

DEMONS IN THE THEOLOGY OF AUGUSTINE

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Lay Abstract

This thesis gives an account of Augustine's understanding of demons. Christian Scriptures declare that pagan gods are demons, and I argue this fully encompasses what demons are for Augustine, as they have not a merely conceptual but a fully religious significance. This study explores the theology with which he contextualizes this assertion and makes it intelligible. Demons are a highly integrated component of Augustine's broader theology, rooted in his conception of angels as the ministers of all creation under God. They take shape through Augustine's doctrine of evil as privation and understanding of the fall, his thoughts on embodiment, desire, and visions, as well as his theology of sacraments and social bodies. The demons' association with pagan religion represents the full inversion of the angels' Christocentric ministry, such that, for Augustine, the only true freedom from demons is found through incorporation into the sacramental life of the church.

Abstract

This thesis gives an account of Augustine's understanding of demons, a full-length study of which has yet to be published. I argue that the scriptural assertion that pagan gods are demons fully encompasses what demons are for Augustine, and I proceed by elucidating the theology with which he contextualizes this assertion and makes it intelligible. Demons emerge as a highly integrated component of Augustine's broader theology, having not a merely conceptual but a fully religious significance. The dissertation begins with the intellectual nature of the angels and their Christocentric mission to reveal God in creation. The second chapter considers the fall of the angels and Augustine's questions about its cause and the timeline of its occurrence. These questions pertain to the matter of embodiment, which becomes the starting point for Chapter 3, where we discuss the demons' putative aerial bodies, their appearance in bodily visions, and some of Augustine's reports of wondrous demonic phenomena. These phenomena are identified together as demonic not by a common aerial nature but a common meaning. Chapter 4 begins our analysis of what is the most significant demonic phenomenon for Augustine, *viz.* pagan religion. There we give an account of Augustine's notion of the devil's body, which, like its counterpart in the body of Christ, is constituted by sacraments, whose production is best described in terms of Hermetic "god-making." The last chapter examines Augustine's account of pagan sacramental theology more specifically, in terms of both a more straightforward understanding of pagan religion, and the more philosophical one offered by the Platonists. The demons' association with pagan religion represents the full inversion of the angels' Christocentric ministry, such that the only true freedom from demons is found, according to Augustine, through incorporation into the sacramental life of the church.

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List of Abbreviations

First, for the sake of readability, I have restricted the use of the Latin abbreviations of Augustine's works to citations, which appear in the notes. In the body of the text I use the full names of his works as they appear in the translations I prefer. Second, the scriptural manuscripts to which Augustine had access did not consistently conform to what would ultimately become the standard Latin text in Jerome's Vulgate. As such biblical quotations are taken from Augustine's own texts, with the scriptural passage given, followed by its source in Augustine. Third, since Augustine's OT conformed most closely to the LXX, Septuagintal chapter and verse numbering will be used. Any variance from these patterns will be noted.

Abbreviations of Augustine's Works

Abbreviations of Augustine's works come from *AA*, with some modification. Latin texts are those used by *Corpus Augustinianum Gissense*. Edited, including the electronic edition, by Cornelius Mayer. Basel: Schwabe, 1995.

<i>agon.</i>	<i>De agone Christiano</i> (CSEL 41)
<i>an. et or.</i>	<i>De anima et eius origine</i> (CSEL 60)
<i>an. quant.</i>	<i>De animae quantitate</i> (CSEL 89)
<i>c. Acad</i>	<i>Contra Academicos</i> (CCL 29)
<i>ciu.</i>	<i>De ciuitate Dei contra Paganos</i> (CCL 47–48)
<i>conf.</i>	<i>Confessiones</i> (CCL 27)
<i>corrept.</i>	<i>De correptione et gratia</i> (CSEL 92)
<i>c. Prisc.</i>	<i>Contra Priscillianistas</i> (CCL 49)
<i>cura mort.</i>	<i>De cura pro mortuis gerenda</i> (CSEL 41)
<i>diuin. daem.</i>	<i>De diuinatione daemonum</i> (CSEL 41)
<i>diu. qu.</i>	<i>De diuersis quaestionibus octoginta tribus</i> (CCL 44A)
<i>Dulc. qu.</i>	<i>De octo Dulcitii quaestionibus</i> (CCL 44A)
<i>ench.</i>	<i>Enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide spe et caritate</i> (CCL 46)
<i>en. Ps.</i>	<i>Enarrationes in Psalmos</i> (CSEL 38–40)
<i>ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i> (CSEL 34, 44, 57, *88)
<i>ep. Io. tr.</i>	<i>In epistulam Iohannis ad Parthos tractatus</i> (PL 35)
<i>doc. Chr</i>	<i>De doctrina Christiana</i> (Simonetti. Verona, 1994)
<i>Gn. adu. Man.</i>	<i>De Genesi aduersus Manicheos</i> (CSEL 91)

<i>Gn. litt.</i>	<i>De Genesi ad litteram</i> (CSEL 28)
<i>gr. et lib. arb.</i>	<i>De gratia et libero arbitrio</i> (PL 44)
<i>gr. et pecc. or.</i>	<i>De gratia Christi et de peccato originali</i>
<i>imm. an.</i>	<i>De immortalitate animae</i> (CSEL 89)
<i>inq. Ian.</i>	<i>Ad inquisitiones Ianuarii</i> (=ep. 54–55)
<i>Io. eu. tr.</i>	<i>In Iohannes euangelium tractatus</i> (CCL 36)
<i>lib. arb.</i>	<i>De libero arbitrio</i> (CSEL 74)
<i>mor.</i>	<i>De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum</i> (CSEL 90)
<i>mus.</i>	<i>De musica</i> (PL 32)
<i>nat. b.</i>	<i>De natura boni</i> (CSEL 25)
<i>nat. et gr.</i>	<i>De natura et gratia</i> (CSEL 60)
<i>persev.</i>	<i>De dono perseuerantiae</i> (PL 45)
<i>retr.</i>	<i>Retractationes</i> (CCL 57)
<i>s.</i>	<i>Sermones</i>
<i>Simpl.</i>	<i>Ad Simplicianum de diuersis quaestionibus</i> (CCL 44)
<i>spir. et litt.</i>	<i>De spiritu et littera</i> (CSEL 60)
<i>trin.</i>	<i>De Trinitate</i> (CCL 50, 50A)
<i>uera. rel.</i>	<i>De uera religion</i> (CCL 32)
<i>uirg.</i>	<i>De sancta uirginitate</i> (CSEL 41)

Abbreviations of Works of Other Ancient Authors

Abbreviations of non-Augustinian works conform to *AA* where possible, otherwise SBL for Christian authors, and OCD⁴ for pagan ones.

Apollodorus Mythographus (Pseudo-Apollodorus)

Bibl. *Bibliotheca*

Apuleius

deo Soc. *De deo Socratico* (n.b. Oudendorp's page numbering is used, following the Harrison translation.)

Athenagoras

leg. *Legatio pro Christianis*

Cicero

divin. *De divinatione*

nat. d. *De natura deorum*

<i>Diogenes Laertius</i>		
	Diog. Laert.	<i>Vitae philosophorum</i>
<i>Dionysius of Halicarnassus</i>		
	Ant. Rom.	<i>Antiquitates Romanae</i>
<i>Herodotus</i>		
	Hdt.	<i>Historia</i>
<i>John Cassian</i>		
	Conl.	<i>Conlationes Patrum</i>
<i>Livy</i>		
	—	<i>Ab urbe condita</i>
<i>Origen</i>		
	mart.	<i>Exhortatio ad martyrium</i>
	de princ.	<i>De principiis</i>
<i>Ovid</i>		
	Fast.	<i>Fasti</i>
	Met.	<i>Metamorphoses</i>
<i>Plato</i>		
	Ap.	<i>Apologia</i>
	Cra.	<i>Cratylus</i>
	Epin.	<i>Epinomis</i>
	Euthphr.	<i>Euthyphro</i>
	Phd.	<i>Phaedo</i>
	Symp.	<i>Symposium</i>
	Tim.	<i>Timaeus</i>
	Tht.	<i>Theaetetus</i>
<i>Plotinus</i>		
	Enn.	<i>Enneads</i>
<i>Porphyry</i>		
	Abst.	<i>De abstinencia</i>
	Aneb.	<i>Epistula ad Anebonem</i>
<i>Tatian</i>		
	orat.	<i>orationes</i>

Vergil

<i>Aen.</i>	<i>Aeneid</i>
<i>G.</i>	<i>Georgics</i>

Other Abbreviations

<i>AA</i>	<i>Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia</i> . Edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.
<i>ACW</i>	Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation. Edited by Johannes Quasten, Walter J. Burghardt, and Thomas Comerford Lawler. New York: Paulist, 1946–.
<i>AugStud</i>	<i>Augustinian Studies</i> . Villanova: Villanova University Press, 1970–.
<i>CCL</i>	Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina. Turnhout: Brepols, 1953–.
<i>CSEL</i>	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum. Vienna: Tempsky, 1865–.
<i>Dolbeau</i>	<i>Vingt-Six sermons au peuple d’Afrique/Augustin d’Hippone; retrouvés à Mayence</i> . Edited by F. Dolbeau. Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1996.
<i>FC</i>	Fathers of the Church: A New Translation. Editorial Director Thomas P. Halton. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1947–.
<i>JECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i> . John Hopkins University Press.
<i>JLT</i>	<i>Journal of Literature and Theology</i> . Oxford: Oxford University Press.
<i>JRE</i>	<i>Journal of Religious Ethics</i> . Atlanta: Scholars.
<i>NPNF</i>	A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Oxford; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.
<i>OCD</i> ⁴	<i>Oxford Classical Dictionary</i> . Edited by Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth, and Esther Eidinow. Fourth edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

- PL Patrologiae Cursus Completus. *Series Latina*. Edited by J. P. Migne. Paris, 1844–1864.
- PLS Supplement to the Patrologiae Cursus Completus. *Series Latina*. 3 vols. Edited by A. Hamman. Paris, 1958–1963.
- RÉA* *Revue des études augustiniennes*. Paris: Études Augustiniennes.
- RS* *Religious Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- WSA Works of Saint Augustine: A New Translation for the 21st Century. Series editor, Boniface Ramsey. Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1990–.

Introduction

*The crown of victory is promised only
to those who engage in the struggle. . .
We ought to know, then, who that very
adversary is, at whose defeat we are
going to receive a crown.
— Augustine, *agon*. 1.1.*

Augustine grew up in an age where men thought that they shared the physical world with malevolent demons. They felt this quite as intensely as we feel the presence of myriads of dangerous bacteria. The ‘name of Christ’ was applied to the Christian like a vaccination. It was the only guarantee of safety. As a child, Augustine had been ‘salted’ to keep out the demons; when he had suddenly fallen ill, as a boy, he would plead to be baptized.¹

Thus does Peter Brown describe the demon-fearing context of the church of Roman North Africa, in which St. Augustine of Hippo was raised. It is indubitable that such traditions of men, if demons are indeed such a tradition, have a profound impact on how one sees the world. Perhaps, then, it is not unfair to say, as van der Meer does, “Augustine thought in the terms of the world of late Antiquity,” and that this “explains why his belief in demons was to him a belief in a very real thing.”² For it was not just the superstitious masses that believed in such invisible beings; churchmen and natural philosophers alike asserted their presence not only in the air around us, but throughout the entirety of the cosmos. Surely Augustine, great doctor of the church that he is, can be forgiven for being a product of his time.

¹ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (2d ed.; Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2000), 30, citing *conf.* 1.10.17.

² Frederic van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop: The Life and Work of a Father of the Church*. (trans. Brian Battershaw and G. R. Lamb; London: Sheed and Ward, 1961), 71.

There is, however, more than a little triumphalism in such an assessment, and confidence that the modern world has rightly been disenchanted, to use Weber's word.³ But disenchantment presumes that demons were entirely "incalculable forces"; that is, that they were only ever a cipher for unknown causes, and that, now that we have a better grasp on things, the phenomena they were invoked to explain are better explained by material or psychological causes, without exception. Of course, no careful reader of such an extraordinary mind as Augustine's would fail to recognize his habit of digging relentlessly behind such mysteries in order to seek a better understanding of his faith. That Augustine refers to demons so widely, and so easily, should invite us to our own investigation of what we find mysterious, or simply odd. Yet, while the authors mentioned above are certainly careful readers of Augustine, the dismissive air persists. Van der Meer, for example, finds it reassuring that Augustine does not "have demons on the brain," and that he is quite capable of forgetting them.⁴

In fact, the disenchantment of the cosmos finds in Augustine a hero. Of course Augustine took demons seriously; he could do no less given his surroundings. But it is more important that he was able to transform their significance. Brown notes that Augustine did not overturn the basic belief in the struggle against demons. He "merely turned the Christian struggle inwards: its amphitheatre was the 'heart'; it was an inner struggle against forces in the soul; the 'Lord of this world' becomes the 'Lord of desires'—of the desires of those who love this world, and so come to resemble demons committed to the same emotions as themselves."⁵ Less nuanced articulations of Augustine's supersession of ancient demonology limit demonic power to mere appearances and deceptions, such that there is "no need to be afraid of demons or superstitions."⁶ Indeed, it is not impossible to find good scholars assuming a straightforward contradiction between moral formation and the postulation of demons, as though such questions had never occurred to Augustine. As one author puts it, "the Christian is not

³ Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills; London: Routledge, 2009), 139.

⁴ Van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, 73.

⁵ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 240–41.

⁶ G. R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 110; cf. van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, 75: "At some places demons were still on the watch, but they were no more than chained dogs which could still bark savagely enough but could only bite those who went too near them."

defiled by what others do, but by what he does himself. This position is *strictly* inconsistent with belief in the power of demons, for then their words and food and drink and shrines really would be polluted and dangerous.” For this reason, “Augustine seemed to be saying . . . that a blithe disdain could accompany the truly faithful and confident Christian in an ambiguous world.”⁷

That the diabolical lord of this world is, for Augustine, the lord of the desires of those who love this world is certainly correct. Indeed, we may affirm Brown’s assessment of the significance of demons, but only so long as we do not take Augustine’s demonology to be described exhaustively as an inward turn. Augustine may forget demons when he reflects on the wonder of the physical cosmos, or deny that they contaminate words, food, drink, and statues in a bodily way;⁸ but it does not follow that he has isolated the real, inner struggle for virtue from “superstitious” resistance to external but invisible forces. Perhaps Augustine just does not think the significance of demons is in their place in the aesthetic display of the physical universe, or that they act like an infectious contagion. If we hope to assess Augustine’s contribution to ancient demonology, let us first take time to assess what he actually thought demons were. This dissertation strives to do just that. And we should not be surprised when we discover that Augustine’s attitude toward demons is not, in the end, best characterized as “blithe disdain.”

The suggestion that Augustine moralized, even psychologized, demons makes for a good narrative to the extent that it preserves both the exotic quality of the ancient past and the familiar quality of a great theologian’s genius. Unfortunately, it is not true. Consider Augustine’s *Christian Combat*, on the basis of which Brown makes his statement about the inward turn of the Christian’s struggle with demons. There he asserts that the devil rules over those who love temporal goods because he is the ruler of those desires. Thus, to overcome those desires is to overcome the devil, as Brown rightly notes.⁹ But we should also pay closer attention to what else Augustine says in this work from his early days as a bishop: “the devil is cast out when we renounce this world with all our heart. The devil, who is prince of this world, is thus renounced when we renounce his

⁷ James J. O’Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography* (New York: Ecco, 2005), 154–55, emphasis original.

⁸ Cf., van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, 73–74.

⁹ See *agon*. 1.1–2.2.

corruption, his pomp, and his angels.”¹⁰ This is a reference to the catechumenate’s ritual renunciation of the devil, which, in the church of late antiquity, took place at the final penitential vigil or the eighth day before Easter, as well as before their baptism during the Easter vigil, accompanying the examination, exsufflation, and exorcism of the catechumens.¹¹ And while Augustine never wavers on the importance of moral resistance to demons, neither does he waver on these rituals of renunciation. In fact, if anything, they grow in importance,¹² as incorporation into the church becomes the paradigm for humanity’s opposition to demonic powers. In other words, the importance of the engagement with demons is, for Augustine, not its moral nature, per se, but rather the containment of that moral struggle within an ecclesial setting.

This kind of sacramental, liturgical response to demons points much more clearly toward the true nature of Augustine’s demonology. To say, on the one hand, that demons were thought to share the world somehow like we share the world with microbial contaminants and contagions, that demons might be hiding under lettuce leaves and rocks, that “everywhere Augustine went, demons and angels hovered almost within reach,”¹³ is to imagine them far too physically and bodily for Augustine. On the other hand, to say that Augustine reduces human interaction with demons to a moral struggle is, in a sense, not to think of them as bodily enough. Augustine’s conception of demons requires the distinction between their invisible existence and the perceivable phenomena that mediate them, so that these two aspects can be properly related, and thus his understanding of their operations and powers accurately assessed. Questions of embodiment are

¹⁰ *Agon.* 1.1.

¹¹ See Daniel G. Van Slyke, “The Devil and His Poms in Fifth-Century Carthage: Renouncing *Spectacula* with Spectacular Imagery,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 59 (2005): 53–72, at 60; J. Patout Burns and Robin M. Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa: The Development of its Practices and Beliefs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 204–06. There was some variation of the wording of the renunciation throughout the church, but the common foci were the renunciation of the devil (*diaboli* / διάβολος), his works (*opera* / ἔργα) or pomp (*pompa* / πομπή), and his angels (*angeli* / ἄγγελοι) or cult (*cultus* / λατρεία). See Van Slyke, *op. cit.* 60n.35.

¹² As Van Slyke shows, some of Augustine’s greatest emphasis on the ritual of exsufflation and exorcism—the blowing-upon and laying-on of hands to rid the baptismal candidate of the demonic powers—of the catechumens comes in his work against Julian Eclanum, written near the time of his death. See Daniel G. Van Slyke, “Augustine and the Catechumenal ‘*Exsufflatio*’: An Integral Element of Christian Initiation,” *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 118 (2004): 175–208, at 197–205.

¹³ O’Donnell, *Augustine*, 152.

therefore central in what follows, as we seek out Augustine's identification of the kinds of signs that mark demonic desire.

Description of Augustine's understanding of demons—including the theology, angelology, and anthropology, that undergird it—is the principle goal of this dissertation. Ultimately, for Augustine, the gods of the nations are demons. In other words, pagan religious culture and philosophical theology are paradigmatic of the demons' power and influence upon humanity. Their significance is thus not merely moral, but also fully religious, and my dissertation will show that this religious characterization of demons fundamentally encompasses what demons are to Augustine in general. Of course, Augustine explicitly says the pagan gods are really demons, and when he does, he is simply quoting the Psalmist.¹⁴ But demons emerge as a highly integrated component of his broader theology, rooted in his conception of angels as the ministers of all creation under God, and informed by the doctrine of evil as privation and his understanding of the fall, his thoughts on human embodiment, desire, visions, and the limits of human knowledge, as well as his theology of religious incorporation and sacraments.

Our examination of Augustine's demons begins with their original angelic nature. Chapter 1 establishes the creator-created, eternal-temporal distinction so foundational for Augustine's understanding of the entire created order. This distinction forms the basis for his reflections upon the creation account of Genesis, in which he attempts to locate creation of the angels. But it also defines the problem that the angels are to help solve, namely, how humans are to know and love God in the remoteness of God's eternity. For Augustine, angels are created wisdom, enlightened in their love of God, perfected at the beginning of their creation, always beholding the Father's face. As perfected intellectual spirits, angels possess a knowledge of creation in God that allows them to administer all of creation. In this administrative role it is the angels' responsibility to be God's external, volitional mode of providence for the whole cosmos: they see in God what ought to occur in God's creation and carry it out as required. I will show that, for Augustine, the primary goal of this angelic office is to testify to the incarnation of the Son of God, not only with miracles, but also by working through human institutions, most notably in their administration of the Holy Scriptures themselves.

¹⁴ Ps 95:5; cf. 1 Cor 10:20.

Augustine is clear that the angelic office requires the willingness of such created spirits to love God above all, and thus subordinate themselves to him. That some angels fail to offer this volitional response is the basis for Augustine's doctrine of their fall, whereby they become demons, which is the subject of Chapter 2. There we give an overview of Augustine's understanding of evil as pride's apostasy from God, after which we examine two issues that confront Augustine concerning the devil's fall. The first is the question of whether it can have any cause. There we will show that Augustine assumes a non-competitive relationship between the created will and the God that creates and empowers it. The rational will is thus always in a position of response to God's eternal priority, which preserves, for Augustine, the devil's responsibility for his fall. The second issue is Augustine's understanding of when and in what conditions the devil fell. While he is clear earlier in his career that the devil sins from the very beginning of his existence, before he is ever good, Augustine later doubts this in the conviction that all angels must have been established in the good. I will attempt to show that, granting the establishment of the angels in the good from the beginning, Augustine's earlier understanding of the immediacy of the fall remains the most compelling, since the demons' lack of animal bodies precludes the insertion of any time before the devil's fall. I will conclude by engaging with some of James Wetzel's work on the fall. In conversation with Wetzel, I find that interrogation into Augustine's understanding of the fall of the angels reveals a crucial component of Augustine's demonology that he does not state explicitly, but clearly assumes: demons require the assumption of some kind of embodiment in order to interact with humans within history.

Chapter 3 goes on to investigate this question of demons and bodies, beginning with the traditional postulation that demons have bodies of air, which Augustine inherited. Augustine's reflection with philosophical rigour upon the nature of visions, as well as his scripturally-prescribed reticence to speculate, show that it is impossible to say that the demon's aerial body is the means by which it appears to humans. Augustine thus maintains a crucial ontological difference between the demonic nature itself and the phenomena by which it appears. An aerial body is not, strictly speaking, in itself a historical body, and is instead a way of speaking about the unknowable methods by which demons do, in fact, appear among humans. We then consider a variety of phenomena by which demons are perceived, focusing upon the more wondrous or miraculous. For

Augustine, demons have power only over bodies and appearances, which should not be thought to extend to the human understanding and will. This restricts demonic power to the natural, causal limitations of things, which they only know externally—scientifically, as it were—and not in God as the angels do. It also makes it possible for the saints to resist them with virtue, by which they are made the “sport of angels.” The chapter ends with Augustine’s differentiation between angelic and demonic miracles not according to their perceived power, but by their meaning. The self-love in which they fell is the self-love to which all the works of demons ultimately refer, and by which they are identifiable in those works.

Viewed in terms of its reference to self-love, it quickly becomes clear that the most profound work of demons, for Augustine, is not the odd prodigy or oracle but the religious institutions of the earthly city such wonders support. The final two chapters reprise the Christocentrism of the angelic office by showing that the demons’ fall away from God produces a rival symbolic order to Christ’s angelic ministers, one which manifests in a corporate opposition to Christ’s body. Chapter 4 begins to consider Augustine’s perception of the history of Rome and its false gods as the history of the demons themselves. For the contrary referents of the work of angels and demons correspond to contrary sacraments, which constitute contrary historical bodies: the body of Christ, which is the church, and that of the devil, which, in Augustine’s case, is pagan Rome. In this chapter I show that Augustine’s understanding of the earthly city is informed by a concept of disordered, demonic sacraments, taking Hermetic god-making as their paradigm. Human myths and artefacts are elevated to divine status and given cult, a euhemeristic movement that demons both receive as worship and confirm with wonders.

Chapter 5 continues the investigation of signs and sacraments of demons in pagan religion, which Augustine sees as the very foundation of Rome’s history of moral corruption. I try to show what Augustine thinks is particularly demonic in his evaluation of paganism, both as it is presented most straightforwardly to the public, and as it is understood by its most clever interpreters, the Platonists, chiefly Apuleius and Porphyry. In light of this analysis, I suggest that Augustine’s demons interact with and manifest among humanity in three principle ways: the straightforward imitation of demonic pride, the demons’ administration of false religion as though they were true angels, and, folding these two together, the promotion of admittedly false religion for the sake of possessing other people in

pride. This chapter concludes with Augustine's postulation of ecclesial incorporation into Christ as true where demonic religion is false, as good where it is wicked, and thus as the primary means by which humanity is to find freedom from such possession by the lordship of demons.

Though he speaks of demons throughout his considerable corpus, Augustine probably does not refer to them anywhere more frequently than in *The City of God*, to which the association of demons with pagan gods is central. Nevertheless, much of what he says about demons in that work is greatly illuminated by his development of the same concepts elsewhere in his writings, which often appear in vignettes scattered throughout his works. I have tried to concentrate upon the discussion of demons when they appear in his significant doctrinal works of Augustine—other than *The City of God*, these are chiefly *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, *The Trinity*, and *Teaching Christianity*—but there are many instances where ideas are discussed elsewhere, sometimes only briefly, which are nevertheless too important to avoid mentioning. One area I do not explore, which bears further study, is the pastoral use of the concept of demons in Augustine's extensive collection of sermons.

Much more needs to be said to identify Augustine's novel contribution to early Christian demonology. At first glance, however, there appears to be little content in Augustine's demonology that is especially innovative. Their aerial bodies, their equation with pagan gods, their identification as the power behind arts of divination, magic, and prodigies, and of course as the source of much torment and affliction: all of these themes are present in Christian thought about demons prior to Augustine, as are the belief in Christ's conquest of demons on the cross, the extension of this victory to Christians through their incorporation into the church, and the ongoing power of exorcisms.¹⁵ The basic attitude of opposition to demons as unambiguously evil is traceable well back into the Jewish origins of Christianity, including the Christian Scriptures themselves, but especially within various apocalyptic works.¹⁶ Much of the complex cosmologies implied in the latter had faded by Augustine's time, however, as all the different

¹⁵ See Everett Ferguson, *Demonology of the Early Christian World* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984), 105–42.

¹⁶ See Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, vol. 1 of *A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea* (ed. and trans. John A. Baker; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), 187–92.

superhuman evil beings were gradually gathered under the single genus of “demons,” and subsequently identified as fallen angels. The finalization of this process was probably the closure of the Christian cannon, and its rejection of much of this literature upon which such cosmic speculation was based. Augustine makes explicit arguments for the rejection of *Enoch*, but he is more an inheritor of, than an innovator in, the process of canonization that marks these changes in Christian demonology. It is a long and gradual process by which ancient Jewish “demons” become the fallen angels of post-Nicene Christians, and Augustine, it seems, can take little credit for it.¹⁷

It would appear, rather, that Augustine’s contribution to Christian demonology is something more like what is said of the Neoplatonists’ contribution to paganism: they are less interested in innovation than the support of traditional beliefs with greater intellectual rigour.¹⁸ That Augustine and these philosophers should both engage in projects of this nature, but that the philosophers undertake this work in service of what Augustine considers to be demonic religion, helps give one a sense for why, in his demonology, such philosophers emerge as Augustine’s foremost human rivals. Moreover, this rivalry is all the more ardent for the fact that Augustine considers their philosophy more properly illuminative of true religion, including its significant contribution to the proper Christian conception of demons and pagan religion themselves. Augustine looks to the Platonists for much of the intellectual rigour by which he might come to a greater understanding of this traditional aspect of the Christian faith, whose ultimate literary source is the Christian Scriptures. For this reason, though the systematic placement of Augustine’s thought within the ancient history of demonology remains beyond the purview of this dissertation, I do attempt to note those sources of Augustine’s demonology he considers most important to mention by name: the Christian Scriptures and platonic philosophy.

This dissertation represents an attempt to seek an understanding of Augustine’s faith. And, although it is not structured as an apology for belief in the kinds of demons in which Augustine believed, I do hope I have done that faith

¹⁷ Cf. Dale Basil Martin, “When Did Angels Become Demons?” *JBL* 129/4 (2010): 657–77.

¹⁸ Cf. E. R. Dodds, “Supernormal Phenomena in Classical Antiquity,” in *The Ancient Concept of Progress and Other Essays on Greek Literature and Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 156–210, at 166; Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians: In the Mediterranean World from the Second Century AD to the Conversion of Constantine* (London: Penguin, 1983), 256.

justice by clarifying the underlying concepts that support it. A great span of history intervenes between the Bishop of Hippo and us, and it is not always clear how we, as modern readers, should digest some of the stranger doctrines he espouses. In the end, however, Augustine's demonology is best understood not when we assume it concerns only quirky and antiquated beliefs, but rather when we presuppose he is speaking about matters to which we can relate, and then examine his concepts to discover how.

1. Augustine on the Angels of God

It is a given for Augustine, in a way that is not always clear or explicit in the Judaeo-Christian tradition that precedes him, that demons are fallen angels. The departure of demons from the nature in which the holy angels have remained makes Augustine's understanding of those angels definitive for his conception of demons. We therefore begin our elucidation of the latter with a consideration of the former. We will discuss here the connection between the nature of angels as intellectual spirits, created to know and love God and creation in their proper order, and their administrative role over creation, particularly their office as messengers of God. Augustine's most substantial reflection upon the angelic nature occurs in his search for their presence in the creation account of Genesis on the pages of *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, the exegesis of which will thus occupy much of the present chapter. Augustine's *Trinity*, however, considers the role of angels in theophanies, and so we will turn to this text in order to understand in particular the Christocentric orientation of the angelic administration. But we will begin with Augustine's *City of God*, in which he sets the angels' relation to demons within the context of humanity's alienation from God, and the need to mediate God's eternity in time and space.

The Remoteness of God and the Need for Witness

In Book 11 of *The City of God*, Augustine commits himself to a discussion of the angels as the original members of the heavenly city itself. Augustine's principal concern throughout the work is to speak about this holy communion of those who love God, and also of its corruption in those who love themselves. But in Books 11–14, Augustine tells the story of their origins. It is a story in which Genesis figures prominently, since Augustine takes Genesis to give an account of the origins of all things, “an authorized *Peri archôn*,” as TeSelle says, in a cultural atmosphere preoccupied with causes and origins.¹ So when Augustine explicitly sets out to articulate the foundation of the city of God, it is to Genesis that he

¹ Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 198.

turns in order to find the origins of the heavenly city's first and most glorious members, the angels.

It is instructive, however, that Augustine cannot move into an interpretation of Genesis and the origins of the angels directly. He comes to creation in two short chapters, and to angels specifically in five more after that, but before speaking of the origins of the two cities in the angels he must first speak of God.² Augustine notes how great and rare an achievement it is to be able, through the contemplative effort of the mind, to come to the immutable substance of God, and learn "from God Himself" that everything that is not God is made by God. This leads him not into a discussion of *creatio ex nihilo*, but rather a consideration of what it means for God to "speak." For, although the contemplative learns "from God himself," Augustine denies that this instruction comes from hearing God audibly, or from seeing God in a bodily or mental vision. Humans do not relate to God the way created things relate to one another, with sight and sound crossing the intermediate space between beings. To the extent that God speaks at all, God speaks by means of "truth itself." To hear God is not to hear words, but to perceive God with the mind. By virtue of this very ability to perceive God, the mind is the greatest part of the human being, and there is nothing greater than it except God alone, for by it one is brought closer to God.

This achievement is, as he says, a great and rare thing, and Augustine contends that because of its faults the mind is almost incapable of enjoying, embracing, or even glimpsing God's immutable light. There is a kind of distance between humanity and God, not only because God is not available to the bodily senses, but more importantly humans fail both to understand and to love God. This intellectual and affective distance is crossed only by the renewal of the mind, by healing, by purification through faith. Thus, although he has pledged to talk about angels, Augustine speaks straightaway about the ineffability of God and the need for the Incarnation. For it is only as the Truth itself, the Word of God, assumes created humanity without setting aside his Godhead "that man might find a way to man's God through God made man."³ For knowledge of the goal is not enough: between the man striving toward God and God toward whom he is striving there must be a way; *in via media* there must be *mediator*. This is found

² *Ciu.* 11.2.

³ *Ciu.* 11.2.

in the union of humanity and divinity—God the goal, man the way—so that in one person humanity finds “the mediator between God and man: the man Christ Jesus.”⁴

When Augustine suggests that Christ, being both man and God, is the “only way that is wholly defended against all error,”⁵ he is recalling from earlier books his argument against Platonists who would claim the necessity of demonic mediators.⁶ In those pages, he denies not only that evil demons can be mediators between humanity and divinity, but also that the holy and blessed angels can serve that role. As we enter into Augustine’s greater expositions of these spiritual beings, however, we find that the matter is not so simple. In fact, we find that when Augustine describes angels, he describes beings whose job is precisely to mediate divinity for humanity. By no means, however, does this call into question the obviously singular necessity of Christ in Augustine’s understanding of salvation. Rather, it is a matter of acknowledging the plurality of actors Augustine recognizes in the historical drama of salvation, at the centre of which Christ stands. Hence, no sooner does Augustine emphasize the exclusivity of Christ for salvation than he highlights the role of divine scriptures in bringing divine matters that are remote from us into proximity. For, since we cannot know about things remote from our senses from the testimony of our senses, “we require the testimony of others in respect of them, and we rely upon those from whose senses we do not believe the objects in question to be, or to have been, remote.”⁷

Augustine makes the critical importance of this testimony immediately apparent. For not only is God intellectually remote in his ineffability from our understanding, and morally remote in his perfection from our sinfulness, but God’s singular manifestation in the Incarnation is also remote from the very human senses to which it was precisely to make God manifest. This remoteness is overcome as God reveals himself in the Scriptures. For these are the words of the very mediator incarnate in Christ, speaking first through the prophets, then in his own incarnate person, then through the apostles. Insight into God, so difficult for most to reach contemplatively, is made publically available in the Scriptures by

⁴ 1 Tim 2:5, *apud ciu.* 11.2.

⁵ *Ciu.* 11.2.

⁶ See, e.g., *ciu.* 9.13–15.

⁷ *Ciu.* 11.3.

means of the testimony of those whom the church believes to have achieved greater proximity to God.

That God made the world, we can believe from no one more securely than from God Himself. Where have we heard Him? Nowhere more clearly than . . . where His prophet said: ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.’ Was the prophet there when God made the heavens and the earth? No; but the Wisdom of God, by Whom all things were made, was there, and this Wisdom causes itself to pass over into holy souls, and makes them the friends and prophets of God, and speaks soundlessly within them of His works. The angels of God, who always behold the Father’s face, also speak to them, and proclaim His will to those whom it befits.⁸

The Word of God reveals the Triune God by taking on humanity in the incarnation, but also by taking on words in the body of the Scriptures by passing like “soundless speech” into the minds of his prophets. But the prophetic apprehension of the Word of God that allows the authors of Scripture to make God known to people is attributed to a much greater degree to the angels, “who always behold the Father’s face.”⁹ The context Augustine sets for his discussion of angels is thus, in the first place, epistemological. Humans need a perception of the Father’s face, an insight into the Word, that can be made perceivable for us. We need the soundless speech of God put into words, the representation of that divine presence from which we are absent, to reveal to us the Word itself who is incarnate in Christ.

Even when Augustine commits himself to speak about angels he cannot begin with angels, for everything he thinks about them is conditioned by his understanding of God. The beginning of Augustine’s reflections are thus not those of his great predecessor in hexameral homiletics, Basil the Great: “it is right that any one beginning to narrate the formation of the world should begin with the good order which reigns in visible things.”¹⁰ Augustine’s is a far more philosophical reading of the creation narrative than the rather more

⁸ *Ciu.* 11.4.

⁹ *Ciu.* 11.4; see Matt 18:10.

¹⁰ Basil, *Hex.* 1.1.

straightforward account given by Basil.¹¹ He does not, on this account, begin with the good order of things, visible or invisible, but rather with the God in whom all things have their good order. That is, Augustine wishes to speak first not about the beginning of things, but about that in which all things have their beginning. To understand his conception of the angels, we will follow suit, though it amounts to an attempt to begin prior to the beginning. Augustine knows this, however, and how he proceeds only underscores the distinction between God and his remote creation, which is the very basis for our need of angels.

The Eternal God

The decision to begin with God in the account of God's creation raises for Augustine, at least in the context of Book 11 of *The City of God*, the question of when God created. Augustine agrees with the platonic assertion that the immutability of God precludes any sudden or impulsive decision to create the world, having never been there before. Yet, in order to reconcile the creation of the world with the immutability of God, the Platonists posit that the world was therefore not created in time, but is rather somehow eternal with God. But this is a solution precluded by Genesis, and with good reason: it amounts to selling the farm to save the farm. Eternity cannot be saved from mutability by making what is mutable co-eternal. Creation must begin without any change occurring in the eternal will of God, yet it must begin all the same. One need not posit infinite time to prevent a change in God's mind in his creation of time any more than one must, with Epicurus, posit infinite space to prevent God from being inactive in the "space" in which he created space. The Platonists see no need for an Epicurean opinion on this latter issue, so neither, Augustine thinks, should they get worked up about the former. That is, just as it is absurd to ask why God created the universe here and not there, so too is it absurd to ask why he created it now and not then. It is precisely because God transcends finite space that one does not claim God needs space in which to create space; so, too, because God is eternal,

¹¹ Which Augustine knew. See TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 199; P. Agaësse and A. Solignac, "La connaissance angélique et les jours de la création," *BA* 48, 645–53, at 645.

because he transcends time, one asks in vain at what point in time God created time.¹²

No worthy interlocutor thinks God is corporeal, as far as Augustine is concerned, but the atemporality of God is no less intrinsic to God's immutability for being less self-evident.¹³ Temporality is a property of created things as much as corporeality, insofar as time does not exist without movement and change, and there can be no movement or change without time. But this means the world is not made in time, but simultaneously with time: "For that which is made in time is made both after and before some time: after that which is past, and before that which is to come. But there could have been no 'past' before the creation, because there was then no creature by whose changing movements time could be enacted."¹⁴ This much is implied by the beginning of Genesis, since to speak of the creation of the world is to start speaking in terms of the passing of days, even though it may be difficult to understand the nature of those days.

Time, it would seem, knows none of the stability of eternal immutability. In his reflections on time and eternity in *Confessions*, Augustine asks how long the present moment can last. A year? A month? A day? Not even an hour or a minute is present all at once, nor even a second:

If we can conceive of a moment in time which cannot be further divided into even the tiniest of minute particles, that alone can be rightly termed the present; yet even this flies by from the future into the past with such haste that it seems to last no time at all. Even if it has some duration, that too is divisible into past and future; hence the present is reduced to vanishing-point.¹⁵

Time itself, if it is anything in itself, is loss, a "vanishing-point"; one cannot consider a moment without being able to divide it smaller, and the smaller one divides it, the quicker it dies into the past. But this slipping away is constitutive of time, for, if present time "were always present and never slipped away into the

¹² *Ciu.* 11.4–5. On the argument of this section, and Augustine's interlocutors, see O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 137–38.

¹³ See *ciu.* 11.5.

¹⁴ *Ciu.* 11.6.

¹⁵ *Conf.* 11.15.20 (WSA).

past, it would not be time at all; it would be eternity. . . . In other words, we cannot really say that time exists, except because it tends to non-being.”¹⁶

God relates to time from outside of it, so to speak. He does not remember the past, look to the future, or grasp at the present as we do, striving to hold them together in our minds.¹⁷ Rather, past, present, and future are all held simultaneously and unchangingly. The future does not come to God, nor does the past slip away. As Augustine says in *Confessions*, all time for God is but a simple, eternal Today.¹⁸ We might more strictly say all of created time is, for God, an eternal Now, “where things to be and things passed away stand.”¹⁹ At one and the same “time,” the world is being created and coming to its end, Christ is hanging on the cross and being resurrected. Each of the infinitely divisible moments that make up what humans take to be single events is present in God simultaneously, without God having to put any successive moments together in thought in order to comprehend the whole. “For in His incorporeal vision all things which He knows are simultaneously present. For just as He moves all temporal things without any temporal motion of His own, so does He know all things with a knowledge that does not occupy time.”²⁰

And if pan-temporal creation is present to God all at once, then all of creation takes place simultaneously. For it is no more possible to proceed by gradation from eternity toward temporality, than to proceed by gradation from nothing to something.²¹ The creation of something from nothing, of something

¹⁶ *conf.* 11.14.17 (WSA).

¹⁷ Augustine suggests that it is our psychological capacity alone that affords any life at all to the movements of created life, which slip towards non-existence in the past as soon as they have come out of the future into the present (*conf.* 11.26.33–31.41). It is a capacity of our soul, our mind, to hold what has passed, in a tension within the present, to an expectation of the coming future. Surely holding time, slipping as it does out of existence, within our minds, so that the past and even future can have a certain presence there for our examination, is a reflection in some small capacity of God’s simultaneous apprehension of all things, which we will discuss presently. I am not sure whether Augustine explicitly held this capacity to constitute some part of the divine image in humanity, but his concept is certainly suggestive of that opinion.

¹⁸ *Conf.* 11.13.16.

¹⁹ *Trin.* 4.17.22, my trans.

²⁰ *Ciu.* 11.21.

²¹ I.e., if one wishes to envision eternity moving towards the creation of temporality, one has already imagined a temporal event. Likewise, if one wishes to imagine the building up of something out of nothing, the very first building block, whatever is imagined, is by definition something, and the leap has already taken place. With a simultaneous conception of creation Augustine is still not envisioning God doing a work all at once that he was not doing previously,

other than God, is a qualitative leap. It is the entire history of the process of becoming and passing away that comes into existence *simul*. There is thus no contradiction between the representation of creation unfolding, as Genesis depicts, and the recognition that this unfolding is created in its entirety all at once, which Scripture also attests: “He created all things simultaneously.”²²

That the very essence of God is eternally simple, incorporeal and unchanging, means that God does not do anything of his own proper substance in space or time. God neither walks in gardens, nor speaks words, which take time to utter. Hence, Augustine considers at length, especially in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, what it means to say that God “spoke” the words, “let light be made.”²³ How long would it have taken God to utter this? What language would God have used? Thinking that God’s proper tongue is English is no more ridiculous than Latin, Biblical Hebrew, or some pre-Babel language. All require a mouth to articulate and time to speak, neither of which can be attributed to God, to say nothing of the audience for such speech that does not yet exist! This discussion is thus in the background when, in *The City of God*, Augustine says, “he ‘spake and it was done,’ with a word which was not audible and transient, but intelligible and eternal.”²⁴

And yet, though Augustine ultimately denies that this particular passage refers to a corporeal speech in time, both the very idea of God so speaking, and the particular command that light might be made, are pertinent to the matter of angels. They comprise the two fundamental aspects of the angelic existence identified in Ps 103:4, “he makes his spirits into his angels.” Augustine explains the passage this way: “If you inquire about the nature of such beings, you find that

and did not continue doing afterward. If any temporal change is excluded from an eternal God, then as long as *simultaneous* is conceived as a moment, no matter how small and instantaneous, one will have missed what Augustine is rejecting; if it is a millionth of a second, it is a million years. But for precisely this reason, neither can it be suggested that God creates at once and steps back to let it go, as though playing with a wind-up toy. As Christ says, “My Father is working still” (John 5:17), and Augustine explains: “God is working even now, so that if his action should be withdrawn from his creatures, they would perish.” *Gn. litt.* 5.20.40. Augustine sums up his answer to how God can be said to “rest” from his works on the seventh day and yet be “working until now,” at *Gn. litt.* 7.28.42.

²² Sir 18:1, *apud Gn. litt.* 4.33.52. Augustine’s translation had *simul* for the Greek κοινῇ, “altogether.” On simultaneous creation, see *Gn. litt.* 4.33.51–4.34.55; 5.3.5–6.

²³ *Gn. litt.* 1.2.4–6; 1.9.15–17.

²⁴ *Ciu.* 11.8, quoting Ps 33:9; 148:5.

they are spirits; if you ask what their office is, the answer is that they are angels. In respect of what they are, such creatures are spirits; in respect of what they do, they are angels.”²⁵ As the Latin transliteration of the Greek, ἄγγελος, *angelus* means, in the first place, “messenger.” It is the name not of a nature but of an office,²⁶ namely that of disclosing the will of God, speaking on his behalf. And yet the office of God’s messenger is so closely tied with this particular nature that Augustine has no qualms with using the name of the office to signify the creature itself. For, as we will see, Augustine understands the nature of angels to be intellectual light, and it is because God has created them with such a nature that they can reveal his eternal will to humanity in time and space.

The Creation of the Angels

What it means for God to speak is hardly the only mystery that confronts the reader of the opening lines of Genesis. For what is the nature of the light first spoken into existence, which mark the passage of creation’s days? He notes here as a possibility what he will shortly claim with some certainty: that it refers to the city of God, the Jerusalem above, the holy angels and blessed spirits, who might be called “light” in the sense that “you are all the children of the light, and the children of the day.”²⁷ Augustine finds this interpretation rather fitting, not least because it kills two birds with one stone. For, not only must one make sense of the light of the first day, before the creation of luminous bodies on the fourth, but one must also answer the fact that Genesis gives no explicit account of the creation of angels. Their omission is impossible. Scripture clearly suggests that the six days are exhaustively inclusive of all creation when it says that it is “from all the works he had made” that God rested “on the seventh day,” and implying that nothing was made before the first since God created the heaven and the earth “in the beginning.”²⁸

Whatever is not God is a work of God. And even if Genesis does not explicitly identify the creation of the angels, there is certainly other scriptural

²⁵ *En. Ps.* 103(1).15.

²⁶ On this, see Goulven Madec, “Angelus,” *AL*, 303–15, at 304–05. Augustine comments upon the Greek origins of *angelus* at *Gn. litt.* 5.19.37; *ciu.* 15.23.

²⁷ 1 Thess 5:5, *apud ciu.* 11.7, trans. modified to update King James English.

²⁸ *Ciu.* 11.9.

witness. Job helps the most to reveal when they were created: “when the stars were made, the angels praised me with a loud voice.”²⁹ This passage clearly attests that the creation of the angels must precede the fourth day of the Genesis account, on which the stars were created. But, Augustine notes, days two and three do not seem to signify angelic creation, as the second pertains to the firmament separating the waters, and the third recounts the separation and formation of earth and water, and the bringing forth of the earth every rooted thing. The angels must therefore be that light named “day” on the first day. The Lord said “let light be made,” and the angels were made, enlightened by the Wisdom of God, partakers in eternal light. Despite grounding his argument for this placement of the angels in the hexaemeron’s succession of days, however, it is an interpretive move that will ultimately overturn such a straightforward understanding of that succession.

This interpretation goes through a number of important developments to arrive at this conclusion, and its fruit is borne most fully in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*.³⁰ As with the opening of Book 11 of *The City of God*, Augustine begins his great commentary with a consideration of the difference between the creator and his creation, and a consideration of what it means for God to speak. The speech proper to God, he says, is not temporal but eternal, indeed the co-eternal Word of God, which is “the intelligible meaning of the audible utterance, ‘Let light be made,’ and not the audible utterance itself.”³¹ But while there may be no divine speech in time, there is nevertheless an event indicated by the words “let light be made,” a happening “outside” of, or distinct from, God’s eternity, the origin of which is nevertheless God himself. God’s speech is timeless, but the effect is not.

²⁹ Job 38:7, *apud ciu.* 11.9.

³⁰ See Aimé Solignac, “Exégèse et Métaphysique: Genèse 1:1–3 chez Augustin,” in *In Principio: Interprétation des premiers versets de la Genèse* (ed. Paul Vignaux and A. Caquot; Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1973), 153–71, at 153–60; Eugene TeSelle, “Nature and Grace in Augustine’s Expositions of Genesis 1:1–5,” *RechAug* 5 (1968): 95–137, at 98–101. It begins with the postulation of spiritual matter in *uera rel.* 37.68, which he links to the creation narrative in *Gn. litt. imp.* He explicitly identifies this spiritual matter with angels in the *caelum caeli* of *conf.* 12 and 13, there laying the foundation for his ultimate understanding: angels are an intellectual creation, and they are the first creation. On the creation of the angels more generally, see TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 199–223; Solignac, *op. cit.*; Agaësse and Solignac, “La connaissance.”

³¹ *Gn. litt.* 1.2.6.

Augustine notes that God does not “speak” heaven and earth into formless existence “in the beginning.”³² This is because, though Genesis only describes the earth’s formlessness, it is clear that all created things—the bodily heaven and earth called “earth,” and the spiritual creation called “heaven,” that is, all things both visible and invisible—have their form only in the Word. The divine *fiat* is thus the creator’s call to the creature to turn toward the creator of its pure, unformed material essence, in order likewise to receive its form and become complete. In an immaterial and eternal utterance, the Word “recalls his imperfect creature to himself, so that it may not be formless but may be formed according to the various works of creation which he produces in due order.”³³

As for the light itself made on the first day, from an exegetical standpoint it must refer to something either spiritual or bodily. We have seen that Job excludes a bodily understanding of this light, but Augustine finds good reason for this. Any bodily understanding is at best a redundant anticipation of the Sun created on the fourth day, and at worst the creation of some unknown light, lesser than the sun. Rather, this first-created light is much better understood as the light of which the sun itself is only an image, the light of understanding, the enlightenment spiritual, intellectual creatures find in the Word.

If it was a spiritual light that was made when God said, “let there be light,” it must not be interpreted as the true light which is coeternal with the Father, through which all things were made and which enlightens every man, but rather as that light of which Scripture could say, “wisdom has been created before all things.” For when eternal and unchangeable Wisdom, who is not created but begotten, enters into spiritual and rational creatures, as he is wont to come into holy souls, so that with his light they may shine, then in the reason which has been illuminated there is a new state introduced, and this can be understood as the light which was made when God said, “let there be light.” This supposes, of course, that spiritual creatures already existed and were intended by the word “heaven,” where

³² *Gn. litt.* 1.3.8.

³³ *Gn. litt.* 1.4.9.

Scripture says, “in the beginning God created heaven and earth,” and that this means not the material heaven but the immaterial heaven above it.³⁴

Non-bodily light is what happens when an intellectual creature “beholds the Father’s face,” as uncreated Wisdom “transfers itself into spiritual and rational creatures.” There are only two such creatures called “intellectual,” capable of this perception: humans and angels, and humans are not the first but the last to be created. To be clear, this is not knowledge of something yet to be created, as is the case for the successive days; it is the creation of knowledge itself in the creation of a knower capable of knowing that which is the destiny of all created knowers to know, namely God.³⁵ They are a “created wisdom”; their intellectual formation is their actual existence, contemplation of the Word their very turn from formlessness.

The “Angelic” Contemplation of Spirits and Humans

It may seem that the identification of angels as the light of the first day of creation is eisegetical, or at least an imaginative “allegorical” interpretation of the text. This would, however, confuse Augustinian categories, and miss the cosmological structure to which he is pointing. His understanding of angels as created light depends upon the use of language of sight and illumination as figures of speech for knowledge, not only in common language, but all the more so in philosophical or theological usage. Socrates famously uses the illumination of the eye and what it perceives by the sun as an image of the illumination of the mind and the truth it perceives by the good.³⁶ And yet the end of that illustration is that the good not only illuminates the knower and the thing known, but is itself the origin of the very existence of the mind and the truth known, being itself “beyond being.” This is at the root of an entire ontology that Plotinus develops, and his influence upon Augustine is clear here.³⁷

³⁴ *Gn. litt.* 1.17.32.

³⁵ Cf. *Gn. litt.* 3.20.31.

³⁶ *Pl. Rep.* 507d–509b.

³⁷ Armstrong suggests Augustine’s angels, far more than his doctrine of the Word, represent a study in his remarkable ability to unite Plotinian-philosophical and scriptural insights, which neither distorts Christian insight, nor evacuates philosophy of its original content to press it into service for the faith. A. Hilary Armstrong, “Spiritual or Intelligible Matter in Plotinus and St.

Agaësse and Solignac explain that two integral aspects of the angels we have focussed upon thus far are adaptations of Plotinus' understanding of νοῦς: they are first-created, and they are an intellectual creation.³⁸ In fact, the concept of νοῦς appears to have been an important muse for Augustine, as he applied to it the decisive and all-encompassing Nicene division between creator and created, clarifying it metaphysically for Christian theology.³⁹ In his mature years he still considers it essentially a reference to the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity.⁴⁰ And the aspects of νοῦς indicative of its status as divine hypostasis make it easy to see why: it is eternal and simple, having a single and timeless embrace of the whole intelligible creation; it is yet a unity-in-plurality, as it “contains” all the forms of lower created things as their source.⁴¹

But Plotinus conceived of νοῦς as the emanation (περίλαμψις) of the One (Ἐν), which consisted in a two-stage process of the procession (προόδος) of

Augustine,” in *Augustinus Magister I: Congrès International Augustinien* (ed. Fulbert Cayré; Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1955), 277–83. See also Agaësse and Solignac, “La connaissance,” 645–47; TeSelle, “Nature and Grace,” 102–04; idem, *Augustine the Theologian*, 135–46.

³⁸ Agaësse and Solignac, “La connaissance,” 646. It is a concomitant property of the second characteristic that they reflect all of creation in their knowing, an aspect of Augustine's angels we will discuss shortly.

³⁹ On the division of Νοῦς between angels and the Word, see also Solignac, “Exégèse et Métaphysique,” 163; Madec, “Angelus,” 308; cf. Armstrong, “Spiritual or Intelligible Matter,” 283.

⁴⁰ See *ciu.* 10.23.

⁴¹ See R. T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), 54–55, and 68–69; P. Agaësse and A. Solignac, “Le double moment de la création et les ‘raisons causales,’ ” *BA* 48, 653–68, at 654–57. This unity-in-plurality is less akin to Augustine's theology of God as one in three persons, than his notion of the Word as possessing the eternal *rationes* that are the divine origin of every created thing. On the latter, see below, n.85. By way of being the source of Soul, ψυχή, νοῦς is the λόγος of all things, in the sense of being their ground-plan or blueprint; all things are also, *eo ipso*, the λόγος of νοῦς in the sense of it being a speech, the external expression of a thought, again by way of the Soul. For Plotinus, these λόγοι are mediated through Soul to living creatures as a seed or germ, like a genetic code, in order to account for their ontological derivation from νοῦς. Plotinus thus speaks of a σπερματικὸν λόγοι that has affinity with Augustine's notion of *rationes seminales*, which we also touch upon below. The λόγος is, for Plotinus, not a hypostasis, but a function, a way of characterizing the relation of a hypostasis to its source. It thus does not directly inform Augustine's theology of the Λόγος, the *Uerbum*. For Augustine, the Word is “hypostasis,” though Latin does not use the translation of ὑπόστασις, *substantia*, to describe its distinctiveness within the Trinity, preferring instead *persona*. In God's eternal speaking of the Word, the Father gives to the Son the fullness of divine essence in its simplicity, which Augustine maintains in spite of locating in the Word itself the original *rationes* of all things. This is not true of Plotinus' νοῦς, which, as λόγος, does not receive the simplicity of the One. Cf. Armstrong, “Spiritual or Intelligible Matter,” 278.

formless spiritual or intelligible matter, and its reversion back toward its source (ἐπιστροφή) to contemplate it, and thereby receive form. There is here a distinction here between knower and the known from which it receives form, by which it is actualized. This is based on an Aristotelian psychological principle, whereby the intellect “becomes what it thinks.”⁴² As such, it implies potentiality, desire that is distinct from a logically prior existence, and therefore dependence, all of which make νοῦς unequatable with the Word as such, but in fact quite appropriate for a spiritual, intellectual existence.⁴³ The notion of materiality encompasses everything definitive of finite createdness: it signifies constitutive mutability, a “capacity” to be brought as something out of nothing; it is the conception of a creature formless and void, and hence capable of receiving form. Concomitantly, however, it will *eo ipso* be able to lose that form, since it is not what it has, which is a property important for understanding the fall, as we will explore next chapter.⁴⁴ That this material is “spiritual,” indicates God’s intention that this be a created wisdom, a creature that receives its form in its wilful contemplation of God, in order that it might be the first and most glorious creature.

As he discusses angels in *The City of God*, Augustine repeats the claim that the knowledge angels have of God is their being in the presence of the simple, immutable, ineffable truth itself. It is thus not only wordless, but even timeless: dwelling in the Word they “hear” this co-eternal speech of God, having neither beginning nor end, directly as the understanding that constitutes their very form as creatures.⁴⁵ “Becoming what they know,” then, the angels are a wisdom created by Wisdom, a light created by Light. It is not only the Platonists that speak of the good or the One as emanating light⁴⁶; Scripture describes God as “inaccessible light,”⁴⁷ and that Wisdom, the second person of the Trinity, is the

⁴² See Armstrong, “Spiritual or Intelligible Matter,” 278.

⁴³ See TeSelle, “Nature and Grace,” 102–104.

⁴⁴ On materiality as mutability, and the consequent connection to the possibility of evil, see TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 138–46. Cf. also, Ayres, who notes that the mutability of things that distinguishes them from their immutable creator is not strictly a matter of defect, but is their very capacity to receive form, which allows creatures to reveal and be ordered by their immutable source. Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 207.

⁴⁵ See *ciu.* 10.15; 11.29; 16.6.

⁴⁶ Cf. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, 61–62.

⁴⁷ 1 Tim 6:16, *apud trin.* 2.1.1.

“brightness of eternal light.”⁴⁸ When Augustine speaks of the creation of light as the formation of illuminated intellects, enlightened minds, he is speaking not allegorically, nor even metaphorically. The language of illumination is tied by broad tradition to the mind’s attainment of truth, and Scripture itself gives the reason for this, which is that the God that is truth itself is true light. “‘The true light, which lights everyone who comes into the world,’ also enlightens every pure angel, so that he may be light not in himself, but in God.”⁴⁹ Enlightenment is simply the word for what happens when a created mind comes into contact with its eternal source. Augustine thus means it literally, realistically, with the caveat that such a mysterious experience of the ineffable can have no vocabulary exhaustive of it.⁵⁰

In a passage from *City of God*, Book 11, which we quoted near the beginning of the chapter, Augustine places Wisdom passing itself into holy souls through soundless speech beside the angels’ eternal contemplation. Some books later, he describes God’s sublime speech as prior to God’s action “as the immutable reason of the action itself.” This speech is what angels perceive, but Augustine says humans “also grasp something of this kind of speech with our

⁴⁸ Wis 7:26, *apud trin.* 4.20.27.

⁴⁹ *Ciu.* 11.9, quoting John 1:9.

⁵⁰ *Gn. litt.* 4.28.45. Cf. TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 210; cf. also Roland J. Teske, “The Heaven of Heaven and the Unity of Augustine’s *Confessiones*” in *To Know God and the Soul: Essays on the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 259–74, at 265. Denys Turner’s cautionary remarks about the language of experience in relation to mysticism are duly noted. He suggests that contemporary “experientialist” understandings of mediaeval Christian mysticism tend to identify language of ‘inwardness,’ ‘ascent’ and ‘union’ as pointing to the cultivation of kinds of experience. This is, he claims, reductive, and, though mediaeval mystics did use such language, it was “precisely in order to deny that they were terms of descriptive of ‘experiences.’ ” In other words, Turner suspects the language of experience remains insufficiently aware of the deeply neoplatonic apophasis in mediaeval mysticism. “What is distinctive about the employment of these metaphors within the mediaeval traditions of ‘mystical theology’ is the Neoplatonic dialectical epistemology—its apophaticism—within which those metaphors are set and by which their employment is governed. What differentiates the mediaeval employment of those metaphors from ours is the fact that we have retained the metaphors, evacuated them of their dialectics and refilled them with the stuff of ‘experience.’ ” *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 4–5. Nevertheless, I retain the language of experience, and precisely because I agree with Turner’s identification of neoplatonic apophaticism in Augustine’s theology. For if the term experience threatens apophaticism, so does its rejection, which risks conflating the vision of God with the content of its consequent articulation, i.e., the reduction of wisdom to knowledge.

inward ears,” and in doing so, “we ourselves come close to angels.” He goes on to give the two fundamental ways God speaks to his creatures: “For the immutable truth either speaks by itself, ineffably, to the minds of rational creatures, or it speaks through a mutable creature: either to our spirit by spiritual images, or to our corporeal sense by corporeal voices.”⁵¹ It is clear, however, that the latter has its basis in the former. This is how, we will recall, Scripture is a witness to a God remote from the senses. It is an essentially angelic act, even though written by humans, because it is the work of messengers reporting in words ineffable truth.

Being the name of an office, not a nature, “angel” is thus a term applicable to humans.⁵² Christ himself applies the term to John the Baptist, using the prophecy of Mal 3:1, while the prophet Malachi himself is called an angel.⁵³ Paul claims the Galatians received him as an angel.⁵⁴ Augustine uses Paul’s language to describe his mother’s love for St. Ambrose, whom she loved “as an angel of God.”⁵⁵ Christ himself, in the prophecy of Isaiah, is called “angel of great counsel [*magni consilii angelus*].”⁵⁶ Augustine gives us an indication of his conception of the human-angelic generation of scriptural witness to God in his opening reflections on John the evangelist in his *Tractates* on John’s Gospel, and he uses mystical terms. “The only way John’s heart could have arrived at what he said . . . was by soaring above all the things that were made through the Word.”⁵⁷ In this way, John is a lofty soul who passes on his enlightenment to lesser souls, who

⁵¹ *Ciu.* 16.6.

⁵² See Madec, “Angelus,” 304–05.

⁵³ Mark 1:2; Mal 2:7. See *ciu.* 15.23.

⁵⁴ Gal 4:14; see *s.* 37.19.

⁵⁵ *Conf.* 6.1.1.

⁵⁶ Or, “angel of the high council.” Isa 9:5; see *en. Ps.* 33(2).11; *Io. eu. tr.* 24.7; cf. *trin.* 2.13.23. Of course, the example of Christ must be treated carefully. As Augustine notes in *Io. eu. tr.* 24.7, the prophet Isaiah not only says that God will send an angel of great counsel, but also that God will send precisely not an angel or ambassador, but will himself come to save his people (Isa 63:9). Augustine says Christ had something to announce, so he was called an angel rightfully, but as God incarnate he was also the Lord of angels. It is worth noting that Christianity inherited from Judaism a profoundly diverse angelology that it used in the development of its Christology. In its application to Christ, however, the term “angel” was found to be too ambiguous, in light of the homoian controversies, to survive the fourth and fifth centuries’ clarification of the distinction between created and uncreated, and likewise the humanity and divinity of Christ. See Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, vol. 1 of *A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea*, ed. and trans. John A. Baker (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), 117–46.

⁵⁷ *Io. eu. tr.* 1.5 (WSA).

cannot so soar, in terms they can grasp, in order that they might receive faith. Because he brings his enlightenment like a message, Augustine suggests that John had started to become more than merely human, an angel of God, and in a way all can become more than human. “For all the saints—because they are announcers of God—are angels.”⁵⁸

The possibility of this common office is due to the commonality of their intellectual nature. Humans and angels alone in creation share intellectual existence, according to which to know and to love their creator is the perfection of their nature.⁵⁹ The angels abide in this knowledge of the Word eternally—that is, in all time, not, to be sure, co-eternally⁶⁰—and securely. That they “always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven” confirms the constancy of the angelic vision.⁶¹ Meanwhile, Christ also promises that humans “shall be equal to the angels of God.”⁶² Humans will be equal to the angels, Augustine is clear, “not in flesh, nor in resurrection,” of which the angels, lacking mortal flesh, had no need. Rather, it is equality only “in immortality and felicity,”⁶³ the “enjoyment without interruption of the immutable Good which is God; and the certain knowledge, free from all doubt and error, that it will remain in the same enjoyment forever.”⁶⁴ The final good of the angel and the human is to cleave to God, indissolubly. *Haerere, inhaerere, cohaerere*.⁶⁵ The term “vision” for this hardly seems adequate. Nevertheless, as Burnaby notes, “no other metaphor from sense perception could serve to convey at once the nearness and the remoteness of the divine Object of spiritual experience.”⁶⁶ Nor is it, he adds, merely a platonic inheritance. For it is

⁵⁸ *Jo. eu. tr.* 1.4 (WSA).

⁵⁹ See, e.g., *ciu.* 5.11.

⁶⁰ See *ciu.* 12.16.

⁶¹ *Ciu.* 11.32.

⁶² Luke 20:36; cf. Matt 22:30; *apud ciu.* 11.32; cf. 22.17.

⁶³ *Ciu.* 22.17. That is, humans will have their mortal flesh made immortal in the resurrection, while angels have aetherial bodies, whose immortality requires no resurrection. Earlier in his career, Augustine supposed humans would be given the light, aetherial bodies of angels in the resurrection to replace their mortal animal bodies. See *diu. qu.* 47 and *retr.* 1.26. On this change in Augustine’s thought, see Frederick Van Fleteren, “Augustine and *Corpus Spirituale*,” *AugStud* 38/2 (2007): 333–52. Although I do not treat the aetherial bodies of angels here, I would consider them much in the same way I do the aerial bodies of demons in Chapter 3.

⁶⁴ *Ciu.* 11.13.

⁶⁵ Cf. John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine* (Canterbury, 1938; repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 141.

⁶⁶ Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 157.

to St. Paul's conception of human vision of God in the present life that Augustine can appeal to highlight our present difference and coming equality with the angels. For now, he says, quoting 1 Cor 13:9 and 12, " 'we know in part, and we prophesy in part, until that which is perfect is come;' and 'now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.' " But, he adds, "this is how the holy angels see already."⁶⁷

For this reason, Augustine's famous account of his intellectual ascent to "that which is" can help shed some light on how he conceives the angelic contemplation of God in their formation. He depicts a journey of the mind through considered reflection upon things, triggered by the realization that the assessment of the beauty, goodness, and justice of things is only possible according to the principles or notions of such qualities, in light of which things are judged. The journey proceeds backwards, from the things judged, through the capacity for judgement, to the light itself in which they are judged.

In the course of this inquiry why I made such value judgements as I was making, I found the unchangeable and authentic eternity of truth to transcend my mutable mind. . . . [My soul's power of reasoning] withdrew itself from the contradictory swarms of imaginative fantasies, so as to discover the light by which it was flooded. At that point it had no hesitation in declaring that the unchangeable is preferable to the changeable, and that on this ground it can know the unchangeable, since, unless it could somehow know this, there would be no certainty in preferring it to the mutable. So in the flash of a trembling glance it attained to that which is. At that moment I saw your "invisible nature understood through the things which are made." But I did not possess the strength to keep my vision fixed. My weakness reasserted itself, and I returned to my customary condition. I carried with me only a loving memory and a desire for that of which I had the aroma but which I had not yet the capacity to eat.⁶⁸

In Augustine's arguments about the dependence of just and good things upon the Just and the Good itself, logic is inseparable from his experience of its logical

⁶⁷ *Ciu.* 22.29.

⁶⁸ *Conf.* 7.17.23, quoting Rom 1:20.

force.⁶⁹ In the recognition of the truth of God's immutability, Augustine has glimpsed something that, when turned over and over in the mind, yields a glimpse of God. But, as profound as the "trembling glance" is, its partiality and unsustainability leaves him only with a loving memory continually seeking another glimpse of the homeland.⁷⁰

"If Augustine is to be called a mystic, that and no other was the character of his mystical experience—a reflective ascent through the ordered values of the created world, inexplicably transformed into an instantaneous apprehension not of any particular truth, but of *the* Truth, the Light that lighteneth every man."⁷¹ As Burnaby recognizes, it was by the intellectual method of ascent of a pagan philosopher, namely Plotinus, that Augustine reached, probably repeatedly throughout his life, insight into the eternal itself.⁷² There is a certain fittingness that Augustine's experience of Plotinian ascent should help elucidate the character of his angels' intellectual formation, since such platonic contemplation already went hand-in-hand with the conception of the formation of spiritual material so informative for it. But, his recollection of this event in *Confessions* is accompanied by Augustine's explicit identification of the Platonists' failure to recognize the incarnation of God in Christ, in spite of their insights into God. The

⁶⁹ As Turner notes, "historians of ideas and philosophers . . . will attend to the logical force of these connectives and are likely to neglect as logically irrelevant the first-person, experiential language which also characterizes this passage and is interwoven with the language of inference. And they will, from their point of view, be right. For *qua* argument Augustine's reflections offer hostages only to *logical* fortune and their further character as autobiographical can do nothing to protect Augustine from the logician's scrutiny of that argument's validity. Nonetheless it is also the description of a personal *itinerarium mentis*." *The Darkness of God*, 53. Using Turner's terms, what is important in the dialectical process Augustine undertakes is attentiveness to the autobiographical experience of something as logical. It is in the experience that is inseparable from the delimitation of the logical that the real fruit of reason is produced.

⁷⁰ On the transitoriness of the vision of God, see Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 35–36.

⁷¹ Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 33. TeSelle explains, perhaps, Burnaby's hesitation to call Augustine a mystic. "The exact character of Augustine's 'mysticism' has been a matter of some controversy. We must agree, I think, with those who assert that Augustine really meant to claim an immediate vision of God, of the sort that Plotinus (e.g., in *Enn.* 1.6.7) would have prepared him to expect. But we must also agree with those who deny that it was 'mysticism' in the sense which that term has had since the Middle Ages. The reason is that Augustine did not think it abnormal or the result of any exceptional gifts, as in later mystical theology, but saw it as the proper exercise of man's natural capacities; what makes it exceptional, so that great effort is required, is the mind's distraction by the cares of earthly life and the bondage of the affections to finite things." *Augustine the Theologian*, 113–14; cf. 34–35.

⁷² See Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 32–33.

fundamental weakness that pulls Augustine back from his contemplative heights is the basic infirmity of his love, a condition common to all humanity and healed only in the humility of God's incarnation. His platonic insight into God is thus only completed, so to speak, in the following book of *Confessions*, when his vision of Contenance and the divine locution in the voice of a singing child ushers Augustine into the discovery of freedom from his divided desires through putting on Christ.⁷³ Accordingly, this neoplatonic vision of God is incomplete as an image of the true, angelic vision of God, so long as it is conceived strictly noetically. "It is never to be forgotten that the Augustinian 'intellect' is not the discursive reason but the mind at worship."⁷⁴ For true union with God is not just knowing God, but loving God as well. And, as we will see, this is a love that is defined in an important part by its relation to God's bodily creation.

Angelic Knowledge

For Augustine, there is no description adequate for the angelic knowledge of God. The beginnings of the apprehension of the angelic form lie not in the textual descriptions of angels themselves, but in the experience of the reader. In other words, to know what the angels know one must attain to a glimpse of God. Simply consider good things that are good by participation in the good, so that you might see the good itself in which they are good by participation; if you could "put these goods aside and perceive the good in itself, you would see God."⁷⁵ One is perhaps better off taking the time to read Augustine's *Trinity* as he tries to lead his readers to such a glimpse in his search for an (the) image of God; or Book 4 of *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, as he searches for the God without measure, number, and weight at the source of all things with measure, number, and weight, and from there passes into a discussion of angelic knowledge.⁷⁶ In lieu of the

⁷³ As he himself says immediately following the account of his Plotinian ascent, "I sought a way to obtain strength enough to enjoy you; but I did not find it until I embraced 'the mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.'" *Conf.* 7.18.24, quoting 1 Tim 2:5.

⁷⁴ Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 155.

⁷⁵ *Trin.* 8.3.5.

⁷⁶ Cf. Teske, who cites "Augustine's words about our knowledge of God, 'who is known better by not knowing': *qui scitur melius nesciendo*. His formula also recalls Plotinus' description of how matter is known, even echoing Plotinus's words, 'that which wants to be a thought about it will not be a thought but a sort of thoughtlessness; or rather the mental representation of it will be

impracticable, not to say presumptuous, exercise of replicating such a dialectical journey here, let us rather attend to the descriptions of angels as knowers.

For Augustine, as we have seen, it is axiomatic that angels are secure in and certain of their eternal and true happiness. They enjoy God in praise of him, burning with holy love.⁷⁷ Because of its enduring posture of worship and clear apprehension of God, which humans will also attain in the resurrection, the angelic creature “precedes, by the dignity of its nature, all other things that God has established.”⁷⁸ Earlier in his career, Augustine found there to be a certain aesthetic quality to the existence of angels, who were created, he says, “in order to adorn the universe.”⁷⁹ God would be deprived of nothing had all the angels sinned, nor would he lack the means of providing for his creation. It is simply more fitting that they remain so. In other words, the nature of angels as knowers of God is what makes them important in and of themselves, so to speak, as beings distinct from their functional role in creation. “There is no better order of things than for the angelic powers, due to the excellence of their nature and the goodness of their will, to be preeminent in the arrangement of the universe.”⁸⁰

But even here, with language of God’s provision, and the means by which God governs the created realm, we are already turned towards the role of angels in creation. In fact, Augustine’s praise of the aesthetic fittingness of the angels is inseparable from what they provide for it.

If there were no souls to occupy the very highest position in the order of the created universe, such that had they willed to sin the universe would be weakened and undermined, something important would be missing from Creation, namely, something the removal of which would disrupt the

spurious not genuine.’ ” Teske, “The Heaven of Heaven,” 266; he cites August. *ord.* 2.16.42; and Armstrong’s trans. of Plot. *Enn.* 2.4.10.

⁷⁷ *Ciu.* 11.33. “Enjoyment” is Augustine’s category, but “praise” here is a reference to Ps 148:2, and “burning” is one to Ps 103:4.

⁷⁸ *Ciu.* 11.15, my trans. This assertion rests on the argument that a rational creature, given the opportunity to participate in the perfection of its existence, and so also made capable of losing its perfection in sin, is *eo ipso* better than a non rational creature. And therefore, a rational creature that has achieved perfection in the love of God is the best possible creature. This argument is important for understanding the fall of the angels, and will thus be revisited next chapter. For now, see *lib. arb.* 3.5.15.

⁷⁹ *Lib. arb.* 3.11.32.

⁸⁰ *Lib. arb.* 3.12.35.

stability and interconnectedness of things. Such are the best creatures who are the powers of the heavens and beyond, the holy and sublime creatures whom God alone commands and to whom the whole universe is subject; without their just and perfect roles the universe could not be.⁸¹

Note the similarity between this statement and that of Diotima in Plato's *Symposium*, who explains that the Greek gods are demons, poised between humanity and the truly blessed gods, bearing the requests of the former and the orders of the latter: for the demonic "is in the middle of both and fills up the interval so that the whole itself has been bound together by it."⁸² This should be added to the examples of Pépin, which show the "striking" influence of Platonic demonology upon not only Augustine's demonology, but even his angelology.⁸³ But to understand how this is so, we need to delve deeper into Augustine's conception of the different modes of angelic knowing, as he expounds upon them in his *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*.

The Angels' Knowledge of Creation

We have seen that Augustine's insight into God is, for him, a glimpse of the vision angels have constantly. But a major difference between the two lies in the fact that the angels are not in need of the dialectical means he used to achieve that ascent.

We in our acquisition of wisdom go forth to see and understand the invisible things of God through the things that are made; but the angels

⁸¹ *Lib. arb.* 3.11.32. N.b., while Augustine calls angels "souls" (*animae*) here, it is a habit of speech from his early writings he retracts later on, in light of the lack of any scriptural use of that term for angels, who are rather "spirits" (*spiritus*). See *retr.* 1.11.4; 1.16.2.

⁸² Pl., *symp.* 202e.

⁸³ See Jean Pépin, "Influences païennes sur l'angelologie et la démonologie de saint Augustin," in *"Ex Platonis personis": Etudes sur les lectures philosophiques de saint Augustin* (Amsterdam, 1977), 29–37, at 37. Such an influence should not be so striking. That angels and demons should be theorized together is given to Augustine, even if only in relatively recent tradition, by their original ontological identity as angels, some of whom fell. On the historical development of the notion of demons as fallen angels, see Dale Basil Martin, "When Did Angels Become Demons?" *JBL* 129/4 (2010): 657–77. That Platonists have some insight into these cosmological matters simply follows from their keen insight into the truth of God, which Augustine freely admits.

from the moment of their creation enjoy the eternal Word Himself in holy and loving contemplation. As they look down then on our world, they judge all by what they see interiorly, approving virtue and condemning sin.⁸⁴

Angels do not know God through creatures, as the eternal implication of their finite existence; they know God directly. But the final effect is not just the excision of any awareness of the creaturely participation in God by which humans come to know God. Rather, it is something like an inversion of human knowledge of God: angels know God and in him also see creation.

