Beyond Public and Private: A Theological Transfiguration

by

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Duke University

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Kathryn Tanner

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Graduate Program in Religion in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I argue that the conceptual grammar of Augustine’s thought provides a way of re-thinking the public/private distinction as it has been developed in modernity. The dissertation consists of two parts. The first part is a conceptual analysis and a genealogy of the distinction through focus on specific private characters produced in both antiquity and modernity. I focus on the characters of the “woman” and the “refugee.” Conceptually, I argue that the public/private distinction can be seen both as an anthropological distinction and as a socio-political distinction: claims about the structure, nature, and history of selves have implications for how society ought to be organized, and claims about how society ought to be organized have implications about the structure, nature, and history of selves. I show how Christianity changed society by creating new character scripts and with them, new socio-political possibilities. The second part of the dissertation provides one Augustinian conceptual “grammar” that makes sense of the revolution Christianity effected possible, and it responds to problems raised by the genealogy in the first half by providing a close reading of Augustine’s texts relating to God and creation, interiority, salvation and beatitude, and the Virgin Mary. I display the logic in Augustine’s thought by which, in God, domestic and public come together, how God’s relation to creation changes how to think about interiority, what that means for how Augustine understands salvation as a restoration of proper inwardness, and how the character of the Virgin Mary condenses the grammar as a sacrament of human salvation. I draw out the ways that Mary shows how Augustinian thought provides resources to think “beyond” the public/private distinction both as it was given to her in antiquity and how it has been received in modernity.
For my parents, James Craig Larsen and Lori Nita Larsen
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List of Abbreviations

ST  
\textit{Summa Theologiae}^1

M  
\textit{Monologion}^2

Standard References for Works of Augustine^3

beata v.  
\textit{On the Happy Life}

b. coniug.  
\textit{On the Good of Marriage}

cat. rud.  
\textit{On Teaching the Uninstructed}

civ.  
\textit{City of God}

conf.  
\textit{Confessions}

corrept.  
\textit{On Admonition and Grace}

doctr. chr.  
\textit{Teaching Christianity}

duab. An.  
\textit{On the Two Souls, against the Manichees}

ep.  
\textit{Letters}

ep. Jo.  
\textit{Tractates on the First Letter of John}

c. ep. Man.  
\textit{On the Basic Letter of the Manichees}

exc. Urb.  
\textit{On the Fall of Rome}

c. Faust.  
\textit{Against Faustus}

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<tbody>
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<td>f. et symb.</td>
<td>On Faith and the Creed</td>
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<tr>
<td>f. invis.</td>
<td>On Faith in the Invisible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gn. litt.</td>
<td>The Literal Meaning of Genesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gn. adv. man.</td>
<td>Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees</td>
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<tr>
<td>gr. et pecc. or.</td>
<td>On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin</td>
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<tr>
<td>imm. an.</td>
<td>On the Immortality of the Soul</td>
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<tr>
<td>lib. arb.</td>
<td>On the Freedom of the Will</td>
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<td>mor.</td>
<td>On the Morals of the Catholic Church and the Morals of the Manichees</td>
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<tr>
<td>nat. et gr.</td>
<td>On Nature and Grace</td>
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<td>orig. an.</td>
<td>On the Origin of the Soul</td>
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<td>persever.</td>
<td>On the Gift of Perseverance</td>
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<td>praed. sanct.</td>
<td>On the Predestination of the Saints</td>
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<td>s.</td>
<td>Sermons</td>
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<td>Simpl.</td>
<td>To Simplicianus</td>
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<td>sol.</td>
<td>Soliloquies</td>
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<tr>
<td>spir. et litt.</td>
<td>On the Spirit and the Letter</td>
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<tr>
<td>trin.</td>
<td>On the Trinity</td>
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<tr>
<td>util. cred.</td>
<td>On the Usefulness of Believing</td>
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<tr>
<td>vera rel.</td>
<td>On True Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>virg.</td>
<td>Holy Virginity</td>
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Thanks are due to my committee, especially to Paul Griffiths, my dissertation supervisor. Paul taught me to read Augustine. He made himself available to talk whenever I needed help, read and commented on everything I gave him to read, and even read most of the books I recommended. Academically, I couldn’t have asked for more than the sharp, engaging, and intellectually capacious guidance he gave from the beginning of my time at Duke. He was hands-on without being overbearing, and his sharp eye, especially for methodological fuzziness, combined with penetrating questions, an encouragement to ask my own questions and pursue the answers in my own way (albeit according to his standards of rigor), and his knowledge of more literatures than I thought it possible made this dissertation much better than it would have been. Even more, Paul’s high standards for thought and argument have helped shape me deeply as a thinker, speaker, teacher, and scholar. His commitment to graduate student formation is exemplary, and I am grateful to have been a recipient of it. He offered more than academic guidance, too, with earnest, appropriate, and sustained concern for my overall well-being in and beyond school. I thank Stanley Hauerwas for inviting me to intellectual and personal friendship with him. He generously opened up his office, his life, even his teaching schedule to me. He read nearly everything I wrote, shared his work with me, and constantly recommended new books even as he took my recommendations. He treated me like an equal, and by doing so, helped me become a better scholar, teacher, and person. He read and commented on each chapter of this dissertation, sometimes multiple versions, and always had helpful things to say and helpful directions to point me in. Reinhard Hütter formed my questions very early on, and he taught the value of high level, analytical, exegetically responsible patience. The trace of his rigor and his questions are everywhere in this dissertation, even if I moved them in different directions. He has been consistently generous and kind to me. I am especially grateful for the opportunity he gave me to sit in his Thomas Aquinas reading group, and for the muffins that Nancy made for us each week—a token of the Hütter’s hospitality, both personal and academic. Ken Surin taught me to read the theory I engage in chapter 2, and he kindly read over and commented on an earlier draft of the first two chapters. Kathryn Tanner, whose influence is infused throughout, generously agreed to be a reader on my committee.
Other faculty have engaged me in my time at Duke in ways that have directly and indirectly contributed to this project. Liz Clark allowed me to sit in on her classes and her reading groups, and she served on my exam committee. Any historical competence I display in relation to late antiquity I owe to her. Warren Smith helped me learn to teach historical theology and continues as a conversation partner. J. Kameron Carter helped shape my questions as well as my approach in many long, unplanned conversations at Starbucks on Guess Rd.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, because apart from them, I don’t know who I am. My mom, Lori Larsen, taught me that it was always okay to ask why, and she let her cheeky son err on the side of asking way too much. She has reminded me for as long as I can remember that there is nothing I could do to change her love for me. I cannot remember a time in my life when I haven’t felt both the stability of her love combined with the desire to let me be myself. She engaged and encouraged my theological questions early on, even as she let me see her own wrestling with hard questions when I was young. I don’t know if this dissertation would have been the same—or have been written—without those early lessons, conversations, and reminders over the last 31 years. My dad, Jim Larsen, has been my most consistent supporter for my whole life. Even when he had no clue about what I was doing, or what I was saying, or what sports I chose to play (cross country? He came to every meet), or how I speak, or my political affiliation, or what
path in life I’ve chosen, or why I am 31 and still don’t have a job. The one thing he has always been is there, ready to help however he can, making himself as available to me as he possibly could, whether it’s a phone call to ask about brake pads for my car, driving down to remodel my kitchen, or calling just to see how I’m doing. I treasure his constancy and care, which have been as astonishing as they have been quiet and unassuming. My mom and dad help me to know how deeply I am loved.

And really, what is there in the end (and in all my gratitude) but Love?
INTRODUCTION: Beyond Public and Private?

1. Interiority and Society

“Mortals look at outward appearances, but the Lord looks at the heart.” Consider the context of the biblical narrative in which readers first encounter this astonishing claim. David’s predecessor, Saul, fit the kingly description. He was from the right social and economic pedigree, and “there was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he; he stood head and shoulders above everyone else” (1 Samuel 9.2). But after Saul’s tumultuous reign, the Lord stripped Saul of his kingship and transferred it to someone else (1 Samuel 15.24-30). The Lord’s second choice stuns even those who think they know God best. When the prophet Samuel—himself an unlikely choice—arrives at Jesse’s house, Jesse’s sons present themselves to the prophet. Samuel looks for another Saul. “When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, ‘Surely the Lord’s anointed is now before the Lord.’” But Samuel learns that the Lord is seeing and choosing with a different set of criteria the second time around. “But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.’” The Lord chose David—still aesthetically normative, “he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome”—but for some reason, maybe his age, maybe his stature, maybe his height, he was not selected by his father to appear before the prophet as candidate for king. But the Lord, we are told, saw things—and sees things—differently.

David’s kingship continues to help the reader see what it means for the Lord to look at the heart. Whether David is faithful or unfaithful to God, the narrative depicts God’s faithfulness to David not in any particular success, nor unfaithfulness in any particular failure. Rather, the Lord’s
faithfulness is primarily seen in divine attention to David’s heart. The Lord constantly watches David’s heart, holds him accountable, expects faithfulness from him, and responds always with tender and kind determination to bring David before the divine gaze. For the divine gaze on David’s heart changes it. “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me,” the Davidic Psalmist prays in Psalm 51. Careful readers do not miss the world-shaping political implications: from David western societies receive the sensibility that the rulers, too, are accountable before the Lord, the law, and, by extension, the people.

“Mortals look at outward appearances, but the Lord looks at the heart.” This dissertation is an analysis of some of the social and political meanings of this claim. What does it mean for the way we structure our life together that there is One who is nearer to us than we are to ourselves and knows us better than we know ourselves? The eternal perspective of God reforms our human perspectives and causes us to treat one another differently. For not only does God see us on the “inside.” God’s love for us makes us who we are, setting the most basic context for our lives, not just in terms of individual piety, but socially and politically as well. The divine intimacy funds every other human encounter. What does it mean that the Lord does not look at outward appearances but at the heart over the long term? Especially when traditional societies are organized precisely according to these “outward appearances”? What is Christianity’s relation to them? How might it transform the social relationships from the inside?

The public/private distinction has traditionally been organized according to precisely the felt necessities of outward appearances. Social roles are naturalized according to perceived physical strengths and virtues. Contingent societal conventions are taken to be “natural”; roles to be

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1 On the relationship between Israel’s king and the law, see Oliver O’Donovan, The Desire of the Nation: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1999), chap. 2.
performed are confused with universal or biological facts about certain types of subjects. Classical antiquity organized itself this way, and contemporary society continues to do so, with different standards for different social needs. I wish to analyze the great theologian of the Lord’s vision of the heart, St. Augustine, for further help in thinking through the political and social implications of interiority. In doing so, I wish to address its meaning for the foundational distinction between public and private. In the first part of the dissertation, I provide a formal analysis of the terms “public” and “private,” an account of how the distinction has developed to the present day, and a set of terms by which I can begin to engage it theologically. In the second part, I lay out a theological grammar that I take to “transfigure” the distinction.

In what follows, I distinguish two problems, the socio-political problem and the anthropological problem. Most works relating Augustine to politics have focused on the socio-political problem directly and the anthropological problem indirectly. They have focused on public life and virtue, public order and concepts of love, political theory and pluralism, the relationship of religious faith to public speech, and strategies for the sustenance of the common good. By focusing on the public/private distinction, I attend directly to the formation of political agents, the

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anthropological problem, and only indirectly on the formation of polities, the socio-political problem. I read the texts with a view to what they say about moral and political agents. My central theological focus is therefore on theological anthropology rather than on ecclesiology. I therefore also focus on a different set of texts. I mostly neglect the canonical status of City of God, which is where Augustine turns his direction to the socio-political problem directly. Debates about the nature of justice, the relation of the earthly and heavenly city to the saeculum, while important, are also tired. I hope to provide some new perspective by focusing on the significance of the theological anthropology found in On the Trinity, for, if I am right that the anthropological and socio-political problems are intimately related, we might find new perspective for the interpretation of City of God (which I do not take up here), or we might find alternative resources within Augustine, who never pretended to be consistent with himself in the first place!

2. Problem

What does it mean to call something “public”? “Private”? What does it mean to distinguish “public” from “private”? The interpretation of ostensibly simple and straightforward terms should be easy, and one might wonder why a theologian would take the time (much less an entire dissertation) to investigate the meaning of the terms and of the distinction between them. Suffice it

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8 For accounts that deal with this very well, see Oliver O’Donovan, “Usus’ and 'Fruitio’ in Augustine, 'De Doctrina Christiana' I,” Journal of Theological Studies 33 (January 1, 1982): 361. See also Milbank, Theology and Social Theory; Robert A. Markus, Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine (Notre Dame, IN: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Robert A. Markus, Christianity and the Secular (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006); Gregory W. Lee, “Republics and Their Loves: A Rereading of City of God 19,” Modern Theology 27, no. 4 (2011): 553–581.

to say that the terms are not actually straightforward, even if they seem so. The purpose of this introduction is to offer some conceptual clarification, stipulate what the public/private distinction is, what publicity is, what privacy is, discuss how political and social theorists have understood them, and lay out how I intend to engage them.

Because the distinction relies always on the two terms, neither the terms nor the distinction can be understood in isolation. Though each term is conceptually more basic than the pairing, it is to the advantage of discussing them that they be stipulated and then absorbed into the distinction, since each presumes the other. The first chapter offers a genealogy of the distinction through the modern age and a lexicon for talking about it. The second chapter problematizes the liberal distinction by attending to one aspect of the reality of liberal societies through Marxist and Nietzschean critique. The critique serves to intensify a single strand in a way that makes the genealogy I offer neither a progress nor a decline narrative.

I have adopted and extended Alasdair MacIntyre's concept of a “character” to focus my discussion in the first two chapters; I return to it in the sixth chapter. According to MacIntyre, “we have not yet understood the claims of any moral philosophy until we have spelled out what is social embodiment would be.” A character is a distinctive figure that in some way socially embodies a moral system. “The requirements of a character are imposed from the outside, from the way in which others regard and use characters to understand and evaluate themselves….” Characters furnish others “with a cultural and moral ideal… The character morally legitimates a mode of social

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11 Ibid., 23.
existence.”12 My representation of characters is by no means exhaustive. Rather, I draw attention to typically “private” characters, especially the character of the “woman” in chapter 1 and the “refugee” in chapter 2. I take it that attention to private characters illuminates how the public/private distinction works, and attention to alternative character possibilities shows what difference Augustine’s thought might make in relation to it. So the device of the character is the way I try to bring together the anthropological and the socio-political problems.

The term “character” has resonances both in drama and in virtue ethics, and I use it to name the embodiment of a social habit that describes some aspect of the moral community it can be thought to inhabits. Characters are general figures that always have scripts; their scripts make them the kinds of characters they are. Scripts constitute characters as characters, and may include directions for dress, dialect, speech, action, education, religion, and other historically contingent characteristics. The idea of a character and her or his script is, as far as I can see, neutral and analytical. That is, a character can be formed in liberating or constricting ways, and the idea of a character is helpful in analyzing what sorts of implicit claims a society accepts about itself, its world, and its inhabitants. These assumptions are embedded in scripts, which are analytic to characters, and therefore always include boundaries (say this, go there, eat this, love that) that are taken by the characters and their societies to be natural and inevitable but are in reality contingent and historical. Characters are different than stereotypes because stereotypes are merely externally imposed, whereas characters, because they are so central to a society’s moral understanding of itself, are owned from inside an individual’s agency. Stereotypes are generalizations about what another person is like from an external perspective, and can be included in a character. Characters

12 Ibid., 29.
are the perceived limits and possibilities for agency for oneself and one’s fellows from within a way of life. A character is not a one-dimensional imposition on the fine texture of another’s life. Rather, it is a description of the shape of that life from within the community that produces it. Think, for example, of four characters from the Jim Crow south: the black man, the black mammie, the poor white man, and the aristocratic woman. With any familiarity with good, historically informed fiction or film, it is not difficult to name the set of received scripts for those characters and even to picture the characters. The best way to discern what sort of scripts are assumed in a social or political setting is to note the individuals that violate their received character scripts. History, literature, and film are replete with exactly these sorts of examples that have so much potential to reveal society to us.

In the more properly “theological” portion of this dissertation, the last four chapters, I seek to offer a grammar of the distinction in which the constituent terms emerge in a more robust way. In the last chapter I put together the two parts of the dissertation and return to the characters I outline in the first two chapters and add to them the theological character of the holy virgin.

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14 I wonder if Miroslav Volf’s concept of “double vision” can be narrated as trying to understand another kind of character’s script from the inside as much as possible. See Miroslav Volf, Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996).

15 For example, the characters in Tim Tyson’s Blood Done Sign my Name is centered around what happens when a black man violates what is considered to be the proper decorum around a white woman, revealing the set of expectations, gestures, acts, and speeches that are taken to be normative for that time and place. See Timothy B. Tyson, Blood Done Sign My Name: A True Story (New York, NY: Broadway, 2005).
3. The Nature of the Distinction

The distinction between public and private is called “natural” in two senses, the first rightly, the second wrongly. First, it is called natural because it is nearly universal. It seems “clear” and “commonsensical” that people in most times and places would distinguish a realm of things that are commonly seen or shared—a public realm—from a realm of things that are separated, or hidden from the public gaze—a realm of privacy. Indeed, a “clearly defined realm is set aside for that part of existence for which every language has a word equivalent to ‘private’.” This formal sense of the distinction is stable; it is so widespread that it is a “common unexamined assumption of nearly everybody.” But its foundational status and universality make it particularly difficult to grasp. What is it? Susan Gal, together with many other feminist treatments of the subject, points out that the terms “public” and “private” do not “describe the social world in any direct way; they are rather tools for arguments about and in that world.” Nothing carries the label “private” or “public,” though the way some people talk and live implies that they think some things are evidentially or naturally public or private. In this second use of the term natural, the terms public and private are prone to unselfconscious ideological iteration. They are therefore very difficult to theorize and challenge partly because they serve as second order “tools” for social description. In this way, the “universality” of the distinction hides its variability.

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16 My argument is based on the claim that, while it may be natural (in the sense of universal) to distinguish between public and private, there is no single natural configuration of the public-private distinction that is deducible from the nature of human beings. If there were a universally knowable “natural” configuration, no theological account would be necessary.


The distinction is intrinsically normed, linguistic, and contingent. The terms “necessarily presuppose norms, and any application of them will be contextually related to some particular norms.”20 For example, the description “private correspondence” carries a norm with it: there is a prohibition built in to the concept of a “private” letter.21 While the description is often normed, it need not be so directly normative. It may just be part of a wider social structure. Designating something “private property” needn’t suggest a norm, just a description informing an observer about ownership.

Why does this matter? Because the concepts “public” and “private” are particularly central for how most people organize their environment, sort things and bodies, and understand social norms. “Perhaps the most basic way in which concepts help us organise our environment is by providing us with the means to pick out certain of its features and so to describe them.”22 Since the distinction is central to how societies are organized, the effects can be particularly devastating for those who are hurt by the places that the terms assign to them.

As one would expect, the distinction’s material constitution in any given society or even


21 Consider the difference between a private and a secret letter. One can imagine a scenario in which an intimate lover hides something from her partner that concerns both of them. In such a situation, it would not be wrong of one partner to read a “secret” but not “private” letter. This is because the norm of privacy dictates that one shouldn’t read a private letter, and the notion of privacy is more determinate than the norm of secrecy. The concept of secrecy is not exhaustively normed the way that the concept of privacy is. One can have a secret from someone that the person is nevertheless entitled to know, but to say that something is private already implies that the other has no entitlement to know it. For example, imagine a case in which someone keeps a cancer diagnosis or some other matter of concern to her partner or spouse a secret, and a secret piece of mail about the recent cancer diagnosis arrives and falls into the partner’s hands. If the partner has a legitimate interest in knowing about the matter than concerns him, he has not violated any norms if he discovers the secret. If a spouse were to discover the piece of mail about the “secret” accidently, he could not be accused of invading his partner’s privacy the same way he might be open to the accusation if, say, he hacked into an email account. In that case, even though he still might be entitled to know the secret, he has invaded a private email account in order to discover the secret. In short, there are secrets I might have a right to know, but if something is private, I am not entitled to access it apart from an invitation.

among different sectors of the same society is constantly shifting. One cannot guess exactly what someone would consider “public” and what someone would consider “private” merely by knowing she acknowledges the distinction, for, as the history shows, the two terms are context-relative indexicals. Though we can speak of a stable “liberal” conception of the public and private in some sense, theorists and sociologists note that the liberal conception itself is a site of contested and mutually exclusive renderings of the distinction.

Gal helpfully names the distinction a “fractal,” helping those who wish to discern its grammar name the way in which the term is not ambiguous. A “fractal” is a geometrical term used to describe the way a shape is divided so that it replicates the shape within itself. Like geometric shapes, the public/private distinction is constantly re-projected onto broader and narrower objects. The distinction can only exist in constantly multiplying, concrete iterations.

Take two spatial examples from middle class American life. Imagine yourself approaching a friend’s home. You park your car in front of the house, leave your car, and move off the street and onto a piece of “private” property. Proceeding farther, you walk up the brick pathway onto a porch. When you enter the porch, you move onto a private structure. The private property is immediately

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23 The line between public and private is constantly being renegotiated, Gal, “A Semiotics of the Public/Private Distinction,” 80.

24 For an example of the wide range of understandings within a small slice of contemporary American society, see Christena E. Nippert-Eng, Islands of Privacy (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 2010). See also Gal, “A Semiotics of the Public/Private Distinction,” who argues that the distinction’s “referential content always relies on contexts of use and that the distinction is relative to those contexts” (79).


26 Gal, “A Semiotics of the Public/Private Distinction,” 82.
subdivided into relatively public and relatively private spaces, between the yard and the structure.
You knock on your friend’s front door, and she welcomes you into her living room. She offers you a seat, but, after a long drive, you excuse yourself to go to the bathroom. She tells you that one of the bathrooms is under repair and that you will have to use the bathroom off her bedroom, immediately ushering you into the most private part of her home. You walk through your friend’s bedroom, around her bed and dresser, to get to her bathroom. After washing your hands, you close the slightly-ajar door to the medicine cabinet so that you can fix your hair. It is inappropriate for you to examine the contents of the medicine cabinet, for you might see prescriptions or other items, and your seeing them would violate your host’s privacy.

The progression into the house illustrates the fractal. The front yard is private in relation to street, the porch in relation to the front yard, the living room in relation to the porch, the bedroom in relation to the living room, the bed and dresser in relation to the bedroom, the medicine cabinet in relation to the bathroom. Each one of these “private” spaces can be further subdivided into “public and private.” If you would have opened the medicine cabinet, surely in it you would have found things that are both relatively private—like medications—and relatively public—like toothpaste.

Or imagine paying for a pack of chewing gum. You take your wallet out of your purse or pocket, open up the wallet and move to the cash or credit card, and you pay for the gum. Your body is private. So is your pocket. So is your wallet. So is your credit card. Say your social security card fell out, or another personal item—even more private. Like the house, the process of paying for something and the wallet can be subdivided into relatively public and relatively private domains, and we are constantly shifting our frame of reference to accommodate the subdivisions. In each of
these cases, it is worth pointing out, exactly what we consider public and what we consider private depends a lot on contingent factors about how society organizes itself.

Though the fractal exists only in its relativity, constantly shifting, always subdividing, it is also easier to generalize. But we should think of the general terms with care. The image of the fractal suggests to the imagination a spatial boundary or line, and many use such imagery to depict it. But the fractal reality immediately undermines the imagery: constant multiplication suggests a mutual embedding that calls into question any univocal predication of public or private. English speakers tend to talk about the distinction in singular, univocal terms; “discussions of public and private spaces with unstable boundaries assume a single dichotomy, thereby collapsing the nested distinctions into each other, making the nesting processes and indexical recursions hard to notice.”

Ordinary language makes sense, but construals and interpretations of it can also deceive.

4. Narrating the Distinction: Methodological Reflections

A social-historical distinction both in its formal universality and material variability, a fractal that can be described and narrated only in its particular settings, a near-universal rooted in the inherent unpredictability of human nature, the distinction resists exhaustive representation and univocal closure. There is no universal distinction, only the unending multiplicity of dichotomies; it is in principle impossible to pin it down.

Because of the large number of possibilities for discussing the distinction, I subdivide the distinction into two components: an anthropological distinction and a socio-political distinction. I provide both a lexicon and a genealogy for discussing both aspects of the distinction conceptually.

27 See Ibid., 90–91. “Even though social theorists have often noted that publics and privates are mutually embedded, they then usually revert to cartographic metaphors of shifting and unstable boundaries. Yet the imagery of shifting boundaries is a result and not an explanation of the ideological processes we observe and use.”

28 Ibid., 83.
The specifics of the modern distinction emerge in the early modern era, especially after the Reformation. The seeds for the spectacular re-thinking of the self and community that anticipated modernity were laid much earlier, however. I take up the task of narrating both the historical seeds and the conceptual grammar for the place we find ourselves today. As a result, I draw on multiple types of resources. I limit myself to interacting with a few historical and conceptual accounts among many I could have chosen. I am less interested in offering an exhaustive historical account than in offering a sort of parable that gives us terms by which we can think better about where we are.

This sort of method is built in to the purposes of the dissertation. I wish to analyze theological possibilities for thinking about public and private. In order to do so, I identify the development of the specific ancient and modern characters. My genealogy is focused around an explanation for the conditions under which those characters make sense. This means that my discussion is limited to the characters I identify and discuss, and whether it is persuasive will depend upon my choice of characters. Since the characters are ideal-typical, they occupy a strange place between concrete and abstract. They are concrete in that they can be described and “characterized” and represented with specific examples. They are abstract in the sense that they are never actually embodied.

What emerges from my account, especially the genealogy I present in the first chapter, is two distinct assessments of the distinction. The first assessment, drawing on select parts of the

complex lexicon surrounding the issue, is generally positive. The public/private distinction emerges in the modern era as a source of religious toleration. It provides an arena for rational deliberation. It opens up a space for “freedom.” This, it will become clear, is the characteristic liberal narration of the distinction.

The free space liberalism opens up is, however, an ambiguous space. This first strand of the public/private distinction cannot be separated, I argue, from a second strand, one that is far less affirming. This second strand is not merely a form of moral relativism. Rather, I read feminist theorists together with the work of the late Michel Foucault on biopolitics to show the ways in which the liberal political narration of public and private prescribes a way of organizing bodies. The prescriptions tend to conflate the distinction’s universality with an account of a natural order (nothing new—it all started with Homer!)\(^\text{10}\) that, according to various contemporary theorists, becomes extremely unsalutary in modernity. So, after my historical narration in chapter 1, I’ll engage my more theoretical dialogue partners to make sense of what it means in chapter 2.

As I’ve suggested, I intend the story I tell to be a genealogy. It is concerned with thinking through how we got to where we are. It is therefore not a social history rooted in archival research or material culture. It rather fuses causal and conceptual explanation about the present. Here Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition* serves as a helpful illustration of what I’m trying to provide as distinct from a formal history accountable to the methods of that discipline. One can come away from her text with two remarkably different readings. Sometimes the book reads like a nostalgic decline narrative that seeks to explain the original and “originary” meaning of important terms and then shows how the meanings of those terms have been distorted by important historical turning.

points. Insofar as it is a decline narrative that purports to offer the pristine originary condition of politics, Seyla Benhabib is right to accuse it of “relentless pessimism” and “gross historical oversimplification.”

A second way of reading is derived from what Benhabib calls the “fragmentary historiography” of Walter Benjamin. Benjamin’s historiography refuses the lure of either historical triumph or decline, and instead it contents itself with a set of ambiguities that can only be resolved in hope. Behind my use of this historiography lies a more basic theoretical point: the world is causally thick. Any given event has multiple causal connections. It is rare, if not impossible, to offer a causal narrative that exhaustively accounts for an event. Causal narratives are therefore inevitably thinner than reality. They abstract a relatively thin string of events from a relatively thick set of causal nexuses. This isolated string of connections is chosen according to the interests of the one telling the causal narrative.

The root of my genealogical method is theological. Narratives too easily confuse human views of the world and history with the world and history themselves. Only God sees all the causal connections. Christian belief in providence and in last judgment implies that God not only has the final word about what it all means and what each event causes, but that God is intimately bound to the process itself, indeed, closer to the process than it is to itself. This takes a considerable deal of the pressure off our own historicizing. It also means that God does not need to “show up” in the narrative as a particular cause, one player among many, a hand directing events that would make

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God one piece of the historical puzzle. Indeed, God may choose to exercise agency in particular events in history, as Augustine describes in book III of *On the Trinity*. Because God is equally the cause of everything, historical work can attend to the human level of causality without looking for God to be one among many of the particular causes unless there is good reason to think of a particular exercise of divine agency.\footnote{See Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988).}

The method I use embraces the thinness of causal narrative and the theological point about God and providence. It traces developments and ruptures in select concepts and examines events without attempting to place them neatly—not even to mention comprehensively—together. Identifying key moments of “rupture, displacement, and dislocation”\footnote{Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, 94–95.} in the social-political aspect of the public/private distinction helps to talk about the distinction better by offering sometimes highly generalized examples of how it has functioned. The value, however, is limited, because it is more heuristic than historical. It is a sort of third type: neither a “big story” that seeks to absorb all others in itself, nor a microscopic look at select and richly detailed moments of social history. Rather, it is a thick explication of a conceptual grammar that rejects all aspirations to comprehensiveness and all intimations of either progress or decline. The ambiguity, I take it, is built in. And that it prompts productive theological talk about the distinction I wish to evaluate is enough for my purposes. I have no wish to deny that there are always more stories that could be told that would fulfill the same function. In fact, I hope that the narratives continue to multiply. The success of these stories therefore should be judged by how helpful they are in tracing a
theologically significant developments and setting out terms for discussion.\textsuperscript{36}

How exactly can engaging the historical ruptures be theoretically productive? Again, the Arendt example is helpful. The genealogical ruptures Arendt narrates are vital for the type of feminist theory Benhabib inhabits. She argues: “Despite the apparent antagonism between feminist goals and Hannah Arendt’s political thought, engaging in a ‘dialectical conversation’ with Hannah Arendt about the concepts of the public and private is indispensible for contemporary feminist theory.”\textsuperscript{37} The ruptures, according to Benhabib, enact some of the concepts that are hidden by our every-day, common sense understanding of the fractal-distinction. They bring to our knowledge the specific ways we might still conflate “universal” and “natural.” By narrating key historical developments regarding the public private distinction in the context of genealogy, then, I hope to help shed light on some of the other concepts clustered together with them that we tend to skim over. By attending to the theoretical points, theological thinking can more easily engage a historical narrative.

