

## THE THEME OF ONTOLOGICAL DEPENDENCE IN *CONFESSIONS* BOOK 7 CHAPTERS 14-20

### Abstract

In a recent article ("Saint Augustine's Milan Vision Reconstructed", *Augustiniana* 58 [2008], 151-180) I argued that in *Confessiones* 7.10.16 Augustine uses the argument from dependence (which demonstrates that all beings are dependent upon Being Itself), in order to overcome his previous materialistic understanding of God. In this article I argue that a close analysis of *Confessiones* 7.11.17-7.20.26 confirms this interpretation.

In his work *Augustine's Intellectual Conversion* Brian Dobell notes that book 7 chapters 11-16 of the *Confessions* have been almost completely neglected by scholars.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, most scholars claim that Augustine describes an ascent to Truth based on the argument from judgment<sup>2</sup> in book 7 chapters 10, 17, and 20 but they neglect to give a systematic analysis of chapters 11-16, the six chapters which fall between these passages, and so do not establish whether these passages verify their interpretation.<sup>3</sup> In a recent article I argue

<sup>1</sup> See B. DOBELL, *Augustine's Intellectual Conversion*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 138: "The first ascent is described in one paragraph (7.10.16), and the second ascent in another (7.17.23). Between these two paragraphs Augustine spends fully six paragraphs recounting his reflections upon the nature of being (7.11.17), the relationship between being and goodness (7.12.18), the nature of good and evil (7.12.18-7.13.19), the nature of the true and the false (7.15.21) and the nature of sin (7.16.22). For the most part, scholars seem to regard these six paragraphs as filler, if their almost complete neglect in the literature is any indication (a neglect that is all the more conspicuous given the attention lavished upon the ascents themselves)." As Dobell himself observes, O'Donnell makes note of this fact as well. Moreover, Dobell notes that both O'Connell and Du Roy also attempt to bring structure to these paragraphs; see J. O'DONNELL, *Augustine: Confessions*. Vol. 2, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 448; O. DUROY, *L'intelligence de la foi en la Trinité selon saint Augustin. Genèse de sa théologie trinitaire jusqu'en 391*, (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1966), pp. 82-8; R. O'CONNELL, "Where the Difference Still Lies," *Augustinian Studies*, 21 (1990), p. 143 and p. 152, n. 9.

<sup>2</sup> See E. GILSON, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, Trans. L.E.M. Lynch, (London: Gollancz, 1961), pp. 16-17.

<sup>3</sup> Courcelle was the first to emphasize these passages. O'Donnell gives the best summation of Courcelle's interpretation: "This paragraph contains the first of two (by some counts: three) accounts of what Courcelle defined as 'vaines tentatives d'extases plotiniennes'... Courcelle's views are most concisely presented at *Recherches*, 160-164, where he presents three passages – 7.10.16 (a), 7.17.23 (b), and 7.20.26 (c) – in parallel columns, marking seven stages, which he identifies: (1) reading the *platoniorum libri* (ac), (2) searching for truth and finding above himself (abc), (3) ascent

that *Confessions* book 7 chapter 10 cannot be understood to be the description of an ascent to Truth based on the argument from judgment or as a mystical experience based on such an argument.<sup>4</sup> Instead, the passage describes Augustine's use of the argument from dependence, an argument which shows that all created being is dependent upon uncreated Being. In other words, the essential knowledge Augustine intends to communicate to the reader in book 7 chapter 10 is that rational knowledge of God as He Who Is is reached through knowledge of one's ontological dependence. In the following, it will be argued that review of the six chapters which follow chapter 10 confirms this reading, for chapters 14-16 describe Augustine's defeat of materialism via the argument from dependence. It will also be shown that chapter 20 substantiates this reading. These passages function as a summation of Augustine's intellectual conversion recorded in book 7 chapters 10-12.

### 1. Confessions Book 7 Chapter 10

Analysis of *Confessions* book 7 chapters 9, 10, and 11 demonstrates that they cannot be understood to describe an ascent to Truth based on the argument from judgment, or as a mystical vision based on such an argument. This, however, does not mean that Augustine's vision was not mystical. The argument here is that whatever the nature of Augustine's vision, mystical or non-mystical, it was built upon a specific form of rational argument, namely the argument from dependence. The reason for this is that all three chapters describe what

by degrees (b), (4) Rom. 1:20 (bc), (5) sense of certainty but incapacity (abc), (6) 'faiblesse' (abc), and Rom. 1:20 (a). This schema highlights the parallels among these paragraphs, but imposes a structure that should not be understood as originating with Augustine." See, J. O'DONNELL, *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 2, pp. 434-435 and P. COURCELLE, *Recherches sur les 'Confessions' de Saint Augustin* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1950), 63. Courcelle, Cary, Van Fleteren, O'Connell, O'Donnell, and Dobell all hold that Augustine makes an ascent to Truth based on the argument from judgment in book 7 chapters 10 and 17; see, *Recherches*, pp. 59-63; P. CARY "Inner Vision as the Goal of Augustine's Life", *A Reader's Companion to Augustine's Confessions*, ed. K. Paffenroth, & P. Kennedy (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2003), pp. 115-126; F. VAN FLETEREN, 'Augustine's Ascent of the Soul in Book VII of the Confessions: a Reconsideration,' *Augustinian Studies*, 5, pp. 29-73; R. O'CONNELL, *Images of Conversion in Augustine's Confessions* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), p. 142; O'DONNELL (1992); *Augustine's Intellectual Conversion*, pp. 129-137.