The speech of God in Genesis signifies the eternal Word of God. God creates in the Word, forming it according to ideas or formulae (*rationes*), that have been in him from eternity. “God does not work under the limits of time by motions of body and soul, as do men and angels, but by the eternal, unchangeable, and fixed *rationes* of his coeternal Word and by a kind of brooding action of his equally coeternal Holy Spirit.”⁸⁵ The angels’ very existence is to be the created

⁸⁴ *Gn. litt.* 2.8.17.

⁸⁵ *Gn. litt.* 1.18.36. On the eternality of the *rationes* of creation, see also *Gn. litt.* 1.2.6; 1.10.20; 2.6.12; 2.8.16. Augustine does say that the things God has made, which he governs and holds together, are *in* him in one way, whereas the things he himself is, the things he has by which he is, are *in* him in another. And he describes the *rationes* not as *coaeterna* but simply *aeterna*. Nevertheless, if God is what God has, then the eternal *rationes* of creation in God are God, and the formation of creation on the basis of them entails a becoming not of these immutable *rationes* themselves, but of the things created after their “pattern.” Augustine highlights this paradox of the one-yet-many of the Word in *ciu.* 11.10: “For wisdom is not many things, but one thing, in which there are immense and infinite treasures of intelligible things, and in which reside all the invisible and immutable forms of the visible and mutable things made by it.” The image Augustine offers in *Gn. litt.* is creation as the product of the excess of God’s eternal self-giving to the Word: “When it is said of the Word, ‘all things have been made through him,’ it becomes quite clear that light was made through him when God said, ‘let there be light,’ and so this utterance of God is eternal. For the Word of God, true God in the bosom of God and the only Son of God, is co-eternal with the Father; and yet through this utterance of God in the eternal Word, creation has been brought about in time.” *Gn. litt.* 1.2.6. The mysterious eternality of the *rationes* of all creation thus corresponds to a mysterious eternality of creation. This accords with God’s perception of creation as an eternal Now, and the concomitant doctrine of simultaneous creation. It is just not the temporal infinity Augustine reads in the Platonists. To maintain a God that creates time and space despite being eternal and incorporeal, Augustine must also imply a kind of eternal creation. This raises questions of the “necessity” of creation, which I think are misguided, but are certainly beyond our purview. Yet, I think it is within the spirit of Augustine’s account of creation to suggest that creation is eternally known without change by God. In eternally speaking the Word, God eternally creates,

wisdom that beholds the co-eternal Word, and through the contemplation of this Word and his *rationes* for all creation, as they are ineffably in the Word, and so to be the first to know the whole of creation.⁸⁶ When the text says, “let there be made,” scripture is recalling the eternal presence in the Word of all things created.⁸⁷ Genesis follows this by saying “and thus it was made,” which signifies spiritual creation contemplating in the Word the *ratio* of whatever it is about which God said “let there be made.” In the contemplation of these created minds the thing first receives its form: the Word, who is Form itself in whom all things have form, passes himself into the minds of the angels through their eternal contemplation of him, such that the *ratio* of the thing becomes something more straightforwardly knowable in those minds, an idea of the thing. In other words, in the cycle of the days, the first two elements—“let there be” and “thus it was”—are the angels beholding all things in the Word, and the subsequent manifestation in the minds of those angels the intelligible (as opposed to ineffable) form of creation.

The first day is a little unusual, as angelic creation’s contemplation of their *ratio* in the Word awaits no further creation of what they contemplate. Rather, the very formation of the idea of their own existence is itself their full reception of form as created intellect. The intellect’s knowledge of God leaves nothing else of its nature to be created. Other things, however, have an existence proper to themselves, beyond their perception by angels. To mark this, the text of Genesis adds “and God made,” where no such statement is found on the first day, and none is needed. But on the rest of the days, after knowledge of lesser things is made in the angels, those things then receive their formed existence.⁸⁸ The complete cycle, then, is the mystery of a creature as it is in God (“Let there be”), which, after the first day, the angels are able to perceive; then the noetic idea of that creature in the angelic mind (“and thus it was made”); and finally that creature’s own, proper existence with limit, form, and order (“and God made”).

though the creation is delimited by space and time, possessing a beginning and end, and thus not co-eternal.

⁸⁶ See *Gn. litt.* 4.24.41. This is not, however, to say that in this contemplation the *rationes* of creation are perceived as God perceives them. This would be to know the substance of God the way he knows it himself, which God alone is able to do. See *Gn. litt.* 4.6.12.

⁸⁷ Augustine gives a précis of the following matters at *Gn. litt.* 2.8.19 and 4.26.43.

⁸⁸ See *Gn. litt.* 3.20.31.

The angels' mystical knowledge of things in God is the highest possible knowing among creatures, but it is obviously not the only kind. Part of what it means to receive existence is to be effable, to be straightforwardly, and not just mystically, knowable. This second kind of angelic knowledge, Augustine suggests, Genesis gives the name "evening," which it uses to help mark the passage of days in creation. Evening, Augustine explains, is a certain dimming of the light, though not because the light that is God has withdrawn, nor because enlightened angels have pulled away. The evening, after all, is not night, which plays no role in the marking of days in Genesis. Rather, evening represents the distinction between the lesser knowledge of things as existing as other than God, and the greater knowledge of things as they are in God himself, with respect to which the former knowledge is comparatively dim.⁸⁹ "And there was evening, because there was necessarily that knowledge by which a creature would be distinguished from the creator, the creature being known in itself otherwise than in God."⁹⁰ The completion of angelic perception of a particular creation comes in the return of the angel's attention to the creator in praise for this created thing it now knows, where the angels regain the brightness according to which they were first named "day." And, just as the earth's turn toward the light of day is called "morning," so Genesis gives this name to the angelic turning to the creator in praise for the existence of a creature. From there, in the light of day, they can perceive the *rationes* of creatures to follow.

The identification of the days of Genesis with modes of angelic knowledge excludes the interpretation that they were successive terrestrial, twenty-four hour days, an interpretation already problematic because of the inauguration of the day-cycle well before the creation of the heavenly luminaries by which terrestrial days are measured. The successive days do not recount per se the actual appearance of each creature forged out of nothing by God in its own proper, given existence, such that the evening represents the end of that work. Every individual work itself unfolds at its own proper rate, in its own proper time.⁹¹ The days in Genesis speak rather of the angels' comprehensive intellectual presence to the totality of creation, from its basic divisions to its most ornate adornments. And, so as not to speculate unduly about what is and is not possible for the angels, Augustine says

⁸⁹ See *Gn. litt.* 4.22.39–4.24.41; cf. 4.30.47–4.32.50.

⁹⁰ *Gn. litt.* 4.32.50.

⁹¹ See *Gn. litt.* 4.33.51–52.

that either angels are capable of morning, day, and evening modes of knowing simultaneously, or they are limited to exercising these different modes of their intellect successively. But even if the latter is the case, just as there is no such thing as day on the whole earth, but rather there is always day in one place and night in another, so in the totality of angelic creation will all three modes of knowledge be exercised at once.⁹²

The Trinitarian connotations of this movement should not be lost. As Agaësse and Solignac point out, the three modes of angelic knowing correspond to the three aspects of the metaphysical structure of every creature, which are an image of the trinity dispersed throughout all things.⁹³ The *ratio* in the Word is the identification of a creature's *species*, the objective creature known as distinct from its creator is knowledge of its *modus*, and the return to the creator in praise and love a recognition of its *ordo*. The reversal of the first two terms gives us the limit, form, and order of a thing; or, in the language given by Scripture, "you have arranged all things in measure and number and weight."⁹⁴ With respect to creatures, Augustine implies that Scripture has not given a full account of the creation of something until it has identified its triune structure. But it does this by placing it in the knowledge of the angels, which is a great honorific indeed. It makes of angels a "noetic archetype," a creation that accomplishes the complete metaphysical—and, we should add, Christological—movement, from God to creatures, and from creatures to God, anticipating the description of the human mind as an image of God, *mens*, *notitia*, and *amor*.

This first creation is of an intellectual existence capable of contemplating the Word and seeing in eternity itself all the diversity of lower, temporal things to be formed. In the language of semiotics, it begins by knowing the end of signification, and proceeds from that contemplation to a knowledge of all signifying things. Present to all creation as the archetypal intellect, angelic creation demonstrates, in the words of TeSelle, "the proper mode of relation of soul to body, remaining sovereign over it and not being drawn into excessive involvement with it."⁹⁵ The notion of sovereignty is important as it highlights the continued and important relationship with those things below. Angelic

⁹² *Gn. litt.* 4.31.48–4.32.50.

⁹³ Agaësse and Solignac, "La connaissance," 647–48. Cf. *ciu.* 11.24.

⁹⁴ Wis 11:20, *apud Gn. litt.* 4.3.7 (WSA).

⁹⁵ TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 211.

contemplation is not self-indulgent, solipsistic, or occult; it is not a knowledge of divine principles that keeps itself pure from their manifestation, for it does not forsake lesser things, but rather precisely keeps them in their proper order.⁹⁶

Augustine's interest in divine *rationes* is a practical one, an interest in "plans for things to be done, standards which ought to be followed in making judgments and decisions. . . . [Angels] ask what they are to be within the whole and according to the Wisdom that presides over the whole."⁹⁷

Here again Augustine's own experience of the vision of God is instructive. As a direct result of it he finds himself in a "region of dissimilarity."⁹⁸ This means, in the first place, that Augustine finds himself to be a creature as distinct from the creator; in the second place, after his second vision, it represents the realization of his sinfulness. The first aspect is shared with the angels in a way the second is not, on account of angelic sinlessness. Nevertheless, the latter is illuminating, since it implies Augustine's insight into his own proper ordering, a measure from which he falls short on account of his sinfulness, precisely his "excessive involvement" with the flesh. It is this glimpse of what and how he ought to be that is the substance of the angelic understanding of all creation, including itself. And just as this recognition about himself is a motivation to action—he sees a glimpse of himself in God and loves it, wishing to conform himself to it, to be "changed into" God,⁹⁹ for which he needs Christ—so the true insight of the angels motivates and manifests in action. But where it was

⁹⁶ Hans Aarsleff shows the influence of Augustine's angelology upon Descartes' concept of "perfect science," in which creation is known by the creator, and effects by their causes. Although angelic knowledge concerns both aspects—the principles of creation and their actualization—Descartes' desire to emulate the angels tends to imply a desire to be rid of the body and its limitations, particularly of the constraints of language and discursive reasoning. See "Descartes and Augustine on Genesis, Language, and the Angels," in *Leibniz and Adam* (ed. Marcelo Dascal and Elhanan Yakira; Tel Aviv: University Publishing Projects, 1993), 169–95. In other words, if Aarsleff's reading is correct, in Descartes' hands Augustine's angels become more like the platonic gods we will see in later chapters, who have no dealing with humankind on account of the contamination of the body, while Descartes himself seems to mark less a modern philosophical revolution than a repetition of platonic philosophy. As we will see presently, however, Augustine's angels humbly serve humankind as part of their loving subjection to God.

⁹⁷ TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 212.

⁹⁸ *Conf.* 7.10.16, quoting *Pl. Plt.* 273d. On the fruit of Augustine's vision as recognition of his otherness to God, particularly in contradistinction to Plotinian union with the One, see Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 34–40.

⁹⁹ *Conf.* 7.10.16.

Augustine himself, as sinful human, that was to be the object of activity, the eternally blessed angels work on behalf of others, to be a chief component of the providence of God.

The Providence of God

In *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Augustine suggests God provides for creation in two basic ways: through “natural activity,” the activity that occurs according to the natures God has assigned to things; and through “voluntary activity,” which is the work of created wills, and here Augustine is thinking specifically of the rational wills of angels and humans. It is worth bearing in mind that the distinction should not be taken as absolute. For every will belongs to a nature, and every nature to the will of God.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, a few comments should adequately highlight the usefulness of the distinction, beginning with natural activity. Augustine says the following:

In the natural working of providence the heavenly bodies above and earthly bodies below follow an established order: the stars and other heavenly bodies shine, night follows day and day follows night, earth firmly established is washed and encircled by waters, air moves above it all around, trees and animals are generated and born, develop, grow old, and die; and so it is with everything else in nature that comes about by an interior, natural movement.¹⁰¹

This is fairly straightforward. Natural activity is the unfolding and movement of created things according to the order implanted in them by God. All things are, as it were, sown with seminal formulae, *seminales rationes*, the divinely-given properties of things scattered throughout all creation like so much seed.¹⁰² God

¹⁰⁰ As Augustine says in *ciu.* 5.9, there are no efficient causes that are not voluntary causes, either of God or of creatures. On reconciling some of the different language Augustine has for God’s providence, see TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 219–22.

¹⁰¹ *Gn. litt.* 8.9.17.

¹⁰² See *Gn. litt.* 3.12.18; 3.14.23; 4.33.51–4.34.55; 6.6.10–11. TeSelle discusses Augustine’s inheritance of the concept of seeds from Stoic and perhaps Pythagorean doctrines. With it these philosophers tried to explain the phenomena of the reproduction and development of all organisms that grow from a seed much smaller and without resemblance with the final product, as well as the ancient theory of spontaneous generation. TeSelle notes that the way genetics are said to be

has “arranged all things in measure and number and weight”; God sets the limits, gives the form, and draws into order and stability all things. And while the immutable principles of all things are “contained” within the immutable God, the ineffable immutability of these principles and blueprints correspond to a creature’s dynamic realization of it.¹⁰³ It is not that the *ratio* of a tree pertains only to its mature form, such that a seed is not yet what God intends it to be, as though it were nothing more than an incomplete tree. God’s natural providence entails that everything is exactly what it ought to be throughout the process of its unfolding, given its surrounding conditions. There is nothing disordered about a seed that does not grow in the absence of the conditions required for growth.¹⁰⁴ Agricultural metaphors pervade Augustine’s pondering of the created order; perhaps fitting for a theologian of late antique North Africa.¹⁰⁵

There are two things notable about God’s natural providence. The first is that it belongs to God and no other. In contrast to Plato, who held the universe to have been created not by the supreme God but by lesser gods created by him, and at his command, angels are not co-creators. They do indeed take part in bringing forth the things of this world, Augustine says, and certainly only according to God’s command. But they are no more creators of the natures they administrate than farmers are the creators of their crops.¹⁰⁶ The second is that it is the human need for more than God’s natural providence in the economy of humanity’s salvation that Augustine uses to frame what angels do contribute to God’s providence.

We noted about how the measure, number, and weight of every created thing constitutes, for Augustine, the imprint of the Triune creator upon each and every creature. Since all created things have their *rationes* in God, all things are a trace of God. “Whence indeed and where can [Wisdom] not give a signal?”¹⁰⁷

encoded in DNA is not far at all from what is being envisioned here. See *Augustine the Theologian*, 216–18. Also see above, n.42.

¹⁰³ Cf. *Gn. litt.* 4.5.12.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Gn. litt.* 4.33.51–52; 5.23.44–45.

¹⁰⁵ On the agricultural significance of North Africa for the empire, and Hippo Regius in particular both as a port city and in virtue of the fertility of its own surrounding lands, see Serge Lancel, *St. Augustine* (trans. Antonia Nevill; London: SCM, 2002), 149–50; Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 185–86.

¹⁰⁶ See *ciu.* 12.25–27, with reference to Pl. *Tim.* 41c.

¹⁰⁷ *Ord.* 1.8.25.

Thus, a capable mind can consider literally anything and, turning it over properly in the mind, come to a vision of God. This theme is more apparent in Augustine's earlier literature, where his philosophical heritage is less "digested."¹⁰⁸ We need only recall when mere leaves blocking a channel of water provided him sufficient occasion to consider the nature of God. Simply consider the good in which a thing is good, leave aside the thing and see God as the good itself. But, while this remains no less true for him, Augustine abandoned the optimism of his early career about the capacity of human minds in general to attain such philosophical heights. "For the corruptible body presseth down the soul," as he so often repeats.¹⁰⁹

Embodied existence invariably pulls back the few who are able to experience a glimpse of the true light, and tempts everyone to prioritize the satisfaction of bodily needs. Humanity is destined for the incorporeal, immortal light, but, having the onus to search for that light in a life full of the visible and tactile things of God's creation, we need something more than things such as they normally are. Free and disordered human wills need communication, signs onto which we can hold in faith. Natural signs, *signa naturalia*, are insufficient for humanity in its present condition. We need given signs, *signa data*, the external communication by which we wish to make another a "participant in our will."¹¹⁰ This brings us to the heart of Augustine's anthropology and Christian soteriology. But before we comment upon that, we must look to the nature of God's volitional providence, where we find that communication as an outward manifestation of a will is the key to understanding how an eternal, immutable God can give signs in time.

After speaking about God's natural activity, Augustine summarizes God's volitional mode of activity this way:

¹⁰⁸ I borrow this helpful metaphor from Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (2nd ed.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 86.

¹⁰⁹ Wis 9:15, *apud ciu.* 12.16.

¹¹⁰ *Doc. Chr.* 2.3.4. For this translation, and on this passage, see David Dawson, "Sign Theory, Allegorical Reading, and the Motions of the Soul in *De Doctrina Christiana*," in *De Doctrina Christiana: A Classic of Western Culture* (ed. Dwayne W. H. Arnold and Pamela Bright; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 123–41, at 126; but see more generally, 124–28; see also Robert A. Markus, "Augustine on Magic: A Neglected Semiotic Theory," *REA* 40 (1994): 375–388, at 383–84.

In this other mode signs are given, taught and learned, fields cultivated, communities administered, arts and skills practiced, and whatever else is done, whether in the higher company of the angels or in this earthly and mortal society, in such a way as to be in the interests of the good even through the unwitting actions of the bad.¹¹¹

In other words, the volitional activity of God is nothing other than the things rational wills do and make. With respect to humans, it is every product of the soul's capacity to impress itself upon its bodily life: education, agriculture, politics, and the arts.¹¹² It is clear that no mode of signifying approaches the ubiquity or the usefulness of words, oral or written. But the base material of signs can be anything so long as it is sufficiently receptive to the imprint of a will so as to be set apart from what it is strictly in its nature: the image of an arrow painted upon a sheet of metal; a trodden path through the woods.¹¹³

Of course, paths are trod by the good and wicked alike, and even a fool can write a book.¹¹⁴ All wills are subject to God, having been given their power to will by God, but it is only those wills that act in accordance with the will of God that can themselves properly be called the will of God.¹¹⁵ This begins to touch upon philosophical matters of the will, and its participation in God, that we will discuss more when we speak about the fall of the angels. But here it is important to see the role of the created rational will in the proper Augustinian understanding of what it means for an immutable Wisdom to “cause herself to pass over into holy souls,” or command the angels to do her bidding.

Augustine explains that this communication operates according to the logic of the unmoved mover, whereby something is said to move only with respect to another that is stationary. So, a finger only moves with respect to a still hand, a hand only with respect to a stationary forearm, and so forth. In this way, Augustine suggests, things that are subject to space and time are placed below and moved by that which is subject only to time and spatially unmoved, namely souls. Furthermore, souls are themselves placed below and moved by that which is

¹¹¹ *Gn. litt.* 8.9.17.

¹¹² Cf. *quant.* 33.72. On God's willingness to be known through humans themselves, see *doc. Chr. Prologus*.6.

¹¹³ Cf. *doc. Chr.* 2.3.4.

¹¹⁴ Cf. *an. quant.* 33.72.

¹¹⁵ Cf. *ciu.* 5.9.

subject to neither space nor time, namely the uncreated God alone.¹¹⁶ This is why Augustine includes the intimate knowledge of all existent things as they are in God in the constitutive sublimity of angelic nature and their priority in the cosmological order.¹¹⁷ While there is no question as to the angels' prioritization of knowledge and praise of their creator, the fact that in the creator they also see all created things and how they ought to be is an integral part of their nature that allows them to be the divine emissaries they are created to be.

God does not move rational wills by a temporal will beyond his own eternal will, commanding this and that; much less does he move bodies with a corporeal hand. In order to communicate something beyond what occurs naturally, God "moves" rational wills by having made creatures capable of willingly discerning and participating in God's administration of creation, who know his commands by willing to know God himself in a way that only rational wills can. How did a dove receive a command to descend upon Christ at his baptism? How does a whale know its obedience is constituted in swallowing not just fish but a prophet as well? It does not belong to the irrational nature of (untrained) animals to submit to spoken command.

Beasts and birds have not received such power. But according to their nature they obey God, not by a rational free choice of the will but according to the plan by which God moves all creatures at the appropriate times. Although he is himself unmoved in time, the angels who minister to him understand in his Word what things are to be done at appointed times. And hence, without any temporal motion in God, the angels are moved in time to accomplish his will in the creatures that are subject to them.¹¹⁸

Those things that do not have the rational capacity to be obedient to the volitional activity of God are nevertheless moved at God's will through angelic obedience, for the angel sees in God everything it must do with the bodies in its charge. And because of the enduring constancy of angelic contemplation, God has subjected nearly all creatures to the angels: every bodily nature, every non-rational form of life, and, excepting resurrected humans in their equality with the angels, every

¹¹⁶ See *Gn. litt.* 8.19.38–26.48.

¹¹⁷ *Gn. litt.* 5.5.14.

¹¹⁸ *Gn. litt.* 9.14.24.

weak or bent human will besides.¹¹⁹ In God they know how all things ought to be, and they provide for all things according to this vision of perfection, above all for humankind.

Angels are, in effect, similar in conception to a rational soul for everything in creation that does not have one. Augustine is well aware of the conception among Platonists, as well as others, of the universe as an animate being, in possession of an *anima mundi*, a world-soul, by which it is blessed, and from which it receives eternal life.¹²⁰ And, early in his career, he took this for granted.¹²¹ The role of the world-soul in mediating the eternal, divine mind into temporal movement, the later Augustine clearly gives to angels in the form of their administrative role over all of

¹¹⁹ See *Gn. litt.* 8.24.45–47. Angels do not supplant the human rational soul in their ministry. Rather, Augustine understands the subjection of humans under them to take the same form as the subjection of all other things, whereby lower creatures are moved through enticements and cultivation appropriate to their natural orders. Angels present things appealing to the desires of humanity's natural order, both of the soul and the body beneath it, without over-riding the freedom of the will that is given as part of the soul's nature, by which a person would choose whether or not to consent to such external angelic stimuli. In other words, human subjection to angels does not entail angelic mediation of the human experience of attaining God himself. An angelic vision even within a human mind is nevertheless more "external" than a gaze upon the immutable Truth itself, in which a person receives the kind of direct inward assistance from God the angels have, by which they know to present such a lower and more external vision to a person. See *Gn. litt.* 8.25.47. As a human's rational soul is his own and not an angel's, so too his contemplation of God, fulfilled and eternal in the resurrection, is truly his own. Cf. *lib. arb.* 2.6.14; *Io. eu. tr.* 23.5.

¹²⁰ *Ciu.* 13.17; *retr.* 1.11.4. For Augustine's views of the world-soul and its philosophical antecedents, see Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 62–70; see also Roland J. Teske, "The World-Soul and Time in Augustine," in *To Know God and the Soul: Essays on the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 216–37. Pl. *Tim.* 34a–b is an important source text. Wallis notes the Stoic influence upon Plotinus on this matter, particularly in the development of the visible cosmos from *σπερματικὸι λόγοι* within the world-soul (cf. above, n.42), and the *συνπάθεια* organically linking the entire cosmos. Plotinus differs on two points, with which Augustine will agree: he denies that the world-soul is the highest deity, and that it is to be conceived in bodily and spatial terms. See *Neoplatonism*, 25.

¹²¹ See *imm. an.* 15.24; cf. *ord.* 2.11.30; see also *mus.* 6.14.44, though, as he points out in *retr.* 1.11.4, it depends how you read it. Even so, however, already at *mus.* 6.17.58, he seems to imply a plural administration of creation by angels and saints, rather than a singular world-soul. Another transitional text between world-soul and angelic administration of this nature is *Gn. litt. imp.* 4.17. At *an. quant.* 32.69, Augustine is reluctant to answer the question of whether incorporeal souls are one or many, or somehow both. For a summary of Augustine's use of the world-soul, see O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind*, 62–64; Teske, "The World-Soul and Time in Augustine," 219–23.

creation.¹²² Teske suggests it is possible that the notion of a world-soul continues to be an operative component of Augustine's conceptual scheme at least as late as his *Confessions* and its language of the *caelum caeli*,¹²³ which is somehow simultaneously both surprisingly singular, "a certain sublime creature"¹²⁴ ceaselessly contemplating God without fail, and mysteriously many, a city of angels joined by saints in eternity.

In that work, Augustine makes most explicit how he conceives angels almost to be perched on the precipice between time and eternity.

No doubt the 'heaven of heaven' which you made in the beginning is a kind of creation in the realm of the intellect. Without being coeternal with you, O Trinity, it nevertheless participates in your eternity. From the sweet happiness of contemplating you, it finds power to check its mutability. Without any lapse to which its createdness makes it liable, by cleaving to you it escapes all the revolving vicissitudes of the temporal process.¹²⁵

The angels, it would seem, are as close to God-like immutability as is possible for a creature.¹²⁶ "You [God] are always present to it, and it concentrates all its affection on you. It has no future to expect."¹²⁷ Augustine even describes this creation as "devoid of time [*carentia temporalibus*]."¹²⁸ What is being excluded is moral change, the possibility that the angel might suffer a lapse in its pure affection for God. Augustine clarifies this in *The City of God*: "though the immortality of the angels does not take place in time—does not have a past, as

¹²² See Teske, "World-Soul and Time," 221–222; O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind*, 69–70; see also TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 214–215.

¹²³ See Teske, "World-Soul and Time," 223–237.

¹²⁴ *Conf.* 12.15.19. See Teske, "World-Soul and Time," 225. I agree with Teske, contra O'Daly, that angels are not obviously distinct from the universal platonic world-soul by virtue of being a plurality. See *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind*, 70. O'Daly remains unconvinced of Teske's argument that something like a concept of a world-soul remains active in Augustine's thought at least up to *conf.* I take this under advisement, but suggest his conclusion that the angels represent a replacement of some aspects of the platonic doctrine, but not others, is not that far from what Teske is suggesting.

¹²⁵ *Conf.* 12.9.9.

¹²⁶ Augustine recognizes that it is not without scriptural warrant to call angels "gods," though he does not seek to justify this name with the godlikeness of their attributes. See *ciu.* 9.23.

¹²⁷ *Conf.* 12.11.12.

¹²⁸ *Conf.* 12.12.15, my trans.

though it no longer existed, nor a future, as though it were not yet—the movements of the angels, by which time is produced, nonetheless do pass from future to past.”¹²⁹

In the end, Augustine is not willing to commit to the idea of a world-soul, calling his earlier assumptions “excessively rash.”¹³⁰ This is not, however, because he is sure it is wrong. Augustine clarifies that he is strictly agnostic: he finds no certain basis in either argumentation or Scripture to accept it, nor is he sure it should be rejected. What he is certain of, however, is that, “even if the world is not ensouled, it is most correctly believed . . . that there is a spiritual and vital power, and that this power serves God in the holy angels for the purpose of adorning and administering the world.”¹³¹ While angelic creation remains, in a sense, atemporal with respect to the constancy of their love for and vision of God, in no way does it preclude their power to move created things in time and space on behalf of a God for whom such movement is a contradiction in terms.

Christ in the Ministry of Angels

The perfected noetic movement that is the very existence of the angels, from God to creature and creature to God, is clearly constituted first in the love of God. But, on account of the administrative responsibilities that flow from this perfect movement, the angels are thus secondarily constituted in service to humanity. Augustine decisively excludes one half of the platonic conception of demonic mediation that informs his angelology: God has no need of angelic messengers to learn anything about the creation that has its existence in him. But in the human need for divine testimony angels find a part of their ontological completion, though it is a part subordinate to their love of God, to be sure. As Augustine says, God “has messengers, however, for our sake and for theirs; for to obey and serve God in this way, to seek his counsel regarding creatures of lower rank and obey his divine precepts and commands, is a good for them in

¹²⁹ *Ciu.* 12.16.

¹³⁰ *Retr.* 1.5.3.

¹³¹ *Retr.* 1.11.4. In part, he seems to be getting hung up on names: he retracts his early identification of angels as souls, since he can find nowhere in Scripture that attests to this nomenclature. See also 1.16.2.

accordance with their own proper nature and being.”¹³² Serving humanity is good for angels because human union with God is within the very divine will in which angels find their own perfection.

Humanity’s destiny is Christocentric, and therefore the angels’ ministry is too. Augustine follows St. Paul’s assertion that the mystery of the grace of the incarnation has been “hidden from eternity in God,” but made known through the church to the principalities and powers.¹³³ But Augustine understands the angels, the heaven of heaven, to be the primordial church, the church as it has praised God from the beginning, and will do so in eternal life, joined in the resurrection by the faithful of that church on pilgrimage in this life. The angelic *ecclesia* has thus known the mystery of the incarnation from the beginning. As such, it has oriented all their spatio-temporal ministry, which St. Paul again sums up for Augustine.

The mystery of the kingdom of heaven was not hidden from them; they knew what in the course of time was revealed for our salvation, namely, that we should be freed after our pilgrimage on earth to join their company. They would not be ignorant of this; for the offspring that came in due time was placed through their ministry in the hands of a mediator, that is, in the power of him who is their lord both in the form of God and in the form of man.¹³⁴

The comment about the offspring being placed in the hands of a mediator, who is Christ, through the angels’ ministry is actually a reference to Gal 3:19. Augustine explains it later in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* this way: “hence, we may assume with some probability that everything done miraculously beyond the ordinary course of nature to foretell or proclaim in the world the coming of the offspring was done through the ministry of angels.”¹³⁵

As he would later recognize, Augustine’s text was corrupt: it was not the offspring (*semen*) that was placed (*dipositum*) into the hands of the mediator by

¹³² *Gn. litt.* 5.19.37. As TeSelle explains, “in thus serving God with an awareness of all his aims for the world and for human history spirit finds its true freedom.” *Augustine the Theologian*, 213.

¹³³ Eph 3:8–11, *apud Gn. litt.* 5.19.38.

¹³⁴ *Gn. litt.* 5.19.38.

¹³⁵ *Gn. litt.* 9.18.35.

the angels; a difficult text, to be sure. Rather, it was the law (*lex*) that was promulgated (*ordinata*) by them.¹³⁶ Interestingly, this textual correction only helps to confirm Augustine's perception of the angelic ministry, which we can see in his reflections on angels in *The Trinity*. There he repeats the erroneous text from Galatians, but its proper sense is preserved in conjunction with a clear witness to the same tradition of the angelic ordination of the law elsewhere in Scripture.¹³⁷ Yet the significance of the passage is not solely its witness to the Jewish tradition of the angelic provision of the law, but rather what that says about the angels' role in preparing humanity for the incarnation.

As Book 11 of *The City of God* set the genesis of the angels within the remoteness of God, so the angels appear in *The Trinity* as the solution to the question of how God can appear in time and space. In Book 2, Augustine establishes that the revelations of God prior to the incarnation must be products of the Trinity working inseparably to signify either one of the Persons or all three together, with the signifying phenomena appearing when and where required, "creature serving the creator."¹³⁸ He refutes any suggestion that the Son might alone be responsible for such theophanies as the "visible member" of the Trinity, who would thus have appeared variously in the flesh before he was born of Mary. Augustine appeals to the singularity of the incarnation following St. Paul: "when the fullness of time came, God sent his Son made of a woman."¹³⁹ The only question left to ask is whether we should think of such theophanies as having been made *ad hoc*, *ex nihilo* by God when and where he required them; or whether we should attribute them to angels, either moving physical creatures beneath them, or changing their own bodies to take on the requisite appearance.

Scripture continues to be definitive, as Augustine confirms his supposition that theophanies are the work of angels with the Letter to the Hebrews. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent for service, for the sake of those who shall possess salvation by inheritance?"¹⁴⁰ The author of Hebrews goes on to suggest that the "word spoken by angels," which had become a steadfast law, spoke of God's

¹³⁶ *Retr.* 2.24.2; see John Hammond Taylor, Notes to *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, by St. Augustine (2 vols; ACW 41–42), 1:259n.61.

¹³⁷ Acts 7:53; see *trin.* 3.11.26.

¹³⁸ Wis 16:24, *apud trin.* 2.6.11.

¹³⁹ Gal 4:4, *apud trin.* 2.7.12.

¹⁴⁰ Heb 1:14, *apud trin.* 3.11.22.

salvation, which was confirmed both by those who themselves heard God, and by signs and wonders that occurred according to God's own will.¹⁴¹ In the discussion that follows, Augustine demonstrates that "when God was said to appear to the Fathers of ancient times before the coming of the Savior, those voices and those corporeal forms were wrought by angels."¹⁴² This is the case whether or not angels are mentioned, and is suggested by the explicit attribution to angels of God's first person speech (a prophetic idiom as well) that is sometimes found in scripture.¹⁴³ Since it is impossible to see or hear God's substance, the service of angels to humans, as suggested in scripture, is crucial for Augustine's understanding of how it is possible for humans to perceive God.

There are a variety of Old Testament theophanies that can demonstrate this obedience of creation to its creator. Augustine is careful to highlight when human insight into God provides the volitional power to signify God. Jacob anoints a stone, using dramatic action to make a sign out of a pre-existing material. "But the rock was Christ."¹⁴⁴ Likewise, Isaac carries the wood for his own sacrifice, becoming a type of Christ.¹⁴⁵ Sometimes words are applied to human action to produce divine signification, as is the case with baptism and communion in the church.¹⁴⁶ And sometimes human words themselves become this kind of sign, as is the case with scripture.¹⁴⁷ The only purpose of reading scripture "is to discover the thoughts and will of the authors it was written by, and through them to discover the will of God, which we believe directed what such human writers had to say."¹⁴⁸

We know from the common rationality of humans and angels that, at the source of the matter, this "angelic" work of blessed humans is not different in kind from that of angelic spirits. Both receive insight into what ought to be as a grace from God. The difference between the two, then, is the miraculous or anomalous nature of the angels' work.¹⁴⁹ In a sense, anomaly is typical of all

¹⁴¹ Heb 2:1–4; see *trin.* 3.11.22.

¹⁴² *Trin.* 3.27.

¹⁴³ *Trin.* 3.19–20, 23, 25.

¹⁴⁴ 1 Cor 10:4, *apud trin.* 2.6.11, concerning Gen 28:18.

¹⁴⁵ *Trin.* 2.6.11, concerning Gen 22:6.

¹⁴⁶ *Trin.* 3.4.10; cf. *Io. eu. tr.* 80.3.

¹⁴⁷ See *doc. Chr.* 2.3.4–2.5.6.

¹⁴⁸ *Doc. Chr.* 2.5.6.

¹⁴⁹ See *Trin.* 3.2.7–3.6.11, 3.10.19–20; *Gn. litt.* 9.18.35; *ciu.* 21.8.

volitional activity. It is precisely when things are done in bodily creatures beyond what unfolds in those creatures according to their nature that a will is described. So the recognition of another's will is based upon familiarity with the natural order of things. But humans are also familiar with the normal limits of the manifestation of human wills. Pillars of fire and cloud are not within human capacity for signification; and bushes may burn, but it is within neither their nature, nor the nature of human power, to prevent such burning from consuming a bush.

In fact, Augustine points out, humans are accustomed to a great many wondrous things beyond our power, whether frequent, like the rising of the sun, or rare, like an eclipse. All such occurrences witness to God's natural provision, but their familiarity fails to amaze us, and thus we remain closed to their testimony, except in rare and great feats of contemplation. The ability to be turned into wine is within the natural limits of water, but the normal process involves cultivation, harvest, pressing, fermentation, and so forth; it is a miracle whose material causes conceal its fundamental wondrousness from a dull and sinful humanity. So, in order to engage this "doubtful" humanity, Christ turns water into wine with unaccustomed speed.¹⁵⁰ Where Augustine had once been dismissive of the necessity of miracles, optimistic about what was possible for the human mind, his later interest in their ubiquity became for him "a measure of the habituation and sluggishness of the rational mind; the function of miracles is to startle human beings into awareness."¹⁵¹ It is in astonishment that miracles are taken to be signs of God, volitional activity above and beyond the marvel of God's normal activity in nature.

One ought, however, to hesitate to say that the miracles wrought by angels are against nature.¹⁵² All things have their natural limits, forms, and orders, by which they are known. But the very mutability of all things that allows them to receive their particular existence gives them the capacity to be moved in ways not inscribed in their seminal *rationes*. It is a natural property of trees to flower and

¹⁵⁰ *Trin.* 3.5.11, with reference to John 2:9.

¹⁵¹ Margaret Miles, *Augustine on the Body* (American Academy of Religion, 1979; repr., Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 37; on miracles more generally, which Miles sets within Augustine's theory of sensation, and their ultimate testimony of the importance of the body for faith, see 35–39. See also TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 219. For Augustine's early opinions on miracles, see *uera rel.* 25.47; *util. cred.* 16.34.

¹⁵² Cf. *ord.* 1.3.8: "whence, then, does marvelling arise . . . but something unusual and apart from the evident order of its causes?" "Yet nothing is done apart from order."

bear fruit; but when this happens to a wooden rod cut out of the ground, without roots, earth, and water, as when Aaron's staff blossomed, it shows the subjection of things not just to their inherent natural order but to the powerful will of God.¹⁵³ The capacity for miracles is thus woven into the very created order for the benefit of those who need to be led up beyond the natural order of things to its creator in order to live according to their natural design.¹⁵⁴ God has ordained that creatures should be subject to the movements of wills superior to them. It is thus a mistake to suggest that miracles are contrary to nature. Indeed, we should even resist calling miracles "supernatural," since, according to Augustine's theological ontology, the rest of nature is no less a direct product of the divine will.¹⁵⁵

As Augustine considered the sowing of *rationes* in creation agriculturally, so he envisions its miraculous direction agriculturally.¹⁵⁶ The application of human volition to nature's plants and animals is the cultivation whereby the earth becomes more fruitful for human bodily consumption. Likewise, the earth is made more fruitful for the human soul by the cultivation of the angels. In short, Augustine thinks of angels as farmers, and regularly in conjunction with 1 Cor 3:7: "for neither he who plants is anything nor he who waters, but only God who gives the growth."¹⁵⁷ Farmers are not creators of crops and trees; they did not make it that water should flow downhill or be drawn up by the roots of plants. Rather, where God is working internally within a nature, they work externally, with the appetites and desires of plants and animals, planting here, channelling water there, providing food for cattle at the right times. The skills of agriculture and animal husbandry operate according to both a knowledge of the *ratio* of the plant or animal being worked with, how to entice it and cultivate it to get what one wants from it; and an idea of that which one wants from it, a will according to which one works it.¹⁵⁸ The sublimity of angels in creation is that, in one and the same God, they behold eternally the very divine *rationes* that are not only the key to how to cultivate things, but also the proper ends of that cultivation. Human

¹⁵³ *Trin.* 3.5.11; *Gn. litt.* 9.17.32, with reference to Num 17:23.

¹⁵⁴ *Gn. litt.* 9.17.31–9.18.34; see also 6.14.25; *Trin.* 3.8.13–15. Cf. *trin.* 3.9.16: "For as mothers are pregnant with unborn offspring, so the world itself is pregnant with the causes of unborn beings."

¹⁵⁵ Cf. *ciu.* 21.7–8.

¹⁵⁶ *Trin.* 3.8.13–15; *Gn. litt.* 9.15.26–28; *ciu.* 12.25.

¹⁵⁷ *Apud Gn. litt.* 9.15.26; cf. *ciu.* 12.26.

¹⁵⁸ *Trin.* 3.8.15; *ciu.* 12.26; but see esp. *Gn. litt.* 9.14.25.

farming is able to achieve remarkable rule over flora and fauna. “How much more readily, then, can this be done by the angels, who by the command of God, which they see in his immutable truth, which they never cease to behold, move through time and with marvellous ease move bodies subject to them.”¹⁵⁹

As Augustine recognizes, however, the tradition of the angelic ordination of the law concerns not merely individual historical moments in which miracles occurred. It no less involves the collection of such stories alongside other more “ordinary” moments of God’s manifestation in history, and the ordination and promulgation of such a collection as a canon for God’s people. In this “most clear and weighty statement,”

not an angel in the singular nor men in the plural are spoken of, but simply angels in general. For it is here shown most clearly that the angels did not just utter some words [*per quos non sermo quilibet factus*], but that the law itself was given through them. And surely none of the faithful doubt that this law was given to Moses in order to keep the people under control, but yet that it was given through angels.¹⁶⁰

It is true that the law was given to Moses, and according to Augustine’s own identification of *angelus* as *nomen officii*, this already makes it angelic. He certainly thinks Moses was wise and receptive of such angelic insight into God as humans are capable.¹⁶¹

But a concomitant point is also very important. It is not about this or that particular speech in the law, or this or that event; it is that the whole thing is angelic. In it we see the agreement constitutive of the city of God, comprised of humans and angels, at work. It may not seem to be a miracle because, *prima facie*, it is only text in a human language. But it nevertheless reveals itself to have the structure of a miracle because this ostensibly human script is a manifestation, a communication, of insight into God by his rational creatures. “The law indeed was given as the decrees of angels, but by it the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ was prepared and foretold. And he himself as the Word of God was in the angels

¹⁵⁹ *Gn. litt.* 9.14.25.

¹⁶⁰ *Trin.* 3.11.26, trans. modified.

¹⁶¹ Cf. *Gn. litt.* 12.26.54.

in some wonderful and ineffable manner, in whose decrees the law itself was given.”¹⁶²

From here we can see properly how Augustine ultimately sets the role of the angels within creation. The order of their nature is to behold God and thereby receive the command of the Word to tell all about him as is appropriate. The message is, accordingly, first and foremost about his incarnation. Angels give the law, but the law is about Christ. “If you believed Moses, you would believe me also, for he wrote of me.”¹⁶³ Augustine’s angelology coheres with his Christian typological hermeneutic.

All those things, which appeared mysteriously and mystically to our fathers by the miracles of the angels or which were done by the fathers themselves, were likenesses of this mystery, this sacrifice, this priest, this God, before he came and was sent as the one born of a woman, in order that every creature might in some measure proclaim the one who was to come, in whom would be the salvation of all who were to be redeemed from death. For we had fled from and fallen away in discord from the one, true, and supreme God by sin and impiety, and had become vain in many things, and were distracted by many things, and held captive by many things. It was therefore, only fitting that these same many things, in obedience to the will and the command of the merciful God, should call together for the one who was to come, and that the one thus called for by the many should come, and that the many should testify that the one had come. And then when we were freed from the burden of many things, we should come to the one, and though dead in our soul by our many sins and destined to die in the flesh on account of our sins, yet we should love the one without sin, who died in the flesh for us, and should believe that he has risen and should rise with him by faith. Nor should we despair of our own resurrection in the flesh itself, when we see that the one head has preceded us, his many members. In him we have now been cleansed by faith and shall then be renewed by sight and reconciled to God by him as

¹⁶² *Trin.* 3.11.26.

¹⁶³ John 5:46, *apud trin.* 3.11.26.

our mediator, in order that we may adhere to the one, enjoy the one, and remain one.¹⁶⁴

This is the order of the angels, according to Augustine: that, in the midst of our disordered attachment to created things, angels who always behold the face of God might rightly use such things to usher us toward God incarnate, who so became a thing in order to capture our faith, that we might, letting go of all other things, be raised to God.¹⁶⁵

In the tradition of angels ordaining the law, the most obvious referent of the latter is the five books of Moses. But Augustine makes clear that it applies to all of Scripture. For the blessed and immortal angels who dwell in the heavens love us and desire that we too become immortal and blessed. “The pilgrim part of that city, ourselves, is aided by the other part. For from that supernal city where God’s intelligible and immutable will is law—from that supernal court, as it were, where the angels confer together for our sakes—there descends to us by the ministry of the angels that Holy Scripture.”¹⁶⁶ Moreover, it is not even only Scripture that Augustine views Christocentrically; he sees all of history this way. Thus, while the focus in *The Trinity* that raises the question of angels is the theophanies of the Old Testament, it is not as though angels cease to work after the incarnation. The immediate question, which Augustine raises but does not dwell upon, is that of the manifestation of the Father’s voice and the dove representing the Holy Spirit at Christ’s baptism, and the tongues of flame likewise signifying the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.¹⁶⁷ His hesitation to make any definitive statements at that point is insignificant. As he considers the ongoing miracles toward the end of his life, especially those associated with the holy martyrs, Augustine knows that such events are either due to the spirits of the martyrs themselves, or, at their prayer and petition, to the power of holy angels. “But all such miracles nonetheless bear witness to that faith which preaches the

¹⁶⁴ *Trin.* 4.7.11; cf. 4.18.24–4.19.25.

¹⁶⁵ The notion of Christ capturing the faith of humanity comes from Hill’s apt translation of *trin.* 4.18.24 (WSA).

¹⁶⁶ *Ciu.* 10.7

¹⁶⁷ *Trin.* 4.21.31.

resurrection of the flesh to life eternal.”¹⁶⁸ The crucial focus of witness to Christ remains the same.

Since the purpose of the angelic administration of God’s created order is to direct humanity to Christ so that Christ can bring us to God, when (saved) humanity is resurrected to equality with the angels in their vision of God face to face, the dispensation of signs through angelic principalities and powers will no longer be necessary.¹⁶⁹ Until then, however, angels are the very image of good government: devout and subject to God, directing “the most immense and boundless commonwealth of all creation” according to his will.¹⁷⁰ Humans who would join them in the most blessed city of God are those who, like the angels themselves, rightly order the spiritual under God, so the bodily might be subject to the spirit. Such people seek the order of the bodies that have been placed in the command of their souls in the willing subjection of their souls to God.¹⁷¹ But as humanity remains distant from that God in the unlikeness of sin, self-subjection to God in imitation of angelic worship occurs through submission of the body and soul in faith to the signs the angels themselves administer, through scripture, miracles, and all things that draw people to the body of Christ.

In spite of the remarkable theological and scriptural cohesiveness of Augustine’s understanding of the angels, he remains all too aware of how dependent it is upon his own capacity for philosophical reflection. He consistently claims to be ready to be proven wrong, or to submit to another, better interpretation of the scriptural materials. Christians are certainly to believe in angels,¹⁷² for Scripture well attests to their work, while the need for such a creation is made evident by a philosophically rigorous conception of God’s eternity. But it is precisely because, being invisible, they are known only by their work and the insight of reason, and not in their nature itself, that Christians know them by faith and not by sight. Undue speculation about their properties, orders, ranks, and methods is to be resisted.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ *Ciu.* 22.9.

¹⁶⁹ *Trin.* 1.8.16, with reference to 1 Cor 15:24.

¹⁷⁰ *Trin.* 3.4.9.

¹⁷¹ *Trin.* 3.2.8–3.4.9; see also *ciu.* 19.4, 24–25; *Gn. litt.* 9.11.19.

¹⁷² *En. Ps.* 103.1.15; cf. *lib. arb.* 3.5.14.

¹⁷³ So, e.g., *trin.* 3.21; *c. Prisc.* 11.14; *ench.* 15.58.

Beyond chastening human desire for speculation, however, the hiddenness of the agent behind the miracle opens up a far greater problem. Not all that glitters is gold, and not every angel cloaked in light is a herald of God. For it is no small matter that the entire system of cosmic Christological signification that Augustine articulates depends upon a nature that can only fulfil its task if it first loves the God who created it. The greatest creature possible, the one who knows God, is the one given the opportunity to participate in the perfection of its nature through its love of God; great authority is given in accordance with such a wondrous capacity. But it is a capacity borne by a constitutive freedom: the opportunity to love depends upon the freedom of the will to love what it will. Since it is truly freedom, God does not deprive existence from those whose loves go awry. But errant love sets up an entirely different system of reference in accordance with what it places before God. This is disastrous for humanity, which is, on the whole, far too willing to follow and reproduce signs that point not to God but to its own disordered desires. Ultimately, paths trod by the wicked and books written by fools are precisely what Augustine's demonology is all about. But before we get there, we must go back to the beginning and attend to the primal love of that one who became not a bearer of the light of truth, but the father of lies.

2. The Fall of the Angels

Augustine fundamentally understands demons in terms of the departure from their angelic nature as knowers of God and all creation, and the angelic office of guiding humanity toward God in Christ. This departure is, in Augustine's conception, the very fall of the angels away from their perfection in God. Unlike the fall of Adam and Eve, however, there is no substantial scriptural account of the angelic fall. Augustine must therefore reason through the notion of falling itself in order to give an account of the origins of the demons. This notion is rooted in his insight into what evil actually is, which came as a consequence of the vision of God that preceded his conversion, and it is with this that we shall begin. Because of this vision Augustine establishes very early in his career that the angels' apostasy from God is to be identified with their pride.

But in the examination of Augustine's texts concerning this fall—principally *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* and *The City of God*—the development of his understanding of it raises two issues that we must address. One has to do with Augustine's clarity about maintaining the responsibility of the created will for its apostasy, and the problematic tendency of some of his rhetoric to suggest that the divine will is the cause of that fall. The other concerns Augustine's changing opinion about whether there was any time before the devil's fall. Here we suggest the greatest consistency is found by taking his earlier assertion that the devil and his demons fell from the temporal beginning of their existence, and adding it to his later position that they were established in the good from the very beginning. The answer to the question turns on the demons' lack of animal bodies of the sort that adorn humans, and so we conclude with a reflection, based in a conversation with an essay by James Wetzell, that highlights the importance of making a clear distinction between spiritual creatures and the bodies in which they appear. Not only is there no scriptural narrative of the demons' fall, Augustine's understanding of demons suggests there cannot be any such narrative, scriptural or otherwise, a point that is crucial to keep in mind throughout Augustine's discussion of demons, especially when he tries to provide such a narrative.

Augustine's Insight into God and the Problem of Evil

By his own account, the critical element in Augustine's dissolution of the problem of evil was his recognition of the immateriality of God, perceived by the soul as a kind of immaterial light.¹ The solution comes all at once, but Augustine's explication of the significance of what he saw would be an ongoing process from then on, such that not even the remaining forty-four years of his life would be enough to think through its significance with full consistency.² Before that could happen, though, his encounter with Faustus had to dislodge him from any real commitment to the Manichaean doctrines of a corporeal God that seduced him in his youth. After this he remained attached to such notions, but only ambivalently and by default.³ Without any better alternative immediately at hand, and driven by what he would ultimately consider a misguided piety, he continued to suppose that it was better to think that God was bound on one side by evil than suggest that God himself was its source.⁴ The first serious challenge to this formulation of piety came from the exposition of Christian scriptures, despite Augustine's incredulity at a religion that dared to suggest God had become incarnate in a man.⁵ After that, though, the only assistance he would need to find the path toward resolution was the clearer and more reasonable explication of these scriptures, which he would receive from Ambrose of Milan.

¹ See *conf.* 7.10.16–7.16.22. Burnaby nicely captures the religious or mystical nature of this event and the light it sheds on the problem of evil. See John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine* (Canterbury, 1938; repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), p. 25–42; on sin, see also 183–200. For other introductions to Augustine's thought on evil and the fall helpful for our present focus on the angels, see J. Patout Burns, "Augustine on the Origin and Progress of Evil," *JRE* 16/1 (1988): 9–27; Peter King, "Augustine and Anselm on Angelic Sin," in *A Companion to Angels and Medieval Philosophy* (ed. T. Hoffmann; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 261–281; Donald A. Cress, "Augustine's Privation Account of Evil: A Defense," *AugStud* 20 (1989): 109–28; and Rowan Williams, "Insubstantial Evil," in *Augustine and his Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner* (ed. Robert Dodaro and George Lawless; London: Routledge, 2000), 105–123.

² Throughout his biography, Brown helpfully marks the moments in Augustine's life that are indicative of his ongoing wrestling with the problem of evil. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (2d ed.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), *passim*.

³ *Conf.* 5.6.10–7.13; 5.10.18. "Default" is from Boulding's apt rendering of 5.10.18 (WSA). Evans suggests that Faustus was the precipitating factor for a movement more fundamentally driven by Augustine's dissatisfaction with the Manichees' inability to solve the very question of evil they claimed best able to answer. See G. R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 16.

⁴ *Conf.* 5.10.20.

⁵ See *conf.* 5.11.21.

It was Ambrose's ability to distinguish between the spirit and the letter in the Christian scriptures that initially sparked the interest of Augustine,⁶ but Ambrose also presented him with the related doctrine of God's incorporeality that was the first major contribution to his solution.⁷ Augustine had already learned from Cicero that wisdom was not a thing straightforwardly known, not a literal thing, but the object of a quest, in which the authoritative testimony of those who have gone before and returned from the far-off places of the soul might be of some help.⁸ The purported "wisdom" of the Manichees was merely a literalist shortcut,⁹ and Ambrose's testimony of an incorporeal God that *eo ipso* needed to be thought through before it could be understood broke Augustine free from their superstitions.¹⁰ The Christian doctrine of God's incorporeality, however, was developed foremost in relation to platonic philosophy, and, in the end, Augustine's thinking-through God came less under the tutelage of Ambrose,¹¹ and more under platonic philosophy more directly.

⁶ *Conf.* 5.14.24.

⁷ Although for Augustine it is literally true that man is made in God's image (Gen 1:26), his realization that God does not thereby have a body is correlated with the freedom from Manichaean literalism in the spiritual reading of scripture. Freedom from the letter freed Augustine to seek God not in bodily realities, but in spiritual ones. See *conf.* 6.3.4–4.6.

⁸ Hence, *conf.* 6.5.7. On the influence of Cicero, see Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 29–34, 69–70. Augustine recounts his discovery of Cicero's *Hortensius* in *conf.* 3.4.7–8. Ironically, it was this very idea of searching out wisdom that drove Augustine to the Manichees in the first place. *Conf.* 3.6.10.

⁹ See Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 48–49, where he speaks of Manichaeism as offering no more than a "*Gnosis* in its crudest form." See also 69–70. Cf. Augustine's condemnation of Manichaean promises of certainty, and the "mindless repetition" that was the sole means of fulfilling them. *Conf.* 6.4.5. True certainty, Augustine would find, lies not in memorizing statements about things, but in experiencing God as a spiritual reality. See 7.10.16.

¹⁰ On the influence of Ambrose, and the difficulty in identifying it with certainty, see Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 69–78; with respect to the specific question of God's immateriality, see 75–76.

¹¹ Augustine himself seems to give reasons why this was so: on the one hand, he was unwilling to give his assent and plunge into the Christian faith (*conf.* 6.4.6), and on the other hand, Ambrose had no time for Augustine to ask him the penetrating questions that might have led to his insight and understanding (*conf.* 6.11.18). Brown's characterization of Ambrose, however, as having "ransacked" "undigested" Plotinus does call into question whether Ambrose would have been capable of leading Augustine to the depths he sought even if he had had the time.

By the time he read “some books of the Platonists,”¹² Augustine was already certain that God is incorruptible, inviolable, and immutable, since whatever possesses these attributes is better than whatever is corruptible, violable, and mutable; and it was inconceivable to him that he should be able to imagine something better than God.¹³ But he still could not understand God’s incorruptibility, as he continued to think of God as a material reality, sharing the fundamentally finite nature of bodily things subject to corruption, injury, and change.¹⁴ It was the Platonists, in particular the Neoplatonist Plotinus, that helped him break the paradigm and move beyond merely holding certain theological conceptions as true. Plotinus had his own teaching on the question of evil that anticipates in some ways Augustine’s treatment of the matter.¹⁵ But his account of his philosophical influences focuses not on doctrines they added to the Christian ones Augustine already held, but rather to the way this philosophy taught him to see and understand the truth of God’s immateriality for himself. The importance of the Platonists for Augustine was that they showed him where to look for God.¹⁶

¹² *Conf.* 7.9.13. These are certainly works of Plotinus, though, since Augustine is not forthcoming with his sources, the question of their identification remains open. The most likely other author here would be Plotinus’ student and compiler, Porphyry.

¹³ *Conf.* 7.4.6. Cf. *doc. Chr.* 1.7.7.

¹⁴ See *conf.* 7.5.7.

¹⁵ E.g., Plotinus begins his tractate on evil by saying it is most important to know first what evil is, and claiming that it manifests as the absence of the good. *Enn.* 1.8.1. At 5.1.1, Plotinus identifies the soul’s indulgence in the desire for self-ownership. On the relation of this to Augustine’s concept of pride, see John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 102–03. The principle difference between Plotinus’ conception of evil and Augustine’s is the connection Plotinus makes between evil and matter. See *Enn.* 1.8.4; 2.4.16. In noting the connection between Augustine and Plotinus on evil, G. R. Evans suggests that, despite his overall rejection of Plotinus’ theory of evil, Augustine retains many of its parts, including the association of evil with matter. Unfortunately, she does not point to anything in Augustine’s work that substantiates this claim. See *Augustine on Evil*, 35–36, 39–40. Cf. her article, “Evil,” in *AA*, 340–44. On the other hand, Rist notes that Plotinus himself does not, in fact, make the nature of the relation between evil and matter very clear. See *op. cit.*, 103–04.

¹⁶ Rist notes that the Plotinian texts on evil and the soul’s pride (τόλμα) are not directly connected to the texts that inspired Augustine’s vision of God in Milan, recounted in *conf.* 7. See Rist, *Augustine*, 103. Augustine’s relation to platonic philosophy has been the source of contention for some time. For a very brief background on it, see Robert Crouse, “*Paucis mutatis verbis*: St Augustine’s Platonism,” in *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner* (ed. R. Dodaro and G. Lawless; London: Routledge, 2000), 37–50. He notes that the accusation against the church fathers as having corrupted the simple faith of the early church with pagan philosophical dogma goes back at least to 1535. *Ibid.*, 38.

Where he should look is not among things and in images of things, but in the same place he knew incorruptibility was better than corruptibility: deep within himself.¹⁷ There he would see that the greatness of God was not spatial extension, nor was God's superiority in a higher location. God was found to be above his soul because God was in the position of a kind of ontological priority: "It was superior because it made me, and I was inferior because I was made by it."¹⁸ The vision finally allows Augustine to abandon material notions of God, but materiality and substance do not leave nothing in their retreat. Instead Augustine's vision confirms that, as Burnaby says, "the superior value of the spiritual [is] its superior reality."¹⁹ God is not less substantial for being incorporeal and immaterial, but more so. In a very short period of time this will become axiomatic for Augustine, a "little argument" that revives his mind's eye when it is afflicted by the senses: "the mind and intelligence are better than the eyes and this ordinary looking. This would not be the case, unless those things that we understand had more being than these things which we see."²⁰

Augustine came into contact with the source of all things, that which truly is.²¹ God unchangingly abides; God is the selfsame, simple; God is what he has, and thus what God has God cannot lose.²² Because God immutably, and thus supremely, *is*, there is no existent thing that is contrary to God; indeed, nothing is God's contrary.²³ As we noted in the last chapter, Augustine's vision depended upon his capacity to recognize the unchanging standard of truth and goodness that allow for any soul to make judgements between things good and bad, true and false. That standard of truth and goodness is not an impersonal, articulable legal standard, but the ineffable creator of all things. The experience of discovering God through his dialectical ascent thus showed to Augustine the identification of

¹⁷ *Conf.* 7.4.6; 7.10.16; Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 30–31.

¹⁸ *Conf.* 7.10.16.

¹⁹ Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 32. See *Conf.* 7.10.16.

²⁰ *Ep.* 4.2. Burns puts this nicely: "The principles of meter which make poetry pleasing to the ear, like the proportions which make certain shapes pleasant to the eye, for example, are more real than the sounds and shapes whose structure they provide. Indeed, the principles of art are more perfect than the mind and the senses which are guided by them in forming and recognizing beautiful verses and bodies." "Augustine on the Origin and Progress of Evil," 11.

²¹ *Conf.* 7.10.16–11.17; cf. 7.17.23.

²² On these descriptions, see Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 200–11; Lewis Ayres and Michel R. Barnes, "God," in *AA*, 384–90.

²³ *Ciu.* 12.2.

existence itself, that which truly *is*, with the true and the good and all other “qualities of divine substance” that, insofar as they are rightly attributed to God, are inseparable from what God is.²⁴

By virtue of existing at all, creatures partake in existence itself; as existence itself, God alone is capable of giving existence to nothing in order that it may be something. And just as the founding essence of all existence is itself the good, existence as such is a good thing. But, precisely because they are not God, creatures are not what they have, and so they can lose what they have been given.²⁵ This is the revelation that opens Augustine to the realization that evil is not a thing itself, but the destruction of a good thing, the demolition of its somethingness, bringing it closer to nothingness.²⁶ Thus it can do no injury to the immutable God, not because God’s inviolability is like a really strong wall, but by definition, since God is no more subject to evil’s destruction than truth is changed by a lie.²⁷ The corruption of a good but mutable nature is what evil is, and it confirms the goodness of existence as such, inasmuch as evil would be no problem at all if some prior good thing were not corrupted by phenomena we identify as evil.²⁸ It is thus a corollary to the goodness of all natures that evil has no existence or nature whatsoever.²⁹ “For no nature is something evil if what is

²⁴ See *trin.* 15.5.8. The important exception to this, of course, the personhood of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the “modalist” or “Sabellian” conflation of whom Augustine resists by distinguishing “relation” from “quality” or “substance.” See 5.11.12; 7.2.3; *ciu.* 11.10; on the use of the language of “persons,” see *trin.* 7.4.7–6.11.

²⁵ Cf. *ciu.* 11.10.

²⁶ The close relation of Augustine’s mutual insight into God and evil is attested to first in the fact that, in *Confessions*, his vision is immediately followed by a reflection on evil. See *conf.* 7.12.18ff. Furthermore, integral to the discussion of evil throughout his work are statements on the nature of God derived from his insight. See *mor.* 2; *uera rel.* 18.35–36; *nat. b.* 1; *ciu.* 11.1–10; 12.2–5; *ench.* 3.9–10; the two are interwoven throughout *lib. arb.* Clarity about the nature of God was, for Augustine, the dissolution of the problem of evil. He misunderstood God because he got evil wrong; he was mistaken about evil because he was confused about God. Cf. Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 36: “The moment of vision passes, and in its passing convinces of sin; but its intellectual fruit may be solid and permanent. The discovery that God is a Spirit was the discovery of evil in Augustine’s own heart, but it gave him his solution of the general problem of evil which had tormented his mind.”

²⁷ Cf. *ciu.* 12.3.

²⁸ *Conf.* 7.12.18. See also *mor.* 2.1.1–9.18.

²⁹ *Conf.* 7.13.19. See also *ciu.* 11.9.

contrary to nature is going to be evil.”³⁰ And yet, it is not just any loss or corruption of a perishable good that is evil or vicious. It belongs to the good order God established that the rock should be eroded by the breaking tide, that flowers should wilt and animals die, returning in time to the earth. More strictly speaking, evil concerns only creatures possessed of intellect, a rational soul, and thereby a free will. And the most critical instance of evil is the voluntary self-vitiation of these greatest created natures, the rational creatures, humans and angels.³¹

The Fall of the Angels: The Darkness of Angelic Pride

Since evil is the destruction of a good nature, an understanding of the fall depends upon an understanding of the nature vitiated. For Augustine, the perfection of intellectual creatures requires both “the enjoyment without interruption of the immutable Good which is God,” and “the certain knowledge,

³⁰ *Mor.* 2.2.2. Babcock seems to suggest that Augustine’s stance on privation is arbitrary (he simply “insists” that evil has no independent reality); and, moreover, that it is the only thing distinguishing him from Manichaeism, to whom he is “dangerously close” when characterizing evil actions as the fruit of an evil will, in spite of the fact that the image of an evil tree bearing evil fruit rooted in Matt 7:17–20. See *ciu.* 14.11. William S. Babcock, “The Human and the Angelic Fall: Will and Moral Agency in Augustine’s *City of God*,” in *Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian* (ed. J. McWilliam; Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1992), 133–149, at 135–36. The present account of Augustine’s understanding of evil should give the lie to that. Cress also offers, however, that if all Augustine was doing was offering an *ad hoc* and cynical protection of God from the charge of evil, Augustine’s additional arguments about evil’s containment within God’s order and the ultimate solution to the problem in Christ and the resurrection would have been redundant. He could have said evil is merely nothing and moved on in a denial of the problem. See “Augustine’s Privation Account of Evil,” 115–117. Ultimately, Babcock’s suggestion that Augustine’s difference from Manichaeism is mere assertion gives the conceptual confusion of the Manichees too much credit. To say that evil has no nature is precisely not to say that evil is “merely” nothing, but rather to recognize that what we see as the “force,” “activity,” or “integrity” of evil comes from good attributes possessed by creatures, the excellence of which is misused. Cress, *op. cit.*, 112–13; see also Williams, “Insubstantial Evil,” 110–13.

³¹ *Ciu.* 12.4: “It is, however, ridiculous to condemn as vices the faults of beasts and trees and other mutable and mortal things which entirely lack intellect or sensation or life, even if those faults should corrupt their perishable nature.” On the created hierarchy, at the top of which rational creatures sit, see *ciu.* 5.11; 8.6; 11.16. As Rist notes, while Augustine follows the Stoics and Neoplatonists in distinguishing moral evils from “evils” that occur independently of human volition, he is not satisfied with denying that the latter are evil. The world has become a place of suffering, and the suffering is real. But even suffering not directly moral is tied to human volition through original sin. In a sense, no suffering is underserved because of our solidarity with Adam. See Rist, *Augustine*, 261–62, incl. n.19.

free from all doubt and error, that it will remain in the same enjoyment for ever.”³² We saw last chapter that the angels have possessed this perfection from the moment of their creation. It is crucial for Augustine not only that God is the origin of the nature capable of enjoying God, but also that God is enjoyed insofar as God gives himself to the angels to enjoy, and confirms for them that they will be steadfast in this enjoyment. But, although God is its source, it is an indispensable aspect of this enjoyment that the intellectual being cleaves to God willingly. The knowledge of the angels is dependent upon their union to the Word of God in pure charity.³³ That is, they cannot be that light they were created to be by living in any fashion whatsoever; they must live “wisely” and “blessedly,”³⁴ partaking of the source of their existence by turning immediately (*continuo*) with all they know of creation to God in praise and love.³⁵ Were an angel to fail to do this, and instead delight in itself rather than God, it would deprive itself of the very condition of its wisdom and blessedness, its enlightenment and happiness. Delighting in themselves, such angels would cease to be “‘light in the Lord,’ [and become] darkness in themselves because deprived of their participation in the eternal Light.”³⁶

With his identification of delight in one’s self—that is, pride—as the fundamental movement or orientation of sin, Augustine reconciled a certain disagreement among patristic authors between whether the devil’s fall³⁷ was due to pride (*superbia*) or envy (*invidia*), specifically envy of humanity having been made in the image of God.³⁸ Augustine reasons that it is impossible that envy

³² *Ciu.* 11.13.

³³ *Gn. litt.* 4.32.49.

³⁴ *Ciu.* 11.11.

³⁵ *Gn. litt.* 4.24.41.

³⁶ *Ciu.* 11.9, quoting Eph 5:8.

³⁷ The devil is synecdochical for all fallen angels, inasmuch as he is the archetypal sinner. His pride was the very first sin (*ciu.* 11.15; *ep.* 105.4.13); but more than priority in time the Devil’s sin has primacy in malice (*Gn. litt.* 11.22.29). The Devil shares a nature with the demons, who are said to be his (Matt 25:41; *passim* in Augustine; at s. 198.26, he is an archangel and they are his angels), and so Augustine speaks univocally of them, their attributes and behaviours. Cf. Frederick van Fleteren, “Demons,” in *AA*, 266–268; idem, “Devil,” in *AA*, 268–69.

³⁸ See King, “Augustine and Anselm on Angelic Sin,” 262–64. Those among the former were in the majority, including Origen, Chrysostom, Jerome, Ambrose. Among the latter were Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Cyprian. See 262n.5–6. See also Burns, “Augustine on the Origin and Progress of Evil,” 18; 26n.1. He adds to the latter group Gregory of Nyssa, and, interestingly, also Ambrose, citing *On Paradise* where King cited his sermons.

should precede pride as its cause, for envy, as the resentment of another's superiority, presupposes a desire for one's own superiority.³⁹ Pride, as Augustine says, is the mother of envy.⁴⁰ It is the fundamental logic of all sin because every transgression presupposes a creature's preference for its own will in opposition to God's will for it. This sound reasoning is confirmed by Scripture.

If instead [the mind] gets in its own way, so to speak, and it pleases it to imitate God perversely so that it wills to enjoy its own power, it becomes lesser to precisely the extent that it desires itself to be greater. Hence, "pride is the beginning of all sin" and "the beginning of pride is when one departs [*apostatare*] from God."⁴¹

The intellectual creature is built to have its limit, form, and order by way of cleaving to, or enjoying, God alone. When a creature is what it is made to be it imitates God, conforming to its *ratio* in God, which, in God's mysterious simplicity, is essentially indistinguishable from God.⁴² It is a great paradox that the mind becomes like God, who is subject to none, only through subjection. Godlikeness is achieved through recognizing oneself as a creature, and lost in the attempt to be divine. Evil, then, is a "perverted imitation of God."⁴³ It is the attempt to found one's own order; to depart from the creator in preference for his good creature; to turn from what is eternal to what is temporal; to "set up" (*constituo*) a good thing as the measure of the rational soul's good, in place of the good itself by which the goodness of all things is truly measured.⁴⁴

The mind of the devil, as Augustine says, got in its own way. Created first of all things, the angels' first task was to love and behold God, and thereby become the intellectual light of the first day, created wisdom fashioned before all

³⁹ *Gn. litt.* 11.14.18

⁴⁰ *Uirg.* 31.31; *s.* 354.5; 399.7. See King, "Augustine and Anselm on Angelic Sin," 264.

⁴¹ *Lib. arb.* 3.25.76, trans. modified, citing *Sir* 10:13 and 10:12 respectively. For his appeal to *Sir* 10 to support pride as the beginning of sin, see *s.* 159B.11; cf. *mus.* 6.13.40; *Gn. adu. Man.* 2.5.6; *ciu.* 12.6; *Gn. litt.* 11.15.19. See King, "Augustine and Anselm on Angelic Sin," 266; Rist, *Augustine*, 102.

⁴² Cf. *nat. b.* 3; see also ch. 1, n.85.

⁴³ *Ciu.* 19.12; see also *mor.* 1.12.20; *mus.* 6.13.40. Rist notes that this is a particularly Christian addition to the notion of pride Augustine shared with Plotinus. *Augustine*, 103.

⁴⁴ See *ciu.* 12.8; *lib. arb.* 1.4.10; 1.15.32–33; 2.9.27. See also Burns, "Augustine on the Origin and Progress of Evil," 15.

other things. But, forsaking the love of Wisdom by which he would have been wise, the devil does not attain even created wisdom, turning instead to folly. In a single movement of pride, the devil renounces the true object of his love, turning toward himself instead; he delights in his own power, refusing to subject himself to the one who made him. Disobeying God's will for the perfection of his nature, the devil focuses instead upon the greatness of his nature such as it is, and, arrogating his own greatness, he falls.⁴⁵ Refusing the love of uncreated light that would enlighten it, the demonic intellect moves not onto morning, but straight to the blackness of night that is separated from the light in Gen 1:4. Though the inclusion of night in the hexaemeral account testifies to God's ordination of this fall, the pronouncement of goodness that follows every other element of creation is here withheld. It is attributed only to the light of the first day—where in all other days the attribution is general—lest God appear to approve of the angelic fault.⁴⁶ So, some angels apostatize from God, and the light switch never goes on for them, and it is not good.

And yet, to say that the light switch “never goes on” for some angels is to ignore an important question in Augustine's conceptualization of the angelic fall. It is one of two issues that are joined in a passage of scripture that is central to Augustine's understanding of fallen angels: the devil “was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in truth, because the truth is not in him.”⁴⁷ The first is the question of the temporality of the fall: How was the devil a murderer “in the beginning”? When did the devil cease to be a good angel? Was the devil ever a good angel? The second has to do with the John's implication that the cause of the devil's fall is the withdrawal of truth. The question there is whether Augustine can establish an understanding of the angelic fall that is consistent with the demands

⁴⁵ See *uera rel.* 13.26; *Io. eu. tr.* 42.10.5; King, “Augustine and Anselm on Angelic Sin,” 265–67.

⁴⁶ *Ciu.* 11.19–20. This represents a development of his understanding of the darkness of Gen 1:4 in *Gn. litt.* There he suggests that darkness signifies incomplete creation, reasoning that its goodness could not be proclaimed by virtue of its very incompleteness. *Gn. litt.* 1.17.33–35. He is tentative there in a way he is not in *ciu.* At *Gn. litt.* 4.25.42, however, Augustine suggests night is excluded from the further recounting of days because night does not belong to the kind of knowledge the angels have of creation, which is reconcilable what he says in *ciu.*, though it remains unexplored in *Gn. litt.*

⁴⁷ John 8:44. See, *ciu.* 11.13–14; *Gn. litt.* 11.16.21; *Io. eu. tr.* 42.11.

of his own insight into the nature of evil. The more foundational of the two, we shall consider the second problem first.

The Devil “Abode Not in Truth, Because the Truth is Not in Him”

The Voluntary Origins of Evil and the Distinction between Angelic Wills

Augustine establishes the will as the origin of evil in his early writings, where he seems comfortable enough with its finality. The search for the cause of the will threatens infinite regress; either it is another will, in which case that is the cause, or it is not, in which case there is no sin.⁴⁸ As we can observe in the preceding discussion of pride, the will is not conceived *per se* as a faculty of decision-making or conscious intellectual deliberation. Augustine is suggesting rather that actions, choices, and even character traits that occur at this level are themselves consequences of the will’s prior orientation, its loves and desires. The will is thus better characterized as one’s moral personality.⁴⁹ It is not, however, divorced from intellect; rather, in it, one’s intellect is in union with one’s affective stance, in which the perception or thought of something is inseparable from a desire for it, to set it up for his enjoyment as his own highest good.⁵⁰ Hence, we find “turning” to be a key word used for this orientation: turning implies activity, and thus evokes the will by which all human activity is understood to take place,

⁴⁸ *Lib. arb.* 3.17.47–49. See also *ciu.* 12.6. The logic of the argument is helpfully summarized in Babcock, “The Human and the Angelic Fall,” 139–40.

⁴⁹ See Rist, “Augustine on Free Will and Predestination,” in *Augustine: A Collection of Critical Essays* (ed. R. A. Markus; Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1972), 218–52, at 220–21. Elsewhere, Rist notes “the Latin is *uoluntas*, and *uoluntas* is a love which has been accepted or consented to. Or, if you like, ‘will’ is the conscious acceptance of a set of loves and desires and a determination to ‘stick with them.’ ” *Augustine*, 177. King describes it as an occurrent psychological state in which one has made a fundamental comparative evaluation. “Augustine and Anselm on Angelic Sin,” 264–65. For an introduction to the Augustinian concepts of love and the will’s activity, including their background in Platonic ethics of inspiration, see Rist, *Augustine*, 148–202. There he describes Augustine’s near-identification of will with love, or a set of accepted loves, as his “powerful and transforming thesis.” *Augustine*, 188. Cf. Brown, *Augustine*, 148–49.

