

TRUTH AND IMAGE IN AUGUSTINIAN EPISTEMOLOGY¹

Abstract

Numerous authors have argued that an excessively Platonic view of the soul is discernible in Augustine's early writings. Before long however, so the argument runs, Augustine shifts away from these positions and adopts the more orthodox stances that characterize his later works. In this paper, I follow this progressive interpretation, but take the additional step of outlining the effect that this transition has on Augustine's epistemological system. Namely, whereas many suppose Augustine has a largely static theory of knowledge throughout his forty years of publication, I argue that there is in fact a discernible shift in Augustine's epistemology. Specifically, in his early work Augustine follows the Platonic assumption that the soul possesses Truth within, not images. Before long, however, Augustine jettisons Truth from the soul, preferring instead to argue that the soul has a vision of Truth which is above the soul; whilst only images of Truth abide in the soul. How and why this shift occurs is the subject matter of this paper.

Numerous authors have argued that an excessively Platonic view of the soul is discernible in Augustine's early writings.² Platonic themes such as a world-soul, the pre-incarnate existence of the soul, the partial immutability of the soul, and even the qualified divinity of the soul are alluded to in these early texts. Before long however, so the argument runs, Augustine shifts away from these positions and adopts the more orthodox stances that characterize his later works.³ In this paper, I follow this progressive interpretation, but take the additional step of outlining the effect that this transition has on Augustine's epistemological system.

¹ I would like to thank Peter Erb for a number of helpful suggestions on earlier versions of this paper. I would also like to thank two anonymous referees for their valuable comments.

² Robert O'Connell, *St. Augustine's Early Theory of Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968); Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) and Phillip Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³ The progressive model has recently undergone some criticism by Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) and John Peter Kenney, "Confession and the Contemplative Self in Augustine's Early Works," *Augustinian Studies* 38 (2007): 133-146.

Many suppose Augustine has a largely static theory of knowledge throughout his forty years of publication.⁴ In this paper, I argue there is in fact a discernible shift in Augustine's epistemology. Specifically, in his early work Augustine follows the Platonic assumption that the soul possesses Truth within, not images: "the figures of Geometry are in the Truth... Truth also is compelled to be in our mind... Or have that line or squareness or roundness other things which they imitate that they may be true? In no way can I believe that".⁵ Before long, however, Augustine jettisons Truth from the soul, preferring instead to argue that the soul has a vision of Truth which is above the soul; whilst only images of Truth abide in the soul: "So when we know God... that knowledge becomes a kind of likeness of God; yet that knowledge is of a lower kind, since it is in a lower nature".⁶ How and why this shift occurs is the subject matter of this paper.

1. Platonic Epistemology and the Early Augustine

The capstone of Platonic epistemology is the doctrine of recollection (*Meno* 81ff; *Phaedo* 73ff). According to it, human souls get a pre-incarnate glimpse of the Forms. Incarnate learning, therefore, is simply

⁴ Thus, Henry Bubacz, in *St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1981): 141-145, interchangeably cites from such chronologically distinct texts as *De Immortalitate Animae* and *De Trinitate*, as though Augustine expounds the same doctrine at both times. Similarly, Ronald Nash, in *The Light of the Mind* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1969): 65-68, cites from *De Quantitate Animae* in one pen stroke, and *De Trinitate* in another, without indicating possible evolution. Nash does, however, discuss Augustine's shifting attitude toward recollection later in his book (Pg. 82-84). More recently, Robert Miner argues that roughly the same doctrine of Augustinian recollection that is at work in *Soliloquia* is evident in later works such as *De Magistro*, and perhaps even *Retractationes*. See Robert Miner, "Augustinian Recollection", *Augustinian Studies* 38 (2007): 435-450.

⁵ *Soliloquia* 2.33: Siue enim figurae geometricae in ueritate, siue in eis ueritas sit, anima nostra, id est intellegentia nostra, contineri nemo ambigit, ac per hoc in nostro animo etiam ueritas esse cogitur. Quod si quaelibet disciplina ita est in animo, ut in subiecto inseparabiliter, nec interire ueritas potest; quid, quaeso, de animi perpetua uita, nescio qua mortis familiaritate dubitamus? An illa linea uel quadratura uel rotunditas habent alia quae imitentur ut uera sint? Nullo modo id possum credere. — Translations follow C. C. Starbuck "Soliloquies" in *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine, Vol. 1* (New York: Random House, 1948) ed. Whitney Oates, 259-300. To help with context, I occasionally cite a wider portion of the Latin text than appears in the translation.

⁶ *De Trinitate* 9.11.16: Ita cum Deum nouimus, quamuis meliores efficiamur quam eramus antequam nossemus, maximeque cum eadem notitia etiam placita digneque amata uerbum est, fitque aliqua Dei similitudo illa notitia; tamen inferior est, quia in inferiore natura est.

a matter of unearthing the Truths that are already buried within. For example, in *Meno* 82, Socrates questions a servant boy about the mathematical structure of a triangle. The boy, who has never been educated in geometry, figures out the intricacies of the triangle by himself, with only some helpful prompting from Socrates. Socrates concludes the boy must have already possessed the Truths about the triangle within:

And if there have been always true thoughts in him, both at the time when he was and was not a man, which only need to be awakened into knowledge by putting questions to him, his soul must have always possessed this knowledge, for he always either was or was not a man?... If the truth of all things always existed in the soul, the soul would be immortal.⁷

The boy already has the Truths of geometry buried within, and he simply needs to recollect or retrieve them.

A related principle in Plato's epistemological system is that knowledge is not possible if images are involved.⁸ In *Republic*, Plato argues that people who look to the sensible world of sights and sounds can have opinion (*doxa*), but not knowledge (*epistēmē*).⁹ The reason for this is that sensible objects are images of the actual intelligible objects, not the actual objects themselves.¹⁰ A sensible tree is an image of the Form of Tree, it is not the actual Form. Thus, to see the sensible tree is still not to grasp the Form itself. Since the slave boy has knowledge, and possesses Truth, it is safe to conclude that he does not possess an image of the Truth within, but rather possesses the actual Truth within. Plotinus, from whom Augustine most likely received his Platonism, stresses the fact that knowledge is not possible if the soul grasps an image of the Form as well.¹¹ This leads Plotinus to conclude

⁷ *Meno* 86a; translations follow *Meno*, Benjamin Jowett (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1949).

⁸ *Republic* 476-480; 510a and 514b. For secondary sources see Lloyd Gerson, *Knowing Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 150ff; Francisco Gonzales, "Non-propositional Knowledge in Plato", *Apeiron* 31 (1998): 235-283. For an opposing account see Gail Fine, *Plato on Knowledge and Forms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003). The interpretation given here has a neo-Platonic ring to it, but Augustine was undoubtedly exposed to neo-Platonic versions of Plato himself.

⁹ *Republic* 476ff and 507b.

¹⁰ *Republic* 476c; 509d and 510a.

¹¹ See *Ennead* 1.4.10; 4.6.1; 4.23.15; 4.5.2; 5.3.5; 5.3.8; 5.3.15; 5.5.1; 5.5.2; 5.8.4; 5.9.5; 5.9.7. As secondary sources, see Mark Alfino, "Plotinus and the Possibility of Non-Propositional Thought", *Ancient Philosophy* 8 (1988): 273-285; A. C. Lloyd, "Non-Propositional Thought in Plotinus", *Phronesis* 31 (1986): 258-265; Eyjolfur Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007): 124ff. For an opposing view, see Richard Sorabji, "Myths about Non-Propositional Thought",

that the actual Form must be present inside the intellect. Plotinus goes so far as to argue that the intelligible object is identical to the intellect.¹²

Augustine's early enthusiasm for the books of the Platonists is well documented.¹³ Indeed, Augustine's adherence to such Platonic teachings as the immortality of the soul, the existence of immaterial objects and the folly of the skeptical path is palpable. Here I attempt to demonstrate that the aforementioned Platonic framework is also evident in Augustine's early epistemology. There are several places where this framework is closely followed, one of which occurs during a prolonged argument for the immortality of the soul in the second book of *Soliloquia*. Here Augustine carries on a dialogue with reason about what and where Truth is. Reason wonders what Truth is, and responds by saying that falsity occurs when an image represents another thing: "We call that also a false tree which we see in a picture, and a false face which is reflected from a mirror".¹⁴ Reason goes on to assert that an image of a tree is more false than the relationship that a rock has to the tree, because at least the rock does not attempt to represent the tree, and so it cannot deceive people into thinking that it is the actual tree. Reason goes on to call shadows, echoes and paintings false as well, since they are both similar and dissimilar to the actual object. If they were not similar, they would not be false. If they were not dissimilar, they would not be false. But, since they are both similar and dissimilar, they are false.¹⁵ Augustine does not want images, which are only half-true and are therefore the origin of falsity, but rather Truth itself. He says that he will: "seek that Truth, which is not, as if laid out on a bifronted and self-repugnant plane, false on one side that it may be true on the other".¹⁶ Reason agrees with him and says that the actual object will be True, not an image of the object.

The outworking of this line of reasoning is that if the soul only possesses images of Truth, then humans do not have knowledge, they

Language and Logos eds. M. Nussbaum and M. Schofield, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982): 295-314.

¹² See *Ennead* 1.4.10; 5.3.5; 5.3.8; 5.4.2; 5.5.1; 5.5.2; 5.8.4; 5.9.5; 5.9.7; 6.5.7

¹³ Augustine acknowledges his indebtedness to what he calls the "books of the Platonists" (*Confessiones* 7.9.13). Concerning Plotinus, Augustine gives him the honorific title of being a second Plato in *Contra Academicos* 3.18.41. See also *Epistulae* 6. For a secondary source, see O'Connell.

¹⁴ *Soliloquia* 2.10: Dicimus item falsam arborem quam pictam uidemus, et falsam faciem quae de speculo redditur.

¹⁵ *Soliloquia* 2.29-30.

¹⁶ *Soliloquia* 2.18: Sed illud uerum quaerere, quod non quasi bifronte ratione sibi que aduersanti, ut ex aliqua parte uerum sit, ex aliqua falsum sit.

only have falsity: "Let us consider this last point, whether the body be not truly true, that is, whether there be in it, not truth, but a certain image of Truth".¹⁷ If an image of Truth is in the body, then the body is not truly true. As it turns out, the body does contain images, and is therefore false. However, actual intelligible objects, such as the idea of squareness and roundness, exist in the mind (*in animo/in subiecto*):

Or have that line, or squareness, or roundness, other things which they imitate that they may be true? In no way can I believe that... Or is not Truth where these things are?... Or is not the science in the mind.¹⁸

Since the science of geometry, and Truth in general, abides in the mind, humans can possess Truth rather than falsity.¹⁹

At this point, reason implores Augustine to conclude that the soul is immortal as well: "Therefore the soul is immortal: now at last yield to your own arguments, believe the truth; she cries out that she dwells in you, and is immortal, and that her seat cannot be withdrawn from her by any possible death of the body".²⁰ Since Truth dwells in the soul, and Truth is immortal, the soul is immortal. We will come to this argument again, but for now only the context is important. The immortality of the soul is only guaranteed because immortal Truth, rather than passing images, dwells in the soul. In *Soliloquia*, therefore, the presence of Truth rather than images in the soul undergirds both the ability to have knowledge and the immortality of the soul.

Augustine repeats the view that images are epistemologically incompetent in some of his early correspondence with Nebridius.

¹⁷ *Soliloquia* 2.32: Quare iam illud ultimum uideamus, utrum corpus non sit uere uerum, id est non in eo sit ueritas, sed quasi quaedam imago ueritatis.

¹⁸ *Soliloquia* 2.33: An illa linea uel quadratura uel rotunditas habent alia quae imitentur ut uera sint? Nullo modo id possum credere, nisi forte aliud sit linea quam longitudo sine latitudine, et aliud circulus quam linea circumducta undique ad medium aequaliter uergens. Quid ergo cunctamur? An ubi ista sunt, ueritas non est? Auertat Deus amentiam. An disciplina non est in animo? Quis hoc dixerit?

