Putting On Virtue

The Legacy of the Splendid Vices

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as good, from something like *akrasia* to continence to temperance, from acting virtuously only when it is pleasant to taking pleasure only in virtuous action. This transformation takes place not through any mechanical repetition of action types but rather through a reflectively and affectively engaged process in which the learner repeatedly seeks to approximate an ideal that is itself progressively more fully understood. But the goal of true virtue seems to recede from grasp once more when Aristotle considers the difference between those who possess a reflective understanding of their commitment to acting for virtue's own sake and those who do not. So what from one stage appears as a full embodiment of virtue may at a more mature stage appear only preliminary and thus as semblance. Moreover, we have seen that there is reason, even on Aristotle's own terms, to question his characterization of magnanimity as an adornment of perfect virtue, to worry that magnanimity itself might be a different, and more intractable, semblance of virtue. For what first appears as a virtue concerned with truthfulness and accurate self-perception, and specifically with truthful acknowledgment of one's own worthiness of honor, emerges instead as a falsifying grasp at godlike self-sufficiency. And even though the consciousness of one's own moral greatness is not intrinsically problematic, the fact that the magnanimous "man" pretends to self-sufficiency strongly suggests that the magnanimous man is indeed preoccupied with his own moral greatness, with himself as moral actor, in a way that competes with his commitment to virtuous activity for its own sake.

Augustine 2

Disordered Loves and the Problem of Pride

While for Aristotle there is a logical conundrum hovering over the process of habituation, this in no way renders suspect either acquired virtue or the process of acquiring it. For Augustine the situation is more complicated. Aristotle asks how we can act justly or temperately unless we are already just or temperate, and the solution lies in distinguishing between performing actions characteristic of the virtuous and performing those actions *in the way* the virtuous perform them, that is, knowing what they are doing, choosing so to act, choosing to act in such a way for its own sake, and doing so out of a settled character. Rather than seeing the semblance of virtue as a stage in the ordinary process of acquiring virtue, or even as that process gone somehow awry, for Augustine the distinction is made to bear significantly more weight, since he uses it to distinguish between two cities, one constituted by those united by their love of God and one composed of those who love self. Choosing virtue for its own sake is no longer simply a shorthand for speaking of acting (reflectively) for the reasons characteristic of the virtuous (i.e., *not* for the sake of honor, out of ignorance, as a result of accidental features of personality or context). For Augustine, love of God and love of virtue are interdefined in such a way that those who fail to love God are unable truly to choose virtuous actions for their own sake. Habituation simply anchors them more deeply in pride and self-love.

Augustine's position on pagan virtue is far from clear. Notorious as he is for having declared the pagan virtues to be *splendida vitia,* glittering vices, he never actually said so.[1] He did deny that pagans could possess true virtue, but his attitude toward pagan virtue was more ambivalent and ambiguous than definitive, in contrast to Reformation and early

modern appropriations of his critique. As John Rist notes, Augustine "seems to wish to assert that, if a choice must be made, such acts must be classed as vices rather than virtues, but to recoil from condemning them outright as vicious."[2] While such Augustinian leitmotifs as suspicion of the splendid vices and the demand for pure love for God intensified in the early modern period, Augustine's reconceived eudaimonism, his understanding of virtue as acquired through mimesis, and his sense of the encounter with grace in beauty were sustained only rarely. In part 2 of this book I shall argue, however, that in Erasmus and the early Jesuit theatrical tradition we do encounter a similar conception of Christian virtue as simultaneously actively achieved and given wholly by grace. Here virtue is understood as acquired through the Christian's imitative act, but only as these efforts are inspired by the beauty of the example of Christ and those already captured by the power of Christ's example, the saints.

Our first task in this chapter will therefore be to try to sort through Augustine's critique of pagan virtue. In what sense does pagan virtue constitute a mere semblance of virtue? Does Augustine's critique encompass a critique of habituation as the path to virtue? Or can acting the part of virtue, imitating the actions of the virtuous, lead Christians from semblance to true virtue, even if it does not do so for pagans? "Virtuous" pagans fall short of true virtue because their actions fail to be directed to their true final end. Even if pagans can make progress in virtue, bringing their affections into harmony with reason and directing their actions toward the common good, their actions are not truly virtuous since they are not directed to God. Moreover, Augustine suspects that virtuous pagans can never really succeed in acting even for virtue's own sake, for goods internal to virtue; even the most fully developed pagan virtue is actually directed toward the self. Thus, pagans are convicted of the semblance of self-direction—of failing to direct their actions to their true final end and instead of setting up themselves and their own self-image as that for the sake of which they act. Augustine concedes, though, that it is not solely pagans who can be convicted of self-direction. Those within the church, too, are often guilty of "hypocrisy," of acting in apparently virtuous ways for their own sake rather than for God's sake.

While pagan virtue remains mere semblance because of its failure to direct action toward its proper last end, this does not mean that Augustine rejects pagan eudaimonism as such. I therefore briefly take up the vexed question of the nature of Augustine's own eudaimonism and of the ways

in which it does and does not fundamentally redefine what is meant within ancient ethics by "final end," "happiness," and "virtue" itself. What emerges as the heart of Christian virtue is a willingness to be dependent on God and to give up all striving for self-sufficiency, since this aspiration is for Augustine the heart of pagan misdirection. Dependency does not imply passivity, however; for Augustine, Christian virtue is active insofar as it is fundamentally responsive, responsive to the grace that converts us from love of self to love of God.

Once we have discussed the semblances of virtue criticized by Augustine, the balance of our discussion will unpack a bit more fully what for Augustine constitutes true virtue and consider whether acting the part of virtue can conduce to virtue. One aspect of this is a consideration of the theatricality of virtue in the context of Augustine's critique of the theater. Augustine's critique is not directed against *mimesis* as such. The fundamental problem with theater is simply that it offers bad models for imitation. This in fact underscores the centrality of imitation within the moral life. Because we are transformed by the models we find attractive, insofar as we are drawn to imitate these models, it is vitally important that our attention be directed toward models of true goodness.

For Augustine there is indeed room for habituation in Christian virtue, but talk of habituation and human striving must go hand in hand with talk of conversion. True virtue, insists Augustine, requires "singleness of heart"—a pure intention, directed solely to God. In this life, Christian virtue remains imperfect, embattled, our loves divided. It is grace that converts us, that turns us from self to God by confronting us with divine beauty so irresistible that we cannot but fall in love with it—the beauty of God in Christ. Having fallen in love, we want naturally to draw closer to our beloved and seek to do so through imitation, since like assimilates to like. Habituation in Christian virtue is thus much more than the imitation of exemplars of human virtue, though it is also this. Made in the image of God, but having lost through sin our likeness to God, we are restored through mimesis of Christ. Christian imitation never attempts to become independent of its exemplar, to achieve self-sufficient virtue. Rather, mimesis unites copy with exemplar or, better, reunites copy with exemplar, restoring us to the God from whom we came. Ironically, what for Augustine constitutes true virtue might from the perspective of pagan, particularly Stoic, ethics itself be viewed as a semblance of virtue, in that the final good becomes something we must finally receive from God rather than achieving through our own action.