⁵⁰ King, “Augustine and Anselm on Angelic Sin,” 265. The language of setting up (*constituo*) comes from *lib. arb.* 2.9.27. The identification of the will with its love is accompanied by a shift away from Augustine’s preoccupation with ignorance as the locus of human ills, a notion common among philosophers. See Rist, *Augustine*, 129–30; 140; 151–52; 161. Nevertheless, it is a mistake to think this effaces the problem of ignorance for Augustine. See Robert Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 28–29.

making the fundamental desires of the rational soul imputable to it, even if such a voluntary operation is beyond the direct reach of conscious choosing.⁵¹

And yet, in his early work, Augustine differentiated angelic and human sinfulness according to the circumstances in which they sinned.⁵² Lucifer's sin was before all others', entirely spontaneous, and thus *eo ipso* the most wicked and deserving of eternal death—that is, spiritual separation from God⁵³—without any possibility of redemption. It is axiomatic for Augustine that eternal punishment is the fate of demons because of Scripture. He is aware of the suggestion of ἀποκατάστασις, attributed to Origen, Basil the Great, and others, that supposed even the devil might be saved in the end after due penitential suffering.⁵⁴ To Augustine, Matt 25:41 settles the matter: “Depart into the eternal fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels.”⁵⁵ Understanding this correctly depends in part upon the proper translation of the Greek adjective αἰώνιον with the Latin noun *aeternum* (or the neologistic adjective *aeternale*). But even then, all uncertainty is erased elsewhere in Scripture. Matthew 25:46 makes eternal punishment the parallel with eternal life, using the same term, αἰώνιον. This suggests that the unending nature of the former cannot be undermined without compromising the unending nature of the latter, which is non-negotiable.⁵⁶ Isaiah 66:24 indicates punishment of some kind without end, quite straightforwardly: “Their worm will not die, and their fire will not be extinguished.”⁵⁷ A few years later, he will point to Rev 20:10, whose lake of fire is said to last ages of ages (*saecula saeculorum*), and 2 Pet 2:4, which speaks of God's condemnation of demons to hell as a perfected action, where they await their judgement.⁵⁸ And this

⁵¹ The image of a will turning or moving the person is central for Augustine. As Evans points out, his vocabulary for describing evil, a *defectiuus motus*, is suffused with it: *peruersus*, *peruersitas*, *auersio*, *defectio*, *lapsus*, *deformatas*, *deuiare*, *infirmare*. *Augustine on Evil*, 95.

⁵² On the following distinction between spontaneity and temptation, and its subsequent shift to the identity of human and angelic sin, see Burns, “Augustine on the Origin and Progress of Evil,” 17–21.

⁵³ *Ciu.* 13.24: “So it is also with the rebellious angels. By sinning, they did in a sense die, because they forsook God, the fountain of life by virtue of which, while they drank from it, they were able to live wisely and well; yet they could not die so completely as to cease in every way from living and feeling, for they were created immortal.”

⁵⁴ See *c. Prisc.* 5.5–6.7.

⁵⁵ *C. Prisc.* 5.5. Van Fleteren notes that Augustine cites this verse 110 times. “Demons,” 268.

⁵⁶ This point is reiterated in *ciu.* 21.24.

⁵⁷ *C. Prisc.* 6.7.

⁵⁸ *Ciu.* 21.23.

fate is, on account of these passages, certain for the demons, which is why the church does not pray for them the way it prays for her human enemies, about whose fate she cannot be so certain in this life.⁵⁹

That this immediate and irrevocable fate of the demons differs markedly from the immediate fate of humanity in their fall is self-evident. But the early Augustine identifies Adam's and Eve's sin with the action of taking the fruit, and claims that their guilt is mitigated somewhat on account of having been tempted by the devil, even though it was justified by their willingness to consent to him.⁶⁰ It was the lack of circumstances that necessitated the immediate ordination of the devil's eternal punishment, whereas his use of the fruit to tempt the primordial humans made a corrective penalty (namely the ignorance and trouble that characterize this life)⁶¹ more appropriate, leaving humanity with the opportunity for redemption in Christ.⁶² Locating the humans' sin in the taking of the fruit helped Augustine account for the disparity in God's response to angelic and human sin, but with this he inadvertently collapsed the distinction in human sin between the orientation of the will and the choices, actions, and traits it orients.

So, in his reconsiderations of the matter in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* and *The City of God*, the distinction between the spontaneous angelic fall and the conditioned fall of humans evaporates. The human and angelic sins of pride are nearly identical, both utterly spontaneous in the way Augustine before thought was applicable only to angelic sin.⁶³ Like the apostate angels, Adam's and Eve's sin is an evaluative judgement prior to any act of disobedience. By eating of the fruit, Adam and Eve simply made their underlying pride manifest in relation to a temporal law.⁶⁴ Despite their differing actions, Adam and Eve commit the same sin; despite their different natures, humans and angels fall with the same pride. The interchangeability of rational creatures in pride is clear when Augustine sets the proud will in its starkest relief in *The City of God*. In book 12, he asserts that the identification of the cause of evil must exclude all circumstances external to

⁵⁹ *Ciu.* 21.24.

⁶⁰ *Lib. arb.* 3.10.29–31.

⁶¹ Cf. *lib. arb.* 3.22.64.

⁶² *Lib. arb.* 3.25.76.

⁶³ Burns, "Augustine on the Origin and Progress of Evil," 20–21.

⁶⁴ *Ciu.* 14.13.

the will: “the will made itself evil.”⁶⁵ Then he proceeds to illustrate the angelic fall with the image of two men, beholding the same beautiful woman, one of whom considers the latter lustfully, the other in upright chastity. Augustine’s argument is that such differing responses must be possible, even when all other attributes of the viewers are identical, because the orientation of the will cannot be based upon anything if the moral integrity of the soul is to be upheld.⁶⁶ “No matter how thoroughly we examine the matter, therefore, we can discover nothing which caused the particular will of one of them to be evil.”⁶⁷

This is more or less a summary of his argument in *On the Free Choice of the Will*, but here he is less comfortable with the will’s responsibility than he formerly was. Augustine’s own depiction of evil’s origin in the will, which he asserted earlier with such confidence, appears in *The City of God* to unsettle him with its mysterious depth and hiddenness, as he is goaded on by interlocutors a trifle more contentious than the congenial Evodius.⁶⁸ Having established that there can be no cause for evil beyond the will, Augustine asks, “how can it be that a [good] creature . . . should produce any evil before his will has become evil: that is, should produce the evil will itself?”⁶⁹ Augustine is here asking the question he has just answered. Since no answer is possible, Augustine tries describing the problem of the evil will again, now introducing the concept of deficient causality: “the cause [of an evil will] is not an efficient but a deficient cause because the evil will itself is not something effective, but something defective.”⁷⁰ Wickedness is not in the will’s attainment to the evil, but in a failure to cling to the good, a defection, a falling away.

⁶⁵ *Ciu.* 12.6.

⁶⁶ Babcock says, “Augustine obviously wants to eliminate every variable except the will itself, every appeal except the appeal to the will’s own willing.” “The Human and Angelic Fall,” 141. His suggestion that such a limitation to the will predetermines Augustine argument arbitrarily has it backwards. Augustine must hold all other factors as constant inasmuch as the will has already been established as the *sine qua non* of moral imputability. The figure of the two men is thus not an argument whose outcome is predetermined, but an illustration designed to highlight with precision what it means for the will to be the origin of evil.

⁶⁷ *Ciu.* 12.6.

⁶⁸ See Burns, “Augustine on the Origin and Progress of Evil,” 18: “This discussion . . . shows evidence of the concerns of the Pelagian controversy: the nature of created freedom and the power of a creature to make itself better, to acquire a perfection which is not the gift of God.”

⁶⁹ *Ciu.* 12.6.

⁷⁰ *Ciu.* 12.7, trans. Babcock, “The Human and the Angelic Fall,” 144.

Augustine reinforces his proposition that the will is the locus of evil: “where the will becomes evil, this evil would not arise in it if the will itself were unwilling; and its defects are therefore justly punished, because they are not necessary, but voluntary.”⁷¹ But something has changed in his thoughts about this, for which he is anxious to account.⁷² In *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* he held that the devil fell from a middle state, a place of indeterminacy common to all angels from which they either raised to God by an act of will, or, forsaking God, fell from what might have been.⁷³ Here Augustine sees that this suggests that a good will is based not in God, but in an act of will achieved in some sense independently of God’s active help. This is a Pelagian notion of will that Augustine rejects: God forbid a creature might make itself better than God made it! But as he attributes the angels’ good will to God’s simultaneous act of creating the angelic nature and establishing it in the grace by which it cleaves to God forever, Augustine likewise includes the very thing he had tried, from the moment of his conversion, to exclude. For if not all the angels so cleaved, then in spite of their common nature, some angels were not established in God’s grace, even as the “two acts” of God are simultaneous.⁷⁴ Augustine then puts it this way: “the fallen angels, therefore, . . . received less of the grace of the divine love than those who remained steadfast in the same love . . . [who] were more amply aided by

⁷¹ *Ciu.* 12.8.

⁷² See TeSelle, “Nature and Grace,” 124–37, esp. 134.

⁷³ *Gn. litt.* 11.23.30, on the devil: “he did not receive it and then scorn it; rather, being unwilling to receive it, he forsook it and lost it.” On this indeterminacy, see TeSelle, “Nature and Grace,” 106–15.

⁷⁴ “Simultaneously establishing their nature and endowing them with grace.” *Simul eis et condens naturam et largiens gratiam.* *Ciu.* 12.9, trans. modified. I highlight the simultaneity of nature and grace because Augustine himself does not always clarify that their distinction is in respect not of God—who does not act in addition to being God, much less act twice—but of creatures, for whom something remains to be done in response to being created, to accomplish which the gifts of the same God that created it are still required. For humans, this metaphysical distinction between nature and grace is also existential. Conversion requires perseverance, continual turning and returning, opening and reopening, to God, which may very well be sought and experienced as additional gifts of God’s grace over and above what one experiences as one’s basic nature. But, for Augustine, this is to return to the same eternal and immutable fount of existence.

God.”⁷⁵ Does God then choose which of his angels will fall, and deprive them of grace accordingly?

This last word⁷⁶ on the angelic fall threatens to undermine Augustine’s effort to locate the origin of evil in the movement of the created will. God exalts angels and punishes demons, even though “the critical point of distinction between the two rests in something that God has given to the one and not to the other.”⁷⁷ Augustine’s account of the fall of the angels thus bears the marks of his doctrine of predestination, on account of which he has received more attention, and more criticism, than we can here reprise.⁷⁸ To delve into the topic in this context is fraught, bearing little promise of a resolution that will satisfy the demands of the subject. Nevertheless, if it is to be inevitable, then a conception of the fall of the angels is due, even in outline. Here we offer one that prioritizes as far as possible consistency with Augustine’s angelology, in which angels are pure intellectual creatures, willing participants in God’s gracious will for them, and have been so from the very moment of their creation.

⁷⁵ *Ciu.* 12.9. He in fact posits an option, namely, either the fallen angels received less of the grace of divine love, or the good angels were more amply aided by God. This, of course, is a false distinction given that he is speaking in terms of comparative quantities of divine aid.

⁷⁶ He leaves the subject at this point, most vexingly, by referring to his ostensibly fuller treatment of the matter in the preceding book, viz. *ciu.* 11.13, where it was most certainly not brought to any satisfying conclusion.

⁷⁷ Babcock, “The Human and the Angelic Fall,” 146. On this particular construal of the aid or assistance of God (*adiutorium*) in Augustine, see Rist, “Augustine on Free Will and Predestination,” 224–25.

⁷⁸ For an overview of the matter, which concerns centrally Augustine’s dialogue with the Pelagians, see TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (Herder and Herder, 1970; repr. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 176–82; 310–38; and Rist, *Augustine*, 104–08; 256–89. See also Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 219–52; and Ian McFarland, *In Adam’s Fall: A Meditation on the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 62–75. With the exception of Rist, these authors review Augustine’s literature with an eye toward the bases within Augustine’s own theology for resolving the issues he makes for himself. McFarland goes on to appeal extensively to Maximus the Confessor in order to ameliorate Augustine. Rist also has a clear sense of where Augustine goes wrong (his conception of omnipotence), and notes Augustine’s traditional contrast with Cassian, though he seems more content to let Augustine squirm, in the interest of strict exegesis.

God, the Will, and Non-Competition

Augustine's great rejoinder to Pelagian notions of the will is St. Paul's insight that nothing has anything good that it did not first receive.⁷⁹ But his way of speaking of the angels as more or less amply aided by God implies that angelic reception of that grace is to be understood passively. This makes the rational will's relation to God competitive: the will does not make itself better, God does. Augustine occasionally characterizes the relationship this way, of which there is perhaps no better example than his late reflection upon his first such characterization: "I in fact strove on behalf of the free choice of the human will, but God's grace conquered."⁸⁰ He maintains this explicitly to affirm that God is the origin of all good things, but his straightforwardness entails that all will is an epiphenomenon of divine predetermination, a puppet whose show is morally repugnant to the extent that God truly punishes the fallen will he himself provided.⁸¹ Unless understood properly, Augustine makes God the origin of evil willing.

The positing of an either-or between God and the will in the latter's orientation belies the non-competitive conception of their relationship that is more fundamental to Augustine's doctrine of the will.⁸² It follows from his recognition of God as a spiritual substance that is the source of all things that God is not just the fashioner of bodily materials and author of ruling principles; God is also the fountainhead of all movements and abilities.⁸³ Augustine establishes this earlier in

⁷⁹ 1 Cor 4:7; see *Simpl.* 1.2.9; see also *retr.* 2.1.3; *praed. sanct.* 4.8.

⁸⁰ *Retr.* 2.1.1, concerning *Simpl.* 1. qu. 2. Wetzel suggests that *Simpl.* set off a "veritable revolution" in Augustine's theology with respect to his conception of the will, and cites this very line from *Revisions*. See James Wetzel, "*Simplicianum, Ad,*" in *AA*, 798–99, at 798.

⁸¹ Cf. Rist, "Augustine on Free Will and Predestination," 241

⁸² On Augustine's notion of non-competition, see esp. McFarland, *In Adam's Fall*, 62–65; see also Williams, "Insubstantial Evil," 106–10; and TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 327–38. McFarland describes this as being a feature of Augustine's "mature" doctrine of the will, citing only the anti-Pelagian works that are the focus of his study on original sin. *In Adam's Fall*, 65. Likewise, TeSelle suggests it is in and around 418's *gr. et pecc. or.* that Augustine begins to conceive of grace as an inward assistance. *Op. cit.*, 333. It may be that grace is explicitly so conceived only later, but the non-competitive concept underlying it is a necessary concomitant to Augustine's understanding of God as unchanging spiritual substance, which Williams makes clear. Thus, the mature concept is anticipated as early as *lib. arb.* 3.22.65.

⁸³ This is in distinction from the Pelagians, who "could acknowledge a non-competitive relationship between grace and human agency only by limiting grace's role to that of sustaining the will's existence and capacities, whereas Augustine insisted that grace's operation extended to the very act of willing." McFarland, *In Adam's Fall*, 85n.65. See also 63: for the Pelagians, "the

The City of God: “just as he is the creator of all natures, so is he the giver of all powers.”⁸⁴ There, in Book 5, Augustine determines that there are no efficient causes that are not voluntary causes, either directly in the will of God, as in the establishment of all natures, or in the will of some creature, angelic or human.⁸⁵ But Augustine makes explicit that all created voluntary causes themselves belong to the breath of life, God the wholly uncreated spirit that quickens all things. We saw last chapter how the wills of angels and humans just are God’s volitional provision for creation. The voluntary cause that is straightforwardly the will of the rational soul is simultaneously, but indirectly, the will of God, though just to the extent that it is truly a good will.

Augustine’s language for the non-competitive relation between created wills and God is participation, whereby God grants rational creatures the power (i.e. “mind, intelligence, and will”) to cooperate in the realization of their measure, number, and weight as set by God.⁸⁶ Augustine’s question of whether God or the angel made the angelic will good is thus a trick question according to his own commitments. The answer is both: the creature’s willingness to receive grace is the mode in which God gives the will the grace to be good.⁸⁷ The crucial priority of God is maintained by articulating the created will’s relation to God in terms of consent. Augustine is thus consistent when he says in Book 12 that some angels received more of God’s grace than others only insofar as “to receive” is understood in the irreducibly active sense he articulates elsewhere against the

actions of the will cannot simultaneously be ascribed to God, except in the indirect sense that God is the one who created the will and endowed it with its powers of self-determination.”

⁸⁴ *Ciu.* 5.9.

⁸⁵ Or animal. But insofar as animals cannot but will according to the desires established in their nature, this is only to point back to God, who created the nature, or some human or angel, endowed as they are with the capacity to manipulate that animal nature according to its bodily desires.

⁸⁶ *Ciu.* 5.11. On the language of “cooperation,” see TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 328–29.

⁸⁷ Cf. Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 229, emphases in original: “What vitiated his later treatment of the whole matter was his wavering reaction to the Pelagian *Entweder-oder*—either God’s work, or ours?—a dilemma which before the controversy began he had accepted without scruple. The attempt to distinguish between what we do ourselves and what God does for us must always involve our thinking about grace in tangles which are inextricable. And so we find that Augustine will first attribute the forthcomingness of the act of will (*ut uelimus*) both to God’s calling and to man’s response, while ascribing the right action and the eternal happiness, to which the will is directed, to God’s gift alone; but that in the end the pressure of controversy will make him assert that it is the forthcomingness of will which God works in us ‘without us,’ and only when the will is formed and active can we say that He works with us in the grace that makes perfect.”

Pelagians: “and thus whatever [the soul] possesses, and whatever it receives, is from God; and yet the act of receiving and having belongs, of course, to the receiver and possessor.”⁸⁸

Augustine rejects any suggestion that the angels made themselves better than God made them. In doing so he resists the Pelagian notion that God establishes the will in neutral indeterminacy—a notion with which Augustine was once deeply sympathetic—and basically winds it up and lets it go, such that God no longer actively contributes to the created will’s operation.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the capacity of the will to determine its own orientation freely in response to God’s prior offering of grace, and the concomitant possibility that it may not, is a necessary aspect of the soul’s great blessedness. The rational soul must have a work of “its own”; willing participation in its own good, cooperation in the perfection of its own nature, is a responsibility proper to its nature. It is for this reason that angels and humans are more blessed than all other creatures, as Augustine establishes at the beginning of the very book of *The City of God* whose comments on the angelic fall concern us.

Just as the sentient nature, even when it suffers pain, is superior to that of a stone which cannot suffer pain, so the rational nature is more excellent even when it is miserable than is that from which reason or sensations is absent, and which can therefore experience no misery. . . . For it has been created with an excellence such that, though mutable in itself, it can nonetheless achieve its blessedness by cleaving to the immutable Good, the supreme God.⁹⁰

There is something God leaves undetermined in the principle of every rational spirit and soul, something to pursue or acquire, to “achieve” (*consequatur*). And, as he says elsewhere about the human fall, “it is a more glorious victory not to

⁸⁸ *Spir. et litt.* 34.60; see also *gr. et lib. arb.* 17.33: “In order that we will, then, God works without us; but when we will, and we will in such a way that we act, he works along with us.” On this distinction between operating grace and cooperating grace, see TeSelle, “Nature and Grace,” 133–36.

⁸⁹ See McFarland, *In Adam’s Fall*, 63.

⁹⁰ *Ciu.* 12.1. On the superiority of the life of reason, see *lib. arb.* 1.7.16–17. Augustine’s most sustained articulation, as far as I have found, of the necessity of the possibility of temptation to the blessedness of rational souls comes as a prelude to his discussion of the fall of Satan in *Gn. litt.* 11.4.6–11.11.15.

have yielded when under temptation than to have been unable to be tempted.”⁹¹ This is why the objection falters that God should have willed even the wicked to be good. It is precisely the determination of the created will by the divine that robs the former of its created glory. “How much better was the will of God, namely, that men should be what they willed to be, but that the good should not go unrewarded, or the wicked unpunished, and that thereby the existence of the wicked should be useful for others!”⁹²

Rational creatures are “open-ended,” though not neutral. It is not that they are perched on some indeterminate threshold between God and the abyss, from whence they cannot but make the choice God awaits. They are rather established in uprightness with a genuine *posse non peccare*, which is nevertheless incomplete to the extent that it is not yet a *non posse peccare*.⁹³ The grace offered for that perfection of their nature, though offered simultaneously with the creation of that nature, has, TeSelle notes, the character of a “*iustitia retinenda*,” an uprightness onto which it remains to be held fast. “This aid is only offered, and

⁹¹ *Gn. litt.* 11.6.8.

⁹² *Gn. litt.* 11.9.12. The highest class of good creatures could not exist without the potential for apostasy, and were God to change all evil wills to good, as some erroneously desire, it would only undermine the very goodness these same people ostensibly want: “under the pretext of increasing the number of more perfect men, the number of the good would be diminished.” *Gn. litt.* 11.10.13. See also *lib. arb.* 3.20.57. This is different from the argument that God depended upon the fall, and that only in redemption is creation as good as it can be. See, e.g., Rist, *Augustine*, 278–83. “Without evil, good could not be brought out of it.” *Ibid.*, 283. Rist shows, correctly, that Augustine’s notion of divine omnipotence as it stands—which claims that a creature cannot thwart God’s will for it—cannot escape the charge of arbitrariness, and that this necessity of evil is consequently the only way to make sense of the fall. If presented with the starkness of the alternatives, I suspect Augustine would have conceded to revising his understanding of omnipotence after all. It is of the utmost importance to that God does not require evil to make anything good. At *ciu.* 14.11, Augustine not only makes this clear, he also asserts that the incarnation is not a response to something unforeseen, but part of the eternal plan. If evil was “almost inevitable,” it is in this sense alone: God knows from eternity that his rational creatures will fall. From eternity the Word was to be made known in Christ, the goal and the way. It seems more consistently Augustinian to say, then, that the one through whom perfection is mediated is thus the one in relation to whom all sin and fall short of the glory of God. But there is another reason that the highest good cannot have depended upon the redemption of evil, one which is quite apposite to our own discussion. The perfection of the angels, which is not surpassed by even the resurrection of the just, is not achieved through redemption of the demonic fall but established in the beginning of their creation. It is not the correction of evil but the capacity for love that is, for Augustine, the condition of possibility for the highest good; but the capacity for love is itself the capacity for apostasy.

⁹³ See *corrupt.* 12.33.

the decision to use it or not is left in the creature's own hands."⁹⁴ The angels may love their God and be perfected, or they may not and fall away. At its base, it is not really a question of whether God *can* will the wicked to be good (doing so in effect makes such a creature an animal, by definition); God does not, in fact, make rational creatures good without their cooperation.⁹⁵ The achievement of perfection really does belong to the creature, even as the assignment, the nature in which it takes place, and yes, the achievement itself in addition, all belong to God.⁹⁶

The cooperation of the creature in its attainment to perfection necessarily belongs to that creature if the creature is likewise to be made responsible should it turn aside to evil. At the same time, the creature's prior establishment in some

⁹⁴ TeSelle, "Nature and Grace," 134–35. We could call this the difference between the goodness of the thing as such, and, in the later language of Aquinas, its owed good. See Cress, "Augustine's Privation Account of Evil," 117; cf. Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 40. As Cress notes, this distinction is critical in order to prevent the collapse of privation into negation, whereby simply not being God would be evil, an apparently Plotinian notion (see above, n.15). Wetzel also notes that Augustine's concept of privation does not mean that God never creates beings with less than absolute goodness; rather, God's creatures admit of relative perfection. "Augustine on the Origin of Evil: Myth and Metaphysics," in *Augustine's City of God: A Critical Guide* (ed. J. Wetzel; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 167–85, at 169. Relative to what? To the order established by God for their nature: "When they are where they should be according to the order of their nature, they preserve their own being according to the measure in which they have received it." *Ciu.* 12.5; see also *nat. b.* 3.

⁹⁵ Rist shows that Augustine commits himself to a "physical" conception of divine omnipotence: God's power is to get things done. Thus, while Paul says that God desires all men to be saved (1 Tim 2:4), the evident fact that all are not actually saved must therefore be because God does not, in fact, want all to be saved, otherwise God would have accomplished such. This clearly contravenes Augustine's own notions of the creature's love. Rist contrasts Augustine's position with that of John Cassian: "If God does not will that one of his little ones shall perish (Matt 18:14), how can we imagine, without the greatest blasphemy, that he does not wish all men, but only some in place of all, to be saved? Therefore those who perish, whoever they may be, perish against his will." *Conl.* 13.7.2, quoted in *Augustine*, 271. Cassian's is, in fact, the only solution to the question of why some—but not all or none—are saved that does not make of evil a necessity. But Augustine himself gives grounds for a "Cassianian" understanding. At *trin.* 6.1.2 and 15.5.7, Augustine identifies the power of God with the wisdom of God (cf. 1 Cor 1:24). The wisdom by which God redeems some and not others cannot be opposed to the wisdom that ordains rational creatures with the capacity to participate in that redemption; and by this same wisdom God gives rational creatures the ability to reject that very participation. Cf. *ciu.* 20.1: "no man acts rightly unless he is sustained by divine aid, and no demon or man acts wickedly unless permitted to do so by the same divine and most just judgment." If a creature's rejection of God is not an affront to God's wisdom, neither then can it be an affront to God's power. Note, therefore, that it is an important theme for Augustine's demonology and understanding of history that God "permits" evil to occur to test the good and condemn the wicked. E.g., *ciu.* 2.23.

⁹⁶ Cf. *lib. arb.* 3.22.65.

kind of uprightness is also necessary if Augustine is to maintain the asymmetry of privative evil according to which it has any coherence at all. In his depiction of the voluntary origins of all causes, Augustine is careful to delineate that, although God empowers all wills, not all wills belong to God, insofar as wicked wills oppose the will of God for those wills. And yet, wicked wills would be unable to operate according to their wicked desire without having been granted the power to do so by God.⁹⁷ Privation thus requires that the difference between obedience and disobedience be asymmetrical. Where a good will remains in the good, willingly receiving the good God gives it to be and do, evil does not conversely remain in some evil. There is no such thing as the Manichee's active principle of evil for one to receive, willingly or otherwise. Rather, evil is the failure to remain in the good, the failure to be receptive to God, to cooperate with the good in which God has established all things.⁹⁸ It is not a binary choice between flesh and spirit, cupidity and charity, but a question of one's willingness to allow God's love to

⁹⁷ *Ciu.* 5.9.

⁹⁸ Cf. TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 331. Against Babcock, what leads Augustine down this path of crude divine determinism in *ciu.* 12.10 is therefore not the asymmetry he posits between the origin of good and evil, but his failure to maintain that asymmetry. See "The Human and the Angelic Fall," 145. Hence, the problem Rist identifies in some of Augustine's theorizing about the will is one of excessive symmetry, namely, that of making God the author of both good wills and bad: "man is totally subject to the acts of God. . . . Man is not even able to accept or reject whatever graces may or may not be offered to him." Rist, "Augustine on Free Will and Predestination," 239. Thus, in spite of the fact that his discussion of causality was the context of his error, Augustine's concept of deficient causality in itself is completely consistent with his statement on the will, provided it is understood properly. King explains: "It is wrong to take his rhetorical rhyme seriously, to think that alongside efficient causes there are also 'deficient causes.' The deficiencies in question are not prior to, and somehow causal grounds determining, the (evil) will; they are instead features of the (evil) will itself, namely, its failure to do something in some fashion." King, "Augustine and Anselm on Angelic Sin," 269. Babcock claims that deficient causality makes sin inexplicable, compromising the "appealing plausibility" in the garden scene. What Babcock thinks of as "explicable," however, is not only the over-simplified Pelagian anthropology Augustine rejected, but also a desire for a rationale for the evil will more substantial than the asymmetry of privation, the sort of which Augustine rejected in the Manichees. *Op. cit.* 144–45. Against this claim, King appeals to a distinction between reasons and causes: "Why did Lucifer turn his will away from God? There is no cause; he had his reasons, namely, his love of himself, but in the end that is just to say that he turned his *voluntas* to himself rather than God. Primal sin is precisely as explicable as any other action—and precisely as inexplicable, as well." *Op. cit.*, 271.

pervade one's entire being, or to cut that love off in favour of a love for the lesser.⁹⁹

In the immediate context of Book 5 of *The City of God*, Augustine's distinction between the will's orientation and its empowerment by God helped to constitute his rejection of both the Stoic concept of fate and Cicero's opposition between divine foreknowledge and free will.¹⁰⁰ And in its broader context, it helped Augustine articulate how the Roman Empire's great breadth and extent fall within the providence of God. God has given to rational creation powers and abilities, variously limited, to do with what they will, to love as they please. For some, nothing less than loving the eternal God will do; for others, desire stops short at love of human praise and lust for domination, and some are capable, in concert with others, of pushing the boundaries of an expansive empire to satisfy that desire. In each case there is a power in the will that is not its own as opposed to God's, but is nevertheless experienced as independent of its inscrutable foundations for the sake of making the will "free." This means, however, that a person's free and willing use of the power he or she has been granted is therefore not opposed to the foreknowledge of God precisely because in the giving of such power God foreknows how one uses it.¹⁰¹

Augustine works hard in Book 5 to nuance the creator-creature relation indicated by the otherwise straightforwardly temporal term "foreknowledge." In light of this effort, Augustine's depiction of God as aiding some angels more, some less, seems, if not careless, then more indicative of rhetorical dichotomies

⁹⁹ As McFarland shows, it is when Augustine conceives of the will as a faculty of choice poised between two desires, and not as the means by which the creature receives the power to be what God wills it to be, that he becomes most Pelagian. See *In Adam's Fall*, 75–79. Cf. Wetzel, "Snarers of Truth: Augustine on Free Will and Predestination," in *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner* (ed. Robert Dodaro and George Lawless; London: Routledge, 2000), 124–41, at 131–32. Wetzel notes that Augustine's doctrine of reprobation only remains coherent if one recognizes a redeemable goodness given to all humans that all have consequently forsaken, an assertion his doctrine of original sin tends to oppose. See *ibid.*, 129–30. The case of the angels, as we can see, accords with Wetzel's position, while the subsequent question of original sin lies beyond the purview of angelology.

¹⁰⁰ *Ciu.* 5.8–9. See Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 96–97. O'Daly calls Augustine's arguments specious, but does not clarify.

¹⁰¹ *Ciu.* 5.10.

than clear philosophical reasoning.¹⁰² When predestination is made to be straightforward it collapses the complex participatory relation between grace and the will into a transaction of cause and effect that makes God a competitor to his creatures, and thus finite.¹⁰³ Properly conceived, participation denotes the connection between the temporal and the eternal, and so such temporal language must break down. Foreknowledge is the traditional term, but *afk*knowledge would be no less accurate (or no more inaccurate) for being less elegant; so too the predestinations of the God for whom all is eternally now are equally *post*destinations. Augustine's own conception of participation helps check his sometimes-deterministic language concerning the angels by confounding its straightforward causality. It is most fundamentally the case that the angels in possession of the grace of God are those angels who were willing to hold to God; whereas the angels lacking the full grace of God are those unwilling so to hold, the fallen angels. It is not a statement of cause, but a statement of fact, a definition, a tautology.

Interestingly, this is precisely what Augustine says of the devil, when he reads John 8:44 back in Book 11: "He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because the truth was not in him." Does this not, he asks,

¹⁰² Rist notes this tendency in Augustine's work, *Augustine*, 310. In this case, the philosophically unsustainable rhetorical dichotomy is: either the good will is the result of the creature's work or the grace of God.

¹⁰³ Such straightforward speech about God appears often in Augustine's engagement with the Pelagians. So, e.g., in *corrept.*, there are suggestions of "more powerful grace," and a "first" and "second" grace, and thus, a difference in God's relation to creation before and after the fall. See *corrept.* 11.30–12.34. Augustine adopts the distinction of grace as that which is required to heal fallen nature, to differentiate himself from Pelagius' conflation of the two, as though human nature were already complete, and all one had to do to act without sin was realize this. See *nat. et gr.* 10.11–11.12. And yet, such resolutely quantitative and temporal language strains against the notion of God's eternity, which is why Augustine elsewhere rejects that God had to change his decrees out of a lack of foresight of the primal sin. *Ciu.* 14.11. McFarland suggests that Augustine simply wants to point out that grace is more necessary after the fall than before, resisting the implication that Adam was less dependent upon God than his descendants (see, e.g., *corrept.* 11.32). He puts it best when he says "humanity's situation renders the mode of dependence different before and after the fall." *In Adam's Fall*, 74. McFarland, however, is perhaps more comfortable than is warranted with the need for an "additional gift" of grace after the fall when he claims this need is logically unassailable. If God does not have a temporal mode of activity proper to his eternal and immutable being, as Augustine believes, then every difference in grace must be a difference with respect to its reception in creatures. In addition to the anthropological focus of McFarland's discussion of the will and God's grace in Augustine, there must be attention to the theological issues raised by Augustine's shifts in conceptions of the will.

indicate that it is the truth's not being in the devil that is the cause of his not abiding in the truth? He responds with a masterful reference to the Psalms:

On the contrary, his not abiding in the truth is the cause of its not being in him. The same form of speech occurs also in the psalm: "I have called upon thee, for thou hast heard me, O God," where it would seem the psalmist should have said, "thou hast heard me, O God, for I have called upon thee." But when he had said, "I have called," then, as if someone had asked him to prove that he had called, he uses the effect—that is, God's answering his call—to prove his own act. It is as if he had said, The proof that I have prayed is that thou hast heard me.¹⁰⁴

We may thus interpret Augustine according to his own methods of interpretation, and do so simply so we can understand his claims consistently with the content of his own interpretations! "The fallen angels received less of the grace of the divine love than those who remained steadfast." The confirmation that some angels fell away from God is in the effect: they have less of the grace of divine love.

The Devil was a "Murderer from the Beginning"

The Devil's Foreknowledge

Christ's claim about the devil in John nicely sets us up to address the first of the two problems encountered in Augustine's account of the fall of the angels in *The City of God*. What does it mean for Satan to have been a "murderer from the beginning"? This is a question raised in Book 11 of *The City of God*, at the centre of which is an issue about the devil's foreknowledge.¹⁰⁵ It is in the angelic nature both to live eternally and to have utter constancy of will. In their making, the angels are created light, not darkness "in any way or for any duration of time,"¹⁰⁶ and thus, from the beginning, they are perfectly blessed; they are

¹⁰⁴ *Ciu.* 11.14, quoting Ps 17:6; see also *Io. eu. tr.* 42.13; cf. 42.1.

¹⁰⁵ On the devil's foreknowledge in Augustine, see King, "Augustine and Anselm on Angelic Sin," 271–73. He notes that it is a recurring question. See *Gn. litt.* 11.17.22; 11.25.33; *ciu.* 11.13; *corrupt.* 10.27; see also *ep.* 73.3.7, where, in 404, Augustine thinks the devil foreknew his coming fall, but asks Jerome for his opinions. As we note below, Augustine maintains from about 420 on that the devil did not see his own fall coming.

¹⁰⁶ *Ciu.* 11.11

established in the good and they willingly remain there. As we have seen, however, the perfect blessedness of an angel must include not only the enjoyment of God without interruption, but also necessarily the certain knowledge, free from doubt and error, that such enjoyment will last forever, lest the blessedness of angels, to whom humans shall be equal in the resurrection, be less happy than the greatest imaginable blessedness. There is no room in such perfect blessedness for a fall. The devil by definition could not have had properly angelic foreknowledge even before he sinned since he, in fact, fell.¹⁰⁷

Augustine suggests the possibility that the angels who were to fall lived for a duration in some less-than-perfect blessedness, having no knowledge of either their perseverance or their fall, and thence fell. Such a middling blessedness would know the ambiguity of Adam's prelapsarian existence: without enjoyment of God in eternal contemplation, ignorant of the coming fall, and yet also ignorant of suffering and the cry of deliverance, and so happy to a limited extent.¹⁰⁸ But he chafes at the idea that such lesser-blessed angels would necessarily be made to live alongside fully blessed angels, who knew perfectly from their beginning that they would abide eternally. Such a distinction in nature is without basis in scripture, and, although he does not anathematize it as such, Augustine finds it unimaginable, having already rejected it explicitly in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*.¹⁰⁹ The only other option available, about which Augustine is certain after 420, is that all angels were created in the same upright state, from which the wicked fell by their own will, while good angels remained willingly, to receiving certain knowledge of the eternity of their happiness as a reward for their love, but only after other angels had fallen.¹¹⁰

It remains for us to consider the demons' prelapsarian state of intermediate blessedness, and in particular, Augustine's inquiry as to whether it could have lasted any length of time. In *The City of God*, Augustine begins by suggesting the possibility that the devil sinned from the very beginning, following the plain sense of John 8:44: "He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the

¹⁰⁷ *Ciu.* 11.13.

¹⁰⁸ *Ciu.* 11.12.

¹⁰⁹ *Gn. litt.* 11.19.26; cf. 11.26.33. Augustine suggests other Christian authors have thought this. *Gn. litt.* 11.17.22; cf. 3.10.14. Taylor notes Marius Victorinus held this opinion. John Hammond Taylor, notes to *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, by St. Augustine (2 vols.; ACW 41–42), 2:291n.50.

¹¹⁰ *Ench.* 9.28; *corrupt.* 10.27–11.32. See TeSelle, "Nature and Grace," 125.

truth.”¹¹¹ This is the interpretation he gives when treating the fall of Satan in his earlier commentary on Genesis, in an attempt to secure an original created equality between angels and demons.¹¹² And yet, after clarifying that this earlier interpretation is not Manichaeism,¹¹³ he rejects it here, because the prophet Ezekiel says Lucifer had every precious stone as his covering in Paradise, and that he was perfect in his ways.¹¹⁴ This suggests to Augustine that there was for Lucifer a time before his sin. Thus, where Christ says in John that the devil was a murderer from the beginning, this must indicate that he sinned at the beginning of his sin, rather than at the beginning of his existence.

Job also speaks of the devil at the beginning, describes him as “the beginning of the Lord’s handiwork, which he made to be a sport to his angels,” a tradition repeated in the Psalms.¹¹⁵ Augustine is clear that the beginning of the Lord’s work is the angelic nature, not God’s intention for it to be mocked by the blessed angels, which is rather the punishment for its sin. God, of course, is not properly said to have reacted to the devil’s sin on account of this. Rather, God made the angel good, but, foreseeing the devil’s misuse of what he had been given, God likewise prepared the use he would make of the cohort of fallen angels.¹¹⁶ Accordingly, Augustine suggests that the separation of the blessed angels from the unclean in the division of day from night on the first day of Gen 1 indicates God’s division of the holy from the wicked in God’s foreknowledge of the fall.¹¹⁷ How, then, are we to characterize this prelapsarian angelic existence? What are we to make of the assertion that the devil sinned not from the beginning of his existence, even though the angels who were blessed from the very beginning and for all eternity could only have received full affirmation of their eternal constancy, which is itself partly constitutive of that blessedness, after these other angels had already fallen?

¹¹¹ *Ciu.* 11.13.

¹¹² *Gn. litt.* 11.16.21; 11.23.30.

¹¹³ The subject of demons in Augustine is frequently interlaced with his privative and volitional defense against Manichaeism. One must ignore this to suggest, as Charles T. Mathewes does, that Augustine’s belief in demons constitutes a vestige of his incompletely rejected Manichaeism. See *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 63.

¹¹⁴ Ezek 28:13, 15; see *ciu.* 11.15.

¹¹⁵ Job 40:14, *apud ciu.* 11.15; Ps 103:26.

¹¹⁶ *Ciu.* 11.17.

¹¹⁷ *Ciu.* 11.19.

The Difference Embodiment Makes

Because of the need to understand God's establishment of the angels in uprightness, Augustine maintains to the end this later reading of John 8:44, in which demons did not know the "fullness of happiness" because they lacked knowledge of their coming fall, but nevertheless "enjoyed a lesser happiness, but one still without any defect."¹¹⁸ This strains against his earlier interpretation in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, where he links the original equality of the angels not to this intermediate happiness in uprightness without defect, but to an original angelic neutrality out of which some rise to the love of God and others fall in self-love, but all likewise at the very beginning of their existence.¹¹⁹ There, Augustine reads the passage from Ezekiel in question as applying more aptly to the body of the devil—humans living in imitation of the devil's pride¹²⁰—than the spiritual creature himself. Lucifer's adornment with precious stones, his dwelling in blessedness prior to his fall, is a more suitable description of human apostates, who bear the glorious light as members of the church only to renounce it later.¹²¹ Augustine is even so bold as to suggest the possibility that there is really no other meaning of these verses, though, he admits, it would take a treatise devoted solely to that subject.

As in *The City of God*, Augustine suggests that a prelapsarian angel of limited blessedness must be understood in kind with prelapsarian man, who does not have the certainty of full beatitude and constant contemplation of God, but is not thereby entirely wretched since he can endure tribulation with obedience, relating to his future beatitude in faith and hope. What Augustine does in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* that he does not do in the later work, however, is make it explicit that humanity's temporal experience of blessedness that remains ignorant of future compromises to that beatitude is dependent upon the human's possession of an animal body (*corpus animale*). This embodiment is precisely not shared with angels. On the contrary, Augustine is clear that the animal body must be transformed into a spiritual one (*corpus spiritale*) for the promised attainment

¹¹⁸ *Corrept.* 10.27.

¹¹⁹ *Gn. litt.* 11.19.26.

¹²⁰ For a succinct account of this, see also *Io. eu. tr.* 42.9–11.

¹²¹ *Gn. litt.* 11.24.31–25.32.

of equality with angels in the resurrection.¹²² It was, he notes, according to the weakness of this body that Christ was placed “a little below the angels.”¹²³

The significance of the animal body lies in the important difference between the will as a capacity to choose a path of action and the love that orients that action; Augustine will also speak of the will (*uoluntas*) as that orienting love, the moral character of the person, distinguishing it from its works (*opera*) or choices (*arbitria*).¹²⁴ Consider again Augustine’s recognition that pride is the logical basis of all sin. It was impossible for Augustine to maintain the distinction between human and angelic sin as the difference between temptation and spontaneity since temptation and the sinful choice—the plucking of forbidden fruit, for example—occur at a conscious, visible, audible, bodily level that necessarily presuppose a prior evaluative judgement according to which they occur.¹²⁵

The first evil act of the will, since it preceded all other evil acts in man, consisted rather in its falling away from the work of God to its own works than in any one work. And those works of the will were evil because they

¹²² *Gn. litt.* 11.18.23–24; see also 6.19.30; 6.24.35; *ciu.* 13.22–23. The doctrine of bodily transformation in the resurrection follows 1 Cor 15:44. Whereas early on, Augustine conceived of this equality with the angels in the resurrection as a bodily equality—i.e. that the *corpus spiritale* is an angelic body—Augustine eventually decides that the bodily quality of the resurrection is unique to human nature, and it is only the eternal contemplation of God with perfect assurance of constancy that humans are to share with angels. See Frederick Van Fleteren, “Augustine and *Corpus Spiritale*,” *AugStud* 38/2 (2007): 333–52.

¹²³ Ps 8:6; cf. Heb 2:9. *Gn. litt.* 6.19.30. See also *en. Ps.* 8.11.

¹²⁴ See, e.g., *ciu.* 14.11. This equivocation of the term *uoluntas* is indicative of Augustine’s lack of technical terminology in making these distinctions. Djuth points out that *uoluntas*, for Augustine, can indicate the power of the soul to move a being, but also be applied to the soul’s wishes, intentions, purposes, choices, desires, emotions, and affections. See Marianne Djuth, “Will,” in *AA*, 881–85, at 881. This is not all bad insofar as it helps Augustine preserve a sense of the soul’s unity. Action and its orienting desire really are continuous for Augustine, each a feature of a single soul, even as they are, and must be, distinguished. To help clarify this distinction in Augustine, McFarland appeals to Maximus the Confessor’s differentiation between the natural will (θέλημα φυσικόν) and the gnostic will (θέλημα γνωμικόν). See *In Adam’s Fall*, 88–116. Also significantly instructive for this section on the difference embodiment makes for humans vis-à-vis angels is McFarland’s treatment of Aquinas’ angelology, *In Adam’s Fall*, 154–57. See also Dyan Elliott’s chapter, “On Angelic Disembodiment and the Incredible Purity of Demons,” in *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 127–56. Though both of these concern post-Augustinian angelology, many of the characteristic features of the later work examined are traceable to Augustine.

¹²⁵ See *Gn. litt.* 11.5.7; 11.27.34; 11.30.39.

were according to itself, and not according to God. Thus, the will itself, or man himself, insofar as his will was evil, was, as it were, the corrupt tree which brought forth the evil fruit of those evil deeds.¹²⁶

As he says shortly after, “it was in secret that Adam and Eve began to be evil; and it was because of this that they were then able to fall into overt disobedience. For they would not have arrived at the evil act had an evil will not preceded it.”¹²⁷

This is not a simple question of inner versus outer, mind versus body. Discursive reasoning may be a functioning of the intellect, but its use of words also identifies it as proper to the embodiment of the human soul. In fact, there is much activity of the soul that concerns the body.¹²⁸ In all its depth, the orienting desire of the soul tends to be a mystery even to the person whose will it is.¹²⁹

Although they must be distinguished, for Augustine the conscious choice and its orienting will work inseparably, with the latter logically preceding the former.¹³⁰ But the secret of Adam and Eve’s relation to the eternal requires mediation, manifestation to themselves and others, which is accomplished in relation to a temporal object. The prohibition against the fruit of the tree of knowledge, a temporal law, offered Adam and Eve just such a medium for the revelation of their adherence, or lack thereof, to the eternal law. The command was designed to reveal the human heart, and their transgression revealed that those first humans had attenuated their love for God. Hence, for Augustine, the fruit of the tree of knowledge is not poisonous, and its introduction of evil to the

¹²⁶ *Ciu.* 14.11, with reference to Matt 7:17.

¹²⁷ *Ciu.* 14.13.

¹²⁸ Cf. TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 92–116, on the psyche in Augustine. TeSelle enumerates nine ascending (i.e. progressing from most bodily to most intellectual) operations of the soul, of which the first six pertain to its connection with the body.

¹²⁹ *En. Ps.* 41.13; *ciu.* 14.13. See Rist, *Augustine*, 129; see also 139–40, where he cites *s.* 340A.8, and Rist’s comments on identity in the context of our *concupiscentia* and *difficultas* after the fall. “We are able neither to understand our own minds nor to control our own bodies, and we run the risk of becoming further fractured into more and more weakened, would-be-autonomous units.” For an good account of Augustine’s attempt to gather the fractured components out of the depths of his self in the recollection of confession, though one that is suspicious of Augustine’s relentlessness in doing so, see Romand Coles, *Self / Power / Other: Political Theory and Dialogical Ethics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 14–53. Coles’ is a very helpful chapter, but in the end his attempt to analogize Augustine’s extirpation of evil desires in himself with the political exclusion of pagans from a Christian hegemony is ill founded.

¹³⁰ McFarland is instructive here. See *In Adam’s Fall*, 61–87, especially 66–71.

primal humans is not due to some chemical property.¹³¹ It is in the animal body and its attendant sensory perception, literal knowledge, and straightforward understanding, that the articulable (i.e. temporal) command not to eat of a tree is received (or perceived).¹³² And it is at the same level of embodiment that the deliberation occurs and one's underlying desires are manifest, according to which a path of action is taken.

For the garden scene to be intelligible the connection between the depths of the soul and its body must be real. To Augustine, one's true desires have a way of working themselves out. But, at the same time, the nature of bodily mediation precludes a one-to-one relationship. The animal body of humans conceals the deepest desires of their wills in addition to revealing them. Embodiment involves much ambiguity, making it a necessary task of a human life merely to clarify one's basic desires: perception goes with misperception, knowledge with ignorance, understanding with error. Also proper to the animal body are a range of desires that are not directly God and yet legitimately satisfied insofar as they are established by God. But these are susceptible to the soul's disordered priorities, and thus ambivalent in their capacity to signify desire for God or the self. For it is well within the power of the mind to trade opportunistically upon the ambiguities of the body to rationalize its disordered desires.

Furthermore, bodily human life does not merely unveil the hidden will; mediation works both ways. This makes both the correction and corruption of the

¹³¹ *Gn. litt.* 8.6.12; 8.13.28–30; *ciu.* 14.13. See also Burns, “Augustine on the Origin and Progress of Evil,” 20–21.

¹³² God's mode of communicating the command is not made clear in Genesis. Augustine suspects, however, that it was given through some kind of bodily appearance, and suggests that the reference in Gen 3:8 to Adam and Eve hearing God in the garden as he strolled verifies the likelihood of this. *Gn. litt.* 8.18.37. A bodily reception fits the apparent subjection of the command to the ambiguities of the human memory and understanding. The way Eve distorts the command in conversation with the serpent bespeaks the vagueness of a temporal command that disappears as soon as it is spoken; the kind of vagueness that has no place in the contemplative spiritual insight that enlightens the minds of angels and (occasionally) saints. Eve's ambivalence about the law (see *Gn. litt.* 11.30.39) suggests it could not have come internally, into her “heart,” because it knows none of the certainty and conviction Augustine associates with that kind of insight: “I heard in the way one hears within the heart, and all doubt left me. I would have found it easier to doubt whether I was myself alive than that there is no truth ‘understood from the things that are made.’” *Conf.* 7.10.16. Adam and Eve receive the command, but they don't “get” it.

soul possible.¹³³ The unveiling of one's desires always happens in relation to things and people that confront one with something to be desired, that ask to be imitated and thus to be determinative and transformative of one's deepest desires. It is thus never finally clear whether the desires being laid bare in any particular moment are demonstrative of one's true character. Augustine's classic statement on this is in *The City of God*:

Let these answers . . . be made to their enemies by the redeemed family of the Lord Christ and by the pilgrim city of Christ the King. Remember, however, that among those very enemies are hidden some who will become citizens; and do not think it fruitless to bear their enmity until they shall come to confess the faith. On the other hand, while she is a pilgrim in this world, the City of God has with her, bound to her by the communion of the sacraments, some who will not be with her to share eternally in the bliss of the saints. Some of these are concealed. Some of them, however, join openly with our enemies, and do not hesitate to murmur against the God Whose sacrament they bear. Sometimes they crowd into the theatres with our enemies, and sometimes into churches with us. But there is no reason to despair wholly of the correction even of some of these. For among our most declared enemies—unknown even to themselves—there lie hidden some who are predestined to become our friends. In this world, the two cities are indeed entangled and mingled with one another; and they will remain so until the last judgment shall separate them.¹³⁴

The experience of a modicum of happiness depends upon precisely this ambiguity intrinsic to human embodiment. Adam can be "happy" since his bodily condition is at peace, he can look forward to the promise of union with God, and he knows of no tribulation or compromise to this promise. Therein lies its limitation: Adam's own desires are not transparent to him, so he is happy to the extent that ignorance is bliss. The revelation of his heart is to come, and Adam's subsequent disobedience characterizes the human project as a whole, bequeathing to

¹³³ *Ciu.* 14.13: "I venture to say that it is of benefit to the proud that they should fall into some open and manifest sin, which can cause them to be displeased with themselves even after they have already fallen through being pleased with themselves." Cf. Burns, "Augustine on the Origin and Progress of Evil," 21.

¹³⁴ *Ciu.* 1.35.

humanity a personhood rent by disobedience: souls divided against God, bodies against their souls.¹³⁵ From the garden on, human wills are in want of power to reform their own orienting loves, and to sustain it in those moments they do attain it.¹³⁶

And yet, for this very reason any single temporal revelation of the presence of morally culpable desires in an incomplete soul cannot be the final word. Time is granted humanity for each to discover and respond to the offer of divine grace. All of history is the playing-out of this drama of consent and refusal, complete with deceptions, revelations, and reversals, and indeed unsatisfying and ambivalent endings. Apparent membership in either city is never a guarantee of perseverance. It is not wrong to call people living righteous and godly lives blessed, but “what man can know that he will persevere to the end in the practice and increase of righteousness?”¹³⁷ It is thus the task of a human life to realize what God has already foreknown and predestined from eternity. Temporary and apparent membership in a given city that is contrary to the citizenship one ultimately and eternally receives according to the true desire of his heart is a possibility only because of the ambiguities and deceptions of embodied life. Such false appearances seem to have no bearing on one’s final judgement. Hence, the orientation of a life is not complete until such life is spent; and even then there is the possibility of remaining ambiguity, to be judged truly only by God.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ *Ciu.* 14.15.

¹³⁶ “For all the significance that Augustine accords to the inner conflicts that mark human willing, a key feature of his mature doctrine of the will is that at a basic level human beings do what they want. Importantly, however, this point does not constitute a ringing affirmation of human autonomy; it simply reflects Augustine’s belief that willing follows desire. The problem—the point of existential crisis that undergirds Augustine’s analysis—is that human beings can’t want what they want. It is this incapacity that is the source of the experience of the divided will: we do what we desire, invariably—but *what* we desire remains beyond our control.” McFarland, *In Adam’s Fall*, 75. My only reservation with this is that the lack of human control over desire ought not to be asserted too rigorously. It is clear in his reflections upon the divided self that Augustine recognizes his own inability to want the right thing; but the very experience of division suggests that this incapacity is not absolute. What he is able to do is want to want the right thing, which disrupts absolute incapacity enough to allow the division between what his desires in fact are, and what he knows they should be, to begin to be healed. See *conf.* 8.8.19–8.11.26.

¹³⁷ *Ciu.* 11.12.

¹³⁸ Hence, as TeSelle points out, predestination for Augustine is used not for the deterministic exclusion of perceived sinners, but rather to exhort those listening finally to lay hold of the grace for which they are destined, and to find the strength to finish the race. The notion of rejection as an element of preaching, TeSelle notes further, is always in the third person and hypothetical: “*If* any

It is not so with angels. They are not *animae*,¹³⁹ and they are not endowed with *corpores animales*. For this reason there is no gap that delays discovery of and allows for influence upon their will. The human body exists in a kind of dialectical tension with the soul until it is drawn up in conformity to the soul after death, which, given the dual destinies of humanity, makes for two resurrections.¹⁴⁰ But what is clear from the final unification of the human body to its soul is that it gives the person equality with angels of either stripe, thus bringing the person to where the angels already are.¹⁴¹ For the angelic nature, being spiritual, is simply a loving intellect, an intellectual love. Without the ambiguity of human embodied life, the angelic existence is fully transparent to itself from the very beginning, so what takes humans all of their bodily history to determine for themselves, the angels determine all at once.

The fallen angels are created in a certain moral uprightness with no foreknowledge of their coming fall. But what Augustine does not make explicit—for it seems he himself was not clear¹⁴²—is why they were thus ignorant. Their lack of foreknowledge is not a simple question of ignorance, as it would be for a human who does not foresee his own future actions. On the contrary, without an

are not foreknown and predestined to his kingdom, *then* they shall not persevere.” *Perseu.* 22.61, quoted in *Augustine the Theologian*, 327. As for Adam himself, Augustine leaves his status ambiguous. To say Adam’s actions were of grave importance to Augustine would be an understatement. “For, because of that sin, human nature was made subject to all the great corruption that we see and feel, and so to death also.” *Ciu.* 14.12. But Adam is the “father of both kinds [*utriusque generis pater*],” the heavenly and earthly cities, while the first unambiguous member of the earthly city, the father of that house, is instead Cain (15.17).

¹³⁹ For Augustine’s denial of his earlier description of angels as “souls,” see *retr.* 1.11.4; 1.16.2.

¹⁴⁰ For the difference between the resurrection of mercy for the good and the resurrection of judgement for the evil, see *ciu.* 20.6. On the conformity of the body to the soul in the first resurrection, see *ciu.* 13.22–23; on the conformity of the body to the soul in the second (to wit, the indissolubility of their union), see *ciu.* 13.2; 21.10.

¹⁴¹ On the resurrected body’s conformity with angels, see again *ciu.* 13.22. For the conformity of wicked men and demons, see *ciu.* 21.9–10. The latter subject is a little less clear, since Augustine appears to assume that the torments of hell will entail a transformation of the demonic condition that enables them to suffer bodily. But the depiction of Satan throughout, e.g., *ciu.* 20, especially as the strong man to be bound by Christ (Matt 12:29 pars.; Rev 20:2), makes him and his angels the clear standard of the resurrection of judgement to come. Judgement only increases the devil’s possession of the ungodly, and he seduces them into eternal damnation “with himself.” *Ciu.* 20.7.

¹⁴² See King, “Augustine and Anselm,” 271.

animal body, such temporal distinctions are indiscernible in the angelic nature. As King suggests, it is best, on Augustine's behalf,

to opt for the view that none of the angels knew of their future status at the instant of their creation, which is the very moment when they could exercise their freedom to turn their wills as they pleased; those who kept their wills directed to God were rewarded with both eternal happiness and knowledge of their eternal happiness, whereas those who did not were damned. (Indeed, this is what Augustine usually says in his later works.) Hence, at the moment of their creation, and ever after, the good angels are assured of their happiness, and the bad angels were not—as Augustine says, they turned their back on the gift of eternal happiness and so lost it, never having received it.¹⁴³

In the first place, logic demands this. If the blessed angels can only know of their eternal constancy after the fall of other angels, and said angels are blessed from the moment of creation, then the fall of the angels must likewise be temporally simultaneous with their creation. But it is also the case that a temporal experience of blessedness, a span of time in ignorance of the coming fall, implies a level of will and action on top of one's most fundamental desire that is only possible with a bodily medium. This, however, compromises original angelic equality, for an embodied angel is a very different kind of creature than the purely spiritual angels of Gen 1. And, lastly, it seems to suggest that angels need a body of flesh, need to be more human, in order to sin, and that it was never really possible for the fully blessed angels to fall, which, as we have seen, would undermine the very possibility of their blessedness.¹⁴⁴

“The devil sinneth from the beginning.”¹⁴⁵ Augustine says that this does not mean the devil sinned from the beginning of his existence, but rather from the beginning of his sin, for he enjoyed a “lesser happiness without defect.” The suggestion of temporality in Augustine's explanation, however, must be excluded according to his own commitments not only to the character of the blessedness of

¹⁴³ King “Augustine and Anselm on Angelic Sin,” 272–73.

¹⁴⁴ By his own account demons would be better than angels. See *ciu.* 12.1; see also above, n.

92.

¹⁴⁵ 1 John 3:8, *apud ciu.* 11.13.

the angels, but also to their natural bodilessness. He must maintain the original goodness of the angelic nature, and God's establishment of it in the uprightness of grace offered, rejecting above all the presence of any fault in the metaphysical beginnings of the angelic nature. But, from the temptation to understand this lesser happiness temporally as well, let us restrain Augustine on his behalf, hopefully without temerity.

As for the interpretation of Ezekiel, the postulation of adornment with every precious stone is certainly applicable to human apostates who have forsaken what God has given them; but this apostasy has its archetype in the devil himself, who was given a wondrous intellectual nature before all other things, and established in the offer of grace that it might be perfected in the love of God. That he fell from such greatness immediately in time should not, for Augustine, compromise the verity of his original adornment. Despite the fact that, in Book 11 of *The City of God*, the devil's adornment in Eden suggested to Augustine a length of time before the angels' fall, in a later passage Augustine himself confirms that the paradise from which the devil is not exactly that of Adam and Eve. For human paradise was both spiritual and corporeal in order to provide for both soul and body. But the devil fell from the spiritual paradise, becoming present within the corporeal and spatial garden of the first humans only with the use of a serpent through which he might speak. Such a paradise is commensurate with the devil's immediate fall in that it consists precisely in what was offered, not what was received.¹⁴⁶

As Augustine was wont to do, he left room open for this interpretive modification. While, with an air of certainty, Augustine proclaimed in the midst of Book 11 that night was divided from day in the foreknowledge of God, by the end of the book he reverts to saying that Gen 1:4–5 depicts God dividing the angels "either in foreknowledge or in act."¹⁴⁷ The latter is more consistent with not only our present attempt at finding consistency, but also his insightful understanding of the hexaemeron. The six days of creation are a description of the

¹⁴⁶ *Ciu.* 14.11. Augustine distinguishes between a spiritual and literal paradise in *Gn. litt.* 8.1.1, but there he means something different. In *Gn. litt.*, by "spiritual" he means allegorical; i.e., the account of Adam and Eve in the garden "stands" for other things that teach us about the human condition and our relation to God, and so forth; i.e., the kind of account he gives in his *Gn. adu. Man.*, as he himself suggests at *Gn. litt.* 8.2.5.

¹⁴⁷ *Ciu.* 11.33.

angels beholding in God all of God's simultaneous creation. Thus the inclusion of intellectual night refers to angels cleaving to God in perfected love, while beholding in God the existence of other angels who must by definition already be failing to have the very same vision. God's division of angels is constituted in the very perception of that division by some of those angels. Thus, to divide the angels at all is to divide them in act.

Differentiating Humans and Demons

There is a certain sense in which the original equality of angelic goodness is prior to the particular exercise of their will, even as this goodness includes the existence and power of the will. And yet, for Augustine, rational creatures are always already willing, for they are always already being offered the grace of God, and there is no such thing as no response to such an offer. Anything other than acceptance is rejection.¹⁴⁸ For humans, willing may not always manifest what is ultimately one's most fundamental desire, but it is never neutral. Angelic willing is also never neutral, but their spiritual nature makes an important difference. The divine *fiat* invites the angels to receive their perfected form in the love and contemplation of the Word. They have always already consented or not to divine love and set up for themselves their final good. Without the animal bodies of humans, however, angels never manifest a will contrary to this most fundamental desire, which is singular and constant and eternal.

In this unwavering and eternal constancy of angelic love, either of God for the blessed angels or of themselves for the demons, the apocalyptic difference between the two cities is epitomized. The cities have their origins in the angels, good and bad, and all of humanity has its end with the angels, in life or death. For both kinds of rational creatures God's judgement evaluates whether or not one loves God, and the difference absolute and devoid of degrees.¹⁴⁹ In this sense they

¹⁴⁸ Cf. TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 331: "the will, at least when confronted with the possibility of conversion, is not in a position of indifference but must either consent or fail to consent." This raises a number of anthropological questions that cannot be sufficiently treated here. What, e.g., constitutes sufficient confrontation with the possibility of conversion?

¹⁴⁹ See Johannes van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon: A Study into Augustine's City of God and the Sources of his Doctrine of the Two Cities* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 115–18. Van Oort lists some of the primary terms for this antithesis, noting its foundation in Scripture. "Again and again the antithesis is evident. There is nothing in between. 'Whatever is not of faith is sin,' Augustine often

are metaphysically identical. The difference is simply that, being embodied, humans work out their love through history. Note, however, that this temporalization of humanity's search for love is not for God's sake. God's judgement is true and his foreknowledge perfect, God having no need to learn anything about his creatures from history. A person's achievement of what has been eternally foreordained ultimately relativizes any appearances to the contrary as products of the ambiguity and deception of embodied life. What does it matter to their predestined end if a true saint spent time at the games? What does it matter if a true apostate spent time in church? Augustine says the church would not pray for its human enemies any more than it prays for demons, if it knew with divine certainty who those predestined to judgement were.¹⁵⁰

But while scripture testifies to God's eternal judgement of the angels and souls alike, we do not directly perceive souls holy and damned any more than we do angels and demons. Our pilgrimage through embodied life in this world acutely restricts our access to God's predestination of people, and so the church continues to pray for the repentance of all. God may have nothing to learn, but the human passage through time, by which we arrive at that foreordained destiny, is of the utmost importance to humans themselves. Variations in the path one takes to get there, false appearances, and the sense that it could go either way are simply the conditions in which embodied humans determine their destinies; there is no other more direct way for humans. And yet the departure of this life marks the end of that process. After this, all false appearances are dropped and souls are judged justly, with only those who have sought a taste of righteousness to receive it in full. Souls will then be laid bare in their equality with angels and demons, and from one to the other no one shall pass. "For a man will look in vain, after he has left this body, for that which he has neglected to obtain while in the body."¹⁵¹

This suggests that we should conceive of the fall of the angels differently from that of humans. For humans, the fall is the inauguration of the ambiguous historical drama of the determination of our loves. For angels, the fall has no clear

declares in his later writings. Although this statement of Paul's is not quoted literally in the *City of God*, the work is, as it were, one long commentary on this text [Rom 14:23]. There is only belief or unbelief; a middle course does not exist." Ibid., 116; cf. also 151–53, and the lack of a third, neutral city.

¹⁵⁰ *Ciu.* 21.24.

¹⁵¹ *Ciu.* 21.24.

temporality and thus no story, and so is not directly perceivable by us embodied creatures bound to history. But its outcome is instantaneous, unambiguous, and irrevocable. It is far more akin to a simple restatement, a hypostatization, of the metaphysical definition of evil as the rejection of God. This difference between angels and humans is important for the accurate characterization of demons and their involvement in humanity's drama. A brief discussion of James Wetzel's article, "Augustine on the Origin of Evil: Myth and Metaphysics," will help to elucidate this.

Metaphysics and the Serpent

James Wetzel attempts to distinguish two strands in Augustine's thought on the origin of evil that Augustine himself does not always sufficiently differentiate, namely the metaphysical and the mythical. Augustine's metaphysical account of evil begins with the absolute goodness of God, and thus holds that responsibility for sin lies absolutely with God's rational creatures. The paradigm in this model of sin is Satan, whose sin is irredeemable because of the persistence of his rejection of all grace offered to him. Wetzel's concern with this account of evil is of the "angelization" of Adam, which leaves him as irredeemable as Satan to the extent that the story of temptation in the garden is nothing other than the external manifestation of an internal and absolute deprivation identical to Satan's.¹⁵² The result, he says, is a kind of moralism, in which any transgression implies final damnation: "mere susceptibility to temptation is going to be evidence enough for an irredeemably corrupt disposition."¹⁵³

Wetzel suggests an alternative is available in the mythical account Augustine gives. Attendance to the drama in the garden, and Adam's relation with Eve, who disappears in the metaphysical account,¹⁵⁴ preempts any finality of the judgement over the transgression in Eden. In this reading, Adam decides to stand in solidarity with Eve in her sin out of a kind of benevolence, convincing himself wrongly that God will empathize with the difficulty of having to choose between

¹⁵² See also James Wetzel, "Agony in the Garden: Augustine's Myth of Will," in *Parting Knowledge: Essays After Augustine* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 9–27, at 25–27.

¹⁵³ Wetzel, "Augustine on the Origin of Evil," 180.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Babcock, "The Human and Angelic Fall," 135.

God and his wife. The sin still belongs to Adam, but his fault is mixed with simple error and misunderstanding; temptation succeeds and the fruit is taken out of what is perceived to be a genuine desire to do good. In such a modicum of goodness, the possibility of correction and redemption, and thus Christ, remains. The mythical account still assumes the metaphysical concept of evil as privation, but without absolutizing deficient agency. Responsibility in this context takes the form not of perfect adherence to the law, Wetzel says, but perpetual openness to self-revision. Satan disappears from the drama, as Augustine's angelology is simply too thin to play a role. The anti-mythical Satan and his irredeemability are excluded.

As Wetzel rightly notes, it is one thing to confine the responsibility for sin absolutely to the creature; it is quite another thereby to absolutize the agency by which humanity negotiates its bodily and temporal life.¹⁵⁵ In the terms of the present chapter, Augustine's mythological conception of the origin of evil as Wetzel understands it pertains to humanity because of its constitutive embodiment. But he also claims to retain the metaphysical principle of sin underlying this mythical account. This suggests, then, that Augustine's error is not that he gives a metaphysical account where he should have given only a mythical one, but that he improperly conflates them. But if this is the case, the solution is not to privilege the myth over the metaphysics, but rather to restore each to its proper place.

Since it involves a conflation, there are two sides to the problem of the angelization of Adam, that is, the assimilation of his sin to that of the irredeemable Satan. On the one hand, it assumes a one-to-one relation between the temporal actions of Adam (mythical) and its constitutive will (metaphysical), and a concomitant conflation of temporal (mythical) and eternal (metaphysical) law.¹⁵⁶ It is truly moralism if a given sinful action willed in time—the plucking

¹⁵⁵ "Augustine on the Origin of Evil," 185.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Rist's discussion of absolute moral rules, *Augustine*, 191–99, which is similarly vexed by this conflation. Augustine's " 'love and do what you will' . . . licenses a man and makes him wish to want what God wishes, loves and commands." This implies to Rist "that there will be absolute moral rules, and that these will encapsulate not just tautologous truths like 'murder is wrong' or 'adultery is wrong,' but synthetic propositions which are invariably true." *Op. cit.* 191. On the contrary, the temporal law may be the image of the eternal law, but God's wishes are no more identifiable with laws than God's substance is identifiable with words. Thus, it is not that absolute rules are "rules of thumb" from "God's point of view," which God may suspend at will

and eating of a forbidden fruit—signifies absolutely one’s eternal rejection of God. But for Augustine, the human is judged on the basis of one’s true and ultimate desire for God, or lack thereof, and not any one given sinful act, or even a collection of them, which may be misleading. He remains all too aware not only of his past sins, but also that even Christians are incapable of resisting all temptations to sinful action. It is certainly true that the more basic relation to the eternal law is revealed in one’s relation to the temporal law, but there is a remainder, which is of the utmost importance for his anthropology.¹⁵⁷

Just because he hasn’t sinned against the temporal law doesn’t mean Adam is metaphysically perfected; and just because he is created good doesn’t mean there’s nothing left for an embodied soul to do. This is the importance of a free will for a rational creature’s participation in the perfection of its own existence, and it depends upon a recognition that the metaphysical open-endedness of rational beings is a divinely created “imperfection” that is not thereby a divinely created evil. What is crucial, however, is clarity about the role Adam’s animal body does and does not play in his particularly human rational nature. For it is tempting to locate his original, metaphysical open-endedness of the will in his animal body. But this is incorrect, for the angelic spirits likewise had originally, metaphysically open-ended wills without any such flesh. As we have been suggesting, the difference between angelic spiritual existence and embodied humanity in this matter is only that humans are destined to work out this same spiritual open-endedness of the will in time.

On the other hand, Wetzel is concerned that any inclusion in the narrative of a tempting spirit, whose sin is irredeemable, threatens to transfer that

(p. 195); rather, it is that temporal representations of God’s absolute, i.e. eternal, law only hold as rules of thumb for creatures whose finitude God transcends.

¹⁵⁷ Wetzel says that the metaphysical reading “presumes that at the end of the analysis, an Adam looking in on himself will have run out of reasons for his desire to transgress: he just sins, and that’s it.” “Augustine on the Origin of Evil,” 171. My point is that a metaphysical account of Adam cannot conceive of him looking in on himself and considering reasons and desires. Such activity is irreducibly temporal and thus belongs to the mythical conception. To speak metaphysically is to say that, whatever the process of deliberation, the fact of transgression is attributable to no one other than Adam and his failure to give God his due priority. But it is as impossible to say anything final about Adam’s desire at a metaphysical level as about anyone else. To say something at all would require the examination of the data of his life, on the basis of which one could make an educated guess as to his true citizenship. As noted above, n.138, however, the data suggest he is the founder of each city and little else.

irredeemability back onto Adam by appealing to a prior pride equivalent to the devil's. But the mythical narrative has no tempting spirit, only a serpent. Hence, Augustine makes a distinction between the sin that is the devil's from the beginning, by which he is a murderer from the beginning, and the action of that murder itself, which consists in his deception of humanity in the time of their establishment in Eden.¹⁵⁸ Wetzel's claim is that any inclusion of the angelic tempter necessitates that the talking serpent and Adam's sin each equally signify an irredeemable soul, which presupposes an equivalent relation between the devil and the serpent on the one hand, and the soul and body of Adam on the other. But this is a categorical mistake twice over. First, neither the devil himself nor Adam's deepest desires are immediately present. The devil is present only in and through the serpent, and, likewise, Adam's deeper desires are revealed in his partaking of the fruit, though the act cannot literally constitute his eternal rejection of God. Irredeemable desire, if it is irredeemable, is not identical with the mythic action but mediated by it.¹⁵⁹

Second, while the relation of the demonic spirit to the serpent is closely analogous to the relation between Adam's soul and body, they are nevertheless not perfect parallels. Adam's and Eve's embodiment plays the role of bringing their wayward desires out into the open in external, visible relation to each other and the devil. But in order to make himself known as such, the devil has to assume a perceivable form that is not his own. "In the serpent it was the devil who spoke, using that creature as an instrument, moving it as he was able to move it and as it was capable of being moved, to produce the sounds of words and the

¹⁵⁸ *Gn. litt.* 11.16.21; *ciu.* 11.13.

¹⁵⁹ In a related essay, Wetzel notes that, in his reflections upon the serpent in the garden, Kant interprets the serpent as the representation of the unrepresentable interruption of the temptation to sin into the perfection of Eden. This is, Wetzel notes, crucially different from Augustine, despite the deep similarities between the two accounts, for the latter sees the serpent rather as an anticipation of Adam's sin. "Both men read into the serpent an absolute evil, a will disposed, when faced with all the advantages of the good, to want corruption. But only Kant seems to realize that an Adam who wills sin directly, without the mitigating factor of desire for the flesh, is beyond redemption." "Agony in the Garden," 26–27. Note the similarities of Kant's reading with Augustine's earlier notion of angelic spontaneity and human temptation, which we outlined above as it emerges in *lib. arb.* It would be interesting to explore the significance this has for Kant's philosophy, but for the moment I would simply point out that it is my argument that Augustine does, in fact, recognize the important difference human bodily desire makes for human redeemability vis-à-vis fallen angels, who alone are capable of "sinning directly" on account of the bodilessness unique to their angelic nature.

bodily signs by which the woman would understand the will of the tempter.”¹⁶⁰ As the expression goes, he played it like a violin.¹⁶¹ In *The City of God*, Augustine even goes so far as to suggest the devil abused the serpent, though, “slippery and moving in twisted coils,” it “was indeed well suited to such work.”¹⁶² The serpent is not bound to its temporary possessor as the human body is to the fate of its soul. Just as its proper attachment to an animal body is what makes the human soul transformable and redeemable, so it is the very lack of such a proper attachment that leaves the devil free to reject God eternally and constantly, even as that eternal rejection is manifest temporally, and temporarily, in the odd behaviour of a serpent.

Where Augustine once located the difference between the immediate fate of humans and angels in the distinction between tempted and spontaneous sin, the increasing correlation of their sin in pride was thus accompanied by the relocation of their differing capacities for redemption to the differences between their natures. Human sin is redeemable not because humans were originally tempted or tricked, but because embodiment means that any given sinful act is not the final word, allowing humans time to seek and attach themselves to Christ. The body makes the human a nature capable of moral transformation, to provide which God became incarnate in Christ, sharing human nature in order to heal it. The bodily death by which humans participate in the death of Christ, and so lay hold of redemption in the resurrection, is not available to the devil, who lacks the body to follow Christ in death.¹⁶³ The demon’s immortality is not a vehicle (*uihiculum*) of eternal triumph but a shackle (*uinculum*) of eternal damnation.¹⁶⁴

Embodiment notwithstanding, however, ultimate human rejection of God is just as irredeemable as the apostasy of any angel: “they shall not be forgiven,

¹⁶⁰ *Gn. litt.* 11.27.34.

¹⁶¹ See Edmund Hill, notes to *On Genesis*, by Saint Augustine (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2002), 449n.38. Hill’s suggestion there that *eo modo quo movere ille et moveri illa potuit* is a marginal gloss can hardly be correct. There is a crucial difference between the angels (good or fallen) and the media of their manifestation. As we saw in chapter one, and will see again in chapter three, angels are capable of moving things in certain ways, and this depends upon the latter’s limited capacities so to be moved.

¹⁶² *Ciu.* 14.11; cf. *Gn. litt.* 11.28.35, where he says demons “have certain kind of affinity with this animal.”

¹⁶³ *Trin.* 4.12.15.

¹⁶⁴ *Ciu.* 9.9.

neither in this world, neither in that which is to come.”¹⁶⁵ It is not the body as such that redeems humanity, just as it is not incorporeality that condemns angels to hell. For damned humans share a bodily nature with the redeemed, and blessed angels lack a body likewise with the demons. True apostasy is the same for both created natures, and what makes it irredeemable is neither the fleshlessness of the demon nor its manifestation in any one bodily act of the sinner, but rather the persistence of the spiritual, rational creature’s desire for itself above God.

