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Love, Knowledge and Periagōgē: An Examination of Personal Identity in the Writings of St. Augustine and Francesco Petrarch

An Honors Thesis
Presented By
Andrew Imbrie

To the Department of Italian
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for
Honors in the Major Field (Humanities: SDM)

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Introduction: On Thinking within a Tradition

"We are expected to develop our own opinions, outlook, stances on things, to a considerable degree through solitary reflection. But this is not how things work with important issues, such as the definition of our identity. We define this always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the identities our significant others want to recognize in us. And even when we outgrow some of the latter—our parents, for instance—and they disappear from our lives, the conversation with them continues within us as long as we live."

–Charles Taylor: *Ethics of Authenticity*

The original impetus for writing this thesis came from a series of conversations I had with Professor Robert E. Proctor while studying abroad in Rome, Italy. I had recently rediscovered Proctor's work on *Defining the Humanities* and was quite struck by its apparent skepticism regarding the didactic value of the "modern" self. One passage stood out in particular:

> I want to argue that this shaping [of the self] cannot be accomplished without models to emulate, and that the Greeks and the Romans are the only such models capable of such emulation…the personal self, in all its glorious autonomy—which is also a form of isolation from both the cosmos and society—is too little, too weak, too "self-centered"—too imperfect in short, to inspire another human being to self-perfection. We can learn a great deal about our selves and our experience of the human by reading and re-reading *Hamlet*. But if our goal is Bruni's or Arnold's "perfecting" of a self, there is nothing in *Hamlet* to emulate.[1]

Implicit within this critique, or so I thought at the time, was not only a skepticism over the possibility of establishing a purely "modern humanities" but more importantly, an epistemic claim related to how we moderns may come to know and shape our selves.

The notion of "making a life," of shaping one's self (*Bildung*) towards a particular goal has all but vanished in the modern world. Covetous of maintaining a multiplicity of

[1] Robert E. Proctor. *Defining the Humanities*. Second Edition. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998, pp. 109-110.

choices in our lives and wary of our unconscious energies and desires, we moderns seek autonomy, freedom and, above all, harmony in our life decisions. To constrain ourselves to a particular end or goal (*telos*) would not only set limits to our desire for boundless agency, it would run against, what Lionel Trilling refers to as, our "cultural grain—it is as if the fluidity of the contemporary world demands an analogous limitlessness in our personal perspective."[2] Modern debates on selfhood and its cultivation have thus shifted away from the concept of *Bildung*—a shaping of the self—and toward the subjective and more limitless act of self-analysis. This turn to the self, or "slide to subjectivism," as Charles Taylor terms it in his *Ethics of Authenticity*, is a dominant social fact of our lives and has colored most, if not all, of the modern debates on selfhood and agency.[3]

The implications of this recent turn in western thought are manifold and not a few scholars have chosen to address the more deviant forms of our individualist ethos.[4] In Taylor's view, our modern centering on the self, heightened subjectivism and abiding pursuit of instrumental reason[5] is not in itself disastrous, but merely a degenerate form of a lively modern ethic which can no longer look to the "publicly accessible order of

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[2] Lionel Trilling. "The Uncertain Future of the Humanistic Educational Ideal." *In The Last Decade: Essays and Reviews, 1965-75*. Ed. Diana Trilling. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 175. Quoted in: Ibid. p. 112.

[3] A sense of individualism, both in its political manifestations and in its emphasis on self-responsibility and personal commitment, has permeated western thought for some time; arguably one could trace it back to the thought of Descartes and Locke, even Plato. What makes the individualism of our age novel, and thus particular to our culture, is its subjective and egoistic connotations. "The dark side of individualism," Taylor observes, "is a centering on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society" (Charles Taylor. *Ethnics of Authenticity*, p. 4).

[4] To mention only a few: Albert Borgman (*Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*); Peter Berger et. al. (*The Homeless Mind*); Robert E. Proctor (*Defining the Humanities*); Charles Taylor (*Sources of the Self*, *Ethics of Authenticity* and the "Diversity of Goods"); Lionel Trilling (*Sincerity and Authenticity*); Allan Bloom (*The Closing of the American Mind*); Will Kymlicka (*Liberalism, Community and Culture*); David Harvey (*The Condition of Postmodernity*); Rollo May (*Psychology and the Human Dilemma*, *Love and Will* and *Man's Search for Himself*); George Herbert Mead (*Mind, Self and Society*); R. Bellah et. al. (*Habits of the Heart*).

[5] See: Charles Taylor. *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000, pp. 5-6: "By 'instrumental reason' I mean the kind of rationality we draw on when we calculate the most economical application of means to a given end. Maximum efficiency, the best cost-output ratio, is its measure of success."

meanings provided by the pre-18th century Great Chain of Being" for moral and spiritual guidance.[6] To arrive at an understanding of whom we have become and of the sources that have given rise to the powerful cluster of moral demands that we feel today, an exposition of the *modern* self thus assumes a sense of urgency in Taylor's thought, an urgency that is manifestly absent in—if not antithetical to—Proctor's normative outlook stated above. One could argue that both thinkers ascribe to a form of "moral absolutism," but Taylor would ultimately fault Proctor for the narrowness of his outlook and the impossibility of his attempt to articulate a humanistic ethic bereft of any reference to his own modern identity:

> What I hope emerges from this lengthy account of the growth of the modern identity is how all-pervasive it is, how much it envelops us, and how deeply we are implicated in it: in a sense of self defined by powers of disengaged reason as well as of creative imagination, in characteristic modern understandings of freedom and dignity and rights, in the ideals of self-fulfillment and expression, and in demands of universal benevolence and justice.[7]

Intrigued by this difference, I wrote Proctor a series of questions addressing the apparent tendency of his book to disparage the "modern" self. In particular, I posed to him the following questions: What is the relevance of the past? Why are we moderns, according to your book, unable to learn from other modern, interior selves? And what, if anything, can be done to convince our contemporaries that there is more to life than material possessions, that education should be *edification*, and that philosophy, as Pierre Hadot argues so well in his book *What is Ancient Philosophy*, should be a "way of life"?

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[6] Charles Taylor. "Comments and Replies," *Inquiry*. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. LIV, 1, March 1994, p. 248.
[7] Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self*: The Making of the Modern Identity. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001, p. 503.

Professor Proctor's response reemphasized to me the importance of thinking within a tradition, of interpreting the past to address the moral and spiritual needs of the present. There is, of course, some truth in two of the common answers given for studying the past: "those who do not study history are condemned to repeat it;" and "we understand better who we are if we understand how we and our society came into being *in time*."[8] But more importantly, for Proctor, working within a tradition gives order and meaning to one's life. It provides one with a framework for addressing moral and spiritual questions, and it imposes a necessary limitation on our intellectual choices, allowing for a recognizable "starting position" from which one may engage in a dialogue with another tradition; and in this regard, there is a great deal that we moderns can learn from our contemporaries, "but only if we can understand them in terms of the whole history of Western thought, culture, and civilization."[9] To relegate ourselves to what Christopher Lasch refers to as "the windowless room of the present" not only risks a perpetual pathological narcissism, but it disregards other, more meaningful modalities of self-realization that derive from comparing and contrasting one's self with those pre-modern selves who turned outward, not inward, in their trials.[10]

Within this context, the focus for my senior honors study centers on two pivotal figures within the Western tradition, both of whom exerted a tremendous influence on western conceptions of the human person and its place within a greater moral and spiritual order: St. Augustine of Hippo and Francesco Petrarch. Above all others, I choose St. Augustine and Petrarch for three reasons. First, not only are Augustine and Petrarch essential for understanding the roots of the Western identity, but they themselves

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[8] See: George Santayana. *The Life of Reason*. New York: Prometheus Books, 1998.
[9] Robert. E. Proctor. Correspondence with Author. January 24th, 2005.
[10] Ibid. p. 7

heralded the coming of two monumental intellectual movements within the West itself: the Middle Ages and the Renaissance respectively. Second, the similarities and intertexuality between the two thinkers is itself a topic worthy of careful study. Both Augustine and Petrarch are noted for their penchant for introspection, their relationship to antiquity, their acute sense of historical perspective, their relentless search for happiness, and the extent to which this search is deeply intertwined with their lives. It is noteworthy that Augustine figures prominently in two of Petrarch's principle works: "The Ascent of Mont Ventoux" and *Secretum*, a consolatory (*consolatio*) dialogue that Petrarch imagines between himself and St. Augustine. Finally, for reasons noted above, both thinkers place a premium on the ethical dimensions of life, on discerning the just path for living virtuously and attaining happiness (*eudaemonia*). And yet, in spite of the common ethical trajectory between the two, Augustine and Petrarch locate their paths to happiness through opposing channels. Petrarch, reared as a Christian, turns away from the Christian scholasticism of the time as a means to combat the contingency, pain and suffering of the world and looks, instead, to the power of the written word and the transformative effect of historical examples to fashion an identity. Augustine, born a pagan and mired in the sin of "worldliness" from a young age, is initially drawn to the rhetoric and knowledge of pagan texts, but eventually sees within them not an independent source of wisdom, but traces of God, of a divinely ordered world (*logos*: the Word of Christ). Adhering to Christian doctrine becomes for Augustine not an impediment to living a moral life, as it was for Petrarch,[11] but a moral compass leading to his salvation.

[11] It is important to stress here that Petrarch never did abjure his *faith* as a Christian; indeed, Petrarch remained a Christian throughout his life. His "turning away" from Christianity reflected primarily his views toward what the *religion* of Christianity had become in early 14th century Europe: a degeneration of

The divergent responses of Augustine and Petrarch toward Christianity as a means to fashion an identity and situate the human person within a greater moral order are emblematic of a larger, more significant difference between the two. Augustine was, for all his concerted introspection and locutions of the mind as an "interior man" (*homo interior*), markedly ancient with respect to his conception of the human person. The extent that he may be construed as advocating a modern, interior conception of the self can only be sustained through an awareness that the culminating effects of Augustine's interiority, in its tendencies and, more importantly, in its goals, lie beyond the self and toward the "invisible things" of God. Augustine's conception of personal identity is thus ultimately "extensive" in its orientation, as that which turns inward in order to be "drawn upward."[12]

Petrarch's conception of personal identity retains Augustinian strands of interiority but contrary to Augustine, Petrarch's efforts are not circumscribed by an awareness that man is ultimately dependent upon the grace of God to rectify the perversity of the human will. Petrarch's existential humanism, as it is often referred to, derives precisely from the fact that Petrarch was unable to locate in medieval theology an ethic capable of providing meaning and reason in the face of the many tragedies that colored his life. As a result, one often sees in Petrarch a conception of personal identity that is mired in subjectivity, fragmented and unhinged from previous moral orders but nevertheless capable of serving as the central source of all values and objectivity.[13] Petrarch thus expounds a deeply personal understanding of self-identity, one that is often

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theology into methodology, narrow specialization and an obsession with logical and linguistic analysis. As Petrarch notes in *Le familiari*: "Our vanity has turned theology into dialectic" (Fam. X, 5 and 8).

[12] Op. cit. Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self*, p. 134.

[13] Giuseppe Mazzotta. *The Worlds of Petrarch*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993, p. 83. Cf. Petrarch's *Trionfi*, *Secretum* and *Familiares*.

identified by recent scholars as indicative of a turning point in western thought from ancient, extensive conceptions of the human person to more modern, interior notions of selfhood.

Taking this contrast as a point of departure, this essay seeks to analyze in greater detail the thought of Augustine and Petrarch as regards their varying conceptions of personal identity and its relation to a greater moral and spiritual order. A broader, but closely related, aim of this thesis is to highlight how this search for self-understanding becomes increasingly internalized over time. If one begins with the thought of Plato, one may say that this search has moved from an *external* domain, from a view that man must go beyond himself to accede to a realm of higher moral and spiritual sources, to an *interior* one, to a notion that higher moral and spiritual sources are *made* in the image of an autonomous self, not *found*. Before delving into the thought of Augustine on the subject, the essay begins with an introductory chapter on the philosophy of Plato in order to lay the intellectual foundations upon which Augustine draws to articulate his vision of the human person. Chapters two through four comprise the bulk of the thesis and aim, together with the introductory chapter, to provide a sequential look at three attempts within the Western tradition to articulate the nature of personal identity. Chapter two focuses on the thought of Augustine and may be divided into three sections: 1) The Soul's Search for Knowledge, Truth and God, 2) Memory and the Interior Teacher, and 3) Human Nature and its Redemption. Chapter three discusses the nature and influence of St. Anselm's ontological proof for the existence of God on Petrarch's intellectual outlook and seeks, by extension, to lay the groundwork for a more detailed exposition of Petrarch's views on medieval scholasticism, love, and the experience of death and

contingency. The final chapter deals principally with the figure of Petrarch. It provides a detailed look at the reasons that gave rise to his intellectual outlook on man as well as the express nature and implications of his subjective conception of the human person. The essay concludes with a brief attempt to draw out more explicitly the similarities and differences between Augustine and Petrarch with a view to identifying where and how their conceptions of personal identity diverge.

Before moving on, it is important to clarify two caveats that run throughout this essay, one dealing with language and the other with methodology. As regards language, I have explicitly avoided the use of the term "self" and opted instead for the term "person," "mind," or "soul" when referring to the works of Plato, Augustine, Anselm, and, to a lesser extent, Petrarch.[14] This is because none of the thinkers in question advance an explicit or unified "theory of the self." Preoccupation with the nature of selfhood and its attendant formulations is principally a modern exercise, and it would be incongruous to transpose a modern understanding of this term onto thinkers for which the term had a vastly different meaning.[15] Consequently, the methodology of this paper will proceed by way of reflection. It will attempt to elicit and formulate a clearer understanding of Augustine's and Petrarch's approaches to personal identity by looking for reflections of

---

[14] I should note that this assumption is considerably relaxed in Chapter IV. My decision to do so was motivated, in large part, by Petrarch's role as a transitional figure to modernity.

[15] By way of example, R.S. Pine-Coffin's popular edition of Augustine's *Confessions* translates "*tum in illa grandi rixa interioris domus meae, quam fortiter excitaveram cum anima mea in cubiculo nostro, corde meo, tam vultu quam mente turbatus invado Alypium*" as "My inner self was a house divided against itself. In the heat of the fierce conflict which I had stirred up against my soul in our common abode, my heart, I turned upon Alypius" (Book VIII, Chapter VIII). As I would argue, this translation superimposes a modern term, namely, the term "self," onto a text for which the phrase "*in illa rixa interioris domus meae*" had quite a different meaning. I would translate the above passage as follows: "Then, with my inner house [*interioris domus meae*] in conflict with itself, which I had so fiercely raised against my soul in our common chamber, my heart, I turned, troubled in both mind and countenance [*vultu*], to Alypius."

their views on the subject in a variety of their writings on God, psychology, metaphysics, epistemology, and language.

Chapter I: *Eros*, *Ergon* and *Periagōgē*: Plato's Vision of the Moral Order

"We are fired into this world with a madness that comes from the Gods."

–Plato: *Phaedrus*

Introduction

In 1929, Alfred North Whitehead wrote, "The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato."[16] Although this appraisal of the Western philosophical tradition certainly overlooks its dialogical character—western philosophy being more of a conversation across time than a lengthy commentary on its earliest proponents—it does give the reader a sense of just how influential the thought of Plato was for future generations of philosophers. This influence is most readily apparent in the works of the early Christian philosophers, particularly those of St. Augustine of Hippo. In this chapter, I wish to touch upon a number of themes within Plato's work that influence the thought and development of Augustine's philosophical outlook. I concentrate, in particular, on aspects of Plato's thought that Augustine will later have to reconcile with his Christian faith, including Plato's views on wisdom, recollection and the love and direction of the human soul. A broader aim of this chapter is to provide an intellectual background against which the

[16] Alfred North Whitehead. *Process and Reality*: An Essay in Cosmology. New York: Macmillan Company, 1929; New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960, p. 39.

sequential nature of western attempts to define personhood in terms of locale, such as "inner" and "outer," "interiority" and "exteriority," will become more apparent.

Love, Understanding and the Search for Wisdom

All men desire to be wise; and to be wise, according to Plato, is the ability to view all of reality in light of the Forms (*eidos*, *idea*). A man capable of such a feat would not only possess a true understanding (*noein*, *noēsis*, *nous*) of the natural order of things but he would also rightly perceive how things "ought" to be. That is to say, Plato presents an epistemology that is intimately connected to a normative understanding of the world of experience: to *know* what is right necessarily entails *doing* (*teche*) right.[17] As Plato has Socrates state in the *Gorgias*:

> Socrates: Now is not the man who has learned the art of carpentry a carpenter?
>
> Gorgias: Yes
>
> Socrates: And he who has learned the art of music a musician?
>
> Gorgias: Yes.
>
> Socrates: And he who has learned medicine a physician? And so too on the same principle, the man who has learned anything becomes in each case such as his knowledge makes him?

[17] There is a conspicuous shortage of available literature on Plato's conception of the freedom of the human will. My research has lead me to believe that Plato is, to a large extent, deterministic in his outlook. This assertion is based on two premises: 1) Plato's exclusive, *a-priori* definition of the harmonious and rationally guided soul: "The first [of the three parts of the soul] is the part with which a person learns [rational], and the second the part with which he gets angry [spirit]. As for the third…we called it the appetitive part, because of the intensity of its appetites for food, drink, sex…but we also called it the money-loving part [desire]…*And doesn't this part rule in some people's souls, while one of the other parts—whichever it happens to be—rules in other people's*?...And isn't that the reason we say that there are three primary kinds of people: philosophic, victory loving, and profit-loving [my emphasis]?" (Plato. *Republic*. Translated by G.M.A. Grube. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1992, 580d-581c). 2) The *necessary* relationship that Plato draws between knowledge and just action ("virtue is knowledge"), which leaves little to no room for the freedom of individual choice in matters of moral concern—a claim that Augustine will later contest.

> Gorgias: Certainly.
>
> Socrates: Then according to this principle he who learned justice is just.[18]

As the above analogy suggests, human excellence (*aretē*) derives from a direct experience of knowledge. Only the musician possesses an understanding about the nature and use of his or her instrument; just as only a carpenter with a direct experience of the act of carpentry may be said to be possessive of a true understanding of his or her craft. The "maker" possesses, at best, only a true belief about the making of musical instruments or furniture, one that, although true, remains entirely dependent upon the user's knowledge of what makes an instrument or piece of furniture better or worse.[19]

Plato's definition of knowledge follows from this distinction between mere belief, or opinion (*doxa*), and understanding. As noted above, belief and knowledge may both possess the quality of being "true," but only knowledge is *necessarily* true: one cannot be said to know falsely. Belief, by contrast, is only *contingently* true, and may change at any moment according to the availability of information, context and/or the subjective motives of the agent. What separates knowledge from belief is that knowledge, in addition to being true, is "tied down" by a *logos* (account) of the reason why:

> For true opinions, as long as they remain, are a fine thing and all they do is good, but they are not willing to remain long, and they escape from a man's mind, so that they are not worth much until one ties them down by giving an account of the reason why…After they are tied down, in the first place they become knowledge, and then they remain in place.[20]

---

[18] Plato. *Gorgias*. Translated by W.C. Helmbold. London: Prentice Hall, 1952, 460b.
[19] Julia Annas. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981, Chapter 8.
[20] Plato. *Meno*. Translated by G.M.A. Grube in *Plato's Meno*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 1992, 98A.

Although some scholars have argued that this interpretation of knowledge entails a "two-worlds view" whereby the objects of knowledge are said to be distinct from the objects of opinion irrespective of their veracity, it is clear that Plato is speaking not of two separate *worlds* but of two different, interdependent *perspectives*. Those possessive of knowledge perceive reality as an ordered whole. Their perspective is not limited to particulars, nor is it easily persuaded by the arbitrary whims of others. It is the result of a meticulously crafted *logos* about the objects of this world; and because this dialectic of reason proceeds initially by way of the world of experience, the objects of its knowledge are not distinct from the objects of belief but build upon them toward more inclusive and broader forms of knowledge.

These broader, more inclusive forms of knowledge are what Plato refers to as the world of the "Forms." In contrast to the world of sensible experience, the world of the Forms is an ideal reality, one that exists independently from the world of experience but nevertheless accounts for and makes intelligible its content. Accordingly, all objects within the sensible world derive their essential characteristics from their participation in the Forms: large stones, buildings and mountains may all differ greatly from one another in terms of their material composition and appearance, but they all share the common characteristic of "largeness" due to their participation in the Form of largeness. By tracing the participation of the visible world in the intelligible world of the Forms, the philosopher embarks upon the path toward wisdom.

At the apex of this journey stands the Form of the Good, Plato's metaphysical "First Principle." The Form of the Good accounts for and sustains all partial goods, both intelligible and visible, and functions, by extension, as the ultimate source and object of

all knowledge, as that which "gives truth to the things known and the power to know to the knower."[21] Unlike the lower Forms, which proceed "not to a first principle but to a conclusion,"[22] the truth of the Form of the Good is self-evident: it requires no further explanation to account for, or sustain, its existence. It is, as Plato terms it, a point of final "rest" and "security" for the human soul seeking certainty in a world of change.[23]

What is interesting to note for present purposes is the manner in which the apprehension of this highest good is described. No longer considered part of the sensible or intelligible realms of being, the apprehension of the Form of the Good is often described by Plato in mystical terms as a form of vision, a "seeing" with the "eye of the soul." As Plato writes in Book VII of the *Republic*:

> In the knowable realm, the form of the good is the last thing *to be seen*, and it is reached only with difficulty. Once one has *seen* it, however, one must conclude that it is the cause of all that is correct and beautiful in anything, that it provides both light and its source in the visible realm, and that in the intelligible realm it controls and provides truth and understanding, so that *anyone who is to act sensibly in private or in public* must see it.[24]

There are two important points to draw out from this passage. First, it is clear that Plato conceives of knowledge as a form of direct and immediate experience: to *see* the Good is at once to *understand* the Good. When this moment of pure understanding is reached, the distinctions that formerly separated the "knower" (the human soul) and the "object to be known" (the Good) effectively melt away. There is, as F.E. Cranz observes, a necessary

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[21] Op. cit. Plato. *Republic*, 508e.
[22] Ibid. 510b. The division between "lower" and "higher" forms derives from Plato's division of the intelligible world into two parts: a) those forms which serve as hypothetical constructs from which one may reason back to the visible world ("the conclusion") to account for the existence of certain objects or values and b) those forms which, although remaining hypothetical in nature, are employed to account for more basic concepts within the intelligible world itself. See Melchert's "eagle" analogy in: Norman Melchert. *The Great Conversation*. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 2002. p. 129.
[23] Ibid. 533d
[24] Ibid. 517b-c [my emphasis]

conjunction between the "knower" and the "known" across a single realm of being[25] which, in Plato's case, is itself "beyond being."[26] A second point to draw out from this passage is that this highest good is of a public and common domain, accessible to "anyone who is to act sensibly in private or in public." The attainment of the Good may be limited to the select few—Plato refers to this privileged elite as "the philosopher kings," but its location nevertheless lies beyond the human soul, beyond the realm of individual thought and feeling. As a result, the focus of the lover of wisdom (*philosophia*) fastens upon an *external field of common objects to be known*, not the subjective and particularized thoughts of the agent.[27]

Plato notes near the end of Book VII of the *Republic* that one's ability to accede to this field of higher moral and spiritual sources depends upon the direction in which the soul is facing, a task which he entrusts to the powers of education (*paideia*). "Education," Plato states, "….isn't the craft of putting sight into the soul. Education takes for granted that sight is there but that it isn't turned the right way or looking where it ought to look, and it tries to redirect it appropriately."[28] This view suggests that there is a preexisting desire and capacity within the soul to attain wisdom; all the craft of education must do is guide the soul in the proper direction. The issue at stake is thus not whether the soul *loves* the good, for this is almost certainly the case, but whether the soul is able to *see* the good

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[25] For a more extensive elaboration on the subject of ancient conjunctive vision please refer to: F.E. Cranz, *The Reorientation of Western Thought c. 1100A.D*. The Break with the Ancient Tradition and its Consequences for Renaissance and Reformation. Prepared for Duke University Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1982.