Augustine's defense of Christian virtue as true virtue rests on the fact that we are responsive to grace rather than passive in the face of grace; our own agency, striving to imitate exemplars of virtue, remains central, and our final good, enjoyment of God, is possible only through our own active involvement.

Pagan *Superbia*

One of the most important discussions of pagan virtue comes in *City of God,* book V, where Augustine concedes that pagans can certainly develop in virtue insofar as they move from the pursuit of *dominium,* driven by the desire to impose their own will on others, to the pursuit of glory and honor. Among those who pursue glory, there is a distinction to be made among those who seek praise from the masses, those who seek praise from the prominent, and those who seek praise only from the virtuous. The latter must shift from pursuing glory and honor by whatever means available to pursuing them only through virtuous, honorable means.[3] Those who do so have a certain claim to being called virtuous, and indeed Augustine speaks at length about virtuous Romans, and even holds these up as examples for Christians (CD V 17, 205). Yet despite making these distinctions and holding up these examples, Augustine also insists that "no one can have true virtue without true piety, that is without the true worship of the true God" (CD V 19, 213).

Augustine takes from the Platonists the notion that virtue seeks proper order—in the soul, and ultimately also in the community. But for Augustine, pagan "virtue" represents a fundamental perversion of right order, insofar as it fails to recognize that all things should be ordered to God, since nothing but God has value in and of itself.[4] Pagans can achieve a sort of subsidiary order in the soul, insofar as they succeed in bringing the irrational desires under the governance of reason. This order in turn allows virtuous pagans effectively to pursue the end of earthly peace, order on the communal level. Augustine singles out for his highest praise those Romans, like Regulus, who sacrificed themselves for the sake of the common good (CD I 24, 35). As Robert Markus points out, despite the fact that Augustine speaks of Rome as an outsider, his "tone is often unmistakably and authentically Roman, and full of legitimate pride in the stock *exempla* of Roman virtue."[5] The importance of this can be seen in the fact that both earthly and heavenly cities are concerned with the

common good. Earthly peace is made use of by the "Heavenly City in her pilgrimage here on earth," which, like the earthly city, "defends and seeks the compromise between human wills in respect of the provisions relevant to the mortal nature of man" (CD XIX 17, 878). However, from a more comprehensive perspective the "order" achieved by pagan virtue is actually disorder, since it is not placed in the service of God: "The fact is that the soul may appear to rule the body and the reason to govern the vicious elements in the most praiseworthy fashion; and yet if the soul and reason do not serve God as God himself has commanded that he should be served, then they do not in any way exercise the right kind of rule over the body and the vicious propensities" (CD XIX 25, 891). This might suggest that pagans can be virtuous at a first-order level, insofar as they achieve this order in the soul and pursue virtue for its own sake. At a second-order level, though, that is, when asked, "Why act virtuously?" they give a wrong answer, that is, an answer other than "To order all things to God."

Augustine's claim against pagan virtue is stronger than this, though, in that he claims that it is pervaded by *superbia,* pride, the fundamental disorder that orders all things to self; "although the virtues are reckoned by some people to be genuine and honourable when they are related only to themselves and are sought for no other end, even then they are puffed up and proud, and so are to be accounted vices rather than virtues" (CD XIX 25, 891). The passage in which Augustine first expresses his intention to write a treatise on the two cities is telling; he characterizes the first city as "considering common goods for the sake of heavenly society," while the second is charged with "placing common things under its own dominion for the sake of arrogant domination."[6] Already here, Augustine excludes the possibility that the common good can be pursued for its own sake.[7] It is not just that pagan virtue fails at a second-order level to be directed to God but also that it is intrinsically "puffed up and proud," alleges Augustine, that is, ordered to the agent's own self. Virtuous pagans are not guilty of outright hypocrisy, that is, of wanting to seem to be good persons without being so (CD V 19, 212). Moreover, as the example of Cato suggests, a pagan might be capable of pursuing virtue for the sake of his own good opinion of himself rather than for the sake of honor from others (CD V 13, 200). But even the best Romans, alleges Augustine, use virtue as a means to honor. They fail to recognize that honor and glory "must be the consequences of virtue not its antecedents"; honor and glory should be put to use in the promotion of virtue, not the reverse (CD V 12,

200). Cato appeared particularly virtuous in light of Sallust's statement that "the less he sought glory, the more it pursued him" (CD V 12, 199). Regulus appeared even more virtuous, given his self-sacrifice for the sake of the city. Both, though, continued to pursue honor and glory, even if a refined version arising from self-regard (CD V 20, 215). Even the best pagan virtue thus remains for Augustine an instance of superbia, pride, ordering all things to self.

Augustine's suspicion is that pagan virtue will always be corrupted in the way that we suspected was the case for Aristotle's magnanimous person—the virtuous pagan acts for the sake of his own sense of moral greatness; consciousness of his own moral worth infects his motivation. Disorder at the second-order level permeates the first-order level as well. The telltale sign of this is the magnanimous person's refusal of gratitude, his denial of dependency, his aspiration to godlike self-sufficiency. To the extent that pagan virtue is defined by the ideal of Aristotelian magnanimity, we might agree that pagan virtue is indeed ordered to self rather than simply not ordered to God. To accuse all of pagan virtue of the failings of Aristotelian magnanimity seems too quick, though. Think instead of a contrasting Aristotelian ideal, that of the nobly good person, who at the first-order level chooses virtue for its own sake and at the second-order level acts for the sake of the noble, that is, has a *reflective understanding* of virtuous actions as choice worthy for their own sake, regardless of cost or benefit to the agent. Here pagan virtue does not seem ordered to self in a problematic way, although it is true that it is not ordered to God. There is no self-absorption here that infects motivation at the first-order level.

Augustine's Eudaimonism

In order to make more sense of why Augustine convicts pagan virtue of superbia we must first understand what Augustine does *not* reject about pagan ethics—its eudaimonism. This is particularly important in that later thinkers have sometimes thought that any ethics structured around the pursuit of happiness could not fail to be ordered to self in a deeply problematic way, in effect, that any eudaimonist ethic gives rise only to a semblance of virtue.[8] This is not the issue for Augustine, whose ethic, like that of the Platonists, Stoics, and Epicureans alike, has a eudaimonist form.

As we have already noted in connection with Aristotle, acting for the

sake of happiness need not compromise the fact that the virtuous person chooses virtuous actions for the sake of those actions. If virtuous actions *constitute* happiness, they are choice worthy regardless of whether or not they benefit the agent in any ordinary way. It is the Stoics who draw out the implications of this in the most uncompromising fashion—the sage is happy even on the rack, happy even when the minimal *commonsense* conditions for happiness are utterly lacking. She is happy because her happiness is fully constituted by her virtue.