As a point of comparison, Caesarius of Heisterbach’s image of a morbidly repentant demon is impossible, from an Augustinian perspective, because it is far too much like a human in the present life, both in its apparent turn of desire, and in the flesh that renders such a turn intelligible.

If . . . there were a column of burning iron set up from earth to heaven, and if it were furnished with the sharpest razors and blades of steel, and if I were given flesh capable of suffering, most gladly would I drag myself up it from now till the Day of Judgment, now climbing up a little and now slipping down again, if once I might at the last win home to the glory in which once I dwelt.¹⁶⁶

The judgement of God in the words of his fellow-demon ring harsh resonance: “Be silent, this repentance comes far too late; never can you go back.” Such regret is impossible for an Augustinian demon, which does not depend upon flesh to learn the consequences of its actions and suggest its correction. Its apostasy is fully transparent to itself, otherwise God’s judgement would be unjust. The temptation to blame God for refusing the repentance of a demon, or refusing it the flesh it requires for penitence, is precisely demonic *qua* desire to blame God. The condemnation of demons is true to the extent that its hatred of the divine knows no hesitation for all eternity.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Matt 12:32, *apud ciu.* 21.24.

¹⁶⁶ Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus miraculorum* 5.10, *apud* Elliott, *Fallen Bodies*, 139, trans. Scott and Bland, modified by Elliott.

¹⁶⁷ Once again, we falter upon Augustine’s lack of consistency. He does, after all, speak of human souls and demons “tormented by fruitless repentance,” in *ciu.* 21.9. This is in direct contradiction to the depiction of the “eternal misery or miserable eternity of the demons” (*ciu.* 9.13), insofar as that misery is predicated upon rejection of the soul’s highest good. An examination of Augustine’s doctrine of material hell (see *ciu.* 21.9–10), such as he developed it, is here beyond our purview. An introduction to some of the crucial issues can be found in Burnaby’s

One is tempted to retain the usefulness of Caesarius' image for the moral exhortation of licentious people—confess and repent now, before it's too late—but even this risks too much. Such a resolutely anthropomorphic depiction of demons threatens to have the opposite effect, namely suggesting that there are some sins that are unforgiveable, no matter how remorseful a person is, obviating any exhortation. Augustine's church had rejected this position since Cyprian of Carthage. That kind of moralistic angelization of Adam is the unambiguous demonization of fellow humans living amidst the cities mixed. Wetzel is certainly right to suggest that we "cut the will to sin down to human size."¹⁶⁸ But such a task is accomplished precisely with close attention to Augustine's demonology. Restoration of the devil's temptation neither makes human sin unforgivable, nor does it mitigate human guilt by contrasting it with spontaneous angelic sin. Rather, it affirms temptation and testing as part of the mediation of human desire, in all its imperfection, and extends that mediation beyond strictly human society to include humanity's relation to all of creation.

We should note that, in order to avoid its moralistic misinterpretation, Wetzel excludes Satan from the garden drama. While he rightly appeals to a mythical conception of the human fall to preclude the absolutization of their sin, it is an interesting consequence of Satan's exclusion that the role of Eve is also drastically reduced and entirely passive; she only figures in as one who has already sinned, as one in relation to whom Adam works out his agency and relation to God. Now, this is clearly not Wetzel's intent, as he wants to correct her effacement in the metaphysical account with an appeal to the importance of human sociality in the fall. But if Eve's sin is not to be conflated with Adam's, Augustine makes clear it is because, following St. Paul, one was deceived by the serpent and one was not. "For she accepted the serpent's statement as true, while Adam did not wish to be separated from his only companion, even at the cost of

reflections on punishment. *Amor Dei*, 206–14. For the moment, let it suffice to say that hell's "repentance" should probably be taken to mean not a true regret of one's sin, but rather a desire for one's suffering to cease. As Burnaby suggests, this bodily conception of suffering is probably in and of itself a mistake: "if the supreme good for man is *adhaerere Deo*, the only real evil which man can suffer is that very separation from God in which sin consists." Ibid., 206. The suffering of hell is more consistent with Augustinian theology when it is conceived not as bodily torments, *per se*, but the very persistence of the desire for oneself that is to put oneself there in the first place.

¹⁶⁸ Wetzel, "Agony in the Garden," 27.

sharing in her sin.”¹⁶⁹ Where Adam retains a kind of self-awareness in his sin of his disordered priorities, Eve stands as one willingly, unthinkingly seduced. She can see that the fruit is delicious, a delight to the eyes, and offering to satisfy the desire for wisdom. The serpent doesn’t have to convince her to take it; she is already curious. It just has to tell her what she wants to hear.¹⁷⁰

Augustine refuses to push the distinction too far, however, as both err in judgement and underestimate the seriousness of their transgressions. Although there are instructive differences between man and woman in the story of their fall, Augustine resists gendering sin all the way down. But Augustine goes on to represent this commonality in diabolical terms: “both were captured by sin and entangled in the snares of the devil.”¹⁷¹ The metaphysical logic of sin transcends persons, genders, communities, and even the human race itself; the apocalypse divides the whole rational creation. The human experience of sin is that it exceeds strictly human manifestations of it in people and their communities and institutions. Fleshless and unambiguous, apostasy precedes the appearance of humanity in paradise, and remains greater than the sum of its embodied human manifestations.

If one includes Eve in an Augustinian-mythical account of the fall—and one must—one must also include her temptation from beyond the human couple. Humans are privileged on account of their rational souls, but they are still inseparable from the larger order of creation. Thus, the solidarity shared between the human couple extends beyond them.

[There are] two distinct and contrasted societies of angels, in which the origin of the two human communities . . . is also found.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ *Ciu.* 14.11.

¹⁷⁰ Gen 3:6. There is interesting continuity here with Augustine earliest commentary on Genesis written against the Manichees. There, the devil is able to take in the woman “because our reason too can only be brought down to consenting to sin when pleasurable anticipation is roused in that part of the spirit which ought to take its lead from the reason, as from its husband and guide.” *Gn. adu. Man.* 2.14.20. In that work Augustine identifies curiosity—which he associates with the desire for knowledge of the future and religious mysteries, and so with demons present with haruspices and theurgists—is highlighted as one of the three major temptations of the devil. See 2.18.27; 2.25.40. See also *diuin. daem.* 3.7; *ep. Io. tr.* 2.13.

¹⁷¹ *Ciu.* 14.11.

¹⁷² *Ciu.* 11.34.

It is not improper or inconsistent to speak of a society consisting of both men and angels. For we may properly speak not of four cities or societies—that is, two of angels and two more of men—but rather of two in all, one composed of the good angels and men together, and the other of the wicked.¹⁷³

The commonality of human sin lies in the logic of metaphysical rejection that is distinguished as intellectual night on the first “day” of creation, preceding and exceeding any one example of faulty human willing. But, while the paradigm of sin may be satanically fleshless¹⁷⁴ and hell the antithesis of a city,¹⁷⁵ the failure to desire God fully and perfectly continues to be embodied, signified by fallen rational creatures who retain in their fallenness some power over bodily creation. The rejection of God undermines the only true basis for solidarity and pan-creation communion. But God does not deprive rational creatures of their existence on account of their misuse of it, allowing for the organization of that failed desire into a city that is no less existent for its movement back towards nothingness in the love of a lie.¹⁷⁶

The earthly city transcends any particular human society, whether Adam and Eve in the garden, or the Roman Empire. And fallen angels are central to its false solidarity. Its expression has two facets, which Augustine represents in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*:

God . . . did not permit [the devil] to tempt the woman except by the serpent, nor the man except by the woman. In the serpent it was the devil who spoke, using that creature as an instrument. . . . But in the woman, who was a rational creature and able by her own powers to speak, it was not the devil who spoke, but it was the woman herself who uttered words and persuaded the man, although the devil in a hidden way interiorly

¹⁷³ *Ciu.* 12.1.

¹⁷⁴ Wetzel, “Augustine on the Origin of Evil,” 184.

¹⁷⁵ Wetzel, “Augustine on the Origin of Evil,” 170.

¹⁷⁶ See *ciu.* 15.4. In the end, the rejection of God, who is the true basis for community, condemns the earthly city to the dissolution of its social bonds. E.g., Adam’s own attempts to keep his solidarity with Eve over and against God undermine themselves, as his attempts to blame her for his transgression reveal. See Wetzel, “Augustine on the Origin of Evil,” 183–84. Also in the background here is Rowan Williams, “Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the *City of God*,” *Milltown Studies* 19/20 (1987): 55–72.

prompted within her what he had exteriorly accomplished when he used the serpent as an instrument.¹⁷⁷

First, the devil speaks through the serpent to get to Eve. Where we found last chapter that all of creation is made subject to the angels for the sake of directing humans to God, so we find here that fallen angels retain something of this power of subjection so that they also might twist creatures to their own purposes. Augustine's demonology thus speaks of the occasional manifestation in creation of an apparently self-aware desire to lead humans away from God, which cannot properly be attributed to the manifest non-rational creation. Human desire is negotiated in relation to all of creation, and thus there is the possibility of temptation lying beyond strictly human society, appearing as an interruption from without.

Second, the devil also speaks through Eve to get to Adam. Humanity prior to its perfection was likewise made subject to angels, and again demons retain something of this power, exercising it through temptation and "interior prompting." Diabolical suggestion is thus also articulated through humans themselves, manifest in people appearing to live in willing rejection of God. This may appear as the power of human institutions that exceed the sum of individual human wills, the more-than-human quality that problematic but still obviously human relations can take; but it need not. It could appear as straightforwardly human as a play or a poem. For Eve's suggestion to Adam is fully her own. But it is also the devil's.

On Seeking Embodiment

The angels appear to exist at a level akin to the deepest spiritual reaches of the human soul. Since this is the locus of the consent or refusal of the timeless God, it is no wonder that angelic temporality should be highly ambiguous. The spatio-temporal, bodily activity of humans is connected to this level of desire, but the latter remains every bit as ambiguous as the very existence of the angels themselves. It is not that Adam and Eve fall by making the wrong choice and taking the fruit. It is rather that they only know they are fallen when they take the

¹⁷⁷ *Gn. litt.* 11.27.34.

fruit. As Brown notes, for the mature Augustine, that very “sense of choice is a symptom of the disintegration of the will.”¹⁷⁸ The pride of Adam and Eve is inferred from the very existence of a moral conundrum. “It was in secret that Adam and Eve began to be evil.”¹⁷⁹ What is striking in Augustine’s consideration of the temptation of Adam and Eve is the absence of any inquiry into when this secret evil began. Likewise, the presence of the devil is inferred from the movements of the serpent, but nothing about his assumption of a slithering physique and hissing voice form tells us anything about the history of the angel’s fall.

Wetzel thus suggests correctly that “Augustine really has no story to tell about how a good angel goes bad; he has instead a metaphysical mystery that he tries to dress up as a story.”¹⁸⁰ Augustine’s vision of God changed his question about evil from that of its source, to the prior and more illuminating question of its definition. The identification of evil as the wilful apostasy from God was as readily applicable to fallen angels as it was to humans. But it remains, as Wetzel says, a metaphysical mystery, and so “maddeningly uninformative.”¹⁸¹ This is because it does not say why such a fall happened, or when or where it occurred; it simply says what it is and to whom it is applicable. There is an angel, a nameless intellectual existence, that refuses the grace of God in preference for itself. There is no story, just a principle, a description.

The absolutism of Augustine’s metaphysics of the will may be fraught, but it is not thereby negotiable. Not only does it run throughout his theology, it does so because it confirmed for him a truth testified by Scripture: that upon this principle Christ will judge the whole of history. It is a testimony to the apocalypse, the division between the sheep and the goats, those who love God and those who do not, the city of God and the earthly city, the resurrection of mercy

¹⁷⁸ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 376. He goes on to say “the final union of knowledge and feeling would involve a man in the object of his choice in such a way that any other alternative would be inconceivable.” This amounts to a fairly good description of the angels, who are able simply to be God’s providence because their manifestation in time and space flow out of the constant and eternal love for God angels have in response to their divine *fiat*. Their theophanies happen, as it were, naturally, automatically, except that they manifest a loving response that is by no means automatic, but rather achieved through willing consent and participation.

¹⁷⁹ *Ciu.* 14.13. It is indeed strange even to speak of it as an event. Hence, after this sentence on the secret “beginning” of evil, Adam and Eve are consistently “already evil.”

¹⁸⁰ Wetzel, “Augustine on the Origin of Evil,” 170.

¹⁸¹ Wetzel, “Agony in the Garden,” 14.

and the resurrection of judgement, to the church's belief in angels and demons. It thus cannot be simply cast aside. But let metaphysics be metaphysics. The timeless metaphysical definition of sin only runs aground for humans when mistaken for mythical narrative, as though the eternal rejection of God were as straightforward as plucking the fruit from a tree. "The way to keep anything from being lost is to put everything in its proper place," as Gilson says.¹⁸² Wetzel thinks Augustine is a master dramatist of the will but not a great theorist.¹⁸³ This chapter suggests rather that he is a master of both, even if he does not always keep them in their proper place.

The impossibility of a narrative of the angelic fall is thus not a failure of Augustine's angelology, nor symptomatic of their uselessness, but instead the consistent recognition of their invisibility. An angel is not a saint, whose story of the struggle to be faithful stands as an example to the church; nor is a demon a lost sheep, whose tragic tale is a warning against bad behaviour. Lacking bodies of flesh, angels and demons exist at the metaphysical origins of the city of God and earthly city. In themselves they say nothing of the shaping of the human will and its desires, only of its ends. There is no story to tell of the dramatic twists and turns of angelic love, no narrative of the movement of angels toward salvation and damnation. The dramatic movement of that history humanity alone performs.

And yet angels still have a place in this story, at the level humanity's perpetual openness to self-revision, where refusal of temptation and penitence for succumbing always exist as a possibility. The ends of humanity have their ways of reaching into human history, and so Augustine's reflections on angels and demons should be understood as the ongoing identification of their ways of drawing human desire to one end or the other, myth and metaphysic each taking its proper place. But this is the case only insofar as angels seek embodiment, adapting themselves to the perceptions of humans. We will therefore now turn to a consideration of demonic embodiment that will last the remainder of the dissertation. It will begin in our next chapter with an examination of a widespread tradition of demonic bodies Augustine inherited. For many in Augustine's day believed demons were adorned with bodies of air, so we must inquire as to the

¹⁸² Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine* (trans. L. E. M. Lynch; New York: Vintage, 1960), 121.

¹⁸³ Wetzel, "Agony in the Garden," 27.

nature and function of such bodies, and, ultimately, whether he thinks they can provide the embodiment demons require to be manifest in human history.

3. Demonic Bodies and their Phenomena

In the previous chapter we saw that the angels' lack of animal body turned out to be highly significant for our understanding of their fall. Without the bond to flesh characteristic of humanity's animal nature, the moral status of the angels—fallen or abiding in God—is determined all at once. Indeed, the apparent freedom with which angels and demons speak through flesh that is not their own, like the serpent in the garden, makes it tempting to describe Augustine's demons as having no bodies of their own. But if we were to ask straightforwardly whether Augustine thinks demons have bodies, the answer must be yes. Indeed, they have aerial bodies, differing materially from the aetherial substance of the bodies of unfallen angels.¹ Moreover, accompanying the conception of their moral fall is the idea of a physical descent of transgressing angels to the tumult of sublunar air, down from the pure superlunary aether original to their nature, "where the demons cannot live, for the demons were thrown down from heaven."²

Augustine's attribution of aerial bodies to demons is both pervasive and interesting enough to warrant some consideration of the nature and capacities he thinks they have. But the question with which we ended the previous chapter—that of the demons' need for some kind of bodily mediation to interact with humans—looms over Augustine's thoughts about these aerial bodies. Augustine's reflection upon visions in the final book of *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* shows that he thinks the limits of human knowledge are such that excessive speculation should be resisted, which precludes him from identifying the phenomenal mediations of demons as the manifestation of their putative aerial bodies *per se*. But Augustine insists that ignorance about the exact nature and physical origin of demonic activity is of little importance. His demonological thought primarily concerns not their physical existence but the significance of certain kinds of phenomena. Thus, the second half of this chapter discusses the two basic kinds of

¹ As we shall see presently, this is an inherited notion, primarily from Platonists. But he makes the concept his own: "They do indeed dwell in the air; but they do so only because they were cast out from the sublimity of the higher heaven." *Ciu.* 8.22; see also *ciu.* 8.15; 11.23; 11.33; 15.23; *trin.* 4.11.14; 4.13.18; *Gn. litt.* 3.10.14; 11.13.17; *diuin. daem.* 3.7.

² *En. Ps.* 94.6. See also *ciu.* 11.33; *Gn. litt.* 3.10.14–15; *en. Ps.* 148.9; *ench.* 9.28; cf. *agon.* 3.3.

demonic mediation, deception and affliction, as they are limited to a range of bodily mediations, which preserves human morality throughout demonic encounters. For it is precisely through human moral judgement of wondrous phenomena that their underlying demonic origins are distinguished from the angelic origins of true theophanies.

Aerial Bodies

The concept of demonic (and angelic) bodies has significant antecedents in the history of ideas, the most obvious of which belong to philosophers.³ The postulation of an aerial nature is most closely associated with the notion of the demons' role as divine intermediaries, which was found centrally among Platonists, and from them most influential among Christians.⁴ When Augustine looks for a spokesman for the demonology of this most respectable of all philosophical schools, he goes to his North African compatriot, Apuleius of Madaura.⁵ In his book, *On the God of Socrates*, Apuleius says this: "For, to encompass them by a definition, demons are living beings in kind, rational creatures in mind, susceptible to emotion in spirit, in body composed of the air,

³ Gregory A. Smith shows how pervasive belief in demonic bodies were in ancient thought, appearing in the work of Christian theologians, apologists, and monks, as well as pagan philosophers and magical papyri, of which he considers Augustine almost a "textbook summary." "How Thin is a Demon?" *J ECS* 16 (2008): 479–512, at 506. G. R. Evans claims that, among the hypotheses of the day, "there was a general agreement that demons were disembodied beings, dwelling in the air above us." *Augustine on Evil*, 101. But this insufficiently attends to the traditions, which Smith highlights: demons are aerial dwellers, yes, but hardly disembodied. For an introduction to pre-Christian philosophical demonology that notes this more accurately, see Everett Ferguson, *Demonology of the Early Christian World* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1984); Valerie Flint, "The Demonisation of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity: Christian Redefinitions of Pagan Religions," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome* (ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 277–348, at 281–92. For the philosophical antecedents of Augustine specifically, see Jean Pépin, "Influences païennes sur l'angelologie et la démonologie de saint Augustin," in "*Ex Platoniorum persona*": *Etudes sur les lectures philosophiques de saint Augustin* (Amsterdam: Haekert, 1977), 29–37.

⁴ See Ferguson, *Demonology*, 45–48. The ur-text of this idea is Pl. *Symp.* 202e–203a, though Plato himself makes no explicit connection between this function and air, either here or elsewhere, though precedent may be found in *Tim.* 32b. See below, n.11. But Ferguson notes that Pythagoras may have possibly been a source for Socrates' (indeed, Diotima's) notion of the demonic, and he was held to believe that "the whole air is full of souls which are called demons or heroes." *Op. cit.*, 46, quoting Diog. Laert. 8.1.32.

⁵ *Ciu.* 8.14.

everlasting in time.”⁶ Apuleius speaks explicitly of bodies, but the tradition had at least as much to do with the bodily location of demons, as it did with their bodies *per se*, which can be seen in the work of, among others,⁷ Porphyry,⁸ Plotinus,⁹ and Varro.¹⁰ The placement of demons in the air (and gods in the aether) is in part a function of the division of the cosmos into distinct elements and the assurance that each has its proper inhabitants, a concept found early on in the writings of Plato’s followers,¹¹ though perhaps popularized by Aristotle in particular.¹² Thus, as Jean Pépin observes,

one can observe a constant in the cosmological representation that understands the two higher elements of the world, the aether and the air (though names vary from one author to another), as the locus of the two categories of divine beings, gods and demons (again, names are diverse); having appeared among the first disciples of Plato, this doctrine was reprised in diverse ages, from the first century BCE by Varro, to the second century CE by Apuleius, to the third century by Porphyry; it was thus transmitted all the way up to the very age of Augustine, which he could hardly have forgotten when he established the angels in heaven and the demons in the air.¹³

Christian thinkers before Augustine participated in this tradition as well, as they most commonly placed demons in the air, into which these angels had been thrown down from heaven.¹⁴ So, Tatian held that demons are composed of the spirit (πνεῦμα) that pervades all matter, distinct from the spirit by which scripture says “God is spirit,”¹⁵ but in common with human souls and angels, with a

⁶ *Deo Soc.* 148, with *daemones* and *aer* also translated. Augustine quotes this passage, *ciu.* 8.16.

⁷ In addition to Pépin, “Influences païennes,” see Michael Fiedrowicz, notes to *Demonic Divination*, by Saint Augustine (WSA 1.8), 207n.10.

⁸ *Abst.* 2.37–38; *Aneb.* 1.2; cf. Augustine, *ciu.* 10.9.

⁹ *Enn.* 3.5.6.

¹⁰ *Antiquitates Rerum Diuinarum*, apud Augustine, *ciu.* 7.6.

¹¹ In particular, (Pseudo-)Plato, *Epin.* 984d–e. Cf. Pl., *Tim.* 32b, whose consonance with the Christian Scriptures Augustine suggests at *ciu.* 8.11.

¹² In his non-extant *de Philosophia*, apud Cic., *nat. d.* 2.42.

¹³ Pépin, “Influences Païennes,” 31–32, my translation.

¹⁴ See Ferguson, *Demonology*, 111.

¹⁵ John 4:24.

structure “like that of fire and air.”¹⁶ He confines demons to the lower material realm by their willing consent to the natural attraction of their bodies to that realm. Athenagoras, though less explicit about the bodily composition of demons, similarly had the angels fall from the highest realm, this time “above the heavens,” to be confined to the visible earth and heavens, where they lurk among humans, and were able to procreate with the “daughters of men,” begetting the “souls of giants” that are demons, following Gen 6:1–4 and its Enochic expansion.¹⁷ Interestingly, Athenagoras alludes to the demons’ physical consumption of the steam and odour of sacrifices,¹⁸ *kapnophagia*, an opinion of demonic nature that Origen also held.¹⁹

Origen is a particularly interesting case. When, in the Preface to Book 1 of *On First Principles*, he seems to be setting himself up for a defense of the incorporeality of God, he contrasts this—in Rufinus’ text, at least—with the verisimilitude of incorporeality demons possess on account of their invisibility. This would suggest that because only God is incorporeal demons must have a body, though one obviously unlike that of a human. It is rather “by nature a fine substance and thin like air, and on this account most people think and speak of it as incorporeal.”²⁰ This nicely highlights the use of aerial embodiment to point to the liminal character of demons as neither incorporeal like God, nor corporeal like humans, a use that is seen among both Christians and Platonists, accepting some terminological flexibility.²¹ As Smith notes, this equivocation of the language of

¹⁶ Tat. *orat.* 15.3, *apud* Smith, “How Thin is a Demon?” 490; see also Ferguson, *Demonology*, 110.

¹⁷ See Athenag. *leg.* 24.5–6; 25.1; quotes *apud* Smith, “How Thin is a Demon?” 493–94. The Enochic account of the fallen angels is found in *1 En* 6–7.

¹⁸ Athena. *leg.* 27.2; see Smith, “How Thin is a Demon?” 496.

¹⁹ Origen, *de princ.* 1.8.1; cf. Smith, “How Thin is a Demon?” 483–84, who cites *mart.* 45. Porphyry, a sometime acquaintance, and possibly even student, of Origen’s also held this. See *Abst.* 2.42; Smith, *op. cit.*, 486.

²⁰ *Princ.* 1.praef.8. On the incorporeality of the Trinity, see also 1.6.4; 2.2.2; 4.3.15; 4.4.8. See Peter Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius* (rev. ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 19–20. That Origen considered God alone to be truly incorporeal is disputed. See *ibid.*, 20n.46.

²¹ E.g., Apuleius has demons mediate between humans and the celestial gods, who do not condescend to appear among humans or even hear their prayers for fear of contamination. These Augustine will equate with the angels. But Apuleius also identifies “their Father, who is the master and source of all things, . . . [who] alone, such is the amazing and ineffable excess of his majesty, cannot be comprehended, even to a limited extent, in any discourse, owing to the poverty of human speech.” *Deo Soc.* 123–24.

embodiment to describe those without bodies “reflected profound physical ambiguity, an existence of not-quite-flesh lived right at the edge of the visible, tangible world, spilling over on either side of a blurred and permeable border.”²² The concept of aerial bodies is employed like a working theory, a hypothesis that attempts to account for the character of the space between the visibly embodied and the truly ineffable, and we shall see it retains this valence in Augustine’s work as well.

What should not be overlooked in a discussion of Augustine’s conceptual forebears is how important it would have been for the theologian that Scriptures seemed to confirm the aerial location of demon, if only in their own pithy way. It did not escape Augustine’s notice that Eph 2:2 describes the devil as the “prince of the power of the air.” Early on this seems to have motivated him to assemble a handful of passages to show that scripture uses the word “heavens” to indicate “this air of ours.” For Eph 6:12 reminds Christians that “our wrestling is not against flesh and blood but against the princes and powers of this world, rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavens,”²³ and Augustine does not want anyone to imagine that, being in the heavens, “the evil spirits have their abode where God has assigned the sun, the moon, and the stars.”²⁴ In the same vein, Augustine reads the fall in terms of this passage so that, for example, in 2 Pet 2:4 we find the sinful angels thrust down into the air, understanding the Petrine “dark prisons of the underworld” to signify the turbulence of the lower world surrounded by air in comparison to the tranquility of the heavens whence they fell.²⁵

In addition to being faithful to his sources, whether Christian or pagan, Augustine finds the postulation of airy demonic bodies and habitat conceptually useful. In *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* he notes that philosophers have assigned each element its being, including the demons so that the air too may be

²² Smith, “How Thin is a Demon?” 488.

²³ *Agon.* 5.5

²⁴ *Agon.* 3.3.

²⁵ *En. Ps.* 148.9. On Eph 2:2 more generally, see *conf.* 10.42.67; *ciu.* 10.21. In *s.* 198.26, he cites the passage to locate the demons where they can rule over humans; and at *Gn. adu. Man.* 2.14.20 and *diu. qu.* 79.2, he uses it to emphasize the insensibility of demonic influence. These associations are important for Augustine’s understanding of demons, as we will see shortly.

adorned,²⁶ suggesting that such aerial bodies may also help account for the immortality of demons.²⁷ He maintains a reporter's distance from this theory of cosmic adornment, however. And it seems to me that it would be less than fully fitting for Augustine to claim that the completion of the air's adornment would depend upon creatures who only inhabit that region because their moral corruption.²⁸ He does not, however, make this point himself. What he really likes about the theory is instead how suggestive the bodily condition of demons is of their moral condition.

If we may follow the opinion according to which the angels that sinned inhabited this highest [celestial] region before their fall . . . it is not surprising that after their lapse into sin they were driven down into the misty atmosphere below. Here, it is true, there is air, but it is air saturated with the vapor that produces winds when stirred, lightning and thunder when violently agitated, clouds when gathered in mass, rain when condensed, snow when clouds are chilled, hail when thick clouds are tightly frozen, and a clear sky when rarefied. . . . Now, if the rebel angels before their fall had bodies of a celestial nature, there is no cause for wonder if these bodies in punishment were changed into the element of air so that they might undergo suffering from the element of fire, which is an element of a superior nature. They were then permitted to occupy not the pure realm of air above but this misty air near earth, and this is a sort of prison house for them, in keeping with their nature, until the day of judgment.²⁹

²⁶ *Gn. litt.* 3.9.13. Pépin claims Augustine does not give this philosophical rationale for the establishment of the demons in the air, but he seems to have overlooked this passage. See "Influences païennes," 30.

²⁷ This is because "in them the element that is more active [i.e. air] than passive [earth or water] dominates." *Gn. litt.* 3.10.14. This is exemplary of his broader attempt to give a reading of Genesis' account of creation in a manner responsible both to current scientific understandings and debates about the order of the cosmos and to proper Christian fidelity to Scripture. Hence *Gn. litt.* 3.1.1–3.8.12, leading up to the present passage, and really the entire commentary. See *Gn. litt.* 1.19.38–1.21.41; see also *ep.* 143.7.

²⁸ At *lib. arb.* 3.11.32, he claims God created the angels to adorn the universe whether or not they sinned, though he does not there differentiate the angels and demons by cosmic location.

²⁹ *Gn. litt.* 3.10.14–15. N.b. the allusion to 2 Pet 2:4. Cf. *ciu.* 3.18, which works almost the opposite way, in that their material composition is too fine, as it were. There Augustine suggests

It may be strange at first to think that angels could go through such a momentous ontological change in their bodies as a result of a primordial act of will. Furthermore, it is reminiscent of Origen's description of the fall of demonic souls into aerial bodies on account of their greater offences, which employs a conception of the fall that Augustine will reject.³⁰ But, it is worth bearing in mind that Augustine thinks humanity acquired such a pervasive and defining attribute as its bodily mortality as a result of its own fall.³¹ Moreover, unlike the Origenist tradition, and in continuity with human concupiscence, Augustine is clear here that demonic embodiment is not itself God's punishment for sin but rather that by which the demon is made capable of receiving its punishment. Being thrust down into the misty air the demons are made subject to God and the powers God has placed above them, the angels. In any case, the tone here is tentative and hypothetical, pointing minimally to the suitability of this arrangement, should it turn out to be true.

The fine-material physics employed in the conception of demonic bodies of air was also the most obvious framework within which to address the apparent wonders of demons, though it is not clear Augustine always held demons to have such abilities. In his commentary *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees*, Paul's description of the prince of the power of the air as a "spirit who is now at work in the children of unbelief" is cited as confirmation that the devil did not approach Eve even in the body of the serpent. "So then, he doesn't appear visibly, does he, to those in whom he is at work, or approach them by a kind of bodily movement in material places? No, of course not, but in mysterious ways he suggests whatever he can to their thoughts."³²

the airy composition of demons correlates to their "bloodless" incapacity to feel shame over the misfortunes of Regulus, who was pious and faithful to the gods. The statement, however, is highly rhetorical.

³⁰ See Origen, *de princ.* 1.7.4; cf. *1.praef.* 8. At *ciu.* 11.23, Augustine rejects both the idea that embodiment might be a punishment for sin—though this is somewhat of a reduction of the position of Origen, who allowed that the body is also the medium of salvation—and that the greater sin of demons would warrant not a worse body than humans but a better more subtle one.

³¹ Cf. *ciu.* 13.3; 21.8. Cf. Katherine A. Rodgers, "Fall," *AA*, 351–52, at 352: "the fall actually changed human nature."

³² *Gn. adu. Man.* 2.14.20.

Written in the late 380s, this appears to correspond to Augustine's early ambivalence about miracles,³³ a period in Augustine's life in which his Platonist influences are the least digested. A certain vein of platonic intellectualism's preoccupation with the mind, and its concomitant ambivalence about the body, did not have much truck with paranormal miracles and wonders of a bodily nature.³⁴ But in the development of his theology of creation, Augustine found miracles to be in total continuity with the rest of nature, for they are both equally manifestations of God's will. The only difference is that "nature" is simply that to which humans are accustomed, the "normal" operation of things as God himself has directly and inwardly ordained; while the miraculous is the unusual, the movement of things beyond their apparent natural limits by wills in God's service. In light of this underlying continuity in the will of God, Augustine identified the value of miracles for faith as God's volitional mode of directing people back to God. And where his theology of creation made the requisite space to affirm the usefulness of miracles as performed by rational spirits, his doctrine of privation likewise made room for similarly miraculous movements of bodies and their images according to a disordered love. Once Augustine had thought through the matter, that is, there was nothing contradictory to be found in Satan's serpentine temptation, or any other demonic miracle, which Augustine begins openly discussing by the mid 390s at the latest.³⁵ Once the external body that is able to tempt another is distinguished from the internal pride that moves it to do so, Satan can once again approach by a bodily movement.

³³ See *uera rel.* 25.47, in which he suggests the church was borne in miracles that were not permitted to continue lest the soul go on looking for visible signs instead of the truth itself. But in *retr.* 1.13.7, he makes clear that he more narrowly meant that, for example, baptism is no longer accompanied by speaking in tongues as a matter of course. He was not denying miracles as such, as he had already known a blind man healed by the relics of the martyrs Protasius and Gervasius in Milan, as well as the existence of other miracles. As Brown notes, "Augustine's sudden decision to give a maximum of publicity to miraculous cures in Africa, should not be regarded as a sudden and unprepared surrender to popular credulity. It is, rather, that, within the immensely complex structure of Augustine's thought, the centre of gravity had shifted; modern miracles, which had once been peripheral, now become urgently important as supports to faith." *Augustine of Hippo*, 419. On Augustine's shifting attitudes to miracles, see *ibid.*, 416–22; and F. van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop: The Life and Work of a Father of the Church* (trans. Brian Battershaw and G. R. Lamb; London: Sheed and Ward, 1961), 527–57, though the latter highlights the very connotations of popular credulity in this shift that Brown is minimizing.

³⁴ Cf. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 420–21.

³⁵ See *diu. qu.* 79.

Thus, when he did begin to discuss things like the efficacy of pagan oracles, and the wonders attributed to pagan gods, it was to demons and their bodily abilities that Augustine appealed. Such phenomena were the source of anxiety among some Christians, like those with whom Augustine conversed in the midst of one Easter octave, a discourse recorded in a short book he called *Demonic Divination*.³⁶ In this case, the destruction of the Serapeum at Alexandria in 391, a casualty of civil unrest in the wake of Theodosius' new "anti-pagan" laws, had been foretold by a priest of Serapis in Canopus of the Nile Delta. But the successful divination that so unsettled his interlocutors Augustine did not find surprising in the least. Far from the modern (or Ciceronian!)³⁷ strategy of denial, Augustine affirmed the ease with which demons could give accurate information about the future, since "it is allowed them to know and foretell."³⁸ To the laymen in the conversation, the very success of a wonder like divination indicated God's approval of the event. But Augustine resists reading God's approval off the surface of history. "It must be admitted that even those evil deeds which are committed in opposition to the religion by which God is worshiped both displease a just God and are permitted in the order of His judgment by an omnipotent God."³⁹ We saw the theology underlying this point in the second chapter: God creates rational souls with the power to will and act as they will, even if that will opposes the very source of its ability to do so.

³⁶ For an introduction to the work, see Anne-Isabelle Bouton-Touboulic, "Le *De Divinatione Daemonum* de saint Augustin: Le pouvoir des démons en question," in *Fictions du diable: Démonologie et littérature de saint Augustin à Léo Taxil* (ed. Françoise Lavocat, Pierre Kapitaniak and Marianne Closson; Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2007), 15–34.

³⁷ It is hard not to hear a reference to Cicero's *de divinatione* behind the title of Augustine's *de divinatione daemonum*. It may perhaps seem an ironic twist that Cicero, the "pagan," should have there denied divination any efficacy in order to uproot superstition, while Augustine should never call its efficacy into question, attributing it to the work of invisible demons, in effect to accomplish the same thing. As Bouton-Touboulic notes, the addition of *daemonum* signals the Christian judgement both that the power of divination is that of demons, and that the gods to whom such divinations are attributed are none other than these same demons. "Le *de divinatione*," 15–16. See Cic. *divin.* 2.72.148–149; cf. Aug. *ciu.* 5.9.

³⁸ *Divin. daem.* 1.1. On the matter of the Serapeum, see the second note ("II. Augustine and a Prophecy of the Destruction of the Serapeum") in A.D. Nock, "Two Notes," *Vigiliae Christianae* 3 (1949): 56.

³⁹ *Divin. daem.* 2.6 (FC).

With the principle of the matter thus resolved, the question of how such divination could be successful is a relatively straightforward question of material causality according to the natural capacities God has assigned to his creatures:

The nature of demons is such that the sensitivity of their airy bodies easily surpasses that of earthy bodies, and, because of the superior mobility of these airy bodies, they also incomparably outclass in speed not only the most fleet-footed of men or beasts but even the flight of birds. So, endowed in virtue of their airy bodies with these two advantages, namely keen sensitivity and rapid movement, they come to know of many things and predict or announce them to the astonishment of human beings dependent on the sluggish responses of a sense apparatus made largely of earth. Demons also have such a very prolonged lifespan that they gain a much more extensive experience of things than we human beings can come by, given the shortness of our life. By means of these efficacious powers with which nature has equipped airy bodies, demons not only foretell many future events but also perform many wonders.⁴⁰

Augustine names three advantages demons have for the production of oracles and the performance of marvels—speed, perception, and experience—all of which are linked to their bodily nature. In this way Augustine demystifies demons: an event does not transgress natural limits just because it exceeds the faculties of humans. But Augustine also connects the sense of wonder such events produce with his refusal to derive God's will from the very facts of history alone. That something is amazing does not in and of itself make it good or worthy of worship, any more than it makes it indicative of God's will. Put another way, if God is the good itself, then anything that is not good is not divine, no matter how amazing or mystifying it is. The God-given abilities of demons are no different from the keen scent of hounds or vultures, the perceptive vision of eagles, the swiftness of hares and stags, the strength of lions and elephants, all bodily capacities that well surpass our own. "Physical superiority is thus separated entirely from ontological superiority, which is to say, for Augustine, moral superiority."⁴¹ We should not be

⁴⁰ *Diuin. daem.* 3.7.

⁴¹ Bouton-Touboulic, "Le *de diuinatione*," 23. See also Evans, *Augustine*, 102–03.

seduced into reverence for demons by the mystique of their methods, any more than we are for animals that exceed us in myriad bodily ways.⁴²

The bodily abilities of demons can be divided, for heuristic purposes, into two basic kinds: the passive and the active, perception and activity.⁴³ In the first place, with perception keener than ours, demons can receive and thus read natural signs⁴⁴ imperceptible to humans. It should not be at all surprising, Augustine says, if demons could predict future storms on the basis of the condition of the air. His primary interest, though, is in demonic perception of human thoughts. We are all well aware of times when it can be difficult to conceal what we are thinking. The human soul leaves its traces upon the body, and Augustine suggests this occurs to a degree of subtlety beyond the detection of cruder human senses.

With all ease [demons] discern the intentions of men, not only as they are expressed by the voice, but also as they are conceived in reflection, when certain individual phases of the mind are expressed in the body. Indeed, in this way they forecast many future events. These disclosures are truly miraculous to those who do not know the acts intended; for, to be sure,

⁴² *Diuin. daem.* 3.7; *ciu.* 8.15.

⁴³ Cf. Bouton-Touboullic, who notes the distinction between the demons' power of conjecture and the force of suggestion. "Le *de diuinatione*," 28. I take it as a heuristic division because, for Augustine, unsurprisingly, these matters are not so cut and dry. In his reflection on human perception, he denies that it is strict passivity, but rather insists that the body's passive receptivity is receptive at all only because the soul is always acting on the body to animate it. Likewise, no movement of the body by the soul takes place without the soul having first received and interpreted bodily data, so we can say all action is both active and passive, and all perception both passive and active. See Margaret R. Miles, *Augustine on the Body* (American Academy of Religion, 1979; repr., Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 9–35. Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 108, shows the dependence in Augustine's thought of creative imagination upon the memory's store of images. See also the first six or so points of Eugene TeSelle's reflection from the ground up on Augustine's concept of the soul, *Augustine the Theologian*, (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970; repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 93–100. Augustine will not engage in this level of reflection with respect to demons before he retreats from highly speculative angelology. All the same, as Miles shows, his theory of sensation was guided both by a commitment to the primacy of the soul over the body, on the one hand, and the irreducible union of the God-given body to the soul, on the other. There is no reason to think Augustine's commitments would radically change with respect to angels and demons.

⁴⁴ As opposed to conventional signs. Natural signs are those that signify something without being the effect of any conscious, rational intention for such a signification to occur. Such intention is constitutive of conventional signs, which are predominantly verbal. See *doc. Chr.* 2.1.1–2.5.6.

just as an especially violent emotion is reflected in the countenance so that inward meditations are to some extent recognized outwardly by men, so it should not be incredible if even milder thoughts afford some indications through the medium of the body. These cannot be recognized by the dull sense of men, but can be through the keen perception of demons.⁴⁵

The subtle faculties demons possess by virtue of their aerial nature give them access to human thoughts and desires written upon our bodies.

Such a faculty is implied as a likely explanation for the ability of a notorious Carthaginian diviner, who appears as the mutual acquaintance of the characters of Augustine's dialogue, *Against the Academics*. There this uneducated man, named Albicerius, is said to have read a line of Virgil from the mind of another. By the precision and subtlety of its senses, the demon, a "contemptible being living in the air," could perceive it. And it was to just such a contemptible being that the high-minded Flaccianus attributed Albicerius' powers, "by whose inspiration, as it were, Albicerius was usually filled and prompted so as to be able to give these replies."⁴⁶

This leads us nicely to the question of demonic activity. We already noted the speed that demons possess on account of their bodily nature, which helps to explain how far-off events can be prophesied. In Smith's apt description, "they see a distant event, set off running, and scoop ordinary news channels."⁴⁷ Augustine elaborates this notion in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* with a story of a man whose febrile delirium was understood to be a demonic possession because he could declare accurately, from his bed, the locations of a priest who would visit him, as he proceeded upon his journey from twelve miles away.⁴⁸ It appears Augustine envisioned a (single?) demon darting back and forth between the

⁴⁵ *Diuin. daem.* 5.9 (FC), trans. modified. The ability to read the soul off the body, or to "see incorporeal things," is broadly angelic, and Augustine thinks humans will gain this ability in the resurrection. See *diu. qu.* 47 and its attendant entry in *retr.* 1.26.2 (47), where Augustine points to *ciu.* 22.29 as a better account of vision in the resurrection. Interestingly, in the earlier passage Augustine suggests that, beyond increased ocular perceptivity, the aetherial nature of the resurrected body will itself reveal every inclination of the soul, a claim not revisited in *ciu.* 22.29.

⁴⁶ See *c. Acad.* 6.17–7.21.

⁴⁷ Smith, "How Thin is a Demon?" 506.

⁴⁸ *Gn. litt.* 12.17.35. Augustine seems to imply that he was an eyewitness to these events.

walking priest and the delirious man in order to report to the latter, in some mysterious fashion, the whereabouts of the former.

Augustine makes a more substantial point, however, about the usefulness of demons' ability to read human thoughts off their bodies, prior to *Demonic Divination* in his correspondence with Nebridius, particularly *Letter 9*.⁴⁹ Nebridius asks about the mechanism "heavenly powers" use to influence human dreams, and Augustine says the question frightens him deeply on account of both its importance and its suggestion of demons.⁵⁰ His response is intended to be cursory, providing only a few guidelines for Nebridius to consider until they can discuss it further in person. After noting the keen perception of airy and aetherial creatures, and the traces left upon our bodies by the movements of our minds, Augustine goes on to suggest that these traces can remain upon the body as a kind of *habitus*, a disposition or even attire, and when these habits "have been unconsciously stirred up and touched in accord with the will of the being that stirs them up and touches them, they produce in us thoughts and dreams, and this is done with a surprising ease."⁵¹

Augustine is here resisting the idea that demons communicate directly or immediately with the minds of men, which was what worried Nebridius. He suggests that there is no direct transference of thoughts or images from the demonic mind to the human one, nor any direct bodily appearance of demons in the mind, of a mysterious, even contradictory nature, perceived by interior, but still paradoxically bodily, eyes. Against appeals to demonic powers that seem frighteningly limitless, Augustine's concern here is, O'Daly notes, to account for the real possibility of "communication between demonic and human minds, . . . in a way which does not call for any abnormal functioning of the imagination, for the latter works exactly as in the everyday manner, receiving and forming images from corporeal sources."⁵² Taking his place in a philosophical tradition of

⁴⁹ The correspondence with Nebridius encompasses *ep.* 3–14. On *ep.* 8 and 9, which concern us, see O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind*, 121–23.

⁵⁰ *Ep.* 8 and 9.2, respectively.

⁵¹ *Ep.* 9.3.

⁵² O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind*, 123.

speculation about the mechanism of divination,⁵³ Augustine suggests answers are to be found in the subtle materiality of demonic bodies.

Augustine's emphasis upon the demonic body reduces the power of demonic influence on people to the physical or mechanical talents of angelic beings. It is a technical skill, not unlike that of a musician or, a favourite analogy of Augustine's, a circus performer.⁵⁴ Decent human beings hardly look upon a tightrope walker and desire to imitate his actions on account of them, much less his morals (of course, common sentiment assumed such performers were morally suspect); likewise, a pious and faithful person will not wish for such power as demons and their diviners have, nor think them morally better than himself on account of their power.⁵⁵ But the focus of the letter to Nebridius is the capacity for the soul to be persuaded and moved,⁵⁶ by way of the body, on account of the reciprocal influence they have on one another. Just as anger is thought to produce bile, which in turn makes a person more susceptible to being angry, so the *uestigia* left by our thoughts contain the possibility of an instrumental or productive relation with respect to our thoughts, a relation demons can exploit.⁵⁷

Demonic Penetration into the Soul

And yet, in that very same letter, Augustine also employs language that undermines the neatness of a system in which demonic-human communication is strictly limited to bodily impression. "It is by no means absurd that those beings that produce something with an airy or aetherial body in bodies that they naturally penetrate [*penetrare*] enjoy a much greater ease in moving whatever they want, while, although not sensed by us, whatever is done there is nevertheless endured."⁵⁸ The passage is very nearly repeated in *Demonic Divination*. In the

⁵³ Cf. E. R. Dodds, "Supernormal Phenomena in Classical Antiquity," in *The Ancient Concept of Progress and Other Essays on Greek Literature and Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 156–210, see 161–66.

⁵⁴ See *ep.* 9.3; *diuin. daem.* 4.8; *trin.* 4.11.14.

⁵⁵ See *diuin. daem.* 4.8; *trin.* 4.11.14. On the reputation of circus performers, see Fiedrowicz, "Notes," 209n.19.

⁵⁶ O'Daly notes the "emotive and colourful language [used] to evoke the passive state of our perceptive faculty in such experiences": *adsumi, rapi, extasis, alienatio, alienari*. See *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind*, 121, 121n.31.

⁵⁷ *Ep.* 9.3–4.

⁵⁸ *Ep.* 9.3, trans. modified.

very place he proposes the demonic access to the subtleties of human body language, he speaks again of the demons' ability to penetrate human beings, "unperceived, unfelt, and to mix [*miscere*] themselves into their thoughts, whether they are asleep or awake, through visions intruded into their imaginations."⁵⁹

There are two scriptural passages in particular that suggest the ability of angels to penetrate to the interior person that help illuminate Augustine's understanding of this demonic power. He cites them together, as they exercise him for the same reasons.⁶⁰ In Zech 1:9, the prophet says "the angel who was speaking in me said to me. . . ." The angel speaks "in me" (*in me*), not "to me" (*ad me*), as Augustine is careful to note. Matthew 1:20, on the other hand, recounts the story of Joseph, Mary's betrothed, when "an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying. . . ." While the latter passage does not have a nice prepositional phrase like *in me* to draw attention to itself, it indicates no less than Zech 1:9 an angelic communication that is at first glance bodily (whether visual or audial), but which takes place independently of bodily senses.

In his discussion of Zech 1:9 in the later *Enchiridion*, Augustine goes so far as to suggest that the angel is set up [*constituere*] within [*intus*] the very soul of the man.⁶¹ Nevertheless, his desire is still to show that an alien presence in the mind does not thereby suggest an alien functioning of that mind.⁶² Perhaps the prophet hears the voice of the angel in his mind the way one hears the words and tune of a song one is about to sing; Augustine even makes the intriguing suggestion that the angel could somehow appear to a sleeping person in a manner like one sees oneself moving through the space of a dream, though he does not elaborate on the idea.⁶³ The imagination is capable of much, and it is fundamentally susceptible to a variety of influences, including spiritual ones. Unlike the letter to Nebridius, however, here we see an increasing reluctance on

⁵⁹ *Diuin. daem.* 5.9. O'Daly identifies a break between *ep.* 9 and *diuin. daem.* 5.9 on the one hand, and the later literature that seems to indicate an angelic ability to bypass the bodily intermediary. See O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind*, 124–27. But while the idea that angels can activate a latent *habitus* in the human body seems to keep them outside that very body, the language of penetration, present already in *ep.* 9, does not connote this same restriction, appearing to anticipate the later language of demons mixing with human thoughts.

⁶⁰ *Ep.* 162.5; *ench.* 15.59. Cf. also *Gn. litt.* 9.2.3.

⁶¹ *Ench.* 15.59.

⁶² See, O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind*, 124.

⁶³ *Ep.* 162.5.

the part of Augustine to delve into speculation about how exactly it works on the part of the angel. As O'Daly says, "if, from the human point of view, the receptive mechanism is explained, the problems of communication with the superhuman power, and its access to our psyche, remain."⁶⁴

The Human Spirit

O'Daly's comment, in fact, amounts to a fair description of Augustine's most substantial reflection on the production of visions in his mature writings, found in Book 12 of *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*. It turns out, questions like that of Nebridius—how do higher powers induce visions in people?—only raise further questions about human psychology, and expose human ignorance about the mechanism of any angelic activity. Hence, the discussion in the concluding book of that commentary only treats the question of how visions happen as a subset to the prior question of what it means to have a vision at all. Within his earlier bipartite division of the human into soul and body, Augustine introduces a third term to help clarify the connection between the two. The body is the receptive instrument by which the soul perceives what is external to it, in order that it might understand it. But in order for what is "out there" to be "in here," present to the mind for thought, there is a representation of external sensorial objects within the soul, in what Augustine calls the spirit (*spiritus*).⁶⁵

As it is used here, the spirit is "a power of the soul inferior to the mind, wherein likenesses of corporeal objects are produced."⁶⁶ Corporeal vision is whatever is taken in by the eyes (or, by extension, any of the bodily senses),⁶⁷ and it is matched by a spiritual vision in the soul—what Augustine sometimes calls a

⁶⁴ O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind*, 124.

⁶⁵ On the *spiritus*, see John H. Taylor, "The Meaning of *Spiritus* in St. Augustine's *De Genesi*, XII," *Modern Schoolman* 26 (1948–49): 211–18; Miles, *Augustine on the Body*, 23–30. As Augustine makes clear, this usage of the term *spiritus* is idiosyncratic. It is indicative of his priorities that he attempts to give it biblical precedent, even though, as Taylor notes, it is based upon a most tenuous reading of 1 Cor 14:14, and its true source is, in spite of their differences, far more evidently Porphyrian. Cf. Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine* (trans. L. E. M. Lynch; New York: Random, 1960), 269n.1. See also *Gn. litt.* 12.7.18–12.8.19; *ciu.* 10.9.

⁶⁶ *Gn. litt.* 12.9.20.

⁶⁷ Cf. *Gn. litt.* 12.16.32–33; *conf.* 10.35.54.

*phantasia*⁶⁸—which acts like a gapless interface between the corporeal vision and the intellect. But the relation between corporeal and spiritual vision is asymmetrical. Thus, one cannot see Carthage “in the flesh” without a corresponding vision of Carthage in one’s spirit. But one can nevertheless recall such images (*phantasiae*) with the memory and form a picture—what Augustine will call a *phantasma*—of the Carthage one has seen in the body when one is not present there. By a related process, one can also form an image (also a *phantasma*) of cities one has not visited, Augustine’s characteristic example being Alexandria. To do this, one might, in the imagination, combine images of objects with which one is already familiar in conformity with a description of that place.⁶⁹ The spirit is also the medium of dream images, which are perceived when the bodily eyes are inoperative, closed in sleep. The activity of the spirit in remembering, imagining, and dreaming is distinguishable from the soul’s use of the body in perception, though what is seen, whether using the body or not—seen with the mind’s eye, we might say—is properly called a bodily image.

Being superior to the bodily images received by the senses and produced in the spirit, the intellect comprehends what is seen and makes judgements about it, and is also spoken of as being its own kind of vision (*uisio*), that of understanding. By this vision do we “see” the virtues, for example.⁷⁰ Considering the commandment to love one’s neighbour as oneself, Augustine notes that both the words of the commandment and one’s neighbour can be seen both corporeally when they are present, or spiritually when they are absent. “But love can neither be seen in its own essence with the eyes of the body nor be thought of in the spirit by means of an image like a body; but only in the mind, that is, in the intellect, can it be known and perceived.”⁷¹ It is one thing to see; it is another thing to see

⁶⁸ E.g., *trin.* 9.11.16: “when we learn of bodies through our bodily sense, some likeness of them arises in our mind, and is a phantasm [*phantasia*] of the memory (for the bodies themselves are by no means in our mind when we think of them, but only the likenesses).”

⁶⁹ *Gn. litt.* 12.6.15; 12.24.51; *ep.* 120.2.10. On the distinction between the “reproductive” function of the imagination, *phantasia*, and the “creative” function, *phantasma*, and the dependence of the latter on the former, see O’Daly, *Augustine’s Philosophy of Mind*, 106–110. In *trin.* 8.6.9, where this concept is also developed, the “true” images one recalls from memory and the “fictitious” ones one fashioned by the power of thought are called *phantasia* and *phantasma* respectively.

⁷⁰ Cf. *Gn. litt.* 12.24.50.

⁷¹ *Gn. litt.* 12.11.22. This will form the basis of his suspicion that God in his essence will not be seen in the resurrection by any kind of bodily eyes, even those of a spiritual body. The beatific

that there is something to be understood in what is seen; and still another thing to understand it. By far the greatest ability of these is the last, even if the seer attracts the most awe. Thus, Joseph the interpreter is greater than the Pharaoh who had the dream but did not understand it; and Belshazzar sees the writing on wall with an ostensibly corporeal vision, but only Daniel can interpret what is written. Moreover, the latter confirms his pre-eminence as a great prophet when he both receives a vision of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and interprets it successfully.⁷²

While the distinction of the spiritual power of the soul from its higher intellect is important, for the moment Augustine dwells upon its difference from the corporeal senses beneath it, and its capacity for becoming dissociated from them. In normal waking hours it is a simple matter to distinguish when we are seeing something with our eyes, and when we are remembering or imagining things.⁷³ But there are all sorts of occasions in human life where the difference between the two becomes less clear. Dreams are a foundational example here. One can be deceived about the reality of exceptionally vivid dreams, though waking will clear up any confusion. Still, Augustine points to his own experience to suggest that even in dreams in which we know we are dreaming, and the images are evidently spiritual and not corporeal, since our eyes are closed, this distinction is not made with the same certainty as when we are awake and just imagining things.⁷⁴ In the case of some health disorders and even in the “excessive application of thought [*nimia cogitationis intentione*],”⁷⁵ images can be present as though to the eyes, concurrent with proper corporeal images of things present and observable by anyone, such that the difference between the two can be difficult to discern. It sounds as though part of what Augustine has in mind here is what we now call Schizophrenia. In these cases, he says, the attention of the mind is divided between the bodily eyes and the spirit, the mind's eye. And finally Augustine considers times when the attention of the mind is entirely dissociated from the body in what might be called an ecstasy, which may perceive

vision of God is one of understanding, though he suspects we shall also see God with bodily vision not as he is in himself, but as he is in all things visible. See *ciu.* 22.29.

⁷² Respectively, Gen 41:1–32; Dan 5:5–29; and 2:1–45. See *Gn. litt.* 12.9.20; 12.11.23; cf. *Simpl.* 2.1.1.

⁷³ For what follows, see *Gn. litt.* 12.12.25–26; 12.19.41.

⁷⁴ See *Gn. litt.* 12.20.43; cf. 12.15.31.

⁷⁵ *Gn. litt.* 12.12.25; cf. *trin.* 11.4.7.

incorporeal realities with the intellect or visions of bodies in the spirit, but in which case no bodies seen are present at all.

One should not, however, presume that all spiritual visions are significant.⁷⁶ In fact, the vast majority of such visions are unimportant, and are thus products of the soul itself.⁷⁷ But some may carry meaning, and it is here that space is opened up for angelic communication.

It is a remarkable thing if another spirit can so mingle [*conmixtio*] with the spirit of a man as to manifest its knowledge through images presented to the mind with which it mingles. . . . If this knowledge is revealed to the mind (and it cannot surely be revealed by a body), it follows of necessity that the revelation must come only from some spirit.⁷⁸

There are some who consider the soul itself able to produce the knowledge of divination by its own power, but Augustine remains unconvinced since it does not exercise this power at will, but precisely needs the assistance of something like an angel.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ *Gn. litt.* 12.22.45.

⁷⁷ See *Gn. litt.* 12.12.26; 12.19.41–12.20.43.

⁷⁸ *Gn. litt.* 12.12.26. This obviously puts Augustine at odds with the psychoanalytical theories that are often referred to in order to account for phenomena the ancients took to be indicative of deities, angels, demons, etc. It is not only moderns, however, that think that the soul is capable of generating meaningful dreams in and of itself, particularly when it comes to erotic dreams. As Dyan Elliott notes, “master of the interior that he was, Augustine mobilized his full theological genius around the problem of disowning the realm of dream-fantasy, thence forestalling the examination of its contents. In so doing, he definitively broke with the classical tradition of oneirocriticism, which subjected every aspect of dreams to painstaking analysis. Indeed, if the dream book of Artemidorus is any indication, erotic dreams elicited particular scrutiny.” *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 18. See *conf.* 10.30.41; *Gn. litt.* 12.15.31. What seems categorical here, however—no meaning=soul generated, meaning=angel generated—appears to become more flexible in Augustine’s summary comments on human spiritual vision in *Gn. litt.* 12.23.49. There, visions that occur because of one’s bodily condition may or may not have meaning, which he mentions before even broaching the subject of external spirits. Nevertheless, when Augustine considers the causal origins of significant dream-visions, he tends to think exclusively of angels. See O’Daly, *Augustine’s Philosophy of Mind*, 119.

⁷⁹ *Gn. litt.* 12.13.27. Augustine is pointing to his own “phenomenological” method here; i.e. that the superhuman origin of divination’s power is implied by the generation of knowledge that the human diviner could not possibly have known. We will discuss this further below. His case here is not airtight since he leaves unexamined any possibility of what we might call sub- or unconscious knowledge.

He goes on to consider a few ways visions like this might therefore be produced by angels: 1) perhaps the angel disengages the body from the soul such that its concentration (*intentio*) upon the body is slackened (*relaxo*) to direct itself to images full of meaning already latent within the soul itself. But, again, Augustine cannot understand how such images could always have been in the spirit of the diviner, ready to be understood, if the human was not always capable of understanding them, unless the angelic power somehow also assists the understanding. Perhaps 2) the angel produces images in the soul that were not already there, or 3) the images are produced in the angel itself, into which the soul then rushes to see them.⁸⁰

Augustine also points out that disruptions of the soul's attention originating in the body do not exclude meaningful, and thus spiritually generated, visions. Angels can appear in dreams without first needing to cause the human to fall asleep, lending their power and guidance to the soul's usual capacity for oneiric images.⁸¹ Indeed, spirits can influence the thoughts and actions of the waking, who betray no symptoms of such influence, of which they themselves even appear to be unaware. Augustine thus maintains, in a significant way, the imperceptibility of demonic influence upon human thoughts, which he had asserted earlier in *Demonic Divination* and the letter to Nebridius, where he attributed this property to the subtlety of their aerial bodies.⁸²

Thus, with some extensive anthropological reflection, Augustine isolates the locus of angelic communication. The human person is capable of undergoing different kinds of bodily visions in a variety of circumstances, all of which have their impact in the spirit. When the soul itself gathers these "likenesses of bodies [*corporaliū similitudines*]" into a vision, its images are simply the raw image

⁸⁰ *Gn. litt.* 12.13.27. See O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind*, 125–27. Augustine lists two more options, which O'Daly does not consider: 4) maybe there is no disengagement of the soul's attention upon the body, and the soul is carried to a spiritual vision of the objects; and 5) maybe it is "sometimes in itself, and other times by means of mingling with another spirit" that a soul sees such objects. In O'Daly's defense, however, Augustine never really returns to the fourth option, nor is it at all clear what it means for the soul to remain engaged with the body, while it is taken directly to the objects of vision only to see them not with bodily but with spiritual vision. And with the fifth option, Augustine simply hedges his bets between option 1), and options 2) and 3).

⁸¹ *Gn. litt.* 12.21.44.

⁸² Cf. the important ironic words of the High Priest Caiaphas before the crucifixion of Christ, at John 11:50–51. For this and other examples of unwitting prophets, see *Gn. litt.* 12.22.45–47; cf. *Simpl.* 2.1.1.

data that come from the memory, *phantasiae*; “if, however, it gazes upon images placed before it, they are disclosures [*si autem obiectas intuetur, ostensiones sunt*].”⁸³ “These visions can be attributed to the action of a spirit when sound and healthy people are transported, whether through the senses of the body they see real bodies, and in the spirit, likenesses indistinguishable from bodies, or completely carried out of their senses and perceiving nothing at all through them, they dwell by this spiritual vision amidst the likenesses of bodies.”⁸⁴

These visions can occur whether a person is dreaming or sick, or otherwise alienated from the senses by an angelic agent for the purpose of revealing images to the spirit,⁸⁵ even when waking. Whatever the precise conditions, however, Augustine considers them all after the manner of dreams: some are true, some are false, some are calm, some are troubled; and those that are true sometimes make their statements and predictions clearly, other times darkly and figuratively.⁸⁶ For a seer may have a vision, ignorant that it has any meaning at all⁸⁷; or he may perceive that there is a meaning, being ignorant of it nevertheless, like Belshazzar and Nebuchadnezzar; or, like Daniel, he may both see the vision and perceive its meaning.

But all this amounts to ground clearing with respect to the various capacities humans have to receive visions. As for how the angels accomplish what they do, Augustine invokes mystery, and the vague language of some sort of union [*quadam coniunctio*], joining [*iunctio*], or mixing [*conmixtio*], by which they either transfer their own visions to the human spirit or fashion them there, though he remains open to the idea of images being fashioned in our minds by some other, equally mysterious means.⁸⁸ In *The Trinity*, he says it is “through a kind of spiritual mixture of similarly spiritual substance [*per quasdam spirituales*

⁸³ *Gn. litt.* 12.20.42.

⁸⁴ *Gn. litt.* 12.19.41.

⁸⁵ On the concept of *alienari*, *alienatio*, see O’Daly, *Augustine’s Philosophy of Mind*, 120, 126.

⁸⁶ *Gn. litt.* 12.18.39.

⁸⁷ Augustine is unclear, but perhaps he has in mind those unwitting prophets like Caiaphas, who say more than they realize. See above, n.82. Otherwise this may indicate, e.g., normal dreams or the visions of a schizophrenic.

⁸⁸ See *Gn. litt.* 12.12.26; 12.13.28; 12.30.58. O’Daly notes that Cicero uses *coniunctio* to translate the Stoic *sympatheia*, which would connote an affinity between human and angelic minds. He also points out that Augustine clearly does not mean these terms to be mutually exclusive; i.e., this is not technical terminology. *Augustine’s Philosophy of Mind*, 126.

mixturas similiter spiritalis substantiae].”⁸⁹ In spite of his lack of clarity on the matter, he no longer restricts himself to the inchoate theory of angelic-human communication he suggested to Nebridius, which depended upon bodily impressions. The angelic access to the soul that Augustine infers from Zech 1:9 therefore becomes his working concept for imagining all such communication.

How do these things enter the spirit of man [*in spiritum hominis ueniant*]? Are they fashioned there? Or are they implanted fully formed and seen as a consequence of some sort of union [*quadam coniunctione*], so that angels reveal to men their own thoughts and the likenesses of bodies which they fashion beforehand in their own spirit through their knowledge of future events? In such a way angels see our thoughts; not, of course, with eyes, because they see not by body but by spirit.⁹⁰

Angels are given access to the very interior of man, and demons are no exception. “This class of deceitful and malign spirits . . . enter into the soul from without [*extrinsecus in animam ueniunt*] and delude the human senses both asleep and awake.”⁹¹ This notion of mixture also helps Augustine account for the experience of alien identities in the apparent possession phenomena that can sometimes accompany divination. For in divination, there is “some mysterious union with the evil spirit, so that the tormenter and his victim seem to be one and the same spirit.”⁹²

O’Daly suggests passages like these represent a modification in Augustine’s thought from his earlier letter to Nebridius, namely that the influence of demons is no longer taken to be dependent upon “corporeal and imaginary intermediaries.” Now he imagines that “the angels themselves are *within the recipient’s mind*.”⁹³ That such a notion of invasion would have been familiar to Augustine is indicated, O’Daly suggests, by his quotation of a certain Fonteius of Carthage in his “collection of essays,” *Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions*.⁹⁴ That quotation reads as follows:

⁸⁹ *Trin.* 11.4.7.

⁹⁰ *Gn. litt.* 12.22.48.

⁹¹ *Ciu.* 10.11.

⁹² *Gn. litt.* 12.13.28.

⁹³ O’Daly, *Augustine’s Philosophy of Mind*, 124, emphasis original.

⁹⁴ O’Daly, *Augustine’s Philosophy of Mind*, 126.

Act . . . O wretched mortals, act in such a way that the wicked spirit never pollutes this dwelling, that he does not intrude himself into your senses and defile the holiness of your soul or becloud the light of your mind. This evil being slithers through all the openings that your senses provide: he assumes different shapes, adapts himself to colors, clings to sounds, lies concealed in anger and in false speech, hides in odors, pours himself into flavors, and by his turbulent and filthy activity casts the senses into the gloom of dark emotions. With certain vapors he fills the pathways of the intellect through which the light of reason, the mind's ray, is accustomed to spread.⁹⁵

As in the letter to Nebridius, demonic influence is here imagined in the most bodily of terms. But as we read Fonteius describe demonic activity within a person, we should recall that *Letter 9* also spoke of penetration. In fact, having arisen out of the same basic period in Augustine's writings,⁹⁶ there is no substantive reason to think Augustine would have seen the contents of the two documents as opposed at all. Augustine's transition is not from imagining demonic activity as taking place through an exterior influence through intermediaries to an immediate interior access to the mind. If Augustine makes any transition, it is towards increasing reluctance to speculate with any finality about the precise nature of human-angel interaction.

The Limits of Speculation and the Ambiguity of Demonic Bodies

This restraint is already well established when he writes book 12 of *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*. How angelic visions arise in the spirit of man, and what takes place there that allows for the great variety in quality, clarity, and understanding of visions are questions whose answers can only be found and explained with great difficulty, and Augustine does not pretend to be up to the task.⁹⁷ He is explicit about preferring to listen to one who is so capable, insisting that he himself be thought of "rather as one who discusses and investigates than as

⁹⁵ *Diu. qu.* 12; see also *Retr.* 1.26.2.12, in which Augustine identifies the author and the title of source, *On Purifying the Mind in order to See God*.

⁹⁶ Namely during his attempt at living in common as "servants of God" in Thagaste, ca. 388–91, on which see Brown, *Augustine*, 125–30.

⁹⁷ *Gn. litt.* 12.22.48. Cf. *cura mort.* 20.

one who knows.”⁹⁸ For the Apostle Paul makes clear that among the gifts the Holy Spirit distributes throughout the church is the discernment of spirits; any knowledge of the hidden operations of visions beyond what is discoverable through philosophical investigation must be a gift from God.⁹⁹

The need for moderation is confirmed for Augustine in the wisdom literature of Scripture, which counsels restraint in speculation about higher matters on account of human limitations. “Do not seek matters higher than yourself, and do not search out matters mightier than yourself, but always ponder those things which the Lord has commanded you.”¹⁰⁰ “Hardly do we guess aright at things that are upon the earth: and with labor do we find the things that are before us. But the things that are in heaven, who shall search out?”¹⁰¹ Most of the time we are scarcely cognizant enough to realize the images we behold in dreams are not actually bodies but rather images of bodies; how much less qualified are we then to say how such images are produced, whether by the application of one substance to another, like ink on parchment, or by making an impression in a single substance, like a seal in wax? It is a difficult enough question with respect to images produced by the mind itself, how much more mysterious are the means when we receive such images at the behest of an angel.¹⁰²

This widespread, biblically counselled, retreat from excessive certainty would ultimately lead Augustine to regret his temerity in *The Divination of Demons*. We recall him speaking of the ease with which demons read men’s

⁹⁸ *Gn. litt.* 12.18.39.

⁹⁹ 1 Cor 12:10. See *trin.* 3.9.18; *cura mort.* 20; cf. *Gn. litt.* 12.18.39. In *cura mort.* 21, he wonders if the eccentric monk, John of Egypt, might have had such a gift, since he was apparently able to appear to a woman in a dream at will. He imagines himself asking the monk all the questions that elude him about the *modus operandi* of the martyr’s miracles, questions that match the rigour and discernment present in the Genesis commentary: did John himself appear in the spiritual form of his body in this woman’s dream? Was he doing something else, or, if sleeping at the time, dreaming something else? Was it by an angel or some other means that this was accomplished? And so forth. Note that this manner of authority, this time present in Scripture itself, helps Augustine settle the question of whether it is the deceased prophet Samuel himself or is called up by the witch of Endor at the behest of king Saul, or a diabolical apparition of the same. Early on, Augustine favours the latter, though he is clear that the former could occur according to the just permission of God. See *Simpl.* 2.3. But Sir 46:20 clarifies that it is the prophet himself that appears. See *cura mort.* 18; *Dulc. qu.* 6.5.

¹⁰⁰ Sir 3:22, *apud c. Prisc.* 11.14; see also *cura mort.* 21.

¹⁰¹ Wis 9:14–17, *apud trin.* 3.10.21.

¹⁰² *Ep.* 162.4–5.

thoughts, while in the letter to Nebridius it was easy for demons to activate those thoughts back against humans. He retracts the confidence of the first explicitly, and would no doubt have done the same for the second had he completed his retractive review of his letters.¹⁰³ That demons perceive human thoughts is evident; but how they do so is an open question. “Whether certain signals, obvious to [demons] but hidden from us, emanate from the bodies of persons while they are thinking, or whether they know such things by reason of some other spiritual power, can be discovered by human beings either with the greatest difficulty or not at all.”¹⁰⁴

This, in a very direct way, returns us to the matter of demonic bodies with which we began, though it is not as we left it. One of the contexts in which Augustine cites scriptural counsel against speculation is the question of the use of angelic bodies in their miracles. It is unclear whether angels use the bodies of other creatures in the production of visions and wonders, or accomplish such through the transformation of their own.¹⁰⁵ It is a question he returns to from time to time throughout his career. Early on Augustine assumes angels in their celestial bodies adorn earthly bodies and rule over them at God’s bidding.¹⁰⁶ Later he expresses an inability to comprehend how angels might tangibly appear to the human senses without themselves having bodies. This reverses his earlier opinion by neglecting any adoptive language, and he evidently assumes no angel could make themselves available to the senses except by the transformation of their own body.¹⁰⁷ In the same place he also notes that the book of Revelation ascribes a dimensional stature to an angel that could be an attribute only of a body, since angelic appearances in scripture are not “deceptions.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ See *ep.* 224.2.

¹⁰⁴ *Retr.* 2.30, concerning *diuin. daem.* 5.9.

¹⁰⁵ *Trin.* 3.1.4–5.

¹⁰⁶ *Lib. arb.* 3.11.34.

¹⁰⁷ *Ep.* 95.8, ca. 408/409. Cf *s.* 362.17.20, from the winter of 410–411, where he says it is possible to talk about the flesh of angels on account of their similarity to our flesh when they appear to us in human form, even though they cannot properly be made of flesh, lacking mortality as they do. One cannot read too much into this passage, however, since its primary function is as a point of comparison for the resurrected body.

¹⁰⁸ In *an. et or.* 4.21.34, ca. 419–21, Augustine will reject the notion that this is deceptive. “Belonging to this class of similitudes of corporeity, which are not real bodies, though they seem to be such, are all those appearances which you read of in the Holy Scriptures in the visions even of the prophets, without, however, understanding them. . . . You make mistakes about these, not

In the *Trinity* he retreats from this conclusion and finds the question of the angels' use of their own bodies to be quite beside the point, preferring not to guess.¹⁰⁹ And in the *Enchiridion* he simply notes the difficulty of the question, without prejudice to what he cannot imagine.

Who can explain the nature of the bodies with which angels have appeared to humans, so that they can not only be seen but also touched, and they sometimes present visions not to people's physical eyes but to their spiritual eyes or to their minds, or they say something not outwardly to the ear but inwardly to a person's soul, being themselves also within the soul, as it is written in the book of the prophets, "the angel who talked in me said to me" (for he did not say "who spoke to me" but "in me"), or they appear to people during sleep and speak with them as in dreams (for we read in the gospel, "behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said")? These are the means by which angels indicate that they do not have bodies that can be felt: they raise the very difficult question of how the patriarchs washed their feet and how Jacob wrestled with an angel whose presence was so solidly tangible.¹¹⁰

This is a perfectly sensible statement, but it has significant consequences. Angels "do not have bodies that can be felt." Augustine's interrogation of visions has the effect of fundamentally calling into question even the tenuously physical bodies of angels and demons. The sheer variety of angelic phenomena, and the inclusion therein of events where angels apparently bypass the physical senses of the human body, suggests angels transcend not just animal bodies but any straightforward conception of embodied existence. For if a body is not perceivable as such by any sensible means, in what way then is it a body?¹¹¹

because they are in themselves deceptive, but because you do not accept them as they ought to be taken." He goes on to enumerate visions from none other than Revelation itself, though without mention of the angel of some stature. "If therefore we understand all these things wisely, although we say they are true apparitions, yet we do not call them real bodies."

¹⁰⁹ *Trin.* 3.1.5; see also, *an. et or.* 4.21.35.

¹¹⁰ *Ench.* 15.59, quoting Zech 1:9 and Matt 1:20; the footwashing reference is Gen 18:4 and 19:2; and Jacob wrestling with angels is Gen 32:24–25.

¹¹¹ Cf. *ep.* 13.4: "If this holds true, no one can understand with regard to that body whether it exists, except someone whose senses have reported something concerning it."

In book 3 of *The Trinity*, Augustine makes it explicit that the barrier to human knowledge of angelic means is our dependence on experience. “And since I am a man, I cannot understand these things by actual experience, as the angels understand who do them.”¹¹² The appeal to experience is made central in Augustine’s later commentary on our perception of the souls of other humans.

For we recognize the movements of bodies also from their resemblance to ourselves, and from this fact we perceive that other live besides ourselves, since we also move our body in living, as we observe these bodies to be moved. For even when a living body is moved, there is no way opened for our eyes to see the soul, a thing which cannot be seen with the eyes; but we notice that something is present within that bulk, such as is present in us, so that we are able to move our bulk in a similar way, and this is the life and the soul. . . . Therefore, we know the soul of anyone at all from our own, and from our own we believe of him whom we do not know.¹¹³

Miles also quotes this passage and summarizes it thus: “we *see* bodies, and from this experience together with our experience of our own souls, we *infer* the existence of souls.”¹¹⁴ Because of its incorporeality, it makes no sense to think of ever seeing the soul of another,¹¹⁵ but given our firsthand experience of being a human we can infer the existence of the souls of our fellow humans with as much certainty as we can posit the existence of that in us which is invisible even to ourselves.

It is this lack of firsthand experience that prevents us from even approaching this kind of certainty with respect to angelic *modi operandi*. Whatever might be said of them is constrained, on the one hand, by the capacity for inference of the rational investigation of phenomenal data, and, on the other, by whatever additional information divine insight can provide, especially what is

¹¹² *Trin.* 3.10.21.