[26] Plato. *Timaeus*. Translated by H.D.P. Lee. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965, 41 (9). See also: Plato. *Republic*, 509b: "Therefore, you should also say that not only do the objects of knowledge owe their being known to the good, but their being is also due to it, although *the good is not being, but superior to it in rank and power* [my emphasis]."

[27] As we shall see in chapter two, Augustine has a very different understanding of the domain and activity of knowledge. Op. cit. Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self*, p. 130.

[28] Op. cit. Plato. *Republic*, 518d.

and hence know in which direction it should channel its endogenous desires. As Plato has Diotima, an expert on the subject of love, state to Socrates in the *Symposium*:

> Diotima: Do you think this wish and this desire (the love of the good) are common to all mankind, and that everyone wants always to possess what is good?
>
> Socrates: I think it is common to all men.
>
> Diotima: In that case, Socrates, why do we not describe all men as lovers, if everyone always loves the same thing?
>
> Socrates: I don't know. I agree with you, it *is* surprising.
>
> Diotima: Not really. We abstract part of love, and call it by the name of the whole—love—and then for the other parts we use different names…In general, for anyone, any desire for goodness and happiness is love—and it is a powerful and unpredictable force. But there are various ways of pursuing this desire—through money-making, through physical fitness, through philosophy—which do not entitle their devotees to call themselves lovers, or describe their activity as loving. Those who pursue one particular mode of loving, and make that there concern, have taken over the name of the whole (love, loving, and lovers).[29]

In a very broad sense, Plato would agree that all men are lovers: we all lack and long for that which will make us happy and secure with ourselves, namely the beautiful and the good. But he would caution us in thinking that this common desire bespeaks a common love for the Good itself. Indeed, only the select few are able to progress to the highest and purest stages of love: from the love of the physical and mundane to the love of souls, human institutions, knowledge and, finally, to the Beautiful itself.[30] As will be discussed later on, this form of love is not based on particular modes of loving, but on a vision of a greater moral order within which one is a small but indispensable part. Those who remain

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[29] Plato. *Symposium*. Translated by Tom Griffith. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, 205a-205d.
[30] Ibid. 210d

mired in the more physical manifestations of *Eros* may long for the good, indeed they may believe themselves to be rightly pursuing the good, but to refer to them as lovers is merely to "abstract part of love, and call it by the name of the whole."

The Structure and Immortality of the Soul

To claim that those who remain transfixed by the physical manifestations of *Eros* do so because their souls are not properly *directed* toward the light of the Good is to tell only half the story. What is not stated explicitly by Plato is that man's ability to see the Good, and consequently to love the Good, can be impeded or facilitated by the structure and immortality of the human soul. In what follows, I shall provide a brief sketch of Plato's views on these two themes which will, in turn, lead us into a more general discussion of Plato's moral doctrine and its implications for Augustine's interiority.

Plato offers two arguments in support of the immortality of the soul: a) the theory of reminiscence and b) the "self-mover" thesis. Plato's theory of reminiscence derives from a fundamental problem that Plato faced as regards man's ability to recognize and assimilate the knowledge wrought by the Forms. The problem is this: how, unless man had a prior knowledge of, say, Justice itself—the Form of Justice—could man recognize justice within a community or, for that matter, within his own soul? Simply aggregating common, intercommunal perceptions of justice or adhering to one society's definition of justice over another would surely not correspond to "Perfect Justice." Perfect Justice embodies all just actions; simply dissecting societal norms and social practices into

individual components would not only distort the unifying nature of justice, it would result in an abstract and culturally relative understanding of what Justice itself entails.

Plato resolves this apparent epistemological crisis by postulating a theory of reminiscence, whereby an unconscious knowledge of the Forms is presumed to be ever present in the human soul. The process of "learning" reactivates this knowledge by bringing it into the purview of consciousness.[31] When one apperceives the truths of "Perfect Justice" or "the Perfect Square" one is, in effect, *recollecting* a prior, but latent knowledge of the Form of Justice and the Form of the Square. "We must have acquired knowledge of the nature of the Equal Itself before we began to see and to hear and to use our other senses," Plato concludes, "if we were going to refer to that criterion things that appeared to the senses equal, on the ground that they all do their best to be like it though they are inferior."[32] Unlike more modern, empirical notions of the mind, Plato does not view the memory as a repository for information processed via sensible experience.[33] On the contrary, our memories are comprised of dim, but very real visions of a higher reality which may be "recollected" through the medium of education.

Plato's "self-mover" thesis offers an alternate proof of the immortality of the soul, one that is not beset by some of the conspicuous deficiencies of the recollection theory.[34] In his *Phaedrus* Plato states, "For any body which has its source of motion outside itself

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[31] F.M. Cornford. *Before and After Socrates*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 71.
[32] Plato. *Phaedo*. Translated by R.S. Bluck. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited, 1955, 75b.
[33] David Hume, in his *Treatise of Human Nature*, will later refer to this cluster of personal memories grounded in sensible experience as the only justification for believing in the existence of a "personal self."
[34] Plato's theory of reminiscence falls short of a convincing proof of the immortality of the soul for three reasons: 1) it is entirely possible to conceive of alternate ways in which one might account for man's ability to recognize and assimilate knowledge, Aristotle's model of induction perhaps being the most relevant from an historical point of view; 2) even if the premise were granted that the soul predated the existence of the body, there is no reason to believe that it would not perish with the body; 3) and even if it were demonstrated that the soul outlived the existence of the body, what proof is there that its life cycle will not eventually come to an end?

is soulless, whereas that which has it within itself and from itself is ensouled, this being the nature of the soul; and if this is so—that that which moves itself is nothing other than soul, [the] soul will be necessarily something which neither comes into being nor dies."[35] Plato observes that there are, broadly speaking, two categories of things in the world: those which are possessive of their own source of motion, and those which move only when acted upon by an external force or object. To the latter category belongs the body, which moves only when acted upon. The soul, however, possesses its own source of energy, its own internal source of motion. To think of the soul as possessive of its own life force leads Plato to the conclusion that the soul is immortal, "for that which is always in movement is immortal; that which moves something else and is moved by something else, in ceasing from movement, ceases from living. Only that which moves itself, because it does not abandon itself, never stops moving."[36]

Plato's concept of the human soul stands in tension with the material and temporal realities in which the soul is situated. The soul is of an indestructible and eternal essence. Its movement is upward, driven by a longing to reunite with the higher reality from which it came. But in its efforts, the soul is beset by the strictures of the material world, particularly those of the body. It is circumscribed by that which is temporal, changing and material and is, as a result, enmeshed within a world that is not its rightful home. The study of philosophy, for those who choose it as a "way of life," ought naturally to enjoin its practitioners to free the soul from the restraints of the body by actively engendering its separation. "True philosophers," Plato exhorts, "…are always eager to free her [the soul], and…this very thing is the philosopher's occupation, a

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[35] Plato. *Phaedrus*. Translated by C.J. Rowe. Wiltshire: Aris and Philips Ltd., 1986, 245e5.
[36] Ibid. 245d

freeing or separation of soul from body."[37] Plato goes so far as to state that the true lover of wisdom should "practice death"[38]—insofar as death signifies a "separation of soul from body"—in order to facilitate the deliverance of the divine spirit within man from the shackles of the somatic world.

Plato's mediations on the human soul focus not only on the ethereal but also on the practical, on how to live a morally good life *in this world* despite the soul's drive toward other-worldliness. Before moving on to an exploration of Plato's moral doctrine, it will be necessary to first discuss how Plato construes the internal structure of the soul; for Plato's philosophy in this respect is intimately connected to his moral doctrine and to his views on the nature of justice as a concomitant property of the soul and the community at large.

Plato presents us with a view of the soul that is internally complex and persistently at odds with itself. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato invites us to view the internal structure of the soul as analogous to "the combined power of a winged team of horses and their charioteer."[39] The charioteer symbolizes the rational part of the soul (*logistikon*), the part which guides the power of the winged steeds in the proper direction. This role is particularly pronounced in times of inner conflict, where one part of the soul desires one good against the wellbeing or good of another. The task of the charioteer is thus extraordinarily difficult, for only in the case of the gods are the horses and charioteers

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[37] Op. cit. Plato. *Phaedo*. Translated by R.S. Bluck, 67D-E.
[38] Ibid. 67E
[39] Op. cit. Plato. *Phaedrus*. Translated by C.J. Rowe, 246 a5. Note the reference to wings in this analogy. Throughout Plato's middle and later works he refers to the soul through such metaphors: the soul has an inbuilt desire to *fly upwards*, to escape the bounds of this world in order to enter that of the next. As Plato notes in a later section of the dialogue: "The natural property of a wing is to carry what is heavy upwards, lifting it aloft to the region where the race of the gods resides" (Plato. *Phaedrus*. Translated by C.J. Rowe, 246e).

both of good stock.[40] In the human soul the charioteer must oversee the unruly character of two seeds, of which only one is declared good. The one good steed, the white steed, represents *thumos*, or spirit, which corresponds to the part of the soul that acts out of a motivation for honor and glory under the guidance of "spoken command alone."[41] The spirit animates the human person, instilling in us the rage that accompanies perceived acts of injustice and the joy we feel when looking upon the face of a loved one. Without the spirit there would be no passion, no motivation to *do* what is right; a charioteer without a "white steed" would be nothing more than a brain-in-a-vat, capable only of thought but never of action. But just as the charioteer needs his or her white steed to properly guide the soul, so too does the white steed require the guidance of the charioteer; for without reason's temperance, *thumos* is nothing more than a desire to be rooted in the mundane, in the world of the Homeric heroes who live for nothing more than to have their names resound throughout the pages of history.

The third part of the soul, and that which is the most unruly, is represented by the black steed. Plato describes this part of the soul in disparaging terms, as that which is "crooked in shape…a random collection of parts, with a short, powerful neck, flat-nosed, black-skinned, grey-eyed, bloodshot, companion of excess and boastfulness, shaggy around the ears, deaf, hardly yielding to whip and goad together."[42] The black steed represents desire (*epithumētikon*) which, as the above passage suggests, is almost entirely impervious to the command of reason. Plato often refers to this part of the human soul as

[40] Ibid. 246b
[41] Ibid. 253d-e
[42] Ibid. 253e

the appetitive part, as that which spawns blind action and an insatiable appetite for "food, drink, sex, and all things associated with them."[43]

In the soul of a god, these parts function harmoniously[44]; but in the human soul, the three parts exist in perpetual conflict with one another. At any given moment and in any given person, any one of these parts may dominate: "And doesn't this part [the appetitive part] rule in some people's souls, while one of the other parts—whichever its happens to be—rule's in other people's...And isn't that the reason we say that there are three primary kinds of people: philosophic, victory-loving, and profit-loving?"[45] Although this view is somewhat deterministic in nature,[46] Plato retains a strong vision of how the three parts ought to interrelate, and of the possibility of man to attain this end of inner harmony despite the recalcitrant and fissiparous nature of desire to detract from reason's command.

Plato's Moral Doctrine: Inner Harmony, Justice and Conversion

Plato's moral doctrine, by modern lights, is highly rationalist in nature. Man is considered good when reason rules, when reason commands the allegiance of spirit and desire. When such a configuration is present in the human soul, man is said to be possessive of an inner "self-control" (*kreittō autou*), and of a moderation and temperance formerly known only to the gods. To be marked by self-control signifies that reason

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[43] Op cit. Plato. *Republic*. Translated by G.M.A. Grube, 580d-e.
[44] "Now in the case of the gods," Plato writes, "horses and charioteers are all both good and of good stock; whereas in the case of the rest there is a mixture" (Op. cit. Plato. *Phaedrus*. Translated by C.J. Rowe, 2465b).
[45] Op cit. Plato. *Republic*. Translated by G.M.A. Grube, 581c.
[46] See Footnote #3

subsumes the categories of spirit and desire: not only does reason guide and judge the soul as a whole, but it also motivates and leads. Our search for truth is no longer moved by blind desire or a distant hope for eternal glory, but by the tempered wisdom of a soul that possesses inner harmony (*harmonia*).[47]

Why should reason rule? Because reason's very function (*ergon*), its essence, is to rule; just as desire's function is to move and that of the spirit's is to animate. It is one of the great ironies of Plato's philosophy that the very functions of each part of the soul by nature conflict, and yet without each part performing its own function no soul will experience the inner harmony, unity, order (*kosmos*), and calm that it so desires. To reach this state ought therefore to be the end (*telos*) to which all men aspire; for any other configuration leaves the human person torn, agitated and persistently restless. A man whose soul is ruled by his appetites will never obtain the "rest" and "security" that certainty and self-possession provide for he will always be stung by the insatiable appetites of his desire.

Plato's moral doctrine, in the primacy that it gives to rational self-rule and in the unity of place to which it ascribes all thoughts and feeling,[48] represents a dramatic

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[47] It is understandable, therefore, why Plato would argue for much of Book VI of the *Republic* that only philosophers—the true lovers of wisdom—should rule the state; for only philosophers, who persistently seek out rational self-rule, would possess the self-control and moderation necessary to reign with virtue, honor and wisdom.

[48] According to the conventional wisdom of the time (Homer), there was no place readily identifiable as a unique center for all thought and feeling: there existed no single word for what we now understand to be the "soul," "self" or "mind." Within Homeric verse there included, among others: *psychē* (the life force that escapes form the body upon its death), *thumos* (spirit, that which animates man to do great deeds), *noos* (loosely translated as mind or understanding), *phrenes* (related to the lungs), and *kradiē* (related to the heart). This dissipation of the self, so to speak, was complicated by the fact that one's ability to accede to higher fields of moral and spiritual understanding often depended on the actions and desires of a god, a fact which does not accord with more modern understandings of moral responsibility and duty. There was as, Bruno Snell and Charles Taylor observe, a fragmentation of the self into physical compartments located at various points throughout the body. Plato's centering of these resources, that is, the unity he confers on our various centers of thought and feeling, exerts a fundamental and inexorable impact upon the western tradition, one that serves as a strong influence on the thought of St. Augustine. For a more extensive

departure from the prevailing moral wisdom of the time. Contrary to the then current warrior ethic of external displays of one's courage and strength and to the more abstract notions of a poetic morality based on self-rapture and divine inspiration, Plato enjoins us to look deep within ourselves to accede to a higher ground of moral and spiritual sources; and in this regard, Plato may be read as contributing to an embryonic interiority that is, by now, endemic in western society. What is of principle concern is not the pleasures and materiality of the external world of the polis but the inner disposition of the soul, the sense of unity and self-possession that one feels when reason rules.[49] As Plato has Socrates state in Book IV of the *Republic*:

> …justice...isn't concerned with someone's doing his own externally, but with what is *inside him*, with what is truly himself and his own. One who is just does not allow any part of himself to do the work of another part or allow the various classes within him to meddle with each other. He regulates well what is really his own and rules himself.[50]

But in two very important respects, this interiority is qualified by Plato's abiding commitment to the principle of justice and to the weight that he gives to an *external* vision of the Good to calibrate the direction of the human soul. There is much scholarly debate regarding the antecedents of Plato's commitment to the principle of justice within the community: was Plato's vision of the rightly ordered *individual* soul a necessary pre-condition for his vision of the ideal polis? Or did Plato merely extrapolate the qualities of what he already presumed to be justice within the *polis* onto the human soul? Regardless of one's views on the subject, it is indisputable that the two—justice within the soul and justice within the community—are inextricably linked and, when taken together, form the

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treatment of this subject please refer to: a) Bruno Snell. *The Discovery of the Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951 and b) Op. cit. Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self*, p. 118.

[49] Op. cit. Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self*, pp.120-121.

[50] Op. cit. Plato. *Republic*. Translated by G.M.A. Grube, 443D [my emphasis].

central pillar of Plato's argument in the *Republic*.[51] Just actions inevitably flow from a soul that is marked by self-rule and inner harmony; analogously, a just *polis*, administered by a philosopher king, would inevitably produce the moral climate necessary to cultivate justice within the individual. It is inconceivable for Plato to assume that a just soul could, by its own accord, possess inner justice and yet act immorally within the external realm of the *polis*:

> Socrates: If we had to come to an agreement about whether someone similar in nature and training to our [ideal and just] city had embezzled a deposit of gold and silver that he had accepted, who do you think would consider him to have done it rather than someone who isn't like him?
>
> Glaucon: No one
>
> Socrates: And would he have anything to do with temple robberies, thefts, betrayals of friends in private life or of cities in public life?
>
> Glaucon: No, nothing…
>
> Socrates: And isn't the cause of this that every part within him does its own work, whether it's ruling or being ruled?
>
> Glaucon: Yes, that and nothing else
>
> Socrates: Then, are you still looking for justice to be something other than this power, the one that produces men and cities of the sort we've described?

[51] It is worth noting that Plato's vision of justice, both within the soul and within the community, is itself grounded ontologically in the cosmology of the *Timaeus*. As Plato states: "Now there is but one way to care for anything, and that is to provide for it the nourishment and the motions that are proper to it. And the motions that have an affinity to the divine part in us are the thoughts and revolutions of the universe. These, surely, are the ones which each of us should follow. We should redirect the revolutions in our heads that were thrown off course at our birth, by coming to learn the harmonies and revolutions of the universe; and so bring into conformity with its objects the faculty of our understanding, as it was in its original conditions. And when this conformity is complete, we should have achieved our goal: that most excellent life offered to humankind by the gods; both now and for ever more" (Plato. *Timaeus*, 90c–d. Zeyl translation, quoted in Johansen 2004, p. 1, n. 2; Robert E Proctor. *Cosmos: The Beauty Resulting from Order*, p. 5). Through its contemplation and imitation of the motions of the heavens, the soul is able to reduce its "revolutions" to order. A harmonious soul is an ordered soul, and an ordered soul is one that is united with the harmony and beauty of the starry sky.

Glaucon: No, I certainly am not.[52]

To produce such harmony between the "*homo interior*," as St. Augustine shall later term it, and the external domain of the *polis*, is the result of a vision of a larger order within which man is situated. The fruits of rational self-rule may be experienced most immediately and intimately by the "inner man," but this achievement is not possible without a wider vision of the Good; for our ability to apperceive the correct order within ourselves necessarily depends upon our ability to "see" the correct order of the good of the whole. Only when the intellect rises above itself to experience a conjunctive vision of this wider moral order will it possess the "virtue of reason"[53] to properly guide the soul. We mentioned earlier that the soul's ability to see this larger order depends upon the direction in which the soul as a whole is facing. It is now clear that this turning of the *whole* soul is more a matter of conversion (*periagōgē*), of turning from the dark to the light, than it is an internal capacity of the soul to logically deduce moral and quantitative truths.[54] As Plato concludes near the end of Book VII of the *Republic*, "this [the turning of the soul] isn't, it seems, a matter of spinning a potsherd, but of turning a soul from day that is a kind of night to true day—the ascent to what is, which we say is true philosophy."[55]

Many of the themes discussed in this chapter will figure prominently in the thought and intellectual development of St. Augustine. In particular, Augustine will spend much of his mature life working out the implications of Plato's metaphysics, epistemology and psychology for those adhering to Christian doctrine. It is best to think

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[52] Op. cit. Plato. *Republic*. Translated by G.M.A. Grube, 443a-c.
[53] Ibid. 518e
[54] See: Op. cit. Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self*, pp. 121-122.
[55] Op. cit. Plato. *Republic*. Translated by G.M.A. Grube, 521c.

of Plato, in this regard, as a starting point for future deliberations in the West on the nature of the human person and the extent to which one may construe personal identity in terms of locale, such as “inner” and “outer,” “interior,” and “exterior.” One of the principle aims of this chapter was to illuminate these nascent stages of interiority in Plato’s thought, while at the same time eliciting an understanding that such conceptions of locale were, for Plato, very much extensive in origin and in destination. The sequential nature of this turn inward, however, will become much more apparent when we look at the figures of St. Augustine and, later, Francesco Petrarch.

Chapter II: St. Augustine and the "Metaphysic of Conversion"

"To know his own condition and place, what he owes to things above him and beneath and to himself, to understand what he has been made, how he should conduct himself, what he should do and not do—in this for man consists self-knowledge."

–High of St. Victor: *De Sacramentis*

Introduction

Augustine is often overlooked in studies of the history of Western philosophy. Indeed, many are apt to view him solely within the parameters of his contributions to Christian theology and the clarification of Church Doctrine; and to a degree, this assessment is not unfounded. In his later years as bishop of Hippo (396-430 A.D.), a period which many scholars consider to be his most fruitful, Augustine's literary pursuits were primarily directed to the development of Christian doctrine and to the repudiation of theological controversies raised by his contemporaries.[56] From this period one finds such works as *Confessions, On Christian Doctrine* and *City of God*, all of which, although marked by sections of philosophical rigor, are principally theological, historical and biographical in nature. As Augustine states in Book VIII of *City of God*:

> It is not my aim, in this present work, to refute all the baseless opinions of all the philosophers, but only those appertaining to theology…And I shall not deal with all the theological speculation of philosophers, but confine myself to those thinkers who, while admitting the existence of a Divinity and his concern for human affairs, do not consider that the worship of one unchangeable God is sufficient for the attainment of a

[56] Chief among these were the Manichees, the Pelagians and the Donatists.