At the outset of eudaimonist reflection (of whatever camp), happiness is little more than a thin specification of our final end, that which all seek for its own sake and not for the sake of anything else. It is taken for granted by the ancients that I aim not for a good thing, state of affairs, or subjective state of consciousness, but rather I aim to be acting and living in one way rather than another. Happiness "is different from the other goods we aim at; it is not just another end, but the way we actively pursue those other ends, and so can be referred to as the use we make of those ends."[9] Even if there was consensus in the pagan world that our final end is happiness, and about these formal characteristics of happiness as our final end, there was plenty of disagreement over what happiness substantially consists in. Augustine, like the ancient pagans, assumes that the pressing task is to discern in what our happiness substantially consists; the fact that all we do is for the sake of happiness he takes for granted.

Perhaps the most important debate in ancient ethics was over the relation between virtue and happiness. Aristotle and the Stoics agreed, against unreflective common sense, that virtue was necessary to or constitutive of happiness in the ways we have already discussed, but the Stoics went further than Aristotle, arguing that virtue is not simply dominant over other goods but sufficient to happiness, such that no external goods are necessary to complete happiness. One way of beginning to situate Augustine's eudaimonism in relation to that of the ancients is to locate his position in this debate.[10] Augustine agrees with the Stoics that genuine happiness must be secure, immune from loss. It is this conviction that drives the Stoics to insist that virtue, as it alone (on their understanding) is solely up to the agent, must be a sufficient condition for happiness. But Augustine does not follow the Stoics in this inference. Neither does Augustine conclude with Aristotle that one can be happy through a confluence of virtue and good luck, since a happiness dependent on good luck would not be secure and would not thus be true happiness (CD XIX 4, 852). One simply cannot be completely happy, argues Augustine, in the

face of the evils of human life (CD XIX 4, 855). Rather, Augustine concludes that "eternal life is the Supreme Good" (CD XIX 4, 852)—eternal life, a life free of the ills and miseries of this life, secure in the possession of the goods that constitute happiness.

Even if Augustine's ethics share the eudaimonistic form of ancient pagan ethics, his characterization of the supreme good does redefine the boundaries of that eudaimonism. We will have more to say below about what should be understood by "eternal life," but if it is to be free of all the ills of age, disease, natural catastrophe, and death, as well as vice, then it should already be clear that it is not something recognizable to ancient ethical reflection as an end of human activity. For as we have just seen, the final end is for pagan ethicists a way of being and doing, a way of pursuing all other ends. Achieving my final good, living and doing well, is thus intrinsically a matter of the character of my own activity. "People do feel, then, that our final good cannot be something that other people could give us; it must be something we can achieve for ourselves. And so my final end involves my activity: it is not a thing or state of affairs that others could bring about for me."[11] We see here the tendency, most pronounced in the Stoics but visible in the Aristotelian ideal of magnanimity as well (and hardly surprising given a conception of the gods as self-sufficient and indifferent to relationship), to assume that if my final end must be constituted by *my* activity, achieving it requires a certain self-sufficiency or independence on my part. As we shall see, Augustine seeks to sustain the claim that our activity is in some sense constitutive of our final end while rejecting the accompanying assumption. Augustine recognizes that eternal life cannot be in the usual sense an end of human activity; it lies beyond the scope of this life and is given to us by God. But he proclaims this a strength rather than a weakness of his account, since it is an "amazing folly" of pagan philosophers to wish "to be happy here on earth and to achieve bliss by their own efforts" (CD XIX 4, 852). Not only do we not have control over external goods but we do not even have the power to achieve virtue. Augustine rejects both the assumption that our final good must be something that we can achieve for ourselves and the assumption that the happy person seeks to be self-sufficient by making her happiness as dependent as possible on herself rather than anything outside of herself. It is this aspiration to self-sufficiency, not the eudaimonism of pagan ethics, that is the target of Augustine's critique of pagan virtue. It is this that he brands superbia, this which renders pagan virtue a semblance of true virtue.[12]

Eternal Life and Enjoyment of God

While Augustine finds pagan ethics guilty of hubris in its aspiration to self-sufficiency, his characterization of our final good might seem to raise problems for his own view. Certainly the notion that our final good is attained only in the world to come is problematic from a pagan perspective because it is thus decisively not up to us. But it also seems problematic because eternal life sounds like an external good, not one constituted by my activity but one to which my activity is at best instrumentally directed. And certainly some things that Augustine says lend themselves to this interpretation, as when he writes that "eternal life is the Supreme Good, and eternal death the Supreme Evil, and . . . to achieve the one and escape the other, we must live rightly" (CD XIX 4, 852). On this interpretation, my actions have no intrinsic connection to eternal life but are a means to a goal external to themselves. I need divine assistance both because I cannot even perceive my proper goal, lying as it does beyond present experience, and because I cannot even on my own live rightly and thus move in the direction of my goal: "For we do not yet see our good, and hence we have to seek it by believing; and it is not in our power to live rightly, unless while we believe and pray we receive help from him who has given us the faith to believe that we must be helped by him" (CD XIX 4, 852). God helps us to act rightly and then rewards us with eternal life for having done so.

This is a familiar picture, but it is not an Augustinian one. If it were, it would no longer be clear that virtuous actions were being chosen for their own sake, and Augustinian true virtue would itself be unmasked as glittering vice. If virtuous actions did not in any way constitute our supreme good, they would be chosen solely because they are a means to that supreme good. The fact that they did so conduce would be a contingent fact; theoretically, there could be an alternate path to the same end. Moreover, as an external good, eternal life could be a state of affairs or state of consciousness that I pursue *for myself* in a problematically self-referential way. Even if I were to sacrifice myself in this life for my neighbor, I would do so in order that I might achieve eternal life in the world to come. We can begin to correct this picture by noting that for Augustine "eternal life" is a very incomplete designation of our final end. Elsewhere, Augustine articulates that end as fruition of God, as in *De Doctrina Christiana*. To say that our final end is enjoyment of God might at first seem to leave open the same problems noted above: (1) that

virtue is chosen only as a means, not as an end in itself; (2) that the relation of virtue to our final end is contingent, not constitutive; and (3) that my final end is pursued *for myself* in a self-centered way. It is only when enjoyment of God is fully and properly understood that this misleading picture melts away.

Augustine's famous distinction in *De Doctrina Christiana* between *uti* and *frui,* where "to use something is to apply whatever it may be to the purpose of obtaining what you love" while "to enjoy something is to hold fast to it in love for its own sake," represents an early and not wholly satisfactory effort on Augustine's part to articulate the relation between love of God and all our other loves.[13] We are told there that we must enjoy God alone, using this world in order to return to the Lord (*De Doct. Chr.* I. 9–10). This problematically instrumentalizes virtue, suggesting that virtuous actions are not in fact chosen for their own sake. If this were the case, the virtue of Augustine's Christian would seem to be undermined no less than the virtue of Aristotle's magnanimous person.

