

"VERA PHILOSOPHIA"
IN AUGUSTINE'S THOUGHT AFTER 396

Truth can be sought in no better way
than by questioning and answering.

Soliloquies II, 7, 14

Augustine's recognition in *Soliloquies* II, 7, 14 that the best way to seek truth is by question and answer reflects the interest in *vera philosophia* that permeates his thinking at Cassiciacum.¹ The emphasis in the Cassiciacum dialogues on dialectical inquiry aptly represents Augustine's efforts to Christianize the Socratic pursuit of truth in the period immediately following his conversion to Christianity. What commentators frequently overlook in these works, though, is Augustine's concern over the exclusiveness of this approach to salvation, so highly dependent upon rigorous training in the liberal arts and the application of its principles to the search for wisdom. These concerns surface not only in the midst of his difficulty establishing the immortality of the soul but also in his dialectical encounter with the participants in the dialogues, especially in the case of his mother Monica.² Augustine characterizes his friends and relatives at Cassiciacum as occupying various stages in the appropriation of Christian wisdom.³ Portraying himself as a master of Christian teaching, Augustine finds that even he has yet to ascend to the exalted heights of Christian piety that Monica alone inhabits in the dialogues.

Augustine's subordination of himself to Monica suggests two things. First, Augustine's view of Monica as Christian philosopher *par excellence* calls into question the precise nature of *vera philosophia* as well as the role that the method of question and answer has in it. To Augustine's mind, Monica's native intelligence and humility amply compensate for her lack of training in the liberal arts, an expertise that Augustine possesses largely on account of the subordination of her wishes to his own.⁴ What is striking about Augustine's thinking on the subject of *vera philosophia* is the importance that he attributes to Christian piety in the pursuit of wisdom in addition to a

¹ *Soliloquia*. II, 7, 14 (CSEL 89, 63): Cum enim neque melius quaeri veritas possit quam interrogando et respondendo

² On the problem of the soul's immortality, see *Soliloquia*. II, 14, 25 (CSEL 89, 79-81).

³ See *De ordine*. I, 11, 31-32 (CCL 29, 105-106); II, 7, 24 (CCL 29, 120).

⁴ See *De ordine* II, 1, 1 (CCL 29, 106); 17, 45 (CCL 29, 131).

method of question and answer. As a result, *vera philosophia* is broad enough to include dialecticians like Augustine trained in the liberal arts and devout Christians like Monica capable of interrogating the truth.

Second, Augustine's insistence that the practice of *vera philosophia* applies as much to women as it does to men indicates that the Christian search for wisdom has a universal appeal and is not the prerogative of a select group of individuals who are accorded privileged access to the truth.⁵ In this respect, it suffices to recall Augustine's astonishment prior to his conversion at the ability of ordinary people to find happiness more readily than highly educated people who so easily succumb to the nonsense of pseudo-philosophers.⁶

Augustine's attention to both educated and uneducated inquirers into the truth in the Cassiciacum dialogues hints at the manner in which he conceives the nature of *vera philosophia* after his departure from Cassiciacum. Scholars have been quick to point out the short lived nature of Augustine's preoccupation with dialectic in the pursuit of Christian wisdom, particularly as displayed in the Cassiciacum dialogues. So noticeable is the change in emphasis in Augustine's works that some scholars simply assume that, by 396, the philosophical Augustine is all but extinct. But happily for their purposes, the theological Augustine emerges and successfully sheds the philosophical bent of his early works.⁷

The objective of this study is to counter the persistence of this dualistic way of approaching Augustine's texts and to show that both before and after 396 Augustine remains a faithful adherent of *vera philosophia* in the integral sense of the term alluded to above. The first

⁵ Augustine attributes the origin of Monica's wisdom to a divine *inflammatio*. See *De ordine* II, 1, 1 (CCL 29, 106) and the passages in *De beata vita* II, 10 (CCL 29, 71); IV, 27 (CCL 29, 80) where he alludes to this origin.

⁶ See *Confessions* VI, 6, 9-7, 12 in *S. Aureli Augustini Confessionum Libri XIII*, ed. Martinus Skutella (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1981), 106-111.

⁷ Goulven MADEC attempts to dispel this way of thinking about Augustine's texts in *Saint Augustin et la Philosophie: Notes critiques*, Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité, 149 (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1996). Madec observes that "Il est généralement admis que la doctrine augustinienne se prête mal à la distinction de la philosophie et de la théologie." Carol HARRISON's *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), exemplifies a dualistic approach to Augustine's texts because she assumes that the works written before 396 were philosophical in nature while those written after 396 were theological in content. The separation of the domains of philosophy and theology is implicit in her remarks in the opening chapters.

part of this paper focuses on the conception of philosophy that Augustine acquired through his reading of Cicero's *Hortensius* and his subsequent application of its principles to the Christian way of life. Against this background, the second part of the paper explores the significance of Augustine's distinction between *vera philosophia* and *vera theologia*. Finally, the third section of the paper addresses the extent to which Augustine's early conception of *vera philosophia* accords with its counterpart after 396. Proceeding in this manner allows for the emergence of the Christian philosopher, the one who truly dedicates his life to a dialogic search for Wisdom grounded in virtue and piety.