¹⁹ Augustine says that numbers and the sciences are (in) Truth on numerous occasions. See, for example, *Soliloquia* 2.17; 2.24; 2.33. Beyond this, numbers and the sciences have the same qualities that Truth has. For example, both are eternal, unchangeable and intelligible. Moreover, Augustine freely interchanges the sciences with Truth in his argument for the immortality of the soul. The soul is immortal because Truth is in the soul, and the soul is immortal because the sciences are in the soul. He also freely interchanges the presence of God in the soul with the presence of wisdom/Truth in the soul in *De Ordine* 2.1.3-2.2.7; 2.6.18-2.7.21. For a secondary source see Cary, 95-100.

²⁰ *Soliloquia* 2.33: Immortalis est igitur anima: iamiam crede rationibus tuis, crede ueritati; clamat et in te sese habitare, et immortalem esse, nec sibi suam sedem quacumque corporis morte posse subduci.

In *Epistulae* 6, Nebridius argues that “memory cannot occur without an image”. Knowing Augustine, Nebridius then says Augustine will disagree with him on this point: “But, you will say: what about our remembering that we have understood or thought something”. Nebridius is trying to suggest that our intellect contains only impressions or images, but he knows that Augustine will not like this argument. And of course, Nebridius is right. Augustine responds to him in the following letter: “You claim that memory cannot exist without images or those mental pictures which you wish to call fantasies. I think otherwise”.²¹ As an example of how memory can function without images, he cites Plato’s theory of recollection.²² According to Augustine, Plato’s theory implies that the actual ideas are present to the mind, not images of those ideas. He concludes:

If eternity itself always remains, and needs no mental image by means of which it may come into the mind, as if it were on a vehicle, and yet if it were unable to enter our mind unless we recalled it, then there can be memory of certain things without imagination.²³

Not only can the mind contain actual intelligible objects, but Augustine goes on to conclude that these objects can be “truly

²¹ *Epistula* 7: Memoria tibi nulla uidetur esse posse sine imaginibus uel imaginariis uisis, quae phantasiarum nomine appellare uoluisti: ego aliud existimo. – Translations follow Wilfrid Parsons “Saint Augustine Letters” in *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1951).

²² He cryptically credits the Platonists with his priority of the actual object over an image of the object in *Soliloquia* 2.26 as well: “Shall we desist from our undertaking, and wait in hope that some book or other may fall into our hands, which may satisfy this question? For many, I think, have written before our age, whom we have not read: and now, to give no guess at what we do not know, we see plainly that there is much writing upon this theme, both in verse and prose; and that by men whose writing cannot be unknown to us, and whose genius we know to be such, that we cannot despair of finding in their works what we require.”

²³ *Epistula* 7: Ipsa aeternitas semper manet, nec aliqua imaginaria figmenta conquirat, quibus in mentem quasi uehiculis veniat, nec tamen uenire posset, nisi eius meminissemus, potest esse quarundam rerum sine ulla imaginatione memoria. – Ronald Nash thinks *Epistula* 7 is one of the only places where Augustine endorses images in the soul of things thought (Pg. 55). Earlier in the *Epistula* Augustine divides mental images into three types, one of which is images of things thought. From this Nash concludes that Augustine thinks that there are these sorts of images. As *Epistula* 7 unfolds, however, Augustine deals with these three classes of images separately. For the first two classes, he acknowledges that there are images within the soul. However, when he considers the contentious class of things thought, he concludes that the actual intelligible object can be present without images. Thus, it is better to suppose that Augustine is introducing three possible classes of images, of which he eventually rejects the class of images of things thought. This interpretation puts *Epistula* 7 in harmony with the rest of his earlier works.

understood", while mental images are false, defective and diabolical shadows. Again, therefore, the presence of Truth in the soul is not only asserted, but is the required foundation for knowledge.

Similar themes emerge from the discussion recorded in *Contra Academicos*. Here Augustine deals with skepticism; an issue that had haunted him personally for some time. Since the title is called *Contra Academicos*, it is not surprising to see him refuting the skeptical path, and endorsing the view that knowledge is possible. The book starts by stating the skeptical claim that it is unwise to assent to something without knowing for certain that it is true. The truth is hidden due to certain "natural obscurities or because of resemblances among things".²⁴ These natural obscurities are various errors that arise due to the nature of sense perception.²⁵ Embedded in Augustine's lengthy response to the skeptic is the admission that sense perceptions may be deceptive, but the apprehension of intelligible objects is indubitable.²⁶ For example, *Contra Academicos* 3.10.23 says that although the skeptic thinks we cannot know whether there is one world or many, we can nevertheless be certain of the logic which says that there is either one world or many. This truth can be known "regardless of what condition our senses are in".²⁷ The academic claims that the senses are deceptive, for we may be dreaming, and all that appears to us would be false. However, Augustine argues that truths of mathematics remain in the mind whether the entire world is sleeping or not.²⁸ In all of these arguments, Augustine invokes the Platonic assumption that the senses are false, but there is still a Truth that can be possessed:

Whatever the Academicians maintain against the senses doesn't hold against all philosophers. There are philosophers who grant that everything the mind takes from the bodily senses can generate opinion. They deny that this is knowledge, however. They hold that knowledge is contained in the intelligence and abides in the mind, far removed from the senses.²⁹

²⁴ *Contra Academicos* 2.5.12.

²⁵ *Contra Academicos* 3.6.13; 3.18.40; 3.19.42.

²⁶ See Christopher Kirwan *Augustine* (London: Routledge, 1989): 28-29; Gerard O'Daly "The response to Skepticism and the Mechanisms of Cognition" *Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 161-163.

²⁷ *Contra Academicos* 3.13.29.

²⁸ *Contra Academicos* 3.11.25. See also 3.12.28.

²⁹ *Contra Academicos* 3.11.26: Quidquid enim contra sensus ab eis disputatur, non contra omnes philosophos ualet. Sunt enim qui ista omnia, quae corporis sensu accipit animus, opinionem posse gignere confitentur, scientiam uero negant. Quam tamen uolunt intelligentia contineri, remotamque a sensibus in mente uiuere. — Translations follow Peter King *Against the Academicians* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1995).

The reason that the sense world offers only falsehoods is because it is only an image of the real intelligible world.³⁰ On the contrary, the wise man actually possesses (*habere*, Augustine occasionally uses *possidet* and *contineri* as well) wisdom within, so he is not susceptible to such falsehood.³¹ In fact, since the skeptic acknowledges the wise man possesses wisdom, Augustine thinks the skeptic must acknowledge the wise man has knowledge.³² Augustine concludes by arguing the skeptic actually endorses this Platonic perspective, which he takes the time to endorse as well.³³ Evidently, then, Platonic themes are instrumental in the epistemology of *Contra Academicos* as well. The skeptics maintain that truth cannot be known, partially because of the fact that sense perceptions are images and therefore susceptible to error. Augustine counters this by asserting that Truth can be known because the soul possesses actual intelligible Truths, rather than images of intelligible Truths, and as such one need not worry about errors.

De Beata Vita follows *Contra Academicos* in assuming that humans can know Truth, while simultaneously rejecting the possibility of knowledge when images are involved.³⁴ From these assertions, as evident in the previous texts, the conclusion follows that the soul possesses Truth, not any sort of image of the Truth. The conclusion that the soul possesses Truth is arrived at in a different way as well in *De Beata Vita*. Augustine begins his search for the happy life by stating that "whoever possesses God is happy".³⁵ But what is it to possess God? Three opinions are given as to the meaning of this cryptic phrase, and they all revolve around the suggestion that to possess God is to be virtuous or pure. This does not refute my argument however. For, according to *De Beata Vita* 4.32-33, moderation is the greatest virtue. Moderation, so the argument runs, is the proper measure, since moderation entails that one can measure things out in proper accord. Augustine then argues that the proper measure of the soul is wisdom, for to have the equilibrium required to be properly measured, one must be wise. Wisdom, however, according to *De Beata Vita* 4.34, is the same as Truth. Thus to be happy means to possess God, which means to be virtuous, which eventually comes to mean that one possesses

³⁰ *Contra Academicos* 3.6.13; 3.17.37; 3.18.40.

³¹ *Contra Academicos* 3.12.27; 3.12.28; 3.14.32

³² *Contra Academicos* 3.3.5; 3.3.6; 3.5.12; 3.14.30; 3.14.32.

³³ *Contra Academicos* 3.20.43.

³⁴ *De Beata Vita* 2.8 says humans can know Truth; *De Beata Vita* 4.33; 4.35 rejects the use of images.

³⁵ *De Beata Vita* 2.11: Deum igitur, inquam, qui habet, beatus est.

Truth. This conclusion is not surprising, considering the fact that Augustine equates God with Truth in this text, as he is prone to do in other places as well.³⁶

This conclusion also makes sense of the fact that Augustine spends quite some time demonstrating why the skeptic, who does not possess Truth, cannot be happy. Since a happy life entails the possession of Truth, a skeptic who does not possess Truth cannot be happy. Augustine leaves the dialogue with the expectation that happiness can be achieved, a conclusion which supposes that the soul can possess Truth:

Whoever attains the supreme measure, through the truth, is happy. This means, to have God within the soul, that is, to enjoy God. Other things do not have God, although they are possessed by God... this then is the full satisfaction of souls, this is the happy life, to recognize piously and completely the one through whom you are led into the truth, the manner in which you enjoy the truth, and the bond that connects you with the supreme measure.³⁷

The soul possesses Truth and is connected to the Truth in some way. Augustine confirms that the soul possesses Truth in numerous other places in *De Beata Vita* as well.³⁸ The Augustinian assumption that Truth is present in the soul is therefore evident in *De Beata Vita*.

In *De Ordine*, Augustine again displays his view that humans can know Truth along with the view that images are impossible in bringing about Truth.³⁹ This again leads to the conclusion that humans possess Truth.⁴⁰ This conclusion is supplemented by the fact that Augustine argues the wise man is with God (*cum Deo*) in *De Ordine*. In *De Ordine* 2.1.4, Augustine defines being with God as "whatever understands God". The wise man understands God, so is with God. However, a wise man can move on a boat, so it seems that he is not with God. A response comes which states that it is not what the wise

³⁶ See, for example, *Soliloquia* 1.3; 1.15; *De Libero Arbitrio* 2.13.37; 2.15.39; *De Magistro* 8.21; *Confessiones* 3.6; 10.24; 10.35 and *De Trinitate* 4.3; 8.3. For an opposing position see Kenny (2007).

³⁷ *De Beata Vita* 4.34-4.35: Quisquis igitur ad summum modum per ueritatem uenerit, beatus est. Hoc est animo Deum habere, id est Deo frui. Cetera enim quamuis a Deo habeantur, non habent... Illa est igitur plena satietas animorum, haec est beata uita, pie perfecteque cognoscere a quo inducaris in ueritatem, qua ueritate perfruaris, per quid connectaris summo modo. — Translations follow Ludwig Schopp *The Happy Life* (London: Herder Book Co., 1939).

³⁸ See, for example, *De Beata Vita* 2.11; 2.12; 3.17; 3.19; 3.20; 3.21; 4.34.

³⁹ See *De Ordine* 2.20.53 for humans knowing Truth; See *De Ordine* 1.1.3; 2.2.4-2.2.6; 2.11.30; 2.15.43; 2.16.44 for the rejection of images.

⁴⁰ *De Ordine* 1.4.10; 1.8.24; 1.9-10; 1.10.28; 2.2.7; 2.7.20; 2.9.26.

man does, but what he knows that is with God. The interlocutor responds that the wise man knows his cloak and tunic, so this implies that the cloak and tunic is with God. However, the response is that whatever is known by the bodily sense is not with God, but what is known by the soul is. Indeed, to perceive something with the bodily sense is not knowledge, so it is the intellect of the wise man that is with God. Licentious approves and says that in this way the "wise man is utterly with God",⁴¹ in fact he "coheres with God".⁴² Therefore, in this early text as well, Augustine reveals his belief that the human soul possesses Truth and is with God.