Augustine runs into similar problems when he grapples with the status of love of neighbor—are other persons to be loved for their own sake or for some other reason? On the one hand, Augustine insists that our neighbor and we ourselves are to be loved not on our own account but on account of God (*De Doct. Chr.* I. 41–42). On the other hand, he seems hesitant to state that other persons are to be *used* so that we may attain fruition of God. It was a conception of relative ends that initially helped Augustine to move beyond the uti/frui (use/enjoyment) dichotomy—virtue can be loved for its own sake, our neighbor can be loved for her own sake, as long as these loves are properly ordered to God.[14] These things can be loved for their own sake while *also* being ordered to God. Love of neighbor is not a mere means to the love of God, not a way that we prove that we do in fact love God, but rather, we do not love other persons rightly unless we grasp not only that nothing other than God has "a value in and of itself, independently of God" but also that persons are lovable as made in God's image, not simply as material objects.[15] It is not, then, that all things other than God are to be used as means, are to be instrumentalized, for the purpose of my own aim of enjoying God. Rather, I cannot love properly anything in creation unless I have grasped its nature as created being, utterly dependent on God and lovable as God's beloved creation. Thus we truly love virtue and other persons for their own sake only when we love them on account of God.

We can say a bit more now about how virtue, happiness, and our final

end are related for Augustine. Virtue is not the way I demonstrate to God that I am worthy of the reward of eternal life; rather, "virtue proves to be nothing but the perfection of love to God."[16] And it is when my love to God is perfected that I can experience the union with God, which is fruition, the love of enjoyment. Virtue proves after all to be not just instrumental but partially constitutive of my happiness, of my final end. To become virtuous is to be transformed into one enough like God to be capable of this loving relationship with God.[17] My final end is not just external; even though I cannot in this life fully realize that loving union with God, my loving, virtuous activity is even now an expression of the love of God.

Is my final end pursued for myself in a self-centered or problematically self-referential way? For Augustine, as for ancient eudaimonists in general, the agent's search for fulfillment or perfection is affirmed—the eudaimonistic framework builds in an inescapable self-reference. But it is also true that the agent's understanding of what constitutes fulfillment or perfection is radically transformed as the agent comes closer to realizing that fulfillment. Our supreme good really will be good for us, but we cannot consult our subjective desires in order to find out what will be good for us; those desires must undergo a radical transformation if we are to find our true fulfillment.[18] The perfect life is something objective, not a subjective state. I do not become perfect simply by fulfilling whatever desires I happen to have. As Augustine writes in *De Trinitate,* perfect happiness requires both having all that one wants and wanting nothing wrongly (XIII 8). As Burnaby comments, for Augustine, "the only love of self which deserves to be so called is the love of God the Supreme Good. 'The love wherewith a man truly loves himself is none other than the love of God. For he who loves himself in any other way is rather to be said to hate himself; since he becomes evil and loses the light of righteousness, which he turns aside from the higher and more excellent good to himself.' " We do not and cannot love God *in order to* satisfy our love of self, since such a love would not be love of God at all. When we truly love ourselves, we seek to enjoy the Supreme Good, but this means that we love God more than self, that we surrender ourselves to God.[19] It is not the case, then, that the eudaimonistic framework requires that all other loves are in fact subordinated to love of self. I am not my own supreme good; my end is not self-enjoyment but enjoyment of God.[20]

What of love of neighbor? Among our various loves of created beings, love of neighbor is special in that our neighbor is capable of enjoying God

as we are; in loving our neighbor "on account of God," we are seeking to bring our neighbor, too, into the enjoyment of God (*De Doct. Chr.* I. 64). Our desire to enjoy God is not, at least when perfected, a desire to monopolize God. Rather, insofar as we grasp that our supreme good is to return to the Creator the self-giving love that called us into being and thereby to be drawn into intimate union with the loving relationships of self-gift that constitute the Trinitarian Persons, we grasp that this good of loving union with God is enhanced, not diminished, by being shared.[21] "If the *Summum Bonum* is by its very nature the *bonum commune,* a good which can be possessed only by being shared, then the desire and pursuit of it can never be the desire and pursuit of a *bonum privatem.*"[22] It is in this sense that we seek God in our neighbor, not that we use our neighbor as a means for getting ourselves closer to God, nor that we care really only for God and not for our neighbor, but that we desire that our neighbor, like ourselves, be brought into the communion of enjoyment of God, that heavenly peace, which is "perfectly ordered and completely harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God" (CD XIX 17, 878). To love God is to desire the fulfillment of God's purposes for creation, including for this particular neighbor, while to love the neighbor is to desire the fulfillment of God's purposes for that neighbor.

The Responsive Character of Christian Moral Agency

Having given a more adequate account of our supreme good than the preliminary one of "eternal good," and having sought to clear Augustine's eudaimonism of various charges, (i.e., of making virtue and/or love of others a means to my supreme good, of rendering our supreme good an external good merely contingently related to virtue, and of fostering egocentrism or a problematic self-preoccupation), we may offer a few additional reflections on Augustine's departure from the Stoicism that characterizes his early thought. On a fuller understanding of our supreme good, we can understand more fully how for Augustine the possibility of secure happiness runs directly counter to the desire to make one's happiness as dependent as possible on oneself. "Happiness has not been achieved so long as it can be taken from us 'against our will'. But the inference is not that it must be 'within our power', as a condition of the self-directed will; for the soul and its 'virtue' are no less mutable than the body and its pleasures. It must consist in a relation of the soul to that

which is 'eternal and abiding.'"[23] Happiness is found not in achieving independence but in embracing our ultimate dependency.

On the other hand, while our final good is not fully up to us, it is something that requires our active participation; it is not something that we simply passively undergo. If virtue is the perfection of my love for God, the end of enjoyment of God cannot be fully characterized apart from my virtuous activity, my loving response to God. We find happiness in the perfected activity of receiving and returning God's gifts. We cannot enjoy God in this life, since in this life we cannot fully see God, and our love remains the love of desire rather than fruition, but the possibility of this enjoyment rests on our (God-enabled) response as well as on God's call. O'Donovan argues, in fact, that it is this insistence on human activity, human responsiveness, to which the charges of Augustine's "egocentricity" or "anthropocentricity" can ultimately be reduced:

> Augustine's picture of the universe shows us one who is the source and goal of being, value, and activity, himself in the center of the universe and at rest; and it shows us the remainder of the universe in constant movement, which, while it may tend toward or away from the center, is yet held in relation to it, so that all other beings lean, in a multiplicity of ways, toward the source and goal of being. But the force which draws these moving galaxies of souls is immanent to them, a kind of dynamic nostalgia rather than a transcendent summons from the center. Such a summons, of course, is presupposed; but it is reflected by this responsive movement which is other than itself, so that there is a real reciprocity between Creator and creature.[24]

Critics of Augustine's eudaimonism worry that this responsive movement undermines pure theocentrism, depriving God of sovereignty. For Augustine it instead manifests the overflowing plenitude of God, which rejoices in creating beings capable of returning themselves in love to their Creator.

