

AUGUSTINE THE SEMI-PELAGIAN

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Abstract

Pelagius's contributions to the controversy on grace survive only in a fragmentary and incoherent selection, probably chosen by Augustine to support his caricature "Pelagianism." Thus the letters of Prosper (*ep.* 225) and Hilary (*ep.* 226) are invaluable, for revealing both the coherent doctrine of grace and free will proposed by his "semi-Pelagian" opponents and for their pointing to his own early anti-Manichaean writings, and especially *lib. arb.*, as their source and inspiration. After some attempts to refute this claim, Augustine in fact finally acknowledged his part (in *praed. sanct.* 3,7-4,8).

Manichaeism of Augustine's time and place was promoted as the true because Pauline Christianity; thus the anti-Manichaean position of Augustine's reaction never was the naive defense of free will prior to taking account of original sin, as he likes to suggest, but a carefully considered defense of a minimum of free will in the face of original sin (see *lib. arb.* III,20,56). By the time of Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas, it had become the main alternative to his anti-Pelagianism, and arguably the only way to reconcile grace and free will. As late as *spir. et litt.* 33,57 ff. he posed clearly and nearly without bias the fundamental question about the *initium gratiae*, whether God's universal gift of free will in Creation (as in all version of pelagianism, including his own) or Recreation in Christ (as in his anti-Pelagianism). Only thereafter did he gradually harden his choice of Recreation via Christ's grace to the destruction of free will in the ungraced. His decision to defend his fellow bishops' appeal, in the trial of Caelestius, to infant damnation probably contributed more to this turn than his response, years earlier, to the questions of Simplicianus.

To see that Pelagius was also a follower of Augustine's own semi-pelagianism requires learning to read Augustine critically. Though that project will require the facing of some unpleasant truths about his polemical methods, beyond them there are rewards. The apparent lack of impartial but forceful critical referees meant that the intellectual quality of the Pelagian controversy was far lower than it should have been. Fortunately, we can make up part of that loss by critical reading.

Today we can decide which Augustine we prefer, rather than being obsessed by the question of which is the real Augustine, the "semi-pelagian" or the anti-Pelagian. The real Augustine is he who can be credited for the flourishing of the concept of Christian grace far beyond the narrow bounds of theological controversy.

Key Words

grace of creation – *Lib. arb.* III, 20,56 – *Spir. et litt.* 34,60 – infant damnation – reprobation

Eleonore Stump, in her recent study "Augustine on Free Will," takes as her starting point the "remarkable" range, in the scholarly literature, of views on Augustine's account of free will: "it is sometimes difficult to believe they are reading the same texts."¹ This essay shall ignore the question of whether Augustine ever destroyed free will in those who are given grace, and confine the question to the state of those denied grace, both because it was primarily on that question that the Pelagians were concerned to oppose Augustine and because it is probably much the more relevant and interesting question just at present, engaging most religions, not just Christianity.

Augustine is thrice-over the "Doctor of Grace," founder of all three doctrines of grace most in currency today, and not only of the familiar anti-Pelagianism that is usually assumed to be virtually the same as his own position. He is also, just as Prosper's "semi-Pelagian" opponents claimed, the originating source and perhaps the inventor of "semi-pelagianism," and *not* as a position he opposes. Even today there are some commentators who seem to think that if we just look hard enough we can find some way to have the best of both, grace as in his anti-Pelagianism and free will as in his (early) semi-pelagianism. But the ultimate weapon (infant damnation) he inherited, even if reluctantly, from Caelestius's judges in Carthage puts into doubt the validity of his continuing to impute free will to the ungraced. The sharp sensitivity he was to show from then on to charges that he had destroyed free will suggests that he was himself well aware of the problem.² Finally, his credit as inventor of semi-pelagianism has been obscured by his third invention, "Pelagianism," that is, his caricature of the positions of his first opponents (perhaps devised in an attempt to spare his own semi-pelagianism). These statements above will require redefinition or more precise definition of all of these terms.

Almost everything Augustine says in the summary of Pelagianism in Chapter 88 of *De haeresis* needs to be examined critically and

¹ Pages 124-147 of Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). This essay, so stimulating that it is almost irrelevant how far one agrees with it, is also available online at <https://sites.google.com/site/stumpep>.

² That this doubt is now widely acknowledged at least in the English-speaking world is suggested by two recent collections, the one cited in the previous note and Robert Dodaro and George Lawless, eds., *Augustine and His Critics* (New York: Routledge, 2000). Most of the essays which deal with the question are more concerned to correct than to defend Augustine on free will.

much of it can be accepted only with qualifications, sometimes radical. His characterization of the Pelagians, for example, as “enemies of grace” is at best a begging of the question, accurate only if you accept Augustine’s own quite controversial anti-Pelagian theory of grace.³ In fact, one can say the same of most of Augustine’s anti-Pelagian arguments.

He sometimes inadvertently exposes his own misrepresentations, as in the following sentence: “They claim that men *do not receive* these (spiritual gifts) from God (*haec non ab ipso accipere*) but acquire them by themselves, for they say that the grace of God by which we are liberated from impiety *is given (dari)* in return for our merits” (*haer.* 88,4).⁴ (We shall later observe Augustine himself distinguishing these two positions here confused, so as to refute the first by appealing to the second.) Except that it is rather *Augustine* who insists that any human preparation be called merit, the second of these formulations is reasonably accurate and gives the lie to the first statement, which is his central charge against “Pelagians” – that they say men achieve their own grace and save themselves – and which unfortunately usually appears elsewhere without the correcting self-contradiction.

Similarly, a charge that “they negate the prayers of the Church” is belied by Augustine’s earlier statement in this very document (and elsewhere) that Pelagius claimed that grace enables us to “do more easily what we can do without it.” So far as that, we have probably all smiled at Pelagius’s shallowness revealed in that “more easily.” But when we smiled, did we think Augustine’s anti-Pelagian alternative: that the ungraced have *no free choice at all, except as a “choice” between evils*? In fact, that is just what the sentence quoted in the previous paragraph means; “merit” for the *anti-Pelagian* Augustine includes any good will prior to grace. It was his own insistence – against the Pelagian teaching of a required

³ The characterization would be a falsehood, if meant as sometimes taken, to suggest that Pelagians were *professed* enemies of grace, but, to be fair to Augustine, it must be admitted that *haer.* in effect defines the phrase as “friends of free will (in the ungraced).”

⁴ “Haec quippe non ab ipso accipere, sed a seipsis homines habere contendunt, gratiam Dei qua liberamur ab impietate dicentes secundum merita nostra dari.” Translations from Augustine’s works are mine, but have been carefully compared with others’ translations, in the series of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, *The Library of Christian Classics*, *The Fathers of the Church*, and *The Works of St. Augustine*. The Latin texts used are from the online *Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana*, available at www.augustinus.it.

preparation for grace – that any such preparation is a meriting of grace that forced him – against his own observations of life, no doubt – into affirming in effect “total depravity.” As we shall see in due time, the sentence quoted in the last paragraph but one also exposes the other major misrepresentation: that the Pelagians say that the universal gift of human nature in the act of creation is grace period. But first we must observe Augustine showing them how to save free will by starting with the grace of Creation as a foundation for the grace of Recreation.

Augustine the Founder of Pelagianism

Augustine’s dubious accounts of Pelagianism also obscure his own part in initiating or developing the doctrine he later turned against. An accusation found not just in *haer.* but often elsewhere is that Pelagius invented a “new heresy.” Quite the contrary, if what the Pelagians held was indeed a new heresy, as against an acceptable or even commonly held set of assumptions of the day, then we can find its origins far earlier in Augustine’s own writings than in Pelagius’s. I should define my terms. What Augustine invented and what has always been the real alternative to late Augustinianism – and therefore what is my concern – is what is or was usually called “semi-Pelagianism.” Almost certainly Pelagius was semi-pelagian, as we shall see, and probably Caelestius was too, at least by the time they were excommunicated. They may well have had more radical followers who justified Augustine’s caricatures, but to explore that possibility would be to leave the main road of history for obscure and probably trackless by-ways. At any rate, it is probably impossible to define a “Pelagianism” as distinct from “semi-Pelagianism” once we subject Augustine’s caricatures to criticism.

If we put on side P early Augustine, the semi-Pelagians described in the letters of Prosper and Hilary, Thomas Aquinas, and probably the majority of modern academic theologians, and on side A late Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Jansen, and some “conservative” theologians (one might guess they are a minority even in the churches of Luther and Calvin), the main motives controlling the theology of grace and the methods of realizing those motives emerge clearly enough. The main motive of side P is universalism, the judgment that condemning anyone, of any time or any place, to the fires of Hell, without that person’s having a free choice of avoiding such a fate, cannot be reconciled with the justice of God. This is the main thesis

of Augustine's anti-Manichaean writings. So far as its application to pagans, see Porphyry's question and Augustine's answer in *ep. 102: Contra paganos*. This interpretation of the main motive is not the only possible one, and so one of the purposes in what follows will be to recommend and support it.

On side P up through Thomas at least, the key method of preserving both God's justice and human free will without invoking merit prior to grace is to locate the beginning of grace – the preparation for it – in the gratuitous gift of universal human nature. As Peter Lombard has it, in the *Sentences*, Book Two, Distinction 25: "The natural powers also are from grace, belonging certainly to that grace of God given to all" (*naturalia ex gratia [sunt], ad generalem quippe Dei gratiam pertinent.*) In II *Sent.*, d. 28, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1, Thomas restores to the Grace of Creation just those verses Augustine had wrested to the Grace of Recreation by reading into them the word *good*, in a context assuming total perversity, verses such as John 15: 5: "Without me you can do nothing" and 2 Cor 3: 5.

On side A, on the other hand, we have in Augustine's late writings the repeated insistence that if there is any way of salvation except Christian faith and/or baptism, then "Christ died in vain."⁵ See Augustine's answer to Porphyry in *ep. 102 (Contra paganos)* as reinterpreted in *Retractationes* and in *De praedestinatione sanctorum*. If one wishes to read Augustine critically, instead of simply taking his version at face value, and so succumbing passively to his manipulations, it is essential that one understand and always keep in mind the main motives on either side and understand further that Augustine was once a thoroughgoing semi-pelagian and even the inventor of pelagianism. I shall make use of these anachronistic terms, both to invoke the whole historical context of the controversy and to help cleanse the terms of accumulated prejudice, but shall forego caps when referring to Augustine's version.

The essential text for revealing both of these points is *De libero arbitrio*, Book Three, Chapters 18-20 (III,18,52-20,58). In fact, most revealing is to start with Augustine's three denials in his later writings of the obvious semi-pelagianism of this early work; it is these denials above all that have caused the confusion about free will in Augustine referred to by Eleonore Stump, these and the fact that he does not in *lib. arb* insist explicitly that free will is to be attributed also to non-

⁵ *Nat. et gr.* 9,10, for example. As we shall see, however, Augustine never ruled out the salvation of virtuous pagans. He is rather intent on defining all salvation as Christian.

Christians. That latter step he will take only after deciding that all salvation is Christian.

He even claims in *retr.* that *lib. arb.* refuted Pelagianism before it existed (8,4 and 6).⁶ (Note this backward admission of his own priority.) In each of these denials, he correctly pointed out that in *lib. arb.* III,18 he had affirmed the necessity of grace for full restoration of freedom of the will (this twist emerging abruptly – and retrospectively? – at the end of what had seemed an unqualified universal vindication of free will against the Manichaeans).

However, he does not acknowledge that his repeated formula for the fallen state is thoroughly (semi-) pelagian: “ignorance and difficulty.” And in all three he fails to acknowledge the semi-pelagianism that follows immediately in Chapters 19-20. In *De natura et gratia* 67,81, he does quote the beginning of his semi-pelagian statement (from III,19,53), and then brings himself and the moment to life on the page by yielding to a human impulse just like our own, to overlook an inconvenient truth, a useful instance to set the tone of our study, so long as we judge it rightly: original sin, yes; total perversity, no. After the still somewhat inconclusive words: “You are judged as guilty not because you are ignorant against your will, but because you neglect to search for what you don’t know, not because you do not bandage your wounded members, but because you ignore the one who wants to heal them,” he stops, just before the next and telling sentence: “These are personal sins of your own” (*ista tua propria peccata sunt*).⁷ And so he goes on at the end of III,20,56 to make an almost perfect statement of the essence of semi-pelagianism:

⁶ These revealing paragraphs in *retr.* 8 should be studied closely. They do rule out semi-pelagianism, but at the cost of denying free will to the ungraced (unless one devises an ad hoc definition of “free will” to avoid such a result). What they really prove, then, is (1) Augustine was quite aware that the “Pelagians” were really semi-pelagians, for otherwise there would be no need to take such a dangerous position to refute them, and (2) his own position in *lib. arb.* was semi-pelagianism, since it pointedly preserves free will in the yet ungraced, as we shall see. That is exactly the thesis of my essay. In addition to the two denials noted in the text, see *perseu.* 11,26-27. In 27, Augustine notes that some of his opponents have accepted his version of traducianism, but still do not agree that infants must be baptized in order to avoid damnation. He professes to be puzzled by this, but we can easily recognize the “Pelagian” and anti-Manichaean insistence on free will as necessary for the justice of God’s dealings with mankind. Note also that semi-Pelagians would not necessarily reject original sin *ex traduce*, except as accompanied by total perversity or infant damnation. Recall in this context that the opponents cited by Prosper and Hilary openly appealed to their own grounding in Augustine’s anti-Manichaean writings.

⁷ “... non tibi deputatur ad culpam quod inuitus ignoras, sed quod negligis quaerere quod ignoras; neque illud quod uulnerata membra non colligis, sed quod uolentem sanare contemnis: ista tua propria peccata sunt.”

Ignorance [of what is right] and difficulty [in doing it] will not be a punishment of sin for growing souls, but a warning to become better and wiser and a starting point toward perfection. For prior to any merit whatever for good works, it is enough that the soul has received from nature the power of judging, so as to prefer wisdom to ignorance and tranquility to difficulty, thus to acquire these good things by its efforts, though lacking them at birth. If the soul is unwilling to do all this, it will with justice be held guilty of sin, just as was the one that did not use well the talent it had received. For although the soul is born in ignorance and difficulty, it is not constrained by any necessity to remain in that state in which it was born.⁸

It is probable that Pelagius took his position on grace from these concluding chapters, at least after having been charged with heresy, and virtually certain that the semi-Pelagians pointed to by Hilary and by Prosper did so (see *ep.* 225,4 especially). According to Hilary, they appealed relevantly and effectively to at least two of Augustine's early works, including *lib. arb.* We shall not have space to discuss these two letters in detail, but they are key evidence for the argument for Augustine as the originating source of semi-Pelagianism. They are short and easily available in Augustine's letters. Then, it is easy to go from them to Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas. In the other direction, the "semi-pelagian" context defined here will make sense of the otherwise incoherent and fragmented account of Pelagius's teaching that emerges from Augustine's writings. In short, both Pelagius and the "semi-Pelagians" were followers of the anti-Manichaean Augustine.

Indeed, several times, as in *praed. sanct.* 3,7-4,8, Augustine openly contradicts his own denials. At the beginning of 4,8, he acknowledges once having held the same position on grace and free will as that attributed to these final opponents, and goes on to acknowledge in the same section that he turned against free will only later, in writing the much cited *Ad Simplicianum*. What he acknowledges, that he once believed that faith is "our own," goes further in pelagianism than what the semi-Pelagians or Thomas (and even Pelagius?) need

⁸ "... non erit nascentibus animis ignorantia et difficultas supplicium peccati, sed proficiendi admonitio, et perfectionis exordium. Non enim ante omne meritum boni operis parum est accepisse naturale iudicium, quo sapientiam praeponat errori, et quietem difficultati, ut ad haec non nascendo, sed studendo perueniat. Quod si agere noluerit, peccati rea iure tenebitur, tamquam quae non bene usa sit ea facultate quam accepit. Quamquam enim in ignorantia et difficultate nata sit, non tamen ad permanendum in eo quod nata est, aliqua necessitate comprimitur." See III,16,45 for a "preview" of this general grace of nature as being the grace before free will. Someone might object that this "semi-pelagianism" applies only if souls are newly created for each individual; but see the "preview" just cited and *ep.* 143, 5-6. *Supplicium peccati* is probably a reference to *poena peccati*, the term for original sin.

claim, the former two at least going no further than our "asking, seeking, knocking" (ep. 225,4).

By placing early Augustine in the context of the "semi-Pelagians" described by Hilary and Prosper (with some attention to Caelestius and Pelagius between those two points) and then going on to the scholastics of the Middle Ages and especially Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas, we can easily see that what we have at the end of *lib. arb.* is not merely a few thoughtless remarks on free will made in the absence of any consideration of grace, but a well worked out attempt to preserve a minimum of free will in the face of grace, perhaps in fact the only way of reconciling the two. The question of Augustine's possible predecessors as inventors of pelagianism shall be left mostly to the side; all of the others just mentioned started from early Augustine.⁹

⁹ Vittorino Grossi's thought-provoking essay "Il peccato originale nella catechesi di s. Agostino prima della polemica pelagiana" (*Augustinianum* 10 [1970] 325-359, 458-492) shows that there are two rather different influences on the various possible accounts of grace, though both attributable to Paul. One of course is the familiar direct commentary on the history of man from Adam to Christ, especially in Romans. But he shows (338 ff.) that Augustine and others preparing candidates for baptism also went back to the narrative itself, in the Old Testament, of God's Providence over and love for man, starting of course with the Creation and the disobedience of Adam and Eve and going on to present in summary form the story he was later to elaborate in detail in *De civitate Dei*, including repeated backslidings followed by healing punishments. It of course included the story of the unjust as well, and in the great work Augustine indeed suspected that the history of the city of the just was not continuous, sometimes lapsing for a time. Still, one would get a rather different and less pessimistic impression of the force and the nature of original sin from this story as compared with the direct commentary of Paul, especially as interpreted by Augustine. This reminds us that Paul's influence on Christian theology and on the doctrine of grace was far wider and more ambiguous than we might assume, judging only from the direct commentary on fallen man, designed to promote the exclusionary theme of Jesus Christ as the only mediator. On the other hand, it is the same Paul who sanctions the Jewish scriptures as part of the sacred story, the Old Testament or Contract. The saints of the Old Testament too are saved and not only those after the promise to Abraham, not even only those after the written Law given to Moses, but those also who did "by nature" what the Law requires and therefore can be said to have had the law written on their hearts. For his part, Augustine shows that the City of God starts immediately after the fall, with Abel. Pelagius's account of original sin and grace, as cited by Augustine in *gr. et pecc. or.* II,24,28 (see below) seems to derive from this less provincial context, and to be similar to Augustine's anti-Manichaean versions of them. Further, even after going over, whether abruptly in *simpl.* or more gradually, to the "semi-Manichaean" account in Romans, Augustine deemphasizes but does not abandon the account derived from the Old Testament, including the salvation not only of ancient Hebrews but of some pagans. He cannot, because Paul has established that account as "fact."