<sup>4</sup> J. PALETTA, "The *Ordo sapientiae*: Augustine's Program for Philosophical Study in His Early Works," *Augustiniana*, 61 (2011), pp. 55-74.

Augustine saw with the language of ontological dependence. Therefore, the chapter must describe Augustine's use of this argument. Moreover, Augustine clearly uses this conceptual structure to overcome the problem of materialism.

In a previous article<sup>5</sup> I argued that *Confessions* book 7 chapter 10 cannot be read as the description of a purely mystical vision due to Augustine's use of *Acts* 17:28 (in chapter 9) and *Romans* 1:20 (in chapter 10), for both passages signify for Augustine the mind's ability to attain rational knowledge of God.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, it appears that Augustine's vision is based on the argument from judgment. According to this argument God is defined as that which is greater than one's mind, and Truth, because it is eternal and because one judges according to its standards (standards such as "the inferior is subject to the superior" and "the incorruptible is higher than the corruptible") is greater than one's mind, and therefore God is Truth. Further, Truth is immutable, and what is immutable simply *is*, and, as a result, God can be understood as He Who Is. This argument emphasizes the primacy of Truth over Existence because it is necessary to first have knowledge of God as Truth before one can have knowledge of his essential identity as He Who Is.

But it is not possible for the vision passage to be an account of a rational argument for God's existence based on the argument from judgement due to Augustine's use of the verb *facere* in the description of his vision. In the vision passage Augustine says that the immutable light that he saw was superior because it *made* him and that he was inferior because he was *made* by it (*superior, quia ipsa fecit me, et ego inferior, quia factus ab ea*). Here then Augustine relates that he saw that he was dependent upon God for his very being for God makes one. The argument from judgment, however, reveals the knowledge

<sup>5</sup> J. PALETTA, "Saint Augustine's Milan Vision Reconstructed," *Augustiniana*, 58 (2008), 175-179.

<sup>6</sup> See Augustine's commentary on *Romans* 1:20 (which reads *Inuisibilia enim ipsius a creatura mundi per ea, quae facta sunt, intellecta conspiciuntur*) in *Expositio quarundam propositionum ex Epistola ad Romanos* 3.3: Quod autem dixit: Reuelatur ira Dei de caelo super omnem impietatem et cetera, ait et Salomon de sapientibus mundi: Si enim tantum potuerunt scire, ut possent aestimare saeculum, quomodo ipsius mundi Dominum et Creatorem non facilius inuenerunt? (*Wisdom* 13:9) Sed quos arguit Salomon, non cognouerunt per creaturam Creatorem; quos autem arguit Apostolus, cognouerunt, sed gratias non egerunt et dicentes se esse sapientes stulti facti sunt et ad colenda simulacra deciderunt. Nam sapientes gentium quod inuenirent Creatorem, manifeste idem Apostolus, cum Atheniensibus loqueretur, ostendit. Cum enim dixisset: Quia in ipso uiuimus et mouemur et sumus, addidit: Sicut et quidam secundum uos dixerunt (*Acts* 17:28). Hac autem intentione prius arguit impietatem gentium, ut ex hac probet etiam ad gratiam posse pertinere conuersos. Iniustum est enim ut poenam subeant impietatis, et praemium fidei non accipiant.

presupposed in one's value judgments and *not* the source of one's being (as the verb *facere* designates), and so it cannot be the argument used in chapter 10.<sup>7</sup> Instead Augustine uses the argument from dependence.<sup>8</sup> Chapters 9 and 11, the chapters which precede and follow chapter 10, confirm this reading. Chapter 9 foreshadows the use of the argument because it refers to *Acts* 17:28, in which Paul says "in Him [the Creator] we live and move and have our being," and chapter 11 relates that Augustine saw *other* things below God (*cetera infra te*) which *are* because of him (*esse quidem quoniam abs te sunt*). All three chapters deal with the same theme: rational knowledge of God as He Who Is achieved through reflection on creation's ontological dependence. Because all three chapters are defined by the theme of ontological dependence, and because there are no other arguments for God's nature based on this structure, the argument from dependence must be the source of Augustine's knowledge in the vision passage.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> That Augustine uses the verb *facere* to indicate a given created thing's ontological dependence in the argument from dependence is clear from *Confessions* 11.4.6 and *De Civitate Dei*: 8.6, but the verb is not used in *De Libero Arbitrio* 2.15 or in *Confessions* 7.17.23 where Augustine argues for nature of God as Truth via the argument from judgement.

