depends upon the intuition of ideas.

Appearance is what it is relative to what transcends it. It is not a universal category but is relative to being, in relation to which it is defined (the apparent is what *seems to be*). Thus, the pure seeming of the Skeptics is shown to be contradictory and unintelligible just because the bottom of the line has no real independence from what is above it.

Arcesilaus is overcome because the appearance he posits of a thinking ignorance, as contradictory, cannot be (and hence, cannot seem to be). Thus, his first person report of what he took his state to be with respect to knowledge cannot convey what he thinks it does.

This same point is demonstrated again in relation to Carneades, who moves Skepticism up the line from pure appearance into the realm of opinion. Here Skepticism takes the view of itself that it seems to itself *plausible* that knowledge is impossible. Skepticism seems to itself to be a *true opinion*. In other words, it both *seems to be*, and *seems to be true*. Carneades seems to himself to know nothing and seems to himself correct in thinking that he knows nothing.

Augustine however, shows again that if seeming is not without being, then also opinion, or the probable, is not without truth. Carneades cannot limit knowledge to opinion without transcending opinion for the relation of what is known to what is opined must itself be known for opinion to appear as such.

The lynchpin of this movement for Augustine is the criterion of Zeno precisely because this is the form in which the idea of science was present to the Skeptics as the measure of what is known and not known. As such, Augustine's discussion of it marks the transition in his argument from the bottom half of the line to the top for it is the point of objective certainty within Skepticism itself. It indicates what the Skeptics need to possess over and above *eikasia* and *doxa* to have a thinking relation to

their own Skepticism. Accordingly, Augustine can move from this point into the realm of *dianoia*, the formal knowledge of dialectic and mathematics and *episteme*, the knowledge of being as such thought through its categories. To conclude this phase of his argument, Augustine points back to the self-awareness of the perceiving subject as the locus in which these categories are known directly in their instantiation, thus returning to the point from which the Skeptics themselves began and situating it within the total structure of knowledge. At that point, he concludes his epistemological analysis of Skepticism for once it has been shown that we necessarily know the categories of the real and know those categories as irrefutably instantiated, i.e., that we know both form and content in their concretion, there is nothing left of the position of the Academics with respect to knowledge.⁹³

In doing this, Augustine will answer the question raised earlier concerning the seeming mutability of all philosophical discourse. It is a powerful Skeptical argument that philosophers of great intelligence have disagreed over the profoundest questions and that the history of philosophy displays a wide variety of views in its different epochs. Augustine's discourse will show the

stable element presupposed in this change to be immutable and necessary knowledge of truth. Thus, if the philosophers disagree it is only within the context of a more fundamental agreement. To have a disagreement at all requires a common framework in which the disagreement can be stated and this framework is the most basic knowledge of the world common to all subjects. In these terms, any conceivable disagreement or difference between two people would have to be stated. Thus, Augustine will move from his fortified position to battle on the open plain, from a consideration of the inconsistency of Skepticism to its untruth.

Augustine accomplishes this by delineating the categories that determine any philosophical discourse and allow philosophers to state the disjunctions that define their respective positions (3.10.23, 50-70). All discourse, and indeed the reality it mirrors, falls into a basic either/or structure that allows there to be alternative descriptions of the world among which we may choose one or, as the Skeptics do, suspend judgement concerning all. Whether one takes a position or suspends judgement, one does so, and indeed one must do so, within the context of a given set of alternatives that allows us to formulate a meaningful

question about which to either make or withhold from making a judgement.

Accordingly, whatever I say or decide I cannot say, I must say something is or is not, is one or many, is finite or infinite, is eternal or temporal, is true or false, is a product of foresight or chance etc. Any question I form is formed in terms of being/non being, unity/multiplicity, finitude/infinity, eternity/temporality, truth/falsity, providence/necessity, or any other such categories. These are the logical contraries that condition any discourse about the world, which is shown to be governed by logical forms in themselves perspicuous.⁹⁴ Whatever one proposes about something falls on one side of these disjunctions. Thus, whatever disagreements there may be about physics say, whether there is one world or many, there is either one world or many. If the Skeptics ask us to choose between these disjunctions we need not reply for the necessary truth of the disjunctions themselves, that these are the logical forms that determine the real and that it makes no sense to say the world is neither one nor many, is itself perspicuous. Any mind that thinks anything at all thinks the basic categories of the real in which all alternatives are contained and perceives itself measured by a timeless

and objective content that is presupposed in any of its movements from one point of view to another (this answers Alypius' objection).⁹⁵

Thus, there is basic knowledge of, at very least, the basic forms that render reality knowable and able to be experienced. The mind that thinks about the world, whatever it may think about it, knows these as the universal determinations of being and thinking and knows the very necessity of its knowing them as such by the illumination of truth, which is here seen to be what is most inward to consciousness. Not to possess these would be to lack a rational nature altogether and thus to be unable to ask what is possible to a rational nature.⁹⁶

But there is more than the formal side of our experience to be considered here. These forms whose universality and necessity I cannot doubt determine a sensible content I cannot doubt either for there is no doubting the fact that what appears to me appears to me as it appears to me (3.11.24).⁹⁷ It is strictly unintelligible to say that it seems to me that I am cold for if I seem cold I am cold. 'I perceive X' is directly perceived for perception is of its very nature reflexive. I perceive *through* perceiving my own perception otherwise I would be

ignorant of my perception and so would not perceive. At this point, it does not matter to Augustine whether I perceive anything external to myself or if I do whether it is as I perceive it to be. It is enough to point to the fact that any sensuous experience of its nature involves at least one true perception, its perception of itself.⁹⁸ Thus, if the Skeptic asks whether there is a world of which Augustine's disjunctions are true, the answer is yes, the world that appears to me (3.11.24, 5). Even if there are only appearances of external things there are still self-evident truths which must be if anything is to *appear* and one of these is the infallibility of self-perception.⁹⁹

Thus, it is idle to ask whether any of the states of the perceiving subject are 'real' or whether I am awake when I perceive that I am sitting in a room typing or simply dreaming. Either way there are many things which I must affirm as truths (3.11.25 - 3.11.25, 30). Nor does it affect the objectivity of the argument pursued above if it were the case that I am dreaming the whole thing. The same basic logical forms adverted to above must govern the experience of the dreamer or madman if it is experience at all. The truths of number must hold for all states, for instance, for no mental state that was a mental state at all

could be simply inordinable. Mathematics and logic are independent of sense knowledge and thus are not affected by my perceptual state (3.11.25, 30-40). As Augustine puts it, $1+1=2$ though the whole world be snoring.¹⁰⁰

What is more, there is far more to be said in favour of the senses than the Skeptics admit (3.11.25, 40 - 3.11.26, 80). There is indeed a kind of truth in the senses insofar as they depict reality to us precisely as circumstances dictate they should. An oar that appears bent in water appears exactly as it ought to one who views it with the eye. Thus, they perform their natural function as natural causes determine that they should. (3.11.26, 50) If this causes us at times to be deceived then this is not the fault of the senses but a mistake of judgement that relies on them to deliver knowledge they are not designed to provide. Error is always in the judgement, not in the senses, which simply report appearances concerning which the mind is to judge prudently and without an expectation of infallibility. At any rate, the senses do provide us with one infallible kind of knowledge, the knowledge that I perceive things as I perceive them to be and this is the necessary basis even for my being deceived about anything (3.11.26, 60). Thus, it is idle to worry about whether bitter herbs are bitter in

themselves and so on. All of this belongs to the realm of opinion whereas for Augustine it is the universality and the necessity of the intelligible that is the basis of knowledge. Thus, in light of this knowledge of our higher acts of reason and intellection, Augustine can accurately judge the nature and scope of opinion founded in sense knowledge and determine its relation to other forms of knowing. In being able to do so, he is free from its power to deceive, not in the negative form of a Skepticism that denies assent to appearances but in the positive form of knowing its true relation to what transcends it.

Having discussed problems related to the physical world, Augustine now turns to ethics, the second division of philosophy according to the Stoic division (3.12.27). Here again the infallible self-perception of the subject provides an irrefutable basis for ethical inquiry for everyone is pleased by what he or she is pleased by and most pleased by what he or she is most pleased by (3.12.27, 5). As for the question of what is most pleasing in itself, Augustine gives no more than his opinion that it lies in the exercise of the mind but whether or not this is the case the question does not have indefinite parameters. Wherever the highest good lies it must lie in the mind, the body, or both together

(3.12.27, 10). The possibilities among which we inquire are finite because our experience is finite and we know that whatever is, is self-identical in its distinction from other things and that this is why we have definite alternatives about which to suspend judgement in the first place.¹⁰¹

After dealing with ethics, Augustine turns to the truths that can be known about logic and which underlie the assertions he has made about physics and ethics. (3.13.29) He begins by noting the laws of identity and the excluded middle i.e. a man cannot be both mortal and immortal and we are now either asleep or awake etc. These logical principles are true no matter what condition our senses may be in (3.13.29, 15). The same is the case with the necessary relation of antecedent and consequent upon which rest the two basic forms of inference, *modus ponens* (if p then q but p hence q) and *modus tollens* (if p then q but not-p hence not-q). Thus, we can say that wherever there is a necessary connection or disjunction between any two states of affairs these modes of reasoning are valid whether or not the matters with which they deal are actual or purely conditional. They are necessities constitutive of our very ability to think and are valid regardless of whether the relations they describe exist in actuality. If p then q but

p then q is a necessary truth even if there never was and never will be either p or q or anything else to exist in this relation. What is more, these statements of formal logic contain an implicit relation to reality as well for their validity as heuristic tools rests upon the ability of the logical relation of antecedent and consequent to express a possible real relation as well. Thus, logic teaches us both purely formal truths and truths about reality simultaneously insofar as reality conforms to a logical structure. Indeed, this interrelation between being, thought and will that allows us to move from logic to physics to ethics and from pure form to material content and back is a concrete application of Augustine's Trinitarian logic to the structure of experience. It indicates that even in his earliest writings Augustine had already begun to grasp the philosophical import of the Trinitarian principle.

Dialectic also teaches its own distinction from sophistical contention (3.13.29, 30). It teaches that one should not dispute where disagreements are simply verbal and how people who dispute in this way ought to be treated. It teaches as well that if a false conclusion is drawn from an incautiously conceded premise then the disputant must be permitted to withdraw that concession and should not be held

to it simply to produce the appearance that the other party has won the debate (3.13.29, 30). These are formal rules for the conduct of an ordered inquiry into truth which have already been illustrated for Licentius and Trygetius in the first book.¹⁰²

These are all truths that the man trained in dialectic knows to be true such that he is impervious to the sophisms, such as the liar's paradox, with which the Academics attempt to undermine them. The Academics had attempted to undermine the basic truths of logic by means of such paradoxical statements as 'this sentence is false' which if true is false and if false is true thus apparently undermining the logical force of disjunctions such as true/false. As it stands it appears as a counter example to the inference 'if true then not false' for it appears to be both the one and the other equally yet also appears to be a genuine statement.¹⁰³

Augustine dismisses this counter-instance as spurious (3.13.29, 35). He does not say why but the matter itself is clear if one looks at it in light of Augustine's own notion of truth as conformity of thought to being. The sentence 'this sentence is false' is not a declarative utterance like 'it is raining' but a second-order statement concerning such

an utterance. By itself it has no descriptive content to which truth or falsity can be assigned but can only describe another utterance that has such content and can thus be true or false. Of its very form 'this sentence is false' cannot be self-referential but is lexically incomplete in spite of having the appearance of a genuine statement. The liar's paradox rests on a simple confusion of two distinct linguistic categories (i.e., statements whose truth depends on some state of affairs and statements whose truth depends upon the truth of such statements) and Augustine is correct, on his own principles, to dismiss it.¹⁰⁴

With these considerations Augustine concludes his account of perception and turns to the question of assent. He has shown to his satisfaction that the Academics cannot state their position coherently and that the presupposition of their Skepticism is a necessary structure of knowledge intrinsic to all subjects. He now turns to the question of whether it is true that the Wise Man must continue to withhold assent. He does this by returning the argument to the question of the wise man's relation to his own wisdom, now considered in relation to assent. Accordingly, he reverts to the standard of argument with which he began and considers again whether Skepticism can appear plausible to

the Skeptic who holds it.¹⁰⁵ He has already addressed this question in relation to knowledge and shown both that the Skeptic must appear to himself to know and that he must in fact know. Here he turns back to the beginning point to cover the same question in relation to will by examining whether the Skeptic can be related to his own Skepticism without assent.

Augustine begins this section by taking up again Alypius' claim that the refutation of Skepticism undermines itself by demonstrating the intrinsic instability of all discourse. Here he considers it as a ground for withholding of assent from all knowledge claims (3.14.30, 5). Augustine now offers to show that if it is plausible to the wise man that he knows something then the withholding of assent can no longer seem a plausible course of action and must be abandoned by the Skeptic in accordance with his own standard of judgement (3.14.30, 20). This done, Augustine will have removed to his satisfaction the "mountain" that stands in the way of those who would begin philosophy and causes them to fear that there is no light to be found there (3.14.30, 15).

Augustine frames the argument of this section as a confrontation between the Academic Philosopher and wisdom.

Wisdom, he says, says nothing but that it is wisdom, that is, to the extent that it is, it reveals itself as what it is (3.14.31, 20). But if the Skeptic refuses to assent to wisdom as wisdom what is he saying? That the wise man can be wise yet not recognize wisdom as wisdom? Imagine the wise man and wisdom at war with each other! Either the wise man is victorious over the wisdom that says that it is wisdom (in which case he is no longer wise) or he is conquered by wisdom and must consent to what wisdom says of itself (3.14.31, 40). If, then, it appears true to the Skeptic that the wise man knows wisdom, and, if the Skeptic's general ground for withholding assent is that nothing seems to him true, it follows that he has lost all grounds for withholding assent (3.14.31, 45).

If anyone should ask Augustine where the wise man finds wisdom, he replies that he will find it within himself (3.14.31, 50). If someone responded to this that the wise man has wisdom in himself without knowing he possesses it, then the absurdity noted above ensues. If, on the contrary, it is denied that the wise man exists, then the discussion has moved beyond Academic Skepticism to whatever position it is that holds that wise men do not exist (3.14.31, 55). Accordingly, Augustine concludes that wisdom is indeed

certain to the wise man who has it and that anyone who is wise must assent to wisdom (3.14.32). The Academic, who claims to be wise, must claim to perceive something (wisdom) and must therefore assent to what he claims to perceive (3.14.32, 70).

This section of the argument exploits the connection in the Academic position between non-assent and non-perception.

The *epoche* of the Academics is not unconditional but depends upon our inability to perceive the truth. How we will is consequent upon what we know and indeed assent is spontaneously generated by perception. Even in Skepticism the relation is intrinsic. Accordingly, suspension of assent *must* be mediated by the inability to perceive. Since this is so, Augustine can argue that the question of assent is already settled when the question of perception is resolved. Having previously established that wisdom is present to itself as wisdom and indeed subsists in this self-presence, Augustine can then point out that there proceeds by a necessity intrinsic to what is self-present, an assent to itself as present to itself. Wisdom's vision and judgement of itself as wisdom are mutually constituted moments of a whole.

Augustine has thus shown that the attempt to separate assent from perception results in a false abstraction of moments intrinsic to each other. In Augustine's image, it is to turn wisdom against itself and the wise man against wisdom. As such, the affirmation that the wise man knows his own wisdom if he is wise is inseparable from the affirmation that the wise man assents to what he knows.

The final section of Augustine's discourse casts a critical eye on the practical aims of Academic Skepticism which *epoche* is suppose to fulfil. Indeed, these are the strongest grounds of its appeal insofar as Skepticism is an absolute standpoint achieved by arguments that are only of relative probity. Ultimately, it is a way of life, a standpoint that one keeps up by the deliberate exercise of Skeptical inquiry that aims in each case at an equipollence whose achievement must always be realized anew. Thus, one must choose to be a Skeptic for the sake of the goods one has (by happenstance) noted attend the suspension of judgement. Granting all that Augustine has argued up to this point, might it not still seem an error in practical judgement to reject Skepticism if it does indeed offer us immunity from error and freedom from anxiety? What would it matter if there were no epistemological necessity to suspend

judgement if in doing so we gained a share in the impassivity of the divine? Thus, Augustine must conclude by showing that Skepticism does not guarantee freedom from error and anxiety about what we ought to assent to and that human finitude itself imposes upon us the necessity of choice about what we ought regard as good or evil. He must show that we do not improve our chances for happiness by suspending judgement rather than assenting to what we believe to be true.¹⁰⁶

There is even a sense in which the epistemological critique mounted to this point is in itself incomplete without the moral critique that Augustine here mounts. This is not to say, as Mosher would, that Augustine's epistemological arguments are rendered *formally* more persuasive by his ethical ones. Rather, it is the case that at this point in the argument a form of Skepticism might remain that opposes the good, the *apatheia* consequent upon *epoche*, to the true, the rational necessity of assenting to certain truths, and judges them in conflict and contradiction. Indeed, one would have to perform an act of *epoche* between the rival demands of truth and happiness that would land one straight back in Skepticism. Accordingly,

Augustine must head off this eventuality by showing the practical claims of the Skeptics to be empty.

Augustine begins with the hoary objection that the man who took Skepticism seriously would do nothing (3.15.33). So enervated would he be by his state of *epoche* that he would be unable to act as a moral agent or even, at the most extreme, survive as a physical animal.

This is, of course, our ordinary intuition about the problem with Skepticism and is the objection to it most commonly offered at a pre-philosophical level.¹⁰⁷ Suppose the Skeptic could prevent the murder of a small child by an axe wielding maniac, would he really refrain from doing so on the grounds that it would disturb his *equipoise* if he picked up a phone and dialled the police? Of course, the Skeptics exercised much ingenuity in meeting objections of this sort, from the probabilism of Carneades to the Pyrrhonian teaching that the Skeptic could submit to the necessities of nature and the weight of customary activity without assent. Augustine, however, will now argue that the Skeptics have here won an illusory victory. The probabilistic account of practical action offered by the Skeptics does not offer us a substitute for truth, does not relieve us of the anxiety of knowing what we ought to choose

and does not offer us peace of mind amidst the uncertainties of life.

This is a limitation of the Skeptical attitude of which Augustine had intimate personal experience and of which he has left us a vivid account in *Confessions* Book VI. Here he describes the anxiety that impels the search for truth and moves it ever forward, destroying the tranquillity that the soul seeks in the absence of commitment through the fact that even the suspension of judgement can be endlessly put in question. Augustine's profound sense of the urgency of the question of the truth of our lives and of its utterly inescapable character constitutes his most fundamental objection to Skepticism as something false to our nature as erotic beings who seek the completeness of the Good. The *amor* that is the principle of life within us drives us ever forward in self-transcendence towards a wholeness both present and absent, indeed, in large measure present in its very absence. Skepticism is, then, a failure of love or will.¹⁰⁸ An artificial and self-thwarting attempt to limit the infinite teleology of spirit, whose infinite object is revealed by its own inexhaustible depth. This paradoxical character of spirit, that it an infinitizing finitude, is something to which the Skeptics fail to do justice and so

cut themselves off from the true depths of their own natures. Instead, they attempt to create a false image of infinite freedom simply by negating all finite judgement, a freedom that can only exist in the endless task of negating every particular content of the mind it can posit.

At this point in his discourse, however, Augustine is content to examine the claim that the suspension of judgement can secure for us even the freedom from false judgements that it claims and will show that the Skeptical *epoche* is itself subject to the limitations of finite judgement from which it claims to deliver us.