The final early document is *De Immortalitate Animae*. In this text Augustine's argument for the immortality of the soul depends on the inseparable presence of Truth in the soul. He argues that science (*disciplina*), immutable art and unchangeable numbers (which, as we have seen, are equated with Truth in *Soliloquia*), are immortal and eternal, and that these things exist in the soul.⁴³ From these two premises he jumps to the conclusion that the soul is immortal.⁴⁴ We have seen Augustine make this argument before. It runs as follows: if the soul stopped existing, then Truth would suddenly have no place to exist in. However, Truth always exists, and must exist somewhere, so it is impossible for the soul to stop existing.

Importantly, the cornerstone of this argument is that Truth is inseparably present in the soul: it cannot not be present in the soul or the argument would fail.⁴⁵ Augustine goes into some detail about what 'inseparably present' means in *Soliloquia*. In *Soliloquia* 2.22, Augustine notes an important difference between an accidental property and an essential property of an object. He says that a wall could be a different colour, while still remaining a wall. However, fire could not be fire if it had no heat. Indeed, according to the ancient Greek conception of the four elements, whenever heat is present, in the human body for example, this is the presence of fire. He then argues that the soul has Truth essentially.⁴⁶ We can almost say that the soul could no longer be the soul if Truth were not present in it; that the presence of soul is the presence of

⁴¹ *De Ordine* 2.2.5: Sapiens prorsus cum Deo est. See also *De Ordine* 2.3.8; 2.5.17; 2.6.19.

⁴² *De Ordine* 2.2.6: Anima, inquit, sapientis perpurgata uirtutibus et iam cohaerens Deo.

⁴³ *De Immortalitate Animae* 1; 4.

⁴⁴ *De Immortalitate Animae* 1. See also *Soliloquia* 2.20-21; 2.33; *Epistulae* 3.

⁴⁵ *De Immortalitate Animae* 4; 6; 11.

⁴⁶ *Soliloquia* 2.22. See also *De Ordine* 1.9-10, 2.30; *Contra Academicos* 2.9; *De Beata Vita* 35.

Truth. This brings fresh meaning to Augustine's insistence that Truth is inseparably present in the soul. It is not possible that Truth could separate itself from the soul. The depth of this bond between the soul and Truth lends additional weight to the prevalent assumption that Augustine endorses the view that Truth itself is present in the soul.

Before moving on, I want to take stock. Augustine frequently repeats several Platonic assumptions in these early texts. First of all, the soul possesses Truth within it. Secondly, the immortality of the soul is demonstrated based on the presence of Truth within. Finally, the ability for humans to have knowledge is also founded on the presence of Truth within. Humans can have knowledge, but knowledge is not possible when false and deceptive images are involved, so Truth itself must be present within. Before long, the foundation that Truth is present in the soul will be rattled. As a consequence, the doctrine of the immortality of the soul will no longer receive rational justification, and the soul's possession of Truth will be limited.

2. The Shift in Augustinian Epistemology

In his early work Augustine achieves the seemingly happy result that humans possess Truth and that the soul is immortal. Why would Augustine shift away from these early positions? However, and here I follow O'Connell and Cary, lurking in the background of his early philosophical enterprise is the potential divinity of the soul. In this section I will briefly recapitulate the view that the soul is potentially divine in Augustine's early works, and demonstrate how Augustine shifts into a strong emphasis on the soul as an image of the divine; not divine itself. I will then spend the bulk of my time demonstrating how this shift affects his epistemology: namely, Augustine shifts from believing that the soul possesses Truth to the view that the soul only occasionally attains a vision of Truth which is above the soul.

As mentioned, numerous authors have noticed the potential divinity of the soul in Augustine's early writings. Phillip Cary argues that immutable elements such as Divine Reason and Good Will are present in the soul.⁴⁷ Immutability is an essential property of divinity, so this

⁴⁷ Cary argues that the first book of *De Libero Arbitrio*, written well before the second and third books, speaks of transcendent Good Will being in the soul (Pg. 109-111). See *De Libero Arbitrio* 1.25. Moreover, he points out that Divine Reason is also present within the soul in Augustine's early work (Pg. 77-91). See *De Ordine* 2.43; 2.48; 2.50; *Episulae* 13; *De Immortalitate Animae* 2.

implies the soul may be divine. It is clear from the preceding discussion that unchangeable Truth is present in the soul as well. Using the same line of reasoning, the soul possesses immutable Truth, whilst immutability is an attribute of divinity alone, so the soul may be divine. Perhaps without surprise, then, there are early texts in which Augustine liberally refers to the "divine spirit" of himself and his friends.⁴⁸ These and other such considerations lead some commentators to conclude the soul seems to be divine in Augustine's early writings: "In his earliest writings, under the influence of the books of the Platonists, Augustine still seems to have entertained the idea that the soul was divine".⁴⁹

It is the argument that the soul is immortal in virtue of the possession of immortal Truth which I would like to focus on. Recall that Augustine argues Truth is immortal, and Truth is inseparably present in the soul, so the soul is immortal. Plotinus presents an argument for the immortality of the soul which is similar in structure. Plotinus argues:

Wisdom and authentic virtue are divine, and could not be found in the chattel mean and mortal: what possesses these must be divine by its very capacity of the divine, the token of kinship and of identical substance.⁵⁰

The argument runs along the same vein as the one found in Augustine's early writings. Wisdom, or as Plotinus later describes it, the intellectual, cannot be found in a mortal vessel, but the intellectual is found in the soul, so the soul is immortal. The reason that the intellectual cannot be possessed by a mortal vessel is that they have an identical substance. Later in the *Ennead* Plotinus argues that the soul becomes an Intellectual Cosmos due to the presence of the intellectual within the soul. Plotinus is arguing that the soul is immortal because it becomes identical with the immortal intellectual principle.

In this same *Ennead*, Plotinus argues that the soul is divine in virtue of the fact that it is identical with the divine intellectual principle. Plotinus, of course, holds the One, the Intellectual Principle, and Soul to be divine.⁵¹ According to his doctrine of emanation, however,

⁴⁸ *Contra Academicos* 1.1.1; 1.1.3; 1.4.11; 1.8.22; 2.11.31; *De Beata Vita* 2.4 and 2.10;. For an alternate interpretation which would make this terminology sound more orthodox, see O'Meara *Academics*, Pg. 169

⁴⁹ Roland Teske "Augustine's Theory of Soul" *The Cambridge Companion To Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) eds. Eleonore Stump, Norman Kretzmann: 117. See also O'Connell, 122-131; Cary 77-105.

⁵⁰ *Ennead* 4.7.10; Translations follow *The Enneads*, Stephen MacKenna (Burdet: Larson Publications, 1992).

⁵¹ See, for example, *Ennead* 4.7.10; 5.1.1 for the divinity of the soul. See *Ennead* 1.2.3; 2.3.18; 3.2.3; 3.2.16; 4.3.12; 5.2.1; 5.2.2; 5.3.7; 5.8.11; 6.9.11 for the divinity of the intellect.

the intellectual principle is more divine than the soul. The embodied human soul especially, in its lowly terrestrial state, forgets its divinity, and is less divine than it could be. In order to “enhance the divine quality of the soul”, the intellectual principle becomes immanently present.⁵² In *Ennead* 4.7.10, Plotinus demonstrates that the soul is divine because “noble things are immanent”. The noble thing is the intellectual principle, and the immanence means that the soul becomes an “identical substance” with the intellectual cosmos. Simply put, the intellectual principle is most divine, and the soul attains to cognitive identity with the intellectual principle, so the soul becomes more divine by the connection. Plotinus summarizes this process at the end of the chapter:

He will see all things in this Intellectual substance, himself having become an Intellectual Cosmos and all lightsome, illuminated by the truth streaming from the good, which radiates truth upon all that stands within that realm of the divine. Thus he will often feel the beauty of that word, ‘Farewell: I am to you an immortal God’, for he has ascended to the Supreme, and is all one strain to enter into likeness with it.⁵³

Although the soul already has a low degree of divinity, the soul recaptures a deeper divinity when it becomes an intellectual cosmos due to its identity with the intellectual level.⁵⁴ To briefly summarize, Plotinus argues that the soul is immortal and divine in virtue of the fact that it is cognitively identical with the eternal and divine intellectual principle. Augustine argues that the soul is immortal in virtue of the inseparable presence of Truth. However, since he also thinks that Truth is divine, the same argument leads to the conclusion that the soul is divine in virtue of the presence of divine Truth.⁵⁵ As soon

⁵² Plotinus begins *Ennead* 5.1.1 by lamenting the fact that embodied souls have forgotten their divine nature. A preliminary way to recall that the soul is divine is to discern the divinity and splendor of soul in nature, and recall that the human soul itself has such splendor (*Ennead* 5.1.2). Even with this knowledge, however, the soul is merely “nearing God... there is not much between” (*Ennead* 5.1.3). In order to travel further, the soul must look upward to the intellectual principle, which is the source of soul, and is more divine. This intellectual principle “enhances the divine quality of the soul” by being immanently present (*Ennead* 5.1.3).

⁵³ *Ennead* 4.7.10.

⁵⁴ See also *Ennead* 1.6.6; 3.5.10; 5.8.11 and 6.5.7 for similar arguments.

⁵⁵ There are two possible interpretations of this argument. First of all, and most straightforwardly, if the soul stopped existing, then Truth would suddenly have no place to exist in. However, Truth always exists, and must exist somewhere, so it is impossible for the soul to stop existing. This interpretation, offered up by Phillip Cary, suffers from several shortcomings. First of all, when one soul dies, Truth seems to still abide in other

as Truth is inseparably present within the soul, the soul attains to divinity in virtue of the presence of divine Truth. In order to avoid the

souls, so it still has a place to dwell. All of the human souls would have to die at the same time in order for immortal Truth to be homeless. So, it is not clear that this is Augustine's argument for the immortality of a soul. Secondly, why couldn't Truth abide in God's mind, which everyone in this discussion agrees is eternal? If Truth could abide there, it would not need a human soul to remain alive in order to have a home. A third problem, which Cary acknowledges, is that this interpretation of the argument assumes that the ontologically superior Truth is dependent for its existence on its inferior. Plotinus, who thinks that soul emanates out of the intellectual principle, could hardly agree that the intellectual principle could not exist if a soul did not. Augustine, who thinks that God is Truth, and God creates souls, could not suddenly endorse a view which said that God would cease to exist if souls did. As Cary concludes: "This makes God's existence dependent on ours... It is important to appreciate that this conclusion was as repugnant to Neoplatonists as it was to orthodox Christians" (Cary, Pg. 102). Cary thinks that despite these obvious problems, this is the argument that Augustine is attempting to make. His conclusion is that Augustine is "philosophically incompetent" (Cary, Pg. 102) at this point in his life, so it is not surprising that he would make an erroneous argument such as this. The second interpretation assumes that Augustine is merely echoing the Plotinian argument of 4.7.10; which he seems to have done in the case of the immortality of the soul already. Cary grants that Plotinus arrives at the immortality of the soul via this route, but thinks that Augustine is not aware of the argument (Cary, Pg. 30). There are several reasons to suppose that Augustine is aware of the famous Plotinian doctrine of the identity of the knower and the thing known. First of all, as De Labriolle and Verbeke have argued, *Ennead* 4.7 seems to be the source behind Augustine's argument for the immortality of the soul. Plotinus speaks about the identity of the knower and the thing known in *Ennead* 4.7, so it is reasonable to suppose that Augustine is aware of the doctrine. Moreover, Robert O'Connell notices that sections ten and eleven of Augustine's treatise *On the Immortality of the Soul* muses about whether reason is the act of contemplation or the very objective truth which is contemplated (O'Connell, Pg. 139), again indicating that Augustine toys with the identity of the knower and the thing known. Finally, *Soliloquia*, which by definition is a monologue, posits Augustine talking to a separate Reason, which leads to Truth, while at the same time admitting that there is only one person: "Suddenly someone addresses me, whether I myself, or some other one, within me or without, I know not. For this very thing is what I chiefly toil to know" (*Soliloquia* 1.1). These considerations demonstrate that Augustine is at least aware of Plotinus' doctrine. There is reason to suppose that Augustine follows the Plotinian doctrine of cognitive identity as well. First of all, as already alluded to, the only way that Augustine's argument for the immortality of the soul can actually work is if one assumes that he is embracing the Plotinian doctrine of the unity of the intellect. Since the structure of Augustine's argument is virtually identical to the structure of Plotinus', there is more reason to suppose that Augustine is following Plotinus. Beyond this, O'Daly (Pg. 196) points to several texts in which Augustine interchanges the concepts of intellect and intelligible. These considerations demonstrate the plausibility of concluding that Augustine follows Plotinus in his doctrine of cognitive identity. The drawback of this position is that it would certainly follow that Augustine held that the soul is divine in his early writings, for it is impossible for the soul to be identical with divine Truth without itself being divine. For my purposes it does not matter which interpretation is right, for both of them imply that Truth is present in the soul, and that the soul is in a qualified sense divine.

divinity of the soul, therefore, Truth would have to no longer be inseparably present within the soul. As we will see, Augustine does begin to emphasize the fact that the soul is not divine, but rather is made in the image of the divine. At the same time, a discernible shift away from the inseparable presence of Truth within the soul is evident.

