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“None Come Closer to Us than These:” Augustine and the Platonists

John Peter Kenney

Department of Religious Studies, Saint Michael’s College, Colchester, VT 05439, USA; jkenney@smcvt.edu; Tel.: +1-802-654-2525

Academic Editor: J. Warren Smith

Received: 28 July 2016; Accepted: 26 August 2016; Published: 1 September 2016

Abstract: This paper reflects on the importance of pagan Platonism to one of its most sympathetic Christian interpreters, Augustine of Hippo. Its goal is to uncover what Platonism meant to Augustine and why it mattered so much to him throughout his long career. To that end the essay begins by considering salient developments in the study of Platonism over the last fifty years, with particular attention to several crucial shifts in interpretation and consequent changes in its contemporary representation. It then follows those leads into the study of Augustine, considering closely how he himself described the import of Platonism and what it contributed to his development. Brief consideration is first given to Augustine’s earliest works. Attention then turns to his definitive treatment of the conversionary power of Platonism in Book VII of the *Confessions* and his later assessment of Platonism in *City of God* VIII. That inquiry will offer a basis to conclude with some final observations on the interpretation of Platonism in the study of Augustine.

Keywords: Platonism; Augustine of Hippo; monotheism; transcendence; Catholic Christianity

In the history of scholarship the relation of Augustine’s thought to Platonism has at times been neuralgic, a proxy for larger struggles over the nature and shape of Christian theology. Was Greco-Roman philosophy in general, and Platonism in particular, a foreign intrusion and a source of heresy? Was Platonism the wrong philosophical solvent for Christian theology, in need of correction by scholastic Aristotelianism? Was it emblematic of a false philosophical confidence that allowed Christianity to disguise its essential fideism? Did it contribute to the creation of “classical theism” and the “God of the philosophers”?

Some of these concerns still linger. But the specific question of Augustine’s relation to Platonism has assumed a relative tranquility of late, as scholarship has come to a more capacious understanding of the complexity of Hellenistic Judaism, Early Christianity, and Platonism itself. And as scholars have become more cognizant of the genealogies and limitations of terms like “religion,” “philosophy,” and “theology,” there has emerged a diffidence superseding earlier categories of interpretation [1]. This paper is intended to support this irenic disposition and to reflect on the importance of Platonism to one of its most sympathetic Christian interpreters, Augustine of Hippo. Its goal is to uncover what Platonism meant to Augustine and why it mattered so much to him throughout his long career. To that end we will begin by considering salient developments in the study of Platonism over the last fifty years, with particular attention to several crucial shifts in interpretation and consequent changes in its contemporary representation. We will then follow those leads into the study of Augustine, considering closely how he himself described the import of Platonism and what it contributed to his development. We will take a brief look first at the earliest works that we have from him. Then we can turn to his definitive treatment of the conversionary power of Platonism in Book VII of the *Confessions* and his later assessment of Platonism in *City of God* VIII. That inquiry will offer a basis to conclude with some final observations on the interpretation of Platonism in the study of Augustine. When understood

within the cultural context of late antiquity, Platonism can be seen as the theological expression of late Paganism, an autonomous spiritual trajectory from which Augustine drew critical elements for the framing of his Christian theism. And so, while never a Platonist as such, Augustine was nonetheless never free from Platonism [2,3]¹.

1. The Recovery of Ancient Platonism

Just as the study of patristics accelerated dramatically in the second half of the Twentieth Century, so too did the study of philosophy in late antiquity. The reasons were no doubt different but the developments were not unrelated. Renewed interest in philosophy beyond Plato and Aristotle led first to the Hellenistic schools and finally to late antiquity, where the largest body of extant philosophical texts from the ancient world could be found. Discovery of the value of the late antique commentary traditions on Plato and Aristotle, as well as belated recognition of the innovative philosophical thought of the later Platonists, led to a sustained effort at textual editing and analysis. Just as in the case of patristic Biblical exegesis, the recovery of this largely ignored tradition of philosophical exegesis offered new perspectives both on the late ancient reception of Plato and Aristotle as well on those classical sources themselves. These advances in scholarship over the last two academic generations can be seen summarized in the monumental, two volume *Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, edited by Lloyd Gerson and published in 2010 [4].

Two important results from this development bear mention. First, we now possess a detailed map describing the intellectual terrain of late ancient philosophy and the foundation for describing the significant intellectual variations among the philosophical schools, primarily Platonist in character. It is thus no longer possible to make generic doctrinal comparisons between Christianity and Platonism, considered as a whole, since separate Platonist schools—while sharing a basic family resemblance in their views—held significantly different positions. Thus what we have come to realize about variations in early Christianity applies as well to ancient Platonism. Second, we can also now understand much better the essential continuity of the Platonic tradition behind its separate schools, including shared intellectual styles, a textual canon, forms of discourse, modes of personal formation, and, in some cases, types of religious praxis. Indeed the very force of that continuity has led recent scholarship to restore the use of the term “Platonism” to denote the whole historical sweep of this tradition and to reject the modern neologism “Neoplatonism,” based as it is on a critical ascription of rupture and revisionism to the Fourth Century Roman school of Plotinus. For the study of early Christianity, these advances in understanding the full scope of Platonism mean that we can no longer make judgments about Platonism based solely on the dialogues of Plato alone, but must bear in mind Platonism’s historical development around that initial, canonical core.

The recovery of ancient Platonism in all its variety has laid the groundwork for several important interpretive advances in understanding this tradition, developments that bear directly on any assessment of its relation to Christianity, and these require our consideration. First there is the matter of locating Platonism with our interpretive categories. In recent years, religious studies scholarship has helped to promote salutary circumspection in regard to notions like “religion,” “philosophy,” and “theology,” terms that been previously used as natural categories with clear edges. This new hermeneutical awareness has subtly shifted and enlarged our perspective on ancient philosophy and its cultural valences in antiquity. In an earlier time, Platonism was straightforwardly seen as a philosophy and as a product of the exercise of reason. It was thus something quite distinct from Christian theology, rooted in revelation, and also from Greco-Roman religion, understood as being a diverse set of cults, rituals, and archaic stories about the gods. Ancient philosophies were understood to stand apart from ancient religion, and were usually seen as critically rejecting or abstaining from those myths and practices. In the case of Platonism, this Enlightenment historiographical model faced

¹ Translations of Augustine’s texts are the author’s.

tensions in its narrative because of the unpleasant fact that Platonism in late antiquity experienced a “failure of nerve,” becoming increasingly open to the oracular and prophetic aspects of Paganism, such as the *Chaldaean Oracles*, and even explicitly supportive of cultic practice, in particular theurgy [5,6].