He begins this task by relating a parable (3.15.34, 25). Suppose, he says, the following scenario. Two companions come to a fork in a road, one of them of a credulous bent and the other a Skeptic. The former inquires of a humble shepherd which road to take to achieve their final destination and receiving an answer, thanks the man and sets off on the way indicated. His companion, however, jibes at him for his credulity and remains at the fork in the road while he departs. After a while, the Skeptic sees a well-dressed townsman who, unbeknownst to him, is a *samardoci* or trickster. Upon being asked, the trickster points to the road opposite the one indicated by the

shepherd. Weighing probabilities in the balance, the Skeptic decides to follow the advice of the trickster, who is to all appearances an honourable man. According to the doctrine of probabilism, this is an entirely correct procedure for it is the trickster who presents the most plausible appearance and the man who followed the shepherd erred in being rash. But the actual result has been that the man who made the wrong decision has arrived at his location whereas the man who made the right decision is lost in the wilderness.

Whether or not there is some sense in which the first man may have erred, Augustine does not think it possible to say that the second has avoided error simply by following the most plausible impression (3.15.34, 50). There is an objective as well as a subjective measure of the correctness of my actions and this is the actual outcome of my action whether or not it conforms to my actual aim in acting a certain way. If we have a specific goal in mind and we make a decision that does not issue in the realization of that goal then it matters little whether we have assented to it as true or merely followed it as plausible after careful examination. Either way the basic fact remains; I have not acted as I ought to have acted to achieve my end and have

committed an error. Thus, the doctrine of probabilism cannot free the Skeptic from the possibility of error, which cannot simply be identified with mistakes in evaluative procedure.

Augustine's parable shows that while Skepticism can save us from the error of rash judgement it cannot save us from error as such for rash judgement is not the only kind of error. Indeed, when it comes to obtaining some good we seek, the ultimate criterion of our actions, rash judgement can succeed where prudent calculation fails. This has great personal resonance for Augustine. It is easy to read the poor shepherd in the story as Christ and the well-dressed traveller as the wisdom of this world, which Augustine in his youth had found so much more impressive than the humble appearance of Christianity. From outward appearances it is easy, say, to judge the asceticism and critical acumen of the Manichees as lending more plausibility to their position than the naiveté of uneducated Catholics. If one had to choose some way of salvation, of reaching one's final goal of happiness, would one be saved simply by following the plausible impression made by the Manichees if the way of Mani was not in fact the true path? Salvation does not lie simply in using the correct method of choosing but also in

actually making the right choice. The conclusion of this is inevitable; Skepticism cannot bring us the peace of mind it claims to and thus fails in its own ultimate justification.¹⁰⁹

This can be further illustrated by examining the moral implications of Skepticism, as Augustine proceeds to do in the next part of his discourse. In it, he tries to show that for all its concern for avoiding error Academic Skepticism shows little sensitivity to a particularly egregious form of it; sin. In terms of human well being, avoiding sin our paramount concern as the moral law is the ultimate objective measure of our success or failure as persons. It is here that error has the greatest consequences both for us and for the general order of society and simply following the plausible cannot in and of itself guarantee the objective conformity to the law that the notion of moral rectitude itself demands. One can only be righteous in conforming to what is righteous, not in conforming to what happens to strike you as right.

Augustine again uses a story to illustrate his point. He asks his hearers to suppose the case of a young man who, learning from the Academics that one ought never to assent to impressions as true but simply follow the probable

without inward assent, decides that it seems plausible that he should seduce another man's wife (3.16.35). He does not make the mistake of asserting that adultery is in itself good, this would be to risk error. Rather, he simply says that it seems so to him and acts on this impression. Now, if the Academics are correct, then it cannot be said that the young man has committed any error; he has followed the correct procedure with regard to his impressions and not overstepped the bounds imposed by his state of *epoche*. Has this man really avoided error simply by applying a mental reserve to his actions?

Augustine says that he would particularly like to hear from Cicero what he would say to the young man in question (3.16.35, 5). After all, was not the moral development of young men one of his overriding concerns? As a lawyer, was not the majesty and integrity of the Law something he was devoted to upholding? What can he say to the young man's argument that he simply followed the plausible? Cicero could say that it seems to him that adultery is evil. But Cicero does not follow what seems good to Epicurus, who says that a man should withdraw from public life. Why then should the young man follow what seems plausible to Cicero (3.16.35, 10)? Further, what if the youth is hauled into

court on incontrovertible evidence, what will Cicero say in his defence? That he is innocent as acting on the plausible without assent? What if the judges in a plausible and truth-like way find him guilty, what can Cicero say then? Does anyone even know that the whole affair is not a dream (3.16.35, 15-25)?

It is plain that in this situation, everyone can claim to be in the right no matter what they do so long as they are in the subjective state of appearing to themselves right without any dogmatic belief that they are. The youth can be right in committing adultery and the judges right in condemning him on the very same basis. Carneadean probabilism, if taken seriously, would erase all objective moral distinctions and without these no laws of general application could bind individual subjectivities into a common social body. No individual could appeal to anything above private subjective impressions with respect to anything any other individual does and thus no public order could exist except what was imposed by fiat of the most powerful.

It is evident then that Academic Skepticism has been too restrictive in confining erroneous judgement to rash judgement. Its claim to free us from the threat of error

has paid insufficient heed to the different kinds and dimensions of error. It has failed to realize that error has an objective dimension with respect to both means and ends.

It is an error to choose means that do not lead us to our chosen ends even if we have taken all the care in the world in deciding what to do and even if we have chosen our path as merely plausible for we have not gotten where our reason has told we ought to go. Moreover, as moral agents we are judged and measured by a law that commands us to do x or y and not simply what seems to us plausible. We are judged by what we do, not by the reasoning process by which we justify it or by the degree of assent with which we act. Thus, if we do not act rightly we commit the error of sin and the Academics cannot protect us from this. Thus, Academic Skepticism cannot bring us the peace of mind that it claims to for it admits that we have to act and cannot show how we can avoid all kinds of error in acting but teaches us only how to avoid the error of rashness.¹¹⁰

This concludes Augustine's argument that Skepticism fails both in its epistemological claims and in its practical claim to liberate us from anxiety and error. He concludes the dialogue with an account of why he thinks that the Platonic school, the repository of the deepest wisdom

known to antiquity, could have come to put forward such incoherent and self-undermining views. It must indeed have been a cause of wonder to Augustine how the Academy could have moved so far from the spirit of its founder as to deny any knowledge of the realm of super-sensible being to the mind. The claim he puts forward here is that the Academics retained the wisdom of Plato as a kind of esoteric doctrine while using their negative arguments to undermine the materialist doctrines of the Stoics and Epicureans.

It is best to avoid the temptation to think that Augustine is here mounting a historical explanation in the manner of a modern historian of philosophy. The very position of this account, at the end of the dialogue, gives away the fact that it is a Platonic *mythos* or likely story such as we find in many dialogues of Plato. It is, then, more an image of what the truth could be like than the truth itself and Augustine clearly indicates it as such. More important, though, than the literal accuracy of the story is the poetic truth that it embodies, that Skepticism contains within its own assumptions all that it needs to recollect its origins and recover true Platonism.

Augustine begins his short history of philosophy up to his time with Platonism and indeed the thought of Plato is

the beginning and in a way the end of his account. The revival of Platonic thought in the later Roman Empire is in one respect for him the culmination of Classical thought and culture and in another the point at which this tradition opens to something new, the Christian faith in the incarnation of God, to which Augustine alludes at the end of his text. His account singles out Plato as the discoverer of ideas as the exemplars of sensible things and the intelligible as what is real in itself, in contrast to the secondary reality of the realm of becoming (3.17.37, 25). Plato then distinguished what is changeless and intelligible from what is changeable and sensible and showed the latter to be an image of the former. Moreover, he identified knowledge with our grasp of the former and opinion with our grasp of the latter. Augustine also attributes to Plato a distinction between 'civic' virtues, which are commonly practised in the world and the true virtues practised by philosophers. The former, Augustine says, may be called 'truth-like' (3.17.37, 30).

In the decades following Plato's death controversy broke out between the more conservative members of Plato's Academy and the new position represented by Zeno the Stoic, who combined a philosophical materialism with an interest in

epistemological questions of a different kind than those which animated the Old Academy (3.17.38, 40). In particular, he was interested in the question of the criterion of knowledge; how knowledge was known to the subject who possessed it to be knowledge. As well, he held that the soul was mortal and that God himself was a fiery substance pervading the cosmos (3.17.38, 50).

Zeno was opposed most vigorously by his fellow student Arcesilaus, founder of the Skeptical Academy. In particular, Arcesilaus began the practice of turning Zeno's criterion against him and showing that nothing bodily could fulfil that criterion. Since Zeno held that only what was bodily was real, he was forced to defend the hopeless proposition that a class of self-evident sense perceptions existed (3.17.39).

This conflict was continued in the next generation by Arcesilaus' successor Carneades, who disputed with Chrysippus, the most brilliant disciple of Zeno. One of his major contributions to the debate was to outline against the objections of the Stoics a theory of probablism that could be used to justify action (3.17.40). Carneades noted that the kinds of action approved of by the Stoics bore a real resemblance to the true virtues known by philosophy. They

were, in fact, images of true exemplars. Indeed, they are the 'civic' virtues alluded to in the preceding account of Plato. Thus, he was able to term these 'truth-like' and recommend them to the uninitiated in the knowledge that they bore a real relationship to the truth. This, Augustine holds, is why he could speak about the 'truth-like'. Accordingly, he was able to recommend certain imitations of true virtue while reserving the truth for those within the Academy and in doing so leave some hints to posterity as to his true position (3.18.40, 5-10).

This conflict, Augustine says, continued until the time of Cicero, who gave final expression to the Academic position in his criticisms of Antiochus of Ascalon (3.18.41). This Antiochus was, as has been mentioned in Book II, an acute critic of Skepticism who devised many of the basic arguments offered against it. Augustine, following Cicero, takes him as following the precedent of Philo of Larissa in attempting to open the door of the Academy to the positive doctrines with which it began. However, in Antiochus' hands, the old Platonic teaching became indistinguishable from the doctrines of the Stoics so that a Skeptical reaction became once again necessary. Accordingly, Philo and after him Cicero took up the negative

teaching of Carneades and Arcesilaus once more until the positive doctrines of Antiochus had been suppressed (3.18.41, 30-40).

Shortly after these disputes had died down, the positive doctrine of Plato, hidden for so many years, was able to emerge into view once more in the person of Plotinus who was like Plato come to life again after a long period of time (3.18.41, 40). In Augustine's own time, this revived Platonism had become the one truly living philosophical school apart from the Cynics and Peripatetics. The Cynics, of course, could always find adherence among those who sought freedom from civilisation as such but for those who sought genuine virtue and knowledge Platonism now presented itself as the one true system of thought (3.19.42). Even the Aristotelianism of the peripatetic school could be shown to be in reality one with the thought of Plato fully understood and so philosophy in Augustine's day had, in his mind, attained a certain degree of completion arrived at through a long and arduous history (3.19.42, 5-10).

This history is externally one of the re-emergence of the true philosophy from the esoteric form it had taken during the centuries when Stoicism and its materialist categories had been the dominant school of thought. In my

comments on the second epistle I noted that the larger story of philosophy was distinctly echoed by the story of Augustine's own life as both moved from materialist thinking through Skepticism to a knowledge of intelligible being. This is apparent again here. Augustine's history of philosophy has the structure of a fall from unity with true being into a confusion of self and God with external categories back to a knowledge of true being through a Skepticism for which sensible externality cannot be the true or the good. Personal and intellectual history have the same basic order as the path of the soul to knowledge has its own intrinsic structure. Thus, there is here, as in the *Confessions* an original harmony, a fall and a recovery of the knowledge of that harmony from which the fall occurred. What is more, the final result of this process has taken up and integrated the standpoint of Hellenistic thought, which had originally lost hold of the Platonic ontology. Thus, there is a completeness to what is restored that was not present prior to the original fall.

Yet this story is not complete in itself. Having recounted how the wisdom of the Classical world had attained a kind of completion in Plotinus, Augustine turns to the incarnation of the Word in Christ. He says here that the

philosophy of the Platonists is not the philosophy of this world condemned by scripture but rather of the intelligible world (3.19.42, 10). In this, it must be distinguished from say, Stoicism. Still even the most subtle reasoning cannot fully recall us to this higher world, subject as we are to the shadows of error and bodily desires (3.19.42, 10). This can only occur by the compassion of the Divine intellect itself submitting to the humility of our bodily state and manifesting in its words and deeds the truth to which we must be recalled (3.19.42, 15).¹¹¹

Here Augustine affirms what he took as the central truth of the Christian religion, that the only power adequate to unite us eternally to the divine is the divine itself. The permanent salvation of the human person is an infinite act and so cannot proceed from the finite act of any creature. Thus, the mediation between the human and the divine must be the divine itself acting as human in time and space for only so are these infinitely distinct standpoints truly reconciled. Thus, the way to the permanent possession of wisdom must be what it is here said to be, the incarnation of the Word. Accordingly, the knowledge of God as the end attained in the long course of Classical thought points us to the Christian faith as its necessary completion

and the concluding comments of *Against the Academics* point clearly to this fact.

Thus, it can be seen that already at this early date Augustine had worked out the basic anagogic pattern of the soul's ascent and reunification with the divine that he was later to give such masterful formulation in the *Confessions*.

In a general way his whole argument recapitulates the movement in Neo-Platonism to complete the reduction of the sensible to finite subjectivity in Skepticism by reducing the subject to the objectivity of the Good. Augustine here has given formal expression to the validity of this move. But something else appears here as well which shows that in another way Augustine has taken more seriously than the Neo-Platonists the starting point of Hellenistic thought in the concerns of concrete historical individuality. *Against the Academics*, as we have seen, ends pointedly with a reference to the incarnation, the unity of sensible human nature with the divine (3.19.42, 15). Stoic pantheism and realism thought it had possessed this unity through the relation of sense perception to a divinised natural realm. The Skeptics were able to demonstrate that this was an illusion and the Neo-Platonists in turn that this demonstration rested on a prior intuition of the ideas. But Plotinian ascent, while

valid as far as it goes, does not offer the possibility of salvation for finite individuals as finite individuals and as such does not respond to the deepest concern animating Stoic and Skeptic alike, that is, how the individual can be free for himself in the world. Thus, Augustine sees the need for a further completion of the argument that comes full circle back to the sensible world in order to know concrete personality as one with the divine in Jesus Christ. This, however, he knows not by any Stoic pretence to an indefeasible grasp of sensible particulars but, initially, by the illumination of faith.¹¹²

This, then, is the sense in which *Against the Academics* can be taken as a Christian work rather than as a Platonic work with a Christian veneer.¹¹³ It takes what Augustine always regarded as the crucial step that distinguished Christianity from Platonism and shows itself conscious of what he regarded as the reasons for taking this step. Thus, it is in its essentials and not simply in its accidents the work of a Christian author who grasps the nature of the new principle he has recognised. If in his *Retractions* Augustine will find reasons to censure certain expressions in this work as still too Platonic sounding we need not be surprised. The author of *Against the Academics* is not yet

the master theologian of later years. Nonetheless, I think it has been adequately demonstrated that in terms of what the later Augustine would have held crucial to becoming a Christian (as opposed to being a master of Christian doctrine in its totality) the young Augustine can be taken as fully and unmistakably a Christian.

Part II Chapter VI- The Conclusion of *Against the
Academics*

Against the Academics ends with a short exchange that Augustine will later criticise as a needless exercise in levity (*Retractions* 1, 4). Indeed it does not add anything of major significance to the argument and can be treated with a few brief comments.

Augustine begins by saying that whatever wisdom is he does not yet possess it but does not despair of coming to it either. The results of the preceding discussion, he says, have liberated him from anxiety about completing the quest for wisdom he has undertaken (3.20.43, 10-15). Human beings are taught by the twin powers of authority and reason and Augustine states that from here on in he will rely upon Christ for the former and the Platonists for the latter (3.20.43, 15-20). He expresses his confidence that he will not find the two in conflict and notes that his most ardent desire is to understand what he believes (3.20.43, 15-20).

At this point Augustine ends his discourse and Alypius responds with an outburst of lavish praise. He renounces all desire to mount a rebuttal and intimates that the Academics themselves may well have hoped to be rebutted by their own descendents in such fine fashion (3.20.44, 30,

35). He expresses breathless admiration for Augustine's discourse and pronounces him the leader under whom all must now set off in pursuit of the secrets of truth (3.20.44, 40).

At this point Licentius and Trygetius appear to express some dissatisfaction at Alypius' decision to throw in the towel (3.20.45). Augustine says that if they wish to take up arms once again they would be well advised to return to the arguments of Cicero's *Academica* where they will find Augustine's trifling arguments thoroughly demolished. After this, they can compel Alypius to defend the discourse of Augustine against Cicero and the Academics (3.20.45, 50-55).

With general mirth at these speeches the discussion ends with Augustine expressing his general satisfaction at how well the discussion has gone however sound its conclusion might be. It is clear from the *Retractions* that this concluding section is to be taken as an ironic flourish whose purpose is to end a rather heavy discussion on a suitably light note. Even if Augustine had not said so this would be apparent from Alypius' comically extravagant praise of Augustine as well as from Augustine's obviously insincere bow to the authority of Cicero, whom the argument has left very far behind. Overall, it appears that this section is

tacked on out of a consideration for literary form and style and betrays something of the rhetorical spirit that Augustine later complains still hangs around his early writings. As such, it cannot, any more than the fable in the second epistle, pass the scrutiny of the aging Bishop of Hippo.

Part III- Augustine: Modern or Post-Modern?

This reading of *Against the Academics* has brought to the fore the power and depth of the Platonic intellectualism that permeates both the earliest and latest writings of the Augustinian corpus. Far from being the fideistic, obscurantist or anti-rationalist figure he has sometimes been portrayed as being, Augustine emerges from our consideration of him as a foundational figure for the culture of reason in the Latin west, even where that culture has distinguished reason from faith in ways opposed to Augustine's own relating of them. The path taken by modern thinkers, who sought to establish a self-certain subjectivity impervious to Skepticism, was clearly laid out by Augustine at the very origins of western culture. Indeed, he can be taken as the father of this approach to the foundations of knowledge insofar as he is perhaps the first thinker in antiquity to *directly and explicitly* critique the possibility of Skepticism in light of the mind's intuitive self-certainty.¹¹⁴ This is precisely where Augustine is placed by writers like Charles Taylor, Stephen Menn and Phillip Cary. These authors note the affinity between his concerns for subjective interiority and foundational epistemology and the later modern interest in

the same.¹¹⁵ Cary even goes so far as to attribute to Augustine a radical doctrine of the intelligibility of the divine substance (2000, 55-57). For all three of these writers, Augustine is a crucial link between modernity and antiquity. I think this view of Augustine is borne out by the results of this dissertation, at least to the extent that it demonstrates that the subjective turn in modern thought is not the simple revolution it is sometimes taken to be but is clearly anticipated by Hellenistic thought forms transformed and transmitted to the Latin west in great measure by Augustine.

However, this is not a mantle influential contemporary followers of Augustine are eager to grant him. In particular, John Milbank and his associates have claimed to find in Augustine an anti-foundationalism having more affinity with a post-modern critical spirit than the self-confident rationality of the modern era.¹¹⁶ As this interpretation of Augustine is being put forward by a vigorous and influential school of contemporary religious thought, I will conclude this dissertation by situating my own commentary in relation to it. This I will do by stating the basic criticisms of this new position that I think are entailed by the results of this dissertation. For the sake

of brevity, I will focus on the interpretation of Augustine put forward by John Milbank and show where I think it is mistaken on two critical points.

For Milbank's radical orthodoxy project Augustine is a crucial figure but crucial precisely for things rendered problematic by a close reading of his early works and a careful delineation of their relationship to later ones. Milbank looks to Augustine to restore a sense of the priority of theology to philosophy because he finds in him both a deconstruction of Hellenic metaphysics and a sense of religious *poiesis* and cosmic liturgy that counterbalances the nihilism of post-modernist thought (1997, 467; 1999, 485). Accordingly, he is eager to deny in him any sense of philosophical truth independent of theology and in particular any notion of a substantial rational soul that is directly the object of its own knowledge (1997, 465; 1999, 448). For Milbank, any such entity would lead to the Cartesian foundationalism whose collapse has led to post-modern nihilism. Accordingly, he is eager to strip Augustine of anything that would connect him with the self-certain subject of modern rationalism in terms of an autonomous philosophy or independent subjectivity.