First of all, though, I want to demonstrate that Augustine emphasizes the fact that the soul is not divine. Shortly after writing his *Cassiciacum* books, Augustine begins to reveal the Nicene doctrine that everything is either a creator or a creation.⁵⁶ According to this doctrine, the soul can have no divinity within it, nor can it be created out of any divine elements. Augustine, therefore, spends some time discrediting the Manichean view that the soul is partly divine.⁵⁷ The philosophical argument that Augustine deploys against the view that the soul is partly divine is that the soul is subject to change. If the soul is partly divine, then this renders God subject to change, which is impossible.⁵⁸ This crafty argument contrasts with his earlier view that the soul has unchangeable elements within it. Augustine is now armed with theological and philosophical reasons for resisting the conclusion that divine and unchangeable Truth is present within the soul.

Augustine replaces his emphasis on the inseparable presence of divine Truth within the soul with an emphasis on the soul being an image of the divine.⁵⁹ This shift is noticeable in *De Quantitate Animae*, which is the first philosophical book written after the *Cassiciacum*

⁵⁶ Cary, 59-60; 111ff; Joseph Torchia, *Creation Ex nihilo and the Theology of St. Augustine* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999).

⁵⁷ *De Genesi Contra Manichaeos* 2.11; *De Genesi ad Litteram* 3.22.34; 7.2.3; 7.3.4-7.4.6; 7.5.8; 7.11.16; 7.28.43; *De Natura et Origine Animae* 1.4; 1.24; 2.4; 2.5; 3.3; *De Libero Arbitrio* 3.56-59; *De Duabus Animabus* 12.16; *Contra Faustum* 2.17-22; 24; *Contra Fortunatum* 1.10-18; *De Genesi ad Litteram Imperfectus Liber* 60; *De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae* 12; *De Duabus Animabus* 1.

⁵⁸ *Confessiones* 7.2.3; *De Genesi Contra Manichaeos* 2.11; *Epistulae* 166; *De Libero Arbitrio* 2.12.34. For a secondary source, see O'Daly, 32.

⁵⁹ Harrison, Pg. 74ff, argues that Augustine thinks the soul is created out of nothing, even in his earliest works. She cites many post-*Cassiciacum* texts to make her argument, and to this extent she seems to be correct. However, she also thinks that the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is evident in a *Cassiciacum* text, namely, the opening prayer of *Soliloquia* (Pg. 82). This text states that the universe is created out of nothing, but it does not say that the soul is created out of nothing, which is the issue at hand. More broadly, in writing *Retractationes*, Augustine is one of the few thinkers in history who devotes an entire book to amending previous works, so there seems to be reason to think that some of his thinking shifted over time. Specifically, some of his early musings on the soul are the exact things he shifts away from. See, for example, *Retractationes* 1.1.3; 1.4.4; 1.8.2.

texts. Not only does he mention it throughout,⁶⁰ but it makes an integral appearance at the end. In this final section, Augustine climbs up seven levels of soul, beginning with the lowest life giving level of soul that even plants have. He climbs up through the senses and reason before finally arriving at the seventh level of soul, which is the contemplation of Truth. According to the Cassiciacum texts, this Truth would be a possession of the soul, abiding within the soul. Perhaps to clarify that the soul no longer possesses divine Truth, Augustine announces:

The human soul is not what God is... therefore, it has been the divinely inspired and categorical teaching of the Catholic Church that no creature is to be adored by the soul (I prefer to use the very words by which these things were taught me), but that he alone is to be adored who is the creator of all things that are.⁶¹

God is more excellent than the soul, so no part of the soul is of the same nature with God. Not only does this text leave no doubt that divine Truth is not a possession of the soul, but Augustine also displays his recent conversion to this position.⁶²

The shift away from the inseparable presence of Truth within the soul has an immediate effect on Augustine's epistemology.

⁶⁰ *De Quantitate Animae* 1.2; 2.3; 28.55 and 34.77. See also *Epistulae* 18; 48; *De Ciuitate Dei* 12.23; *De Trinitate* 12.7.12; *Sermones de Scripturis de Nouo Testamento* 1; 2; 3; 40; *De Natura Boni* 13; *De Natura et Origine Animae* 4.20; *De Genesi ad Litteram Imperfectus Liber* 60; *De Genesi Contra Manichaeos* 1.17.27-28; 2.9-11; *De Spiritu et Littera* 48; *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 13.4; 43.6; 49.2; 146.2; *De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae* 18-20.

⁶¹ *De Quantitate Animae* 34.77: animam humanam non esse quod Deus est... Ideoque diuine ac singulariter in Ecclesia catholica traditur, nullam creaturam colendam esse animae (libentius enim loquor his uerbis quibus mihi haec insinuata sunt), sed ipsum tantummodo rerum, quae sunt, omnium Creatorem. – Translations follow Joseph Colleran "The Greatness of the Soul" (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1964). *Epistula* 18, written around the same time, also seems to demonstrate the newness of the doctrine to Augustine's mind: "Since I know you so well, here is something both great and short. There is a nature, which is subject to the changes of both time and space, as the body; and there is a nature which is not subject to space but only to time, as the soul; and there is a nature which is subject to neither space nor time, and that is God. What I have portrayed as changeable is called creature; what is unchangeable, the Creator". If the recipient of the letter knows Augustine so well, he would likely already know Augustine believed this teaching, and there would be no need to use up precious space to write about it.

⁶² Cary goes so far as to argue that Augustine's conversion to the doctrine of the creaturely nature of the soul is so new in *De Quantitate Animae* that it is mentioned, but it is not weaved into the fabric of the argument. I have attempted to show that it is worked in to the argument to some extent, but the manner in which he introduces the doctrine does seem to demonstrate the novelty of the idea to Augustine.

Remaining in *De Quantitate Animae* for a moment, there are two texts which are well worthy of investigation. In chapter two, Evodius wonders whether the soul is immortal. The Cassiciacum response would be to say that the soul has immortal Truth within it, so it is immortal. However, Augustine does not follow this route anymore. Rather, he does not directly respond to the question, and ends the conversation by asserting that the soul “does not possess the same power as He in whose likeness it has been made”. Where Augustine once would have provided an argument which implies that there are unchangeable elements in the soul, he now highlights the fact that the soul is a creation made in the likeness of God.⁶³

Later in the dialogue, Augustine repeats the familiar Plotinian phrase that one should return into oneself to find Truth. For Plotinus, as is evident from *Ennead* 6.5.7, this means that the divine intellect is within the soul, and one simply needs to turn away from the senses to reconnect with this divinity. In his early works, Augustine frequently implores his readers to return into oneself to find Truth as well, implying that Truth is within.⁶⁴ However, in this text here, Augustine suggests that we should rather ‘retire’ into ourselves, which does not imply the doctrine of pre-existence as strongly as ‘return’ does. Secondly, immediately after stating that one should retire into oneself to find knowledge, he says that this should be done in order to “become a child of God again...remake ourselves in his image”.⁶⁵ In the Cassiciacum texts, Augustine encourages his readers to return within to find Truth, while here he encourages his readers to retire within to become a child and a perfect image of God. We will come across this issue again, but for now it suffices to conclude that in *De Quantitate Animae*, Augustine no longer uses the argument for immortality which was based on the presence of Truth within, and he so dampens the claim that we can return within ourselves to find Truth that it now means that we will somehow become a child and an image of God.

In *De Magistro*, the shape of Augustine’s emerging epistemology is displayed. In his Cassiciacum works, Augustine occasionally

⁶³ Indeed, in *Retractationes* 1.5.1, Augustine is quite confused by his own argument in *De Immortalitate Animae*. To my knowledge, his later works bear no trace of an argument for the immortality of the soul, though Augustine would certainly have liked to prove it.

⁶⁴ See *Soliloquia* 2.33; *Contra Academicos* 1.8.23; 3.17.37; *De Ordine* 1.1.2; 1.1.3; 1.8.23; 2.2.4; 2.2.5; 2.2.6; 2.11.30; 2.19.

⁶⁵ *De Quantitate Animae* 28.55: ne se ultra quam necessitas cogit, refundat in sensus; sed ab his potius ad seipsam colligat, et repuerescat Deo... Quod omnino fieri non potest, nisi ad eius reformemur imaginem.

says the soul has a vision of Truth, but more frequently says the soul possesses Truth within.⁶⁶ In his post-Cassiciacum writings, he occasionally still says that the soul possesses Truth, but prefers to instead speak of having a vision of Truth.⁶⁷ What is the difference between possessing Truth, and having a vision of Truth? Simply put, when we possess something it is typically inside of ourselves, whereas when we see something it is typically outside of ourselves. The Platonic doctrine of recollection, since it suggests that Truths are buried within awaiting recall, implies that the soul possesses Truth within. In his early works, Augustine seems to accept the Platonic teaching of recollection, and the ensuing conclusion that the soul possesses Truth.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Some early texts where Augustine's suggests that the soul has a vision of Truth include *De Ordine* 1.3.7; 2.2.5; 2.2.7; 2.11.33; 2.19.51. In the last text, notice that Augustine says 'qui erunt illi oculi', or 'what those eyes will be' or 'what will be in those eyes'. Either way, the implication is that Truth still resides within the soul in this early text, it is not above the soul. Augustine also speaks of a vision of Truth in *De Beata Vita* 4.35; 2.3.10, although here Augustine again says that the thing understood or seen is still present. *De Immortalitate Animae* 6; 10; *Soliloquia* 1.23; 1.25 also speak of having a vision of the Truth, but again these texts have been shown to assume that the Truth that is seen is present in the soul, not above the soul. Finally, *Contra Academicos* 1.2.6; 1.5.13; 2.7.18; 3.3.5; 3.3.6; 3.4.8; 3.4.10; 3.10.22; 3.12.27 mentions a vision of Truth, but we have seen that this text operates under the assumption that the Truth seen is unqualifiedly in the mind. See especially *Contra Academicos* 3.12.27: "If you ask my opinion, I think that man's highest good is in the mind". Of course, years later Augustine retracts the conclusion that man's highest good is in the mind, preferring instead to say that man's highest good is in god: "I should have said more truthfully 'in god', because to be happy the mind finds joy in him as its highest good" *Retractationes* 1.4.