> life of blessedness even after death, but suppose that for this end many gods are to be worshipped.[57]

It would appear, from passages such as these, that Augustine's chief concern was not the construction of an elaborate philosophical system, but an ardent defense of the Christian faith, one reminiscent, perhaps, of the apologetic discourses of Marcianus Aristides (*Apology* c. 140A.D.), Theophilus of Antioch (*Ad Autolycum* c. 180 A.D.) and Tertullian (*Prescription Against Heretics* c. 200 A.D.).

But what this view misses, and, at times, often distorts, is the delicate balance Augustine draws between the disciplines of philosophy and theology. That philosophy signified for both pagan and Christian the unrelenting love of wisdom Augustine would not disagree. The issue at stake, particularly for those Christian thinkers attempting to reconcile pagan wisdom with the revealed wisdom of the Christian Gospel, was the scope and end (*telos*) to which one's intellectual activities were applied. As an inclusive, intellectual activity that appertained to the critical ends of *human* life, pagan philosophy carried very little weight within Augustinian discourse; for the ultimate truths of human life, and by extension the ends to which we ought to aspire, had already been revealed by the divine light of Christ. But if one is to consider philosophy in more general terms, as an intellectual activity and method of analysis for clarifying Christian doctrine and deepening one's understanding of the Christian faith, its utility for the "Christian philosopher," and indeed for Augustine, was invaluable. To be sure, its study would naturally take a subordinate place to the revealed wisdom of the Gospel, but it would nevertheless become an indispensable tool of the Christian philosopher for understanding with the mind truths that were at once intuitively grasped by the heart.

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[57] Augustine. *City of God*. Edited by David Knowles. Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1972, Book VIII, p. 298.

It is within this context that one may come to appreciate the unity that characterizes Augustine's thought, a unity which presupposes an inextricable link between the disciplines of philosophy and theology. Seeing that all men desire happiness and truth, philosophy—the love of wisdom—for Augustine entailed the study of where such goods were ultimately to be found and the means by which one could obtain them. For the Christian philosopher, true wisdom had been revealed by the divine Word (*logos*) and was uniformly to include the love, knowledge and possession of God. But in order to understand and clarify this revelation *in time* for both himself and for those who might choose to disbelieve him, the Christian must employ the techniques of philosophy; for only in heaven, in clear vision of the "Light Eternal, that alone abidest in Thyself, alone knowest Thyself, and, known to Thyself and knowing, lovest and smilest on Thyself,"[58] may he be rightly said to posses and *understand* the eternal objects of his desire.

The close connection that Augustine draws between theology and philosophy naturally enjoins him to assimilate and transform into a Christian framework a variety of philosophical debates from his pagan predecessors. Chief among these, particularly for the purposes of this chapter, is the ancient question regarding the soul's self-knowledge. For Socrates, concern for the soul—the essential component of the human person—was considered to be of the utmost importance for constructing a good life. To care for the soul, one must necessarily seek out self-knowledge; for without knowledge of the soul, of what one knows and does not know, one will not be able to discern knowledge from opinion, belief from understanding, and will thus prove incapable of acting virtuously in matters of moral concern. The question of self-knowledge has proved to be a perennial

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[58] Dante Alighieri. *Paradiso*. Translated by John D. Sinclair. New York: Oxford University Press, 1939, XXXIII 124-126: "*O luce etterna che sola in te sidi, sola t'intendi, e da te intelletta e intendente te ami e arridi*."

one in the history of western thought, and it is thus no surprise that medieval philosophers, Augustine in particular, attached a special importance to it.

It should also come as no surprise, however, that once in the hands of the Christian philosophers, the question of man's self-knowledge assumed a novel and altogether unprecedented form. In Genesis Book I the Bible states:

> Then God said, Let us make humankind [Heb *adam*] in our image, according to our likeness; and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them.[59]

That man was created in the image of God raised two fundamental questions for Christian thinkers: 1) If man is an image of God, of what does this image consist and where does it reside? 2) If man is created in the image of God, what are the implications of this truth for man's ability to attain self-knowledge?

The problem was essentially a relational one. How could man, in any conceivable sense, reflect the virtue and universality of the Divine? From the outset, there was one truth upon which all were agreed: whatever man's constitutive essence, the divine image was necessarily located in that which was most noble in man, namely, in his intelligence and, by extension, in his freedom.[60] Schools of medieval thought naturally diverged over the extent to which one was to be emphasized over the other, but the general parameters of the philosophical problem remained the same. Augustine's approach to the question was characteristically more elusive: our virtue of being an image of God lies less in our

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[59] *Genesis*, Book I 26-27. The New Oxford Annotated Bible. Third Edition. Editor: Michael D. Coogan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 12.
[60] Etienne Gilson. *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*. Translated by A.H.C. Downes. London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991, p. 211.

intelligence and freedom *per se* and more with our innate ability to perceive and abide by the wider metaphysical order of which we are a part. "The peace of the whole universe," Augustine notes in *City of God*, "is the tranquility of order—and order is the arrangement of things equal and unequal in a pattern which assigns to each its proper position."[61] To discover our rightful place amidst this order was, for Augustine, the only true means to attain wisdom. For an awareness of our place within God's order naturally brings us to a consciousness of the order within ourselves. It is here that we may locate the divine image and it is through ourselves that we may then turn to God.

In turning inward, however, the Christian philosopher also confronts a reality that is at once inscrutable and shrouded in mystery. For if man is of the Divine image, the very depths of his soul participate in the mystery and "incomprehensibility of God."[62] Through his perception of God's created order man may discern certain truths. He may come to understand his place within the larger whole, the dominion he holds over nature, and the grandeur that characterizes his existence in relation to the "brutes."[63] But experience alone, as Etienne Gilson rightly notes, "makes an end of pride,"[64] and unless man confronts the mystery of which is a part, he is likely to relinquish his innate dignity to the pride and presumption that persistently plague human existence. We may thus conclude that self-knowledge for the Christian philosopher consisted at once of an understanding and a mystery, a pride of place and a humility. Fashioned in the image of the divine, man occupied a special place within the cosmic order, and needed only look within to locate the ultimate object of his love. And yet, in turning inward, the Christian was ultimately

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[61] Op. cit. Augustine. *City of God*, Book XIX Ch. 13: "*Pax omnium rerum tranquillitas ordinis. Ordo est parium dispariumque rerum sua cuique loca tribunes disposition*."
[62] Op. cit. Etienne Gilson. *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, p. 220.
[63] Ibid. p. 216
[64] Ibid. p. 216

surpassed by a vision that exceeded his own powers of understanding. To be humbled by this vision was to risk despair, but only through an intimate awareness of this order could the search for self-knowledge truly begin.

Many of the themes that have been presented thus far figure prominently in the life and thought of St. Augustine. Perhaps more than most, Augustine placed the problem of self-knowledge at the forefront of his search for understanding. In the remainder of this chapter, I would like to explore in further detail the content of this search, focusing in particular on where Augustine's search for understanding his faith overlaps with his search for self-understanding. As stated earlier in the introduction to this thesis, Augustine himself does not present to his readers a unified "theory of the self," and it is certainly not my intent in this chapter to construct one for him. What I do hope to articulate, however, is a clearer understanding of how Augustine construes personal identity and the various modalities which this interpretation takes. For convenience sake, I have divided the following analysis into three broad sections, which may be read respectively as corresponding to sections of Augustine's writings on metaphysics, epistemology and theology: 1) The Soul's Search for Knowledge, Truth and God, 2) Memory and the Interior Teacher, and 3) Human Nature and its Redemption. But before delving into the first of these topics, a word or two on Augustine's method of inquiry will be in order.

Reflective Interiority and the 'Homo Interior'

I should begin here by underlining the fact that Augustine's method of inquiry is precisely just that, a method. Augustine's intense introspection as a method for understanding his faith, characterized by some scholars as a reflective, almost radical, interiority,[65] is certainly not without textual support.[66] But it would be a mistake to interpret such inwardness as indicative of a radical turn in western thought from conceptions of the individual as *part of* a larger order to, in fact, *becoming* this order. Augustine's own employment of the language of inwardness, modeled on the language of the biblical tradition,[67] serves a twofold purpose: 1) to establish a medium of communication through which he could come into contact with reflections of the Divine and 2) to facilitate the confession and narration of his life's inner struggle.

As was recounted earlier in this chapter, Christian Doctrine construed man as having been created in the image of God. "Let us make humankind [Heb *adam*] in our image, according to our likeness**,"** God says in Genesis Book I, "and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them."[68] On the subject of man's self-knowledge and his relation to God, the Bible speaks unequivocally to the Christian pilgrim: God is to be found within, recognizable to us

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[65] Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001, Ch. 7.
[66] Cf. Augustine. *On Free Choice of the Will*. Translated by Anna S. Benjamin, Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill, Inc., 1964, Book II Chapter III, p. 40; Op. cit. Augustine. *Confessions*, Book VIII, p. 170; Augustine. *De Trinitate*. Translated by Edmund Hill, O.P. New York: New City Press, 1991, Book X 16.
[67] Cf.: Job 24:15 ('the eye of the adulterer'); Proverbs 18:15 ('and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge'); Ecclesiastes 2:15 ('and I said to myself'); Matthew 5:27-28 ('everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart'). Op. cit. R.A. Markus (ed.). *Augustine*, p. 176.
[68] Op. cit. *Genesis*, Book I 26-27. The New Oxford Annotated Bible, p. 12.

through the Divine image that dwells within our souls. For Augustine, this truth touches upon the entire edifice of his search to comprehend the significance of his newly found faith. As he states in Book X of his *Confessions*, "I have learned to love you [God] late! You were within me, and I was in the world outside myself. I searched for you outside myself and, disfigured as I was, I fell upon the lovely things of your creation. You were within me, but I was not with you."[69] To seek the certainty of God is, as Charles Taylor puts it so well, to discover the intimacy of His presence within.[70] For Augustine, this journey inward is thus not a "*way of life*," that is to say, an end in itself, but a *means* to arrive at a deeper understanding of a Truth that lies within.

Compared with Plato, Augustine's reflective interiority represents an interesting shift in epistemological resources. As we saw in chapter one, Plato's experience of knowledge as that which is eternal, immutable and true led him to believe in the supra-sensible reality of the Forms. These Forms were externally situated, that is, they existed beyond the immediate grasp of the human intellect, and were considered to be of a public and common domain. To accede to this higher realm was to rise beyond oneself, beyond the strictures of the body and that which is particular to an immaterial world ordered according to the first principle of the Good. To come into sensible contact with this highest Good is near impossible. Indeed, Plato describes its apprehension as a form of mystical vision, as a "seeing with the soul" that which could not be "seen" with the eye.[71] What is important to note for present purposes is that this journey for Plato begins with an awareness of an *external* order of knowledge. To experience the Good, and indeed its apprehension could be nothing but an experience, man was to focus first on the world

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[69] Op. cit. Augustine. *Confessions*, Book X 27, p. 231.
[70] Op. cit. Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self*, p. 134.
[71] Op. cit. Plato. *Republic*, 517b-c.

which it nourished. Consider the following: "And when the eye of the soul is really buried in a sort of barbaric dog, *dialectic gently pulls it out and leads it upwards*, using the crafts we have described to help it and cooperate with it in turning the soul around."[72] It is *dialectic*, an intellectual commerce with another soul, that facilitates our ascent, not *introspection*. When we move, we are moving "upwards," as Plato states, "proceeding to the first principle itself, so as to be secure."[73]

The contrast here with Augustine is significant, but it is important to note that this difference is ultimately one of method. The problem is this: given the difficulties involved when attempting to contemplate and ascend to the highest principle of reality, where must one turn to begin the journey? The question is an epistemological one because we are dealing with the question of knowledge from both the point of view of the subject (how am I to locate this highest reality) and from the point of reality itself, as that which is produced and made intelligible through its participation in the highest principle, whether this principle be God or the Form of the Good. We have already noted Plato's answer to this question: to discover the Highest Good is to observe first the order (*kosmos*) which it confers upon the sensible world. Through the contemplation of this external order we are drawn upward to a higher reality, one that accounts for and sustains the existence of the sensible world. This higher reality is itself divided, and through its contemplation we are led invariably to a vision of the highest Good, as that which produces and makes intelligible all of reality. Augustine shares with Plato this intimate sense that reality is structured according to a rational and externally situated moral and spiritual order, and he describes the apprehension of this order in very similar terms:

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[72] Ibid. 533 c-d [my emphasis]
[73] Ibid. 533 c-d

"there is this good and that good," Augustine states in Book VIII of *De Trinitate*, "remove the 'this' and the 'that' and see, if you can, the good itself. Thus you will see God."[74] Like Plato, Augustine describes the act of understanding this Highest Good through visual metaphors, as an act of "seeing" with the "eye of the soul" or with the "inner man."[75] The difference between the two thinkers lies in their choice of method for ascertaining this Good. For Augustine, a reflection of this Highest Good, namely God, is located within our souls. To accede to Him, we are therefore instructed to probe first the inner depths of our own souls before we may rise to seek Him in the external order which He has created.

Augustine's use of the language of inwardness also serves another, arguably more important, purpose: to facilitate the confession and narration of his life's inner struggle. In *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, Etienne Gilson claims that Augustine's philosophy can be read almost entirely as a "metaphysic of conversion."[76] That is to say, Augustine's efforts as a philosopher were almost entirely consumed with understanding a singular experience in his life, namely, the experience of his conversion. To understand this moment in his life naturally leads Augustine to ponder the reasons for his inability to convert to Christianity when he already knew with his *mind* what he ought to do:

> Why does this phenomenon occur? What causes it? The mind gives an order to the body and is at once obeyed, but when it gives an order to itself, it is resisted. The mind commands the hand to move and is so readily obeyed that the order can scarcely be distinguished from its execution. Yet the mind is mind and the hand is part of the body.

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[74] Augustine. *De Trinitate*, Book VIII 3.4. Quoted in: Op. cit. Cranz, F.E. *The Reorientation of Western Thought c. 1100 A.D*, p. 7.
[75] Cf. Augustine. *City of God*, Book XIII 24.2.
[76] Op. cit. Etienne Gilson. *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, p. 132.

> But when the mind commands the mind to make an act of will, these two are one in the same and yet the order is not obeyed.[77]

The struggle depicted here refers to the struggle that Augustine faced between his intellect and his will. Unlike his Greek predecessors, Augustine was of the conviction that reason alone was insufficient to lead us to truth. Man may well know what path he *ought* to take, or the truths that he *ought* to follow, but without a conversion of the will, that is, a turning of the whole will toward God, the intellect is feeble and incapable of acting with a "full will" to give effect to the decisions that reason makes:

> But it [the mind] does not fully will to do this thing and therefore its orders are not fully given. It gives the order only in so far as it wills, and in so far as it does not will the order is not carried out…The reason, then, why the command is not obeyed is that it is not given with the full will. For if the will were full, it would not command itself to be full, since it would be so already. It is therefore no strange phenomenon partly to will to do something and partly to will not to do it. It is a disease of the mind, which does not wholly rise to the heights where it is lifted by the truth, because it is weighed down by habit.[78]

Augustine goes on to speak of there being "two wills" within us, each with an unique ability of its own, but neither possessing the capacity to act in the name of the "whole will." Augustine's tale of conversion is thus a tale of his life's inner struggle and conflict. To focus on Augustine's external actions, those of his "outer man,"[79] as he often refers to them, is to miss this intense and personal debate that lies at the heart of his experience in the Milanese garden, and indeed one that lies at the heart of most, if not all, of his later attempts to understand the meaning of his faith. Augustine's use of the language of

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[77] Op. cit. Augustine. *Confessions*, Book VIII 9, p. 172. See also: 2 Cor. 4. 16.
[78] Op. cit. Augustine. *Confessions*, Book VIII 9, p. 172.
[79] Op. cit. Augustine. *City of God*, Book XIII 24, p. 542.

inwardness enables him to depict this inner struggle with the utmost vividness and sensitivity. His literary outputs thus move from being a particular confession (*confessio*) of his own sins and love for God to a universal narrative of historical and religious significance.

Augustine's Search for Knowledge, Truth and God

Augustine's search for God stems not from a desire to prove His existence, but from a desire to understand what he *already* believes. In his *Soliloquies*, an earlier work dating from around the time of his baptism, Augustine states:

> Augustine: So, I have prayed to God.
>
> Reason: What, then, do you want to know?
>
> Augustine: All these things which I have prayed for.
>
> Reason: Sum them up briefly.
>
> Augustine: I want to know God and the soul.
>
> Reason: Nothing more.
>
> Augustine: Nothing at all.[80]

It is significant that this passage takes the form of a prayer. Augustine is, in effect, praying to God in order to "know" His existence. By any standards of rationality, this act would appear to be an absurdity: Augustine is presupposing the existence of the Being he wishes to know exists. But for Augustine this act, far from a contradiction in terms, represents the essence of his mature philosophy, namely, of a faith seeking understanding (*Fides quaerens intellectum*). It is important when dealing with Augustine's attempt to

[80] Augustine. *Soliloquies*. Translated by Gerard Watson. Warminster: Aris & Philips Ltd., 1990, 1.7.

understand God that one does not conflate this search with a desire to logically prove God's existence; for as we shall later see, Augustine's "proof" of God's existence is far from logically sound. What I hope to draw out from Augustine's deliberations on the subject is his method for understanding God and the resultant effects of this search on Augustine's conception of the human person and its relation to the Divine.

Augustine structures his treatment of God in three steps, progressing from the certainty of his own existence to standards of truth and knowledge that lie beyond the soul and finally to an equation of these truths with the ontological status of God. The coherence of the "proof" rests upon Augustine's ability to demonstrate that there are truths that lie beyond the immediate certainty of his own existence, truths that regulate and define his own behavior and powers of judgment.

Augustine's desire to "know" God begins with an attempt to establish the certainty of his own existence, an attempt which is remarkably similar at first glance to that of Descartes' renowned *cogito* argument.[81] Admitting that we are sometimes fooled by certain "imaginary and deceptive fantasies,"[82] Augustine offers us a truth which he considers to be self-evident: "that I exist, that I know it, and that I am glad of it."[83] Of the veracity of this proposition, Augustine fears not the arguments of the skeptics:

> They [skeptics] say, 'Suppose you are mistaken?' I reply, 'If I am mistaken, I exist.' A non-existent being cannot be mistaken; therefore I must exist, if I am mistaken. Then

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[81] I will take, here, as my point of reference, Augustine's argument as it is presented in *City of God* Book XI as opposed to his, albeit similar, argument in *On Free Choice of the Will* Book II Chapter III, in which he states to a close friend: "I will ask you first whether you exist. Are you, perhaps, afraid that you are being deceived by my questioning? But if you did not exist, it would be impossible for you to be deceived" (Op. cit. Augustine. *On Free Choice of the Will*, Book II Chapter III, p. 40). The phrasing of this passage is remarkably similar to that of Descartes, and would thus make for an interesting comparison. However, his argument is left undeveloped and is, on the whole, a rather unsophisticated version of that which is presented in fuller detail in Book XI of *City of God*.

[82] Op. cit. Augustine. *City of God*, Book XI 26, p. 459. Augustine is referring here to those deceptions that are associated with our memories and our bodily senses.

[83] Ibid. Book XI 26, p. 459

> since my being mistaken proves that I exist, how can I be mistaken in thinking that I exist, seeing that my mistake establishes my existence? Since therefore I must exist in order to be mistaken, then even if I am mistaken, there can be no doubt that I am not mistaken in my knowledge that I exist. It follows that I am not mistaken in knowing that I know. For just as I know that I exist, I also know that I know. And when I am glad of those two facts, I can add the fact of that gladness to the things I know, as a fact of equal worth. For I am not mistaken about the fact of my gladness, since I am not mistaken about the things which I love. Even if they were illusory, it would still be a fact that I love the illusions.[84]

Consider the truth which Augustine purports to have established, namely, the certainty of his own existence ("I exist"), thought ("I know it") and emotion ("I am glad of it"; "I love"). This truth is about himself and his own state of being, not the external world, nor the metaphysical nature of God. To be sure, God remains the object of Augustine's search, but the journey to Him beings within.

The affinities between Augustine and Descartes on this subject are more than apparent; but it would be a mistake to interpret Augustine's argument in light of the motivations that guided Descartes to reach a similar conclusion (*cogito ergo sum*). Contrary to Descartes, the purpose of Augustine's project was conceived primarily as a response to the skeptics—to those who would deny Augustine the possibility of establishing with certainty any form of knowledge whatsoever. Augustine is not attempting to establish an elementary truth about the certainty of his *own* existence, nor is he out to establish a new method with which he may hope to redirect and reconstruct our

[84] Ibid. Book XI 26, p. 460

previous conceptions of knowledge and truth.[85] His purpose is to provide a sharp rebuff to his skeptical critics, as a closer examination of his argument will attest.

The validity of Augustine's *si fallor sum* ("If I am mistaken, I exist") argument hinges upon how one interprets his motivations. If one interprets Augustine's motive in a Cartesian light, that is, as an attempt to establish the certainty of his own existence, the argument fails. If, however, one interprets the *si fallor sum* passage as a method for repudiating the skeptical claim regarding man's ability to discern certain truths about reality, then the argument holds. Let's take a closer look at the structure of the argument. Augustine's principle claim may be rendered as follows: 1) "I know that I exist," 2) "Unless I am mistaken, I exist," 3) "Either I am mistaken or I exist," 4) "If I am mistaken, I exist," 5) "Either I exist or I exist," 6) "I exist."[86] Step one corresponds to Augustine's initial claim, namely, that he knows that he exists. In between step one and two there is an implied premise, which I shall refer to as one b), which is intended to take into account the skeptical claim regarding the possibility that he might be mistaken. To accommodate the skeptic, Augustine thus asserts step two: "*Unless I am mistaken*, I exist." Step three ("Either I am mistaken or I exist") is a restatement of the facts, which allows Augustine, in step four, to isolate the subject portion of the statement ("Unless, I am mistaken") from its predicate ("I exist"). Step four is thus the crucial statement of the argument, namely, that if Augustine is mistaken he must exist, for "a non-existent being cannot be mistaken."[87] In step five Augustine therefore proceeds to replace the subject of statement four ("If I am mistaken") with ("I exist"). Statement five thus reads: "Either I exist or I exist," which naturally leads Augustine to conclude that he exists.

