

AUGUSTINE VERSUS JULIAN OF ECLANUM ON THE LOVE OF WISDOM

In his article "Philosophia Christiana (Augustin, *Contra Iulianum*, IV, 14, 72)" Goulven Madec raises the issue of the relevance of philosophy in Augustine's late works, particularly in relation to the controversy with Julian of Eclanum.¹ Rather than divide Augustine's works into two distinct periods – a philosophical period prior to 396 and a theological period after 396 – Madec observes continuity in Augustine's works from the earliest period onwards.² That continuity revolves around the notion of the *vera philosophia* of Christianity and Augustine's identification of it with the term *philosophia Christiana* in *Contra Iulianum* IV, 14, 72. Imploring Julian to embrace the true philosophy of Christianity, Augustine writes: "I beg you, do not let the philosophy of Gentiles be more honest than our Christian philosophy, which is the one true philosophy, in as much as the study or the love of wisdom is signified by this name."³ Augustine then encourages Julian to consider the implications of Cicero's *Hortensius* for overcoming his erroneous views.

Madec's interest in Augustine's use of this term in his late works is no doubt significant given the current tendency to cast the thought of the late Augustine solely in theological terms.⁴ Augustine, however, uses the term *philosophia Christiana* on three different occasions in the controversy with Julian of Eclanum, once in the *Contra Iulianum* and twice in the *Opus imperfectum contra Iulianum*.⁵ The central theme in these passages is the extent of humankind's ability to resist the love of the world, or the temptations of the flesh, in the fall's aftermath. Thus, in the midst of his controversy with Julian of Eclanum over the

¹ Goulven Madec, "'Philosophia christiana' (Augustin *Contra Iulianum*, IV, 14, 72) in *Petites Études Augustiniennes*, Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité, 142 (Paris, 1994: Institute d'Études Augustiniennes), 163-177.

² Goulven Madec, "Le 'Platonisme' des Pères," in *Petites Études Augustiniennes*, 27-50. See also *Le Dieu d'Augustin* (Paris: du Cerf, 1998), 83.

³ *Contra Iulianum* 4, 14, 72 (PL 44, 774): Obsecro te, non sit honestior philosophia Gentium, quam nostra Christiana, qua una est vera philosophia, quandoquidem stadium vel amor sapientiae significatur hoc nomine.

⁴ See, for example, Carol Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 36, 274.

⁵ *Contra Iulianum* 4, 14, 72 (PL 44, 774); *Opus imperfectum contra Iulianum* 2, 166 (CSEL 85/1, 286-287), 4, 22 (CSEL 85/2, 22-23). The notion of theology appears in neither of these works.

Christian understanding of marriage, original sin, and the evil of carnal concupiscence Augustine recalls Julian's attention to the role that the love of wisdom plays in combating the ill effects of humanity's fall from goodness.

In this respect, Augustine's use of the term *philosophia Christiana* indicates that even at the end of his life he never relinquished his interest in philosophy because it provides the sure means of countering the threat that Pelagians like Julian of Eclanum posed to Christianity. When viewed from this perspective, Augustine's response to Julian is much more complex than initially meets the eye. For underlying the preoccupation with marriage and human sexuality is the concern that carnal concupiscence, the residual effect of the fall, is inimical to the philosophical way of life. And if this is so, then the lust for pleasure constitutes the antithesis of the love of wisdom.⁶

In order to draw out the implications of these claims, I will address three concerns in the remarks that follow: the distinction between an authentic and inauthentic Christian philosophy, the development in Augustine's response to secular philosophy, and the extent of Augustine's reliance on a vertical model of Christian philosophy. Far from undermining the importance of philosophy in Augustine's thought, the polemical nature of the controversy manifests the need to defend the possibility of Christian philosophy against the attacks of pseudo-Christians like Julian of Eclanum, who fail to perceive the relevance of Christ's incarnation and redemption for the practice of philosophy.