This account fits perfectly with Peter Lombard's use of Augustine. He prudently continues to treat Augustine as the great doctor of grace and Pelagius as a heretic, but he goes on to use Augustine's frequent lapses, even late in his life, into what we would call semi-Pelagianism to vindicate free will against the anti-Pelagian Augustine.

And seeing early Augustine as a semi-pelagian directs attention to the ambiguity or ambivalence of his anti-Pelagian writings. If we let Peter Lombard sharpen our awareness of openings for human free will prior to grace and even to faith, we notice that the larger part of what we might call the concrete application of *his own* (?) doctrine of grace (as against the anti-Pelagian theory in its abstract form), even in the anti-Pelagian writings, is semi-Pelagian, in that the fundamental assumption of that concrete application is that we should ask and pray for grace. More than that, we see that especially at the beginning of his campaign against the Pelagians, he vacillated between two very different strategies: attacking them as "Pelagians" from a semi-pelagian perspective and attacking them as semi-Pelagians from an anti-Pelagian perspective. One of the most significant cases of this applied semi-pelagianism rises again to the level of explicit theory (*nat. et gr.* 16,17) and is used to define *by contrast* Pelagius's position by distinguishing and setting against each other the two positions on grace that, at the beginning of this essay, we saw Augustine deliberately confuse in *haer.*: "An et istam [sapentiam] quisquam abrogare audet gratiae Dei et eam superbissima uanitate ponit in hominis potestate? Cur ergo oratur ut accipiatur, si ab homine est ut habeatur?" (Who would dare seize Wisdom away from the grace of God and with vain and supreme pride place It within human power? Why then do we pray that we receive It, if it is from man that It is to be had?)¹⁰ Below, I shall cite another use of this same semi-pelagian argument, from *gr. et lib. arb.* 4,9; see also *praed. sanct.* 20,41.

We must be clear on the following point: what separates the anti-Pelagian Augustine from his semi-Pelagian opponents, including his earlier self, is not acceptance or rejection of original sin in itself, as he likes to claim, over-simplifying this point, like so much else, to an either/or. For Pelagius on original sin, see the passage from *gr. et pecc. or.* II,26,30 cited below. In fact, some of the opponents described by Prosper accepted original sin *ex traduce*, actually going beyond

¹⁰ We find the same semi-pelagianism turned against the caricature "Pelagianism" even very late, as in *perseu.* 2.3: "Cur autem perseuerantia ista poscitur a Deo, si non datur a Deo?"

what even the anti-Pelagian Augustine will affirm. It is rather *total perversity inherited from Adam, in whatever way*, that is required by his rejection of the pelagian preparation for grace and also probably needed to help infant damnation go down without indigestion. But he surely did not really believe in total perversity; who could, except compelled by ideology?

Finally, this is perhaps the place to pay to Augustine what admittedly might at first glance look like a back-handed compliment: that his own writings have done far more to advance the Pelagian cause, whether defined narrowly or by potential extension to such positions as deism, than all of the writings of the Pelagians, and not only because those writings have survived mainly in his own. This situation is indeed partly a function of what we will turn to just below, the obviously and extremely poor quality of some of the arguments he was forced to make against the Pelagian appeal to free will while being constrained to deny that he was destroying free will in the ungraced. But more stress should be put on the admirable if terrible honesty with which he presented the horrifying parts of his anti-Pelagian position, such as reprobation and above all infant damnation. The monks of Hadrumetum and Marseilles are good examples of the double-edged effects of Augustine's "anti-Pelagian" writings, perhaps reflecting suppressed ambivalence on his own part. But could this undercutting of his explicit position be entirely inadvertent? This honesty is especially impressive compared with the over-refinement of recent supporters, who, like Alexander Pope's "soft Dean... never mention Hell to ears polite."¹¹

By the time we reach Thomas, the positive contributions of Augustine's own semi-pelagian school come to the fore.

Reading Augustine Critically

It is remarkable that after a millennium and a half, prejudice against Pelagius, even among those likely to agree with him, and even in a world situation that should be favorable to his rehabilitation, is

¹¹ Thus, on page 328 of the essay mentioned in note 9, Vittorino Grossi condescends to the Pelagian rationale for grace: "al massimo, facilitare la volontà nel voler [il bene]" without any hint of the severe problems raised by going beyond that maximum. Suppressing the real purposes behind the pelagian position (including Augustine's) is to fail in interpreting accurately and thus to undervalue not only theirs but Augustine's writings.

only now just beginning to relax its grip, and mainly among specialists on the controversy.¹² The problem starts with the fact that Augustine was one of the world's great masters of polemical rhetoric. His attacks on Pelagius are not only so effective but so extreme, in their purpose (excommunication) and in their methods (of stretching the truth), that supporters of Augustine might very naturally have some anxiety that

¹² Vittorino Grossi begins his essay "Il peccato originale nella catechesi di s. Agostino prima della polemica pelagiana" with a gratuitous because nearly irrelevant account of "pelagianismo" which turns out to be a skimming off of the old familiar jibes from Augustine's caricatures. One might have thought that the precious few citations of Pelagian writings saved in Augustine's would demand attention from a scholar of his standing, but no. Perhaps encouraged by Augustine's freedom of invention, Grossi goes even further, being especially fond of charging Pelagians with "naturalismo," as if anyone ever believed humans could make their own heaven and make their own way there. Augustine himself was content with a charge of softness on infant damnation, when, in *gr. et pecc. or.* II,5,5, he cited *Libellus fidei Romae* for Caelestius's rationale for baptism, *quia uires naturae non habent [regnum coelorum], conferri necessarium est per gratiae libertatem*. Grossi allows hostility to "naturalismo" to suggest invidious words, *umanizzare il divino* (327), which remind one of the anecdote of the pious student at a Christian college who leapt before he looked in belittling ancient Greek paganism – for showing a god come down to walk the earth. More to the point, that belittling phrase points to the aspect of Christianity perhaps most dear to Augustine. The lazy scholarship in this brief opening passage is especially telling in its contrast with the impressive work shown in the real subject of the essay, as cited above. In fact, Grossi puts to shame many anti-Pelagians with his acute acknowledgment (346 ff) of the difficulties of explaining satisfactorily the justice of the imposition of original sin, whether taken as an imputed guilt, or a disability which makes one's own sin unavoidable. He could have been even more forthright, by citing *lib. arb.* III,19,53, for Augustine's own response to carplings against the justice of original sin: "Recte enim fortasse quererentur, si erroris et libidinis nullus hominum uictor existeret: cum uero ubique sit praesens, qui multis modis per creaturam sibi Domino seruientem auersum uocet, doceat credentem, consoletur sperantem, diligentem adhortetur, conantem adiuuet, exaudiat deprecantem; non tibi deputatur ad culpam quod inuitus ignoras, sed quod negligis quaerere quod ignoras; neque illud quod uulnerata membra non colligis, sed quod uolentem sanare contemnis: ista tua propria peccata sunt." That brings us back to the Old Testament on original sin and grace. The prejudice of those not anti-Pelagian is perhaps even more significant: "The theology of Pelagius was the theology of deism: his ethics were the ethics of naturalism." John Burnaby, trans., *Augustine: Later Works*. Library of Christian Classics, vol. 8 (London: SCM Press, 1955), 192. Burnaby appears to be a good example of a modern semi-Pelagian (*De spiritu et littera* is his favorite of the books against the Pelagians) who, perhaps to maintain his distance from a "heresy," retains too much of the prejudice against Pelagianism instilled so skillfully by Augustine. If we call Pelagius a deist we shall probably also have to use the term of Augustine, as hinted above and as we shall see below. On the other hand, Burnaby is to be credited for recognizing at least as early as the work cited (see pages 191-92) that the critics of late Augustine described by Prosper and Hilary were very close to early Augustine on grace.

beginning to doubt the fairness of Augustine's charges risks reaction against him.

But even after allowing for this, it must be admitted that partiality for Augustine is at worst pardonable (Pelagius simply cannot compete as an interesting and original writer) and at best in many ways justified; yet modern scholarship, or at least some of it, must set itself against such partiality and attempt to see the controversy as in itself it really is. There is a huge backlog of commentary and even translation, sometimes so partial as to be untrustworthy, as in the late 19th century translation commonly known today as "The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Edition" that is still much consulted online and that is still, admittedly, quite useful otherwise.

With the partial exception of *De spiritu et littera*, Augustine's contributions were not open and disinterested exchanges on the theory of grace, but attempts first to shut the mouths of Pelagians and then to drive them from the Church. There is no use measuring out politically correct blame today, for what happened so long ago and in a situation we can only partly enter into; on the other hand, failure to assert our own morals and manners as thinkers can endanger them.

Augustine's worst arguments can seem insults to one's intelligence; recognizing rather than suppressing one's anger at that can promote catharsis and reconciliation as well as serve usefully to sharpen wits and will for reviving the true interest and importance of the questions raised by this ancient controversy, via reading Augustine critically. It can also greatly enhance the interest of reading the anti-Pelagian tracts, whose obsessive repetition, otherwise nearly insufferable, can prove most useful for critical reading. The apparent lack of impartial critical referees (though Rome seems to have tried to play such a part) means that the intellectual quality of the debate is far lower than it should have been. Fortunately, we can make up part of that loss by critical reading.

The need for criticism of Augustine's polemical methods is easiest to illustrate vis-à-vis *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali*. On one hand, by now Augustine in addressing Pelagius's followers was holding up the latter's testimony in Palestine as a model of orthodoxy (though of course not of sincerity!). On the other hand, by the time he was asked to respond to doubts about Pelagius's heresy, it was too late for Augustine to contemplate any sort of compromise or retreat, for the Church, at his own prompting (and against its own better judgment?), had issued its official condemnation and so Augustine was locked into his account of Pelagius as heretic (and thus into his own position as anti-Pelagian). It is worth studying closely Book One,

Chapter 2. Has there ever been a more ingenuous rationale for misreading?

But let us go to *gr. et pecc. or.* I,22,24, a major transition in the argument:

“Qui currit”, [Pelagius] inquit, “ad Dominum, et ab eo se regi cupit, id est, uoluntatem suam ex eius uoluntate suspendit; qui ei adhaerendo iugiter, unus, secundum Apostolum, cum eo fit spiritus, non hoc nisi de arbitrii efficit libertate.” Videte quantam rem dixerit non effici nisi arbitrii libertate; ac per hoc sine adiutorio Dei nos Deo existimat adhaerere; hoc est enim, “nonnisi de arbitrii libertate”; ut cum adhaeserimus eo non adiuuante, tunc iam quoniam adhaesimus, etiam adiuuari mereamur.

This is translated by Peter Holmes, in the NPNF edition, as follows:

“The man,” says he, “who hastens to the Lord, and desires to be directed by Him, that is, who makes his own will depend upon God’s, who moreover cleaves so closely to the Lord as to become (as the apostle says) ‘one spirit’ with Him, does all this by nothing else than by his freedom of will.” Observe how great a result he has here stated to be accomplished only by our freedom of will; and how, in fact, he supposes us to cleave to God without the help of God: for such is the force of his words, “by nothing else than by his own freedom of will.” So that, after we have cleaved to the Lord without His help, we even then, because of such adhesion of our own, deserve to be assisted.

Augustine’s interpretation rests on what is by no means the only, and probably not the most obvious, meaning of *non... nisi*; it can introduce a necessary but not sufficient cause, “this is not effected except out of freedom of choice.” As it happens, a comment of Augustine’s own, in *nat. et gr.* 18,20, on praying for help to avoid future sins, neatly illustrates this other meaning: “Quod licet non fiat, nisi uoluntas adsit; tamen ut fiat, uoluntas sola sufficit.” (See also the first sentence of *ep.* 217,6,23.) If the quoted comment is from Pelagius’s *Pro libero arbitrio* and written after the controversy had begun, it is not credible that Pelagius would have handed his enemies such obvious ammunition as Augustine claims, certainly not if he were as cleverly devious as Augustine paints him.

And in fact, in I,7,8 of *gr. et pecc. or.*, Augustine had already quoted Pelagius as complaining against exactly the misrepresentation made in 22,24, that is, being taken to attack grace because he insists on free will, or, to put it another way, to claim he believes free will is the whole of grace because he says it is the *beginning* of grace, or again, to say that he denies the grace of recreation because he insists

on the grace of creation (as did Augustine's early account of grace): "because we say that grace can by no means perfect holiness in us without our wills, as if God of His grace would command something and would not give the aid of His grace to those to whom he had given commands, so that what men were commanded to do through free choice they might be able to fulfill more easily through grace."¹³

Even a translation favorable to Augustine should at least mention such strong reasons for doubting his interpretation of Pelagius's comment in I,22,24, but Peter Holmes, in the NPNF translation, does not merely fail to do so. In effect, he conceals the problem by imposing Augustine's tendentious and dubious interpretation on *Pelagius's own words* as quoted: "does all this by nothing else than by his freedom of will." But to blame Peter Holmes or question his language skills is to risk falling victim ourselves to the millennium and a half of profound and uncritical prejudice against Pelagius, and affecting even those not partial to Augustine (as Holmes certainly was).

These passages also illustrate another of Augustine's fallacies, which I will just mention here but not take space to demonstrate, since it is so common in the anti-Pelagian tracts that anyone can easily observe it: the either/or fallacy: when interpreting Pelagius, it is a question of either God's will or Man's will, whereas when presenting his own theory the two can comfortably coexist.

There is even more that commentators have failed to point out. *Gr. et pecc. or.* I,22,23-24 are transitional chapters; they begin the accusation that Pelagius holds that we merit grace through right use of free will (see the passage just above from 22,24 that I started with). But in Book One up until these chapters Augustine had used an argument (continued from *nat. et gr.*) quite at odds with this new charge: that, according to Pelagius, grace *is* human nature with free will. There is, as we have seen, a model which shows how these two otherwise mutually contradictory positions can be made to fit together: the passage from Augustine's own *lib. arb.* above identified as the perfect definition of "semi-pelagianism." A possible motive then for Augustine's present misrepresentation might have been to obscure his own credit as founder of pelagianism.

¹³ "Hic nos imperitissimi hominum putant iniuriam diuinae gratiae facere, quia dicimus eam [gratiam] sine uoluntate nostra nequaquam in nobis perficere sanctitatem: - quasi Deus gratiae suae aliquid imperauerit, et non illis quibus imperauit, etiam gratiae suae auxilium subministret, ut quod per liberum homines facere iubentur arbitrium, facilius possent implere per gratiam."

To be sure, the contexts of Augustine's exhibiting the two "heretical" halves of semi-pelagianism usually keep those two halves well separated from each other, but the less skilled case against Pelagius in Palestine, as reported in Augustine's *De gestis Pelagii* 14,30, yanks both of these mutually contradictory teachings from context in Caelestius and yokes them face to face together: "In tertio capitulo scripsisse Coelestium: 'Gratiam Dei et adiutorium non ad singulos actus dari, sed in libero arbitrio esse, uel in lege ac doctrina.' Et iterum: 'Dei gratiam secundum merita nostra dari, quia si peccatoribus illam det, uidetur esse iniquus.'" Since these extracts from Caelestius were probably paraphrased (see 13,29), we can only guess at what Caelestius's original might have said.

I am tempted to say that the obvious self-contradiction of these two charges and, more importantly, the obvious directions in Prosper's *ep.* 225 on how to put them back together, ought to have alerted scholarship to the need for critical reading. But I must confess that it was long into my project to read Augustine critically before I noticed these "obvious" points, such is the power of prejudice against Pelagius, even on the part of those not disposed against him.

In *gr. et pecc. or.* Augustine's strategy is to atomize Pelagius's whole account of grace into its component parts: grace *is* free will, or the Law, or the teaching or example of Christ, or forgiveness of past sins, and yet grace is something we merit *through* free will. We see the same strategy in *De gratia et libero arbitrio* of some 8 or 9 years later, perhaps because it is Augustine's response to the charge that his account of grace has destroyed free will, so that he tries there, perhaps for the last time and not very successfully, to occupy the semi-pelagian position and thus has to deny it to the Pelagians. The fundamental fallacy of Augustine's method of fragmentary quotation could easily be demonstrated by raking through his own writings, right up to the end, for evidence that he was a Pelagian heretic. The resulting evidence would be overwhelming: for example, see *perseu.* 2,3. Scholarship ought to have been alerted much sooner to the dubiousness of Augustine's account of Pelagianism, by its very incoherence. The great value of Hilary's and especially Prosper's letters (*ep.* 225 and 226) is that they show us that coherent whole, and they trace it back to Augustine himself.