¹¹³ *Trin.* 8.6.9.

¹¹⁴ Miles, *Augustine on the Body*, 30.

¹¹⁵ For an introduction to the soul and its incorporeality in Augustine, see Roland J. Teske, “Soul,” in *AA*, 807–12. This is perhaps why Augustine dissociates himself somewhat from his own citation of Fonteius, in which he describes a physical obstruction to the operation of the mind. In *retr.* 1.26.2.12, Augustine clarifies that the passage was selected for *diu. qu.* 12 by his communal brothers, because “they liked it and wanted to place it among our writings.”

related in Scripture. Hence, it is precisely when Augustine reaches the limits of what can be deduced about the precise connection between angels and their bodily manifestations that he cites the wisdom literature counselling against curiosity in heavenly matters, exculpating people from our ignorance: in his *Refutation of the Priscillianists*, for example, he cannot find a scriptural, or otherwise rational, basis to say that angels constitute the souls of stars;¹¹⁶ in *The Care to be had for the Dead* and *The Trinity*, he cannot identify the precise causes of the visible wonders of martyrs, angels, and demons.¹¹⁷

The method of inference Miles highlights, which Augustine employs to speak about our knowledge of the soul, is basically a phenomenological method,¹¹⁸ and Augustine applies it to the work of angels and demons as well. It is an assessment of particular experiences and their contexts that leads to the conclusion that the given phenomenal set is indicative of angelic action. “Supernatural events—or paranormal ones—seem to demand a superhuman cause. . . . Augustine needs demons to explain certain observable, but otherwise inexplicable phenomena.”¹¹⁹ The conjunction of an abnormal state with an image of manifestly special meaning suggests both the activity of a rational volition like ours, and yet that this activity nevertheless does not belong to the will of the

¹¹⁶ *C. Prisc.* 9.12–11.14. Here he seems to have given up the cautious optimism he held earlier, in *Gn. litt.* 2.18.38, that this question might receive some answer through the study of scripture.

¹¹⁷ *Cura mort.* 21; *trin.* 3.10.19–21.

¹¹⁸ See TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 92–93. Such a phenomenological approach, one based upon the analysis of the data of religious experience, has been used recently to justify a “realist” interpretation of Christian language of “spirits” like angels and demons. See Phillip H. Wiebe, *God and Other Spirits: Intimations of Transcendence in Christian Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). This text introduced me to the method, and I think it notable that, in his attempt to give a rational account of the existence of such creatures in response to their rejection by many in the spirit of modern rationality, Wiebe’s method is in strong continuity with Augustine’s pre-modern method. Furthermore, I would suggest Augustine’s method comports with his approach to the interpretation of Scripture as a whole, and, even further still, that this was a common hermeneutic among patristic authors. As O’Keefe and Reno write, “the basic structure of the patristic ‘total reading’ of scripture bears some analogies to scientific inquiry. Scientists collect data, and their goal is to find theories that can account for or best interpret the data. The ideal interpretation is the most elegant and comprehensive.” John J. O’Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 25. Such a theory is also borne out in Lewis Ayers’ approach to the theological history of Nicaea, in *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), see esp. 31–40.

¹¹⁹ O’Daly, *Augustine’s City of God*, 127.

human in question. At the same time, the very phenomena that suggest dissociation from the human subject themselves limit the investigation into their causes: without an insider's knowledge, the certainty of any conclusions is necessarily limited. Hence, although Augustine acknowledges how difficult it is to determine how spirits influence the minds of people, he says we nonetheless have abundant proof that they do, and he goes on to relate the story of the febrile man who knew of the priest's journey, who "was considered to be possessed because of what he had said."¹²⁰ He speaks in a similar way in his *Revisions*, where he says that "it has been ascertained, thanks to various experiences," that the thoughts of men are known by demons, though he should not have spoken with such certainty about how they are known.¹²¹ Later on we will see more demonic events identifiable by their unusual gestures and actions exhibited in relation to a peculiar content.

The demon is known by its manifestations, but, to those with no inside knowledge of the composition of angelic natures, the relation of these phenomena

¹²⁰ *Gn. litt.* 12.17.34–35. Of course, Augustine's threshold for what constitutes action so abnormal as to be inhuman is likely quite different from that of a typical modern academic. Nevertheless, this is not to say he attributed phenomena to demons willy-nilly. For example, he is reluctant, as O'Daly notes, to attribute the appearance of the dead in dreams to "supernaturalism, . . . intent upon limiting the latter to those cases where no normal psychological explanation seems adequate." *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind*, 118. On the sobriety of Augustine's treatment of paranormal phenomena, see W. Montgomery, "St Augustine's Attitude to Psychic Phenomena," *Hibbert Journal* 25 (1926): 92–102. It may be that greater rigour will exclude more inferences of demons than Augustine did. For an account of ancient supernormal phenomena, looking for evidence of telepathy and clairvoyance, that does attempt to employ this greater rigour, see E. R. Dodds, "Supernormal Phenomena in Classical Antiquity," esp. 170–71, 174–76, concerning Augustine. But the difference is one of degrees, and not kind. While Augustine may be slightly more credulous than Dodds, they use the same basic phenomenological method. Hence Dodd's praise, p. 173–74: "The most careful and sober descriptions of supernormal occurrences which have come down to us from Antiquity are those furnished by Augustine, who deserves a more honourable place in the history of psychical research than any other thinker between Aristotle and Kant."

It also seems appropriate to note here that Augustine's rejection of astrologers is based precisely upon the false inferences of their ἀποστελέσματα, what he translates as their "so-called scientific observations [*quasi documentorum experimenta*]." Clear observation should have been enough for them to know that the astral determination of human lives was erroneous. His standard example is that of twins, whose lives are inevitably manifestly different in many ways, despite having been born under the same astrological conditions. *Gn. litt.* 2.17.35–36; see also *ciu.* 5.1–6; and see John Hammond Taylor, notes to *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, by St. Augustine (2 vols.; ACW 41–42), 1:238n.56.

¹²¹ *Retr.* 2.30.

to whatever bodily existence the angel itself might have remains ambiguous. “Certain learned persons have supposed that demons do have a kind of body of their own, composed of that dense and humid air which we feel strike us when the wind blows.”¹²² Perhaps the demon does have such a body that we could feel when it blew upon us just so. But if it is not clear whether demons use their own bodies or stir the elements in order to achieve an effect, then one cannot say with certainty that breeze you feel is the demon’s own body, even as its foulness betrays its ultimate origin. All demonic phenomena are only indirectly demonic, from flailing limbs to words in strange voices; from temptations, mysterious visions, to full somatic possession. But this undermines any easy supposition of the bodily nature of demons. Hence, there are moments in his mature writings when Augustine opens up room for doubt about the doctrine of angelic bodies, including the aerial bodies of demons. We can see that, late in *The City of God*, he still gives aerial bodies the benefit of intellectual authority—“learned persons suppose” demons have them—but in the same breath he also notes that someone could assert that demons have no bodies at all, and it would be no great matter of contention. We have also recently seen him ask, in the *Enchiridion*, whether anyone can explain the nature of angelic bodies by which they appear to humans in such diverse ways. And in *The Trinity*, he pleads ignorance as he does in the *Enchiridion*: “we certainly cannot investigate those things which are in heaven, nor in what kind of entities not only appropriately dignified angelic bodies, but also their kind of corporeal action, are actually constituted.”¹²³

He further denies demons much that would give them an identifiably bodily quality. They are immortal, whereas every body in the familiar sense is subject to decay and death. He rejects that demons are “kapnophagic,” that they literally feast on the smoke and odours of burning sacrifices for bodily sustenance, as others before him had thought. They consume sacrifices only insofar as such signs satisfy their hunger for divine honours.¹²⁴ Recall also that one of the reasons Augustine favoured the idea of aerial demons was because it provided a suitable explanation of the mode of their subjection to angels and divine punishment. In the end Augustine says this punishment will be meted out regardless of whether

¹²² *Ciu.* 21.10.

¹²³ *Trin.* 3.10.21, my trans.

¹²⁴ *Ciu.* 10.19.

they possess aerial bodies or not.¹²⁵ And we will see below that their subjection to angels is not so much a physical inferiority as it is a subordination to the greater wisdom of angels and the divinely instituted order of all creation.

And yet Augustine never seemed to overturn his presumption that demons have aerial bodies. “Whether the angels have bodies suited to their functions and dealings with human beings or are merely spirits” remains for him an open question, though if the latter is true, it remains for someone to “show how without having bodies they could do all those things” that they are known to have done.¹²⁶ What is important, however, is that his phenomenological approach makes the question inconsequential, as he insists.¹²⁷ Augustine appeals to the aerial bodies of demons as an explanation for how they can “do all those things”; but now we can see these aerial bodies for what they are, not a lynchpin of his demonology, but a hypothesis offered by tradition that allows him to maintain the unity of disparate events. The importance of the phenomena is not how but simply that they are demonic manifestations, so he focuses on the functionality of aerial bodies, allowing him the flexibility to reject them if necessary.¹²⁸

For it is easy for these most contemptible spirits to do many things through their aerial bodies, such as will arouse admiration even in the minds of the better-disposed, burdened as they are with earthly bodies. . . . Why should it be something wonderful for the devil and his angels to produce things out of corporeal elements through their aerial bodies, such as the flesh admires, or even by occult inspirations to conjure up fantastic images for deluding the human senses, whereby they can deceive men, whether awake or asleep, or rouse them to frenzy?¹²⁹

This passage is probably roughly contemporaneous with *Demonic Divination*, both in and around the first decade of the fifth century. In both places, aerial

¹²⁵ *Ciu.* 21.10.

¹²⁶ *Ep.* 95.8.

¹²⁷ See the citations above, n.109

¹²⁸ Cf. *Gn. litt.* 12.18.39–40. Augustine notes how the abnormality of angelic visions prompts people to inquire into their origins and methods of production, but that there is much that occurs daily, like dreams, about whose origins and methods we are ignorant, an ignorance familiarity allows us to bear often without care.

¹²⁹ *Trin.* 4.11.14, trans. modified.

bodies help Augustine mitigate the amazement that demonic wonders generate among humans; and there, as here, the most important thing about that “finest, nimblest kind of body there is,” are the “potentialities of air, which enable demonic bodies invisibly to get to work on a great many visible bodies, moving, changing, twisting and turning them as they please.”¹³⁰

While he takes the doctrine of demonic bodies for granted, it is clear that their significance for Augustine lies in their capacity to manipulate corporeal elements and make visions through secret inspirations. In other words, the usefulness of an airy body is either to appear to be or to move that which it is not, namely a variety of visible things. Though insensible according to its own nature, the airy body of demons allows them to become manifest in untold numbers of ways. By the end of his life his position on demonic bodies lay somewhere between dispassionate adherence to the concept and genuine agnosticism.¹³¹ But this does not represent a substantive shift, for Augustine had already defined the true usefulness of aerial bodies by their ability to generate manifestations that cannot be doubted even if the nature of the mechanism behind them can. For it is certain above all that demons act in history; if they do what they do without a physically material body, so be it.

This is to say, however, that even if their aerial adornment is granted, such bodies are not sufficient in and of themselves to satisfy the demon’s need for embodiment if it is to act in history. Aerial bodies are invisible and therefore only ambiguously related to the phenomena they are invoked to explain. Whether or not demons do possess them, it is their lack of animal bodies that keeps the question of their embodiment open. To account for the embodiment historical action requires, Augustine can point to the theory of aerial bodies and suggest demons transform their own bodies. But they could equally manipulate those of

¹³⁰ *Diuin. daem.* 4.8. This kind of indeterminate flexibility of movement, including the movement of other bodies, is familiar in Augustine’s day from Porphyry, in particular his notion of the spiritual (πνεῦμα) substance of souls and demons, that acts as a kind of vehicle (ὄχημα). Pépin summarizes it thus: “like souls, demons are endowed with a certain *pneuma*. This is first of all a vehicle, which transports them to a thousand places, or better yet transports their image. It is also a power of the imagination, which they use to abuse humans. They imprint upon their aerial *pneuma* whatever images they please, mysteriously reflecting them, like a game of mirrors, upon the atmosphere that encompasses them, and send them back to haunt the spirits of those sleeping, who believe them to be visits of the gods or of the souls of the dead.” “Influences païennes,” 34. Cf. *ciu.* 10.11.

¹³¹ *Ciu.* 21.30.

others, and who is to say which is correct? After early doubts, Augustine finds himself easily able to imagine Satan mysteriously tempting humanity through bodily movement, but he cannot help but see a clear distinction between the phenomena by which Satan tempts and the mysterious nature of the tempter himself, even as the tradition of fine-material physics seems to be the most sensible explanation for the causal relation between the two. In the end he recognizes the occurrence of bodily wonders attributable to Satan and his angels, but the nature of the spirits behind the bodily movements remains a mystery.

Demonic Activity and its Limits

The Impenetrability of the Intellect

Augustine speaks of the mingling and union of demons and humans, and even their entrance into the very souls of men to such an extent that it can become difficult to distinguish the two rational creatures in the behaviour of a demoniac. As we have seen, Augustine is scarcely able to get any more specific about the causal operations at work, though he suggests the three basic alternatives we saw above. O'Daly suggests that in spite of such uncertainty, the differences between these alternatives “are nuances: the terms ‘deprived of reason (*alienari*)’, snatched away (*rapi, assume*)’ can be used of all three possibilities mooted, for all are forms of possession by a more powerful mind.”¹³² He rightly notes that Augustine is the least interested in the first causal alternative, in which demonic influence is restricted to their release of the soul’s attention upon the body, allowing it to consider on its own images latent within itself. This is notable for O'Daly, since it is perhaps most like the theory Augustine held in *Letter 9*, one of the central purposes of which, O'Daly claims, was to avoid “direct communication” by the demon, “bypassing corporeal means.”¹³³ As far as O'Daly can tell, the Augustine of *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* gives demons direct, unmediated access to the human mind.

In other words, given the ambiguous nature of demonic bodies, it can be difficult to know how their activity might be restricted. The idea of limitless demonic access to the mind is disconcerting, and O'Daly is wary of it as

¹³² O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind*, 126.

¹³³ O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind*, 127.

Augustine's own interlocutors had been in *Demonic Divination*. On the other hand, TeSelle, speaking of Christ's ransom from the devil as a significant constituent of Augustine's concept of the atonement, notes that, though "the forces of evil" have a power to tempt in the flesh that cannot really be resisted in the body—he calls it an "unrestricted power"—it can be resisted in the spirit.¹³⁴ He points out that Augustine thus falls in line with the ancient world's "extensive 'demythologization' of its belief in demons, for after Posidonius almost every Stoic and Platonist philosopher, almost every pagan and Christian teacher assumed that the demons have no immediate access to the mind, as God has, but act only upon the body and the imagination to arouse fears and desires."¹³⁵ And yet, the text TeSelle cites to confirm his point is none other than Augustine's ninth *Letter*. What, then, should we make of TeSelle's claim, given the modifications we have seen to Augustine's opinions in that text?

In short, Augustine's modifications provide helpful nuance, as well as caution, but do not fundamentally overturn TeSelle's argument. Augustine foregoes the cursory theory of bodily impression from *Letter 9*, but, as we have now seen, their appearance to the human imagination still constitutes a mediation of demonic access. The fundamental restriction of boundless demonic transcendence—the ill-defined fears of unrestrained demonic power constitutive of "superstition"—is its confinement of demonic influence to corporeal and spiritual vision, excluding them from any access to the human intellect, the "higher" powers of the soul responsible for clinging to God himself. In other words, even "direct" access to the mind is indirect. Thus, the essence of this demythologization remains intact, having more to do with the finitization of demonic transcendence per se—the recognition that demons operate within natural limits set by God—than the restriction of demonic influence to the body of a human as opposed to the mind.

"One sees nothing with the eyes except bodies." In his discussion of our inference of the soul's existence, which is also a discussion of our perception and judgement of the virtues possessed by the soul, Augustine makes clear the invisibility of the soul and its virtues to the bodily senses. He then goes on to

¹³⁴ Of course, by this TeSelle means not the imaginative operation we have been discussing, but something more like the rational part, that which opens up to God, the more common Augustinian use of the term.

¹³⁵ TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 169.

declare that “the wonderful thing is that the soul should see within itself what it has not seen anywhere else,”¹³⁶ by which, of course, he means the very same soul and virtues. But his concept of the spiritual vision defines an operation of the soul that *does* concern itself with visible things; if not with bodies themselves as the senses do, then in their images or likenesses. These different operations of the soul correspond to what Gilson calls superior reason and inferior reason: the former is concerned with contemplation, the latter with action; the former with wisdom, the latter with knowledge; the former made to cling to the eternal light that illumines all minds, the latter to attend to the changing reflections of divine wisdom in sensible things.¹³⁷ Indeed, the operations of the soul can be divided many more times than two, but it is enough that there are in the soul two basic jobs that are proper to it: one that attends to God interiorly, within and beyond it, and one that attends to the human exterior, one’s own body and the world beyond it.¹³⁸

This division of operations does not undermine the fundamental unity of the soul, which Augustine clearly maintains.¹³⁹ Thus, Augustine can speak of demons entering the soul, mingling and mixing with it, and maintain the fundamental independence of the intellect, the superior reason, without necessary contradiction. This is, as one would expect, crucial for Augustine to maintain moral freedom, and it is therefore the most basic limit set upon the activity of demons according to which TeSelle’s thesis is confirmed. Augustine’s moral theology is able to incorporate demonic influence by limiting its influence to the inferior rational operations of the soul, keeping the foundation of the will in its

¹³⁶ *Trin.* 8.6.9.

¹³⁷ See Gilson, *Saint Augustine*, 117–19. Cf. Taylor, “Notes,” 2:308n.66.

¹³⁸ See Gilson, *Saint Augustine*, 269n.1, who identifies within the *animus* (soul): *anima* (i.e. soul as principle of life), *spiritus* (with two different meanings), *mens*, *ratio*, *intellegentia*, and *intellectus*. See also TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 92–116, who identifies nine ascending levels of the soul’s awareness in Augustine’s thought: feeling, action, sensory pleasure, intentionality, projects, artistry, rational judgement, virtue, contemplation. Even as far as artistry, he says, “the psychic has not yet ‘come to itself.’ Its attention remains directed toward physical occurrences” (99). Only in rational judgement does the soul begin to open itself to intellectual perception of the norms of things wherein God is first described. It is clear how much of the soul’s operation, for Augustine, is occupied with the negotiation of the sensible world of the body.

¹³⁹ *Gn. litt.* 12.24.51. See Gilson, *Saint Augustine*, 117. One should note that this is an ontological unity, not necessarily a moral unity, which is to be sought in part now, and in full in the resurrection. For now, one very much experiences one’s own soul as “fractured.” Cf. Gilson, *op. cit.*, 119–20.

superior operations—which we saw last chapter consists in the consent to or rejection of God at the depths of the soul—fundamentally free.

This is what Augustine says:

By means of corporeal vision as well as by means of the images of corporeal objects revealed in the spirit, good spirits instruct men and evil spirits deceive them. But there is no deception in intellectual vision; for either a person does not understand, and this is the case of one who judges something to be other than it is, or he does understand, and then his vision is necessarily true.¹⁴⁰

Augustine notes that it is possible to deceive the eyes of the body and spirit into thinking it sees something other than what is there. The bodily senses and spiritual vision are helpless to change what they perceive. It is the responsibility of the intellect to make a judgement about the truth of what is seen, that is, the correspondence of image, thought, or language to reality, and there is no error here unless the intellect jumps to false conclusions about what it perceives in the body and its images.¹⁴¹ Of course, much error of this nature does occur, and frequently so, since we are usually more than willing to settle the question of what we have seen prematurely. Thus the Apostle Peter at one time thinks his prison break is a mere vision, and at another assumes the Lord is commanding him to eat in reality the likenesses of animals set before him.¹⁴²

Such errors in judgement, however, occur “without harm to the soul,” as long as one perceives the norms of evaluative judgement correctly; provided, that is, “no error is made in the true realities, that is to say, in goodness itself by which a person becomes good.”¹⁴³ For the greater responsibility of the intellect is not to judge correspondence between perception and reality, but make an evaluative assessment of what is perceived. Whether what one sees exists in physical reality “out there” or not is less important than whether one thinks what is seen is good

¹⁴⁰ *Gn. litt.* 12.14.29.

¹⁴¹ See TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 100–102. See further *Gn. litt.* 12.25.52–26.54. Paul’s prudent refusal to jump to such conclusions is fundamentally why he is unable to say whether he was taken up to the third heaven in the body or out of it. Exploration of this problem is the stated purpose of Book 12 and its discussion of visions.

¹⁴² *Gn. litt.* 12.14.30, citing Acts 12:7–9 and 10:14 respectively.

¹⁴³ *Gn. litt.* 12.14.30; see also *ench.* 16.60.

and worthy of one's love.¹⁴⁴ But, as Augustine's moral theology requires, the intellect's understanding of the norms or principles according to which such judgements are made are incapable of being deceived: either a person understands them or he does not; either he glimpses the truth, or he does not.¹⁴⁵ Where, then, do demons come in?

Demonic Deception

Incapable of manipulating the intellect, the cornerstone of demonic deception is in the false appearance of goodness. Augustine frequently refers to the Apostle Paul's description of Satan as one who can appear as an angel of the light, and it is central to his understanding of demonic activity.¹⁴⁶

The discernment of these experiences is certainly a most difficult task when the evil spirit acts in a seemingly peaceful manner and, without tormenting the body, possesses a man's spirit and says what he is able, sometimes even speaking the truth and disclosing useful knowledge of the future. In this case he transforms himself, according to Scripture, as if into an angel of light, in order that, once having gained his victim's confidence in matters that are manifestly good, he may then lure his victim into his snares.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Hence, as O'Daly notes, when it comes to deceitful, empty illusions, the difference between reproductive *phantasiae* and creative *phantasmata* breaks down. *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind*, 110n.11.

¹⁴⁵ This corresponds to the asymmetry of privation discussed last chapter. Just as one either consents to or rejects God—for there is no consent to an alternative God—so either one sees the truth by which one can make judgements or one does not see it. And since this very consent to God in openness to the immutable light is itself what is constitutive of the understanding by which one ought to judge, in point of fact understanding in this mortal life is not yea or nay but varying degrees of the failure to understand, just as our love of God remains at varying levels of imperfection.

¹⁴⁶ 2 Cor 11:14. See *Simpl.* 2.3.2; *trin.* 4.10.13; *Gn. litt.* 12.13.28; *ciu.* 2.26; 10.10; 19.9; 21.6; and *passim*; *ench.* 16.60.

¹⁴⁷ *Gn. litt.* 12.13.28, with reference to 2 Cor 11:14.

Demons seduce people to adherence to a lie by associating the lie with evident goodness, the appearance of truth, even factual correctness. It is a bait-and-switch, which is exactly how Augustine describes it.¹⁴⁸

We will delve into this more deeply in the last chapter as we get into Augustine's criticisms of pagan Roman religion in *The City of God*, but some examples here will make this clear. One pattern Augustine identifies is the justification of pernicious public ritual and festival by its leaders because of its association with the supposed revelation of prophecy or even good morals secretly to chosen initiates. The gods appear to demand shameless and infamous rites of the population, which those initiated continue to propagate on the basis of the integrity of teachings reserved for themselves. "Out of doors, therefore, foul impiety clamours unceasingly around the people on every hand, while, inside, a feigned chastity whispers to the few."¹⁴⁹ Similarly, Augustine regards as the invention of a devious man, or the responses of impure demons, an oracle of Hecate cited in Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles* that calls Christ an exceedingly pious man. Such appreciation is demonic to the extent that it presents a seductive appearance of truth in the recognition of Christ's piety—for neither Celsus, nor even Nietzsche, could deny that!—at the very moment it denies his divinity, and thereby undermines the very basis for the worship of the one true God.¹⁵⁰

Perhaps the best example of this diabolical seduction is the primordial temptation itself, that of Adam and Eve in Paradise. We have already spoken at length about this episode last chapter, in which the devil speaks through the serpent to tempt Eve, and through Eve to tempt Adam. Here we will simply note the attention Augustine draws to Paul's distinction between Eve who was deceived and Adam who was not.¹⁵¹ Eve is convinced the devil's promise that they will not die but become as gods is true. Adam, in Augustine's reading, has no illusions about the truth of that promise, but takes the fruit anyway to maintain solidarity with his wife, thinking the transgression of God's law venial given so noble a cause.¹⁵² In spite of this distinction, both are seduced and thus "captured

¹⁴⁸ See *Agon.* 7.8.

¹⁴⁹ See *ciu.* 2.26; cf. 21.6.

¹⁵⁰ *Ciu.* 19.23.

¹⁵¹ 1 Tim 2:14; see *ciu.* 14.11.

¹⁵² See *ciu.* 14.13.

by sin and entangled in the snares of the devil.”¹⁵³ And their seduction is nothing other than the cloak of goodness obfuscating a more fundamental lie: namely, that such goods as divinization and communion in love with one’s spouse are to be gained by shortcutting the commandment of God and the death that follows its transgression.

The appearance of Satan as an angel of the light is also used to describe a slightly different class of seduction. It is one that returns us to the concerns of *Demonic Divination*, namely the belief that signs and wonders are divine by virtue of their marvel. As he makes clear in that place, susceptibility to seduction by demonic wonder falls within the category of curiosity, which was one of the elements of Augustine’s triple concupiscence, and thus a subject of interest particularly in his early career.¹⁵⁴ It is essentially the vice of “seeking what it is wrong to seek, and . . . using fascinating but improper (or even blasphemous) means in the search, itself often undertaken for trivial or self-interested reasons.”¹⁵⁵ Association with this vice helps to link demonic activity to a profoundly expansive group of phenomena, not least of which is theatrical spectacle, whose gore and pornographic sexuality offered much to pique one’s interest.¹⁵⁶ In *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, Augustine explains that John “calls all curiosity the desire of the eyes. How extensive is curiosity? It is in spectacles, in theaters, in the devil’s sacraments [*sacramentis diaboli*], in magic, in evil deeds; that is where curiosity is.”¹⁵⁷ Oracles and other prophecies, auguries and haruspices, including scrying, the use of charms and incantations, the tricks of a conjuror like Albicerius, all are things Augustine discusses, and all represent attempts to access a suspect power to satisfy suspect desires.¹⁵⁸

The miraculous knowledge of future or distant events, the mysterious power over the health or affections of another, or even the ability to identify the

¹⁵³ *Ciu.* 14.11.

¹⁵⁴ *Diuin. daem.* 3.7. Curiosity was a leitmotif for Augustine especially in the 390s. See John Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 140n.123; on triple concupiscence, see p. 102. For triple concupiscence—based upon 1 John 2:16, namely pride, sensual pleasure, and curiosity—as the basic temptations of the devil, see *Gn. adu. Man.* 2.18.27; *uera rel.* 38.69–71; *agon.* 6.6.

¹⁵⁵ Rist, *Augustine*, 144.

¹⁵⁶ See *conf.* 3.2.2–3.3.5; 10.35.56–57.

¹⁵⁷ *Ep. Io. tr.* 2.13, on 1 John 2:16.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. *ciu.* 2.25; 8.16; *doc. Chr.* 2.20.30; *c. Acad.* 1.7.19

location of certain missing items or tell you what you are thinking; these are not really things that deceive by commending themselves as moral goods. After all, Christians were not the only ones to view some of these things as morally suspect.¹⁵⁹ Demons are able to seduce to the evil, like Satan appearing as an angel of the light, by playing upon human desires for knowledge, power, grandeur, sex, and so forth. They cultivate perverse desire by showing you what you want to see. On the one hand, this encourages a human to place his own desires above the will of God, to apostatize in pride. On the other, such demonic phenomena satisfies curious desires with illusory visions whose falsity lies not in the lack of correspondence between vision and physical reality, or prediction and outcome, but precisely because humans will interpret such a show of power as divinity: “being ignorant of the devil’s strength . . . they will believe that such things could only have been achieved by the power of God.”¹⁶⁰ Miraculous demonic seductions can also have you believing demons are gods.

The reference to “diabolical sacraments” merits special attention. The translation of μυστήριον by *sacramentum* might suggest a reference to secret initiation rites of so-called mystery religions.¹⁶¹ Augustine does after all make mention of the initiation rites called τελεταί as an instance of Satan transforming himself into an angel of the light.¹⁶² But his most basic referent for the deceptively angelic appearance of demons is, more broadly, the liturgical rites associated with the Neoplatonists, known by the name theurgy.

What a splendid thing this theurgy is! . . . As to those who perform these sordid purifications by sacrilegious rites and who, as Porphyry records,

¹⁵⁹ Rives cites the fifth century Vergilian commentator, Servius: “although the Romans adopted many rites (*sacra*), they always condemned those of magic (*semper magica damnarunt*).” For this, and an analysis of the history of Rome’s shifting ground of disapproval of “magic,” see J. B. Rives, “Magic in Roman Law: The Reconstruction of a Crime,” in *The Religious History of the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (ed. J. A. North and S. R. F. Price; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 71–108, quote at 71. See also Mary Beard, et al., *Religions of Rome* (2 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1:154–56, who note that the term “magic” was already introduced in the late Republic as a strategy of differentiating licit from illicit religious practice. Of course, what Augustine the Christian bishop counts as magic will vary from what a given pagan authority will.

¹⁶⁰ *Ciu.* 20.19.

¹⁶¹ Boniface Ramsey, notes to *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, by Saint Augustine (WSA 1.14), 49n.30.

¹⁶² *Trin.* 4.10.13.

when purified in spirit seem to see certain visions of miraculous beauty, of angels or gods: if they do indeed see anything of the kind, this is what the apostle means when he speaks of Satan transforming himself into an angel of light. For these phantasms [*phantasmata*] come from him who, longing to ensnare miserable souls by the deceitful rites of the many false gods, and to turn them away from the true worship of the true God by Whom alone they are purified and healed, transforms himself, as was said of Proteus, into every shape.¹⁶³

To what kind of wondrous visions those theurgists attained, who can say? Nor is it at all clear to see how such visions might have been generated. But to the extent these experiences are paranormal yet intelligible, they declare themselves, as far as Augustine is concerned, to be the products of angelic action, by whatever kind of impression upon or mixing of spirits it may be conceived.

The interplay of demonic power and human desire is complex and content specific, and thus will require more substantial analysis in the following chapters. But the pseudo-divine power of demons sought in oracles, magic, theurgy, and other “nefarious arts” is manifest in other ways that are worth mentioning here. It is in this way, for example, that Augustine explains the floods that, by common etiological legend, afflicted the Athenians following their vote to name their city after Minerva (i.e., Athena) rather than Neptune (i.e., Poseidon).¹⁶⁴ Demons fooled the citizens, drawing them into a quarrel between two gods. And when Minerva won the day on the marginal strength of the women’s vote, Neptune was so angered at his loss that he laid waste to Athenian territory with sea-floods, “for it is not difficult for demons to spread waters around in any quantity they wish.”¹⁶⁵ As a result of this the rulers of the city were terrified into avenging the sea-god’s loss by punishing Minerva vicariously in the women who voted for her, depriving them of the rights to vote, to have their children bear their mother’s

¹⁶³ *Ciu.* 10.10, quoting Vergil, *G.* 4.411. Cf. *conf.* 10.42.67. On the link between theurgy and curiosity, see *ciu.* 10.26,28.

¹⁶⁴ Augustine’s source is Varro’s *De gente populi Romani* (see *ciu.* 18.2), a work known principally from *ciu.* 18, where he depends upon it extensively. See O’Daly, *Augustine’s City of God*, 184, 237. For this myth, including mention of the flood, cf. Apollod. 3.14.1. But the naming of Athens as having been constituted in a competition between Minerva and Neptune is also contained in Hdt. 8.55; Ovid *Met.* 6.70.

¹⁶⁵ *Ciu.* 18.9.

name, and to call themselves Athenian women. Of course, such punishments only serve to indict Minerva further, since the goddess did nothing to protect those who cherished her.

To a certain extent, Augustine also speaks out of the other side of his mouth, as it were, since it is precisely “natural” phenomena, among which floods are certainly numbered, that he denies being prodigious. Monstrous births in animals and strange phenomena in the heavens fall within the providential will of God encoded within nature’s laws; they are not caused by demons, nor are they averted with demonic rites.¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, this is not to deny all events that are taken to be portentous. Cattle speaking, infants speaking with words out of the womb, snakes flying, raining earth and chalk and stones: there is always a question of the veracity of the tales that speak of such events,¹⁶⁷ but it is not beyond the power of demons to manifest them.

Pagan history and literature was replete with stories of wonders and miracles: the idols of Aeneas are thought to have moved about; Magna Mater stays immovable in the ship that bears her to Rome, despite all the efforts of men and oxen, until a little woman proves her chastity by bringing her ashore; a Vestal Virgin confirms her own chastity when she fills a sieve with water from the Tiber and it does not run out through the holes. Augustine describes these as empty illusions not to deny but to confirm the demons’ possession of a power by which they can play on the imagination of humans and deceive their senses.¹⁶⁸ Their emptiness concerns not a lack of facticity but the false postulation of mere power to amaze as true divinity.

Likewise, many founding narratives of the Greeks and Romans contain the miraculous transformation of humans into animals, and vice-versa. Diomedes’ divinization was accompanied by the transformation of his companions into birds, who even in Augustine’s day were said to attend to the temple of their king on the island of Diomedea with marvellous devotion, and even claimed to show to visiting Greeks an affection that they refuse to bestow on people of any other nation; Circe likewise transformed the companions of Ulysses into pigs; a variety of men are transformed into wolves.¹⁶⁹ Augustine also cites Apuleius’

¹⁶⁶ *Ciu.* 10.16.

¹⁶⁷ *Ciu.* 3.31.

¹⁶⁸ *Ciu.* 10.16.

¹⁶⁹ See *ciu.* 18.16–17.

Metamorphoses for its account of the power of a sorceress to transmogrify the protagonist into an ass while his mind retained its human rationality. It is perhaps an embarrassingly literal reading of Apuleius' satire, but Augustine had heard similar stories from people in Italy when he lived there, who spoke of female innkeepers administering drugs on pieces of cheese that had the effect of mutating their victims into beasts of burden.¹⁷⁰

For his part, Augustine tends to think the stories are untrue, and categorically rejects the notion that demons might have the power to change human body, much less the soul, into the members and lineaments of beasts. But he nevertheless acknowledges the demonic power by which such wonders would happen if they were true. It is by manipulation not of bodily substances but appearances. The manipulation to the senses occurs both in the man ostensibly transformed and those who would perceive the man-cum-beast, while the real body of man lies elsewhere concealed, his senses suppressed beyond that of normal sleep. And even if such a phantasmagoria included the beast's bearing of real burdens, it must be the demons somehow bearing the weight of the genuine object in a bid to complete the illusion, while the presence of the real burden is juxtaposed with the image of the false body of the animal.

Despite his instinctive incredulity, Augustine goes on to relate the story a man named Praestantius, whose trustworthiness he refuses to question, used to tell about his father. The man ate, once again, a piece of cheese with a certain potion on it, after which he lay in bed for days as though asleep, it being impossible to rouse him. In this sleep he dreamed he turned into a horse carrying grain to soldiers, and when he finally did awake "it was found that this had indeed happened just as he told it." Tantalizingly, Augustine does not clarify how it could have been discovered that a particular horse was in fact a man immovable in bed, or in whatever other sense it "had indeed happened."¹⁷¹

The human spirit, *a fortiori* the bodily eyes and all the physical things beyond them in creation remain subject to the workings of external forces. But none of these visions and events, whatever their wonder, can assail the operation of the soul that lies beyond its attention to bodies and their images, at least not without the consent of the mind. Whatever the portentous prodigy, however it

¹⁷⁰ *Ciu.* 18.18.

¹⁷¹ *Ciu.* 18.18.

may be seen or heard, it remains subject in principle to the judgement of the intellect and the desire of the will. Thus, there is a strong theme within Augustine's demonology, particularly in *The City of God*, that those who fall prey to the devil deserve to be deceived.¹⁷²

This goes right back to Satan's temptation of Adam. For "the devil would not have been able to lure man into the manifest and open sin of doing what God had prohibited had not man already begun to be pleased with himself."¹⁷³ Likewise, in his polished image of two men beholding the beautiful body of a woman, one of whom succumbs to temptation, the other remaining chaste, the consent of the one who falters cannot be attributed to an evil spirit, for the evil spirit can do no more than prompt the temptation to which he, of his own will, consented.¹⁷⁴ This limitation of demonic influence to the consent of its victim is thus well established in accordance with Augustine's doctrine of the will.¹⁷⁵ For the rejection of God here manifests positively as consent to a lesser love of an object of desire that the demon presents to a human spirit, to which it thereby subjects him. Thus, "when the Devil deceives us with corporeal visions, no harm is done by the fact that he has played tricks with our eyes, so long as we do not deviate from the true faith or lose the integrity of intelligence, by which God instructs those who are obedient to Him."¹⁷⁶

Demonic Affliction

The extensive discussion of demons in book 12 of *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* has for the most part directed our analysis to their appearance in images.

¹⁷² See *ciu.* 9.20; 19.9; 20.19; 21.8; see also *doc. Chr.* 2.23.35; *trin.* 3.7.12; cf. the merited affliction of King Saul by an evil spirit, *Simpl.* 2.1.3,6. This is consistent with the concept belonging to the doctrine of the atonement according to which humanity is justly handed over to the possession of the devil. E.g. *trin.* 4.13.17; 13.12.16. See also, TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 167–68.

¹⁷³ *Ciu.* 14.13.

¹⁷⁴ *Ciu.* 12.6.

¹⁷⁵ For further reference, it appears in early texts, like *Gn. adu. Man.* 2.14.20; as well as late texts, *ciu.* 14.13–15; cf. 22.22–23. The exemplary resistance is shown by Christ in the desert, into whom the devil could not force his way. *Trin.* 4.13.17.

¹⁷⁶ *Gn. litt.* 12.14.30. The reverse is also true. Augustine discusses how, in the midst of his pursuit of David, Saul receives a genuine spirit of prophecy. There is nothing to suggest holy gifts are withheld from those who will in the end reject them and remain incorrigible. See *Simpl.* 2.1.7–11.

But the focus of that work should not lead us to assert that Augustine restricts demonic phenomena to image production, whether bodily or spiritual. As with Satan abusing the serpent in the garden of Eden, playing it like an instrument to bend it to its will, he allows for this kind of more stereotypical possession event, and it is probably what he has in mind when he speaks of the mysterious union in spirit of tormentor and victim, which we saw earlier. “And what shall I say of those who suffer the attacks of demons? Where does their own intelligence lie hidden and buried while the malignant spirit makes use of their soul and body according to his own will?”¹⁷⁷ Of course, the division between intelligence from soul in this case restricts the latter to its role as animator of the body, the source of the body’s movement.

The stories above are exemplary of Augustine’s claim that demons can act in an apparently peaceful manner, in the sense that they do not torment their victims, making their presence difficult to discern. Of course, floods and fire raining from the sky can cause real harm, but most of what astonishes amounts to little more than harmless oddities. Even in the transformation of humans into animals Augustine supposes the real people are stowed away in some kind of stasis until the restoration of their human form; though he does assume demons destroyed the companions of Diomedes, since their human forms were never seen again after their supposed transformation into birds.

In cases of possession, however, demonic harm is evident. We saw this kind of possession in the febrile man who knew of the approach of the coming priest. Augustine also relates a story told by Cyprian of Carthage of a baptized infant who was left with a nurse when its parents had to flee. The nurse had involved the infant in some kind of pagan worship, “the sacrilegious worship of demons,” and when the child was later taken to church, it spit the Eucharist out “with unusual gestures.” There is certainly, for Augustine, a moral lesson to be had here, but it is not about the impurity of the infant who, being of the age in which reason is “still asleep,” cannot be held morally accountable. Somehow resisting any comment upon the seemingly inescapable suggestion of demonic contagion (though it is not excluded), he notes only that the infant’s behaviour was a sign God used to admonish those who took care of the child for taking the

¹⁷⁷ *Ciu.* 19.4, trans. modified.

sacrament lightly, when they should have abstained from communion in penance for “such a great offence.”¹⁷⁸

Following the story of the possessed man and the priest is one of a pubescent boy who, every few days, suffered such fits of physical pain in his genitals that he would toss about and shout violently, in the midst of which he would suddenly lie motionless with his eyes open, completely unresponsive to all stimuli. The doctors had little insight into his suffering, but in his ecstasies the boy would have visions, which he would later relate, in which an old man and a boy would typically serve as guides. At the beginning of Lent, in just such a vision they advised him that he would remain painless for forty days, prescribing that he have his unusually long foreskin removed. He followed the advice and remained without any such episode for all of Lent. But on Easter Sunday he had another fit and vision, in which he was shown a choir of the faithful singing hymns, and a company of the wicked suffering various torments, as the old man and young boy described what each had done to merit their lot. They then advised him to wade into the sea up to his thighs and come out after a time, after which, they assured him, he would feel no more pain. This happened as the vision had said, and he recovered under the doctor’s care, but, Augustine adds, “he did not remain steadfast in his pursuit of sanctity.”¹⁷⁹

The detail in this story both makes it fascinating, and renders it deeply ambiguous. It is given as an example in the discussion of the difficulty of explaining how evil spirits make thoughts arise in people.¹⁸⁰ But is it clear that the boy’s visions are demonic productions? It is intelligible to interpret the delirious man’s awareness of the visiting priest as a demonic anxiety about his visit; it is also intelligible to ascribe the infant’s rejection of the Eucharist to the possessing demon’s antipathy to the God it mysteriously makes manifest. But the boy’s visions, at least the ones we are privy to, are of a morally cautionary and prescriptive nature, and lead ultimately to his healing. Are we to think of the

¹⁷⁸ There is a little ambiguity here, since he never explicitly attributes the actions of the infant to a demonic possession, calling it rather a *diuinitus factum*, a divine or divinely influenced act. But this would by no means exclude the work of a demon, since Augustine makes it clear elsewhere that God uses even evil spirits to accomplish his hidden judgement. This reading is more in line with both the sheer suggestiveness of the account to that end, and his statement in *Simpl.* 2.1.6, that a good spirit of God has a good effect and an evil spirit an evil effect.

¹⁷⁹ *Gn. litt.* 12.17.37–38.

¹⁸⁰ I.e., *Gn. litt.* 12.17.34.

bodily affliction as demonic, but the visions as angelic? What are we to make of this juxtaposition? Furthermore, if that is the case—perhaps an indication of the angels’ ongoing subordination of demons—it is interesting that it does not end in the boy’s faithful pursuit of “sanctity,” whatever Augustine means by this precisely. The prescriptions for his cure are laden with significance: he is literally circumcised, and water is a heavy-laden signifier: baptism and the Holy Spirit are not least of its common referents. But such significance comes to naught in his neglect of sanctity, making it difficult to know what to make of this strange story.

As with this episode, stories of demonic affliction are often accompanied by the account of their miraculous healing or exorcism. A similar possession is intimated in Augustine’s story of a young woman he knew in Hippo who was cured (*fuisse sanātam*) of a demon when she anointed herself with unction that was mixed with the tears a presbyter had shed while praying for her.¹⁸¹ Augustine also reports the discovery of the relics of the martyrs Gervasius and Protasius and their translation to Ambrose’s basilica in Milan: “some people vexed by impure spirits were healed, the very demons themselves making public confession.”¹⁸²

A most fascinating story also involves these martyrs, though it takes place not in Milan but at a shrine to them at a villa near Hippo called Victoriana. A young man was carried to that shrine, having been attacked by a demon while watering his horse at noon one summer’s day. He lay there close to death or resembling one dead as the lady of the villa came out to the shrine with her maidservants and a group of nuns (*sanctimoniales*) for evening hymns and prayers. As they began to sing the possessed man leapt up shrieking and seized the altar, clinging to it as if bound. Thereupon the demon, begging to be spared, confessed with loud wails where, when, and how he had invaded the man, though sadly Augustine was not considerate enough to furnish us with those details, if he had them. It announced it would depart, but named certain parts of the young man’s body and threatened to damage them as it left. Perhaps the demon mention the man’s eye—Augustine does not say—for at that moment the demon departed, and one of the man’s eyes fell out, hanging down to his jaw, suspended by a vein, and its pupil was now white where it had just been black. Those gathered, which by now was a crowd, had been praying prostrated for the young man, and now

¹⁸¹ *Ciu.* 22.8. One wonders how she would ever have come to be in possession of such tears.

¹⁸² *Conf.* 9.7.16; see also *cura mort.* 21

they rejoiced that the demon had gone, though there was still the matter of the eye! Many suggested he seek medical advice, but the man who brought him to the shrine, his sister's husband, insisted that God could restore the eye just as God had disposed of the demon. The man counselled his brother-in-law to stuff his eye back into place, bind it with a cloth, and not uncover it for seven days. The young man did all of this and found his eye to be completely healed.¹⁸³

As in Milan, the exorcism of demons can involve the use of relics as instruments of healing. A tribune in Hippo, named Hesperius, had once asked Augustine's presbyters, while Augustine himself was away, to come to his estate in Fussala, forty miles south of Hippo in the direction of Thagaste, where he had found his family, servants, and cattle suffering from affliction by evil spirits. One presbyter went and prayed, and the affliction ceased. Hesperius had also kept in his bedchamber a quantity of "holy earth" from the place where Christ had been buried, which a friend had brought back to him from Jerusalem. Augustine does not make any explicit connection between the earth and the exorcism, but it seems Hesperius did, since he was afterwards unwilling to keep it there out of reverence for it. At his request, Augustine and another bishop helped translate the earth, burying it in a spot that was then established as a place of prayer, where a paralytic was later taken to be healed.¹⁸⁴

The kind of possession phenomenon we see here tends to fascinate most easily because it is the most dramatic: strange voices, bizarre behaviour, superhuman abilities. But its moral significance is limited precisely because of the ambiguous relation to the human intelligence lying hidden and buried. Hence, when Augustine speaks theoretically of this kind of phenomenon, he focuses not upon the desert of the victim, but rather draws attention to the fact that this kind of demonic incursion can happen to anybody, no matter how virtuous. There are moral points to be drawn, but they tend to be once removed. Somatic possession is less a moral problem, per se, than a moral lesson. Like any kind of illness, affliction, or otherwise unfortunate event, how one responds is of the essence; where one looks for help, and to what one holds as determinative of life's significance is what is of crucial importance. The pervasiveness of afflictions of all kinds, and our inability to secure ourselves from them in this life, show us that

¹⁸³ *Ciu.* 22.8.

¹⁸⁴ *Ciu.* 22.8.

the perfection of our happiness is not to be found in this life, and therefore is to be sought in the eternal God. “Can anyone trust in his own innocence as a defence against the incursions of various demons? Let no one do so, indeed; for even baptised infants, who are certainly nothing if not innocent, are sometimes so vexed by demons that God, by permitting this teaches us thereby to bewail the calamities of this life, and to desire the happiness of the life to come.”¹⁸⁵

Being a Christian is no protection, for demons desire to afflict their victims thus, “even if they cannot manage to seduce them to their side.”¹⁸⁶ Hence, Augustine relates the story of a doctor that suffered from gout, who, the day before his baptism, had a dream vision of black, woolly-haired boys, whom he understood to be demons, who forbade him to be baptized. When he resisted they stamped on his feet, causing him severe pain. The experience made him all the more determined to go through with his baptism, whereupon he was relieved not only of the pain in his feet, but the gout as well.¹⁸⁷ These stories may testify to the power of the resurrection working miraculously even now,¹⁸⁸ but they also warn people of their ongoing vulnerability to pain and delusion before attaining to that final happiness. Augustine recites a litany of evil desires that reads like a register of human susceptibility to demonic deception and attack, which I paraphrase here: we must by the grace of God withhold our consent as far as possible: lest a semblance of truth mislead us; lest cunning speech deceive us; lest we believe good to be evil or evil good; lest desire precipitate us into doing what we should not; lest evil rumours wear out our good conscience; lest the eye follow lust; lest sight or thought linger over some evil thing which delights us. What desire among these can demons not affect with their abilities as Augustine has described them? Vigilance against these incursions must be unceasing, whatever success one has already enjoyed, “lest we either hope to win victory by our own strength, or attribute it when won to our own strength, and not to the grace of Him of Whom the apostle says, ‘Thanks be unto God, Who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.’”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ *Ciu.* 22.22. This is a central theme throughout *The City of God*, especially book 19, of which a kind of précis is given in 22.22.

¹⁸⁶ *Ciu.* 22.22.

¹⁸⁷ *Ciu.* 22.8.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. 22.8–9.

¹⁸⁹ *Ciu.* 22.23; cf. *ench.* 16.60

Demonic Limitations

Having moved beyond Augustine's theoretical discussion to the examples we have just seen, we find a wide variety of demonic phenomena. But even in the most violently possessive accounts, demonic activity remains below the human intellect. A passage in Job, from God's speech out of the whirlwind, identifies this limitation of the devil, whom the behemoth was widely held to signify: "this is the beginning of the Lord's handiwork, which He made to be a sport [*illudo*] to His angels."¹⁹⁰ The primary referent of *illudo* here, to mock or ridicule, is the constancy of the saints. When they resist the devil, God brings good out of temptation that makes a mockery of it. God made the devil foreknowing both his fall, and what God would have the power to do to bring good out of such a great evil. There is no evil so great that God cannot bring its darkness into the aesthetic whole of creation, enhancing the beauty of this world as a poet uses antitheses.¹⁹¹

The most basic significance of the limitation of demonic activity is thus moral: its phenomena always remain to be responded to, since no corruption of a soul's nature is possible except by will. The present examples have borne this out. The boy with the stinging genitals is presented with a choice of company: he follows it to the healing of his body, though apparently not to that of his soul. Likewise, the man about to be baptized is confronted with terror and pain, which he willingly resists in order to follow the path he had chosen. And those whose wills seem to be buried still exemplify this precisely because their wills are buried. Hence, the man with the drooping eye is so purely a victim that he is scarcely a moral actor in the story, with no more of an agential contribution than the vomiting infant, whose rational soul was "still asleep." The most important factor in both events was the faith, or lack thereof, of those in relation to the demoniacs.

Thus, in spite of Augustine's acceptance of a more "direct" access to the human mind, demonic action is still restricted to the movement of bodies and their

¹⁹⁰ Job 40:19. *Ciu.* 11.15,17; cf. 11.33; see also *Gn. litt.* 11.22.29; *retr.* 1.15.7. In *ciu.* 11.15 and *retr.* 1.15.7, Job 40:19 is correlated with Ps 103:26: "There is that dragon which Thou hast made to be a sport therein."

¹⁹¹ *Ciu.* 11.17–18; *Gn. litt.* 11.22.29. N.b. the difference between this and the "aesthetic argument" of evil, in which what we call evil is only so from the limited point of view of humans, but not to God who can see all things in their proper perspective. See Rowan Williams, "Insubstantial Evil," in *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner* (ed. Robert Dodaro and George Lawless; London: Routledge, 2000), 105–123, at 106–10.

images in the human soul. It is this, rather than the aerial nature of their bodies per se, that makes demonic activity a fundamentally mechanical, bodily skill. One may wonder at the fact that the Pharaoh's magicians were able to reproduce some of the miracles God wrought through Moses and Aaron—they turn their staves into serpents, turn water into blood, and add to the plague of frogs upon Egypt.¹⁹² But these material things do not serve demons against the will of their creator; much less do demons create these things. Rather God has established in all things a marvellous fecundity, seeds that can be cultivated in mysterious ways, to ends whose limitations are also unknown except to the angels. Demons, as per their angelic nature, are not creators but farmers, working created things according to their built-in potentialities for a set of ends demons are able to define by virtue of being rational. But this has at least as much to do with demons retaining the intelligence (not to say wisdom) of their created angelic nature as it does with bodily aptitudes. "Why should it be a cause of wonder that the wicked angels, in proportion to the subtlety of their perception, have a better understanding of the more hidden seeds in the elements, whence frogs and serpents are born, and by applying secret movements upon these seeds, under certain and known favourable conditions, cause them to be created but do not create them?"¹⁹³

Like humans, angels work within the established limits and laws of all creation as set by God, even if what is possible for angels within these limits exceeds what is possible for, or even definable by, humans. The scientific theory of seeds Augustine uses to explain this may have long fallen out of date, but it was just that, a theory that tried to account for diverse phenomena like reproduction and apparently spontaneous generation without reference to mystery, chance, or creation out of nothing.¹⁹⁴ "The world itself is pregnant with the causes of unborn beings."¹⁹⁵ Wondrous potentiality for formation and transformation lies latent within all creation, there to be exploited by those acquainted with their properties. This paradigm should hardly sound strange to the ears of modern scientific rationality.

¹⁹² Ex 7–8. The confrontation between Moses and the Pharaoh's magicians is a favourite reference of Augustine's. See *diu. qu.* 79; *trin.* 3.7.12; *ciu.* 10.8; 22.10; *en. Ps.* 77.29. For what follows, see *trin.* 3.7.12–3.9.18.

¹⁹³ *Trin.* 3.9.17.

¹⁹⁴ See TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 215–19.

¹⁹⁵ *Trin.* 3.9.16.

Speaking more generally, it belongs to all of finite creation to be material, and thus mutable.¹⁹⁶ God retains ultimate rule through laws that govern the ways all things may be changed, but it remains constitutive of that order that all things are susceptible to influence or impression according to their kind, by virtue of their finitude.¹⁹⁷ This is the common logic underlying the total range of miraculous phenomena, from the transformation of a staff into a snake, to prophetic dreams and visions. There is potential within the soul for visions—whether demons use the memory and its *phantasiae* to generate content, or some other means—just as there is potential in bodily substances for transformation, and they are both manipulable with the right techniques.

Augustine is clear that the process is the same whether for angel or demon. But where angels proceed according to God's command, demons fall rather within God's permission.¹⁹⁸ While the natures used by the demons remain obedient to God's will, the injustice of their misuse is attributable narrowly to the wicked will of the angel (and those who fall in agreement with it); but even this injustice is permitted, according to God's will to test the patience of the good, warning them lest they desire the performance of such miracles as though they were good in themselves; and to deceive the deceitful, so that wonders might be performed nevertheless for those who delight in them rather than in the truth, in order that their love may be made known. The Apostle thus even speaks of God sending to the unrighteous a strong delusion in the end times, that they might believe a lie. Permitting the deception of demons is a central constituent of God's judgement: "Thus, being judged, they will be deceived, and, being deceived, they will be judged."¹⁹⁹

Demons, like all things, must abide by God's permission, and they are accordingly unable to get outside God's divine laws that define the causal order of all creation. And this fundamental ontological constraint upon demonic activity is

¹⁹⁶ Cf. TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 136–40.

¹⁹⁷ Hence, Augustine makes the point that miracles are not contrary to nature, despite the fact that people regularly speak of them as being so. It is not human custom and experience but God's will alone that determines nature. A miracle is thus not "supernatural" simply because people find it astonishing. See *ciu.* 21.8.

¹⁹⁸ *Trin.* 3.7.12; cf. *Simpl.* 2.1.4; 2.6; *ciu.* 18.18; 20.19.

¹⁹⁹ *Ciu.* 20.19, with reference to 2 Thess 2:11.

definitive for its moral usefulness for the just.²⁰⁰ The same divine providence that places limits on causality has included among the limitations that the wicked cannot corrupt the soul of another unwillingly. Hence, God permits demons to operate within the created order of cause and effect, just like every other creature, and there is nothing they can do to prevent being ridiculed by the discipline of the saints. Because no demonic lie can turn the eternal, immutable truth itself into a falsehood, truth is always there to offer itself as the basis for rejecting the work of demons, no matter how wondrous, should the rational mind avail itself of this help. To put it another way, the wicked wills and evil actions of demons do not change the fact that all things signify God who created them. Because evil is privative, it simply means that they signify God negatively. This is why Augustine states that even if God did not deign to produce any miracles, and demons were the only angels to perform miracles, this would still not undermine the authority of God. For even without commending himself to the bodily senses, God would nevertheless commend himself to human reason, simply by virtue of being true.²⁰¹

The containment of the demonic by the truth manifest in God's created order—the inability of the darkness to overcome the light—brings us back to the source of demonic woes, namely their will-forming rejection of the very truth that contains them, the light in which they would have found the perfection of true enlightenment. Augustine recalls a traditional etymology of the word “demon” that claims “knowledge” as its original meaning. It is a non-philosophical knowledge, a knowledge that “puffs up,” lacking the charity that “builds up,” the love of God.²⁰² It is a truly scientific knowledge, a knowledge of sensible things and their material causes, which does not seek any reconciliation with wisdom since that would mean subordination to it and the object of its delight, which it

²⁰⁰ *Simpl.* 2.6; cf. *agon.* 7.8–8.9; *trin.* 4.13.18: “For the devil does not know how the most sublime wisdom of God makes use of him, both when he is laying snares and is enraged, to bring about the salvation of His own faithful ones. For, it reaches mightily from the upper end, which is the beginning of the spiritual creature, to the lower end, which is the death of the flesh, and orders all things sweetly. For Wisdom reaches everywhere by her purity and nothing defiled comes into her.”

²⁰¹ *Ciu.* 10.16.

²⁰² *Ciu.* 9.20, citing 1 Cor 8:1. Regarding the etymology of “demon,” cf. Pl. *Cra.* 398b: “Because they were wise and knowing [δαήμονες] he [Hesiod] called them spirits [δαίμονες] and in the old form of our language the two words are the same.”

has already rejected.²⁰³ As wondrous as demonic knowledge obviously is, it thereby fails to be as great as it could have been, for it is precisely their prioritization of love for God that makes angelic knowledge unsurpassed in all creation:

By the good angels, therefore, all that knowledge of corporeal and temporal things which puffs up the demons is deemed base. It is not that they are ignorant of such things, but that they love the love of God by which they are sanctified. They burn with such a holy love for the beauty of that love, which is not only incorporeal, but also immutable and ineffable, that they hold all things which are beneath it, and all that is not it, in contempt. They do this so that they may, with all the good that is in them, enjoy that good by which they are made good. Therefore, they know even those temporal and mutable things with greater certainty, because they can perceive the primary causes of such things in the Word of God, by whom the world was made: the causes by which some things are approved, others condemned, and all things ordained.²⁰⁴

Near the beginning of this chapter we noted that Augustine draws attention to three powers demons possess to prophesy accurately: speed, keen perception, and experience. The first two are bodily in more obvious ways, but now we can see the extent to which the third is as well, and why it is therefore as much of a limitation of demonic power as it is a great gift surpassing the abilities of humans. It is true that bodily immortality makes their profound experience possible. But all demonic knowledge is of this sort, derived from the reading of external signs. As much of an asset as it is, experiential knowledge is the best they have. When they are not simply forecasting what they themselves are going to do, demons are able to conjecture and make predictions based on a set of data perceivable to them, which experience has taught them to read with some accuracy. This is, Augustine says, very much like what humans do in many professions: physicians make diagnoses and prognoses, sailors and farmers forecast the weather.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ See Gilson, *Saint Augustine*, 115–26.

²⁰⁴ *Ciu.* 9.22.

²⁰⁵ *Diuin. daem.* 4.7.

Included within the set of available data may be bodily things the demon sees with perception that is all the greater for its lack of eyes. It can see the thoughts of men in some mysteriously spiritual way. Augustine counts among the data even the possibility that demons overhear the true prophetic annunciations of angels, and know of their record in the Scriptures. Their reliance on an external set of data removes demonic works by far from those of the angels, who, ever beholding the Father, consult the immutable truth for all that needs to be done and said for the wellbeing of those in their charge.²⁰⁶

For it is one thing to infer temporal and mutable events from temporal and mutable causes, and to insert into such things the temporal and mutable influence of one's own will and power: this is to a certain extent permitted to the demons. But it is another thing to foresee how the times will change according to the eternal and immutable laws of God, which are sustained by His wisdom, and to know the will of God, which is the most certain and potent of all causes, by participating in His spirit. This gift has been granted to the holy angels by a righteous discernment.²⁰⁷

It is only by reading the signs that the demons are able to recognize Christ, who made himself known to those capable of perception through various miraculous temporal effects. And they know just enough about Christ to be terrified by him in his presence. "What have we to do with Thee, Jesus of Nazareth? Art Thou come to destroy us before the time?"²⁰⁸ They did not love him in his righteousness, and so feared him because he would judge them in their tyranny. "For even the demons believe, and they tremble."²⁰⁹ Like Peter, the demons confess Jesus is the Messiah. Yet it is not flesh and blood that reveals this to Peter, as it does to demons, but God the Father himself. And the constitutive difference is love: "It is one thing, then, to confess Christ so that you may hold onto Christ; it is something else to confess Christ so that you may push Christ away from yourself."²¹⁰ But without this love the demons do not truly know

²⁰⁶ See *Simpl.* 2.6; *diuin. daem.* 4.7; 5.9–7.11; *trin.* 4.17.22–23; *ciu.* 9.22; on demons hearing what God commands or permits, see *Simpl.* 2.3.3.

²⁰⁷ *Ciu.* 9.22.

²⁰⁸ Matt 8:29 (cf. Mark 5:7; Luke 8:28), *apud ciu.* 9.21; see also *ciu.* 8.23.

²⁰⁹ James 2:19, *apud ep. Io. tr.* 10.1.

²¹⁰ *Ep. Io. tr.* 10.1; see Matt 16:17.

Christ as eternal life, the incarnate Word. Thus, Augustine says, when he ceased his wonders for a time to fast, the devil tempted him in the wilderness to discover again whether he was the Christ.²¹¹

The demons know Christ, and they know the prophecies about him and their coming destruction, though they are loath to speak about it. Augustine wonders if they did not believe it was going to take place, to their further condemnation given the reputable sources from which they heard it; perhaps they knew very well it was coming, but concealed it from their own haruspices willingly lest they lose followers to true prophecies.²¹² Either way, they do eventually find ways of using this fool's knowledge to their advantage, since the act of prophecy itself convinces so many of their divinity. Hence, demonic knowledge of Christ was used to lead people astray by misrepresenting Christ in an oracle of Hecate as an exceedingly pious man, but not the deity incarnate the oracular demon could not know.²¹³ In this way even foretelling the destruction of the Serapeum leads some to marvel at the apparent divinity of very god whose worship is being overthrown.²¹⁴

To the vigilant, however, these prophecies only confirm the wickedness of demons, who thereby reveal their desperation. It is no wonder that they rush to predict their imminent destruction lest they appear to have been ignorant of it and reveal that they were outmanoeuvred. Nor is it surprising that they should be permitted since it represents for the oracles an about-face, and the attempt to demonstrate the power of demons through prediction only ends up confirming that all past oracles have but pretended to divinity.²¹⁵ In the end, lacking a mind clinging to God, demons are incapable of prophesying anything of lasting value. Restricted to spatio-temporal data, they cannot predict anything greater than the comings and goings of historical affairs. Denying the divinity of Christ, providing their worshippers with no substantive moral instruction, delighting in having crimes and lies attributed to them, Augustine will condemn demons for not

²¹¹ *Ciu.* 9.21.

²¹² *Diuin. daem.* 7.11.

²¹³ *Ciu.* 19.23.

²¹⁴ *Diuin. daem.* 6.11.

²¹⁵ *Diuin. daem.* 7.11.

communicating anything of worth; their prophecies may be accurate, but without beholding God they are never properly true.²¹⁶

Even then, however, much in demonic prophecy goes astray. Although they see much more than humans, their prophecies err through false inferences of the data where those of the angels, who look into the one who sees all time simultaneously, do not. Of course, demons err for other reasons than misreading the signs. Sometimes they deliberately mix in lies in order to deceive. In these matters, the demons are always careful to protect themselves: miscues are always the fault of the oracle or the interpreter, never the lies of the god speaking. Augustine also intimates without speculative elaboration the existence of some kind of hierarchy of demons, wherein a demon of lower rank could publicize a plan of its own invention that ultimately gets overruled by a superior with knowledge of a greater plan. Sometimes, indeed, the demon reads the signs correctly or establishes a plan, but what is foretold is foiled by the greater power of angels.²¹⁷

The volitional difference between angels and demons makes a manifest difference in their power to make miracles. An absence of angelic miracles may not in the slightest deprive God of the authority God has simply by virtue of being God, but Augustine is clear that they are not in fact lacking, and furthermore that angelic miracles are “of a greater, more certain and more celebrated kind.”²¹⁸ “For if unclean demons can do such things, how much mightier are the holy angels.”²¹⁹ This is one of the reasons Augustine enjoys Moses’ encounter with the Pharaoh’s magicians so much. Like stories of exorcism, it indicates over and over the subjection of demonic miracles to the power of miracles God works through Christ and the host of angels and martyrs. Not only does the snake of Aaron devour the magicians’ serpents, the demons are only capable of keeping up with the first two of the following ten plagues before they give up and confess the spirit of God at work.²²⁰ The limits placed on the miracles of demons permit just

²¹⁶ Cf. *c. Acad.* 1.7.19.

²¹⁷ See *diuin. daem.* 6.10.

²¹⁸ *Ciu.* 10.16.

²¹⁹ *Ciu.* 21.6.

²²⁰ Ex 8:15; *trin.* 3.7.12.

enough a manifestation of power to be mocked by the miracles of God, whose angels far exceed demons in ability.²²¹

The Meaning and Purpose of Demonic Wonders

According to Augustine, some had claimed that the devil and his angels are good according to their own proper order, citing their mockery by the angels in Job as confirmation. In this interpretation, demonic temptations are obedient to the commands of God, and they are only evil “for us” when we give in to them.²²² There are good grounds in Augustine’s thought to understand the reception of God as an affliction to the wicked and unwilling, that all punishment is self-punishment.²²³ But Augustine denies demons the perfection of their participation in God that would allow them to communicate such caustic goodness. Having become evil by their own will, demons are not good things that the villainous find repugnant only because of their own corruption, as a sick palate is disgusted by bread or diseased eyes hate the light.²²⁴ He takes the example of King Saul, who both prophesied by the Holy Spirit and was afflicted by an evil spirit. Scripture itself makes it quite clear that the spirit was not evil for Saul simply because he could not bear its holiness, despite the fact that it is described as being “from the Lord.” For it says explicitly that the evil spirit arrived upon the departure of the spirit of God, and seized him, departing only when David played the cithara for him. It is thus “safer and truer” to say that a good spirit has a good effect, whereas an evil spirit has an evil effect.²²⁵

Augustine thus wants to point in some way to an evident phenomenological difference between the work of angels and demons. So, for example, he says of spiritual visions that suppress the soul’s attention on the body that, “when an evil spirit transports men thus, he either possesses them or makes them frenzied or false prophets. When, on the contrary, a good spirit transports

²²¹ See *ciu.* 10.8.

²²² *Retr.* 1.15.7; cf. *Simpl.* 2.1.6.

²²³ See, e.g. *ciu.* 12.3–4; 21.26. See also John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine* (Canterbury, 1938; repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 206–16; and John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 417–22. Both authors find Augustine expounds this doctrine and betrays it.

²²⁴ *Conf.* 7.16.22.

²²⁵ *Simpl.* 2.1.6. For the affliction of Saul, see 1 Sam 16:14–23.

them, he inspires them to give a reliable account of mysteries; or if understanding is also imparted, he either makes them true prophets or for the moment aids them in seeing and narrating the vision that must be revealed through them.”²²⁶ But the judgement of such phenomena can hardly have the character of absolute clarity of distinction in experience that it has in principle. Demons deceive, and Satan appears as an angel of light. It is understandable theologically that Augustine would assert the supremacy of the angelic rank, demarcating them from demons, but it remains an abstract assertion. Even if his claim that angelic miracles are more powerful is taken to be demonstrable, it is still a claim that concerns a large data set that will not necessarily apply in a smaller sample size. The parting of the Red Sea may be a “greater” miracle than the oracular suggestion that Christ is nothing more than a good and pious man, but the quotidian nature of the oracle itself does nothing to announce its diabolical origins. Any given wonder, angelic or demonic, may be greater or lesser than any other given wonder, angelic or demonic; they do, after all, function within the same causal order. Even if their wisdom does allow angels a greater insight into this order, it merely represents a greater ceiling on their ability over all, rather than a suggestion that good miracles will triumphantly manifest wherever there is a demonic wonder.

Of course, Augustine is well aware of this, as his reflection on the demonic appearance as angels of the light makes clear. He acknowledges that in the short term, a deception may be peaceful enough that it requires someone with the gift of discerning the spirits to suss out its demonic origins. “But when the evil spirit has achieved his purpose and led someone on to what is contrary to good morals or the rule of faith, it is no great achievement to discern his presence—for in that case there are many who discern him.”²²⁷ The very truth that would allow us to reject demonic miracles even if there were no angelic ones to match them is what allows people to adjudicate between the wonders of angels and demons, and what allows us to reject demonic prophecy as false even when it is true. This is why the primary meaning of the mockery of the devil is not the strength of the angels but the constancy of the saints. As long as the intellect judges what it perceives according to the true principles of goodness, it will be capable of following angelic miracles, abandoning them should they begin to lead down a

²²⁶ *Gn. litt.* 12.19.41.

²²⁷ *Gn. litt.* 12.14.28.

path contrary to true faith, and rejecting false prophecies even when their contents correspond factually to reality. The intended ends of any concealed evil will eventually manifest themselves, and it is by these that phenomena are to be judged.

As phenomena, miracles are ambiguous and must be judged; the absolute distinction between angels and demons remains at the level of their absolutely distinct wills that miraculous phenomena make manifest. In other words, the distinguishing feature of miracles is not their material means, which do not substantially differ from angels to demons, but rather the quality or orientation of their principle of movement. Augustine sums up the distinction between the two companies of angels this way:

The one company enjoys God; the other is swollen with pride. To the one, it is said, 'Praise ye Him, all his angels'; but the prince of the other says, 'All these things will I give Thee if Thou wilt fall down and worship me.' The one burns with the holy love of God; the other smoulders with the impure love of glory. And since, as it is written, 'God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble,' we may say that the one company has its habitation in the heaven of heavens, but the other is cast down from thence, and rages in the lower heaven of the air. The one is tranquil in the light of godliness, the other turbulent with dark desires; the one, at God's command, brings merciful aid and just vengeance, but the other, in its pride, seethes with the desire to subdue and hurt. The one is the minister of God's goodness to the utmost of its will, whereas the other is restrained by God's power from the harm that it longs to do. The good angels make sport of the fallen ones when the latter do good inadvertently by their persecutions; and the fallen angels envy the good when the good gather in their pilgrims.²²⁸

Out of the distinct appetitive objects of angels and demons flow the intended ends of their miracles. Angelic miracles use the paranormal to witness to the God of all creation, so that humanity might be directed toward the love of God in common with them; demonic miracles are paranormal wonders without reference to God,

²²⁸ *Ciu.* 11.33; internal quotes, respectively, Ps 148:2; Matt 4:9; James 4:6//1 Pet 5:5.

and they commend a love that will satisfy their desire to be worshipped, but which does so in fact by drawing people into the imitation of the demonic love of self.²²⁹ If the holy signs generated by angels and men are like the same name of the Lord, but one written in gold the other in ink, the miracles of demons are like the name of a man written in gold. What is signified by the Lord's name is to be sought, whatever the perceived value of the medium that points to a man.²³⁰

The common denominator of the wide variety of phenomena considered to be demonic—possessions, afflictions, deceptions—is the privation of the good that they represent. In Augustine's ontology, all things take their proper place in God's order so that all creation might be directed and opened up to the uncreated source of its existence. But sin names the possibility that the symbolic structure of the created order might suffer a premature closure of meaning, the obstruction of universal reference to God, the interruption of God as the significance of all things.²³¹ This is the essence of the demonic, which is why the devil is called the false mediator and the mediator of death. And yet, though primacy of malice belongs to the devil, his fall is characteristic of many others besides, including the *massa damnata* of humanity. The closure of the self to God is thus not just the organizing logic of demonic phenomena, it is the foundational desire that binds a substantial portion—perhaps even a great majority—of rational creatures throughout all of history into a single communion, which Augustine comes to call the *terrena ciuitas*, the earthly city.

Uniformly *damnata* it may be, but the *massa* is not undifferentiated. The earthly city seeks its own order that resembles somewhat its prior counterpart, the heavenly city, but after the manner of its own desires. In this order, demons have risen to the rank of gods as those most valued by a disordered and fleshly love, because they will promise you what you desire, and even fulfil it to a certain limited extent. For this reason the earthly city is also called the city of the devil.²³² This is consistent with demonic desire. As with angels, the demons' love pushes toward manifestation to humanity, in order that we also might find our ends in the

²²⁹ See *ciu.* 10 generally, but esp. 10.12 and 10.16; see also 22.9–10; cf. *diu. qu.* 79.

²³⁰ *Trin.* 3.10.20.

²³¹ In the background here is Rowan Williams, "Language, Reality and Desire in Augustine's *De Doctrina*," *JLT* 3/2 (1989): 138–50.

²³² *Ciu.* 17.16,20; on the names of the earthly city, see Johannes van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon: A Study of Augustine's City of God and the Sources of his Doctrine of the Two Cities* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 130.

angel's original desire. Both have a certain limited power to accomplish this manifestation by themselves, as we have seen, but such miracles work to constitute and promote a communion with us that fulfils their desire in a way they cannot accomplish on their own, because it makes humans the embodiment of angelic desire through affiliation. Where angels desire this communion out of love for God, wanting what is best for us according to their knowledge of the order of all created things, demons desire it out of self-love, for it provides them with worshippers.

But if demons have become gods for the earthly city it is only because humans have bestowed upon them these honours and have constructed various religious institutions in order to establish them at the center of their communion. Since people are fundamentally responsible for their own desires, these institutions represent a genuinely human contribution to that which carries the epithet "demonic." What is demonic for Augustine, then, concerns not simply or even primarily the manifestation of evil spirits in bodily phenomena; rather, he is much more preoccupied with humans rampantly providing demons with their embodiment. The communion of humans and demons in the earthly city thus represents a complex interaction between these creatures that moves both ways, identifiable in its common underlying desire. A discussion of this relation will thus center upon mediation, which will be the subject of our final two chapters.

We can now establish the material basis for this in Augustine's thought. In the present chapter we continued to expound major features of Augustine's demonology, namely, his postulation of the aerial nature of their bodies, the modes of their manifestation in visions, and the limitations of their activity, all of which provided us with the opportunity to get a taste of their behaviour from examples Augustine cites throughout his work. When viewed in context, however, the role of these matters in the larger picture begins to appear. Last chapter showed that the will of angels and demons prevents them from direct participation in history, that they require embodiment. This chapter, we have found that the aerial bodies of demons cannot be said to provide that embodiment in themselves. Instead, it is better to think of the postulation of aerial demonic bodies as representing the capacity of demons to take upon themselves embodiment in a variety of phenomena, all of which confront the sub-intellectual human soul. Augustine's method of inference finds the demons behind the phenomena, but it is impossible for human judgement to discern the precise relation between

phenomena and their angelic cause. What establishes the link between phenomenon and demon is not clear scientific knowledge of material causes, but the moral discernment of its intended purpose. And it is this uncertain material relation between the demon and the embodiment of its desire that gives Augustine the flexibility required to maintain from a theological-cosmological standpoint the traditional Jewish-Christian polemical identification of the human embodiment of demonic desire with the demons themselves: the gods of the nations are demons.²³³ Augustine associates a wide variety of phenomena with demons, certainly through the concept of manifestation in miracles whose wonder suggest superhuman origins; but all the more so through the concept of incorporation into a self-love to which humans are all too susceptible, but which takes the name “demonic” because this desire is purest in the demons themselves.