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[85] For an interesting comparison see: René Descartes. *Discourse on Method*, 2.18-2.19, p. 120.
[86] I have adapted the basic structure of this rendition from: Gareth B. Matthews, "Si Fallor Sum," p. 154.
[87] Op. cit. Augustine. *City of God*, Book XI 26, p. 460.

The argument itself is logically flawed. As Gareth B. Matthews astutely points out, the argument yields the conclusion, "I exist," but Augustine's answer to the Academic skeptics is supposed to safeguard the premise "I know that I exist."[88] Taken as rhetorical attempt to establish a tautology with respect the certainty of his own existence, the argument thus fails, succumbing to the familiar logical fallacy of "begging the question." However, if interpreted as a rhetorical trap to silence the skeptic, the argument holds. Let's return to premises one and one b) expounded upon above. Premise one reads: "I know that I exist." Implied premise one b) is initiated by the skeptic and may be presumed to take the following form: "But you have often been mistaken in the past. Therefore, you might be mistaken about whether *you are*…[my emphasis]."[89] The claim is self-defeating. The skeptic has presupposed the very truth that he wishes to call into doubt, namely, Augustine's existence!

That Augustine's argument in this passage is tailored specifically to his more skeptical audience is reinforced by his claim that he "knows" his own existence not through the certainty of argument but through the immediacy of the mind's own knowledge of itself: "when it is said to the mind, 'Know Yourself!' it knows itself the moment it understands what is said: 'yourself'; nor does it know itself for any reason other than that it is present to itself."[90] Thus we may conclude that Augustine's original "argument" shares more in common with an article of faith, which presupposes no intellectual justification, than it does with Descartes' *cogito*. What is at stake for Augustine is not, as was mentioned previously, the establishment of his own certainty of

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[88] Op. cit. Gareth B. Matthews. 'Si Fallor, Sum', p. 157. Matthews notes that Augustine's response to the skeptics would thus read: "'Because therefore I, who would be the one mistaken, would have to exist to be mistaken, there is no doubt that I am not mistaken in knowing that I am'" (Matthews p. 166).
[89] Ibid. p. 158
[90] Augustine. *De Trinitate*, Book X 9.12. Quoted in: Ibid. p. 160.

presence but the ability of man to ascertain certain truths which are made available to the mind through its participation in the Divine Ideas.[91]

In *On Free Choice of the Will*, Augustine builds from the aforesaid principles to note that the immediate and direct truths of his own existence are arranged in a hierarchy of values: to know and to love is better than to live,[92] and to live is better than to merely exist.[93] In a conversation with Evodius, a close friend, Augustine states:

> Augustine: So you now know what you said you did not know: not everything that lives knows that it lives, although everything that knows that it lives is necessarily alive.
>
> Evodius: I am in doubt no longer. Go on to the next point: I have now learned that it is one thing to be alive and quite another to know that one is alive.
>
> Augustine: Which of these two things do you think is more excellent?
>
> Evodius: Why, clearly, the knowledge of life [*scientia vitae*].
>
> Augustine: Do you think that the knowledge of life is better than life itself? Or perhaps you understand that a certain higher and truer life consists in the knowledge of life, which no one can have except those who have understanding? For what is understanding except living more clearly and perfectly by the very light of the mind? Therefore, unless I am deceived, you have not set something else above life, but rather have set a better life above mere life.

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[91] At the end of Chapter 27 of Book XI Augustine states: "we have another sense, far more important than any bodily sense, the sense of the inner man, by which we apprehend what is just and what is unjust, the just by means of the 'idea' which is presented to the intellect, the unjust by the absence of it. The working of this sense has nothing to do with the mechanism of eye, ear, smell, taste or touch. It is through this sense that I am assured of my existence; and through this I love both existence and knowledge, and am sure that I love them" (Augustine. *City of God*, Book XI 27, p. 462).

[92] For Augustine's argument regarding the certainty that he lives see: Augustine. *De Trinitate*, Book XV Chapter XII n.21.

[93] It is worth noting that this is also an analytic hierarchy of capacities, with the latter (existing and living) being incorporated into the former (knowing). As Augustine has Evodius state: "Because, while there are these things—to be, to live, and to understand—the stone *is*, and the beast *lives*, yet I think that the stone does not live, nor the beast understand. Furthermore, it is very certain that he who understands both *is* and *lives*. For this reason I do not hesitate to judge that in which all these three are present to be more perfect than that in which anyone is lacking." Augustine: "We maintain, then, that the dead body lacks two of these three [does not live or understand]; the beast, one [does not understand]; and man, none" (Op. cit. Augustine. *On Free Choice of the Will*, Book II Chapter III, p. 40).

Evodius: You have understood and explained my view very well.[94]

Augustine points out that when one speaks of a hierarchy among these goods one is, in truth, highlighting the *qualitative* difference between them. To desire "knowledge of life" (*scientia vitae*) does not entail a desire to abandon the principle of "life" itself; instead, the knowledge of life represents "a *better* life," one that reaches its supreme fulfillment when reason exercises its mastery over the emotions. "When reason, whether mind (*mens*) or spirit (*animus*), rules the irrational emotions," Augustine notes, "then there exists in man the very mastery which the law that we know to be eternal prescribes."[95] Thus, at the pinnacle of Augustine's hierarchy of values stands man's capacity to reason, the essential ingredient for one to possess a true "knowledge of life."

Thus far, the truths which Augustine purports to have established are truths that concern the state of his own existence, his own thought, feeling, and intellectual capacities, in short, truths linked to the immediacy of his own experience. These truths are arranged according to a hierarchy of values, and are presumed to be "well ordered" (*ordinatus*) when reason rules. At this point, one might pose the following question to Augustine: is it possible to know more than this? That is, can one demonstrate that there are truths, not just about ourselves, but about the world around us? Or is man's reason the highest truth among all known goods of our personal experience? This question presents itself with the utmost urgency for Augustine, particularly given the dangers that the skeptical challenge poses for his ability to *understand* why it is rational to believe in the existence of God.

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[94] Ibid. Book I Chapter VII, p. 17
[95] Ibid. Book I Chapter VIII, p. 19

Augustine meets this challenge in two ways, focusing first on the existence of mathematical truths (*ratio et veritas numeri*) and then on the existence of more practical truths, such as those truths concerning happiness and what is *best*, or *better*. Examples within Augustine's work of the veracity of mathematical principles are quite common. Here is one of his more straightforward examples:

> Whatever I may experience with my bodily senses, such as this air and earth and whatever corporeal matter they contain, I cannot know how long it will endure. But seven and three are ten, not only now, but forever. There has never been a time when seven and three were not ten, nor will there ever be a time when they are not ten. Therefore, I have said that the truth of number is incorruptible and common to all who think.[96]

Augustine claims that this is a truth that "all reasoning men see with their reason and mind, in common with all others."[97] This is, moreover, a truth that endures, irrespective of whether or not a man succeeds in or fails to comprehend it.

Augustine's discussion of practical truths follows naturally from his understanding of the nature of mathematical truths. Recall in the passage quoted above that the "truth of number is *incorruptible*." For Augustine, that which is incorruptible carries with it a certain moral import. As he states in a later passage from the same work, surely the "incorrupt is *better* than the corrupt, the eternal *better* than the temporal, the inviolable *better* than the violable."[98] Here we have a truth concerning that which is "better," implying that in addition to mathematical truths man may also discern moral truths of an equal weight. As we shall see shortly, the existence of such truths bears significantly upon Augustine's ontological conception of God.

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[96] Ibid. Book II Chapter VIII, p. 54
[97] Ibid. Book II Chapter VIII, p. 53
[98] Ibid. Book II Chapter X, p. 61 [my emphasis]

But before we move on to Augustine's ontological argument, it is important to draw out more explicitly the common nature of these truths that Augustine purports to have established. Three principles stand out immediately as defining characteristics of the truth: that it exists, that it is immutable and that it is common to all who may know it. "You will not deny," Augustine states, "that immutable truth, comprising everything that is immutably true, exists; and you cannot say that immutable truth is yours, or mine, or anyone else's. It is present and shows itself as a king of miraculously secret, yet public, light for all who see what is immutably true."[99] But more important than all three of these characteristics, at least for Augustine's purposes, is truth's *superiority* to the minds that may know it. As Augustine notes in a later passage, our minds do not make judgments *about* truth, but judge *in accordance with* truth.[100] To make judgments *about* something, Augustine notes, is at once to assume that this thing is inferior; in which case, one may say not only what the thing in question *is*, but also how it *ought* to be. "But no one," says Augustine, "makes judgments about the *rules themselves*."[101] Returning to the mathematical truth noted above, one may say that seven plus three *are* ten, but no one could possibly state that seven plus three *ought* to be ten. Augustine's observation could also be applied with equal facility to practical truths, such as the inadmissibility of claiming that the beautiful or the good *ought to be* beautiful or good, for they already encompass, by their very nature, the qualities of beauty and goodness respectively.

It is at this stage of Augustine's argument that we may come to understand how and why it is rational to believe in God. Recall what Augustine has demonstrated thus far: a) we may know certain truths; b) of these, the most immediate concern the truths of our

[99] Ibid. Book II Chapter XII, p. 66
[100] Ibid. Book II Chapter XII, p. 67
[101] Ibid. Book II Chapter XII, p. 66 [my emphasis]

own experience, namely, that we exist, that we live and that we know; c) these truths are ordered in a hierarchy of values and capacities, with reason recognized as that which is highest and most noble in man; d) in addition to truths about ourselves, man may also discern quantitative and practical truths, such as truths about the status of mathematical knowledge and our happiness respectively; e) these latter truths, being of an eternal and immutable nature, are superior to our reason, that is, we make judgments according to these truths, not about them. If we examine these arguments carefully, Augustine notes, we shall notice that our definition of truth coheres with our common ontological understanding of God:

> Augustine: What if we should be able to find something which not only exists, but even is more excellent than our reason? Will you hesitate to say that, whatever it is, this is our God?
>
> Evodius: If I could find something better than what is best in my nature, I would not immediately say that this is God. I am not inclined to call God that to which my reason is inferior, but rather *that to whom no one is superior*.
>
> Augustine: Clearly. And God Himself has given your reason the power to think so devoutly and truly about Him. But, I ask you, if you find that there is nothing superior to our reason except what is eternal and immutable, will you hesitate to sat that this is God?...Reason itself is clearly proven to be mutable, now struggling to arrive at truth, now ceasing to struggle, sometimes reaching it and sometimes not…
>
> Evodius: I shall admit that this is God to which nothing is granted to be superior.[102]

God, by definition, is "that to whom no one is superior." Augustine has demonstrated that truth exists, that it is eternal, immutable, universal, and, most importantly, superior to us. It follows that, in so far as there is nothing superior to truth, God *is* truth and must therefore necessarily exist. As Augustine puts it somewhat succinctly, "if there is

[102] Ibid. Book II Chapter VI, p. 49 [my emphasis]

something more excellent than truth, this is God. If there is not, then truth itself is God."[103]

One striking aspect of Augustine's ontological argument for the existence of God is its similarity to that of St. Anselm's. We shall be taking a closer look at Anselm's argument in the following chapter. What I would like to concentrate briefly on here, however, is the affinities between the two uses of the argument, with a particular focus on where and how their definitions of God diverge.

The lynchpin of Anselm's ontological argument is as follows: "we certainly believe that you [God] are something *than which nothing greater can be conceived* [*te esse aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari posit*]."[104] Above we noted that Augustine's definition of God treated, in particular, His superiority to the minds that may know Him: "God [is]…that to whom no one is superior."[105] This is, however, only one among many definitions that Augustine has for God. More frequently, what Augustine chooses to emphasize is God's supreme goodness and His incorruptibility. In Book VII of his *Confessions* Augustine states:

> Now that I had realized that what is incorruptible is better than that which is not, I took this as the basis for further research and acknowledged that, whatever your nature might be, you must be incorruptible. *For no soul has ever been, or will ever be, able to conceive of anything better* [melius] *than you*, who are the supreme, the perfect Good. And since, as I now believed, there could be no possible doubt that the incorruptible is better than the corruptible, it followed that you must be incorruptible.[106]

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[103] Ibid. Book II Chapter XV, p. 71
[104] Anselm. *Proslogion*. Ed. Charlesworth, M.J. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979, Chapter II, p. 4.
[105] Op. cit. Augustine. *On Free Choice of the Will*, Book II Chapter VI, p. 49.
[106] Op. cit. Augustine. *Confessions*, Book VII 4, p. 137. See also: Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book X 7.7 [my emphasis].

Note here what Augustine is emphasizing; it is not God's existence that invites our speculation but His incorruptibility, His goodness. As John F. Callahan argues in his excellent little book *Augustine and the Greek Philosophers*, "it [Augustine's ontological argument] is an argument regarding a being than which a better *is* not thought, not a being than which a better *cannot* be thought, and it is based on the universal consent to such a being rather than on the content of the conception itself…"[107] By couching his definition of God in terms of qualitative principles, such as His Goodness or the fact that He is "better than you," Augustine does not introduce the epistemic separation that one finds in Anselm's argument.[108] Indeed, the very quality of God that is in question for Augustine is not, properly speaking, a question; for no one doubts the incorruptibility of God. The real question for Augustine is not the nature of God or, for that matter, His existence, but whether or not we may understand our faith in Him.[109]

In *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, Etienne Gilson remarks that most medieval speculations on the nature of God move along a specific and identifiable trajectory; "not, that is, from God to man, but from man to God."[110] Although stated within a general context, Gilson's observation carries with it a particular relevancy for understanding the thought of Augustine. Recall that in his attempt to understand God, Augustine begins by establishing a truth about his own existence, thought and feeling. These truths, in addition to the truths of mathematics and practical knowledge, are immutable and eternal, and are

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[107] John F Callahan. *Augustine and the Greek Philosophers*. The Saint Augustine Lecture. Villanova University Press, 1967, p.3.
[108] I refer here to the separation that Anselm's argument engenders between the "knower" (Christian pilgrim) and the "object to be known" (God). This will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.
[109] It is interesting to note that Augustine himself refers little weight to the rational coherence of his "proof": "this indisputable fact [that God's exists] we maintain, I think, not only by faith, but also by a sure though *somewhat tenuous form of reasoning, which is sufficient for the immediate question* [my emphasis]" Op. cit. Augustine. *On Free Choice of the Will*, Book II Chapter XV, p. 71.
[110] Op. cit. Etienne Gilson. *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, p. 213.

known to Augustine not by any bodily sense but by an inner light, which irradiates the truth within our souls.[111] As such, when reason turns within to ascertain truths regarding its own existence, it is at once brought into contact with a higher reality, one that regulates and defines its own powers of judgment.[112] As Augustine states in Book II of *On Free Choice of the Will*, "reason itself is clearly proven to be *mutable*, now struggling to arrive at truth, now ceasing to struggle, sometimes reaching it and sometimes not."[113] Augustine thus presents a portrait of the human soul that is, by its nature, a knower and a lover; but in knowing, the soul is made aware of its dependency upon something greater, something which is common to all but necessarily found by turning within.[114]

Memory and the Interior Teacher

This notion of man's dependency upon something greater, particularly as it relates to man as "knower," is made even clearer in Augustine's writings on memory and the interior teacher. Here, the central question is not specifically *what* man knows, but *how* he knows. That is to say, what accounts for man's ability to recognize the truth when he sees it? Is truth ascertained by way of the senses? Or is there something deeper which accounts for our abilities to possess and lay claims to knowledge? Augustine's answer is

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[111] See: Augustine. *City of God*, Book XI Chapter XXVII, p. 462. Contra Descartes, Augustine's *si fallor sum* passage was not born of a motivation to establish an elementary truth about the certainty of his own existence. The argument was conceived primarily as a response to the Academics, and Augustine more than willingly admits that the truths which he has ostensibly derived from the *si fallor sum* argument have their true origins in the immediacy of man's "inner sense"—that which is illuminated by the light of the Divine Ideas (see: Op. cit. Augustine. *On Free Choice of the Will*, Book II Chapter VIII, p. 54).

[112] Op. cit. Augustine. *On Free Choice of the Will*, Book II Chapter VI, p. 49: "…reason discerns that it is inferior and through its own power discerns something eternal and immutable…[which] is its God."

[113] Ibid. Book II Chapter VI, p. 49 [my emphasis]

[114] "I have learned to love you late," Augustine says to God, "You were within me, and I was in the world outside myself. I searched for you outside myself and, disfigured as I was, I fell upon the lovely things of your creation. You were within me, but I was not with you" (Op. cit. Augustine. *Confessions*, Book X Chapter 27, p. 231). See also: Augustine. *De vera religione*, 39.72.

that there is indeed a deeper explanation for our abilities to "know," and that these abilities are linked not to our bodily senses nor to our memories but to an "inner light" that dwells within.

As was discussed earlier in Chapter one, Plato faced a similar problem as regards man's ability to recognize and assimilate knowledge. The problem was particularly acute with regard to man's knowledge of "intellectual truths" (*intelligibilia*), as Augustine will later refer to them. For such concepts as Perfect Justice, Beauty and the Equal Itself are not made available to our minds via the sense organs. They are perfect, indivisible and universal and must therefore exist in a realm beyond that which is changing, temporal and imperfect. Plato resolves this epistemological crisis by positing a "theory of reminiscence," whereby the truths of the intellectual world, such as that of Perfect Justice and Equality, are assumed to be forever present in the soul in the form of dim, but very real reflections of a higher reality. Our coming to "know" these truths thus becomes an exercise in remembrance, in our ability to recollect, based on the soul's previous existence, truths with which we were once intimately familiar. As Plato argues in *Timaeus*, "We should redirect the revolutions in our heads that were thrown off course at our birth, by coming to learn the harmonies and revolutions of the universe; and so bring into conformity with its objects the faculty of our understanding, *as it was in its original conditions*."[115]

Augustine's solution to this problem is, in some respects, remarkably similar to that of Plato. For one thing, both describe the apprehension of true knowledge as a form

[115] Plato. *Timaeus*, 90c-d. Zeyl translation, quoted in Johansen 2004, p. 1, n. 2. Quoted in Robert E. Proctor. "Cosmos: The Beauty Resulting from Order," p. 5 [my emphasis].

of intellectual illumination, one that follows from a direct acquaintance with the intelligible object in question. As Augustine argues in Book I of his *Soliloquies*:

> For the soul's powers of perception are as it were the eyes of the mind [*nam mentis quasi sui sunt oculi sensus animae*]. The most certain truths which are arrived at by the sciences are like those objects which are illuminated by the sun with the result that they can be seen, such as the earth and all things on the earth. Now it is God Himself who illuminates, and I myself, the Reason, am to minds what the sight is to eyes.[116]

In Book VI of the *Republic*, Plato states that the Form of the Good is the "cause of all things right and beautiful, giving birth to light and the lord of light in the visible world and originating truth and reason in the intelligible world."[117] Augustine would also agree with Plato that no one can, in the strictest sense, "teach," or be "taught," anything. "When I am stating truths," Augustine claims, "I don't even teach the person who is looking upon these truths. He is taught not by my words but by the things themselves made manifest within when God discloses them."[118] The similarities between the two thinkers in this regard are not coincidental. Indeed, Plato's views on epistemology, particularly as they were read through the Neo-platonist tradition, had a considerable and explicit influence on Augustine's thought; but this influence was not unqualified, and when and where Platonic doctrine contravened that of the Holy Scripture, Augustine was not adverse to transforming—and sometimes discrediting—the wisdom of the ancients.

This tendency in Augustine's thought can be seen quite clearly in the case of his more mature views on memory and how one may account for the soul's ability to acquire and sustain knowledge. Unable to reconcile Plato's doctrine of the soul's preexistence

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[116] Op. cit. Augustine. *Soliloquies*, Book I, p. 41.
[117] Op. cit. Plato. *Republic*, 517c.
[118] Augustine. *De Magistro*. Translated by Peter King. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1995, 12.40.

with the Christian Doctrine of creation, Augustine offers us a novel and fascinating view about how the soul learns—one that combines the thought of Plato and the Neo-platonic tradition with the thought of the Manichean religion and the Christian belief in Christ (Word or *Logos*) as the "true light that enlightens everyone coming into the world."[119] In the remainder of this section, I would like to explore in further detail Augustine's theory of knowledge, focusing in particular on where and how his epistemology reinforces the notion of man's dependency upon God.

Let us return to what Augustine has to say about teaching. Recall that Augustine does not believe that one can, in the strictest sense, be "taught" anything. This claim is based on two factors: a) it is quite possible that we may be told lies, in addition to truths and b) words do not themselves mean anything; they are signs and as such they merely represent, or signify, reality. "I'm trying to persuade you," Augustine argues in Book X of *De Magistro* (*The Teacher*), "…that we do not learn anything by these signs called words. As I have stated, we learn the meaning of the word—that is, the signification hidden in the sound—once the thing signified is itself known, rather than our perceiving it by means of such signification."[120] Words thus carry, at least at minimum, a certain value for Augustine for they "remind us to look for things,"[121] meaning that our search to comprehend the *meaning* of words is at once a search to come into direct contact with the *realities* they represent. True knowledge therefore entails both a knowledge of the

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[119]*John*, 1.9. The New Oxford Annotated Bible. Third Edition. Editor: Michael D. Coogan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 148. See also Augustine's reference to John in: Op. cit. Augustine. *Confessions*, Book VIII Chapter 10, p. 173: "In this way their darkness becomes denser still, because in their abominable arrogance they have separated themselves still further from you, who are *the true Light which enlightens every soul born into the world*."
[120] Op. cit. Augustine. *De Magistro*, 10.34.
[121] Ibid. 11. 36

meaning of words—a contextual web, so to speak, within which we may process sensible inputs—and an experience of the realities that these words signify.