⁶⁷ Some later texts where Augustine continues to say that the soul possesses Truth include *De Libero Arbitrio* 1.24; 2.8.24; 2.9.27; 2.13.36. But Augustine begins to write this book early, and finishes after he is ordained, so it is impossible to know exactly when which words were written. Moreover, Augustine qualifies his supposition that humans possess Truth with the additional caveat that Truth cannot be one's private possession (2.12.33; 2.14.37; 2.18.52). As we will see later, this qualification casts doubt on the depth of Augustine's conviction that the soul possesses Truth. Augustine also says that Truth dwells within in *De Magistro* 11.38, but he is now quick to say that Truth "presides over our minds within us". Again, in *De Magistro* 14.46 Augustine says Truth dwells within, but he now adds that Truth is "in heaven". See also *De Vera Religione* 3.5; *De Quantitate Animae* 22.38; 26.51; 27.53. Augustine is clear in these books that Truth is above and beyond the soul as well (*De Vera Religione* 39.72; *De Quantitate Animae* 26.50-27.53; 34.77). Augustine more frequently argues that the soul has a vision of Truth in these later works. See, for example, *De Vera Religione* 3.3; 8.15; 31.57; 32.59; 33.61; 44.82; 49.97; 51.100 and 52.101; *De Libero Arbitrio* 2.13.36; 2.6.14; 2.7.15; 2.8.24; 2.10.28; 2.13.36 and 2.16.42; *De Magistro* 11.36; 12.40 and 14.45.

⁶⁸ Some early texts where Augustine endorses recollection include *Soliloquia* 2.20.35; *Contra Academicos* 1.22; 2.9.22; *De Immortalitate Animae* 6; *De Quantitate Animae* 34; *Epistulae* 7 and *De Libero Arbitrio* 1.12.24. For secondary sources, see

Eventually, however, he comes to reject this doctrine.⁶⁹ In its place arises Augustine's theory of illumination, which teaches that humans can have a momentary vision of a Truth above the soul. The theory of illumination is formally introduced in *De Magistro*.

For our purposes, there are three important facets to the theory of illumination. First of all, humans now have a vision of Truth, rather than a possession of Truth. In chapters eleven and twelve Augustine compares the intellectual process to eyesight. Later on, in chapters twelve and fourteen, he speaks in terms of having a vision of Truth. Secondly, this vision of Truth is momentary. It occurs at a specific time and then it passes; we do not permanently possess Truth within. Imagine the sensible eye perceiving a tree in broad daylight. In order to perceive the tree, the tree must be present and it must also be light out. When the night comes, the tree can still be present, but the eyes do not see it. Likewise, the mind can only see an intelligible Truth if there is some illumination. It may have always been the case that 'Justice is Good', or ' $2+5=7$ ', but then a brief moment of insight comes upon a specific person, and they grasp the idea for the first time. In that moment, the divine teacher sheds light onto the intelligible realities, enabling the person to have a vision of them. Contrary to the doctrine of recollection, it is only in this moment of illumination or insight that the human has knowledge.

The final relevant component of the doctrine of illumination is that the illuminated Truths are above the mind. Augustine says:

It is Truth that presides within, over the mind itself; though it may have been words that prompted us to make such consultation. And He who is consulted, He who is said to dwell in the inner man, He it is who teaches – Christ – the unchangeable Power of God and everlasting Wisdom.⁷⁰

This text may, at first glance, seem to suggest the opposite; namely, that Truth and the divine illuminator are within the soul. Notice, however, that Augustine actually states that Truth is over the

Roland Teske, "Augustine's Philosophy of Memory" Pg. 148-152; Nash, Pg. 51; 82-84 and Gilson, Pg. 71-72. O'Daly, 201, is not convinced, however, preferring to conclude that Augustine is speaking metaphorically in these texts.

⁶⁹ *Retractationes* 1.1.3; 1.4.4; 1.7.2; *De Trinitate* 12.15.24.

⁷⁰ *De Magistro* 11.38: sed intus ipsi menti praesidentem consulimus ueritatem, uerbis fortasse ut consulamus admoniti. Ille autem qui consulitur, docet, qui in interiore homine habitare dictus est Christus, id est incommutabilis Dei Virtus atque sempiterna Sapientia. See also 12.39; 12.40. Translations follow Joseph Collieran "The Teacher" (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1964).

mind as well. Moreover, by suggesting that Truth presides, he is again implying that Truth rules or is in some way above the soul. In his concluding remarks, Augustine again reveals that Truths and the divine light are above the soul: "We should not call anyone on earth a teacher, since there is one in heaven who is the teacher of all. What 'in heaven' means He himself will teach us".⁷¹ The term 'in heaven', if it means anything like what it normally means, implies that the Teacher and Truth is above and outside of the soul. The doctrine of illumination worked out in *De Magistro*, therefore, replaces the Platonic view that the soul constantly possesses hidden Truth within with the Augustinian view that the soul has a momentary glimpse of Truth above the soul. In so doing, Augustine introduces the seemingly paradoxical view that Truth is within the soul in the sense that it is above the soul. I will clarify this perplexing doctrine below.

De Vera Religione also reveals a gradual shift away from Truth being within the soul to having a vision of Truth which is above the soul. Augustine argues here that Truth is "higher than our minds" and "above the rational soul".⁷² His argument, located in chapter 30, is that the circularity of a wheel is judged to be perfectly circular based on an idea of a circle that is a higher standard than the one on the wagon. In the same way, the standard which judges all arts, which is called Truth, is higher than the human mind. During this argument, he also repeats the fact that the soul is mutable, whereas the Truth is not, so again the conclusion that Truth is no longer in the soul is reached. Augustine repeats this claim in *De Vera Religione* 36.67, and as though haunted by conclusions past, immediately moves on to the statement that it is an error to worship the soul in place of God, for the soul is a creation. Seemingly, the Truth is above the soul now, not within it, so it can in no way be considered to partake in divinity.

Augustine repeats this theme in *De Vera Religione* 39.72. Here Augustine articulates the traditional Platonic exhortation to return within oneself to find Truth, but he adds his twist again:

Do not go abroad. Return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth. If you find you are by nature mutable, transcend yourself. But remember in doing so that you must also transcend yourself even as a

⁷¹ *De Magistro* 14.46: ne nobis quemquam magistrum dicamus in terris, quod unus omnium magister in coelis sit. Quid sit autem in coelis docebit ipse.

⁷² *De Vera Religione* 3.3; 30.56: Supra mentem nostrum esse legem; *De Vera Religione* 31.57: quae supra rationem animam sit; *De Vera Religione* 36.67: Sed ipsi menti supereminet. — Translations follow John Burleigh "On True Religion" in *Augustine: Early Writings* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953).

reasoning soul. Make for the place where the light of reason is kindled. What does every good reasoner attain but truth?... Confess that you are not as it is.⁷³

Like in the previous books, we are encouraged to go within. However, as soon as we are there we see that we are a mutable creation, which is not as Truth is. In order to find the place where Truth is, we need to transcend, or go above, ourselves.

The second book of *De Libero Arbitrio*, completed after his ordination as a presbyter, contains the strongest arguments for why Truth is above the soul, rather than within the soul. Starting in chapter six, Augustine offers up a proof of the existence of God, which starts by suggesting that if there is something above the mind, this will be God. He then shifts his train of thought somewhat, by concluding that although each person has their own eyesight and mind, what the eye or the mind sees is common to all. The sense of taste allows only one person to eat a particular bite from an apple at a time, whereas the sense of sight allows numerous people to look at the same thing at once. He argues that the mind is more akin to sight, since many people can look at the Truths of numbers at the same time, or see the same wisdom. This leads him to conclude that Truth is common for everyone.⁷⁴ Implicit in this claim is the consequence that Truth is not private, which Augustine also acknowledges.⁷⁵ During this discussion, Augustine draws a contrast between a private sense of sight and the common sensible object, and between a private mind and the common intelligible Truth. The private things are contained within the individual soul, whereas the common things are outside the soul, available for all to see: "You will never deny that there is an unchangeable Truth... you will never be able to say that it belongs particularly to you or to me or to any man, for it is available and offers itself to be shared by all".⁷⁶ If Truth were within a particular soul, it would not be common and hence available for all to see. We will come upon this argument again, but for now it suffices to notice how it demonstrates that Truth has been lifted out of the soul.

⁷³ *De Vera Religione* 39.72: Noli foras ire, in te ipsum redi; in interiore homine habitat ueritas; et si tuam naturam mutabilem inueneris, transcede et te ipsum. Sed memento cum te transcendis, ratiocinantem animam te transcendere. Illuc ergo tende, unde ipsum lumen rationis accenditur. Quo enim peruenit omnis bonus ratiocinator, nisi ad ueritatem?... Confitere te non esse quod ipsa est.

⁷⁴ *De Libero Arbitrio* 2.8.24; 2.14.37; 2.14.38.

⁷⁵ *De Libero Arbitrio* 2.10.28; 2.8.24.

⁷⁶ *De Libero Arbitrio* 2.12.33.

After making this argument that Truth is in common space outside of the soul, he returns to his proof for the existence of God in chapter fourteen. He has just proven that Truth is outside and beyond human minds. Now, in line with the argument in *De Vera Religione*, Augustine states that wisdom, or Truth is the perfect unchangeable standard with which everything else is judged, and as such it is better than our minds. Since Truth is outside the mind in common space, and it is better than the mind since it is the standard to judge things by, Truth is very much superior to the human mind. But at the beginning of the argument it was agreed that if there was something better and beyond the human mind, this would be God. Truth, therefore, is better than and beyond the human mind, and it is God. This argument is predicated on the assumption that Truth is both outside of the mind in common space, and above and superior to the human mind. Augustine also argues here that Truth is outside the mind since the soul can be separated from Truth by a perverse will. Clearly, then, by the time of completing *De Libero Arbitrio*, Augustine has exorcised Truth from the human soul.

To summarize, in his Cassiciacum writings, Augustine rejects the use of images for they barred the soul from possessing actual Truths. As Augustine clearly rejects the divinity of the soul and focuses on the soul as an image of the divine, so his epistemology shifts from the soul possessing Truth to having a vision of Truth above the soul. This move generates several problems: what does the soul possess in place of the Truth that had once been in the soul? After seeing the Truth, what does the soul come to possess after the experience? The answer to these questions, as will be worked out in the final section, is that images (copies, transcriptions or impressions) of Truth come to be within the soul, while Truth rests unchangeably above.

3. Augustine's Later Epistemology

The assertion that the soul possesses images of intelligible Truths, rather than intelligible Truths themselves in considerably contested. There are a number of people who think Augustine is a representationalist with respect to both sensible and intelligible objects.⁷⁷ On the contrary, however, there are a number of people who think

⁷⁷ Bubacz, 86; Eugene Portalié, *A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Chicago: Regnery, 1960): 111-113; Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1961): 75-92.

Augustine is an ontologist, which teaches that the soul possesses, or at least glimpses, actual Truths.⁷⁸ In this section I argue that in two later works, *Confessiones* and *De Trinitate*, Augustine thinks images of Truth abide within the soul, not Truth itself.

The claim that the mind only possesses images of intelligible objects is more difficult to prove from *Confessiones*. Numerous authors agree that the memory contains images of sensible objects in *Confessiones* ten, but then argue that Augustine here states the memory contains the actual intelligible objects.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, I will argue that there is reason to think *Confessiones* paints a picture in which impressions of Truth abide in the mind, while Truth is above the mind.