In this Milbank contrasts sharply with Stephen Menn who holds Plotinus, Augustine and Descartes together in a single tradition of contemplative discipline and sees Augustinianism as foundational for modernity in a way that brings it close to the very Cartesianism decried by Milbank (Menn, 64-65). Milbank is explicitly critical also of the more moderate views of Taylor and denies any relation at all between Augustine and modern subjectivity. Nor does he accept the hitherto nearly universal view that Augustine was the profoundest ancient student of the inner self and a 'virtuoso of the interior sphere' (1997, 465). In this he contrasts with Cary, who holds the invention of 'interior space' to be Augustine's signal contribution to intellectual history (2000, 4-5).

So, is Augustine the father of modernity with its autonomous reason and subjective interiority or, as Milbank would have it, our crucial source for deconstructing the same? The first thing that must be said is that in *Against the Academics*, as in all Augustine's early writings, there is philosophical truth independent of the ecclesial community (how otherwise could Augustine have come to that community?) and in self-knowledge a point of contact with the intelligible and super-sensible that allows for

certainty with respect to the existence of God and an imperfect though real knowledge of his nature. Augustine clearly attributes these insights to the Platonic philosophers whose categories he employs in depth and with whom his whole work is in profound critical dialogue. Nor is any of this ever directly repudiated in any later work even when Augustine has occasion to speak harshly of the Platonists. To the end they remain basic tenets of Augustine's thought. This is clearly established by a close reading of *Against the Academics* and a consideration of its relation to subsequent works that deepen its argument but do not in any way abandon it. Consequently, it seems to me very difficult to square the 'radically orthodox' Augustine with a balanced and holistic reading of the texts.

This can particularly be seen with respect to the claim made by Milbank that Augustine subverts rather than critically appropriates the tradition of Platonic interiority. This claim is pushed forward primarily on the basis of a characterization of the Hellenic tradition according to which 'interiority' equals a 'hermetically sealed' inner space, terms with which Milbank also characterizes the Cartesian subjectivity of the modern era. Milbank claims that, in contrast to the subject as

conceived by Greek philosophy and by modern rationalism, the Augustinian self is constituted by its intentionality to God and neighbour and so is, in its inner depths, radically exteriorised in a way that subverts the distinction of inner and outer, self and other (1997, 465). This radical intentionality of the self toward divine and natural otherness is taken by Milbank to undermine philosophy as autonomous secular reason and absorb it into theology which in turn ceases to be speculative and becomes a form of *poiesis* (1991, 225-26). Thus, Milbank can characterize Augustine over against Descartes (and Neo-Platonism?) by claiming that for Augustine "...the soul is knowledge because it is knowledge of something (likewise memory and love of something). Hence we should take its relationality-intentional knowledge-as its essence" (1997, 472). Milbank adds that this "ecstatic intentionality" precludes "any scepticism concerning the existence of the external world" (1997, 472).

Indeed, Milbank holds that for Augustine, the self is finally lost in 'cosmic liturgy'. As he puts it "Augustine also places the soul within the Cosmos and in the *Confessions* finally realizes his own self-hood through losing it in cosmic liturgy. Nor is the Augustinian *cogito*

Cartesian, for in Augustine our certainty of our own being, life and understanding is a certainty of intentional opening to these things, which are taken as innately transcendental realities, exceeding their instantiation in us. Thus no *res cogitans*, enclosed upon itself, is here reflexively established" (1999, 485).

One can see the appeal of Augustine for Milbank as for him there is no human self and in particular no human knowing apart from God. In this however, Augustine contrasts neither with Plotinus nor, for all Milbank's protestation, with Descartes. The soul in Plotinus is constitutionally self-transcendent in a higher principle (*nous*) and fundamentally ecstatic in a way Milbank seems to regard as uniquely Augustinian. In Descartes too, the mind contains the notion of an infinite perfection (whose only possible source is God) prior to its knowledge of itself and indeed knows its own finitude in relation to this idea (*Meditations* III). It is not, for him, 'hermetic' or 'self-enclosed' any more than it is for Augustine. Nor is it true, as I have already taken pains to show, that Augustine, unlike Descartes, finds no place for Skepticism about the external world despite Milbank's flat assertion to the contrary.

Milbank fails to pay attention to the significance of the rational soul's self appropriation in Augustine's *anagogy* and so misses the true basis of his interest in epistemology and his concern with Skepticism. Although the soul for Augustine is indeed structured by its intentionality towards the other it is so structured through a primary intentionality towards itself. It is through its capacity for self-reversion that it can possess otherness in knowledge and love, for without self-presence there can be no presence as such. It is this that allows us to speak of the soul as a self-knowing substance without a false reification. This is quite evident from the *cogito* passages in *City of God* XI where the soul's constitutive knowledge of its own being, knowing and loving is implicated in its 'intentional opening' to being, knowing and loving in their transcendent objectivity, which opening embraces the potential knowing and loving of every other being. The relation of the mind to any other content is mediated by the transcendental structure of self-knowing and self-loving by which mind is mind. Augustine himself directly affirms this in *On the Trinity* IX, 5, 6 when he says "...if the love by which the mind loves itself ceases to be, then the mind itself will at the same time cease to love. Likewise, if the

knowledge by which the mind knows itself ceases to be, then the mind will at the same time cease to know."

In this a-temporal self-reversion the soul is clearly marked off from the externality of sensible extension. Indeed, it is just this unchanging structure of the soul that allows it to experience temporality as temporality.¹¹⁷ The soul cannot be absorbed into time and flux in the way post-modern Augustinians assert. It is not true, as Milbank claims (1997, 446), that nothing in the soul transcends the mutable and temporal for the soul is constituted in the transcendental structure mentioned above by its participation in a changeless divine reason. It is on this ground that time and again Augustine rejects Skepticism as untenable.

But if the Augustinian soul cannot be dissolved into the spatio-temporal extension below it neither is it simply absorbed into God. Beatitude for Augustine is a unification of self-knowledge through knowledge of God. The human is not lost in the divine but unified with itself through unification with God. Human and divine are not identified but united in their difference. Indeed the unification, and its consequent beatitude, pre-suppose this difference as maintained else it is not *I* who know God as *I* am known.

Salvation for Augustine, as we have seen throughout this dissertation, must include salvation of the individual person as a spiritual and physical whole. The self is fully grounded and unified, not subverted, by its turning to God.

Thus, the soul is neither to be confused with matter and the phantasms derived from it nor identified, in Stoic-Manichean fashion, with God. This makes speaking of it as a being or substance in its own right inescapable and Augustine makes crucial use of the notion that soul is a substantial act of self-knowledge in proving its distinction from material things (*On the Trinity* X, 3, 15). The whole trajectory of Augustinian spirituality, inward from what is external and sensible and upward to God gives an essential place to the immateriality and immortality of the soul. Knowing ourselves as finite thinking substance, as incorporeal yet mutable mind, is a crucial step on the way to knowing God as incorporeal and eternal mind. Correct self-knowledge is the hinge on which this entire process turns and remains a crucial component of Augustine's most advanced theological speculation after his conversion. This is witnessed by the fact that the tenth book of *On the Trinity* is a virtual treatise on the command of the Delphic Oracle.

Thus, the Augustinian ascent to truth is correctly characterized by Menn in the following terms, which gave equal weight to the soul's conceiving of itself and its understanding of its relation to God:

His method is Plotinus' method: first the soul withdraws from the contemplation of bodies and enters into itself, so that it can perceive itself in the proper manner, from within, as a rational soul; then it ascends to contemplate God as the perfect standard of the truth of its thoughts, and the source of its intellectual light- that is to say, as *nous*...Once the soul has been enabled to conceive incorporeal things, and to understand its own nature and that of *nous*, it will see how it is the product and image of *nous* without being of the same nature as *nous*." (1998, 141)

Moreover, the distinction between soul's direct intuition of itself, which links it to the intelligible world, and its mediated knowledge of external things; the fact that it has a kind of knowledge of itself that it cannot according to its very nature have of sensible things, makes the question of Skepticism and its overcoming inevitable. Without this gap, in which the possibility of Skepticism about the external world necessarily exists, the soul could not possess itself as soul or understand the

nature of God as intelligible and incorruptible. We could never come to the distinction of intellectual knowledge from sensation or of God from matter if soul's quest for certainty did not drive it to the formulation of these distinctions.

Epistemology, then, is not ultimately separate from ontology or morality. We learn the order of what is inseparably from the order of intelligibility. We learn what is unconditionally from our quest for what is unconditionally intelligible and absolutely lovable. In this way, Skepticism about the external world is as necessary a moment as the purgation of our affection for it. Both cure us of idolatry by reminding us that only God is per se knowable and per se lovable and that all things are known and loved properly in relation to him. Milbank may decry all of the above as a false hellenization of Christianity that must be deconstructed to get beyond the dead-end of modernity but he has no grounds for claiming Augustine as his ally in this.

This is not to say that there is in Augustine an autonomous secular reason such as developed in the modern age. Even though philosophy can come to real conclusions prior to theology philosophy and theology do not constitute

two independent realms of inquiry. All truth is one for intelligence and Augustine would never divorce philosophical reflection from theology. Theological reflection for Augustine is an extension and deepening of philosophical reflection under the tutelage of revealed knowledge. Both are exercises in the intellectual comprehension of the same object and end with the latter attaining systematic completeness only through its being absorbed in the former. In turn, the revelation on which theology reflects has its completeness for rational natures only in the self-conscious form of a conceptual mediation in which the content of faith is *thought*. Both together form the human participation in the totality of God's wisdom. Augustine formulates this double form of God's self-manifestation as a contrast between the incarnate Christ who reveals God in history and the Divine Word who illuminates the inwardness of the soul. This allows him to see philosophy itself as grounded in a revelation or theophany at the primary depths of conscious existence that sustains the possibility of historical revelation from the human side.

Thus, there is no need for Augustine to defend the priority of revelation and the absoluteness of God by denying rational certainty prior to theology and erasing the

distinction between self and not-self. This is why he does neither of these things and, in point of fact, explicitly connects certainty with self-knowledge in contradistinction to both Skepticism and direct realism. This he does without absolutizing the conscious ego or reducing God's revelation to the categories of finite reason.

This means that we do not have to choose between a modernist and post-modernist Augustine. We can admit the evident and say that the founders of modern philosophy were taking up something that was actually in Augustine without having to attribute to him a 'separate philosophy' that pre-empts and limits the self-revealing love of God. We do not need to resort to the arbitrary selectivity displayed by Milbank and excise everything in Augustine that anticipates Descartes to find in him an antidote to meta-narratives that make an idol of finite reason. In Augustine can be found both the legitimate modern concern with the self and the demand that truth be truth for the inwardness of the free subject and a proper sense of dangers involved a false reification of the other.

Notes

Part I: Chapter I

¹ This is not to say that all acts of introspection are per se infallible but rather to say that indubitable perception is implicated in all acts of introspection, even where we are formally in error. Some perception of truth is presupposed in the very possibility of error and self-deceit because there are some true perceptions that are constitutive of our mental life as such and a being that does not think and live cannot err or be deceived. This side of Augustine will be taken up in Modernity by Descartes in his second and third *Meditations* and by Malebranche in his major work *The Search After Truth* (see especially Elucidation 10). Nonetheless, it remains true that, as W.J. Hankey points out, "Augustine also discovered the contradictions and self-deceptions of mental introspection" (1999, 564). While Augustine defends certainty against Skepticism he is just as adamant in defining the limits of that certainty. This Skeptical side of Augustine remains even in his overcoming of Skepticism and is taken up by such figures as the Augustinian Skeptic Pascal (*Pensees*, XIV, 230).

² It should be noted that this presence of thought to itself is at the same time recollected. Mind is not at all times making present to itself its self-presence in a true mental word and can often, owing to its focus on particular objects of attention, have difficulty doing so. Nonetheless, self-knowledge is given in object knowledge as its condition and is always present as a possible object of recollection. Nor is it perfectly translucent to itself, at least in Augustine's view. This is the point of Augustine's *si enim fallor sum* formulation. The self is present to itself as in perplexity and doubt but must be present to itself in some degree to be perplexed or dubious. One might say that what is mysterious is not the unknown but the known and not known so that if we are inescapably mysteries to ourselves it is just because of the intimate presence of what baffles us. In the final analysis, this is because we are truly in the image of God yet are only an image. We possess some measure of truth, indeed we cannot be wholly apart from truth, yet we are not Truth in itself.

³ This point is crucial in Augustine's argument that mind is an incorporeal substance. In *On the Trinity* X, 3, 10 he argues that the mind possesses a knowledge of itself as a thinking substance because it is only as thinking that the self-present mind is present to itself. As the mind has no direct knowledge of itself as having a material determination, yet knows itself directly and not mediately through a representation, it cannot be a physical substance. In earlier works, Augustine argues for the immateriality of the soul based on its having properties incompatible with extension, such as the simple knowledge of the principles of an art or the cognition of non-spatial entities such as the point or line (*The Immortality of the Soul* 3, 3, *The Magnitude of the Soul* 13, 22). Both these forms of argument reappear in modern Rationalism (Descartes, *Meditations* II; Malebranche, *Entretiens sur la Metaphysique* I, I; Leibniz, *Monadology*, 17).

⁴ Augustine would hold with Plotinus that intellection, as prior to judgment, is infallible. As Plotinus says "The intellectual principle either apprehends its object or does not: error is impossible" (*Ennead* I, 1, 9). Insofar as the human soul shares in an intellectual nature, it too knows necessarily. Plotinus' relation to Skepticism is discussed by Sara Rappe in her article "Self-Knowledge and Subjectivity in the *Enneads*" (1996, 250-274). Rappe finds that "Plotinus anticipates Descartes in arguing both that the soul as subject of perception cannot be an extended substance, as well as in arguing that the mind necessarily knows itself." (1996, 250). As we shall see, these claims are equally crucial to Augustine. In contradistinction to the Cartesian tradition however, Rappe finds that for Plotinus the realization of self-present *nous* in the human knower is experiential rather than discursive. This means that Plotinus is less ready to employ it as an epistemic criterion for our ordinary judgements (1996, 257-58). Augustine, for whom the structure of human subjectivity is more tightly unified, is much more ready to use the moment of *intellectus* within *ratio* as a direct criterion of truth and is correspondingly more direct and explicit in his critique of Skepticism.

⁵ This point was well brought out by the nineteenth century Augustinian Antonio Rosmini. Commenting on *Confessions* VII,

16 he writes the following, "St. Augustine began from 'I exist', not as the first truth but as a truth accepted as self-evident by the Academicians whom he was refuting. When he spoke of the first truth, his mind had already abandoned the *subject* and attained the *object*, that is, to the very essence of truth, stripped of time, place, restrictions and limits. He saw its light as more certain and unshakeable than his own existence, and wrote these memorable words: *faciliusque dubitatem vivere me, quam non esse veritatem quae facta sunt intellecta conspicitur*" (2001, 333). Thus, the foundation of knowledge, the first truth, is not the subject's knowledge of its own existence but the light of truth itself in which all true judgments are made. On the other hand, it is in necessary judgments, such as the judgment that we exist, that this light reveals itself to us. Thus, while it is through self-knowledge that the criterion of certainty is known, self-knowledge is not itself that criterion. Rather, the knowledge that we exist is our first intellectual perception in the order of reflection, even as our perception of the light of truth is first in the order of causality and thus first absolutely.

⁶ Augustine held with the Platonic tradition that the light of the Ideas mediated to us the Divine ground of all finite being and knowing. Augustine also saw Orthodox Christianity's identification of the Word, the primal thought in which the Ideas were held as a unity, with God, as the logical ground of this mediation. Thus, that which discloses the principle to us is the presence to us of that principle in its own act of self-disclosure. We speak the being of God in God's speaking himself to us. Insofar as this occurs in the timeless necessity of thought, Augustine speaks of Christ the inner teacher. Insofar as this occurs in the contingency of time and space, he speaks of the incarnation of the Word. Augustine's clearest account of the ideas of God as mediating both logically and ontologically between creature and creator may be found in *83 Different Questions* no.46.

⁷ Some have questioned the consistency of this 'Platonic' side of Augustine with the more 'existentialist' side expressed in the later books of the *Confessions*. Thus, James K.A. Smith in his article "Interiority and the Strategy of "Confession"" makes the following evaluation "I say a "certain" Augustinian ego, since we have been bequeathed at

least two: the Pascalian existential ego" and the Cartesian substantial ego" The latter is a product of an uncritical development of Augustine's persistent Platonism, a development failing to realize that other (Christian) moments in his thought undermine these Platonic traces. Thus, one can certainly find Augustine privileging a soul which would be present to itself; but this would also be the soul which scholarship has linked to heritage of the Greek "World Soul"- a fundamentally un-Christian notion" (2000, 140). That the 'Pascalian' and 'Cartesian' sides of Augustine are in fact equally necessary moments in his total position and that the arguments of works like the *Against the Academics* are helpful in understanding that position will be argued throughout the present dissertation. Here, I should point out that for Augustine this dichotomy between a soul rationally and substantially certain of itself and a self attuned to the paradoxes and limitations of finite knowledge is a false one. This is because, as noted previously, doubt and even error have in them a moment of certainty by which their very possibility is constituted (*On The Trinity*, X 3,14).

⁸ Peter Brown says of the *Cassiciacum* dialogues that "Dialogues which betray amateur philosophers at work can be most painful reading" (1967, 120). Readers may judge this statement for themselves after reading the following commentary.

⁹ A contemporary treatment of the problem of Skepticism that has striking affinities with Augustine's can be found in Thomas Nagel's *The Last Word* (1997). Nagel's arguments are all the more interesting in that he shows no awareness of Augustine's place in the tradition of rationality he defends.

Part I: Chapter II

¹⁰ An exhaustive account of the Skeptical movement cannot be given here. Indeed, no unproblematic account of it could be given for its history must be reconstructed from secondary sources that are sometimes vague and fragmentary. Our most important primary text, the *Outlines of Pyrrhonnism* by Sextus Empiricus, comes from the revived Skepticism of later

antiquity and the picture that emerges from the accounts of earlier thinkers is not always consistent and clear. That being said, it is possible to give an account the basic tenets of Skepticism as a way of life and the considerations taken to justify it adequate to an understanding of *Against the Academics* and that is what I have attempted here. Augustine himself knew the Skeptical tradition largely from Cicero's account of it in the *Academica* and the *Hortensius* though other sources may have played a role (O'Daly 2001, 159).

¹¹ For a general account of Hellenistic thought see A.H Armstrong, *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy* (1981) and A.A.Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy* (1974). See also E. Zeller, *Stoics Epicureans and Skeptics* (1962) and G.Reale, *The Systems of the Hellenistic Age* (1985). Citations from Cicero and Sextus Empiricus in the following chapter are from *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings* trans. Inwood and Gerson (1988). Sympathetic accounts of Ancient Skepticism are given by L. Groarke, *Greek Skepticism* (1990) and R.J. Hankinson, *The Skeptics*, 1995).

¹² The most extreme expression of this immanentist spirit is, indubitably, to be found in the Stoic claim that the sage could be happy even in the bull of Phaleris (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 5, 75, 8). Paradoxically though, they also counselled suicide in cases of extremity (Long, 1974, p.206). *City of God IX* presents Augustine's own view of the possibility of earthly happiness and forms an instructive contrast to the attitude mentioned above.

¹³ It should be remembered that, as materialists, the Stoics tended to take this formula literally; the object perceived left a physical impression on the soul that matched its own physical shape. Zeno described this in terms of eminence and depression while Chrysippus spoke more vaguely of 'qualitative alteration'. In doing this, he seemed to be responding to the criticism that Zeno's theory could not account for the simultaneous presentation of distinct shapes to the mind, as when a geometer thought at one and the same time of a circle and a square (Reale, 1985 221-222).