Such a definition of true knowledge raises interesting epistemological questions regarding how man may come to know certain truths, particularly with respect to man's ability to ascertain intellectual truths, such as the truths of wisdom, justice and equality. Consider the implications of Augustine's theory of signs for our ability to learn by way of instruction. According to the theory, our ability to learn from others is severely limited, for human instruction will, at best, merely acquaint us with the meanings of words. To gain a true sense of what these words actually signify, we would have to be acquainted with the realities they represent, which would suggest that true knowledge must be formed via sensible experience. But even here our own abilities are inadequate, for experience alone, without the assistance of language to structure one's reception of these inputs, merely accords us a crude understanding of reality.

Suppose it is granted that we possess a basic understanding of the world of experience and that this understanding is attended by a sufficient lexicon with which we may express ourselves. Even here, however, one senses a hesitancy in Augustine's thought to accord man an independent capacity to formulate true knowledge. In Book XII of *De Magistro* Augustine states:

> When a question arises, not about what we sense before us, but about what we have sensed in the past, then we do not speak of the things themselves, but of images impressed from them on the mind and committed to memory. Indeed I do not know how we come to call (the things we speak of) real, since what we look at are counterfeits,

> unless it is because we explain, not that we see and sense them but that we have seen and have sensed them.[122]

When we speak of sensible things, barring our being located in their immediate presence, we are "looking at" the impressions that these sensible objects have left on our minds; in a word, we are considering only their images—or "counterfeits," as Augustine refers to them. Our memories thus do not represent an independent source of knowledge but serve, instead, as repositories for the sensory-based objects that we have experienced.

But how, then, do we learn? Sense experience alone seems to be insufficient, and our memories grant us only an approximation of the truth. Augustine's solution to this conundrum invokes the power of the Interior Teacher, Christ, who dwells in the "inner man" and provides the rational soul with the wisdom and certainty that it so desires:

> Regarding each of the things we understand, however, we don't consult a speaker who makes sounds outside us, but the Truth that presides within over the mind itself, though perhaps words prompt us to consult Him. What is more, He Who is consulted, He Who is said to dwell in the inner man, does teach: Christ—that is, the unchangeable power and everlasting wisdom of God, which every rational soul does consult, but is disclosed to anyone, to the extent that he can apprehend it, according to his good or evil will.[123]

It is Christ, the Wisdom of God, who ensures the veracity of our judgments and enables us to possess true knowledge. To consider whether or not a proposition is true Augustine enjoins us to look deep within ourselves; if the proposition is true it will be illuminated by the "inner light" of Christ. Note that the wisdom that the Interior Teacher provides is common to all who choose to consult it, but only insofar as man is capable of apprehending it "according to his good or evil will." It is the will then, and not the

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[122] Ibid. 12.39. I go with Gareth B. Matthew's translation here.
[123] Op. cit. Augustine. *De Magistro*, 11.38.

intellect, that determines the extent of one's knowledge; and it is the will, as we shall see in the following section, that relies most upon the grace of God for its restoration.

Human Nature and its Redemption

A pivotal component of Augustine's conception of the human person centers on man's dependency upon something greater than himself. Thus far, we have considered this notion of dependency from an epistemological point of view. In the first section, this dependency was identified as one in which reason, in turning inward to find God, was made aware of truths that exceeded its own powers of discernment. In section two, this notion of dependency was reinforced by an examination of Augustine's views on how we learn. Here, it was discovered that man's very ability to know, to possess a certain knowledge of intellectual and sensible truths, depended upon a consultation with the interior light of Christ. In the following section, I would like to continue with this theme of dependency, but from a more theological point of view; that is, I would like to focus on the soul as not only dependent upon God for knowledge but as inherently *broken* and in need of God's grace to deliver itself from the weights of sin, pride and lust.

In his *Confessions*, and to a lesser degree in such works as *On Christian Doctrine*, *City of God* and *On Free Choice of the Will*, Augustine spends a considerable amount of time trying to understand the complexities of human nature. On the one hand, the Bible states that man is an image of God; he is created by God and is therefore a being with inherent worth and dignity. And yet, despite such noble origins, man is plagued by a prevailing sense of misery, insecurity and unhappiness. The Bible explains this

incongruence with the concept of original sin: as descendents of Adam and Eve, we all bear the mark of their original sinful transgression. We are best by pride, lust, ignorance, and concupiscence, and are incapable of "going back" to recover our lost innocence. Although Augustine takes this account of original sin quite seriously, this does not deter him from trying to understand why it is that we sin, the nature of sin, and how sin is possible in a world created by a good God.

In Book I of his *Confessions*, Augustine paints a revealing portrait of human nature at its infancy. Questioning the conventional wisdom of regarding infants as innocent and uncorrupted, Augustine states:

> It can hardly be right for a child, even at that age, to cry for everything, including things which would harm him; to work himself into a tantrum against people older than himself and not required to obey him; and to try his best to strike and hurt others who know better than he does, including his own parents, when they do not give into him, and refuse to pander to whims which would only do him harm. This shows that, if babies are innocent, *it is not for lack of will to do harm, but for lack of strength*.[124]

Here, as in a variety of other passages from the same work,[125] Augustine speaks of sin as a condition of the soul, not of the body. That is to say, the nature of sin flows not from one's external actions but from an inner disposition, in short, from a *motivation* for satisfying one's own needs and wants. Augustine refers to these motivations that collectively determine a person's actions as "loves."[126] When we are motivated to do something, Augustine claims that we are in fact moved by a *love* to perform this action. We imagine that this action or object will make us happy, and we are therefore willing to do whatever is in our power to rest securely with the object of our desire.

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[124] Op. cit. Augustine. *Confessions*, Book I Chapter 7, p. 28 [my emphasis].
[125] Cf. Ibid. Book II Chapter 2, Book II Chapter 6 and Book VII Chapter 3
[126] Cf. Op. cit. Augustine. *City of God*, Book XV Chapter 22, pp. 636-637.

Not unlike Plato, then, Augustine believes that all men are "lovers": we are all moved by a love of the Good, and we all wish to possess this Good so that we may secure our happiness. Augustine would also agree with Plato that this love is not involuntary; for in addition to pure desire we are also creatures of reason, endowed with wills that may regulate the forces of love within us. It is therefore our *moral responsibility* to love appropriately or, as Augustine terms it, to exhibit a "rightly ordered love." As he states in Book XV of *City of God*:

> Now physical beauty, to be sure, is a good created by God, but it is a temporal, carnal good, very low in the scale of goods; and if it is loved in preference to God, the eternal, internal and sempiternal Good, that love is as wrong as the miser's love of gold, with the abandonment of justice, though the fault is in the man, not in the gold.[127]

In addition to signaling out man's moral responsibility to exhibit a rightly ordered love, Augustine introduces the idea of there being a metaphysical "scale of goods," each marked by varying degrees of worth, or value. The idea that reality is structured according to a hierarchy of value is central to Augustine's thought. We have already seen how this hierarchy informs Augustine's search for God and Truth; we may now also see that this notion of an ordered reality has a direct application for Augustine's moral philosophy.

According to the Neo-platonic tradition that Augustine inherits, reality is structured according to a Great Chain of Being. At the apex of this hierarchical order stands God, a Christian rendition of Plotinus' "One."[128] Through Christ (*logos*), who both

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[127] Op. cit. Augustine. *City of God*, Book XV Chapter 22, p. 636.
[128] This notion of creation is specifically Christian. According to Christian doctrine, the world was *created freely* by God. This conflicts with Plotinus' understanding of reality as a *voluntary emanation* of the metaphysical first principle of the "One."

"is God" and is "with God,"[129] God created the world that we see around us. Everything, from inorganic matter and plants to animals, man and the angels, has its being in God and is therefore entirely dependent upon Him for its existence. This hierarchy of being is also one of value, with a thing's being directly proportional to its degree of goodness. Accordingly, this order requires man to direct his love with equanimity: man must know his place within this order and must take care not to confer upon lower goods a love that is incommensurate with their intrinsic value. In *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine offers us the following advice:

> Now he is a man of just and holy life who forms an unprejudiced estimate of things, and keeps his affections also under strict control, so that he neither loves what he ought not to love, nor fails to love what he ought to love, nor loves that equally which ought to be loved either less or more, nor loves less or more which ought to be loved equally. No sinner is to be loved as a sinner; and every man is to be loved as a man for God's sake; but God is to be loved for His own sake. And if God is to be loved more than any man, each man ought to love God more than himself.[130]

We may now better understand what Augustine means when he enjoins us to exhibit a "rightly ordered love." For if our loves were correctly ordered, they would not cease to love some objects in favor of others but would perfectly reflect the hierarchy of value inherent within God's created order. To love "rightly" is to love God first, followed by a love for objects in accordance with their inherent worth and being. Those who are considered virtuous are thus those who exhibit a rightly ordered love. By contrast, sin and

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[129] See: *John*, 1.1. The New Oxford Annotated Bible, p. 147.
[130] Augustine. *On Christian Doctrine*, Book I 27. 28.

vice are associated with disordered love, with a love that accords lower objects—such as money or pleasure—a value greater than their intrinsic worth.[131]

Sin, then, is a property of existence for which we are held responsible. God created man and in so doing He created him free so that he may *choose* to live rightly. Recall that Augustine holds us morally responsible for our loves. It is *we* who decide what to love and in what proportion; God does not make these decisions for us. "When an evil choice happens in any being," Augustine states, "then what happens is dependent on the will of that being; the failure is voluntary, not necessary, and the punishment that follows is just."[132] A corollary to this last point is that sin is more than just mere ignorance. To be sure, there is an ignorance associated with sin but it is a willful ignorance that marks our existence.[133] Recall what Augustine has to say about Christ in *De Magistro*:

> He Who is consulted, He Who is said to dwell in the inner man, does teach: Christ—that is, the unchangeable power and everlasting wisdom of God, which every rational soul does consult, but *is disclosed to anyone, to the extent that he can apprehend it, according to his good or evil will*.[134]

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[131] Speaking of such lower goods Augustine states, "Let my soul praise you for these things, O God, Creator of them all; but the love of them, which we feel, through the senses of the body, must not be like glue to bind my soul to them. For they continue on the course that is set for them and leads to their end, and if the soul loves them and wishes to be with them and finds its rest in them, it is torn by desires that can destroy it" (Op. cit. Augustine. *Confessions*, Book IV Chapter 10).

[132] Op. cit. Augustine. *City of God*, Book XII Chapter 8, p. 480.

[133] This notion of willful ignorance stands in contrast to the Platonic notion that all wrongdoing is the result of ignorance and "virtue is knowledge"—that is, all that is necessary for the soul to live virtuously, according to Plato and Socrates, is for it to be re-directed by way of education toward the light of the Good. Augustine is arguing that education is simply not enough. In Christ, the light of Wisdom has been revealed to man; and yet, despite this selfless sacrifice, man remains impervious to His message. We are willfully ignorant and are therefore in need of something much greater than education to rescue us from our earthly predicament.

[134] Op. cit. Augustine. *De Magistro*, 11.38 [my emphasis].

Since the time of Christ, we have all been enlightened as to the power and everlasting wisdom of God. This knowledge is "disclosed to anyone" but available only insofar as man is capable of receiving because of his good or evil will.

It is clear to Augustine that man has grossly mishandled his free will. Instead of focusing on that which is eternal, permanent and true we have chosen to focus on goods of a lower order. We are concerned not with the "common good" but with our own private well-being. As Augustine states in *On Free Choice of the Will*:

> The will…commits sin when it turns away from immutable and common goods, toward its private good, either something external to itself or lower than itself. It turns to its own private good when it desires to be its own master; it turns to external goods when it busies itself with the private affairs of others or with whatever is none of its concern; it turns to goods lower than itself when it loves the pleasures of the body. Thus a man becomes proud, meddlesome, and lustful; he is caught up in another life which, when compared to the higher one, is death.[135]

In turning away from God man becomes "proud, meddlesome, and lustful." We have attached a disproportionate amount of value to goods of a lower order, while at the same time choosing to disregard the more enduring fruits of higher goods such as peace, love and God. But in turning away from God, we have also allowed our pride to subsume our categories of will and judgment. In *City of God*, Augustine remarks that man's pride is the "original evil," whereby man "regards himself as his own light, and turns away from that light which would make man himself a light if he would set his heart on it."[136] For in seeking to be "self-sufficient," we reveal our disdain for the order that God has created. Instead of recognizing our proper place in the Great Chain of Being as "some little part of

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[135] Op. cit. Augustine. *On Free Choice of the Will*, Book II Chapter XIX, p. 82.
[136] Op. cit. Augustine. *City of God*, Book XIV Chapter 13, p. 573.

the perfect,"[137] we have tried to elevate ourselves to the status of becoming "the perfect." We have sought, in the words of Augustine, to make *ourselves* the "supreme and real" ground of our being.[138]

Augustine's portrait of human nature leaves us in a radically impotent and insufficient state. We are perverse and lustful creatures, driven by the insatiable dictates of our earthly needs and desires. We seek in goods of a lower order a happiness that can only be found in God. These desires shackle to soul, binding it by necessity to a world that is founded upon self-love and contempt for God.[139] As Augustine recounts from his own life, "…my will was perverse and lust had grown from it, and when I gave in to lust habit was born, and when I did not resist the habit it became a necessity."[140] These desires, as Augustine notes, form a chain that links pride to lust, habit to necessity.[141] Given the perversity of the human will, man is incapable of breaking this chain on his own. What is needed is thus not a *re-direction* of the soul, as Plato advocates, but a radical *re-construction* of the will made possible by the grace of God.

It is important to emphasize that the grace of God is, in every sense, a *gift* of grace: we neither merit the salvation that God has accorded us, nor would this salvation be possible without the work of Christ. As Augustine states somewhat paradoxically in Book X of his *Confessions*, "Give me the grace to do as you [God] command, and

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[137] Marcus Tullius Cicero. *On the Nature of the Gods*, Book II 14. 37. Quoted in: Op. cit. Robert E. Proctor. *Defining the Humanities*, p. 17.
[138] Op. cit. Augustine. *City of God*, Book XIV Chapter 13, p. 573.
[139] Cf. Ibid. Book XIV Chapter 28, p. 593
[140] Op. cit. Augustine. *Confessions*, Book VIII Chapter 5, p. 164.
[141] Recall our earlier discussion of the role of the intellect and the will in Augustine's thought. In Augustine's view, the intellect is insufficient to bring about a total "turning of the will" toward God. This is illustrated in Book VII of his *Confessions* in which Augustine laments his inability to turn to God (a property of the will) despite the fact that he knew with his mind what he *ought* to do.

command me to do what you will!"[142] On the one hand, our salvation is a choice that *we* make; and in this sense, we are free to decide for ourselves what is right and how we will live. But Augustine also points out that our wills are incapable of making this decision on their own: we are inherently broken and love imperfectly, and yet somehow we are connected by that which loves us. Once again, we see in Augustine's thought a hesitancy to ascribe to man the independence that he so desires. We are creatures of God and as such we are wholly reliant upon His Being and Goodness for our salvation.

[142] Op. cit. Augustine. *Confessions*, Book X Chapter 29, p. 233.

Chapter III: St. Anselm and the Reorientation of Ancient Categories of Thought

Faith, Reason and the New Scholasticism

St. Anselm (1033-1109) marks a turning point in the history of Western philosophy. Rebelling against the Christian anti-intellectualism of his time,[143] Anselm's work represents a bold and creative effort to synthesize the theology of St. Augustine with the new scholasticism of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[144] Like Augustine, Anselm believed that reason and faith complimented one another in the search to understand God and the soul; the difference between the two thinkers, and consequently what places Anselm so firmly in the scholastic tradition, lies in their respective beliefs about the place of reason in theological discourse. Anselm held that a rational analysis of one's faith was *essential* for the development, understanding and defense of one's beliefs. This is not to say that Anselm rejected those articles of faith that he himself was unable to prove: if the limits of reason were reached, faith would abide. The important point, as Copleston rightly notes, is that Anselm was not prepared to "set limits in advance."[145]

It is within this context that one may come to appreciate the novelty of Anselm's ontological argument for the existence of God. Faith has provided Anselm, in a manner

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[143] Cf. the works of St. Peter Damian, a prominent figure in the Gregorian reform movement of the 11th and 12th centuries. St. Damian was an outspoken opponent of the use of dialectic in philosophical and theological discourse, and was often highly critical of those who attempted to substantiate the truths of Christian Revelation through the use of reason.

[144] This "new scholasticism" of the late middle ages functioned in opposition to modes of Christian anti-intellectualism that had prevailed in Europe for centuries. The movement, practiced by Christian philosophers and theologians in the medieval university, was concerned primarily with integrating the logic and metaphysics of Aristotle with the wisdom of the Sacred Scriptures.

[145] Op. cit. Frederick C. Copleston. *History of Medieval Philosophy*, p. 72.

of speaking, with the evidence or "conclusion" of God's existence; but Anselm's desire is to *understand* this faith in a way that gives primacy to human reason and logical argument. In his *Monologion*, or *Soliloquy*, as it is often translated, Anselm attempted to substantiate the truths of Christian doctrine, particularly truths relating to the nature and existence of God, without recourse to faith. As he states in the preface: "Now, whatever I have stated in this treatise I have stated in the role of one who by reflection alone (*sola cogitatione*) investigates, and disputes with himself about, points which he had previously not considered."[146] Although Anselm found nothing in the treatise that was incompatible with the writings of the Catholic Fathers, he soon began to wonder whether the "chain of many arguments" presented in the *Monolgion* might be reduced to a single argument that would "constitute an independent proof and would suffice by itself to demonstrate that (1) God truly [really] exists, that (2) He is the Supreme Good, needing no one else yet needed by all else in order to exist and to fare well, and that (3) He is whatever else we believe about the Divine Substance."[147] The content and nature of this "single argument" we will soon explore, but for now it is important to observe the tone of Anselm's inquiry, the faith that he places not only in his belief but more importantly, in his reason.

Anselm's Ontological Proof for the Existence of God

Let's take a closer look at Anselm's argument. By way of introduction, perhaps the most striking aspect of his text is its indebtedness to St. Augustine. In Chapter one of

[146] Anselm. *Monolgion*. Edited and Translated by Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson. New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1975, p. 4 (Preface).
[147] Anselm. *Proslogion*. Ibid. p. 89 (Preface)

his *Proslogion*—originally entitled *Faith Seeking Understanding*,[148] Anselm states his reason for undertaking the task of proving God's existence in familiar terms: "I yearn to understand some measure of Your truth, which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand in order to believe but I believe in order to understand."[149] As was the case with Augustine, Anselm's ostensible aim is not to "prove" God's existence, but to *understand* His existence in a way that is complimentary to his faith. It is also worth nothing that Anselm's search to understand God begins not in the world of experience, but in an appeal to God as a *teacher* that lies within. Echoing the words of Augustine in *De Magistro*, Anselm prays, "Teach me to seek You [God], and reveal Yourself to me as I seek; for unless You instruct me I cannot seek You, and unless You reveal Yourself I cannot find You."[150]

The argument that Anselm believes to have learned from the Interior Teacher begins with a deceptively simple proposition about the idea of God: *God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived*.[151] There are a number of important points to draw out of this proposition before moving on to a more formal analysis of Anselm's argument. First, note that Anselm is not merely stating that God is the *greatest* of all possible beings—an argument closer to that of Augustine; he is arguing for a conception of God that is unaffected and unbound by human faith or understanding. Second, Anselm's argument makes no presuppositions regarding the *nature* of God. Anselm is concerned only with the "content of the conception itself"[152] and as such, qualitative principles, such as God's incorruptibility, do not factor into his broader argument. Third,

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[148] Ibid. p. 90 (Preface)
[149] Ibid. p. 93 (Chapter I)
[150] Ibid. p. 93 (Chapter I)
[151] Ibid. p. 93 (Chapter II) "*aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit*"
[152] Op. cit. John F. Callahan. *Augustine and the Greek Philosophers*, p. 3.

the essential question for Anselm is therefore not the *goodness* of God, as it was for Augustine, but the *existence* of God. As he states in the Preface to the *Proslogion*: "I began to ask myself whether perhaps a *single argument* could be found which would constitute an independent proof and would suffice by itself to *demonstrate that God truly exists*."[153] Anselm may be guided by a desire to understand what he believes, but the thrust of his argument aims at a proof of God's existence that stands independently of his Christian faith.

Anselm's method for developing this proof proceeds according to the common rhetorical form of the scholastic disputations—enlisting a high-minded interlocutor to further advance one's argument. In the *Proslogion*, this interlocutor is "the fool" who, according to Psalm 14:1, "has said in his heart that God does not exist."[154] Anselm's response to this "fool" is twofold.[155] Perhaps the fool comprehends only the *word* signifying what is conceived, namely, the word "God," in which case the fool is merely ignorant of the terms he utters. To convince the fool of his mistake, one would only need to clarify the concepts that underlie the terms "God" and "does not exist" for the fool to realize the error of his ways. If, on the other hand, the fool is able to *understand* what he is saying, that is, if he asserts that "God does not exist" and knows full well that God is *that than which nothing greater can be conceived*, then Anselm claims he is engaging in a logical contradiction. To understand why this is so, let us take a closer look at the logic that underpins Anselm's argument. We can begin with a question: what about Anselm's ontological proof *entails* God's existence? Take a painting for example.[156] If one is to

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[153] Op. cit. Anselm. *Proslogion*, p. 89 (Preface) [my emphasis].
[154] Ibid. p. 93 (Chapter II)
[155] Ibid. p. 95 (Chapter IV)
[156] Anselm makes use of this analogy in Chapter II (Ibid. p. 94).

conceive of a painting, as an artist does before he or she commits it to the canvas, what would be greater than the mere conception of it? Limiting ourselves to a painting, the only answer would be if it existed *in reality* as well as in the mind. When applied to the concept of God, this form of reasoning yields a similar conclusion. If *that than which no greater can be conceived* were to exist only in relation to our understanding (*esse in intellectu*) it would surely not be *that than which nothing greater can be conceived*; for it would require little creative effort to imagine something greater, namely, something that exists both in relation to the understanding *and* in reality. In the former case, God's existence is dependent on the human mind; in the latter, God's existence is a fact that stands independently of all other things.

But suppose *that than which nothing greater can be conceived* were to have never existed, just as we can imagine a painting to have never existed. As Anselm is quick to point out, this is a sheer impossibility: "[for] if that than which a greater cannot be conceived could be conceived not to be, we would have an impossible contradiction: That than which a greater cannot be conceived would not be that than which a greater cannot be conceived."[157] So now we may return to the "fool" and see why he is mistaken. Implicit within the definition of God, as Anselm construes it, is a self-evident truth that mandates existence. The fool may utter the words "God does not exist," but he most certainty cannot make such an assertion with a clear and distinct perception of its content; for Anselm's argument invites mental analysis and as such, it does not focus on the experience of God or faith *per se*, but on the experience of human reason at work as almost an end in itself.