Cicero's *Hortensius* and *Vera Philosophia*

Early on in the *Confessions* Augustine recounts the impact that his reading of Cicero's *Hortensius* had on his life. After noting that this work contains an exhortation to philosophy, Augustine proceeds to characterize philosophy in terms of the ancient Greek ideal of the love of wisdom (*amor sapientiae*).⁸ Both here and elsewhere he observes the distinction between the philosopher's love of wisdom and the object of that love, namely, Wisdom itself. From the Cassiciacum period onwards, Augustine identifies this wisdom with the wisdom of God, that is, with the Son of God, the second person of the trinity, the ultimate source of all of the truth, beauty, and goodness found in creation.⁹ Thus, as a lover of divine reality, the philosopher not only seeks a knowledge of the transcendent origin of his being but also strives passionately to attain it as his end in life, for only in this way will he ever arrive at eternal happiness.¹⁰

Augustine's characterization of the philosopher in this passage from the *Confessions*, however, reveals another significant aspect of the pursuit of wisdom that commentators on Augustine's thought have largely ignored. Appealing to Paul's warning in *Col.* 2, 8 not to succumb to the philosophy of vain and deceitful men, a favorite text of patristic authors, Augustine points out the hazards of mistaking the pseudo-philosophy of the pagans for the true wisdom mediated to

⁸ *Confessions* III, 4, 8 (Skutella, 41): *amor autem sapientiae nomen graecum habet philosophia*. Cf. *De ordine* I, 11, 32 (CCL 29, 105-106); *De civitate dei* VIII, 2 (CCL 47, 217).

⁹ *C. Academicos* III, 9, 20 (CCL 29, 46); *De beata vita* IV, 34 (CCL 29, 84); *Enarrationes in Psalmos* VIII, 6 (CCL 38, 51-52).

¹⁰ On the antiquity of the mystery of eternal life see *De civitate dei* VII, 32 (CCL 47, 213).

Christians through the Incarnate Christ.¹¹ Since the philosopher is a lover of wisdom and not yet its possessor, he must devote his life to discerning the difference between appearance and reality in order to adhere to the *vera philosophia* of Christianity, which alone is capable of transporting him to the vision of God. Moreover, since this vision is the common source of happiness for humankind, *vera philosophia* presupposes a vision of divine reality that transcends the conflicting views of the various sects that remain mired in error. Unity, not discord, is the singular feature of the *vera philosophia* that Augustine initially encounters in Cicero's *Hortensius* but subsequently learns to identify with the depth of the wisdom and knowledge of Christ.¹²

On more than one occasion in the *Confessions* Augustine insists that piety is wisdom.¹³ In doing so, he acknowledges the religious character of *vera philosophia*. Oftentimes he associates this religious quality with Monica's loyalty to her faith and the constancy of her devotion to the Christian religion.¹⁴ Augustine's attentiveness to the religious nature of *vera philosophia* manifests his sensitivity to philosophy as a way of life that aims to integrate the inner cognitive, voluntary, and affective striving of the human heart towards the divine.¹⁵

The source of this particular conception of philosophy lies in Greek thought, especially as it appears in the works of the Platonists. In his article "*Verissima philosophia*", Pierre Courcelle observes that,

¹¹ *Confessions* III, 4, 8 (Skutella, 41-42); *De civitate dei* VIII, 10 (CCL 47, 226-227). Cf. the remarks of Anne-Marie MALINGREY, "*Philosophia*": *Étude d'un groupe de mots dans la littérature grecque, des Présocratiques au IV siècle après J.-C.*, *Études et commentaires* 40 (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1961), 105-106.

¹² *Confessions* III, 4, 8 (Skutella, 41-42). Cf. *Sermo* 160 (PL 38, 872-877). The influence of Cicero's *Hortensius* on Augustine's notion of universal truth underlies his proof for the existence of God in *De libero arbitrio* II, 9, 25-27 (CCL 29, 253-255) and his exegesis of scripture in *Confessions* XII, 25, 34-35 (Skutella, 318-320).

¹³ See, for example, the passages at *Confessions* V, 5, 8 (Skutella, 81); VIII, 1, 2 (Skutella, 154).

¹⁴ *De ordine* I, 8, 22 (CCL 29, 99); *Confessions* III, 11, 19 (Skutella, 52); V, 9, 16 (Skutella, 89); XI, 12, 33 (Skutella, 206).