¹⁴ The Stoics held that a sense impression was veridical if it possessed a character such as it could not have if it

came from an object other than the one from which it did come. This they termed a 'cognitive impression'. As to how one knew an impression to be cognitive the Stoics were vague. Zeno appears to have held that an impression was cognitive if it was so clear and forceful as to compel immediate assent. To this, the Skeptics could easily reply that many dreams and hallucinations would, on this account, have to be counted as veridical. Later Stoics attempted to fend off criticism by arguing that the cataleptic impression itself was not sufficient to compel assent apart from circumstances favourable to its reception. Thus, the evaluation of particular impressions came to depend more on an analysis of the context in which the impression occurred. Even in antiquity the striking convergence between this view and the 'probabilism' of Carneades was remarked upon. Galen is even said to have remarked that in epistemology the doctrines of the Stoics and Skeptics were identical. For a useful account of this argument see A.A Long (1974, Chap.3).

¹⁵ It is important to note the distinction between Skepticism and relativism. The Skeptics claimed that there was an unbridgeable gulf between things as they appear to us and things in themselves. The suspension of judgement makes sense only on the presupposition that there is in fact an objective world which may differ from our perception of it. A perspectivalist who holds that there is no thing in itself apart from the appearance of that thing for a subject has no problem with assent to perceptions since, for him, what is, is identical to what appears. Being and appearance are one and error impossible. In antiquity this position was represented by Sophists such as Protagoras and Gorgias. The Skeptics, then, held that subject and object were distinct and that there could be no mediated relationship between them.

¹⁶ The Skeptics did not confine their critique to sense knowledge and the claims based upon it. They claimed as well that logical truths were susceptible to the same arguments advanced against perception. Thus, for any inference claimed to be valid, they thought they could produce a fallacious one identical in form. As well, they made use of the notorious liar's paradox to undermine such general logical definitions as the assertion that a proposition was a statement either true or false (Cicero *Academica*, 2.95-98). In the field of ethics too, the Skeptics thought that all accounts of the good life could be

shown to be equally plausible and equally implausible. This was the point of Carneades' famous demonstration in Rome, in the course of which he argued with great force in favour of justice and then, with equal force, in favour of injustice (Long 1974, 94).

¹⁷ The contemporary reader should note the distinction between Academic Skepticism and contemporary Skeptical doctrines that attempt to undermine reason by reducing it to some external other such as linguistic practice, the unconscious, socio-economic conditions etc. For the Skeptic, thought reflecting on itself is the immediate measure of all things, including its own capacity to measure and judge what is other than itself. Thought is simply and only thought and not reducible to any more primary dimension. The problem then, is how reason, which is thus present to itself, can have a mediated knowledge of what is other than itself. For the ancient Skeptics it could not justify to itself, on its own terms, the claim that it could do this. If the Skeptics are right about this, then their doctrine is every bit as destructive of the various forms of reductionism as it is of other philosophical positions. Indeed, from their standpoint, reductionism would be the purest form of dogmatism in that it completely identifies thought with an assumed otherness as if this other were not already an object for thought.

¹⁸ It should be noted that Sextus speaks of the Skeptics' *apatheia* as the fortuitous outcome of their position. This is to avoid any suggestion that they had a preconceived notion of the good life. Having suspended all judgement, they simply found this a satisfying way to live (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I 7,13). Moreover, Sextus criticises the Academics for failing to make this distinction. In his view they erred in speaking of *apatheia* as a good in itself and thus as an object of rational choice. Nonetheless, it might also be said that the discovery of Skeptical *apatheia* follows precisely from seeking and failing to find it in its Stoical form so that the good sought deliberately becomes fortuitously found and is then experienced as satisfying.

¹⁹ In spite of their reverence for Socrates himself the Skeptics distinguished the state of *epoche* from Socratic ignorance. The latter, they rightly saw, was a form of self-knowledge. Socrates knew that he knew nothing for he knew

himself as seeking an object, the Good, which transcended the finitude through which he sought it. This elusiveness of the transcendent principle of discourse is what is uncovered by his own negative dialectic. Arcesilaus, on the other hand, claimed that he did not even know that he knew nothing (Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1, 232). By this he meant to point out that he did not know, in any positive sense, his relationship to truth as being one of ignorance. Rather, he concluded from the fact of universal ignorance that his own particular state was unknowable to himself and that even the self-knowledge of Socrates was closed to him.

²⁰ In antiquity, numerous stories circulated about the supposed indifference of the Skeptics to even the basic necessities of life. Pyrrho, for instance, is said to have won the praise of one of his companions for not stopping to rescue him from a ditch. He himself was said to have been kept alive by the constant attention of others, who prevented him from being run over by wagons or from walking off cliffs. It is hard to say what kernel of truth might lie in these stories, though Diogenes Laertius, who reports them, seems to take them with a grain of salt (Hankinson 1995, 111).

²¹ Carneades is reported to have said that he suspended judgement concerning all matters discussed by philosophers and was indifferent to the rest (*Against the Academics* 3.10.22). This would seem to indicate that for him it mattered little that a certain degree of plausibility was possible in practical matters that could not be attained by theoretical reason. Only in the employment of the latter was the ethical good to be found, the freedom and self-possession of the happy man. Thus, the utility of plausible presentations would appear to lie in the fact that the wise man can use them to secure the goods necessary to pursue a life of theoretical freedom. Skepticism, after all, is a kind of witness to the love of truth. For the Skeptic, error is an alienation from our true selves and this is why it must be avoided even at the cost suspending all judgement. In this it is recognized that our true freedom and dignity lie in the ordering of our thought to the truth of things, even if this is expressed only negatively.

²² The predominance of the dialectical element over ethical has by some been used to differentiate Academic Skepticism

from Pyrrhonism. Augustine himself understood Academic Skepticism as ethically motivated and among modern commentators Groarke is of the same view (1990, 107). It need not be denied however that, in the sources that we possess, the ethical concern is more prominent among the Pyrrhonians. The reason for this is not far to seek. For the followers of Pyrrho, the Academics lapsed into dogmatism insofar as their *epoche* was based on a positive claim about the impossibility of knowledge. They saw no way to acquit the Academics of the charge of performative self-contradiction so often urged against Skepticism. Thus, they themselves made no claim about the knowability or unknowability of things but simply reported their own suspensive state of mind and their satisfaction with it. This ethical state is the ultimate aim of their Skepticism. Even the arguments, or more properly tropes, by which they attacked the dogmatists were taken simply as therapeutic and, their subjective purpose being fulfilled, were kicked away like a ladder. In this way, they attempted to avoid the contradiction inherent in a Skepticism that is at the same time a wisdom, that is, a rational account of the human condition.

²³ Augustine held the notion that the Academics concealed a pure Platonism from the threat of Stoic vulgarisation by means of their polemic against dogmatism (*Against the Academics*, 3.17.38). Modern scholars are almost unanimous in dismissing the possibility (Armstrong, 1981, xv.). Be that as it may, it serves Augustine well enough as a convenient fiction if all it means is that, as D.K House argues, it is theoretically sound that one can come to Platonism from a refuted Skepticism (1982, 1261). Perhaps it is not so unlikely that in the end Augustine regarded it as no more than this. However, the argument of this thesis does not hinge on determining how literally Augustine took this idea. For our purposes, it is not necessary to go any further than to say that Skepticism witnesses negatively to what the Platonists show positively and that this fact finds poetic expression in the notion of a secret doctrine

²⁴ Augustine gives three accounts of this ascent in the *Confessions*, all involving a reversion from body to soul to God (*Confessions* VII, 23; IX, 24; X, 9-36). Other accounts may be found in Book II of *On the Free Choice of the Will* and *On the Magnitude of the Soul* 71-81. The section of *On*

the *Trinity* stretching from the tenth to the fifteenth book may be read as a vast account of such an ascent.

²⁵ Augustine himself recounts in *Confessions* VII, 1-6 how he freed himself from materialist notions of Divinity (reminiscent of Stoicism) by considering how the Good was, in its logical character, simple and incorruptible. This meant that the Good could not be identified with anything material. As the presupposition of all his activities he could not coherently deny its super-eminent reality and this forced him to recognize the Ideal as the primary reality underlying the secondary reality of material things.

²⁶ Augustine gives masterful expression to this overall argument in his *Epistle to Dioscorus*. Here he is adverting to the general problem the Platonists had in addressing the common run of mankind who could not conceive of a reality prior to the objects of the senses. The turn to the supersensible, he says, could occur in this circumstance only in the negative form of Skepticism from which the mind must then turn to the certainty and self-evidence of the intelligible, of which the first example the soul's direct perception of itself. This epistle is worth quoting at some length for the light it sheds the argument of this dissertation. Augustine begins " When, therefore, the Epicureans said that the senses are never deceived, and, though the Stoics admitted that they are sometimes mistaken, both placed in the senses the standard by which truth is to be comprehended, who would listen to the Platonists when both of these sects opposed them? Who would look upon them as entitled to be esteemed men at all, and much less wise men, if, without hesitation or qualification, they affirmed not only that there is something which cannot be discerned by touch, or smell, or taste and which cannot be conceived of by any image borrowed from the things with which the senses acquaint us, but that this alone truly exists, and is alone capable of being perceived, because it is alone unchangeable and eternal, but is perceived only by reason, the faculty whereby alone truth, insofar as it can be discovered by us, is found?

Seeing, therefore, that the Platonists held opinions which they could not impart to men enthralled by the flesh; seeing also that they were not of such authority among the common people as to persuade them to accept what they ought

to believe, until the mind should be trained to that condition in which these things can be understood, they chose to hide their own opinions, and to content themselves with arguing against those who, although they affirmed that the discovery of truth is made through the senses of the body, boasted that they had found the truth...But this one fact merits our attention, that whereas Plato is in many respects most clearly proved by Cicero to have placed both the supreme good and the causes of things, and the certainty of the processes of reason, in Wisdom, not human, but divine, whence in some way the light of human wisdom is derived, in Wisdom which is wholly immutable, and in truth always consistent with itself... " (*Epistle CXVIII*, 19,20).

In this text we can see quite clearly the movement I have been describing from Stoicism through Skepticism to Platonism and from the externality of the senses to the inwardness of the mind to the light of truth above the mind, here explicitly identified as the criterion of certainty. As well, we can see clearly the necessity of Skepticism in overcoming the Stoic and Epicurean identification of truth and being with the bodily.

²⁷ To say that Augustine is an unsystematic writer is not to say that he is in any sense loose or eclectic. Indeed, if my portrayal of him in this chapter is correct Augustine is a systematic writer in the sense that he writes from an ordered comprehension of the whole. It is still the case though, that he does not give in any one work a systematic exposition of the totality of this knowledge. There is no Augustinian *Summa*. Thus, it is most accurate to say that while Augustine does not write systematically, he nonetheless writes from a systematic knowledge. The open character of this system, which while ordered is by no means hermetic or self complete, is nicely captured by Gilson, who notes that in Augustinian thought "...lacunae become so many fields left open to the free play of our inner development, and we come to understand at last that it is our task and ours alone to fill them" (1960 p.245).

²⁸ I do not believe there is anything in my account that the Augustine of Cassiciacum would have repudiated even though I am drawing at times upon his more mature reflections. In this I follow Augustine himself who, in his *Retractions*, interprets the course of his career as involving a deepening of his explanations and a sharpening of his vocabulary and expression but no basic change in substance. There seems to

me no hermeneutic irresponsibility in reading the early Augustine in light of the later where the *Retractions* do not note a direct change. This is all the more so in that the developed structures of Augustine's mature thought are already present in an incipient way in his earliest works, as will be argued at a number of points in this thesis. With this basic continuity established, it becomes a matter of detail to say when and in what way Augustine came to full consciousness of this or that element contained in the potentiality of his whole thought. In this judgement I concur with Gilson, who says " There was a psychological evolution in St. Augustine; there were many variations of detail and a great number of these we have pointed out, but we have never discovered the slightest philosophical change in any of his essential theses. St. Augustine fixed his main ideas from the time of his conversion-even, we believe, regarding grace- and he always drew on the capital he acquired" (1960, 364).

²⁹ The heart of Augustine's account of the doctrine of the Trinity and its significance for Christian belief lies in his claim that the scriptural doctrine of the *Imago Dei* is the ground of the possibility of understanding our potential for beatitude. If the knowledge and love of God represents for us the perfect integration of attention and will and thus the full actuality of our being this is because God in himself is the exemplar of integrated personhood; in his triune self-relation he is absolute being, total knowledge, perfect love and as such can communicate a measure of his perfection to those who participate in his knowledge and love of himself (*Confessions*, XIII, 12). In his later accounts of the divine triad Augustine identifies the being of the father with memory thus more radically identifying ontology with the structure of subjectivity (*On the Trinity*, XIV, Chaps. 3-4). As well, he expresses more exactly the co-inherence of each divine person in the other two so that the Son is the wisdom of the Father *expressed* and the Spirit the love of the Father and Son *mutually given* (*On the Trinity* XV 2,12). This achieves a deeper expression of the unity of God by subordinating the attributes of Being, Knowledge and Love to the relations Begetter, Begotten and Mutually Given so that each divine person contains each attribute in its own proper mode. Thus, the divine unity is reconciled with the divine trinity is by way of a triplification whose full expression is enneadic (see Booth 1979, 110). Nonetheless,

it remains proper to speak of a trinity rather than an ennead for the Memory, Knowledge and Love triad subsists in and through three fundamental relations. It even remains proper to relate distinct terms of the triad to distinct persons insofar as the wisdom of the Father *is* in its expression in the Son and the charity of each *is* in the giving of it (*On the Trinity* XV 5,29)

³⁰ Meagher says: "Self-knowledge appears to be twofold: knowledge of who one is and knowledge of what one is: we may note that Augustine addresses the question "Who am I" to himself and the question "What am I" to God." This distinction Meagher makes between a self that struggles in time to know itself and a self that is eternally known in God, between human *person* and human *nature*, is a very fruitful one for understanding Augustine. To grasp it is to grasp the crucial but difficult sense in which the soul shares at once in both temporality and timelessness.

³¹ There are grounds for thinking the Platonist tradition itself admitted failure on this score. One need simply note the increasing prevalence in Neo-Platonism of extra-philosophical means of purifying the soul such as theurgy, magic, and the worship of demons that so shocked Augustine. The obvious implication of all of this is that the pursuit of Wisdom alone is inadequate to liberate us from the bonds of the mortal body. Augustine's views on this trend and the problematic that animated it are given masterful expression in Book X of the *City of God*. In late Platonism, it becomes fully explicit in the teaching of Iamblichus, who held that the soul is fully fallen in matter and that only theurgical rites can raise it from its mortal condition. Moreover, he seems to have held that the efficacy of these rites depended on the grace of higher Gods. For Augustine, what is still lacking here is the recognition of the possibility and the necessity of this grace taking the total form of the incarnation that we might be saved in our concrete personhood, body and soul. For an account of Iamblichian theurgy the reader may consult J.F. Finamore "Plotinus and Iamblichus on Magic and Theurgy" *Dionysius*, 1999.

³² It is a difficult question in Augustine in what way we know these first principles of judgement, the ideas of goodness, unity, beauty, truth, and being. One might say that we do not know them by a direct intuition for they are

not in our awareness apart from the experiences that bring them to light. But does this mean that we have no grasp of their content and that they impinge on us only indirectly in our use of them in judgement? Gilson defends this interpretation (1960, 91) but it hardly seems an adequate answer. The use of the standard in judgement must imply some intuition of it independent of the act of judgement or we would not know that the object before us stands under the universal in question. For this reason, we must indeed possess an intuitive knowledge of them in spite of the fact that we are not directly conscious of them prior to experience. Perhaps what ought to be said is that even though the Ideas elude description or conceptualization we possess them in the sort of unknowing knowing with which we possess other forms of implicit knowledge. This, ultimately, is the paradox of memory, in which is stored knowledge of which we do not possess full consciousness but which shows itself to us as we have occasion to call it to mind. We have memory of these principles even as we have it of ourselves but we can no more master them fully than we can recall ourselves perfectly. They belong to the abyss of memory whose depths we cannot plumb for they are the image of God's infinity in us. Only in exceptional moments of vision can we turn from good and beautiful things to recall the Good or Beautiful itself and even then it is only to know them as infinite ideas beyond our capacity to exhaust or discursively comprehend.

³³ As an example one need only look at the remarkable passage to be found at *Confessions* XI, 6: " See, heaven and earth exist, they cry aloud that they are made, for they suffer change and variation. But in anything which is not made and yet is, there is nothing which was previously not present. To be what once was not the case is to be subject to change and variation. They also cry aloud that they are not made themselves: "The manner of our existence shows that we are made. For before we came to be, we did not exist to be able to make ourselves" And the voice which with they speak is self-evidence." Here Augustine clearly recognizes a spiritual contemplation that can move from sensible things to God. He does not, however, articulate this movement as a formal proof in the manner of St. Thomas. Is there any reason in principle why he does not? Things that are made bespeak the fact that they are made and so bespeak their maker and this is as true of a piece of dirt as it is of the

human soul. However, that Augustine leaves this movement from external nature to God to the pious meditation of the Christian who knows God already by the illumination of truth and by the incarnation is indicative of the fact that this movement in fact possesses already the knowledge of the divine that it seeks. It is really because of our inward illumination by the ideas that we are able to see in nature its divine source. Accordingly, it is with what is inward to the soul that our ascent to knowledge of the divine more properly begins.

³⁴ Charles Boyer points out that the core of any demonstration of God's existence from created things can be expressed as follows, "*Des lors, rien dans le monde, si beau soit-il, n'est la Beaute; rien, si bon soit-il, n'est la Bien; rien n'y est L'Etre. Tout y est donc cree*" (1941, 129-30). For Augustine, the argument from the presence of immutable truth to the mind is simply an argument that no finite intellect is truth itself, even as no living thing is life itself and no existent thing is existence itself. Any of these points of departure is adequate to the task of revealing the divine being. That Augustine prefers the first above the others is driven in part by theological concerns. Operating under the aegis of the scriptural doctrine of the Imago Dei, he would have seen in mind's awareness of itself the highest point from within creation to contemplate God in his triune personhood. As the principle is being, knowledge, and life, consciousness, which involves all three, is the mirror in which it can most adequately be seen. Moreover, the movement from participant to participated involved in the movement from nature to God is valid precisely because of our inward awareness that nature is measured by and comprehended in absolute ideas that transcend it. Accordingly, its certainty depends upon the prior certainty of our knowledge of these ideas and it is these latter which form the ultimate basis for absolute certainty about the existence of God. This is clearly brought out in *Confessions* VII, 4 where Augustine argues that we know the corruptibility of the corruptible in and through our knowledge of what is incorruptible.

³⁵ It is important to note the difference between Augustine's account of knowing and an apriorism for which ideas such as unity, goodness and truth are a natural endowment

'hardwired' into the mind by Nature or by God. For Augustine, the ideas are present to us through the active self-communication of the Word by which we are constituted as minds. We know because Christ the Inner Teacher forms and sustains our knowing in a relationship of constant participation whether or not this relationship is apperceived. The primary ideas, one might say, are constituted by the eternal speaking of the word and in turn constitute our own temporal speaking through our continuous formation in the divine image. For this point one may consult the argument of Augustine's dialogue *On the Teacher* (XII, 39). The precise character of this formation has been subject to a number of varying interpretations that have spawned a vast secondary literature. An interesting account of the question may be found in Donald X. Burt *Augustine's World* (1996, 121-127). Alternative accounts may be found in Ronald Nash, *The Light of the Mind: St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge* (1969) and Bruce Bubacz, *St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge* (1981). A systematic philosophical development of Augustine's theory of knowledge may be found in A. Rosmini, *A New Essay on the Origin of Ideas* trans. Cleary and Watson (2001).