But if we shuffle our categories, Platonism begins to look quite different. For starters, scholarly discussion of traditional religion in Greco-Roman antiquity was usually confined to cultic practice and mythic discourse. And that religion had no name, at least until late antiquity, when some Platonists started to call themselves “Hellenes,” and Christians began to call them “Pagans.” It was therefore easy to segregate religion—when so narrowly defined—from philosophy, making the former seem inchoate and the later an emancipating voice of reason. Yet this older scholarly model missed several important features of the cultural dynamic of antiquity. We might be alerted to these by considering another traditional religion that went without a name until modern times, Hinduism. Remotely related historically, both Hinduism and Paganism share some important characteristics, including a cluster of ancient written accounts of the gods and a wide range of cults and ritual traditions. But crucially they also each developed philosophical sects that engaged with these mythic and cultic elements, providing divergent readings of those texts and practices. In both traditions these schools helped to elaborate, criticize, and revise their mythic and cultic cores. That model is instructive for considering Greco-Roman antiquity as well. When so viewed, for example, Plato’s Socrates emerges not as a rationalist critic of the pieties of Paganism, but as its committed reformer. Indeed that spirit of revisionism might be seen to be characteristic of Platonism throughout much of its history. More importantly, Platonism and other philosophical schools gave theological and ethical voice to Paganism, articulating what had been mute in archaic times and redirecting the tradition itself. In that sense the philosophers were the systematians of Paganism. When thus represented, Platonism can be seen as playing an integral and enriching role with the wider religious culture of Paganism, rather standing critically aloof from it. Its deployment in late antiquity as the rallying point of that tradition in the face of Christianity was a natural extension of its antecedent role and not a sudden flight from reason.

Moreover, Platonism throughout antiquity was never just a philosophy in the modern sense, that is, a problem solving set of conceptual techniques and a type of discourse centered on theoretical analysis. While it was certainly that, it was also—in Hadot’s now famous phrase—a “way of life.” This point follows from the broader representation of philosophy just iterated [7]. What Hadot grasped was the extent to which philosophy played the central role of ethical articulation and, most importantly, moral formation in antiquity. To be a philosopher meant, in some significant measure, to adopt a specific way of life associated with moral principles set down by one’s school and grounded in its metaphysics. Those ethical principles and practices radiated out beyond the schools themselves in the wider Pagan culture. But their epicenter was in the philosophical schools themselves. Thus to become a philosopher was sometimes akin to a conversion experience, as can be seen in Porphyry’s description of Plotinus’ adoption of philosophy at the age of 28 in his *Life of Plotinus* [8]. There we even learn that becoming a Platonist cured the gout of Rogatianus, the Roman Senator. Admittedly, not all ancient philosophers were austerely observant; some were just professional instructors of doctrine, as the young Plotinus’s disappointed search for a committed philosopher among the pedantic lecturers of Alexandria indicates. But the point remains that philosophy was culturally understood in antiquity to include a transformation of the self in accordance with a specific form of life.

This insight from Hadot is dispositive for our consideration of Platonism and early Christianity. Philosophical doctrines remained essential to the Platonist schools, as did dialectic and textual exegesis. But these were not stand-alone activities. Nor were they ends in themselves. They nested in a culturally sanctioned praxis that gave further meaning to these ideas, adding, if you will, a real life valence to those abstractions. Most significantly, the goal of philosophy was the cultivation of the person, not systematic theory formation. So to speak of Platonism in antiquity is, first and foremost, to refer to this full composite of theory and practice. But when we refer in contemporary scholarship, for example, to the “Platonism of Augustine,” we usually call attention only to a limited subset of what constituted ancient Platonism, perhaps some aspects of its doctrine or contemplative practices acquired

by Augustine second-hand. But that is a reductive use of the term “Platonist.” It bears mention that we have evidence of only a few ancient Christians who studied formally as members of a Platonist school—Origen, a student in the Alexandrian school of Ammonius, the teacher of Plotinus, being the best-known exception. So Christians were never really Platonists in antiquity when we understand more fully what being a Platonist actually meant. Their Platonism was informal and fragmentary and borrowed. And, most importantly, they did not remain under the direction of a Platonist scholar once they became Christians. For they followed a different way, and belonged to what came to be seen as a different and distinctive school, even if they were, in some important ways, fellow travellers with the Platonists.

An additional point requires reflection, one that follows from those just made. Early Christian thinkers were indeed influenced by the Platonists to varying degrees. But we need to be very wary of what this means when we make that assertion. It is easy enough to find concepts or theories whose original provenance was Platonist but it is tricky to determine what such concepts actually mean in their new contexts. As already noted, since meaning is closely associated with use, the patterns of practice in which these notions were originally embedded were critical to their actual significance. And so their new Christian contexts can subtly shift their semantics, losing earlier fields of association and acquiring new ones. We need only consider the challenge of tracking the meaning of *ousia* or *substantia* from philosophy into Christianity [9]. This caveat we should keep in mind as we turn to a final but crucial aspect of the philosophical association between Platonism and Christianity, one whose significance necessitates careful parsing. That is the development of a type of monotheism within the Pagan tradition.

“Pagan monotheism” seems like a category mistake of some sort, challenging the received narrative that monotheism is exclusively a product of the Jewish tradition. But a careful reading of ancient pagan theology makes it difficult to ignore its growing, indigenous effort to systematize the layered pastiche of gods and powers that had constituted the ancient pantheon. Moreover, that drive towards greater unity and coherence seems to have been conjoined to a desire for an account of divine justice beyond the intensely anthropomorphic stories of the classical gods. This dynamic generated a lengthy trajectory of theological discussion within the philosophical schools. For it was in those philosophical schools—as we have seen—that ancient Pagan culture did its thinking about the nature of divinity. That ancient discussion came to the fore during the classical period in Plato’s Academy, which generated a spectrum of philosophical theologies including those of Plato, Speusippus, Xenocrates, and Aristotle. Despite a limited period of neglect during the New Academy, the Platonist tradition remained committed to that theological project throughout antiquity, intensifying this concentration during the Roman period. And it was within the Platonic school that efforts were made to develop an account of a single divine principle that was responsible for the existence of all reality outside itself.

The theistic turn of Paganism was, needless to say, a convoluted process, finally coming to fruition in the Roman school of Plotinus around 250 A.D. This Platonic theism was distinctive in its logic, starting as it did by acceptance of multiple gods and then pressing towards a deeper divine unity behind the manifest image of plurality. Its logic was therefore different from that of Jewish or Christian monotheism and its modes of articulating the nature of the ultimate One were consequently distinctive in character. Great emphasis was placed on the hierarchy of divine powers, stretching out to the remote divine unity beyond the surface of divine manifestations in this world. The gods thus appeared as individuated aspects of the One, each with its own spiritual value, each an expression of divinity itself and a path to the One. This embrace of the power of multiple gods is captured by the famous expression of Symmachus: “not by one path alone to so great a mystery” [10]. That sentiment points beyond the many to the One, and for that reason Pagan monotheism relied on a logic of ultimacy in which the surface powers of the One were seen to point toward that initial divine source from which they had emerged. At the same time, Pagan monotheism traded on this notion of hierarchical depth so that specific characteristics found in the individual gods, e.g., personality or emotion, were understood to be grounded in the vast richness of the One itself.