Once the terms are set, I go on to show how one major Christian thinker—Augustine—along with some others influenced by him can be read to recast the distinction by implicitly challenging the basic terms that develop. The initial genealogy I offer suggests how terms that seem basic to many are in fact radically contingent and therefore eminently challengeable.

5. Relevance of the Distinction

The anthropological and social-political aspects of the distinction have become the sites of problems in contemporary life. The problems are relevant at multiple—academic, political,

\textsuperscript{36} It would also be a mistake to confuse one manifestation of the distinction for the whole, as if the way all peoples understood their relations with one another could be summed up. It may be helpful to reflect on one concrete community’s way of distinguishing, but that is also another project

\textsuperscript{37} Benhabib, \textit{The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt}, xlviii.
personal—levels. Ultimately, they have to do with how we distinguish ourselves from one another and how we live together in human communities. The first problem can be approached from various angles. A descriptive point underlies them all: the universal subject of universal reason (and modern cosmopolitan identity) is also the “inner private” subject. “He” walls himself off from his “world,” and he wants back in, usually on his own terms. Conveniently, he has rigged the playing field such that others—women, Jews, colonized peoples, racialized others—do not start on equal footing. The modern philosophical problem of overcoming the gap between the inner private subject and his external world has plagued epistemologists and metaphysicians since Descartes and Montaigne.

Immanuel Kant’s project (though, any of the major “Enlightenment” philosophers will do!) can be framed as one influential attempt to bridge the gap between knowing self and outer world via practical reason. As it turns out, Kant makes the problem worse, but in a helpful and quite spectacular way. When he famously turned to the knowing subject itself to bridge the gap, Kant assumed a stable, universal subject for whom the problem of getting to “the world” was obvious. Later thinkers have questioned him. Many of the particularities of Kant’s knowing self bear an eerie and unjustified resemblance to Kant’s own person. Who gets to decide the nature of the problem? Who gets to decide the subject of the problem? Kant’s turn to the subject inadvertently helped us to see how the “inner private self,” once a phenomenon that philosophers and psychologists thought

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88 As Charles Taylor shows, the way we make moral judgments and interpret ourselves cannot be separated from academic discussions see Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).


they could investigate for all individuals, has turned out to be irreducibly diverse. In turning to the subject, however, Kant also opened a space to historicize the subject. Many now ask: where do the categories of knowledge come from? The very terms of the question have deceived, but have also, paradoxically, provided a way out.

The destruction of a stable universal subject tends to produce two types of responses. One response celebrates disunity. For this view, there is no such thing as a universal reasoning self and therefore no universal inner private self, distinguished only by some unfathomable connection to different bodies. Instead, the one who tries to describe the inner essence of human consciousness (if he has any self-consciousness at all!) is thrown into a diverse multiplicity of private selves constructed by a variety of social and historical factors. A second response takes the failure of one paradigm as a challenge to find another. It searches for universal set of structures to which all selves conform. Augustine is often read this way, and many contemporary Cartesian philosophers re-assert new versions of universal subjectivity.

The corollary of the philosophical problem, which reaches its epitome (or nadir, or both—depending on one’s perspective) in Heidegger, is a political problem of how to imagine citizenship and identity in a world that strips individuals of political agency, reduces them to “bare life,” zoe,
and renders them helpless at the mercy of not-so-benevolent sovereigns.\textsuperscript{45} Previously, human lives only made sense with religious drive in the context of sacrifice to God or the gods. This stripping of political agency is enabled almost entirely by the way that liberal discourses of universal subjectivity presuppose neutrality with relation to the cult and thereby hide a set of power relations that some think inevitably replace the cult. After the career of Michel Foucault, a historical or social nominalism has come to prominence. It calls into question any notion of a real “private inward” realm. In both academic and popular discourse, the universalist language is coming to be rejected even as the distinction is re-applied to a different self-interpretations: north Atlantic subjects increasingly distinguish themselves according to consumer preferences. It is unclear that the new inner private consumer self is any freer, or any less subject to insidious power relations, than the old colonized cosmopolitan inner private self. The narrative I tell partly explains this development.

Summarizing and moving forward, the following discussion is structured by a set of loosely connected narratives about how we got to where we are. These narrations are genetic in that they try to offer causal explanations and heuristic in that they seek to frame a more theoretical discussion. As genetic accounts, they are also thin and interest-relative. Their purpose is the heuristic starting point they provide, and their usefulness is determined with respect to their helpfulness in talking about the anthropological and social/political problems described above. These narratives have internally complex structures. Each essentially traces a moment of rupture, though the narratives overlap with one another in important ways.

6. Conceptual Mapping

Some important conceptual work needs to be done ahead of time in order to streamline the following discussion. In the following conceptual map, I want to draw attention to three ways in which contemporary theorists have made sense of the public-private distinction. Each sorting of the distinction highlights the intimate relationship between the anthropological and the socio-political aspects of the distinction. I conclude by offering a synthetic typology of my own that will help to clarify the following discussion.46

The divide between anthropology and politics, it seems to me, is the fundamental divide in the ways of conceptualizing the public/private distinction. It maps on to my two problems: the anthropological problem and the socio-political problem. Of course, what is meant by “politics” is partially determined by how one understands the distinction, so it is somewhat circular, though

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46 Multiple types of literatures about the public/private distinction, far too many for me to interact with. There are detailed histories perhaps most well known as the massive series The History of Private Life. There are also sociological and anthropological analyses, such as Nippert-Eng, Islands of Privacy. There are philosophical arguments reflecting on more normative and descriptive questions about, such as Beate Rössler, Privacies: Philosophical Evaluations (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004); Thomas Nagel, Concealment and Exposure: And Other Essays (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002). There is legal theory, such as Morton J. Horwitz, “The History of the Public/Private Distinction,” University of Pennsylvania Law Review 130, no. 6 (June 1982): 1423; Paul Fairfield, Public/Private (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005); Gerald Turkel, Dividing Public and Private: Law, Politics, and Social Theory (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992); Alan Uzelac and C. H. van Rhee, Public and Private Justice: Dispute Resolution in Modern Societies (Antwerpen: Intersentia, 2007); Bryant G Gard and American Bar Foundation, Public and Private Justice: Issues in Ideology, Professional Interest, Information, and Private Governance (Chicago, IL: American Bar Foundation, 1990); Mike Brake and Chris Hale, Public Order and Private Lives: The Politics of Law and Order (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992). There are literary studies. For example, Nancy Armstrong, Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1987); Michael McKeon, The Secret History of Domesticy: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005). Other studies focus on the linguistic/semiotic implications, such as Gal, “A Semiotics of the Public/Private Distinction”; Gal and Woodard, “Constructing Languages and Publics: Authority and Representation.” There is also a very broad and prominent set of debates about the nature of the public sphere, especially engaging figures like John Rawls, Jurgen Habermas, and philosophers and theorists who accept their framework. I cite them and interact with them some below. I have chosen to engage not in any of these particular discourses, though I sometimes make use of them. Rather, I have chosen to engage a set of frequently cited meta-texts that are more descriptive about different concepts of the public/private distinction and can take account of most of the other areas of discussion. My goal in doing so has been to open up space for a framework in order to think about it, clarify my discussion by stipulating and then isolating my dialogue partners, and showing how (implicitly) my argument relates to the other areas of discourse about the distinction. The typology I end up with based on my reading and synthesis of these texts is, I take it, not the single best, but adequate for the purposes of the discussion that follow.
not, I hope to show, viciously circular. Regardless, classical conceptions of politics all the way through Enlightenment liberal theories posited a strong connection between the nature of an individual based on some characteristic of her or his birth (gender, class, race, etc.) and the individual’s place in the political order.

7. Anthropological Distinction

Two criteria inform Jeff Weintraub’s account of the anthropological distinction: visibility and collectivity. The criterion of visibility or disclosure leads to the common mapping of “public” onto “outer” and “private” onto “inner.” The inner private self is, in part, the hidden self, nestled away from the outside world. Inside is almost a retreat, and it is always the basis of the separation of the individual from her world. It is in this, quasi-spatial sense, that Augustine has been called the “inventor” of the “inner self.” Luther famously reified the distinction between inner and outer as the basis for both the structure of individual salvation and the separation of the two kingdoms. Current debates about information privacy map on to this use of the distinction. Many theorists and theologians now question the stark distinction between inner and outer, and its mapping on to private and public, but, in many ways, the distinction still lies at the foundation of liberal social thought.


48 Cary, Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self.


The second criterion of collectivity or access maps public-ness on to the group and private-ness on to the individual. According to this criterion, a fundamental anthropological divide between the public and the private is the conceptual basis of the individual’s distinction from the group. Early modern thinkers like John Locke based their political theories on the autonomy of an individual’s use of his body. Bodily privacy became the basis for the right over private property and over one’s work, forming also the basis for capitalist societies. It also became the basis for the distinction between “public” concerns of the state and the private opinions of religion. Debates about “access” center on this second criterion. Moore lists four sets of rights based in the separation of the individual from the group: rights not to have one’s realm of autonomy intruded upon, rights of privacy over facts or information about oneself, rights not to have oneself portrayed in a false light, and rights to appropriate information about oneself as one sees fit. When the rights over “access” to the individual become an issue of knowledge, it bleeds into the visibility/disclosure criterion.

8. Sociopolitical Distinction

In some ways, the various ways of sorting the sociopolitical distinction give us different ways of sorting the collectivity criterion of the anthropological distinction. There are multiple avenues for sorting the public/private distinction at this higher level. Before I go further with Weintraub’s account, however, two preliminary, related points have to be made. First, I agree with the theorists who suggest that at the group level, it is necessary to add a third term of “society”

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or “civil society.” The binary “public/private” alone cannot accommodate lived experience. A third term is necessary. Second, and correlatively, at the collective level, the public/private distinction is more like two ends of a spectrum than an absolute dichotomy. In the various ways of conceptually analyzing the distinction that I list below, the question is constantly raised as to which end of the spectrum is more basic. That is, at what end of the spectrum is the definition clearest? And is a spectrum really an adequate definition? How does a third space, a realm outside or beyond strictly public or strictly private, fit in?

Weintraub’s account of the distinction seeks to be pan-political—that is, it is not tied to specifically liberal social orders, though it is obviously informed by them. I will follow with a discussion based on Benn and Gaus’s essay that is specifically interested in understanding the public/private distinction in liberal societies, and then I will summarize the way Paul Kahn frames the distinction, though he does so indirectly.

9. Weintraub’s Pan-Political Distinction

In Weintraub’s pan-historical, pan-political framework (though, to be sure, with an accent on liberal social orders), he offers two major families of approaches. In the first family, the public/private distinction corresponds to the political/nonpolitical distinction. This family is mainly determined by the collectivity criterion. In it, what is public is communal, and what is private is individual. The market is the paradigmatic sphere of the non-political: it is the realm of “explicit contract, rational exchange, personality, instrumental calculation of individual advantage, and so forth.” The disadvantage is that the character of the political sphere tends to be ambiguous.

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54 Discussed below.

Is it the state, civil society, a realm of legitimate coercion, or spontaneous cooperation? On these terms, it is clear what the market is, and public is defined negatively as what is “not market.”

In the second family, the public/private distinction corresponds to the public/domestic distinction. The visibility criterion controls this family of views. The public realm is the realm of “sociability” because it is the realm of what is visible to others. On this family, the public sphere includes the market, and the private realm is determined not by what is individual, but by what is hidden from the collective gaze.

According to Weintraub, four different models of the public/private distinction that fit in varying ways into these families of approaches dominate the discussion. First, what he calls the “liberal-economistic model” contrasts the state with the market economy. The state is named “the public sector” and the market economy “the private sector.” In this model, each individual is understood to be an isolated interest-pursuer who needs to be regulated by the state. Public administration and public policy are necessarily utilitarian, because the goal is to maximize individual interest. This model maps on to what Paul Kahn calls the “liberalism of interest.” The main form the public/private distinction takes, then, is between the governmental (public) and the non-governmental (private). Debates about the distinction primarily negotiate questions of jurisdiction.

In this first model, according to Weintraub, there is a perennial conceptual debate that informs the various answers to questions of jurisdiction. John Locke and Adam Smith take one side, tending toward a “‘natural’ harmonization of selfish interests,” and Hobbes and Bentham take the opposed side, tending toward a more “technocratic, social-engineering side” by a “coercive agency

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56 For a broad discussion of these themes, see Kahn, *Putting Liberalism in Its Place*, 113–182.
standing above society.”

The question of jurisdiction relies most on how one regards the effectiveness of the invisible hand of the market over against the visible hand of the government.

Leo XIII’s seminal encyclical *Rerum Novarum* and the whole tradition of Catholic social teaching following in its wake wades into these more basic conceptual debates, implicitly accepting this first framework, though without limiting the church’s teaching to it. On the one hand, Leo argues, the state has a duty to ensure distributive justice in which wages meet the needs of the family, the principle of the “family wage.” More basically, Leo is concerned to emphasize the dignity of the worker as a creature in the divine image over the type of work he or she does. This means that pay ought to reflect the humanity of the worker rather than the type of work done. The work, no matter how lowly, is the occasion for the worker to receive what he needs to flourish in society. That is to say, the dignity of the worker is what gives his work its dignity. On the other hand, Leo is confident that a third realm, that of civil society, will be able to provide a sufficiently textured social life to guard against the worst abuses of the market and the state. He was specifically keen to support Catholic labor unions. Later developments, however, showed Leo’s idea of the power of civil society lamentably unrealistic. Pius XI and then Paul VI argued in light of historical developments that the state does have a positive role in guaranteeing distributive justice,

60 Ibid., para. 43–47.
61 Leo XIII imagines that, for the most part, workers are men. The encyclical assumes that women primarily occupy a domestic realm.
64 “Leo XIII - Rerum Novarum,” para. 53–57.
thus tacitly admitting the failure of labor unions to secure the family wage. Pius is interesting to read insofar as he condemns those who make the market into a natural thing that cannot be interfered with. He says that the “poisoned spring” of free market capitalism is the source of all individualist economic heresy. He contrasts this to an extreme form of technocratic rule and social engineering (communism and socialism), which merely reproduce the opposite error.

The second of Weintraub’s models contrasts a realm of the “political,” which is understood not as the technocratic or bureaucratic state, but rather the realm that is exposed to the collective gaze. On this “republican virtue” approach, the public can be defined as “the realm of political community based on citizenship.” The heart of public life is “a process of active participation in collective decision making, carried out within a framework of fundamental solidarity and equality.” The “republican virtue” framework is, however, made invisible by the earlier, “liberalism of interest” framework. The first framework, in which “public” means “administrative

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65 See “Pius XI, Quadragesimo Anno (15/05/1931),” para. 88, accessed December 18, 2012, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno_en.html. “Just as the unity of human society cannot be founded on an opposition of classes, so also the right ordering of economic life cannot be left to a free competition of forces. For from this source, as from a poisoned spring, have originated and spread all the errors of individualist economic teaching. Destroying through forgetfulness or ignorance the social and moral character of economic life, it held that economic life must be considered and treated as altogether free from and independent of public authority, because in the market, i.e., in the free struggle of competitors, it would have a principle of self direction which governs it much more perfectly than would the intervention of any created intellect. But free competition, while justified and certainly useful provided it is kept within certain limits, clearly cannot direct economic life - a truth which the outcome of the application in practice of the tenets of this evil individualistic spirit has more than sufficiently demonstrated. Therefore, it is most necessary that economic life be again subjected to and governed by a true and effective directing principle. This function is one that the economic dictatorship which has recently displaced free competition can still less perform, since it is a headstrong power and a violent energy that, to benefit people, needs to be strongly curbed and wisely ruled. But it cannot curb and rule itself. Loftier and nobler principles - social justice and social charity - must, therefore, be sought whereby this dictatorship may be governed firmly and fully. Hence, the institutions themselves of peoples and, particularly those of all social life, ought to be penetrated with this justice, and it is most necessary that it be truly effective, that is, establish a juridical and social order which will, as it were, give form and shape to all economic life. Social charity, moreover, ought to be as the soul of this order, an order which public authority ought to be ever ready effectively to protect and defend. It will be able to do this the more easily as it rids itself of those burdens which, as We have stated above, are not properly its own.”


67 Ibid.
state,” hides the various ways in which people live—unregulated, spontaneously, creatively, actively—with each other outside of the state control. On this view, the state ought to facilitate this public life that happens apart from it not by intruding, but by interacting in appropriate, non-invasive ways meant to nurture “a world of discussion, debate, deliberation, collective decision making, and action in concert.” Hannah Arendt represents this quite powerful framework for thinking of the public/private distinction in her classic discussion of the topic in The Human Condition.

On the republican virtue model, antiquity gives us two ways of thinking of how we can identify “public.” The first way is the res publica, that is, self-governing polis. We get the idea of citizenship from this first understanding. Second, public can be identified with “empire.” It is from this tradition that we get the idea of “sovereignty” through administration of laws. So the “public” includes both the administrative state and the realm of civil society. It is therefore an inherently ambiguous concept, and most of the ambiguities we face in politics come from the ambiguity contained in it. For example, in Aristotle’s thought, the citizen is both ruled and ruler. There is no inequality on the level of citizenship. Domination, however, still takes place in natural inequalities of the private realm. Debates about the criteria for citizenship and the proper constitution of the political community as well as the relationship of state sovereignty to rational deliberation tend to take place within this ambiguity. The realm of civil society was subsumed and re-framed in the structure of feudal relations in the middle ages, or so Arendt argues.

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68 Ibid.
69 Arendt, The Human Condition.
70 Much of the feminist criticism of Arendt addresses this complaint about the way she makes the distinction.
71 See Markus, Christianity and the Secular; Markus, Saeculum.
Weintraub lists three important historical transformations coincident with the development of liberalism. These transformations led to a reappropriation and redefinition of the civic republican model of public and private. The first is the resurgence of civil society, though under different terms. In liberalism, civil society became a “social world of self-interested individualism, competition, impersonality, and contractual relationships.” Such a world needs the mediating structures of civil society; otherwise, it becomes inhumane. Thus the Catholic impulse in *Rerum Novarum* to recommend a strong civil society in emerging capitalist and liberal nation-states thus could provide the social cushion that such a world needs. In other words, because of the potential impersonality of liberal societies, “liberalism is the philosophy of civil society and, frequently, its apology.”

Second, the concept of sovereignty has also been recovered and re-shaped. The liberal public/private distinction depends on the distinction between state and civil society. Evaluations of sovereignty vary when the sovereign is identified with the liberal state. The positions range from generally optimistic accounts of the possibilities of civil society to produce meaningful social life and counter the worst effects of capitalism to generally pessimistic Hobbesians who wish to collapse civil society back into the sovereign state and reduce society to a model of individual and the state with nothing intervening.

Third, the concept of citizenship is recovered in liberalism. In a world of “negative

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citizenship implies self-determination. Weintraub points to Tocqueville’s conception of “political society” as an example. Similarly, Arendt’s “public realm” and Habermas’s “public sphere” are concerned for the redevelopment of this notion of citizenship around the development of capacities and dispositions to enter into a realm of equal and rational dialogue. Weintraub closes by suggesting that these three historical developments, along with the entire republican virtue tradition, suggest that the public/private distinction is inadequate for giving an account of social life in contemporary societies. He points instead to a third realm of sociability that can provide the sort of textured life that can prevent the state’s sovereignty from undoing politics. He advocates going “beyond” the public/private dichotomy by introducing a trichotomy: public/social/private.

The third model of public and private, like the republican virtue tradition, starts from identifying what is private concretely and leaving the “public” as a remainder concept. This is the view that Philippe Aries adopts in *A History of Private Life* and *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*. In this view, the emphasis is on public as the realm of sociability. Private is the realm of domesticity. This framework attends less to the sovereign state and questions of “politics” and more to the increasing divide between the personal and the impersonal dimensions of modern life.

On this framework, the privatization of life occurs as the sphere for interpersonal interaction gets smaller and as the family becomes the increasing focus of political attention. “The triumph of privacy” in modernity is simultaneously understood to be a triumph of “discipline,” for as life outside of the home becomes increasingly depersonalized and as intimacies become scarcer...

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outside of the home, more common life in modernity is shaped by external, impersonal, bureaucratic forces. That is to say, as the “older ‘public’ realm of polymorpous sociability” breaks down, social life is more sharply polarized “between an increasingly impersonal public’ realm (of the market, the modern state, and bureaucratic organization) and a ‘private’ realm of increasingly intense intimacy and emotionality (the modern family, romantic love, and so forth).” The emphasis on the personal/impersonal shifts the criterion slightly from the second to the third framework. Whereas in the first model, the collectivity criterion contrasts the market and the state, and in the second model, the visibility criterion contrasts the social from the hidden, the third approach focuses on the modern split between personal intimacies and impersonal forces. The accent falls on “the sharpness of the split between [personal and impersonal]” as “one of the defining characteristics of modernity.”

The personal/impersonal distinction, when mapped on to the private/public distinction, in turn colors modern views of love, romance, family, children, etc. It is not merely that the increasing prominence of the personal over-against the impersonal affects the social constructions of those realities. “It is as if the modern family had sought to take the place of the old social relationships in order to preserve mankind from an unbearable moral solitude.” More prescriptively, the private realm on this view is overloaded with significance, and the public realm is emptied of it. But additionally, the argument is (at least from a Foucauldian perspective) that the impersonal forces actually shape how selves get defined. The impersonal asylum disciplines us

77 Ibid.
78 Ibid., 21.
79 Ibid. Quoting Aries.
80 Thus, much of Stanley Hauerwas’s critique of the rise of “sentimentality” in Christian ethics and preaching arises most fundamentally as a critique in line with Aries.
into sanity, the hospital into health, and the nation-state into citizenship, all with our consent.

Aries looks to the restoration of public social space as mediating space, for personal life “cannot fully bear this weight of emotional expectation.” The revitalization of the public realm is the best hope to save the family from the weight that modernity places upon it. So, when combined with the republican virtue model, two different understandings of public space emerge. Note the difference in significance for the revitalization of the public realm on this view. For Arendt, Habermas and the civic republican tradition, reconstituting a public realm involves developing a common world of discourse so that a robustly political dialogue can take place. On Aries’s view (and here, Foucault does not follow him) the public as a space of “apolitical coexistence” is necessary to take the burden off the family.\footnote{Ibid., 26.}

Finally, and perhaps most starkly, the feminist account of the public/private distinction starts from the observation that the “state,” the “political” realm, and the apolitical “social” realm have tended to exclude women, who have traditionally been identified with the domestic sphere. According to Carole Patemen, the public/private distinction is “what the feminist movement is about.” “Feminist criticism is primarily directed at the separation and opposition between the public and private spheres in liberal theory and practice.”\footnote{Pateman, “Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy,” 118.} Even those thinkers less comfortable with such broad statements emphasize the ways in which the strong identification of rationality, freedom, and publicness with “maleness” has led whole sectors of domestic life and the related sphere of the social to be occluded. My presentation of the distinction follows the feminist argument’s criticism of the conflation of “universal” and “natural” with “hierarchical.” Feminist analysis, like liberal analysis,
seeks to undo the naturalized social hierarchies by redescribing “individuals as free and equal beings, emancipated from the ascribed, hierarchical bonds of traditional society.” For the conflation of natural, universal, and hierarchy has allowed contingent forms of the distinction to functionally oppress women in ways that are simultaneously unacknowledged and, when challenged, justified by appeals to “natural law.”

By focusing on women specifically, the feminist account makes the private sphere concrete and definitive, but like its counterparts in the second family of views of the distinction, it tends to be unclear about what the public sphere is. Weintraub notes that, like the second and third views, the many feminist criticisms of the distinction also recommend a third “social” sphere, though on different terms.

Feminist critiques of the public/private distinction focus specifically on women’s oppression, distinguishing them from liberalism, which has tended toward patriarchy. Pateman defines patriarchy and liberalism thus: “Liberalism is an individualist, egalitarian, conventionalist doctrine; patriarchalism claims that hierarchical relations of subordination necessarily follow from the natural characteristics of men and women.” The claim that liberalism and patriarchy are intertwined is just another way of highlighting the relationship between anthropological claims and socioeconomic claims. Liberal social orders are specified, as Pateman points out, by “an apparently

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84 Ibid.
universal, egalitarian, and individualist social order” in which people are judged primarily as individuals rather than by their natural social status. But the egalitarianism of liberalism, according to feminist replies, obscures a deeply patriarchal bias. “Liberalism is structured by patriarchal as well as class relations, and... the dichotomy between the private and the public obscures the subjection of women to men.”

The ideology of the “separate spheres” has structured much industrialized North Atlantic life. Some feminists would be quick to point out that ideology does not necessarily reflect the lived experiences and structures of women’s and men’s existence; women have found creative means of agency despite the formally patriarchal bent of western liberal societies.89

Ambiguity about the meaning of nature and its relationship to social constructions still dominates conversations within and outside Christian traditions. On the one hand, the natural/constructed distinction is just another way of highlighting the connection between anthropology and politics. This can be seen, for example, in Aquinas’s treatment of questions of gender and natural slavery as some have presented it.90 On the other hand, debates about the nature of morality continue to take place in evolutionary biology.91 Here, the question is important

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88 Pateman, “Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy,” 120.

89 For example, Hansen has documented the existence of a textured and important “social” sphere in early American life. This sphere is neither “public” nor “private” and seriously complicates the caricature that women’s lives were somehow completely bound to the home and men’s outside of the home. The article helps show the ways in which lived experiences often complicate even the ideologies that form them. See also Karen V. Hansen, Not-So-Nuclear Families: Class, Gender, and Networks of Care (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2004).


because of the two senses of “natural” distinguished above: natural as a descriptive point about what is shared by most or even all, and natural as a prescriptive category that defines the rules for social interaction and structure of social existence.

Pateman thinks that the liberal-individualist framework is inadequate to address feminist concerns fully. What the best liberal frameworks—whether republican virtue or other—can do is extend political equality to a private sphere, but, due to their methodological individualism, they cannot challenge the way in which the public sphere is framed as a whole. The heart of the feminist critique is directed toward the typically liberal way of framing the private sphere as an apolitical sphere. Theorists like Pateman point out that “woman” is always already a political term, and therefore “the personal is the political.” Indeed, the family is in fact a major concern of the state. The question is not whether “woman” or “family” are political terms, but in what way domestic matters ought to be political, and how the personal can be political in an affirming way.

Feminists... have been investigating how personal and family life is politically regulated, an investigation which denies that conventional liberal claim that the writ of the state runs out at the gate to the family home. They have shown how the family is a major concern of the state and how, through legislation concerning marriage and sexuality and the policies of the welfare state, the subordinate status of women is presupposed by and maintained by the power of the state.92 That is, there is no way of adequately theorizing “women’s oppression” from a liberal framework.

Something more is needed.

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92 Pateman, “Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy,” 133.
To summarize, the powerful feminist criticism is that the other frameworks (1) ignore the ways in which public and private are interconnected. Thus the slogan, “the personal is the political.” Further, (2) the assertion of the stark difference between public and private spheres on which liberal theory relies obfuscates similarities between them. For example, liberal societies tend not to recognize the main way that women have traditionally contributed to society through care for the domestic sphere as work. This approach ghettoizes women and inserts a patriarchal construction of “work” that obscured the domestic work of women. They also (3) hide inequalities, ways in which men tend to dominate in both public and private spheres. Gender blindness hides unequal pay, unequal distribution of resources, unequal political influence in public, and the ways in which men dominate in the home.93

While most feminists agree about the critiques, they diverge in prescriptive solutions. Liberal feminism seeks to gain political power within the already existing liberal framework. This view is confident that liberalism can expand to include feminist concerns. Key to this strategy is the increased participation of women in decision-making structures. According to Beverly Wildung Harrison, “no policy of social change will benefit women unless women themselves are given a central place in defining social well-being.”94 Marxist feminism, alternatively, wishes to undo the entire liberal way of sorting public and private in a different political framework. Capitalism is seen as the economic expression of liberalism, and therefore women’s oppression is tied to the oppression of the poor. Second-wave feminist approaches tend to valorize domestic activity and a

politics of care in a way that enhances the standing of women.⁹⁵

All three approaches, it can be argued, may end up re-instantiating the distinction in ways that are harmful to women. For example, the liberal feminist approach of seeking political or public power, which has been stereotypically male, has the potential both to reinforce the notion that typically male power is “real” power while simultaneously ignoring the ways in which women have exercised agency.⁹⁶ The distinction itself risks a vast and misleading overgeneralization. As Rebecca Chopp has noted, the narrative of a “purely” domestic woman “never really fitted all women and the women it did represent may well have pushed at its seams and edges. But the dramatic cultural, economic, and technological changes force the fractures of the narrative to rupture even further. Women and men are required to form new narratives and practices for the basic realities of reproduction, work.”⁹⁷ The second wave feminist approach can be read to re-inscribe the distinction in an almost essentialist way. Both potentially hide the ways in which oppressed women nevertheless have real agency and are not merely victims of a social order.