Returning to *gr. et pecc. or.*, we should note that Augustine's argument in 1,22,23 that the letter to Demetrias promotes the idea that we merit grace fails to hold; she had been baptized (see Pelagius's letter, 19,1) and was accepted as a believing Christian; Augustine's own remarks on the "inclusive" preaching of grace in *perseu.* 22,58,

together with his concept of cooperative grace, make it plain that he too would have urged her to merit an increase of grace. In fact, Augustine himself notes this possible response in 22,24, and his reply to it takes us back to the beginning of this section and the misinterpretation of *non ... nisi*.

The transcript, in *gr. et pecc. or.* II,3,3, of the inquisition of Caelestius at Carthage prefigures the technique of Augustine's own procedure in this very book in its brusque brushing aside of meaningful nuances so as to force oversimplified questions on the opponent. Caelestius in Carthage replied to the charge that he had said that Adam's sin harmed only himself and not the human race by replying: "Dixi de traduce peccati dubium me esse." (That is probably a good example of the disparity between what Pelagians really said and what they are reported to have said.) But the crucial distinction between original sin *per se* and original sin *via traducianism* implied by that comment was ignored.¹⁴ Again, when asked if he had taught that infants at birth are in the same state as Adam before his transgression, he almost certainly asked for a definition of Adam's moral and psychological state before his transgression (for example, good but able to sin). This question, if answered fully, would almost certainly have embarrassed his inquisitors and revealed profound differences among them and between some of them and Augustine. But the questioner refused to let the definition go beyond whether Adam was mortal or not before sin (even to this oversimplified question, Augustine's answer probably would not have agreed fully with his fellow bishops'). Caelestius again tries to say that what he is against is traducianism and that it is a matter of debate and not of heresy – and so it probably was, in the Church as a whole, at the time of the Carthage trial. Like the first, this second attempt to get things right is brutally brushed aside.¹⁵

¹⁴ Even today this crucial distinction is often brushed aside, as in the article on "Original Sin" in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999). It begins with this definition: "a sin inherited from Adam by way of propagation." To be sure, this is an encyclopedia on Augustine. On the other hand, we know that Augustine never committed himself to traducianism.

¹⁵ Marcellinus, on the other hand, got it right, as reported in *pecc. mer.* III,1, in whatever question it was he asked about those who deny *ex eius peccato quidquam ad eius posteros propagando transisse*. Had he consulted "Pelagians" as well as their enemies? Or was he responding to Augustine's offer in *pecc. mer.* II,36,59 to discuss tentatively and with open mind, among other questions going to the heart of the controversy, whether we could avoid judging God Himself author of the very guilt requiring the redemption of baptism, especially if He created souls "de traduce." In any

That Pelagius knowingly deceived his questioners in Palestine could be truthfully said only on the assumption that he was fully aware that the Church (not merely Augustine or even the African Church) considered traducianism the only possible orthodox doctrine of original sin. On the contrary, by Augustine's own testimony in *gr. et pecc. or.* II,5,5-6,6, Caelestius had been completely open in his book published in Rome and in the church proceedings there, declaring that *peccatum ex traduce firmare... longe a catholico sensu alienum est*. Augustine quotes Caelestius there to prove that what Caelestius stated openly is what Pelagius believed but was "hiding." If instead of passively allowing ourselves to be manipulated by Augustine, we read critically, we see instead evidence that proves much more directly and firmly that in 417, in Rome at least, there was no consensus that traducianism was the only orthodox doctrine of original sin. Indeed, recent accounts of Zosimus's attitude to the charges against Pelagius and Caelestius belie Augustine's account of his condemning Caelestius's doctrine though charitably refraining from excommunication (II,6,7).¹⁶

In fact, as we know, Augustine himself could not affirm traducianism in the full sense of generation of the soul from the parent(s), and so had to fall back on round-about and dubious arguments for original sin. As late as 418, he seems to have felt it necessary to impart to Sixtus a basic education in anti-Pelagian doctrine, including the risky double-edged argument for original sin as needed to vindicate God's justice to infants that he had used in *pecc. mer.* III,2,3 (see below); see *ep.* 194,10,46: "Audeant ergo dicere quod a iusto Deo innocens condemnabitur, si nullo uinculo peccati originalis innectitur." Augustine certainly did not lack nerve, but was willing to go way out there in the blue.

Why then should Pelagius be accused of deceit for not answering questions according to a doctrine of original sin he did not himself hold and which his eastern questioners probably did not believe, certainly not uniformly? Given the extremely harsh language Augustine

case in *pecc. mer.* III,10,13 Augustine explicitly acknowledges the question whether the soul itself is produced by human propagation and, as always, fails to take a stand which would justify calling Pelagians heretics on this point. There is considerable evidence that Marcellinus was not the passive disciple Augustine tries to persuade him that he is; his early death may have been a greater tragedy than we know. For certain there is a loss of flexibility and openness of mind after *De spiritu et littera*.

¹⁶ See Roland Teske, ed. and trans., *Answer to the Pelagians I* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), pages 387-88, and page 729 of *Augustine through the Ages* (see note 14).

uses about Pelagius's supposed deceitfulness and the fact that it is exactly that skillfully deployed rhetoric that has subsequently led readers uncritically to credit Augustine as against Pelagius, it seems that our duty, however unpleasant, is to raise the question of who it is that is trying to deceive us in *gest. Pel.* or *gr. et pecc. or.* When in I,26,27 he counsels Pelagius to clear his name by ceasing to conceal *impudentissimo pudore* that he *used to be* a heretic, we cannot help remembering that Augustine at that moment is failing to acknowledge once having published a doctrine that is heretical if Pelagius's is so judged.

One is tempted to say that Augustine succeeded in prosecuting his opponents by getting away with a daring bluff or begging of the question, assuming with what appeared to be supreme confidence and unquestioned authority that traducianism compounded by total perversity was the only possible orthodox theory of original sin and explanation for baptism. He seems to have had no great respect for the intelligence of the friends addressed in *gr. et pecc. or.* If there had been impartial or even friendly critics of greater backbone and acuteness, the quality of the Pelagian controversy would have been much higher. Fortunately, we can recover some of that lost opportunity if we read critically ourselves.

But we should give Augustine credit for several times acknowledging that the Pelagians did not really say (they did not *dare* to) what he puts in their mouths, such as, that we do not need baptism (*pecc. mer.* III,13,22) or the help of God or – an especially obvious misrepresentation – that we *ought not* to pray (*spir. et litt.* 2,4, *ep.* 145,8, *ep.* 175,3-4)! Rather, this is his own interpretation or misinterpretation of what is entailed by what they do say (*pecc. mer.* II,2,2), an interpretation which in fact may be judged correct only if you share his assumptions. In *ep.* 186,10,34, he explains that Pelagius's believing that our wills are equally capable of good or evil (as against being totally perverse, presumably) leaves no place for grace (or prayer, no doubt). These naively rationalistic accounts of the human mind do not square with the great psychologist's sophistication elsewhere. He certainly does not apply this either/or logic to his own doctrine, when he appeals to Paul's mind divided against itself, as in "Who shall free me from this body of death?"

A passage from *ep.* 217: *Vitali*, thought to be from about the same time as the insurrection in Hadrumentum, presents an especially revealing summary of Augustine's argument and his rhetorical strategy. According to Augustine's account, Vitalis was what we would call a semi-Pelagian, claiming for man only the *initium fidei*, and he tries both to separate his position from that of the bogey "Pelagians"

(7,29) and to implicate him in their errors, the latter described according to his own caricature:

They [Pelagians] attribute everything belonging to man's faithful and pious life to free will to such a degree that they think it all to be had from ourselves and not to be asked from God. You, on the other hand, if what I hear is true, will not have the beginning of faith [*initium fidei*] – where also begins a good and pious will – to be a gift of God, but argue that we have it from ourselves that we begin to believe. You agree, however, that the other good things of a religious life God gives to those who, already faithful (*iam ex fide*), seek, ask, knock.¹⁷

We have to hope that Vitalis was alert enough to see the sleight of mind being practiced on him, as faith somehow is passed from the object side (*initium fidei*) of seeking, asking, knocking to the subject side (*iam ex fide*). Probably in the act of writing Augustine noticed that otherwise there would be no difference from his own semi-pelagian *a Domino esse poscenda*. And we have to hope too that Vitalis did not act on Augustine's challenge to throw off his pretenses and show his real opinion of prayer, suggesting perhaps a vulgar or even obscene gesture: *Exsere contra orationes Ecclesiae disputationes tuas* (1.2)!

What is most important to note here is that, even twenty years or more after his own semi-pelagianism, he still remembers it and its distinction from his own caricature "Pelagianism," that it depends on a small opening for universal free will, and as well perhaps on a vanishingly thin distinction between inner and outer: see the discussion of *gr. et lib. arb.* 5,10 below.

We must learn to appreciate Augustine's supreme rhetorical skills so that we become able to look through them to something closer to the truth. This letter is a good example of Augustine's favorite stratagem of suppressing his opponents' point of view and the justifying rationale for their position and replacing it with one which will bias the reader against their motives. He looks at the dispute from within the closed circle of Christian faith, so that the Pelagian hesitations about putting grace before free will look like stubborn "pride" or ingratitude to God, and so that his own putting of free will under

¹⁷ "Illi [Pelagiani] quippe omnia ad fidelem piamque uitam hominum pertinentia ita tribuunt libero uoluntatis arbitrio, ut habenda ex nobis, non a Domino putent esse poscenda: tu autem, si ea quae de te audio uera sunt, initium fidei, ubi est etiam initium bonae, hoc est piae uoluntatis, non uis donum esse Dei, sed ex nobis nos habere contendis ut credere incipiamus; cetera autem religiosae uitae bona Deum per gratiam suam iam ex fide petentibus, quaerentibus, pulsantibus, donare consentis."

question can be ignored. Over and over we must consciously remind ourselves that, on the contrary, looking at the dispute also from beyond that closed circle, Pelagians are concerned, not with self-glory, but with God's justice to those who never heard of Christ and so get "disappeared" from Augustine's perspective. His power in brushing aside the interior of the Pelagian point of view is shown by the fact that he can even afford often to notice that the justice of God *is* their concern (in *ep.* 217, at 6,19), so that he can cite against them the potter's snub of the pots.

A comparison of these two ways of looking at one's religion might also seem to be a useful way of finding the contemporary interest of the controversy, so long as we can take both perspectives and treat them with respect.

This is also to say that there is a way to make Augustine's position coherent, his attacks on the Pelagians accurate and candid, and the controversy relevant and vital today and that is to take his real objection to them to be to their saying *publicly* that for God to condemn some of his human creatures to damnation without their having freedom to choose salvation is inconsistent with the justice of God. That would seem to imply that Christianity is not the sole path to salvation.

Pelagius the Semi-Pelagian

The exact position of Pelagius himself is probably of less significance, so far as the subsequent history of teachings on grace, than are the letters of Prosper and Hilary, pointing as they do back to early Augustine and forward to scholastic writers such as Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas. But at least as early as Peter Lombard Pelagius got chosen as the figure against whom Augustine had defined himself. Further, it is his comments on Pelagius that force upon our attentions the necessity of critical reading of Augustine. Therefore, we shall follow up the case already started in the previous section that Pelagius was a "semi-Pelagian," at least after having been attacked for heresy, and probably a student of early Augustine from the time of his earliest writings. But that latter detail, like the question of whether there were radical followers of Pelagius and Caelestius who in fact held the views attributed by Augustine to "Pelagians," we must agree to leave aside, however interesting, unless further facts emerge. In any case they are departures from the main line of the history of grace.

Since it must answer those who accused his doctrine of destroying free will, it is not surprising that *gr. et lib. arb.* starts off with a position much like his early semi-pelagianism. Indeed, he begins with the assertion that in this treatise he is refuting those who make the complementary and opposite error from that of the Pelagians, that is, those who destroy free will in the name of grace. By now, of course, we know enough not to get our hopes up that free will shall be extended to the ungraced. And by the end (22,44) he is arguing that damnation of unbaptized infants reveals and clarifies what (the illusion of?) adult free will obscures: that there is no free will before grace, even though the evil must be punished for their evil will.

What is new and significant is that he acknowledges, to the critical eye, that the "Pelagians" are now semi-Pelagians. We noted in the previous section that Augustine's strategy was to atomize the "Pelagians'" doctrine into its parts – all of which are parts of his own concept of grace, and so are "new heresies" only when judged apart from a unifying structure and rationale. What pointed to his fallacy was his also arguing that they claimed that grace was something that we merit, thereby revealing that "nature with free will" was not the whole of grace for them, but the starting point only, the *initium fidei*, the grace before any possible merit, as in his own early semi-pelagianism.

Now he tries a new strategy (14,27) for separating semi-pelagianism into heretical parts; he acknowledges both parts but separates them in time. Having been proven wrong in saying that grace is nature or the Law or remission of sins, they have turned around to a new account: grace is given not for the merits of good works, since those are the result of grace, but is given in return for the merits of a good will: "*quia bona voluntas*", *inquiunt*, "*praecedat [orationem] orantis, quam praecessit uoluntas credentis, ut secundum haec merita gratia sequatur exaudientis Dei.*" It is important to notice one solid fact here: that by now Pelagians did not claim faith as our own, as did early Pelagius following early Augustine (prior to the public controversy), but only *uoluntas credentis*, knocking, praying, seeking.

Two of Augustine's favorite arguments for the function of free will in the process of grace are both semi-pelagian in tendency (1) that the purpose of the Law is to teach us that we can only fulfill it by praying for help and (2) that the surest proof that grace is a gift of God occurs when our prayers for it are answered. These arguments persist in his anti-Pelagian writings, whether as attempts to conceal his putting free will into question or as inadvertent revelations of his own beliefs on grace and free will. In *gr. et lib. arb.* 4,9 he rehearses these

arguments: "Nec tamen sufficit arbitrium uoluntatis humanae, nisi a Domino uictoria concedatur oranti, ne intret in tentationem. Quid uero euentius quam Dei ostenditur gratia, ubi quod oratur accipitur?" and concludes that "*Homo ergo gratia iuuatur, ne sine causa uoluntati eius iubeatur.*" That last could almost be a quotation of Pelagius's words in *gr. et pecc. or.* I,7,8 (see above).

Then in the following paragraph (*gr. et lib. arb.* 5,10) he attributes what is in substance exactly the same position to the Pelagians, but turns theirs into heresy by adding the mere word *merit*, even while acknowledging that Pelagius in Palestine had censured that word (no doubt counting the gift of human nature as the *initium gratiae* before merit). Then in a passage that might have brought joy to the heart of Jean-Paul Sartre and maybe even a smile to his lips, he struggles futilely to extricate himself from the tar-baby of human subjectivity. He tries to distinguish his from the Pelagian reading of *Conuertimini ad me, et conuertar ad uos*: "Nec attendunt qui hoc sentiunt, quia nisi donum Dei esset etiam ipsa ad Deum nostra conuersio, non ei dicere-tur: *Deus uirtutum, conuerte nos...*"

This address to the monks of Hadrumetum dates to after Pelagius's disappearance from the scene, so we need to look for an earlier direct acknowledgement. *Ep.* 194: Sixtus of 418 is from shortly after Pelagius's excommunication. It advises Sixtus on how to deal with the remaining "Pelagians," some by repression (*coercere*), some by gentler means. It is especially valuable because it forearms Sixtus with the arguments they are liable to make against this repression. He points to their answer when asked the crucial question of what grace without any preceding merits Pelagius had in mind when making his famous answer in Palestine: "respondent sine ullis praecedentibus meritis gratiam ipsam humanam esse naturam in qua conditi sumus: neque enim antequam essemus, mereri aliquid poteramus ut essemus" (*ep.* 194,3,8). Augustine tells Sixtus how to reply to this *fallacia*: such is not the grace that Paul speaks of. But it is Augustine's response that is the fallacy. As we have had to observe over and over, the gift of nature is not the whole of grace, but only the first grace or the *initium gratiae*, the grace, exactly as they had replied, *sine ullis praecedentibus meritis*. Augustine's own founding statement of semi-pelagianism, with which we started, makes this plain enough, and shows us how to put the present misrepresentation together with the other one – that the Pelagians say we merit grace – so as to make sense. Augustine's perfect statement of semi-pelagianism in *lib. arb.* III,20,56 fully explains Pelagius's answers in Palestine. See also *gr. et lib. arb.* 14,27 just above.

Gr. et pecc. or. I,31,34 demonstrates exactly the same fallacious charge of heresy Augustine manufactures by splitting his own early doctrine of grace into two parts; this time, such is his skill at sleight of mind that he can make the unmerited gift of human nature disappear though it is right there on the page before you:

“In illis”, [Pelagius] inquit, “nudum et inerme est conditionis bonum”; in eis dicit, qui christiani non sunt. Deinde cetera contexens: “In his uero”, inquit, “qui ad Christum pertinent, Christi munitur auxilio.”

This is to prove that Pelagius was deceiving us when he rejected the meriting of grace in Palestine.

Main Motives

As quoted directly by Augustine, the transcript of Caelestius's trial in Carthage, of 411-412, does not mention the word *grace*, the bishops' main concern being baptism as the one cure for original sin and so the one opening to salvation. They took Caelestius to have denied original sin and so perhaps were concerned to insure that the Catholic Church, through its rite of baptism, held the keys to the Kingdom.

The “Pelagian” statements brought forward by Hilary in *ep.* 156 again do not mention grace itself, but rather challenge the damnation of unbaptized infants on the grounds of their sinlessness, and thereby probably also suggest the salvation of those who are said to live without sin. There are also some remarks attributed to those Christians of Syracuse which smack of perfectionism, thereby perhaps reviving the trauma of the Donatist controversy.