²³³ Although a claim touted predominantly by Christian apologists like Justin Martyr, Tatian, Athenagoras, Minucius Felix, and Lactantius, with a biblical basis—most obviously Ps 95:5—it is one that found surprising agreement among the frequent pagan subjects of apologetic polemics themselves, namely the Platonists. See Jean Daniélou, “Démon: Dans la littérature ecclésiastique jusqu’à Origène,” *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique: doctrine et histoire*, vol. 3 (45 vols.; ed. Marcel Viller; Paris: Beauchesne, 1937–1992), 152–89, at cols. 153–60; see also Ferguson, *Demonology of the Early Christian World*, 111–15. We return to the platonic identification of pagan gods as demons in the last chapter.

4. The Devil and His Body

In our discussion of demonic bodies, we began to address the mediation of demons, in particular as they appear in different kinds of bodily phenomena, like visions and more stereotypical “possessions.” The key to understanding Augustine’s demonology is to separate demons ontologically from the various phenomena in which they appear, for in this way Augustine can identify disparate phenomena with demons, and thus open up an avenue for human participation in the production of such phenomena. We ended the previous chapter with the suggestion that, for Augustine, this human participation in fact constitutes the primary mediation of demons. We will bear this out in the final two chapters, as we hone in on his criticism in *The City of God* of Roman paganism as the worship of demons. The present chapter will establish the theoretical bases present in Augustine’s work for the sacramental incorporation of humans into a body of the devil that conceptually derives from and historically opposes the body of Christ. This will include a discussion of the constitution of such diabolical sacraments in the joining of human and demonic elements according to the paradigm of god-making Augustine finds in the Hermetic corpus. But first we will set this analysis against the backdrop of Augustine’s formation of a concept of true religion, with reference to which he develops a strong association between the pagan and the demonic.

Writing the history of demons

According to Sabine MacCormack, it is a testimony to the depth of Vergil’s influence that Augustine’s demons, “who in themselves were no more than a crowd of faceless malign powers, appear in Augustine’s pages in the garb of Vergilian deities whose very weaknesses and passions elicit interest.”¹ For Augustine, it is the true, “faceless” demonic nature underlying these poetic deities that confirms they ought not to be worshipped. But, MacCormack notes, it is precisely this visage, which is little more than a reflection of sinful humanity in

¹ Sabine MacCormack, *The Shadows of Poetry: Vergil in the Mind of Augustine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 174.

deity, that makes such demons so memorable. In this role, Vergil is for Augustine the spokesman for the pagan identity he helped to shape, “not simply as Rome’s greatest poet, but as the learned exponent of Roman theology and sacred law.”² But the idea that demons are the kind of thing that can receive a manifest form in a human artistic achievement has conceptual significance for Augustine that goes beyond their memorable character. MacCormack goes on:

Concurrently, Augustine’s heightened awareness, in his old age, of the power of the gods, or demons, in Roman society endowed not only Vergil’s poetry but also the writings of other classical authors with renewed weight and validity. As a result, the stories of the poets about the multifarious doings of the gods became, in Augustine’s *City of God*, part of an authoritative historical narrative, something that they had not been before.³

This postulation of an authoritative historical narrative as a manifestation of demonic power with which it is unified is the subject of our final two chapters, which work together as a whole. In the first place we recount the emergence of Augustine’s polemical engagement with pagans from within the context of his development of the concept of true religion.⁴ The outcome of this is the

² MacCormack, *The Shadows of Poetry*, 172. For a broader introduction to the pagan cultural background to Augustine’s Christianity, see Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians: In the Mediterranean World from the Second Century AD to the Conversion of Constantine* (London: Penguin, 1983); for a more succinct and Augustine-specific introduction, which notes his demonological assessment of this culture, see Frederic van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop: The Life and Work of a Father of the Church* (trans. Brian Battershaw and G. R. Lamb; London: Sheed and Ward, 1961), 29–75; see also Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 3–102.

³ MacCormack, *The Shadows of Poetry*, 174.

⁴ It is worth noting that the fact that there is no one such thing as “religion” has become the paradigmatic problem of modern religious studies. In spite of the serious reservations some scholars have of the usefulness of this term, however, we nevertheless employ it following Augustine’s own rich notion of the concept. *Religio*, for Augustine, is ultimately a matter of binding, as its etymology suggests. See *ciu.* 10.3, however, where Augustine connects *religio* etymologically with his absolutely central concept of clinging to God as the highest good of the rational creature, even though when he wrote this passage, he incorrectly thought *religio* came from *relegere*, “to choose,” rather than *religare*, “to bind.” He corrects himself in *retr.* 1.13.19. Because of the importance of the *inhaerere Deo* to which “religion” correlates, our use of the term “religion” to describe Augustine’s commitments sets aside his reservation—found at *ciu.* 10.1—that it may be too widely applicable in Latin to describe what he wants. He is looking for a word

identification of historical paganism with the demons it is said to worship. After this, we establish the conceptual basis for this identification in Augustine's extension of sacramental theology from the body of Christ to the body of the devil. In the last chapter we will expound upon the pagan sacraments themselves as Augustine sees them, operating both in a more popular manner and among intellectuals, of whom the Platonists are paradigmatic.

Behind the construction of an authoritative narrative is, in part, the movement of a religion bound to Christ, which, "unlike any pagan cult or heretical system, . . . took its stand on history."⁵ What it meant in Augustine's day for Christianity to take its stand on history was to demonstrate the unity of the church throughout time, linking the church of the post-Constantinian and morally perilous *tempora christiana* with the church of mortally perilous martyrdom, which itself already had to establish its continuity with Israel.⁶ But the identification of this people of God united through history also included setting that history within the context of all of world history, in which it is, as Robert Markus has noted, a privileged strand.⁷ History, for Christians, constituted an "elementary . . . orientation in a predominantly pagan world."⁸

Now, Markus is surely correct that the most privileged strand of sacred history is contained within the Scriptures themselves. But it is not enough to say,

for that which humans owe God, and in that place he suggests the Greek term *λατρεία* is a more accurate term.

⁵ Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 333.

⁶ On the continuity of the pre- and post-constantinian church, see Robert Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 90. On the church's continuity with Israel, which had to be established against those (*viz.* gnostics) who undermined its embodiment in a continuous people with the elevation of gnosis and the rejection of the Old Testament, see Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 331–333. Cf. Robert Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 11.

⁷ See Markus, *Saeculum*, 1–21.

⁸ Markus, *Saeculum*, 4. While Markus distinguishes this from pagan sacred history, the myths of the gods, and traditional historical chronicle, which he claims cater to a "desire to know the past," it is important to recognize that these kinds of pagan history are every bit as orientative for pagan traditions as Christian history. The primary difference is rather the apocalyptic character of Christian history: where pagan myth is orientative for those striving to be at home in the world, Christian history sees those at home in the world as opposing God, and is thus orientative for being the people of God wandering in a world alienated from God. Cf. Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology* (trans. David Ratmoko; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 26–31.

when speaking of Augustine, that all that is extra-biblical is univocally secular.⁹ Augustine makes it clear from the outset of *The City of God* that more is at stake than the identification of a privileged sacred history out of the neutrality of historical events as such, since all events are divinely ordained.¹⁰ “I have undertaken to defend [the city of God] against those who favour their own gods above her founder.”¹¹ The apologetic and catechetical need to tell a Christian history of the city of God’s orientation demands, in Augustine’s view, an inverse and complementary history of the earthly city’s disorientation—that city which, even though all the nations serve it, is mastered by its lust for mastery. “For it is from this earthly city that the foes against whom the city of God must be defended come forth.”¹² Let us begin by situating Augustine’s writing of this history of the earthly city in terms of his own encounter with paganism as a moral corruption.

True Religion and Augustine’s Confrontation with Paganism

Augustine did not always have in view such an antagonistic distinction between the earthly and heavenly city. It developed, rather, along with his increased awareness of the power of demons. Augustine, MacCormack notes, was once able to transform the prayers of Aeneas to Apollo into his own Christian prayers, in the milieu of Cassiciacum, shaped as it was by the liberal arts.¹³ But the move back to Africa as a would-be monastic, and the ordination to the presbytery and episcopacy that followed so quickly, were accompanied by a decisive change in Augustine’s attitude. As his subscription to the pedagogy of the liberal arts and easy agreement with the philosophers receded into the background, and along with it any possibility of assimilating to the Christian faith prayers to Apollo, Augustine takes to heart the words of the Psalmist, “all the gods of the nations are demons,” and those of Paul, “what the pagans sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God; I do not wish you to become the associates of demons.”¹⁴ According to Markus, this transition seems to come in 399, and it is manifest in Augustine’s inclusion of the putatively harmless and

⁹ Markus, *Saeculum*, 14–16.

¹⁰ Markus, *Saeculum*, 12.

¹¹ *Ciu.* 1.*Praef.*

¹² *Ciu.* 1.1.

¹³ MacCormack, *The Shadows of Poetry*, 137–39, citing *ord.* 1.4.10.

¹⁴ Ps 95:5 and 1 Cor 10:20, *apud ep.* 102.19, trans. modified.

“neutral” civic spectacles of the theatre among the practices of cult ceremony and sacrifice, divination and astrology, that any bishop, however lax, would condemn.¹⁵ It was a change that correlated to the implementation of history’s first anti-pagan legislation pronounced by Theodosius I and his son, Honorius, and the pronounced increase in hostility between groups of pagans and Christians that followed it in its wake.¹⁶

But Augustine is neither a government shill, even of a Christian emperor, nor does he approach such unfortunate conflicts as pagan-Christian riots with uncritical, identitarian loyalties.¹⁷ Rather, the turn of the century marks the culmination of a decade of important development in a variety of related areas of Augustine’s thought. This period begins with a new interest in religion, particularly as an embodied way of life, and so distinct from the platonic texts that were formative for him in the early years after his conversion and the prioritization of the attainment of direct insight and preoccupation with the soul’s reconciliation to God that characterized their philosophy.¹⁸ Indeed, this interest in religion is precisely a kind of culmination of this earlier inchoate striving. It is thus commensurate with his ordinations and the concomitant submission to the active life of the church. Since the contemplative life and the active life are not mutually exclusive alternatives, however, it is not for Augustine a switch from one to the other but from naïve neglect of the active life to its proper coordination with contemplation. His interest in religion is marked by the recognition of both the difficulty of contemplative vision now, and the need of all, even contemplatives, for a robust conception of the journey that is to end in true

¹⁵ Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, 107–23.

¹⁶ In addition to McCormack, *The Shadows of Poetry*, 139–40, see Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, 115.

¹⁷ Both of which Markus seems to imply. With respect to the climax of pagan-Christian confrontation in North Africa in 399–400 CE, which reversed a trajectory of mutual toleration and co-existence, he says this: “Confrontation had turned Augustine’s preaching into a summons to the Christian people to take sides.” And this: “The government’s heavy-handed intervention brought this [pagan-Christian civic] consensus, and with it Augustine’s conciliatory attitude, to an end.” *The End of Ancient Christianity*, 118, 119. For a different reading of Augustine’s response to the pagan and Christian rioting at Calama from this period, one that attempts to show his attitude in such matters is not simply Christian chauvinism, see Robert Dodaro, “Augustine’s Secular City,” in *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner* (ed. Robert Dodaro and George Lawless; London: Routledge, 2000), 231–59.

¹⁸ See Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970; Reprint Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 123–31.

contemplation.¹⁹ Where the temporal was once reduced to being merely the way to the goal, that “way” now receives “more reverent attention.”²⁰

As Burnaby puts it, “the metaphysic of Plotinus could not undo the effects of the teaching of Monica.”²¹ The religious way for which Augustine develops deep reverence passes through submission to the church. “Religion is not to be sought except among those alone who are called catholic or orthodox Christians, that is, keepers of the whole tradition unimpaired and followers of the right path.”²² It is a stretch, to say the least, to epitomize Augustine’s thought on religion and the church, but it is helpful for our purpose to highlight a few salient characteristics. For Augustine, true religion is above all an act of humility,²³ which is, in its essence, an act of love, namely the love of God by which one does not put oneself ahead of God but subordinates oneself properly to God as his creature. One can do nothing without God. But another aspect of this humility is the need for humans to accept that to submit to God is to submit to one whom we do not know, that true religion would have us proceed by faith and not by sight. Here humility is again required to admit our dependence upon mediation; for not only is God distant from us because of the finitude of the mind and the errors of sin, but even the account of God’s constant retrieval of us in the redemption of history is a story that vastly exceeds our direct experience.²⁴ Thus faith implicitly requires submission to the authority of others’ testimony, since faith is precisely faith in these testimonies of God and his work in human history.

The submission to the authority of testimony is a submission to the church of Christians, who are the “keepers of the whole tradition unimpaired.” Accordingly, humility is required both to adhere to the histories and doctrines kept by the church for the delineation of the unity of the faith, and to accept discipline by church authority when one strays from its communion either through error in love (sin) or error in belief (heresy). The exercise of true religion is

¹⁹ On contemplation and action, see John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine* (Canterbury, 1938; repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 60–73. On this shift in Augustine’s life and thought, see also Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (2d ed. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2000), 198–206.

²⁰ TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 130.

²¹ Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 68.

²² *Uera rel.* 5.9, trans. modified.

²³ On humility, see Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 70–80.

²⁴ See TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 128.

impossible outside of sacramental communion with those capable of coherently explicating the doctrines held in common, and wielding authority to interpret when and where their moral and theological boundaries have been transgressed.²⁵ One does not simply adhere to Christ individually. Upon this block stumbled Marius Victorinus, for before his baptism Victorinus liked to claim he was “already a Christian,” and would scoff when told that joining the church is the only way to make good on that claim, as though it were the walls that made the Christians.²⁶

There is also an integral connection between humility and one’s attitude toward the body, which includes much more than the physical human body itself. We have already spoken of Augustine’s interest in religion as a concern with embodiment. So when Augustine looks back on his days of philosophy and liberal arts at Cassiciacum he regrets sounding a little too much like Porphyry, who famously said *omne corpus fugiendum*, every body is to be fled.²⁷ In his resistance to the church Victorinus had Porphyry’s pride: union with God requires flight from every body, including all that which makes the church the locus of *uera religio*. The flip-side of this rejection of the body is the equivocality of all *religiones* in their common insufficiency for union with wisdom, another former opinion that Augustine retracts in the same place.²⁸ Christ’s “I am the way” rejects both errors at once in the embodied religious establishment of the church that bears the just to God like an ark, excluding the possibility of any other path to

²⁵ *Uera rel.* 5.8–9. Two things are notable. One, Augustine is well aware, early on, of the reality that some profess the Christian faith outwardly, while their hearts inwardly do not conform to the truth and love, and so forth, of which it speaks. These the church tolerates as chaff to be winnowed in the final judgement. Two, he is also aware of the possibility that the local ecclesial body may fall into error itself and expel one who is in fact good, who is to show this goodness through inexhaustible patience with the church, putting up with insult and injury, not undertaking any new schism or heresy, bearing witness to true Christian loyalty and love, and continuing to defend the catholic faith. They are to do this even if the “hurricane persists,” and they receive their reward from the Father in secret. Humility indeed! *Uera rel.* 6.10–11.

²⁶ *Conf.* 8.2.5.

²⁷ *Retr.* 1.4.3, concerning *sol.* 1.14.24.

²⁸ *Retr.* 1.4.3, concerning *sol.* 1.13.23, quoting John 14:6. Cf. John Vandervoort, who connects these two aspects in “The Background to Augustine’s Denial of Religious Plurality,” in *Grace, Politics and Desire: Essays on Augustine* (ed. Hugo A. Meynell; Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1990), 179–93. See also John Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptised* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 205–06. Pagan religious toleration is thus one of two possible religious manifestations of the denial of the body, the other being asceticism paired with fantastic and esotericist hermeneutics in gnostic religions, like that of the Manichees.

wisdom but Christ himself. For submission to church authority is a bodily sort of activity, the *signa* of faith are bodily *res*: its spiritual disciplines, like fasting, its liturgical rites to be performed, even its histories, teachings, and creeds, are all articulated with bodily words. Moreover, the matters to which these all pertain are bodily: the bread and wine of the eucharist and the water of baptism are bodily entities, as are the historical events to which its writings refer, and which its doctrines interpret. At the centre of all of this is the historical event *par excellence*, the incarnation, the reference point of all mediation, for the mediator makes present in time and space—the Word made flesh—the God that is the greatest of all invisible things, remote in God’s eternity.²⁹ God’s union with humanity reveals even the body worth the trouble of religious discipline, for it also shows its destiny is to be retained and perfected in the soul’s final reconciliation to God in the resurrection.

Accompanying the development of this interest in religion as it is found truly in Christianity is not only its distinction from religion’s false manifestations, but also the characterization of the latter as the worship of fallen angels.³⁰ As MacCormack points out, by Augustine’s time such Christian arguments against paganism had become quite standardized and predictable,³¹ rooted as they were in the Christian Scriptures themselves, as we have noted. But Augustine was poised to fill this traditional claim with new significance as his career took shape at the turn of the century. In 399, Christians of the colony of Sufes in Africa Byzacena, some distance to the south-east of Hippo, tore down a statue of Hercules in an effort to enforce the edict of the emperor Honorius issued earlier that year.³² As repayment for such an affront, legal though it was, the local pagans massacred sixty Christians. Augustine responds to this appalling slaughter: “If you say that it was your Hercules, we shall then give him back: metal is at hand; rocks are not lacking; there are also various kinds of marble; an abundance of workmen are

²⁹ Cf. *ciu.* 11.2–4.

³⁰ So *uera rel.* 13.26; 55.108. Interestingly, in the latter section—unlike in his later work, as we will see—Augustine implicitly distinguishes the worship of demons from the worship of imaginative fancies, animals, the cult of the dead, the earth, and the rational soul.

³¹ MacCormack, *The Shadows of Poetry*, 140.

³² *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.16.

present. . . . Restore, then, the lives that your bloody hand has torn away, and just as we restore to you your Hercules, so also restore the lives of so many people.”³³

In the years to follow, Augustine would refer to hostile pagans who make defamatory statements about Christ and his church, doing so in order to block some in their inquiry into the faith, and disrupt and agitate those already Christian.³⁴ By the work of these pagans the devil would tempt Christians, Augustine says, “through the agency of those who have hatred for the name ‘Christian,’ and who deplore the fact that the whole world has been taken over by this name, and who still desire to be slaves to idols and demonic superstitions.”³⁵ And yet, because of the forbearance of God, who saves some of the grain to be winnowed only at the end, the defining marks of this temptation can be found also within the church. “In the Church you are going to see numerous . . . healers using sacrilegious amulets, devotees of spell-chanters and astrologers, or of soothsayers versed in any and every ungodly trick. You will also notice that those same crowds which fill the churches on the Christian feast days also fill the theaters on the feast days of the pagans.”³⁶

Emblematic of this paganism violently opposed to Christianity is Porphyry.³⁷ There are a number of difficulties within Porphyrian scholarship arising from the fragmentary nature of his work that make it difficult to know what and, more importantly, when Augustine knew of the disciple and biographer of the great Plotinus.³⁸ There is a neoplatonic Porphyry with whom Augustine can identify, who is critical of pagan religion, linking animal sacrifice and divination with evil demons,³⁹ and who therefore maintained that no sacrifice can purify the soul of its ignorance and vice, which only the divine hypostases themselves, the

³³ *Ep.* 50.

³⁴ *Cons. eu.* 1.7.10.

³⁵ *Cat. rud.* 25.48.

³⁶ *Cat. rud.* 25.48.

³⁷ See TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 237–58; cf. Rist, *Augustine*, 16–17. TeSelle gives a sensible overview of the debate between a unified and a divided Porphyry, whose basic arguments begin respectively with John J. O’Meara, *Porphyry’s Philosophy from Oracles in Augustine* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1959), and Pierre Hadot, “Citations de Porphyre chez Augustin (à propos d’un livre récent),” *REA* 6 (1960): 204–44.

³⁸ Porphyry’s apparent inconsistencies, however, may be due to Augustine’s interpretation of him against himself. See TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 239.

³⁹ See *ciu.* 10.11.

principia, can do.⁴⁰ This Porphyry recognizes that there must be revelations apart from demonic divination that lead people through purification anagogically to the divine. It is even possible Augustine knows the *Timaeus*, and therefore some of the insights of Platonism that are most consistent with biblical revelation, from Porphyry's writings.⁴¹

Then there is the Porphyry who turns to Christianity and says it is precisely an example of false and deceptive demon-worship. This Porphyry locates divine revelation not in the Holy Scriptures that speak of the humble incarnation of God, but in the institutions of pagan oracles historically connected with the persecution of Christians.⁴² These describe Christ as a delusional god who was justly put to death by righteous judges, or else as a pious soul, but one that has become "a fatal gift to other souls," inasmuch as he is wrongly, and incorrigibly, worshipped by Christians.⁴³ To him, the Hebrews possess a greater wisdom, more ready to attain to God, while Christianity has spread only because of the sorcery of Peter.⁴⁴ Porphyry emerges as the "most bitter enemy of the Christian religion,"⁴⁵ for whom true philosophical beatitude is available only to the few who are capable, who claims the soul must ultimately be purified of the body, and thus denies the compatibility of the Christian concept of divine incarnation and bodily resurrection with this true blessedness.

In Porphyry Augustine finds at once both a man of great insight, who demonstrates that there are none "closer to us than the Platonists,"⁴⁶ and a man that makes clear that this very Platonism brings the pagan traditions it seeks to transcend to their logical conclusion in a vehement opposition to Christianity. Augustine's development of a concept of true religion culminates after the turn of

⁴⁰ *Ciu.* 10.23, 28.

⁴¹ See TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 253–54. He names, "the vivid sense of temporality and the problem of its relation to eternity (29c), the suggestion that the world originated in time (or, if not this, at least the awareness that it is constantly changing and that any element of order has been introduced by intelligent purpose), its explanation of creation as resulting from God's lack of envy (29e), the joy of the Craftsman at the perfection of the universe (37c), and his address to the gods, promising that his steadfast will would preserve the ordered universe from the threat of dissolution (41a–b)." *Ibid.*, 254.

⁴² On this connection, see Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 258–59; cf. 451–52.

⁴³ *Ciu.* 19.23.

⁴⁴ *Ciu.* 18.53–54.

⁴⁵ *S.* 241.7, trans. TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 252.

⁴⁶ *Ciu.* 8.5.

the century in a more rigorous opposition to its false iteration in paganism, in light of the manifest violence of which Augustine found pagans to be capable, and the fact that the institutions of paganism—both at the most basic level of cult and festival, and in the most elevated of its philosophies—fundamentally propped this violence up. But this more rigorous opposition can only be seen rightly against the background of Augustine’s deeper discernment into the fundamental weakness of all humanity in its sin, and the basic need for Christ working through his church and its traditions as distinct from Greek philosophy.⁴⁷

As John Rist notes, “the influence of Porphyry among non-Christians, and the consequent hostility of Augustine, could only have increased as a result of the events of the year 410.”⁴⁸ There is something in the vigour of Augustine’s opposition that speaks of a rejection of a former self, the anxiety of a path nearly taken.⁴⁹ But he is ultimately a teacher of Christianity and a defender of the faith. This is the bishop Brown comes to describe as “the loyal colleague of his fellow-bishops, when they struggled with endless cases of violence and the abuse of power among the clergy, the landowners and the Imperial administrators,” one capable of “an inspired fussiness, and by a heroic lack of measure when it came to the care of endangered souls.”⁵⁰ Having found his particular contribution to the body of Christ as its formidable defender-in-words, Augustine writes an “authoritative history” of the demons with Vergilian faces that attack the church. For while the devil is not afraid to use schismatics and heretics to assault the church⁵¹—Augustine’s ecclesiology is clearly honed in argumentation with these—it is in the history in which Vergil looms large that their story is primarily

⁴⁷ So TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 258–66.

⁴⁸ Rist, *Augustine*, 17.

⁴⁹ Porphyry in some sense represents for Augustine a former self. MacCormack notes that Augustine was not the kind of pagan we think of when we first hear the word, a polytheistic worshipper of manmade idols, offering blood sacrifices. *The Shadows of Poetry*, 136. But there was something characteristically pagan, if of a particularly educated kind, about the ambivalent and sceptical way he wandered through his early years and into the church. See James J. O’Donnell, “The Demise of Paganism,” *Traditio* 35 (1979): 45–88, at 63–64. And, as we will see next chapter, the platonic philosophy so helpful for his conversion not only leaves paganism intact, but also even justifies it in limited but important ways. See also Vanderspoel, “The Background to Augustine’s Denial of Religious Plurality.” Thus, we find Augustine used philosophy to help renounce his pagan wanderings for Christianity, only to find out later how united to paganism his early philosophical notions of the Christian life really were.

⁵⁰ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 466.

⁵¹ See, e.g., *cat. rud.* 25.48; s. 359b.16.

to be found. For Vergil's story, as history, tells of the deeper spiritual reality of rational creation's self-imposed alienation from God, of which it is a manifestation. The character Vergil's gods have they have as demons.⁵²

The gods of the Roman pagan tradition are thus more than the memorable faces of demons; their history is the very history of the demons that seek to compromise the salvation offered to all. Augustine draws Vergil into his narrative because of his authority in the theological matters constitutive of the history of pagan Rome, in which Augustine finds an incarnation of the earthly city itself, founded in the fall of the angels. And its religion, culture, and politics are the very appearance of those demons—the body of the Devil—in which they assault Christ and his church. Before we turn in our last chapter to some of the historical particulars of this identification of demons with human phenomena, we will spend the remainder of this chapter exploring the theoretical grounds for this union in the concept of the devil's human body and its constitutive sacraments, and the joining of the human and the demonic to make the gods at the centre of these sacraments.

Totus Christus, Totus Diabolus

Augustine articulates the quintessential religious union in terms of the sacramental unity of *totus Christus*—the whole Christ, Christ as the whole—which is simply his interpretation of the scriptural description of the church as the body of Christ.⁵³ Christ, the high priest, offered himself in the form of a servant on behalf of others as a sacrifice to God. Through this sacrifice the whole of the city of God is offered as a sacrifice, whose citizens willingly participate in this sacrifice by dying to the world and chastening themselves, living for God and loving others after the manner of Christ. The latter sacrifice is achieved in the

⁵² Cf. MacCormack, *The Shadows of Poetry*, 154: "In this way, Vergil's gods were transformed into Augustine's demons. They retained all the characteristics with which Vergil had endowed them, but the ethical import of these characteristics changed." She goes on to relate the different interpretations Augustine gave of Proteus. Where he is, at first, an image of truth, which is hard to discover and must be pursued tenaciously, later his mercurial nature is exemplary of Satan's ability to transform himself into an angel of light.

⁵³ So Rom 12:4–5; 1 Cor 12:12–27. See Tarsicius van Bavel, "The '*Christus Totus*' Idea: A Forgotten Aspect of Augustine's Spirituality," in *Studies in Patristic Christology* (ed. T. Finan and V. Twomey; Dublin: Four Courts, 1998), 84–94.

former, “so that we might be the body of so great a head.”⁵⁴ Thus, on the one hand, the church is not simply the body of the head, which is Christ; rather, head and body are one Christ, the whole Christ. “Paul does not say ‘so also is Christ and the body,’ but ‘as one body has many limbs, so also is Christ.’ Consequently, the whole is Christ.”⁵⁵ And, on the other hand, this is not simply a metaphor for Augustine, nor is the city of God the body of Christ by analogy. Rather, Augustine understands it realistically. Even after his ascension, Christ continues to be embodied on earth in the lives of Christians, who are incorporated together, the individual and the community each irreducible to one another.⁵⁶

As Augustine’s conception of true religion developed in relation to the identification of false religion, so too this corporate, civic understanding of the body of Christ is accompanied by the gathering of false religion into a body of citizens. All rational love is divided into two ends, fostered in true or false religion, constituting two citizenships, the city of God and the earthly city. The two cities are opposed as their founding loves are opposed: one loves God, the other the self, which takes to itself gods that accord with its preferences.⁵⁷ Being thus founded in love, the cities originate with the first lovers created, the angels, some of whom cleaved to God from the moment of their creation, some of whom considered themselves to be their own light, falling in the dark pride of apostasy. And because the cities are founded in love, in will and desire, angels and humans good and wicked are each able to be bound into these communions with one another in spite of their created differences, due to their mutual possession of the capacity to love, each likewise made to be perfected in the love of God.

⁵⁴ *Ciu.* 10.6.

⁵⁵ *En. Ps.* 142.3, trans. van Bavel, in “The ‘*Christus Totus*’ Idea,” 85. See also *ep. Io. tr.* 1.2; *Io. eu. tr.* 21.8.

⁵⁶ See van Bavel, “The ‘*Christus Totus*’ Idea,” 84–89.

⁵⁷ The apocalyptic comprehensiveness of this division, and the inimical exclusivity of the two loves and their cities, is a foundational theme for Augustine’s thought. *Ciu.* Book 19 is a classic exposition on their difference and relation. But for a clear statement of this, which includes the recognition that God created humanity for unity, and that the division was only introduced with the founding of the earthly city in sin, see *ciu.* 14.1: “Thus it is that, though there are a great many nations throughout the world, living according to different rites and customs, and distinguished by many different forms of language, arms and dress, there nonetheless exist only two orders, as we may call them, of human society; and, following our Scriptures, we may rightly speak of these as two cities.” See also *ciu.* 14.4: these two cities are “different from and inimical to one another.”

Augustine speaks of the beginning of these cities as being among the angels,⁵⁸ but true religion makes no creature its Lord, even one so glorious as an angel, save the man who is God. As Christ is the head of his body, the whole of which is Christ, so Christ is the king of the city of God. Where Christ is the king of one city, however, it is precisely an angel that rules the other.⁵⁹ For Augustine speaks of the devil as the king of the earthly city. How is this so, given the foundation of this city in the “love of self” (*amor sui*) not the “love of the devil” (*amor diaboli*)? It is in part because of this temporal precedence of angels, but Augustine also asserts “the primacy of [the devil’s] malice.”⁶⁰ The Pauline life “according to the flesh” that defines the earthly city is not a statement on the intrinsic evil of human flesh. For not only is it clear that human sin arises not from the material body but from the wilful movement of the soul, to understand “flesh” narrowly as “bodily vices” would also exculpate the devil himself from sin, since, being a demon, he lacks the flesh necessary for such vices. The fleshly life is not merely that of fornication and drunkenness, but a life lived according to the self, and it is this life that the devil lives most completely, altogether without flesh. And so when one lives one’s life in the same manner, one becomes like the devil.

For the devil chose to live according to self when he did not abide in the truth, so that the lie that he told was his own, and not God’s. The devil is not only a liar; he is ‘the father of lies’; he was indeed, the first to lie, and falsehood, like sin, began with him. Thus, when a man lives according to man and not according to God, he resembles the devil.⁶¹

For this reason, *ciuitas diaboli* is one of the synonyms in *The City of God* for the *terrena ciuitas*.⁶² And, as Christ is the lord of the heavenly city as the head of his body, so too the devil is the head of his own earthly body. This interpretation appears in the hermeneutical principle Augustine learned from Tyconius, the seventh in his *Liber regularum*, namely that concerning the devil

⁵⁸ E.g., *ciu.* 11.1, 34; 12.1.

⁵⁹ So *ciu.* 17.20.

⁶⁰ *Gn. litt.* 11.22.29. N.b. the extensive discussion of the fall of Satan in book 11 is the context for a précis of his forthcoming project that would become *ciu.* See 11.15.19–20.

⁶¹ *Ciu.* 14.3–4, quoting John 8:44. See also *Io. eu. tr.* 42 on imitation of pride as diabolical filiation.

⁶² *Ciu.* 17.16, 20. See van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 130.

and his body (*de diabolo et eius corpore*).⁶³ With respect to the interpretation of Scripture, the rule points out that words spoken therein of the devil may be more suitably applied to his body. But this is not the aerial body that we considered last chapter. “Wicked men are vessels of the . . . devil,”⁶⁴ for “he recruits even from the human race, especially . . . those who attach themselves to him through pride by rejecting the commandments of God.”⁶⁵ Like the city of God, one is incorporated into the devil’s body through agreement upon a common object of love. But to earthly city belongs “a different faith, a different hope, a different love.”⁶⁶ Thus the body of the devil is also gathered together anagogically through a network of signs. To see how this works, however, we will need to discuss in more detail the nature of Christian sacraments.

The Sacramental Body of the Devil

The constitution of Christ as head and body is first of all a work of Christ in his Incarnation, but this work of Christ is made manifest, and so served in a crucial way, by sacraments.⁶⁷ All Christians become “Christs” in baptism and chrismation, entering into its common priesthood.⁶⁸ And this work of incorporation is continued in the “daily sign” of Christ’s sacrifice “in the sacrament of the church’s sacrifice.”⁶⁹ This is how the church offers itself as a sacrifice like Christ, through Christ, in order to become Christ.

So if you want to understand the body of Christ, listen to the apostle telling the faithful, ‘You, though, are the body of Christ and its members.’

⁶³ See *doc. Chr.* 3.30.42–3.37.56, esp. 3.37.55; *Gn. litt.* 11.22.29–11.25.32.

⁶⁴ *Gn. litt.* 11.22.29.

⁶⁵ *Gn. litt.* 11.24.31.

⁶⁶ *Ciu.* 18.54.

⁶⁷ See van Bavel, “The ‘*Christus Totus*’ Idea,” 92–93. Van der Meer also notes that becoming one together and with Christ through the eucharistic body and blood of Christ was the function of the sacraments Augustine most emphasized. Van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, 282–85, 315. For an introduction to Augustine’s sacramental theology, see *ibid.*, 277–316; Emmanuel J. Cutrone, “Sacraments,” in *AA*, 741–47.

⁶⁸ *Ciu.* 20.10, citing Rev 20:6 and 1 Pet 2:9. Note that, in spite of the tendency, apparently common already in Augustine’s day, to call presbyters (*presbyteri*) and even bishops (*episcopi*) “priests” (*sacerdotes*), if any is a *sacerdos*, all are *sacerdotes*, since all Christians are members of the true *sacerdos*, Christ.

⁶⁹ *Ciu.* 10.20; see also, *ep.* 98.9.

So if it is you that are the body of Christ and its members, you are the mystery placed on the Lord's table; you receive your mystery. To what you are, you respond 'Amen,' and by so responding you give your assent.⁷⁰

This is the sacramental fulfilment of the call to all humanity to complete its nature in God: as Augustine says, "turn to him and become what you are."⁷¹

It is true that *sacramentum* sometimes carries this specific meaning in Augustine's work, and it is not inappropriate to attribute to him an emphasis placed upon the liturgical sacraments of baptism and the eucharist, along with chrismation, penance, orders, and matrimony, which would help lay the foundation for the medieval western church's identification of seven sacraments.⁷² Nevertheless, it remains the case that, first, *sacramentum* enters Augustine's works as the Latin translation of the Greek μυστήριον (which is also at times simply transliterated, *mysterion*), and so as the scriptural term for the mystery of the Incarnation, and God's work in history through Christ.⁷³ Second, it enters into the midst of an already-developed semiology in which creation is constituted in signs, some of which are set apart as "sacred signs," being particularly revelatory of God.⁷⁴

In our chapter on angels, we quoted from Augustine's *Trinity* as a summary of this relationship:

All those things, which appeared mysteriously and mystically to our fathers by the miracles of the angels or which were done by the fathers themselves, were likenesses of this mystery, this sacrifice, this priest, this God, before he came and was sent as the one born of a woman, in order that every creature might in some measure proclaim the one who was to

⁷⁰ S. 272, quoting 1 Cor 12:27. See van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, 284–85; van Bavel, "The 'Christus Totus' Idea," 92; Cutrone, "Sacraments," 745.

⁷¹ *Ciu.* 5.14.

⁷² See Cutrone, "Sacraments," 742–43.

⁷³ So, e.g., Eph 1:9–10; 3:3–6; Col 1:26–27. Cf. Cutrone, "Sacraments," 741.

⁷⁴ See Cutrone, "Sacraments," 741–42; cf. Robert Markus, "Augustine on Magic: A Neglected Semiotic Theory," *REA* 40 (1994): 375–88, at 385.

come, in whom would be the salvation of all who were to be redeemed from death.⁷⁵

In Augustine's theology, angels administer the signs serving the sign *par excellence*, the human-divine, sign-signified union that is the person of Christ, the sacrament by which God redeems the world. As Christ is the divine sacrament, he is signified by a host of divine sacraments, all of which participate in the anagogic role of Christ leading all to God by leading all to Christ. Hence, the range of what Augustine calls *sacramentum* is profound in number and diversity. The Old Testament is full of sacraments, in its stories of people and places, including its theophanies (hence the angels), as well as its feasts and rituals, all of which foreshadow, and thus are a type of, the one to come. The coming of this one lifted the veil on these old, but useful signs, raising those serving under them to the substantive realities that they signified, namely, Christ and the sacraments he instituted as their fulfilment.⁷⁶ "The Lord himself and the discipline of the apostles has handed down to us just a few signs instead of many, and these so easy to perform, and so awesome to understand, and so pure and chaste to celebrate."⁷⁷ Augustine gives as examples baptism and the eucharist, but he is perhaps being a touch disingenuous, since the range of what goes by sacrament in the liturgical activity, public life, and spiritual disciplines of the church is no smaller than that of the Old Testament that prefigures it. Baptism and communion may be for Augustine the sacraments that do most to constitute the body of Christ, but everything from feasts to fasts, penance to prayers, plays a role in this constitution,⁷⁸ and it is all governed and administered by angels.⁷⁹ Hence, *pace*

⁷⁵ *Trin.* 4.7.11.

⁷⁶ *Doc. Chr.* 3.8.12.

⁷⁷ *Doc. Chr.* 3.9.13.

⁷⁸ Van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, 280–81: Augustine "speaks of the following as *sacramenta*: the sign of the cross, salt, exorcisms, contemplation, the penitential garment; the bowing of the head, the transmission of the *symbolum*, the taking off of shoes, and the other rites of the catechumenate, and of the entry on the period of being *competentes*; the octave of Easter, penance, the laying-on of hands, reconciliation, the great fasts, spiritual songs, the Lord's Prayer; and many other things. Their common characteristic is that they are all of some spiritual importance and are externally visible." Cf. Cutrone, "Sacraments," 742. Van der Meer does note a certain hierarchy of sacraments in Augustine, in which he strongly implies the prioritization of baptism and the eucharist over other kinds of *sacramenta*, particularly verbal images used in sermons. It is by these especially that the church is built up. And yet there is no opposition

Markus, the privileged strand of history does not start and stop with Scripture—which already only had sacred authority, for Augustine’s Christianity, by virtue of being a testimony to the historical realities of the incarnate Word in Christ and the church he established—but extends to the ongoing traditions established and maintained by the church to preserve its identity as the “body of so great a head.”⁸⁰

One of the components of Christian sacraments, without which they cannot be true sacraments, is the likeness (*similitudo*) of the sign to the reality that it signifies.

For, if the sacraments did not have some likeness to those events of which they are sacraments, they would not be sacraments at all. But because of this likeness they generally receive the name of the realities themselves. Just as, then, in a certain way the sacrament of the body of Christ is the body of Christ and the sacrament of the blood of Christ is the blood of Christ, so the sacrament of the faith is the faith.⁸¹

We can understand this to begin with in the somewhat intellectualistic terms of Augustine’s early semiology, namely, a sign must resemble what it signifies because it must bring to mind what it signifies.⁸² But the importance of similitude ultimately lies in the anagogical function of sacraments, which is greater than

between the two, but rather union, as all kinds of sacrament have their basis in Christ, the Apostles, or the universal church. See *op. cit.* 281–82; cf. *inq. Ian.*(=*ep.*) 55.7.13.

⁷⁹ See *trin.* 1.8.16 (WSA), where Augustine speaks of “the regime of symbols administered by the angelic sovereignties and authorities and powers.”

⁸⁰ So, *inq. Ian.*(=*ep.*) 54.1.1: “But we are given to understand that those practices we observe which are not in scripture, but in tradition, and which are observed throughout the whole world, are maintained as taught and established either by the apostles themselves or by plenary councils, which have an authority in the Church most conducive to salvation.” For Augustine it is the privilege not only of Christ and the apostles in the Scriptures to prescribe the constituents of its identity, but also of the universal church, which was left much responsibility to decide on matters of great importance. Here he names Easter, the Ascension, and Pentecost, while he notes in 54.2.2 that the church also sees fit to maintain some flexibility in its acceptance of local variance in a number of practices. The determining factor for what is essential is the consensus of the universal church. On this, see van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, 285–98. If anything is a “privileged strand of history” for Augustine it is this, the very city of God itself and not narrowly the Scripture, for it includes the Scripture.

⁸¹ *Ep.* 98.9.

⁸² So, *doc. Chr.* 2.1.1.

simply what is thought of when a word is uttered, though attention to the leading of the intellect remains an irreducible component of Augustine's sacramentalism. For such things not only bring to mind the inexpressible wisdom that few can glimpse, they are an extension of the flesh—the human *res*—that Wisdom took upon herself in order to give humanity something to hold onto in order that we might be brought to the inexpressible one we ought to hold onto.⁸³ As van der Meer puts it, “the sign which acts as a symbol for something becomes an actual channel of that which it signifies.”⁸⁴ The signification of Christ itself bestows Christ.

Thus, the fundamental difference between Hebrew and pagan sacrifices is that the Hebrew sacraments, their observance of temporal signs of spiritual realities (and of future Christian sacraments of those same spiritual realities), which acted like a schoolmaster until the mystery was revealed in Christ,⁸⁵ were “useful” (*utilis*); by them the Hebrews were “found nearby” (*prope inuenti*).⁸⁶ The basic usefulness to which Augustine points that allows their signs to bring Jews into proximity with spiritual realities is their profession of one true God. In other words, at the core of a range of complementary signifiers lies this one signifying doctrine that bears maximal likeness to that which it signifies: despite the inadequacy of all language for God,⁸⁷ there is some fundamental sense in which God is one just as Hebrew religion explicitly taught, and around this all its sacraments were organized.

Thus, when the veil was lifted that Christ is the mystery of God's work in history, and that in their reference to the one true God all the signs of the Hebrews mean Christ, those who believed were lifted from the burden of their servitude to the complexities of the law and its variety of requirements to the simplicity of

⁸³ So *s.* 198.61–62. Hence even those able to attain such glimpses require such sacramental signs. This is Augustine's fundamental criticism of the Platonic philosophers, who see this Wisdom as if from afar upon a mountain, but do not descend in humility by attaching themselves in faith to the flesh of Christ that will raise them up to what they see. *S.* 198.59. We will return to this next chapter, but, to be sure, there is a simple but important philosophical point to be made here as well. Since no one can sustain such rare glimpses of direct insight into God, even those able to attain them rely upon the representation of these experiences in whatever words are possible, if they are to be made operative in life in any way at all.

⁸⁴ Van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, 308.

⁸⁵ Gal 3:24.

⁸⁶ Eph 2:17. See *doc. Chr.* 3.6.10–3.9.13; see also, *ep.* 102.3.16–21.

⁸⁷ *Doc. Chr.* 1.6.6.

Christian sacramental service, easy to perform and understand. Pagan signs and sacrifices, on the other hand, were useless (*inutilis*). Not professing one God, they prevented their observers from approaching the proximity in which the Jews served, requiring the breaking of idols and conversion from a multitude of gods before they could be lifted to true rites and the understanding of spiritual realities. Thus, the churches composed of Israelites were ready to burn with charity of the Holy Spirit after Pentecost, whereas there is no evidence that any church of gentiles was prepared to undertake such wondrous deeds so readily, and Augustine suggests this is because their own useless pagan signs kept them at a distance.⁸⁸

“All such sacrifices, however, are signs and likenesses of certain realities, and they ought to teach us to examine, to recognize, or to recall those realities of which they are likenesses.”⁸⁹ Of course, what Augustine means is not that any sacrament is good so long as it bears likeness to some spiritual reality, whatever it happens to be, but rather that a sacrament that does not bear similarity to true spiritual realities is a false sacrament, a sacrament bearing witness to false spiritual realities. A sacrament is thus judged by its likeness, by what it teaches and where it brings its worshipper, what it says of the worshipper. Indeed, Augustine conceives of religion as such, true and false, sacramentally. “People cannot be brought together in the name of any religion, whether true or false, unless they are assembled by some shared visible symbols or sacraments.”⁹⁰

Accordingly, Augustine speaks of the sacraments of the devil and of demons.⁹¹ And they present themselves—or rather, the devil presents them—as being just the kind of anagogic mediation Augustine sees at work in the Christian sacraments. Because certain men were “infected with pride,” he says,

that self-deceiving and deceitful and proud being intruded himself, with ready promises that their souls could be purified by goodness knows what pride-engendered arts, and thus he made them worshipers of demons, that

⁸⁸ See *doc. Chr.* 3.6.10–11.

⁸⁹ *Ep.* 102.3.17.

⁹⁰ *C. Faust.* 19.11, my trans. See Markus, “Augustine on Magic,” 381–382, 382n.27; Cutrone, “Sacraments,” 741.

⁹¹ *Sacramenta diaboli*, *ep. Io. tr.* 2.13; *daemoniorum sacramenta*, *s.* 198.63; see also *s.* 198.32; *diu. qu.* 79.1.

is, of bad angels. That's the origin of all the sacraments celebrated by the pagans, which they claim are effective for purifying their souls.⁹²

The spiritual reality these sacraments signify, however, is the pride of the worshipper and the worshipped. To say the gods of the nations are demons is to identify that what the gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons. Augustine uses the term *daemonicola*, "demon-worshipper."⁹³ This is not, of course, a term pagans self-applied. By it Augustine, following St. Paul, is claiming that when pagans worship gods of whatever particular characteristics, with whatever particular actions, what they are worshipping in fact is nothing other than demons.

Every sacrifice or act of worship, which the Greeks call *λατρεία*, and Christians know is due only to the one true God, is a "visible sacrament of an invisible sacrifice."⁹⁴ It is a union of external form and inward movement, where the outward form signifies the orientation of its constitutive inward movement, and the inward desire on account of this is of the utmost significance. A temple sacrifice, as an act of worship, is a sacrament of a sacrifice of the soul, a desire, a giving of the self over to the object of worship. It is here that the question of the difference between Hebrew and pagan sacrifice arises. Demons have no interest in blood, smoke, and flesh as such, lacking the bodies necessary to consume such things. It is the desire these sacraments manifest that they want, and they want it because it belongs to God, because that is what they wish, in their pride, to be. And they delight in the deception of the worshipper, because they envy the possibility of his salvation.⁹⁵ The desire of the worshipper belongs to God and thus ascribes divinity to the object of devotion, turning it into a god. So whenever such worship is offered to anything less than God, the demons take delight in such folly, and are honoured to receive the mistake as their own worship. The devil hoodwinks you into worshipping Mercury, because when you worship Mercury you are worshipping the devil.⁹⁶

It is desire engaged in something, moving in some direction as it cannot but move, that makes the person a worshipper. Because of this, Augustine holds

⁹² S. 198.32. The scare-quotes around "sacraments" are removed, as it should be clear Augustine is speaking quite straightforwardly.

⁹³ *Ciu.* 9.19; 18.41; *conf.* 8.2.4; *ep.* 231.5.

⁹⁴ *Ciu.* 10.5.

⁹⁵ *Ciu.* 10.5, 19; *ep.* 102.17–19.

⁹⁶ S. 198.24.

that one can be worshipping demons even when it is not immediately obvious that the outward form of one's desire serves false gods. One can worship demons even if the worshipper should claim to be honouring one of the true God's holy angels, which is why the angel rebukes John of Patmos for falling down before him.⁹⁷ Hence, Augustine speaks of his own dabbling in the sacrilegious curiosities of Manichaeism as subservience to demons (*obsequia daemoniorum*), and evil acts like lusting after a girl in church as his sacrifice to them;⁹⁸ despite his self-identification as a Christian, Victorinus' rejection of the church places him, Augustine says, squarely in the grip of the devil.⁹⁹ One of the most important kinds of false worship for Augustine, however, was attendance at spectacles, the cruelty of beast-baiting and the madness of the chariot races. From such events Augustine and his fellow bishops could hardly restrain their congregations, in spite of their common renunciation of such *spectacula* in the rejection of "the devil and his pomps" at their initiation into the church from the catechuminate. By the fifth century, these had been evacuated of most of their explicit pagan imagery. The justification for their rejection was subsequently focused upon the dubious moral character of the participants, the consequent vicious moral impression they left upon their spectators, and the wasteful expenditure they required to stage. And yet, in spite of the lack of overt reference to pagan gods, participating in these spectacles is like "offering incense to demons from their hearts."¹⁰⁰

When Augustine speaks of demonic "sacraments" by that name, however, to what is he referring? In his sermon "Against the Pagans," there is a parallel between these *sacramenta* and the "sacrilegiously sacred rites [*sacra sacrilega*]" of pagans, which form one third of a cluster of concepts along with "magic arts [*magicae artes*]" and various methods of divination, namely astrology (*mathematica*), lots or oracles (the media of the *sortilegi*), augury, and

⁹⁷ *Ep.* 102.20. So Rev 19:10; 22:8–9.

⁹⁸ *Conf.* 3.3.5.

⁹⁹ *Conf.* 8.4.9.

¹⁰⁰ *S.* 198.3. On the concern of fifth-century North African bishops, including Augustine, with the *spectacula*, see Daniel G. van Slyke, "The Devil and His Pomps in Fifth-Century Carthage: Renouncing *Spectacula* with Spectacular Imagery," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 59 (2005): 53–72; see also van der Meer's overview of the devil's "pomps," *Augustine the Bishop*, 47–56.

haruspicy.¹⁰¹ Elsewhere the term “devil’s sacraments” is grouped even more generally with spectacles, the theatre, magic, and evil deeds.¹⁰² Magic (*magia*) in late antiquity carries the connotations of the occult and esoteric, the foreign, and of demonic methods of harming another person,¹⁰³ while *spectacula* for Augustine’s North Africa refers primarily to the beast fights of the amphitheatre and the chariot races of the circus noted above.¹⁰⁴ The sacramental rites Augustine has foremost in mind, then, are probably temple rituals, including the esoteric-initiate mysteries practiced in some cults,¹⁰⁵ though the reference to purification—clearly an allusion to Neoplatonism, as we will see—perhaps shows he has theurgy in mind more specifically. However, his way of grouping these terms, and the catch-all nature of their use, makes it seem unlikely that Augustine thinks it important to make overly-precise distinctions between the various forms of demonic religious phenomena.¹⁰⁶

A reductive understanding of pagan materials appears within the same semiology out of which Augustine’s conception of Christian sacrament grew. In

¹⁰¹ S. 198.28, 41, 42, 61, 63. At 198.28 magical arts and sacrilegious rites even seem to be conflated. The close connection between magical conjurations and sacramental union, however, is asserted most forcefully in *diu. qu.* 79.1.

¹⁰² *Ep. Io. tr.* 2.13.

¹⁰³ On the pre-Constantinian development of these connotations, see Richard Gordon, “Imagining Greek and Roman Magic,” in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome* (ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 159–275, esp. 253–66; on the importance of demons for the Christian understanding of magic, see Valerie Flint, “The Demonisation of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity: Christian Redefinitions of Pagan Religions,” in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome* (ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 277–348. J. B. Rives also traces the development within pagan Rome of magic as religious deviance, which is a connotation Christians picked up strongly, and is obviously the main focus of Augustine here. See “Magic in Roman Law: The Reconstruction of a Crime,” in *The Religious History of the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (ed. J. A. North and S. R. F. Price; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 71–108.

¹⁰⁴ See van Slyke, “The Devil and His Poms,” 53.

¹⁰⁵ *Cf. trin.* 4.10.13.

¹⁰⁶ Augustine runs roughshod over distinctions that different pagans at different times would want to make. For example, the opposition to magic of *Cod. Theod.* 9.16.3 is not a Christian invention *per se*, but rather the Christian development of earlier Roman laws against magic. See Mary Beard *et al.*, *Religions of Rome, Volume 2: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 11.2c (p.263). See also Beard *et al.*, *Religions of Rome, Volume 1: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 149–56, 372. Beard *et al.* show that Roman religion was never simply tolerant of anything and everything, but rather always policed its boundaries against those influences it found suspicious.

Teaching Christianity, Augustine defines the range of pagan sacraments in the identification of that which leads to and from the love of self. The interpretation of the scriptures requires the distinction between that in pagan tradition which is true, useful, and thus belonging to the Lord,¹⁰⁷ and that which is false, useless, and thus associated with the demons, to be repudiated and kept at a distance. What is false is identified by the inversion of the principle by which Augustine determines what is true, namely his much-lauded hermeneutical principle of love of God and love of neighbour.

“Not that an idol is anything,” says the apostle, “but because what they sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God; I do not wish you to become the associates of demons.” And what the apostle said about idols and about the sacrifices which are offered in their honor is to be taken as applying to all the imaginary signs that either draw people to the worship of idols or of creation and its parts as though they were gods, or that have to do with remedial charms and other observances which have not been, so to say, publicly promulgated by God to promote love of God and neighbour, but which instead distract the hearts of wretched people in pursuit of their own private appetites for temporal goods.¹⁰⁸

Augustine identifies the logic of Paul’s demonological conception of idolatry with the primordial movement of the devil towards himself, which humans imitate in private desire and the prioritization of the temporal over the eternal. According to Augustine, idolatry is for Paul a synecdoche of all things that draw people toward any observance that teaches people to pursue their own private appetites. The love of self expressed in idolatrous acts, like temple ritual and sacrifice, unifies them sacramentally with all the useless signs that draw people to them. Whatever the specific referent when Augustine refers to pagan “sacraments,” then, it is clear that he has an understanding of paganism that uses the same kind of semiotic range as Christian sacraments: there is a central set of sacraments, temple rites and sacrifices, supported by a network of sacramental signs, like magic and divination, that refer their adherents back to the typical sacraments.

¹⁰⁷ See *doc. Chr.* 2.18.28, which he explores further in 2.25.38–2.38.57.

¹⁰⁸ *Doc. Chr.* 2.23.36, quoting 1 Cor 10:19–20.

Any sign that manifests this pride is part of the sacramental communion of the earthly city. Thus, “superstition includes anything established by human beings which refers to the making and worshiping of idols, or the worshiping of creation or any part of creation as God; or to consultations and certain agreed codes of communication, settled in collusion with demons.”¹⁰⁹ The codes of communication agreed upon between humans and demons are the sacramental-semiotic-ritual constituents of religion. The demonic origin of pagan sacraments is a theme to which Augustine returns. “For unless the demons first instructed men, men would not be able to know what each of them desires.”¹¹⁰ Even though the demons’ desire is not for the bodily sign itself but what it signifies, demonic sacraments appear to retain a level of propriety. In the forgotten past, the gods have established that they prefer certain kinds of symbols, and Augustine appeals to these ancient and arcane origins to help explain what efficacy pagan prayers, divinations, and invocations have. Reading between the lines a bit, this also seems to help make sense of the unusual and apparently arbitrary nature of some of the symbols that are efficacious—mysterious symbols on amulets, the peculiar rituals involved in oracles, the magician’s preference for ancient- and Egyptian-sounding gibberish all come to mind. But what is most important about demonic sacraments, as Markus points out, is that it is precisely a religious-symbolic system that forms the bonds of the community.¹¹¹ Where the aery bodies of demons left them in need of some embodiment in the flesh in order to interact with humanity, the notion of pagan sacraments makes room for human cultural phenomena to fill that void.

There is cohesion between humans and demons in the earthly city to the extent that its sacraments all agree with one another, if in no other way than their communication of a love disordered from the beginning of time, manifest in the sheer variety of temporal desires.¹¹² “Communicating with others by signs we seek to ‘make another a participant of our will’ (*uoluntatis nostrae participem*). . . . It seems that it is this affective element, the presence of will within acts of

¹⁰⁹ *Doc. Chr.* 2.20.30.

¹¹⁰ *Ciu.* 21.6.

¹¹¹ Markus, “Augustine on Magic,” 382–83.

¹¹² Recall here *lib. arb.* 3.11.33: “Spiritual beings, in fact, have the feature that they join together with no accumulation and separate with no diminution. . . . Although spiritual creatures may possess their individual bodies, they can only be joined together by the likeness of their affections or separated by their unlikeness, not by their locations or the mass of their bodies.”

communication, that Augustine's 'pact' with demonic powers ultimately rests on."¹¹³ But while the underlying love remains constant through history, forming the affective basis for the shared symbols of the earthly city, those symbols themselves are, as Augustine has said, "established by human beings." Whether archaic or novel in its origins, all of that which signifies the underlying will of the earthly city is conventional. As Markus notes, the particular form the sacraments of disordered desire take are "not freely chosen by the language-user, but imposed by the conventions of the existing linguistic community, its habits and traditions. You do not *choose* to use the language of demons, thereby entering a community with them; rather, you belong to their community, so you speak their language."¹¹⁴ The emphasis against choice here is against idiosyncrasy, not the role of volition in adherence to the earthly city. What is crucial here could subsequently be put thus: one's willing participation in the sacramental body of the devil is constituted in the choice for particular kinds of human institutions. The language of demons is not esoteric mumbo-jumbo; it is a human language. It is Latin that is used in myth and poetry; it is statuary made by human hands; it is activities of human ritual and artistic performance. The language of demons is a range of symbols conventional for a culture of private desire, of temporal loves, and the lust for mastery, giving idioms for the manifestation of that desire, and cultivating the desire itself in particular forms.

Making Gods

The sacramental system of pagan religion is an agreement of desire between humans and demons, and the union of that desire with bodily likenesses that together comprise its linguistic-symbolic language, which demons can use for their own purposes (as can humans). The paradigm for this joining is in *The City of God*, in Augustine's reading of the Hermetic treatise, *Asclepius*.¹¹⁵ Augustine finds Hermes Trismegistus astonishingly open and honest about the nature of idolatry. Hermes gives a cosmological account typical of late antique paganism, claiming that the higher gods, made by God, the Father and Supreme Being, are to

¹¹³ Markus, "Augustine on Magic," 384, quoting *doc. Chr.* 2.3.4.

¹¹⁴ Markus, "Augustine on Magic," 383, emphasis in original. On conventionality of demonic signs, see *doc. Chr.* 2.24.37.

¹¹⁵ *Ciu.* 8.23–26.

be distinguished from the lower gods of traditional cult and pagan temples, made by man in his own image. But the anthropomorphic images of cultic gods are only the bodies of such lower deities. For humans have received the great and wondrous power to make gods (*deos facere*), the art by which they can unite visible objects and invisible spirits, creating what are like animated bodies (*animata corpora*). Hermes recognized that the forefathers of religion who invented the art of making gods could not make souls, so they “invoked the souls of demons or of angels and united them with holy images and divine mysteries, so that, through those souls, their idols might have the power of doing both good and harm.”¹¹⁶ Summoned to dwell as neighbours to mankind, such gods are able to prophesy and fulfil the desires of their worshippers, but they are also liable to manifest their anger if honours and service are neglected.

The similitude of falsity in this sacrament is its clear contradictory nature, for those who have created such gods have “invented for themselves, so that they might have gods, those who were no gods.”¹¹⁷ But the result is far from impotent, for the god is not merely the body made by human hands, but its union with demons. Thus, although statues are nothing, mere manmade works, they have a power to ensnare their worshippers in a manner commensurate with demonic animation. “The power which those gods possess,” Augustine says, “they possess as demons.”¹¹⁸

Whatever else is to be said of materials carved, however cleverly, into effigies, they still lack life and sensation. Unclean spirits, however, united with those same effigies by nefarious arts, have miserably enslaved the souls of their worshippers by subduing them into fellowship with themselves. And so the apostle says: “We know that an idol is nothing, but what the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God; I do not wish you to become the associates of demons.”¹¹⁹

This account of god-making appears to reflect the late pagan development of the practice of theurgy within the Hermetic tradition, and its concern to transform and

¹¹⁶ *Asclep.* 37, *apud* August. *ciu.* 8.24.

¹¹⁷ *Ciu.* 8.24. He explicitly invokes the prophetic denunciation of idols from Jer 16:20: “If a man make gods, behold, they are no gods.”

¹¹⁸ *Ciu.* 8.24.

¹¹⁹ *Ciu.* 8.24, quoting 1 Cor 10:20, trans. modified.

redeploy traditional cultic practices toward the goal of communion with God.¹²⁰ But it evokes more basically the sense of the mysterious and awesome presence of the divine associated with pagan statuary, which the arts of theurgy were simply trying to evoke more systematically.¹²¹ Augustine's selection of texts read like a description of the nature of pagan idolatry itself, and this is how he views them.

In this way, for Augustine, things representative of the gods become representative of the demons themselves; this is how the gods can have Vergilian faces. What is said of the gods in human history, what humans say of the gods, is said of the demons. And yet, however much Augustine developed this line of thought in his writings, this too is an inheritance. It was a trope for Christians before Augustine in both the East and West, particularly among the apologists,¹²² where, yet again, the insights of Plato and his followers continued to reverberate. Platonic demonology itself begins as a commentary on the place of religion in human movement toward the gods.¹²³ Porphyry exemplifies this tradition. Perhaps the clearest statement of all, however, comes from the pen of Apuleius, whom Augustine considered had provided the epitome of platonic demonology.¹²⁴ "It is of this category of demons . . . that the poets are wont to write—and they are not far from the truth—when they depict the gods as hating or loving some

¹²⁰ Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 142–150.

¹²¹ See *ep.* 102.18, on the endowment of statuary with the semblance of living presence through ceremony and sacrifice. See also, MacCormack, *The Shadows of Poetry*, 151. On divine presence and statuary, including a note on theurgy, see Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 133–37, also 393: "pagan cities were crammed with forests of statuary whose powers and imaginative impact were undeniable. Christians accepted their supernatural effects, but referred them to the demons. These creatures lurked beneath the pedestals in forms which only a pious eye could see." He also notes the persistence of pagan statuary beyond Constantine's symbolic efforts at overturning them. *Ibid.*, 673–74.

¹²² See Everett Ferguson, *Demonology of the Early Christian World* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984), 111–15.

¹²³ Pl., *Sym.* 202e–203a. In the hands of Socrates, following Diotima, the task of giving praise to eros becomes a question of how to understand the role of this god of tradition, and the desire present to all humans he signifies, in Socrates' more fundamental quest for beauty itself. "For eros is not, Socrates, . . . of the beautiful," but "of engendering and bringing to birth in the beautiful." 206e.

¹²⁴ See *ciu.* 8.14.

particular men.”¹²⁵ For not only are they the source of the hidden power behind the successful practice of divination in all its forms,¹²⁶ they are the invisible but existent referents of poetic theology.

The Human

In Augustine’s reading of Hermes’ account of god-making, the idol that is not a god is united to a demon that is not a god, and the demon and its embodiment are joined in sacramental likeness. The predominant form or likeness of idolatry is not, however, that of a stone statue, but the mythical or dramatic display of human immorality. Apuleius goes on to say that the gods

prosper and uplift some; but others, by contrast, they oppose and afflict. The demons, then, experience mercy, indignation, grief, joy and every aspect of human feeling. Their hearts are moved in the same way as ours, and their minds are tossed upon a heaving sea by all their thoughts. All such storms and tempests, then, banish them far from the tranquility of the celestial gods.¹²⁷

Augustine agrees. He goes on to consider philosophical examples of rational control over the passions to show that demons lack even the tranquility of wise men, much less that of the celestial gods Christians call angels, to say nothing at all of the eternally impassible and immutable God who created them all. But the deeper issue for us is that the images humans give of themselves to the gods—as

¹²⁵ Apul., *deo Soc.* 145–146, *apud* August., *ciu.* 9.3. Harrison’s translation brings this out even more clearly: “The poets have the habit, not one far from the truth, of presenting some of this group of what one might call demons . . . as gods.”

¹²⁶ Apul., *deo Soc.* 133–134: “And it is through these same powers, as Plato affirms in his *Symposium*, that all messages are transmitted from above, and that the various wonders of magicians and all types of portent are controlled. Individuals amongst them are in charge of particular activities, with each assigned to his province—whether constructing dream-visions, or marking prophetic entrails, or directing divinatory bird-flight, or teaching oracular bird-cry, or launching thunder-bolts or inspiring seers, causing clouds to flash, or indeed every other activity through which we try to make out the future. Our view should be that all these things are done by the will, power, and authority of the gods of heaven, but by the service, effort, and agency of the demons.” Augustine summarizes this, *ciu.* 8.16.

¹²⁷ Apul., *deo Soc.* 145–146, *apud* August., *ciu.* 9.3.

fickle, temperamental, even contentious and violent—are being accepted as indicative of the nature of demons.

The hook upon which the poetic depiction of demons hangs is euhemerism.¹²⁸ The Greek mythographer Euhemerus had suggested in his *Sacred History* that the origins of the gods were in the lives of men. Augustine is aware that some believe in the transmigration of souls,¹²⁹ but his own distinction between angels and human souls precludes any sort of ontologizing of the euhemeristic notion. Rather, the deification of men is the historical kernel at the origin of all subsequent mythical and poetic elaboration, and thus allows for the projection of human desires into divinity. Augustine gives a nice summary of how he envisions this historical process:

Sacred rites and solemn festivals were established for each one of them, according to his genius, character, actions and circumstances, by those who chose to worship them as gods. These rites, creeping little by little into the souls of men—souls which resemble the demons in their eagerness for theatrical displays—spread far and wide as the poets adorned them with lies and deceitful spirits seduced men to accept them.¹³⁰

What starts in the desire of one outstanding man for honour, glory, and the sort of immortality that comes with remembrance, extends itself through the establishment of cult, and enters its obligations into tradition. As the demand for public displays of fidelity increase so too is the fabulous content of those displays increasingly embellished.

¹²⁸ *Passim* in *ciu.*, but esp. 6.7; 7.18; 7.27; 8.26; 18.13–14. See G. Bardy, “L’Evhémérisme,” in *Œuvres de saint Augustin*, vol. 33: *La Cité de Dieu, Livres I–V: Impuissance sociale du paganisme* (ed. G. Bardy and G. Combès; Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959), 785; Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 49n.95. On the common appeal to euhemerism in earlier Christian apology, see O’Daly, *Augustine’s City of God*, 43–44.

¹²⁹ On Hermes, see *ciu.* 8.26; see also Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, 198. On Apuleius, see *ciu.* 9.11. Both dynamic and static theories of the soul are to be found in Platonism. See John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 46–47.

¹³⁰ *Ciu.* 7.18.

The principle example here for Augustine is Romulus, whom all remember as the victorious founder of Rome. Divinely conceived and miraculously raised, nourished by a she-wolf after being exposed as infants in the Tiber, Romulus grows up to murder his twin brother, Remus, jealous that any should share in the glory of founding the commonwealth he would name after himself. He consulted the gods to establish not only the sacred boundary of the city, the *pomerium*, but also its first cult and festivals. Under his care Rome undertook the Rape of the Sabine women and the expansion of its territories through war. The glory of his attainments were then confirmed by his apotheosis, in the midst either of an eclipse of the sun or a sudden storm of dark cloud and peals of thunder. Livy's record includes the note that even at the time of its occurrence there were those who suspected that the senators nearest to Romulus, those who spoke of his ascension, simply murdered him themselves. Any doubt of this sort was ostensibly dispelled by one Proculus Julius,¹³¹ who proclaimed that Romulus appeared to him in the fearfulness and awesomeness of divinity and that it was the will of the gods that no human strength should resist Rome's conquest of the world. And where Livy extends the deification of Romulus to an unconquerable empire bearing his name, in Vergil the eternity of Rome is the pronouncement of Jupiter: "To these I set no bounds of space or time / Dominion without end I have bestowed."¹³²

But the god is false and the poet is a liar. To Cicero, Augustine points out, the story is one of recognition of Romulus' great virtue, without which no one would give credence to his elevation, which Cicero even suggests is merely a fiction that arose out of the goodwill and renown of the Romans themselves.¹³³ Rome turns Romulus into a god. It is Romans that appoint him a *flamen* under the name of one of their oldest gods, Quirinus; it is Numa, Romulus' successor, that puts him on the early Capitol with Jupiter and Mars.¹³⁴ In this way, one whom

¹³¹ This name signals the quasi-canonical importance of this kind of mythological history. In spite of questions of historicity—for Romans no less than for us—this tale is brought squarely to bear, positively or negatively, upon the question of Livy's day regarding the official deification of the very historical descendent of the legendary Proculus Julius, Julius Caesar. See Beard et al., *Religions of Rome*, 1:148–49.

¹³² Verg. *Aeneid* 1.278–279, *apud* August. *s.* 105.7.10. On Vergil, Augustine, and *Roma Aeterna*, see MacCormack, *The Shadows of Poetry*, 187–90.

¹³³ *Ciu.* 3.15. Augustine quotes from *Cic. Rep.* 2.10.17; *Cat.* 31.1; and the lost *Hortensius*.

¹³⁴ *Ciu.* 3.15. See also, Beard et al., *Religions of Rome*, 2:1.3, 2.8a.

everybody remembers to have been a man is elevated above many gods.¹³⁵ But for Augustine this is mere flattery. The concern of the Romans is that they should have as gods those who reflect their own desires and ambitions. Of what concern, Augustine wonders, is moral rectitude to Rome, for such as these? “Only let it stand, they say, only let it flourish with abundant treasures, glorious in victory.”¹³⁶ Any king more devoted to pleasure than Romulus, he suggests, would *eo ipso* have been made all the greater a god.

In a sense there would have been nothing controversial about Augustine’s accusation of euhemerism among his interlocutors. Honouring the dead was an important aspect of pagan religion. Other than Aeneas, Romulus, and perhaps Latinus, Romans as a rule offered this cult not so much to the individual as the general dead, under the title of *di Manes* or *diui parentes*. But paganism as a whole is characterized by a keen awareness of the possibility of the appearance of the gods as humans in various ways, and this is no less true of Roman paganism. Divinity and the forms it takes are highly ambiguous; we need not look further than the identification of Paul and Barnabas with Hermes and Zeus in their visit to Lystra.¹³⁷ But the euhemerism Augustine employs makes a totalizing claim about a people and their gods, from which no god, no matter how great or celestial, is exempt.

The fact that people were willing to deify a man who existed within the scope of human memory is too suggestive for Augustine not to extrapolate it as an explanation for the origins of the other gods. It is a powerful historical precedent. But euhemerism is more than aetiology; it is about the resemblance between a people and its gods, as the gods it has recognized resemble the people. This is the

¹³⁵ Augustine appeals to Cicero’s marvelling at the fact that such a divinization of a leader could have occurred after the time of Homer, and so within the time of remembered history, and a period when people were already educated. Cic. *Rep.* 2.10.18 and 19, quoted in August. *ciu.* 22.6.

¹³⁶ *Ciu.* 2.20.

¹³⁷ Acts 14:8–20. Lane Fox is particularly good at bringing out this aspect of the awareness of and expectation of encounter with divinity in the constitution of paganism. He does so in part by structuring his inquiry into pagan religious experience around the question of how the people of Lystra could have made this identification of Paul and Barnabas. On the cult of the dead specifically, see Lane Fox *Pagans and Christians*, 83–84; on their appearance in dreams and visions, which helps constitute their divine status, and the extension and prolongation of this sense of divine presence to statuary, see *ibid.*, 132–33. Lane Fox emphasizes Greek sources, however. On Roman cult of the dead, see Beard et al., *Religions of Rome*, 1:31. Cf. Augustine on Apuleius, *ciu.* 9.11.

nature of the earthly city. And with Romulus as its established founder, Rome comes into being as the sacramental embodiment of this diabolical commonwealth. For, while the origin of the city of the devil in the angels was the fall of the latter at the beginning of time, its desire becomes a civic constitution in the murder of Abel by Cain, who founded the first city. And this crime is an “archetype . . . echoed by a kind of image of itself” long after in Romulus’ murder of Remus.¹³⁸ The murder that founds Rome is an earnest of its coming identity as the “capital of the earthly city.” In other words, the reduplication of Cain’s murder, Romulus’ murder of his own brother, along with the apotheosis that ratifies it, establish Rome as the earthly city, sacramentally speaking; they are like a cross and resurrection based in self-interest and pride rather than self-sacrifice and humility, which turn the city of Romulus into a manifestation of the demonic city.

Humans provide the embodiment for demons not just in statues, but in lives that they live and stories that they tell. Lacking their own proper embodiment in the flesh, demons are dependent upon humans to establish the cult by which they are worshipped as they desire, a desire Augustine repeatedly seeks to expose. The sense of superiority according to which demons desire worship is based, at least in part, upon a derision of humanity’s mortal flesh.¹³⁹ And yet, without a mediating material sacrament, there is no human worship, and so they are compelled by their own desire to manifest in idols. Despising the body, demons nevertheless, “through I know not what art, are bound by the chains of their own desires to idols.”¹⁴⁰ Thus, they serve their desires, and those of human religion, by witnessing to these fleshly conceptions of divinity with bodily wonders. In short, “demons took delight in such rites, through which they themselves were worshipped in place of those dead men whom, by means of the testimony of false miracles, they had cause to be regarded as gods.”¹⁴¹ Let us now, therefore, consider the demons’ contribution to the art of making gods.

¹³⁸ *Ciu.* 15.5; see also 15.1.

¹³⁹ *Ciu.* 10.24. Hence, the humility of Christ to be made “a little less than the angels” (Ps 8:6; Heb 2:7, 9) opposes diabolical pride. *Trin.* 4.13.17.

¹⁴⁰ *Ciu.* 8.24.

¹⁴¹ *Ciu.* 7.35.

The Demonic

Augustine attacks the palpable sense of fear that accompanies pagan cult and its attendant institutions. Embedded in the accusations against Christian worship as a failure to take responsibility for the safety of the citizens is the presumption that the gods are to be worshipped precisely to avoid calamities like the sack of Rome, that the gods' anger is to be appeased.¹⁴² Augustine gives a select few examples of the manifestation of this anger, assuming it more than demonstrating it. This is consistent with the polemical nature of the work.¹⁴³ But this is not to say it is a caricature. And, in fact, Augustine does not need to give one to make his point. Historically, the relation between humans and the gods was not narrowly contractual. Humans were neither helpless slaves to all-powerful deities, nor reliable manipulators of divine action. The relation was rather one of negotiation, which the *collegia* of Rome attempted as best they could to keep peaceful through their various responsibilities over cult, festival, auspices, the interpretation of prodigies, and so forth. The gods "were indeed bound to the human community by a network of obligations, traditions, rules, within which the skill of the priests, magistrates and senate could keep them on the side of the city."¹⁴⁴

The deified dead upon whom the city is founded represent not merely a projection of the self and its desires, but a projection that returns to the city as obligation. "The gods had been honoured always, and who would say what would happen if they were not?"¹⁴⁵ Lane Fox's rhetorical question becomes in the hands of Augustine a trenchant criticism of the pagan ethos as such. So, when Augustine speaks of the demons demanding or extorting religious worship from their followers, it should be understood in this most basic sense.¹⁴⁶ It is a criticism of

¹⁴² So, *ciu.* 1.29; 3.31.

¹⁴³ Augustine is selective in his examples, and his polemical purposes tend towards ridicule, rather than the straightforward refutation he might have offered had he intended staunch pagans themselves to read *ciu.* O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God*, 36–37.

¹⁴⁴ Beard et al., *Religions of Rome*, 1:34.

¹⁴⁵ Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 98. He emphasizes the importance of divine anger for understanding paganism, including the subsequent questions of what gods must be placated and how best to do so. See further, e.g., *ibid.*, 95, 230–37.