Platonism was in the vanguard of these developments. Its special contribution was the articulation of metaphysical theology that served to elaborate this Pagan understanding of the divine. Several conceptual advances emerged within the Platonic schools that became essential to Pagan monotheism. First, the traditional hierarchical aspect of Pagan thinking about the Gods was supported by an ontology of degrees of reality. The notion of spatio-temporal transcendence also emerged, postulating a level of stability and perfection deeper than the world of change. That was the true level of reality, “being itself,” a world that was truly divine. And deep beyond the level of true being was the ultimate source of divinity and perfection, the One or Good itself. Central to this theology was an emphasis on the One’s position at a level exceeding all forms of finitude and the limitations of anthropomorphic description. Apophatic theology was the conceptual instrument for articulating this metaphysical depth, becoming the signature of Platonic monotheism after Plotinus. Platonic theology was thus committed to a higher world beyond the manifest image of the physical cosmos. It was, therefore, responsible for developing the critical notion of divine transcendence and the consequent understanding of the divine as being beyond space and time, and also as eternal. Moreover, Plotinus ascribed the positive notion of infinity to the One, revolutionizing the very notion of the divine. Henceforth the ultimate first principle would come to be understood as the infinite source of all finite reality. And, because it utterly transcended all finite beings, it could then be understood to be present to them in a non-spatial fashion. It was omnipresent because it was the ontological sustaining cause of all finite reality, spatially removed from all things, but most intimately present to them by their very existence. Beyond being, the One was the eternal root of all beings. Finally, this innovative understanding of the One was allied with another innovation, the rejection of *hyle* or matter as a fundamental principle of reality. Again it was Plotinus who struggled to dissolve the ancient commitment to a material principle, a substrate that served to underlie and resist the rational power of order. That thinking was characteristic of the cosmologies of Plato and Aristotle, and it remained a staple of Greco-Roman theology until Plotinus. But in later Platonism, the infinity of the One left, as it were, no conceptual room for an independent principle of matter upon which the ordering powers of the divine were applied. Everything emerged from the One, even matter, and, while it may have a role to play at the base of the process of emanation from the One, it was not an independent power over against the Good.

One additional aspect of the notion of transcendence bears special mention. Because the One was not a supreme being within space and time, it was not a being that could be reached, or contacted, or associated with. It was infinite and so, one might say, it was beyond relationality entirely. Therefore the spiritual vector began to shift among some Platonists, focusing no longer on a distant and remote supreme deity to whom propitiation and sacrifice might be offered. Instead the path to the transcendent One was to be found within the self. By going down into the self through the practice of dialectic and meditation, the soul could unite with its omnipresent spiritual source directly. Here Hadot’s insight mentioned above is especially apposite, for the practice of philosophy came to be seen among Platonists as the practice of transcendence, a disciplined way of life by which the soul could rediscover its roots in the infinite One beyond time, space and the material cosmos. While Platonists in the period after Plotinus would come to believe that most souls were unable to unite with the One completely during their current reincarnations, and so and required divine assistance in their journey through the practice of theurgy, they nonetheless maintained the contemplative path as the ultimate ideal.

It seems reasonable, in light of this powerful trajectory of philosophical theology, to describe the Platonists of late antiquity as harbingers of monotheism, even if the shape of their theology was different from that of the Jewish tradition. Indeed their thinking became the foundation for philosophical theology among early Christians and on into the medieval period for Muslims, Jews and Christians alike. But Platonic theism was, nonetheless, a distinctive tradition, emerging from Pagan thought and part of its ambient religious culture. It nested within that culture and gave voice to it. So to understand Augustine and Platonism we need to keep in mind this broader understanding of Platonism within the religious life of late antique Paganism, for it was far more than a philosophy in

the restricted modern sense. Thus prepared, we are ready to observe Augustine read “the books of the Platonists.”

2. “Certain Rich Books”

Augustine’s discovery of the Platonism of the school of Plotinus was a momentous event in his life. Not only does his autobiographical account in the *Confessions* feature the transformative effect of his reading of some books of the Platonists, but also his earliest treatises, written at Cassiciacum before his baptism, corroborate that story. We might begin by considering those initial works. Here is Augustine’s breathless report of that encounter from *Against the Skeptics* 2.2.5, written in the autumn of 386, found in his dedication to his patron Romanianus, a Manichee [11]:

And notice, when certain rich books exhaled over us, . . . costly substances from Arabia, and poured a few tiny drops of the most precious perfume onto that little flame, incredibly, Romanianus, incredibly, and even more powerfully than you might believe about me—what more can I say?—unbelievable even to me, those books excited within me a conflagration . . . Truly I was returning completely to myself. As if on a journey, I confess, I looked back upon that religion which had been grafted into us as boys and entwined in our marrow. Indeed it was taking hold of me but I didn’t realize it. And so, hesitatingly, I grabbed the works of the apostle Paul . . . I read all of it intently and carefully.

This is a very revealing passage, exhibiting the incendiary exuberance of Augustine’s first reading of Platonism. But we should note—for future purposes—where that reading quickly leads: to the letters of St. Paul.

Against the Skeptics 3.17.37 explains that it is through Platonism that Augustine discovered the notion of a transcendent, intelligible world [12]. Platonism is the “one discipline of truest philosophy” (*una uerissimae philosophiae disciplina*) that is not the philosophy of this world, but of that other, intelligible world. At *On the Happy Life* 1.4, another early work, Augustine reports, in its dedication to the aristocratic Christian philosopher Manlius Theodorus, that he has been reading Plotinus and comparing his thought to the divine mysteries of the scriptures [13]:

After reading a few books of Plotinus, for whom I gather you are very keen, I compared them as best I could with the authority of those who handed down the divine mysteries, and I was so inflamed that I’d have broken away from all anchors, if the judgment of several men hadn’t forced me back.

These texts exhibit one crucial point for understanding the import of Platonism to Augustine. It is quite clear that Augustine did not regard Platonism as a live option for himself, but rather as a separate tradition whose insights offered a new way to interpret the Christian scriptures. Its value was, therefore, supplemental and hermeneutical.