Augustine's *ep.* 157 in answer to Hilary puts the topic of grace at the center; when the trial of Caelestius is cited, his statements are characterized as *has ipsas contra Christi gratiam disputationes* (3,22). To be sure, *ep.* 186,1,1, taken together with *gr. et pecc. or.* I,35,38, suggests that Pelagius had complained as early as 406 of being wrongfully accused of promoting free choice to the exclusion of grace. The former also suggests that, for Augustine, the charge of attacking grace refers mainly to undermining the exclusivity of Christian salvation. This suggests that at this point in the controversy, grace is being used as a “code word.” Another possible reason for Augustine's focusing on grace is that he knew, or was soon to find out, that neither Pelagius nor even Caelestius in fact denied the need for baptism: see, for example, *gr. et pecc. or.* II,4,3-4.

A further possible reason for Augustine's substitution of grace for baptism in the terms of the controversy might at first seem paradoxical: to preserve an opening to salvation, so long as Christian salvation, for non-Christians. Augustine probably never denied the salvation of some "virtuous pagans," though his anti-Pelagian definition of grace does require him to deny that their never having heard of Christ provides them an excuse for not believing (see his remarks on the Sidonians and Tyrians in *praed. sanct.* and *perseu.*). But that same definition denies to Christians, even infants, also any excuse for not receiving grace. In short, Augustine's recasting of the controversy in terms of grace could have been motivated in part by a desire to keep a balance between the institutional and the personal, leaving open direct access to God.

Of course, it was almost inevitable that the theme of God's grace would get drawn into disputes about the damnation of unbaptized infants and in fact the topics had no doubt already been intertwined, following Paul. Augustine himself is painfully aware of the seeming inconsistency of infant damnation with human ideals of justice, and especially as invoked in the case of infants of Christian families. To his credit, he confronted this problem so directly, that the appeal against human merits, however dangerous, was the only one of his solutions that can be taken seriously (see "Semi-Manichaeism" below). He should have left it at that.

As with so much else in his anti-Pelagianism, this denial of human merit would almost certainly have been condemned as heretical, if he had not been able so skillfully to justify it from the writings of Paul. See the passage below from *uera rel.* 14,27 for his own earlier "orthodox" sense of how destructive to our ordinary way of thinking of ourselves and living as human beings would be the denail of free will and responsibility and praise and blame. On the other hand, his genius especially shows in his efforts to make a virtue of this "heresy". He makes a plausible case that other "ways" of life, whether Jewish or Pagan, even of the philosophers, are "Pelagian" in substituting self-justification for God's justification, and that self-justification can easily weaken to conceiving of oneself as just rather making oneself just. Still, however easy to sneer at the lowest common denominator of "orthodoxy" guaranteed by the policeman on the corner, the butcher just down the street, and one's neighbor, *Heart of Darkness* suggests that we not be too quick to scorn it.

As a final point on baptism, we should note its paradoxical role in both sustaining and finally virtually undermining anti-Pelagianism. The obvious reflection that no humans know what God's dispensation

actually is surely would soon have lead to some sort of compromise, were it not for this seeming proof of His actively and openly condemning souls, some of them without any personal sin of their own. Even more troubling, the condemnation applies not just to unspecified individuals but to a whole class of souls, and an almost open-ended class, unless some way of defining its closure is found. The softening vagueness is gone that allowed us to assume that there is some hidden though comprehensible justice at work in grace. Most troubling of all, it is not here as with the answer to Simplicianus concerning Rom 9, a question of unidentified and hypothetical souls (except for Esau), but a class of identifiable and actual souls; as we might say today, the news has been “personalized.”

Is it not here, more than in *simpl.* I,2, that the decisive turn in Augustine’s position occurred, and a turn, moreover, that he was no longer in firm control of? Note, in the discussion of Lettieri’s *L’Altro Agostino* below, the assumption that Augustine’s anti-Pelagianism entails the universal condemnation of pagans. Almost certainly, he never intended such an implication nor sanctioned it. Yet it may have been very difficult for him to reject it openly. Baptism always was a requirement with huge exceptions, being accessible to what in Augustine’s day was only a tiny minority of all who ever lived. Except insofar as he got involved in anti-Pelagianism, that fact was no real problem for Augustine, whose position always was that (Christian) faith remained the same at its core, though defined in different ways and supported by different ceremonies in different times and places, as arranged by God’s infinite wisdom.

With the present virtual abandonment of infant damnation, might it not be better to acknowledge the failure of Augustine’s anti-Pelagianism so as to be able to turn decisively to defining and celebrating his sustainable achievements in defining and recommending grace?¹⁸

The Pelagians, of course, did not agree that they denied grace. In fact, it is so easy to say that of course you acknowledge and pray for God’s help by whatever name, that one must have some sympathy with Augustine’s desire to make them pay more for those verbal

¹⁸ James J. O’Donnell, in *Augustine: A New Biography* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2005), names his chapter on the Pelagian controversy “Augustine’s Great Failure” and ends it with this judgment: “To take this late Augustine seriously is to expose him to criticism that he is finally unable to sustain, and his partisans and opponents are of one party on this” (285). But surely it is due finally to Augustine that the concept of Christian Grace flourishes far beyond the narrow boundaries of learned theological controversies.

acknowledgments, even as one judges his attempt to enforce sincerity and detect lack of it a very dangerous and even pernicious path to set out on. What both sides did agree on was the question of how to do justice to both grace and free will, without destroying one to favor the other. So long as the problem is put that way the Pelagians, following early Augustine, have mostly won in the long term, for they had gone as far as you can in favoring grace without destroying free will (in the ungraced). To be sure, their victory waited a situation where the point of view of religions other than one's own had to be recognized. At any rate, here is a way of stating the controversy which should prove most fruitful if we revive interest in the Pelagian controversy, but only so long as we improve on the original, by treating *both* points of view with respect. What are the advantages and disadvantages of thinking of one's own religion as the only true one, or of recognizing that others have equal claims to truth, at least in the abstract?

Given then that the price of grace had to be measured in terms of other currencies, we must assay them as well. It is significant that in *pecc. mer.* Augustine argues not from original sin to baptism, so as to rationalize the sacrament, as we might expect, but vice-versa, taking Christ's establishment of baptism as the firm fact and trying to infer original sin as its rationale, and this despite having to make a dangerously two-edged appeal to the justice of God in an argument *for* infant damnation (III,2,3): "Let them cast about to find some way of proving it just that persons without any sin come not to eternal life but the wrath of God and are condemned and damned by God – without any sin, I say, if that means not only no sin of their own commission but also without original sin."¹⁹

After their excommunication had been accomplished, in *gr. et pecc. or.* II,1,1 – 6,6 Augustine rounds off a perfectly circular argument by acknowledging that Pelagians do accept baptism but not for the right reason: original sin (see also II,17,19 – 18,19). He now feels secure enough in managing his readers to misrepresent Pelagians as rejecting original sin period, even while quoting the transcript of Caelestius trial in Carthage and the book Caelestius "openly" submitted to Zosimus in Rome (II,6,6), both of which show clearly that what the Pelagians rejected was traducianism, not original sin *per se*. I have

¹⁹ "Iam nunc uideant isti, qua iustitia temptent uel conentur adserere non ad uitam aeternam, sed ad iram Dei pertinere et iudicari diuinitus atque damnari homines, qui sine peccato sunt, si quemadmodum proprium ita nullum in eis est etiam originale peccatum."

cited the latter above to support Caelestius' claim in Carthage that original sin *ex traduce* was not then dogma.

A passage he quotes from Caelestius's book submitted to Zosimus is worth citing as one of the best surviving statements of their own of the main motive of Pelagianism, at least prior to the letters of Prosper and Hilary. In *gr. et pecc. or.* II,6,6, he is quoted as acknowledging that infants should be baptized for remission of sins, so as not to imply different kinds of baptism, but with the proviso that those sins are not *ex traduce*, for that would ascribe them to nature and not to will, and so blame them on the Creator of man's nature.²⁰

It seems safe to identify the main motive of the Pelagians, in the controversy with Augustine, as defense of free will, but in such a way as to defend themselves from the charge of denying grace, in other words, exactly the anti-Manichaeism, or semi-pelagianism, of early Augustine, as we shall see. Whether their interest in grace was sincere, or only a part of their self-defense, is difficult to say, and better left unworried, for we have only their words to go by, and not many of them. We certainly cannot trust Augustine on this point. Their interest in grace was not as profound as Augustine's, but whose is?

Almost certainly what attracted hostile attention was not the defense of free will itself, unless they initiated the controversy, but their universalism, the implication of their defense of free will that the justice of God requires that all men, of any time or place, have a free choice of avoiding damnation. Whether this universalism was their main motive or only an implication of their teaching on free will, perhaps even an implication drawn by their enemies, is hard to say, given the fragmentary nature of their surviving documents. What we

²⁰ "In remissionem autem peccatorum baptizandos infantes, non idcirco diximus, ut peccata ex traduce firmare uideamur: quod longe a catholico sensu alienum est. Quia peccatum non cum homine nascitur, quod postmodum exercetur ab homine: quia non naturae delictum, sed uoluntatis esse monstratur. Et illud ergo confiteri congruum, ne diuersa Baptismatis genera facere uideamur, et hoc praemunire necessarium est, ne per mysterii occasionem, ad Creatoris iniuriam malum antequam fiat ab homine, tradi dicatur homini per naturam." The phrase *ex traduce* does not precisely fit the context of the Pelagian controversy. It is well known that Augustine, though aware on the one hand that the transmission of the soul from the parent(s) and ultimately from Adam would better rationalize his conception of original sin, on the other hand was wary of committing original sin to that one vehicle (see, for example, *ep.* 143, to Marcellinus, and *ep.* 166, to Jerome.) Caelestius defines *ex traduce* here well enough for my purposes in this essay, and we note that sin in human nature versus sin in the human will does precisely reflect the terms used in Augustine's anti-Manichaean polemics, and so presumably explains the implication of Caelestius's remark about Augustine's present position.

do have shows no great desire to save hosts of pagans, so it might be safer to say that their main concern was the justice of God.

The motive of their enemies is easier to guess; no doubt it was not the defense of free will per se, but the implications or the assertions, whichever, of the possibility of salvation outside of Christianity that made the attack, or counter-attack, on the Pelagians seem winnable, to a degree that such a complex and subjective concept as grace never could. As Augustine puts it in *gr. et lib. arb.* 13,25: "*Si ex lege iustitia, ergo Christus gratis mortuus est... Si ex natura iustitia, ergo Christus gratis mortuus est.*" *Ep.* 186:Paulino. 1,1 finally puts the implications of Pelagius's starting with the grace of general nature accurately: "*ut uidelicet haec intellegatur doctore ipso gratia Dei, quae Paganis atque Christianis, impiis et piis, fidelibus atque infidelibus communis est.*" But we must face a huge paradox or contradiction here, due to the distortions in his doctrine of grace Augustine's involvement in the Bishops' anti-Pelagianism caused. It is obviously far more Augustine than the cautious and orthodox Pelagius who opens salvation to both sides of the last two disjunctions, and probably in the case of the Pagan/Christian disjunction as well.

In fact, in *gr. et pecc. or.* I,31,34, of a year or so later, Augustine was to censure Pelagius for granting a sort of generic advantage to Christians over non-Christians, claiming that amounted to saying that Christians merited grace, though the context clearly shows that Pelagius, following the anti-Manichaean, semi-pelagian Augustine, was counting the grace of Creation as the unmerited *initium gratiae*. There are two fundamental problems with concept of grace responsible for these contradictions.

Augustine clearly understands that he cannot simply destroy the concept of merit, whether against the language of the Bible or against universal human values. He allows merit back in after the first grace with his distinction between operative and cooperative grace. Consequently, his argument with Pelagians ought to focus on the *initium gratiae*. But with some exceptions, as we shall see, he simply squashes their process of grace flat, ignoring its stages, so rendering most of his attack on them, for those who expect a high standard of argument, one vast either/or fallacy, either grace or merit.

As for the other problem, we can credit Augustine's careful analysis with raising this question: whether there is some fundamental contradiction between the concept of *unmerited* grace and the concept of *Christian* grace (at least if that means exclusively Christian grace). One may fairly say that he did not adequately address this problem; he either did not notice that it had been raised, or pretended not to. On

the other hand, as we have begun to notice, Augustine probably never ruled out the salvation of those we would normally think of as non-Christians, his concern rather being to define all salvation as Christian salvation. Perhaps, given his times, that is the most we should expect, excepting of course always a higher quality of argument, worthy of his own great abilities.

There are at least two substantial passages in Augustine's attacks that do seem to show Pelagius asserting the universality of *access* to salvation for its own sake and not just as an universal implication of free will. The first, from *nat. et gr.* 2,2, I shall not quote, since it is long and not certainly a quotation from Pelagius. I do agree with the Latin text of the *Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana* and the two recent English translations in *The Fathers of the Church* and *The Works of St. Augustine* series, which put quotation marks around the passage, taking it as a direct quotation from Pelagius's *De natura*. But the Latin texts of *Patrologia Latina* and of CSEL have no such marks, thus presumably taking the words as Augustine's, though probably as summarizing Pelagius's position. And the ambiguity does not stop there. The discussion above of Augustine's unusual argument from baptism to original sin (rather than vice-versa), via daring to argue that God could not justly condemn infants with no sins of their own unless they were infected with original sin, and especially the passage quoted from *pecc. mer.* III,2,3, if compared carefully with the passage under consideration, will show that it could express Augustine's own position.

To be sure, Augustine immediately responds that if such salvation of those who never heard of Christ is possible then "Christ has died in vain" (thus transforming His mission to save all men into the rationale for the damnation of many). But the passage contains nothing that Augustine does not also affirm. We cannot impute any special credit – or blame – to Pelagius as an early source of deism; if we are to call Pelagius a "deist" then we shall have to call Augustine (and not just early Augustine) a deist also. They both get their "deism," such as it is, from the same safe source: the "facts" of the Old Testament as interpreted by Paul, especially in Hebrews and Romans. Augustine also, and even *after turning against Pelagius*, acknowledges the salvation not only of ancient Hebrews, some under the natural law, but also of some not Hebrews (such as Job, Ahazuerus /Artaxerxes,²¹ and the

²¹ Augustine cites to disprove Pelagianism instantaneous conversions supposedly somewhat like his own, in which God conquers a resisting mind, such as Paul's or that of Ahazuerus/Artaxerxes in the additions to the Book of Esther (Chapter 15; cited in *gr. et pecc. or.* I,24,25). Let us just note in passing that Augustine's allegorical

inhabitants of Nineveh); see for example, *gr. et pecc. or.* II,24,28-26,30. Even after turning against the Pelagians, for Augustine it is *not* limitations of time or place that rule out Christian salvation; rather, he places it beyond the reach of human free will whatever the time or place, *when*, that is, he is stating his ultimate defense against semi-Pelagianism. We *could* read the passage in question as Augustine's own position, *if* we take it as setting up his doctrine of original sin and the subsequent absence of any good in human wills prior to grace, these topics being the subject of the surrounding paragraphs of *nat. et gr.*

In fact, there is an unusual twist here; it is mainly after writing *simpl.*, the supposed turning point defeating free will in the name of grace, that Augustine publicly affirms the possibility of the salvation of pagans, as in *ep.* 102 (*Contra paganos*). It is as if determining that all salvation is Christian, that is, initiated by the grace of Christ, so that any perplexity of a multi-cultural salvation is avoided, is what freed Augustine to acknowledge the salvation of *some* pagans.

If we find it a puzzle that the early anti-Manichean Augustine was less open in vindicating the free choice of salvation in pagans even as he vindicated free choice in general, the answer may be that he did not want to jeopardize the latter by pushing it into dangerous paths. In *uera rel.* there is statement that may help to explain this puzzle and perhaps much more; it occurs in the context of asserting the conventional theological rationale for free will, and doing so in the context of original sin (14,27 ff.): "But although God heals souls in every sort of way adapted to the particular circumstances of the times, arranged by His wonderful wisdom – but these are not to be discussed, or only among the pious and the perfect –

reading of Artaxerses' sudden change of attitude to prove *interna et occulta, mirabili ac ineffabili potestate operari Deum* seems insensible to the great literary skill lavished on the appearance and behavior of Ester, and perhaps on her skill, as causes for the change. Augustine's argument would also seem to require that such conversions at least be typical. Thomas denies that Paul's conversion is typical; in fact he characterizes it as miraculous, unlike most (*ST*, 1a2ae, 113, a. 10). In fact, Augustine's "conversion" (if he can be said ever to have left Christianity, as against the Catholic Church) seems much closer to Thomas's account of "external" habits being gradually internalized and deepened than to Paul's conversion. The dramatic scene in the garden was not a conversion to Christianity, but to asceticism, away from the world. A theory of grace must be adapted to its living context. Augustine's, arising from the age of adult conversions from paganism, had to be adapted to fit an age such as Thomas's, now long thoroughly Christianized. Our own age has rendered "Augustinian" conversions relevant again, though many of them away from Christianity to novel or fanatical versions of religion, including Christian.

nevertheless in no way more beneficent did He show care for the human race than when... *the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*" (16,30).²²

If we posit a personal doctrine of grace of Augustine's own, in distinction from the one he proclaimed publicly at the request of his fellow bishops on behalf of the Church, and allow ourselves to speculate about that silent and vanished doctrine, it is at least possible that the main difference between Augustine and Pelagius is that Augustine believed that the interests of the Church ruled out *public* discussion of the possible non-exclusivity of Christian salvation. So far as that, it is possible that the leading Pelagians also accepted that caution, until "outed" by indiscreet enemies.