In the first nine books of the *Confessiones*, Augustine recounts the story of his life to date. After catching up to the present day, book ten analyzes his current state of mind. He does this by turning to a study of the contents of his own memory. Memory, according to book ten, is an immense storehouse consisting of images of past experiences and bodily objects, and impressions of certain affections of the mind. All of the things in his storehouse are part of himself: "Great is the power of memory, something awe-inspiring... a deep and endless multiplicity; and this thing is my mind, and this thing am I myself".⁸⁰ This move, which will appear later as well, individualizes the memory.⁸¹ Everything within Augustine's memory is part of himself. The sense images within his mind are his own, while the actual sense objects remain outside and are not his own. If the intelligible realm follows the same pattern, then we can say that Truth remains outside. There is reason to think this must be the case. As shown in *De Libero Arbitrio*, Truth is common so it is difficult to see how it could be in Augustine's memory and therefore part of himself. Moreover, if he is his memory, and Truth is in his memory, then by the transitivity of identity, we have to admit that there is a sense in which Augustine is Truth. But we have seen how strongly Augustine shies away from

⁷⁸ Nash, 102-104; Cary, 70; Garreth Matthews "Knowledge and Illumination", *The Cambridge Companion To Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) eds. Eleonore Stump, Norman Kretzmann: 179-180.

⁷⁹ Todd Breyfogle "Memory and Imagination in Augustine's Confessions", *Literary Imagination, Ancient and Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1999) ed. Todd Breyfogle: 139-154 and Roland Teske "Augustine's Philosophy of Memory" *The Cambridge Companion To Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) eds. Eleonore Stump, Norman Kretzmann: 148-158.

⁸⁰ *Confessiones* 10.17.26. See also *De Natura et Origine Animae* 4.9-4.10.

⁸¹ Augustine will more fully individualize the memory in *De Trinitate* 10.11.17ff where the memory is one of three parts of himself, so it is as valid to say that he is the contents of his memory as it is to say that he is his mind.

such claims. Whereas Plato accepted the view that common and eternal Forms are buried within, Augustine thinks everything within the memory is part of himself.

As noted earlier, however, this conclusion is not shared by everyone. Even Phillip Cary, for example, who agrees that Augustine invents the inner self through this expanded memory, thinks that actual intelligible objects are within the soul.⁸² A common text in favour of this view is *Confessiones* 10.9:

Here also are all the skills acquired through the liberal arts which have not been forgotten. They are pushed into the background in some interior place – which is not a place. In this case I carry not the images but the very skills themselves. For what literature is, what the art of dialectical debate is, how many questions there are – all that I know about these matters lies in my memory in this distinctive way. It is not that I retain the images and leave the object outside me.⁸³

Most things in the memory are images of the actual object, but Augustine draws an exception here for the liberal sciences. In later chapters he adds that numbers are not present in the memory as images either, but as the actual numbers themselves. If this is the full and final word on the subject, it would appear as though my argument is in jeopardy. After all, numbers and the liberal sciences are the exact Truths that I have been arguing can no longer be present within the mind. Fortunately, there is reason to think that Augustine's position is more nuanced than this text alone indicates.

Central to Augustine's argument that numbers and the liberal sciences are not images is the observation that they do not come into the soul through the five senses. In chapter ten, Augustine explains how the nostrils, the ears and the other senses would speak up if the liberal sciences passed into the soul through them. Similarly, in chapter twelve, Augustine explains that numbers give off no odour or colour, so they do not come in through the senses. Unlike sense objects, therefore, numbers and the liberal sciences do not come into the soul from out in the sensible world. Thus it is no use to look outside in the world to find the liberal sciences or numbers. This is the sense in which we must go

⁸² Cary, 127

⁸³ *Confessiones* 10.9.16: Hic sunt et illa omnia, quae de doctrinis liberalibus percepta nondum exciderunt, quasi remota interiore loco, non loco; nec eorum imagines, sed res ipsas gero. Nam quid sit litteratura, quid peritia disputandi, quot genera quaestionum, quidquid horum scio, sic est in memoria mea, ut non retenta imagine rem foris reliquerim aut sonuerit et praeterierit. – Translations follow Henry Chadwick *Confessiones* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

within to find them, since they are not found in the sensible world. When we go within, however, we do not immediately find them in the same way we find a sense image of a city we visited earlier in our lives. On the contrary, we go within, but then we have to transcend the soul by looking above in order to find Truths and God.

There are two reasons to suppose that numbers and the liberal sciences are not simply within the mind; but they are within and above the mind. First of all, recall that Augustine equates unchangeable numbers and the liberal sciences with Truth. Truth, however, is also equated with God, or at least with the thoughts of God. Therefore, from the day Augustine learned his first math lesson, and probably before, God should be buried somewhere deep within him. Yet in considering when God first comes into the memory, Augustine makes the following observation: "Where did I find you to be able to learn of you? You were not already in my memory before I learnt of you".⁸⁴ Gerard O'Daly uses this text to demonstrate that God is not present in the soul before being consciously apprehended. He thinks, however, that Forms such as numbers can be present within the memory before they or God are deliberately contemplated.⁸⁵ But how, since numbers are Truths, and are thereby equated with the thoughts of God, can God be both present within the soul before having an experience of him, and at the same time not be present within the soul before having an experience of God? One explanation which overcomes this paradox is the suggestion that numbers are only present within the soul in the qualified sense that they are above the mind.

But did Augustine really attempt to qualify the presence of the liberal sciences, or of God more generally, within the soul? I will now argue that he does. In *Confessiones* 10.17.26, Augustine embarks on an attempt to find God. He starts out by assuming that God transcends the memory:

I will transcend even this, my power which is called memory. I will rise beyond it to move towards you, sweet light. What are you saying to me? Here I am climbing up through my mind towards you who are constant above me. I will pass beyond even that power of mind which is called memory, desiring to reach you.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ *Confessiones* 10.26.37: Ubi ergo te inueni, ut discerem te? Neque enim iam eras in memoria mea, priusquam te discerem.

⁸⁵ O'Daly, 212.

⁸⁶ *Confessiones* 10.17.26: Transibo et hanc uim meam, quae memoria uocatur, transibo eam, ut pertendam ad te, dulce lumen. Quid dicis mihi? Ecce ego ascendens per animum meum ad te, qui desuper mihi manes, transibo et istam uim meam, quae memoria uocatur, uolens te attingere.

Augustine's first inclination is to assume that God transcends the memory. He has to climb above and beyond his memory in order to find God – something which would not be necessary if God were present within his memory. Before long he stumbles upon a problem. How can he even desire to find God if he does not already know about God in some way? And how can he know about God in some way if God were not already present within his memory somehow? As he is trying to rise above his memory, he uses these problems to realize that God must be inside his memory after all.

Augustine ranges deep within his memory in order to find God, under the assumption that God is within him somewhere. Finally, in chapter 24, he thinks he has found God within himself. As he begins to explain the location of God, however, a new problem arises. Specifically, Augustine cannot locate the specific place where God is within. He does not find God within the part of memory that animals have, so he rises above that. He does not find God within the part where his emotions are stored, since God is not an emotion. Nor does he find God in the part where his mind is, since God is not Augustine's mind. As it turns out, God is above all of these things:

For you are the Lord God of the mind. All these things are liable to change. But you remain immutable above all things, and yet have deigned to dwell in my memory since the time I learnt about you. Why do I ask in which area of my memory you dwell, as if there really are places there?... Where then did I find you so that I could learn of you if not in the fact that you transcend me? There is no place, whether we go backwards or forwards; there can be no question of place. O truth, everywhere you preside over all who ask counsel of you.⁸⁷

God is present within the memory in the sense that He is above the memory; he transcends it and presides over it. Augustine here says that we can make sense of this paradox if we keep in mind the fact that immaterial objects do not have location. God and numbers are not present in a room in the memory, since only material objects can occupy a certain space. On the contrary, there is no place where God

⁸⁷ *Confessiones* 10.25.36-10.26.37: Quia Dominus Deus animi tu es, et commutantur haec omnia, tu autem incommutabilis manes super omnia et dignatus es habitare in memoria mea, ex quo te didici. Et quid quaero, quo loco eius habites, quasi uero loca ibi sint? Habitas certe in ea, quoniam tui memini, ex quo te didici, et in ea te inuenio, cum recordor te. Ubi Deus inuenitur, cum cognoscitur? Ubi ergo te inueni, ut discerem te? Neque enim iam eras in memoria mea, priusquam te discerem. Ubi ergo te inueni, ut discerem te, nisi in te supra me? Et nusquam locus, et recedimus et accedimus, et nusquam locus. Veritas, ubique praesides omnibus consulentibus te.

is not.⁸⁸ But then, how can God be above the mind, or outside of the mind, as I have been claiming? As we have seen, God is ontologically above the mind, not spatially above the mind. He is the creator, not a creation; he is a superior being, and none of his being went into the making of the human mind. Augustine cannot countenance an equality of God and human mind, so he must say that God is above the mind in that he is ontologically distinct and superior. This point becomes clearer through a discussion of Augustine's mystical encounters with God in other parts of *Confessiones*.

Both the issue of the presence of God above the soul, and the issue of whether God abides within the soul after experiencing him, are clarified by further considering Augustine's discussion of his encounters with God. Here is Augustine's account of his first mystical vision:

I was caught up to you by your beauty and quickly torn away from you by my weight ... but with me there remained a memory of you ... but I did not possess the strength to keep my vision fixed. My weakness reasserted itself, and I returned to my customary condition. I carried with me only a loving memory.⁸⁹

Augustine is torn away from Truth, implying that Truth does not remain in him. Moreover, he 'only' possesses memories, which again implies he does not possess God. Finally, Augustine returns to his customary condition, which implies that his moment of viewing Truth is not his customary condition, nor does he continue to hold onto Truth when he returns to his customary position. Augustine later explains that the experience 'imprints' things on his memory.⁹⁰ An impression of the reality, however, is not the reality itself.

⁸⁸ In his Cassiciacum writings, Augustine emphasizes this point often. See, for example *De Immortalitate Animae* 6 (Augustine later retracts the remark made here that nothing can separate two immaterial objects) and *De Beata Vita* 3.21. This fits into his early view that God is present within the soul. What is not emphasized in these early writings is the additional fact that the soul is a creation, and as such is ontologically inferior to and separate from God.

⁸⁹ *Confessiones* 7.17.23: Sed rapiebar ad te decore tuo moxque diripiebar abs te pondere meo et ruebam in ista cum gemitu; et pondus hoc consuetudo carnalis. Sed mecum erat memoria tui... sed aciem figere non eualui et repercussa infirmitate reditus solitis non mecum ferebam nisi amantem memoriam et quasi olefacta desiderantem, quae comedere nondum possem.

⁹⁰ *Confessiones* 7.20.26. This pattern is repeated in his vision in chapter nine. He describes "And while we talked and panted after it, we touched it in some small degree by a moment of total concentration of the heart. And we sighed and left behind us 'the firstfruits of the spirit' bound to that higher world, as we returned to the noise of our human speech where a sentence has both a beginning and an ending ... if only it could last" (*Confessiones* 9.25).

In this text, Augustine is also 'caught up' to God, implying that God is above where Augustine normally dwells. Augustine clarifies what it means for God to be above him in an earlier description of his mystical experience:

I entered and with my soul's eye, saw above that same eye of my soul the immutable light higher than my mind – not the light of everyday... it was not that light, but a different thing, utterly different from all our kinds of light. It transcended my mind, not in the way that oil floats on water, nor as heaven is above earth. It was superior because it made me, and I was inferior because I was made by it.⁹¹

God is above the human mind in the sense that He is ontologically superior to the human mind. God is the creator, and the human mind is created out of elements entirely devoid of divinity. Earlier Augustine merely went inside to find God, not to the outer sense world. This is the Plotinian move, and it implies that the human soul is divine, so one only needs to look at it to find God. Now, as we have seen in seed form in *De Quantitate Animae*, and as O'Connell and Cary point out, Augustine goes inside in the sense that he still does not look to the sense world, but then he has to look up, since the mind possesses no divinity in itself.⁹² Thus, when Augustine looks up and catches a glimpse of Truth, or of God, he does not take back a part of Truth as a possession of his soul, rather he takes back a memory, or an impression, of the event. In *De Trinitate* we will see how this happens exactly. For now, it is enough to conclude that *Confessiones* teaches Truth is above the soul, and though we catch a momentary glimpse of Truth, we do not bring it back into our individual memories.