<sup>8</sup> Eugene Portalie cites the classic expression of this argument in his work *A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine*. See, E. PORTALIE, *A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine*, Trans. R.J. Bastian (Westport: Greenwood, 1975), pp. 125-126. Olivier Du Roy notes that in the final passages of the *De Immortalitate Animae* Augustine uses a second argument for God's existence which is based on the soul's ontological dependence (although I believe that he reconstructs it incorrectly). See, *L'intelligence de la foi en la Trinité*, pp. 184-185, 191-192, and (most importantly) 193-194. Etienne Gilson also sees a second form of argument for God's existence used by Augustine, but has certain technical reservations which are based on his commitment to Thomism. See E. GILSON, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, Trans. L.E.M. Lynch (London: Gollancz, 1961), pp. 19-20, and (again, more importantly) fns. 35 and 36 on p. 19. Gerard Esser also believes that Augustine argues for the existence of God through a version of the argument from dependence. More specifically, he holds that Augustine argues for the existence of God by recognizing the contingent perfections of created things, but he claims that the argument is incomplete because Augustine does not explicitly state an important premise which is necessary to make the argument valid. See, G. ESSER, "The Augustinian Proof for God's Existence and the Thomistic Fourth Way," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 28 (1954) pp. 194-211. The use of the verb *facere* is the essential distinguishing characteristics common to all arguments identified by these authors. See my "Saint Augustine's Milan Vision Reconstructed," pp. 161-162. In contrast, Cary gives a very straightforward defense of the argument from judgment, and, consequently, does not see Augustine's use of *facere* to be central to Augustine's philosophical point of departure. See *A Reader's companion*, pp. 115-126.

<sup>9</sup> Augustine may not be giving the reader an reproduction of the chronological order of the arguments in book 10, but instead the insight that communicates God's essential nature. In other words, perhaps there is no account of the chronological

In a second article I argue that this reading is confirmed through analysis of Augustine's early dialogs. In *De Beata Vita* and *De Ordine* Augustine makes a distinction between Truth and that upon which Truth depends, and in both dialogs knowledge of that upon which Truth depends is categorized as a higher form of knowledge.<sup>10</sup> In *De Beata Vita* 4.34 Truth is described as the highest object of the mind, the source of happiness, and that through which one arrives at the supreme measure.<sup>11</sup> In *De Ordine* 2.9.26 Augustine describes an educational program which young men must be trained in in order to love God, and in this program he makes a distinction between (1) knowledge which demonstrates that the soul either *is* Truth or is *in* Truth (an ambiguous form of knowledge based on the argument from judgment) and (2) knowledge which shows the source of all things (including Truth), a form of knowledge which clearly entails a relationship of ontological dependence.<sup>12</sup> The former distinction occupies the third level of knowledge in what Augustine calls the *ordo sapientiae* while the latter occupies the fourth and highest level.<sup>13</sup> The final level is the highest form of knowledge because it concerns knowledge of God as the source of all things.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, analysis of *De Immortalitate Animae* establishes the theoretical foundation for the distinction between Truth and that upon which Truth depends made in *De Beata Vita* and *De Ordine*. Here again the argument from judgment yields an ambiguous form of knowledge for Augustine says that it establishes that "the mind either is a subject with the true in it as in a subject" or that "the Truth is a subject with the mind in it as in a subject,"<sup>15</sup> an ambiguity he explicitly states

progression of his mind, but instead a "fast-forward", a skipping over and movement to his most essential insight, the argument from dependence.

<sup>10</sup> J. PALETTA, "Saint Augustine's Milan Vision Reconstructed," pp.151-180.

<sup>11</sup> *De Beata Vita* 4.34: Veritas autem ut sit, fit per aliquem summum modum, a quo procedit, et in quem se perfecta conuertit. Ipsi autem summo modo nullus alius modus imponitur: si enim summus modus per summum modum modus est, per seipsum modus est

<sup>12</sup> *De Ordine* 2.9.26: tum demum discet et quanta ratione praedita sint ea ipsa quae secutus est ante rationem, et quid sit ipsa ratio quam post auctoritatis cunabula firmus et idoneus iam sequitur atque comprehendit et [1] quid intellectus, in quo uniuersa sunt, uel ipse potius uniuersa, et [2] quid praeter uniuersa uniuersorum principium. See also, *De Ordine* 2.19.51: Cum autem se composuerit et ordinauerit ac concinnam pulchramque reddiderit, audebit iam Deum uidere, atque ipsum fontem unde manat omne uerum ipsumque Patrem Veritatis.

<sup>13</sup> *De Ordine* 2.9.26

<sup>14</sup> *De Ordine* 2.9.26

<sup>15</sup> *De Immortalitate Animae* 6.11: Quare ista coniunctio intuentis animi, et eius ueri quod intuetur, aut ita est ut subiectum sit animus, uerum autem illud in subiecto; aut contra subiectum uerum, et in subiecto animus.

is based on the original problem found in *De Ordine* concerning whether the soul *is* Truth or is *in* Truth. But in this dialogue (the *De Immortalitate Animae*) Augustine stops using the qualification which holds that the mind either is a subject with the true in it as in a subject or vice versa after he introduces the argument from dependence. That is to say, Augustine overcomes the ambiguous form of knowledge arrived at via the argument from judgment and arrives at definitive knowledge concerning the nature of the soul and God in *De Immortalitate Animae* because this argument establishes that God is the supreme maker and the soul is an object made, that God is uncreated Being and the soul created being. Augustine can now see that the soul and God are two distinct substances (because God is the source of the soul).<sup>16</sup>