The authenticity of Augustine's direct quotation of the second "universalist" passage from Pelagius (identified as his in *C. ep. Pel.* I,21,39) seems more certain. Its context is also instructive: *gr. et pecc. or.* II,24,28 appeals to the hardened version of anti-Pelagianism we would expect after the condemnation of Pelagius and Caelestius. It is one and the same faith, in the incarnation and death and resurrection of Christ, that is the only salvation and required of all men (even if not offered to all), even for the saints mentioned or not mentioned in the Old Testament, including any non-Hebrews such as Job. Furthermore, the grace that cures is absolutely before any human merit, not necessarily, however, before any human acts of will, for in 24,29 he repeats his familiar "semi-pelagian" version of the function of the Law: to show people that they could not be justified by law, whether of nature or the written Law, so that they would ask God for help. This account of law leading to the grace of Christ before Christ probably enabled Thomas's "implicit" faith, the faith not explicitly Christian but sufficient to Christian salvation, and like it operates so far as we can tell naturally as against, or as well as, supernaturally. Consequently, if anything Pelagius's version (26,30), in implying that before Christ salvation was available through His *discipuli*, appears more conventionally "orthodox" than Augustine's, in "dividing the times":

Let us not then, like Pelagius and his disciples, divide the times, saying that men had first lived as just from nature, then under the Law, thirdly under grace, "from nature," that is, starting from

²² Sed cum omnibus modis medeatur animis Deus pro temporum opportunitatibus, quae mira sapientia eius ordinantur, de quibus aut non est tractandum, aut inter pios perfectosque tractandum est; nullo modo beneficentius consuluit generi humano, quam cum... *Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis* (16,30).

Adam, that very long age when the Law had not yet been given. They say, "For then the Creator was recognized by the power of reason, and how one should live was carried written in the heart, not the written Law but the law of nature. But customs and morals became corrupted," they go on, "when nature now corroded began not to suffice, the Law was added to nature; by it, as by a file, the rust was polished away and nature restored to its pristine brightness. But afterwards," thus they argue, "the habit of sinning too much prevailed, for curing which the law had too little strength. Christ then came, as the physician himself, by his own presence, and not just through his assistants, comes to relieve a desperate disease."²³

The only difference I can find between the two that might be implied here is that the Law operates through Pauline reverse psychology in Augustine and presumably straightforwardly in Pelagius.²⁴ But any adequate psychology surely must include both: law must operate straightforwardly before it can operate by reverse psychology.

This brings us to a final point about main motives, an important one that nevertheless must be treated too briefly: sympathies change radically as we look at this controversy from changing perspectives. So long as Augustine sticks to the psychology of grace, he mostly has the best of it, especially in appealing to Paul. But when we have to contemplate God carefully and even lovingly creating a human soul

²³ Non igitur, sicut Pelagius et eius discipuli, tempora diuidamus, dicentes primum uixisse iustos homines ex natura, deinde sub lege, tertio sub gratia. Ex natura, scilicet ab Adam tam longa aetate, qua lex nondum erat data. "Tunc enim", aiunt, "duce ratione cognoscebatur Creator, et quemadmodum esset uiuendum, scriptum gerebatur in cordibus, non lege litterae, sed naturae. Verum uitiatu moribus, inquit, ubi coepit non sufficere natura iam decolor, lex ei addita est, qua, uelut lima, fulgori pristino detrita rubigine redderetur. Sed posteaquam nimia, sicut disputant, peccandi consuetudo praeualuit, cui sanandae lex parum ualeret: Christus aduenit, et tamquam morbo desperatissimo, non per discipulos, sed per se ipsum medicus ipse subuenit." We should observe at least two additional points of interest here: (1) the reference to Rom 2:12-16 on the gentiles who have the law written on their hearts and (2) Pelagius's version of original sin, probably taken from early Augustine.

²⁴ It is not until later (*ep.* 164, 6,17-18) that Augustine will succeed in separating himself from semi-Pelagians on this point, though only to implicate himself in semi-pelagianism on a more important point. He speculates, or asserts, that before His coming in the flesh and indeed starting with Adam and Eve, the to-be-incarnated Christ (he must avoid the implied universalism of citing the Logos here) came down "in spirit": *ad utrosque [malos et bonos] admonendos, ut alii ad salutem suam crederent, alii ad poenam suam non crederent, ipse utique non in carne, sed in spiritu ueniebat, uisis congruis alloquens, quos uolebat, sicut uolebat.* We can be much more confident of the Pelagians' desire to blame the ungraced than of their desire to save them – they were no Origenists. So Augustine's blaming of the unbelieving here, and in the context of their failure to respond to Christ's admonitions, implies that those who do heed in some sense are meriting grace; see his argument to this effect in *simp.* 1,2,8 ff.

with the purpose of sending it to eternal agony, not because respecting its freedom to choose, but via denying it the freedom to choose, Augustine's position becomes all but untenable, and even appealing to Paul does him little good on this point. His own and his followers' attempts, even at the cost of self-contradiction, to prove that the ungraced somehow merit their lack of grace virtually acknowledge that reprobation cannot be made acceptable in theological terms, that is, as consistent with the justice of God, however convincing from a psychological perspective. The abilities of the Pelagians did not measure up to Augustine's, but it must be admitted that they gradually forced him onto such ground.

After Augustine's death, Prosper compiled two lists of charges made by Pelagians against Augustine's destroying of free will via predestination. Prosper tries, usually in vain except for keeping up appearances, to answer them. Probably falling into the Pelagians' trap, he even anathematizes them, generally in an introduction and specifically in some cases. One of these is that, according to Augustine, God uses some (the ungraced) as means to serve the ends of the chosen.²⁵ Despite Prosper's indignant denial, it is easy to find evidence for this charge, such as *persev.* 8,18 or *praed. sanct.* 16,32-33, and in fact as early as *simpl.* I,2,18. Prosper's revulsion from the idea, even though his difference from Augustine is cosmetic, shows how far Augustine was from winning the war even after the defeat of Pelagius and Caelestius.

But let mere opinion make way for the question itself. The Pelagian controversy, revived as it ought to have been, asks these questions: Is it possible to rationalize reprobation, faced honestly and directly? If not, what follows?

Semi-Manichaeism: Adam Died to Save God from Sin

One of Augustine's great strengths is his facility in argument, but it can be a weakness too. He shows too much tolerance for self-contradiction, or fondness for paradox, if you prefer. Some of this is forced on him by the circumstances of his times. Religions rise and develop in a particular time and place, and when any of them aspire to universality and that is taken to imply exclusivity in truth, apologists will face difficulties in defining that universality. Most embar-

²⁵ *Answers to the Objections of the Gauls and Answer to the Vincentian Articles* in Prudentius De Letter, SJ, (trans.), *Prosper of Aquitaine: Defense of St. Augustine* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1963). See Objection 13 of the former.

rassing perhaps is Augustine's repeated turning of 1 Tim 2:4 into the tautology that God desires to save all men whom he desires to save.²⁶ In *pecc. mer.* I,18,23, he cites Christ's mission to save all mankind against itself: "Sine ista ergo regeneratione saluos in aeternum posse paruulos fieri quis audeat adfirmare, tamquam non pro eis mortuus sit Christus?" ("Who would dare claim that without the rebirth [of baptism] little ones could attain eternal salvation, as if Christ died not for them?").

Gaetano Lettieri, in his massive and monumental *L'Altro Agostino*, provides a useful formula for classifying interpretations of Augustine on grace, original sin and free will.²⁷ It must be evident that the present essay agrees with him in holding that by some point a change occurred rendering Augustine's later anti-Pelagianism irreconcilable with what went before it. On the other hand, this account finds much more continuity than he between the two Augustines. He finds such a decisive and definitive break between "la scoperta della grazia indebita e predestinata in *Ad Simplicianum* I,2" and "la platonizzante teologia" that went before that he spends much time refuting details of the traditional chronology which would seem to weigh against a decisive turn at that point. But if the writings prior to *simpl.* show "arcaica e del tutto 'superficiale' rispetto alla nuova, rivoluzionaria dottrina della grazia" and "il minimo accenno" to it, by what signs are we assured that *simpl.* is more sincere and serious?²⁸ And what about *simpl.* I,1's "archaic" answer to the first question, about Rom 7? Is not the evidence better for the trial of Caelestius as forcing a decision on a temporizing Augustine? And even then, does he not contemplate a compromise in *spir. et litt.*? Are the questions involved so easy to answer that we cannot understand and even share a desire to defer them? So far as those who would make a semi-Pelagian out of (late) Augustine, it is true that they would be overlooking his intentions, unless they acknowledged their own part in the transformation. But

²⁶ Prosper is often referred to as having broken with Augustine on this crucial point, but at most he can be said to put on a good show, as in the title itself: *De uocatione omnium gentium*. Chapters 9-12 of Book One provide much amusement, as you watch his futile struggle to find a more acceptable way of parsing the tautology. They provide instruction as well. The original sin, so to speak, of Augustine's concept of original sin is that, in the context of the Pelagian controversy, it was invoked to enforce Christian exclusivity, and so you can never get beyond that, except by taking a new start.

²⁷ *Ermeneutica e retorica della grazia dalla crisi metamorphosi del De doctrina christiana*. Brescia: Morcelliana, 2001.

²⁸ For the quotations, see page 7. For the argument about chronology, see Chapter Two. The complaint about Augustine's minimal and superficial nods toward grace sound exactly like Augustine's complaints about Pelagius!

after all, if the Church has in effect condemned reprobation, what else in serious fact and in honest logic is left of his anti-Pelagianism? And what is the ultimate implication of Lettieri's ridiculing of them (besides the admitted fun of it)? That the Church should condemn its condemnation of reprobation? Or, on the contrary, that it should condemn Augustine as a semi-Manichaean heretic?²⁹

In sum, Lettieri's position on several points is perfect for an illuminating comparison with this essay, whichever is correct. (1) If this essay is correct about Augustine's acquaintance with the problems raised by Paul on grace at least as early as his time with the Manichaeans, Lettieri's failure to recognize that, or take it seriously, can be seen to lead to far too sharp a break between Augustine's anti-Pelagianism and whatever exactly it is that Lettieri opposes to it. (2) On page 547 of the note on Rottmanner, Lettieri appears to agree that a doctrine of Augustine's that belies attempts to reconcile him with semi-Pelagianism is "quella dell'universale condanna dei pagani." If Lettieri can demonstrate any such doctrine in Augustine, he should do so. There is no question that Augustine's anti-Pelagian doctrine of grace does not grant to pagans any excuse for never having heard of Christ, just as it does not grant any excuse to anyone – how could it, after condemning unbaptized infants? – and he certainly does not promise special hope for salvation of all virtuous pagans, just as he does not promise such hope to virtuous anyone. But all of that is far from a doctrine of universal condemnation of pagans. Unless Lettieri can find such proof, he should consider what Grossi reminded us of – that Paul's inclusion of the Old Testament in the sacred story makes for rather significant qualifications of Paul's own exclusionary account in Romans. See note 9 above. And let Lettieri compare *nat. et gr.* 2,2 (discussed at length just above in "Main Motives") with the end of *nat. et gr.* 67,81, where he ends the essay by approving a quotation from *lib. arb.* taking a position indistinguishable from the one of Pelagius he began by finding heretical. Is not this human figure, struggling, sometimes in vain, to organize his feelings and make up his mind, a much more interesting and believable figure than an unhesitating and infallible dispenser of definitive dogma? And perhaps a wiser one, too.

The anti-Manichaean vindications of free will that caused Augustine embarrassment later were no thoughtless utterances prior to reading Paul or to thinking about grace and "original sin." He would

²⁹ See, in *L'Altro Agostino*, pages 544-549: "Nota [bibliographica] XI – Contra Rottmanner: su alcune interpretazioni "semipelagiane" di Agostino."

have become acquainted with all of the elements of his various theories of grace well before leaving the Manichees; the later developments of his teaching were rearrangements of those elements, in response to friends as well as to opponents (if we could define which were which!). In fact two of those elements are almost certainly among the various motives which led to his conversion to Manichaeism. One would be the question of the nature of God, especially in the context of accounting for the existence of evil, their clearing God of any responsibility for evil being an attractive if short-sighted solution. And then there is his life-long fascination with the mind or will divided against itself, both attracted to but rebelling against the good or the Law. This latter, the cornerstone of Western psychology, is perhaps the essence of the *uncontroversial* contribution to Christianity of the Pelagian controversy.

Augustine's effort in written attacks is often, but not always, to portray Manichaeism as a rival religion to Christianity, and not as a sect of Christianity, but at least two of his Manichee opponents, Fortunatus and Faustus, strongly resist this attempt and instead portray their religion as the true because Pauline version of Christianity, the one which accurately reflects Paul's "rejection" of the Law and of the "Old" Testament and his explanation for the source of evil in the "old" or "fleshly" man.³⁰ I shall have to leave to experts in that field to give an authoritative account of the version of Paul Augustine was likely to have gotten both before and after his conversion to Manichaeism, but it seems to me likely that under the Manichees he would have gotten a thorough-going privileging of grace over free will; that would seem to follow from his almost single-minded emphasis on their destroying of free will, in his reaction against them.

Augustine's break with the Manichees required him to find an alternative source for evil, neither in a independent force of Darkness nor in the good Creator (his Manichee opponents claimed that is the

³⁰ These themes might seem to anticipate the millenarian interpretations of Paul during medieval Christianity and during 17th century England, and in William Blake. So far as a "Christianized" version of Manichaeism, at least in North Africa, Grossi's discussion of the stages of initiation into Christianity, via preparation for baptism, illustrated in the writings of Augustine, reveals the use of some of the same terms as in Manichaeism, such as "Auditors" and "Elect;" see page 331 of the essay referred to above. The article on "Manichaeism" in *Augustine through the Ages* asserts that recent research now points to Christianity as the main influence on Manichaeism. Augustine does try to force his Manichee opponents onto the ground of their non-Christian mythology, such as their theological dualism, but Fortunatus seems almost unfamiliar with the matter, and appears at the end to promise to convert to Catholicism if his superiors cannot answer Augustine's objections.

explanation Catholics are left with). It had to be the human will, and in fact, to separate clearly from their conceptions both of man and of God, it must be the human *free* will. When, nearly a quarter of a century later, Augustine decided to sanction and to rationalize the appeal of the Church at Carthage to that complex of salvation as exclusively Christian, of original sin, and of infant damnation, in the trial of Caelestius, that leaves Adam as the only human exemplar of free will prior to grace.

A little knowledge of Augustine's anti-Manichaean writings can throw light not only on his semi-pelagian reaction against them but on his partial return to Manichaeism in reaction against the Pelagians, just as the latter charged. He was right to deny this charge in that he did not return to Manichaean dualistic theology, but they were right in that he did return, in effect, to Manichaean dualistic anthropology, with the exception of the brief moments of Adam's innocence and free choice, before his fall, thus putting immense pressure (more than it can sustain?) on this vanishingly short beginning of human history. Can that fleeting moment justify God in washing His hands of responsibility for saving those who cannot be saved without His help and saved from His own *poena* imposed on them, for some their only sin?³¹

Before turning to his attempt to deal with that hard question, let us look at what might be the most enduring of Augustine's positions on grace, the "semi-pelagian" interlude before his return to "semi-Manichaeism." His attempts to refute the Manichees did not mean that he rejected their appeal to Paul's critique of free will and to his teaching of the grace of Christ as the only remedy for consequences of Adam's sin. He does, though, to put it carefully, refute Manichaean interpretations of Paul that totally destroy free will, even in the ungraced, that, in other words, insist on total perversity or otherwise put grace beyond the free choice.³² Experts can probably tell us

³¹ If Augustine does decide deliberately, instead of casually and ad hoc, to abandon original sin *ex traduce* and totally perverse, in his comment on the Tyrians and Sidonians in his last writings, in favor of resting all on God's predestination, maybe we glimpse the possibility that backing away from Manichaean anthropology risks returning to Manichaean dualistic theology. It may be easier to accept God's leaving some in a state of total perversity that is his own *poena*, than to accept His damnation, before they had a chance of avoiding it, of those not entirely despicable. See *ep.* 186,6,18ff. for Augustine's own reasoning to this effect.

³² Granted, the recognition of the problem that he was soon to call "original sin" is so abrupt in the early *lib. arb.* as to suggest later addition. But in the almost contemporaneous *vera rel.* he invokes *homo uetus et exterior et terrenus* (26,49). And the early debate (392) with Fortunatus confirms that *ergo duo sint genera malorum, peccatum et poena peccati* (15). In short, Augustine the anti-Pelagian could plausibly and even rightly claim a certain consistency from beginning to end in his doctrine of grace,

whether either the Manichees or Augustine while under their influence or, in fact, later, as a semi-pelagian, held original sin to be *ex traduce*. But as noted above, even in *pecc. mer.*, baptism was used to prove original sin, not vice versa. And at the least Augustine does not in the early writings treat original sin as a settled theological doctrine widely enough accepted as to preclude the need for interpretation and explanation based on human experience.

Perhaps the most interesting – and significant, in influencing semi-pelagianism, including Thomas's – of these early treatments of original sin is in *c. Fort.* 22. The familiar order of *poena* first and then *peccatum* is reversed. To be sure there is an "original" aspect, an excessive love of pleasure and consequent tendency to form (bad) habits, but the actual loss of free will to bad habit must be activated by personal sins or acts:

Hodie namque in nostris actionibus antequam consuetudine aliqua implicemur, liberum habemus arbitrium faciendi aliquid, uel non faciendi. Cum autem ista libertate fecerimus aliquid, et facti ipsius tenuerit animam perniciose dulcedo et uoluptas, eadem ipsa sua consuetudine sic implicatur, ut postea uincere non possit, quod sibi ipsa peccando fabricata est.

The similarity to modern theories of addiction is obvious. This version of original sin, unlike his anti-Pelagian version, clearly spares free will in the ungraced and even allows them to be blamed, obviously and straightforwardly, for incurring God's *poena*.³³ In *simpl.*

but as my analysis has made clear, I trust, that claim is not entirely in good faith, not until in the last two tracts he admitted that he had once held the view of grace and free will as now his semi-Pelagian critics held.