Hansen thinks that Arendt’s category of the “social” “resolves the tension within feminist theory about the publicness of domestic life.”⁹⁸ Acknowledging and further theorizing this third sphere would help solve both a “structural” problem of providing “a category to address a complex

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society and women’s community activities” and the interpretive problem of helping display these activities and their significance. It fits them together: “public (polity), private (individual, household) and ‘social’ (economy, civil society).” In my judgment, the feminist critiques along with the distinct feminist responses to of distinction are most promising for a theological conceptualizing, both because Christian theology is always erotic and therefore concerns questions about gendered distinctions, but also because feminist accounts of oppression and freedom are deepened by and in turn deepen Christian theological questions. Further, I will show in the two chapters that follow that the feminist account of the distinction can make sense of all the others, especially the Marxist critique, though the other frameworks often neglect the questions about gender and sexuality that feminists raise.

10. Liberal Portrayals

Benn and Gaus focus on the liberal ways of framing the distinction. They begin with the semantic problems of the terms of the distinction, drawing attention the fractal nature of the distinction discussed above. They ask, how can public and private be predicated of so many disparate things: public goods, public house, public servant; private property, private parts, private opinion? Are the terms analogical, predicated the same way that false can be predicated both of teeth and lovers? How should we conceive of the language? While they don’t put it in these terms, they suggest that there is some sort of analogical reasoning functioning. I have accounted for the “ordinary” use of the terms public and private above in my discussion of the fractal nature of the distinction. Like Gal, they name the distinction a “complex-structured concept” “embedded in a

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100 I think that my account of God and sin will show that the fractal is not just a description of ordinary language, but is actually rooted in analogical reasoning: God is the object common to all, and sin is absolute privation. Though I do not
culture and its language are principles or presuppositions that account for the continuity of the various senses of public.”

In other words, the public/private distinction is part of language, and it must be learned.

Because the “connections” between public and private “are likely to be ideological rather than purely logical,” they will depend on specific, culturally located beliefs about what it is to be an individual, a society, of action, of agency, and of collectivity. They wish to present a “semantic” theory of the distinction, which “will be about the ways in which the categories of public and private regulate a people’s institutions, practices, activities and aspirations. The distinction between publicness and privateness is a practical one, part of a conceptual framework that organizes action in a social environment.”

They distinguish three criteria for thinking of the public/private distinction in various contemporary debates: access, agency, and interest. The access criterion maps broadly on to Weintraub’s criterion of visibility, though with a different accent. It concerns physical access, access to activities, information, and resources. The debates about agency have to do with questions about whether an individual acts for himself or another: “What is your standing as an agent? What significance do your actions and decisions have for the status of other people?” The criterion of interest maps onto collectivity, and it draws attention to the feature of liberal democracy that work it out here, one could give a theological semantics of the public/private distinction based in the multiple uses of the terms as they are rooted in the theological realities of God, sin, and finitude.


102 “Our ontological status as intentional agents depends on the conceptual equipment that we bring to experiencing the world, and we acquire and learn the use of that equipment in learning our language. And because, in western culture at any rate, we apprehend a great deal of our social world by distinguishing things that are public and things that are private, how those concepts are structured necessarily informs not only what we ourselves say and do but also what responses to our actions we expect from others, how we assess their actions, and so on. Ibid.

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid., 9.
private interest is the way to the public good.

Benn and Gaus stipulate two different models of the distinction: individualist and organic. The individualist and organic models each have four corresponding “levels,” each of which build on one another. We can see illustrated in the building of the levels a movement from the anthropological to the socio-political distinction.

First, the most basic level of the individualist model is the individual person. The level depends on a “capacity for self-differentiation” and on the importance for personal actions…of the awareness that access to things about oneself can be extended or withheld.” “The ‘assignable individual’ who knows who he is, is thus the most basic, the logically most primitive, subject of privateness, and the public/private distinction is applicable to groups and institutions only by some logical or ideological process by which they can be built up from individuals."106

The second level, group identity, is based in the individual identity. “The privateness of love affairs, of the home, of friendships, of private parties and private meetings all relate to the aggregations of particular persons, known and specifiable to one another.”107 The public on this level is construed as an “overwhelming mass.” The concept requires the “notion of unspecified individuals” and “a boundary condition.”108 So a “public” can be “distinct” from other publics based on a set of criteria that make the public more than a private aggregate. In this case, “the antithesis of ‘public’ [is] not ‘private’ but ‘domestic’.”109 The private sphere is “set apart from the public arena and based in Roman conception of the pater familias. To enter into someone’s domicile is, then, to

106 Benn and Gaus, “The Liberal Conception of the Public and the Private,” 34.
107 Ibid., 35.
108 Ibid., 36.
109 Ibid., 38.
enter into his person.” To regulate “the domestic tyrant’s wife, children and servants” is akin to telling him to take more baths or clip his toenails. To tell him how he ought to spend his money is akin to telling him to change his haircut. The conception of the *pater familias* has been undermined to some extent, and what’s replaced it is “group or association of mutually dependent persons having a special kind of involvement with one another.” This level of life remains private because it is seen to involve intimate knowledges and cannot be universalized. This level is closest to the form my analysis will take.

The third level depends on “institutionalizing and treating the group as a corporate agent.” The private subject at this level “has a kind of corporate identity, a constitution, however informal, that enables one to ascribe to it actions, decisions and responsibility without, however, ascribing those actions etc. severally to every member.” It is under “no obligation to conduct their affairs for the sake of the public interest” but can rather pursue its own. Publicness on this model has to do with a Hobbesian or Oakeshottian idea of the *res publica* and of communal interest in which the state serves the interests of the whole. Interest on this level accounts for revitalized focus on non-governmental, private organizations that exist for the public interest and require public funding. The relevant question is: “what transforms an aggregation of unspecified individuals into a community capable of institutional personification as a public agency”? 

The fourth level is a network of private corporate individuals. Here, concern with some combination of the “private sector,” the “market economy” and “civil society” is important. By

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110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
112 Ibid., 39.
113 Ibid.
114 Ibid., 41.
attending to the way this model conflates the market economy with civil society, Benn and Gaus are able to show how the state exists to protect the civil society of contractual transactions. Within this understanding, the “polity exists for the sake of civil society.”\(^{115}\) The civil society, renamed “the private sector,” comes under attack with the “nationalisation of industries and increased socialisation of welfare services.”\(^{116}\) So the ideological cards are stacked before the discussion even starts: socializing “private” institutions for the public interest is automatically an attack on “civil society.”

On the individualist view, it is unclear that its methodological principle (starting from the individual and moving up) allows for the aggregate subjects in higher levels. How can corporations be “persons”? A second, deeper problem is that it fails to integrate the concepts and practices related to group identity that important to public life in liberal societies. In the end, the individualist model must admit Bentham’s claim: “individual interests are the only real interests.”\(^{117}\) The only way this model allows speech about collective interest is as “interest shared by everyone.” But in that case, it is never justified to help some at the expense of others. “As far as the individualist model is concerned, the public interest can only signal a conclusion, not an argument.”\(^{118}\) Finally, since politics reduces to individual interests, this model has problems accounting for political engagement. How can a member of the polity consider himself a member of a “group” except accidentally? Here we see the politics of the Tea Party and of many suburban, non-political evangelical churches, which often trade on this conception of “public” in order to

\(^{115}\) Ibid., 42.

\(^{116}\) Ibid., 43.

\(^{117}\) Ibid., 44.

\(^{118}\) Ibid., 47.
justify their apolitical stances, hiding their own group participation (white, middle-class, etc.) in their stated self-descriptions. Benn and Gaus’s conclusions about individualist model, then, give important insight into limits of conceptual work that Weintraub’s first family of approaches can do.

The second, organic model derives from Rosseau and Hegel, aligning broadly with Weintraub’s second family of approaches. It is also very similar to the model of society advocated by Catholic social thought. Like the individualist model, the organic model also involves what Benn and Gaus call four “modes” (rather than levels) of publicness and privateness. Reversing the order of the individualist model, the organic model moves from the highest level of publicness down to the level of privateness because the group is conceptually prior to the individual.

The first mode relies on the distinction between “mere aggregate and organic unity.” So two organic bodies are conceptualized. Interest and agency are two important criteria to differentiate the two types of groups. Broadly, “public [is] that which pertains to the whole”; the private is “that which concerns groups and individuals in their particularity.” On the individualist model, private is specified and public less unspecified. Here we see a countervailing trend: “particular” means “that which relates to any or every person apart from his character as a member of the whole” and general is “that which pertains to the organised body as a whole.”

The second mode is the “institutional realisation of what exists in the first mode as an abstract notion of an organic whole.” Here the focus is on the nation-state, the modern institution in which civil society can flourish. The conviction lying behind the construction of a coercive state

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120 Benn and Gaus, “The Liberal Conception of the Public and the Private,” 50.

121 Ibid., 51.
is that “the system of private ends is not ultimately self-regulating.” The state here doesn’t serve everyone’s individual interests, however. At least one aspect of the Rawlsian “original position” is relevant: private reasons have no place public affairs. The focus here is the way in which the state provides the legal protections necessary for a community of either equal discourse (Habermas) or public reason (Rawls) can flourish. This model of the state makes voting for private interests unintelligible, for “the State is not simply a joint-stock company or a private club.”

The third mode of the distinction is the family. The family is understood, to some extent, to be the basic unit of organic political life. The higher levels are projections of the family, and the fourth level is only understood in the context of the family. The family emerges here as a basically political entity, or, one might say, political entities are more complex expressions of familial units.

The fourth mode of the organic public/private distinction moves directly into the anthropological distinction: the public and private aspects of a person. We could parse the individual public/private distinction along the three criteria. The individual is understood as a private agent, making his (women are normally excluded from these discussions) own decisions and performing his own actions. The individual is understood to have his own interests over-against group identity. And the individual is understood to have parts that are hidden and parts that are revealed.

The focus on the ontological priority of the group over the individual tends to make liberals uncomfortable. In the organic view’s descending order of priority, “private life is first and foremost participation in particularistic associations and activities.” Liberals tend to think of the individual

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122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
124 Ibid., 57.
in terms of the individualist model. They take “the self-conscious individual with a private mental life as its logical and ideological point of departure.” But they also maintain practices of group identity that assume the organic model. If the first mode of the organic model is taken to include civil society, it places the account of political/social publics above their institutional expressions and embodiments.

11. Liberalisms and Corresponding Distinctions

Like Weintraub’s account, the way of parsing the public private distinction in Benn and Gaus doesn’t allow for a single model of public and private that can accommodate the various aspects of liberal social life. The aporia in liberalism that Benn and Gaus’s account of the distinction reveals is that it assumes a methodological individualism while relying on practices that assume group identity. Within liberalism, the public/private distinction is irreducible to either model. Paul Kahn’s account of the distinction in *Putting Liberalism in its Place* both ties the anthropological and socio-political aspects of the distinction together more firmly and provides a compelling explanation of the *aporia* that Benn and Gaus reveal and that Weintraub circles around. I will survey the account briefly here just to outline the way Kahn follows classical political philosophy in rooting the socio-political expressions of the public/private distinction in the human person.

Following Plato in the *Republic*, Kahn offers a political anthropology by distinguishing between the three parts of the human person: will, reason, and interest. These three parts map on to three different types of liberalism: liberalism of will, liberalism of reason, liberalism of interest.

Kahn begins his account of liberalism with a re-hashing of the differences between liberals and communitarians (which maps on to Benn and Gaus’s distinction between individuals and

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125 Ibid., 51.
organicists). The debate between the two “presents an unavoidable and unresolvable antinomy between a capacity for abstraction and a practice of contextualization. The antinomy is based in the very nature of discourse.” Kahn roots the liberal self in the subject/object distinction, the distinction between the I and the me, which he says is the basis of inner subjectivity. The subject is always only a subject among objects, always him or herself an object that can be thematized in a world of objects. That is, the subject is always a subject as an object, a context-formed self. The individual, the theoretical basis of the liberal order, is itself formed as a liberal citizen in a community. In this way, Kahn repeats the contradictions raised by the simultaneous existence of the individualist and organic views of the distinction. The only way to escape the contradictions or antinomies, Kahn argues, is to posit the mythical fiction of either an original position (Rawls) or a perfect discursive future (Habermas). As Stanley Hauerwas memorably puts it, for liberals, “you have no story but the story you chose when you had no story. But where did you learn the story that you had no story but the story you chose when you had no story?” Or, to put it with a slightly different accent that brings out the philosophical roots from Wittgenstein and Iris Murdoch, “You can only act in or refrain from acting in a world you can see, and you can only see what you’ve been taught to say.” Kahn concludes: “neither the liberals nor communitarians succeed because each seeks to understand politics as a form of discourse. The antinomic character of discourse continually replicates itself in the endless debates between liberalism and its critics.”

Kahn identifies two varieties of liberalism that dominate American life and jurisprudence, both of which revolve around religious freedom. The first prioritizes the protection of religion as the fundamental right above all others. This type of liberalism has its roots in the early religious

126 Kahn, Putting Liberalism in Its Place, 49.
127 Ibid., 60.
struggles, and it sees the liberal state as existing to protect the private exercise of religion. The second type of liberalism emphasizes the deployment of reason. It sees religious voices as voices that may be suppressed in the way that any type of reasoning might be deemed illegitimate, for religious reasoning is only one among many types of reasoning. Kahn uses this dichotomy to point out the way in which a third category gets neglected, a category which opens up what he calls “the erotic foundations of politics.” That is, the state itself is a quasi-religious entity that demands sacrifice.\footnote{128}{See William T. Cavanaugh, \textit{The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict} (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009); Cavanaugh, \textit{Theopolitical Imagination}.} The liberal state relies on a connection to a people, which is the basis for the justification for war. He argues that liberalism needs to be reconceived with attention to the under-theorized question of sacrifice.\footnote{129}{This self—the self of the individual, the self of the collectivity—is not prior to the will. Instead, the self is rooted in an account of desire. It’s a derivative reality.}

The public/private distinction for Kahn proceeds from a modesty. Liberalism is an amalgamation of competing and irreconcilable normative claims based in a philosophical psychology that is itself based in an anthropology. All three exist alongside each other. Liberalism of reason prioritizes the capacity of reason to discern the meaning of justice and universalize it. Liberalism of interest depends on the power of unconstrained markets to satisfy individual interests. Liberalism of will depends on the founding moment of popular sovereignty, in which revolution secures the identity of a people for which sacrifice must be made.

The public/private distinction is figured differently for each of these types of liberalism. Liberalism of will makes individual private desire both the basis of the political community and a constant threat to it. The sovereign cannot tell a person what to believe, but the sovereign can demand the sacrifice of life. Individuals come together to form a corpus with a single head. That
head is the sovereign, and can be either an individual, a group, or general collective will. The important thing is that the head is the head of a single body, a people who come together to protect their lives. This protection requires sacrifice.

Liberalism of reason either ignores or privatizes interest and will. It starts from an ideal starting point—either a Rawlsian veil of ignorance or a Habermasian ideal of communicative action—and moves to an account of the structure of society from the ideal. Because it trades on ideas for the structure of society, it is in principle universal, and therefore has a difficult time understanding the “erotic” attachment formed by the political body in the constitution of the popular sovereign. The particularity of the individual political community that requires sacrifice finds no place in an ideal, rationalist structure for political life. Further, because the ideal structure of society is meant to negotiate between competing interests, the accounts of “public reason” offered exclude textured, comprehensive accounts of the good life. Therefore, public discourse is sharply distinguished from private opinion, which includes religious and other moral matters that cannot garner universal assent.

Liberalism of interest maps on to the political/market account of the public private distinction. It is typified by libertarian accounts of free markets, which see society as an assemblage of individual private interests. The purpose of liberal government in liberalism of interest is neoliberal minimalism which regulates as little as necessary for free markets to work. Freedom is depicted almost entirely as economic freedom.\(^\text{130}\)

12. Sorting the Distinction

I find Weintraub’s sorting most persuasive for my purposes because his model is able to absorb the others, even as the others offer important correctives and ways of texturing his.

1) The first form of the distinction is between public and market. This form brings together important aspects of Benn and Gaus’s individualist distinction and the liberalism of interest. Benn and Gaus nuance this first form as it is found in Weintraub because they show the intimate connection of the distinction to both the private and the social. Insofar as it is an ideological and normative starting point that assumes a competition between public sector and the market, the distinction turns out to be less useful to Christian theology because of its irreducible individualism which separates interests. While descriptively powerful when applied to capitalist societies, it often bleeds into a normative individualism, as the Catholic social doctrine expresses nicely.

2) The second form of the public/private distinction is political/domestic. Hannah Arendt, its most powerful exponent, decries the rise of the realm of the social precisely because it destroys an “in-between” that mediates meaning for individuals in the polis. This version of the distinction is closely related to Kahn’s liberalism of reason (especially in Habermas). I think that this way of speaking is more normatively promising, even if it is problematic. I describe it in some detail in the next two chapters and I put its normative ideals directly into dialogue with the claims about the inner public self in chapter 4. I hope to show the way in which its prescription misses something important. Further, the argument in chapter 2 about the nature of sovereignty and governmentality in modernity shows that it is inadequate to the task of organizing political and social life because of the power of market forces in a society of control.
3) The third version of the distinction, closely related to the first, is the social/private distinction. According to this view, a realm of the social or of civil society moderates the distinction. Life at the level of the social is textured. But insofar as this view aims at comprehensiveness, it neglects the restoration of reason and therefore of justice. By focusing on society, this view of the public/private distinction potentially errs by being too polite, of conceding questions of justice to personal opinion. It is a sort of parlor room distinction, unwilling to offend even for the sake of the common good.

4) Feminist accounts of the distinction draw from all of the above but focus them on issues of hierarchy of men over women. Because they draw from the above approaches, they can be subject to the same limitations as the above approaches depending on which approach is most prominent. This form of the distinction, which corresponds to a variety of different strategies but one single normative claim about hierarchy, manages to be most compatible with the claims of Christian theology, which emphasize the equal dignity of all people, and which has strong traditions of thinking about gender, sexuality, hierarchy, and flourishing. In many ways, the feminist criticisms of the distinctions are most compatible with Augustine’s thought because both are most straightforwardly normative. Further, the best feminist thought acknowledges the effect of global capital’s shaping of desire in the way that rational plans for society are structured. It is able to desire both a textured social life in its valorization of the homes and still desire a public place for women.

The main focus in my dissertation will be the second and fourth forms of the distinction: the political/domestic distinction, and the critiques made by feminists that the political/domestic
distinction as it is construed by Arendt ends up marginalizing women. Further, my account of the
distinction will be filtered through Foucault’s analysis of biopolitics.

13. A Note on Constructive Theological Use of Augustine

Chapters three through six all engage Augustine thought: about trinity and creation (3),
interiority (4), nature and grace (5), and Mary and gender (6). So it is appropriate to say a word
about how I engage Augustine in what follows.

Augustine’s thought is unapologetically dualistic and hierarchical: matter is plastic to
rationality, body to soul, outer to inner; God is Lord of history and creation, and man is lord of
woman. The last of these hierarchies is problematic on Augustine’s own terms and ought to be
abandoned. Not a thing of use or substance is lost in Augustine’s thought by rejecting it. Those
hierarchies that precede it, however, are not weaknesses in Augustine’s thought. They should be
neither downplayed nor avoided but rather appropriated. After all, all thought is to some extent
hierarchical in what it assumes and how it is structured. I do not pretend to confront hierarchy in
some systematic way, but rather seek out better forms of hierarchical thinking—that is, truth—and
the better deployment of the truth. It is unfashionable to be hierarchical in later modern, western
academic circles because of a consciousness of the abuse of the hierarchical structures of thought.
The strategy here will be to engage what I take to be true and good hierarchical structures, to
deploy them in fruitful ways, and to show how they serve Augustine’s goal of understanding divine
life-sharing. It is not merely that there is some good end that justifies what are now considered by
many to be less-than-attractive conceptual means. Augustine rather introduces his reader into
thinking dualism and hierarchy productively. Matter-spirit dualism enables the affirmation of
enmattered embodiment. The hierarchical trinity is immediately and necessarily equal through the
hierarchy. The God-world hierarchy produces maximally powerful, active, and free human creatures. At least that is what I will argue. I trust that the way Augustine explains the hierarchy does not blur what he thinks essential to talk about living bodies.

The two types of sharing and the various dualisms and hierarchies do important work within Augustine’s thought; unfolding them helps a reader to understand the structure of Augustine’s theology. I trace out the grammar of his thought and show how the grammar helps to understand more clearly what God is, what creation is, what possibilities are available for the human soul, and what it takes to realize those possibilities. In the third through sixth chapters, I will especially concern myself with the last two items, answering “what kind of life does God share?” and “How does God share it?”

Negotiating the grammar of Augustine’s thought, however, is insufficient for a systematic, constructive, ethically attentive theological project. Why navigate unfashionable and (at times) genuinely treacherous dualisms and hierarchies when other options are available? Can the resultant goods be secured differently without dualism and hierarchy? Granting for the sake of argument that dualism and hierarchy have been abused by theologians to turn truths into lies, as they most surely have been, it is important to ask why one shouldn’t jettison Augustine’s thought altogether and find the needed resources in other thinkers or perhaps in a theological system of one’s own devising that avoids problematic concepts. I opt to stick with Augustine in spite of the historical misuses for several reasons. First, and most importantly, the hierarchy and dualism are only problematic on the surface. A careful exposition of Augustine’s thought will demonstrate the deeper structure. When the deeper structure is appreciated, the problems can be reformulated in more helpful ways.

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131 For an excellent account of why texts should not be judged by their worst readers, see Mark D. Jordan, *Rewritten Theology: Aquinas after His Readers* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2006). Jordan argues that the need for “rewriting” the *Summa* resulted from the subversive potential of the text.
that avoid all-or-nothing thinking. Second, it is nearly impossible fully to extricate the Christian system from all forms of hierarchy and all forms of dualism. If this is so, then Augustine is a most useful dialogue partner, for he provides an excellent example of hierarchical Christian thinking, especially since he happens to be the most influential Christian thinker in the west since the apostle Paul. Third, even if it is possible to extricate Christianity from all forms of hierarchy and dualism (which is non-sensical given that hierarchy is a universal feature of thinking), systems that attempt to do so fall outside of the mainstream grammar of Christian theology, which is largely derived from Augustine. Even if the ad hoc revisions seem more convincing, a whole system that avoids hierarchical dualisms (if it were possible) is unlikely to seem so. This project is concerned with Augustine’s particular claims in the context of the relatively systematic whole of his thought. The intuition is to work with a received grammar of faith and push it in light of more contemporary concerns rather than overhauling the system without exhausting every conceptual resource available. It is a tinkering within a received framework rather than an overhaul. It does not, however, wed itself thereby to all of Augustine’s particular conclusions. Fourth, Augustine was a genius, and the conceptual elegance of his thought recommends his writings to all serious thinkers of Christian theology. Fifth, his thought is useful in unmasking contemporary biases and blind spots. Christian Moevs’s claim about Dante and medieval metaphysics, I think, applies also in Augustine’s case: “The distortion of medieval metaphysical reflection common among modern nonspecialists is such that they often do not recognize that thought as medieval when it is presented to them in more accurate form: it seems too daring, too sophisticated, too ideologically unfettered, too nonmedieval. It can even, to those who understand it, come to seem at least as compelling as our
own examined or unexamined assumptions about the world." Augustine remains relevant even in light of all the advances in knowledge that have been made since he lived. So at the very least, reading Augustine can be taken as a thought experiment in the grammar of Augustine’s thought. Can Augustine “work” for contemporary readers, even if Augustine must in some ways subvert Augustine?

One caveat is necessary. The way I read Augustine does not sufficiently attend to the way his views emerged in a set of histories: histories of his own life, the history of philosophy, the political history of Christianity, and the history of Christian dogma. I will explain the development of Augustine’s thought only as it becomes necessary for the development of my argument. I offer no argument for the way Augustine’s claims fit within the various histories I named. Such a project would be interesting but entirely different than the one I undertake.

One way in which the hypothetical “historical” project above is different from what I am doing is that I am interested in the way that the conceptual grammar of Augustine’s thought can be deployed for thinking issues of contemporary importance, a constructive tracing of his theological logic. I want to think with him rather than merely to talk about him. I do not start from nowhere, but rather from his patterns of thinking, to see where they go. To some extent, therefore, because of the institutional location of this dissertation, I must allow the contemporary theoretical knowledges that dominate in my particular (western, academic) setting inform my discourse. I take it that any truth claim offers itself to a dialectical theological framework that takes truth seriously for revising theological claims. Christians who believe that the divine substance is identical with truth and that God created our bodies to fit with this world take truth into account wherever they

find it even if it causes theological revision through dialectical engagement. This is especially fitting for Augustine. Theological claims are one type among many human knowledges. Theology must therefore be accountable to the claims that do not originate within it. This brings up all sorts of questions about the priority of theological claims, etc. that were the fascination of the debates about theological method in a previous generation of theologians. 

I do not have a theoretical methodology that will specify how theology is accountable to other knowledges. Suffice it to say that, given the above claims about truth, various theoretical claims may exercise regulative force on theology. Evolutionary biology, eco-theology, feminist theory, queer theory, post-colonial theory have in various ways and with different force offered a set of discursive rules that affect the formation of theological claims in the modern academy. For example, feminist theory sets rules for discourse about the relations between men and women: the two are not arranged hierarchically, women are not to be defined solely by their capacity to bear children, etc. I take it that these rules can be deduced by anyone with familiarity with the discourse. They are, after all, the underlying assumptions that make various debates within the discourse possible. Evolutionary biology revises the set of possible claims about the first parents. Postcolonial theory questions an imaginary universe dominated by white men. These various theories rely on underlying, meta-assumptions which inform the complex debates that go on in the type of academic setting I find myself in. These underlying assumptions that are the basis of agreement are what offer themselves for consideration of theological claims. They need not regulate it by unproblematically imposing standards on it, for they do not impose themselves straightforwardly and without question. They may be rejected, bracketed, etc. But they remain regulative, however, because

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even when rejected, one is now constrained to give reason or at least signal that one is rejecting them. A rejected option says something about the ethos of an argument; the argument is different for rejecting something that might be considered live than it would be if it simply ignored it. In contemporary academic theology, theological writing can no longer act as these types of truth claims do not exist. If they are simply ignored, however, it is difficult to pretend intellectual credibility; they stand as challenges to academic theology. So the overall strategy will be to think with Augustine, to appreciate his usefulness, and, where necessary, confront the problems, expose their structure, and attend to their inadequacies. Careful thinking with Augustine will not only seek to commend the merits of his thought. It will also seek to expose the problems.
Chapter 1: A Genealogy of the Distinction

1. Introduction

Upon receiving the Lessing Prize in the free city of Hamburg, Germany, Hannah Arendt reflected on the meaning of her public honor, and on the danger of the slow, seemingly inevitable disappearance of a public world—she calls it an “in-between”—into a private realm. The later published essay laments the decline of the “in-between,” and it issues a warning:

The world lies in between people, and this in-between—much more than (as is often thought) men or even man—is today the object of greatest concern and the most obvious upheaval in almost all the countries of the globe. Even where the world is still halfway in order, or is kept halfway in order, the public realm has lost the power of illumination which was originally part of its very nature. More and more people in the countries of the Western world, which since the decline of the ancient world has regarded freedom from politics as one of the basic freedoms, make use of this freedom and have retreated from the world and their obligations within it. This withdrawal from the world need not harm an individual; he may even cultivate great talents to the point of genius and so by a detour be useful to the world again. But with each such retreat an almost demonstrable loss to the world takes place; what is lost is the specific and usually irreplaceable in-between which should have formed between this individual and his fellow men.¹

According to the typology of the public/private distinction in the introduction, Arendt is speaking within a civic republican framework. I argue, however, that her appeal on behalf of the “in-between” has wider relevance: the in-between makes a cast of characters and the scripts that go with those characters possible. Arendt is saying that the demise of the in-between forecloses the possibility of public action and public argument. In this chapter, I trace a genealogy of the loss of the in-between and its cast of characters—or, better, their replacement—while I build a conceptual vocabulary to make better sense of it. In the next chapter, I reflect on the meaning of contemporary debates in political theory about sovereignty and the creation of the character of the

liberal citizen on the one hand and the refugee on the other. My goal is to show that the loss of
Arendt’s “in-between” stems far more profoundly from the loss of a certain type of attachment or
desire or bond of social union than it does from a loss of rationality. Indeed, by framing the public-
private distinction as primarily a form of rationality, Arendt neglects the very possibilities of having
any public at all.