Augustine's perfected human agents will thus appear too passive from the perspective of pagan eudaimonism, while too active from the perspective of Augustine's anti-eudaimonist Christian critics. Pagan philosophers would find it unintelligible to make my final end, the end of my action, eternal life, something that lies beyond the reach of human agency. (Stoics and those who defend the ideal of Aristotelian magnanimity would go farther, decrying Augustine's celebration of dependency, his

rejection of the ideal of self-sufficiency.) Anti-eudaimonists, meanwhile, charge that Augustine has not properly recognized that all activity is God's activity, that only God can carry out God's purposes and bring us to perfection, and that our total resignation of self to God cannot thus be understood as our own activity.

For Augustine, it is humility that marks a proper account of human activity, one that accepts our own activity as itself God's gift. Virtuous human activity does not rest in itself but ascribes its existence to God, like the apostles who ascribed their virtue "all to the glory of God, whose grace had made them what they were" (CD V 14, 203). The concern of the truly virtuous is certainly not to garner praise, but neither is it to disdain praise while relying on their own consciousness of virtue. Rather, the concern of the virtuous is "that praise should rather be given to him from whom man receives whatever in him is rightly deserving of praise" (CD V 19, 213). Humility is fundamentally an aspect of truthfulness, which for Augustine displaces the false claim of the magnanimous person to truthful self-appraisal. Humility is the recognition that "man is not God but that he depends on God for his existence. . . . At bottom, humility is honesty about the human condition, and it is on the basis of that honesty, that willingness to face the facts, that man's moral and spiritual regeneration has to be founded."[25] The anti-eudaimonists recognize their dependence on God, but wrongly think that gift precludes activity, when in fact it requires it, calling it forth and enabling it. Humility is a person's "recognition that in his fallen state he needs the help of God's 'humility,' God's being willing to serve others, as shown above all in the Incarnation."[26] Stoic, Epicurean, Platonist—all lacked "the pattern of divine humility."[27] It is God's humility in Christ, God's willingness to become a servant rather than retain supremacy, that enables us to accept our own weakness, our utter dependency on God, even for that which we would most like to consider our own—our moral character.[28] It is finally only the honesty of humility that can for Augustine guarantee that virtue is not simply a cunning mask worn by superbia.

Divided Loves and Christian Hypocrisy

Christians, then, relinquish the notion that our final end is up to us, something we can achieve for ourselves, and give up the ideal of self-sufficiency, of seeking to make our happiness as dependent as possible

on ourselves and things under our control. It does not follow, though, that Christians, by understanding this, arrive immediately at the ordered soul that both pagans and Christians regarded as essential to virtue. It is not sufficient to have a theoretical grasp of our dependency on God, of the proper ordering of love, and so on. If virtue is a form of love, then the crucial question will be "What do you love?" And while Augustine insists that we cannot *not* love perfect beauty when we see it, in this life we cannot yet clearly see God's perfect beauty. So we are in fact enslaved by disordered loves. These disordered loves are bad habits, to which we have consented and which have become engrained in our irrational appetites. In Christians we encounter true virtue, but this is far from perfect virtue.

Not only are Christians characterized by imperfect virtue but it is also the case that we often encounter the mere semblance of virtue among those within the church. Thus, Christians as well as pagans embody false virtue. This becomes clear in Augustine's treatise *On the Lord's Sermon on the Mount,* which includes a sustained discussion of hypocrisy. Abetted by the etymology of the Greek word—*hupocrites* is an actor, while *hupokrinein* is to play a part—Augustine compares hypocrites to stage actors. "Hypocrites are pretenders, like mouthpieces of other persons, as in the plays of the theatre. For one who in tragedy takes the part of Agamemnon, for example, or any other person involved in the story or myth being enacted, is not really the person himself, but impersonates him and is called a hypocrite. So, too, in the Church or in any phase of human life, whoever wishes to seem what he actually is not is a hypocrite."[29] More specifically, the hypocrite wishes to appear virtuous, but in fact is not, since "the whole purpose of his behavior is to win the praise of men." No matter what good works they perform, hypocrites are not themselves good, since it is "strictly forbidden to place the fruit and purpose of our good work in the praise of any man whatever" (DSD II 2, 6). In order to avoid hypocrisy, it is not necessary to hide one's good works from others; in fact, it is good to display one's good works in order to invite others to imitate this goodness and to praise God as the source of this goodness; "as to having people imitate you, who see with satisfaction your good works, we must give this opportunity not only to believers, but also to unbelievers, that in praising our good deeds they may honor God and come to salvation" (DSD II 2, 6). What we must avoid is all seeking after human praise. Augustine concedes that this is a difficult challenge and that many have divided purposes: "they actually direct

their intention towards God when they give alms, yet at the same time there creeps into this excellent intention not a little craving for praise or for a perishable and transitory object of some sort or other" (DSD II 2, 9). We are summoned, though, to a clean and undivided heart, "and how can it be a single heart if it serves two masters and does not keep its sight clear by giving eternal things its only attention, but bedims it by the love of mortal and transitory things as well?" (DSD II 2, 9).

In fact, Augustine denies that there are any sages among us, any who exemplify perfect virtue.[30] Following Pauline themes of the constant struggle between flesh and spirit, Augustine regards evil desires as a result of original sin that can never be extirpated in this life, even though the guilt of original sin is washed away in baptism. Thus, the life of Christian virtue is one of ongoing inner strife. Augustine in fact claims the name *temperance* for what Aristotle would have called mere *continence*: "Although [virtue] claims the topmost place among human goods, what is its activity in this world but unceasing warfare with vices, and those not external vices but internal, not other people's vices but quite clearly our own, our very own? And this is the particular struggle of that virtue called in Greek sôphrosynê, which is translated 'temperance'— the virtue which bridles the lusts of the flesh to prevent their gaining the consent of the mind and dragging it into every kind of immorality" (CD XIX 4, 853–54). According to Aristotle, the continent person must continually struggle to overcome her irrational desires, while the temperate person's desires are always properly ordered in accordance with reason (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1146a10–15). What Aristotle would have called true temperance is now realizable only in the next life.

It is not simply pagans, then, whose virtue is corrupted by the love of praise. Here Augustine makes an important concession—the imperfect virtue of Christians is often corrupted by the same ordering to self that rendered pagan virtue merely counterfeit virtue. We cannot simply say that Christian virtue is true but imperfect while pagan virtue is not virtue at all. Just as in this world the city of God and the city of man are inextricably mixed, so the splendid vices are found among Christians as well as pagans. Moreover, given that none of us has in this life a clear grasp of God's beauty, so neither do Christians have more than an inkling of our own dependency on God, of our own final end. Granted, the very presence of a divided heart, an intention partially directed toward God, indicates a partial right ordering, a partial grasp of God as source and

sustenance of our being and goodness. But the imperfection of Christian virtue is also a partial falseness.