¹⁵ For philosophy as a way of life, see Juliusz DOMÁŃSKI, *La philosophie, théorie ou manière de vivre?: Les controverses de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance*, *Vestigia* 18 (Fribourg, Switzerland: Editions Universitaires Fribourg, 1996); Pierre HADOT, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?* Folio 280 (Gallimard, 1995); *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Études augustinienes, 1993); Goulven MADEC, "*Saint Augustin et la philosophie*"; Malingrey, "*Philosophia*". Malingrey, in particular, emphasizes the religious character of philosophy as does Michael L. MORGAN in *Platonic Piety: Philosophy & Ritual in Fourth-Century Athens* (New Haven & London: Yale, 1990).

unlike the expression *verissima philosophia*, the notion of *vera philosophia*, whose source he attributes to Plato, had broad appeal in both pagan and Christian circles in antiquity and eventually exerted an enormous influence on monastic authors.¹⁶ Anne-Marie Malingrey, in turn, traces the distinction between true and false philosophy to the ancient quarrel between Socrates and the rhetoricians. Socrates, it will be recalled, accused his opponents of being sophists or pseudo-philosophers on the grounds that their search for wisdom led only to endless wrangling and arrogant posturing over subtle distinctions that deceived rather than enlightened others.¹⁷ Because of their vanity, greed, and superstition, the sophists' pursuit of wisdom was doomed to failure, as all efforts at attaining wisdom are that arise out of immorality and impiety.¹⁸

In the *De doctrina christiana*, then, despite his respect for the Platonists for having attained some understanding of the truth, Augustine urges Christians to wrest this truth from the Platonists, as from unjust possessors, and convert it to good Christian use.¹⁹ This wresting of the truth from the Platonists constitutes one of Augustine's central aims in the *De civitate dei* in his defense of *vera philosophia* against pagan criticism. Like Plato, who represents Socrates as denouncing his opponents on the grounds of immorality and impiety, Augustine reproaches even esteemed pagans like Plato for their pride and superstition. To Augustine the Platonists' failure as philosophers lies in their arrogant belief that they could find the truth on his own without divine assistance and in their superstitious acceptance of polytheism and its corrupt practices.²⁰ Christians like Augustine, therefore, converted the spoils of Platonism to good Christian use by seeking to convince pagans that *vera philosophia* was synonymous with the Christian religion while pagan practices and beliefs amounted to nothing more than pseudo-philosophy.²¹ Accordingly, Augustine patterned his criticism of pagan philosophy after the Platonists,

¹⁶ Pierre COURCELLE, "Verissima philosophia" in *Epektasis. Mélanges patristiques offerts au cardinal Jean Daniélou*, eds. Jacques Fontaine and Charles Kannengiesser (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972), 655, nn. 14-15.

¹⁷ MALINGREY, "Philosophia", 100-103.

¹⁸ ID., "Philosophia", 100-101.

¹⁹ *De doctrina christiana* II, 35, 53 (CCL 32, 69); 40, 60 (CCL 32, 73).

²⁰ *De civitate dei* VIII, 12 (CCL 47, 229).

²¹ *De vera religione* V, 8 (CCL 32, 193): Sic enim creditur et docetur, quod est humanae salutis caput, non aliam esse philosophiam, id est sapientiae studium, et aliam religionem...

refuting the pagans on their own grounds for their inability to overcome sectarian dispute and embrace the unifying truth of Christianity.²²

For Augustine, true philosophy requires the integration of the intellectual, moral, and religious dimensions of human nature as well as their outward expression in the varied activities of Christian life such as teaching, friendship with others, and the observance of sacramental rites.²³ When virtue and piety are neglected, dialectical inquiry is devoid of life and proceeds solely on the basis of empty concepts that, by failing to yield truth, end in the despair of ever being able to find truth.²⁴ True philosophy, therefore, has its roots not only in pagan virtues such as prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice but also in the specifically Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity.²⁵ These virtues, however, require the pious observance of the Christian religion if they are to be at all effective.²⁶ In this respect, philosophy can truly be said to be a way of life that unifies the various strivings of human nature even as the philosopher seeks to enter into union with the absolute unity of the triune God.²⁷

At this point, some concerns arise in regard to Augustine's conception of *vera philosophia*, especially in light of the change that occurs in his thinking in 396. Not only does Augustine's view of grace and freedom change at this time, but a notable shift in perspective occurs in his works, one that some scholars represent as a definitive break with the classical ideal of philosophy that permeates the early dialogues. And yet, as witnessed above, Augustine clearly continues to expound the notion of *vera philosophia* in works as diverse as the *Confessions*, *De doctrina christiana*, and *De civitate dei* as well as in his anti-Pelagian writings, sermons and letters. Augustine's preoccupation with the notion of *vera philosophia* in these works prompts a consideration of the relationship between this notion and the idea of *vera theologia* that appears in the works written after Cassiciacum.