2. Political Anthropology

I begin my account with Plato and Aristotle, who together raise the connection between
the socio-political and anthropological aspects of the public-private distinction. Socio-political
claims open up spaces for certain types of political actors. I call the “types” of actors created
“characters,” and the spaces that are open to them—their characteristic beliefs, habits, practices,
modes of dress and speech, self-expectations, forms of work, etc.—their “scripts.”

Plato famously rooted the justice of the city in the proper ordering of the individual soul.
Since then, various strands of western political thought have related what I call an “anthropological
problem” to a “social-political problem.” The anthropological problem attends to how characters
interpret themselves within their received scripts. Common western tropes about this problem
concern the nature of the soul, the soul’s relation to itself, and the soul’s relation to the body. The
social-political problem attends to the question of the proper ordering of the community: what
social conditions are created in a particular community, which possibilities are opened up, and

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2 I approach the anthropological and socio-political problems through representative political texts of Plato (Republic)
and Aristotle (Politics). I choose these texts because they are the most widely cited and read texts about each author’s
political thought. Further, Aristotle engages Plato, and the two together offer the beginning of the conceptual grammar
that Arendt, who I analyze below, will draw upon. The two texts also provide an excellent starting point into
discussing the ancient framework of the public/private distinction. My purposes are to isolate a conceptual grammar
from each. Because my purposes are broad and heuristic, and nothing hangs on the technical vocabulary, I rely on
standard English translations of each text.
which are foreclosed. I will describe the way that Plato approaches the connection in the Republic and the way Aristotle approaches it in the Politics in order to shed light on the nature of the formal connection between the anthropological and the political problems as well as on how each figure construes the relationship. I take it that Plato and Aristotle together help provide a formal grammar and a set of problems that remain to the present day. Hannah Arendt’s treatment of these problems in The Human Condition helps isolate the conceptual grammar important for setting up an account of what is meant by the public/private distinction. So the account of Plato and Aristotle does double duty. First, it highlights a set of formal connections between anthropology and politics, which I take to be paradigmatic of all political proposals. Second, it provides a starting point for talking about the issues that get raised about the public/private distinction in modernity. Augustine and the western Christian tradition following him rely on the conceptual grammar that Plato and Aristotle develop. Peter Brown’s analysis of the difference Christianity made in antiquity shows in more detail how Christian claims were socially embodied against the Greek backdrop.

3. Plato

The goal of Plato’s reflection on justice is to theorize a timeless, universal concept of justice, “a city founded according to nature” rooted in a timeless, universal account of human nature. Justice, after all, is a “form” rooted in the way things are. Reality hangs together, and justice is just the way of naming how it hangs together socially. The relationship between the universal concept of justice and the universal account of the human being, brought together in the concept of

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1 For an account of this claim, see Kahn, Putting Liberalism in Its Place.
3 For an account of the development of justice from Homer through Plato and Aristotle, see MacIntyre, Whose Justice? Which Rationality?, 30–145.
“nature,” interests me here. For unlike most modern conceptions of justice, which are formal in that they do not specify what types of bodies ought to dominate a social order, Plato offers a substantive account of societal ordering and social hierarchy based in the proper ordering of the human soul. “Virtue” is the way of naming (formally) the proper ordering of the soul; Plato’s social doctrine is thus founded in his concept of the unity of the virtues. By a process of elimination (in which each of the virtues is rooted in some natural capacity), Plato concludes that justice names the proper ordering of each virtue in relation to the others. Because he is able to root justice in an account of the human being’s essential moral nature in this way, he is able to universalize and naturalize the social hierarchies he recommends. Philosophical anthropology, philosophical ethics, and politics are therefore intimately related. For Plato’s heirs, the characters almost always wrestle with the problem of universal subjectivity.

First, I describe in more detail the process of elimination by which the dialogue identifies justice. Each particular city is natural in the sense that each individual has a “nature” that makes him or her “naturally most fit” for exercising one of these three functions in the city. The guardian/ruler of the city is suited to his task because he is wise. The task maps on to the individual virtue of prudence. Those citizens of the city charged with its defense are suited to their task because they are courageous. The city as a whole exercises “courage” through its soldiers.

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6 See Rawls, A Theory of Justice; Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere; Kahn, Putting Liberalism in Its Place.

7 In Plato’s dialogue, Socrates identifies three classes: rulers, soldiers, and citizens who are ruled. Each of these classes, he argues, is specified by a particular virtue; the city is thus a natural kind of thing because the cardinal virtues are suited to human nature. The guardian class provides for the wisdom or prudence of the city, the soldier the courage, and the citizen the temperance.


9 Ibid., 428d–e.

10 Ibid., 429b.
Temperance is different. Unlike wisdom and courage “each of which resides in a part, the one making the city wise and the other courageous… moderation… actually stretches throughout the whole, from top to bottom of the entire scale.”\textsuperscript{11} Citizens who are neither rulers nor soldiers participate in the city’s temperance as citizens who carry out their respective duties.

This account of the three tasks leaves out justice. Justice, Socrates argues, must be the proper ordering and separation of the three classes. So the hierarchical ordering of the city, which recognizes the classes and places the individuals into their proper place is its justice. The violation of that natural hierarchy, “meddling among the class, of which there are three, and exchange with one another is the greatest harm for the city and would most correctly be called extreme evil-doing” is “injustice.”\textsuperscript{12} “A city seemed to be just when each of the three classes of natures present in it minded its own business and, again, moderate, courageous, and wise because of certain other affections and habits of these same classes.”\textsuperscript{13}

Plato ties the three classes even closer together by relating the structure of the city more directly to the properly ordered hierarchy in each individual person. The intellect or “calculating part” properly rules each individual.\textsuperscript{14} “A just and fine action one [is] one that preserves and helps to produce the condition [of harmony] and wisdom the knowledge that supervises the action.”\textsuperscript{15} In this way, the construction of public and private, political and domestic are rooted directly in an anthropology that is considered to be natural and universal. The proper moral ordering of the individual is then directly related to the proper functioning of the polis. Augustine reverses Plato in

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 432a.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 434b.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 435b.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 441e.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 443e.
On the Trinity XII when he re-reads the male/female dualism in 1 Corinthians 11 to be an indication about the proper ordering of the soul in a way that (partially) erases the male/female hierarchy.

Two arguments about the specifics of the social order dominate the fifth book of the Republic. The first has to do with the elimination of an intrinsic set of gender hierarchies (not altogether) in order to establish the true type of hierarchy—that of natural capacity—that would govern the city. The second has to do with the elimination of private property for the sake of the “highest good” of the city: its unity. In this way, the public ordering of a city in book IV bleeds into the ideal social order book V with the fifth book’s analogy of the city to single body, a single center of pain and pleasure.

Plato starts his discussion of the most just social order by turning to the question of “children—how they’l1 be begotten and, once born, how they’l1 be reared—and that whole community of women and children of which we speak. We think it makes a big difference, or rather, the whole difference, in a regime’s being right or not right.”\(^{16}\) In doing so, he turns the question of social order immediately to the construction of the family/private sphere.

First, he asks about the place of women. Is there a set of skills, capacities, or virtues particular to women? One the one hand, women should share responsibilities in common with men, for women and men participate in the same human nature. On the other hand, he thinks that female nature is different than male nature. This presents a dilemma that Socrates takes it upon himself to resolve: in what sense do men participate in the same nature as women?\(^{17}\) In what sense are men and women different? He resolves the dilemma by denying that men qua men are inherently capable of some things and women qua women of others. Rather, both have capacities

\(^{16}\) Plato, The Republic of Plato., 449d.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 453e.
for the same things. In this way, both are human and instantiate generally human capacities. The difference is that women participate in human nature in a weaker way and are therefore generally, across the board, weaker instantiations of the same capabilities as men. “Woman participates according to nature in all practices, and man in all, but in all of them women is weaker than man.”

Plato turns more directly to the private sphere and constructs an argument for community of women and children by further tying the political order to his anthropology. Socrates argues that the unity of the city is its goal, and dissolution of the city is the chief danger. The way to the goal, which is the “highest good” of the city is to establish a “community of pleasure and pain” so that “to the greatest extent possible all the citizens alike rejoice and are pained at the same comings into being and perishings.” The single organic body provides the model for the type of unity Plato wants the city to exemplify in his perfectionist schema. The only way to approximate this goal is to eliminate the natural family, which forms its own unit, and instead to make women and children common, removing the private sphere altogether. For the collective feeling of pains and pleasures can happen only when people no longer use phrases like “my own” and “not my own.” Private property and individual family life “dissolve” the feeling necessary to sustain the unity of the city. So Plato eliminates private homes, land, and possessions and instead institutes a common order of distribution. The city then functions not like a single, private family, but really more like a single, private body. It is here that Aristotle critiques Plato’s thought experiment.

18 Ibid., 455d-e.
19 Ibid., 462b.
20 Ibid., 462b.
21 Ibid., 462c.
For Aristotle, who broadly accepts the formal connection between anthropology and politics, political community begins with two types of natural relationships: the man and the woman, and the master and the slave. The family is in some sense more basic than any political connection because it is the means by which humans, like plants and animals, “leave behind an image of themselves.”\(^\text{22}\) The “state is a creation of nature” and, correlative, “man is by nature a political animal.”\(^\text{23}\) Both claims are important as they establish the close connection between anthropology and politics on the one hand, and root both in “nature” on the other. Aristotle pursues his natural political anthropology differently than Plato. He shares with Plato the view that the good pulls all human acts toward itself.\(^\text{24}\) But he structures his account differently by attending to the grittier, more concrete situations in which human beings find themselves.

One example of this tendency to start with the concrete rather than the abstract is the way that Aristotle roots his political anthropology in the good by means of attention to “the gift of speech.”\(^\text{25}\) Speech, unlike mere voice shared with the other animals, enables human animals to “set forth the expedient and inexpedient, and therefore likewise the just and the unjust.”\(^\text{26}\) The state is defined simply as “the association of living beings who have [the] sense [of good and evil, of just and unjust, and the like].”\(^\text{27}\) In this way, the city is the concrete way that human life organizes itself so

\[^{23}\text{Ibid.}\]
\[^{24}\text{Ibid., 1253a11. John Hare compares Aristotle’s conception of God to a magnet. See John E. Hare, God and Morality: A Philosophical History (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2007), 7–74.}\]
\[^{25}\text{Aristotle, “Politics,” 1253a.}\]
\[^{26}\text{Ibid.}\]
\[^{27}\text{Ibid., 1253a12.}\]
that it can be drawn to the good that relentlessly draws all things to itself. In Aristotle’s perfectionist understanding, as in Plato’s, political organizing is the way that human animals pursue the good life.

Aristotle departs from Plato when he turns to the private sphere, the basis of political community, and focuses on the art of household management. The private sphere concerns “life” and the “household.”\(^{28}\) The gift of speech directs the art of household management in the way that the manager of a household “has to order the thing which nature supplies.”\(^{29}\) What does nature supply? Nature supplies not only different ways of creating wealth and using the world’s natural resources, but also what we might anachronistically call “human resources.” Aristotle agrees with Plato that human resources are determined by natural capacities. He is more reluctant to set up an ideal political order the way that Plato does, but he gives a broad framework for household management and political ordering, differentiating a sphere of politics from its basis in the household. Having structured it thus, he proceeds to order the household according to natural capacities or ideal “types” of people, what I have called “characters.” “Almost all things rule and are ruled according to nature. But the kind of rule differs.”\(^{30}\) Two characters are especially noteworthy. First, he famously refers to natural slaves with “no deliberative faculty”\(^{31}\) and that are “naturally” ruled.\(^ {32}\) Although the parts of the soul are present in all people, slaves and rulers alike, they are present in different degrees. Second, whereas for Plato, women participate in a weaker way in the same nature as men, for Aristotle, the same “parts of the soul” are present, but in a lower degree

\(^{28}\) See ibid., 1256b. Note the distinction between production and action, “life” is action, not production.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 1258a1-2.

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 1260a7.

\(^{31}\) Ibid.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 1260a.
that makes her always and in every case the ruled rather than the ruler. Because Aristotle’s understanding of difference is more deeply essentialist, the characters in Aristotle’s city, which does not give up the family, are more firmly fixed than those in Plato’s.

Aristotle develops a vastly different account of the relation of the household to the state in dialogue with Plato. Whereas Plato’s thought experiment absorbs the household into the state in his community of women and children, Aristotle, argues against Plato’s account of the unity of the state because organic bodily unity is too united. Rather, the state’s unity is different in kind than an organic body. Therefore, the state’s unity should not aspire to a type of bodily unity.

Directing his argument against the community of women and children, he details a set of practical considerations and argues that Plato’s analogy depends on a unity like the erotic love binding the lovers in the Symposium. It involves a “specious appearance of benevolence,” because it is not true to the kind of thing it actually is. A city is united not in the way lovers are united, but in the way a family is united. Further, such a unity is self-undermining because the strong bond between the members of the state would make rebellion and revolution a greater threat. It will simultaneously divide society too much, as the clear class segregation would inhibit the motivation to preserve family life, and it would unite it too closely as the city would form a single body. By distributing authority (a sort of principle of subsidiarity), Aristotle provides the basis for conceptions of the family and of political bonds that do not undermine themselves the way he thinks Plato’s conceptions do. “There is a point at which a state may attain such a degree of unity as to be no longer a state, or at which, without actually ceasing to exist, it will become an inferior state, like harmony passing into unison, or rhythm which has been reduced to a single foot. The

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33 Ibid., 1262b.
34 Ibid., 1263b11.
state, as I was saying, is a plurality, which should be united and made into a community by education.\textsuperscript{35}

Correlatively, he argues against full communism and for the institution of private property. The argument, like the others, is pragmatic. “When every one has a distinct interest, men will not complain of one another, and they will make more progress, because every one will be attending to his own business.”\textsuperscript{36} “Property should be private, but the use of it common; and the special business of the legislator is to create in men this benevolent disposition.”\textsuperscript{37} He then goes on to root private property in human nature. “How immeasurably greater is the pleasure, when a man feels a thing to be his own; for surely the love of self is a feeling implanted by nature and not given in vain.”\textsuperscript{38} Additionally, a state of common property annihilates the virtues of temperance toward woman and liberality with property.

Aristotle’s argument shows why Arendt, after \textit{Origins of Totalitarianism}, might be attracted to Aristotle’s framework for thinking about private property. It preserves the unity necessary to sustain individual self-determination in a common world. We can also see this account of private property in both Catholic social thought (right to private property but not over its use) and in various responses to contemporary biopolitical regimes. The intuition behind Arendt’s vision and Foucault’s analysis, to be discussed in the next chapter, is that the modern world has come to be dominated by the dynamic of publicizing what is private, exemplified by the state taking responsibility for education and for birth. This sort of flattening of social relations portends a

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 1263b14.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 1263a6.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 1263a8.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 1263a8-b8.
tyrannical unity that smooths the texture of private life necessary to sustain a true publicity. The question here will be: how do we assess the weaknesses of the Arendtian framework while simultaneously responding to the real challenges to which it responds?

Having surveyed the conceptual grammars of Plato and Aristotle, some formal, preliminary conclusions can be reached about the relation between public and private. First, the pair is intimately tied to the concept “justice,” which has to do with the proper ordering of a polis. Second, the “just” ordering is considered “natural.” That is, justice is understood as the way in which the city is structured to approximate the good, which is conceived as a timeless universal. Third, justice orders each individual into his or her natural place according to the individual’s nature, understood with reference to the individual’s natural capacities. For Plato’s more communal framework, this has less to do with family of origin and more to do with rational ordering based on stereotypical generalizations. For Aristotle’s framework, this has to do with the kind of thing one is (man, woman, child, slave, master).

5. Early Christian Problematic

The reason that Plato and Aristotle were able to maintain a clearly distinguishable public and private realm is because they presumed that nature appointed a social hierarchy. Not so for early modern thinkers. Hobbes, for example, structures his proto-liberal account of politics around his construction of a “state of nature” in which life is “nasty, brutish, and short” and in which all war against all because of “natural liberty.” Boundless desire and boundless right (in Hobbes’s reframing of the ius naturale) are reined in only by reason, which senses that the war of all against all is less-than-desirable and that, instead, society will set up some provisional hierarchies to rein in the violence.
What is most significant for my cursory grammatical reading of Plato’s and Aristotle’s political thought is that they connected a political setup to a view of the human person, and they naturalized both. The earliest Christian proclamation came as a moral revolution that questioned exactly the naturalness of the account of the self and the inevitability of the social set up. In some ways, the entire argument about Augustine that follows in chapters 3-6 can be read as a deep grammar of the way Augustine’s thought does this. Much has been written about the difference Christian thought—the apostle Paul, early Fathers, St. Augustine—made for views of human nature and agency.\(^{39}\) We can see in texts like 1 Corinthians 11 and the various household codes, which I will discuss below, a struggle with the naturalizing of the social order.

Oliver O’Donovan gives a plausible theoretical model that helps imaginatively explain the antinomies in the early Christian writings:

Imagine an official of the Russian Government in October 1991, confronted with some demand from the foundering Soviet authorities. ‘This is ridiculous!’, he thinks to himself. ‘We will be running that ourselves by next week!’ Yet to display open contempt would give the impression that the new authorities did not believe in constitutional government at all. So confident is he in the shape of the coming order, that he has no need of an insolent posture to assert it against the order that is vanishing. Jesus, similarly, believed that a shift in the locus of power that was taking place, which made the social institutions that had prevailed to that point anachronistic. His attitude to them was neither secularist nor zealot: since he did not concede that they had any future, he gave them neither dutiful obedience within their supposed sphere of competence nor the inverted respect of angry defiance. He did not recognize a permanently twofold locus of authority. He recognized a transitory duality which belonged to the climax of Israel’s history, a duality between the coming and the passing order.\(^{40}\)

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O’Donovan’s sensibility is useful partly because it helps to explain the motivation for the seeming quietism of the biblical texts that I will discuss. It also helps put into starker relief two other ways of taking the scriptural texts. First, it explains the tendency to use readings of scriptural passages like the household codes or claims about gender complementarity to assert a universal social structure (and therefore a universal structure of public/private). The most powerful and obvious place these sorts of debates are taking place right now are in the realm of gender and sexuality. The problem with reading the Bible to be offering a universal social structure based in “nature” is that the approach fails to take the words of scripture seriously enough to attend to the spiritual meanings of the text. Mark Jordan gestures to this criticism, but frames it in terms of critical approach to the way that cultural languages from what David Kelsey calls a “host culture” need critical examination. “Theological speech ought to be powerful enough to describe human sex persuasively without becoming simply the propaganda for some all-too-human tyranny. Christian ethics can begin to find such language by being scrupulous in the examination of the languages it already has…”

41 See, for example, the endless number of theoretical and practical works arising from both conservative evangelicalism and Catholicism (though, the Catholic works tend to be much more theoretically stimulating): Steven A Long, Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2010); Lawrence Feingold, The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas and His Interpreters (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2010); John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006).

42 For a really nice discussion about the way in which debates about homosexuality in Anglicanism represent much larger issues, see Oliver O’Donovan, Church in Crisis (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008).


6. Strategies of Containment

Hannah Arendt provides a helpful extension and reflection on the conceptual grammar of the Greek positions. Her view sounds more Aristotelian. It is part of the narrative of how public and private get structured in classical culture. In many ways, Arendt’s broadly Aristotelian framework depends on Aristotle’s argument that the only way to sustain the public city was to allow for a realm of privacy. She identified various ways in which the conceptual grammar inherited from Plato needed the Aristotelian revision in order to sustain the type of life necessary for human flourishing. Her account is often taken as a tragic decline narrative. Instead, I read her to be offering a powerful conceptual grammar that must be maintained in order to create the conditions of the possibility for discourse in a common world. In that way, her thought serves as a constructive conceptual stopping point that helps to show how the narrative moves along.

For Arendt, the concept action—which requires the “in-between”—is only understood against the backdrop of two other types of human activity. We share labor with all creatures who need to sustain their biological life, because labor is the activity aimed at sustaining life. Work, which is somewhat closer to action, is specified by making artifacts of relative permanence to extend mortal lives. Everyone understands biological needs, but, for Arendt, one doesn’t need a common “world” in order to administer biological needs. One only needs to organize labor, and animals can do that. But surely we are destined for something greater. Action is the formal name for that something greater, the highest activity—distinctively human, and always political. Action has to do with the individual or collective making of meaning. It therefore depends on deliberation and shared understanding, which is why it requires a common, public space in which we can be seen and heard, and on a common framework that makes it possible for our actions to be intelligible to others.
On classical terms, action, especially in speech, is only possible for the one who is free from the need to sustain himself biologically and extend his mortal existence in time. That is, action is only possible for people that can leave their bodies behind. Men of means, then, tend to be the subjects of action. For only those liberated from needs in this mortal life can be concerned enough about “immortality” to act; magnificence and magnanimity are virtues that make for greatness, and these virtues require good fortune, especially the good fortune to be born a man! Laborers, artisans, merchants, and all businessmen—those who needed to work to sustain themselves—cannot free themselves of their bodily needs. A society of laborers is enslaved to the immanent and mundane.\(^{45}\)

This bears out historically. Certain subjects were identified by their relation to domestic life more than others. Anyone whose domain of action was specified by activities having to do with the nurturing of life (labor in Arendt’s terminology) was identified as domestic or private. Chiefly, women were identified this way, and we can identify an ideal-typical “character.” Because women’s bodies are identified by their connection to the transmission of human life—women not only have babies, but are a perpetual risk of having illegitimate babies—a woman’s body brought domesticity everywhere it went.\(^{46}\) Since women could only be private—a change in fortune would not enable

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\(^{45}\) In the modern world, according to Benhabib’s powerful summary of Arendt, we all become what history has made Jewish women like Arendt: without a shared homeland, tied to our work of labor, without a politics, irreducibly embodied. See Benhabib’s chapter on Rahel Varnhagen in Benhabib, The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt. See also Hannah Arendt, Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewish Woman, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974).

them shed their bodily domesticity—they were for the most part separated off from the public, political realm.⁴⁷ Even when there were exceptions, the construction of the character made it so.

Consider this example from Philo of Alexandria:

A woman, then, should not be a busybody, meddling with matters outside her household concerns, but should seek a life of seclusion. She should not show herself off like a vagrant in the streets before the eyes of other men, except when she has to go to the temple, and even then she should take pains to go, not when the market is full, but when most people have gone home, and so like a freeborn lady worthy of the name, with everything quiet around her, make her oblations and offer her prayers to avert evil and gain the good.⁴⁸

John Chrysostom comes out and says it:

Our life is customarily organized into two spheres: public affairs and private matters…. To woman is assigned the presidency of the household; to man, all the business of the state, the marketplace, the administration of justice, government, the military, and all other such enterprises…. [A woman] cannot express her opinion in a legislative assembly, but she can express it at home.⁴⁹

Tertullian applies it to liturgy: “It is not permitted for a woman to speak in church, but neither is it permitted her to teach, nor to baptize, nor to offer, nor to claim for herself any manly function, least of all a public office.”⁵⁰

According to the conceptual grammar underlying these claims (which I will tease out using Arendt), all men are private insofar as they, too, have bodies. Some men, especially those without means—working classes, laborers, slaves—are identified primarily by their bodies. In antiquity, men who were identified primarily by their relation to the sustenance of bodily life were in a

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⁴⁷ See Torjesen, When Women Were Priests. This is the central thesis of the book.


structurally similar position to women. Their bodies could not be recognized as “public bodies,” for public bodies are bodies that do not seem like bodies in public. A poor man could not leave his body behind in public, because he wore signs of his labor even when he wasn’t working: calloused hands, simple clothing, leathered skin. Wealthy men, however, could be considered public so long as they did not bring their private, bodily concerns into public. Wealth and manhood sufficed to cover the signs of human finitude and vulnerability.51

The logic of the public/private distinction prioritized certain types of bodies (male, wealthy) in social hierarchies, and therefore determined a set of social roles in the home and in society. Men had to maintain control over their domestic workers and their women. In a society where children and the home are sites of economic production, it is especially important to contain women by preventing them from being violated or having sex with the wrong man (in the case of daughters) or another man (in the case of a wife), which could compromise the fragile social/economic order.52 Societal organization was based on a man’s need to guarantee his progeny as his own. A wealthy man’s private life could be brought in public only if he lost control over it. Either he loses control over his possessions and becomes poor, or he loses control over his wife’s body sexually and she bears illegitimate children. She is therefore always a potential source of shame. Women’s privacy or domesticity was in this way reducible to their genital sexuality. Wives therefore needed to be contained and identified in public. So societies that distinguished public and private like this—like the Greeks and Romans tended to do—placed a high premium on purity, on

52 See Clark, “Ideology, History, and the Construction of ‘Woman’ in Late Ancient Christianity.”
virginal integrity, on the intactness of the hymen. The public/private distinction is therefore the main way that gender and sexuality were organized in antiquity.

Scholars of sexuality in late antiquity identify various rhetorical “strategies of containment” used to ensure that women were kept in their rightful place in the ordering of society, which was indistinguishable from sexual “virtue.” These strategies are rhetorical, legal, even textual. Their goal was to form characters for women, which seemed “natural” within the system that evoked them and to the people that performed them. These strategies therefore formed characters to make one particular convention of distinguishing between public and private seem like part of the divine law of nature. One of the main ways this goal was achieved was by assigning virtues differently: a man’s public role in political deliberation was seen to include the virtues of prudence, fortitude, and justice (the so-called cardinal virtues, which are etymologically related to the meaning of “masculinity”). Aristotle has no magnanimous woman! A set of virtues proper to the women’s roles—chastity, obedience, silence—constructed how women were valued and how they thought of themselves. To accompany these virtues, another strategy insisted on strict rules for


54 See Wayne A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995). For Meeks, economic concerns in scripture centered around maintaining the good order of the household within and with respect to the polis. “Two dimensions of this order were uppermost in the minds of householders: assuring continuity of name and inheritance through legitimate offspring and assuring the honor of the family and its clan.” Meeks uses the word “therapeutic” to denote “those measures that were felt to be needed to protect against the disordering, threatening powers of the female.” Thus the concern that Paul has for marriage rules in Thessalonica and the injunction to avoid *porneia*. “[Paul’s] language merely represents the central economic importance and danger of the woman’s body in common moral reasoning” (143). Paul feared an interruption of the line of legitimate heirs. But according to Meeks, Paul began to budge. He imagines a private conversation between a female and Paul, moving him to a more moderate position in which the “receptacle” theory of reproduction moves to a “balance of mutual powers and obligations” with a complete absence of procreation language in 1 Corinthians (143). “Now it aims not at the protection of the husbands goods in the community, but at limiting the dangers of passion in the private economy, so to speak, of sexual interchange between man and woman” (143). He notes especially the continuing centrality of the concern with the “purity” of the group.

55 Liz Clark takes the term from Fredric Jameson in Clark, “Ideology, History, and the Construction of ‘Woman’ in Late Ancient Christianity.”
women’s deportment in public. Women were only to leave their homes at certain times, and they were forced to wear veils when they did.

The “virtue” strategy is prominent in early Christian sources, and the veiling strategy is hinted at as well. Paul used the virtue strategy in various instructions to women (i.e., 1 Corinthians 14). Paul seemed to assume the above background grammar of the public/domestic distinction, even if he resisted it in certain ways. Deutero-pauline household codes especially reflect this in their calls for women, children, and slaves to submit to the control of the paterfamilias, the role of which is softened but not undone. In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul says that when women exercise a quasi-public function of praying or prophesying, they need to wear veils to show their attachment to their husbands, that is, their husband’s headship. Paul says it is “shameful” for a woman to pray or prophesy with her head uncovered, and that when she does so, she brings dishonor upon her head. New Testament scholar Dale Martin puts it like this, “The veil not only symbolized but actually effected a protective barrier guarding the woman’s head and, by metonymic transfer, her genitals...To tear off the veil was to invite or symbolize sexual violation.”

As is the case in many veiling cultures, a veil not only protected a woman; it functioned to contain the chaos that a woman’s uncovered body might cause when it attracts the male gaze. To go without a veil tempted men and liberated women’s bodies sexually. Veils protected society by holding the chaos of free female sexuality in place. “The female is seen as both threatened and threatening. Female sexuality, as either an active or passive force, constantly threatens to disrupt the order of society, its proper hierarchy, its ability to maintain control.”

Joan Scott generalizes the claim I wish to make from her survey of anthropological studies:

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56 Martin, The Corinthian Body, 234.
57 Ibid., 236.
The dominant causal feature that emerges from anthropological studies of the sexual order … is whether, and to what extent, the domestic and the public spheres of activity are separated from each other. Although what constitutes “domestic” and what “public” varies from culture to culture, and the lines of demarcation are differently drawn, a consistent pattern emerges when societies are placed on a scale where, at one end, familial and public activities are fairly merged, and, at the other, domestic and public activities are sharply differentiated… Where familial activities coincide with public or social ones, the status of women is comparable or even superior to that of men. This pattern is very much in agreement with Engels's ideas, because in such situations the means of subsistence and production are commonly held and a communal household is the focal point of both domestic and social life. Hence it is in societies where production for exchange is slight and where private property and class inequality are not developed that sex inequalities are least evident. Women's roles are as varied as men's, although there are sex-role differences; authority and power are shared by women and men rather than vested in a hierarchy of males; women are highly evaluated by the culture; and women and men have comparable sexual rights.58

I think this lens helps to make sense of why, say, Augustine argues that polygyny was legitimate and that polyandry was illegitimate.59 The “law of nature” is really a placeholder for a convention based on a confluence of societal assumptions into an account of the political/domestic distinction. Reading Augustine’s assumptions about virginity and marriage through this lens, it is easier to understand why he thinks that women who are raped can’t be consecrated to a life of holy virginity. The priority on purity and the intact hymen is neither a feature of what we can discern from nature nor is it a product of the divine dispensation of history, as far as I can tell. Rather, it is derived from the received social assumptions that animated Augustine’s political order. It seems “natural” to him because that is how the strategies of containment work—they naturalize what is a contingent feature of culture so that it can be seamlessly integrated into moral formation.