In the previous two articles presented above analysis focused on identifying the theme of ontological dependence, but the specific problems that the argument solves for Augustine were not addressed, and so it is this issue which will now be taken up. In the beginning of chapter 10 Augustine recalls that he saw an immutable light (*lucem incommutabilem*) which was higher than his mind (*supra mentem meam*).<sup>17</sup> He says that this light was unlike the type of light that would have filled everything with its magnitude (*totumque occuparet magnitudine*).<sup>18</sup> He calls it utterly different (*aliud valde*), transcendent (*supra*), and superior (*superior*).<sup>19</sup> Augustine then specifically defines what he saw as truth (*ueritatem*) and eternity (*aeternitatem*).<sup>20</sup> This set of terms is intended to impress upon the reader that what Augustine saw was totally beyond the nature of material things. Finally, in the concluding lines of his reflection he tells the reader, "And I said:

<sup>16</sup> *De Immortalitate Animae* 12.19: Ex qua si habet animus idipsum quod est (non enim aliunde hoc habere potest, qui ex se non habet, nisi ab illa re quae illo ipso est animo praestantior), nulla res est qua id amittat, quia nulla res ei rei est contraria qua id habet; et propterea esse non desinit. I translate this, "If the mind has its essence from that itself which *is* (for since it does not have it from itself it cannot have it otherwise than from that thing which is superior to the mind itself); then there is nothing by which it may lose its being."

<sup>17</sup> *Confessiones* 7.10.16: Intraui et uidi qualicumque oculo animae meae supra eundem oculum animae meae, supra mentem meam lucem incommutabilem...

<sup>18</sup> *Confessiones* 7.10.16: ...non hanc uulgarem et conspicuam omni carni nec quasi ex eodem genere grandior erat, tamquam si ista multo multoque clarius claresceret totumque occuparet magnitudine.

<sup>19</sup> *Confessiones* 7.10.16: 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.

<sup>20</sup> *Confessiones* 7.10.16: Qui nouit ueritatem, nouit eam, et qui nouit eam, nouit aeternitatem. Caritas nouit eam. O aeterna ueritas et uera caritas et cara aeternitas!

'Surely, truth cannot be nothing, when it is not diffused through space, either finite or infinite?' And you cried from far way: 'Now, I Am Who Am.'"<sup>21</sup> Knowledge of God as He Who Is overcomes materialism. Here the phrase "not diffused in infinite space" (*neque per infinita locorum spatia diffusa est*) is intended to remind the reader of book 7 chapter 1 where he recalls, after abandoning Manichaeism, that he still imagined God to penetrate infinite space. There he says, "I conceived even you, life of my life, as a large being, permeating infinite space on every side, penetrating the entire mass of the world."<sup>22</sup> This reference (in chapter 10) links the two passages and makes it clear that Augustine is referring to the problem of materialism. Again, what is important to note about Augustine's description of his experience is that he is not just trying to show that the argument from dependence arrives at knowledge of God as He Who Is, and that this knowledge moves one beyond materialism. What is equally important to his project are the terms he uses, such as Immutability, Truth, and Eternity, to highlight the distinction between the nature of the immaterial and the nature of the material. In other words, in book 7 chapter 10 he recounts here the full range of terms which distinguish the material order from the immaterial order, even though the distinction is fundamentally grounded in the argument from dependence and its conclusion that God is He Who Is.

Although it is not a formal demonstration, Augustine then gives a slightly more detailed description of how he overcame materialism in book 7 chapter 11, for here he gives a summary of the argument from dependence. More specifically, this paragraph establishes that created things are and are not, that they receive being from God (*esse quidem quoniam abs te sunt*), and that only God truly Is because he remains unchangeably (*Id enim uere est quod incommutabiliter manet*).<sup>23</sup> Here again one can see that Augustine intends to emphasize the contingency of creation.

In chapter 12 the relationship between being and goodness is explored in order to refute the idea that evil is a substance. Augustine

<sup>21</sup> *Confessiones* 7.10.16: et dixi: "Numquid nihil est veritas, quoniam neque per finita neque per infinita locorum spatia diffusa est?". Et clamasti de longinquo: "Immo uero ego sum qui sum". English translations are taken from Chadwick; see H. Chadwick, *St. Augustine's Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>22</sup> *Confessiones* 7.1.2: Ita etiam te, uita uitae meae, grandem per infinita spatia undique cogitabam penetrare totam mundi molem.

<sup>23</sup> *Confessiones* 7.11.17: Et inspexi cetera infra te et uidi nec omnino esse nec omnino non esse: esse quidem, quoniam abs te sunt, non esse autem, quoniam id quod es non sunt. Id enim uere est, quod incommutabiliter manet.

begins this chapter by recalling that it was clear to him that all corruptible things are good.<sup>24</sup> He then noticed that both supreme goods and things which are not completely good cannot be corrupted: the former is incorruptible by definition while the latter does not exist. That is, because everything is created good, evil is merely the privation of the good which all things naturally have. It follows that if something was totally evil, totally corrupted, it would no longer be, and therefore pure evil does not exist.

Augustine then notices that created things aren't equally good, and that their inequality is justified because together they form an even greater good – the harmony of the lower and the higher. He notes that there are parts of the universe which are thought to be evil because they appear to be in conflict with the order of things, and that these parts are commonly associated with the earth. There is, however, no contradiction, says Augustine, in the existence of these elements because the earth is a part of the lower half of the created world and together with the higher (the heavenly bodies) create the even greater good of a graded harmony. As a result of this understanding, says Augustine, one should not be displeased with creation.