Augustine's substitution of the term *philosophia Christiana* for *vera philosophia* in the controversy with Julian of Eclanum signals a subtle shift in his perspective on philosophy. There are three factors that may have contributed to this change in outlook. First, it may simply be the case, as Madec has argued, that Augustine acquired the notion of Christian philosophy from his acquaintance with Rufinus of Aquileia's *Historia ecclesiastica*, an early fifth century text.⁷ Second, assuming that he indeed had some acquaintance with Rufinus' text, Augustine may very well have recognized the usefulness of the expression for distinguishing a genuine Christian philosophy from a fraudulent one, such as that of Julian of Eclanum. Aware of the threat to Christian philosophy from dissenters within the Christian community, Augustine could have regarded the expression as a convenient way of differentiating pseudo-Christians, like Julian, from true, or orthodox,

⁶ *Contra Iulianum* 4, 14, 65 (PL 44, 769-770); 5, 10, 42 (PL 44, 808).

⁷ Goulven Madec, *Petites Études Augustiniennes*, 164.

lovers of wisdom.⁸ Finally, given the established nature of the Church as an institution in fifth-century society and Augustine's mature grasp of Christian doctrine, Augustine could easily have seen in the term a clear expression of Christianity's effective possession of the true wisdom of Christ embodied in salvific religion as opposed to the worldly wisdom found in other sects.

Whatever the explanation for this linguistic shift may be, in his anti-Pelagian writings, Augustine represents Julian as the antithesis of a Christian philosopher on account of his denial of original sin and his failure to affirm the devastating effect that carnal concupiscence has on human nature. In his own works, first to Turbantius, and then, later on, to Florus, Julian rejects the idea that the taint of Adam's sin was transmitted to his descendents in the form of carnal concupiscence. As a result, Julian's conception of Christian marriage and the role human sexuality has in it differs considerably from Augustine's, as does his doctrine of divine grace.

Since, for Julian, human beings still possess the *possibilitas boni* in their nature and are therefore capable of choosing between good and evil, a protective form of divine assistance suffices to enable them to regulate carnal desire and to channel it in the proper direction. A conception of grace more intrusive than this, such as Julian construed Augustine's to be, robs the will of its freedom to choose and depicts God as a cruel and unjust arbiter who divides humanity into two groups: the *massa damnata* who perish through no personal faults of their own and the elect who attain salvation solely on account of divine favor. In so far as Augustine's doctrine of original sin implies humanity's complete inability to resist the force of carnal concupiscence without divine grace, Julian concludes that human sexuality must be evil because fallen human nature, deprived of its original goodness, is now naturally capable only of evil.⁹

Given the public nature of the controversy between Augustine and Julian and the concern that ordinary Christians might be misled by Julian's statements, Augustine's strategy to refute Julian's arguments inevitably involved many layers. Not only was the controversy over whose theodicy was more appropriate or whose position was ultimately Manichaean, but it was also over who truly lived and thought as a Christian should live and think. From Augustine's perspective, what

⁸ For the gravity of the threat posed to Christianity, see *Contra Iulianum* 1, 6, 21 (PL 44, 654-655); 6, 26, 83 (PL 44, 658).

⁹ For the debate between Julian and Augustine on the *possibilitas boni* see *Opus imperfectum* 5, 31-63 (CSEL 85/2, 229-285).

was at stake was the very nature of Christian philosophy. As a result, an important strand of Augustine's refutation of Julian's writings in defense of Pelagianism was to strip away Julian's pretense of being a Christian philosopher and in so doing to clarify the true nature of Christian philosophy.¹⁰

For Augustine, the obvious sign of an inauthentic Christian philosophy is its complete disregard for the necessity of the incarnation and redemption. If wisdom is to be attained, then the intellectual content of philosophy must conform to the Christian understanding of reality. Julian's denial of the doctrine of original sin and the evil effect of carnal concupiscence on the soul even after it has been regenerated by baptism implies, to Augustine, that Julian's conception of fallen human nature is radically different than that of true Christianity. As a result, Julian places too much emphasis on a human being's natural ability to resist the evil of carnal concupiscence. In so doing, he denies the absolute necessity for grace in overcoming an evil that married couples, at best, can use for a good end, namely, the reproduction of children. For Augustine, Christian reality dictates that, in the absence of divine grace, the struggle between the flesh and the spirit is a permanent disability that afflicts human beings in this life.¹¹