Arendt opposes her account of political action to all things that nurture biological life (including, as feminists have pointed out, the womb!), partly because she thinks that politics is the

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59 coniuj., 17.20.
realm of freedom and equality that is possible only if fortune liberates us from our slavery to our mortality. In a world before reliable technologies that separated sex, children, and death, the task of carrying new life symbolized slavery to mortality. The home is the concrete sphere of biological life: eating and drinking, marrying, giving in marriage, having children, farming food, selling goods, making money. Family, tribe, or whatever community concerns itself with natural needs is also sites of the animal violence and hierarchy necessary to secure the goods necessary to sustain life. Domestic life is intrinsically hierarchical, and it sometimes involves brutal measures to ensure survival in a world of scarce resources. This is just part of what it means that the domestic sphere is the realm of “life.” Arendt completely neglects the political import of giving birth.

The slavish necessity involved in economic life—on a spectrum, because on this framework the more private and the less freely public, the less specifically human one is—is contrasted to the free exercise of persuasion in political life. The distinction is gendered and sharp. For Arendt, like Aristotle and Paul, men are public, women domestic. The male freedom from necessity precludes the need for a “right” to private property makes political engagement possible and places all those whose existence is exclusively “domestic” outside of the sphere of public, political life. There was no “political” right to private property. Rather, private property was guaranteed by the political arrangement that required “freedom” as its condition. The “good life” on this view means “having mastered the necessities of sheer life, by being freed from labor and work, and by overcoming the innate urge of all living creatures for their own survival.” It means removing politics from “the

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biological life process.” Again, we see Arendt providing a broader conceptual framework in which the exercise of public and private social organization in antiquity made sense.

Classical thought named two types of life: *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*. *Vita activa* is the generic category under which action, work, and labor fall. Action is the highest form of the active life because it enables us to distinguish ourselves among other people. Those who act “are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live.” In the language of the virtues, action is the basis of our distinctive “character.” By contrast, “the human condition of labor is life itself... The human condition of work is worldliness.” Both are ultimately unremarkable.

Much of the *vita activa* is coping with our mortality in different ways: labor extends species life, work adds some permanent artifact to the world in spite of time’s flight, and action extends our life differently by making our lives memorable. Action alone copes with mortality in a distinctively human way. It introduces something new in the world, and, by bringing something new, human death gives rise to new types of human life: “the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting.” Through action, we extend ourselves in time by opening up

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61 Ibid., 37.  
62 Ibid., 8.  
63 Ibid., 7.  
64 Ibid., 8–9.  
65 Ibid., 9.
collective political horizons. Action best corresponds to our nature because our nature implies an infinite horizon that extends beyond precisely because it implies the power to act.66

The Aristotelian *bios politikos* is therefore the crucial subject of the *vita activa* for Arendt. By sharply distinguishing between action and other forms of the *vita activa*, it is possible to see why “publicity” or “politics” is attached to wealth. For the *bios politikos* is really only possible when one is freed from the maintenance of biological life—free especially from labor.67 Other laboring, working forms of life are not even *bios*. They are inherently apolitical (or, for Arendt, “unpolitical”) because they are too wrapped up in mundane concerns to actualize the potencies that make for human greatness. Here, I refer to them as “domestic” forms of life. Domestic (or economic) life is that which is related to the nurturing of life.

For Aristotle, the meaning of the active life requires the shared world arrived at through contemplation—this is the basis of his perfectionist politics. Political consensus depended on a shared world, which can only be arrived at and agreed upon through contemplation. The *bios politikos*, therefore, cannot exist without reference to the *vita contemplativa*. Arendt locates her genealogy of the decline of the public and the private in the way that Christianity compromised the relationship between the political life (*vita activa*) and the philosophical life (*vita contemplativa*) shifted.

7. The Revolution

I argue that Christianity can be seen to have brought about a revolution in the categories of public and private not by undoing them but by revising their significance. This claim can be seen

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most clearly in relation to women and the poor. Here I focus on broad historical narrative in order to set the question more clearly. In subsequent chapters, I substantiate my claim by examining the grammar of the distinction using the thought of Augustine. Augustine serves as an exemplary Christian grammar for what it means to continue to think the meaning of this revolution against the present alternatives.

Consider, first, the “household codes” of early Christianity in relation to women. They can be found in Ephesians 5, Colossian 3, and 1 Peter 2. In them, the same relationships that we see detailed in both Aristotle and Plato (husband/wife, father/children, slave/master) are reconfigured around the meaning of Jesus. Whereas some of the earliest Christian texts (the authentic Pauline letters of Galatians and 1 Corinthians, for example Galatians 3:26, 1 Cor. 11:2-16) have some strong egalitarian overtones, the later texts fit the Christian household within ancient Roman conceptions of propriety. Thus the ways in which they act as “strategies of containment.” At the same time, the early Christians tried to reimagine the same relationships around the meaning of Christ’s cross in a way that ultimately subverted them and called them into question. The household codes, while important for my historical account, do not need to be rehashed in detail as they are the objects of extensive study elsewhere. Meeks nicely summarizes the “enduring tension” extant in some of the earliest Christian—which also happen to be canonical—accounts of the household and family relationships. This tension would beset the Christian ethos. On one side is the traditional household, in which precisely the body of the woman—perceived simultaneously as essential to the continuation of family and community alike and as the vessel of passions and powers

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68 Except, in some cases, for women—see Martin, The Corinthian Body.

extremely dangerous to the health and honor of men and state—is the focus of her established roles. On the other side are the active, gender-transcending roles to which the Spirit might call a woman in the new faith.\textsuperscript{70}

This is because, I argue, the grammar of Augustine’s thought calls into question exactly the naturalization of the self and the corresponding naturalization of social roles.

This tension gestures toward the radical basis within Christianity for revision of conceptions of the home, which is the private basis of public life. It is not primarily a matter of discerning textual meanings, applying them, or discounting them, as if one should tally a set of scriptural or traditional conclusions to discern ethical norms.\textsuperscript{71} Rather, the approach is to map the difference a new conceptual grammar made, and then to elucidate the specifics of that grammar later. This grammar is found principally in the New Testament and its meaning solidified and expounded crucially in late antiquity by the Church Fathers.

Here I rely on Peter Brown’s analysis of the difference Christianity made for the public-private distinction in late antiquity, where my purpose is to map out the social embodiment of the grammar that I will explicate in detail later. Analyzing his account here in light of Arendt’s lexicon also helps me give a better picture of the two parts of the political/domestic distinction narrated

\textsuperscript{70} Meeks, The Origins of Christian Morality, 147.

above: sex and class. He helps to show the radical difference Christian faith made in antiquity, despite the evidences of continuity I have outlined above. Brown begins with the classical “Antonine” backdrop of life of the upper classes in the Roman city-state. Upper classes are trained into “status-based, inward-looking” morality “rooted in an upper-class need to demonstrate social distinction by means of an exceptional code of deportment.” The code is strikingly illustrated by sexual rules and norms of gift-giving. Sexual norms were structured around “effect of such pleasure on the public deportment and social relations of the male,” on which the man’s very status as man was based. Rules about sex came from norms about class status. Therefore neither sexual pleasure nor rules about fidelity (upper class men were expected to have heterosexual and homosexual relationships before and in addition to their marriage bed) controlled the moral logic. Sexual pleasure caused no problems for what Brown calls the “puritan” sexual ethic of the well-born in the Antonine age, for its Puritanism was not a sexual Puritanism, but a form of “moral hypochondria,” or perhaps “class hypochondria.” They feared the contagion of lower status, either brought about through their own activity, or into their homes through wives’ uncontrolled sexuality. So in sex:

what was judged, and judged harshly, was the effect of such pleasure on the public deportment and social relations of the male. Any shame that might be attached to a homosexual relationship resided solely in the moral contagion that might cause a man of the upper class to submit himself, either physically (by adopting a passive position in lovemaking) or morally, to an inferior of either sex. The relations of men and women were subject to the same strictures. Inversions of true hierarchy through oral sexuality with a female partner were the most condemned and, not surprisingly, the most titillating, forms of collapse before the moral contagion of an inferior, the woman… A man was a man because he moved effectively in the public world.  


73 Ibid., 243.

74 Ibid.
Brown is careful to note that these sexual codes applied only to the upper classes, which held different standards for those who fell beneath them because only upper classes could be public.

Brown’s discussion of gift-giving can be read through the categories Arendt gives us: the upper classes gave the city gifts in order to secure its (and their own) immortality. Though it is not directly speech, civic giving can be considered a form of Arendtian action. “Civic notables ‘nourished’ their city; they were expected to spend large sums maintaining the sense of continued enjoyment and prestige of its regular citizens.”75 If parts of the large sums trickled down to the poor, it was only an unintended side effect of well-born beneficence: its exclusive purpose was to “enhance the status of the civic body as a whole.”76 The common practice of gift-giving among the elites served, therefore, to further inscribe their social distance from the others.77 Like rules about sexuality, public deportment controlled understanding of private goods.78

Brown describes a massive shift in these norms by the creation of a “new group”79 that questioned the social distance constantly re-entrenched by practices of upper-class morality. Even apart from Christianity, the shift toward a “private”80 morality that respected wedlock for all classes and frowned on other more traditional class-marked practices (like suicide) was subtly gaining prominence. The central characteristic of Jewish and Christian morality was a motive reason: the “single heart” of one devoted to love of God and neighbor.81 The “single heart” presents a

75 Ibid., 261.
76 Ibid.
77 See also Meeks, The Origins of Christian Morality, 41.
78 A third, extremely important category, is education. Brown narrates a shift from tutoring in rhetoric in the forum to monastic training in the desert.
80 On Arendt’s terms, lower classes (slaves, laborers) are inherently economic.
81 Brown, “Late Antiquity,” 254.
fundamentally different anthropological principle for morality. Rather than boundary maintenance implied in upper class norms, Christian morality sought for a purity of intention. The Christian questioning of social distance took place on what looked like a *philosophical* basis: the pursuit of eternal good. Brown, then, implicitly concurs with Augustine’s estimate in *On True Religion* that the church made something like philosophical morality “more universal” and “more intimate in effect of the private life of the believer.” He also agrees with Augustine’s implicit claim that Christian shift did not introduce fundamentally new moral codes. Indeed, “in moral matters the Christian leaders made almost no innovations.” If the morality seems different from what was commonly reflected in surviving literature, that is because the literature itself flows from the life of the well-born, whereas Christians adopted “the morality of the socially vulnerable.”

Brown says the upper-class distinction between public and private receded, and a new way of distinguishing them took its place, which is exactly what one would expect for a fractal. The morality of the lower classes—inhomogeneously “unpolitical” according to Arendt—grasped the upper classes through Christianity. Brown discerns complex re-negotiations and not merely the sublation of the distinction.

Two of the clearest examples of the shift caused by Christianity were the shifts in sexual norms and in rules for giving. Christian sexual morality was “austere” on the surface: some renounced sexuality entirely, and those who were married rejected outside sexual encounters and divorce. Some married couples renounced sexuality altogether. The austerity introduced a new

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82 Ibid., 263. *vera rel.*, 1.1ff.
83 Ibid., 260.
84 Ibid., 261.
85 See the discussion of the fractal nature of the distinction in the “Introduction.”
boundary between church and world: “lacking the clear ritual boundaries provided in Judaism by circumcision and dietary laws, Christians tended to make their exceptional sexual discipline bear the full burden of expressing the difference between themselves and the pagan world.”

The “negative privacy” of sexual mores was reflected in an increasingly positive assessment of celibacy. Paul recommended it, and, in light of Christian expectation, Christians were freed from the burden of extending themselves in time, of “immortality.” Indeed, Christians believed that they no longer needed to extend their lives through children. This rejection of the necessity of producing offspring put Christians at odds with wider society.

“Public space” created “in the bodies of the leaders themselves” placed “the society of the Church, ruled and represented in public by celibate males, over against the society of the world.”

The church’s new publicity communicates the idea that “natural” kinship ties are penultimate. Jana Bennett’s phrase sums up the sentiment nicely: for Christians “water is thicker than blood.” The Christian way of sorting the “world” not only restructures human social groups into a new Christian family—an order of charity in which all humanity would become a unity, the single “body” of which Arendt speaks—but it also reframes ethnic, gender, and class particularity.

“As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs

86 Brown, “Late Antiquity,” 263.
88 Brown, 269. This account is confirmed by Torjesen, When Women Were Priests. She argues that women’s priestly status was papered over when post-Constantinian Christianity started occupying the “public” space of the basilica rather than the domestic space of the home.
Christian universalism begins in baptism and is rooted in the office of bishop, who serves as public head of the church. But the meaning of universalism is ambiguous: does Christianity undo our “natural” particularity and violently supplant it with a new form of particularity? Is Christianity just another “identity” politics masquerading as the universal human spirit? Foucault will ask the same question with a different accent: what are the ways in which the single body united under one shepherd learns how to exert power over our inner selves? If the answer to these questions affirms what they presuppose—at it must at some level—Christianity inherently rejects all those whose particularity places them outside the universal. But the ambiguity also implies a different set of resources available alongside Christian social violence: a redefinition of “world” that destabilizes the very logic of the universal, that suggests that the Christians did not go far enough in making the celibate bodies of the bishops a new public space.

For Augustine, the object that is common to all is precisely what no one can own, what always resists attempts to define, and therefore provides a genuine possibility of the critique of all human universals. Augustine provides a way beyond a public/private distinction that, according to Brown, Christians decided early on to work within.

Brown’s analysis of transformations of sexual morality implies that the emerging society came to think that all humanity is related, a single family under one head. The bishop’s public body, simultaneously repeating in time Christ’s crucified body and standing in for the church’s body in the celebration of the eucharist, undid the social chasm between rich and poor. Together, bishop, baptism, and eucharist modified the symbolic universe and subverted the morality of the well-born Antonines. The second shift Brown identifies therefore flows out of the first. The “poor”, an undifferentiated, faceless, actionless, speechless mass to the Antonines, was the very definition of
humanity’s margins, “unpolitical” life, which is to say of zoe, bare life without political significance. But for Christians, as early as the writings of the apostle Paul, gifts to the poor reflected divine generosity to poor sinners. The Roman middle classes had always given small gifts to the poor due to their social proximity. This middle-class ethos slowly spread to the well-born, and, in the Christian empire, “the obtrusive outlines of patronage by the great, expressed in stone, mosaic, silken hangings, and blazing candelabra, in the manner of the old civic munificence, were veiled in the slight, but steady drizzle of daily almsgiving by the simple average Christian to the faceless afflicted.”90 The poor were, after all, individuals, baptized into Christ, and part of the church.

This second transformation, one related more directly to sexual morality, happened on two different levels in different parts of the empire: desert monasticism and Augustinian transformation of the family. The contrast is both interesting and helpful for understanding different possible mindsets Christians might have had. A subtle politicization of wealth had already started taking place among the upper classes: rather than displaying hierarchy in political action and speech, the well-born started displaying wealth in clothing, thereby publicizing private, economic goods in a new way. Newly displayed wealth went to church in a Christian empire, where it sat under the watchful eye of both the bishop and God. Rich and poor met together in one society. The new proximity to the poor made the upper classes accountable. This shift started with the replacement of standards of comportment and speech with external economic class makers to differentiate individuals in society.91

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90 Brown, “Late Antiquity,” 279.
In this context, we can detect more of what made desert monasticism significant: the monks went to the desert to set up a radically different social order according to the logics of both the original Edenic state and the hoped-for, imminent reign of Christ in which family would dissolve. The counter-society involved both voluntary poverty and renunciation of sex. We could call it an “anti-society” because it reversed the terms of the emerging well-born social order. Monastic exit from society served to critique society and confirm the domestication of politics.

“The monks functioned much as a chemical solution functions in a photographer’s darkroom: their presence brought out with greater sharpness of contrast the new features of a Christian image of society. This was an image that ignored the cities by ignoring the old divisions of town and countryside, citizen and noncitizen, and concentrated on the universal division of rich and poor in town and countryside alike.” They “acted” precisely through the renunciation of worldly goods. They “joined the faceless poor in forming a new universal class.”

Augustine gives a softer and more influential re-thinking of sex that helps us to see somewhat more clearly how the social shifts in late antiquity would reverberate. In Augustine’s account of the prelapsarian world, Adam and Eve were fully married, and in his eschaton, the elect retain gender distinctions. In the church’s present overlap, the sin-stained world and the City of God occupied the same political space. Concupiscence marred the primal good but did not destroy it. Therefore an Augustinian account of sex did not require the elimination of intercourse but instead its governance. We should not underestimate the significant revolutionary implications of

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92 Brown, “Late Antiquity,” 292.

93 Here I read the society monks form through Michael Warner’s idea of a counterpublic. For more on the notion of a “counterpublic”, see Michael Warner, Publics and Counterpublics (Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 2005), 112ff. For a thick explication of the sort of “culture” created by one counterpublic—anticipating the argument I will make in chapter 6—see David M. Halperin, How To Be Gay (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2012).

Augustine’s view: if sex stood for a model of the social order in Antonine age, Augustine’s views implied “a new body image.” Concupiscence located formerly diffuse sexual energy in particular movements of specific organs. Additionally, Augustine’s transformation of the home equalized society: everyone—all classes, all genders—shared weaknesses of concupiscence. In these two ways, Augustine’s views “muted” the “more brutal forms of misogyny”; it became more difficult to ascribe sexuality to women in a way it was not ascribed to men, for sexual frailty weakened everyone.

The more concupiscent parts proved it. The Augustinian moral focus shifted from public codes of deportment and “ancient roman dread of ‘effeminacy’, of the weakening of the public person though passionate dependence on inferiors of either sex, to concern with moderation and the single-hearted pursuit of “goods” of marriage. Through the subtle revision in which the motive reason of the single-heart came more sharply into focus, the door allegedly opened to the medieval confessors who so dominate Foucault’s account of pastoral power.

8. Arendt and Augustine

For Arendt, this social transformation also signaled an important anthropological transformation. The politics of Christian faith had an underlying set of descriptions that transfigured the terms of the ancient philosophers and therefore the practices of antiquity. The major change was toward interiority.

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95 Ibid., 309.
96 Ibid., 309.
97 Ibid.
98 See b. coniug., virg.
99 I discuss Foucault in the next chapter.
We can move back to Arendt to focus the lexicon. First, Augustine’s interpretation of Rome’s demise denigrated the \textit{vita activa}. Arendt blames the valorization of monasticism and the contemplative life. Previously, the \textit{vita activa} had received its “meaning” from the \textit{vita contemplativa}; the philosophical life was a necessary condition for a shared way of sorting reality that enables public action. Christian thought, according to Arendt, “conferred religious sanction” on the abasement of the \textit{vita activa} to a “derivative, secondary position.”\footnote{Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, 16.} She therefore locates the origin of the modern distinction between public and private is the distinction between active and contemplative life: life in public, and life in the desert. “\textit{Duae sunt vitae, activa et contemplativa. Activa est in labore, contemplativa in requie. Activa in publico, contemplativa in deserto. Activa in necessitate proximi, contemplativia in visione Dei.}”\footnote{Hugh of St. Victor, “Exegetica Dubia,” in \textit{Patrologiae Cursus Completus}, ed. Adalbert-G. Hamman, Latina (Paris: Garnier, 1854), book 3, chapter 3. Quoted in Arendt, \textit{The Life of the Mind}, 6.} To state the transition more baldly than Arendt does: previously the \textit{vita activa} existed in a sort of non-competitive, symbiotic hierarchy (to be sure, an exaggeration of its nature) with the \textit{vita contemplativa}.

The abasement of political life expanded the sense of the \textit{vita activa} so that it was thought to encompass all earthly activities in a less discriminating way. “With the disappearance of the ancient city-state—Augustine seems to have been the last to know at least what it once meant to be a citizen—the term \textit{vita activa} lost its specific political meaning and denoted all kinds of active engagement in the things of this world.”\footnote{Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, 16.} \textit{Vita activa} started to refer to all “worldly” and “mortal” concerns, including labor and work. It acquired a new status in light of a new human end: eternity and the beatific vision. Before, when men strove for immortality in the polis, they could perform actions in order to be great and therefore continue their lives after death. When Augustine re-set
the eschatological horizon to “eternity,” he obviated the need for immortality. Eternity and eternal life denigrated time and all temporal cares with it. Merely human, earthly immortality was no longer thinkable in light of the overwhelming splendor of God. Christianity, Arendt thinks, established a more rigid hierarchy than ever before.

The second shift has to do with the famous “turning upside down” of traditional thought patterns in modernity. The hierarchy that Augustinian Christianity established for the *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa* was reversed. Arendt names Marx and Nietzsche, but surely the whole age—including its religious voices—owns the secularizing reversal.103 “The modern reversal shares with the traditional hierarchy the assumption that the same central human preoccupation must prevail in all activities of men, since without one comprehensive principle no order could be established.”104

The fall of the Roman Empire plainly demonstrated that no work of mortal hands can be immortal, and it was accompanied by the rise of the Christian gospel of an everlasting individual life to its position as the exclusive religion of Western mankind. Both together made any striving for an earthly immortality futile and unnecessary. And they succeeded so well in making the *vita activa* and the *bios politikos* the handmaidens of contemplation that not even the rise of the secular and modern age and the concomitant reversal of the traditional hierarchy between action and contemplation sufficed the save from oblivion the striving for immortality which originally had been the spring and center of the *vita activa*.105

Once the modern transposition was complete and thought served action, theory served praxis, then the world was on a path to secularity, or at least to utilitarian use of religion. One sociologist has described contemporary religion as “therapeutic moral deism” in which God exists for the sake of


an ethical framework and therapeutic needs but is otherwise absent from life.\textsuperscript{106} Something like “therapeutic moral deism” is the type of religiosity one would expect under the conditions of the modern reversal that Arendt describes. This second shift is made possible, and some think inevitable, by the first.\textsuperscript{107}

Arendt thinks that in Augustine’s framework, political activity is replaced with domestic activity because the shared framework necessary to perform political action is lost. She identifies the rise of a vast apolitical sphere called the “society,” which embodies the transposition and conflation of public and private. Society is new, the hybrid\textsuperscript{108} sphere created by a historical fusion: home life extends onto politics, nurture absorbs speech, politics is conflated with economics, and a new oxymoron is established: the political economy. “With the rise of society, that is the rise of the ‘household’ (\textit{oikia}) or of economic activities to the public realm, housekeeping and all matters pertaining formerly to the private sphere of the family have become a ‘collective’ concern. In the modern world, the two realms constantly flow into each other like waves in the never-resting stream of the life process itself.”\textsuperscript{109} By this conflation, the rise of the social sphere eclipses both the public and private. “Privacy was like the other, the dark and hidden side of the public realm, and while to be political meant to attain the highest possibility of human existence, to have no private place of one’s own (like a slave) meant to be no longer human.”\textsuperscript{110} In society, everything is private,


\textsuperscript{108} The “curiously hybrid realm where private interests assume public significance that we call ‘society.’” Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, 35.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 33. Increasingly, “through society it is the life process itself which in one form or another has been channeled into the public realm,” (45).

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 64.
so much so that even what is today considered public, like one’s job, is strictly private on Arendt’s terms.\footnote{Benhabib distinguishes three ways of interpreting Arendt on the distinction between political and social. First, one could read her to be making a distinction between two spheres or sets of objects. Debates about economics would fall into the “social”, and debates about constitutional matters would fall into the “political” sphere. Benhabib points out that this distinction is untenable because it ignores the way economic factors often underlie political factors. Second, the distinction might be attitudinal. The rise of the social sphere indicates a preoccupation with consumption and survival. Benhabib rightly names this the most tenable possibility, though certainly not the only correct reading of Arendt. Still, the political ideology underlying this distinction imagines a world of economic abundance, demonstrating an “aristocratic” dismissal of the fears of labor. Third, she might imagine an institutional distinction between spheres of home and civil society and state institutions. This view doesn’t respect the complexity of the actual institutions. My constructive appropriation follows the second reading without neglecting the ways in which Arendt sometimes expresses the first view. I affirm—with qualifications—Benhabib’s retrieval of Arendt and her advocacy for “a certain view of the life of speech and action, of talking and acting in common with others who are one’s equals. This quality is characterized by the willingness to give reasons in public, to entertain others’ points of view and interests, even when they contradict one’s own, and by the attempt to transform the dictates of self-interest into a common public goal” Benhabib, The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt, 146.}

What about Augustine’s influence caused this unhappy fusion? In late antiquity,\footnote{For more about the development of the terminology, see Mark Vessey, “Literature, Patristics, Early Christian Writing,” in The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 42–65.} Augustine, a crucial figure of this period, figures prominently into the loss of a common political world. Citing R. H. Barrow’s book The Romans, Arendt argues that after the demise of Roman Empire and the city-state, the Catholic Church offered new equivalent of citizenship and therefore also of humanity: citizenship as membership in a worldwide human family. In the middle ages, the sphere that used to be divided by “public” and “private” was conflated in the saeculum: “The secular realm under the rule of feudalism was indeed in its entirety what the private realm had been in antiquity. Its hallmark was the absorption of all activities into the household sphere, where they had only private significance, and consequently the very absence of a public realm.”\footnote{Arendt, The Human Condition, 34.} Additionally, the “common good,” once a robustly political category, no longer indicated what was arrived at through debate and persuasive speech (action) in a public realm. Instead, it came to indicate a
sphere of brotherly affection and love, of mutual bodily concern. In Arendt’s middle ages, we became our “brothers’ keepers.”

On Arendt’s terms, this Christian social-fusion introduces the pre-political violence proper to the domestic sphere of the home into the heart of human social organization and makes totalitarianism possible. The biopolitical regimes of the 20th century, then, are on Arendt’s terms (though Arendt did not say so) a Christian phenomenon. The saeculum, the name of the “world” synthesized in the middle ages, regressed from the pristine social world or ancient Roman republican life into a world of proto-Darwinian violence for survival. The saeculum’s only salvation could be another society, the church, which through the hierarchy bestowed its gift of an order of charity on a harsh, secular world. The church, therefore, constitutes the horizon of the secular, and a new distinction between secular and religious arises:

Historically, we know of only one principle that was ever devised to keep a community of people together who had lost their interest in the common world and felt themselves no longer related and separated by it. To find a bond between people strong enough to replace the world was the main political task of early Christian philosophy, and it was Augustine who proposed to found not only the Christian ‘brotherhood’ but all human relationships on charity. But this charity, though its worldlessness clearly corresponds to the general human experience of love, is at the same time clearly distinguished from it in being something which, like the world, is between men…

Arendt thinks that in the middle ages, not all was lost. If the classical public sphere was going to be replaced with something, the church was very well chosen, because the bond of charity between people, while it is incapable of founding a public realm of its own, is quite adequate to the main Christian principle of worldlessness and is admirably fit to carry a group of essentially worldless people through the world… The unpolitical, non-public character of Christian community was early

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114 See Genesis 3-4.
defined in the demand that it should for a corpus, a ‘body,’ whose members were to be related to each other like brothers of the same family.\textsuperscript{116}

In an important way, then, the Catholic Church under the developing office of unity\textsuperscript{117} constituted a new equivalent to the public realm.\textsuperscript{118}

What are we to make of this narrative? Arendt has both given a lexicon for talking about the public-private distinction and identified a set of transpositions and ruptures in western history with reference to that lexicon. Her writing is aimed at mapping an account of the effects those transpositions have had. In addition to political-social effects, her lexicon serves to map the anthropological effects. The following section consolidates the claims she makes.

9. Arendt on Depoliticization

First and most immediately: by relating society to the family, the strong distinction between the political and domestic spheres collapsed. Politics became the administration of a public family. Hence, Christian social imagining implied a heretofore oxymoronic “political economy.”

Arendt, writing from what seems like an Aristotelian perspective,\textsuperscript{119} characterizes it negatively, in a way that tellingly intimates declension: “the only thing people have in common is their private interests.”\textsuperscript{120} The classical “well-born” public ideal was the free male citizen engaged in persuasive speech after his household needs were met. The human condition therefore implies a sharp divide between animal laborers and political actors. It sounds harsh: “man existed in [the private] sphere

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{118} For this line of argument, see Milbank, \textit{Theology and Social Theory}, 2006. For Milbank, the church in the middle ages exemplified what the public realm as civil society, embodying and enacting the conditions for the possibility of true publicity. For similar types of claims, see Cavanaugh, \textit{The Myth of Religious Violence}; Cavanaugh, \textit{Theopolitical Imagination}.