²² *De vera religione* V, 9 (CCL 32, 194): ... neque in confusione paganorum neque in purgamentis haereticorum neque in languore schismaticorum neque in caecitate Iudaorum quaerenda religio est, sed apud eos solos, qui Christiani catholici uel orthodoxi nominantur, id est integritatis custodes et recta sectantes.

²³ See n. 15 above.

²⁴ *Soliloquia* I, 2, 7-5, 11 (CSEL 89, 11-19).

²⁵ *Epistula* 171 A (CSEL 44, 635).

²⁶ See *Epistula* CLV (CSEL 44, 431-439); *Contra Iulianum*. IV, 3, 17 (PL 44, 745-746).

²⁷ Augustine emphasizes philosophy as a way of life in *Sermo* 150 (PL 38, 840-849).

Grasping the connection between these ideas provides a clearer understanding of what Augustine means by *vera philosophia*.

Vera Philosophia and Vera Theologia

Despite the fact that his life undergoes tremendous change from 391-397 as a result of his entry into the ecclesiastical life of the Church, Augustine remains fully committed to the ideal of *vera philosophia* that encourages true lovers of wisdom to seek the knowledge of Christ.²⁸ If his language becomes more ecclesiastical in nature during this period, Augustine eventually assures his reader in the *Retractationes* that the truth found in Christianity, though expressed in a different language than that of the Platonists, nevertheless accords with the truth contained in their writings. It is possible, Augustine suggests, for someone to be completely ignorant of pagan philosophy and yet, through the language of the Christian religion, to comprehend the same truth that Plato does in his writings.²⁹ Augustine's shift in language as his knowledge of Christian literature expands, however, does not negate his interest in *vera philosophia*, but rather causes him to scrutinize more carefully the writings of the Platonists and to reassess the extent to which they approximated the truth of Christianity.

Augustine's reassessment of Platonism in the *De civitate dei* compels him to distinguish true and false theology in order to preserve the integrity of the Christian notion of *vera philosophia*. Augustine prefaces his remarks in Book VIII on the merits of Plato's philosophy with an extensive critique of Varro's conception of theology in Books VI and VII. In this connection, Goulven Madec has observed that references to the notion of theology in Augustine's works are few in number and largely confined to a discussion of the implications of Varro's division of theology into natural, mythical, and civil in the *De civitate dei*.³⁰

Of these three types of theology, the notion of natural theology is perhaps the most useful in discerning the superiority of Plato's thought to that of other pagan philosophers. Like Varro, these philo-

²⁸ Ten years later, Augustine's interest in expanding his knowledge of sacred literature is still evident in *Epistula* 104 (CSEL 34.2, 583).

²⁹ *De civitate dei* VIII, 10-11 (CCL 47, 226-228). For an example, see Augustine's collation of Monica's and Plato's insights in *De beata vita* IV, 27 (CCL 29, 80).

³⁰ Goulven MADEC, "Theologia chez Augustin et Jean Scot", in *Petites Études augustinienes*, Collection des études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité, 142 (Paris: Études augustinienes, 1994), 261-262.

sophers never succeeded in grasping the difference between God and the natural world on account of their materialism. Plato alone grasped this distinction, and insofar as he did, he was able to comprehend the difference between the natural order and its maker.³¹ Augustine therefore implies that Plato's metaphysics is superior to Varro's natural theology because it rests upon the distinction between the Creator and his creation.

Another indication of the falseness of Varro's theology, Augustine insists, is his suspension of judgment with respect to the conflicting opinions about the nature of the gods that the pagans held. Because of his inability to distinguish between the Creator and his creation, Varro is left in a state of doubt regarding the truth about God.³² In other words, his materialism is the cause of his skepticism regarding the possibility of ever being able to distinguish between true and false opinions. Augustine's use of the latin term *opiniones* throughout his critique of Varro recalls the significance of Plato's distinction between the truth found in the higher metaphysical world of divine reality and the opinions based upon the shifting appearances of sensible objects in the lower world of sense experience.³³ For if truth is to be found, the philosopher must lift his mind above the conflicting opinions of this world in order to discern Truth itself. Only by discerning Truth in and of itself is the philosopher able to distinguish between true and false opinions. To his credit, Plato achieved this goal. As a result, Augustine rebukes Plato for his eventual misappropriation of the truth of Christianity primarily on moral and religious grounds. Varro, however, he reproves on cognitive grounds as well on account of his inability to discriminate between truth and opinion. Nevertheless, in both cases the truth is obscured because of the lack of faith in Christ that alone enables the mind to turn towards the truth.

Augustine mentions the notion of *vera theologia* in the course of his critique of Varro's conception of theology and his reassessment of Plato's thought. In a passage in which he confirms the antiquity of the Hebrew prophets to the pagan philosophers, he portrays Moses as a true theologian (*verus theologus*) and implies that the *vera sapientia* of the Hebrew prophets is the common property of Christians because God has spoken through the prophets. Augustine justifies this belief

³¹ *De civitate dei* VIII, 1 (CCL 47, 216-217).