## 2. Confessions Chapter 7 books 14-20

In this section it will be shown that chapters 14-16 and chapter 20 are condensed summaries of Augustine's intellectual conversion recorded in book 7 chapter 10, and that they serve to introduce a new topic, the problem of enjoyment.

In chapter 14 Augustine describes his movement from materialism to Platonism:

'There is no health' (Ps. 37:4,8) in those who are displeased by an element in your creation, just as there was none in me when I was displeased by many things you had made. Because my soul did not dare to say that my god displeased me, it refused to attribute to you whatever was displeasing. Hence it came to adopt the opinion that there are two substances. But it found no rest and spoke a strange language. Returning from this deviation, it created for itself a god pervading all places in infinite space. It imagined this god to be you and installed him at its heart. It again became the temple of its own idol, an abomination to you. But afterwards you calmed my head without my realizing it, and 'shut my eyes that they should not see vanity' (Ps. 118:37). I relaxed a little and my mad folly was put to sleep. I

<sup>24</sup> *Confessiones* 7.12.18.

woke up in you and saw you to be infinite in another sense, and this way of seeing you did not come from the flesh.<sup>25</sup>

In the above Augustine begins by associating displeasure with the created order with the theology of the Manichees. He reports that, because he was unwilling to hold that God was the cause of evil, he came to believe that there must be two eternal ungenerated substances – one good and one evil. This understanding, however, still left his mind restless, and so he adopted the Christian understanding of God, but still conceived of him as a substance extended in infinite space (*Deum per infinita spatia locorum omnium*), again, a reference to his materialistic conception of God referenced in book 7 chapters 1 and 10. Finally, he realized that this position was also false, and “woke up” to see that God was “infinite in another sense” (*infinitum aliter*). So in this chapter Augustine reminds the reader of the fact that the *libri Platoniorum* allowed him to overcome his understanding of God as a being extended in infinite space.

Chapter 15 constitutes the continuation of this intellectual history, for it repeats what Augustine did after gaining the knowledge that God is He Who Is. Here Augustine reports that he turned to other things and saw that they *are* because of God:<sup>26</sup>

I turned my gaze on other things. I saw that to you they owe their existence, and that in you all things are finite, not in the sense that the space they occupy is bounded but in the sense that you hold all things in your hand by your Truth, and so all things are true insofar as they have being, and the term falsehood applies only when something is thought to have being which does not. And I saw that each thing is harmonious not only with its place but with its time, and that you alone are eternal and did not first begin to work after innumerable periods of time, for all periods of time both past and future neither pass away nor come except by your working and remaining.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *Confessiones* 7.14.20: *Non est sanitas eis, quibus displicet aliquid creaturae tuae, sicut mihi non erat, cum displicerent multa, quae fecisti. Et quia non audebat anima mea, ut ei displiceret Deus meus, nolebat esse tuum quicquid ei displicebat. Et inde ierat in opinionem duarum substantiarum et non requiescebat et aliena loquebatur. Et inde rediens fecerat sibi Deum per infinita spatia locorum omnium et eum putauerat esse te et eum collocauerat in corde suo et facta erat rursus templum idoli sui abominandum tibi. Sed posteaquam fouisti caput nescientis et clausisti oculos meos, ne uiderent uanitatem, cessauit de me paululum, et consopita est insania mea; et euigilaui in te et uidi te infinitum aliter, et uisus iste non a carne trahebatur.*

<sup>26</sup> This reading is confirmed by the parallel between *inspexi cetera* in book 11 and *respexi alia* in book 15 found in the opening lines of each.

<sup>27</sup> *Confessiones* 7.15.21: *Et respexi alia et uidi tibi debere quia sunt et in te cuncta finita, sed aliter, non quasi in loco, sed quia tu es omnitenens manu ueritate, et omnia uera sunt, in quantum sunt, nec quidquam est falsitas, nisi cum putatur esse quod non*

Dobell argues that this passage relates Augustine's understanding of the "nature of the true and the false," but even more dominant here is the theme of ontological dependence.<sup>28</sup> Augustine tells the reader that he came to understand that God was beyond space and time because he sustains created things in space and time. More specifically, in the first half of the second line above he says, "I saw that to You they owe their existence, and that in You all things are finite, not in the sense that the space they occupy is bounded but in the sense that You hold all things in your hand by your Truth." Things are finite not because they are limited in space by their shape but because they owe their existence (*uidi tibi debere quia sunt*) to their Creator. It is the creature's ontological dependence (which is ultimately established by the argument from dependence) which solves the problem of materialism, knowledge which clearly parallels the nature of the knowledge which Augustine describes in chapters 10 and 11. In the second half of the second line which follows this insight Augustine then comments: "So all things are true insofar as they have being, and the term 'falsehood' applies only when something is thought to have being which does not." Just as things receive their being from God so too do they receive their truth, for truth presupposes being. Finally, in the line following this one he explains that God's creative act sustains creatures not only in space but also in time: "And I saw that each thing is harmonious not only with its place but with its time, and that you alone are eternal and did not first begin to work after innumerable periods of time, for all periods of time both past and future neither pass away nor come except by your working and remaining." Creation comes and goes in time through God's working (*operante*) and remaining (*manente*), and so change in time is dependent upon God's eternal creative activity. Here again the theme of ontological dependence dominates. Finally, it should be noted that Augustine says here that Truth is the source of being, and so it may seem that here he is referring to the use of the argument from judgment.<sup>29</sup> But this is not possible because here he does not introduce an argument which establishes the *necessity* of this relationship – the necessity

est. Et uidi, quia non solum locis sua quaeque suis conueniunt sed etiam temporibus et quia tu, qui solus aeternus es, non post innumerabilia spatia temporum coepisti operari, quia omnia spatia temporum, et quae praeterierunt et quae praeteribunt, nec abirent nec uenirent nisi te operante et manente.