[157] Ibid. p. 94 (Chapter III)

Anselm's ontological argument has had a profound influence on Western thought. His demonstration of God's existence stands on its own as the first attempt at a *self-evident* proof of a metaphysical first principle. This is not to say that philosophers and theologians who preceded Anselm did not attempt a similar project, but there is something remarkably unique about Anselm's understanding of ontology and analyticity. This distinction will be illuminated shortly, but for the time being it is sufficient to note that Anselm has done for reason what Socrates did for intellectual piety: through Anselm, reason no longer existed subordinate to faith but paralleled it, complimenting what the heart could not put into language.

St. Anselm and the Reorientation of Ancient Categories of Thought

Anselm's ontological proof for the existence of God brought about a radical reorientation of the ancient categories of thought and experience.[158] In a paper delivered at Duke University Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, F.E. Cranz argues that this reorientation was not merely a break with the ancient and medieval epistemological traditions, but that it "had large consequences for the way in which the ancient tradition was thereafter understood."[159] For the remainder of this chapter, I would like to focus on the nature and implications of this shift as a way to lead into a more general discussion of identity in the thought of Francesco Petrarch.

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[158] Op. cit. F.E. Cranz. *The Reorientation of Western Thought c. 1100 A.D*. The Break with the Ancient Tradition and its Consequences for Renaissance and Reformation. Duke University Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, March 24, 1982, p.1.
[159] Ibid. p. 1

Cranz begins his discussion of this change by contrasting the dominate modes of thought of the Greco-Roman world with the modes of thought and experience introduced by Anselm's ontological argument. The analysis of this shift is structured in three interrelated phases: 1) epistemological, 2) psychological and 3) theological.[160] As regards the first phase, Cranz argues that the ancients experienced knowledge as a conjunction between the knower and the object to be known.[161] That is, the experience of coming to know an object was, for the Greeks and Romans, tantamount to being physically and spiritually united with the object that one knows or senses. Consider the following passage from M. F. Burnyeat's article, "Plato on Why Mathematics is Good for the Soul":

> For Plato, as for Aristotle, knowledge and understanding depend on receptivity. You submit your soul to be in-formed by the world as it is objectively speaking. A soul that assimilates the vast abstract system of mathematics on the curriculum is in turn assimilated to it. *You* come to be like, akin to, of the same family as, the nature of what is (in the sense of unqualified, context invariant being)…[162]

Cranz himself cites numerous sources to support this claim. He quotes from Aristotle's *De anima* III: "In what is without matter, what intellects and what is intellected are the same…Theoretical science and that which is so scienced are the same…Science in act is the same as the thing (to pragma)."[163] Cranz cites another passage from *De anima* that captures more fully the *unity* that characterizes the ancient experience of knowledge: "…the intellect in intellecting becomes exactly what it intellects…Before the intellect

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[160] Cranz himself does not use this terminology.
[161] Ibid. p. 2
[162] M.F. Burnyeat. "Plato on Why Mathematics is Good for the Soul." Ed. T. Smiley. *Mathematics and Necessity in the History of Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 70.
[163] Aristotle. *De anima*. Book III, 430a2 f. Quoted in: Op cit. F.E. Cranz, *The Reorientation of Western Thought c. 1100 A.D.*, p. 3.

intellects in act, what intellects and what is intellected stand in relation to one another as other and opposed. But when they are in act, the intellect and what is intellected have become one; there is not longer a relationship and a contrast."[164]

The second phase of the ancient experience incorporates a psychological component into the experience of knowing. Cranz argues that in coming to know an object, and consequently in being united with that object, the ancients experienced an "extensive self" that was conjoined with other objects within a single order of being.[165] Consider the following passage from Plotinus' *Ennead*: "So you have entered into the All, and you did not remain in one of its parts, nor do you any longer say, 'I extend *so and so far'*, for, having given up the 'so and so far', you have become all, though indeed you *were* all before."[166] There is a sense that the soul that Plotinus is describing is ever-present among *all* beings, so much so that the "you" (the soul) may be construed as actually being one and the same as "all beings."[167] The "self," as Cranz refers to it, is therefore "extended" in that the "self" and the "realm of all other beings" are potentially identical: the ancient experience of knowledge did not bring about a separation between the knower and the intended object to be known—a separation that today might be referred to as intentionality.[168]

The final phase of the ancient experience pertains more specifically to the *experience* of knowledge itself, that is, to the process by which knowledge is ascertained.

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[164] Ibid. p. 3
[165] Ibid. p. 3
[166] Ibid. p. 4
[167] Cranz cites an important passage from Aristotle's *De anima* that supports this idea: "Now in summarizing what has been said about the soul, we say again that the soul is *somehow all beings*. The beings are either sensible or intelligible, and science is somehow the scienced, and sense the sensibles" (Aristotle. *De anima*, Book III, 8 432b20 f. Quoted in: Ibid. p. 4).
[168] Cf. Franz Brentano *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (Routledge, 1995) and Daniel Dennett *The Intentional Stance* (MIT Press, 1989).

Cranz argues that the ancients experienced reason and argument as a form of vision. He cites two powerful passages from Augustine's *De Trinitate* and the *Soliloquies* respectively to illustrate this point:

> There is this good and that good. Remove the 'this' and the 'that' and *see*, if you can, the good itself. Thus you will *see* God…[169]
>
> Reason who speaks with you promises that she will demonstrate (*or* show) God to your mind as the sun is demonstrated or shown to the eyes.[170]

For Plato and Augustine alike, this notion of reason as culminating in a form of vision or "illumination" was central to the experience of knowledge. In the *Timaeus*, Plato captures this sense of "conjunctive vision" in a poignant visual metaphor:

> …when there is daylight around the visual stream it falls on its like and coalesces with it, forming a single uniform body in the line of sight, along which the stream from within strikes the external object. Because the stream and daylight are similar, the whole so formed is homogenous, and the motions caused by the steam coming into contact with an object or an object coming into contact with the stream penetrate right through the body and produce in the soul the sensation which we call sight.[171]

Light from the sun joins with the light from the eye to form a visual steam that illuminates all objects of perception. For Plato, this experience of knowledge did not rest upon the "coherence of the argument," but on vision, on seeing the truth with the "eye of the soul."[172]

Anselm's ontological argument radically transformed these categories of thought and experience. Moving away from the categories of conjunction, extension and vision, Anselm's argument structures the experience of knowledge within a new "reason of

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[169] Augustine. *De Trinitate*, VIII 3. #4 (CC L, 272). Quoted in: F.E. Cranz. *The Reorientation of Western Thought c. 1100 A.D.*, p. 4.
[170] Augustine. *Soliloquies* I, VI, #12. Quoted in: Ibid. p. 4-5
[171] Op cit. Plato. *Timaeus*, 45 (13).
[172] Cf. Op. cit. Plato. *Republic*, 517b-c.

faith" (*ratio fidei*). Contrary to the unity that characterized the ancient experience of knowledge, Anselm's ontological proof introduces a dichotomy between the knower (the Christian pilgrim) and the object to be known (God).[173] The self is no longer extended across a single order of beings, but is confronted with two worlds, one of "meanings" (arguments, phrases, or "intellections"), and one of "things" (sensible beings).[174] Cranz refers to this new self as an "intensive self," one that depends not on receptivity for knowledge and understanding but on its own ability to *create meaning*. Accordingly, Anselm's ontological proof of God propounds a theory of knowledge that rests almost entirely upon the coherence of the argument. As Anselm states in *Responsio editoris* X:

> The significance (*significatio*) of this utterance ('that than which a greater cannot be thought') contains so much force that what is spoken of is, *by the very fact that it is understood or thought*, necessarily proved really to exist and to be whatever ought to be believe about the divine substance.[175]

Anselm believes that he has offered us a systematic proof of God's existence that does not rely upon vision for its validity, but upon the mere coherence of meanings.

What is perhaps most striking about Anselm's reformulation of the ancient categories of thought and experience is his own dissatisfaction with it. In one of the more personal passages of the *Proslogion*, he states:

> Have you found, o my soul, what you sought?...For if you have *not* found your God, how can He be that which you have found and that which you have understood Him to be with such certain truth and such true certainty? If you *have* found Him, why is it that you do

[173] Op. cit. F.E. Cranz. *The Reorientation of Western Thought c. 1100 A.D.*, p. 5.
[174] Ibid. p. 6
[175] Op. cit. Anselm. *Proslogion*, p. 134 (Responsio editoris X). Quoted in: Ibid. p. 6

> not feel or experience (*sentis*) that which have found? Why, Lord God, does my soul not *feel or experience* you, if it has found you?[176]

Anselm's ontological proof lacks all the *immediacy* and *ultimacy* of the ancient experience of knowledge.[177] Recall that for the ancients, argument and demonstration were experienced (*sentire*) as a form of direct and immediate vision. When the knower encountered an object it felt conjoined with this object across a single order of beings. Anselm's proof not only renders such a conjunction impossible, but it relegates the experience of reason to the world of "meanings" alone. Anselm's new reason is therefore operative *only* within the realm of the intellect, wherein the immediacy and fullness of ancient forms of vision are replaced by the logic and coherence of argument. "My soul strains to see more," laments Anselm, "but beyond what it has already seen it peers only into darkness (*tenebras*)."[178]

Before moving on to an examination of Petrarch's response to this new "reason of faith," it is important to underscore the ethical implications of Anselm's reorientation of the ancient categories of thought and experience. For the ancients, the ability to perceive and experience the beauty, order and harmony of the cosmos as a form of conjunctive vision had a transformative effect on the human soul. The perception of beauty, for the Greeks and Romans, aroused within the soul a longing (*cupiditas*) to become one with the beauty of truth, with the order and symmetry of the heavens. Through the contemplation and imitation of this order, the soul was inspired to reduce its own motions to order. As the great Greek astronomer, Claudius Ptolemy, wrote in his *Almagest*:

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[176] Anselm. *Proslogion*, Chapter XIV, p. 103. Quoted in : Ibid. p. 7
[177] Op. cit. F.E. Cranz. *The Reorientation of Western Thought c. 1100 A.D.*, p. 8.
[178] Op. cit. Anselm. *Proslogion*, Chapter XIV, p. 103.

> This science of stars can . . . better than any other, render an excellent service in connection with our concern for an eminently moral life. For from the example of the similarity, precise order, symmetry, and simplicity which we experience with divine beings (the heavenly bodies) it imparts to its practitioners love for divine beauty. What is more, through habit such an attitude of mind becomes second nature.[179]

Astronomy, for the ancients, was, in many respects, tantamount to moral philosophy: through the contemplation of the heavens, the mind was transformed ethically by its desire to imitate the order of divine beauty.

Anselm's ontological proof, with its attendant dichotomy between the knower and the known, and its focus on rational demonstration as opposed to the immediacy of vision, precluded the possibility of being ethically transformed through the contemplation of the divine. Anselm's reason was concerned primarily with the "*systematic coherence of an experienced faith*"[180] and as such, the ancient experience of receptivity, unity and conjunctive vision was replaced by a conception of human reason that was left almost entirely to the world of "meanings" (*intentiones*) alone, not of "things" or "actual beings." For those who followed Anselm, the implications of the new scholasticism therefore stretched far beyond mere questions of epistemology; Anselm's proof, which served as a springboard for the new scholastic theology, called into doubt the very ability of man to fashion an identity based on hitherto conceptions of the Good and of what it meant to live a pious and morally virtuous life.

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[179] Claudius Ptolemy. *Almagest*, 1. 7. 17 – 24. Quoted in Wildiers 1982 pp. 22 – 23. Op cit. Robert E. Proctor. "Cosmos: The Beauty Resulting from Order," p. 23.
[180] Op. cit. F.E. Cranz. *The Reorientation of Western Thought c. 1100 A.D.*, p. 17.

Chapter IV: Petrarch and the Moral Drama of the Self

Recapturing the Immediacy of Vision: "Seeing with the Mind"

Petrarch was acutely aware of the inadequacies of the new reason of scholasticism. On numerous occasions he speaks quite openly about his disdain for the failure of the new categories of thought to capture the immediacy and fullness of the ancient experience of knowledge. Thus he states in his *Epistulae familiares*:

> That prostituted philosophy which we see everywhere (*vulgo*). At what does it aim except scrupulously and anxiously to concern itself with petty questions and with words…Thus truth is entirely given over to forgetfulness, good morals are ignored, the very things themselves (*res ipsae*) are spurned in which lies that true philosophy which is never deceived…[181]

By Petrarch's time, the scholastic theology that Anselm had helped to initiate had degenerated into a discipline concerned primarily with the technique of logical and linguistic analysis. Far from developing the rules of logical analysis in a way that would illuminate and valorize the *experience* of faith, medieval scholars became increasingly preoccupied with the rules themselves, with the "internal signification of sentences and propositions."[182] It is thus not without reason that Petrarch complains in one of his letters that, "Our vanity has turned theology into dialectic."[183]

Petrarch's own hope is for the restoration of a philosophy that is grounded in "things," in the sensible realities of *this* world, rather than in mere "words" or

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[181] Francesco Petrarch. *Epistulae familiares*, XVII 1, 7. Quoted in: Op. cit. F.E. Cranz. *The Reorientation of Western Thought c. 1100 A.D.*, p. 10.
[182] Op. cit. Robert E. Proctor. *Defining the Humanities*, p. 39.
[183] Francesco Petrarch. *Letters on Familiar Matters*. Translated by Aldo S. Bernardo. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982, X 5.

propositions. We should aim "not for that windy and loquacious scholastic philosophy," Petrarch exhorts, "but for the true one which dwells not only in books but also in souls and which is founded in *things* not in *words*."[184] It is clear, from passages such as these, that Petrarch was deeply dissatisfied with the new reason of scholasticism. Cranz notes that this dissatisfaction prompted Petrarch to resurrect the ancient program of "seeing with the mind" as a way to recapture the immediacy and fullness of the ancient experience of knowledge.

Petrarch's strongest and most developed statement of this program of "seeing with the mind" appears in the *Secret*, a consolatory (*consolatio*) dialogue in three parts between Augustine and Petrarch in the presence of Lady Truth. Near the end of the first dialogue, Petrarch remarks to Augustine that he had recently chanced upon his *De vera religione* during a brief hiatus from his regular studies in philosophy and poetry. Augustine points out that although the book was written under the auspices of the Catholic faith, his inspiration for undertaking the work derived from pagan texts, specifically, from a passage in Cicero's *Tusculanae disputationes*. Arguing against those who are unable to detach themselves from the somatic world, Augustine quotes Cicero as saying: "They could *look at nothing with their mind*, but judged everything by the sight of their eyes; yet a man of any greatness of understanding is known by his detaching his thought from objects of sense, and his meditations from the ordinary track in which others move."[185]

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[184] Ibid. XII 3. 10. Op. cit. F.E. Cranz. *The Reorientation of Western Thought c. 1100 A.D.*, p. 10.
[185] Cicero. *Tusculanae disputationes*, I, 16, #37. Quoted in: Francesco Petrarch. *Petrarch's Secret or The Soul's Conflict with Passion*. Three Dialogues Between Himself and S. Augustine. Translated by William H. Draper. Connecticut: Hyperion Press, Inc., 1978, p. 44 [my emphasis].

This ancient model of "seeing with the mind" figures prominently in Petrarch's thought. Indeed, Petrarch makes mention of this program in a number of his principle works.[186] Cranz observes, however, that Petrarch's understanding of "seeing with the mind" was quite different from that of Cicero and Augustine. "The ancient 'seeing with the mind'," Cranz argues, "was a conjunctive vision of intelligible beings, and Petrarch has no such vision nor, indeed, any such intelligible beings."[187] Consider the following passage taken from Augustine's *De vera religione*:

> We are reminded by the things we judge to see that by which we judge, and as we turn from the work of art to the law of the arts, we see with the mind that form (*species*) in comparison with which even those things fair through it are foul. 'The invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen as they are intellected through what has been made.[188]

Augustine's employment of the program of "seeing with the mind" is intended to signify an *ascent from the body*, one that culminates in a vision by the mind of immaterial truths relating to the "law of the arts" and the "invisible things of God."[189]

Petrarch's own program of "seeing with the mind" is markedly different from that of Augustine. Consider the following passage from Petrarch's *Secret* in which Augustine instructs Petrarch on how to meditate on the thought of death so that the experience sinks to the very depths of his heart[190]:

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[186] Cf. Francesco Petrarch. *De vita solitaria*, in Prose 353; Invective ed. Ricci p. 85 and 86, note; Op. cit. F.E. Cranz. *Reorientation of Western Thought c. 1100 A.D.*, p. 11.
[187] Ibid. p. 11
[188] *Romans*, I. 20. Augustine, St. *De vera religione*, 110. Quoted in: Ibid. p. 11
[189] Ibid. p. 12
[190] Thus Augustine states: "I have no doubt that when you [Petrarch] turn over in your mind the many things you have learned, whether in the school of experience or in your reading of books, the thought of death has several times entered your head. But still it has not sunk down into your heart as deeply as it ought, nor is it lodged there as firmly as it should be." Op. cit. Francesco Petrarch. *Petrarch's Secret or The Soul's Conflict with Passion*, p. 32.

> It will not do that we hear that name but lightly, or allow the remembrance of it to slip quickly from our mind. No, we must take time to realize it. We must meditate with attention thereon. We must picture to ourselves the effect of death on each several part of our bodily frame, the cold extremities, the breast in the sweat of fever, the side throbbing with pain, the vital spirits running slower and slower as death draws near, the eyes sunken and weeping, every look filled with tears…all these things will come to mind and, so to speak, be ready to one's hand, if one recalls what one has seen in any close observation of some deathbed where it has fallen to our lot to attend. *For things seen cling closer to our remembrance than things heard*.[191]

This last sentence is crucial. For Petrarch, the act of "seeing with the mind" was, in effect, an exercise in remembrance. Petrarch invokes the ancient program of "seeing with the mind" not so that he may experience an ascent from his body, but so that he may experience *in his imagination* the sensuous presence of those who have passed. Petrarch's program of "seeing with the mind" thus parallels that of Augustine and Cicero only in name: in his attempt to recapture the ancient experience of knowledge as a form of direct and immediate vision, Petrarch merely substitutes the ancient categories of conjunction and extension for an experience of reason that brings about "the presence of bodies imagined with sensible vividness."[192]

Cranz's insight into Petrarch's attempt to recapture the immediacy and ultimacy of ancient forms of knowledge and experience touches upon a number of important themes that run throughout Petrarch's work. In particular, Petrarch's ubiquitous sense of death, his disdain for the new reason of scholasticism, and his desire to "go back" to the ancients as sources for moral inspiration are essential points of analysis for understanding his thought. What I would like to do for the remainder of this chapter is to explore some

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[191] Ibid. pp. 32-33 [my emphasis]
[192] Op. cit. F.E. Cranz. *The Reorientation of Western Thought c. 1100 A.D.*, p. 12

of these themes in greater detail. Since Petrarch's thought resists any attempt to unify it within a coherent structure or intellectual design, I will proceed with my analysis of his views on personal identity in a selective manner. In section one, I focus on Petrarch's inner struggle, particularly as it relates to the conflict that he faced between the moral demands of his Christian faith and the intensity of his emotional commitment to Laura. In section two, I explore the various ways in which Petrarch attempts to resolve his inner crisis. Ultimately, I would submit that it is Petrarch's *inner* conflict that marks his very identity. It is *deep within* that Petrarch experiences and expresses his most personal concerns about love, death and contingency; and it is a spiritual crisis that emanates from *deep within* that enjoins Petrarch to seek solace and inspiration in the lives of the ancients.

Solo et pensoso…

Petrarch's inner struggle is marked from the outset by his profound and unrelenting love of Laura, his poetic muse and historical temptress. In sonnets, such as sonnet 211 in his *Rime Sparse*, Petrarch openly reveals the "enduring *agon*"[193] that lies at the heart of their relationship. Writing on the eleventh anniversary of his first encounter with Laura, Petrarch confesses: "One thousand three hundred twenty seven, exactly at the first hour of the sixth day of April, I entered the labyrinth, nor do I see where I may get out of it."[194] Petrarch's employment of the liturgical year—evoking the anniversaries of

[193] I borrow this phrase from Roman Coles. See: Roman Coles. *Beyond Gated Politics*. Reflections for the Possibility of Democracy. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004, xiv.
[194] Op. cit. The *Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*, p. 1666.