Julian's confidence in the good of carnal concupiscence, however, strikes Augustine as indicative of his inability to adhere to the intellectual, moral, and religious demands of the Christian philosophical life.¹² To Augustine, Julian's failure to follow his arguments demonstrates the truth of the doctrine that Julian strives to undermine with his dialectics, namely, the doctrine of original sin.¹³ For carnal concupiscence, not just personal wrongdoing, weighs the mind down with the lure of pleasure that obstructs the mind's efforts to find the truth.¹⁴ Julian's faulty syllogistic reasoning, his irrelevant remarks and

¹⁰ *Contra Iulianum* 4, 11, 57 (PL 44, 765); 5, 9, 37 (PL 44, 806); 6, 20, 64 (PL 44, 862).

¹¹ Augustine distinguishes sensation from concupiscence at *Contra Iulianum* 5, 15, 55 (PL 44, 814-815); 6, 18, 56 (PL 44, 855-856); *Opus imperfectum* 4, 27 (CSEL 85/2, 27) and good and bad concupiscence at *Contra Iulianum* 6, 16, 50 (PL 44, 851-852). For a definition of carnal concupiscence, see *Contra Iulianum* 6, 18, 53 (PL 44, 854-855) and *Opus imperfectum* 3, 177 (CSEL 85/1, 476-478). See also *Contra Iulianum* 6, 23, 70 (PL 44, 865-866) for Augustine's change of heart in regard to the applicability of carnal concupiscence to the lives of saints.

¹² *Opus imperfectum* 4, 20 (CSEL 85/2, 19-20).

¹³ *Contra Iulianum* 3, 21, 44 (PL 44, 724-725); 26, 65 (PL 44, 735-736).

¹⁴ For a study of the concept of mind in patristic literature, see A. N. Williams, *The Divine Sense: The Intellect in Patristic Theology* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

verbal manipulation, his wordiness and loquacity, his reliance on Aristotle's *Categories* and abuse of scripture are all symptomatic of his ignorance of the truth.¹⁵

Underlying this intellectual struggle is the moral difficulty Julian experiences in acknowledging the ineffectiveness of his arguments in the presence of others. Even if he does comprehend the truth of Christianity, his stubbornness and pride prevent him from admitting his mistakes and moderating his desires. Contentious and vain, Julian reminds Augustine of the Athenian philosopher Polemo who, as a dissolute young man, burst into the school of Xenocrates in the middle of a talk on temperance and was converted to philosophy. Conjuring up in his mind an assembly of holy men before whom Julian stands, Augustine suggests that, following Polemo's example, Julian should desist from his sophistic wrangling with them. For these venerable bishops are to be revered more than Xenocrates since Christ is their teacher, and surely Christ is more worthy of respect than Plato, the teacher of Xenocrates, is. If Julian exhibits more reverence for holy men of this temper from both east and west, then perhaps he, too, would be able to recognize the true worth of Christian philosophy.¹⁶

Julian's unwillingness to submit to the truth of Christian philosophy, therefore, contributes to his ignorance of the truth. His defense of the natural virtues of the pagans reflects not only the extent of his Pelagian sentiments, but also his ignorance of the need for faith if virtuous actions are to be at all effective. The virtuous deeds of unbelievers, such as Fabricius and Regulus, are of no avail in the attainment of salvation because they are not done for the sake of divine glory. They are, in short, ineffectively good as long as they rely on the law of nature apart from faith in Christ.¹⁷

In language reminiscent of Aristotle's ethics, Augustine attributes Julian's error to his inability to discern the difference between the function and the end of an action. True virtue takes into account the end of the action, the reason for which the action is to be done, in addition to its function, the action that is to be done.¹⁸ To judge an

¹⁵ *Contra Iulianum* 2, 6, 16 (PL 44, 685); 6, 6, 15 (PL 44, 831-832); 20, 64 (PL 44, 735); *Opus imperfectum* 2, 51 (CSEL 85/1, 199-200).