<sup>28</sup> Augustine's *Intellectual Conversion*, p. 38.

<sup>29</sup> This seems to be Cary's understanding. See *A Reader's Companion*, p. 115.

of Truth as the source of being. The reason for this is that Augustine does not have such an argument: his formal argument which establishes the necessity of concluding that created beings are brought into being by the Creator moves from the contingency of beings to Being itself. Moreover, as this passage indicates, being and truth are convertible and so the general statement that Truth is the source of being is a true one.

In chapter 16 Augustine continues his intellectual history while transitioning into a new problem.<sup>30</sup> He states that he was not surprised to see that the unhealthy perceive what is good for them as something bad, for they are used to an unhealthy diet.<sup>31</sup> This is the problem of enjoyment, the inability of a damaged faculty to enjoy the true object that it loves and needs, an analogy which is meant to apply to the damaged will and its inability to take pleasure in the highest Good. The wicked are unable to appreciate the good order that God establishes in creation because they are so accustomed to their own disordered view of it, and so he says here that they reject the goodness of lower things in the order of nature, things like the earth, snakes, and worms. Augustine says that only when they come to understand that all creation is good can they truly be part of creation's higher order. This chapter clearly parallels chapter 12 where Augustine explains that one should not be displeased with creation because the harmony of the lower and the higher forms a greater good. So chapters 14-16 are a review of Augustine's intellectual conversion for the sake of the introduction to a new problem, the problem of enjoyment.

In chapter 17, Augustine continues his reflection on the problem of enjoyment. He states that he was astonished to find that he loved God but that he was still unable to be firm in the enjoyment of him. He recalls that the beauty of his Creator "lifted him up and away" from the material world, but that he was immediately pulled back from him by the "weight" of his sexual habit. At this point Augustine then gives a description of an ascent to God:

In the course of this inquiry why I made such value judgements as I was making, I found the unchangeable and authentic eternity of truth to transcend my mutable mind. And so step by step I ascended from bodies to the soul which perceives through the body, and from there to its inward force; to which bodily senses report external sensations, this being as high as the beasts go. From there again I ascended to the

<sup>30</sup> *Confessiones* 7.16.22.

<sup>31</sup> For example, a man who is sick may believe that the bread which is good for him is bad due to his unhealthy palate.

power of reasoning to which is to be attributed the power of judging the deliverances of the bodily senses. This power, which in myself I found to be mutable; raised itself to the level of its own intelligence, and led my thinking out of the ruts of habit. It withdrew itself from the contradictory swarms of imaginative fantasies, so as to discover the light by which it was flooded. At that point it had no hesitation in declaring that the unchangeable is preferable to the changeable, and that on this ground it can know the unchangeable; since, unless it could some how know this; there would be no certainty in preferring it to the mutable. So in the flash of a trembling glance it attained to that which is.<sup>32</sup>

Courcelle argues that this ascent is another version of the one found in chapter 10. But this ascent is not the same type as the one recorded in chapter 10 because the experience described here is based on the argument from judgement. Here Augustine says that he knew his mind to be mutable, and also that the immutable is superior to the mutable. As a result, he concludes that he must know the immutable (*unde nosset ipsum incommutabile*) or there would be no certainty in his judgment that the immutable is superior to the mutable (i.e. what is known with certainty must exist).<sup>33</sup> But as has been demonstrated earlier, Augustine describes a relationship of ontological dependence in chapter 10, a relationship which is not used in the argument from judgment, and consequently it must be the case that in chapter 17 Augustine introduces a new argument. In short, the argument shows that one knows God because one must know him in order to make certain types of judgments. This argument does not show that all created being is dependent upon uncreated Being. Further, it should also be noted that it cannot be the case that the knowledge of Truth is a

<sup>32</sup> *Confessiones* 7.17.23: hoc ergo quaerens, unde iudicarem, cum ita iudicarem, inueneram incommutabilem et ueram ueritatis aeternitatem supra mentem meam commutabilem. Atque ita gradatim a corporibus ad sentientem per corpus animam atque inde ad eius interiorum uim, cui sensus corporis exteriora nuntiaret, et quousque possunt bestiae, atque inde rursus ad ratiocinantem potentiam, ad quam refertur iudicandum, quod sumitur a sensibus corporis; quae se quoque in me comperiens mutabilem erexit se ad intelligentiam suam et abduxit *cogitationem a consuetudine*, subtrahens se contradicentibus turbis phantasmatum, ut inueniret quo lumine aspergeretur, cum sine ulla dubitatione clamaret incommutabile praeferendum esse mutabili, unde nosset ipsum incommutabile (quod nisi aliquo modo nosset, nullo modo illud mutabili certa praeponeret) et peruenit ad id quod est in ictu trepidantis aspectus. Tunc uero *inuisibilia tua per ea quae facta sunt intellecta* conspexi, sed aciem figere non eualui et repercussa infirmitate redditus solitis non mecum ferebam nisi amantem memoriam et quasi olefacta desiderantem, quae comedere nondum possem.