\textsuperscript{120} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, 69.
not as at truly human being but as a specimen of the animal species man-kind."\textsuperscript{121} Politics and action depend on a shared way of sorting the world. When biological life becomes the basis of a shared social space (and it is unclear whether Arendt thinks this happens attitudinally, institutionally, or by dividing realms of public and private things), formerly transcendent human aims are collapsed into the every-day structure of life. The “social” therefore introduced a new immanentism constructed around the shared goal of sustaining biological life.\textsuperscript{122}

The conflation of public and private in the social sphere “transformed all modern communities into societies of laborers and job-holders.”\textsuperscript{123} So for her, “a political economy” is not just a social imaginary, but makes something like MacIntyre’s “corporate manager” possible.\textsuperscript{124} Late capitalist economies represent the culmination of a new, shared social world of political economy. “Only when wealth became capital, whose chief function was to generate more capital, did private property equal or come close to the permanence inherent in the commonly shared world.”\textsuperscript{125} In capitalism, the public sphere “has become a function of the private” and the private is “the only concern left.”\textsuperscript{126} In such a “world,” the only common concern (which is the only real concern of government or “public” concern) is formal: protection of private interests. This explains the loss of the “in-between.” The modern academic discipline of (classical) economics is in some ways the height of the rise of the social, and liberal Capitalist economists introduced the “communist fiction”

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 46.
\item\textsuperscript{122} “Society is the form in which the fact of mutual dependence for the sake of life and noting else assumes public significance and where the activities connected with sheer survival are permitted to appear in public,” Ibid., 47.
\item\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{124} See MacIntyre, After Virtue, 23–35.
\item\textsuperscript{125} Arendt, The Human Condition, 68.
\item\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 69.
\end{itemize}
of harmony, the invisible hand:127 “a complete victory of society will always produce some sort of ‘communistic fiction’ whose outstanding political characteristic is that it is indeed ruled by an ‘invisible hand,’ namely, nobody.”128

The second main effect is anthropological in that it pertains to individual self-descriptions, but since self-description cannot be separate from social action, as Plato and Aristotle demonstrated above, it exists in dynamic relation with the social-political setup Arendt describes. The social realm simultaneously atomizes people and makes it impossible to distinguish themselves meaningfully from one another. How so? Recall two relevant concepts implied by “action.” First, action is the basis of self-differentiation. As such, it requires a shared way of sorting reality, a world, so that one can be seen and heard by others. We can call this shared world the public realm. Only when one is seen and heard in a common, public world can actors in the plurality of humankind be distinguished from one another. “The public realm… was reserved for individuality: it was the only place where men could show who they really and inexchangeably were.”129 “Action” therefore implies self-differentiation in plurality. The rise of the social, which places private concerns at the center of the public realm, reduces and eventually destroys the possibility for action and thus for self-differentiation.130 But even if the concept of action becomes moot, the need for self-differentiation in plurality is not. Something had to take its place. Citing Rousseau, Arendt

127 See Ibid., n35. See also Taylor, Sources of the Self.

128 Arendt, The Human Condition, 44.

129 Ibid., 41.

130 Ibid., 40.
locates this space of distinction in a transformed private realm, which functions to “shelter the intimate.”

The concept of the private-intimate is not indexed to the public, but to the social. Rousseau named an “innermost region” that needed “special protection” against “society’s unbearable perversion of the human hurt.” If society is like a giant family, the shared space is like the space of a private home, and the newly emerging private realm is “a room of one’s own.” This inner region is the new locus of differentiation and manipulation in mass society, as theorists and philosophers of differing persuasions have documented. Ultimately, this undefiled, universally significant “innermost region” can be traced to Augustine, who brought the rise of the social in his understanding of the secular human family.

Ironically, the sphere of the intimate shows how “the rise of society” coincides “with the decline of the family.” The fractal shifts and the functions are reversed: the inner private sphere replaces the family as the locus of the private realm, and the family becomes a relatively public social grouping. The “absorption of the family unit into corresponding social groups” is to be expected. The, new private inner self replaces action in the public realm as the basis of self-differentiation. I will argue that Christianity and Augustine in particular offer resources to imagine

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132 Arendt, The Human Condition, 40.
135 Taylor, Sources of the Self; Cary, Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self.
136 Arendt, The Human Condition, 40.
human differentiation and the relationship of “interiority” and “publicity” in a dramatically different way. Specifically, I argue that by restoring a basis of self-differentiation, Augustinian thought provides an alternative to Arendt’s account of either the social or the action-based public-private distinction.

Another way of narrating the loss of meaningful self-differentiation points to two other features of her account: (1) the emergence of the social coincides with the rise of the saeculum and (2) that secularization is an eschatological category. She intriguingly names the way in which “public” “action” in a shared “world” only makes sense against an ultimate, transcendent horizon for action. Action seeks immortality, “endurance in time, deathless life on this earth and in this world as it was given.” Only gods are immortal. For most, immortality is attained only through the biological reality of procreation. But for the few, those who can act publicly and politically, immortality could be attained through action. “By their capacity for the immortal deed, by their ability to leave non-perishable traces behind, men, their individual mortality notwithstanding, attain an immortality of their own and prove themselves to be of a ‘divine’ nature.” Thus the goal to achieve immortality through action only makes sense against a religious horizon.

Christianity was more impressed with the philosophical preference for the eternal. Eternity could be reached not through the vita activa, but through the vita contemplativa. But, and here Arendt concurs with Augustine in On True Religion, “the eventual victory of the concern with eternity over all kinds of aspirations toward immortality is not due to philosophic thought” at least, not for its transmission. Rome’s fall belied claims to immortality, and Christianity’s rise

\[137\] Ibid., 18.
\[138\] Ibid., 19.
\[139\] Ibid., 21.
redirected western aspirations to eternal individual life. The abandoned hope of immortal memory in the city slowly faded from collective consciousness.

On her account, Christianity prioritized contemplation and denigrated action because of the central claim that all hopes for earthly immortality through the polis were futile. The effect was to remove religious hope from this world—to de-divinize history. Once transcendent goals for history no longer make sense, only secular immanent goals are available. Since society makes action impossible, and since action is required for differentiation, Arendt’s concept of the “social” implies a new immanence. Correlatively, a society of private laborers is, on her terms, a secular society. One of the major goals of contemporary political philosophy has been to make sense of politics in a world where the only acceptable goals are immanent, in which transcendence competes and diminishes human political goals and social communities. Ironically, for Arendt, eternity is what enabled the rise of immanent societies.

Once again, we can locate Augustine at a genealogical root of modern loss of transcendent. According to Arendt’s reading, this secularism is specified by the immanence of “every day” life or collapse of human aspirations into the flourishing of biological life from the loss of the possibility of immortality. In the discussion above, Brown demonstrates the difference Christianity makes for practices of gift-giving and sexuality. Augustine’s *City of God* is a sort of climax of an underlying conceptual pattern: the eternal shifts the desire for immortal earthly standing (either for the city’s good, one’s own fame, or one’s deportment in relation to one’s inferiors) to eternal concerns (Christ in the poor, the new society that anticipates the coming eschatological reign in the City of God).
So Arendt’s account offers an important lexicon for making sense of the history of the public/private distinction. She locates “the public” and the political in action (as opposed to labor and work) in the vita activa. She locates “the private” especially in labor and in domesticity. Her argument is that, by undoing the life that made sense of the ancient polis, Christianity made political action impossible and therefore introduced a fundamentally new way organizing society to the west. Before, contemplation made sense of action. In Christianity, the contemplative life diminished the active life. When it diminished the active life, the highest form of “action” became less important and it stood in starker contrast to other forms of the active life. This paved the way for a fusion of labor and action such that politics became a domestic, economic affair. Augustine’s “order of charity” is at the root of this shift. Two main effects of this shift can be discerned. First, the political-social effect is the rise of “the social” and the blending of public and private. Second, the anthropological effect can be described as the inability to discern meaningful distinctions between people, now construed as private, economic units.

In summary so far, the narrative Arendt tells posits two “classical” terms: public and private. For Arendt, these terms map broadly onto the political and domestic spheres. Politics involves a “public” in which one is seen and heard and against which one’s actions can be registered. Performing “action” in public is how one distinguishes oneself from others in a group. The public realm therefore provides a space for both connection via a shared “world” and differentiation from others. Erasing it means creating a problem of both connection and differentiation. The domestic sphere existed to meet our animal, laboring needs. Arendt conceived a strong separation between the two realms. One could only be “public” when one’s “private” needs were met. Arendt traces a rise in the development of a third hybrid realm called “society.”
The development of the social realm began in late antiquity and is symbolized by two historical moments of rupture. In the first moment, Rome was sacked and the late Roman city eventually lost its intelligibility. An Augustinian framework in which the political realm was conceived of as a family replaced it. In this realm, the *saeculum*, action did not serve to differentiate. Instead, a newly developing inner private realm formed the essence of individuality. A complex negotiation of familial-societal and church relationships began to relate individuals to one another, effectively replacing the public sphere of action. In the *saeculum*, one no longer sought immortality through action. Rather, an indefinitely postponed eternal changed one’s relationship to one’s city. Immanent economic concerns replaced a more “high-minded” politics.

10. The Rise of the Liberal State

I have spent a good amount of space detailing what I take to be both a history of the public/private distinction’s transformation in late antiquity and a conceptual grammar to help make some sense of the changes. As I extend this narrative into modernity, I want to emphasize the thinness of the story that I’m telling. I have identified a “moment” of rupture and displacement that Christianity brought to the world. The resurrection of Jesus was an event, and its interpretation singularly re-shaped social conventions. I’ve drawn attention to some of the reshaping using the account of historian Peter Brown and the conceptual grammar of political philosopher Hannah Arendt. Now I wish to tease out the significance of this moment using the conceptual categories developed above. Because I resist the temptation to tell a simple decline narrative, the evaluations implicit in my account are intrinsically ambiguous. But for the sake of telling the story, I draw attention to two aspects of my account of modernity. The first has to do with the development of the liberal state in the face of religious conflicts of the sixteenth century. The second has to do with
the grammar of sovereignty, biopolitics, and governmentality that some theorists think rose out of the liberal nation-state. Each of these aspects can be evaluated negatively and positively. The rise of the liberal nation-state can be evaluated through the lens of the rise of rights-language and political equality before the law. It can also be narrated as a rejection of the transcendent good for a perfectionist politics. I take it that the decline of perfectionist politics is a good thing. The grammar of sovereignty can be seen as a source of stability and order, albeit flawed, or it can be seen as the incursion of a “disciplinary society” or a “society of control” that shows that the exercise of liberal practices is in fact a smokescreen for the exercise of decisionistic sovereignty in a state of exception. Though my account may accent the negative evaluations, I maintain that they are inherently ambiguous because of an epistemic commitment: it is impossible to know the meaning of a historical event from the middle. Judgment must be suspended. So in the remainder of this chapter, I will briefly narrate Brad Gregory’s account of the rise of the nation-state from his recent book on the unintended consequences of the Reformation.  

Gregory narrates two ways in which “the good” was privatized in the Reformation. This privatization of the good is the basic assumption at the heart of liberal social orders. How did this privatization happen? Gregory’s narrative focuses on two intellectual/conceptual shifts in the late Middle Ages and the Reformation. First, he traces the development of a univocal account of God, which led to voluntarist accounts of the will. Then, he traces the consequences of the doctrine of

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140 Gregory, The Unintended Reformation.


142 Various medievalists have complicated Gregory’s account. He basically agrees with Radical Orthodox accounts. For a countervailing voice from an expert on Scotus, see Richard Cross, “Where Angels Fear to Tread’: Duns Scotus and Radical Orthodoxy,” Antonianum LXXVI (2001): 7–41. See also the articles in the October 2005 issue of Modern Theology, including Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt and Jim Fodor, “Editors’ Introduction: John Duns Scotus and Modern Theology,” Modern Theology 21, no. 4 (2005): 539–541; Catherine Pickstock, “Duns Scotus: His Historical and
sola scriptura. Here I will bracket his account of univocity and voluntarism and focus on the unintended consequences of sola scriptura. I will summarize the broad scope of the book’s argument and then pull out a few strands to show how modern liberal states arose.

First, the doctrine of sola scriptura, which is that scripture alone is the final basis for doctrinal appeal and thus the basis of unity, was intended to be the basis of church consensus. If only the Reformers themselves could agree. Famously, whatever early agreement they had was quickly overcome by serious disagreements, most notably over the nature of the Eucharist at the Marburg Colloquy. So the unintended consequence of sola scriptura was disunity and protestant disarray. “Sola scriptura led to an open-ended proliferation of contested, competing doctrines among exegetical rivals, some of whom were demonstrating their willingness to die for their respective beliefs.” 143

Failure to produce a unified alternative to Rome is perhaps the biggest institutional failure of the Protestant Reformation, opening up the door for the indefinite multiplication of protestant communions and with no final court of appeal to settle the disputes and disagreements. Gregory draws attention to the long term social, cultural, and political effects of this development. With the failure to produce unity of belief, many came to the conclusion that there was no unified concept of the good possible for political ordering. The point to which this has led is a general cultural inability to discriminate religious truth claims, thus “relativizing knowledge”: “Millions of people apparently


143 Gregory, The Unintended Reformation, 100.
believe that in the special case of religious truth claims, logic is abrogated to accord with politically protected religious individualism and desires for social civility among fellow citizens—as if, say, Jesus really was and really was not God incarnate, depending on what one believes."\textsuperscript{144}

That is the argument of chapter two. The argument of chapter three traces out the political consequences of this shift. First, the category of “religion” is invented and re-defined. Because of the disarray, Christianity “is conceived as one wedge in the pie of an \textit{individual} life, a matter not of shared obedience to the Word incarnate with eternal life in the balance, but of preferred inclination toward” the group one prefers.\textsuperscript{145} Second, this transformation refigured the relationship between church and state. Whereas earlier social orders depended on a public concept of the good life around which the common good could be oriented and a transcendent against which immortality or eternity could be assured, the consequences of radical doubt in the wake of the Reformation was the privatization of claims as to what constitutes the good life and therefore the common good. “Society and ethics were separable from religion. So too were politics and religion, state and church, entirely distinct… Christianity itself was being so radically redefined as a private and highly circumscribed matter of individual preference.”\textsuperscript{146} Whereas, in both Plato and Aristotle’s account of political and moral order, ethics and politics are inseparable because individual good depends on a shared common good. There is one Good, and individual and political life is organized around it. In liberal orders, however, ethics and politics are distinct because substantive individual views are subordinated to the formal idea of liberty and equality. The priority of the formal idea of liberty and equality is necessary in order to ensure the peaceful coexistence of those who have different

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 110.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 164. See also Cavanaugh, \textit{The Myth of Religious Violence}; Cavanaugh, \textit{Theopolitical Imagination}.

\textsuperscript{146} Gregory, \textit{The Unintended Reformation}, 165–166.
comprehensive views of the good. Interestingly, according to Gregory’s account, this new privatization of religion is both the source of state control of the new concept of “religion” precisely by preventing it from making public claims (more on this in the next chapter) and the source of modern ideas of religious liberty.

Open-ended indeterminacy was inevitable insofar as human beings were embodied souls and therefore unified wholes. No simple, dichotomous demarcation—body versus soul, public versus private, outer versus inner, or even temporal versus spiritual—could provide a formulaic answer to the question of how ecclesiastical and secular authorities were to divide their responsibilities in the exercise of power, because Christianity entailed creatures seeking body-and-soul to live, a certain kind of shared life in fidelity to Jesus’s commands. The result was prodigious commentary and argument, endless negotiation, ongoing contestation, and frequent conflicts between ecclesiastical and secular authorities at every scale, from local disputes over privileges regarding land use and taxation to centuries-long power struggles between popes and emperors.

Once all the possible answers to what Gregory calls “life questions” were disestablished in such a way that no common “science” of morality could be found, the church had no public role. The disputes between popes and emperors were always settled in favor of the emperor after the Reformation. This is not so much an empirical claim as it is a claim about the immediate effect of privatizing religion.

As I have suggested, however, the public/private distinction as it has developed has also enabled individuals to go on in society with different answers to comprehensive life questions. This has worked out—not perfectly, but generally well—to protect religious minorities. Isaiah Berlin

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149 See Kahn, Putting Liberalism in Its Place, Part 1.
has powerfully depicted the idea of “negative liberty,” which, though not ideal, is certainly to be preferred over a tyrannical imposition of the views of a religious majority in a perfectionist state.\textsuperscript{150}

The next step in Gregory’s narrative is the subjectivization of morality, the rise of the consumer culture, and the decline of the humane sciences in the university. By now, it is not difficult to trace the narrative. Without appeal to commonly agreed upon procedures to truth, the natural sciences come to dominate human intellectual life, to the point where “science” now means “natural science.” The term “moral science” is anachronistic. By separating moral knowledge from knowledge of truth, science either subjectivizes morality or it becomes the basis of morality. Gregory argues forcefully that natural-scientific knowledges fail to provide moral sources.\textsuperscript{151} The disjunction leaves us with subjectivism, and a new way of figuring the public/private distinction: the private (and public) sphere.

Something new was created: a ‘private sphere’ within which individuals could do as they pleased based on their own beliefs and preferred goods, provided they were publicly obedient... and legislators could afford to give American citizens such freedom in their private lives in part because capitalist production and consumption practices were providing new goods to stimulate and satisfy the desires of politically obedient individuals.\textsuperscript{152}

This new private sphere leads to a refiguring of private property. Without a common good, Lockean conceptions of private property as the extension of one’s own labor came to dominate, and the West abandoned the idea that the common good could have priority over the individual good mostly because the idea of a common good had been rejected. The rise of a consumer society

\textsuperscript{150} See Berlin, \textit{Two concepts of liberty}.

\textsuperscript{151} For convincing arguments about the inability of the natural sciences to serve as moral sources, see Taylor, \textit{Sources of the Self}, 13–77; Charles Taylor, \textit{Philosophical Papers: Volume 1, Human Agency and Language} (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 15–76.

\textsuperscript{152} Gregory, \textit{The Unintended Reformation}, 217–218.
was required by the new dependence on the creation of a political-economy to produce the peace necessary for the liberal consensus to hold.\textsuperscript{151}

To recap: sola scriptura ultimately undid the possibility of a final court of appeal for matters of the good and thus politicized debates about the good differently. This prevented substantive agreement in the protestant churches at first and in the protestant formed west over the long term. It undermined a common basis for knowledge (ch. 2), politics (3), morality (4), ethics (5), and education (6). The long-term political outcome of this is ambiguous and difficult to evaluate in monolithic terms.\textsuperscript{154} I conclude with Gregory’s own summary of his argument:

The central social virtue in medieval Christianity was caritas, the obviously inadequate instantiation of which was thought by Protestant reformers to imply false teachings that required a rejection of the Roman church. The threat of subversion and fears of heterodoxy in the conflicts between confessionalizing Catholic and magisterial Protestant rulers made obedience the central social virtue of early modern Europe. And the central social virtue of Western modernity, within the institutions of the liberal state, is toleration—as it must be. The subjectivization of morality demands it, because of the open ended way in which individuals choose their respective goods and act accordingly, the result of which is contemporary Western hyperpluralism.\textsuperscript{155}

\textsuperscript{151} “In order to ameliorate the resulting clash of commitments to divergent, incompatible preferences and pursuits, political leaders and other elites relied heavily and increasingly on platitudinous rhetoric and consumerism, the latter involving citizens’ widespread conformity to a seemingly insatiable acquisitiveness regardless of their income level. Were the flow of prosperity’s spigot seriously to wane, however, citizens’ clashes would likely intensify, reversing the dominant trajectory through which Westerners have willingly permitted their self-colonization by capitalism since the seventeenth century. Hence the necessary ideological commitment of modern Western states to unending economic growth.” Ibid., 189.


\textsuperscript{155} Gregory, \textit{The Unintended Reformation}, 232–233.
CHAPTER 2: The Refugee: Sovereignty, Governmentality, and Biopolitics

In the previous chapter, I focused on a set of privatized characters in antiquity: the woman, the laborer, and the slave. I contrasted them to the man of means and discussed the moral, social, and metaphysical grammar that makes sense of them all. I associated the privacy of a character with the degree to which she or he is associated with bodily sustenance of life, and I described various transpositions in how those characters—and thus bodily sustenance of life—were understood and evaluated. I paid special attention to the difference Christianity made in the evaluation of embodied life, especially with reference to sexual ethics, norms about gift-giving, and conceptions of the meaning of social existence. In this chapter, I focus on a specifically modern character: the refugee. The refugee makes sense of a strand of the modern logic of the public/private distinction. S/he is not the only character liberal modernity produces, but s/he is significant and therefore worth tracing in some detail. In order to describe the refugee, I spend a significant amount of time discussing contemporary debates about sovereignty, governmentality, and biopolitics.

1. Arendt and the Refugee

In her analysis of the rise of fascism in The Origins of Totalitarianism, Arendt argues that the development of the nation-state in the wake of World War I left large groups of people essentially without a national identity. The “state” took priority over the “nation” in a way that chopped up Europe along new lines and left groups—Armenians, Jews, etc.—without polities of their own. Old systems of asylum and naturalization failed due to the scope of the problem. The world had a new type of character: “the refugee,” part of the new masses of people without any legal protection. “The new categories of the persecuted were far too numerous to be handled by an unofficial practice destined for exceptional cases… The new refugees were persecuted not because
of what they had done or thought, but because of what they unchangeably were—born into the
wrong kind of race or the wrong kind of class or drafted by the wrong kind of government.1

Arendt argues that the plight of this new character of the “refugee” was not that s/he was
actually deprived of rights, but was rather “driven outside the pale of the law.”2

Their plight is not that they are not equal before the law, but that no law exists for them;
not that they are oppressed but that nobody wants even to oppress them. Only in the last
stage of a rather lengthy process is their right to live threatened; only if they remain
perfectly ‘superfluous,’ if nobody can be found to ‘claim’ them, may their lives be in
danger… The point is that a condition of complete rightlessness was created before the
right to live was challenged.3

We can stipulate that for Arendt, the figure of the “refugee” is defined by a stripping of a certain
type of status before the law that we can call “personhood.” A refugee may have her bodily needs
met, but the difference is that her status does not entitle her to anything she needs. Food,
healthcare, shelter, equal protection before the law are not understood to be “due” to her, but
rather given to her from charity. “The prolongation of their lives is due to charity and not to right.”4

The human being who has lost his place in a community, his political status in the struggle
of his time, and the legal personality which makes his actions and part of his destiny a
consistent whole, is left with those qualities which usually can become articulate only in the
sphere of private life and must remain unqualified, mere existence in all mattes of public
concern. This mere existence, that is, all that which is mysteriously given us by birth and
which includes the shape of our bodies and the talents of our minds, can be adequately
dealt with by the unpredictable hazards of friendship and sympathy, or by the great and

1 Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, 294.
2 Ibid., 295.
3 Ibid., 295–296.
4 Ibid., 296. See “Pius XI, Quadragesimo Anno (15/05/1931),” para. 3–4. “For toward the close of the
nineteenth century, the new kind of economic life that had arisen and the new developments of industry had gone to
the point in most countries that human society was clearly becoming divided more and more into two classes. One class,
very small in number, was enjoying almost all the advantages which modern inventions so abundantly provided; the
other, embracing the huge multitude of working people, oppressed by wretched poverty, was vainly seeking escape
from the straits wherein it stood. Quite agreeable, of course, was this state of things to those who thought it in their
abundant riches the result of inevitable economic laws and accordingly, as if it were for charity to veil the violation of
justice which lawmakers not only tolerated but at times sanctioned, wanted the whole care of supporting the poor
committed to charity alone.” Cf. Wolterstorff, Justice, Introduction.
incalculable grace of love, which says with Augustine, ‘Volo ut sis (I want you to be),’ without being able to give any particular reason for such supreme and unsurpassable affirmation.\(^5\)

Separation of justice from charity is what produces the desire for someone to “be” without reason. The traditional name for the “reason” for someone to be is “justice,” and what typifies the refugee is the impossibility of justice with regard to her, for she is defined in a way where nothing can be due her.

Arendt then connects the plight of the refugee, whom Agamben will identify as “homo sacer,” to his or her irreducible privacy, now characterized in what Foucault will call a biopolitical framework. “The fundamental deprivation of human rights is manifest first and above all in the deprivation of a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective.”\(^6\)

Opinions are only significant and actions are only effective on Arendt’s terms when one is part of a public realm.

In what follows, I try to make sense of Arendt’s claim by connecting some dots. The basic contention is that the strange feature of modernity, and what is meant by “biopolitics,” is that the privatized body becomes simultaneously the public body, under the common ownership of all. I argue that Foucault’s account of pastoral power and the transition from the disciplinary society to the society of control can be understood together with the questions about sovereignty raised by Schmitt in order to shed light on the public/private distinction in modernity. It does not provide a

\(^5\) Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 301.

\(^6\) Ibid., 296.
A comprehensive framing of the distinction today, but is rather an analysis of one important dimension of it.\(^7\)

Arendt’s discussion of the refugee above helps me bring together three distinct discussions. First, her claim depends on a set of debates about the nature of sovereignty. For Arendt, the sovereignty of the nation-state is used to render a “decision” on the legal status of entire groups of people.\(^8\) Second, the existence of right-less, non-political people depends on the formation of a new type of power, which Foucault calls “governmentality.” Third, the existence of the refugee depends on a radicalization of the public-private distinction in the twentieth century. The refugee, *homo sacer*, stands in for a new global reality of increasing privatization and depoliticization of society on the one hand and the intrusion and publicization of all human relationships on the other. Finally, Arendt makes the connection between the question of “right” and human nature. Her essay is framed by the idea of “the rights of man.” The declaration of human rights, which was unable to save the refugees and the Jews, is still inadequate on her estimation.\(^9\)

It implies the belief in a kind of human ‘nature’ which would be subject to the same laws of growth as that of the individual and from which rights and laws could be deduced. Today we are perhaps better qualified to judge exactly what this human ‘nature’ amounts to… Man of the twentieth century has become just as emancipated from nature as eighteenth-century man was from history. History and nature have become equally alien to us, namely in the sense that the essence of man can no longer be comprehended in terms of either category.\(^10\)

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\(^8\) This strategy, the “state of exception” is, according to theorists depending on Schmitt and Agamben, increasingly taking the place of politics. See the analysis below.

\(^9\) For a nice explanation of the contemporary political problems surrounding the refugee, see chapter 3 of Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*.

The privatization, which is the symbolized by the political “denaturalization” of the refugee, is enabled by a two-fold intellectual crisis. First, “humanity” is freed from its history, second, it is freed from its “nature.”

In this context, it is no surprise that the central theological debate of the twentieth century in both Catholic and Protestant circles ranges around a set of debates about human nature and its relation to grace and “the supernatural.” This is because, as Herbert McCabe argues, participation in the community of “humankind” is just the meaning of our nature. For Christians, human community in general, and no particular political community, is where our action can find its deepest meaning. For Augustine, our inability to discern our true significance is directly related to a trade-off, a self-privation that results in political and social privatization. The true master of human political communities after the fall is the devil, who constantly tries to keep us private by pushing us into a self-defeating interiority. Jesus gives us publicity (so I argue from Augustine) by releasing us from the devil. Since on these terms, the public-private distinction depends ultimately on a third, One in whom we participate and before whom we can be properly ourselves and properly common, it is necessary to go “beyond” it not only to the question of human nature, but to the question of Godhead and Godhead’s relation to the world. It is only by appreciating who Godhead is, who we are in God, and what God in Christ does for us to restore us to ourselves, to our nature, and to human community, that we can move back to offer a full response to the modern problems of sovereignty, governmentality, and the public-private distinction. The question of the

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public/private distinction can, then, only be resolved when it is pushed beyond itself. The Virgin Mary, the paradigmatic human in relation to Christ, acts together with Christ to open this space to us.

2. Hobbes

In order to get at the internal logic of the modern refugee, I will discuss a grammar of sovereignty as we receive it by using the political philosopher whose writings about sovereignty dominate discussions today, Thomas Hobbes. After discussing Hobbes, I discuss Schmitt, and then Foucault and some of Foucault’s recent interpreters to show how the grammar of sovereignty works.

Hobbes’s grammar of sovereignty depends on a set of theological revisions. Starting with revisions to a concept of nature, he revises concepts of commutative and distributive justice, then equality, then personhood, and then teleology.