³² *De civitate dei* VII, 17 (CCL 47, 199-201).

³³ See, for example, *De civitate dei* VIII, 1 (CCL 47, 216-217); 3 (CCL 47, 219); 7-8 (CCL 47, 224-225) and n. 28 above.

on the basis of the common agreement of the authors included in the Christian canon.³⁴ The Israelites are therefore to be commended for their ability to distinguish between true and false prophets, and for rejecting the idea promoted by pagan philosophers that all opinions are of equal worth. It is on these grounds that the prophets are rightfully said to be the Hebrews' philosophers, their true lovers of wisdom, their teachers of virtue and piety, in short, their theologians. For unlike the pagan philosophers, who prefer to dwell in a Babylon of confusion on account of their conflicting opinions and acrimonious search for truth, the Hebrew prophets proclaim a common truth in harmony with others.³⁵

In the *De civitate dei* Augustine uses the notions of *vera philosophia* and *vera theologia* interchangeably. Even natural theology falls under the rubric of *vera philosophia* provided that natural theologians are true lovers of wisdom. And since true lovers of wisdom are true philosophers, if natural theologians truly love wisdom, then they too must be true philosophers. But since the wisdom that the true philosopher loves is identical with the God who made heaven and earth, natural theologians can be said to be true philosophers only if they grant the distinction between the Creator and his creation. Because the Platonists grasped this distinction, unlike Varro's physiological explanations, their metaphysical insights truly embody the natural theology that Paul has in mind in *Rom.* 1, 19 when he says that the human intellect can grasp the invisible truths of God through the visible works of creation.³⁶ But such insights into the nature of God are limited because they rest solely upon natural revelation.

³⁴ *De civitate dei* 18, 37 (CCL 48, 632). On the antiquity of the Hebrew prophets and their relation to Christianity, see Augustine's remarks at *De doctrina christiana* II, 28, 43 (CCL 32, 63); *De civitate dei* VIII, 11 (CCL 47, 227-228).

³⁵ *De civitate dei* 18, 41 (CCL 48, 635-638), especially the passage at (637): At uero gens illa, ille populus, illa ciuitas, illa res publica, illi Israelitae, quibus credita sunt eloquia Dei, nullo modo pseudopphetas cum ueris prophetis parilitate licentiae confuderunt, sed concordantes inter se atque in nullo dissentientes sacrarum litterarum ueraces ab eis agnoscebantur et tenebantur auctores. Ipsi eis erant philosophi, hoc est amatores sapientiae, ipsi sapientes, ipsi theologi, ipsi prophetae, ipsi doctores probitatis atque pietatis. Cf. *De civitate dei* XVIII, 51 (CCL 48, 648-649). *De ordine* I, 4, 8 (CCL 29, 94) is also striking: ueritas, cuius uates sunt, quicumque possunt esse sapientes.

³⁶ *De civitate dei* VIII, 1 (CCL 47, 216); 6 (CCL 47, 222-224). In this connection, note the allusion to a "science" of God (rationem...Dei) at *De civitate dei* VI, 8 (CCL 47, 176). Cf. the passage at *De civitate dei* VIII, 1 (CCL 47, 216-217) where Augustine interprets the Greek word *theologia* in terms of ... de diuinitate rationem siue sermonem.

Augustine's comments in the *De civitate dei* indicate that while Augustine rarely thinks in terms of true theology, when he does, he equates it with true philosophy. Moreover, Augustine's acceptance of Plato's tripartite division of philosophy into natural, moral, and rational suggests three things about the nature of true theology.³⁷ First, because Augustine speaks of it primarily in relation to natural philosophy, the concept of *vera philosophia* appears to be broader than that of theology. If this is the case, then true theology constitutes a part of philosophy, but not the whole of it.³⁸ Second, because of Augustine's increasing knowledge of Scripture, the subject matter of *vera philosophia* cannot be confined to Plato's metaphysics. It must encompass the revealed truths found in Scripture.³⁹ Finally, because *vera philosophia* has its roots in lived experience, it cannot simply be identified with a body of knowledge or a science but must be construed in terms of a dynamic, sapiential awareness of the divine that seeks to transcend the confines of the spatio-temporal world.

Augustine's assessment of the varying amounts of truth found in pagan philosophy tacitly acknowledges this fact.⁴⁰ After 396, as Bishop of Hippo, he insists on the authority of Scripture as the standard for determining how much truth resides in pagan thought. The source of this authority resides in Christ's incarnation that confirms all of the truths ever spoken by genuine lovers of wisdom.⁴¹ As in the Cassiciacum dialogues, Augustine measures the truth of Platonism against the norm of Christ's authority. But now, with his greater mastery of Christian teaching, he is reluctant to bestow as much praise on the Platonists as he once did at Cassiciacum.⁴² For although the Platonists approximate Christian wisdom more fully than materialists like the Stoics and Epicureans do, their philosophy nevertheless contains many errors that obscure the truth.⁴³

³⁷ Augustine comments on the tripartite division of philosophy in *De civitate dei* VIII, 4 (CCL 47, 219-221).