³⁶ This co-inherence of the logical and the ontological in Augustine's thought is well expressed by Ludwig Schopp who notes "The creator has imprinted upon the things, with their being, their intelligibility, or their ontological truth; upon the mind of man, on the other hand, he has impressed the eternal, necessary laws of recognition and cognition, or logical truth. The *Rationes Aeternae* are as *causae, origins, formae* the forms and prototypes of being, and as *lucidae cognitiones, notitiae solidae et terminate*, the norms of recognition and thought; there is an evident agreement between the ontological and the laws of cognition..." (1948, 16-170).

³⁷ It is interesting to note that in this passage Augustine moves directly from a contingent truth to truth as such without intermediary. In other accounts of the ascent to truth, such as the three accounts given in the *Confessions* and the demonstration of God's existence given in *On the Free Choice of the Will* the ascent is from the contingency of the mind to God by the mediation of eternal and necessary truths of logic, aesthetics and mathematics. I would argue that Augustine can, in fact, give either kind of account as

the context requires for even contingent truths have, as truths, the form of necessity and eternity. If today I doubt my own existence then it always has been true and always will be true that on such and such a date Bernard Wills either doubted his own existence or would doubt his own existence. This precision in the Augustinian account of truth is given clear expression by St. Anselm in *Monologium* (XVIII) but has its basis in those texts, such as the one cited above, where Augustine telescopes the ascent to truth in the manner I have described.

³⁸ A word of clarification is perhaps in order if the following argument is to be understood. When Augustine speaks about truth he has conception in mind that corresponds to what philosophers nowadays would call a theory of truth. Truth in Augustine has the sense of 'true to' as, say, an image is 'true to' its original to whatever extent it is like it, or, more properly, as a mental word is adequate to its content. Thus, the thought "I doubt" is true if the conception it conveys is adequate to my actual mental condition. If in actuality I am in a dubious state of mind then it is a true 'word'. Augustine, as we shall see, holds all truths to be derived from the Truth itself, the Word in which being-unity, the ultimate 'measure', is eternally expressed. It should be noted that truth here is more expansive in its meaning than the conformity of the mind to its object but embraces the universal teleology of thing to exemplar.

³⁹ It is a metaphysical corollary of this argument that the Logos, or truth, is consubstantial with the 'measure' or unity it apprehends. Any denial of this primal identity would entail a denial of finite truth and hence Skepticism. This affirmation of the identity of the Logos with the Father Augustine held to be within the purview of Pagan Platonism although his immediate source for this doctrine appears to have been the Christian Victorinus. For an account of Augustine's debt to Victorinus and the latter's relation to the Platonism of Porphyry see Mary T. Clark "A Neo-Platonic Commentary on the Christian Trinity: Marius Victorinus" (1982). Augustine's position on this matter is given forceful expression in *On the Happy Life* 4, 34. Here he states "The Truth, however, receives its being through a supreme measure, from which it emanates and into which it is converted when perfected. However, no other measure is

imposed upon the supreme measure. For, if the supreme measure exists through the supreme measure, it is measure through itself. Of course, the supreme measure also must be a true measure. But, just as the truth is engendered through measure, so measure is recognized in truth. Thus, neither has truth ever been without measure, nor measure without truth." Thus, measure is eternally and necessarily present to itself as truth. This is the basis of all finite truth and the foundation of all certainty.

⁴⁰ It is important to note that the immediacy of the Augustinian soul to itself is not an immediacy devoid of inner articulation but is constituted out of a moment of difference. The soul is present to itself *through* the act in which the soul conceives itself to itself. Indeed, the manner in which it becomes present to itself out of sheer immediacy is by being absent from itself in a moment of distinction and in turn annulling this distinction through returning to itself in a reflexive act. The self-identity here is predicated on a moment of distinction, which is posited precisely in its overcoming. The soul cannot be present to itself unless it goes out from itself and returns to itself. Its self-presence is this going out and returning and in this way, the soul in its very constitution reflects its trinitarian archetype. It should be noted too that the soul knows itself both in a fundamental act of constitutive self knowledge which is constant and unvarying and in the specific acts of conscious apperception in which it knows its own knowing (*On the Trinity* X 2,7, XIV, 7, 9, see also Booth 1989, 19).

Thus, there are two relations of the Augustinian soul to itself that ground the distinction between the self in its timeless transcendental structure and its concrete personal identity. These relations take up the Plotinian distinction of *nous* and soul and make them moments of a single subjectivity structure. Augustine's designation of memory as what is most primordial in the self and God subsumes the Plotinian one in the same fashion. For this point I am indebted to James Doull's article, "What is Augustinian Sapientia" (1988).

⁴¹ Augustine's argument presumes at all points the orthodox understanding of Christ as fully human and fully divine. While the final settlement of the christological question at

Chalcedon came two decades after his death and established a terminology rather different than his own, *Confessions* VII, 25 indicates clearly that Augustine understood the basic thrust of the position later summarized in the *Tome* of Pope Leo. Christ, for Augustine, unites in one substance both a divine and a fully articulated human agency whose union allows us to say both that the divine has descended into time and space and that the human has become divine.

⁴² Augustine, it should be noted, saw the Platonists as moving toward the first of these identifications. He even goes so far as to say in the *Confessions* that they knew the Johannine identification of the Logos with God (*Confessions* VII, 4). This is due to developments in the history of Platonism after Plotinus, particularly with respect to its transmission to the Latin west. The tendency to subordinate *Nous* to the One, so prominent in Plotinus, was moderated by his successor Porphyry, who was less strict in separating the Neo-Platonic hypostases. The notion that the One reverts fully upon itself in *Nous* and that therefore the One and *Nous* are perfectly identified in their difference occurs more strongly in Latin Platonists like Victorinus, whose translations of Plotinus and Porphyry are a crucial source of Augustine's knowledge of Neo-Platonism. (A.C Loyd 1967, 331,340) Augustine takes over from these figures the effort to use Neo-Platonic concepts to conceptually illumine the doctrine of the Trinity. Augustine, though, will go further in an ontological direction than Victorinus by more explicitly identifying the Father with being (and later memory) and the Son with wisdom.

⁴³ The profound originality of Augustine *vis a vis* his Neo-Platonist predecessors can be seen in his implicit denial that a soul which possesses intellectual vision of the ideas must experience blessedness. Unlike the noetic self of Plotinus, Augustinian memory (which contains an intuition of the ideas) is an active potential that completes itself in conscious acts of attention and love. Apart from these it is merely implicit and unrealized. It is in this actualizing of memory that blessedness or fallenness become possibilities. The soul is blessed not in its intuition of the noetic world but in the positing of its *explicit* self-hood in full conformity with what it *implicitly* knows thus establishing the self in equality with itself through concrete moral and intellectual struggle. One might say that though reason's

highest faculty is the intuition by which it perceives the absolute standards of judgment it is in the acts of judgment that it makes that reason is 'really real'.

⁴⁴ This is evident, for instance, in the fact Augustine shows no interest in Plotinus' reduction of *Nous* to the One prior to thought and being. This is because the beginning point of his search is the ideal of wisdom found in the *Hortensius* of Cicero. This is what he sought to possess and when he found it in the Platonic notion of an eternally subsistent divine wisdom he had no need to look further. One might say that from the very beginning Augustine was looking for the good in a form to which he could be concretely related as a thinking willing being. The Plotinian *Nous* answered this demand for him in a way that a pure One attained only in an *ecstasis* beyond all thought and existence could not.

⁴⁵ In this passage Augustine moves from the idea of the immutable to the immutable itself on the grounds that it is only through the presence to our mutable minds of immutably subsistent truth that we can possess timeless and necessary standards of judgment, such as the idea of perfection. As Menn points out, this means that the notion of God fulfills the Stoic definition of a cataleptic impression, for the idea of the perfect can have its origin only in something perfect (266-68). It is such that it can only have its source in a reality that corresponds to it. Thus, it is the mind's perception of its own relation to divine wisdom or *nous* that is the point of certainty beyond skepticism. God is the object whose existence we cannot be dubious about, once we have properly conceived it, and he is thus the beginning and end of our quest for knowledge. The so called 'ontological argument' employed by Anselm, Bonaventure and Descartes is shown here to have its origin in Augustine's appropriation of Hellenistic epistemology.

⁴⁶ W.J. Hankey states "With Plotinus, in coming to his understanding of mind, Augustine must free himself from Stoic corporealism. For Augustine this escape is above all from Manicheism" (1999, 566). Stephen Menn makes the same identification (1998, 142).

⁴⁷ Following J.A Mourant, Colin Starnes emphasizes that Augustine never belonged in a formal sense to the Skeptical school (1990, 139). Granting this however, it remains the case that Augustine seriously engaged the logic of

Skepticism at the point of his life when he began his turn from Manicheism to Platonism and that what he took from this engagement was vital to this transition. This is the sense in which I speak of Augustine as passing through Skepticism. Indeed, it is just because of this dialectical relationship that Augustine will sometimes present himself as having been or being a Skeptic, as in the *Epistle to Hermogenianus* as well as in the second book of *Against the Academics*.

⁴⁸ This being the case, I will focus in this section on secondary literature whose specific intent is expounding the philosophical content of *Against the Academics* as distinct from works, vastly more numerous, which touch upon it by way of illustrating some more general thesis.

⁴⁹ According to John Heil "Augustine's attack on Skepticism in the *Against the Academics* is, it seems to me, both interesting and important. Its interest lies in the fact that the argument developed by Augustine is rather more sophisticated than most commentators seem willing to admit. It is important because it places the moral and epistemological features of Skepticism in a new and revealing light, and in so doing offers, I think, a plausible refutation of Skeptical doctrine. If I am correct, then the study of Augustine's reasoning is of more than purely historical interest: it is worth studying for its own timeless philosophical content" (1972, 99).

⁵⁰ J.M.Rist, *Augustine* (1994, Chap. 3). According to Rist, Augustine is arguing in *Against the Academics* that because he is able demonstrate the untenability of total Skepticism about all claims of knowledge he can also assert that all other objects are in principle knowable. As Rist puts it "The more extreme ancient position is not only more difficult to justify than the more restricted version (and most moderns of a Skeptical turn have disowned it), but it tempts its opponents into a risky kind of philosophical confidence. For it is easy to assume, and Augustine himself is inclined to assume, that if he can establish any certain knowledge, say in the realm of logic, he has also established at least the possibility of certain knowledge in other areas: philosophical theology, or ethics, or theories of the mind or the person" (1994, 43). I do not find Augustine making this assumption, at least in this work. Taking *Against the Academics* to be primarily an

epistemological work, Rist has forced on it the conclusion he thinks appropriate to such a work i.e. that it is possible to know about the objects that concern philosophers. If one keeps in mind the hortatory and practical dimensions of the work it is evident rather that Augustine is making a more restricted claim: that the universal doubt of the Skeptics is not an obstacle preventing us from *seeking* knowledge of those objects because universal doubt is not possible. The doubter must know something even in the act of doubting. Augustine certainly thinks we can know at least some things about God and the soul but the refutation of Skepticism does not require that he show this. Accordingly, it is no direct part of the argument of his dialogue.

⁵¹ Christopher Kirwan, "Augustine Against the Skeptics" (1983 205-223). Kirwan's approach is heavily influenced by his background in Anglo-American analytic philosophy.

⁵² B. Bubacz, *St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge: A Contemporary Analysis* (1981, 39-55).

⁵³ B. Diggs, "St. Augustine vs. the Academics" (1951, 108-125). Diggs' commentary focuses most heavily on *Against the Academics* Book III.

⁵⁴ John Heil, "Augustine's Attack on Skepticism: The Against the Academics" (1972, 99-116). Heil's paper is the first to question the adequacy of a purely epistemological approach to the *Against the Academics*.

⁵⁵ David Mosher, "The Argument of St. Augustine's Against the Academics" (1981, 89-113). Mosher's position is, in fact, somewhat more involved a straight pragmatic reading. Mosher opposes what he calls the 'received interpretation' of this work according to which it is an epistemological argument purporting to demonstrate against the Skeptics the existence of certain knowledge. He himself holds that Augustine intends only to establish the probable conclusion against Skepticism that "...the wise man knows and assents to wisdom" (1981, 92). This he does first by establishing the probability that there are basic truths of reason. Then, he argues that virtue and happiness cannot be found through *epoche* but only through "...rational activity and the energetic involvement of the mind with an objective truth beyond it" (1981, 101). Since this is so, Augustine has

moral grounds for accepting the truths of reason he has defended as probable (1981, 101). On this basis, Mosher has Augustine concluding that since he can now lay claim to so many certainties (on the grounds that that he has shown the moral basis of universal doubt to be inadequate), he has reason to believe the wise man to be in possession of the truth i.e. knowledge of what is human and divine (1981, 102). Finally, Mosher argues that Augustine's purpose in writing *Against the Academics* was to justify his abandonment of Manicheism and its pretension to scientific certainty in favour of 'Christian authority'. This purpose is achieved in showing that the wise man can be trusted to know what wisdom is (since it is probable that the wise know wisdom) for the wisdom of those truly wise (the Platonists) agrees in all crucial respects with Christianity (1981, 108). That this interpretation does considerable violence to the order and logic of Augustine's discussion will be argued below.

⁵⁶ Augustine J Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism* (1996). Curley states that Augustine's argument is not "...a logical critique, but rather a moral one. Men are already prone to intellectual laziness, and this definition of Zeno, it seems, was used to encourage this laziness, drawing men away from the practice of philosophy" (1996, 107-108). This points to a real aspect of Augustine's work but, as we shall see, it is not a question of *Against the Academics* being either a logical or a moral critique for it gives equal place to both knowledge and will. Given Augustine's emphasis on the interpenetration and mutual implication of these powers both in the soul and its trinitarian archetype this is entirely appropriate. Indeed, Curley's opposition of the ethical and the logical would appear to Augustine as, at bottom, non-trinitarian. Aside from this, *Against the Academics* does, in fact, contain much close consideration of logical and epistemological questions and it would be a very strange procedure on Augustine's part to spend so much effort on something tangential to his main concern. Curley does not explain this odd feature in his commentary and indeed does little with the dense epistemological arguments of Book III beyond summarizing them.

⁵⁷ This chapter will limit itself to a general sketch of scholarly opinion on the *Against the Academics*. More detailed criticism of the views of the aforementioned

authors may be found in the notes appended to the main body of this thesis.

⁵⁸ One might say that the purpose of *Against the Academics* is not to show how a consideration of the finite leads to knowledge of the infinite God but rather to establish a finitude for thought (over against the indeterminacy of *epoche*) from which such a move would be thinkable. In the second book of *On the Free Choice of the Will*, the ascent to knowledge of God begins with the overcoming of Skepticism through a statement of the 'Cogito' argument. On this foundation, the rest of the demonstration proceeds. In relation to Augustine's total philosophical anagogy, the argument of *Against the Academics* occupies the same position and plays the same role. It shows how out of a consideration of Skepticism we can gain the knowledge necessary for the mind's ascent to absolute reality. Thus, it gives a highly involved account of what is subsequently assumed as a beginning. Indeed, it does not seem too much to the present author to say that *Against the Academics* could be read together with *On the Free Choice of the Will* Book II as forming a single work. This clearly shows the way in which the scope and purpose of this dialogue can be defined through a consideration of later works in which the totality of which it forms a part is more fully explicated.

⁵⁹ This is how Ragnar Holte characterizes *Against the Academics* in his major work *Beatitudo et Sagesse*. Holte writes "*Les sceptiques pensent que personne au monde ne peut mettre au jour la verite. Augustin se range en quelque sort a cet avis: L'homme net peut, de son propre pouvoir, devoiler la verite; suel un dieu peut la faire. Mais Augustin est convaincu- par la fides et non par la Ratio- qu'un tel secours divin peut etre obtenu. Cette affirmation de l'assistance divin dans la decouverte de la verite, il la designe comme le point le plus essentiel qui, jusqu'ici, ce soit degage de la discussion*" (Holte, 91). Holte goes on to identify this divine aid that reveals truth with the incarnation and accordingly concludes that for Augustine "...*Le Christ est L'etre divin qui nous montrera la verite. Telle est la solution du Contra Academicos*" (96). This exclusive view of the authority of the incarnate Christ as the sole source of truth seems to me less than fully Augustinian, for reasons I make plain at a number of points in this thesis. Nor, to my mind, can it be reconciled with the actual text of this dialogue, which seeks to establish a

foundation for truth within the inwardness of the mind before it turns to the incarnation. Anyway, it would be quite impossible on this view to say, as Augustine says with perfect explicitness, that the Platonists knew several crucial truths and even knew God as subsistent truth while rejecting the incarnation.

⁶⁰ I am in fundamental agreement with those who see Augustine's *Confessions* as embodying a logical progression in the temporal sequence of the events recorded. This progression leads by stages from his immediate identification of the good with his natural impulses, through Manichaeism, Skepticism, and Platonism to submission to Christ as the true mediator between the divine and the created order. It can be understood as a logical process insofar as Augustine shows how the problems encountered at one stage entail a move to the next until a fully adequate resolution is found. This position is well spelled out by J.A. Doull "Augustinian Trinitarianism and Existential Theology" (1979).

⁶¹ In fact, there is already strong confirmation of the correctness of this procedure within the *Against the Academics* itself. The second epistle to Romanianus contains a short autobiographical sequence that will later be expanded into the *Confessions*. Even at this early stage, Augustine is indicating a broader context in which he wishes his dialogue to be read, the context of his own ascent to the vision of truth and his recognition of the Incarnate Christ as the true mediator between God and Man. As this process has its most complete explication in the *Confessions* (indeed, how comprehensible would the autobiography of the second epistle be without it?) it is to this text that it is most useful to refer.

⁶² The supposedly Neo-Platonic character of the *Cassiciacum* dialogues has led older scholars such as Alfaric and Harnack to assert that Augustine is here re-writing his past for the sake of the theological lesson he is using the *Confessions* to convey (see Starnes 1990, 277-285). Though this has always been a minority view it has undergone periodic revivals since it was first proposed and defenders of the historicity of the *Confessions* have not always agreed on how precisely it should be refuted. The present

commentary will, I hope, make sufficiently clear that the real source of this view lies in an insufficiently subtle reading of Augustine's earliest writings, which on sufficiently close examination reveal a specifically Christian logic.

⁶³ For an account of this in relation to Augustine see Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 478-80.

⁶⁴ In an article on the first book of *Against the Academics* Giovanni Capatano relates this image to the traditional Platonic image of the cave. He conjectures that the 'shining clouds' refer to the "...gradual training which the inner eye has to undertake in order to get accustomed to sustain the dazzling light of the intelligible sun. Thus, we have to do with Plato's famous analogy of the Cave (*Respublica* VII, 515 c - 516 b). The unchained prisoner will see at first the shadows of the things, then their reflections in the water, and finally the things themselves. Afterwards he will proceed from these things to the light of the stars and of the moon, and lastly to the light of the sun and to the sun itself. In plain terms, the ascent of soul from the sensible world to the intelligible one as far as the idea of the Good must be gradual. True *paideia* will undertake this gradual climb through the training of the disciplines" (2000, 58). Capatano bases this conjecture on a parallel with *Soliloquies* I, 13, 23 where the ascent to intelligible knowledge is explicitly described in terms evoking the images of the line and the cave. I am inclined to agree with Capatano that this interpretation is plausible as I think these Platonic images are not only alluded to by Augustine but at crucial points in *Against the Academics* actually structure the discussion, as will be noted in my commentary.

⁶⁵ The argument of Book I concerns the question of what we need to be happy. It does not concern itself directly with showing that happiness can be attained. This point must be urged against Kirwan, who over-reads the intent of this section of the dialogue. Kirwan tries to represent the argument of Trygetius (which he identifies completely with that of Augustine) as moving from the necessity of knowledge for happiness to the conclusion that knowledge must be possible by means of the minor premise "some men are

happy" (1983, 17-18). I can find no firm basis in what Trygetius says for attributing such an argument to him or by extension to Augustine. Indeed, it would be quite contrary to the structure of the work to have arguments against the truth of Skepticism deployed at this point. It is clearly Augustine's purpose to show first what is necessary to happiness (knowledge of wisdom), and then to show that the arguments of the Skeptics are not an obstacle to seeking this. This latter he does in Book III where no such argument as Kirwan describes occurs. Here then, the question is whether we must know to be happy and not whether we can in fact know.