De Trinitate is an attempt to explain the complex doctrine of the Trinity. One of Augustine's central strategies runs as follows: the human mind is more tangible than the divine Trinity, and the human mind is made in the image of God. So, if we can understand the human mind which is an accessible copy, then we will have a better understanding of the original. In studying the human mind, numerous trinities arise. For example, the memory, the understanding and the will are all different, but belong to one and the same

⁹¹ *Confessiones* 7.10.16: Intraui et uidi qualicumque oculo animae meae supra eundem oculum animae meae, supra mentem meam lucem incommutabilem... Non hoc illa erat, sed aliud, aliud ualde ab istis omnibus. Nec ita erat supra mentem meam, sicut oleum super aquam nec sicut caelum super terram, sed superior, quia ipsa fecit me, et ego inferior, quia factus ab ea.

⁹² O'Connell, 51-86; Cary, 38-40.

mind.⁹³ By studying these Trinitarian images in the human mind, it is possible to come to at least a cursory understanding of the divine Trinity.

Integral to the project of *De Trinitate*, therefore, is the assumption that we will find images of God in the human mind. One of the images that Augustine discovers within the human mind is central to the wider epistemological shift being charted here. Namely, Augustine argues that the ideas that humans possess are images of the divine Truth, rather than the Truth itself. In contrast to his early work, where humans possess Truth within the soul, Augustine now argues that humans possess images of the Truth in the form of individual thoughts. Or, so I shall presently argue.

Perhaps the most straightforward way to demonstrate this point is to consider a text where he simply states that the human mind does not possess the actual Truth, but rather some sort of an image or copy of Truth. In book fourteen of *De Trinitate*, Augustine discusses the moral rules that all humans subscribe to. He wonders:

Where, then, are [these moral rules] written, unless in the book of that Light which is called Truth whence every righteous law is copied and transferred (not by migrating to it, but by being as it were impressed upon it) to the heart of the man that works righteousness; as the impression from a ring passes into the wax, yet does not leave the ring.⁹⁴

Moral rules are here included within the wider category of Truth. As a preliminary example of the relationship of Truth to the human mind, then, this text demonstrates that moral rules remain with Truth, while the human receives copies of the moral rules impressed upon the heart. Though the moral rules leave an impression on the human mind, they 'do not leave the ring'. In other words, they do not migrate into the human and rest there as possessions of the human mind. Rather, the humans possess impressions or copies of the moral rules, while Truth remains entirely within itself and above the human mind. I intend to now demonstrate how this pattern repeats itself in all

⁹³ *De Trinitate* 10.12.19. See 8.10.14; 9.3.3; 9.4.4; 10.10.13; 10.11.17 for some other Trinitarian images.

⁹⁴ *De Trinitate* 14.15.21: Ubi ergo scriptae sunt, nisi in libro lucis illius quae ueritas dicitur? unde omnis lex iusta describitur, et in cor hominis qui operatur iustitiam, non migrando, sed tamquam imprimendo transfertur; sicut imago ex anulo et in ceram transit, et anulum non relinquit. — Translations follow Arthur West Haddan "On the Trinity" in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 3* (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887).

cases of the relationship between Truth and the human mind. I will do so by demonstrating first of all that Truth remains outside, or better yet, above the human mind in *De Trinitate*. I will then demonstrate that the thoughts that arise within the human mind are best described as images of the Truth.

Returning to the aforementioned text for a moment, there are two key reasons which lead Augustine to conclude that moral rules abide only in Truth. First of all, moral rules are seen as unchanging by those who see them. They that think torturing children is wrong today will not think that perhaps it will be right tomorrow. The human mind, however, is subject to constant change, so the moral rules cannot be present within the mind. We have seen this argument from unchangeableness before, and we will see it again. Secondly, moral rules are righteous, whereas the human heart is unrighteous. This being the case, moral rules cannot dwell within the human heart. Both of these arguments demonstrate why moral rules, which are one part of Truth, cannot dwell in the human mind.

Later on, while considering Truth more generally, Augustine repeats the point that Truth is not present in the mind. He offers up two further reasons for this conclusion. The first is a version of the argument from unchangeableness: "But when the human mind knows itself and loves itself, it does not know and love anything unchangeable".⁹⁵ When the mind knows itself, it does not know anything unchangeable. Truth, however, is unchangeable. If Truth is present within the individual mind, when the mind knows itself the mind would know something unchangeable, namely, the unchangeable Truth that is present within the mind. However, the mind never comes to know something unchangeable when it knows itself, so unchangeable Truth is not present in the soul.

Not only does the changeable nature of the soul demonstrate that Truth is not present within it, but the private nature of the mind demonstrates this as well. Augustine argues that the individual mind is opaque to other minds, whereas the Truth is accessible to all:

Whence it is manifest, that each sees a thing in himself, in such way that another person may believe what he says of it, yet may not see it; but another [sees a thing] in the Truth itself, in such way that another person also can gaze upon it.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ *De Trinitate* 9.6.9. See also 4.1.1; 14.14.20; 14.15.21.

⁹⁶ *De Trinitate* 9.6.9: Unde manifestum est, aliud unumquemque uidere in se, quod sibi alius dicenti credat, non tamen uideat; aliud autem in ipsa ueritate quod alius quoque possit intueri.

A variant of this argument has already been used to demonstrate that Truth is above the human mind in *De Libero Arbitrio*. Here the assumption is much the same: the contents of my mind are private, only I can see them. Truth, however, is public. If Truth is public, and is also present within my individual mind, then another person should theoretically be able to see Truth in my mind, since it would remain public. This does not happen, however, so again the conclusion that Truth is not present within the mind is reached.⁹⁷ In summary, Truth is unchangeable, perfectly righteous and publically accessible (Augustine will add to this list of distinctions before he is through), while the individual mind is nothing of the sort. Truth is, therefore, above the mind, not present in the mind.⁹⁸

If Truth is above the mind, and not present in the mind, then we need to ask ourselves what it is that is present in the mind. The answer to this question, as already hinted at in the case of moral rules, is that an image or copy of Truth is found in the mind. Augustine describes this image as a word that is formed within us:

We behold, then, by the sight of the mind, in that eternal truth from which all things temporal are made, the form according to which we are, and according to which we do anything by true and right reason, either in ourselves or in things corporeal; and we have the true knowledge of things, thence conceived, as it were as a word within us, and by speaking we beget it from within.⁹⁹

Here Augustine explains that we see Truth with the mind. We do not, however, possess Truth within, as was the case in his early

⁹⁷ In *De Trinitate* 13.1, Augustine points out that everyone has a different sense image, though they are of the same object. He repeats this pattern by saying that faith (13.2) and desire (13.3) is the same for all, though every person has their own as well. *De Trinitate* 13.4-13.5 makes the same point with respect to the will. Everyone wills a blessed life, although everyone also has a different version of a blessed life. It isn't surprising to see Augustine concluding that there is one Truth, but everyone holds individual images within. This conclusion is also reached from Augustine's sign theory. The 'word' in one soul becomes a noise and is carried as a vehicle (*In Iohannis Euangelium Tractatus* 37.4) into the soul of another (*De Trinitate* 9.7.12; 15.10.19; 8.6.9; 15.11.20; *Sermones de Scripturis de Nouo Testamento* 2.20; *Sermones* 225.3). The noise, however, must transform back into another word in the soul of the receiver, through the enlightenment of the Inner Teacher (*Epistula* 144.1, *De Magistro* 11.38; 11.39; 12.39). Thus there is quite a distance and difference between the thought in one soul and the same thought in another soul (*De Magistro* 13.42).

⁹⁸ *De Trinitate* 9.6.10; 9.6.11; 12.14.23; 15.1.1.

⁹⁹ *De Trinitate* 9.7.12: In illa igitur aeterna ueritate, ex qua temporalia facta sunt omnia, formam secundum quam sumus, et secundum quam uel in nobis uel in corporibus uera et recta ratione aliquid operamur, uisu mentis aspicimus.

works. Rather, a word is conceived within the individual mind. What does he mean by this 'word'? The term is, of course, loaded with significance. It harkens back to the second person of the divine Trinity, the Word. Indeed, Augustine draws many of the appropriate parallels himself: like in the case of the divine Trinity, the human word within is conceived by love.¹⁰⁰ This human word is a bare idea, unclothed by language or sensible noise.¹⁰¹ The human word then, like the divine Word, becomes flesh by taking on sensible noise in the act of speech.¹⁰² Once it is flesh, it becomes a sign,¹⁰³ as the divine Word is a sign pointing to the Father. This human word is not, however, the divine Word. Although it imitates and runs parallel to the divine Word, the human word within is a separate thing. I will now attempt to demonstrate exactly this: namely, the separation and difference between the divine Word (i.e., Truth) and the human word.

De Trinitate 9.7.12 ends by suggesting that the human word is either conceived by Truth or by the human mind. In either of these cases, the human word is still regarded as separate from the divine Word, or Truth. I will first of all argue that if the word is conceived by Truth, this still does not mean that Truth is present in the human mind. Seemingly, since Truth conceives something in the human mind, the thing conceived is not Truth: the metaphor of conception implies that the thing born is independent of the parent. However, one could object that according to Augustine's Trinitarian theology, if the word is begotten by Truth, then there is a sense in which Truth can still be in the mind. Augustine argues that the second person of the Trinity, the divine Word, is begotten from the Father. Although the Word is a separate person from the Father, the Word is still divine and still one with the Father. Similarly, if the word within is begotten by Truth, though it is distinct from Truth, there would still be an important sense in which the word within the individual mind is one with Truth.

This possibility is ruled out by the very nature of the word within the human mind. This is evident in Augustine's explanation for how a word is conceived in *De Trinitate* 12.14.23:

And to attain to [intelligible things] with the eye of the mind is the lot of few; and when they are attained as much as they can be, he himself who attains to them does not abide in them, but is as it were repelled

¹⁰⁰ *De Trinitate* 9.7.12.

¹⁰¹ *De Trinitate* 15.10.19; 15.14.24.

¹⁰² *De Trinitate* 15.10.19; 15.11.20.

¹⁰³ *De Trinitate* 15.10.19; 15.11.20.

by the rebounding of the eye itself of the mind, and so there comes to be a transitory thought of a thing not transitory. And yet this transient thought is committed to the memory through the instructions by which the mind is taught; that the mind which is compelled to pass from thence, may be able to return thither again... whence yet once more it may be as it were written down and fixed in the mind. For the thought of man, for example, does not so abide in that incorporeal and unchangeable reason of a square body, as that reason itself abides.¹⁰⁴

Perhaps a few minds can for a moment get a glimpse of the Truth above, but they cannot stay for long. When they leave this vision behind, a transitory thought is generated within the memory. The thought within, being transitory, can certainly not be the unchangeable Truth. Rather, the thought is a transcription copied into the memory. Augustine goes on to point out that this word can be forgotten, and that it comes into being at a time. Truth, however, is perfect and eternal, so it is not the type of thing that is forgettable or conceived at a time.

There are two further reasons to conclude that the word within, if conceived by Truth, still is not Truth present within the soul. First of all, immediately after making the argument cited in the previous text, Augustine launches into a criticism of the Platonic epistemology that he had embraced earlier in his life. Recall that Plato says Truths are buried within, waiting to be recollected. Augustine disputes this claim by saying that we cannot already know the things we learn. For example, someone cannot understand the internal structure of a triangle due to having already learned it in the past, since geometers would have been even rarer in past lives, while everyone is able to understand triangles in this life. Augustine then argues that in the same way the eye sees sensible objects without having seen them in the past, so the mind sees intelligible objects without having seen them in the past. Since Augustine distances himself from the Platonism of his youth, it stands to reason that he is rejecting the possibility that Truths can be in some sense buried within the mind.