Still, by drawing the boundaries between true and false virtue in the way he does, Augustine makes it difficult to distinguish between pagans who pursue virtue for its own sake and those who pursue virtue for the sake of honor, glory, or—as in the case of Aristotle's magnanimous person—their own conception of themselves as worthy of honor. Even if we were to grant that pagan virtue is always only a semblance of virtue, Augustine's conceptual categories are not differentiated adequately enough to account for the variety of semblances of virtue found among pagans (and Christians). As we shall discuss in the next chapter, it is Aquinas who develops these conceptual resources, offering instead of two sets of binary oppositions, ambiguously related to one another (perfect/imperfect, true/false), a tripartite distinction between perfect virtue, imperfect virtue, and counterfeit virtue. Aquinas is thereby "able to make an important distinction Augustine did not: between those pagans with true, albeit imperfect, virtues and those who have the appearance of virtue but are, in fact, motivated by secret vice."[31]

The Critique of Theater

Augustine's etymological critique of hypocrisy already betrays the fact of his ambivalence toward theater. If one of the assumptions of this study is that virtue is theatrical, that we must "act virtuously" in order to become actually virtuous, what are we to make of theater proper? While sin, for Augustine, is a perverse imitation of God, imitation itself is not evil. Proper mimesis of the divine takes the form of imitation of Christ's humility.[32] Grace is active in our acts of mimesis, as our inspiration by examples and analogies serves to form and reform our imaginations. It is in this context that Augustine's critique of theater must be placed. Although Augustine has sometimes been said to embrace a Platonic ontological critique of theater, this cannot be sustained.[33] Plato's attack has traditionally been understood to be grounded in a negative view of representation as such; if what is truly real is just the world of Ideas, then poets create a copy of what is already just a copy of reality.[34] In fact, though, Plato differentiates between two forms of mimesis: general representation or imitation of reality "as it is" on the one hand and imitation of "appear-

ance as it appears" on the other.[35] Poets are like the sophists in creating a deceptive appearance of reality; what they copy is public opinion, "appearance as it appears." Some interpreters argue that this leaves room for the possibility of a poetry that is guided by the true knowledge possessed by philosophers and is therefore an imitation of reality as it is.[36] As things stand, though, Plato perceives poets and philosophers as rival guides to the good life. Even if poets deal only in appearances, the effects of these appearances are potentially disastrous, since they appeal directly to the passions and weaken reason's direction of the soul. Plato champions philosophy and reason as offering proper government of the passions and an escape from entanglement in illusion.

Both Plato and Augustine, then, critique theater for offering bad models for imitation. Augustine's critique, even more clearly than that of Plato, is an attack on a particular theatrical tradition in a particular time and place, not a general critique of mimetic arts. And the theater had become remarkably debased in the Greco-Roman period; "audiences no longer cared for comedy or tragedy, which had dwindled to insignificance among the scenic activities, their place taken by mimes, wild beast shows, lubricious pantomimes, chariot races, and gladiatorial fights."[37] Though also critical of the tragedies and comedies composed by classical poets, Augustine terms them "more acceptable" and recognizes that they hold an acknowledged place within a liberal education (CD II 8, 56). The Roman theatrical spectacles of which Augustine was so critical were instituted not simply for pleasure but at the command of the gods, who demanded such shows to appease an outbreak of plague (CD I 32, 43). The shows are therefore not just vicious human creations but offer themselves as divinely sanctioned models; it is natural for a citizen to "think that in the way he lives his life he ought to follow the examples set by what is acted in plays instituted by divine authority" (CD II 8, 56).

However Platonic Augustine's thought, key differences remain: the world, though finite and fallen, is not just an appearance of the Forms but is an entity created and declared good by a loving God. This God invites us to participate in godly mimesis, but our tendency is to fall into perverse mimesis, which is not simply deceptive, as for Plato, but sinful. In the early books of the *Confessions,* Augustine's critique of his own fascination with stage shows is clearly set in the context of a broader critique of examples of bad mimesis. Sin itself is characterized as perverse imitation of God; pride of God's loftiness, ambition of God's honor and glory, curiosity of God's omniscience, and so on (*Conf.* II 6). Given the

chiastic structure of the *Confessions,* in which the events of the first half "are characterized by images of descent and falling, while the second half is filled with images of ascent and return," we can expect what in fact is the case, that the second half of the *Confessions* will return to the theme of mimesis, this time giving examples of godly rather than perverse imitation.[38] For what renders the provision of bad models so problematic is the fact that human beings so desperately need good models; we are in need of formation and will be formed by that which we imitate.

Can theater ever provide good models for imitation? Theater, or at least any interesting theater, will always be complex, placing on stage good and bad, as well as mixed, examples of human character. Even a highly moralistic play may not succeed in its intention of endorsing good examples as models while vilifying bad examples; the very moralism of such a play may render its good examples too flat, too simplified, to be attractive. On the other hand, the fictional character of theatrical action may well enhance its impact on spectators. Fiction, because less messy, less complex than reality, can highlight certain features of character and action, can clarify connections and consequences, can employ symbolic structures that intensify the significance of what is being depicted. Hence the suspicion with which theater is often regarded—it is morally ambiguous while also potentially quite powerful. Unlike Plato, who brands poetic representation as such deceptive and false, Augustine differentiates in his early *Soliloquies* between two ways in which something can feign to be what it is not, the "fallacious" and the "fabulous," where the former involves an intention to deceive and the latter is simply a desire to tell a story.[39] Actors on stage he recognizes as a particularly complex case, since they must in some sense intend to deceive, or at least intend to enact a persuasive appearance of a character other than their own. Even here, though, Augustine offers quite a differentiated account: in order to be a "true" actor, the actor must enact falsehoods; in comedies and tragedies, "the only thing which helps to their being true is that in another respect they are false. So they can in no way achieve what they wish to be or what they ought to be if they avoid being false. For how could Roscius whom I have just mentioned be a true tragic-actor if he were unwilling to be a false Hector, a false Andromache, a false Hercules and countless others?" (*Soliloquies* II 18). Undeniably, Augustine calls Christians to seek divine truth, "that which is true, and not something which presents two faces which contradict one another so that it might be true on the one hand and false on the other" (*Soliloquies* II 18). Theater that does not direct

us to that truth cannot ultimately help us develop true virtue. There is, though, a theater that can and does do so, in Augustine's eyes, and that is the liturgy, whose theatrical character Augustine explicitly recognizes. In a sermon critical of Roman spectacles, Augustine urges his hearers to "contrast that holy spectacle with the pleasures and delights of the theatre. There your eyes are defiled, here your hearts are cleansed. Here the spectator deserves praise if he but imitate what he sees; there he is bad, and if he imitates what he sees he becomes infamous."[40]