³³ On page 342 of the work cited in note 9, Vittorino Grossi seems to regret that his research has not been able to improve much on a contemporary disproportion in treating original sin: "Oggi s'insiste sull'aspetto dommatico del peccato originale, qualcosa quindi che ne trascende l'aspetto fenomenologico." Those interested in a nuanced conception of original sin instead of a doctrinal absolute can find more of interest in these early writings. In *ex. prop. Rom.* 38,45, he explicates Paul's *lex peccati* as "carnalis consuetudo." More interestingly, in *simpl.* I,1,11, he describes the *poena* imposed on Adam's progeny as *mortalitas quasi secunda natura* causing *concupiscentia* – Carpe Diem? – which is then *mole consuetudinis roborata*. Could the explanatory significance of *mortalitas* be a reference, indirectly if not directly, to the great passage in which Aristotle explains reproduction (in all living beings including ants and plants) as the aspiration of the mortal for immortality and as the most "natural" act of life, apparently even more so than nutrition, presumably because anything has to achieve "a certain magnitude" (here of duration) to be significant; see *On the Soul*, II, 4 (415^a 23 - ^b 8)? I rather hope not; it would be a sad caricature. It is not surprising that right after the appeal to infant damnation in Caelestius's trial, Augustine should have difficulty adjusting from a nuanced conception of original sin adapted

I, 1, 13, he cites Sap 9: 15 as what we can take to express well his version of traducianism, original sin passed down by the body and not directly by the soul and as probably the theory of original sin held by Pelagius and even by Caelestius: *Corpus enim quod corrumpitur aggrauat animam*. Probably it is the version of original sin he would have retained, except for needing to reject Pelagianism. Maybe with close reading, we could even find evidence he did retain it, at least in private. In short we may say that Augustine's early conception of original sin is "Pelagian," which may simply be to say that Pelagius defended himself out of early Augustine, after being attacked; we certainly seem to be able to track him all over Augustine's early writings. In the absence of any factual knowledge about which of these two had priority, we can be confident that it is Augustine who was clearly the original thinker, even to the point of being the potential heretic!

Before turning, as promised, to an evaluation of Augustine's attempts to prove that his anti-Pelagian account of original sin does not destroy free will, it is appropriate to recognize, if too briefly, a recent attempt to render Augustine's arguments in terms of contemporary theology and philosophy, Paul Rigby's article, "Original Sin," in *Augustine through the Ages*.³⁴ It can be highly recommended as a supplement, or antidote, or whatever, to the present essay, for several reasons, one being that it does not limit itself strictly to the Pelagian controversy as does the present essay. Above all, it can be recommended as a good starting point for reviving and improving the Pelagian controversy, though perhaps it is more successful in reviving interest in Augustine's thought than in elucidating it, at least for those who require some overt signs of critical difference between the perspectives of interpreter and interpreted, in order to be fully satisfied that elucidation has occurred.

Rigby's for-and-against-at-once case for free will in the context of original sin seems to owe something, directly or indirectly, to Sartre's paradoxical fusion of an ethical perspective with its absolute demand for free will in action with a psychological or anthropological perspective rendering free will impossible, or nearly so. And indeed,

to adult free will to the new doctrinal absolute. In *ep.* 157: *Ilario*, 3, 15, on Paul's law of sin and death, he seems to catch himself in mid sentence: "Quae tamen nisi mala postea consuetudine roboretur, facilius uincitur, non tamen nisi gratia Dei." In fact he never abandoned trying to blame the ungraced for their own lack, however incompatible with the new conception of original sin as prior to will.

³⁴ P. Rigby, "Original Sin", in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 607-614.

if we include the “nearly so” this might seem a fair statement of the human condition to both sides or all sides, except to any who would reject it as “semi-Pelagian.” Indeed, a possible reservation about Rigby’s case is whether it is semi-Pelagian or anti-Pelagian. In saying that one of the dimensions of Augustine’s “mature” conception of original sin is that “baptism is the necessary means of salvation for all, including infants” (p. 608a), he would imply or at least entail that the real “turning point” is better to be found in the decision to rationalize the bishops’ condemnation of Caelestius than is *simpl.* Since infants do not have actual free will, original sin would have to be a doctrinally defined *penalty* imposed by God; on the other hand, some of the “phenomenological” aspects of original sin Rigby appeals to, in order to blame the loss for free will on human nature, seem to refer back to original sin as in Augustine’s early anti-Manichaean days. But maybe Rigby answers these questions in his fuller treatment in book form.

Perhaps the same can be said of another question absent from the encyclopedia article, but absent unfortunately almost always, in discussions of original sin: an adequate recognition that unless you start with comparable versions of unfallen states of nature you do not have comparable versions of original sin. So far as this problem is solved at all, it is by letting Augustine impose his versions, but that solution will not work if we are to revive interest in the controversy. Furthermore, this question about the unfallen state may return in what we have really been about all along, the state of beatitude.

On the one hand, Augustine’s conception of unfallen human nature without any trace of concupiscence certainly does vindicate his argument that only via divine intervention is fallen nature to be recovered. On the other hand it gives us an alien Adam, with whom we cannot identify, at least in case of the male, and unless Viagra was among the unforbidden fruits. Augustine’s starting point is simply too idiosyncratic to serve as a universal. Any real comparison between Augustine and Pelagius on original sin is probably precluded by this factor.

Might not the great classical definition of man as the rational animal have been a better version of the starting point? It is certainly open to fall into “original sin,” no problem there. At any rate it would enable a somewhat more warmly human version of innocence regained. There is of course no disputing tastes in beatitude, but those who feel that Augustine has left out a rung or two of the Platonic ladder of love could turn to *La Chartreuse de Parme*, our guide back to Dante and Boccaccio and others on the summit of Christian culture,

and especially to the great scene in Chapter 15. At a party at Count Zurla's, for more than an hour, those two magnificent women, the Duchessa and Clelia Conti, contemplate, enjoy and reflect back the signs of passion in each other, surrounded by a circle of otherwise silly courtiers now transformed into the blessed. Love of the human capacity to love is the first rung above the limitations of concupiscence and towards its transformation and transcendence. Those need not be driven by finding fault with concupiscence itself – that would only increase its fascination, as Augustine well knew – but by the vastly greater and wider power to love to be found in the spirit as compared with the poor weak body, its love being (relatively) unsharable, like all lesser because material goods. See the exposition in *Purgatorio*, 15, 44-75, Virgil's, interestingly.

The scene is greater still; it contains the seeds of the fall from innocence: the two women do not know yet they are in love with the same man, not even Clelia quite knows it yet. So we are still on earth, but with a glimpse of the goal, as in the ending of *Passage to India*, and everywhere in Chekhov.

This is the occasion to mention briefly a profound problem behind our subject, but without any presumption to solve it, if indeed it is solvable, beyond saying that it too touches on tastes which are not to be disputed. Rigby and Lettieri share an account of Augustine which emphasizes the "dark," the "tragic," the "mystery," the "anti-rational," though whether because that is their taste too we do not know. They are certainly not inventing this aspect of Augustine. We might generalize and interpret this theme by referring to one of the best known cases of it, T.S. Eliot's preference, at least in the first years after his conversion, for a "hard" God as we might put it, "Christ the Tiger" (a reference to Blake's "The Tyger," burning bright in the forests of the night and seemingly from a different Creator than the lamb's?). One supposes that such a God has the advantage of not seeming a figment of human wish-fulfillment, much as Eliot's attraction to pain might be as a disproof of solipsism. This taste in religion might also be compared to the preference for the "harder" reading in theory of interpretation. Speaking of the latter, and perhaps of the former, we might wonder if the considerable value in the approach needs to be balanced by care not to slide into perversity. Does not the beginning of the gospel of John weigh against making too much of a dark and non-rationalized God?

Clearly one of the valid reasons for revival of original sin in our time is as a response to its tragic history. We just need to be wary that any version of the doctrine of the total perversity of the

ungraced, along with a non-rationalized God, does not cause tragic history.

There is one more question to be raised, in connection with Rigby (though not singling him out), and recalling Eleonore Stump's comment we began with, on the too many versions of Augustine on free will. In the early work, the *De duabus animabus*, he spends much time wondering over and trying to explain his long failure to see through the obvious and pernicious Manichaean error of denying free will, so as to help others see through this and other sophistical arguments. To accomplish this, he renounces all "obscure and profound points, such as, given the few who understand them, often give rise to suspicion of fraud or ostentation" (10.13).³⁵ He uses thought experiments rather like "Frankfurt stories" (omitted here, but much recommended) designed to elicit definitions of free will and other recognitions which "nature herself proclaims... in all men whom we can interrogate without absurdity, from the youth to the old man, from kindergarten to the judgment seat of the wise" (10.14).³⁶ Could Augustine's versions of free will in those not given grace pass such a test? Or again, it may be the resistance of the laity to the "philosophical" versions of free will in Augustine and followers that has in fact more than anything else brought about the near-triumph of Pelagianism, even if not in name. Predestination was almost never mentioned and when mentioned was explained away as foreknowledge in the Presbyterianism of my youth, Southern Presbyterianism at that! Much more recently I have heard a Franciscan Friar tell students that predestination is "a Protestant problem."

In view of these questions, it seems appropriate here to make as blunt and as direct a case as possible, in the spirit of his own test, against Augustine's claims that he did not destroy free will. Then we can see what can be said in response, thereby at least gaining some clarification.

When he undertook to defend and rationalize in the name of grace his fellow bishops' appeal to original sin *ex traduce*, especially as proved by the damnation of unbaptized infants, many will judge

³⁵ "Quisquamne me ista tractantem, posset dicere, in rebus obscuris abditisque uersari, ubi propter intellegentium paucitatem uel fraudis uel ostentationis suspicio nasci solet?" We need not be quite so suspicious of the motives behind the use of specialist language nor quite so confident of the truth-telling of "natural" language to agree that Augustine, like Orwell's 1984 and like that spoof "scientific" essay in deconstructionist jargon accepted for publication, gives a fair warning here.

³⁶ "Haec cum in omnibus hominibus, quos interrogare non absurde possumus, a puero usque ad senem, a ludo litterario usque ad solium sapientis, natura ipsa proclamet."

that it became impossible for him to reconcile grace with free will in the ungraced, or all but impossible, shall we say. The embarrassment caused to Pelagians by this diabolical argument, to Augustine's great satisfaction, hid the even more damaging embarrassment it was to cause to his own reasoning, even if he was able to hide that from himself and until recently from others. He could lean on our ordinary sense that humans are responsible for their evil acts, and he was careful not to contradict that, even as his theory of grace and of merit undermines the ordinary rationale for that ordinary sense.

An unmistakable sign of the real difference between his semi-pelagianism and his anti-Pelagianism appears on the question of which is prior, foreknowledge or predestination. By the time of the last essays, Augustine was not one to confront his opponents best arguments, if they gave him bad ones to savage. In *praed. sanct.* the once subtle ironist and humorist inflicts upon us ten tedious pages of loud railing at the stupidity of men who, to preserve free will, hold that God's predestination was based upon His foreknowledge. Not content with that, even while saying he is ashamed to be thought to take their argument seriously, he resumes his rebuttal in ten even more tedious pages in *persev.*, and this despite the fact that Hilary had pointed out to him (*ep.* 226,3) that these men had appealed to his own arguments to this effect.³⁷

Some followers of Luther and Calvin, and perhaps of Augustine himself, seem to acknowledge implicitly the danger of a return to a semi-Manichaean dualistic *theology* by attempting to soften predestination via distinguishing different concepts of it and choosing the one which makes God responsible for all the good of the graced but for none of the evil of the ungraced, and Augustine himself certainly tries to take such a position. But, even if you judge that such a position is a paradox and not simply a self-contradiction, the attempt is futile, for he has himself as the first step in his teaching defined original sin as a penalty, *poena*, so as to identify two kinds of sin, *peccatum et poena peccati*, with the latter being pointedly distinguished from personal sin of one's own committing.

Probably the best comment on this attempt to soften predestination by blaming the ungraced is Augustine's own argument in *simpl.* 1,2,8 ff., where he acknowledges that to blame Esau for not receiving grace entails ascribing merit to Jacob. The method in this tract of

³⁷ *Ex. prop. Rom.* 52,60 puts God's foreknowledge (of faith) prior, in time and as cause, to predestination, with the explicit purpose of not destroying free will. In *ep.* 102.14, he applies a similar argument to whole ages.

raising objections from his earlier attempts to preserve free will (especially in *ex. prop. Rom.*) and then countering them head-on is so much more candid and searching than his later attempts to reconcile grace and free will that we must agree with his later assessment that in *simpl.* grace won out over free will, literally. But the result is so "unacceptable," shall we say, that his later fudging seems to reflect not only a concern not to cross Rome but a sense of taboo deep within himself.³⁸

The very number of different explanations of how the fallen can be said to have free will – or failing that, how God can be absolved of injustice for condemning to eternal torment those who never had a free choice of avoiding damnation – argues that Augustine himself, to his credit, did not find them valid.

Augustine often appeals to what some readers will consider an inadequate definition of free will, as the absence of external compulsion, so that if you do something because you desire to do it, you do it freely. But how does this distinguish the human from the animal? Can a being capable only of evil thoughts or acts be said to have free will, in a context where that will mean eternal torment, as against the fates of those capable of the alternatives of good and evil? Augustine's own attempt to argue that there can be free choices without there being alternatives (*nat. et gr.* 46,54 and 49,57) has apparently been revived by some modern thinkers.³⁹ Without professing to be able thoroughly to sort the grain from the bran on this interesting puzzler, one can point to the obvious fact that, even if, on one hand, you take exceptions to prove that absence of an alternative does not in itself necessarily rule out free will, on the other hand, those exceptions certainly do not prove that alternatives are never necessary for us to judge that there is free will. That is surely a matter of judgment going far beyond logic.

Then there is the argument (seeming to acknowledge the futility of the previous one) that his descendents did have a free choice with an alternative while "in Adam." Without dismissing this one immediately and definitively, one may suspect that those who appeal to it without facing its difficulties do so because they see that otherwise

³⁸ One probably should say that the fudging begins with *simpl.* itself. To the first question in Book I, the question about Paul's "semi-pelagian" Rom 7, on the mind divided against itself, Augustine's answer is semi-pelagian. In the long term, Augustine may be right to ascribe decisive importance to this book, but immediately he seems to have left the two answers suspended in equilibrium.

³⁹ See Stump, "Augustine on Free Will", p. 125-26 et passim.

"the game is up." But we do need some concept of "original sin" at least in the sense of supra-individual sin. We need a communal confession of generic human failings so powerful and so comprehensive that it transcends and renders irrelevant our paltry personal shames and anticipates our harshest critics, such as offspring and students. Besides, nothing in literature puts one in such a good humor as reading Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels*. In those days no one need suffer an inferiority complex.

Finally, the worst of these fallacious arguments seems to reveal how lacking was impartial critical oversight in those days and how damaging its absence: Augustine's argument that grace in his account does not destroy but establishes free will, openly taking away with one hand from the ungraced what it gives to the graced, and pretends to give generally, with the other. At *ep.* 217,6,23, it would fall far short to talk of his pressing paradox to the breaking point; he frolics in open self-contradiction. He uses it even in his least willful tract, in *spir. et litt.* 30,52. We cannot believe that Augustine himself was taken in by this argument. Indeed, it is so bad, as answer to the criticism of the Pelagians, that we must believe that only those were taken in by it who were more than willing to cooperate in being taken in, thus absolving Augustine of some blame.

In fact he gives the game away on all of these attempts to justify the (in)justice of God by one which is at least more dead-on accurate in assessing his own doctrine if not the thing in itself: that the justice of God is opaque and hidden from the human mind.

In the beginning of anti-Pelagianism, even after the fateful appeal to infant damnation, there was still the possibility of acknowledging the state of infants as a special case, as Thomas was to, and not as the test case the bishops meant it to be. But Augustine at the end of his life (*praed. sanct.* 12,23) was so far from treating infant damnation as a special case that instead he treated (the illusion of?) adult free will as the special case!

... tamen apud eos, qui nisi aliquid sibi assignent, quod priores dent ut retribuatur eis, ab omni studio pietatis reprimi se putant, [omnis haec ratio] laborat aliquantum in aetate maiorum iam utentium uoluntatis arbitrio: sed ubi uenitur ad paruulos, ... omnis deficit praecedentium gratiam Dei humanorum assertio meritorum.

In fact, we can find the same idea much earlier, in *ep.* 186: *Paulino* 6,19 and *gr. et lib. arb.* 22,44.

Not entirely without reason, some have preferred to assimilate him to Thomas by taking his doctrine of original sin to mean no more

than that before grace there are no possible good thoughts or acts of *salvific significance*. The problem with that – for Augustine, not for us – is that it did not rule out Pelagianism: that is exactly what Pelagians need, a good thought or act which does not merit, but does prepare for, grace. In fact, this explanation for why he did not repair the obvious flaws in his anti-Pelagian doctrine of grace applies to all of the preceding problems and many more. Whenever you see a problem in his doctrine of grace that you think could have been repaired, the probable answer is that the repair would have yielded semi-Pelagianism. First get over prejudice against Pelagius, and then you can have Augustine's own semi-pelagianism. Or again, for those interested in an speculative experiment to extract Augustine's "real" position on grace from his anti-Pelagianism, total depravity is probably a good place to start.

Could a person of his abilities have failed to know that his were not valid arguments and that therefore our intelligences are being insulted? The most important question for a revived and improved Pelagian controversy, and not just for Christianity, is whether reprobation can be justified and reconciled with divine justice, if faced *honestly and directly*. If Augustine used fallacious arguments to avoid facing this question honestly and directly, then he could be judged responsible for bequeathing futile and divisive conflict to those after him.