First, Hobbes revises concepts of nature. Hobbes famously depicts an original economy of competitive scarcity in his theory of the state of nature, vividly described in the first part of his *Leviathan*:

> In such a condition [without a common power to keep all in awe] there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain, and consequently, no culture of the earth, no navigation, nor use of the commodious building, no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force, no knowledge of the face of the earth, no account of time, no arts, no letters, no society, and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.13

Traditional Christian concepts of nature imply primal generosity and peace because nature is already graced (and thus no *pure* nature can exist as a state). For Hobbes’s state of nature, however,

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there are no constitutive relationships except competitive relationships, no persons but persons defined purely against each other. Community exists because certain “natural passions” incline people to “peace”: fear of death and desire for “things necessary to commodious living.”14 The “good” is therefore defined as “preservation” and a “more contented life.” Since this is the “common good,” it doesn’t differ from “the private good.”15

Based on his revision of the concept of nature, Hobbes revises the relationship between distributive and commutative justice. It is a minor part of Leviathan, but instructive for demonstrating the shift in relation to the category justice. Aquinas distinguishes commutative and distributive justice this way:

particular justice is directed to the private individual (privatam personam), who is compared to the community as a part to the whole. Now a twofold order may be considered in relation to a part. On the first place there is the order of one part to another, to which corresponds the order of one private individual to another. This order is directed by commutative justice, which is concerned about the mutual dealings between two persons. On the second place there is the order of the whole towards the parts, to which corresponds the order of that which belongs to the community in relation to each single person (ad singulas personas). This order is directed by distributive justice, which distributes common goods proportionately.16 Hobbes goes along with the traditional definition of commutative justice: “commutative justice is the justice of a contractor, that is, a performance of covenant (in buying and selling, hiring and letting to hire, lending and borrowing, exchanging, bartering, and other acts of contract).”17

14 Ibid., 1.8.14.
15 Ibid., 2.17.1.
17 Hobbes, Leviathan, 1.15.14.
Notice, however, than in Thomas’s definition, distributive justice depends on a sense of proportionality and on “the order of that which belongs to the community in relation to each single person.” When asking about whether distributive justice observes the mean, Thomas writes:

In distributive justice something is given to a private individual (*privatae personae*), in so far as what belongs to the whole is due to the part, and in a quantity that is proportionate to the importance of the position of that part in respect of the whole. Consequently in distributive justice a person receives all the more of the common goods, according as he holds a more prominent position in the community. This prominence in an aristocratic community is gauged according to virtue, in an oligarchy according to wealth, in a democracy according to liberty, and in various ways according to various forms of community. Hence in distributive justice the mean is observed, not according to equality between thing and thing, but according to proportion between things and persons (*proportionem rerum ad personas*): in such a way that even as one person surpasses another, so that which is given to one person surpasses that which is allotted to another.¹⁸

Distributive justice is based on a person’s function in that society and contribution to the common good. For Hobbes, alternatively, “distributive justice [is] the justice of an arbitrator, that is to say, the act of defining what is just.”¹⁹ So here Hobbes breaks from the medieval traditions that give rise to his political thought, and he does so on the basis of a revision in concepts of value and of equity. For Aquinas, things have intrinsic values, and so do people. The hierarchy and the equity in Thomas’s account are based in the sense of a really existing common good based in a relation to human nature. Not so with Hobbes.

First, for Hobbes, equality is at least a legal fiction: “If nature therefore have made men equal, that equality is to be acknowledged; or if nature have made men unequal, yet because men

¹⁸ ST 2-2.61.2 corp. “in distributiva iustitia datur aliquid aliqui privatae personae inquantum id quod est totius est debitum parti. Quod quidem tanto maius est quanto ipsa pars maiorem principalitatem habet in toto. Et ideo in distributiva iustitia tanto plus alii de bonis communitibus datur quanto illa persona maiorem principalitatem habet in communitate. Quae quidem principalitas in aristocratica communitate attenditur secundum virtutem, in oligarchica secundum divitas, in democratica secundum libertatem, et in aliis aliter. Et ideo in iustitia distributiva non accipitur medium secundum aequalitatem rei ad rem, sed secundum proportionem rerum ad personas, ut scilicet, sicut una persona excedit aliam, ita etiam res quae datur uni personae excedit rem quae datur alii.”

that think themselves equal will not enter into conditions of peace but upon equal terms, such
equality must be admitted. And therefore for the ninth law of Nature I put this, ‘that every man
acknowledge other for his equal by nature.’ The equality of the social contract requires either
recognition of the equality of the state of nature, which is rooted in competition, or the fictional
equality of the social contract. Second, value is determined not by intrinsic worth, but by laws of
economics: “the value of all things contracted from is measured by the appetite of the contractors;
and therefore the just value is that which they be contented to give.” This new economic law
becomes like a new natural order alongside the state of nature. Hobbes’s redefinition of human
nature around the state of nature therefore causes him to introduce the concept of distributive
justice as a formal quality, an arbitrator who defines what sorts of goods fit with what sorts of
merit. On Aquinas’s terms, there is a set distribution determined by the place one has in society.
For Hobbes, the common good has been redefined according to the protection of interests. It is
based on this revised formal concept of “equity,” which is also a “law of nature.”

How does this relate to the grammar of sovereignty in Hobbes? The comparison with the
grammar of distributive and commutative justice highlights some of the seismic shifts underlying
Hobbes’s political philosophy, which is determinative for the grammar of modern politics. In the
social contract, which is the ultimate fiction that acts as the basis of political community, each
individual transfers her absolute right in the state of nature in a social contract for the sake of self-
protection. Here we see a revision of agency and personhood around the concept of communal
authorship. In the social contract, the individual becomes an author by coming together with a

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20 Ibid., 1.15.21.
21 Ibid., 1.15.14.
22 Ibid., 1.15.15.
“multitude” of others in a single act of authorization of a sovereign. The authorization of a sovereign removes the community from the state of nature. By authorizing a “man” or an “assembly of men” to represent the group in decision-making, the individual enters into a social relationship and becomes properly a “person,” which involves renouncing primal rights, gaining protections, and acquiring privileges. “A person is he whose words or actions are considered either as his own, or as representing the words or actions of another man, or of any other thing to whom they are attributed, whether truly or by fiction.” There can be natural persons (when one’s actions are one’s own) or artificial persons (when one’s actions are performed by another). For Hobbes, the multitude becomes a single artificial person by representation. The sovereign is that communal person created by that initial act of authoring. Apart from this relationship to the sovereign, who represents the commonwealth, an individual body is not personal. She has an absolute natural right to everything, but there is no rule of law to protect her against others. An individual is not obligated to enter the contract, but, upon entering it, she forfeits her natural rights, and she cannot take them back. In the social contract, individual subjects authorize all the actions of the sovereign, who, because he has been authorized to act on their behalf represents the will of the community and cannot therefore commit an act of injustice against anyone. The sovereign alone possesses the “sovereign power of life and death.” There is no concept of primal abundance and natural conviviality to provide a check on the sovereign.

According to the Hobbesian grammar of sovereignty, sovereign authority rests on the collective act of authorization, which, as Schmitt points out, is figured alongside the “new creation”
of a single communal person. Because the collective act of authorization is a negation of the state of nature, the idea of sovereign decision is elevated above the idea of reliable natural laws. The act of authorization precedes everything else: the agency of God and of the people is folded into the sovereign, who dictates the order in which the community can flourish. One more of Hobbes’s distinctions is instructive: the distinction between a despot and a sovereign. The despot exists for his own personal interests, whereas a sovereign has no personal interests whatsoever. The sovereign’s interests are entirely folded into the good of the commonwealth. His argument for the sovereign as a single person is that it’s easier to get a single person to be like that than a community.

3. Schmitt

Hobbes’s grammar does a lot of work in showing how Arendt’s conception of the refugee makes sense by showing how someone could exist outside the rule of law in a state of nature. The other key figure for understanding the grammar of sovereignty in modernity is Carl Schmitt, a German political theorist in the Hobbesian tradition. Schmitt made much of the concept of the “state of exception,” which depends entirely for its coherence on the set of conceptual revisions to the concepts of justice and equality made above. For Schmitt, constitutions specify the structure of how a group of people contracts to live together. As such, the constitution might as well specify only one feature of that life: the sovereign, famously, “he who decides on the exception.” A constitution is essentially “personalistic” on Schmitt’s view. Because no juridical order is stable enough to anticipate every emergency, a constitution can only specify a “who” and authorize a sovereign to decide when to suspend the normal legal ordering in order to save the commonwealth.
Several concepts are necessary to make sense of the relevant aspects of Schmitt’s thought. The first is his concept of “political theology.” The second is his analysis of the “miracle.” The third is his distinction between the friend and the enemy.

Regarding political theology, Schmitt states: “all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts” both in their “historical derivation” and in “systematic structure.” The basic idea political theology is the connection between politics and anthropology discussed in the first chapter. Political claims make metaphysical presuppositions. “Metaphysics is the most intensive and the clearest expression of an epoch.” Those metaphysical presuppositions involve themselves in theological claims. Further, they are often structurally analogous or comparable to theological claims.

For example, Schmitt argues, “the exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology.” How so? First, it’s important to attend to what the exception does. In essence, the exception is a suspension of all parts of the constitutional ordering of a polity except for the central part, the sovereign, in order to make drastic decisions outside of the order envisioned by the constitution. The purpose of the suspension is to save the very constitution that is being suspended. Like the exception, miracles in Schmitt’s view are understood as a break with the natural order. Miracles suspend an order that people have come to rely upon. So the metaphysical supposition is that there is no natural order reliable enough to accommodate a natural law, and the analogy is between the miracle and the sovereign decision.

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26 Ibid., 46. Presumably, then, any systematic set of concepts in one of the interconnected spheres of life would ultimately be theological or at least metaphysical for Schmitt. He seems exactly right about this.
27 Ibid., 36.
With this claim about miracles, Schmitt knows that he is arguing against the grain of what most people want to think. The rationalism of modernity rejects every form of exception, preferring to emphasize the basic lawfulness of the “natural order.” Moderns do not like the idea of the sovereign decision because a decisionistic and personalistic conception of sovereignty conflicts with a secularized theological concept of regularity that guarantees the order of the modern world. “Constitutional liberalism,” which relies on secularized natural law, does not take into account a set of concrete exigencies that might invalidate the entire juridical order that the constitutional liberal state relies upon on Schmitt’s terms. But where did moderns get the idea of a natural order, a stable set of moral and metaphysical laws on which they can depend? Having liberated themselves from superstitious dogmas, modern people constructed their lives around the new myth of the regularity of the natural order. But Schmitt thinks that such a presumption is covertly theological, for the very regularity of the natural order is an expression of a natural law that has God at its foundation. By rejecting the possibility of a miracle, “Deist” political theories, which deny the need for the exception, seek to embrace a regularity that ultimately they cannot justify on their own terms. “Democracy is the expression of a political relativism and a scientific orientation that are liberated from miracles and dogmas and based on human understanding and critical doubt.” Democracy hides its reliance on the myth of natural order through the miracles of technocratic control.

On Schmitt’s view, a political community is not finally determined by a “law.” There is no “nature” but the state of nature and no reliable natural law but the law of that nature which politics exists to avoid. As with Hobbes, politics begins when an individual is authorized to act on behalf of

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28 Ibid., 41.

29 Ibid., 42.
a commonwealth and to guard its safety when necessary. Sovereignty, therefore, like the
corstitution, is not juridical, but “personalistic” and “decisionistic.” At the center of Schmitt’s
account is the concept of the exception because the exception reveals the limit of the law and finds
a place for a better understanding of God. “The exception confounds the unity and order of the
rationalist scheme,” showing its disconnectedness to the exigencies of concrete life. 30 “The legal
order,” rather “rests on a decision and not on a norm.” 31

Schmitt argues that the fundamental decision a sovereign makes is who counts as a friend
and who counts as an enemy. The “friend” is the one “inside” the protections of the constitution and
the “enemy” the one “outside” who threatens its integrity. Here we see the theoretical foundations
of the existence of a refugee. Since the state of nature is the war of all against all, and if the
constitutive act of the social contract is the collective authorization of a sovereign, 32 then someone
outside the social contract is the enemy primarily of the sovereign of the multitude and secondarily
of the individual member of the multitude who authorizes the sovereign. The “state of exception”
means that the sovereign decides on the identity of the friend and of the enemy. There is no way to
be “friends” with someone the sovereign declares an enemy, ultimately because the denial of human
nature means a denial of ability to have common ground with someone outside one’s polity. The
sovereign can declare anyone an enemy in order to protect the constitution. This means that there
is no order of “rights” or “justice” that possibly could form the basis for a common humanity or
form of friendship.

30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., 10.
4. Foucault and the Emergence of a Society of Control

So with Schmitt and Hobbes, we can see one important piece of the grammar of the refugee. The refugee is a creation of the modern version of the friend/enemy distinction. I want to analyze the grammar that creates the refugee even further in order to argue that the grammar of privacy implied by the refugee is central to modern understandings of the human. In order to do so, I’ll explain two more terms: governmentality and biopolitics. In the end, I will come back to Schmitt’s understanding of miracle and complicate the conceptuality at the heart of these modern developments.

Recall the way that Arendt posited two “classical” terms: public and private. For Arendt, these terms map broadly onto the political and domestic spheres. Politics involves a “public” in which one is seen and heard and against which one’s actions can be registered. Performing an “action” in public is how one distinguishes oneself from others in a group. It individuates. The public realm therefore provides a space for both connection via a shared “world” and for differentiation from others. Erasing it means creating a problem of both connection and differentiation. The domestic or private sphere connoted animal needs. Arendt conceived a strong separation between the two realms. One could only be “public” when one’s “private” needs were met. Arendt traces a rise in the development of a third hybrid realm called “society.”

The development of the social realm began in late antiquity and is symbolized by two historical moments of rupture. In the first moment, Rome was sacked and the late Roman city eventually lost its intelligibility. An Augustinian framework in which the political realm was conceived of as a family replaced the polis and ushered the way into the medieval saeculum. In this realm, the saeculum, action did not serve to differentiate. Instead, a newly developing inner private realm formed the essence of individuality. A complex negotiation of familial-societal and church
relationships began to relate individuals to one another, effectively replacing the public sphere of action. In the *saeculum*, one no longer sought immortality through action. Rather, an indefinitely postponed eternal changed one’s relationship to one’s city. Immanent economic concerns replaced a more “high-minded” politics.

The second rupture happened within the *saeculum* that Augustine built. Foucault’s account of governmentality and biopolitics in tandem with Hobbes and Schmitt outlines its grammar by giving a more fully developed account of the effect of this crucial formation of the “political-economy.” Foucault terms the reality he names “biopolitics.” I will trace Foucault’s theoretical description of the political-economy with attention to the problem of self-differentiation.\(^{33}\)

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\(^{33}\) In this section, I will focus on texts late in Foucault’s career, all within the last decade of his life. Foucault provides a nice overview of the trajectory of his thought in the last lectures he gave before he died in Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983-1984* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). He describes three phases of his career. “On the basis of what practices, through what types of discourse have we tried to tell the truth about the subject? Thus: on the basis of what practices, through what types of discourse have we tried to tell the truth about the mad subject or the delinquent subject? On the basis of what discursive practices was the speaking, laboring, and living subject constituted as a possible object of knowledge? This was the field of study that I tried to cover for a period. And then I tried to envisage this same question of subject/truth relations in another form: not that of the discourse of truth in which the truth about the subject can be told, but that of the discourse of truth which the subject is likely and able to speak about himself, which may be, for example, avowal, confession, or examination of conscience. This was the analysis of the subject’s true discourse about himself, and it was easy to see the importance of this discourse for penal practices or in the domain of the experience of sexuality. This theme, this problem led me, in previous years’ lectures, to [attempt] the historical analysis of practices of telling the truth about oneself…” (3). I have chosen texts from the second and third period (mostly from the second), and have almost completely ignored texts from the first, though Foucault presupposes them. For an excellent treatment of Foucault’s relation to Augustine in the first period, engaging issues of power/knowledge, see J. Joyce Schuld, *Foucault and Augustine: Reconsidering Power and Love* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003). I have chosen specifically the texts about the constitution of the self as a sexed subject. I have drawn from his *History of Sexuality* and from more recently published transcriptions of the lectures Foucault gave at the Collège de France. Some of the lectures I draw on are later and engage the third period, though I tend not to draw on those in the same amount of detail. The texts I focus on mark a late turn in Foucault’s career first toward questions of biopolitics in relationship to sexuality, and then to the various ways in which the production of knowledges constituted a way of caring for the self. These later texts mark a more explicitly political turn, and they continue to be read, appropriated, and widely cited. I have drawn on the texts that are, according to my lights, most widely cited by those engaged in debates about the nature of “biopolitics.”
5. Foucault on Governmentality and Biopolitics

Foucault began his classic chapter, “Right of Death and Power over Life,” the fifth and final section of his introduction to the *History of Sexuality*, by analyzing how the definition of sovereignty changes in the modern era. He outlines three ideal-typical paradigms: sovereign, disciplinary, and governmental paradigms. Each paradigm represents a way that “power” operates. In a sovereign paradigm, sovereigns rule territories. Sovereigns had power over juridical subjects: the power over life and death was an indirect power that could “let live” or “make die.” Criminals were executed, war declared, and armies drafted. Juridical subjects are interpreted through the category of law, which is passive with respect to living and active with respect to dying. But, as Paul famously wrote, “Christ is the end of the law” (Romans 10.4), signaling an eventual end to the juridical subject. “Since the classical age, the West has undergone a very profound transformation of these mechanisms of power.”

In a sovereign paradigm, power was exercised in a mostly indirect way. Kings had power to write and enforce (through threat of death) a legal code. To this power of “deduction (*prélèvement*)” was added a new set of capacities. The sovereign could “incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize the forces under it.” So a new set of technologies enabled rulers to take responsibility for the development of life in society. “The power to take life and let live was replaced by a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death.” Power to “make live” and “let die” was gradually added to the old sovereign

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35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 138.
power to “let live” and “make die.”

Foucault seems to imagine two stages in the development of the new power to “make live” and “let die.”

The first stage was the formation of a “disciplinary” state. In this type of state, institutions mediated state-power primarily through the way they affected individuals’ self-interpretation. Having discovered the requisite technologies to shape how people understand their lives and identities, the state could then more effectively manage its people. “I would say that discipline tries to rule a multiplicity of men to the extent that their multiplicity can and must be dissolved into individual bodies that can be kept under surveillance, trained, used, and if need be, punished.”

Over time, a variegated set of “non-disciplinary” institutions, practices, and devices that “centered on the [individual] body” was gradually introduced by new technologies. The second stage was reached, then, when the sorts of control exercised within disciplinary institutions was exercised by society as a whole. In one sense, this second stage—a governmental power or society of control—was reached when a global-capitalist economy came into its own. The quasi-disciplinary institution associated with this stage can be called “neoliberalism.” “The new technology that is being established is addressed to a multiplicity of men, not to the extent that they are...

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38 Foucault’s thought on this is unclear. My analysis smooths it out for the purposes of providing a more coherent narrative.


40 See Foucault, Society Must Be Defended, 242. Foucault distinguished between discipline and non-disciplinary practices: “Unlike discipline, which is addressed to bodies, the new nondisciplinary power is applied not to man-as-body but to the living man, the man-as-living-being; ultimately, if you like, to man-as-species.”
nothing more than their individual bodies, but to the extent that they form, on the contrary, a
global mass that is affected by overall processes characteristic of birth, death, production, illness,
and so on.” At a high level of abstraction, we can say that the practices associated with neoliberal
capitalism transformed political life all the way down to the individual bodies of the living. These
individual bodies were newly separated, aligned, surveyed, and simultaneously grouped into a
mass." Foucault’s description of this process both parallels and complements Arendt’s account of
the rise of society and the formation of a political economy.

The theme of Foucault’s analysis of the development is almost a refrain: “life enters into
history.” By the refrain, he means that human life itself, that is, the fact of human living, entered
into “the order of knowledge and power, into the sphere of political techniques.” The transition
from a disciplinary society to a society of control or governmental society is facilitated by the way
life or living-ness enters more intensely. The broad outline of the process Foucault narrates is
nearly identical to Arendt’s earlier narrative. Arendt thinks the logical outcome of the rise of
society, which is the conflation of the public/private distinction, is the administration of life.
Foucault separates it into two stages and thereby gains more analytical power. He calls second stage
of “massifying” administration of living bodies “biopolitics.” The power enabling biopolitics he calls
“bio-power”: “one would have to speak of bio-power to designate what brought life and its
mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of

41 Ibid. “So after a first seizure of power over the body in the body in individualizing mode, we have a second seizure of
power that is not individualizing but, if you like, massifying, that is directed not at man-as-body but at man-as-species.”
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., 142.
44 I am simplifying Foucault somewhat for this narrative. Others have pointed out that he did not use the language of
biopolitics and bio-power consistently. I account for this problem in my next section on critical appropriations of
transformation of human life.”\textsuperscript{45}

He implicitly locates the shift from the individualizing disciplinarity of “anatamo-politics” to the “massifying” of biopolitics in the secular immanentization of society. Recall the two shifts that Arendt says enables the rise of society: the end of the \textit{polis} and the denial of the contemplative in modernity. I have shown how Arendt thinks these shifts served to make all human concerns immanent domestic concerns. So Foucault solidifies Arendt’s understanding of modern “society” via the concept of biopolitics. Biological life became the only significant political concern: “One no longer aspired toward the coming of the emperor of the poor, or the kingdom of the latter days, or even the restoration of our imagined ancestral rights; what was demanded and what served as an objective was life, understood as the basic needs, man’s concrete essence, the realization of his potential, a plenitude of the possible.”\textsuperscript{46} Foucault therefore shares Arendt’s estimation of the inherent immanence of the concern with life: “what might be called a society’s ‘threshold of modernity’ has been reached when the life of the species is wagered on its own political strategies. For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question.”\textsuperscript{47} This transition to a biopolitical framework, however, signifies a shift to which Arendt does not draw attention: a paradigm of sovereignty to a paradigm of governmentality.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{45} Foucault, \textit{The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1}, 143.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 145.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 143.
\textsuperscript{48} “Power would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself; it was the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death, that gave power its access even to the body.” Ibid., 142–143.
As I suggested above, Foucault’s concept of the immanent administration of bodies (bio-power) takes two forms. It will be helpful to attend more closely to the differences between a disciplinary society and a society of control before going on to show how Foucault narrates the rupture.

First, I explain a disciplinary society. On an individual level, what Foucault calls “anatamo-politics” conceived the body as a machine. The nation-state (Foucault does not here distinguish between the nation-state based on universal rights and the nation-state taken up by capitalism as Arendt does) thereby took responsibility to discipline, optimize its capabilities, increased its usefulness of docility, and, perhaps most tellingly, integrated the body into a system of efficient economic controls. Stereotypically modern biology, following a broadly Cartesian or Kantian understanding of a mechanized body, demonstrates the shift in how bodies have come to be understood. Foucault thinks that a tendency to reduce individuals to a set of statistics lies behind the development of bio-power and facilitates the transition from the first moment of “anatamo-politics” to the second moment of “biopolitics.” The birth rates, reproduction rates, fertility rates and so on enable “governments” to concern themselves with the “living” of its “population.” Such a paradigm is especially concerned with women’s bodies and the transmission of life.

Second, I explain a society of control. On a corporate level, a “biopolitics” invokes the imaginary of a “species body.” Foucault notes that a “move from a theory based on rights in which an individual contracted with the state as a part of society to a new body, a multiple body, a body with so may heads that, while they might not be infinite in number, cannot necessarily be counted”:

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49 Ibid., 139.
the population. Living citizens form as a single organism whose life must be fostered, reminiscent of Plato’s Republic. Biopolitics concerns itself with “biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that caused it to vary.” Later I will explain how through population science, governments have learned how to segregate and impose hierarchy on a society that divides it into what are essentially racial categories. It is against this backdrop that government takes up “natalist policy” and attends to “birth control practices” and “public hygiene.” In modernity, the quasi-platonist politics of biopower takes on a more radically essentialist perspective than either Plato or Aristotle could have ever imagined, which may be behind Arendt’s early opposition to it. “The field of biopolitics also includes accidents, infirmities, and various anomalies.” The concept “biopolitics” is also able to explain the modern development of charitable institutions and also the rise of insurance, public safety nets, public health initiatives, etc. The final step in biopolitics is control of relations between humans and the environment and urban development.

To return to the broader terms of the present inquiry, it is possible to see how Foucault is working with the fundamental effect of the rise of society on the public/private distinction: the development and purification of a political economy through a shift in governing paradigm, facilitated by scientific developments, effecting a social imaginary, and issuing in a set of public policies aimed at taking direct responsibility for the life of a population. Two salient features of his thought are left under-explained in the above treatment. First, the theoretical starting point is the entrance of “life” into history is underdeveloped so far in my account. Second, more careful

50 Foucault, Society Must Be Defended, 245.
51 Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, 139.
52 Foucault, Society Must Be Defended, 244.
attention must be given to the features of the specific economy that has formed the present state of biopolitics. These two features, incidentally, also demonstrate the explanatory power of Foucault’s narrative by laying out in more specific terms the two consequences of the rise of society on the public-private distinction in Arendt’s thought that I narrated above.

All this lays the groundwork for describing the “second rupture” in the development of “pastoral power.” Pastoral power correlates to the rise of an “inner secret” and the development of the modern, inner, private self. This self might be thought of as the second-order anthropological presupposition of the refugee. I use Augustine to develop an alternative to it in chapter 4. The inner self starts with the anthropological effect of the distinction, but quickly transfers to the political-social effect, for the confessional, on Foucault’s terms, is responsible for the development of a capitalist, colonialist economy and a set of racist policies after the reformation. Put differently, when “politics” is about “life,” the only basis for relation is bodily needs.

6. Foucault and Pastoral Power

How did life enter history? Foucault attempts to “go behind” the state to talk about a “general technology of power” that assured the development and functioning of the present order.53 The story behind it begins with the ancient Israelite concept:54 The LORD is my Shepherd. My shepherd: the shepherd of a people and not a territory. The Lord, who led the Israelites through the desert and cared for their needs became for Christians the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. Jesus takes the power of the shepherd to a new level by helping to show how divine power is internalized. Recall Brown’s claim about the “single heart”: Augustine revised ancient

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54 Derived from the Egyptians.
moral codes so that the focus shifted from sexual deportment to single-hearted focus on marriage-goods.

The technique of the pastor—“science of sciences” and “art of arts” took time to consolidate. It surfaces in its paradigmatic form in the late medieval confessional. Foucault analyzes the basic shape of confession: the layperson investigates and examines himself at the direction of the confessor, whose moral manual provides a set of terms to aid the layperson in self-description. The layperson looks “inside” to his heart, the integrity of which is in question, and he finds what he seeks: a secret that did not exist before. In confession, he articulates it to the priest for the first time through the categories the priest gives him. The priest further interrogates the layperson’s secret, his inner truth, according to the categories provided by a system of merits and punishments spelled out in a moral manual written precisely for the purpose of such investigation. The manual leads the confessor, also called a pastor or a shepherd, to insert the individual layperson into an economy of merits and sins and of rewards and punishments.

The three moments of meeting, interrogation, and insertion form a type of subjectivity: the subject who invites certain questions of his heart, submits to the authority of the church and its economy in the person of the pastor, and trusts the pastor to manipulate the economy of salvation on his behalf.

Foucault thinks that the pastor’s economy—not “salvation” or “truth”—in the medieval practice of penance establishes the essential and originary structure of Christianity. For the economy of salvation, the process of interior interrogation for salvation, and this particular way of sorting the self and making sense of the individual through the mediation of the confessor set

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Christianity apart. Its immediate effect is to establish an immanent economy of power. Foucault notes that the implications extend beyond what we have come to call religion: Christianity introduced the Semitic concept to the West. Pastoral power became a more generalizable art of conducting, directing, leading, manipulating, taking charge of every moment of existence. It became, in other words, a way of forming individual subjects. Pastoral power as the technique for subject-formation was separable from a particular economy of salvation that is now behind the sorting of the West.\(^\text{56}\) We might re-narrate Arendt into Foucault’s terms. The first rupture was the formation of subjects through the late-antique proto-penitential practices that specify Christianity. This led to an “order of charity.” The second was when these practices were developed fully and then separated from their material goal to serve other, more immanent ends. This culminates in global capitalism.

How does the technique of pastoral power work? What kind of power structure does it establish? Again, Foucault turns to analysis of the practice.

First, confession individualizes, but not (as in the previous pagan way) by status, birth, or political action—though, of course, the church was still sorting people according to pagan accounts of sexual difference uncritically accepted by early Christians and church fathers in the ways narrated in the previous chapters—but by the new economy confession enables. Foucault concurs here with Arendt; Christian “society” enables individuals to dissect the self and analyze an interior. A group of subjects with richly textured “insides” is amenable to a certain type of economy.

Second, confession equalizes. To see how it does so, consider again the exercise of the confessional. The whole community goes to confession, all and each. Christian economy is

\(^{56}\) Parallel here with Kelsey, Eccentric Existence, 2009, 80–119. The economy of sin and salvation underlying existentialist anthropologies is an interesting example of how a secularized pastoral power is tied to basic understandings of interiority and individual salvation from estrangement.
universal in scope, down to each individual. The logic of the confessional mimics the logic of the Good Shepherd, who leaves the ninety-nine to find the one stray. But its scope is even more intense than the metaphor indicates: the pastor is concerned with every act of every sheep. He identifies with the sheep so closely that he considers their acts his. He exposes himself to the dangers of the sheep, laying his life down for theirs: when the sheep confess, the pastor opens his life up to their darkness. The dangerous revealing of imperfections is the central feature of this economy, for it is only through this revealing that the shepherd manages and manipulates an economy for his sheep’s benefit.