⁶⁶ There is, in fact, a way of considering will in Augustine that gives it a certain priority within the fundamental equality of the mind's operations. A good discussion of this point is in Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine* (1960, 236-237).

⁶⁷ The structure of this beginning is obviously determined by Neo-Platonism. The three elements in the discussion correspond to the three hypostases of Plotinus, the one or good, mind and soul (for Plotinus' account of these see *Ennead V, 1*). The discussion that follows is clearly concerned with how a knowledge of the unity of these principles can emerge out of their finite opposition and difference, as expressed by the division between the opposed schools of Hellenistic thought. Thus, we find Trygetius holding here to mind's perception of being as the end against Licentius emphasis on the immanent life and movement of Soul. The argument they pursue is indecisive precisely because each one holds to a true principle against the other. However, this opposition between the vital and the noetic, the subject and the object, is for Augustine overcome in a Christian wisdom for which being, mind and life are moments of a single divine substance. The extent to which Augustine incorporated the Plotinian distinction between *Nous* and Soul into his own thinking is well brought out by Stephen Menn in *Descartes and Augustine* (1998, 140-141).

⁶⁸ Augustine censures this definition in *Retractions I, II* on the grounds that our happiness lies not in our minds but only in God. As he puts it "Nevertheless, whoever wishes to live a happy life ought not to live according to this element (the mind). If he lives according to this element,

he lives according to man; whereas, in order to be able to reach happiness, life must be regulated according to God." On this point Aquinas makes a pertinent distinction " For that good which is the last end is the perfect good fulfilling the desire. Now man's appetite is for the universal good. And any good inherent to the soul is a participated good, and consequently a particularized good. Therefore none of them can be man's last end. But if we speak of man's last end, with respect to its attainment or possession...in this way something of man, in respect of his soul, belongs to his last end, since man attains happiness through his soul...Consequently, we must say that happiness is something belonging to the soul, but that which constitutes happiness is something outside the soul" (*Summa of Theology*, II, I, Q.2, Art.7).

⁶⁹ In a sense, it is the topic for philosophy for what is being asked is whether the love of wisdom can and must become wisdom and what it means for a finite reason to rest in the apprehension of what it seeks without a false reification of its principle in finite categories. Augustine himself will want to maintain the positive side of this question against the Skeptics while allowing a certain negative relation between the self and God and, indeed, between the self and itself. Thus, it must be allowed that Augustine is both a critic of Skepticism and retains a Skeptical moment in his overall position. The reason for this lies in the very nature of his account to certainty. Insofar as the soul is immanently illuminated by subsistent truth it has the capacity to make certain judgments concerning finite objects, such as the judgment that it exists. Insofar as this light is not the light of the soul itself but the light of eternal and necessary ideas that transcend it, the source of the certainty of the soul's judgements is not itself comprehended in any judgement. The soul comprehends in the light of that which it is comprehended by and which it cannot fully comprehend. It is not transcendent truth but has the perception of transcendent truth acting immanently within it yet remaining transcendent. Moreover, it is this truth and not the soul itself that is the first intelligibility and final point of certainty. Indeed, in comparison with the light of this primary truth, the soul itself can be darkness to itself even though relative to the sensible it is light. Thus, depending on the perspective from which he speaks, Augustine can attribute both self-certainty and self-ignorance to the

soul with equal rigor, always retaining the point that its ignorance is within a prior certainty (*On the Trinity* X, 3,5). Put in Plotinian terms, the soul possesses certainty insofar as it is constituted by a contact with the intuitive realm of *nous* and can avail itself of this certainty by advertent to what is changeless within it. Yet insofar as it is not *nous* and as such mutable, it suffers a corresponding loss of intelligibility. It is precisely where reason comes to be in a temporal subjectivity that the paradoxes and problems of the self cluster, such as the mysteries of time and memory. Thus, when soul considers itself in relation to the *nous* that transcends it, it finds within itself an infallible intuition of truth. When it turns to consider itself in its difference, it finds itself a mystery to itself. This is why self-knowledge in Augustine can only find its completion in the contemplation of God in whom the difference of mind and life is comprehended and overcome. Moreover, this completion is realized only in the direct intuition of the blessed in which they know as they are known and transcends the discursiveness of finite human reason (see the negative result of *On the Trinity* XV, 5). Thus, far from being unassimilated, the Skeptical and anti-Skeptical sides of Augustine are expressions of a necessary ontological relation.

⁷⁰ Kirwan judges this point to be central to the argument of Book I but does not represent it accurately. Leaving aside the fact that he makes no distinction between the argument of the dialogue as a whole and the statements of Trygetius (for him, Trygetius is here simply Augustine's mouthpiece), it must be emphasized that the perfection referred to here is not some particular good but the activity in which the total good of the creature is realized. Trygetius is not arguing, as Kirwan claims, that one cannot be happy with any unfulfilled desires, the Skeptic has an unfulfilled desire for knowledge, and that therefore the Skeptic is unhappy (1983, 18). The argument here assumes what all parties are agreed on, that there is some one activity which is the ultimate end of the agent. The question then is whether this activity for us is contemplation of the truth or the activity of seeking the truth. Thus, it is no objection to the argument to say, as Kirwan does on the authority of Russell and Tolstoy that "it is wrong to think that a happy man must have achieved his major goals" (1983, 20). The question is not one of 'major goals' if these are understood as finite and extrinsic to the subject but of the *telos*

intrinsic to the subject. On this level, it is very much a question whether one can be happy with one's most basic desire unfulfilled.

⁷¹ This move from external order to inward reflection is symbolized by the distinction between the rural setting of the dialogue and the city, in whose activities Alypius is still involved, as is noted by Curley, who writes " Before the discussion can get off the ground, Alypius excuses himself from taking a side in the debate, saying that he must go to the city... This contrast between the country, where the dialogue takes place, and the city, may justify some investigation" (1996, 44).

⁷² This procedure is the traditional Platonic one of arriving at true knowledge through a critical reflection on opinion. The soul does not, indeed cannot move from simple ignorance to scientific truth. It can only move from the implicit knowledge contained in a confused manner in our opinions to an explicit self-consciousness of what we primordially apprehend. This is why philosophy does not begin with freedom but arrives at freedom through a desire to understand what it has first received from others. This is how Socrates himself proceeds in trying to understand virtue through a critical reflection on the knowledge of virtue contained the ethical traditions of the Polis. The first book of *Against the Academics* illustrates this procedure nicely. It inquires into the nature of Wisdom through a purgation of received ideas about Wisdom. Indeed, the very possibility of progress in the enterprise, in the course of which various definitions are tried and rejected, is predicated on already possessing at least enough knowledge of Wisdom to be able to say that it has not been adequately defined. In relation to Wisdom, the argument does not move from ignorance to knowledge but from implicit knowledge to explicit. Indeed, in this it mirrors the order Augustine later lays out in his *Confessions*. In that work, Augustine begins his quest for Wisdom not from scratch but from the *Hortensius* of Cicero. The rest of the book is concerned with clarifying what Augustine had found in that beginning point. For a Platonic account of this question that Augustine himself might have known first hand one should consult the *Meno*. If Augustine did not know the *Meno*, he could have learned its basic content from Cicero, who treats of its problematic in the *Tusculan Disputations*.

⁷³ Curley notes "Aristotle says that that is perfect which is complete, lacking nothing that belongs to it. We do not seek for something unless we lack it; and if one is lacking anything, Trygetius is arguing, he cannot be happy. Trygetius is here espousing a traditional opinion. It would certainly be the opinion of Aristotle" (Curley 1983, 47). Indeed, the question of this book is whether this objective logic can be brought together with subjective standpoint of Licentius, who begins, not from being, but from the individual's pursuit of an inward contentment immediately felt. This latter, he finds in the *epoche* of the Skeptics. Ultimately, both sides are necessary to the full resolution of the question.

⁷⁴ The argument of *On the Happy Life* gives a scientific form to the position that Trygetius has been articulating throughout the first book. The challenge of Licentius' Skepticism is, in fact, what ultimately forces his equation of the good with the possession of the end of our activities to be given a reflective form in terms of a fundamental ontology. Indeed, it is for the lack of such an ontology that the discussion of Book I, and, by implication the categories of Hellenistic thought in which it moves, remain incomplete. Augustine's point is that without the categories of *Esse* and *Non-Esse* the discussion concerning the nature of happiness cannot attain the scientific form necessary to its resolution. Accordingly, the propaedeutic of *Against the Academics* I must be completed by the more direct exposition in *On the Happy Life*. Moreover, the discussion in this second dialogue relates the ontological question of the good much more directly to the process of our coming to possess the good as individuals through making explicit the Trinitarian logic underlying the whole question. Our apprehension of truth can be stable and secure in the bond of love that is the active principle of the divine life itself. The love in which we seek the good is, through the Holy Spirit, one with the love in which the Father beholds himself in the Son. God is the end sought and as Holy Spirit also the principle of the seeking. Accordingly, it is in the contemplation of the Trinity manifested in the earthly life of Christ that the being and truth are brought together with becoming and the central opposition of Book I reconciled. One might say that God the Spirit is present to us in seeking as the love with which we seek and by which we are

led into deeper and deeper apprehension of truth. Since this is so our movement to the end is already in the very end we seek and in the vision of the Trinity the positions of Licentius and Trygetius both attain their proper truth.

⁷⁵ Note that Book I moves from the practicality of Roman culture (represented by Cicero and Alypius) through the inwardness of Augustine and his students to a Platonist account of the nature of wisdom to the question of whether wisdom is actual or simply ideal. This fits neatly with the structure I have described.

⁷⁶ Capatano points out the true sense in which, for Augustine, Philosophy must turn from the senses in order to grasp the truth. He says " It is not a question of condemning corporeality itself (this contempt, in fact, would contrast with Augustine's Christian faith and even with Plotinus' doctrine of the positive character of the sensible world), but of being aware of the need to set aside any materialistic representation in order to attain a pure idea of God" (2000, 53). Thus, it is not sensations themselves that are problematic, but the tendency confuse our concepts with representations based upon them.

⁷⁷ Are these numbers arbitrary? In light of its context in the discussion of a triad of friends and their mutual possession of what is proper to each, it is tempting to see in the first equation a reference to the Holy Trinity (the contemplation of which belongs as much or even more to the inwardness of the mind than mathematical truths). As far as the second goes one might, perhaps, see in the numbers 2 and 4 reference to the two testaments and four gospels which mediate knowledge of the Trinity. In the number 10, one might see the final perfection of all things to which this revelation points. This is all the more apt in that scripture is cited in the very next sentence. Augustine was, as is well known, fond of numerical games of this sort and it is not improbable to think that he may be playing one here.

⁷⁸ The claim that skeptical assertions were performative self-contradictions was argued by the Stoic Antiochus (Cicero, *Academica*, II, 29) and was sufficiently commonplace in Epicurean thought to be present in Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things*. Lucretius states "But if a Man argues that, therefore, nothing can be known, He does not really

even know that much since he's confessing total ignorance" (Book IV, 270-74).

⁷⁹ Kirwan takes this short section as an actual Augustinian argument against Skepticism and proclaims it invalid though interesting (1983, 20-22). Kirwan is quite correct that, in this preliminary form, it does not touch the Academic argument. Dramatically, though, one could hardly expect a truly decisive argument to be stated at the mid-point of the dialogue when the serious discussion is only just getting underway. Moreover, it is quite clear Augustine is making only a preliminary challenge from the fact that he allows Trygetius to formulate a response decisive for the immediate context. Kirwan tends to take each argument in the work just as it stands without regard to context and so, is often critiquing 'Augustinian arguments' that are of his own and not Augustine's devising. The argument of the work as a whole makes it quite clear that, in Augustine's real view, the objection to Academic Skepticism here given is only valid when we know that it is not 'truths' that the Academic must possess to judge impressions plausible but an intelligible criterion of truth. Kirwan in fact gets a glimpse this when he points out that the Academic would need to "...know how a truth would seem if there were any" (1983, 22) if he were to judge something 'truth-like' but does not see that this is in fact the argument Augustine is moving towards. This results from Kirwan's tendency to read *Against the Academics* as a grab bag of anti-Skeptical arguments rather than as a dialogue.

⁸⁰ This statement should be taken as dramatically determined rather than autobiographical. Augustine's actual relation with Skepticism as portrayed in the *Confessions* is more complicated than this. From this work, it does not appear that the Academics prevented Augustine from seeking the truth and even played a positive role in liberating him from Manicheism. For the purposes of the dialogue though, it is appropriate for him to begin by assuming the position of the Academics and undermining it from within. Accordingly, he presents himself as having been an Academic in a more strict sense than he actually was. This point is well brought out by D. Kavanagh in the notes to his translation of *Against the Academics*. He says "Consequently, when he says that as yet he has no certitude, the 'as yet' may indeed mean 'up to the present moment of my life' or it may mean 'up to the

present moment in this debate'. In other words, he may be expressing a real or a mere methodic doubt. If one kind of doubt would be in complete harmony with the context, and if the other would entail contradictions, it is obvious that the harmonious interpretation is the correct one. In the present instance, methodic doubt is in complete harmony with the context, for it incites the pupils to apply their minds to the question...On the other hand, an expression of real doubt would involve several contradictions..." (i.e. it would contradict all those passages where Augustine is critical of Skepticism) (1948, 157).

⁸¹ According to Curley, if I understand him correctly, this point about trees not turning silver is, in fact regarded by Augustine as an example of indubitable knowledge even though we can give no reason that justifies it (Curley 1996, 134). On my reading however, Augustine is much closer in spirit to the Stoics in reserving the word knowledge for those things that are either completely evident in themselves or are objects of demonstration. For Augustine the example above, when taken simply on the level of experience, meets neither criterion even though he would be happy to admit it as a reasonable belief. One cannot, however, meet the Academic argument by pointing to such beliefs as the Academics object not to beliefs as such but to certainty about the things we believe. It must be said, though, that once the objectivity of the intelligible world has been uncovered (as it has not yet been in this argument), the question of whether judgments of this kind can be made about empirical objects appears in a different light. Indeed, Augustine need at no point be taken as denying that there is ever a knowledge of sensible things. Rather, he denies that sensation, as such, contains a criterion of truth. Thus, there is no difficulty in admitting the possibility of knowledge of the sensible if that knowledge is founded on an *intelligible* criterion known separately from sensation. An interesting discussion of this point may be found in Bubacz, *St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge*, (1981, Chap.5).

⁸² By the end of the Hellenic era Greek thought had, with Aristotle, come to the conclusion that the proper object of God's thinking was itself and that this thinking upon thinking was the principle and end of nature and human life (*Metaphysics* XII, 9). It is notorious however that in Aristotle the relation of *Nous* in the divine to *Nous* in

finite human thinking was difficult to precisely define. In Hellenistic philosophy though, this self-thinking thought of Aristotle was brought down to earth and identified directly with the individual in his or her concrete historical identity. In this way they began directly from where Aristotle ended and faced the question of whether the principle they inherited from the older standpoint could encompass a relation to what was other than itself. The Stoics thought it could by means of an immanent criterion of certainty whereas the Skeptics thought this criterion impossible to adequately fulfill. Hellenistic philosophy faced this difficulty above all because it interpreted Aristotle's principle as a contentless reflection upon reflection to which the object world was opposed and to which it needed to be related by a principle of mediation. The clash in Book I between the opposed positions of Trygetius and Licentius can be taken as a confrontation of the older objective logic with this new Hellenistic standpoint in which the inadequacy of each in separation from the other is revealed. A fine account of this history and its significance for Augustine may be found in E. Booth, " St. Augustine's 'Notitia Sui' Related to Aristotle and the Early Neo-Platonists." in *Augustinian Studies*, 27 (1977): 70-132, 364-401, 28 (1978): 183, 221, 29 (1979): 97,124. Booth shows a fundamental affinity between Augustine's quest for knowledge of self through knowledge of God who is subsistent reason or *nous* and Aristotle's account of the highest knowledge as 'thinking upon thinking'. Indeed, he points out that Augustine's conversion to the ideal philosophy is to its Aristotelian form for Cicero's *Hortensius*, which effected this conversion in him, is in large measure derived from Aristotle's lost dialogue *Protrepticus* (Booth, 71-72). A reconstructed account of the contents of the *Protrepticus* may be found in A.P.Bos "Aristotle's *Eudemus* and *Protrepticus* " (1984, 19-51).

⁸³ Augustine's argument turns on the point that the Skeptic must claim to possess a 'word' that corresponds to its measure, the real state of affairs concerning human knowledge (i.e. he must know a truth). Thus, in claiming that there is no adequation of the ideal to the real he must be uniting the ideal and the real, bringing thought and reality together. This is above all evident in the claim of Academic Skepticism to be a form of wisdom. If the Skeptic claims that he is wise he must know both what wisdom is and

that he knows what wisdom is. To know what wisdom is also to know one's knowledge of wisdom. Self-knowledge is implicated in all object knowledge. Form and content cannot in this case be known separately from each other and thus, both notional and real knowledge is implicated in the claims of the Academics. It is still open to the Skeptic to deny that he is wise but at that point all rational support for his position disappears, indeed, it ceases to be a position at all. After all, the Academic draws the conclusion 'everything must be doubted' from the premise 'nothing is perceived'. But no true conclusion can follow from a premise that is not perceived. Thus, if for consistency's sake the Skeptic denies that he perceives that nothing can be perceived he must deny that he perceives that everything must be doubted, at which point his Skepticism simply consumes itself.

⁸⁴ It is crucial to note what Augustine says at 3.4.10,90. Here he says, "For they have agreed- or rather it seemed to them- that a man can be wise, but that knowledge cannot accrue to any man. Wherefore they maintained that a wise man knows nothing. But it seems to you that he knows Wisdom- and certainly that is not to know nothing". This makes it clear that the question in this whole argument is whether Academic Skepticism can be or appear to be a form of wisdom and whether the Academic can be wise in knowing nothing. Accordingly, the argument goes to show that the notion of a wise ignorance is, at least in the Academic form, incoherent. Mosher seriously misconstrues this point and as a consequence regards this section as puzzling and sophisticated. He takes Augustine to be saying that "Any denial by the Skeptics that the ideal wise man knows wisdom is tantamount to claiming that wisdom is nothing, i.e. that there is no wisdom to be known. But this flies in the face of the Academics own admission that there is somewhere 'out there' an objective truth whose possession would bring happiness if only it could be achieved, and that it is the actual wise man's solemn obligation to seek that truth with all his might" (Mosher 1981, 95). But Augustine is not accusing the Academics of saying that some 'ideal wise man' would know nothing and that wisdom is therefore in itself nothing. He accusing the Academics of inconsistency in their claim that a man, such as the Academic, who knows nothing can be wise on the grounds that wisdom is a reflexive property. Mosher's discussion of this whole section is

bedeviled by his failure to note that the Academic notion of the ideal wise man must encompass the claim of the Academics to be or appear to be wise men. Accordingly, he misses the force of Augustine's argument.

The source of this confusion lies in Mosher's contention that the wisdom of the Academic lies in the accumulated set of probabilities that result from the exercise of his assent free judgments (Mosher 1981, 94). Yet Augustine's argument makes little sense unless it is the Academic's philosophical position as a whole that constitutes his wisdom, not his particular practical judgments. If this point is missed the force of the whole argument is lost.

⁸⁵ Kirwan says of this entire argument that it is "confused and unconvincing..." and that "...its conclusion, that if there is no knowledge there is no wisdom, does no more than dent the body-work of the Academic bulldozer" (1983, 20). He does not, however, give his grounds for this statement, judging the argument about probability in Book II to be more interesting. That this is to turn Augustine's dialogue on its head will, I think, be clear when it becomes apparent that both here, and in the following sections, Augustine is giving real bite to the argument of Antiochus that forms his opening gambit.