There is, however, another and more positive way, and certainly more charitable, to take those arguments, even if judged invalid: as acknowledging what he maintains elsewhere and always or almost always, that grace must not be so understood that it destroys free will. Using obviously invalid arguments can be taken to acknowledge that he has not yet succeeded in reconciling them, but without thereby either abandoning the attempt or yielding victory to the other side, since success may still be possible. And after all, reading even the great Thomas's attempts to reconcile grace and free will may cause one to suspect that orthodoxy is a middle which cannot be formulated between intelligible but unacceptable extremes.

Short of definitive answers to these questions, we can fairly compare Augustine's own early and late definitions of free will, explicit or implicit. In *duab. an.* 10,12, Augustine uses a sort of "Frankfurt story" to censure the Manichees' destruction of free will.⁴⁰ At first it seems that presence or absence of external compulsion is the

⁴⁰ I use, perhaps loosely, the definition of Stump, "Augustine on Free Will", p. 143.

deciding factor, thus being consistent with one of the definitions judged fallacious above. But then it appears that if the person compelled had conspired with the person compelling him, his attempt to appear innocent would fail. We must also remember that in an anti-Manichaean context, "external" compulsion would be God's refusing to endow the person with "internal" freedom. It would be most valuable to continue such an inductive research into the similarities and especially the differences in the concepts of free will in early and late Augustine, assuming the reader is not satisfied with Augustine's own better-late-than-never confession that he had once argued as a "semi-Pelagian." But it would take too long to do that here, so let us go to the deductive.

The telling distinction between the early and late positions on free will is the prominence in the early writing and the nearly complete absence in the later writing of what we can call the conventional theological rationale for free will: God wanted man's love and obedience to be unforced and thus meaningful, and so gave him the freedom to withhold those, if he chose. *Vera rel.* 14.27 is a most useful text for this point as well as closely related points: the injustice of blaming those who have no alternative and the destructive effect on religious (and surely social) discipline of abolishing blame (and praise).⁴¹

As the complementary but opposing theme in the late writing, we can take the favorite phrase of Luther, Calvin, and their followers: "the Sovereignty of God," whether or not Augustine actually uses the exact phrase. Sometimes the assumption seems to be that God is not able, even if He so desired, to withdraw His power so as to make enough space for man's free will. Augustine seems to approach such a position in his last writings, and it becomes more serious as an argument as modern theology leans on modern physics, metaphysics,

⁴¹ "Defectus autem iste quod peccatum uocatur, si tamquam febris inuitum occuparet, recte iniusta poena uideretur, quae peccantem consequitur, et quae damnatio nuncupatur. Nunc uero usque adeo peccatum uoluntarium est malum, ut nullo modo sit peccatum, si non sit uoluntarium; et hoc quidem ita manifestum est, ut nulla hinc doctorum paucitas, nulla indoctorum turba dissentiat. Quare aut negandum est peccatum committi, aut fatendum uoluntate committi. Non autem recte negat peccasse animam, qui et poenitendo eam corrigi fatetur, et ueniam poenitenti dari, et perseuerantem in peccatis iusta lege Dei damnari. Postremo, si non uoluntate male facimus, nemo obiurgandus est omnino, aut monendus: quibus sublati Christiana lex et disciplina omnis religionis auferatur necesse est. Voluntate ergo peccatur. Et quoniam peccari non dubium est, ne hoc quidem dubitandum uideo, habere animas liberum uoluntatis arbitrium. Tales enim seruos suos meliores esse Deus iudicauit, si ei seruirent liberaliter: quod nullo modo fieri posset, si non uoluntate, sed necessitate seruirent."

psychology and biology. When the individual is put in the context of the whole universe, it is hard to rationalize human free will. Of course, some sort of answer to that difficulty is that we are not trying to make the far edges of the universe reverberate with our claims to power; we are just trying to cultivate a microscopic postage stamp of a garden.

Most who favor the Sovereignty of God, including Augustine, simply use it in place of the traditional rationale for free will, rather than do what we must therefore do for them: bringing the two into confrontation. They were no doubt aware that the traditional rationale too obviously would deconstruct the argument from Sovereignty and may also have felt that, at least with lay-persons, the traditional view would have a decisive advantage, fair or not. Astonishing is the frequency with which Augustine will puzzle over the fact that God does not save all men, despite desiring to do so, without betraying the least awareness that there is an obvious answer; but this failure no doubt is due to the fact that he was only too well aware that the conventional theological rationale for free will is the heart of Pelagianism; see the *Letter to Demetrias*, chapter 3.

Here is a most promising confrontation of conceptions of human life. On the one hand, the traditional rationale for free will almost instantly deconstructs all of Augustine's, Luther's, and Calvin's (and we may as well include Paul's) theological challenges to free will (in the ungraced at least), and far beyond just that, it is perhaps the last and best hope for sustaining a "humanistic" concept of free will against modern trends of thought. On the other hand, after reading Augustine's acute deconstruction of free will, especially if supported by those modern trends, who can avoid feeling that the orthodox rationale is rather childish in its hopeful superficiality. We need Samuel Johnson just at this turn.

The whole Pelagian controversy can aptly be summarized by Samuel Johnson's famous comment over dinner, recorded in Boswell's *Life*: "All theory is against the freedom of the will; all experience for it." Indeed the remark, though almost certainly referring to contemporary theological and scientific debates on free will, could as well have been inspired by thinking of Augustine's vacillations. And Augustine's most trenchant defense of free will, in *De duabus animabus*, though not as concise as the following of Johnson's, is equally definite in arguing from our own experience as incontrovertible: "Sir, we *know* our will is free, and *there's* an end on it." If theology cannot support what we know, as against "all theory," what good is theology?

The Spirit and the Letter

There are profound ambiguities in *De spiritu et littera*, which we may never be able to clarify with certainty. Augustine first directs his attention against those who claim that it is possible for a person to live without sin (2,3). This is a charge made against Pelagians several times in the early stages of the controversy, but he is only able to show, in *nat. et gr.*, that Pelagius said that it is *possible*, something Augustine himself does not deny. This point is probably an implication of the theory of sin and free will (as it will be for the young Thomas). Both Pelagius and the anti-Manichaean Augustine deny that an act or thought is a sin unless it can be avoided; it follows in theory that all sins can be avoided, one by one and with sufficient time to prepare at least. Nor does Augustine himself show much concern to refute this possibility, unless the claim is that a sinless life is possible without grace. Finally, this charge disappears from the later anti-Pelagian writings. But if Augustine's critique of sinlessness is largely a distraction or even a red herring in the limited context of the Pelagian controversy, it is a much more solid achievement in the broad context of Christian culture.

The real problem is in saying that righteousness or even a beginning of it is possible without God's help (2,4). But even while Augustine seems to imply that Pelagians hold such heresy, he admits that they don't dare to say it, avoiding the charge by defining this help as human nature with free will and God's law prescribing how we should live. It is important to note that Augustine has to acknowledge that these *are* aspects of God's grace. We have noted above Augustine's tactic of dividing into parts a position very close to, or even copying, his own early semi-pelagianism, into parts each of which alone can be defined as a heresy. To those two agreed upon components, Augustine here adds the Holy Spirit's pouring love of the law into our hearts by and as God's grace, to heal original sin, our fault / punishment (*ueteris hominis noxa*. 20,35). But when he explains our receiving of grace, the only difference from Pelagians seems to be whether the law functions straightforwardly or in reverse. The function of the Law according to Augustine is to show that we cannot justify ourselves, and so must seek for God's help (6,9; 9,15; 10,16, etc.). Surely any adequate theory must accept both of these functions.

Another way to put this is to say that in *spir. et litt.* Augustine explores refuting the Pelagian challenge to the exclusivity of Christian salvation by resting it on the doctrine of God's call, as worked out in *simpl.*, rather than on a complete disabling of the wills of the ungraced

by original sin, as implied in the trial of Caelestius, and furthermore, by suggesting that the ungraced deserve their lack of grace by rejecting it, even while also trying to maintain that grace precedes free will, so that no one can accept it except as led by God.⁴² But when he refers (5,7) to Rom 8:29-30 to invoke predestination and the call, he follows the Biblical text by putting foreknowledge first, though without any interpretation, leaving it uncertain whether God's predestination follows from His foreknowledge of faith, as he had argued in the semi-pelagian *ex. prop. Rom.* 47,55 and especially 52,60, or not, as in his refutation of that argument in *simpl.* I,2,5 ff. And see *spir. et litt.* 24,40.

But the revival/reassessment, as we might call it, in *spir. et litt.* of his earlier semi-pelagianism needs more thorough examination than we can give it here. The nominal question of Marcellinus, with which he starts, is far from the most significant and challenging question about grace and free will acknowledged. Could Marcellinus himself, perhaps preparing to referee this dispute as he had the Donatist dispute, have expressed fundamental reservations about the position reached in *pecc. mer.*? In fact, the conclusion to the second book of *pecc. mer.* anticipates the compromising spirit and tentative tone of *spir. et litt.* There Augustine acknowledged that Pelagians do rationalize baptism, just using a different word in place of redemption (II,36,58). He offers to reexamine the question of whether the soul is created via traducianism, as the body is, and even whether God's predestination follows from his foreknowledge of merits, and to do so tentatively and thoughtfully (36,59). It sounds as if he had some presentiment of the probable cost of this developing debate.

Or Marcellinus may have passed on reservations from others, whether Pelagians or observers such as Volusianus and his relatives. Letters such as *ep.* 137: *Volusiano* and *ep.* 143: *Marcellino* show a tone and compromising spirit similar to *spir. et litt.* and at odds with most of the other anti-Pelagian tracts. At *ep.* 143,6, he even goes so far as to point out that in *lib. arb.* he had not said anything to offend those who reject the damnation of unbaptized infants, and so, presumably, original sin via traducianism. What could possibly be his motive for that remark? Is he offering to go back to the semi-pelagianism of *lib.*

⁴² We must impute Augustine's eventual abandonment of this position not to its evident self-contradiction (though he must have known it to be so) as to the fact that blaming the ungraced for their own failure to attain grace is the heart of semi-Pelagianism, as in their attempts to ascribe the withholding of baptism to God's foreknowledge of "future" rejections of grace. But in *spir. et litt.* the presence of this argument is another reason for characterizing the essay as an attempt to compromise with the Pelagians or their friends.

arb.? Or is he blaming the Pelagians for starting the controversy? Is there a hint here of a difference between Rome and Carthage as to the best strategy for converting pagans? At the very least he is expressing reservations about the doctrinal formula aimed by the bishops against Caelestius. Are these enough (along with the absence of grace in their formula) to suggest it was not Augustine who devised that formula?

Augustine also in *ep.* 102: *De GRATIAE* ["*Contra paganos*"] and *ep.* 137: *Volusiano* expressed a compromising attitude in dialogue with intelligent pagans. Did he retain a sense from his years as a Manichee that his superior knowledge of, and skill in marshalling, Biblical texts made it easy for him to bully fellow Christians, whereas the need to appeal to universal principles made the task much more delicate with non-Christians? Whatever the motives, we may use *spir. et litt.* to help us recover the more edifying Pelagian controversy that might have been had the Church in Carthage not brought Caelestius to trial, or, perhaps, had Marcellinus not been executed.

Let us now turn to the most significant question, whether raised by Marcellinus, Volusianus, the Pelagians, or by Augustine himself. In the course of distinguishing the old and new covenants as based not on different "laws" but on whether those are external laws written on stone or internal laws written on hearts, Augustine takes up a difficulty raised by Rom 2:12-16, the Gentiles who do by nature what the law requires and thus can be said to have a law written on hearts (*spir. et litt.* 26,43). This certainly seems a passage Pelagians or pagans would use to challenge Augustine's new doctrine of grace as formulated in *pecc. mer.*; it implies that some good will is possible prior to grace, and so challenges the nexus of traducianism, total perversity, and the consequent priority of grace, implied by the argument from the damnation of unbaptized infants. In fact, Pelagius seems to appeal to Rom 2:12-16 in the passage quoted by Augustine (*gr. et pecc. or.* II,26,30) to accuse Pelagius of "dividing the times" (see above).

Augustine's answer will take us back in many ways to his early "semi-pelagian" position. Therefore we should note that his first and presumably preferred interpretation is that these verses refer to Gentiles who have been converted to Christianity and that their "natures" refer to natures restored by grace (25,42-27,47). In 27,48-28,49 Augustine works out a second interpretation, in case the first is rejected. Presumably this alternative interpretation is permissible, even if not preferred.

Here the Gentiles are still heathen, but some of them do deeds we must approve, however suspicious we are of the ultimate purpose for which they do them. Here, probably for the only time in his *anti-*

Pelagian writings, Augustine in a general theoretical statement of doctrine rules out total depravity of the fallen. Although his general criticism of the Pelagians in his early works against them is that they have not advanced beyond the Old Testament, in that they say grace consists in the law along with free will, and in that they open salvation to those given the natural as well as the written law, his own statement of the (potential for?) faith in these heathen is hard to distinguish from Pelagius's. In a rather obscure passage in the middle of 28,48, he seems to say that the Hebrew saints of the Old Testament would have been saved by the vestiges of the natural law they retained as "rational animals," and not by the written Law.

Augustine soon regresses to familiar sleights of mind, actually taking away from the ungraced the free will he boasts of giving to the graced and even generally: "Liberum ergo arbitrium euacuamus per gratiam? Absit, sed magis liberum arbitrium statuimus. Sicut enim lex per fidem, sic liberum arbitrium per gratiam non euacuatur, sed statuitur" (30,52). He does not acknowledge that he has confirmed his critics' charges; he rather pretends that he has answered them. But what really counts here is Augustine's acknowledgment that he has been charged with destroying free will and that the charge has hurt.

In fact, as if acknowledging the frivolity of that argument, at 33,57 Augustine goes on to face directly and without blinking the crucial question posed by the Pelagians, and in his own early semi-pelagianism, so as to determine whether or not all have a free choice of the gift of grace: "utrum uoluntas illa qua credimus etiam ipsa Dei donum sit an ex illo naturaliter insito libero adhibeatur arbitrio?" ("Whether that act of will by which we believe is itself the gift of God or results from that free choice implanted by nature?") That is the central question somewhere behind just about every sentence in this study, and is one more proof, if any is needed, that Pelagius by now was a semi-Pelagian. And he acknowledges with unusual openness the difficulty of answering without destroying either grace or free will. Whatever else we make of this most significant passage, it is important to note that it shows his perfect retrospective understanding of his own semi-pelagianism and presumably that of Pelagius, so that we must suspect that his refutations elsewhere that depend on "failures" to understand are only tactical pretenses.

To understand the answer to that crucial question we need to read and interpret closely a long, complicated and difficult sentence at 34,60, which I shall cite so as to include a useful portion of the preceding context:

33,59... Quae dilectio diffunditur in cordibus nostris nec per sufficientiam propriae uoluntatis nec per litteram legis, sed per Spiritum Sanctum qui datus est nobis.

34,60. Haec disputatio, si quaestioni illi soluendae sufficit, sufficiat. Si autem respondetur cauendum esse, ne quisquam Deo tribuendum putet peccatum, quod admittitur per liberum arbitrium, si in eo, quod dicitur: *Quid habes quod non accepisti?* propterea etiam uoluntas, qua credimus, dono Dei tribuitur, quia de libero existit arbitrio, quod cum crearemur accepimus, adtendat et videat non ideo tantum istam uoluntatem diuino muneri tribuendam, quia ex libero arbitrio est, quod nobis naturaliter concreatum est, uerum etiam quod uisorum suasionibus agit Deus, ut uelimus et ut credamus, siue extrinsecus per euangelicas exhortationes, ubi et mandata legis aliquid agunt, si ad hoc admonent hominem infirmitatis suae, ut ad gratiam iustificantem credendo confugiat, siue intrinsecus, ubi nemo habet in potestate quid ei ueniat in mentem, sed consentire uel dissentire propriae uoluntatis est.

I shall translate the sentence beginning *Si autem*, since my reading differs from any of the translations I have so far found. They admittedly have an advantage as readable translations, since they break up this Ciceronian monster – that’s what Latin will do to you – into parts, while I shall try to stay as close as possible to the original, with the exception of needing to add a bracketed *et* just before *propterea*. The difficulty of the sentence begins with *si in eo* and ends with that missing *et*, and my solution to the difficulty starts with assuming that we need the two *alternatives* named in the central question just posed at the beginning of 33,57 (see the previous paragraph) and developed in the remainder. The idiom *in eo* I interpret in accordance with the familiar formula for whatever is “in us” as nature or gift or nature/gift, and shown in the last sentence of 33,59 above as well as in the omitted parts of 33,57, and prefigured by the *insito* in the sentence posing the central question at 33,57. The *eo* I take as “one” or as standing in for some such word as *homine*, and I take the citation of 1 Cor 4:7 as his favorite touchstone definition for the gifts of the Holy Spirit (I cannot resist pointing at the ambiguity of *accipere*, before hurrying on). And I add the *et* after the citation because I need *propterea* to mean *therefore* and not *because*, as in some other translations, and that because, again, I need the *alternative* to free will as produced by Christian grace, that is, free will as the *initium fidei* or *gratiae* given to all in creation. That gives us the clear alternatives as in the question introducing this part of the book, at 33,57 (see above), but with a “Pelagian” bias to the answer. The reason given for this bias is indeed the same as in a passage from Pelagius (his *pro. lib. arb.* III?) quoted by Augustine at

gr. et. pecc. or. I,17,18, to explain that Pelagius hesitated to attribute free will to the gift of grace because that might seem to blame our failures of will on God. Augustine himself seems to accept this reasoning at *spir. et litt.* 31,54.⁴³ Even more relevantly, in the very paragraph 33,57 where the decisive question is raised (see just above), the same Pelagian objection is acknowledged in a slightly different form, as giving unbelievers and sinners an excuse if they are not given God's grace as the will to believe.