¹⁰⁴ *De Trinitate* 12.14.23: Ad quas mentis acie peruenire paucorum est; et cum peruenitur, quantum fieri potest, non in eis manet ipse peruenitor, sed ueluti acies ipsa reuerberata repellitur, et fit rei non transitoriae transitoria cogitatio. Quae tamen cogitatio transiens per disciplinas quibus eruditur animus, memoriae commendatur ut sit quo redire possit, quae cogitur inde transire.... idque inueniret ubi primum inuenerat, in illa incorporea ueritate, unde rursus quasi descriptum in memoria figeretur. Neque enim sicut manet, uerbi gratia, quadrati corporis incorporealis et immutabilis ratio, sic in ea manet hominis cogitatio. — See also *De Trinitate* 8.3.4; 9.6.10; 9.11.16; 13.20.26; 14.8.11.

Secondly, Augustine explains that the word within is merely a likeness or image of God. It exists on a much lower level, and it is not divine in any way:

So when we know God, although we are made better than we were before we knew Him, and above all when the same knowledge being also liked and worthily loved becomes a word, and so that knowledge becomes a kind of likeness of God; yet that knowledge is of a lower kind, since it is in a lower nature; for the mind is creature, but God is Creator.¹⁰⁵

The word that resides within the human mind is lower than God, it is a likeness of God, and is created by God. Given these humble descriptions of the human word, it is safe to conclude that the presence of the human word within does not imply the presence of divine Truth within. Therefore, even if the word within is conceived by Truth, this still means that Truth is not present within the human mind when the word is.

Importantly, Augustine does not even seem to prefer the conclusion that the word is conceived by Truth. Instead he more frequently implies that the word is conceived by the human mind. Although Augustine spends some time discussing how the human word comes from the human mind in *De Trinitate* 9.11-12, he elaborates on this matter in the final book of the treatise. In these final sections, Augustine argues that humans now see God through a glass dimly, or 'in an enigma'. A glass replicates images off of its reflective surface. To say that we see God through a glass, then, is to say that we see God by considering the image of God which we ourselves are. The glass, Augustine goes on to say, is dim, or is an enigma. This means, according to chapter nine, that the glass is "obscure, and difficult to see through". We know God through considering our mind as the image of God, but our mind is so inferior to God that it is difficult to understand God just by looking at this faint image. However, since this is all that we have, he makes several attempts to discern the nature of the divine Trinity through a study of the human mind. Only one of these attempts concerns us here.

In *De Trinitate* 15.11, Augustine considers the precise origin of the human word. The word within the human mind is a "word of man, [a] word of the rational animal, [a] word of that image of God, that is

¹⁰⁵ *De Trinitate* 9.11.16: ita cum Deum nouimus, quamuis meliores efficiamur quam eramus antequam nossemus, maximeque cum eadem notitia etiam placita digneque amata uerbum est, fitque aliqua Dei similitudo illa notitia; tamen inferior est, quia in inferiore natura est; creatura quippe animus, Creator autem Deus. — See also 9.4.4; 10.5.7; 10.6.8.

not born of God, but made by God".¹⁰⁶ The word within, then is generated out of the human mind, not out of divine Truth. God made the human mind, and the word came out of the human mind, so we can say that God made this word. However, since this word belongs to man, an animal and an image of God, we cannot say that it was born out of God or Truth. Augustine highlights this point later on: "Therefore, as our knowledge is unlike that knowledge of God, so is our word also, which is born from our knowledge, unlike that Word of God which is born from the essence of the Father."¹⁰⁷

Augustine uses this as an insight into the divine Trinity as gleaned from studying the image. As the human word comes out of the human mind, and then takes on flesh through the noise of language, so the divine Word comes out of the Father and takes on bodily flesh in the incarnation. If the human word had not come out of the human mind, but had instead come out of Truth, the parallel would break down, and no insight into the divine nature could be gleaned from the example. However, since Augustine uses this as a parallel, it is clear that the human word must come out of the human mind.

If the human word comes out of the human mind, then the word which humans possess can not be Truth. There are numerous reasons for this. Augustine spends chapters fifteen and sixteen explaining the differences between the human word and divine Truth. The human word is not eternal while the divine Word, or Truth, is. Similarly, the human word can be deceptive, while the divine Word, or Truth, cannot be false. To this we can add the aforementioned problems that a human word is forgettable, changeable and private.¹⁰⁸ All of these discrepancies validate Augustine's conclusion that the human mind is an obscure image of God. Since the image is so vastly inferior to the actual divinity, little can be learned from studying the image. This being the case, however, it is clear that the word within the human is a mere image of Truth, and is in no way Truth itself. If it were Truth, then we could

¹⁰⁶ *De Trinitate* 15.11.20: Perueniendum est ergo ad illud uerbum hominis, ad uerbum rationalis animantis, ad uerbum non de Deo natae, sed a Deo factae imaginis Dei. — See also *De Trinitate* 15.12.22.

¹⁰⁷ *De Trinitate* 15.13.22: Propter hoc, sicut nostra scientia illi scientiae Dei, sic et nostrum uerbum quod nascitur de nostra scientia, dissimile est illi Verbo Dei quod natum est de Patris essentia. See also 15.14.24; 15.15.25; 15.22.42.

¹⁰⁸ Gilson, 73, points out another reason why the human word cannot be Truth if it is conceived by the individual human mind: "Augustine emphasized the contradiction involved in the notion of a temporal soul engendering eternal truths by itself. Thus the mind, in conceiving truth, gets more from itself than it contains. Whence come such riches?" How can a lowly mutable and temporal soul give birth to, let alone sustain, the existence of immutable and eternal truths?

greatly understand Truth by studying ourselves, since Truth would be within the very thing we are studying.

Augustine spends the final pages of the *Trinity* solidifying the conclusion that there is a radical difference between our thoughts and Truth. He starts by saying we do not see God face to face when looking into our memory and understanding, but rather we see an image:

I have undoubtedly taken pains so far as I could, not indeed so that the thing might be seen face to face, but that it might be seen by this likeness in an enigma, in how small a degree soever, by conjecture, in our memory and understanding, to intimate God.¹⁰⁹

Understanding, knowledge and memory is "my own",¹¹⁰ and there is a great disparity between them and the divine Trinity above.¹¹¹ The thoughts humans possess then, since they are images that belong to an individual mind, are not the actual Truths found in God.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ *De Trinitate* 15.21.40: Deum Patrem, et Deum Filium, id est, Deum genitorem qui omnia quae substantialiter habet, in coaeterno sibi Verbo suo dixit quodam modo, et ipsum Verbum eius Deum, qui nec plus nec minus aliquid habet etiam ipse substantialiter, quam quod est in illo qui Verbum non mendaciter sed ueraciter genuit; quemadmodum potui, non ut illud iam facie ad faciem, sed per hanc similitudinem in aenigmate quantulumcumque coniciendo uideretur in memoria et intellegentia mentis nostrae, significare curaui.

¹¹⁰ *De Trinitate* 15.22.42.

¹¹¹ *De Trinitate* 15.23.43.

¹¹² Further evidence for this conclusion can be drawn from Augustine's views on sense perception. As Nash (Pg. 54) and Bubacz (Pg. 93-126) have documented, Augustine has a representational view of sense perception. A sensory object comes into the human via the bodily sight. From the bodily sight it is transformed and put in the animal sight. From the animal sight an image of the sensible object is put into the memory. Finally, from the memory an image is placed in conscious thought (*De Trinitate* 11.9.16). Thus, a sensible tree is transformed into an image of the tree, which is then transformed into an idea of the image of the tree. Augustine explains: "When we learn of bodies through the bodily sense, a likeness of them, which is a memory image, arises in our mind" (*De Trinitate* 9.16. See also *Confessiones* 10; *De Ciuitate Dei* 11.26). We have already dealt with the possibility that Augustine is a representationalist with respect to sense objects, but a direct realist with respect to intelligible objects. As a further point on this matter, Augustine frequently uses the sensible world to explain the intelligible world (See, for example, *De Trinitate* 11.1.1; 12.15.25; *De Utilitate Credendi* 13.28). He says that the mind is an inner eye, like the physical eye. The mind has a vision of Truth, like eyes have a vision of the sensible world. The mind needs illumination in order to see, as the eyes need sunlight in order to see the world. It is quite likely, therefore, that Augustine would follow his representationalism vis-à-vis sense objects with representationalism about intelligible objects. Indeed, he states as much himself: "...and what the vision of one seeing is to that species of the body from which the sense is informed, that the vision of one thinking is to the image of the body that is fixed in the memory, from which the eye of the mind is informed" (*De Trinitate* 11.4.7. See also *De Trinitate* 12.14.23; 12.15.24).

4. Conclusion

In his *Cassiciacum* writings, Augustine rejects the possession of images, and embraces the possession of Truth. In his later writings, Augustine embraces the possession of images, and rejects the possession of Truth. This move is largely inspired by a simple theological conviction: the mind is not divine; it is the image of the divine. Hence, the mind does not possess divine Truth; it possesses images of the Truth. Perhaps this is why he recants some of his earlier criticism of the academics. The academics often act in ways which they call 'truth-like'. By doing this they hope to avoid having truth, but at the same time be able to function practically in the world. The early Augustine criticizes this dependence on likenesses or images of Truth: "Therefore, the academicians... gave approval to falsehoods in which they recognized a commendable imitation of true things".¹¹³ Late in his life, Augustine retracts this statement. He retracts the suggestion that imitations should be considered falsehoods, and he retracts his suggestion that the academicians were wrong to approve of 'truth-like' things:

Again, I regret having said about the Academicians that they had known the truth, the likeness of which they call 'truth-like', and also that I called the truth-like itself, to which they gave their approval, false. What I said was wrong for two reasons. First, it was wrong because I said that something that was truth-like in some fashion was false: this too is true in its own way.¹¹⁴

In his early writings Augustine scorns images as false and inferior to possessing actual Truth. Later on, Augustine appreciates and endorses the possession of images, rather than actual Truth.

What effect does this shift have on the human ability to know? Unlike the teaching of the philosophers he originally embraced, Augustine eventually concludes that the human soul cannot permanently possess Truth. Rather, the human soul can perhaps get a momentary glimpse of Truth, and leave with an image and a memory of that moment. The human soul can perhaps see the divine, but it does not possess the divine within. I say perhaps because many texts

¹¹³ *Contra Academicos* 3.18.40: Ergo illi norant, et approbant falsa in quibus imitationem laudabilem rerum uerarum animaduertebant.

¹¹⁴ *Retractationes* 1.1.4: Item quod dixi de Academicis, quia nouerant uerum, cuius simile appellabant ueri simile, idque ipsum ueri simile appellaui falsum quod approbant, duas ob causas non recte dictum est: uel quod falsum esset quod aliquo modo esset simile alicuius ueri, quia in genere suo et hoc uerum est,

indicate that it is very difficult to see the divine, and a few even suggest it is impossible.¹¹⁵ On the contrary, however, Augustine acknowledges having his own religious experience, and does mention the momentary glimpse of Truth. Augustine therefore seems to stand in between the Platonic view that Truth is possessed, and the later medieval view that God is utterly unknowable. The representationalist is right to say Augustine claims we possess images of sense objects and intelligible objects, rather than the objects themselves, or Truth itself. The ontologist may not be right to say Augustine claims we possess Truth, but there is some room for her to say that a momentary vision of Truth is possible. One thing is certain, however. Augustine's epistemology shifts over time. He gradually moves away from the view that humans can possess Truth, to a more humble stance. If Augustine's epistemology is not seen through this developmental lens, then his views will appear more complex and paradoxical than they actually are.

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¹¹⁵ See, for example, *De Genesi Ad Litteram* 5.16.34; *Sermones* 117.5; *De Trinitate* 15.6.10.