<sup>33</sup> The argument recorded in 7.17 differs slightly from standard versions of such arguments, for example, *De Libero Arbitrio*.

secondary (i.e. not primary) effect of Augustine's argument in book 7.17 due to the fact that he concludes the chapter with the statement that he had attained That Which Is (*id quod est*). In this argument knowledge of Truth is always the immediate conclusion, while knowledge of God as Being is secondary. The reason for this is that this argument clearly works on the epistemological plane: its objective is to show that the mind has access to certain knowledge (i.e. Truth) and that certain knowledge fulfills the criteria of divinity. This reading is supported by Augustine's summation of the argument in the opening line of the paragraph. It will be important to keep this point in mind in order to understand the relationship between this chapter and chapter 18. Augustine concludes the chapter by saying, "But I did not possess the strength to keep my vision fixed," and also "I carried with me only a loving memory and a desire for that of which I had the aroma but which I had not yet the capacity to eat." Scholars usually see here the opposition of the partially mystical and the fully mystical (i.e. the record of a partial mystical vision that will be made perfect at Ostia), but, as it will be demonstrated, Augustine actually intends to oppose rational and faith knowledge in regard to the problem of enjoyment.

That Augustine is now comparing scientific knowledge reached via the argument from judgement with faith knowledge is confirmed by the continuation of the theme in chapter 18. Chapter 18 begins as follows:

I sought a way to obtain strength enough to enjoy you, but I did not find it until I embraced "the mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus" (I Timothy 2:5), "who is above all things, God blessed for ever" (Romans 9:5). He called and said "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). The food which I was too weak to accept he mingled with flesh, in that "The Word was made flesh" (John 1:14), so that our infant condition might come to such milk from your wisdom by which you created all things.<sup>34</sup>

In the above Augustine intends to show that only Christ gave him the power to enjoy God because only Christ is God and man. More specifically, Christ, because he is man *and* Truth, enables other

<sup>34</sup> *Confessiones* 7.18.24: Et quaerebam uiam comparandi roboris, quod esset idoneum ad fruendum te, nec inueniebam, donec amplecterer mediatorem Dei et hominum, hominem Christum Iesum, qui est super omnia Deus benedictus in saecula, uocantem et dicentem: Ego sum uia et ueritas et uita, et cibum, cui capiendo inualidus eram, miscentem carni, quoniam Verbum caro factum est, ut infantiae nostrae lactesceret sapientia tua, per quam creasti omnia.

men to enter into relationship with Truth. The argument from Truth presented in the preceding chapter is meant to find an immediate parallel in this one: in the former Augustine says that he discovered that unchangeable and eternal Truth transcended his mind (*inueneram incommutabilem et ueram ueritatis aeternitatem*: 7.17.23) and here he says that one knows that Christ is God because he called himself Truth (*Ego sum ueritas*). Clearly then Augustine saves the use of the argument from Truth until book 17 (i.e. he does not use it in chapter 10) in order to establish that Christ is God incarnate, for the nature of God revealed at the conclusion of the Platonic argument from judgment is identical to the nature of Christ described in John 14:6. In other words, the argument from dependence is not suitable for making this connection because the immediate conclusion of the argument from dependence is not that God is Truth, and so Augustine needs the argument from judgment in order to link Platonism with Christ's self-designation. Moreover, this argument helps to solve the problem of enjoyment insofar as it helps to illuminate Christ's nature. According to Augustine, Truth is mixed with flesh so that the soul, in its weakened state, can be empowered to enjoy it. When he says that he was not stable in the enjoyment of God Augustine is not comparing imperfect mystical experience with perfect mystical experience but faith-knowledge of Truth (knowledge based on belief in God incarnate) to rational knowledge of Truth. Moreover, there seems to be allusions here to the Eucharist, and if this is the case it would strongly support this thesis that the opposition is between rational and faith-knowledge.<sup>35</sup>

The next chapter, chapter 19, concerns Augustine's understanding of Christ's nature at the time of his intellectual conversion. Concerning this he says that at the time just following his intellectual conversion he understood Christ to be the wisest of all men but not Divinity incarnate.