³⁸ See Hadot's remark in the preface of Dománski's book "La philosophie", viii: "Alors que, dans l'Antiquité, la philosophie englobait la théologie et n'hésitait pas à donner des conseils sur la pratique religieuse ..."

³⁹ Note Augustine's comparison of the truths found in Scripture with those found elsewhere at *De doctrina christiana* II, 42, 60 (CCL 32, 73-74).

⁴⁰ Sermo 240 (PL 38, 1130-1133). In *De civitate dei* II, 7 (CCL 47, 39-40) Augustine indicates that divine assistance accompanies the varying degrees of truth.

⁴¹ *Epistula* 137 (CSEL 44, 111). Cf. *De doctrina christiana* II, 18, 28 (CCL 32, 53).

⁴² *Retractationes* I, 1, 4 (CCL 57, 10-11).

⁴³ *De civitate dei* VIII, 4-11 (CCL 47, 219-228).

Augustine's reflections on the Hebrew prophets as true philosophers suggests as well that as his knowledge of Christian authors increases, he includes other lovers of wisdom besides dialectical philosophers trained in the liberal arts in the category of true philosophers.⁴⁴ In this sense, Monica becomes the prototype of uneducated Christians whose minds Augustine attempts to lift up to a greater understanding of God in his various encounters with them. Augustine's patent admission in the *Retractationes* that he placed too much emphasis on the liberal arts in his early works attests to the enlargement of his understanding regarding who can participate in the search for wisdom.⁴⁵

And yet, Augustine never ceases to value the importance of Christian dialectic, not just simply in the strict sense of the liberal arts but also in the sense that dialogue with others is the wise and charitable means of sharing the word of God with them. Augustine exhibits his propensity to dialogue with others in various contexts in his works. One of the obvious contexts is in his sermons, particularly those preached at the height of the Pelagian controversy. Thomas Martin has shown how the dialogues between Paul and the Pelagians in these sermons enable Augustine to use Paul's voice to defend his own position against the Pelagians.⁴⁶ Other sermons reveal this same technique at work in Augustine's efforts to refute the false philosophies of the Stoics and Epicureans.⁴⁷ In this instance, as the Bishop of Hippo and successor to Paul, Augustine re-enacts in the voice of his own sermon the truth contained in Paul's speech to the Athenians warning them of the false philosophies of the Stoics and Epicureans. For uneducated Christians who listened to Augustine's sermons, this mimesis of Paul's words surely had the positive effect of sharpening their insight into the truth at the same time as it functioned as a model for their own encounter with the false philosophers of their day.

Augustine's sermons, however, are not the only works in which this dialogic process occurs. In the *De vera religione* and the *Contra Iulianum* Augustine confronts others with questions as Socrates once did in the streets of Athens in order to elicit the truth from them.

⁴⁴ See Augustine's comments in *Epistula* 155 (CSEL 44, 431-39) and *Sermo* 150 (PL 38, 840-49).

⁴⁵ *Retractationes* I, 3, 2 (CCL 57, 12-13); 4, 4 (CCL 57, 15). Augustine refers to the use of the liberal arts in *De doctrina christiana* II, 35, 53 (CCL 32, 69).

⁴⁶ Thomas MARTIN, OSA, "Vox Pauli: Augustine and the Claims to Speak for Paul: An Exploration of Rhetoric at the Service of Exegesis", in *The Journal of Early Christian Studies*, v. 8/2 (Summer 2000), 237-272.

⁴⁷ *Sermo* 150 (PL 38, 840-849).

Amazed at the rapid spread of Christianity in the fourth century, in the *De vera religione* Augustine asks Plato, "What do you make of this phenomenon?" And Plato responds, "If I were living today, I would be a Christian."⁴⁸ Similarly, in the *Contra Iulianum* Augustine asks Julian to imagine himself in a conversation with a peaceful assembly of Christian fathers who gently and kindly question him regarding his false accusations of Manichaeism. "How will you answer their question?" Augustine inquires. "What sophistical arguments will you hurl against them?" "What distasteful show of arrogance will you press upon them?"⁴⁹ In both cases, Augustine turns the arguments of others against them in order to confront them with the truth.