What was the powerful appeal of Platonism to Augustine? Quite simply, it was the radical notion of transcendence, the lynchpin of Platonic monotheism. In book five of the *Confessions*, Augustine insists that his inability to grasp reality in any terms other than material terms was the primary and almost the sole cause of the religious confusions of his early life [14]. When he was a young Catholic catechumen in North Africa, he was taught a physical conception of God drawn from the Bible. As a Manichee, he subscribed to an attenuated form of religious materialism, with two cosmic forces locked in opposition. In neither instance did he encounter the idea of a transcendent God existing outside time and space. In saying this, however, more than just a theoretical mistake about God was involved. That reading misses the full dimension of what might be called the culture of transcendence to which Hadot drew attention. Augustine encountered in Platonism a conjunction of metaphysics and ethics that required a complete change of life if taken seriously, a conversion to *philosophia*. And, as the texts quoted above indicate, Augustine was well aware of this.

Augustine’s earliest accounts of contemplation tell us about his soul’s inner access to this other plane of reality. In these early works, Augustine offers a series of inner ascension schemes, iterations of

the levels by which the soul can deepen its hold on transcendence. Examples of these early ascension schemes—which I have examined in a recent monograph—can be found at: *On the Immortality of the Soul* 33.70 ff., *On Genesis, against the Manichees* 25.43, *On True Religion* xxvi.49, *On the Sermon on the Mount* 1.3.10–11, and *On Christian Teaching* 2.vii. 9–11 [15]. There are several aspects of these texts that warrant particular notice. The insight of transcendence found in “the books of the Platonists” brought with it the associated Platonic conception that the human soul was not fixed at one level in the hierarchy of reality, but was in fact capable of advancement towards the divine. Again, this is a notion found in the earliest, pre-baptismal works of Augustine, e.g., *Against the Skeptics* 3.19.42 where we find that fallen and embodied souls can re-associate with a more perfect level of reality [16]. Crucially for Augustine, this is not something that souls can do through philosophy alone. That was the position of the school of Plotinus, though not of other Platonist schools. Augustine insists this is possible only through intervention by “the highest God,” who exercises clemency for humans through the Incarnation. Divine assistance is, therefore, necessary to effect the ascent of the fallen soul even at this earliest stage in Augustine’s thinking. This is another instance of the immediate adaptation of critical Platonic themes into a Christian context by Augustine. Indeed, throughout the ascension narratives in the early works just listed, the Augustinian soul is understood to advance through contemplation towards a deepening association with the transcendent God only because of divine assistance through Christ the mediator. Transcendence is not a self-catalyzing state within the soul. Inner ascension is beyond the powers of the soul, for the reversal of its fall is beyond its moral capacity. That is the coordinated insight that emerges together with the recognition of transcendence in Augustine from the beginning. For this reason, he does not see the philosophical life as an effective path to transcendence as did Plotinus. Nor does he regard intelligible contemplation of the ideas as the powerful engine of psychic advancement as Platonists did. Instead he revises Plotinian Platonism, describing the soul’s interior ascension to a higher transcendent level primarily in terms of its moral transfiguration, its assumption of a likeness to God through divine grace. That divine grace is available to the Christian soul through the scriptures, whose depth is disclosed in spiritual interpretation of the texts. For Augustine the soul’s interior ascension is rooted in its moral transformation as it restores its likeness to the transcendent by God’s own assistance. In this we can see quite clearly the transformation of the Plotinian notion of transcendental contemplation, retaining its conception of degrees of reality but shifting its significance. Rather than being an ontological account of the soul’s latent power in relation to the divine One, as in Plotinus, Augustine’s account of contemplation becomes a narrative of the soul’s restoration of its personal association with a transcendent God who intervenes in its life. In this special sense, Augustine’s account of transcendence ceases to be metaphysical and becomes specifically Christian and theological. It interprets the soul’s breakthrough into a higher level of reality as a gift from God, something that can be understood only when read against the larger Christian understanding of salvation disclosed through revelation. We are thus at once in a zone of Platonic metaphysics, but now substantially revised and adapted to Christianity.

3. Platonism and Confessions VII

This can be seen with clarity in Augustine’s recounting of his discovery of Platonism in the *Confessions*. The early ascension texts are—to some extent—works in progress, in which Augustine grapples with these complex ideas drawn from Platonist and Christian sources. In contrast, book seven of the *Confessions* presents an autobiographical account that is, by this stage in Augustine’s development, both reflectively nuanced and theoretically well formed. There is one striking claim that comes through in Augustine’s narrative: his discovery of transcendence through reading the dispositive insight that allowed him to become an orthodox Christian. While it is true that Augustine is concerned to leverage Platonism in his polemic attacks on Manichaeism, the story he tells offers one of the most arresting personal accounts of transcendental contemplation in Western literature. At once Platonic in ontological architecture, the ascension narratives are framed in Christian theological terms

and offer a Christian account of the soul's interior ascension to the transcendent. That pattern of conceptual transposition is, as we have seen, consistent with the early works just discussed.

Book seven of the *Confessions* is the defining text for understanding the significance of Platonism to Augustine. As he begins to relate the catalytic events of his conversion narrative, Augustine has prepared his readers for his encounter with Platonism. He carefully stages this moment conceptually with a menu of philosophical options before him. He is, as Book VII begins, the new municipal rhetor of the imperial court city of Milan, lately a member of the proscribed Manichaeism sect, but now enrolled as a Catholic catechumen—at least for the moment [17]. That decision is presented both as a matter of expediency and also as a result of hearing the preaching of Ambrose on the spiritual meaning of the Old Testament [18]. But it was not the result of any deep conviction. Book VII starts by placing the dualistic materialism of Manichaeism in the foreground. But just as telling is what can be discerned in the background. First there is his acquiescence to a refined, Ciceronian skepticism, something that he had fallen into as he despaired of the philosophical cogency of Manichaeism. And that refined skepticism had allowed him to become a catechumen, since he had come to countenance the rationality of Catholic biblical exegesis thanks to Ambrose, even if he was as yet unconvinced. Moreover he says that the precedents of his parents—particularly one suspects primarily Monica—also commended that path. Yet something stood in the way of adopting his ancestral religion. What was it? At the beginning of Book VII he is quite clear about the issue: Catholicism, as he had known it, lacked a spiritual, non-materialist understanding of God and, in consequence, was unable to answer the problem of evil to his satisfaction. Augustine is thus registering the fundamental inadequacy of both the materialism of Manichaeism and, more subtly, of the Catholicism of his youth. Yet this should not come as a shock to his readers. Even in the account of his adolescence, he underscores the fact that he was unaware of the existence of another level of reality [19]. He had not encountered that critical insight during his youth as a catechumen in North Africa, and, as a result, he believes that he was prone to accept the apparently sophisticated materialist theology of the Manichees when he came to study in Carthage.