Bernard Diggs as well finds that Augustine does not succeed in convicting the Sceptics of self-contradiction. As he put it "All these arguments try to show that the assertion of the Academical doctrines implies the assertion of some truth. But, as was pointed out, the Academicians can adopt a consistent position without any reference to reality or truth. They can maintain that we live in a world of appearances, and can set up their criterion of probability wholly in terms of the properties of these appearances" (Diggs 1951, 88). Diggs, however, misses the crucial step in the argument we have been analyzing. Augustine shows not only that a wise man would know wisdom but also that a man who seemed to himself wise would seem to himself to know wisdom. Thus, even if the Academic only claims on the basis of probability that it seems to him that the wise man is as the Academics claim him to be, he is still subject to the charge of inconsistency (exactly as he would be if he claimed that the wise man was in actuality as the Academics describe him). The Academic position is every bit as inconsistent when asserted as an appearance as it is when asserted as a truth. This is ultimately because some truths,

such as the law of non-contradiction, condition the possibility of appearances even as they condition the possibility of subsistent things. Since this is so, the claim made in Book II that the Academics need truth in order to conceive the probable is here vindicated. Nothing could seem true without the form of truth and the basic principles revealed by its light. As conditions of the possibility of appearance, these cannot themselves be appearances but must be objects of pure and certain apprehension. Diggs' failure to see this lies in the fact that he draws no clear relation between the argument taken up here and the general question of how probability is related to truth. Indeed, in his account, this section on whether wisdom must know itself is treated almost as an interesting after-thought rather than as a critical moment in the argument.

Gerard O'Daly, as well, finds this section unconvincing. As he states "Academic "wisdom" is a Skeptical strategy, and does not entail knowledge of something called "wisdom," in the sense of an idea or Platonic form of wisdom, as Augustine's critique seems to imply" (2001, 160-61). However, if the Academic is to offer his Skepticism as a *reflective* Skepticism distinct from sheer mental emptiness he must appeal to *something* to justify his suspension of assent and what can this something be if not an ideal of science or wisdom of which he fails to find an instantiation? As the following section of the argument makes clear, this ideal is present to the Academics as the cataleptic impression of the Stoics, which their argument everywhere assumes. Indeed, for Augustine, this assumption is a matter of strictest necessity for the form of truth is intrinsic to the very possibility of intelligent activity. Insofar as the Academic comes to his position by an act of intelligent reflection, he must, as much as anyone, do so in the light of this form.

⁸⁶ Augustine mentions Proteus again in the following passage from *On Order* " In all these branches of study, therefore, all things were being presented to reason as numerically proportioned. And they were all the more clearly visible in those dimensions which reason, by reflection and contemplation, beheld as most true; but it used to recall rather the shadows and vestiges of those dimensions in the things that are perceived by the senses. Then, reason gained much courage and preconceived a great achievement; it ventured to prove the soul immortal. It treated diligently of all things. It came to feel that it possessed great

power, and that it owed all its power to numerical proportions. Something wondrous urged it on. And it began to suspect that it itself was perhaps the very number by which all things are numbered, or if not, that this number was there whither it was striving to arrive. And he of whom Alypius made mention when we were treating of the Skeptics, grasped with all his might-as if Proteus were in his hands-this number which would be the discloser of universal truth. But false images of the things which we number drift away from that most hidden something by which we enumerate, snatch our attention to themselves, and frequently make that hidden something slip away even when it has been already in our grasp" (*On Order II*, 15, 43). In this passage it is ideal number, or form, that stabilizes the sensible and renders it measurable and hence knowable to the mind. Apart from numerical form, the sheer content of sense experience has no intrinsic stability and is surd and unknowable, 'protean' in fact. These numbers are known within the soul itself, which, in this passage, first takes them as intrinsic to itself (in which case it would be the ordering principle of the sensible) and then as *objective* principles that order *its* activities as their eternal and necessary basis. The soul can order the sensible because its ordering is ordered by the (divine) ideas, which ground both the soul and sense objects. Thus, the realm of nature, unstable in itself, is stabilized in the divine-ideal numbers that illuminate the mind from within. This is the divine power that binds Proteus and Augustine will show it operating in this text by pointing to the logical contraries that structure any possible appearance and within which all change must be stabilized and held.

⁸⁷ This the Academic could not coherently do either. To suspend judgement concerning the criterion is to suspend judgement concerning whether it provides a ground for Skepticism which would in turn mean suspending judgement concerning Skepticism. However, Skepticism is precisely the judgement that one ought to suspend judgement concerning all things. Moreover, even a Skepticism that suspended judgement about itself would still be doing so on the grounds that there are no grounds for judgement and on what grounds could it assert this except that all things appear as false as they do true? Zeno's criterion is itself the only ground on which to doubt anything, even itself.

⁸⁸ This is because judgement would in fact be infallible if the true were not distinct from the false. If the Skeptic denies the criterion, then Skepticism becomes superfluous as all our perceptions would then be equally worthy or unworthy of assent at the same time; the Skeptic would then in fact become a perspectivist or relativist for whom all our judgements would be correct in the simple making of them. This is why I think, contrary to commentators like Pierre Couissin, that the Academic use of the criterion is more than a dialectical concession to the Stoics made for the sake of argument and that the Pyrrhonians were correct to see the Academic argument as moving within the logic of Stoicism. This, of course, is only to say that the logic by which they reached *epoche* was perforce Stoic, whether or not any individual Academic actually thought that logic was objective. In terms of a critique of Skepticism, such as Augustine is mounting, one can proceed only from the argument as the Skeptics, either seriously or playfully, state it. That the arguments of the Academics were ironic in intent is argued by Pierre Couissin in "The Stoicism of the New Academy" (1983). Coussin's position is critiqued by Dorothea Frede in her article "How Sceptical were the Academic Sceptics?" (1996, 15-18).

⁸⁹ In Book X of the *Confessions* Augustine notes the distinction between material facts apprehended through the medium of images and immaterial truths apprehended through themselves. Here he speaks of "...notions where we do not draw images through our senses, but discern them inwardly not through images but as they really are and through the concepts themselves..." (*Confessions* X, 18). This conception of primary notions that directly manifest their own truth and are per se intelligible clearly lies behind the present argument. One fascinating example Augustine gives of a per se intelligible object is memory itself which is, he says "...present to itself through itself, and not through its own image." Accordingly, the very activity of remembering is constituted by memory's remembering of itself. It subsists in its own self-presence.

⁹⁰ With these considerations Augustine is moving the question of certainty inward into the necessary structure of reason itself. This is a necessary part of his procedure since, as has earlier been pointed out, the Academics went beyond the critique of sense knowledge and tried to show that thought

had no objective measure within itself. Augustine is trying to show here that the Academic critique of sense knowledge rests on just such a measure and cannot be established if that measure is not affirmed. If thought is not the measure of the sensible there is no movement from the sensible to the inwardness of *epoche*. Moreover, thought cannot be the measure of the sensible if it has no measure in itself. Accordingly, the beginning point of the Academic argument is destroyed in its end if that argument seeks to subvert the very reason by which it has undermined sense knowledge. That thought is in point of fact measured even in its effort to measure itself is implied in Augustine's discussion of logical disjunctions. It is a point brought out with great force in the ascent to Truth in Book X of the *Confessions*. If mind has in it its own power to measure and judge the senses and to measure and judge its own power of measurement this can only because it is itself measured by what is above it.

⁹¹ This is my best guess as to the meaning of this difficult passage. Curley, following Jolivet, interprets it to mean that Carneades, since he is only interested in philosophical matters and is anxious above all to avoid philosophical errors, does not care if the 'blind' judge his doctrine faulty for not saving him from mistakes on a common sense level (1996, 109). Curley then proceeds to parse Jolivet's view as follows "In everyday life, he will follow common sense, but if perchance he makes an error, he can appeal to philosophy and say that what he is doing would not be understood by the common man" (1996, 109). This seems as odd an interpretation of Jolivet as it is of Augustine. At any rate, it cannot be correct for Carneades' soliloquy does not stem from a fear of making practical errors but from a fear that he might seem to err in denying evident truths. His strategy for dealing with apparent *certainties* is to deny that they concern important matters. Thus, it is nothing whether he affirms or denies them so long as he is secure in his belief that philosophy results in *epoche* concerning ultimate questions. Nor do I think the opinions of the common man are what is at issue here for the passage clearly states that Carneades is worried about what Chryssipus, a philosopher, will say. The blind, then, are more likely (in my mind) to be the Stoics and those of 'divine eyes' the Platonists.

⁹² This point must be emphasized against Mosher, who takes

the whole of Augustine's argument to stated simply in terms of probabilities. It is indeed the case that Augustine's stated aim to show that it is more believable that the truth can be perceived but his demonstration of this point clearly rests on the fact some truth is *in point of fact* perceived. Skepticism cannot seem believable because Skepticism is not true. Judgments of plausibility in the end entail knowledge of, at very least, the idea of truth. Thus, starting from his demonstration that Skepticism, as internally inconsistent, cannot meet its own criterion of plausibility Augustine can show the specific instances of knowledge intrinsic to Skepticism itself. Augustine can go farther than simple plausibility because this standard is surpassed directly in being met. This is because, put Platonically, being is implicated in appearance and knowledge is implicated in opinion. To show that Skepticism is false on the level of *eikasias* and *doxa* is already to have moved up the line to *dianoia* and *episteme*.

⁹³ Augustine could easily continue from here to show how perception depends upon the common sense, the common sense upon reason, reason upon intellect and intellect upon God. In knowing ourselves as perceivers, we must know ourselves as rational and so on. Thus, his critique of Skepticism ends precisely where the ascent to the vision of truth begins for he has secured its starting point in the perceiving, thinking and intuiting subject.

When this ascent is described in later works, Augustine can assume what he has discovered here, the concretion of form and content in the perceptions of a rational and intellectual subject, and express it more simply and directly in the form of the *Cogito*, which encompasses the whole structure of consciousness implicated in the act of perception. Here though, he stops at perception as it is already an act of the whole soul and contains all that is subsequent to it. What he has done is bring together the structures of experience which meet most directly in self-consciousness and which, for the purposes of subsequent discussion, can be simplified in *Cogito* formulations. The advantage of Augustine's procedure here is that it brings out the total structure implied in this apparently simple class of judgments.

⁹⁴ Kirwan objects to this train of argument on the grounds that Augustine does not provide a bridge from what the mind

affirms as indubitable to what it must affirm as true. He says "Since his specimen necessary truths are all simple and his specimen contingent truths are subjective, it is a defensible view that none of them can be taken for false—that is, disbelieved- or even doubted; they compel assent. What he needs, then, is a reason for treating indubitability or unrejectability as a sign of truth. Augustine offers us no such reason; so the game goes to the Academics" (1983, 29). Why is an indubitable perception a true perception? Why is it that what cannot intelligibly be denied, for instance what is presupposed in its own negation, cannot be nonetheless false? This is a crucial question the answer to which seems to me contained in the overall epistemology of this dialogue even if Augustine does not explicitly spell it out. Clear and indefeasible perception, such as we have of necessary truths or of our own existence, is for Augustine as much as for the Stoics the criterion of truth for the basic reason that there is no other basis for any knowledge claim. Whatever criterion we employed to link indefeasible perception to true perception would only be valid insofar as it was an object of indefeasible perception. Thus, it is neither possible nor intelligible to ask for any criterion of truth beyond rational certainty any more than it is possible or intelligible to ask for reasons why we should submit to the dictates of reason or arguments as to why we should follow arguments. Something must have the last word and even if we deny that rational certainty is this something we could only do so on grounds which appear to us rationally certain. There is, in thinking, no going beyond thought's perception of its own intrinsic necessity, which remains the only conceivable criterion for knowledge.

⁹⁵ According to Diggs the Academic response to the overall argument of this section would point out that Augustine's disjunctions apply only to the world as it seems to us and cannot be known to apply to anything outside our own sensations. Accordingly, they would deny that Augustine has forced them by means of these disjunctions to recognize any objective truths about the world. As Diggs puts it, " To Augustine's question they would perhaps reply that we cannot say that the world, i.e. the collection of our sensations, is either one or not-one, but only that it seems to be one or not one" (1951, 83). Augustine's easy riposte to this is that even if we say that the world only seems to be one or not one to us, it still must seem to be one or the other. The necessity of this disjunction holds not only for any

possible reality but for any possible appearance as well. At any rate, as Diggs himself recognizes (Diggs 1951, 84), Augustine holds that our perceptions themselves, whether or not they correspond to anything external, are real content of which his logical disjunctions are truly predicated. Not only do we perceive logical forms, we perceive the true instantiation of these forms in experience.

⁹⁶ According to Heil, Augustine's central claim in this work is that it is as intelligible to believe in the first principles of reason as not to believe in them and thus justifiable to choose belief over unbelief on moral grounds. Either way, it is through the will that we define our relation to reason. The Sceptic, on ethical grounds, chooses not to believe in reason and we cannot argue him out of this choice. Augustine on the other hand, chooses to accept it because he is morally committed to seeking fulfilment through truth. Having made this choice, he can justify believing in reason as the instrument for attaining truth in spite of the fact that it is still, in principle, possible to doubt it. As Heil put it "No one doubts the competency of the Sceptic to deny the validity of these proposed examples. What one may question, however, is the Sceptic's reasons for doing so. The value of psychic calmness is by no means obvious; and the procedures of the Sceptic are all directly or indirectly related to this end. Thus, if we abandon this particular goal, there is no longer any need to accept the drastic epistemological conclusions of the Sceptic...But suppose we establish a new ethical focus, on which elevates the activity of the will, which locates virtue and happiness in the process of apprehending the truth. Now the issue between Scepticism and our view becomes a normative one. It can only be decided by an appeal to the moral sensibilities of men, not by further epistemological considerations" (Heil 1972, 110-111). As, I have pointed out in a number of places, I do not think this voluntarist interpretation adequately captures the force of Augustine's argument. Augustine is saying here and throughout the third book that the Sceptic in fact *must* recognize the basic principles of reason even in the act of doubting. They are the basis for the very act of doubt by which he becomes a Sceptic. For Augustine, not only is it defensible to believe the basic principles of reason, it is incoherent and indefensible to reject them. Thus, it is not simply by choice that Augustine rejects Scepticism but also

by what he perceives as logical necessity. He does not hold that Skepticism and philosophy are equally coherent alternatives and that our choice between them is based on our moral sensibility. This kind of indeterminacy is precisely what the Academics use to point up the necessity of *epoche* and Augustine's response to them takes up their challenge in the fullest sense; it seeks to show that the Skeptic, from within Skepticism, must recognize truth.

⁹⁷ In these two sections of the argument, Augustine shows both that there is necessary *ideal* or *logical* knowledge and direct perception of the *actual* or *real* and that these elements of our experience mutually condition each other. It is not far from this to the insight that it is most directly in the reflexivity of our consciousness that this identity in difference of thought and being is revealed. Thus, it is evident that what the Skeptics hold to be utterly distinct, thought and being, are in the thinking subject united and that Skepticism cannot be true. In the immediate context Augustine is showing that we know logical forms not in separation from the world but as actually united with experience.

That a Trinitarian logic underlies this insight will be more comprehensively expressed in the *Confessions*. In this work it will be seen that being, knowing and willing belong inseparably together in finite experience because they are eternally related as necessary moments of the divine activity, of which the finite subject is an image and likeness. God is related to himself as being through thought and as goodness through will. *Against the Academics* emphasizes the side of this equation Augustine says is knowable through Platonism, the identity of thought and being in the finite subject from which the identity of God's being with the thought in which it is present to itself (the consubstantiality of the Father with the Son) necessarily follows. Indeed, it is precisely by showing against Skepticism that wisdom of its essence has an object (i.e. itself) that this point is established. Accordingly, it is by way of Skepticism that Augustine obtains the Platonic vision of truth through which he learns "...not indeed in the same words, but to the self-same effect... that "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God..." (*Confessions*, VII, 9).

It is interesting to note that in this dialogue there is comparatively little mention of the Holy Spirit (except

in the epistles, which are not part of the main text). It is the person of the Son, whether as the eternal word illuminating the mind or as the incarnate Christ, who dominates throughout. This is because the heart of its argument is concerned with the separation of thought and reality assumed by Skepticism. Accordingly, the necessary relation of the Son to the Father is what the critique of the Academic doctrine brings most directly to our awareness. However, in so far as Augustine is also engaged in a critique of the practical side of Skepticism, the Spirit is, in an indirect way, present to his argument, which thus has an implicit Trinitarian form. Augustine does not hold the question of truth in separation from the question of the good any more than the Skeptics themselves did and thus assumes the relation of love to thought and being that he will clearly bring out in *The City of God* XI, 26. However, this identity of love with truth is asserted at the beginning of the dialogue rather than fully thematized (though it is intimated in the third book by the argument at 3.14,30). The argument of *Against the Academics* is concerned with showing that the Skeptics do not possess the good they seek through *epoche*. It does not go beyond this negative critique to fully establish the identity of God as end or good with God as the power that moves us to the good. This division between the good as end and the good as the way to the end, which appears in the first book, is left deliberately unresolved. What I think Augustine is saying by this is that although there is a profound intimation of the Trinity in the Platonism that comes out of a refuted Skepticism, it does not belong to it to understand it in its fullness. It knows God as the end but not the Spirit of God active in Christ as the way to the end (*Confessions* VII, IX, 14). Thus, Platonism has in it a religion of the Son but not yet a religion of the Spirit (*The City of God* X, 23). This is why a clear statement of Augustine's Trinitarianism occurs rather in *On the Happy Life* at the culminating point of the dialogue where it is explicitly affirmed by Monica that the Christian Trinity is the object and endpoint of the discussion. This is because this latter work is more explicitly religious in character and is written more directly under the auspices of the church, whose authority is represented by the presence of Monica. Since it is written from the standpoint of faith it is there that the Trinitarian circle in which the argument in *Against the Academics* has been moving is fully closed.

Thus, *Against the Academics* stands both as a real

achievement itself, insofar its result is assumed in works like the *Confessions*, and as the prelude to a more comprehensive argument. Its achievement, however, is in actual fact a summing up what of Augustine took Academic Skepticism and Neo-Platonism to have achieved; the recollection of the mind from its dispersal in the externality of sensation first to itself and then to God as subsistent truth. As this is a significant advance, the speculative content of *Against the Academics* is given its own place in the unfolding of the *Confessions* and of *On the Trinity*, which is precisely why it is mentioned in these works. On the other hand, *Against the Academics*, as summing up what Augustine has learned through Platonism (the knowledge that thought cannot be apart from its object), also points us forward to the knowledge of the Spirit known in the life of the Catholic Church. As such, it finds its completion in the fuller argument of the *Confessions*.

⁹⁸ The fact that this reflexive structure applies as much to knowledge as it does to sense perception has been adverted to in the refutation of Alypius, where Augustine pointed out that Wisdom must know itself. Thus, while it is true to say as F.A Doull does that there are no cogito-like passages in *Against the Academics* (1983, 46) it is nonetheless evident that it makes use of the reflexive logic of consciousness as an anti-Skeptical tool and that the 'cogito' explicated fully in *The City of God* XI.26 is directly in line with this usage. I would grant, though, that this is one aspect of Augustine's critique of Skepticism that is given sharper expression in later works and have explained above why I think this is so. It should be noted as well that there are 'cogito' passages in works that are nearly contemporary with *Against the Academics*, such as *Soliloquies* II, 1,1. Indeed, there are even intimations of it within Skepticism itself, as the following passage from Sextus Empiricus attests "Those who say that the sceptics eliminate appearances seem to me not to have listened to what we have said. For we do not overturn that which, as a result of a state produced by a presentation, leads us involuntarily to assent, as we said previously. But these are just what appearances are. Whenever we investigate the question of whether an object is such as it appears to be, we grant that it appears as such, since we are not investigating the appearance, butt rather claims made about the appearance. And this is different from investigating the appearance itself. For example, honey

appears to us to be sweet. This we concede, for we have the sensation of sweetness." (Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, X, 19). That a perception is present to itself as a perception in an irreducible way is exactly the point Augustine makes here and is exactly the point conceded by Sextus Empiricus.