The contrast that Augustine draws between Monica as the humble and devoted Christian capable of advancing in the practice of true philosophy and Julian as the proud and wrangling pseudo-philosopher adept at manipulating arguments to obscure the truth exemplifies the disparity between true and false philosophers.⁵⁰ When wrangling replaces dialogue as a method of attaining wisdom, the disharmony that results from pride hinders the discovery of truth. And yet, because false philosophers mix truth and falsity in their pursuit of wisdom, they are not so bereft of truth that they cannot search for it at all. They merely seek it in a perverse manner.⁵¹

So intent, then, is Augustine in employing dialogue in the search for wisdom that he applies it even in contexts where there are no human respondents. In *Confessions* X, for example, Augustine initiates the ascent to God through memory by interrogating the natural world around him to determine if it is God. When nature replies that it is not, Augustine turns to himself and undertakes the same process of questioning with respect to his own nature until he is satisfied that this nature is not God.⁵² Augustine uses the same technique in Book XII in his exegesis of Scripture. In this instance, Augustine wants to interrogate Moses regarding the truth of his statements in *Genesis*. But when he realizes that Moses cannot answer

⁴⁸ *De vera religione* 3, 3-4, 7 (CCL 32, 188-193).

⁴⁹ *Contra Iulianum* I, 4, 12 (PL 44, 647-648). Augustine questions Varro in *De civitate dei* VII, 5 (CCL 47, 190).

⁵⁰ *De ordine* I, 11, 31-32 (CCL 29, 105-106); *Contra Iulianum* VI, 18, 54-55 (PL 44, 854-855).

⁵¹ *De civitate dei* XVIII, 41 (CCL 48, 635-638); 51 (CCL 48, 648-650); *Epistula* 149 (CSEL 44, 369-376); *Sermo* 141 (PL 38, 814-819); 150 (PL 38, 840-849); 160 (PL 38, 872-877). Cf. *Contra academicos* II, 5, 11 (CCL 29, 24).

⁵² *Confessions* X, 6, 8-27, 38 (Skutella, 214-37).

his questions because he is absent, Augustine consults the truth within and questions it instead.⁵³

Thusfar, in commenting on *vera philosophia* and *vera theologia*, Augustine simply reaffirms the insights into the nature of true philosophy that he acquired upon first reading the *Hortensius*, but now he extends them to true theology insofar as true theology is synonymous with true philosophy. Accordingly, both disciplines involve a love of wisdom. Both encourage an authentic search for truth and discourage an inauthentic one. And both strive to attain the common object of their love through agreement with others. It remains, then, as the final part of this study, to examine the implications of these ideas for Augustine's conception of *vera philosophia* before and after 396.

The Continuity of Augustine's Understanding of *Vera Philosophia*

Augustine's interest in *vera philosophia* is evident from the very beginning in his Cassiciacum dialogues. Not only does this idea play an important role in the dialogues, but it also attests to the Christian character of Augustine's conversion. Moreover, Augustine's discovery of Cicero's *Hortensius* clearly plays a crucial role in Augustine's understanding of the meaning of this term, both before and after 396.

Despite this continuity in outlook, the changes that occur in Augustine's thinking in 396 inevitably affect his understanding of *vera philosophia*. There are at least three significant ways in which this is the case. First, Augustine's entry into the ecclesiastical life of the Church requires him to broaden the scope of his method of seeking truth through question and answer and to moderate the emphasis that he placed on the liberal arts as a means of salvation in the Cassiciacum dialogues. Second, Augustine's reassessment of the Platonists leads him to curb his youthful enthusiasm for their writings and to submit them more rigorously to the standard of Christ's authority. Third, Augustine's altered perspective on grace and human freedom requires him to align the notion of *vera philosophia* with the doctrine of grace that he defends during the Pelagian controversy. Of these three concerns, the third constitutes the main focus of this section since the first two have already been addressed above.

⁵³ *Confessions* XI, 3, 5 (Skutella, 267).

In his critique of Varro in *De civitate dei* VII Augustine indicates that he intends to root out all of the harmful, erroneous opinions that have darkened the minds of the enemies of true piety for generations. Augustine attributes the persistence of this problem to the power that concupiscence has over humankind.⁵⁴ In Book VIII Augustine discovers a ray of light in Plato's philosophy; for it was Plato who first realized that the source of all life, truth, and goodness was an eternal, incorporeal being.⁵⁵ Despite the brilliance of this insight, Augustine criticizes Plato for his pride and places him in the company of the enemies of true piety. As was the case with all of the pagan philosophers, in the end, Plato failed to find the truth because he relied upon himself in searching for wisdom instead of humbly submitting himself to Christ's authority.⁵⁶ Plato's failure as a philosopher, then, stems from his desire to philosophize without the grace of God, the only source of the humility that informs true piety. Thus, even Plato, the greatest pagan philosopher of them all, falls short of the truth because he cannot discern the difference between presumption and confession. And he cannot do so because he has not found the Way to the truth.⁵⁷