¹⁴⁶ This is primarily a trope in Book 2. So, *ciu.* 2.8: "it was not merely by their own ignorant submission that the Romans introduced into the rites of their gods those displays in which the fictions of the poets held sway. Rather, the gods themselves, by imperious commands and, in a

pagan religion that echoes some of the more philosophical pagan minds that shudder at the thought that the gods should be so widely perceived to be fickle, lustful, and angry.¹⁴⁷ Augustine refers to the innumerable prodigies of Roman history—from speaking cattle and flying snakes to raining chalk and the eruption of Etna—that would have demanded interpretation and reparation to ensure continued peace with the gods.¹⁴⁸

Now, Augustine is not so credulous as to think that earthquakes are more than earthquakes.¹⁴⁹ But the proliferation of shrines to Poseidon Seisichthon shows that even what is so clearly natural to us, as opposed to volitional, was very quickly brought into the realm of the latter, where gods speaking through nature blurs their distinction. It is the task of Book 2 of *The City of God* in particular to investigate whether the gods have the power to deliver the things they promise. Augustine finds that they do indeed have some such power, useful for testing the good and tempting the wicked, but only as much as God permits for that purpose.¹⁵⁰ The attribution of this kind of efficacy to demons is primarily Augustine's consent to the possibility of their production of meaningful interaction with humans. Demonic miracles are differentiated from angelic ones not by being powerless but by having a different referent, namely a self-love that desires to be worshipped. If you are a pagan, what you do when an earthquake strikes is consult an oracle, which will hopefully enlighten you as to which god is angry and what must be done to make reparation.¹⁵¹ And the experience of the gods to be had there commends the perpetuation of the practice, "for they are

certain sense, by extortion, caused these things to be solemnly performed for them and consecrated in their honour." See also 2.13, 14, 16, 20, 23, 26; and further, 4.26; 8.13; 10.16, 19.

¹⁴⁷ E.g. Cic., *nat. deor.* 2.28.70, quoted by August., *ciu.* 4.30; and Apul., *deo Soc.* 145–48, summarized at August. *ciu.* 8.16. Vergil is uncomfortable with divine wrath at the very beginning of *Aeneid*, 1.13, but praising Aeneas' pious endurance of it does not do nearly enough to call it into question for Augustine. See MacCormack, *The Shadows of Poetry*, 166–67. Philosophical dissatisfaction with the depiction of gods in terms of human vices is definitive for what constitutes "superstition," as Martin explores in *Inventing Superstition: From the Hippocratics to the Christians* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004). Cic. *loc. cit.* draws this aspect out clearly.

¹⁴⁸ *Ciu.* 3.31.

¹⁴⁹ See *ciu.* 10.16 for Augustine's distinction between the miracles traditionally attributed to the gods of the nations and the wonders that occur from time to time having to do with the hidden nature of the world.

¹⁵⁰ *Ciu.* 2.23. The strict limits to their power is a subtheme of Book 3.

¹⁵¹ Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 231.

shown to have been present by the many signs derived from entrails, auguries and prophecies through which they so loved to vaunt and commend themselves.”¹⁵²

Like earthquakes, plagues were a disaster that required divine consultation. An important story for Augustine is that of the introduction of the theatre to the Roman people as a remedy for a devastating pestilence in the early days of the monarchy. It is significant precisely because it appears to work. Not that Augustine attributes to demons the power to stop a plague. Rather, he suggests, cunning demons foresaw the end of the pestilence and used that knowledge to take advantage of an opportunity to introduce a much graver pestilence of morals.¹⁵³ Another story, also concerning the propagation of the Roman theatre, is demonstrative of the lengths to which the gods go to threaten and extort from the Romans the solemn performance of such sacred vices. Augustine recounts the tale of one Titus Latinus, a Roman farmer who was repeatedly compelled in dreams to announce to the Senate that the Roman games should be repeated, since the amusement of the gods was most rudely interrupted by the execution of a criminal during the opening of the games. When he was reluctant to do so, his son died and he himself fell gravely ill with a disease that was not overcome until he reported, at the behest of friends, the divine commands to the magistrate.¹⁵⁴

Dreams and the divinations of augurs and haruspices signify the presence of demons, who are capable of using the semiotic structures the nations have put in place (in collusion with the demons themselves) for this purpose. Malign spirits, Augustine says, do not neglect to delude the minds of humans and confirm their noxious opinions about men-turned-gods.¹⁵⁵ Occasionally they perform what one might almost describe as bona fide wonder: weeping statues, sieves through whose holes water does not drain, and so forth—the sort of thing we examined in Chapter 3. He suggests in an earlier work that sorcerers can also conjure this power to signify by means of entreaty and ritual, with the same effect of binding those who stand in amazed desire of such wonders into sacramental

¹⁵² *Ciu.* 2.25.

¹⁵³ *Ciu.* 1.32 and 2.8, referring to Livy, 7.1–2.

¹⁵⁴ *Ciu.* 4.26.

¹⁵⁵ *Ciu.* 6.7.

communion.¹⁵⁶ But Augustine claims that most such events are empty illusions used to play upon the imaginations of mortal humans.¹⁵⁷

In *Teaching Christianity*, Augustine speaks of the open-endedness of the sacramental language of demons. It is a result of their conventionality that demonic signs “signify different things to different people according to their assumptions and ways of thinking.”¹⁵⁸ Their lack of “any particular signifying value”¹⁵⁹ is what makes them useless for true religion; but it is precisely this that makes “useless signs” useful for the demonic desire to deceive. Such wonders are an empty cipher that allows one to fill it with the content of one’s own desire, which is the spirit of euhemeristic god-making, as we have seen. These little demonic miracles do just enough to suggest divine presence, and then abandon the recipient to draw his own conclusions. Like Eve in the Garden, it belongs to the devil not to take over, but to tempt, to excite the human desire demons crave. Little tricks, like appearing in dreams in the guise of gods familiar from statuary, or foreseeing the future, are very handy in this regard.

For Augustine, false worship compromises everything the Romans do, and the demons are culpable because they have done nothing to discourage this falsity and everything to encourage it. That demons play upon the suggestible imagination of humans is central to Augustine’s account of how the corrupt morals of the gods and the Romans themselves are intertwined, and mutually incriminating. So, for example, during his civil war with Marius, Sulla seeks time and again an oracle of future victory. Now, we will recall that their putative influence over events rest merely in the demons’ ability to predict the future upon the basis of present circumstances. In this limited way, though, Sulla receives signs that are auspicious with respect to his desire for victory. But these signs are most significant to Augustine for including no word about the horrible crimes Sulla himself would commit against his fellow citizens in the course of the war and afterwards.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ *Diu. qu.* 79.1. The example here is the power of Pharaoh’s magicians.

¹⁵⁷ *Ciu.* 10.16; for the weeping statue of Apollo, see 3.11.

¹⁵⁸ *Doc. Chr.* 2.24.37.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. *ciu.* 10.12: the wonders accomplished by theurgic arts surpass human ability but have no reference to the worship of the one true God.

¹⁶⁰ *Ciu.* 2.24.

Demons take care to be regarded and worshipped as gods: they tell Romans like Sulla what is necessary to perpetuate the myth that they have powers that humans will take to be divine. Demons thus become accountable for their characterization in Roman religion, everything said and, importantly, not said. To Augustine, the Vergilian face of demons with which we began, their identification with pagan religious culture, is an identification the demons themselves have espoused through their marvels. At the same time, humans are also accountable for everything they have received from demonic tradition, whatever is false that has been taken as true. We have seen here that diabolical sacraments draw humans into agreement with demonic desire, such that they willingly form a religious body of the devil. The archetype of these sacraments is the act of god-making, which joins religious myth, euhemeristically constructed upon a kernel of historical truth, to demons that receive honours wrongly given to false gods. But it is the underlying love of self that unifies the human and the demonic in the production of all kinds of sacraments, beyond pagan rites of worship narrowly conceived, according to which such sacraments thereby unify humans and demons into the devil and his body.

The moral corruption of Rome fashions gods out of demons, and false demonic gods help corrupt Roman morals. Humans and demons are mutually operative in the same complex social networks of moral influence on the basis of the sacramental agreements they share, which is how demons come to be embedded within *The City of God*, a work whose focus is widely understood to be political or social. As Dodaro points out, Satan provides not only the “archetypal seduction,” but also the “prototype for all secular political discourse,” which is constituted in deceptive rhetoric that disrupts the political community in its search for beatitude and happiness.¹⁶¹ It is to the more specific sacramental constituents of this deception that we shall now turn.

¹⁶¹ Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, 67–68. Cf. Michael Hanby, who argues that just war rhetoric constitutes an extension of just this kind of demonic political discourse in contemporary America. “Democracy and its Demons,” in *Augustine and Politics* (ed. John Doody, Kevin L. Hughes, and Kim Paffenroth; Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2005), 117–44.

5. Pagan Demonolatry

Last chapter we spoke of *The City of God* as a history Augustine wrote of pagan Rome by which he identified demons and their “Vergilian faces.” The humans of this history, part of the earthly city with the demons, comprise the body of the devil, which is constituted sacramentally much like the body of Christ is in the church. These sacraments are nothing other than the Vergilian faces of the demons, which is to say their cultural manifestation, in particular within pagan religion. The theory underpinning this reading is Augustine’s conception of pagan god-making as a union of human artefact (or, better, artifice) and demonic power. In this final chapter, we shall take a closer look at Augustine’s understanding of the character of these sacraments, the religious face of the demons, as they appear both to those less insightful, not to say ignorant, and the philosophers whom Augustine credits with some perception of wisdom. We will then be able to use the character of pagan religiosity, as Augustine understands it, to explicate his conception of the work of demons. In the end we will find that, just as Augustine says, demons are false mediators in opposition to the true mediator that is Christ. For, at every turn, the character of demonic religiosity manifests some privation of the true religious order found in the sacramental union of the body of Christ to its head. And it is in this union alone that true freedom from demons is found. In order to orient our discussion of demonic religion, however, let us first note the moral effect Augustine claims it has upon the Roman people.

The Continuous Immorality of Roman Pagans

There is, for Augustine, a fundamental continuity in desire that links all of the earthly city, and so he makes it clear that he could (and would, but for the tediousness!) write *The City of God* about any empire equally.¹ But it is, of course, Roman traditionalists that accuse Christian worship of failing to prevent the sack of Rome. In light of the recent success of Alaric and the Visigoths, Romans are blaming Christianity and its God for the downfall of the rapidly

¹ *Ciu.* 3.1; 19.24; cf. 7.*Praef.*

fading empire, urging a return to the worship of the gods of their fathers. But Augustine suggests that their exigency in this is reducible to a desire “to secure an infinite variety of insane pleasures.”² Unpunished luxury, exemption from all hardship and annoyance, peace and all kinds of wealth in abundance, the restoration of their political domination: their lust for these things is at the root of their desire to worship the false gods who share their identity. Rome’s true destruction, Augustine argues, was not of its walls in 410, but of its morals under the watch of pagan gods. As such, no restoration can be found in a return to those demons.

While the Romans argue for a return to traditional piety for the sake of restoring the once-great empire, Augustine wonders in return what is so great about a great empire.³ The material desire underlying the attacks of his Roman accusers is a manifestation of the pride constitutive of the earthly city as it relates to this life and the good things it contains. The city of God is not captivated by such things, and thus uses them like pilgrims as signs and sustenance in their search for the one true God. But the city of the devil seeks the goods and advantages to be found in this temporal life, wanting to enjoy them for their own sake. The loss of extrinsic goods—empire, property, bodily life—is indeed an evil, but one who clings to God is not shaken by such ills, whereas those with a great stake in these things experience such loss as a punishment. This is why Christians suffer the very same loss of Rome as purification that pagans suffer as damnation.⁴ Thus the pagans cry out with Vergil as though Troy had been destroyed all over again: “All the gods upon whom this realm stood have gone, forsaking shrine and altar.”⁵ The force driving them away is ostensibly the

² *Ciu.* 1.30. See, generally, 1.30–33.

³ *Ciu.* 4.3.

⁴ *Ciu.* 1.8–9. There were undoubtedly no few Christians lamenting the sack of Rome. Van Oort notes that Rome was not only the traditional centre of the cult of the gods; it was also the home of the relics of Sts. Peter and Paul. There would have been a significant disillusionment among Christians, especially among those subscribing to a “Eusebian ‘Reichtstheologie,’ ” according to which the same expectations pagans had of their gods to protect the city were simply transferred to the Christian God. See Johannes van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon: A Study of Augustine’s City of God and the Sources of his Doctrine of the Two Cities* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 58 and 162. Augustine, however, does resist full identification of this type of Christian with pagans, suggesting that they suffer alongside the Romans not in leading a common wicked life, but for loving this life in common with them.

⁵ Verg., *Aen.* 2.351, *apud* August., *ciu.* 2.22.

impious atheism of Christians, whose equanimity in the face of such a disaster only betrays their guilt. The falsity of the accusation, however, is easily established: if bodily destruction is all the evidence one needs for the desertion of the gods, Roman history itself shows the Romans have been perfectly capable of chasing them off all on their own, in spite of their continued piety. On the contrary, it is not the absence of the gods that the destruction of Rome marks, but their presence.

Augustine describes the “collapse of those moral standards which, corrupted little by little at first, then tumbled pell-mell like a torrent until, though the houses and city walls remained intact, the commonwealth was so ruined that even its own most eminent authors do not hesitate to say that it was lost.”⁶ Rome’s history of moral decay was already a pagan Roman trope, as Augustine finds it in such distinguished writings as those of Sallust and Cicero.⁷ This history ends with Rome over-reaching itself in its ambition for gain, which Augustine, following Sallust, calls its lust for mastery (*libido dominandi*).⁸ But the emic account of this downfall takes for granted a virtuous origin to which one can appeal to restore the glory of Rome. Sallust recalls a time in the early Republican period, just after the expulsion of the kings, in which Romans displayed high morals and concord. “Justice and goodness prevailed among them as much by nature as by law.”⁹ Now, Augustine admits that Rome did not always desire domination for its own sake. He even accepts that the love of glory, although still rooted firmly in pride and the desire for happiness in this life, enabled the Romans to attain a measure of restraint, which amounts to a kind of virtue.¹⁰ What Sallust praises in the *Catiline*, however, receives more sober treatment in his *Histories*. An appeal to a Golden Age of Roman virtue highlights the conditions of moral degradation in which the conspiracy of Catiline occurred. But, as Augustine points out, the record in the *Histories* shows how quickly powerful men took control of the early Republic, which undermines such romantic notions.¹¹ This is especially so in light of Augustine’s recounting of the moral failures of the regal

⁶ *Ciu.* 2.22.

⁷ See principally *ciu.* 2.18 and 21 respectively.

⁸ Sall. *Catil.* 2.2. See August., *ciu.* 3.14.

⁹ See *ciu.* 2.17 and 18, quoting Sall. *Cat.* 9.1

¹⁰ *Ciu.* 5.12.

¹¹ Sall. *Hist.* 1.11; see August., *ciu.* 2.18. On Augustine’s use of Sallust, see O’Daly, *Augustine’s City of God: A Reader’s Guide* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 240–46.

period. Contrary to Sallust, Augustine insists that Rome starts out bad and gets worse, its moral failures visible throughout: its history is full of betrayal, violation, and incessant warring, among the Romans themselves and with their neighbours, from the fratricide of Romulus to the brutality of the civil wars.¹²

The more Augustine tries to get a handle on moments of Roman virtue, the more slippery and elusive they become, revealing themselves to be merely “less vile” than properly virtuous.¹³ It is telling for Augustine that the very high point of morality Sallust sees outside Rome’s golden age¹⁴ Cicero represents as a prelude to the moral degradation to come, which Cicero himself describes as the very cessation of the commonwealth’s existence. For it was then that Scipio Aemilianus Africanus was exiled, he who had delivered Rome from Hannibal and the Carthaginians, thus bringing an end to the Second Punic War; he in whose mouth Cicero establishes the principle of a commonwealth’s existence upon an agreement as to what is right, such that no commonwealth can survive the destruction of its morals.¹⁵ It was also then, Augustine explains, that certain “oriental luxuries” were introduced, “worse than any enemy,” and unjust laws were passed that prevented women from becoming heirs.¹⁶

The most fundamental undoing of Roman claims to virtue comes in Sallust’s admission that their greatest moments of virtue were achieved only through fear of an enemy, like the Etruscans or Carthaginians, capable of destroying them.¹⁷ Hence, the great discipline the Romans achieved in the face of Carthaginian hostility before the final Punic War, for which Sallust praises them, was of no avail to them at the conclusion of that third war when Carthage was destroyed. Augustine draws attention to the pontiff, Scipio Nasica Corculum, who argued against Rome’s destruction of Carthage precisely because of the utility of the fear that comes with a powerful enemy.¹⁸ It was only this fear, love of glory’s fear of death, and not true virtue that had restrained the hand of Rome. Because of this, when the last threat of death was removed, the love of glory did not manifest

¹² Anticipated in *ciu.* 2.17, he gives a fuller treatment of this early history in Book 3.

¹³ *Ciu.* 5.13.

¹⁴ *Ciu.* 2.18.

¹⁵ *Ciu.* 2.21; with reference to Books 1 and 2 of *Cic. Rep.*; see also August., *ciu.* 3.21. Cicero’s claim about the loss of the commonwealth comes in his own voice at 5.1.

¹⁶ *Ciu.* 3.21.

¹⁷ *Ciu.* 2.18; see also 3.16, 21.

¹⁸ *Ciu.* 1.30–31; 2.18.

in discipline but exploded into lust for mastery. For it was exactly this lust, according to which all is sacrificed to one's greed for the greatest empire, that motivated the decision to destroy Carthage. By avarice the last inhibition of avarice was destroyed, and the relatively prosperous condition Rome enjoyed, having been disciplined by its enemy, gave way to the great evils of which Sallust and Cicero spoke. "From that time forth, the morals of our forefathers were swept away, not by slow degrees, as formerly, but as if by a torrent."¹⁹ Rome succumbed to the lust for mastery, which "belongs in its purest form to the whole Roman people,"²⁰ in which war itself is sought for the glory of slaughter and dominion over other nations and peoples, and they suppressed all other desire for the sake of the glory of this mastery.²¹

An educated and religiously conservative Roman aristocracy in the late fourth century was never going to look to recent times as an example of the moral commonwealth bound with the pagan piety it desired. The order after the crisis of the third century was established by military strength, which was exactly what made it possible for an emperor sympathetic to Christianity to gain control of the empire.²² Any appeal to good order rooted not in the fortunes of strength but harmonious relations with the gods was going to have to look a lot further back for its archetype. And, in any case, a certain atavism was characteristic of pagan culture; the appeal to tradition was the primary—and, in the end, only—argument in paganism's possession.²³ Thus, in identifying the continuity between the "virtuous" Rome and the Rome of moral decline evident to all, Augustine not only takes his criticism one step further than that of the Romans themselves; he also robs his opponents of the very foundation of the case they wish to make against Christians. The lust for domination that led to such atrocity throughout

¹⁹ *Ciu.* 2.18, quoting Sall. *Hist.* 1.16.

²⁰ *Ciu.* 1.30.

²¹ Cf. *ciu.* 5.12.

²² See Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: AD 150–750* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971), 22–28.

²³ Hence, as MacCormack points out, where Augustine focuses on the defeat of the Trojan *penates*, Vergil's readers are less concerned with their loss in battle than the establishment of Rome upon such a long and venerable divine lineage. "In troubled times, the very antiquity of Rome and its sacred traditions seemed to be a pointer toward the continuance of these traditions, which therefore figured not merely in the religious polemic but also in historical and legal writings of the late fourth and early fifth centuries." Sabine MacCormack, *The Shadows of Poetry: Vergil in the Mind of Augustine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 171–72.

history was not a betrayal of some golden age of virtue, but rather the fulfillment of the very desire for glory upon which Rome was founded, when the fear of destruction no longer restrained that desire. Those Romans advocating for a *ressourcement* are appealing to the very pagan traditions that cultivated the worst excesses the same Romans would denounce. If there was a golden age, then the principles of good government need only be retrieved from Rome's history. But for Augustine pagan Rome comprises a morally consistent history. And what binds it all together are the theological institutions interwoven throughout its structures of governance. That is, it is bound by a religious problem, a problem of bonds, of that to which one binds (*religare*) oneself. For, in the worship the aristocratic exiles would restore, Rome had bound itself to demons.

The Moral Instruction of the Gods

“All the gods upon whom this realm stood have gone, forsaking shrine and altar.”²⁴ The Roman lament is certainly for the loss of favourable outward conditions, for temporal desires left ungratified, but it is a lament that identifies the speaker himself as responsible for betraying the *fides* of the gods. And yet, in spite of the fact that Augustine's opponents advocate pagan worship for the sake of the benefits the gods can bestow, it is not at all clear to Augustine that the reverse is not true: that the most impious and cruel gain the most temporal felicity, while the pious and restrained suffer for their loyalty.²⁵ It appears that the Roman gods are in the business of flattering the fortunate, and failing the unfortunate, as the historical outcomes pagans seek through their worship are not in fact evidently correlated to the exercise of that piety. Such are the vicissitudes of history. Augustine's point is not that the Christian God will succeed where the pagan gods failed, but that what is sought in pagan worship is false, and the gods did nothing to correct the error. It never occurred to the Romans that they might impute such moral ills to these very gods, “even though,” Augustine says, “it was the gods themselves who, by their malignant cunning, implanted in the minds of men the

²⁴ Verg., *Aen.* 2.351, *apud* August., *ciu.* 2.22.

²⁵ As a comparison of Marius and Regulus shows. Regulus shows a piety that Christianity's Roman accusers would admire, but it secures for him precisely the fate—his own death—they would turn to the gods in order to avoid. Marius, on the other hand, shows an impiety they would vilify, only to gain everything for the sake of which they demand piety. See *ciu.* 2.23; for more on Regulus, see 1.15.

beliefs from which all such vices arose.”²⁶ For, where Roman religion was silent on morals, there demons were silent; what Roman religion taught, this the demons taught.

The path to God that humans require must address both the intellect and the will, to the extent that these are distinguishable. The interlocutors of his later years certainly led Augustine to emphasize the need of the human will to be healed, but this should not lead us to think that original sin consists in moral weakness as opposed to ignorance. Humans need a true, good, just exemplar every bit as much as they need a healing balm for the soul. That Christ is both healer and exemplar is, of course, the point for Augustine, and thus the proper context for understanding Augustine’s criticism of the demonic nature of pagan worship.²⁷ For all paganism, to Augustine, is theatrical by nature,²⁸ and by its spectacles it corrupts and contaminates. For humans are spectators, susceptible of desiring what they see, seizing upon spectacle as exemplar and so worthy of imitation, whether good or wicked.²⁹

Augustine says, “the highest duty of religion is to imitate him whom you worship.”³⁰ What is expressed as hortatory here Augustine might also have put descriptively: one does not worship something, strictly speaking, without imitating it. Desire for Augustine is mimetic, and mimesis is worship. What is

²⁶ *Ciu.* 2.18.

²⁷ For the ongoing impact of ignorance upon the human condition, see Robert Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 28; for his analysis of Augustine’s account of paganism as demonic deception from within the context of humanity’s persistent affliction by ignorance, see *ibid.*, 43–53. Also on evil as an obstruction to the proper human operation of the mind, see G. R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 29–90.

²⁸ Jennifer Herdt, “The Theatre of the Virtues: Augustine’s Critique of Pagan Mimesis,” in *Augustine’s City of God: A Critical Guide* (ed. James Wetzel; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 111–29, at 111–14.

²⁹ Cf. Herdt, “The Theatre of the Virtues,” 120–21, emphasizes original: “What Augustine emphasizes is that the spectator is in a receptive position, determined first by what he or she *sees* rather than by what he or she *does*.” In light of this, Herdt compares pagan religion and Christian liturgy as two kinds of spectacle, two kinds of *exempla*, in Augustine’s thought. For more on Christians as spectators, whom Fifth-century North African Bishops like Augustine and Quodvultdeus continually had to call back from pagan spectacles to the spectacles of the church, see Daniel G. Van Slyke, “The Devil and His Poms in Fifth-Century Carthage: Renouncing *Spectacula* with Spectacular Imagery,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 59 (2005): 53–72, esp. 63–65.

³⁰ *Ciu.* 8.17.

proffered as divine is thus accurately judged in accordance with the kind of example it sets. What example did the various constituents of pagan religion set?

The whole city learnt these stories of the seductions and crimes of the gods: these ignominious tales of deeds which the gods either viciously and foully did or even more viciously and foully invented for the eyes and ears of the public. The Romans perceived that these deeds were pleasing to the divine beings, and so they believed them not only worthy of display to the gods, but also worthy of imitation by themselves. And I know nothing of that purportedly good and honest teaching which, if it was given at all, was given to so few and so secretly that the gods seemed rather to fear that it might be disclosed than that it might not be practised.³¹

Herdtschke helpfully identifies three aspects of the exemplarity of pagan cult: its authoritative nature on account of its divinity; the fact that it is made fully public before the assembled people; and its appeal to base human desire.³² But all three fundamentally cohere in the attribution of divinity. It is because such a wide variety of morally questionable examples go by the name of “god” that all of Augustine’s subsequent criticisms hang together. For “god,” according to Augustine, is simply the word humans use to designate that which they consider greater than all other things.³³ When the lives of the wicked are called divine, therefore, they inform and confirm the wicked desires of those who behold them, giving license to these desires by associating them with what humans consider the best of all things. “For human infirmity cannot be restrained from the perpetration of damnable deeds for as long as a seemingly divine authority is given to the imitation of such deeds.”³⁴

³¹ *Ciu.* 2.27.

³² Herdtschke, “The Theatre of the Virtues,” 113.

³³ See *doc. Chr.* 1.7.7.

³⁴ *Ciu.* 4.1. It is a theme primarily of Book 2. E.g., *ciu.* 2.27: “The Romans perceived that these deeds were pleasing to the divine beings, and so they believed them not only worthy of display to the gods, but also worthy of imitation by themselves.”

Demonic Silence

As he suggests above, however, what the gods do not say is as important to Augustine as what they do say.³⁵ Now, Augustine admits that his depiction of paganism is selective and polemical.³⁶ Not every facet of the near limitless variation to be found in paganism will offend the ancient Christian and modern liberal sensibilities alike as the castrated priests of Attis do. But Augustine is clear that even “harmless” acts like giving good-luck presents and playing dice, idle songs and the fanaticism associated with sporting events, exist along the same continuum as the more “obvious” pagan transgressions of Christian moral standards. For they are mediations of the very same desire, however more subtle.³⁷ Seemingly innocuous pagan practices do nothing to stem the tide of the cultivation of self-love in which they too participate. For this a great deal of moral instruction is necessary, and Augustine finds almost none in traditional paganism.

There are exceptions, of course, but only those that prove the rule. Civic laws give some moral guidance, but human law stands below the gods by

³⁵ A recurring theme in Book 2. See Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, 43–44.

³⁶ *Ciu.* 2.1. See O’Daly, *Augustine’s City of God*, 80–81.

³⁷ *S.* 198.2–3. It would thus be a mistake to think that there is a more innocuous high-art pagan, perhaps Greek, theatre to mitigate Augustine’s zeal. Augustine is aware of the classical comedy and tragedy we might think of here, and considers it the least offensive of pagan theatrics. But even these contain many shameful things, and neglect the duty of religious ritual to exemplify the godliness of good morals. See *ciu.* 2.8. This seems to be the subtext to James K. A. Smith’s attempt to reconsider Augustine’s rejection of the theatre. In light of Augustine’s amendments to platonic ontology following Christian doctrines of creation, incarnation, and resurrection, Smith wants to claim on Augustine’s behalf the possibility of a drama that stirs the affections toward God, a kind of “animated iconography” that would be an integral component of a Christian “public theology.” “Staging the Incarnation: Revisioning Augustine’s Critique of Theatre,” *Literature and Theology* 15/2 (2001): 123–39. One wonders exactly what he has in mind here; his only substantive example is the hypothetical one with which he begins his reflection, namely a cinematographic dramatization of Augustine’s *Confessions*. While I agree with Smith that Augustine’s ontology necessitates the possibility of some kind of iconic dramatic performance to play a role in the salvation of embodied humans, I would also suggest that Augustine himself anticipates this, and furthermore that he provides quite specifically that it should take place in the liturgy of the catholic church. We have noted (above, n.29) that both Herdt, “The Theatre of the Virtues,” and Van Slyke, “The Devil and His Poms,” highlight Augustine’s opposition of pagan spectacle with Christian spectacle. The latter enumerates five kinds of alternate spectacle in the rhetoric and iconography of the church: the passion of Christ, the wonders of Scripture, the interior struggle of the Christian life against vice, the rites of initiation, and the acts of the martyrs. These are summarized at *op. cit.*, 71. Cf. August., *en. Ps.* 39.9; *Io. eu. tr.* 7.6. It is possible that Augustine would appreciate the Christian conversion of theatre in his day and the cinema in ours, but probably only insofar as it directly and explicitly led people to partake in the body of Christ.

definition, and thus cannot, in the end, restrain imitation of the gods by its relatively chaste prescription.³⁸ In the “mystery” cults true morals were supposed to have been taught. And yet these teachings were held to be the occult preserve of initiates, as though morality itself were shameful and unfit for public consumption. Likewise, philosophers through the ages have made some insights into true morals, but these have always been denied divine authority on account of being inexpedient for governance. By keeping the good secret, the demons “transform themselves into angels of light,” admitting that the truth set free among the people is not useful for the purposes they would work among them, but showing enough good to those who would defend their cult.³⁹ All of these moral teachings occur somewhere other than explicit and public instruction about divinity, but it is precisely the responsibility of religion to provide such instruction. It is thus indicative of their demonic nature that the gods the demons promote with their miracles make no public declaration of clear precepts with the force of law that might have restrained the Romans from destroying Carthage, much less free them from the underlying desires that lead to such lust for mastery.⁴⁰ The pagans may claim that because of Christians the gods have forsaken shrine and altar, but Augustine retorts that the entire history of Rome has been one of divine abandonment: that of demons abandoning their worshippers to their immorality.⁴¹

Crimes of the Gods

While good morals remain exemplified by the merely human at best, and hidden within the esoteric at worst, the whole city learns of the crimes of the gods. Had they really departed, Augustine remarks, the Romans would have been subject only to their own vice.⁴² But the gods remain present and accounted for in the records of Roman poetry, testifying to their immoral and impious behaviour. Even the Roman Marcus Varro notes that in the mythical theology of Rome we find that “gods have been thieves, adulterers or the servants of men. In short, in

³⁸ *Ciu.* 2.8.

³⁹ *Ciu.* 2.6, 26; on philosophy, to which we will return below, see 2.7.

⁴⁰ *Ciu.* 2.4.

⁴¹ Cf. MacCormack, *The Shadows of Poetry*, 190–92.

⁴² *Ciu.* 2.25.

this theology all the things are attributed to the gods that can befall not merely a man, but even the most contemptible of men.”⁴³ What is said of the gods is so shameful, Augustine notes, that the actors who perform these ignoble honours for the gods and the city are held in contempt.⁴⁴ For his part, Varro thinks that such are merely falsehoods enshrined by the poets, but this defense by dissociation is irrelevant. At no point in the source material of pagan mythology does Augustine find the gods themselves giving any indication that the crimes attributed to them are false. And from the standpoint of imitation, it does not matter if they are; for what is it to a demon who desires to ensnare humans in false morals if they accomplish their task with falsities?⁴⁵ But, in fact, what is indicated is quite the opposite: it is the unqualified and unequivocal celebration of these very crimes irrespective of their veracity that is extorted by the gods.

Augustine’s concern for exemplarity as a responsibility of the authorities explains why so much of his criticism gathers around the powerful mimetic institution of the theatre.⁴⁶ As Ernest Fortin explains, poets play an important role in the propagation of Roman paganism. “They function both as unacknowledged legislators of the nation and as instruments used by actual legislators in establishing or perpetuating its religious traditions.”⁴⁷ One issue, then, is the deep association between the theatre and the priesthoods that serves not only their mutual condemnation, but constitutes the engine of Rome’s political control over its people.⁴⁸ We will return to this issue below. But we can note now the influence

⁴³ From his non-extant *Antiquitates rerum humanarum et diuinarum*, *ciu.* 6.5.

⁴⁴ *Ciu.* 2.13.

⁴⁵ See, e.g., *ciu.* 2.10.

⁴⁶ *Ciu.* 2.8, 25–26. On the centrality of the theatre in Augustine’s criticisms of paganism, see MacCormack, *The Shadows of Poetry*, 198; Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, 46; idem, “*Christus Sacerdos*: Augustine’s Polemic Against Roman Pagan Priesthoods in *De Ciuitate Dei*,” *Augustinianum* 33 (1993): 101–35, at 106–07; for a helpful summary of Augustine’s criticisms of the theatre, see Smith, “Staging the Incarnation,” 124–29. The theatre is one of three basic constituents of the pagan spectacles Augustine opposes, the other two being the beast-baiting of the amphitheatre and the chariot races in the circus. While Augustine considers the latter two no less demonic than the theatre, we will focus on the theatre here because of its emphasis in *ciu.*, which is perhaps due to the fact that its theological references to pagan gods remained intact in a way not true of beast fighting and races, or perhaps because its immorality was so much more overt, even to the point of being sexually explicit. On these three *spectacula*, see van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, 47–56.

⁴⁷ Ernest L. Fortin, “Augustine and Roman Civil Religion: Some Critical Reflections,” *RÉA* 26 (1980): 238–56, at 248.

⁴⁸ See Dodaro, “*Christus Sacerdos*,” 106–111; also idem, *Christ and the Just Society*, 50–53.

of the songs of the poets as they depict the relations internal to divinity, “exhibited to all eyes as objects worthy of imitation and fit to be seen,” characterized as they are by the lust for sex and power.⁴⁹ As Gillian Clark points out, “most Romans encountered stories about their gods by watching plays, for Roman religion had no belief-statements or sacred texts, and its priests were required to perform the ritual, not to explain it. What else did the ordinary people have but indecent rituals and stage-shows about gods behaving badly?”⁵⁰ And it is all the more wicked because in the shamefulness of the theatrical display neither animal nor merely human blood is immolated to the gods, but rather human modesty itself. Anyone can see what kind of demon it is, Augustine says, that requires the sort of placation the goddess Flora receives in her *ludi scenici*.⁵¹

Augustine recalls that Scipio Nasica Corculum, who had advocated for the preservation of Carthage, likewise took a concern for public morality by resisting the establishment of the theatre as a civic institution. He demolished a stone theatre already under construction that was to be permanent, and prohibited the use even of temporary benches. But even he was unwilling to prohibit the performance of plays altogether, out of fear of demons—which is to say, fear of the consequences of forsaking the traditional modes of their placation—and in this way his loyalties were consistent with those of the *Pontifex Maximus* Quintus Mucius Scaevola and the augur Cicero, for whom the offenses of the theatre could not be dispensed with on account of their essential relation to the civic cult required for the normal operation of the city.⁵²

Augustine establishes the unity of the theatre and other constituents of public festival with the priestly offices primarily in conversation with Marcus

⁴⁹ *Ciu.* 2.26. On the nature of Roman theatre in Augustine, see Gillian Clark, “Augustine’s Varro and Pagan Monotheism,” in *Monotheism Between Pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity* (ed. Stephen Mitchell and Peter Van Nuffelen; Leuven: Peters, 2010), 181–201, at 198–200, citing the work of T. Peter Wiseman, *Roman Drama and Roman History*; see also Herdt, “The Theatre of the Virtues,” 113. O’Daly points out that Augustine is thinking chiefly of mime and pantomime. *Augustine’s City of God*, 105. For the presence of sexual innuendo and display in mime, see Elaine Fantham and Costas Panayotakis, “Mime,” OCD⁴.

⁵⁰ Clark, “Augustine’s Varro and Pagan Monotheism,” 199.

⁵¹ *Ep.* 91.5. Van der Meer notes this passage, *Augustine the Bishop*, 51. Augustine mentions Flora at *ciu.* 2.27, but cf. also his description of the “parade of harlots” in the rites of Caelestis, *ciu.* 2.26.

⁵² *Ciu.* 1.31–32; on Scaevola and Cicero, see 4.26–27. On the “puritanical opposition” of Scipio Nasica Corculum, see W. Beare, *The Roman Stage: A Short History of Latin Drama in the Time of the Republic* (3rd ed.; London: Methuen & Co., 1964), 171.

Varro's discussion of mythical and civil theology in his non-extant *Antiquities of Things Human and Divine*. Though Varro would maintain the legitimacy of Roman civil theology by disassociating it from the falsehoods of the mythical theology to be found in the theatres and games, Augustine argues that the various rites of the city priests demonstrate that the temple is but the mirror image of the theatre, together being but two expressions of a single theology: "the one causes wicked fictions concerning the gods to resound in the songs of men; the other consecrates them for the festivities of the gods themselves."⁵³ It is, after all, Varro himself who has counted the theatre not among "things human," but among "things divine."⁵⁴ It should be no surprise, then, that the crimes of the gods found in the tales of the poets straightforwardly complement the crimes of the priests found in the rites of the gods. "The poets have Jupiter with a beard and Mercury without a beard; but do not the pontiffs have the same? Do not the actors and priests alike represent Priapus as having enormous private parts? When he stands still to be adored in the sacred places, is he different from when he runs about in the theatre to be laughed at?"⁵⁵ And on it goes, extending even to the select and principle gods of the pantheon, culminating it seems, for Augustine, in the disgraceful rites of the Great Mother Tellus, etched as the image of them is in the early memory of the bishop. Her effeminate priests, the Galli, willingly castrate themselves after the manner of Attis, the goddess' consort. Neither the detestable honours bestowed upon the male phallus in piety to Liber and Priapus, nor even the corruption of so many women in the whoredoms of Jupiter, required such iniquitous self-mutilation. Such rites are nothing less than "a confession on the part of the demons and a deception of miserable men."⁵⁶

The Problems with Polytheism

His emphasis on the perversity of the Great Mother's rites is a good example of Augustine's "tendentiously selective" polemics.⁵⁷ And yet, though

⁵³ *Ciu.* 6.6.

⁵⁴ *Ciu.* 4.1.

⁵⁵ *Ciu.* 6.7.

⁵⁶ *Ciu.* 7.26; on the Great Mother, see *ciu.* 7.24–26; on Augustine's experience with the cult of this goddess (=Cybele=Berecynthia), see 2.4.

⁵⁷ O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God*, 105; for a helpful and balanced critical reading of Augustine's use of Varro, see Clark, "Augustine's Varro and Pagan Monotheism," 192–97.

Augustine at times focuses upon sexually explicit theatre and “oriental” rites about which many Romans themselves would have felt ambivalent,⁵⁸ it is also clear that even the most seemingly innocuous aspects of Roman religion suffer from a basic vitiating theological problem, namely, the very representation of divinity as irreconcilably several. The multiplicity of the pantheon is a direct result of the Roman people’s ongoing search for effective methods of securing the objects of their desire. The pagans intuitively know that all good things are divinely given, but instead of recognizing that one God gives all good gifts, divinity itself is divided according to the diversity of gifts. And since effective supplication presupposes the proper identification of the giver, the search for material happiness results in the multiplication of gods. The theme of euhemerism is reprised as the objects of human desires themselves supply names for the unknown gods thought to give them: Money (*Pecunia*), Virtue (*Virtus*), Concord (*Concordia*), and so on. Civil theology remains necessary since the correct use of the gods consists in knowing which god or goddess provides the service you require, just as one cannot successfully negotiate one’s life if one confuses a baker with a builder or a teacher. Knowledge of the gods, according to Varro, is of any use only if it is accompanied by knowledge of their strength and skill.⁵⁹

The division of divinity among the minutiae of created existence ascribes to them the competitive finitude of the latter, thereby postulating gods as opposed to one another, *prima facie*, as Greece and Troy, as mutually exclusive as life and death. Augustine presses upon this theological vulnerability. In the first place, the minute division of every task is at odds with Rome’s fundamental assumption that such an enormous and composite task as the growth and maintenance of an empire should be the responsibility of the gods.⁶⁰ If this is the “IKEA concept of polytheism,”⁶¹ in what aisle of the warehouse does one find the materials for

⁵⁸ See Mary Beard *et al.*, *Religions of Rome, Volume 1: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 91–92, 96–98, on the ambivalence especially Roman governors felt about the establishment on the Palatine hill, at the centre of Rome itself, of the cult of the Great Mother, Cybele, from Asia Minor. The fact that they were commanded to do so by the Syballine Books and the Delphic Oracle, however, would only prove Augustine’s point: demons slip into Roman cult rites that turn out to be obscene and degrading, offensive to Romans themselves who are nevertheless compelled to carry them out.

⁵⁹ See *ciu.* 4.22, 24.

⁶⁰ *Ciu.* 4.8.

⁶¹ Clark, “Augustine’s Varro and Pagan Monotheism,” 183.

constructing the house that would contain all its individual furnishings? One cannot simply add the gods together to arrive at the superlative management required for such a task, though this is proposed in the gathering of divinity to Jupiter, the king of the gods. “All things are full of Jupiter,” as Vergil has it.⁶² Even so, however, Augustine maintains that this does not reconcile their divisions, nor unify their multiplicity. Contradiction persists because what is united in idea remains sacramentally embodied in that which remains competitive. So, for example, in the early monarchy, king Tarquin attempts to mark the priority of Jupiter among the gods with the priority of his temple upon the Capitol, a move that, by augury, the gods Mars, Terminus, and Juventas refuse, though the first of whom, like Jupiter, is a select god himself and part of the original Capitoline triad.⁶³ If the sacramental manifestations of the gods cannot even agree as to their own rank, how can they be reconciled into a single deity such that they might collectively assemble an empire?

In an important anticipation of later philosophical theology, Varro offers a naturalizing interpretation of the gods, in which religious images were invented in the first place so that those who had seen these gods with their eyes might see with the mind the soul of the world and its parts, enlightened by the mysteries of doctrine.⁶⁴ So, every god has its natural referent such that, for example, each fundamental element of the world has its proper god: Tellus, the earth; Neptune, the sea; Juno, the air; Vulcan, fire (though not the aetherial kind, another division).⁶⁵ Aside from being a rather underwhelming mystery (“the goddess ‘Earth’ signifies the earth, you say!”), it remains that the god leads its worshipper to give cult to a creature instead of God. That such “natural” gods are demons is evident in nature itself. Vergil considers it Aeneas’ virtue to withstand the wrath of the gods as one would endure the forces of nature,⁶⁶ but this is the precisely the problem. Nature is capricious with its power and Augustine knows it. The world makes for terrible, destructive, and warring gods.

⁶² Verg., *Ecl.* 3.60, *apud* August., *ciu.* 4.9.

⁶³ *Ciu.* 4.23. Augustine’s source for this is either Varro himself, or a conflation of Ovid, *Fast.* 2.667ff., Livy, 1.55, and Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 3.69. See O’Daly, *Augustine’s City of God*, 93; R. W. Dyson, Notes to Augustine’s *The City of God Against the Pagans* (ed. R. W. Dyson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 171n.26.

⁶⁴ *Ciu.* 7.5–6; see also 6.8; 7.19.

⁶⁵ See s. 198.18–23.

⁶⁶ See MacCormack, *The Shadows of Poetry*, 166–67.

Vergil claims that all things are full of Jupiter, but in the end, the pantheon is more than just the various names of Jupiter, and its distinctions are irreducible. In cultic observance, all are called gods, distinguished by office, and venerated by distinct altars and rites. In the poetic imagination, one is placated while another is enraged; one feels left out, even as another is worshipped. They war with one another, consecrating human war by their own divine, even theatrical, example.⁶⁷ Varro's account of the gods in *Antiquities* rightly suggests the unity of God, but his conflation of God with the soul of the world (*cosmos*) subjects God to creation's divisibility. Moreover, in light of the unity and order of the *cosmos*, those particular divisions the pagan pantheon happens to have hypostasized cannot help but seem arbitrary.⁶⁸ Gods' responsibilities are arbitrarily divided, arbitrary divisions are introduced in natural things to make room for extra gods, and what is most valued in reality does not correspond to the deity given the greatest honour. That the emphases and valuations intrinsic to pagan religion—like the selection of the select gods themselves—are rooted not in virtue but in awe at capricious power is made plain in the worship of Fortune herself.⁶⁹ That is why Augustine can both joke that Foreign Iniquity should be a goddess,⁷⁰ and suggest quite seriously that the logical end of the rationalization of pagan religion—a process begun in the Hellenistic period, in which Plato is a signal figure—should have been the elevation of the single goddess of Felicity to the sole and highest position.⁷¹

One of the reasons Augustine dwells upon the goddess Felicity so insistently is that it effectively replicates the apocalyptic confrontation with Christ and the body that adheres to God in him. If what we want most is our own happiness and so subordinate all to the service of this one goddess, it is but a short step to ask whether we ought to worship happiness itself or the one who gives it, which is the very division between the earthly and heavenly cities.⁷² But such

⁶⁷ Thus, they take sides in human battle, e.g. between Greece and Troy, even as both sides worship ostensibly the same gods. Cf. *ciu.* 3.2. Augustine also relates the occurrence of a mysterious battle, understood to have been a battle between the gods themselves, and taken as condoning the civil wars waged among the Romans. *Ciu.* 2.25.

⁶⁸ See, generally, Books 4 and 7.

⁶⁹ *Ciu.* 7.3.

⁷⁰ *Ciu.* 4.15

⁷¹ *Ciu.* 4.21, 23.

⁷² This point is made most clearly in Book 19 of *ciu.*

reasoning is far too rigorous and philosophical for pagans so characterized by ambivalence.⁷³ The point of paganism as “workaday mass religion,” capable of incorporating just about any kind of cult,⁷⁴ was precisely, in Augustine’s eyes, to avoid any kind of apocalyptic confrontation with the truth, while it quietly and indirectly cultivated the placement of one’s self at the centre of all existence under the pretence of pious service to divinity.⁷⁵ It is not just the content of pagan religion itself but also the careless and often tolerant attitude about religious matters pervading pagan culture that obstructs the way to truth.

Despite efforts at making sense of the gods they worship, the plain sense of the gods reflects the competitive divisions of material desire and the projection of bodily and conceptual distinctions into divinity, which is thereby depicted in division and enmity. “They shout us down by their very multitude, so to speak.”⁷⁶ No theological hermeneutic can read away the clear sense “that all the gods have their own lives: that each one lives for himself, and that no one of them is a part of any other, but that all who can be known and worshipped ought to be worshipped separately.”⁷⁷ This fractured divinity cultivates moral corruption, pride. God is to be sought in his unity as the giver of all good gifts through the sacrifice of all good gifts for the sake of God after the manner of Christ. But instead the gifts themselves are turned into idols, the creator exchanged for the creature. With the unity of the good giver fractured in the desire for goods that will make me happy, I become the One in which all things have their unity. Gods and goddesses are ostensibly to be worshipped in their own right, but their ultimate point of reference is the desire that things should go well for me. Even in piety does Augustine see a reduction of divinity to use for the self’s enjoyment of itself. One negotiates with the gods in order that one’s world might retain some stability and

⁷³ See James J. O’Donnell, “The Demise of Paganism,” *Traditio* 35 (1979): 45–88

⁷⁴ See Niketas Siniossoglou, “From Philosophic Monotheism to Imperial Henotheism: Esoteric and Popular Religion in Late Antique Platonism,” in *Monotheism Between Pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity* (ed. Stephen Mitchell and Peter Van Nuffelen; Leuven: Peters, 2010), 127–48. Siniossoglou notes that this perceived great strength of paganism, its inclusivity, was its downfall, as it rendered paganism incapable of incorporating the exclusivity of Christian apocalypticism, which utterly rejects the broadly henotheistic conception of the relations of gods.

⁷⁵ That Augustine holds pagan religion to obfuscate the fundamental pride it fosters is a point well made by Romand Coles, *Self / Power / Other: Political Theory and Dialogical Ethics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 18–19.

⁷⁶ *Ciu.* 9.15.

⁷⁷ *Ciu.* 4.13.

order, rather than worshipping the one true God because it is the truth, whatever disorder might come to life as a result of it.⁷⁸

Good gifts and creatures of God are not viewed in their relation to God but in terms of the question of whether or not I desire them. But the human person is not God, and so cannot resist being fractured and subjugated by its attachment to divided desires. “Praise the Lord, my soul,” the psalmist says.⁷⁹ Augustine describes this as the rational mind watching its lower powers of the soul being led astray by external things and earthly cravings, recalling it to its proper order in the love of God.

Everywhere you find things to love and things to praise: yes, but how much more worthy of praise is he who made these things which evoke your praise? You have lived under their spell for too long, buffeted by conflicting desires. You bear the marks of the wounds they have dealt you. You are torn apart by these many loves, restless everywhere and nowhere at peace. . . . All these things individually, and all of them together, are exceedingly good, because God made all things exceedingly good. All around you is the beauty of his work, and it all speaks to you of the beauty of the artist. If you admire the edifice, love the builder. Do not be so bewitched by what he has made that you stray from him who made it. He has subordinated these captivating creatures to you, because he has subordinated you to himself. If you cling to him who is above you, you will tread underfoot what is beneath you; but if you desert him who is above you, those lower things will become your torment.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ The “most noble” example of Regulus must be mentioned here, since it was precisely for the sake of piety that he lost his life willingly to the Carthaginians. Augustine even says it is possible that Regulus indeed found true virtue by seeking his happiness in it itself, rather than in its rewards. But either way, his case is demonstrative of the futility of worshipping gods for temporal benefits. *Ciu.* 1.15; see also Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, 36–37.

⁷⁹ Ps 145:1, *apud en. Ps.* 145.5.

⁸⁰ *En. Ps.* 145.5. As Coles puts it, “lust is not a possibility for the proud self—it is a *necessity* imposed by the experience it has of the world. The self that strove for absolute freedom by taking itself to be the condition of its own being—its own light, its own ground—culminates in the most depraved state of slavery. It experiences around itself a world of beings that have been flattened out to its own singular perspective. This experience of the object flattens and drains the subject as well as the object, however. Each object, as for-the-self, demands that the self desire and appropriate it. The self is flattened to the single dimension of lust as it strives to conquer a world

The self worships what it desires, and is thereby torn apart in torment. For what it desires offers itself in service to the self only as it reflexively and possessively demands its own service from the self.

Pagan religion thus makes a feedback loop of the fundamental problem of human sin. In Rom 1:18–32, St. Paul says that the wrath of God is revealed in the human rejection of God in favour of that which is not God, worshipping creatures in God’s stead, when, as a consequence, God hands humanity over to its own desires. The concept of sin as its own punishment is important for Augustine, as it forms the basis for his conception of the concupiscence that characterizes the struggle of all of humanity in its search for God.⁸¹ But where Paul suggests God handing humanity over to its passions is a consequence of idolatry, Augustine identifies it with the apostasy that is idolatry’s logical beginning.⁸²

“God delivered them to the lusts of their own hearts, to do things that should not be done. They became full of every iniquity.” . . . To be an adulterer is already a punishment; to be a liar, a miser, a cheat, a murderer—these are already punishments. Punishments for what sin, then? For the original apostasy, for that sin of pride: “the beginning of human sin is apostasy from God,” and “the beginning of all sin is pride.” That is why the apostle named it as the first sin: “Though they had known God, they did not glorify him as God, or give him thanks. They passed into oblivion in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened.” This darkening of the heart is already their punishment.⁸³

And it is out of this punishment of releasing humanity to its own folly that idolatry is borne, as Paul himself makes clear.

that invites—a world that *insists*—that the self subjugate it. And at the same time the subject is flattened, it is crushed and dispersed into as many objects as it desires.” *Self/Power/Other*, 20–21.

⁸¹ See Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 206–11.

⁸² This is perhaps the reason Augustine does not typically cite the verses of Rom 1 concerning idolatry (1:23, 25) alongside those concerning God handing humanity over to its sins (1:24, 26, 28). On the former, see, e.g., *ciu.* 4.29; 8.10, 23; 14.28; *ep.* 55.6.11; 101.2. On the latter, see *en. Ps.* 6.6, 8; 26(2).7; *gr. et lib. arb.* 21.42.

⁸³ *En. Ps.* 57.18, trans. modified, quoting, respectively, a mishmash of Rom 1:24, 28–29; Sir 10:14, 15; Rom 1:21.

. . . their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of the image of corruptible man, and of birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.⁸⁴

When God leaves humanity to its sin, Augustine is clear, God does not leave humanity to be under its own control. Rather, in the soul's apostasy, it is left to be subject to its own revolts against itself.⁸⁵ The mind that refuses to be subordinate to God is met, according to God's natural order, by a body that refuses to be subordinate to the mind. This is to be subject to one's lusts, whether for sex, vengeance, money, victory, glory, and so forth. But the sinner's lust makes of its object a god, because he knows intuitively, despite his proud pretensions, that he cannot give himself what he desires. In subjection to his lusts, the sinner begs for something with the power to satisfy them, and the demons, beholden to the gratification they receive in these very human lusts, are ready to offer all sorts of empty promises. Thus Augustine describes this subjection to lust as the "harsh and miserable bondage of the devil: a bondage to which he consented when he sinned."⁸⁶ The citizens of the earthly city are mastered by their lust for mastery, a truly demonic affliction.⁸⁷

When Augustine mocks the Roman pantheon for operating as an assembly line,⁸⁸ he might almost have been criticizing contemporary capitalism. The purpose of the system is the satisfaction of whatever temporal desires happen to afflict the people and the generation of a little hunger for novelty, all quite irrespective of morality. And just as fear is used in our own day to push more and more new product—fear that you'll smell bad, or won't have enough fun or sex, or that you won't have financial security in your old age—the fear of loss of status and comfort, itself an instance of the fear of death those things are supposed to obfuscate, drives the Romans to multiply the gods.⁸⁹ Thus, no sooner had Romulus founded Rome with the identification of its founding gods, than his

⁸⁴ Rom 1:21–23, *apud ciu.* 8.10.

⁸⁵ See *en. Ps.* 145.5 for a clear exposition of this.

⁸⁶ *Ciu.* 14.15.

⁸⁷ *Ciu.* 1.*Praef.*; 14.28, which explicitly connects it with Rom 1:21–23, 25.

⁸⁸ *Ciu.* 7.4.

⁸⁹ On fear of death and its connection to material comforts in Augustine's criticism of Rome, see Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, 32–43.

successor, Numa Pompilius, enjoying a time of peace rare in Roman history, sought through the magical art of hydromancy the gods responsible for it. Ignorant of the true God who gives all peace, but aware of the prior inability of the Trojan gods to protect Troy, he added new and foreign gods to the pantheon to honour for the peace in hopes of securing it from loss. But slip away it did, as his successors likewise increased the pantheon in search for that which was lost, unaware of the role such false gods were playing in the corruption of morals that make peace impossible.⁹⁰ Multiplying both its desire for created things, and the fear of its loss, the impure soul finds further occasions to multiply the gods it serves, being thus defiled by their rites, images, and priests. “Being prostituted to the many false gods by reason of its avidity for greater impurity,” the impure soul gives itself up “to be violated and polluted by hordes of foul demons.”⁹¹

The Demonolatry of Intellectuals

To this point, we have seen Augustine poke and prod at the most embarrassing aspects of paganism: exemplification of corrupt morals without any clear instruction about the good, the worship of creatures instead of their creator, and the various contradictions of its polytheistic multiplicity. Yet there are more subtle readings of pagan religion available, and Augustine knows it. We have already noted how much pagans themselves anticipated Augustine’s criticisms, which has included making mention of Varro’s attempts at reconciling the multiplicity of gods. But we have dealt only perfunctorily with this aspect of late antique paganism, even though it is an interpretive strategy that only grows in momentum and importance throughout the imperial period of Rome. Varro was only the beginning.

Attacking a centuries-old account of paganism as much as he does gives some basis for the accusation that Augustine is arguing a straw man, and a number of times Augustine suspects his interlocutors might charge him with reverting to fables in order to make his criticisms stick.⁹² He even suggests that

⁹⁰ On Numa, see *ciu.* 3.9–12; 7.34–35.

⁹¹ *Ciu.* 7.21.

⁹² E.g. *ciu.* 2.10; 4.10. On the utility of Augustine’s use of Varro to a persistent and highly literate paganism, which was characterized by a “fanatical antiquarianism,” see Fortin, “Augustine and Roman Civil Religion,” 252–55; see also Clark, “Augustine’s Varro and Pagan Monotheism,” 188–91.

his criticisms of the multiplicity of gods and the morally questionable tales told of them would fail if the gods were not understood straightforwardly and worshipped for material gain, but rather taken as symbols for the eternal.⁹³ For if one truly worships the eternal, then one is by definition worshipping the one true God and not a demon. But Augustine is really just shaming anyone for having understood the gods in this straightforward way. For his more intellectual interlocutors precisely attempt to worship the eternal, and still their religious practices end up being every bit as demonolatrous as those of “*prima facie*” paganism.

To make this transition to the paganism of intellectuals is to call to the fore a question present from the beginning of our analysis of pagan sacraments, but which has remained beneath the surface of our study. It is the question of the unity of “paganism,” or indeed the question of the existence of such a thing. We might describe paganism as the invention of Christians, but this is over-simplistic. The word certainly belongs to Christianity,⁹⁴ and it was an inescapable conclusion of being divided apocalyptically—that is, by the revelation of the incarnation—against all false worship to identify the connection between all people who are not Christian (though Judaism retains an identity as a non-Christian people who are not thereby pagans). The idea that there might be an underlying unity to “workaday mass religion,” or the “Inherited Conglomerate”⁹⁵ of beliefs and conventions, thus belongs to “monotheism.” For Christians, like Augustine, the unity of the one true God identified pagan theistic multiplicity as the rejection of that God, and thus as self-condemnation, as we have seen. This is why Augustine says that it is “only through this one and true religion that the gods of the nations could be revealed as most unclean demons.”⁹⁶ But some pagans made their own *ad hoc* movements toward monotheism very much as a search for the kind of truth and unity Christians claimed was essential to their tradition. This was not the monotheism of a unified cult, which was never really achieved, if it was ever

⁹³ *Ciu.* 3.18.

⁹⁴ See James J. O’Donnell, “*Paganus*,” *Classical Folia* 31 (1977): 163–69. His suggestion that the word originally connoted non-combatants, those who were not *milites Christi*, but ultimately took on the more mocking connotation of its classical meaning, that is, rustic, even hick or redneck, is sensible.

⁹⁵ Gerald Bonner, “The Extinction of Paganism and the Church Historian,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 35/3 (1984): 339–57, at 342. The term is borrowed from E. R. Dodds, who got it from Gilbert Murray.

⁹⁶ *Ciu.* 7.33.

sought. Rather, as we already suggested, it was an interpretive strategy applied to multiple, inclusive religious phenomena in an attempt to reconcile them with the unity of truth.⁹⁷

Thus, by Augustine's time, a certain grammarian by the name of Maximus of Madaura could boldly declare the following:

Who is so demented, so mentally incapacitated as to deny that it is most certain that there is one highest God, without beginning, without natural offspring, the great and magnificent father, as it were? With many names we call upon his powers spread through the created world, since we all are ignorant of his proper name. After all, "god" is a name common to all religions. And so it is that, while we as suppliants grasp certain of his members, as it were, piece by piece, in various supplications, we seem to worship him as a whole.⁹⁸

More than two centuries earlier, Celsus had suggested that anything less than the worship of God as he is found in all places and cults is simply impious.⁹⁹ For his part, Maximus is not so aggressive as Celsus, and shares something of

⁹⁷ On the lack of monotheistic cult, see Beard et al., *Religions of Rome*, 1:286–87. That being said, there is the ongoing historical question of the role of the empire in unifying or homogenizing cult throughout its lands. One of the factors involved in homogenization of cult is that the variety of cults proper to Rome increasingly supplies the idioms by which peoples throughout the empire could identify—positively or negatively—with Rome. See the chapter "Roman Religion and Roman Empire," in *ibid.*, 1:313–63. For an introduction to the question and its methodological issues, see also Jörg Rüpke, "Roman Religion and the Religion of Empire: Some Reflections on Method," in *The Religious History of the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (ed. J. A. North and S. R. F. Price; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 9–36.

The ongoing process of Rome's policing of its own religious boundaries only intensifies against Christianity, including the establishment of overt official support for ancestral cult. It is in this sense that it can be said that Christianity is the "inventor" of paganism as a system. See Beard et al., *op. cit.*, 312. But, as Lane Fox notes, there were sound reasons from within pagan piety for the exploration of the relations between the gods that lead to theology's development toward unity. See *Pagans and Christians*, 256. For more on that development toward unity, particularly as a hermeneutical strategy, see generally the essays in Stephen Mitchell and Peter Van Nuffelen, eds., *Monotheism Between Pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity* (Leuven: Peters, 2010); esp. *idem*, "Introduction," 1–14; Maria V. Cerutti, "Pagan Monotheism? Towards a Historical Typology," 15–32; Siniosoglou, "Philosophic Monotheism."

⁹⁸ *Apud* August. *ep.* 16.1.

⁹⁹ See Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, "One God and Divine Unity: Late Antique Theologies Between Exclusivism and Inclusiveness," in *Monotheism Between Pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity* (ed. Stephen Mitchell and Peter Van Nuffelen; Leuven: Peters, 2010), 33–56, at 55.

Augustine's antipathy towards those who inhabit the crass, superficial level of pagan polytheism. But because the argument that the multiplicity of cults does not contradict the one true God is the best argument for paganism possible, and because those who think this way do not really identify themselves with the paganism depicted in the first seven or so books of *The City of God*, further, more specific, treatment is required.¹⁰⁰

Far from using a straw man, Augustine prefers to let the host of all such arguments give way to those who pose it the best, those who offer the best readings of pagan theology. According to Augustine, the Platonists have explicitly recognized the simple unity of God, who is incorporeal, immutable, and eternal, and who alone is to be sought for a blessed life, by participation in whom all things have their being.¹⁰¹ In Augustine's estimation, their discovery of a threefold division of philosophy into the physical, rational, and moral, has brought them closer than any to recognizing the Triune nature of the one true God.¹⁰² For

¹⁰⁰ Augustine suggests dividing the first ten books into the first five, dealing with those who worship gods, i.e. demons, for the sake of material happiness in this life, and the second five, dealing with those who so worship because it is useful for happiness in life after death. *Retr.* 2.43.1; *ep.* 1A*.1. O'Daly notes a few times that this description of the latter five books is wanting. E.g., *Augustine's City of God*, 109. The first ten books, broadly speaking, rather seem to represent a progression through increasingly subtle understandings of pagan religion towards its best readings from pagans themselves. The latter includes the suggestion that popular worship of many gods may have some usefulness in attaining eternal blessedness, but it is a stretch to call it a central feature of all of Books 6–10.

¹⁰¹ *Ciu.* 8.12, Augustine names Plotinus, Iamblichus, Porphyry, and Apuleius as those who refuse either of the names Academic or Peripatetic, preferring simply "Platonist." He gives some consideration in Books 8–10 to all but Iamblichus, though he seems present in spirit in one half of Porphyry's divided self. In these books he saves his words of highest praise for Plotinus, but at *ciu.* 22.3, he calls Porphyry "the most noble of the pagan philosophers." The interesting differences between these philosophers tend to disappear when Augustine starts to criticize "the Platonists" as a whole, which should be thought of as a composite of what Augustine considers their best insights.

¹⁰² Cf. *ciu.* 8.4, 6–8. This is a good example of the conflation of all the best insights of the tradition into a unified "Platonism." This tripartite division is traditionally attributed to Xenocrates, but to Augustine it is simply Plato. O'Daly notes that this kind of reading back into Plato is necessary because of his adoption of Socrates' habit of dissimulating his own opinions makes it difficult to access those opinions. That is, Plato can only be understood from within the tradition(s) he started, and Augustine seems to admit this, *ciu.* 8.4. See O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God*, 112. On the matter of the Trinitarian implications of this tripartite division, see also *ciu.* 11.24–25. Although the Platonists recognized this threefold division in all things, and though there are highly suggestive parallels with the threefold division of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as

this reason he maintains “no one has come closer to us than the Platonists.”¹⁰³ By the kind of intellectual exercise Augustine found so fruitful in his own discovery of God, Platonists have been able to attain profound insight into the one true God as the cause of all existence, the ground of all understanding, and the pattern for all right living.

Augustine, therefore, never suggests that the Platonist understanding of truth itself, their perception of the uncreated light attained in contemplative ascent, is anything less than genuine. To this extent, as far as Augustine is concerned, they have seen a glimpse of God.¹⁰⁴ The possibility for this is established in Scripture, as St. Paul acknowledges that “certain also of your own have said” that in God “we live, and move, and have our being”; moreover, as he says in Romans, “that which may be known of God is manifest among them, for God has manifested it to them. For his invisible things from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, also his eternal power and Godhead.”¹⁰⁵ But Paul goes on to declare that these proud humans take the wisdom of this accomplishment and exchange it for folly, worshipping not only the God they have seen, but paying divine honours to his creatures as well. This is for Augustine the problem of the Platonists. For despite their recognition of the ineffable God, who is to be worshipped above all else, in whom alone is blessedness found, they all follow Plato in commending the continued performance of sacred rites in honour of false gods.

Of course, to suggest that the Platonists have been able to attain a glimpse of God is to present a Christian solution to the very problem most central to Platonism as a philosophical tradition. In Plato’s works there are not only gods, but ideas of things and things themselves (like the beautiful, or the good), and also a good beyond being; there is an ineffable cause, maker, and father of the cosmos, and the eternal upon which he gazes to make it; there is god, simplicity, incorporeality, as well as soul and matter, and so on. What among these items are identical and where divisions are to be made between them are questions made all the more difficult by Plato’s dialogical style, and the task of answering them is

Origin, Instruction, and Blessedness, or Essence, Understanding, and Love, it does not follow, Augustine says, “that these philosophers had any notion of a Trinity in God.”

¹⁰³ *Ciu.* 8.5.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *ciu.* 9.16; 10.29.

¹⁰⁵ Acts 17:28 and Rom 1:19–20, *apud ciu.* 8.10

left to the debates of the tradition(s) he started.¹⁰⁶ When, for example, Diotima speaks of the “perfect end of erotics,” in which one “suddenly glimpses something wonderfully beautiful in its nature,” something that is neither coming to be nor perishing, not beautiful in one respect and ugly in another, but beauty “alone by itself and with itself, always being of a single form,” while all other beautiful things share in it,¹⁰⁷ would Plato say Diotima is speaking of a glimpse of God?

And yet, it appears that Augustine could not care less about the historical process whereby Socratic dialectic becomes a kind of philosophical monotheism, in which such diverse terms are collected into a more explicit theology and cosmology he can engage. Where we might have expected Augustine to criticize the theological multiplicity of Platonism, he prefers instead to grant that Platonists have been monotheists from the beginning, more or less on account of Plato’s identification of the good with divinity, in order to focus on the problematic, indeed demonic, relation between this theological truth and the persistence of the Platonists’ paganism.

Apuleius and Platonism’s Attachment to Paganism

Plato states that sacred rites should be performed in honour of many gods, but he also says that the gods are good by definition, implicitly denouncing the fear or propitiation of wicked “gods.” This introduces a tension between the gods defined by their goodness and those called “gods” who demand theatrical obscenities and poetic fictions, though this tension is somewhat resolved in Plato’s reputation for having rejected the theatre, since Socrates appears to ban poets from the ideal city within his pages. To answer how the platonic tradition could inherit this Plato and yet excuse not only the poets, but even blood sacrifices as well, Augustine turns to the demons of Apuleius of Madaura.¹⁰⁸ Augustine is plainly indebted to Apuleius’ demonology. Nevertheless, they differ substantially in the conclusions to be drawn from it. And if we keep Apuleius’ text in view, Augustine’s disagreements are all the clearer.

¹⁰⁶ See, generally, John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977); R. T. Wallis, *Neo-Platonism* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1972).

¹⁰⁷ *Pl., symp.* 210e–211b.

¹⁰⁸ *Ciu.* 8.12–14. On Plato and sacred rites for the gods, see *leg.* 4.716d ff.; 8.828a ff.; on the definition of gods as good, see *Rep.*, 2.379a.

Apuleius claims that the term “gods” has been used equivocally. There are, on the one hand, the celestial gods, of whom the most famous are the twelve select gods of Rome, who remain aloft, beyond contamination by the impious worship of superstitious and contemptuous people.¹⁰⁹ And there are, on the other hand, those who are often called gods but who are present to humanity in a way unbecoming the lofty blessedness of the celestial gods. These, Apuleius says, the Greeks have given the name “demons” (δαίμονες) and they are responsible not only for the various wondrous modes of communication attributed to gods—dream-visions, traces in entrails read by the haruspex, the flight and cries of birds, and other prodigies—but also the variations in regional cultic practice. It is for this reason that the Egyptian gods prefer lamentations, the Greek gods dances, and the barbarian gods certain music.¹¹⁰ These demons are intermediary figures between humans and the gods, bringing human petition up to the gods and returning answers to prayers to humans.¹¹¹ It is Apuleius’ attribution of intermediary status to demons in which Augustine is most interested.

In order to be intermediaries, according to Apuleius, demons must share certain aspects of the natures between which they mediate, of which there are three that are pertinent: bodily location, span of life, and perfection of nature, which is, in its essence, the question of whether the being is passible or not. The gods are sublime in their aetherial location, everlasting in lifespan, and blessed, or impassible; humans, on the other hand, are lowly in their earthly location, finite in their mortal life, and miserable on account of their passibility. As Augustine points out, the fact that demons are intermediary between these means, for Apuleius, that they split the difference between the earthly and celestial location, and share one of the remaining qualities with each nature: so, demons are in the air between the aether and the earth, with an immortal lifespan like the gods, and an incomplete, passible nature like humans.¹¹² It is their passibility in common with humanity that not only explains the variances of their cult according to different human cultures, but also accounts for the very possibility of their invocation by and influence over their worshippers. “For, just as we are, they can be subject to all types of mental calming and excitement, with the consequence

¹⁰⁹ See Apul., *deo Soc.* 121–23.

¹¹⁰ Apul., *deo Soc.* 133–37; 148–50; cf. August. *ciu.* 8.16.

¹¹¹ August. *ciu.* 8.18; Apul. *deo Soc.* 133.

¹¹² *Ciu.* 9.12, citing Apul. *deo Soc.* 127; see also 147.

that they are roused by anger, moved by pity, enticed by gifts, softened by prayers, irritated by insults, soothed by honours, and are thoroughly changeable in all other matters in a similar way to ourselves.”¹¹³ Paradoxically, in their fictions, the poets are not far from the truth, Apuleius says, for although what is said of the character of the gods is inappropriate for those truly called gods, it remains true of the character of the demons that occupy this intermediary region, represented in the various aspects of pagan religious experience. Augustine cannot hide his distaste at such divinities, which resemble nothing so much as a mob at the amphitheatre or circus.¹¹⁴ It is an unflattering characterization to be sure, but for Apuleius it has the virtue of being able to give an account of unflattering religious phenomena, whose ancient history and continuity through time are explained in the direct attribution of the gods’ traditional immortality to the demons themselves.

It is difficult to read Apuleius and ignore the profundity of influence he had upon Augustine’s demonology. But where Augustine considers its contradictions and immoralities grounds for rejection, Apuleius considers pagan cult useful, even necessary, by virtue of the loftiness of the gods. The aetherial location of the gods may recall their ancient associations with the stars in the superlunary realm of fire,¹¹⁵ but in the celestial gods, the unreachable aether has been bound to unreachable purity. “Make sure that you understand that ‘highest,’ ‘intermediate,’ and ‘lowest’ here refer not merely to separation in space, but also to relative rank within nature.”¹¹⁶ The Platonists had maintained their founder’s doctrine in the *Symposium* that no god has dealings with men, rightly taking it as a statement on the unlikeness of popular religion to the good they sought.¹¹⁷ The demons of pagan religion need to share the misery of human passibility because it is precisely in lacking this that the blessed gods are removed from, even ignorant of, human affairs. Seeking a blessedness beyond what is found among humans

¹¹³ Apul., *deo Soc.* 147–48. Augustine summarizes: “they are agitated by the same perturbations of mind as men: vexed by injuries; placated by obsequies and gifts; gratified by honours; delighted by the diversity of sacred rites; and provoked if any such rite is neglected.” *Ciu.* 8.16; see also 9.3.

¹¹⁴ *Ciu.* 9.7; see Apul. *deo Soc.* 145–46.

¹¹⁵ See Apul. *deo Soc.* 116; on cosmic divisions in Apuleius, including the (Aristotelian) appropriateness of the air having its own proper creature, see 137–41.

¹¹⁶ Apul. *deo Soc.* 115.

¹¹⁷ Pl. *symp.* 203a; Apul., *deo Soc.* 123, 128; August., *ciu.* 8.18, 20.

and the demons of their religion was, of course, the motivation behind Socrates' description of Eros as a demon rather than a god in the first place.¹¹⁸ And yet this moral and ontological difference is envisaged as a spatial separation traversable only by the mediating nature of demons, "for [the demonic] is in the middle of both [humans and the gods] and fills up the interval so that the whole itself has been bound together by it."¹¹⁹

Part of Augustine's problem with this is that it implies demons are to be honoured on the basis of their bodily superiority over humans, which we treated in the third chapter.¹²⁰ Humans are wont to fear and praise bodily marvels like prophecies and prodigies. But this disordered praise is always a problem in virtue of being offered irrespective of moral evaluation. For, if Apuleius is right, Augustine says, then blessed gods will not give audience to even a good and wise man except if he makes use of the mediation of evil demons that are the enemies of the good.¹²¹ The necessity of demonic bodies is an apology for bad religion. Humanity is thus restricted to the use of mediators they would, or should, be remiss to resemble morally.

What reason is there, then, apart from folly and miserable error, for you to humble yourself to worship a being whom you do not wish to resemble in your life? And why should you pay religious homage to one whom you do not wish to imitate, when the highest duty of religion is to imitate him whom you worship?¹²²

Because of power demonstrated in bodily marvels, demons are thought to lead souls to the gods. Lead they do, but what are their true ends? Their passible

¹¹⁸ See *Pl., symp.* 202c–e. Eros, precisely in virtue of being desire, cannot be a god. For desire is of that which one lacks, and so Eros must lack the happiness and blessedness of the gods he desires. See *ibid.*, 199d–202e. In this, Socrates is attempting to get his interlocutors to imagine the beautiful "not as a kind of face or hands or anything else in which body shares, nor as a speech nor any science, and not as being somewhere in something else (for example, in an animal, or in earth, or in heaven, or in anything else)." *Ibid.*, 211a–b. The beautiful is, as such, not even of the nature of the gods of the people, who are really demons, but rather as something borne in and glimpsed by the soul.

¹¹⁹ *Pl., symp.* 202e.

¹²⁰ For Augustine's rejection of valuing demons on the basis of their bodies vis-à-vis Apuleius specifically, see *ciu.* 8.15.

¹²¹ *Ciu.* 8.18.

¹²² *Ciu.* 8.17.

nature, which makes them at home among humanity in a way not true of the gods, makes a sacrament of the misery and wretchedness it shares with humanity. Demons lead humanity only back to their own corruption, as we have seen. The crimes of human-like “gods” are made available to the eyes and ears of Romans, and Apuleius’ platonic doctrine of mediation makes them the only way by which people can access whatever is truly good.

And what is more, humans are restricted to the use of demonic mediation as though it were *human* immorality that contaminates the celestial purity of the gods.¹²³ But the blessedness of the gods is protected from human contamination only by putting them into proximity with demons, whose moral constitution is all the worse than humans for being immortal without end. “What a wonderful thing the holiness of a god is, then, . . . if he has no dealings with a man seeking forgiveness, yet allies himself to the demon who persuaded him to commit wickedness.”¹²⁴ For, in spite of the putative necessity of their mediation, Apuleius does not manage to say anything redeeming about the demons.¹²⁵ Their passible nature is alike to humanity’s, but even humans are able to gain a modicum of control over their passions when their minds attain to some wisdom; demons are passible in their very minds, which are eternally tossed about by their own thoughts, as Apuleius acknowledges.¹²⁶ What is greater in them, then, the mind, shares the wretched immorality of the worst of humanity; while in the far less important span of life they share immortality with the gods. What is of value is precisely inverted. And yet, wretched as they are, merely because they share divine immortality, even wise mortals must appeal to them to access the gods. Suspended upside down, demons not only run religious mediation afoul, they make a mockery of the blessedness of the gods.