⁹⁹ It should be pointed out that, for Augustine, these basic conditions of appearance are also basic conditions of being. The Skeptics cannot raise the question of whether there is some 'noumenal' reality outside our consciousness to which these categories may not apply for they can give no sense to the word 'real' apart from them. Even to speak of a 'thing in itself' is to speak in logical categories and any attempt to posit an absolute disjunction of form and content in order to make the former 'merely subjective' can only dissolve in self-contradiction. As Diggs points out "He himself (Augustine) was convinced that such a term as 'one' not only is intelligible in itself, but also makes nature intelligible" (1951, 81). Indeed, 'nature' taken apart from categories like unity would be, for Augustine an empty figment. Sensible nature exists in and through logical forms such that one cannot ask what it might be apart from them. In this way, Augustine retains the doctrine of Plato according to which the forms are the presupposition of both the being and intelligibility of what is. Thus, it is indeed possible in Augustine's mind to apply his disjunctions even beyond the realm of our senses to a world of external objects. Even if we knew nothing else about such a world we would know that it contained either one thing or many with absolute certainty. Even if we did not know whether such a world existed we would know with the same certainty that it *would* contain either one thing or many if it did. This is because unity and plurality are modes of *possible being* that condition any possible world. Even the Skeptic would have to say that a world inaccessible to our senses *existed* and as such, would conform to these basic modes.

¹⁰⁰ What could Augustine say to the possibility raised by Descartes that an omnipotent power could, by definition, deceive me even about truths independent of the state of my senses? Alven Neiman raises this question in his effort to downplay a 'Cartesian' reading of this dialogue in favour of

his own pragmatic one (1982, 299). His claim is that *Against the Academics* is a 'dismal failure' when read as an attempt to demonstrate the absolute certainty of the primary truths of reason but a success when read as a demonstration of the practical impossibility of Skepticism as an attitude to life (1982, 299). He holds the former to be the case on the grounds that "In the context of Descartes' radical doubt and criterion for a successful response to the Skeptic, Augustine's assurance concerning his basic beliefs, his claim to be justified in asserting knowledge of them, must appear irrational" (1982, 299). My grounds for dissenting from a pragmatist reading of *Against the Academics* have been expressed in the overall argument of my thesis. Neiman's grounds for preferring it seem to me subject to the charge of anachronism. No ancient Skeptic, to my knowledge, ever raised an argument of the exact kind employed by Descartes in his evil demon hypothesis. This is a limitation in Augustine's presentation in so far as he is refuting Skeptical problems raised by the Third Academy. He is not addressing Skeptical problems that were never raised by them or by anyone else in Antiquity. For this reason, the supposed weakness of Augustine's argument when judged from a Cartesian standpoint cannot be used as a basis for denying that Augustine sought the foundations of certainty in reason's reflection on its own objective content. More basically, there is a metaphysical reason operative in Descartes formulation of the evil demon hypothesis that would not have been operative for Augustine. In Descartes' view the basic truths of logic and mathematics were created by God and thus are not intrinsically necessary (see F.E. Andrews "God, the Evil Genius and Eternal Truths" *Animus*, 1998). For Augustine, eternal and necessary truths were an emanation of the divine truth itself. Thus, the reason Augustine does not raise the Evil Demon problem is not that he is not interested in certainty but because, in his metaphysics of truth, this problem does not occur. A detailed comparison of Augustine and Descartes on certainty lies well beyond the scope of this thesis however the interested reader may consult the arguments of Stephen Menn in *Descartes and Augustine* and of F.A. Doull in *The Logic of Certainty in Augustine and Descartes*.

¹⁰¹ Since Skepticism seeks to suspend us between mutually exclusive alternatives it necessarily requires a logic of

binary distinctions. All doubt is grounded in an either/or between which the judgment rests suspended. It entails a given set disjunctions and thus presupposes a knowledge of finite categories whose ultimate basis is the law of identity or non-contradiction. The Skeptic cannot deny these categories because without them no one could perform the mental act of doubting. Since Skepticism is intrinsically dependent the capacity to form disjunctions, there is considerable force in Augustine's bringing them up at this point in his dialogue. In fact, it can be said that the *subjective* form of Skeptical *Apatheia*, the indifference to any given content in which the mind is poised between all possibilities, passes easily into the first and primary *objectivity* for thought, the idea of the possible as such. Thus it is that by the most radical negation Skepticism arrives most fully at the undivided and un-hypothetical. This point is lucidly expressed by A. Rosmini, who argues, in terms which one can see developing here in Augustine, for the idea of possible being as the ineradicable foundation of all knowing, a foundation arrived at precisely through the act of negating all determinate content (*New Essay on the Origin of Ideas*, Vol. III chap.2).

¹⁰² The significance of Augustine's appeals to the procedural aspects of reason's activity is well illustrated by a passage in the dialogue *On Order*, a companion piece to *Against the Academics*. Here Augustine says " When the science of grammar had been perfected and systematized, reason was then reminded to search out and consider the very power by which it produced art, for, by definition, division, and synthesis it not only had made it orderly and syntactical, but also had guarded it against every subtle encroachment of error. How, therefore, would it pass on to other discoveries, unless it first classified, noted, and arranged its own resources-its tools and machines, so to speak-and bring them into being that discipline of disciplines which they call *dialectics*? This science teaches both how to teach and how to learn. In it, reason itself exhibits itself, and reveals its own nature, its desires, its powers. It knows what knowledge is; by itself, it not only wishes to make men learned, but also can make them so" (*On Order* II, XIII, 38). In dialectic, then, reason knows that by which it orders other things and by which its own activity is ordered. It is the art in which reason is present to itself as reason and whose objectivity is presupposed in any act of reflection or process of inquiry,

even that of the Skeptics.

¹⁰³ Curley does not take this section as referring to the liar's paradox but rather as characterizing the Academic position as a whole. Thus, he holds Augustine to be saying that the wise man will respond to the contradictory doctrine of the Academics, which if true is in fact false, by ignoring it. He writes, "This, as far as Augustine is concerned, is the only proper, indeed the only possible response to the Academic position. To do otherwise is to get oneself entangled in a web from which there is no escape" (1996, 116). This reading is not sustainable. It is obvious from the fact that Augustine is seriously critiquing the Academic doctrine that he is not ignoring it and does not think that it can be overcome in this way. Why, on Curley's reading of this passage, would Augustine write a dialogue against Skepticism at all? Nor, as has been argued again and again in this dissertation, does Augustine think Skepticism to be "a web from which there is no escape". There is an escape from Skepticism and that is the Platonism to which the very logic of the Academics, in Augustine's view, leads.

Moreover, it is evident from the context, which concerns rules for conducting a serious discussion, that the standard reading of this passage (which takes it as referring to the liar's paradox) is the correct one. Augustine clearly marks his own view of this argument as sophistic by the very fact that he does not respond to it. It is the kind of argument one should ignore because it is not serious. But Augustine responds in great detail to the Academic position as a whole, which means that by his own rules of procedure he must regard it as more than simple sophism. Thus, this section must characterize a particular argument used by the Academics, obviously the liar's paradox, and not the Academic position as such.

¹⁰⁴ Thus, while it true to point out, as Gerard O'Daly does (2001, 163), that Augustine declines to address such stock arguments of the Academics as the liar's paradox, this does not mean that he has illegitimately avoided them. On the principles of dialectic he has stated, sophisms are to be distinguished from serious philosophical questions and effort expended only on the latter. As beloved as the liar's paradox is to contemporary logicians, it is of little interest to Augustine in this work because it is of no moral

or epistemological significance and belongs rather to a discussion of language and the correct categorization of speech acts.

¹⁰⁵ This is why Augustine speaks again of the probable even though his argument has in fact moved beyond it. He is not saying that the arguments he has made in the previous section were merely probable and not evident in themselves but rather that he is going to reconsider the internal consistency of Skepticism in relation to assent. As consistency is again the question the argument must return to the standard of judgment internal to Skepticism itself, the probable. This point must be emphasized against Mosher, who uses this passage to support his argument against what he calls the 'received interpretation' of this dialogue (1981, 97). In my view, Augustine's reference to probability here is determined simply by its context in the logical order of the discussion and should not be used as a hermeneutical key the uncovering the true purpose of the dialogue. Mosher, in a footnote to page 97 of his article, tries to buttress his view by noting Augustine's use of the verb 'arbitrior' at 3.14.32. He translates the phrase "*Ergo arbitrior ego sapienti certam esse sapientium*" as "I am therefore of the belief that the wise man is certain of wisdom" and concludes from this that Augustine is deliberately restricting his conclusion to the level of mere belief. It might be argued though, that Mosher is over-interpreting this statement. 'Arbitrior' can mean 'I believe' as opposed to 'I know' but it can also have the simpler and more general sense of 'I hold' or 'I judge' without indicating any specific degree of conviction. Augustine could easily be using this verb in the latter sense.

¹⁰⁶ Mosher is incorrect to think that Augustine's strategy here is to buttress his epistemological arguments, which are merely probable in themselves, with an ethical argument intended to motivate us to assent to these probabilities. As I have argued, Augustine has been concerned to show what is known even in apprehending the probable. If he did not intend this, it becomes hard to say why his argument did not end with the refutation of Alypius for there it was clearly established that Skepticism cannot seem plausible and that the view that something can be known (i.e. that the wise man knows wisdom) is more believable. Augustine's lengthy discourse subsequent to this point seems to me intelligible

only on the supposition that he wants to explain what, in his original refutation, is already known. Since this is so, Augustine must be concerned here not with adding to the persuasiveness of what he has already established but with turning the mind of the Skeptic toward what can be known by showing him that he does not possess the good apart from knowledge.

¹⁰⁷ As one can easily ascertain by explaining Skepticism to one's acquaintances. It is the natural tendency of rational beings to associate action with a justification for action that we are convinced must be right and the Skeptic's attempt to purge us of this tendency can seem as artificial and pointless as deciding not to breathe (a feat supposedly performed by Zeno the Stoic!). This common sense view that Skepticism is irrelevant as an impossible attitude to sustain in the face of life is well articulated by Hume (*An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* XII, 128). Augustine, though, is not simply interested in showing that the first principles of reason are necessities for life regardless of whether they can be demonstrated to be true. He is much more concerned to show that they are first and foremost necessities for thought. This he tries to do not by falling into the infinite regress of trying to demonstrate them in terms of some more primary principle that would itself stand in need of demonstration but by *manifesting* their necessity even for the thought that attempted to deny or bracket them. Thus, he shows that it is mistaken to think that just because the first principles cannot be demonstrated their truth cannot be shown. To this end he points out that denying these principles annihilates the very thought that denies them so that no coherent doubt about them could ever be formulated. Thus, Neiman is mistaken in assimilating Augustine's argument in *Against the Academics* to the arguments of Pascal and Hume. It is not the case that Augustine thinks "We may not be able to provide demonstrations for such belief, but we cannot both live in the world and doubt their certainty" (Neiman 1982, p.272). For good or ill, Augustine's confidence in the possibility of rational certainty is far more robust than pragmatist or fideist interpretations of him allow.

¹⁰⁸ This is the grain of truth in Curley's statement that "Augustine does not reject Skepticism philosophically; indeed he seems to think it impossible to reject Skepticism

as a philosophical system. What Augustine rejects is Skepticism as a way of life" (1996, 154). Augustine is indeed concerned finally with Skepticism as a way of life. However, his evaluation of it as a way of life includes both an examination of its ethical content and its implications for society and an examination of its grounds for rejecting the possibility of certain knowledge. If Skepticism could not be shown to be incoherent and untrue as a philosophical position then it cannot be finally rejected as a way of life for the second question is surely bound up in the first. Thus, Augustine attacks Skepticism as the totality it in fact is by taking on both its ethical and the epistemological aspects. That this is necessary is evident from the fact Skepticism itself holds the question of knowledge and the question of the good together. To attack the ethics one must attack the epistemology and vice versa for they mutually imply each other. That this is, for Augustine, possible is, I think, adequately established by the present commentary.

¹⁰⁹ Kirwan notes correctly that this example is decisive against the Academic claim that epoche frees us from anxiety about the possibility of error. As he states " Action risks error, and so does judgment by imputing it. But abstention from action is impossible, and from judgment absurd. So the risk of error is unavoidable, and cannot be forbidden to the wise man. In sum, withholding assent fails to secure the very advantage that the argument urged in its favor" (Kirwan 1983, 23). This is correct as far as it goes but Augustine's point is in fact even stronger. Not only is it the case that that the wise must act and hence risk error. It is equally the case that, even in withholding assent from action, the possibility of error remains as it can, conceivably, be at times a mistake not to give assent to an action. Whether one acts or does not act, whether one assents or does not assent, the possibility that one is making a mistake remains. This fact is aptly illustrated by Augustine's story.

¹¹⁰ One might add as well that not even the avoidance of all action and the complete suspension of any kind of judgement, whether of truth or of plausibility, can protect the Academic from error. This is because the Academic cannot know that there are not things he ought to do and situations where it would be an error not to act. It could well be that, say, in declining to choose between Christ and Mani,

one is in error in that one or the other may be the path to true happiness that one is risking the loss of in not choosing. This is a point that is well brought out in book VI of the Confessions and is given an intriguing development by Pascal in his famous wager argument. In the end, Augustine is as clear as any existentialist that not choosing is in fact a choice and that there is no choice but to choose. The burden and responsibility of freedom is inescapable.

¹¹¹ It is evident from the fact that 'subtle reasoning' is specifically said not to be adequate to salvation that the 'multitude' mentioned in this passage must refer to the mass of humanity as a whole and not to the many who lack knowledge of philosophy. This precludes the construal placed by some upon this and other passages in the early writings of Augustine according to which Christ came to bring truth to those lacking the education or aptitude to attain it for themselves. On the contrary, Christ clearly brings what philosophers as much as all other people need, which is not knowledge as such (although he brings this too) but the ability to will what one knows fully, that is, to attain in our 'deeds' as well as our 'precepts' the possession of our homeland. This is only possible for those whose acceptance of the humility displayed in the incarnation as the pattern for their own lives has destroyed the human pride that lies at the root of all vice.

¹¹² It is Curley's position that the purpose of the *Against the Academics* "...set up the distinction between authority and reason" (1996, 135). At the end of the work he thinks Augustine has "... removed himself from the field of battle" on the grounds that he has found the "...quietude that the Skeptics sought..." through accepting baptism and the authority of Christ (1996, 137). He can do this, according to Curley, because the arguments of the Academics have been, if not finally refuted, at least shown to be not the only plausible position. Accordingly, Augustine can now be justified in seeking truth in the Catholic faith as it is no longer necessary to think that truth is unattainable. Thus, for Curley "What the *Against the Academics* does is to open the way to faith, a way that Augustine had presumed was permanently blocked by the arguments of the Academics" (1996, 137). This is partly true in that this dialogue, as I have pointed out, does lead the reader to the Christian

faith that is not, in its initial form of a historical revelation, an object of rational certainty but rather an object of belief. But Curley, like Ragnar Holte, seems to me inclined overemphasize the role of authority in how we actually come to possess the content of truth, as if Augustine's problem was how to justify a 'leap of faith' in the absence of certain knowledge. Augustine is quite clear that Skepticism can be overcome on rational grounds that do not appeal directly to faith in the authority of Christ. He clearly holds that pagan philosophy can know with certainty many important truths. He is also adamant, though, that no rational certainty, even certainty about the existence of God, is adequate for our final salvation. We can know some truths apart from the authority of the historical Christ (though not apart from the self-revelation of Christ the Eternal Word to the inwardness of our minds) but we cannot be saved without submitting to him and to his church. Philosophy can overcome the Academics but it cannot unite us to the end that it sees, as the seventh book of the *Confessions* makes clear. Thus, the *Against the Academics* should be said to open the way to the truths known by Platonism which, out of its own despair, must come to recognize the need for faith. This is clear from the *Confessions* itself, where Augustine does not move, as Curley has him moving here, from Skepticism to Christianity but rather from a qualified Skepticism to a Platonic vision of truth and then to faith in the incarnation.

¹¹³ While it is now largely accepted that the author of *Against the Academics* and the other early dialogues was a Christian and not simply a Neo-Platonist our analysis has shown the depth to which Augustine's Christian position determines even these early arguments. Augustine's Christianity here is not a vague enthusiasm whose relation to his philosophical interests has yet to be worked out. It is already being woven into his reflections according to a precisely apprehended logic. Thus, we can put the capstone to this debate by noting the young Augustine was a more mature Christian than has often been realized, even by those who defend the historicity of the *Confessions*.

Part III

¹¹⁴ I say explicitly and directly because Augustine holds himself to be and in fact is bringing out a critique implicit already in Neo-Platonism and indeed, in earlier thought as well, since all he is in fact doing is showing is that since *nous* or thinking in its transcendent self-relation contains the objective knowledge of all things, humans possess certainty through their participation in it. In this sense, his critique is realizing something latent from the first in Aristotle's view that the mind is in a way all things (*De Anima*, III, 5, 430a).

¹¹⁵ Charles Taylor finds Augustinian interiority to be crucial for Descartes and modernity though he finds that Augustine differs in fundamental ways from his modern epigones with respect to the degree of self-sufficiency he allows human reasoning and with respect to the relation of knowledge to will (1989, 156-157). Menn brings the two much closer together in challenging the distinction between Augustinianism and Modern thought assumed by scholars such as Gilson and Gueroult (1998, 16). I cannot, in this dissertation, adequately address the question raised by these scholars as to whether Augustine is to be distinguished from Descartes and, if so, how this distinction is to be accurately drawn. It is sufficient for my argument here to state that whatever this distinction is, it manifestly does not lie in Descartes' effort to ground knowledge in the reflexive self-presence of the thinking subject for Augustine does this with equal rigor. Useful critiques of Taylor and Menn respectively may be found in D. Peddle "Re-sourcing Charles Taylor's Augustine" (forthcoming in *Augustinian Studies*) and W.J. Hankey "Stephen Menn's Cartesian Augustine: Metaphysical and Ahistorically Modern" in *Animus* 3, 1998 @<http://www.mun.ca/animus>.

¹¹⁶ My account of Milbank's view of Augustine is based primarily on his article "Sacred Triads: Augustine and the European Soul" (1997, 451-474). I make reference as well to "Intensities" *Modern Theology* 15:4, 1999 and "Post Modern Critical Augustinianism" *Modern Theology* 7:3, 1991. Highly influential for Milbank's treatment of this question is Susan Mennel's article "Augustine's "I": The "Knowing Subject" and the Self" (1994, 291-324). Also of note is Rowan Williams' "The Paradoxes of Self-knowledge in the *De Trinitate*" (1993). Williams' article is devoted to severing the Augustinian quest for self-knowledge from any suggestion of epistemological foundationalism.

¹¹⁷ A useful account of how the Augustinian soul contains the timeless as a moment in its own temporal consciousness may be found in W.J.T. Kirby's article "Praise as the Soul's overcoming of Time" (1997, 333-350). Kirby notes "Augustine sees the contrarities of being and becoming, eternity and time, discursive speech and the unity of the divine Word as christologically linked. The rational soul has something in common with both being and becoming; the soul is caught in the distension of time yet stands divinely above time by its ability to measure the before and after in a present awareness which is analogous to eternity..." (1997, 345) This union of being and becoming in the soul is crucial for understanding how time and eternity are related in the God-Manhood of Christ. On this point, Kirby contrasts with Mennel, who holds that for Augustine "There is no *stigma*, no *nun*, no 'presence as point' that can be distilled out of time and represented by a word" (1994, 308).

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