Augustine's critique of Plato points to the redemptive character of *vera philosophia* and the necessity for grace if the true philosopher is to attain wisdom. In concluding the *De civitate dei*, Augustine observes that even Cicero is compelled to admit that in some way the pagans recognized that the philosophical life depends on grace. But the life that Augustine has in mind is that of the true philosopher, not just any kind of philosopher. Moreover, if *vera philosophia* is instrumental in the attainment of beatitude, and if true philosophers are few in number, their scarcity warrants the belief that human beings have been justly condemned to a life of misery on account of their ignorance and wrongdoing.⁵⁸

What is of interest in this passage is the suggestion that the true philosophers of this world are the elect because they are the true Christians who most earnestly and piously seek wisdom. While there is no guarantee that a particular individual will be saved, all are entreated to follow the path of wisdom in the hope that they will

⁵⁴ *De civitate dei* VI, 12 (CCL 47, 184); VII, preface (CCL 47, 184-185).

⁵⁵ *De civitate dei* VIII, 1 (CCL 47, 217); 8 (CCL 47, 224-225).

⁵⁶ *Epistula* 186 (CSEL 57, 77).

⁵⁷ *De civitate dei* VIII, 5 (CCL 47, 221-222); *Confessions* VII, 20, 26 (Skutella, 149-150); *Sermo* 141 (PL 38, 814-819).

⁵⁸ *De civitate dei* XXII, 22 (CCL 48, 740-741).

eventually attain happiness. In this respect, Augustine does not exclude anyone from the category of true lovers of wisdom. Since all human beings yearn for the truth, the possibility of seeking wisdom in this life is offered to all, though only some will choose to do so in an upright manner.⁵⁹

Thus, in his role as Christian bishop, Augustine assumes the role of Christian teacher who, through dialogue with others, seeks to recall wayward individuals to themselves in the hope that they too may humbly submit to Christ and thereby seek the wisdom of God. Concomitantly, grace empowers human nature with the energy of divine love and raises up true lovers of wisdom from the mass of fallen humanity. Why some reject this love and others do not remains a mystery to Augustine. Yet he never ceases to believe that where truth is found there also grace is at work reconciling the conflicting demands of the intellectual, moral, and religious strivings of human nature corrupted in the fall.⁶⁰ For even if the wisdom of Christ is beyond the grasp of pagans like Cicero and Plato, Augustine recognizes that Christ speaks as powerfully through them as he does through Christians.⁶¹

Augustine's acknowledgement of the congruence between pagan and Christian wisdom both before and after 396 reveals a gradual but ever deepening understanding of what *vera philosophia* means in the context of the search for Christian wisdom. Perhaps the most significant change that occurs in his thinking on this subject is the abandonment of the belief that human effort alone suffices to initiate the search for truth. Augustine's pessimism regarding fallen humanity's ability to lift itself up to the truth through its own endeavor is nonetheless completely consonant with the Platonic notion that God is the source of all the truth, beauty, and goodness in the world. This consciousness combined with Augustine's growing awareness of the implications of Christian thought for the pursuit of wisdom effect a change in his approach to *vera philosophia* without eroding its essential characteristics.

⁵⁹ *Epistula* 155 (CSEL 44, 431-439).

⁶⁰ *De civitate dei* VII, 5 (CCL 47, 190); XII, 22 (CCL 48, 845). Cf. *Contra Iulianum* IV, 3, 17 (PL 44, 745-746); *Epistula* 82 (CSEL 34, 363); 155 (CSEL 44, 431-439); 184 A (CSEL 44, 735), 186 (CSEL 57, 77).

⁶¹ *Epistula* 130 (CSEL 44, 50-51); *Contra Iulianum* IV, 15, 78 (PL 44, 778-779); *De civitate dei* XVIII, 41 (CCL 48, 635-638).

As a consequence, at the end of his life, in the midst of his controversy with Julian of Eclanum, Augustine continues to cling to the distinction between true and false philosophy and the hope that, like himself, Julian can overcome his incessant wrangling in the name of truth. For it is only true, or Christian, philosophy that enables the lover of wisdom to rise above the dissonance of worldly philosophers in seeking the answers to questions about the self and God.⁶² To appeal to dualistic categories of thought is to run the risk of ignoring the antiquity of the voice of divine wisdom that Augustine clearly encounters in his reading of Cicero's *Hortensius* and the writings of the Platonists.

Canisius College, Buffalo NY

Marianne DJUTH

⁶² *Contra Iulianum* IV, 14, 72 (PL 44, 774): *Obsecro te, non sit honestior philosophia gentium quam nostra christiana, quae una est uera philosophia, quando quidem studium uel amor sapientiae significatur hoc nomine.* For a discussion of the origin of the term *philosophia christiana* in this context, see Goulven Madec, "*Philosophia christiana* (Augustin, *Contra Iulianum*, IV, 14, 72)" in *Petites Études*, 163–177.