Book VII opens with a lengthy discussion of Augustine's present difficulties in conceiving God in terms that are not material. Strikingly he interprets this failure not just as being cognitive, but also as moral, for it is the product of his vanity [20]. This transitive connection between moral status and cognitive capacity will remain a constant in the account that follows. Augustine states that he had long rejected anthropomorphic depictions of God and is now pleased to discover that this was in fact the position of the Catholic Church. Using the persistent vocative discourse that characterizes the *Confessions* as a whole, he insists to God: "And I, so very human, was attempting to know you, the highest and only, and true God; and I sincerely believed that you are incorruptible and imperishable and immutable" [21]. He now had the conviction that the corruptible was inferior to the incorruptible, the perishable to the imperishable, the mutable to the immutable. But whole-hearted belief was not enough, for his thinking failed to achieve the theoretical level of real knowledge. Instead, when he attempted to think in conceptual terms, he was unable to free his thoughts from physical images [22]. As a result, Augustine confesses to God that he was forced to think of him—though incorruptible, imperishable, and immutable—as occupying space, whether infused throughout the world or infinitely diffused outside it [23]. He thought that if he deprived anything of space, it would seem to him to be nothing, just absence and void [24]. As result his conception of God remained spatial, as a force pervading the cosmos. He realized that this material thinking committed him to a deity who could be present physically to a greater or lesser extent. And so an elephant, he says, would be thought to contain more of God than the sparrow [25].

This materialistic theology was not just misguided; it was dangerous. And here we come to some of the most arresting aspects of Augustine's Platonic moment in Book VII. Augustine maintains that he had found no adequate account of the origin of evil. He also insists that the materialism of the Manichees and their understanding of evil as a malevolent element had compromised their characters, making them malicious and unable to recognize how they participated in evil personally. He fears that if he believed that God was material and mutable, he would himself become the evil he was trying to

explain [26]. So ideas have direct moral consequences and thus the search for truth about God is also a search for a true path to God. It is pagan Platonism that will partially supply that. To sort out that counterintuitive claim, we need to attend closely to what Augustine claims about the intellectual and moral limitations of his catechumenal state.

Augustine had been listening to the theological content of Ambrose's sermons, not just their rhetorical style, and had been told that free will is the source of evil. But he could not come to grips with that claim because he was unable to understand how a good and incorruptible God could have generated a soul capable of evil. Yet he had acquired from Ambrose a fairly full understanding of Catholicism which he lists: that God exists and is immutable, that God cares for humanity and judges us, and that God has provided a means of salvation into a future life after death through Christ, as taught in the scriptures of the Catholic Church [27]. These central doctrines of Catholicism seemed to him certain but nonetheless insufficient. And his soul was still in torment. Why? The answer he offers is that while God was within him, his soul was still in external things, both intellectually and morally. His attention was culpably fixed on external things that distracted him and gave his soul no rest. These external things were inferior to his soul, yet he was as yet unaware of that. Instead inferior and external things weighed down upon him, allowing him neither rest nor even a chance to breathe. Once again, he admits to God that the agony of his soul is rooted in his pride (*superbia*). His language grows desperate, mixing moral with cognitive failure. External things attack his soul, forming an obstacle to his return to God. For the swelling of his pride had closed his eyes. But God, the inner physician, will now heal his soul with new certainty by disclosing the curative power of interior perception [28].

Enter Platonism, providentially put before Augustine by God, not as the way to him, but only as propaedeutic to his complete conversion [29]. It will supply the critical idea he has been missing: transcendence. There should be no surprise in this, for, as we have already discussed, immateriality was the foundation of Platonic monotheism. It will now assume that role in Augustine's Catholicism. Augustine does not identify the Platonist texts themselves, only that they were Platonist treatises, translated from Greek into Latin, and acquired from an unnamed man inflated with immense self-regard [30]. They were almost certainly a mixture of texts from the *Enneads* of Plotinus and from his student Porphyry. Augustine is quick to offer his reader a concordance of the ideas of Platonism and Catholicism. He identifies a series of closely related ideas, along with divergences. To accomplish this, he uses language drawn from the prologue to the gospel of John and from Philippians to articulate Platonic doctrines over against Christian teachings. These include the following [31]:

1. Platonism is monotheistic. It teaches that there is a God that is the creator of the cosmos through the divine Word. It is this divine light that made all things and shines into human souls.
2. Platonism also maintains that this light is distinct from the human soul, for the divine Word is separate from the things it generates. The Word is thus a creative power and the source of the illumination of souls.
3. Platonists also recognize that, though the Word made the world, the world is ignorant of that creative light. Yet Platonists do not teach that the Word came into the world so that humans may become sons of God.
4. Thus the Platonists understand that Word is of God and divine. But they do not recognize that the Word became flesh.
5. Moreover, the Platonist books express in a variety of ways and in different terms that the Word is equal to the Father and has the same nature as the Father. Augustine shifts to Philippians 2:6–11 to express this claim. But he also recognizes that most of what Paul says in that passage is missing from Platonism: the kenosis of the Word, his actual incarnation, his obedient death, and his exaltation by the Father.

6. Finally, Platonists discern that the Son abides before and above all time with the Father. It is by participation in the fullness of Son that souls are renewed by his wisdom within them. That the Son died for the impious is not to be found there.
7. Augustine closes this assessment of the relative claims of Platonic and Catholic theism with a strongly worded recognition that, despite these similarities, he also found in Platonism a commitment to pagan polytheistic cultic practices. Referencing Genesis 25 and Acts 7, he decries and rejects the polytheistic idolatry of Platonism [32].

After taking careful stock of Platonism from a Christian standpoint, Augustine turns to the first account of his discovery of transcendence at VII.10.16. This ascension narrative is the culmination of the earlier sections that unfolded his gradual approach to Platonism. Now we see the dramatic results. Let's examine the first portion of this passage as his initial reading of "the books of the Platonists" reorients him towards the resources of the interior self [33]:

Thus admonished to return to myself, I entered into my innermost depths with you as my guide, and I was able to do so because you had become my helper. I entered and with the eye of my soul, such as it was, saw above that eye of the soul an immutable light higher than my mind—not the everyday light visible to all bodies, nor a greater light of the same type that might shine more clearly and fill everything with its magnitude. It was not that light but another, entirely different from all others. Nor was it above my mind in the way that oil is on top of water or the sky is above the earth. Rather it was superior because it made me, and I was inferior because I was made by it.