¹⁶ *Contra Iulianum* 1, 4, 12 (PL 44, 617-618) 7, 35 (PL 44, 665-666).

¹⁷ *Contra Iulianum* 4, 3, 17 (PL 44, 745-746); *Opus imperfectum* 1, 83 (CSEL 85/1, 96). Compare Augustine's response to Julian on the righteous people of the Old Testament at *Opus imperfectum* 1, 124 (CSEL 85/1, 137-138).

¹⁸ Augustine provides an example at *Contra Iulianum* 4, 14, 66 (PL 44, 770-771).

action's moral worth solely on the basis of its function is to run the risk of mistaking the appearance of virtue for real virtue. The vice of stubbornness, for example, deceptively mimics constancy, and yet, its resemblance to virtue is as far removed from actual virtue as the other vices are.¹⁹

In Augustine's mind, then, the presence of true virtue in the soul depends upon the possession of true wisdom. On this account, Augustine can truly say that without faith that works through love an unbelieving will is no will at all.²⁰ And if this is the case, then the natural virtues of the pagans are insufficient for salvation because they are not from God, but solely from a nature that, when deprived of divine grace, lacks the capacity to love others as it ought to through the love of God.²¹ In this respect, even the moral nobility of the pagans is suspect because it inevitably involves a love of the world, which is not from God.

To Augustine, then, Julian's attempt to philosophize without Christ manifests not only the extent of his intellectual and moral confusion but also the degree of his religious impairment. For even though he identifies human goodness for the most part with virtue instead of with bodily pleasure, as the Epicureans do, he fails to comprehend that true virtue is synonymous with the virtue of true piety. "Piety is wisdom," Augustine says, quoting Job 28:28; that wisdom, namely, that comes only from God.²² This kind of piety implies faithfulness, the devoted loyalty of a humble servant of God who, like Job, remains steadfast in truth and goodness even in the midst of great trials and tribulations.²³

Augustine, however, can think of no greater source of misery than the struggle between the flesh and the spirit. The stark contrast that he draws between Job's fidelity and Julian's infidelity highlights the intractability of Julian's impiety in stubbornly refusing to relinquish his belief in the natural goodness of carnal concupiscence.²⁴ Consequently, Julian's failure to live up to the intellectual, moral, and religious demands of the Christian philosophical life implies, to Augustine at least, that Julian is nothing but a sophist, a living example of what it means to be a false, or inauthentic, Christian philosopher.

¹⁹ *Contra Iulianum* 4, 3, 20-22 (PL 44, 748-749).

²⁰ *Contra Iulianum* 4, 3, 19 (PL 44, 747-748); 3, 30 (PL 44, 753-754); 8, 51 (PL 44, 763-764) and *Opus imperfectum* 5, 57 (CSEL 85/2, 264-266).

²¹ *Contra Iulianum* 4, 3, 33 (PL 44, 755-756).

²² *Contra Iulianum* 3, 21, 48 (PL 44, 726-727).

²³ Compare Augustine's remark at *Contra Iulianum* 6, 16, 50 (PL 44, 851-852) in which he maintains that the antidotes to ignorance and difficulty, namely, truth and charity, are the gift of divine grace.

²⁴ *Contra Iulianum* 2, 5, 14 (PL 44, 683-684).