Christ's death and resurrection—and his reference to his love of Laura as a labyrinth, an endless and torturous maze of amorous wanderings, clearly highlights the frustration, and indeed the insecurity, that colored his attempts to secure spiritual salvation through self-analysis. As Petrarch admits, with a heavy heart, in sonnet 189, he could never be sure that his love of Laura would lead him to the right "port":

> Passa la nave mia colma d'oblio / per aspro mare, a mezza notte il verno, / enfra Scilla et Caribdi; et al governo / siede 'l signore, anzi 'l nimico mio.
>
> A ciascun remo un penser pronto et rio / che la tempesta e 'l fin par ch'abbi a scherno; / la vela rompe un vento humido eterno / di sospir', di speranze, et di desio.
>
> Pioggia di lagrimar, nebbia di sdegni / bagna et rallenta le già stanche sarte, / che son d'error con ignorantia attorto.
>
> Celansi i duo mei dolci usati segni; / morta fra l'onde è la ragion et l'arte, / tal ch'incomincio a desperar del porto.[195]

The moral, albeit metaphorical, dilemma presented here is a very real one for Petrarch. I have quoted the sonnet in its entirety because I think that it paints an accurate portrait of Petrarch's shifting, fragmented sense of self. Take, for example, the very first line of the sonnet: "*Passa la nave mia colma d'oblio / per aspro mare*." Forgetfulness (*colma d'oblio*) is a familiar sin in the work of St. Augustine; those who are "forgetful," at least in the spiritual sense, are those who have forgotten themselves and God. From the very first line, then, Petrarch is describing a self (his "*nave*," or soul) that is adrift in the sea of life, wounded and divided from itself and God. His "enemy," Love, spurs him on, but false hope and unrequited desire soon "break the sail" (*la vela rompe*). At the end of the sonnet, we meet Laura, whose conspicuous absence (*Celansi i duo mei dolci* [Laura's

[195] Francesco Petrarch. *Canzoniere*. Testo critico e introduzione di Gianfranco Contini. Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, s.p.a., 1964, Song 189 (CLXXXIX), lines 1-14, p. 245.

eyes] *usati segni*) leads the poet to despair of the possibility of reaching his true destination (*porto*).[196]

This theme of love's distance and its effects upon the self is put into even sharper relief in song 129 of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. Here, Petrarch speaks of the great distance, or "*lontananza*," that separates him from his beloved. The song, with its rustic descriptions of the shady valleys and solitary slopes of the Italian countryside, carries with it the semblance of an exterior journey, the journey of the lover back to Vaucluse; but as is made clear from the opening line—*Di pensier in pensier, di monte in monte*—the song's "exteriority" is meant only to serve as a mirror for the interior journey of the lover.[197] Canvassing the recesses of his mind, Petrarch reveals himself to be one who is dominated by the capricious, and, at times, maddening, power of love:

> Di pensier in pensier, di monte in monte / mi guida Amor, ch'ogni segnato calle / provo contrario a la tranquilla vita. / Se 'n solitaria piaggia rivo o fonte / se 'nfra duo poggi siede ombrosa valle, / ivi s'acqueta l'alma sbigottita ; / et come Amor l'envita / or ride or piange or teme or s'assecura, / e 'l volto, che lei segue ov'ella il mena, / si turba et rasserena et in un esser picciol tempo dura: / onde a la vista uom di tal vita esperto / diria : "Questo arde et di suo stato è incerto."
>
> Per alti monti et per selve aspre trovo / qualche riposo; ogni abitato loco / è nemico mortal degli occhi miei. / A ciascun passo nasce un penser novo / de la mia donna, che sovente in gioco / gira 'l tormento ch 'i' porto per lei; / et a pena vorrei / cangiar questo mio viver dolce amaro, / ch 'i' dico: "Forse anco ti serva Amore / ad un tempo migliore: /

[196] It is noteworthy that Petrarch does not specify the nature of his destination: is he referring to his final destination in Christian terms, as Dante was in *Paradiso*; or is "the port" simply a metaphor for the consummation of his earthly love for Laura? The inbuilt tension and ambiguity of the sonnet is, as I would argue, emblematic of Petrarch's own inner crisis and habitual uncertainty.
[197] Op cit. Giuseppe Mazzotta. *The Worlds of Petrarch*, p. 52.

> forse a te stesso vile, altrui se'caro": / et in questa trapasso sospirando: / "Or potrebbe esser ver ? or come ? or quando ?"[198]

Petrarch's mind is restless. Unable to control his thoughts under the dominion of Love, his mental states range from laughter and sadness, to fear, insecurity and utter confusion ("*ride or piange or teme or s'assecura…*"). Wherever Petrarch looks, he sees Laura's face alive "*ne l'acqua chiara et sopra l'erba verde, et nel troncon d'un faggio*." His only solace, it seems, comes from the shade of some solitary slope or valley.[199] But the "*ombrosa valle*," as Giuseppe Mazzotta rightly points out, represents only an illusion of consolation: "Shade is not the privation of light; *it is the hidden light*. In a way, it is as if the pure light of judgment were intolerable to him."[200]

The song's final stanza ends with a powerful image of the lover's fragmentation and interior distance from himself. Directing his attention—and the song itself—to Vaucluse, where Laura and his heart reside, Petrarch leaves us with these words: "*Canzone, oltra quell'alpe, / là dove il ciel è più sereno et lieto, / mi rivedrai sovr' un ruscel corrente / ove l'aura si sente / d'un fresco et odorfiero laureto; / ivi è 'l mio cor et quella che 'l m'invola: / qui veder poi l'imagine mia sola*."[201] Petrarch employs a familiar literary conceit to create a sense of disjunction between his self and the landscape. While the lover's interior journey, we are told initially, mirrors the exterior landscape of the Italian countryside, the song's end refers us to a place that lies "*oltra quell'alpe*," beyond

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[198] Op. cit. Francesco Petrarch. *Canzoniere*, Song 129 (CXXIX), S. 1 & 2, lines 1-26, p. 179.
[199] "*Se 'n solitaria piaggia rivo o fonte / se 'nfra duo poggi siede ombrosa valle, / ivi s'acqueta l'alma sbigottita*" (Ibid. S. 1, lines 4-6).
[200] Giuseppe Mazzotta. *The Worlds of Petrarch*, p. 52 [my emphasis]. Thus Petrarch writes: "*ma mentre tener fiso / posso al primo pensier la mente vaga, / et mirar lei et obliar me stesso, / sento Amor si da presso / che del suo proprio error l'alma s'appaga; / in tante parti et si belle la veggio / che se l'error durasse, altro non cheggio*" (Francesco Petrarch. *Canzoniere*, Song 129, S. 3, lines 33-39).
[201] Op. cit. Francesco Petrarch. *Canzoniere*, Song 129, S. 6, lines 66-72.

the present space of the poet.[202] "Here," in the Italian landscape, Petrarch tells us, "one can see only my image (*l'imagine mia sola*)."

A familiar motif in Petrarch's work, then, is this notion of a self that is divided from itself,[203] a self that is torn between what it loves and what it knows it *ought* to love. As Petrarch confesses in a letter to Giacomo Colonna, a close friend and bishop of the town of Lombez in Gascony, in 1336, "my wishes fluctuate and my desires conflict, and in their conflict they tear me apart. Thus does the outer man struggle with the inner…"[204] Even at a relatively early point in his literary career, Petrarch is deeply aware of what will prove to be a perennial tension in his life's work, namely, the task of reconciling his penchant for an inclusive classicism with the moral demands of his Christian faith.

Nowhere perhaps is this tension more clearly articulated, or more intimately analyzed, than in his *Secret*, a dialogue between Petrarch and, as may be surmised from the context, a personification of his Christian moral conscience in the form of St. Augustine. For the remainder of this section, I would like concentrate on Petrarch's *Secret* as a way to draw out more explicitly this inner tension and its relation to his enduring struggle with death and the experience of contingency.

In Book III of the *Secret*, Petrarch presents the reader with perhaps his most sustained and personal account of the tension that he felt between his love of Laura and the spiritual exigencies of his Christian faith. The dialogue opens on the third day of Petrarch's engagement with St. Augustine, and takes as its point of departure a familiar dilemma: "…you are still held in bondage, on your right hand and on your left," Petrarch

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[202] Op. cit. Giuseppe Mazzotta. *The Worlds of Petrarch*, p. 50.
[203] For an interesting parallel in the work of Augustine see: Augustine. *Confessions*, Book VIII Chapter VIII: "*tum in illa grandi rixa interioris domus meae…"*
[204] Op. cit. *Letters from Petrarch*. Selected and Translated by Morris Bishop. London: Indiana University Press, 1966, II 9. Quoted in: Nicholas Mann. *Petrarch*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 67.

has Augustine state, "by two strong chains...Love and glory."[205] This dilemma is compounded, as Augustine dismally concludes, by the fact that Petrarch refuses to acknowledge the sinful nature of his two adamantine chains, particularly the chain of love. Responding to Augustine's claim that a stubborn ignorance with respect to one's sinful nature is the climax of all evils, Petrarch retorts, "why in the world should I not think that the course which I indicated is right? No, I never have thought and I never shall think any truth more indisputable than that these two passions, which you cast at me as a reproach, are the very noblest of all."[206]

Petrarch's inner debate on the subject of his earthly attachment to Laura revolves around three points of contention, or "loves," as Augustine might refer to them: a) the nobility or virtue of the object of his love, b) the purity, or "manner," of his love for this object, and c) the implications of this love for his moral character. Of the veracity of the first of these contentions Petrarch speaks, at least initially, with the utmost conviction. He contrasts Laura, a being whom he considers to be of divine nature, with Thais and Livia, both of whom were merely mortal women: "she of whom you [Augustine] have set out to speak is a mind that has no care for things of earth, and burns only with the love of what is heavenly. In whose face, unless truth is an empty word, a certain divine loveliness shines out; whose character is the image and picture of perfect honor."[207] Petrarch goes on to note that in his love for Laura "there has never been anything dishonorable, never anything of the flesh, never anything that any man could blame unless it were its mere intensity."[208] Indeed, it was Laura, Petrarch admits, "who turned my youthful soul away

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[205] Op. cit. Francesco Petrarch. *Petrarch's Secret or The Soul's Conflict with Passion*, pp. 107-109.
[206] Ibid. p. 110
[207] Ibid. p. 114
[208] Ibid. p. 120

from all that was base, who drew me…by a grappling chain, and forced me to look upwards."[209]

Augustine, Petrarch's super ego, as it were, is not convinced by these arguments. He points out that Petrarch's love for Laura has served only to distract, or "detach," his heart from the true Creator. "By sitting at her [Laura's] feet," Augustine argues, "you [Petrarch] became so infatuated with the charm of her above as to studiously neglect everything else."[210] In other words, Augustine accuses Petrarch of the sin of idolatry, of placing Laura above God and thus "forgetting" the "true order" of things.[211] In the final stanza of sonnet 126 in his *Rime sparse*, Petrarch touches upon this inner conflict with painful honesty:

> How many times did I say to myself then, full of awe: "She was / surely born in Paradise!" / Her divine bearing and her face and her words and her sweet / smile had so laden me with forgetfulness / and so divided me from the true image, that I was sighing: / "How did I come here and when?" thinking I was in Heaven, not / there where I was. From then on this grass has pleased me so that / elsewhere I have no peace.[212]

The pathos of the passage lies precisely in Petrarch's inability, and indeed reluctance, to turn away from the entangling temptations of this world. His love of Laura is so profound, so all consuming, that despite its deleterious effects—a forgetfulness of both self and God—he is unable, and indeed unwilling, to tear himself away from his earthly attachments, from the green "grass" of worldly pleasures.

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[209] Ibid. p. 121
[210] Ibid. p. 123
[211] Ibid. p. 124
[212] Op. cit. Francesco Petrarch. *Rime sparse*, Sonnet 126, lines 32-39. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*, p. 1677.

Petrarch's only consolation, it would seem, is the *purity* of love that he feels for Laura, the honor and respect he bestows upon her as an "image of virtue."[213] By Augustine's lights, however, this love is nothing more than the burning hot flame of passion. As he suggests in a later passage, "Do you [Petrarch] mean to assert that if the same soul had been lodged in a body ill-formed and poor to look upon, you would have taken equal delight therein?"[214] Petrarch tries to exculpate himself by pointing to the fact that "the soul itself cannot be discerned." But were it possible for the soul to be visible to the naked eye, as Petrarch continues in his defense, he would surely have "loved its beauty even though its dwelling-place were poor."[215] Augustine is quick to point out that this view merely bolsters his initial claim, namely, that Petrarch's gaze is moved by the "bodily form"[216] alone, by the sensuous and material passions of this world. Consider the following passage—telling in its similarity to the conflict that Petrarch describes in "Dialogue the Third" of the *Secret*—taken from Petrarch's popular work, *De remediis utruisque fortune*:

> Joy: I am enjoying a passionate love.
>
> Reason: You will be overpowered by the snares of passion.
>
> Joy: I am burning with a passionate love.
>
> Reason: You are right to say burning. For love is a hidden fire, a pleasing wound, a sweet bitterness,[217] a delightful disease, an agreeable torture, a charming death.[218]

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[213] Cf. the distinction that Petrarch draws between common and noble love in "Dialogue the Third," *Petrarch's Secret or The Soul's Conflict with Passion*, pp. 110-111.
[214] Ibid. p. 125
[215] Ibid. p. 126
[216] Ibid. p. 126
[217] Petrarch often encapsulates his inner struggle in oxymorons, such as "a sweet bitterness." Recall, for example, Petrarch's earlier use of "*dolce amaro*" in *Canzoniere*, Song 129, line 21 (see above: p. 85).
[218] Francesco Petrarch. *De remediis utriusque fortune*, I 69. Quoted in: Nicholas Mann. *Petrarch*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 77.

Joy and Reason, Petrarch and Augustine, Will and Intellect seem to be at odds with one another. Once again we see, although never as explicitly as we do in St. Augustine's writings, the fundamental role of the will in Petrarch's moral life. It is the will, or desire (joy), that relates thinking to action, and it is the will, as Petrarch's criticism of Aristotle's *Ethics* in *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* seems to suggest,[219] that must be the central point of focus for those seeking to live an ethical life.

What emerges from Petrarch's introspective account in the *Secret* is just how deeply divided he is between the forces of passion (the will) and the strictures of reason (the intellect). On the one hand, his will tells him that there is nothing dishonorable about his love for Laura. Indeed, it is his love for Laura, Petrarch believes, that "first taught [him] how to escape the vulgar crowd."[220] On the other hand, his reason tells him that it is his pathological love of Laura that has facilitated his flight from God, that has prompted him to choose "the left-hand path," the "more broad and easy" path, over the "steep and narrow" path that leads back home to God.[221] Recall, Augustine says, "what you were when that plague [your love of Laura] seized upon you soul; how suddenly you fell to bemoaning, and came to such a pitch of wretchedness that you felt a morbid pleasure in feeding on tears and sighs."[222]

The only remedy, Augustine suggests, is to break away from the weight of one's passions, to "ready the soul," as he says, so that it may take flight. Near the end of the third dialogue, Augustine thus implores Petrarch to "sever your soul from that which

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[219] Cf. Francesco Petrarch. *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*. Referenced in: *Francesco Petrarca Invectives*. Edited and Translated by David Marsh. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003, pp. 315-321.
[220] Op. cit. Francesco Petrarch. *Petrarch's Secret or The Soul's Conflict with Passion*, p. 122.
[221] Ibid. p. 129. See also: Francesco Petrarch. *Letter to Dionisio da Borgo San Sepolero*. The Ascent of Mount Ventoux. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*, pp. 1668-1669.
[222] Ibid. p. 133

weighs it down and go away without hope of return. You will discover then, but not before, what absence is able to do for the soul's healing."[223] There are two important concepts contained within this injunction: a) the utility of solitude and b) the imperative of having the ethical courage to "make a leap," so to speak, in the face of uncertainty. The latter of the two concepts evokes the familiar maxim of *Fides quaerens intellectum*. The former, however, is slightly more complicated in origin and must be considered in tandem with sonnet 35 in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*.

> Solo et pensoso i più deserti campi / vo mesurando a passi tardi et lenti, / et gli occhi porto per fuggire intenti / ove vestigio human l'arena stampi.
> Altro schermo non trovo che mi scampi / dal manifesto accorger de le genti, / perchè negli altri d'allegrezza spenti / di fuor si legge com'io dentro avampi: /
> si ch'io mi credo omai che monti et piagge / et fumi et selve sappian di che tempre / sia la mia vita, ch'è celata altrui. / Ma pur si aspre vie nè si selvagge / cercar no so ch'Amor non venga sempre / ragionando con meco, et io co llui.[224]

"*Solo et pensoso*." In arguably one of his most moving and revealing sonnets, Petrarch tells us that he often seeks solitude as a way to center his many, and at times contradictory, thoughts about love. As the opening stanza suggests, Petrarch's aim is not merely to withdraw into the recesses of a solitary landscape, but to sink deep within himself so that he may avoid the stultifying gaze of society. "*Ove vestigio human l'arena stampi*," Petrarch admits, he will promptly flee (*fuggire*) so as to preserve the sanctity and authenticity of his own interiority. Mazzotta, in his compelling analysis of the sonnet, makes a point of noting that beneath the apparent serenity of the act of solitude,

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[223] Ibid. p. 143
[224] Francesco Petrarch. *Canzoniere*, Sonnet 35 (XXXV), p. 49.

Petrarch's "avoidance of others as a preamble to reaching the depths of [himself]…gives rise to a number of crucial questions which steadily engage [his] attention."[225]

These "crucial questions," I would submit, must be understood within the context of Petrarch's inner debate in the third dialogue of the *Secret*. Counseling Petrarch against the dangers of fleeing into a state of solitude without first delivering the soul from its earthly shackles, Augustine states: "if your soul is neither cured nor made ready, this change and frequent moving from place to place will only stir up its grief…In whatever place you are, to whatever side you turn, you will behold the face, you will hear the voice of her whom you have left."[226] That such a counsel of prudence comes from Augustine, Petrarch's moral conscience, should not be overlooked. Consider the ultimate effects of Petrarch's solitary retreat as he describes them in sonnet 35. Initially, the flight to solitude appears to provide a measure of solace for Petrarch. His poetic flight into the countryside brings him into intimate contact with nature, so much so that the landscape itself reflects the temper of the poet's inner life: "*si ch'io mi credo omai che monti et piagge / et fiumi et selve sappian di che tempre / sia la mia vita, ch'è celata altrui*."[227] The integration between poet, or lover, and the mountains, shores, and rivers of the landscape is a familiar motif in Petrarch's work, particularly in his sonnets. But as Mazzotta observes, the integration between self and nature does not entail "a state of repose in the illusion of a regained unity between man and nature."[228] On the contrary, Petrarch's retreat inward brings only a deeper awareness of the conflicting passions that tear his soul asunder: "*Altro schermo non trovo che mi scampi / dal manifesto accorger de le genti, / perchè*

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[225] Op. cit. Giuseppe Mazzotta. *The World's of Petrarch*, p. 44.
[226] Op. cit. Francesco Petrarch. *Petrarch's Secret or The Soul's Conflict with Passion*, p. 143.
[227] Op. cit. Francesco Petrarch. *Canzoniere*, Sonnet 35, lines 9-11, p. 49.
[228] Op. cit. Giuseppe Mazzotta. *The Worlds of Petrarch*, p. 44.

negli altri d'allegrezza spenti / di fuor si legge com'io dentro avampi." Beneath the facade of a *solitudo* that confers order upon the self, Petrarch's journey within, as Augustine forewarns, stirs only grief.

Grief, strife, depression, and anxiety. These, then, are the emotions that Petrarch reveals in his most personal and intimate of moments. What is striking, in my view, is how often Petrarch relates these emotions to the experience of death. As the following passage from the final letter of his *Familiares* attests, the notion of life as a slow, protracted movement toward death cast a long shadow over Petrarch's life and work: "We are all constantly dying," Petrarch writes, "I while writing these words, you while reading them, others while hearing or not hearing them…we are both dying, we all are dying, we are always dying."[229] Death, or rather, an acute sense of the inexorable passage of time, haunted Petrarch throughout his life. But it wasn't simply the *experience* of death that Petrarch so greatly feared; as his later writings confirm, it was the fortuitous nature of death, the apparent *contingency* of death that roused such great anxiety within his soul. Writing of the death of one his closest friends, Franceschino degli Albizzi, Petrarch offers us an impassioned account of the egregious deceptions of Lady Fortune:

> So often deceived, so often made sport of, we are unable to shake off the habit of hoping, and a credulity deceived a thousand times over, so great is the sweetness, albeit false, of happiness. How many times have I not said to myself, "O madman, O blind man forgetful of your condition, look here, take note, pay attention, stop, reflect, make a permanent, enduring, indelible sign. Remember this deception and that one. Never hope for anything. Believe nothing of Fortune: she is false, inconstant, capricious, and untrustworthy. First you knew her gentleness and charms, then later her severities. Already tried by this

[229] Op. cit. Francesco Petrarch. *Letters on Familiar Matters*, XXIV I, p. 312. For an interesting comparison on the question of death see: Op. cit. Plato. *Phaedo*, 67E.

> deadly monster, you need no teacher; therefore reflect upon your own examples and be aware of entering into any dealings with her.[230]

It is this notion of a "habit of hoping" that comes across so strongly in Petrarch's writings. In the third dialogue of Petrarch's *Secret*, Augustine tries to broach the possibility of Laura's untimely death. Petrarch's response is telling. "I know it," he replies, acknowledging the feasibility of such an occurrence, "But the stars in their courses will not so fight against me as to prevent the order of Nature by hastening her death like that. First came I into this world and I shall be first to depart."[231] Again and again one sees in Petrarch's thought a vain hope, despite sound evidence to the contrary, that events beneath the circle of the moon will play out according to some higher order or divine purpose.

That his life does not play out according to any such order naturally leads Petrarch to states of prolonged depression and despair:

> Every time that fortune pushes me back one step, I stand firm and courageous, recalling to myself that often before I have been struck in the same way and yet have come off the conqueror; if, after that, she presently deals me a sterner blow, I begin to stagger somewhat; if then she returns to the charge a third or fourth time, driven by force, I retreat, not hurriedly but step by step, to the citadel of Reason.
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> If fortune still lays siege to me there with all her troops, and if to reduce me to surrender, she piles up the sorrows of our human lot, the remembrance of my old miseries and the dread of evils yet to come, then, at last, hemmed in on all sides, seized with terror at these heaped up calamities, I bemoan my wretched fate, and feel rising in my very soul this bitter disdain of life.[232]

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[230] Ibid. VII 12, 1-4. Quoted in: Op cit. Robert E. Proctor. *Defining the Humanities*, p. 35.
[231] Op. cit. Francesco Petrarch. *Petrarch's Secret or The Soul's Conflict with Passion*, p. 115.
[232] Ibid. pp. 85-86

In one sense, Petrarch is able to overcome his melancholy through writing. It is noteworthy in this regard that the *Secret*, Petrarch's most sustained attempt at self-analysis, ends in a compromise of sorts: while acknowledging his worldly pursuits to be of a sinful nature, he nevertheless maintains the nobility of his life's ambitions and desires. In letter of 1339 this conviction comes out with vivid force:

> Although very intelligent and learned men may think otherwise, human exertion in one way or another can, in this prison of the body, merit and hope for this happiness of which I speak, but it cannot embrace and hold on to it. For it is in this stadium that our life's race is run; the end is where the exertion comes to rest. And we are not alone in this opinion; for what else does Cicero mean when he says that this life is a journey towards heaven? Nevertheless, this mortal life has, now and then, something similar to the eternal life, so that if it is not yet happy—for happiness is only that to which nothing can be added—this mortal life can still look down on human miseries far below it, and, standing below, it can still shine with the light from above.[233]

"For it is in this stadium," Petrarch tells us, "that our life's race is run." Perhaps no other statement more fully captures the radicality of Petrarch's intellectual program. It is here, we are told, *in this world*, that we must relentlessly seek out happiness; and it is here, in this "*mortal* life," that we may hope to approximate something of the life eternal. The contrast with Augustine is significant. In the first dialogue of the *Secret*, Augustine offers Petrarch the following advice: "What I had set out to do with you was to make clear that the first step in avoiding the distresses of this mortal life and raising the soul to higher things is to practice meditation on death and on man's misery; and that the second is to *have a vehement desire and purpose to rise*."[234] Considering the extent to which

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[233] Op. cit. Francesco Petrarch. *Epistulae familiares*, IV 2, 5-6. Quoted in: Robert E. Proctor. *Defining the Humanities*, p. 38.
[234] Op. cit. Francesco Petrarch. *Petrarch's Secret or The Soul's Conflict with Passion*, p. 14 [my emphasis].