The passage begins by underscoring the interior vector found in the Platonic books, a turn away from materiality and physicality towards the depths of the self. Strikingly this is accomplished not by the native powers of the soul as in Plotinian Platonism, but by divine guidance. We are immediately alerted to Augustine's Christian assimilation of this Platonic theme of interiority. Through the eye of the soul (*oculus animae*) Augustine's soul discerns the light of reason, a light upon which its existence depends. It is the light of a creative power that transcends the physical world but shines within the interior self. Augustine then develops that insight further [34]:

Whoever knows the truth knows it, and whoever knows it knows eternity. Love knows it. O eternal truth and true love and beloved eternity, you are my God. To you I sigh day and night. When I first knew you, you raised me up so that I might see that what I saw was being, and that I who saw it was not yet being. And you repelled the weakness of my gaze by shining ardently upon me and I shuddered with love and awe. And I discovered myself far from you in a region of dissimilarity and heard, as it were, a voice from on high: "I am the bread of the fully grown; grow and you will feed on me. And you will not change me into yourself, as with food for your body, but you will be changed into me."

The soul has achieved indubitable knowledge through interior contemplation. A higher level of reality beyond the material world is disclosed within the depths of the soul, changing entirely its focus from the exterior and physical to the interior and immaterial. There truth itself is to be found and that truth is eternal and entirely real. In the terminology of the Platonists books, it is true being, eternal and immutable. But what allows the soul to achieve that level within itself is divine love, which lifts it to this knowledge of being and truth, while underscoring that the soul is not yet at that level of eternal and stable reality. The passage ends with explicit eucharistic imagery, foreshadowing Christian sacramental practices that promise to secure the soul's hold on the divine light, now known with certainty yet also beyond its present fallen state. This reminds the readers that Augustine is not describing a merely notional grasp of the idea of transcendence. For as the Platonist books make plain, transcendent reality is only known by a soul that has been morally transformed and purified of material desires and imagery. Being itself is cognitively accessible only through participation, by a soul whose nature allows it to achieve sufficient contemplative depth. Augustine is describing in this

text such an instance of his soul's participation in being itself, but he is also careful to underscore that he can do so only through divine assistance, not on his own.

Augustine then addresses the fundamental problem he identified earlier, his inability to grasp immaterial reality [35]:

And I said: But truth isn't nothing even if it is not diffused through finite or infinite space? And you cried from far off: "Truly, I am who am." And I heard as one hears in the heart, and from that moment there was no longer any doubt. It would have been easier to doubt that I was alive than that there is no truth perceived by the intellect through the things that are made.

Now he knows within the recesses of his innermost self that there is a reality that transcends spatiality. That knowledge has come to him with indubitable force because God has disclosed—in the terms of Exodus 3:14—that he is being itself. Through interior contemplation the intellect can indeed intelligibly perceive transcendent reality beyond the created and material world.

This insight is reiterated at VII.17.23 [36]:

And I marveled that at last I loved you, not a phantom in place of you. Yet I was not stable enough to enjoy my God, but was swept up to you by your beauty and then torn away from you by my weight. I collapsed with a groan into inferior things. That weight was my sexual habit. Yet the memory of you remained with me and I had no sort of doubt that to whom I should cling, though I was not yet able to do that.

Here Augustine begins by underscoring that his ability to participate in the transcendent God because of his impoverished moral state, collapsing back down to the material level on which his soul was principally focused. He describes that ascent and descent in detail, articulating how his soul passed through five levels of interior cognition: the body, the soul that perceives the body, the inward force of the soul itself, the power of discursive reasoning, and lastly, intellect itself [37]:

Then I was inquiring why I approved the beauty of bodies, whether celestial or terrestrial, and on what basis I made unqualified judgments about mutable things, saying: this ought to be thus and that ought not to be thus. While asking on what basis I made the judgments I was making, I discovered the unchanging and actual eternity of truth above my changeable mind. And so by stages I went from bodies to the soul which senses through the body, and from there to its inner force, to which bodily senses report external things; that is as far as beasts can go. And from there I went on to the power of reasoning to which is referred for judgment that which arises from the bodily senses. This power itself, ascertaining within me its mutability, raised itself up to its own understanding. It led its thinking away from that which is habitual, withdrawing itself from contradictory swarms of fantasies so that it might discover the light strewn upon it, and then, without any doubt, it could declare that the immutable is preferable to the mutable. On this basis it could know the immutable, for unless it could know the immutable in this way, there would be no way to prefer the immutable to the mutable with certainty. And so in the flash of a trembling glance it reached that which is. Then I clearly saw your invisible things understood through the things that are made. But I did not have the strength to keep my gaze fixed. My weakness rebounded and I returned to my customary state. I bore with me only a cherished memory and a desire, as it were, for something I had smelled but could not yet eat.

The immaterial level of reality is again reached in a moment out of time and then it is lost to the fallen soul. Platonism is, therefore, right about its ontological claims of transcendence. The immediacy of Augustine's first-person narrative underscores this. But he also regards Plotinian Platonism's confidence in the efficacy of interior contemplation as misplaced, precisely because the soul's nature

is insufficient to effect its purification of materiality. If epistemology and ethics are intertwined, as in Platonism, then the soul's conversion is necessary for participatory knowledge of God. But for Augustine that conversion of soul is beyond its native resources. The fall has restricted the soul's capacity for moral transformation. That is possible only by divine assistance. Thus Platonism is indeed crucial for Augustine because of its fundamental insight into divine transcendence. Yet it offers no stable access to that level of reality, and, to the extent that it makes that claim, it is false and presumptuous. Plotinian Platonists have complete confidence in the power of contemplative vision, of intelligible perception of truth and beauty, to which the soul can restore its essential kinship. The transcendentals, the intelligibles, are knowable by participation because the soul is a precipitant from that level and maintains its connectivity to it. The paradox of Augustine's view of Platonism is thus exposed. He has succeeded in knowing the transcendent truth that the books of the Platonists promised only because the Christian God intervened in his life. It was Christianity's revealed understanding of God that disclosed the efficacy of grace and the soul's need for divine intervention.

The end of Book VII—sections 20.26–21.27—contains a withering critique of Plotinian claims to contemplative soteriology. This, far more than their acceptance of polytheistic cult, is the source of the failure of the Platonists according to Augustine. Its conversionary insights notwithstanding, Platonism is profoundly flawed in its assessment of the human soul. In their pride, Platonists have doubled down on the fall, recapitulating its desire for self-assertion and its misplaced sense of personal worth. By attributing the power of self-salvation to the soul, the Platonists have presumed a divinity natural to the soul, one in which it does not in fact share. The presumption of the Platonists is contrasted with the humble confession of Christians who know that a return to the transcendent presence of God is available only by the incarnation of Christ. The Platonists have, in consequence, no sense of a Christian's tears of confession, a contrite and humble spirit, the need for redemption. None of this makes sense to those whose pride leads them to believe in the native divinity of their souls. But Augustine's life has taught him otherwise. Platonism has led him to transcendence, but not to salvation. For Augustine, that is the critical fault line between orthodox Christianity and pagan Platonism as he encountered it.