I shall give the whole of my English sentence, since the second half, though not difficult at all, is most significant in taking us right into St. Thomas:

If, however, someone responds that we must preclude that anyone should think that sin is to be attributed to God, if it is committed by free will that is in man [in eo] in accordance with the words "What do you have which you have not received [i.e., from the Holy Spirit]?, [and] therefore even the will by which we believe is attributed to the gift of God in the sense that it arises from the free will that we received when we were created, he [who so responds] should observe and understand that this [act of] will [by which we believe] is attributed to a divine gift not only for the reason that it [voluntas] was concreated as nature in us, but also because God brings about by the stimuli of our perceptions that we should will and should believe, stimuli either from the outside, through evangelical exhortations – in which even the mandates of the Law effect something, if they warn man of his weakness, for the purpose that he flee to justifying grace by believing – or from within, where no one has in his power what comes into his mind (but to consent to or dissent from these stimuli is within our own will).

⁴³ "Vide nunc utrum quisque credat, si noluerit, aut non credat, si uoluerit. Quod si absurdum est - quid est enim credere nisi consentire uerum esse quod dicitur? Consensus autem utique uolentis est -, profecto fides in potestate est. Sed, sicut Apostolus dicit: *Non est potestas nisi a Deo*. Quid igitur causae est cur non et de ista [uoluntate?] nobis dicatur: *Quid enim habes quod non accepisti?* Nam et ut credamus, Deus dedit. Nusquam autem legimus in sanctis Scripturis: "Non est uoluntas nisi a Deo". Et recte non scriptum est, quia uerum non est; alioquin etiam peccatorum - quod absit! - auctor est Deus, si non est uoluntas nisi ab illo." The analysis of faculties here seems very similar to Pelagius's, as it is to be cited in Chapters 4 and 5 of *gr. et pecc. or.*, Book Two. And it would seem to acknowledge that even if faith is defined as God's gift – and after all, who thinks that faith in things unseen depends solely on our wills? – Pelagians can still find an opening for human free will in knocking, seeking, finding, as had Augustine's own semi-pelagianism. At *pecc. mer.* II,18,29 Augustine tries to turn this argument back against the semi-pelagian premise that the process of grace begins with the *gratuitous* and *universal* gift of free will, but his argument depends on slipping in the word "good" (*bona uoluntas*), with the result that he actually confirms, not refutes, his opponents' argument.

Translated so, this sentence summarizes the argument (and perhaps the conclusion?) of the whole book, according to which Augustine would be basing the exclusivity of Christian salvation not on disabling totally the free will of the ungraced (as in most of the other anti-Pelagian tracts and as implied by the damnation of unbaptized infants, as defended in *pecc. mer.*), but on the teaching of the (exclusive?) call from God, as defined in *simpl.* But there is a problem here; Augustine never, so far as I know, rules out the salvation of some pagans, virtuous pagans we might say, for the reason that the Old Testament, as interpreted by Paul, cites cases of such salvations, such as Job and the inhabitants of Nineveh, and so opens the possibility of yet others. But there is an even more startling reason given in 33,58.

There he proposes a compromise, according to which the free will given as part of the rational soul by God as universal Creator is a neutral power capable of either faith or infidelity (as Pelagians have argued), but for that very reason needing the call of God that they must *receive/accept* in order to have faith. But then comes the startling twist, in which he does two things completely uncharacteristic of his anti-Pelagian tracts as a whole. He cites 1 Tim 2:4, but straightforwardly and not as his tautology that God desires to save all whom he desires to save. And he cites the conventional theological rationale for free will: “Vult autem Deus omnes homines saluos fieri et in agnitionem ueritatis uenire, non sic tamen, ut eis adimat liberum arbitrium, quo uel bene uel male utentes iustissime iudicentur.”⁴⁴

Surely this is too good to be true! And in fact, Gerald Bonner judged that when free will is referred to as a “*media uis*, a neutral power” in 33,58 it is to be understood as that “original” free will granted to *Adam*.⁴⁵ But as I have shown, the main argument of this book follows from an attempt to answer the Pelagians by a doctrine short of total depravity, and even to reach a compromise with them or some of them. And the long sentence quoted just above clearly refers to the human race as whole as having free will.

Why did the compromise fail? Perhaps the Pelagians called his bluff by accepting it. Maybe the offer never reached them. If

⁴⁴ Note that this appeal to the conventional rationale for free will can be said to have been already implied by Augustine's previous recognition of the gift of free will as an essential aspect of human nature in creation, if we ask why it was given.

⁴⁵ G. Bonner, “Augustine and Pelagianism,” *Augustinian Studies* 24 (1993): 33. That meager acknowledgment must not stand as the only sign of the great debt this essay owes to the grounding provided by Bonner's writings.

challenged from the other side, Augustine could have appealed to one of his dubious definitions of free will, such as doing something freely because we desire to do so and are not compelled, as unsatisfactory as that might appear, face to face with the conventional rationale. But the way out that he has obviously prepared ahead, in case he should need it, is to say that this second interpretation of the gentiles who had the law written on their hearts, was not his preferred reading. Even granted that this qualification seems to disappear as an operative bracket around our reading of *spir. et litt.*, it is impossible to prove wrong.

It seems that is a hazard of wrestling with the Pelagian controversy to fall into suspicion of being hoodwinked by devious language, a suspicion well expressed by Augustine of Pelagius, in *gr. et pecc. or.* I,2,2, but for us, suspicion of being hoodwinked by Augustine as well. On one hand it is fatal to turn one's back blindly against such suspicion, as shown by the incompatible interpretations of Augustine on free will, with which we began. On the other hand unless counterbalanced, such suspicion could undermine the essential empathy required for reading to understand, to "get inside" a writer's mind. For one thing, we can turn our suspicion of each writer against his suspicion of the other. But I shall suggest an appeal to what we can call the justice of influence. A writer who exploits the ambiguities of words and of syntax allows his readers to use him for their own purposes, whether with awareness or not. I think Peter Lombard was fully aware of his exploitation of Augustine's ambiguities and ambivalences. And that raises questions about Augustine's intentions. Maybe he did really mean what he said, that all people have free will, even if he could not find a convincing way of formulating it.

This turn would also take us back to Augustine's wonderful defense of "mistaken" reading, in *util. creed.* Maybe if he had maintained such freedom as a reader of Paul, things might have turned out better.

This is the point at which to end the main argument, which is that Augustine was the origin and source not only for the "anti-Pelagian" theory of grace revived by followers such as Luther and Calvin but also for the "semi-Pelagian" theory, in its scholastic version, against which Luther and Calvin reacted. I trust that nowadays no one, at least among the experts on Augustine, would decide between them simply on the ground that it is true because it is Augustine's final opinion, as against which doctrine is the better, in the individual reader's considered judgment. So long then, as we are careful to recognize

that the two doctrines are probably incompatible, so that we probably have to choose between them, so long as we are careful to acknowledge that it is we who are deciding, it is up to us. Seen that way, I suspect that we can say that at present at least, the semi-pelagian Augustine has largely won out over the anti-Pelagian Augustine.

The position summarized in the letters of Proper and Hilary, formulated by defenders of free will against Augustine's anti-Pelagianism but claimed by them to derive from Augustine's own defense of free will against Manichaeism, a claim confirmed by Augustine himself (*praed. sanct.* 3,7-4,8), whatever we call it, is a position so well thought out as to be nearly irrefutable and in the long run irresistible, no doubt thanks mainly to Augustine, with some help from Pelagians. Most of the genius of it is contained in the opening appeal to the free and gracious gift of free will by God as universal Creator, thereby setting in motion the eventual sapping from within of invidious claims to partial universality, whether by Christianity or other religion, by elevating those claims into a higher form of universality.

There is much genius also in Augustine's attempt to refute his own semi-pelagianism. But Pelagians have no need to oppose either the fall from a state of innocence nor original sin; they can be refuted only by pushing these doctrines to the obviously false extreme of total perversity of *human nature*, passed down literally *ex traduce*, the latter step avoided even by Augustine himself. In fact, the attack on Pelagians would not have succeeded even temporarily except for the appeal to the dangerously double-edged instrument of infant damnation.

But the failure of his attacks to engage precisely and effectually with semi-Pelagianism has actually been to Augustine's advantage, allowing the most of his great achievements as teacher of grace to survive quite well without those daunting extremes, and in fact, within semi-Pelagianism itself.

As with Jonathan Swift centuries later, a large part of Augustine's polemical impulse was inspired by horror of religious controversy bitter enough to disturb the peace of the world. If we start by assuming that so intelligent a mind could not have been unaware of the obvious fallacies in his attempt to limit God's desire that all men be saved, can we take the next step of imagining him as quite content that his opponents, including his younger self, should triumph eventually, once Christianity was firmly established? After all, Augustine never denied the salvation of "virtuous pagans," but only arguments that such salvation is fully merited, not freely given.

Augustine and Thomas Aquinas

We can examine this vast topic only very selectively and briefly, so as to outline the influence of Augustine the semi-pelagian. We noted above Peter Lombard's use of Augustine on grace and free will. He prudently continues to treat Augustine as the great doctor of grace and Pelagius as a heretic, but he goes on to use Augustine's frequent lapses, even late in his life, into what we would call semi-Pelagianism to vindicate free will against the anti-Pelagian Augustine.

For example, see Peter's Book II, Distinction 26. In a chapter with the significant title "De illa cogitatione boni quae praecedit fidem," Peter Lombard quotes (in an edited version) a passage from *Enarrationes in Psalmos* on verse 20 of Psalm 118 (119): "Concupiui desiderare, inquit, non desideravi. Videmus enim ratione nonnunquam quam utiles sunt iustificationes Dei; sed infirmitate praepediti aliquando non desideramus. Praeuolat ergo intellectus, sequitur tardus aut nullus affectus; scimus bonum, nec delectat agere, et cupimus ut delectet."

There is a neat irony here: Peter Brown cites this last sentence, and goes on to call this "ostensibly a thoroughly 'Pelagian' Psalm" with "its static code of precepts" which Augustine managed in his commentary to turn triumphantly to his own (anti-Pelagian?) purposes.⁴⁶ We need to learn to be on the lookout for minute traces of pelagian free will (whether for approval or blame) as sharply as our long-ago predecessors did! Almost certainly for Thomas the origin of his doctrine of grace was in Augustine as interpreted and cited by Peter, not in Pelagius and certainly not in the almost vanished Rufinus.

In II *Sent.*, d. 28, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1, as a first step Thomas restores to the Grace of Creation just those verses one had noticed Augustine impressing into service to the Grace of Recreation by reading into them an unstated and tendentious word *good*, verses such as John 15: 5: "Without me you can do nothing" and 2 Cor 3: 5. Then in ad 3 he puts grace into the universal context of what we can call Thomas's Unified Field Theory of Love, according to which everything which exists is given motion by love of its source and Creator. Those who have encountered this theory in its grand vision in Dante's *Commedia*

⁴⁶ P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, new ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 376. It is worth noting that as late as *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, 9, a.1, Thomas quotes from Peter's paraphrase of this passage, not from Augustine's original. This one niggardly reference must not be allowed to misrepresent the great help I have derived from Peter Brown's writings.

will perhaps more readily notice its subtler expressions in Thomas. The mind open to the inner promptings of God's grace is thus aided by senses open to "exterior occasions" bearing witness to God's love and the love of God.

We need to note in certain quarters the powerful motive to assimilate the two, whether Thomas to Augustine or Augustine to Thomas. For certain purposes this is quite proper, so long as we are quite aware of our own contribution, but not for scholars, except insofar as the likeness is really there.

Recently one sees the argument that Thomas Aquinas by the time of the *Summa Theologiae* turned against his earlier semi-Pelagianism and assimilated himself to Augustine, a thesis that is probably yet another result of unexamined prejudice against Pelagianism. See, for example, the notes and commentary in the Blackfriars edition of the *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 30 (1a2ae, 106-114), edited by Cornelius Ernst, O.P., and also Joseph P. Wawrykow, *God's Grace and Human Action*.⁴⁷ But Wawrykow relies on a flawed argument by Bernard Lonergan in his dissertation, published as *Grace and Freedom*.⁴⁸ Lonergan argues that in his last period, under the influence of Augustine, Thomas renounced as heretical because Pelagian the grace within nature, and above all external events as stimulating preparation for grace, that he had affirmed in his early writings (see pages 21, 39, 122, and 142 for this thesis). But this argument relies heavily on a misreading of a passage from *Quodl.* 1, Q. 4, A. 2 (A. 7), in effect reading the correlatives *non solum... sed etiam* as *non... sed*. Despite the importance Lonergan attributes to the passage, referring to it 9 times, he never cites the Latin, or gives a full translation, but unfortunately only summary paraphrases, probably from his note cards in those days before photocopying. If he had checked the original, he would surely have noticed his obvious (and most uncharacteristic) oversight:

Dicendum est ergo, quod homo indiget auxilio gratiae non solum ad merendum, sed etiam ad hoc quod se ad gratiam praeparet; aliter tamen et aliter. Nam meretur homo per actum uirtutis, cum non solum bonum agit, sed bene, ad quod requiritur habitus, ut dicitur in II Ethic., et ideo ad merendum requiritur habitualiter gratia. Sed ad hoc quod homo praeparet se ad habitum consequendum, non indiget alio habitu, quia sic esset procedere ad infinitum. Indiget autem diuino auxilio non

⁴⁷ J.P. Wawrykow, *God's Grace and Human Action*. "Merit" in the *Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

⁴⁸ B. Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom. Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas*, ed. J. Patout Burns, S. J. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971).

solum quantum ad exteriora mouentia, prout scilicet ex diuina prouidentia procurantur homini occasiones salutis, puta praedicationes, exempla, et interdum aegritudines et flagella; sed etiam quantum ad interiorem motum, prout Deus cor hominis interius mouet ad bonum, secundum illud Prou. XXI, 1: *cor regis in manu Dei; quocumque uoluerit, uertet illud*. Et quod hoc necessarium sit, probat philosophus in quodam cap. de bono fortunae. Hoc enim agit uoluntate; uoluntatis autem principium est electio, et electionis consilium. Si autem quaeratur qualiter consiliari incipiat, non potest dici quod ex consilio consiliari inceperit, quia sic esset in infinitum procedere. Vnde oportet aliquod exterius principium esse quod moueat mentem humanam ad consiliandum de agendis. Hoc autem oportet esse aliquod melius humana mente. Non ergo est corpus caeleste, quod est infra intellectualem uirtutem, sed Deus, ut philosophus, ibidem, concludit.

I have quoted more than the sentence in question, which starts with *Indiget autem*, given the interest of the passage in the context of this essay. Indeed the whole article is useful.

If you compare that passage from *Quodl.* with II *Sent.*, d. 28, q. 1, a. 1, ad 3, you will find no change in the balance of internal versus external “premotion.” And that long passage compared with the long sentence from *spir. et litt.* 34,60 cited above well summarizes the influence of Augustine on Aquinas. As to internal premotion, Thomas’s citation of Aristotle above reminds us that it operates universally, as well as via Christian grace, and sometimes in preparation for the latter. On that point see also *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, 109, a. 1, ad 1: “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod omne uerum, a quocumque dicatur, est a spiritu sancto sicut ab infundente naturale lumen, et mouente ad intelligendum et loquendum ueritatem. Non autem sicut ab inhabitante per gratiam gratum facientem, uel sicut a largiente aliquod habituale donum naturae superadditum, sed hoc solum est in quibusdam ueris cognoscendis et loquendis; et maxime in illis quae pertinent ad fidem, de quibus apostolus loquebatur.” If Thomas had rejected the grace within nature, his system would have fallen apart into two discontinuous halves, the discussion of natural virtues being irrelevant to Christians, except perhaps in inducing pagans to treat them well.

After all the grief of and from Augustine and Pelagius, our reward is the unstrained effortlessness and even the Aristotelian obviousness — how could we have missed it! — of Thomas’s solution to the problem of grace and free will. We hardly need to look beyond the question itself of *ST*, 1a2ae, 112, 3, except to confirm the sudden insight we have received: “utrum necessario detur gratia se praeparanti

ad gratiam, vel facienti quod in se est?" ("Whether grace is necessarily given to one who prepares himself for grace, or to one who does what is in her?"). The conclusion of course is negative, but that negative turns on the qualification "necessario," at once preserving the freedom of both God and man and allowing grace to transcend, not suspend, divine justice. Is this formulation perhaps what Augustine always was struggling towards, and might have reached, except for infant damnation?

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Abstract

Quotations from Augustine have always been attractive, especially those quotations that help religious people to cope with sorrow and pain or armed with any evils that might occur in human life. In the recently destroyed Augustinian Church at Würzburg, a monument has been made into a portrait for people in mourning. It is decorated with a sentence attributed to Augustine: "I want you to be" ("Ich will, dass Du bist"). The present article intends to demonstrate the insufficiency of this sentence with Augustine's theology and pastoral care.

Key Words

Der Mensch als Gottes Geschöpf; Christe Heilswort; christliche Existenz; Erlösung; Liebe.

Als ich am 26. 11. 1991 den Festgottesdienst zur Wiedereröffnung der Augustinerkirche nach dem Umbau besuchte, fiel mir gleich hinter dem Eingang der angebliche Augustinus-Spruch auf einer Wand *Ich will, dass Du bist* ins Auge. Dieser Satz, dessen Fundstelle nicht angegeben ist, so dachte ich, dürfte wohl zumindest unvollständig, wenn nicht gar unangemessen sein. Es geht nämlich aus der Sentenz nicht hervor, ob Augustinus diesen Satz als seinen eigenen äußert, oder ob er ihn als von Gott gegebenem vorgelesen wissen will. Eines liegt mir für unabweisbar fest: Augustinus, wie gesagt, ist verkürzt oder für unzutreffend. Denn wenn man für Gottes Willen der tragende Grund alles Erschaffenen bis ins Unendliche und Ewigkeit. Wie der Schöpfer jede Ziege, jede Blume, jedes Tier zu sein will, so schließt sich