Unlike Julian, a true or authentic Christian philosopher orders his life in keeping with the love of divine wisdom and thereby shuns the wisdom of this world that Julian finds so attractive. Because the wisdom that he seeks is Christian, it is inconceivable to Augustine that anyone could ever philosophize without Christ, much less that the wisdom the philosopher ultimately finds could ever be divisive.²⁵ Thus, Julian's efforts to set dialectical traps for unwary Christian philosophers like Augustine inevitably fail because to philosophize with the Mediator implies that truth defies all contradictions, both inner and outer.²⁶ If the purpose of the redemption is to reconcile human beings with God, then the purpose of philosophy is to reconcile all opposing views in the harmony of truth; for it is in the harmony of truth that Christ is found.²⁷

In rejecting worldly wisdom, though, Augustine is careful to distinguish the pseudo-wisdom that Julian promotes from that of pagan philosophers who, while ignorant of the fullness of truth revealed in Christianity, hold views that more or less approximate to it.²⁸ Augustine's rejection of Julian's dialectics should not be construed as implying a Manichaean denunciation of the secular world for being inherently evil and, hence, a complete avoidance of it. From the time of his conversion onwards Augustine displays an ambivalent attitude towards the world although, as he himself admits, his youthful appraisal of it lacked the sobering effect that the mastery of scripture eventually provided for him regarding the full implications of the fall and the power of divine grace. Much like Julian, whom he represents as a wayward son and the heretical antithesis of the one who sought out Ambrose and Simplicianus, he was struck by the goodness of creation, so much so that in the *Retractationes* he voices his regret for having put too much emphasis on the insights of the Platonists in his early works.²⁹ But unlike Julian, Augustine insists that even as a

²⁵ *Opus imperfectum* 5, 23 (CSEL 85/2, 211): Ego uero non Aristotelem uel Chrysippum, multo minus unum cum sua loquacitate Iulianum, magister delector habere; sed Christum, qui profecto nisi natura humana magnum esset bonum non pro illa homo fieret, cum Deus esset.

²⁶ *Contra Iulianum* 6, 18, 55 (PL 44, 855); 19, 60 (PL 44, 858-859).

²⁷ *Contra Iulianum* 6, 5, 11 (PL 44, 828-829).

²⁸ *Contra Iulianum* 5, 16, 60 (PL 44, 544-545); *Opus imperfectum* 4, 18 (CSEL 85/2, 18-19).

²⁹ *Retractationes* 1, 1, 4 (CCL 57, 10-11). Compare the remark at *Contra Iulianum* 6, 12, 39 (PL 44, 843). See also Augustine's use of the image of wandering in relation to Julian, an image that recalls the parable of the prodigal son, at *Opus imperfectum* 2, 59 (CSEL 85/1, 206-207); 3, 20 (CSEL 85/1, 362-363); 64 (CSEL 85/1, 400-401).

recent convert to Christianity he never denied the doctrine of original sin.³⁰

Now, an aging bishop well-versed both in scripture and in secular philosophy, Augustine adopts a balanced approach with respect to the pagans' appropriation of the truth of Christianity. By collating scripture with the texts of pagan philosophers, in his writings against Julian Augustine is able to discern the difference between truth and error.³¹ Thus, when Julian tries to paint him as an irrational extremist for choosing scripture over logic, Augustine is quick to point out to Julian that dialectical reasoning is to be avoided only if it is used improperly as a means of personal aggrandizement rather than in pursuit of the truth. As in the case of the Platonists, it is Julian's pride, not dialectic, that is at issue.³²

For this reason, Augustine prefers to focus on the insights of moral philosophers more so than on the natural philosophers that Julian lists as opponents of the doctrine of original sin. To counter Julian's claim, Augustine produces his own list of philosophers from Cicero's *Hortensius*, who, despite their ignorance of Christianity, recognize the dangers inherent in carnal concupiscence far more than the bishop of Eclanum does.³³ Long before Augustine's debate with Julian, these philosophers, among whom Cicero mentions Aristotle, were able to grasp the empirical basis of the doctrine of original sin from their familiarity with the errors and hardships of life.

As a result of the insights gained from the collation of Christian and pagan texts, the model of Christian philosophy that Augustine finds most appropriate to the pursuit of Christian wisdom is one that reconciles the opposition between faith and reason, revelation and dialectic, grace and freedom, openness and hiddenness, and divinity and humanity, for it is in this fashion that the Mediator restores the eternal harmony of creation.³⁴ Even during this period Augustine continues to fuse ascension and journey imagery in a paradoxical harmony of horizontal and vertical indicators of salvation. Both the horizontal image of the Christian's pilgrimage through time and the vertical image

³⁰ *Contra Iulianum* 6, 12, 39 (PL 44, 843).