This is obviously Apuleius filtered through Augustine, but attendance to Apuleius’ own objectives serves to clarify Augustine’s point. Demons for Apuleius are ambiguous figures, not the straightforwardly wicked ones they are for Augustine. Apuleius’ account is not as homogeneous as Augustine makes it appear, and it includes a range of demonic origins, including the possibility of differences in virtue within the species. For example, Augustine says that

¹²³ See *ciu.* 8.20–21; 9.16.

¹²⁴ *Ciu.* 8.20.

¹²⁵ See *ciu.* 9.3, 6, 8–9.

¹²⁶ *Apul., deo Soc.* 146; see August., *ciu.* 9.3.

Apuleius says nothing redeeming of the demons, but that does not take into account the eponymous god of Socrates, who is not a true god, by Apuleius' definition, but a "demon," as Plato himself named it.¹²⁷ And yet what guided Socrates was a kind of "guardian angel," a conscience that facilitated Socrates becoming the kind of man even Augustine praised. Hence, Augustine cannot believe that Socrates would have a demon of the passionate kind described by Apuleius, and on this matter the two are in agreement.¹²⁸

But where Apuleius attempts to reserve some space in which to call a demon that is a "personal guardian" a "critic of the bad and commender of the good,"¹²⁹ for Augustine, the very name impeaches it, identifying it with those of the same name that are viciously passionate. Augustine appeals not only to the linguistic habits of Scripture, but also suggests that these are in conformity with popular use: "demons" are never good and always evil.¹³⁰ Augustine thus

¹²⁷ Apul., *deo Soc.* 162. In Pl. *Ap.* 31d and 40a, *Tht.* 151a, and *Euthphr.* 3b, Socrates describes a divine power (δαίμόνιον) that sometimes dissuades him from certain action; in *Tim.* 90a, a kind of personal deity (δαίμων) is given to all people; cf. *Phd.* 107d.

¹²⁸ See *ciu.* 8.27.

¹²⁹ Apul., *deo Soc.* 156.

¹³⁰ *Ciu.* 9.19; see also 9.23. As O'Daly points out, "Apuleius' definition and classification of demons seems to apply to all demons indifferently: [Augustine] does not seem to take account of the good-bad distinction." *Augustine's City of God*, 120. The two terms in Greek are δαίμων and δαίμόνιον, as Augustine notes. Δαίμων originally seems to have captured the uncanny power of the divine in all its ambivalence. It was a word that marked the sense of the force behind one's shifting fortune or allotted fate that was not defined by the images and public cult of the gods (θεοί), with the exception of the ἀγαθὸς δαίμων, to whom one gives the first libation at wine-drinking. As such it could be either good (εὐδαίμων) or bad (κακοδαίμων, δυσδαίμων). Thus, when Socrates tries to name the experience of direction so important to him, he calls it δαίμόνιον, something demonly or demon-like. See Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 179–81. Even if the original meaning of the terms attempted to capture the divine force that exceeded established cult, this exact identification of the popular gods as demons occurs with increasing frequency through antiquity to late antiquity, just as we have seen in Socrates himself. Where at least Socrates tries to maintain the goodness of demons *qua* divine beings, by and large people were distinct from the philosophers in remaining ambivalent about the demons they served, maintaining the real possibility that they could act harmfully. It is this sense of demon upon which the Jewish septuagintal translators and Christians after them draw to describe the gods of the nations; though, for whatever reason, they tended to collapse δαίμων into δαίμόνιον used substantively. What they never do is use the family of terms as Hellenes after Plato would have, namely to describe intermediaries between humanity and God, for which they instead used the term ἄγγελος, messenger. See Dale Basil Martin, "When Did Angels Become Demons?" *JBL* 129/4 (2010): 657–77, at 658–66. See also idem, *Inventing Superstition: From the Hippocratics to the Christians* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004). Because the popular imagination of demons is so determinative of the demonology of Christians, and even late antique

condemns Apuleius for his ties to the very religious order from which he is trying to break free, because he has not done enough to break free from it. Apuleius is among the best of paganism because his account attempts to rise from it to the truth; but his very explanation of how this works ties him to his point of origin, where the vision of truth should repudiate it. For Apuleius, ambivalence about traditional paganism makes room for a dialectical way out what he sees as problematic; but for Augustine, such ambivalence remains lukewarm where ardent rejection is necessary. “What foolishness it is, then, or, rather, madness, to submit ourselves to demons, in the name of some religion, when by the true religion we are set free from those vices in respect of which we resemble them!”¹³¹

Augustine is aware that Apuleius appeals to good demons, those by which one is εὐδαίμων, but he insists that Apuleius’ own schema contradicts the possibility of such a being. For if an immortal demon is good, it *eo ipso* loses the very passibility that keeps it close to humanity and preserves its putative intermediary status. It is precisely the possibility of the mediation of divine good among wretched humanity that Platonists deny when they place the blessed gods in the aether.¹³² For the embodied revelation of divinity in something like religion always involves a privation unbecoming of the celestial gods.¹³³ A good demon is no longer a demon in Apuleius’ sense of the term, because the wickedness of popular pagan religious practice is the very trait that distinguishes them from the gods. No descriptions of the virtues of good demons can be given because public religious myth and cult lacks any manifestation of such virtue. For Augustine, Apuleius’ is the philosophy of a religious culture that has no redeeming qualities,

philosophers like Porphyry, Martin considers this a popular triumph over the elitist attempts of earlier philosophers simply to proclaim the cosmos good as such. Martin, however, misunderstands Plato’s attempt to define the good as that which is divine as an arbitrary assertion of the goodness of the gods, for which Plato can have no evidence. What Martin interprets as a philosophical about-face is rather another step in the process of the task, undertaken in the *Symposium*, of harmonizing popular religious data with philosophical insight into the truth. A better explication of this philosophical ethos is found in Siniosoglou, “Philosophic Monotheism.”

¹³¹ *Ciu.* 8.17; cf. 8.22.

¹³² See *ciu.* 9.13.

¹³³ As Herdt and Smith note, the mimetic simulation of true form and beauty that constitutes the sensible order was central to the platonic rejection of the theatre, the value of which is negated by being a copy of a copy, ontologically. Herdt, “The Theatre of the Virtues,” 117–19; Smith, “Staging the Incarnation,” 125–27. By extension, no religious spectacle *qua* bodily manifestation can ever be properly divine on account of its own ontological remove from true form.

whose sacraments are useless. To speak of “good demons” instead, which is to say “celestial gods,” which is to say “angels,”¹³⁴ is to change the conversation, and religion, dramatically for Augustine. For these creatures *do* deign to dwell among humanity, but only to promote a very different kind of worship. Platonists think that no god dwells among men only because they do not see the heavenly hosts witness to Christ, true God and true man, borne by the true religion of his church.

We will return to the angels in a moment, since, in point of fact, Apuleius associates “good demons” not with any public religion but with the example of Socrates. Nevertheless, this embroils him all the deeper in the demonic problem of intellectual pride. As Apuleius makes clear in the concluding portion of *On the God of Socrates*, a section Augustine leaves unexplored, the example of Socrates is a summons to philosophy, to cultivate, or even give cult to (*colere*), the mind (*animus*), in order that we might also attain to the virtue and divine powers he possessed. For the signs he heard and saw only come as a result of the veneration (*cultus*) of one’s demon, a kind of cult that is nothing other than a sacred oath (*sacramentum*) to philosophy. Such divine powers are not to be confused with the interpretations of the soothsayers, nor the cult with the superstitious and insolent rabble, who are more concerned with the acquisition of possessions than the cultivation of their minds.¹³⁵ True to the *Symposium*’s account of Eros upon which it stands, Apuleius’ demonology is the result of study and careful distinctions, namely those between the gods whom he takes to be utterly good and the demons whose manifest character, exemplified in everything from local cult to the work of one’s conscience, reveals them to be nothing more than aids to, and thus less than, the true and the good in themselves. But the capacity for insight and judgement needed to make such distinctions is the possession of only a few. The identification of gods like Eros as good demons, intermediaries in relation to a higher truth, is a luxury of philosophers, intellectuals, of those given wisdom and insight.

The charge of intellectualist pride remains subdued in Augustine’s treatment of Apuleius, to come out more forcefully in conversation with Porphyry. Augustine instead focuses on the fact that Apuleius’ justification of

¹³⁴ See e.g., *ciu.* 9.23.

¹³⁵ See *deo Soc.* 157–78.

demons as intermediaries conflates the contemplative “ascent” to God with the spatial imagery used to describe it. For argument’s sake, Augustine uses Apuleius’ terms of mediation—that a mediator must share an aspect of each nature between which it mediates—because the inversion of Apuleius’ demons helps to show how Christ is the true mediator.¹³⁶ Spatial interposition is irrelevant because the true God does not exist in space, and so beatitude says nothing of spatial proximity. And while contemplative ascent may achieve a glimpse of the truth itself, final unity with the truth only happens in conjunction with the bringing of humanity into divine likeness through moral resemblance. This fact is not ignored in the Platonic tradition itself; after all, Augustine praises Socrates for introducing ethics to philosophy. But this in itself suggests that any mediator that does not share the blessedness of divinity so that it might make virtue manifest among miserable humanity will fail. It is thus not the immortal misery of demons depicted in myth, but the mortal blessedness incarnate in Christ that truly brings humanity to God. Christ, the perfect union of blessed divinity and mortal humanity, is thus counter-posed as the true mediator, right side up, to the false and inverted mediation of the demons.

Augustine adopts Apuleius’ terms of mediation only “for argument’s sake,” however, because this particular construal of mediation excludes the sacramental role of the angels, who, being immortal and blessed, are the rough equivalent of the pagans’ celestial gods. While it is true that Augustine denies the angels anything like an incarnation, in Apuleius’ terms the impossibility of mediation suggests the lack of any manifest presence to the eyes and ears of common people: the gods are accessible, with the assistance of demons, only through understanding. To suggest this would be for Augustine to deny the angels’ role in theophanies; moreover, it would render unintelligible his claim that we should not invoke angels but imitate them in good will and worship.¹³⁷ Angels are religious guides, as they are responsible not only for theophanies, but the giving of the Law, and the administration of the Scriptures themselves that contain both in uniform witness to one true God.¹³⁸

At one point in his exhortation to philosophy, Apuleius says this: “I find myself unable to give a sufficient account of why all men do not also cultivate

¹³⁶ See *ciu.* 9.15.

¹³⁷ See *ciu.* 8.25.

¹³⁸ *Ciu.* 10.7–8, 24–25.

their mind through the practice of reason.”¹³⁹ We can imagine what Augustine would say had he responded to this particular passage, but the underlying problem it represents for him, the esotericism of philosophy, begins to get addressed by Porphyry. In point of fact, Porphyry appears to be quite ambivalent about the usefulness of more common cultic ritual and magic for philosophy’s ends of union with the divine. In this he was truly his master’s pupil, for the mystic Plotinus had denied that he should observe the feasts of the gods’ holy days, saying, “they ought to come to me, not I to them.”¹⁴⁰ Yet Porphyry can also be seen in his own student, Iamblichus, though only the latter was able to achieve unequivocal confidence about the unification of such exoteric religious practice to philosophy’s ends—Porphyry’s “universal way”—and over just this matter the two had a famous dispute.¹⁴¹ The lack of extant material by Porphyry, and difficulties in putting together what we do have, make identification of just what he thought a difficult matter. But Augustine’s treatment of Porphyry’s work as a single, if contradictory, body of thought makes the latter a paragon for Augustine of both of philosophy’s basic demonic blunders. As one whose opinion vacillates between “the crime of sacrilegious curiosity and the profession of philosophy,”¹⁴² Porphyry exemplifies both philosophy’s persistent connection to popular paganism, and the intellectual hubris by which it rejects all such religion.

Porphyry and the Impotence of Theurgy

It will help us understand Augustine’s criticism of Porphyry if we are a touch more systematic in our examination than Augustine himself is. For this, Andrew Smith provides a helpful account of Porphyry’s understanding of theurgy

¹³⁹ *Deo Soc.* 169.

¹⁴⁰ Porph., *Plot.* 10.33–38, trans. Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 112.

¹⁴¹ Primarily, see Andrew Smith, *Porphyry’s Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition: A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 123–50; for another excellent introduction to the fundamental issues of the relation between bodily ritual and union with divine that drive this debate, see chs. 5 and 6 in Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, 116–53; in brief, see Valerie Flint, “The Demonisation of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity: Christian Redefinitions of Pagan Religions,” in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome* (ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 277–348, at 285–88.

¹⁴² *Ciu.* 10.9.

as it is situated between Plotinus and Iamblichus.¹⁴³ While Apuleius had noted the existence of a deity that is the source of all things, the father (*parens*) even of the celestial gods, the ineffability of this supreme God constrained Apuleius to speak of demonic union only with the celestial gods that were his creation.¹⁴⁴ Porphyry, on the other hand, locates salvation (σωτηρία) in the soul's return to the Father (πατήρ), or more specifically to the Intellect of the Father (πατρικός νοῦς), a mystical-religious conception of the goal of philosophy that increasingly marks late paganism.¹⁴⁵ As Augustine points out, he believes in three *principia*—the Plotinian One (ἓν), Intellect (νοῦς), and Soul (ψυχή)—the first two of which Augustine takes as a genuine recognition of God the Father and Son. For his part he cannot make any sense of what the Neoplatonists mean by Soul, for they do not speak about it the way Christians speak of the Holy Spirit. And, furthermore, the triunity of God comprises not three *principia*, but rather one *principium*, though the three persons are not reducible to each other.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the suggestion that the soul can only be purified and find true blessedness in the *principia* of all existence themselves represents for Augustine a real movement toward pious worship of the one true God on the part of platonic philosophy.

While Plotinus clearly lays the “monotheistic” foundation for Porphyry, what is novel in the latter is the apparently genuine concern that the established platonic philosophical methods one must use to attain this salvation of the soul exclude the great majority of people, who are incapable of the intellectual rigours it demands.¹⁴⁷ Such a salvation is not available while in this life, as Plato himself recognized and Augustine agrees, but it is only those that live according to the intellect whose efforts will be perfected by God in the life to come. And the grace—*gratia*, Augustine's word, perhaps—of this ability has been granted only to a few, by Porphyry's own admission.¹⁴⁸ The truth to which philosophy seeks to

¹⁴³ Smith, *Porphyry's Place*, 123–50. Much of what follows is dependent upon Smith, especially with regard to the relation between the three Neoplatonists. As we will see, however, Smith favours Iamblichus in a couple of places in a way Augustine would, I think, reject. Consideration of this will help to clarify Augustine's argument.

¹⁴⁴ See Apul., *deo Soc.* 123–24, where he explicitly bases it on the doctrine of Plato; cf. Pl., *Tim.* 28c.

¹⁴⁵ Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, 112.

¹⁴⁶ *Ciu.* 10.23–24.

¹⁴⁷ See Smith, *Porphyry's Place*, 147.

¹⁴⁸ See *ciu.* 10.29.

unite the soul is certainly universal, but it provides no accompanying universal way.¹⁴⁹ Thus, in spite of the increasingly religious terms in which its ends are articulated, and the growing empathy for common people, platonic philosophy's relation to popular religion in Porphyry stays true to the characteristics established by its founder: religion is to be sublated in intellectual ascent.

For Porphyry, it cannot be otherwise. The final rejection of religion is a consequence of the necessary rejection of the body, Porphyry's famous *corpus omne fugiendum*. True worship of the incorporeal God itself must be absolutely incorporeal; all ritual and even verbal prayer is excluded in the soul's return to the Father,¹⁵⁰ since, for Neoplatonists, material cult, subject to becoming and change, is apropos only of a material body likewise mutable. So, according to Augustine, Porphyry claims it is the higher soul, the *anima intellectualis*, that must leave every body.¹⁵¹ This includes flight from the lower soul, the *anima spiritalis*, which is used in the perception of bodily images—here we recognize the unnamed influence upon Augustine's own similar division of the soul, when he describes the lower as “spiritual”—and remains bound to a semi-bodily vehicle (ὄχημα) or spirit (πνεῦμα) that allows it to transmigrate to different bodies in the cycle of rebirths. One remains in the cycle of reincarnation when one attends primarily to bodily things, which describes most of humanity. There is a certain resonance here with Manichaean gnosticism, at least on Augustine's reading of Porphyry, for it is contact with bodily material that defiles the soul, and recognition of this is necessary for purification.¹⁵²

The Neoplatonists may have tied traditional religion to the body, but the reverse implication was apparent even to Plotinus: as long as we are subject to the body, we are subject to occult divine forces, and thus dependent upon the religious cult by which humans negotiate their relation with such powers.¹⁵³ Thus, while the esoteric monotheism of especially neoplatonic philosophy put such thinkers into direct conflict with pagan religious tradition—part of the appeal and purpose of philosophy—they also took the body increasingly seriously, a fact which gave grounds for *rapprochement* with their surrounding religious

¹⁴⁹ See Smith, *Porphyry's Place*, 136–39.

¹⁵⁰ Smith, *Porphyry's Place*, 130.

¹⁵¹ See *ciu.* 10.9.

¹⁵² See *ciu.* 10.30.

¹⁵³ Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, 128–30.

culture.¹⁵⁴ This is where theurgy enters, via the *Chaldaean Oracles*. This collection of texts was to have contained this very kind of conjunction of ritual practices with an account of the highest ends of the soul in its return to the Father, prescribing a path through the combination of philosophy, cult, and magic.¹⁵⁵ The range of practices included incantations, ecstatic trances, frenzies and dances, the consultation of oracles, extispicy, auspicy, scrying, astrology, and conjuring with mantic signs or wands.¹⁵⁶ Augustine, however, describes what he thinks for Porphyry is theurgy's most salient feature:

he declares that it is useful as a means of purifying one part of the soul: not, indeed, the intellectual part, which perceives the truth of intelligible things which have no bodily likenesses, but the spiritual part, whereby we receive the images of corporeal things. This part, he says, is made fit and suitable for the reception of spirits and angels, and for seeing the gods, by certain theurgic consecrations which are called mysteries.¹⁵⁷

We can see here a small, but important, shift in platonic demonology and mediation. Plato's doctrine that the gods hold no intercourse with men no longer describes a restriction of the activity of the celestial gods among humans, and now appears to refer more specifically to the ineffability of the Father. Porphyry now admits it is possible to see gods or angels (if there is any difference) in response to more wholesome rituals, which leaves demons to be active in religion's less reputable phenomena, like blood sacrifices and magical conjurations. This association with bad religion retains all of the negative connotations of demons found in Apuleius, but makes the additional claim that it is for this very reason that they should not be thought responsible for bearing prayers to the gods.¹⁵⁸ This implicit criticism of earlier platonic demonology accords far more with views of Augustine we have seen, and strongly suggests Porphyry's influence on his demonology.

¹⁵⁴ See Siniosoglou, "Philosophic Monotheism," 131–34.

¹⁵⁵ The extant text of the *Oracles* is only fragmentary, including nothing of its more philosophical concerns. On this and Porphyry's use of them, see Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, 130–31; Smith, *Porphyry's Place*, 130–32.

¹⁵⁶ Flint, "The Demonisation of Magic," 286.

¹⁵⁷ *Ciu.* 10.9.

¹⁵⁸ Porphyry's criticism of demons comes in his *Letter to Anebo*. See *ciu.* 10.11.

Theurgy, then, is to provide the moral cleansing necessary for the higher soul's ascent to the Father. The invocation of angels and gods as religious agents implies religious reform, which, in this case, appears as a distinction between theurgy and "magic," and the rejection of the latter. But this is a distinction only Iamblichus makes clearly, for Porphyry is not convinced. It is possible that Porphyry once thought theurgy capable of purifying the higher soul for its ascent; after all, Augustine explicitly claims that his opinion vacillates. Ultimately, however, Porphyry does not think theurgy has this capacity, and it is not difficult to see why. To the extent that it seeks to conjure a divine vision, theurgy's highest goal remains within the purview of the *anima spiritalis* responsible for corporeal imaginings (φαντασία). It is a material conjuration of a bodily image in accordance with the sympathy (συμπάθεια) uniting everything in the material cosmos, and thus fundamentally indistinguishable from "sorcery" or "black magic" (γοητεία), even if Porphyry presses for such a distinction more than Plotinus did.¹⁵⁹ Smith says this is a failure on Porphyry's part that Iamblichus corrected, but what Smith takes as a failure, Augustine reads as Porphyry's accurate assessment of their relation: "... the art which they call either magic [*magia*], or by the more detestable name of witchcraft [*goetia*], or by the more honourable one of theurgy [*theurgia*]."¹⁶⁰

The Plotinian conception of magic that Porphyry inherits should be considered an ancient antecedent to modern science: its concerns are of material causality alone, precisely as independent of the morality of the user, a moral ambivalence characteristic of traditional pagan cult more broadly, as we have seen. It is this facet of Porphyry's reluctance upon which Augustine draws most deeply. To demonstrate the moral ambivalence of theurgy Porphyry describes a good man from Chaldea who, try though he might, could not "purify his soul" with a vision because an envious man of great skill used the same arts to bind the spirits, preventing them from granting such purification. This shows either that the spirits being invoked all have the wretched passibility of demons, for they could

¹⁵⁹ In addition to Smith, on the distinction of sympathetic and demonic conceptions of magical causality, see Gordon, "Imagining Greek and Roman Magic," 232–39. This Plotinian conception of magic, which follows the work of Pseudo-Democritus, would be determinative of Platonism, despite his pupil Porphyry's appeal to demons. Ibid., 229. Cf. Robert Markus, "Augustine on Magic: A Neglected Semiotic Theory," *REA* 40 (1994): 375–88, at 376–77.

¹⁶⁰ *Ciu.* 10.9. For Smith, see *Porphyry's Place*, 128.

not be invoked to do evil unless they themselves were evil; or that good spirits can only be of aid if evil spirits are first placated, which is highly problematic theologically.¹⁶¹ To begin with, what it implies of the power of good angels vis-à-vis the wicked is impious. To Augustine, at least Apuleius has the good sense to place the celestial gods above this kind of competition. But, more importantly, if the good man were truly seeking to be purified by the good, there would be nothing outside of him that could compel him otherwise or restrain what he seeks. Good morals are not a bodily condition, for it is by the will that one participates in the good. Porphyry recognizes this to some extent, since he holds that the only preparation adequate to the salvation of the soul is the development of virtue. The greater problem for the theurgist than the obstructions of his rival, therefore, is that he seeks to replace moral development with a bodily effect. This is why theurgy is for Porphyry, as Smith says, “magic in the worst sense.”¹⁶² Instead, Porphyry suggests people imitate angels rather than invoke them, and Augustine gives him credit for saying so.¹⁶³

Again, Smith suggests Iamblichus is an advance over Porphyry in his understanding of theurgy. Iamblichus insists that virtue is prerequisite for the proper undertaking of theurgic arts, and he rejects Porphyry’s example of the good theurgist constrained, for if he were truly good he would not have failed. In fact, insofar as Augustine’s discussion in Book 10 of *The City of God* represents a confrontation between Christianity and theurgy, its greatest imitator, the liturgical-theological sensibilities of Iamblichus seem to be a more formidable opponent, assuming Augustine knew his work. For if religion is to be true, its ritual practice must bear the likeness of good morals. But the internal conflict of Porphyry is, in the end, more indicative to Augustine of theurgy’s true nature. It is not that Porphyry thought virtue was irrelevant to theurgy, but that he correctly saw that it was not there. Virtue is not formally related to theurgy precisely because it is its prerequisite. Whatever virtue theurgy has must be brought to it from outside by the practitioner. Iamblichus can claim to have united the purification of the lower and higher soul by making virtue inseparable from

¹⁶¹ *Ciu.* 10.9; see also 10.21, 26–27.

¹⁶² Smith, *Porphyry’s Place*, 140. As Smith notes, “Porphyry considers the theurgic practices to be an actual alternative to a life of practical virtue.” *Ibid.*, 128. In the end, this is precisely Porphyry’s problem with it.

¹⁶³ *Ciu.* 10.26.

theurgy, but saying it does not make it so. And, in fact, Smith himself suggests that Iamblichus takes his stance on the thwarted theurgist according to his own religious zeal.¹⁶⁴

If there were any virtue in Iamblichus' system as Augustine might have judged it, it would no doubt have been in spite of the form of its liturgical practice, not because of it. The fact remains that the theurgist errantly sought moral purification of the will in a bodily effect. But the nature of bodily events are such that they can be confounded against one's will by similarly material means. Such manipulation attends only to the lower soul and not to what is truly good. Moreover, for Porphyry, it is a wonder that humans should be capable at all of compelling any gods and constraining them to execute their wishes. The very idea that deities might be susceptible to such, he says, originates in the tricks and deceits of demons.¹⁶⁵ Augustine thus concludes that the theurgic arts may accomplish feats beyond human powers, but they are still finally bodily tricks without reference to the worship of the true God.¹⁶⁶ As long as no priest is willing or able to teach morality—especially doctrine of the one true God—as an integral part of his practice,¹⁶⁷ the assertions of theurgy's virtue and power to purify remain empty, while its practice still effects the union of the soul with multiple gods. The gap remains between what is lower and what is higher, between ritual and philosophical ascent, and thus between humanity and God;¹⁶⁸ while philosophy's best attempts at their unification have maintained pagan communion with demons.

The Philosophical Rejection of Christianity

This gap is closed only in the incarnation of Christ, and it is to the sacramental unity of the church with him as *totus Christus* that Augustine points again and again in Book 10 as the fulfilment of all that Platonism's best account

¹⁶⁴ Smith, *Porphyry's Place*, 135.

¹⁶⁵ See *ciu.* 10.11.

¹⁶⁶ *Ciu.* 10.12.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. *s.* 198.16.

¹⁶⁸ Fowden notes, "by ritualizing the initial stages of the soul's ascent, [Iamblichus] was able to make them more accessible than the stern and lonely way of the contemplative philosopher. But the ultimate mystical union remained, as it had been for Plotinus, an intuitive leap that only a few would dare to make, and an experience to the description of which the vocabulary of the philosopher was less inadequate than that of the theurgist." *The Egyptian Hermes*, 134.

lacks. For Porphyry thinks every body must be fled to return to the Father, but the church worships “Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”¹⁶⁹ We can clarify this difference with consideration of the following characterization of neoplatonic thought:

Henry Corbin described Neoplatonic philosophic theology as esoteric monotheism and drew a fundamental distinction with the Judaeo-Christian exoteric monotheism that postulates the existence of an individual *ens supremum*. According to Corbin, the paradox of “exoteric monotheism” consists in a form of metaphysical idolatry, according to which a supreme entity is superior to Being as such. Yet the First Cause cannot be an *ens*, an individual entity, since all entities are particular whereas the First Cause transcends Being as such.¹⁷⁰

One may claim that Augustine is not successful in making his case, but he most certainly was not granting some supreme being the status of “beyond being.” Rather, the claim is that the very ineffable God recognized by the best of philosophers is mysteriously and sacramentally united to creation in the dual-natured Christ. Christian “monotheism” in Augustine’s conception is thus not exoteric as opposed to esoteric, but rather the proper sacramental union of esoteric truth with exoteric religious practice and belief. It is only in this sacramental unity—that Christ is God incarnate, and thus all of humanity, no matter how simple, may attain to unity with the one true God through ritual incorporation into Christ—that universality is achieved.

Porphyry cannot get past a conception of universality that amounts to a magic trick that would make all people into philosophers. But he knew that this is precisely what “magic” cannot do, which is why he rejected theurgy. In fact, it is not surprising that Porphyry could find no other *uia* at all, since, from an Augustinian point of view, he utterly misunderstands the path to beatitude. Porphyry backs himself into a corner by conceiving of blessedness in terms of philosophical ascent, whereas Augustine proposes that the incarnation of eternal deity itself makes the exoteric, bodily, ritual, sacramental attachment to the flesh

¹⁶⁹ 1 Cor 1:24, *ciu.* 10.28

¹⁷⁰ Siniosoglou, “Philosophic Monotheism,” 131, referring to H. Corbin, “Le paradoxe du monothéisme.”

and blood of Christ the way of the return to the ineffable God. “You see after a fashion,” Augustine says of Porphyry and the Platonists, “although at a distance, and with clouded vision, the country in which we should abide; but you do not hold fast to the way that leads to it.”¹⁷¹

In addition to helping clarify Augustine’s claim against Porphyry, this statement about Neoplatonism also clarifies the latter’s rejection of that claim. Christianity’s “metaphysical idolatry” here is equal to Kierkegaard’s description of “essential offense in relation to loftiness,” that a man, even a good one, should claim to be God.¹⁷² The offense is in the apparent contradiction of identifying what is lofty with what is lowly, a created man with the uncreated God he cannot by definition be. It is impossible to overvalue the divine, so this offense must stem from the undervaluation of the creature, and Augustine locates the source of Porphyry’s offence in his philosophical rejection of the body. But the denigration of the body is characteristically demonic, and so it is an opinion that holds Porphyry as much as Porphyry holds it.

Porphyry, however, was in subjection to envious powers. He was ashamed of them, but he was too much in awe of them to speak freely against them. And so he refused to understand that the Lord Christ is the *principium* by whose incarnation we are cleansed. Indeed, Porphyry held him in contempt because of the flesh he took in order to become a sacrifice for our cleansing. It was because of his pride that Porphyry did not understand this great mystery: the pride which our true and gracious redeemer brought low by his own humility when he revealed himself to mortal men clothed in the mortality which he assumed. Malign and deceitful mediators congratulate themselves on not having this mortality and, speaking as immortals, promise false help to miserable men.¹⁷³

There is a fundamental confusion in Porphyry’s rejection, since the claim is not that the humanity of Christ is in its nature what cleanses, but that it is inseparably united to the *principium* that does. This union is demonstrated in Christ’s

¹⁷¹ *Ciu.* 10.29.

¹⁷² See Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity* (ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 94–101.

¹⁷³ *Ciu.* 10.24.

sinlessness and his willingness to hand himself over in death, which thereby constitute a divine and moral example for humankind. Following after this example is one of the ways humans participate in their own cleansing, by which they are prepared for the resurrection Christ promises with his own. But Porphyry's intellectual confusion is established in demonic pride. At root he is scandalized that the πατρικὸς νοῦς, which alone is to offer the cleansing necessary for the soul's return to the Father, should be identified with incarnate Word, who received a body and was born of a woman, and died an ignominious death.¹⁷⁴ Like the demons themselves, so Porphyry thinks flesh is unbecoming of divine immortality. The humble embodiment of truth itself requires of people humility about embodiment to see its truth.

The objection to Christ extends to the religion by which people are to cleave to him. The scandal of the incarnation is correlated to the scandal that an exoteric religion would purport to be more than just prolegomena to the proper work of philosophy, useful for more than cleansing only the lower part of the soul. For the church claims to be the very way to God insofar as it claims to be the very body of Christ. Christians are united to Christ not in philosophical mysticism, but in simple faith and pious signs of worship that are embodied in precisely the manner Porphyry ultimately rejects.¹⁷⁵ For the only truly universal salvation is that which respects the whole by cleansing all parts of the human nature, preparing the whole for immortality in the resurrection. And, correlative to the cleansing of the whole person is the ability to reach even those incapable of lifting their own attention up beyond their preoccupation with the body.

But, again, Augustine is adamant that it requires humility to recognize that the true way should be constituted in this particular religion, in which rendering visible cult is perhaps the least humiliating characteristic. For it is not a national religion, but a religion of people called out from the nations; its faith is founded not in Chaldaean magic but in Abraham who was commanded to leave the Chaldea and its superstitions, leave his country and his father's house. It requires the severing of all ties to life in this world, all the way to one's death if necessary. The apparent weakness of the church in its martyrdoms dissuades Porphyry from

¹⁷⁴ See *ciu.* 10.28.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. *ciu.* 10.19–20; cf. 10.5.

its truth, as he supposes a movement so beset by death cannot possibly be the universal way.¹⁷⁶

Book 10 begins with Augustine singing the praises of the Neoplatonists. They represent theological advancement in philosophy, including the recognition of the singularity and simplicity of God, in whom all things, however lowly, participate for their existence. This God alone is to be offered worship (λατρεία), which is most truly an inward act, the love of the good. Christians recognize more than Neoplatonists the importance of certain symbols offered in worship to signify the true inner worship, “a visible sacrament of an invisible sacrifice.”¹⁷⁷ But even here, Porphyry appreciates liturgical cult and recognizes the problem of philosophy’s failure to be sufficiently universal, while Christians admit that sacraments are in vain without inward worship. So Augustine postulates the Christian religion throughout Book 10 as the very thing for which paganism, as Porphyry understands it, strives. “If you truly loved these things [*uirtus* and *sapientia*], you would have recognized ‘Christ the power [*uirtutem*] of God, and the wisdom [*sapientiam*] of God,’ instead of backsliding from his wholesome humility because puffed up with the pride of empty knowledge.”¹⁷⁸ When confronted with exactly this solution, Porphyry scoffs. His rejection is indicative of a pride that holds him in a demonic grip.

Possession and Exorcism, Demons and Christ

Porphyry’s pride is demonic in three interrelated ways, and, since he is the “most noble of the pagan philosophers,”¹⁷⁹ exposition of these will help to summarize Augustine’s criticism of paganism as demonic sacraments more generally. First, philosophy’s fundamental attitude of confidence in one’s own abilities to ascend to God by one’s own discipline is at its core the straightforward imitation of the devil’s fall. It is the lie of self-sufficiency, for every external religious mediation is sublated in the flight from the body, in favour of a demonic mediation conceived as aid in one’s dialectic ascent to God. This mediation is not just esoteric and internal; it can only be accessed through the intellectual work of

¹⁷⁶ *Ciu.* 10.32.

¹⁷⁷ *Ciu.* 10.5.

¹⁷⁸ *Ciu.* 10.28, quoting 1 Cor 1:24.

¹⁷⁹ *Ciu.* 22.3.

dialectical mysticism. The philosophical conception of mediation posits the self as capable of attaining one's own blessedness, wherever that leaves others not likewise able to attain to dialectical ascent. Such philosophers place themselves beyond every religion except, as Apuleius says, the cult of the mind; *a fortiori* are they too proud to be subjected to the humility of God's true religion. They glory in their sickness, and descend into greater affliction on account of their refusal to take the only medicine against pride, namely, the humble sacraments of the divine incarnation.¹⁸⁰

Second, when philosophers do consider religion as a question of mediation, they show themselves to be every bit as susceptible to the lie of bodily wonders as the ignorant masses they would transcend. While Porphyry sits in dismissive judgement over the martyrs as they are executed, declaring their movement a failure, he gives serious consideration to theurgy simply because its superficial tricks arouse his curiosity.¹⁸¹ Here we can see the significance of Augustine's early rejections of the vice of curiosity, those who "go looking for the spiritual with a fleshly eye."¹⁸² For it is a fleshly eye that thinks bodily wonders and visions are more spiritual than the sacrifices of the martyrs that participate in the worldly shame of the cross. Seeking a kind of knowledge without wisdom typified by demons themselves, curiosity is also tied to divination for Augustine, and the desire to know the future and acquire other illicit knowledge.¹⁸³ And so, Porphyry consulted oracles, looking not so much for divine insight as the confirmation of his philosophical opinions,¹⁸⁴ including the opinion that Christians wrongly worship Christ.¹⁸⁵

This second aspect of demonic subjection, the use of lying signs and wonders to promote false religion, is fundamental to Augustine's demonology as an interpretation of paganism more broadly, as we have seen. But the discussion

¹⁸⁰ *Ciu.* 10.29; the demonic nature of this affliction by one's own pride is clarified in *s.* 198.36, where Pythagoras emerges as the proud philosopher *par excellence* who rejects the need for any ritual.

¹⁸¹ *Ciu.* 10.28. Smith confirms, *Porphyry's Place*, 130: "His preoccupation with theurgy was no doubt due to actual experience of the power of magical activities."

¹⁸² *Gn. adu. Man.* 2.25.40.

¹⁸³ E.g. *uera rel.* 3.5–4.6. See also Paul J. Griffiths, *The Vice of Curiosity: An Essay on Intellectual Appetite* (Winnipeg, MB: Canadian Mennonite University Press, 2006), 1–21.

¹⁸⁴ Smith, *Porphyry's Place*, 134.

¹⁸⁵ *Ciu.* 19.23.

of philosophical justifications of paganism as mediation completes the picture, since it is only here that the full power of demonic wonder is revealed. It is no secret that the philosophers do not think very highly of popular religion, an attitude that stems from their recognition that it contradicts the truth about God. But they see no point in overturning religion for the sake of philosophical insight, both because they know it is unsuitable for the masses, and because attainment to God requires the negation of all religion anyway, in the flight from every body. In the interest of imperial order the philosophers strive for a *rapprochement* between the one true God to the demonic religions that do not refer to him, and they attempt such through appeal to the same language of demonic mediation that they use to describe how they actually think one attains to God.¹⁸⁶

Motivated by a desire not to upset the pluralistic status quo with the truth of one God—a matter to which we will return below—philosophers thus attribute to the demons the very responsibility for the administration of divine religion that these angels rejected in order to become the demons they are. In other words, philosophers represent the power of demons to convey themselves as the very things they are not. Angels refer you to the worship of God, which is true only with reference to Christ. Demons also refer you to the worship of god, but occluding Christ they identify the god as a demon. And yet, humans find it compelling because the god has the power and sex and honour we desire, but with a face resplendent with the bodily radiance of a “divinity” that the fleshly admire. Demons, for Augustine, are self-reference in the guise of deity, who pretend to show you God as they usher you towards your own pride and infirmity in the hall of mirrors that is pagan religion. The devil is the father of lies. And the appearance of divinity, the cloak of verisimilitude, not only deceives the rabble of common people, but also seems plausibly divine enough for the consideration even of those who have glimpsed God. Theurgy conjures visions of miraculous beauty, and the oracle of Hecate speaks of the great piety of Christ. But just so, Satan transforms himself into an angel of the light. Mocking his followers with a false promise of purification that the philosophers themselves articulate, the devil

¹⁸⁶ See Siniosoglou, “Philosophic Monotheism,” 129–35. As Augustine emphasizes, philosophers make this justification even though they don’t think it really works as mediation, loath to admit this reticence openly. “Platonist philosophic theology is consciously multivalent and faithful to Plato’s own strategy of refraining from the explicit distinction between the esoteric and exoteric dimensions of religion.” Ibid., 143.

and his demons ensnare miserable souls with wonders and the cult of fictive gods, blocking their access to God by turning them away from true worship.¹⁸⁷

The third demonic characteristic of philosophical pride is exclusivity and a denigration of the masses, and it not only flows from the first two, but also links us back to the *libido dominandi* typical of the earthly city. One of Augustine's polemical tropes is to decry pagan governance for excluding the philosophers from its theological constitution. Precedence should be given, so the argument goes, to those recommending virtue and at least attempting to discover the true nature of things. They have made some discoveries that, for all their limitations, have at least the minimal virtue of relativizing the obscene worship of traditional myth and cult. Augustine is hence fiercely critical of Varro, who, finding the natural theology of the philosophers beyond reproach, nevertheless relegated it to the academy, calling it unfit for the public consumption of the forum, in favour of vicious myths and civic rituals he knows are based in fiction.¹⁸⁸ Porphyry himself is far too content with the exclusive nature of the gift he has been given. In spite of the anthropological division it reinforces between the upward ends of the soul and the body destined for rejection, Porphyry recommends theurgy to those he knows are incapable of philosophy. For philosophers, the rituals that effectively get you nowhere are always, in the end, for someone else.

Historians and philosophers might not be said to hold much sway among the people, but in this way, intellectuals like Varro and Porphyry participate in a much broader pattern that is very much foundational for the pagan identity of Rome. It is typical in Books 1–10 to find that intellectuals capable of dialectic thought, philosophers who can see through the falsity of the gods, nevertheless commend them for the good of the public. For this Porphyry has “become a preacher and an angel” of most impure demons.¹⁸⁹ This is the basic judgement of the Platonists, who see through to God but justify the mediation of demon-worship anyway, but Augustine also speaks in similar terms of Hermes Trismegistus, Seneca the Younger, Cicero, the *Pontifex Maximus* Quintus Mucius

¹⁸⁷ On false mediation see, e.g., *ciu.* 8.22; 9.15; 10.9; this is also developed at some length at *trin.* 4.8.12–4.15.20, but Augustine's engagement with Apuleius and Porphyry in *ciu.* goes a long way to contextualize the argument. See also *s.* 198.36–49, though the themes of mediation and ecclesiology linger to the end of the sermon.

¹⁸⁸ *Ciu.* 6.5; see also 2.7, and the three-fold theology of Scaevola, 4.27.

¹⁸⁹ *Ciu.* 10.27, my trans.

Scaevola.¹⁹⁰ In fact, the concealment of religious truth from the Roman people for the sake of public order is embedded within the very theological foundation of Rome itself. Varro and others tell of Numa Pompilius, who, as the successor to Romulus, expanded the establishment of Roman rites according to Persian methods of scrying, by which the dead are supposed to prophesy. Whatever Numa saw there, however, he concealed in a book and buried it, considering it unsuitable for the Romans to know the true origins of their civic cult in the honouring of dead men. But since the demons that had accomplished the tricks seen in Numa's hydromancy were evidently not permitted to warn him to dispose of the book more thoroughly, it was later discovered by a farmer's plough, only to have Roman senators come to the same conclusion about the public as Numa, and burn what he only buried.¹⁹¹

Numa founds Roman religion as a noble lie, and his successors embrace his standard. Augustine finds that Varro explains why this should be so. After speaking of Scaevola Pontifex, who suggests the theological doctrines of philosophers are of no use, and even harmful, to states precisely because they are true,¹⁹² Varro goes on to admit that if it were up to him, he would establish a city upon naturalistic civic theology. But, Rome being established as it is, there are truths inexpedient for people to know, and falsities that are expedient for them to take as true. "Varro also says that people are on the whole more inclined to follow the poets than the natural philosophers in their beliefs concerning the genealogies of the gods."¹⁹³ But, of course, for Augustine, this is only because their gods represent the divine justification of their own multifarious and wayward desires. Give the people what they want and they will be yours.

Augustine declares that demons are delighted by such deceit, "for, by it, they possess deceivers and deceived alike."¹⁹⁴ In expounding upon this, Augustine points to a lust for mastery that was exercised over the Roman populace itself through civic religion before it ever grew into imperial political ambition, the latter of which was only ever an outgrowth of the former.

¹⁹⁰ Hermes, *ciu.* 8.23; Seneca, 6.10; Cicero, 4.30; Scaevola, 4.27.

¹⁹¹ *Ciu.* 7.34–35; cf. Livy, 40.29.

¹⁹² *Ciu.* 4.27.

¹⁹³ *Ciu.* 4.32.

¹⁹⁴ *Ciu.* 4.31.

Supposedly prudent and wise men made it their business to deceive the people in matters of religion. In doing this, they not only worshipped, but also imitated, the demons, whose greatest desire is to deceive. For just as the demons cannot possess any but those whom they have falsely deceived, so also men who are princes—not, indeed, righteous princes, but men like the demons—have persuaded the people in the name of religion to accept as true those things which they knew to be false: they have done this in order to bind men more tightly, as it were, in civil society, so that they might likewise possess them as subjects. For what weak and untutored men could escape the simultaneous falsehoods of both the rulers of the city and the demons?¹⁹⁵

The people's desires to take possession of this life and its goods subject them to possession by their lusts. At the same time, being mastered by their desires makes the people susceptible to those responsible for leading them to virtue, who themselves prefer to rule over the people and possess them as a mark of their own glory instead. But this desire to possess the people as subjects itself makes the rulers the possession of demons, whose desire for self-possession they imitate, in which they likewise fall. As Rist explains, "wishing to be one's own master is tied to wishing to master others. Love of one's own power becomes love of one's power over others. . . . just as in Augustine love of God must be tied (socially) to love of neighbour, so hatred of God must be tied to hatred of neighbour and the desire to dominate."¹⁹⁶ By this hatred, by this mastery, all are mastered, human and demon alike subject to the wretchedness of their choosing.

Augustine understands being dominated by one's desire to dominate as God handing the sinner over to self-punishment, which, we saw, he describes as bondage to the devil. Likewise, in the primary social manifestation of this diabolical bondage, the desire for a strong and stable social order returns as the possessive pressure of tradition. Porphyry is reluctant to offend Anebo the Egyptian priest, and so veils his criticisms in inquiry;¹⁹⁷ Apuleius sees through the scheme of the gods, but is likewise unable to offend those held by demons

¹⁹⁵ *Ciu.* 4.32.

¹⁹⁶ John Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptised* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 189.

¹⁹⁷ *Ciu.* 10.11, 26.

through inveterate superstition.¹⁹⁸ Augustine speaks of philosophers as those with insight into the true nature of the gods and their rites, but without the freedom to say so openly; in this way, Varro is an acute and learned man, but one that has not been set free by the Holy Spirit.¹⁹⁹ Engagement with Cicero's *Republic* in particular highlights how, out of Rome's historical success, the obligation of the Romans emerges not only to serve their founding gods but also enforce their superstitions upon subject nations as a part of their governance.²⁰⁰ The anxiety to continue the tradition and maintain peace with the gods only gets shriller as the lie grows and the city considers itself eternal, and such responsibilities form the basis of the Christian persecutions that continued to reverberate in Augustine's day. For it remains present in the senatorial class making one last-ditch effort to appeal to the sack of Rome to resist the Christian cult now increasingly adopted by Roman emperors.

But neither the promises nor the demands of demons are "heeded by the multitude of men for whose sake Christ came, to set them free from the lordship of demons. For in him they have a most merciful cleansing of mind, body and spirit alike."²⁰¹ Freedom from demons is found only in sacramental union with Christ, which is to say in true religion, the church, the city of God, though it is important to note that such freedom remains incomplete on pilgrimage in this life. Augustine points to the psalm that declares all the gods of the nations are demons, which is entitled, " 'When the house was built after the captivity'; and a house is indeed now being built for the Lord in all the earth: the city of God, which is holy church, after that captivity in which demonic forces held prisoner those men who, because they believed in God, have become living stones in his house."²⁰² There is one God, the Apostle says, and thus there is "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."²⁰³ This mediator is the priest of God and the priest who is God, who offers not the sacrifices and oblations of the Israelites, much less those of the pagans, but his own body, which those older Hebrew sacrifices prefigured. This sacrifice is repeated on the altars of the churches, and those who

¹⁹⁸ *Ciu.* 8.22.

¹⁹⁹ *Ciu.* 6.1–2.

²⁰⁰ *Ciu.* 22.6.

²⁰¹ *Ciu.* 10.27.

²⁰² *Ciu.* 8.24; "living stones" is a reference to 1 Pet 2:5.

²⁰³ 1 Tim 2:5, *apud ciu.* 17.5.

partake in it are all likewise priests, being members of the one Priest, “a holy people, a royal priesthood.”²⁰⁴ For “we, being many, are one body in Christ.”²⁰⁵ Where false religion worships many demons with many temples, many priests, and many rites to satisfy many desires, true religion worships one God through one mediator as one body; though there are many altars, there is one priesthood, one baptism, one bread, one cup, and one desire for eternal life with God. In the face of the profound and wanton plurality of paganism, which cannot even organize itself enough to elevate Felicity above all other gods, much less systematically unify the gods, one universal church determines where customary differences may flourish, and where the unity of the church itself is compromised by variation.

From this one mediator emerges true exemplarity, “for you must not think, brothers and sisters, that the Lord our God has left us without public shows.”²⁰⁶ Such spectacles explicitly instruct the faithful about good morals, so that true worship might not be without true imitation, where the demons withheld such teachings from divine example. Demonic spectacles are filled with shamefulness, wickedness, and impious insults in the theatre, frenzied competition in the circus, and violent, murderous aggression in the amphitheatre. But in Christian spectacles the church witnesses Christ defeat the devil like a lamb that, being slain, slays the lion. Thus, where demons are goaded to anger, true religion teaches that passion is for the purpose of compassion; demons are beguiled by gifts, but true religion rejects favouritism based upon return value; demons love some and hate others, but true religion says to love even our enemies; demons seethe and boil where true religion bids us find our heart’s rest in God.²⁰⁷ Christianity is founded upon the sacramental agreement between the humble and virtuous means of worship and its proper ends in the one true God, rejecting all immorality, obscenity, and crimes in the former, and any divisions in the latter.²⁰⁸ It teaches the true doctrine and morality of God as straightforwardly as possible, taking great care in the

²⁰⁴ 1 Pet 2:9, *apud ciu.* 20.10; cf. 17.5.

²⁰⁵ Rom 12:5, *apud ciu.* 10.6.

²⁰⁶ *Io. eu. tr.* 7.6.

²⁰⁷ Cf. *ciu.* 8.17.

²⁰⁸ See *ciu.* 7.27.

articulation of the faith, “lest verbal licence beget impious opinions concerning the matters which our words signify.”²⁰⁹

In a certain sense, the freedom Christ offers is stark in its simplicity: you cannot share the fellowship of demons. The true religion is as distinct from the false as heaven is from hell, and as angels are from demons. But what is straightforward theologically is in practice far more complex and ambiguous, on the one hand, since demons seduce and deceive. And, on the other hand, it is incredibly demanding, since nothing less than true godliness will cast out the power of the air that desires to possess. For the devil is not to be placated but exorcised.²¹⁰ Augustine explains that this is the work of Christ, the sinless one, in whose sinlessness the church participates only through prayer and recognition of its own sins in Christ’s forgiveness. But forgiveness demands flight from sin. The cities will remain mixed in this life, but to take on the mind of Christ in the sacramental communion of the church, to become Christ, entails a separation from the mind of the world.

So if you believe something different from them, hope for something different, love something different, you should prove it by your life, demonstrate it by your actions. Are you going to join today in the celebration of good luck presents with a pagan, going to play at dice with a pagan, going to get drunk with a pagan? How in that case are you really believing something different, hoping for something different, loving something different?²¹¹

Refusing the association of demons entails the cessation of those activities, those sacraments of the earthly city’s desire, that give them pleasure. For the North African church of his day, Augustine included among them idle songs, trifling chatter, the indecencies of the theatre, the frenzy of chariot races, the cruelty of the amphitheatre; all the rivalries, quarrels, and hostilities that arise out of loyalty to the celebrities of sport and stage; all curious inquiry into the future and other occult knowledge through astrology, oracles, haruspicy, and the various other modes of divination, as well as any attempts to adjure hidden powers through

²⁰⁹ *Ciu.* 10.23.

²¹⁰ *Ciu.* 10.22.

²¹¹ *S.* 198.2.

magical means, or seek healing through amulets and charms; and, of course, all the festivals, processions, and temple rites of various gods that were quickly passing away into obscurity. Like Abraham out of Chaldea, Christians are called to come out and reject whatever of one's country, culture, and family serves demons.

It is this apocalyptic opposition and division to which Augustine calls Christians that none of his pagan interlocutors manage. The refusal to reject publically what they know to be false is an effect of the demons they worship. And so the foundation of the Christian's division against demonic powers is nothing less than public, sacramental entrance into the church, where believers are incorporated into Christ in order to give true worship to the one true God. Accordingly, the baptismal ritual that constitutes this entrance includes an exorcism and exsufflation of the powers of darkness, which Augustine increasingly proclaimed to be central to the initiation of Christians.²¹² The church's opposition to the world is manifest in this exorcism-as-entrance required of the believer a death to himself, of which the baptism itself was a sacrament first and foremost.²¹³ The force of this opposition was not always lost on the world, who then might demand the Christian's return to the gods of its tradition on pain of physical death. This too revealed the gods of such servants to be demons. But Augustine claims that Christ places the safety of his people not in a city they are responsible to perpetuate, but in the eternal city of God. That city is revealed now in the church in part, so that people might have Christ to cling to in order that he might bring them to eternal life after death. With their safety in eternity through the promise of the resurrection, Christians are able to die to themselves and their desires for material things, country, glory, and the lust to dominate, able even simply to die, liberated from the demonic bonds that grip the earthly city.²¹⁴

²¹² Cf., e.g., *gr. et pecc. or.* 2.40.45. See, briefly, J. Patout Burns and Robin M. Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa: The Development of its Practices and Beliefs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 205–06. Further on the exsufflation of the devil at baptism, see Daniel Van Slyke, "Augustine and Catechumenal 'Exsufflatio': An Integral Element of Christian Initiation," *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 118 (2004): 175–208, at 198–205. Van Slyke shows that Augustine's argument with the Pelagians, especially Julian, highlights for him the importance of exorcism and exsufflation for entrance into the church.

²¹³ See, e.g., *inq. Ian.* (=ep.) 55.2.3, with reference to Rom 6:6; cf. all of Rom 6:1–14.

²¹⁴ Cf. *ciu.* 3.17 and 22.6.

Conclusion

When Eugene TeSelle discusses Augustine's understanding of the atonement he notes that two aspects of it have typically offended modern thinkers, and they both concern the role of the devil.¹ The first is Augustine's notion that the devil has rights over humanity. In a certain sense, this matter is resolved simply by pointing out that, according to Augustine, just as the fullness of the created order includes creatures who are free to love God, and thus capable of adhering to him or falling away, so too God's just order provides sin with its appropriate punitive consequences. But the significance of the devil's rights is only fully illuminated by the second matter of offense, that of Christ ransoming the devil. Against his critics, TeSelle suggests, Augustine's conception of ransom is not that of a fair and amicable deal negotiated between God and the devil, nor a deception of the latter. After all, the Gospels show that demons clearly (but in a limited way) know who Christ is, and perceive in him their doom. As TeSelle explains, ransoming the devil is rather a matter of freeing humans from the devil's abuse of power with respect to the rights he does have, that is, from the overzealous execution of his office.

Since Anselm and the later Reformers, it has often been thought that the notion of a confrontation between Christ and the fallen powers is obsolete, sufficiently absorbed by a fuller understanding of the reconciliation with God that Christ's obedient self-sacrifice accomplishes. But TeSelle suggests that, for Augustine, the death by which Christ is a sacrifice follows not from Christ's obedience, *per se*, but of the confrontation between the truly obedient one and the hostile powers that oppose God. As obedience to the point of self-sacrifice, Christ's death restores humanity's relation to God; but this movement is inseparable from the fact that Christ's death is unmerited, which reveals just how far the devil has over-reached his rights, making the sinless one suffer death as though he too were guilty of sin. To be a fallen human is to require both the restoration of one's relationship to God, which Christ's obedience accomplishes,

¹ See Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970; repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 165–76.

and the attainment of freedom for that relationship in the cancellation of all claims the diabolical city has upon one by virtue of one's willing sinfulness, which Christ accomplishes by unmasking the powers. The problem Christ's death addresses is not "that God is prevented by his own justice or wrath from acting for men's salvation, . . . but that when God in his sovereign mercy acts to establish a restored fellowship of men with himself there must also be some 'just' way by which those men can be detached from the community of evil to which they 'justly' belong."²

Christ's encounter with the devil and the dissolution of his bonds name the particularly social, particularly religious character of the atonement for Augustine.

Unlike the views of Anselm and Calvin and their successors, which locate the focus of redemption in the hidden depths of God and even in the intra-Trinitarian relations, the ransom theory sets it firmly within earthly life, more in keeping with the gospel narratives which present it as a drama played out between finite agents—the forces of evil, the human soul of Christ, the men who stand between them—with tangible problems of religious observance and political policy as counters, with bids made in terms of opposed orientations of life, and the stakes being eternal life and death.³

The universal way of humanity's salvation must encompass all parts of the human, and thus must address the manifold ways humans are bound by one another to their desires in the earthly city, whose citizenship is constituted in ceremonies and rites antithetical to the grace of God. And Augustine's demonology concerns precisely this common binding of human souls to their damnation with embodied sacraments. Temptations and wonders lead humans to serve in perverse liturgies and rituals, and it is the sovereignty of these that Christ breaks, reorienting those souls through his own sacraments.

We have sought to explicate what it means for Augustine that the gods of the nations are demons, beginning with their original angelic nature and their purpose in the administration of all creation according to the will of God. We then examined Augustine's account of how this Christocentric purpose is corrupted at

² TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 175.

³ TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, 169.

the fall of the angels in their apostasy from God, from the temporal beginning of their existence. Out of this fallen existence demons seek to deceive and afflict humans, in order that we might likewise go astray in our desires, for which purpose demons take upon themselves all the kinds of embodiment possible within the natural limitations of their own knowledge and skill, as well as the limits of the other creatures they (ab)use and the constraints set upon them by holy angels. In the end, demonic embodiment strives to incorporate humans into a religious body of the devil, constituted in the variety of demonic sacraments made available in the service of false gods, like those found in Roman pagan culture.

It has been suggested that “Augustine is perhaps remotest from the concerns of the present-day thinking on the problem of evil in these pages of *The City of God* [in which he considers pagan demon-worship] because he is trying to meet a difficulty of his own time. He has a vivid sense of the reality of the powers he describes.”⁴ The religious, cultural, even socio-political connotations implications of Augustine’s demonology fundamentally call this statement into question. Let us set aside the apparent contradiction between excusing Augustine from his concern with demons because of his historical constraints and occasional responsibilities, and yet suggesting that he himself had a vivid sense of their reality. When we think of what is essential in Augustine’s demonology in terms of this union of demons and their fallen desire with liturgies and rituals, and their opposition to God’s grace, manifest in the sacramental incorporation of the church into Christ, we might very well ask just how remote Augustine is from “present-day concerns.”

It is true that, if Augustine had a sense of the intimate presence of demons, this is because so many vestiges of their traditional worship, which are now absent, were still present in his day-to-day life in statuary, rituals, festivals, games, and so forth. Still, he knew that the historically contingent forms of demonic sacraments were not important in themselves, but rather in the desires they signified and shaped. And the latter are by no means necessarily abolished by the destruction of the former. “For I know quite well and with great sorrow of your superstitious worship of idols, and against those idols your temples are closed more easily than your hearts.”⁵ Augustine knew that the disease was not

⁴ G. R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 101.

⁵ *Ep.* 232.1.

reducible to its symptoms, and, moreover, that the symptoms could always undergo transformation. He could not have known that there would be no revival of traditional Roman paganism in later days. Indeed, there remained much in his time to indicate that the battle was far from over.⁶ But even so the beginnings of such a transformation of demonic modes of appearance were already palpable. On the one hand, the name of Christ was appearing on amulets and in spells, and pagan priests were claiming Christian identity for the old gods. Augustine knew the devil must adapt Christ to his purposes if he is to lead Christians astray.⁷ On the other hand, this diabolical adaptation of Christ was also already occurring within the sacramental bonds of the church, as the devil, seeing the temples of demons closing, stirred up heresies within the church.⁸ “For when those outside the church do not rage . . . there is even then no lack within the church of those who by their abandoned morals torture the hearts of those who live piously.”⁹

Flexibility in the range of their possible manifestations is integral to Augustine’s understanding of the demons’ fleshlessness. The earthly city’s loves will always seek out a sacramental form, for by it demons are worshipped. And if, as TeSelle says, the forces of evil manifest their opposition to the heavenly city in “tangible problems of religious observance and political policy,” then demons can hardly be said to concern matters remote from present-day thinking. In fact, Augustine’s demons are only relegated to the peculiarity of the past when one has already occluded the flexibility inherent to their signification by reifying them historically and culturally. But such a reification has problematic consequences for the interpretation of Augustine, and we can see this exemplified in Charles Mathewes’ reflections on evil and Augustinianism.

Mathewes recognizes that Augustine’s doctrine of evil as privation undermines any conception of evil as material, yet at the same time he claims that Augustine’s appeal to demons contradicts that doctrine.¹⁰ In spite of his refusal to grant evil any substantial purchase, Augustine could not help but adopt the popular view of spiritual presences that fill the air, cosmic agents of good and evil

⁶ See Serge Lancel, *St. Augustine* (trans. Antonia Nevill; London: SCM, 2002), 318–20.

⁷ *Io. eu. tr.* 7.6; cf. van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, 55.

⁸ *Ciu.* 18.51; cf. Evans, *Augustine on Evil*, 109.

⁹ *Ciu.* 18.51.

¹⁰ Charles T. Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 63; 73–75.

locked in battle. To Mathewes, this amounts to a vestige of Manichaeism that Augustine was never finally able to purge, even though he admits Augustine redefined demons against the Manicheans by identifying their nature as created good, making their evil a result of their attempt to live apart from God.¹¹ So how are Augustine's decidedly non-Manichean demons still a problem? It is because they are objects beyond human desire that are (putatively somehow still) *in se* evil, and such an objectivizing concept of evil stultifies human political action.

What Manichaeism and demons have in common is their attenuation of the moral and political life. Augustine had rejected Manichaeism for its utter misdiagnosis of the cause of true human suffering, which had made it quite incapable of offering any remedy. No healing or renewal of the soul, no moral progress was possible so long as the soul itself was exonerated from all fault, which was laid squarely upon the nature of corporeal matter.¹² Likewise, in Mathewes' analysis, the demonic itself by definition is outside the human will, and thus beyond human responsibility. Thus to "demonize" someone is to expel evil from one's own "moral universe," opening a gap between the purity of one's own goodness and the irredeemable wickedness of the other. But this fails to see one's own complicity in the suffering of others, and thus the similitude between oneself and those who are "evil."¹³

Following Augustine's recognition of evil as a privation of the good, Mathewes suggests that the proper response to evil's non-existence is fuller participation in existence, in what he calls a "political ontology," which he also takes to be rooted in the thought of Augustine.¹⁴ The concept, however, is inherited from Hannah Arendt and her understanding of *amor mundi*.¹⁵ The love

¹¹ See also Mathewes, *Evil*, 245–46.

¹² Cf. *mor.* 2.11.22; see Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (2d ed; Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2000), 49.

¹³ Mathewes, *Evil*, 51; for Manichean evil as something essentially outside us, see *ibid.*, 73.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Mathewes, *Evil*, 194–96. Note, however, his admission that he is less interested in understanding Augustine as such, than he is in developing an "Augustinian" account from within the Augustinian tradition, in order to show "how this thought system can become 'operational' for our own time." *Ibid.*, 62. It is significant, in my estimation, that not only is reading Augustine himself insufficient for giving an account that can be operational in our time, but also that Mathewes picks Reinhold Niebuhr and Hannah Arendt in particular to mediate Augustine. It is easy to see how Augustine's theological concerns, and particularly his ecclesial focus, might get lost in such a project.

¹⁵ Mathewes' reading of Arendt is found in *Evil*, 149–97.

of world is, for Arendt, the central virtue of the *uita actiua*.¹⁶ It is the public orientation of uniquely human rational creativity and imagination that produces the political sphere itself, thus distinguishing the active life from the *uita contemplatiua*. Love of the world is determinative of human meaning and flourishing, and thus Arendt's conception of evil is determined in relation to it: evil is worldlessness itself; it is that which takes us from the world, that which renders humanity superfluous. Thus, evil is anything that stultifies the active life and its creative orientation to the world.¹⁷

It is here that Mathewes sees in Arendt's thought Augustine's doctrine of evil as privation. The world created in human political action is good to the extent that it exists. Evil is nothing other than the destruction of this achievement, and, conversely, there can be no response to evil other than the resumption of the world-making process of humanity's active life. That is what it means for "political ontology" to be a response to evil, and it is here that Mathewes considers Arendt to be at her most Augustinian.¹⁸ Of course, Arendt can hardly be Augustinian when she removes God from being the ultimate determining factor of the human condition in the world. Mathewes admits this alteration is "decisive"; it is illuminating, however, that he also thinks it is "slight."¹⁹ Without God, Arendt needs only to ask about the shape of the human condition as it is found in the world as such.

Mathewes contends that Arendt's ontology depends upon a notion of subjectivity that remains impossibly unconditioned. One must re-introduce God—"re-theologizing" Arendt—to situate humans properly as actors responsive to prior acts, whose actions are ends-oriented. "Politics, that is, must see itself as continuous with, and indeed at times even identical to, hermeneutical and metaphysical inquiry, about the 'being' of the people, and the community, and the world that the community makes."²⁰ But Mathewes proceeds to say nothing of what difference Augustine's God makes for the particular form or setting of this

¹⁶ Mathewes, *Evil*, 178–79.

¹⁷ The principle example here is Adolf Eichmann, whose complicity in Nazi atrocities was characterized not by a "demonic" evil but by bureaucratic thoughtlessness. For Arendt's treatment of Eichmann, see Mathewes, *Evil*, 165–69; 184–89.

¹⁸ Mathewes, *Evil*, 153.

¹⁹ Mathewes, *Evil*, 182.

²⁰ Mathewes, *Evil*, 183.

inquiry, appearing to conflate God's priority with the Arendtian public world as such. Perhaps this is why Mathewes' Augustine is so amenable to his Arendt:

Because for her politics is precisely the realm of being, properly speaking—that region of human existence in which humanity comes most fully into its own, becomes most fully itself. An ontological interpretation of politics supports both Arendt's positive proposal of *amor mundi*, and her negative analysis of political evil's essentially "world-denying" reality. We evaluate action's "political" pretensions by determining whether it affirms or subverts the public world.²¹

Arendt herself appears to provide the very "Augustinian" theology her own account was missing. Mathewes does not point out any way to seek God's provision in history outside of the given public world. Making subversion of the public world the standard by which action is to be evaluated, however, is question-begging for Augustine. For Augustine, the primary human question is not whether one will participate in the *ciuitas*, but rather in which *ciuitas* one will participate.

The principle Augustinian example Mathewes gives of political ontology is not the church, which is relegated to the merely contingent setting of Augustine's political strivings,²² but rather the tragic judge who must exercise his duty, even if it requires him to torture innocent men.²³ Fulfilling public duties, doing what is necessary, even when it is "tragically torturous to fulfil," becomes an *imitatio Christi* to the extent that it turns opposition to evil into an historical struggle that participates in Christ's engagement with and redemption of the sinful world. Thus, "the necessities we experience in confronting evil are transformed into the necessities which Christ undertook for our salvation,"²⁴ to the extent that "our participation in violence is a form of suffering injustice in Christ."²⁵

It is not, to be sure, that Mathewes reduces Augustine's Christianity to the mere maintenance of social order, but rather that he makes the latter fundamental.

²¹ Mathewes, *Evil*, 183.

²² See Mathewes, *Evil*, 206; likewise, as far as I can find, Mathewes' only reference to the Eucharist is in terms of "rememberance." Ibid., 203.

²³ *Ciu.* 19.6; see Mathewes, *Evil*, 219–28.

²⁴ Mathewes, *Evil*, 226.

²⁵ Mathewes, *Evil*, 228.

This political ontology begins and ends with the world: “in coming to love the world more fully, we are transforming ourselves, or are being transformed, in ways that enable us to inhabit (and love) the world more fully.”²⁶ It is thus determinative of the limits to Christian religiosity. “The point is to promote true religion and piety (the only sound basis for moral order) while still admitting that many attempts to promote it—to create, that is, a true commonwealth—are simply too costly, too harmful to the fabric of the social order, to be pursued.”²⁷ “What matters,” he says, “is that some modicum of social order be sustained.”²⁸

It sounds suspiciously as though the attempt to re-theologize Arendt’s *amor mundi* has only accomplished a deification of the world that has its precedent not so much in eschatological consummation as in a euhemerism which adapts Christ to its purpose. If any failure to be political, any turn away from the love of world is evil, the world has the very status Augustine would give to none other than God, turning politics itself into a kind of *cultus*. But is the world the “mediator between God and man?”²⁹ Will its cult bear you to God? Is this Christ and his true religion, or false worship, which is only ever the false mediation of demons? These are the questions that matter most to Augustine. For Augustine does not say that true religion must be preached only so long as a modicum of order can be maintained, but rather that it must be preached even if it makes the heavenly city a burden to the world. “Thus, she has had to bear the brunt of the anger and hatred and persecutions of her adversaries.”³⁰ The exemplary Christian for Augustine is not the judge, tragically bound to his duty, but the martyr, those who have hated the “world” and its demonic rulers, and even their own life, for Christ and his church.

Now, we need not discard the concept of an Augustinian “political ontology.” This would not refer to a world humanity is responsible for constructing, however, but rather to an eternal city one is to join, an incarnate body to which one must cleave. As it is on earth, this city neither presumes its own perfection, nor puts off all holiness until the eschaton, but seeks a measure of holiness now in the medicines of the sacramental life of the church. By these

²⁶ Mathewes, *Evil*, 223.

²⁷ Mathewes, *Evil*, 222.

²⁸ Mathewes, *Evil*, 225.

²⁹ 1 Tim 2:5, *apud ciu.* 9.17.

³⁰ See *ciu.* 19.17.

sacraments persistent human sins are forgiven and the faithful attempt to resist evil; they establish, therefore, a measure of true peace. Mathewes seems to fear that such a heavenly city will flee the world, but, for Augustine, the “world” is fraught with demons and defined by their sacraments. If a doctrine of world-love rids Augustine at once of his demons and his church, greater attention to Augustine’s demons clarifies the danger of a political vision that replaces the *totus Christus* with an idol of the world.

We have not understood Augustine’s thoughts about the world, its religious cultures, and even its political structures, until we have recognized the demons he thinks operate within them. But perhaps, conversely, we also ought to strive to understand Augustine’s demonology better by attempting to uncover its points of connection with and criticism of the Augustinian engagements with these matters in our own day. Following Christian tradition and its Scriptures, Augustine teaches that the gods of the nations are demons. Gods and demons might not be normal terms in the present negotiation of the “tangible problems of religious observance and political policy,” but, for Augustine, all of these at their core concern what people worship, what they desire and serve, what demands their honour and loyalty, what promises blessedness, happiness, and fulfilment in return for their observance.

We can see in Mathewes’ work an example of one strong temptation in the study of the contribution of Augustine to contemporary socio-political thought, a temptation that close attention to Augustine’s demonology can illuminate. To love the world, to work for its betterment and build it up, to prioritize cooperation with and working within its institutions is an incomplete notion of Augustine’s political theology at best. At worst, from an Augustinian point of view, it is nothing less than demonolatry. For the apocalyptic opposition between Christ and the demons is manifest in an opposition between their respective mediations. It thus demands on the part of those who would follow Christ a real renunciation of the false communion of the earthly city. For Augustine, this entailed opposition to at least some institutions, particularly those structures of pagan religious culture that were used to prop up Roman imperialism. And whatever is not directly opposed, which can be shared in peace with the earthly city, must nevertheless also be used within the order and direction of the Holy Spirit, as mediated in the sacramental life of the body of Christ, with the worship of the one true God the ultimate goal. For

Augustine it is neither desire nor necessity but the church alone that has the privilege of defining the limits of Christian political participation.

There are, of course, others who do explore Augustine's demonological criticism of pagan Rome in order to use it as a basis for their own criticisms of modern politics. For example, in an essay entitled "Democracy and its Demons," Michael Hanby looks to Augustine's reflection upon the way pagan civil religion undergirded the Roman Empire in order to understand the use of a rhetoric-political apparatus to encourage American citizens to sacrifice themselves for American power and support its military ventures.³¹ Indeed, the contemporary conversation about Augustine's political thought is broad and diverse.³² It would be revealing to enter this conversation with the question of how much its participants attend to the threat that national gods represented for Augustine, and the specificity of his response to that threat in the sacramental life of the church. In other words, more research could and should be done to relate Augustine's demonology constructively to the appropriation of Augustinian political theology in our own time and place.

Though Augustine's demonology undermines any attempt to make orientation to the world a characteristic of Augustinianism, this does not mean that redemption is for him as simple as abandoning the world to join the church. The two cities remain inextricably mixed, while the demonic temptations and deceptions of the earthly city are never fully overcome in this life. Moreover, the fact that the earthly and heavenly cities share a temporal peace opens up an extremely diverse range of possibilities for Christian participation in the socio-political structures of the world. What it does mean, though, is that Augustine sees redemption in the ongoing movement of the sinner away from his participation in the earthly city and its sacraments, towards the city of God in the body of Christ. He will judge politics and politicians too for their contribution to this project: whereas pagan Rome could not be a true or just commonwealth because it offered the service to demons that should be given only to God,³³ Constantine and

³¹ Michael Hanby, "Democracy and its Demons" in *Augustine and Politics* (ed. J. Doody, K. L. Hughes, and K. Paffenroth; Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2005), 117–44.

³² For a helpful introduction to Augustinian political thought within the last century, see Michael J. S. Bruno, *Political Augustinianism: Modern Interpretations of Augustine's Political Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014).

³³ See *ciu.* 19.23–24.

Theodosius, for all their faults, support the church, demonstrate Christian humility, and overturn the idols that lead humanity astray.³⁴

The city of God has a different faith, hope, and love than that of the nations, and its members in this life had best attend to those differences if they are to be so gathered.

If you believe what the nations, the Gentiles, believe, if you hope for what the Gentiles hope for, if you love what the Gentiles love, then by all means live as the Gentiles live. . . . What is it that the Gentiles believe? . . . The beings they call gods have been shown to us by the apostle Paul in a different light: “For what the Gentiles sacrifice,” he says, “they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not wish you to become the associates of demons.” So their morals give pleasure to their gods. But the man who said “I do not wish you to become the associates of demons” wished us to set ourselves apart in life from those who serve demons.³⁵

Therefore, Augustine says, “if you believe something else, hope for something else, love something else, then live in another kind of way, and prove how vastly different your faith and hope and charity are by the vast difference of your morals.”³⁶ To do any less is to be ungrateful to the redeemer who became man, and paid the ransom for all people with his blood. Indeed, to love as the nations love, and thus act as they act, is to offer incense to demons.

Demonic mediation is a parody of the original angelic mission to bear witness to Christ. We have found that the significance of this is that demonic activity is not primarily individual moral temptation and affliction but the use of these kinds of wicked epiphanies in the construction and promotion of a sacramental system constitutive of the devil’s human, corporate body, which is

³⁴ Theodosius I “did not cease from the very beginning of his principate to assist the church in her labours against the ungodly by means of the most just and merciful laws. . . . He commanded that the statues of the heathen should be everywhere overthrown, well knowing that not even earthly rewards are placed in the power of demons, but in that of the true God.” *Ciu.* 5.26. Cf. the “mirror of princes,” 5.24: those rulers are happy “if they make their power the handmaid of [God’s] majesty by using it to spread his worship to the greatest possible extent; . . . if they prefer to govern wicked desires more than any people whatsoever.” In *ciu.* 5.25, Augustine notes that Constantine established Constantinople “without any temple or image of the demons.”

³⁵ *S.* 198.3.

³⁶ *S.* 198.3.

accordingly a parody of the body of Christ. Thus, on the one hand, Augustine conceives freedom from demons not just as freedom from individual affliction, but also as freedom from an actual community, a false communion, an unjust commonwealth. On the other hand, this means that the freedom Christ provides is not just for individual piety and the restoration of morality, but the incorporation of the redeemed into a true communion, a just commonwealth. Christ's atonement offers the communion of true religion, and thus the restoration, though incomplete in this life, of humanity to its true social, even political, existence.

For Augustine, the city of God in pilgrimage on this earth marches through time alongside and mixed together with the earthly city. The very existence of the church and the movement of its members into true communion with God and one another participate in Christ's victory over the demonic powers and the earthly city, but the outward form of those powers and their civic sacraments changes with time and needs to be discerned, especially as they adopt aspects of the outward form of the city of God. If a political theology is to follow Augustine, it must therefore include some account of how the church continues to witness to Christ's exposure and defeat of false gods, even as the modes of demonic embodiment change. A truly Augustinian "political ontology" must always consider how, in the entanglement of all the world's desires, those gathered together in the church are to be set apart; it must always consider the meaning of the apostle Paul's words, "I do not wish you to become the associates of demons."

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