We might still, from a modern perspective, think that Augustine leaves room for "theatrical" provision only of strictly controlled models, that he distrusts messiness and complexity that complicate straightforward emulation. We might suspect that the Greco-Roman culture of *paideia,* in so many respects taken over by Christianity, required simplification and thin description in order to succeed in its goal of embodying exemplary models of excellence and handing these down from teacher to pupil or from saint to disciple.[41] But two facts should give us pause. First, while the civilization of paideia was indeed focused on the handing down of tradition, it did not understand the imitation of exemplary models as a process that could or should result in strict uniformity. Henry Marrou argues that "ideally such an education was supposed to result in a kind of indeterminate human product of very high intrinsic quality, ready to respond to any demand made upon it by the intellect or circumstance." This was no imposition of a narrow mold. Second, Christians in the Greco-Roman world, with very few exceptions, did not set up their own special schools. They did offer specialized religious instruction, but they did not seek to displace the usual classical education—despite the fact that this classical education, highly literary in orientation, relied heavily on the classical poets and their tales about the gods. Even in the fourth century, notes Marrou, "Christian children were still being brought up with pagans in classical schools, still being given 'poison'—Homer, the poets, the long insidious line of mythological figures and the dark passions they symbolized or embodied. Immunity was supposed to come from the antidote of religious training which they received outside school from the Church and their parents."[42] What this means is that, far from exerting tight control over moral education by providing only positive, thinly described models for emulation, Christians—especially children—were routinely required to grapple with deep ambiguity, with rival exemplary models sanctioned by competing authorities. Augustine's *Confessions* re-

cords his own struggle with this ambiguity, his passionate attraction to "poisonous" models as well as good, but also his eventual response to the lure of divine beauty.

There is one additional aspect to Augustine's critique of theater—his concern about the pleasure audiences take in tragic suffering depicted on stage. It is this feature of Augustine's reflections on theater that can make him seem most Platonic, that can make it seem as though Augustine's central critique is that theater traffics in deceptive images and appearances. In fact, though, what troubles Augustine in this context is the fact that spectators of theater take pleasure in something that ordinarily would give them pain. Since they take pleasure in artistic depictions of suffering, they seek to prolong these experiences. Augustine worries that this may undermine the response we should take to actual suffering—a compassion that suffers with the suffering but also seeks actively to relieve the sufferer (*Conf.* III 2). Suffering observed should move us to action; so "to enjoy suffering for its own sake is to make an end of a means, to *idolize* suffering."[43]

Given Augustine's willingness to allow a different sort of "reality" to theatrical representations than to lived experience, this might seem only a phantom problem. After all, it would be silly if audiences leapt on stage to try to assist the suffering protagonist. Audiences are not naïve enough to confuse reality with theater—actual suffering will not be pleasurable, and compassion with such suffering will continue to move spectators to respond. The reason Augustine seems reluctant to have his worries so matter-of-factly assuaged on this count has to do with his conviction that under the guise of rhetoric, theater has colonized the real world of Roman society. The close connections between Augustine's critique of theater and his critique of rhetoric have often been observed, and in fact, the former is probably best seen as a way of underscoring the latter. Here Augustine did inherit from Plato a suspicion of the way in which the rhetorical tradition cultivated appearances in lieu of substance, even if not, ultimately, the determination to privilege reason over affection. "A primary concern of this rhetorical tradition," notes E. J. Hundert,

> was to demonstrate how the public man—the orator and officeholder—could, like the dramatic actor, completely govern his own emotions and at the same time appear forcefully to express or, indeed, be overtaken by them, so as to move an audience. The language of acting

and of the public spectacle perfectly suited these requirements. It was consistently employed by prominent rhetoricians like Cicero, who maintained that the self was composed in the process of composing a public reputation and who famously boasted that he had taken lessons from Roscius, the greatest actor of his time, to learn how to become "Cicero," the public figure.

Rhetoricians, Augustine alleges, care only for appearances, and manipulate these appearances in order to maximize their own honor and glory. "What centrally concerns him are the developed patterns of public performance by which authoritative standards of common morality may be corrupted into opportunities for the enhancement of pride."[44] The solution for these abuses, though, lies not in abolishing public performances and any rhetorical attempt to move and persuade. Rather, such performance, such rhetoric, should be directed toward the honor and glory of God, should seek not to conceal reality with appearance but instead to transform reality through appearance, should foster activity rather than passivity.

Mimesis and Conversion

In his efforts to subordinate his irrational appetites to the rational soul, to order his loves, to pursue a pure and undivided heart, the Christian needs both divine direction and divine assistance (CD XIX 14, 873). Our wills are transformed, our loves reordered, insofar as we are granted glimpses of divine beauty. Acquiring the virtues is not simply a matter of training through repetition, habituating our irrational desires, "getting used" to a particular form of action. In order for our loves to be properly ordered—ordered, that is, to God—we must be inspired, we must first fall in love, with God. It is only when we are in love with God that we can truly relinquish ourselves, give up our desire to be in control, accept the humble truth about ourselves. The good news is that falling in love can happen at any age; one need not have been lucky enough to have had a good upbringing. Against pagan common sense, Christians insisted that true (if imperfect) virtue remained a possibility at any age, since we may at any time encounter the transformative power of divine beauty.

This is available to us most crucially in Christ. Lacking the "pattern of divine humility," pagans are on Augustine's account unable to embark

on return to God, the primordial model, even if they embrace the task of mimetic reformation. "God hid the entire causal doctrine of the Incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Logos from the wise and revealed it to babes. Thus, the causal system of the pagans lacked the essential element in human life: how man, far from God in the region of unlikeness, could be changed into Him."[45] To know God is to love God, to love is to imitate, to move toward, to become one with God. But "we cannot see, or know, or love God unless He is in us, unless He gives Himself to us."[46] It is Christ, by uniting in himself both divine and human natures, who makes it possible for us to know God. Insofar as we are remade after Christ's pattern through the discipline of reading scripture and through partaking in the sacraments and other practices of the body of Christ, we are ordered to God rather than to self. A closer look at Augustine's account of his own final conversion—or, as he puts it, of his deliverance from the chain of the desire of the flesh (*Conf.* VIII 6)—and the place of imitation within it, will allow us to fill out these claims.

The story of Augustine's conversion in book VIII of the *Confessions* is embedded within two other stories of conversion: the story of Victorinus's conversion and the story of the two officials converted by the *Life of St. Antony,* itself a story of conversion. All of these accounts are meant to serve as patterns or exemplars for the reader, as sources of inspiration, as occasions for God to reveal God's supremely attractive beauty.[47] Augustine's *Confessions* is not a static record of his own experience but a cascade of exemplary conversions serving as the occasion for other conversions, which can in their turn serve as exemplary. These exemplars can serve as such inasmuch as they point back beyond themselves to scripture and ultimately to Jesus as the original exemplar. None of this is about imitation of example as a substitute for or displacement of divine grace, but rather as one of the concrete ways in which human beings receive grace.[48] As Lewis Ayres argues, "the *Confessions* presents *exempla* as a tool in the hands of providence."[49] Augustine draws on the common inheritance of the Roman rhetorical tradition in his use of exempla, narratives that present actions or attitudes to be imitated or avoided. Exempla were recognized as having particular persuasive and exhortative power, rendering thoughts clearer, more vivid, and more plausible.[50] For Augustine, though, exempla are no longer simply a way to inspire imitation of human virtues but the site of the creation of desire for God.