³¹ *Contra Iulianum* 2, 9, 32 (PL 44, 695-696).

³² *Contra Iulianum* 3, 7, 16 (PL 44, 710) 10, 20 (PL 44, 712); 5, 14, 51 (PL 44, 763-764).

³³ *Contra Iulianum* 4, 12, 60-61 (PL 44, 767-768); 14, 72 (PL 44, 774-775); 15, 75-78 (PL 44, 776-779); 16, 83 (PL 44, 781-782); 5, 8, 33 (PL 44, 804).

³⁴ Augustine recognizes the difficulty of undertaking such a task at *Contra Iulianum* 4, 8, 47 (PL 44, 761-762).

of the mind's liberation from the force of carnal concupiscence weighing it down are integral to his efforts to refute Julian's arguments.³⁵

Augustine's interest in Christian philosophy in the works against Julian may seem odd at times when viewed from the perspective of contemporary theologians who often posit a sharp division between philosophy and theology in interpreting Augustine's works after 396. But when viewed historically in the context of fifth century thought and in keeping with Madec's suggestion that the continuity in Augustine's thought is rooted in the inability to conceive of reason functioning independently of Christian belief, Augustine's appropriation of the term Christian philosophy is perfectly understandable.³⁶ In fact, it reveals the extent to which philosophically-minded bishops like Augustine excelled in co-opting secular philosophies and replacing them with a distinctive philosophy of their own. Both Goulven Madec and Pierre Hadot have observed that in late antiquity the notion of philosophy is often used synonymously with Christianity.³⁷ In this sense, it is completely fitting that Christian philosophy is nothing other than the true religion of Christ that all true lovers of wisdom embrace.

Furthermore, Julius Domanski, in tracing the development of the notion of Christian philosophy in Western thought, has noted that it is only in the thirteenth century that theology as a science, or as a discipline in its own right, emerges from the shadow of patristic philosophy.³⁸ Because Augustine's influence on early Medieval thought was considerable, Julian's perspective on the fall and its consequences was largely lost to sight in the west until the twelfth century when Abelard's objections to Augustinianism surfaced in his *Collationes*, a dialogue in which he associates Christian, or true, philosophy with theology.³⁹

³⁵ See, for example, the passages at *Opus imperfectum* 1, 69 (CSEL 85/1, 75-78); 3, 44 (CSEL 85/1, 384-385); 5, 1 (CSEL 85/2, 165-167); 11 (CSEL 85/2, 179-183) for weight imagery.

³⁶ See n. 2 above.

³⁷ Goulven Madec, *Petites Études Augustiniennes*, 177; Pierre Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?* Folio 280 (Gallimard, 195), 355.

³⁸ Julius Domanski, *La philosophie, théorie ou manière de vivre? Les controverses de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance*, Vestigia 18 (Freiburg, Switzerland: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1996), 61-79. Compare Hadot's remarks on philosophy as the servant of theology at *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique*, 379-387.

³⁹ See Peter Abelard, *Collationes*, edited and translated by John Marenbon and Giovanni Orlandi (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001), 88: ... a quo tanquam uera Sophia idest sapientia Dei quicumque instructi sunt, ueri sunt dicendi philosophi. Abelard construes this wisdom as the wisdom of Christ in *Ep.* 13. See n. 23 in Marenbon, 89. See also Madec's comment in *Petites Études Augustiniennes*, 177: "La vraie philosophie, dans l'esprit d'Augustin, s'identifie à la vraie religion, dans cette entreprise d'intelligence de la foi qui s'appellera plus tard, – avec Abélard précisément –, la théologie."

Augustine, however, never ceased philosophizing with Christ because he was convinced that Christ was the sole Mediator who could liberate human nature from the evil of carnal concupiscence that Adam transmitted to his descendents in the fall.

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