These instances of contemplation are essential to Augustine's conversion narrative, securing personal, interior, and immediate knowledge of a transcendent God. While catalyzed by reading the books of the Platonists, they also demonstrate the extent to which the core commitment of Platonism to a transcendent One accessible by contemplation has been assimilated into Christian theology. For Augustine, Platonism taught a profound understanding of God, one that demolished for him—with performative certainty—his earlier materialist conception of the divine and secured a new recognition that evil was not a substance opposed to God. All that now fell away and the path to monotheism was clear. But that conviction was not undisturbed, as a reading of *Confessions* XII indicates ([14], pp. 130–36). There Augustine takes on an array of opponents who are resolutely committed to materialistic theology, including Manichees of course, but also orthodox Catholics who retain a literal interpretation of the scriptures and a non-transcendental conception of God. Like the Catholics of his North African youth, they refuse to countenance his transcendentalism and his "spiritual" reading of scripture. This underscores further the value of Platonism to him and its prominence in his conversion narrative. For it was now his tacit ally in the struggle with materialism. In Platonism Augustine had discovered what he regarded as a revolutionary understanding of God. When he turned away from the Manichaeism of Faustus in *Confessions* VI, he turned towards the classical liberal arts. Platonism represented the height of classical intellectualism and its conception of a transcendent and infinite God was the most conceptually sophisticated theology of his time. Without transcendence, Catholicism was closed to him, for it made no coherent sense of good and evil. But with that insight, Catholicism seemed the summation of truth and its scriptures now appeared rich with the story of an immaterial God who took on materiality and entered time for our salvation. As a result of his providential reading of Platonism, the idea of transcendence changed everything for Augustine.

4. Conclusion: “None come closer to us than these”

That is Augustine’s mature judgment on the Platonists in his late masterpiece *City of God*. As we come now to a conclusion, we can see clearly why he would think that this is so. In the Book VIII Augustine’s estimation of the nature and value of Platonism dovetails with the account of *Confessions* VII. As he says in making that assessment [38]:

If therefore Plato said that the wise person imitates and knows and loves this God, and that whoever participates in him is happy, what use is there to examine other philosophies? None come closer to us than these.

It would be a surprise if he thought otherwise. It is the Platonists alone who stand out above all other philosophers because of their rejection of materialism [39]:

Therefore we see that these philosophers have been justly preferred to the others since they discerned that nothing material is God and for that reason they transcended everything material in searching for God.

Unlike materialist philosophers whose minds were so focused on the body and who could only conceive of physical causes, the Platonists recognized the true God who is the author of all things, the illuminator of truth, and the bestower of happiness.

Augustine has, by the time he writes *City of God*, a much clearer grasp of the role of theurgy in Platonism than he had when he wrote *Confessions*, especially the practices of the school of Iamblichus and his followers. Indeed he tends to ascribe this cultic commitment to all the Platonists and to regard it as the root their inadequacy, drawing them into polytheistic worship unworthy of their philosophical monotheism [40]. But despite this failure, he accords to the Platonists a striking level of respect in *City of God* precisely because of their grasp of the soul’s capacity to find the one, true, transcendent God. Here is a final text that exhibits the preeminent value of Platonism to Augustine. After praising Platonism in contrast to other philosophies, Augustine explains that their superiority is rooted in their philosophical monotheism [41]:

They have so understood God that they have discovered him to be the cause of being, the principle of understanding, the rule of life. These three might be thought to pertain: first to what is natural, second to what is rational, and third to what is moral. For if man was thus created, then through that which is superior within him he might touch that which exceeds all, that is, the one, true, supremely good God, without which no nature exists, no teaching instructs, no experience gains. God should be sought, where for us all things are connected. He should be discerned, where for us all things are discerned. He should be loved, where for us all things are morally right.

It is time now to come to terms with this generous attitude towards pagan Platonism and to take stock of what we might call the “inclusive” Augustine. What brought Platonism so close to Augustine’s Catholicism was its commitment to what we might call its “transcendentalism,” that cluster of ideas and practices we have traced. These include the cultivation of interior contemplation within the soul, its disclosure of higher spiritual levels of reality, and its commitment to an infinite One or Good which the source of finite reality. The Platonists were right on all this and deserved respect for that reason. To Augustine, this transcendentalism became the core of his understanding of God and the soul, the two things he set out to understand at the time of his conversion [42]. That conversionary insight, catalyzed by reading “the books of the Platonists,” never left him. It opened the way for him to read the scriptures and explore the amazing depths of hidden spiritual meanings that he assures his readers can be found there. He set out from his earliest writings to infuse Catholic Christianity with that transformative vision. But at the same time he came to regard the transcendentalism of the Platonism to be inadequate. It failed to understand the impoverished state of the fallen soul. It was ignorant of the incarnation of the Word, and so deficient both in its soteriology and its understanding

of the true nature of God. Only Catholic Christianity offered a true and adequate account, completing what the Platonists had been able only to sketch in outline. The Platonists were indeed closer to Catholic Christianity than any other philosophical school, but Augustine was never a Platonist. He was a Christian who discovered the truth, only partially found in Platonism, to be fully disclosed in Catholicism. No other philosophy made such compelling sense of God and the soul.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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11. Augustine. *Contra Academicos* 2.2.5: Cum ecce tibi libri quidam pleni, ut ait Celsinus, bonas res arabicas ubi exhalantur in nos, ubi illi flammulae instillarunt pretiosissimi unguenti guttas paucissimas; incredibile, Romaniane, incredibile, et ultra quam de me fortasse et tu credis; quid amplius dicam? etiam mihi ipsi de meipso incredibile incendium concitarunt.
12. *Contra Academicos* 3.17.37: Platonem sensisse duos esse mundos: unum intellegibilem, in quo ipsa veritas habitaret; istum autem sensibilem, quem manifestum est nos visu tactuque sentire. Itaque illum verum, hunc veri similem et ad illius imaginem factum.
13. Augustine. *De Beata Vita* 1.4: Lectis autem Plotini paucisismis libris, cuius te esse studiosissimum accepi, conlataque cum eis, quantum potui, etiam illorum auctoritate, qui diuina mysteria tradiderunt, sic exarsi, ut omnes illas uellem ancoras rumpere, nisi me nonnullorum hominum existimatio commoueret.
14. John Peter Kenney. "Early Catholic Treatises." In *Contemplation and Classical Christianity: A Study in Augustine*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
15. Augustine. *Confessiones* V.10.19.
16. *Contra Academicos* 3.19.42: Non enim est ista huius mundi philosophia, quam sacra nostra meritissime detestantur, sed alterius intellegibilis; cui animas multiformibus erroris tenebris caecatas, et altissimis a corpore sordibus oblitas, nunquam ista ratio subtilissima revocaret, nisi summus Deus populari quadam clementia divini intellectus auctoritatem usque ad ipsum corpus humanum declinaret, atque submitteret; cuius non solum praeceptis, sed etiam factis excitatae animae redire in semetipsas, et respiscere patriam, etiam sine disputationum concertatione potuissent.
17. *Confessiones* V.14.25.
18. *Confessiones* V.14.24.
19. *Confessiones* III.7.12.
20. *Confessiones* VII.1.1.
21. *Confessiones* VII.1.1: et conabar cogitare te, homo et talis homo, summum et solum et verum deum, et te incorruptibilem et inviolabilem et incommutabilem totis medullis credebam.