While imitation is an act, there is also a chastening of human agency implied in the cascade; we cannot choose to be inspired by an example

and cannot thus convert ourselves. We rely on inspiration from beyond ourselves. "Augustine argues that God's provision of new objects for the will is the provision of objects congruous with the will's occluded or distorted desire for God. Grace is irresistible precisely because God always holds out to us something that will delight the soul."[51] To imitate is to participate in something greater than oneself. Only when what we imitate is exemplary humility can we accept this fully; we then embrace dependency in both form and content and remain always indebted for the "moral virtue" that results. Augustine's *Confessions* is a confession of this indebtedness, a display of truthful humility, which rejoices in relating how dependent our virtue is on that which is beyond ourselves, on divine beauty encountered in Christ and in examples of Christ's transformative power in others. I call imitation "one of the ways" in which grace is received for several reasons: First, because, as James Wetzel has argued, any story we tell of grace preparing the conversion of our will to God can always be traced back further; there is no absolute starting point.[52] And second, because conversion is not enough; Augustine also insisted on the necessity of baptism, which washes away all previous sins and brings us into the church, the body of Christ.[53] Striving to imitate Christ's humility without being incorporated into his body through baptism would be futile.

The story of Victorinus, Augustine tells us, was related expressly "to draw me on to the humility of Christ."[54] Victorinus was a learned and renowned man, a professor of rhetoric in Rome, who had read Holy Scripture and become a believer in secret, but who at first refused to confess his faith openly, fearing loss of reputation. Over time, however, "he grew proud towards vanity and humble towards truth"; finally ashamed of prizing human honor, ashamed of having been ashamed of Christian humility. "He felt that he was guilty of a great crime in being ashamed of the sacraments of the lowliness of Your Word" (*Conf.* VIII 2, 131). To be a secret believer is to be imperfectly converted because it is still to be full of pride rather than humility, wanting to be oneself in control of who one is and how one appears. To desire to appear a model of pagan virtue is to fail to embody Christian virtue. And Augustine, having heard the story of Victorinus's public confession of faith, was "on fire to imitate him" (*Conf.* VIII 5, 134). This was the fire of a new will, a new love, "by which I willed to worship You freely and to enjoy You, O God" (*Conf.* VIII 5, 135).

If the story of Victorinus is a story of the victory of humility, the story of the agent told by Ponticianus is explicitly a story of the power of stories. Ponticianus tells of the imperial agent who chanced to find a copy of the *Life of Antony*, "began to read it, marvelled at it, was inflamed by it" (*Conf.* VIII 6, 137). As the agent imagined what it would be like to live as Antony, he became inspired by—fell in love with—this imagined possibility and ashamed of his life of ambition. "If I should choose to be a friend of God," realizes the agent, "I can become one now" (*Conf.* VIII 6, 138). In contrast to the *City of God*, where Augustine emphasizes the transcendent character of our final good, here he stresses that friendship with God can begin here and now, that the end we seek is not a wholly external good. The agent is changed as he reads; a new life—a new love—comes to birth in him, as he perceives a beautiful exemplar and imagines himself imitating that beauty.

These examples confront Augustine with his own ugliness, his own failure to give himself fully to God, and it is in a frenzy of shame that he flees to the garden, "aware how evil I was, unaware that I was to grow better in a little while" (*Conf.* VIII 8, 140). He presents himself as torn between his one-time mistresses and "the austere beauty of Continence" (*Conf.* VIII 11, 145). The figure of Continence lures him to herself as mistresses do, but the hands she stretches forward to embrace him are "full of multitudes of good examples" (*Conf.* VIII 11, 145). That is, her beauty consists in the transformative power of examples of other lives transformed. She seemed to say, "Can you not do what these men have done, what these women have done? Or could men or women have done such in themselves, and not in the Lord their God? The Lord their God gave me to them. Why do you stand upon yourself and so not stand at all?" (*Conf.* VIII 11, 145). Augustine must learn that he cannot convert himself, that Christian humility consists in being willing to receive what we cannot get for ourselves, that the strong and intact will he desired so much to dedicate to God's service could not be won in a battle, but would instead be a gift received through inspiration, for which he would always be indebted.[55] It is at this point that Augustine's own transformative act of reading can take place. He hears the command to take and read "*tolle lege, tolle lege,*" links this with Antony's own chance reading of the Gospel to go and sell all he had, and reads from the epistle to the Romans. "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscenses" (*Conf.* VIII 12, 146). In reading this text, Augustine "in that instant" does "put on the Lord Jesus Christ," his struggle ends, and he is finally at peace.

We know that Augustine's Christian virtue is far from perfect and that his happiness is not complete. Augustine employs several striking images to capture the contrast between the moment of conversion and the long process of being renewed in the image of God. "This renewal does not happen in one moment of conversion, as the baptismal renewal by the forgiveness of all sins happens in a moment, so that not even one tiny sin remains unforgiven. But it is one thing to throw off a fever, another to recover from the weakness which the fever leaves behind it; it is one thing to remove from the body a missile stuck in it, another to heal the wound it made with a complete cure" (*De Trin.* 14.23).[56] Much more could be said about the rest of the journey of recovery; "people become children of God to the extent that they begin to exist in the newness of the Spirit and begin to be renewed in the inner man according to the image of him who created them."[57] People do not simply become children of God—they become children of God *to some extent*. Augustine's language leaves ample room for gradual process and transformation, for spiritual exercises that habituate one slowly in Christian virtue. Through reading and listening to scripture, fasting and eating (especially Eucharistic eating), and prayer, Christians are renewed in God's image.[58] This takes place insofar as, with God's help, our love is redirected or transferred from earthly and temporal to heavenly and eternal things: "the man who is being renewed in the recognition of God and in justice and holiness of truth by making progress day by day, is transferring his love from temporal things to eternal, from visible to intelligible, from carnal to spiritual things; he is industriously applying himself to checking and lessening his greed for the one sort and binding himself with charity to the other" (*De Trin.* 14.23). Augustine is thus able to absorb into the Christian life many of the ascetic spiritual exercises of pagan philosophy, although these are now chastened by the humble recognition of dependency.[59] Christ, encountered through scripture, and his body the Church, are a school in which Christians learn how to live a good life. Fasting can now be a training in yearning, learning to crave God rather than earthly goods. Prayer, too, can reshape desire in accordance with God's will, and confession as a kind of prayer can train Christians in scrupulous self-examination.[60] Even our capacity to reflect on our own minds and thereby to come to a vision of the Trinity is something that can be cultivated through repeated acts of meditation; we are capable of "training the mind . . . to come in our own small measure to a sight of that trinity which God is."[61] Although Augustine rarely uses the term

habit in connection with virtue, preferring to use it only for the vices that enslave our wills, he certainly does think that progress can be made in the Christian life by training the concupiscent appetites to submit readily to reason.[62] Christian spiritual practices are indeed what we can call habituation. Far as Augustine continues to confess he is from completing this journey to perfection, he is on the way. Catalyzed by story, inspiration, mimesis, he has begun to be formed in humility. Through experiencing his wayward desires and their transformation in response to divine beauty, he has begun to realize that his putting on of Christ—even his will to do so—are God's gift rather than his own achievement.