Petrarch's vision of the moral life and that of Augustine's diverge, it is not surprising that Petrarch's approach to resolving his inner crisis differed drastically from that of his Christian (scholastic) contemporaries.

A Physician to his Soul

In a letter to Tommaso da Messina in 1340, Petrarch writes of the innate power of words to alleviate the pain and suffering of his soul:

> I could not easily say what certain familiar and well-known voices, not only conceived in my heart but brought out by my lips, with which I am wont to arouse my sleeping soul, do for me when I am alone, and how enjoyable it is, moreover, to go back, now and then, over my own writings, or those of others, and what a weight of bitter and heavy cares I feel lifted from my shoulders through this reading. At times I am helped all the more by my own writings, the more they fit my own languors—writings which the conscious hand of the listless physician applies to himself where he feels the pain to be. And this I could never do unless the words themselves caressed my ears, and moving me to read them over and over again by a certain innate power of sweetness, gradually sank down inside of me, and pierced me there with their hidden points.[235]

Reading, in addition to writing, provided Petrarch a measure of solace and defense against the fitful bouts of depression that he suffered throughout his life. Note, however, the nature of Petrarch's reading practice. Reading was not merely an aesthetic or pedagogical experience for Petrarch; it was a deeply personal and therapeutic event. Petrarch read so that the words themselves would sink down deep within him, healing

[235] Op. cit. Francesco Petrarch. *Epistulae familiares*, I 9, 11-12. Quoted in: Robert E. Proctor. *Defining the Humanities*, p. 43.

him, and piercing his "hidden points." Petrarch likens himself to a "listless physician" who applies the aroma of words to the deepest caverns of his soul.

To gauge the radicality of this practice, consider Petrarch's reading experience in relation to that of St. Augustine. Near the end of Book VIII of his *Confessions*, Augustine describes, in moving prose, the events leading up to his conversion to Christianity:

> I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when suddenly I heard the voice of a boy or a girl I know not which—coming from the neighboring house, chanting over and over again, 'Pick it up, read it; pick it up, read it'...So, damming the torrent of my tears, I got to my feet, for I could not but think that this was a divine command to open the Bible and read the first passage I should light upon…I snatched it up, opened it, and in silence read the paragraph on which my eyes first fell: 'Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof' [Romans 13:13]. I wanted to read no further, nor did I need to. For instantly, as the sentence ended, there was infused in my heart something like the light of full certainty and all the gloom of doubt vanished away.[236]

It is not the *words*, I would argue, but the *message* of St. Paul that "infused" Augustine's heart with the light of certainty; and it is through the internalization of this message that Augustine is then *drawn upward* toward God.

Petrarch's own "conversion experience," so to speak, is markedly different than that of Augustine. In his letter to Dionisio da Borgo San Sepolcro, known to posterity as "The Ascent of Mount Ventoux," Petrarch describes a journey that he took with his brother to the top of Mount Ventoux, a mountain not far from Petrarch's home in Vaucluse. Upon reaching the peak of the summit, Petrarch tells us that it occurred to him

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[236] Op. cit. Augustine. *Confessions*, Book VIII Chapter XII, p. 177.

to take out his copy of St. Augustine's *Confessions*, a book of small size, he remarks, but infinite in its wisdom and charm.[237] His eyes fix on a passage that reads: "And men go to admire the high mountains, the vast floods of the sea, the huge streams of the rivers, the circumference of the ocean, and the revolutions of the stars—and desert themselves."[238] Petrarch's reaction to these words is quite consequent. "In truth," he tells us,

> I was satisfied that I had seen enough of the mountain; *I turned my inward eye upon myself, and from that time not a syllable fell from my lips until we had reached the bottom again…I thought in silence* of the lack of good counsel in us mortals, who neglect what is noblest in ourselves, scatter our energies in all directions, and waste ourselves in a vain show, because *we look about us for what is to be found only within*.[239]

Instead of drawing Petrarch out of himself and toward the "invisible things of God," Augustine's words serve as a catalyst for a deep and personal inner experience. That is to say, it is not Augustine's *message*, but the sound and beauty of his *words* that facilitates Petrarch's retreat into the self. Recall what Petrarch claims at the end of the passage quoted above: "we look about us for what is to be found only within." The notion of there being "an ascent," a lifting of the self toward something *beyond it*, is wholly absent in Petrarch's thought. The "conversion" that he describes is one that takes place not in conjunction with God, or with "other beings," but in the intimacy and silence of his own self-presence.

It is instructive, in this regard, to compare Petrarch's words to those of Augustine in Book X of his *Confessions*. Reflecting on the difficulties of his own conversion,

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[237] Op. cit. Francesco Petrarch. "The Ascent of Mount Ventoux." *Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*, p. 1672.
[238] Francesco Petrarch. "Ascent of Mount Ventoux and Coronation Oration." Selections from the *Familiar Letters* and *Canzoniere*. Translated by Hans Nachod from *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* and Aldo Bernardo from *Readings in Western Civilization*, Vol. 5: The Renaissance.
[239] Op. cit. Francesco Petrarch. "The Ascent of Mount Ventoux." *Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*, p. 1672 [my emphasis].

Augustine confesses to God: "I have learned to love you late! You were within me, and I was in the world outside myself. I searched for you outside myself and, disfigured as I was, I fell upon the lovely things of your creation. You were within me, but I was not with you."[240] It is tempting to read this passage in a post-Anselmian light, as one in which the autonomous subject expresses an intimate awareness of its own self-awakening and acquisition of knowledge. However, as I argued in Chapter two, Augustine's employment of the language of inwardness is intended to serve only as a medium of communication through which he could come into contact with reflections of the Divine image: by turning *inward*, Augustine was drawn *upward* toward God.[241]

Petrarch's reading practice, in contrast, was remarkably subjective in nature. Petrarch read not so that he might be drawn upward toward God, but so that he might apply the therapeutic *sound of words* to the wounds of his inner self. In a letter to Boccaccio, Petrarch writes of the power of words, particular those of the great Latin writers, such as Virgil, Flaccus, Severinus, and Tullius, to penetrate the very depths of his soul. "[I read them] not once," Petrarch admits,

> but thousands of times, nor did I rush (*cucurri*) over but rather rested (*incubui*) upon them, and remained in them with all the powers of my mind…These writings have entered into me so intimately, and are fixed not only in my memory but also in the marrow of my bones, and have so become one with my mind (*ingenium*), that even if I were never to read them again, they would remain embedded in me, having set their roots in the deepest part of my soul.[242]

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[240] Op. cit. Augustine. *Confessions*, Book X Chapter 27, p. 231.
[241] See pp. 37-40 of this essay. See also: Op. cit. Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self*, p. 134
[242] Op. cit. Francesco Petrarch. *Letters on Familiar Matters*, XXII 2, p. 212. I go with Proctor's translation here. Please see: Op. cit. Robert E. Proctor. *Defining the Humanities*, p. 44.

Reading the Latin writers was an act of *redemption* for Petrarch: by internalizing the sounds and beauty of classical Latin, Petrarch was able to heal the innermost maladies of his soul without recourse to God, faith or the prospect of divine grace.

The consolatory effect of classical Latin was, however, only partially responsible for Petrarch's love and study of the ancients. As he reveals in a letter to Giovanni Colonna in the late 1330s, he also found moral inspiration in the *exempla* of their lives. Thus he states in his "Defense of Quotations":

> …if anyone asks why I so abound with quotations and seem to dwell on them so lovingly, I can merely reply that I think my reader's taste is like mine. Nothing moves me so much as the quoted maxims of great men. I like to rise above myself, to test my mind to see if it contains anything solid or lofty, or stout and firm against ill-fortune, or to find if my mind had been lying to me about itself. And there is no better way of doing this except by direct experience, the surest mistress—than by comparing one's mind with those it would most like to resemble.[243]

"Nothing moves me so much as the quoted maxims of great men." In addition to the therapeutic qualities of classical Latin, Petrarch tells us that he often turned to the power of historical examples to garner courage in the face of his life's many adversities. When Petrarch looked to the ancients he was thus engaging in a form of "moral research," as Eugenio Garin terms it,[244] in order to test the fortitude of his character and explore the possibilities of constructive change within himself.

Examples within Petrarch's work regarding the power of historical examples are quite common.[245] Perhaps the clearest expression of Petrarch's moral relationship to the

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[243] Francesco Petrarch. *Letters from Petrarch*. Letters on Familiar Matters. Selected and Translated by Morris Bishop, "Defense of Quotations." VI 4, p. 68.
[244] Op. cit. Robert E. Proctor. *Defining the Humanities*, p 48 and p. 215.
[245] See, *inter alia*: Op. cit. Francesco Petrarch. *Letters from Petrarch*, VI 4; Op. cit. Francesco Petrarch. *Petrarch's Secret or The Soul's Conflict with Passion*, III, p. 156.

ancients, particularly for the purposes of identifying this notion of a "personal self" that runs throughout much of his earlier writings, appears in his letter to Giovanni Colonna. Near the end of the letter, Petrarch writes of the great Roman general, Caius Marius, who underwent surgery to remove a varicose vein without being tied down, as was generally the custom. "Before Marius," Petrarch observes,

> it was customary for everyone who underwent surgery to be tied down, for as it was believed that pain in the body could not be overcome by strength in the soul, people sought the aid of bonds. Marius was the first to be cut without being bound, but after him many were. Why, I ask, unless because the example of such a brave and steadfast man encouraged other souls to imitate him, and, to use the words of his compatriot, his authority had power (*valuit autoritas*)?[246]

By comparing his soul to that of Marius, Petrarch was able to calibrate the fortitude of his own character with the "strength of soul" that Marius displayed during his operation. Marius thus becomes for Petrarch not merely a model of historical significance, but a source of moral and spiritual inspiration. It is noteworthy, in this regard, that Petrarch renders the comparison between himself and Marius in terms of inner dispositions, or "souls." That is to say, the *external* actions of Marius do not bear significantly, if at all, on Petrarch's reading of his life nor on his decision not to be strapped down during his surgery. What is of concern for Petrarch is Marius' *inner* character, the strength of his soul to overcome the pain in his body.

That Petrarch is able to use the example of Marius in this way depends upon one fundamental, albeit implicit, assumption: the existence of a "unique and autonomous self which he could objectify, act upon, and compare to other such autonomous selves" across

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[246] Op cit. Francesco Petrarch. *Letters from Petrarch*, VI 4. Quoted in: Op. cit. Robert E. Proctor. *Defining the Humanities*, p. 47.

time.[247] In other words, Petrarch's ability to find consolation in the *exempla* of ancient heroes required that he experience his own being as a personal center of thought and feeling which could be objectified and related to other such personal selves across the spectrum of history.[248] That the ancients themselves did not share this reading of selfhood or individual agency can be evinced by looking at Cicero's own account of Marius in his *Tusculan Disputations*. Near the end of Book II, Cicero speaks of Marius as a man (*vir*) who exemplified the attributes of a true Roman:

> But Caius Marius, a man from the countryside, yet truly a man (*rusticanus vir, sed plane vir*), refused to be bound, as I said, when he was cut. Nor is it said that anyone before Marius was cut unbound. Why then were others after him? His authority had power (*Vlauit auctoritas*). Do you not therefore see that harm (*malum*) is a question of opinion (*opinio*), not of nature? And yet Marius himself showed that the bite of pain was sharp, for he did not offer the other leg. In this way he bore his pain as a man (*vir*), and as a human being (*homo*) did not want to bear greater pain unless it were necessary. Everything, therefore, lies in this, that you master yourself. But I have shown now what self-mastery is. And this reflection (*cogitatio*) on what most befits patience, fortitude, and greatness of soul, not only curbs the soul, but even, in a certain way makes the pain milder.[249]

Cicero's account of Marius differs sharply from that of Petrarch. The portrait that Cicero presents is not one of an *individual* imbued with an inner "strength of soul" (*animi robor*), as Petrarch recounts, but of a *man* who rose to exemplify the virtues of *vir* and *homo*. As Robert E. Proctor observes, Cicero's descriptions of Marius "take our thoughts away from Marius and lead us to the contemplation of the universal, transpersonal virtues—patience, fortitude, and greatness of soul. Petrarch, on the other hand, tells the

[247] Ibid. p. 49
[248] Ibid. p. 49
[249] Marcus Tullius Cicero. *Tusculan Disputations*, 22 53. Quoted in: Ibid. p. 50

Marius story in such a way that our gaze rests firmly on Marius."[250] Whereas in Petrarch's account we are instructed to consider the significance of Marius' *inner character*, Cicero enjoins us to look at Marius' *actions* and their relation to what it meant to be an individual in the social network of ancient Rome.

Petrarch's account of Marius thus discloses a profoundly novel development in the history of western thought. We moderns take it for granted that we are possessive of an *inner* dimension, an autonomous and *personal* self which may be objectified and compared to other such selves across time. As Charles Taylor writes in his *Sources of the Self*, this notion of an interior, "personal" self is a defining characteristic of modern conceptions of identity:

> Our modern notion of the self is related to, one might say constituted by, a certain sense (or perhaps a family of senses) of inwardness…We think of our thoughts, ideas, or feelings as being 'within' us, while the objects in the world which these mental states bear on are 'without'. The unconscious is for us within, and we think of the depths of the unsaid, the unsayable, the powerful inchoate feelings and affinities and fears which dispute with us the control of our lives, as inner. We are creatures with inner depths; with partly unexplored and dark interiors.[251]

What I hope emerges from Petrarch's account of Marius is just how strikingly unprecedented Petrarch's conception of personal identity is when framed against the very tradition he sought to emulate. For Petrarch, the ancient heroes had power (*valuit autoritas*) precisely because he conferred upon them an inner dimension to which he could relate: Marius displayed a "strength of soul," as Petrarch writes in his letter to Giovanni Colonna, whose bravery and steadfastness encouraged other souls to imitate his

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[250] Ibid. p. 51
[251] Op. cit. Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self*, p. 111.

example. Based on Cicero's account, however, we have seen that Marius did not have an inner dimension of this sort. His ability to withstand the pain of surgery without being strapped down was more a function of his social and moral obligations to Roman society than it was a function of his "inner strength." That Petrarch failed to see this intimate connection between the individual and society in classical antiquity was certainly a product of his own life and times in 14th century Italy; but it is precisely the subjective and personal nature of this normative reevaluation of the lives of the ancient heroes that marks Petrarch as a forefather of the modern world. As Nicholas Mann, noted British cultural historian and scholar of Petrarch, observes:

> …in his [Petrarch's] perception of himself, in his acute awareness of his inner motives, and in his never-ceasing efforts to construct an image of himself for posterity, we might consider him the first modern man. That image must be recaptured from the whole range of his writings, but as he recedes into the tree-lined fourteenth-century landscape of Simone Martini's miniature, pen in hand, he lingers in the mind's eye incarnate in that Virgilian vision: as poet, as scholar-exegete, and as his own several heroes.[252]

In conclusion, we may say that Petrarch presents to his readers a remarkably complex and, at times, contradictory portrait of personal identity. On the one hand, Petrarch expounds a conception of the self that is fragmented, divided from itself and God, and torn between the forces of passion and the strictures of reason. On the other hand, Petrarch also presents the self as the source of all values and objectivity, as the autonomous and responsible subject of his life's decisions and historical comparisons.[253] My aim in this chapter has been to articulate the nature of these contradictions in a way that highlights the various inner dimensions that underlie Petrarch's composite notion of

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[252] Op. cit. Nicholas Mann. *Petrarch*, p. 113.
[253] Op. cit. Giuseppe Mazzotta. *The Worlds of Petrarch*, p. 83.

personal identity; for it is precisely “in between” these points of inner tension that Petrarch negotiates between his own subjective existence and the moral exigencies of his Christian faith.

Conclusion: Love, Knowledge and *Periagōgē*

"Cerco del viver mio novo consiglio,
et veggio 'l meglio, et al peggior m'appiglio."

–Petrarch: *Canzoniere*, Sonnet 264

"I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate…I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me."

–Augustine: *Confessions*; Quoted from *Rom*. 7:15, 18-20

Having examined the works of Augustine and Petrarch for reflections of their views on personal identity, we are now better equipped to see where and how their conceptions of the human person diverge.

As was discussed in chapter two, Augustine's portrait of personal identity centers on the fragility and perversity of the human will. We are proud and lustful creatures, as Augustine argues in *On Free Choice of the Will*, who have "turned away" from the higher and more enduring fruits of love, justice and truth in favor of the lower pleasures of the body. Our wills are broken and our "loves," or desires, are disordered. Dissatisfied with our earthly condition, we seek to detach ourselves from the changeless order that God has created; we seek, in Augustine's words, to indulge in a perverse form of exaltation motivated by pride and willful ignorance. "This then is the original evil," as Augustine laments in *City of God*: "man regards himself as his own light, and turns away from that light which would make man himself a light if he would set his heart on it."[254]

The result of this "original evil" is a corrosion of the human soul. Our "loves" fasten upon the things of *this* world and in so doing we become enthralled with the goods

[254] Op. cit. Augustine. *City of God*, Book XIV Chapter 13, p. 573.

of a lower order which, "when compared to the higher one, is death."[255] Recall, by way of example, Augustine's own description of his inner struggle in Book VIII of his *Confessions*:

> …I was held fast, not in fetters clamped upon by another, but by my own will, which had the strength of iron chains. The enemy held my will in his power and from it he made a chain and shackled me. For my will was perverse and lust had grown from it, and when I gave in to lust habit was born, and when I did not resist the habit it became a necessity. These were the links which together formed what I have called my chain, and it held me fast in the duress of servitude. But the new will which had come to life in me and made me wish to serve you freely and enjoy you, my God, who are our only certain joy, was not yet strong enough to overcome the old, hardened as it was by the passage of time. So these two wills within me, one old, one new, one the servant of the flesh, the other of the spirit, were in conflict and between them they tore my soul apart.[256]

The perversity of the human will forms an iron chain which links lust to habit, and habit to pure necessity. For Augustine, this chain shackles his soul, binding him *by necessity* to the worldly pleasures of the flesh. Indeed, despite knowing with his mind what he *ought* to do, Augustine's will is so divided that he is utterly incapable of acting upon the commands that reason prescribes.

Augustine's own experience of his earthly predicament thus leads him to a conception of the human person that ultimately relies upon the grace of God for its restoration: *we are inherently broken and love imperfectly, and yet somehow we are made whole by that which loves us*. As Augustine states in a famous passage, "…you [God] made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you."[257]

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[255] Op. cit. Augustine. *On Free Choice of the Will*, Book II Chapter 19, p. 82.
[256] Op. cit. Augustine. *Confessions*, Book VIII Chapter 5, p. 164.
[257] Ibid. Book I Chapter I, p. 21

Petrarch's conception of personal identity, while retaining Augustine's representation of the will as inherently broken and divided from both itself and God, differs in a number of respects from that of St. Augustine. Consider the contrast between the following two passages:

> A noble mind (*generosus animus*) can nowhere rest (*acquiescere*) except in God, where our end lies, *or* in itself and its secret cares or in some soul joined to it by great likeness.[258]
>
> You [God] made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you.[259]

Whereas Augustine refers the soul to the "invisible things of God," Petrarch succeeds in making his own intensive self the *telos* of his mind's journey to find inner peace.[260] Whereas Augustine is always calling us to direct our attention *within* in order to be drawn *without* toward God, Petrarch's creative energies are almost uniformly directed to dissecting poetically the various inner dimensions that underlie his composite notion of self. Recall, for example, Petrarch's imagined dialogue between Joy and Reason in his *De remediis utruisque fortune*:

> Joy: I am enjoying a passionate love.
>
> Reason: You will be overpowered by the snares of passion.
>
> Joy: I am burning with a passionate love.
>
> Reason: You are right to say burning. *For love is a hidden fire, a pleasing wound, a sweet bitterness, a delightful disease, an agreeable torture, a charming death* [my emphasis].[261]

"Love is…a pleasing wound, a sweet bitterness, a delightful disease…" Despite the frustration and pain that marks Petrarch's "passionate love" for Laura, one could also

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[258] Francesco Petrarch. *De vita solitaria*, I, Prose 296. Quoted in: Op. cit. F.E. Cranz. *The Reorientation of Western Thought c. 1100 A.D.*, p. 13.
[259] Op. cit. Augustine. *Confessions*, Book I Chapter I, p. 21.
[260] Op. cit. F.E. Cranz. *The Reorientation of Western Thought c. 1100 A.D.*, p. 13.
[261] Op. cit. Francesco Petrarch. *De remediis utriusque fortune*, I 69. Quoted in: Nicholas Mann. *Petrarch*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 77.

argue that he derives pleasure from describing poetically this suffering. That is to say, Petrarch's "love" of Laura is also a form of narcissism whereby he dissects poetically his experience of the love and *discovers*, in the process, his own self-identity.

Petrarch's conception of personal identity is thus ultimately *intensive* in its orientation, as that which turns inward in order to "create" or "invent" a poetic individuality. In contrast to Augustine, this process of self-analysis does not lead Petrarch to God, nor does it lead him to a conjunctive vision of intelligible beings; instead, Petrarch's creative and emotional energies were spent trying to understand the significance of his life *here*, in the "stadium" of this world. As Petrarch writes in a letter of 1339:

> For it is in this stadium that our life's race is run; the end is where the exertion comes to rest. And we are not alone in this opinion; for what else does Cicero mean when he says that this life is a journey towards heaven? Nevertheless, this mortal life has, now and then, something similar to the eternal life, so that if it is not yet happy—for happiness is only that to which nothing can be added—this mortal life can still look down on human miseries far below it, and, standing below, it can still shine with the light from above.[262]

[262] Op. cit. Francesco Petrarch. *Epistulae familiares*, IV 2, 5-6. Quoted in: Robert E. Proctor. *Defining the Humanities*, p. 38.

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