22. “phantasmata” is the term used.
23. *Confessiones* VII.1.1: sive infusum mundo sive etiam extra mundum per infinita diffusum.
24. *Confessiones* VII.1.1: quoniam quidquid privabam spatiis talibus nihil mihi esse videbatur, sed prorsus nihil, ne inane quidem.
25. *Confessiones* VII.1.2.
26. *Confessiones* VII.3.4.
27. *Confessiones* VII.7.11.
28. *Confessiones* VII.8.12: mihi per interiorem aspectum certus esses.
29. *Confessiones* VII.20.26.
30. VII.9.13: procurasti mihi per quendam hominem immanissimo typho turgidum quosdam platoniorum libros ex graeca lingua in latinam versos. For a discussion of the likely texts, translated by Marius Victorinus (cf. VIII. 2.3) see James O'Donnell. *The Confessions of Augustine*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, vol. 2, *loc. cit.*
31. *Confessiones* VII.8.13–14.
32. *Confessiones* VII.9.15.
33. *Confessiones* VII.10.16: Et inde admonitus redire ad memet ipsum, intravi in intima mea, duce te, et potui, quoniam factus es adiutor meus. intravi et vidi qualicumque oculo animae meae supra eundem oculum animae meae, supra mentem meam, lucem incommutabilem: non hanc vulgarem et conspicuam omni carni, nec quasi ex eodem genere grandior erat, tamquam si ista multo multoque clarius claresceret totumque occuparet magnitudine. non hoc illa erat, sed aliud, aliud valde ab istis omnibus. nec ita erat supra mentem meam, sicut oleum super aquam, nec sicut caelum super terram; sed superior, quia ipsa fecit me, et ego inferior, quia factus ab ea.
34. *Confessiones* VII.10.16: qui novit veritatem, novit eam, et qui novit eam, novit aeternitatem. caritas novit eam. o aeterna veritas et vera caritas et cara aeternitas! tu es deus meus, tibi suspiro die ac nocte. et cum te primum cognovi, tu assumisti me, ut viderem esse, quod viderem, et nondum me esse, qui viderem. et reverberasti infirmitatem aspectus mei, radians in me vehementer, et contremui amore et horrore: et inveni longe me esse a te in regione dissimilitudinis, tamquam audirem vocem tuam de excelso: cibus sum grandium: cresce et manducabis me. nec tu me in te mutabis sicut cibum carnis tuae, sed tu mutaberis in me.
35. *Confessiones* VII.10.16: et cognovi, quoniam pro iniquitate erudisti hominem, et tabescere fecisti sicut araneam animam meam, et dixi: numquid nihil est veritas, quoniam neque per finita neque per infinita locorum spatia diffusa est? et clamasti de longinquo: ego sum qui sum. et audivi, sicut auditor in corde, et non erat prorsus unde dubitarem, faciliusque dubitarem vivere me, quam non esse veritatem, quae per ea, quae facta sunt, intellecta conspiciuntur.
36. *Confessiones* VII.17.23: Et mirabar, quod iam te amabam, non pro te plantasma: et non stabam frui deo meo, sed rapiebar ad te decore tuo, moxque diripiebar abs te pondere meo, et ruebam in ista cum gemitu; et pondus hoc consuetudo carnalis. sed mecum erat memoria tui, neque ullo modo dubitabam esse, cui cohaerem, sed nondum me esse, qui cohaerem.
37. *Confessiones* VII.17.23: quaerens enim, unde adprobarem pulchritudinem corporum sive caelestium sive terrestrium, et quid mihi praesto esset integre de mutabilibus, iudicanti et dicenti, hoc ita esse debet, illud non ita: hoc ergo quaerens, unde iudicarem, cum ita iudicarem, inveneram incommutabilem et veram veritatis aeternitatem supra mentem meam commutabilem. atque ita gradatim a corporibus ad sentientem per corpus animam, atque inde ad eius interiorem vim, cui sensus corporis exteriora nuntiaret, et quousque possunt bestiae, atque inde rursus ad ratiocinantem potentiam, ad quam refertur iudicandum, quod sumitur a sensibus corporis. quae se quoque in me comperiens mutabilem, erexit se ad intelligentiam suam, et abduxit cogitationem a consuetudine, subtrahens se contradicentibus turbis phantasmatum, ut inveniret, quo lumine aspergeretur; cum sine ulla dubitatione clamaret incommutabile praefendum esse mutabili, unde nosset ipsum incommutabile – quod nisi aliquo modo nosset, nullo modo illud mutabili certa praeponeret – et pervenit ad id, quod est, in ictu trepidantis aspectus. tunc vero invisibilia tua per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspexi, sed aciem figere non evalui, et repercussa infirmitate redditus solitis, non mecum ferebam nisi amantem memoriam et quasi olefacta desiderantem, quae comedere nondum possem.
38. Augustine. *De civitate Dei* 8. 5: Si ergo Plato Dei huius imitatore cognitore amatorem dixit esse sapientem, cuius participatione sit beatus, quid opus est excutere ceteros? Nulli nobis quam isti propius accesserunt.
39. *De civitate Dei* 8. 6: Viderunt ergo isti philosophi, quos ceteris non immerito fama atque gloria praelatos videmus, nullum corpus esse Deum, et ideo cuncta corpora transcenderunt quaerentes Deum.

40. *De ciuitate Dei* 8. 12 ff.
41. *De ciuitate Dei* 8. 4: aliquid tale de Deo sentiunt, ut in illo inueniatur et causa subsistendi et ratio intellegendi et ordo vivendi; quorum trium unum ad naturalem, alterum ad rationalem, tertium ad moralem partem intellegitur pertinere. Si enim homo ita creatus est, ut per id, quod in eo praecellit, attingat illud, quod cuncta praecellit, id est unum verum optimum Deum, sine quo nulla natura subsistit, nulla doctrina instruit, nullus usus expedit: ipse quaeratur, ubi nobis certa sunt omnia; ipse cernatur, ubi nobis certa sunt omnia; ipse diligatur, ubi nobis recta sunt omnia.
42. Augustine. *Soliloquia* 2.7.



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