In chapter 20 of book 7 Augustine gives another summary of his understanding of the books of the Platonists:

[I] turned my attention to your 'invisible nature understood through the things that are made' (Rom. 1:20). But from the disappointment I suffered I perceived that the darkness of my soul would not allow me to contemplate these sublimities. Yet I was certain that you are infinite without being infinitely diffused through finite space. I was sure that you truly are, and are always the same that you never become other

<sup>35</sup> For example, he refers to embracing Christ, to food mingled with flesh, and to Christ as building "a humble home of the human body." Dobell makes this observation as well; see *Augustine's Intellectual Conversion*, p. 226.

or different in any part or by any movement of position, whereas all other things derive from you, as is proved by the fact that they exist. Of these conceptions I was certain but to enjoy you I was too weak.<sup>36</sup>

The above clearly mirrors book 7 chapters 10-11. Augustine begins by reflecting on his Platonic experience, informing the reader that he had attained rational knowledge of his Creator by quoting *Romans* 1:20. He then refers to his overcoming of materialism, for he says that he came to believe that God was not diffused through infinite space (*nec tamen per locos finitos infinitosue diffundi*), a third reference to *Confessions* 7.1. He then goes on to recall the knowledge he gained by reading the *libri Platoniorum*: the knowledge that God exists, that He is unchanging, and that all things come from God which is proved by the fact that they exist (*ex te esse omnia...quia sunt*). Here again the theme of ontological dependence is listed as one of his essential insights and not the mind's ability to make value judgements. Since Augustine prefaces his recollection with a reference to *Romans* 1:20 (which signifies for him rational knowledge), and because he says that he had come to know that all things come from God because they are, one must read him as referring here to the argument from dependence. Augustine does not emphasize the fact that he came to knowledge of God as Truth through reflection on his ability to make judgments concerning the qualities of created things (as he does in chapter 17) but instead focuses on the fact that he came to know that God is by reflecting on their ontological dependence. Also, here too one can see that Augustine is still addressing the problem of enjoyment: he had achieved certainty regarding the nature of God, and God's relationship to Creation, but he still did not have the ability to take true pleasure in what he had discovered.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> *Confessiones* 7.20.26: quid per tenebras animae meae contemplari non sinerer, certus esse te et infinitum esse nec tamen per locos finitos infinitosue diffundi et uere te esse, qui semper idem ipse esses, ex nulla parte nulloque motu alter aut aliter, cetera uero ex te esse omnia, hoc solo firmissimo documento, quia sunt, certus quidem in istis eram, nimis tamen infirmus ad fruendum te.

<sup>37</sup> Augustine concludes with his thoughts on the pride that this new knowledge had produced in him. The final chapter of book 7 concerns how he began to study the writing of Paul, how upon reading them he could now see the harmony between Platonic philosophy and the Christian religion, and how true salvation is attained only through belief in Christ.

## Conclusion

In *Confessions* 7.10 Augustine overcomes the problem of materialism via the argument from dependence and its conclusion that God is He Who Is. In order to clearly emphasize God's nature as immaterial Augustine uses a variety of terms, such as Truth, Immutability, and Eternity, which are convertible with Being. In chapter 11 Augustine gives his conclusions clearer expression, explaining that God is the source of that which both is and is not, and, therefore is That Which Truly Is. In chapter 12 he addresses the problem of evil, arguing that whatever is is good, and that evil refers only to the degree to which good things are corrupted. It is the definition of God as Immutable Being which solves both the problem of materialism and the problem of evil. Materialism is not overcome for Augustine through the use of the argument from judgment and its conclusion that God is Truth.

A close analysis of chapters 14-20 confirms this interpretation. Chapters 14-16 clearly constitute a short summary of chapters 10-12. In chapter 10 Augustine says that God is not diffused through infinite space (*neque per infinita locorum spatia diffusa est*) because, as He Who Is, he is the maker of created things (*superior quia ipsa fecit me*), and this idea is then reexpressed in slightly more detail in chapter 11 where he says that things have their being through God (*esse quidem quoniam abs te sunt*). Similarly, in chapters 14-16 Augustine says that he conceived of God as diffused in infinite space (*Deum per infinita spatia locorum omnium*), but then rejected this notion because he understood God to be infinite in the sense that he is *not* bounded by space, for things which are bounded by space owe their very being to God (*uidi tibi debere qui sunt*) while things changing in time come and go only through God's working and remaining (*nisi te operante et manente*). In both these chapters the next conclusion is that all creation is good because the unity of the higher and lower creates a more perfect harmony. So in each there is (1) a reference to God as extended in infinite space, (2) a reference to the defeat of materialism through knowledge of creation's ontological dependence, and (3) the claim that the harmony of the lower and the higher form a greater good.

At the conclusion of chapter 16 Augustine claims that there are certain people who do not enjoy the goodness of creation because their wills are not pure enough, and so it was argued that this review of Augustine's intellectual history is intended to introduce the problem of enjoyment. This problem, the inability of the corrupt will to enjoy the Good, is then immediately developed in the chapter 17, for here

Augustine addresses the fact that he himself was not stable in the enjoyment of God. The argument from judgement is then used to illustrate the fleeting nature of rational knowledge because, although it achieves knowledge of God as Truth, this chapter too concludes with Augustine's complaint that it does not yield stability. Finally, in chapter 18 Christianity is introduced as the solution to the problem of enjoyment. Christ gives one the power to enjoy the Truth because Christ *is* the Truth mingled with flesh. The argument from judgement is saved in order to help solve the problem of enjoyment because it helps to illuminate the precise meaning of John 14:6 (*ego sum ueritas*). In chapter 20 one can see a second summation of the knowledge he received from the Platonists, for one can see a reference to the overturning of materialism via knowledge of creation's ontological dependence. Here there are clear similarities between book 7 chapters 10-12 and book 7 chapters 14-16. So analysis of chapters 14-16 and 20 confirms that in book 7 chapter 10 Augustine describes knowledge attained through the argument from dependence.

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