Third, Foucault identifies the type of community the confessional creates. Consider once again the exercise of the confessional: one individual submits to another. The more absurd the command by the divine representative, the more meritorious the obedience. The relationship is never finalized. It has no end except its continual exercise, for one never exhausts one’s responsibility to God. The goal is a sort of “apatheia” before God, a renunciation of a singular will in what Foucault calls a “generalized field of obedience.” The pastor experiences this relationship of submission as a service, for he exposes himself to the sheep’s sin. The confessional is then accompanied by teaching, a direction of daily conduct through the moral manual. This further subordinates the individual. The process, once entered voluntarily, is therefore not voluntary in each of its instances, as if the confessional allowed the layperson to pick and choose the directions he or she followed. The confessional instead creates a disciplinary institution—a permanent structure of the pastoral role after the initial volunteering. The law of the confessional is an exhaustive total relation of obedience.
In the exercise of the confessional discipline, however, the very hierarchy required for the establishment of the relationship of obedience is paradoxically undermined. The layperson experiences the confessional as a service. He wants this relationship. The genius of pastoral power is that it creates a voluntary, general “system of servitude” in which all serve all but that nevertheless binds the will. So, Foucault insists, the immediate effect of its exercise is the production of a certain type of inward private self in a community of external obedience. The external obedience is made possible by the internal directing, and, perhaps it is safe to say, coercing.57

7. Foucault and the Society of Discipline

Foucault’s analysis of the confessional is not meant to explain modern “governmentality” and “bio-power” that underlie the existence of the refugee. It rather explains how he thinks “life” first entered into history by tracing the rise of the first disciplinary institution. Life’s entrance coincides with the development of the inner secret. It can be stated more strongly: life entered into history when the disciplinary institution of the confessional developed the generalizable technique to gain control of someone’s body through moving the individual to “internal” assent. The new subject created by this technique was inextricably bound with a new type of social power. Foucault extends his narrative through the reformation to explain the way that the initial confessional discipline of life effected the set of disciplinary institutions that form the institutional skeleton

57 Foucault’s genealogy of modernity is shared by one very influential Catholic moral theologian, Servais Pinckaers. Specifically, Pinckaers focuses on the ways in which morality came increasingly under the rule of a disciplinary paradigm after the rise of nominalism. For him, the non-competitive “freedom for excellence” was replaced with an insidious (Ockhamist and Kantian!) “freedom of indifference.” This latter conception of freedom focused on obedience to external controls, and his diagnosis of modernity’s ills (though not his cure—Foucault has nothing like Pinckaers’s freedom for excellence, or the church, or the Summa, or Scripture) works very much like Foucault’s narration of the rise of pastoral power in the confessional. One major difference is that Pinckaers focuses on the role of the moral manuals in confession for his account. He relates the moral manuals to Ockham and Kant and offers a natural law approach and “freedom of excellence” for the voluntarist obedience Kant narrates. See Servais Pinckaers, The Sources of Christian Ethics (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995).
necessary for the emergence of a new public and a new private and with them the refugee. What Foucault offers is only a sketch, but it is nevertheless worth tracing here.

According to Foucault, the developing confessional—itself a response to the problem of what to do with post-baptismal sin—slowly dissolved the sovereign paradigm. As time went on, pastoral power intensified even as it developed outside a strictly “religious” framework. The emerging nation-state was the disciplinary institution that created good citizens and organized a set of smaller, subsidiary institutions. It imitated the technologies of the confessional, dividing the confessor’s realm of power. That is why Foucault says that the state is an “episode” in governmentality. The nation-state began forming subjects by relegating religion to a new “private” sphere. Since modern subjects are essentially and fully formed by confession—every act of every sheep—the privatization of religion left open a crucial space, which the state began to fill in a “secular” way. The state, then, converged with the development of the new technologies that could be seized upon by new institutions to administer living bodies and re-form consciences, linguistic habits, and, ultimately the categories through which people interpret their lives. These new institutional arrangements required that religion (and, eventually, all comprehensive notions of the good) be relegated to a private sphere, for the “public” exercise of religion in the medieval saeculum depended on a different regime of power to hold it up. The first stage of the life of the nation state, then, is the development of anatamo-politics.

Alongside the “private” religious conduction of oneself and one’s family, Foucault notes that shepherding the public under government primarily took the form of the pedagogical problem

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58 See Taylor, A Secular Age.
of conducting children.\textsuperscript{59} Whereas before, education, a form of housework, was fulfilled by the church and in the home, the state took on the “public” development of institutions for education. Similar developments took place with the formation of modern hospitals, asylums, and prisons. So the exercise of the same type of shepherding power transitions from an economy of merits and punishments to a different type of economy, the public (political) economy and the private (personal) economy. Public and private came to map on to concepts of political and personal.

Foucault is able to narrate this transition from the confessional to the modern disciplinary society because he separates a structure of pastoral power, originally embedded in the confessional, from the specifics of the economy into which the subject is inserted. New developments in external factors (specifically technological developments) are able to form the deployment of pastoral power. The analytical move enables him to posit three different uses of the power: power in the confessional, power in a society of discipline, and power in a more fully biopolitical “society of control.” In a society of discipline, a set of technologies is developed in order to enable the formation of disciplinary institutions. The post-reformation anti-economy replaced the moral manuals of medieval economies and developed a new set of disciplinary techniques to accompany the new economy. In a society of control, which I will explain in the next section, a set of technologies developed that allowed for a more direct formation of political and sexual subjects. On Arendt’s terms, the crucial turn was to exclusive concern with the economy.

Having privatized the confessional, the new “state” could take on the functions of saeculum’s king without its pope by managing a now fully immanent economy for the sake of the population’s life. Modernity, then, is when the family of a nation-state is formed without an ecclesial sphere.

\textsuperscript{59} Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri think this happens through capitalism. Hardt and Negri explain how “state” is naturalized by appeal to “people”, and how the two in turn naturalize sovereignty. See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, \textit{Empire} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), chap. 1.1.
Bio-power is the name for an exercise of a form of pastoral power once “religion” was named and privatized, leaving all economic functions to the ruler of the “population.” The new economy concerns life on its own terms: its flourishing, its multiplication, its health. We can read in Foucault a two-stage development of bio-power. First, bio-power extends the way that pastoral power initially individualizes, equalizes, and creates a community of mutual servitude out of individuals. Its end serves the state’s conception of the immanent concerns of life. Second, when the state learns to start conceiving of “populations,” it racializes by individuating whole people groups in new ways.

8. Effects of Biopolitics

When narrating the details of the development of the West from a society of discipline to a biopolitical society or “society of control,” Foucault suggests that bio-power progressively intensified in direct proportion to the development of new “technologies” and to the expansion of the scope of the disciplinary institutions in society. The most important of these institutions was the emerging capitalist “free market.” The free market above all was able to control people from within—forming every act of every sheep—once they had been inducted into it. A close second among the disciplinary institutions was the liberal nation-state. Foucault uses this insight about the relation of bio-power to technologies in order to narrate the rise of modern racial categories, totalitarianism, and capitalist economies.

Recall that in the society of discipline, the nation-state used a set of disciplinary institutions as instruments to form good citizens. The primary factor in the early development of bio-power (and the technologies that make sense of it) was the emergence of capitalist institutions alongside and within the state. Without getting into the exact nature of the relation between capitalist
institutions and the state, it is important to note the broad theme that, in the beginning, the free market became the main instrument through which the state began to shape the life of the population. Some have argued that at some point the situation was reversed: the nation state became a convenient mechanism through which the free market could shape the life of the population. In his lectures transcribed in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault develops an account of the careful nurture of economic processes that transformed the subject of the state into the character of the *homo economicus* that the state needs in order to discipline life.60

The crucial distinction for understanding the nature of biopolitics is Foucault’s distinction between a society of discipline and biopolitical society of control. In a society of discipline, explained above, individuals are formed to interpret themselves through public disciplinary institutions. Sickness is interpreted through the hospital, madness through the asylum, wealth through certain formations of the market, etc. These institutions are mechanisms of power because they give individuals categories through which they imagine their lives. Much like the moral manuals specified virtues and vices so that people could attend to the inner secret and interpret themselves through the church’s direction, the nation-state imposes the category “citizen” alongside a set of civic practices that it requires to live in the institution of the nation-state. The hospital defines “sickness” and “health” alongside a set of practices for health and healing. The asylum defines “sanity” and “insanity.” And so on. These institutions are genetically related to *pastoral* power because they form people by nurturing internal consent. I own the definition citizen, sick, or sane, and I apply it to myself. I assent to it even as it is given to me, and then I interpret myself through it. My subjectivity pivots off of it. Once I assent, I am taken into the institution and formed by it.

Foucault thinks that at first the state formed a sort of meta-institution that formed the others. Institutions such as schools, hospitals, barracks, and workshops facilitated the power of state control.\textsuperscript{61}

The new disciplinary institutions could “[manipulate] the body as a source of forces that have to be rendered both useful and docile.”\textsuperscript{62} On Foucault’s terms, these institutions individualize people by forming the particular interpretations of individual bodies and conditions. Because capitalism is one such disciplinary institution and the others are subsidiary to it, the emergence of disciplinary institutions was intrinsic in the formation of capitalist economies in the same way that the emergence of moral manuals was intrinsic to the formation of the economy of merits and punishments in the economy of salvation. Through analysis of capitalism, Foucault traces how the nature of “labor” changed and how subjects started understanding various types of education, etc. as investments in the self. The nation-state mainly used capitalist markets and war to “maximize and extract forces” from individuals through discipline.\textsuperscript{63}

A biopolitical society shares the general feature of the maximizing and extraction of forces, but it fundamentally transforms the way it maximizes and extracts. It re-imagines the subject. Unlike disciplinary mechanisms, biopolitical security mechanisms “no longer train individuals by working at the level of the body itself… but of using overall mechanisms and acting in such a way as to achieve overall states of equilibrium or regularity,” regularizing the species, the corporate body, not

\textsuperscript{61} Foucault, \textit{Society Must Be Defended}, 250.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 249.

the individual body. The new mass forms out of a society of discipline. Newly equalized subjects could be grouped together, subjected to statistical analysis, and shaped together as one through public health policy.

Power can be exercised on the abstract “life” of the imaginary (not real) corporate body of a “population.” Disciplinary institutions individualize, biopolitics massifies. The two types of power-deployment work in symbiosis in a society of control. The development of “society” on Arendtian terms is tied to development of biopolitics and capitalism in many of the ways Arendt describes. Foucault’s insight into the simultaneous individualization and massification of bio-power gives Foucault the resources to relate this narrative he shares with Arendt more directly to the systemic racism, colonialism, and sexism behind the totalitarian state and to the politicization of birth. Though Arendt could vaguely attach her reflections on these subjects with her understanding of colonialism and the Jews, she could not connect them to the view of society she develops in The Human Condition. Foucault makes the connection more firmly when he develops his accounts of sexuality and racism. Because the society of discipline and the biopolitical society do not mutually exclude, Foucault can account for both “regulatory mechanisms” that “apply to the population as such” in a society of control and the continuing existence of disciplinary institutions that enable people to continue to think of themselves as individuals with compellingly rich, textured private lives.

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64 Foucault, Society Must Be Defended, 246.

65 Such as savings systems, “health-insurance systems, old-age pensions; rules on hygiene that guarantee the optimal longevity of the population; the pressures that the very organization of the town brings to bear and sexuality and therefore procreation, child care, education” Ibid., 251.

66 Ibid.
The power of this explanation is most evident in Foucault’s analysis of sexuality. “Sexuality exists at the point where body and population meet.”

Sexuality—a second order analytic concept—is as irreducibly individual as birth itself. It is traditionally a matter of discipline that takes the form of surveillance even today. Consider, for example, the ways in which churches monitor the sex lives of ministers, polities monitor the sex lives of elected officials, or the way surveillance techniques were used in the past to prevent children from masturbating. Technologies constantly develop to survey and discipline sexuality, regulating participation in athletic events, regulating birth, etc. Foucault suggests that in modernity, disciplinary institutions that emerged after the church ceded its transcendent role for the saeculum started offering new, compelling descriptions that led individuals to internalize sex and sexual identity differently.

A new way of internalizing sex was mimicked in other parts of life, and the basic presuppositions about sexuality and birth influenced the ways other categories were understood and used. For example, criminals were no longer executed for their crime but because criminals started instantiating “criminality”—they became an intrinsically menacing “type” of human being. Psychological institutions could name “the homosexual” as a degenerate character type. Cultural and institutional forces coalesced so that what was once a habitual sin under the church’s economy “homosexuality” instantiated a new character, “the homosexual,” newly categorized by identifiable traits. What was once named “perversion” was newly labeled “a psychological abnormality.”

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67 Ibid., 251–252.
68 No one has done more (and more persuasive) work developing Foucault’s insights into this topic than Mark Jordan. See Mark D. Jordan, Recruiting Young Love: How Christians talk about Homosexuality (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Mark D Jordan, The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Jordan, The Ethics of Sex.
69 Consider, for example, the way Foucault points to a “theory of degeneracy” stemming from the character of “the degenerate masturbator.”
Similarly, men and women are newly essentialized, and the distinction between political and domestic becomes even stronger.70

How can a state that exists to “make live” and “let die” justify or even make sense of killing at all? “How, under these conditions, is it possible for a political power to kill, to call for deaths, to demand deaths, to give the order to kill, and to expose not only its enemies but its own citizens to the risk of death? Given that this power’s objective is essentially to make live, how can it let die? How can the power of death, the function of death, be exercised in a political system centered upon bio-power.”71 For Foucault, the main feature of modernity is the way in which modern people form characters—they think in terms of “types;” the homosexual, the black laborer, the southern mammie, etc. Whereas juridical subjects can be “killed” by the state because they violate the law in the sovereign paradigm, in a biopolitical age, disciplinary institutions enable the state to identify the criminal characters, those who fall into certain “types” of criminality. Everyone becomes a “type” of person. Certain of these characters can be construed as “threats” to the “body politic.” The “threatening character” either within or outside must be eliminated in order to sustain the body. Foucault shows how the institutions that give rise to the theory of degeneracy form the condition of the possibility of thinking the way degeneracy intrudes on the ability of the species to live.72 Because the institutions needed to be able to internalize their descriptions at the point of birth, the discourse of sexuality became the main—almost too perfect—way to do this. Disciplinary institutions gave the state everything it needed to offer a justification for state-sponsored killing.

70 An example of this might be Balthasar’s complementarian essentialization of sexual difference was followed to some extent by Pope John Paul II as the basis of the denial of ordination to women. Linn Marie Tonstad, “Sexual Difference and Trinitarian Death: Cross, Kenosis, and Hierarchy in the Theo-Drama,” Modern Theology 26, no. 4 (2010): 603–631.

71 Foucault, Society Must Be Defended, 254.

72 Ibid., 251.
Foucault calls the “typing” involved in the internalization of once externalized phenomena that the disciplinary institutions of modernity enable “racism.” Racism just is thinking of people as instantiations of types of characters. This is why Foucault’s racism is “far removed from the ordinary racism” that pits two people groups against one another in mutual hatred.  

Racist concepts function as the way of discriminating so that governments can decide whom to kill or to let die. Instead, “racism” is an intrinsic feature of biopolitics; it is the only way distinctions within a social mass can be made in a biopolitical paradigm. This is why Foucault says that the “specificity of modern racism, or what gives it its specificity, is not bound up with mentalities, ideologies, or the lies of power. It is bound up with the technique of power, with the technology of power.”

Foucault therefore explains racism entirely in functionalist terms. First, racism fragments the field that bio-power controls, enabling the state to make the distinctions between citizens it needs to know to kill or to let die. It allows one part of the mass of the living to be pitted up against another. For it portrays the “race” or intrinsic biological or psychological features of some as a threat to the others. This is where the theory of degeneracy and sexuality comes in. A degenerate detracts from the life of the race. In this way, racism functions to justify both killing and the regulation of offspring (to prevent the birth of “unwanted” children who will detract from the life of the population).

Racism also performs a secondary function dependent on the first: in a scarce social system, in order to live, you must destroy your enemies. Biopolitical racism enables the relation between enemies and “others” to function in a new way. By conceiving of one’s group as a “mass,”

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73 Ibid., 258.
74 Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended.*, 254. “A way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power’s control: the break between what must live and what must die.”
75 Ibid., 258.
“existence” and life can be framed in newly competitive terms. “The more inferior species die out, the more abnormal individuals are eliminated, the fewer degenerates there will be in the species as a whole and the more I—as a species rather than individual—can live, the stronger I will be, the more vigorous I will be. I will be able to proliferate.” War therefore becomes a biological relationship that helps to justify the existence of the modern state. How does the state decide whom to let die, or whom to kill? Only those whose deaths will benefit the whole, those who are an inherent threat to our “life” should be killed, and any of those types that threaten can be killed. The state cannot kill someone who is accidentally a threat, but only one whose very existence calls the life of the mass or population into question. So it has an interest in essentializing features of enemy-characters that make them threats to life. War no longer occurs in a “juridical” framework; it is not primarily a response to violation of offenses. Rather, a state goes to war on behalf of existence, for the sake of life itself. The power to expose a whole population to death is the dark and paradoxical underside that biopolitical logic enables.

Because sexuality is where life comes into being, the state takes control of sexuality through the racializing logic that results from the dynamic interplay between continued existence of disciplinary institutions and the new interpretation of the mass. Most obviously, it takes a responsibility for procreation, family planning, and the prevention of pregnancies that will lead to degenerate members of society. Biopolitics makes eugenics in its hard and soft forms intelligible, because the state has an interest in eliminating the births of those whose lives will be a threat to the

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76 Ibid. 255.

77 See the national security strategy of the Bush administration and the various theological reflections on it in Wes Avram, Anxious About Empire: Theological Essays on the New Global Realities (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004).
The racializing logic is endemic. All makers of “difference” between people in modernity on this Foucauldian view are in some sense racial distinctions because all markers of difference participate in the tendency to make individuals into “types” of characters. Racism is therefore a pervasive feature of modernity. Foucault is not implying that everyone is intrinsically racist—only that racism is impossible to avoid. Consider how it is nearly impossible to resist thinking of the white southern racists as “rednecks” or “trailer-trash.” Like Christian accounts of original sin, which distorts without completely destroying everything, racism touches nearly every feature of modern social experience without necessarily intensifying as much as it might. Like a virus, racial categories infect all social concepts. The fundamental structure of our life together requires this logic to function, and the market economy’s control of birth processes becomes a central feature of this logic.

Biopolitics is on these terms—and, whether they are the only terms or not, it is the way I use and develop the concept—simply shorthand for the new way of administering the “public” that pastoral power enabled when it was inserted into immanentized modern economies and institutions.

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79 I am not sure if Foucault held this view, but I think it follows from what has been said.


81 “When you have a normalizing society, you have a power which is, at least superficially, in the first instance, or in the first line a bio-power, and racism is the indispensable precondition that allows someone to be killed, that allows others to be killed… racism alone can justify the murderous function of the State,” Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 256ff. Later Foucault appeals to social Darwinism and eugenics and its use of racializing logic.
at the disposal of sovereigns and became bio-power. The exercise of pastoral power in modernity therefore created a new definition of public and private (here we are still working with the development of a lexicon, not a strict causal history). The new private is identified with the part of economic life associated with “religious faith” and personal opinion. The new public is all the individual concerns associated with bodily flourishing. Bio-power, on Arendt’s terms, would be a form of violent, hierarchical economic power, a way of manipulating and forming living beings all the way down. It is in Foucault’s thought identical with a certain process of racial formation mediated by global capitalism. That it is so is not inconsistent with the observation that the subjects themselves experience these processes as life-affirming. The formation of subjects does not take place through external coercion, but internal manipulation. There are no longer sovereigns who rule territories full of legal subjects, but sovereigns who govern populations or groups of living subjects by means of this “technique” of pastoral power for the sake of encouraging life. The “public” way of exercising pastoral power is this concern for the “life” of the citizenry.

So far, Foucault has helped us track a way that the distinction has morphed. He offers a rich analysis and description of the conflation of politics and economics after sovereign paradigms collapse. His description is an indispensable tool for making sense of the character of the refugee. The refugee makes sense when social existence has been both publicized (in a massifying society analyzed by public health experts) and privatized (such that each individual becomes an instantiation of a type). The organization of states no longer requires a community that comes together to ensure its existence and promote a common good, but rather a government that encourages the health of the whole population. The figure of the refugee is just the figure at the edges of the new system of societal self-interpretation, and the figures at the margins tend to make sense of the whole by
showing where the boundaries lie. If “race” is the category that helps to define the “other” over-again which the social group defines itself and its health, the category that helps the state full of individuals with no organic relationship other than the will to survival help figure out who needs to die or be eliminated in order to make sense or survive, then the “refugee” is just whomever gets the status of outsider. On these terms, the refugee could be the “black man” or “welfare queen in a Cadillac” over against which white America defines itself, or the “homosexual” against which religious conservatives defend the family, or the “religious conservative” against which enlightened liberals defend “rational” discourse in secular society. All of these figures are lesser instantiations of the same logic; we might call them secondary analogates. Most likely, the refugee will be most properly the production of the economic order combined with the militarized order that helps to enforce the regime of global capitalism. She is found in the slums of the world safely hidden from too many Western cameras, out of the sight of “civilized society,” which might discover at the economic order’s edges more precisely what it’s all about.82

9. Agamben

In what follows, I explain a few ways that different theorists have brought together the logic of sovereignty in Hobbes and Schmitt with Foucault’s development of governmentality and biopower. The purpose here is to refine the grammar underlying the figure of the refugee through more engagement with the literature.

In an editorial to the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung, Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben explains his decision to cancel all future travel plans to the United States, starting with lectures he was scheduled to give at New York University in March 2004. The proximate cause for

his cancellation was a new policy requiring all foreign citizens travelling on a visa to undergo fingerprinting and data registration. But a far more pernicious threat to “life” itself loomed more determinatively over his decision. “For many years now, at first only occasionally and barely perceptibly, then increasingly more openly and persistently, there has been an attempt to accustom citizens to supposedly normal and human procedures and practices that had always been considered to be exceptional and inhumane.”

Technology enables governmental powers to use a seemingly harmless new procedure imperceptibly to cross a new “threshold,” “the control and manipulation of bodies,” for this “appropriation and registration” of the “biological life of bodies” signifies the subtle transformation of the citizen into a suspect. The suspect is treated with techniques once reserved for the most dangerous individuals (whole body scanning at airports). This leads Agamben to an unsettling conclusion: “a few years ago, I wrote that the city had ceased to be the founding political image of the West and that it had been replaced by the concentration camp – not Athens, but Auschwitz.”

In his seminal work Homo Sacer, Agamben suggests that although Arendt’s and Foucault’s analyses of the “bestialization of man” concur at crucial points, Foucault’s narrative is able to connect the homo laborans of “society” to Arendt’s analysis of totalitarianism better than she did. Foucault, however, fails to focus on what Agamben considers the fundamental sites of bio-power in modernity: the concentration camp and great totalitarian states. Agamben structures his account of biopolitics against the backdrop of this twin critique. Bio-power ought to be connected intrinsically

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84 Ibid., 169.
to the camp and totalitarian state, and which in turn ought to form the heart of one’s assessment of biopolitics.

Biopolitics can be said to create a “zone of indistinction” at multiple levels, starting with the very dualisms that have come to structure our life: “only within [this particular] biopolitical horizon will it be possible to decide wither the categories whose opposition founded modern politics (right/left, private/public, absolutism/democracy, etc.)—and which have been steadily dissolving, to the point of entering today into a realm of indistinction—will have to be abandoned or will, eventually regain the meaning they lost in that horizon.”

All dualisms cease to lose their duality, for the chief effect of biopolitics is to bring the central category of “life” into a zone of indistinction. Life no longer has meaning apart from the sovereign that decides. The Aristotelian distinction between the *bios politicos*, politically qualified life, and *zoe*, bare life, is undone.

Agamben’s project is fueled by his appropriation of both Foucault and Schmitt. He adopts Schmitt’s framework about sovereignty in two ways. First, Agamben grants that the state of exception reveals something about the nature of the political order that the talk of liberal constitutional democracy hides. He thus adopts Schmitt’s critique of liberal constitutionalism and largely ignores liberalism. For him liberal discourse is merely a smokescreen for the exercise of decisionistic sovereignty. The real dynamic behind liberal constitutional formations is always only personalistic and decisionistic. Agamben then intensifies Schmitt’s point about the state of exception, arguing that it has taken its place at the center of politics in the twentieth century. It has become a “technique of government rather than an exceptional measure,” the form of law that

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“has today reached its full development.” Whereas Schmitt focuses on the crucial limit experiences, Agamben argues that what was once a limit experience reserved exclusively for criminals and state enemies is applied to all citizens with greater regularity. This transformation has occurred primarily through investing the executive with a legislative power that the parliament or congress is called only to ratify.

In the state of exception, the sovereign declares not only the power to delimit a group of enemies, but to decide that some individuals are stateless and therefore not properly vested with any political rights at all. Those deemed state enemies, sent to Guantanamo, held in solitary confinement with no cause, denied a writ of habeas corpus, subjected to state surveillance, etc. live in a quasi-Hobbesian state of nature with the state by the decision of the sovereign. They are all refugees. When the sovereign declares which classes (races?) or individual citizens are outside of constitutional protections or the juridical protections generally suspended, he collapses bios into zoe. Citizens can at any time become like objects without subjectivity, for the sovereign possess rights over his subjects’ bodies and is in a state of nature with enemies over whose bodies he has an absolute natural right. All bodies thus become potentially pure objects, and the sovereign relates to them in a purely exterior way. Any politically significant identity is stripped from those who might at any time for any reason be declared non-citizens.

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87 Ibid., 32.

88 “If the only life recognizable by the democratic republic is bios, the political life of rights and laws, guarantees and protections, due process and proper legal procedure, positive law and constitution, then the inevitable implication is that only citizens truly live, that only citizens are human. The others, the slaves, the unborn, the stateless, the refugees, the inhabitants of the camps, have lost bios, and in losing it have lost everything. They can be slaughtered, ignored, starved, imprisoned for life, and tortured, all without any laws being broken.” Paul J. Griffiths, “The Cross as the Fulcrum of Politics: Expropriating Agamben on Paul,” in Douglas Karel Harink, ed., Paul, Philosophy, and the Theopolitical Vision: Critical Engagements with Agamben, Badiou, Zizek, and Others (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 181–182.
The modern constitution implicitly depends also on a type of immanent secularization. If the chief function of the sovereign is to decide on the exception, and the exception consists of deciding on who is a friend and who is an enemy, who is a refugee, no friendships are possible outside the frame of sovereignty. Sovereignty as Schmitt understands it therefore implies that no transcendent basis of friendship is possible. Agamben takes this to imply that no transcendent basis of meaning is possible. The Eucharist, for example, or any other form of sacrifice loses its ability to forge bonds that transcend the state.

Agamben says that the “sacralization” of bare life makes the state of exception possible, for the entire framework of Schmitt’s proposal collapses the sacred into the secular; it becomes impossible in his understanding of sovereignty and biopolitics to imagine “holiness.” What emerges is the universal occurrence of homo sacer, a figure that can be killed but not sacrificed. “The figure proposed by our age is that of an unsacrificeable life that has nevertheless become capable of being killed to an unprecedented degree.” He is subjected to a “double” exclusion: both from political life and from “the sphere of the religious.” All notions of life’s sacredness are evacuated of power. The age in which politics increasingly takes it upon itself to encourage “life” or “vitality, the biopolitical age, posited a self-subsisting human nature. It therefore left itself without the resources provided by a zone of the sacred and a cult of sacrifice, a divine violence that dissolves “the link between violence and law” precisely by introducing a basis for personhood untouchable by the sovereign decision.

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89 Agamben, Homo Sacer, 114.
90 Ibid., 65.
The Schmittian and Hobbesian system comes to the fore the more the focus of sovereignty becomes fostering life, the health of the body, and the well-being of the population.91 Such a focus enables the sovereign to make decisions about whom to fight in war or whom to except at home. The very fostering of life is the bright side of an essentially dark phenomenon of modern biopolitical sovereignty.

Note that Agamben’s appropriation of both Foucault and Schmitt depends on two essential points drawn from Schmitt. It will be helpful to return to Schmitt’s *Political Theology* to make this point. First, Schmitt makes a point about the nature of transcendence. “Conceptions of transcendence will no longer be credible to most educated people, who will settle for either a more or less clear immanence-pantheism or a positivist indifference toward any metaphysics. Insofar as it retains the concept of God, the immanence philosophy…draws God into the world and permits law and the state to emanate from the immanence of the objective.”92 The binary of immanence and transcendence maps onto the functional binary in Schmitt’s thought: liberalism or dictatorship. For Agamben, since the dictatorship of the state of exception has spread to all life under the guise of liberalism, another position has to emerge. The task in the face of this is to find a space outside the “law”—the liberal speech that hides decisionistic sovereignty—that can make sense of life.91 Agamben is stuck because he can only find this in a metaphysical immanence.

Agamben is constrained by the same dilemma in a second way: theological ideas of human nature. “Every political idea in one way or another takes a position on the ‘nature’ of man and


presupposes that he is either ‘by nature good’ or ‘by nature evil.’” The choices are stark. Anarchist visions of politics presuppose the goodness of humanity and the corruptibility of the magistrate. Hobbesian sovereignty presupposes the likelihood that the magistrate will be less corruptible in the face of the people. Once again, the choice between immanence and transcendence is before him, this time in the form of the question: whom will you trust? The sovereign magistrate? Or the people?

10. Hardt and Negri

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri can be understood against the background of the previous sections, especially through the two conceptual points raised at the end of the last section: theological presuppositions about transcendence and about sin. On their own view—and here I am going broad to draw attention to the relevant points developed, especially since they do not depart from Foucault as much as Agamben does—they emphasize the positive relation of global capitalist economy to biopolitics and try to open space for an immanent anarchism. More specifically, they emphasize ways that the global capitalist economy creates subjectivity or forms our self-interpretations (this is the real mechanism they claim Foucault grasped only inadequately). The self-interpretation of imperial subjects is characterized by a lack of boundaries created by “abstract machines,” their name for the structures enabling modern capitalism. The language of “machine” emphasizes how they shape people.

How do they open space for immanence and anarchism? They start with Foucault, generally following and expanding on Foucault’s narrative explicitly. They posit a transition from a

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94 Schmitt, Political Theology, 56.
pre-modern (feudal society) to society of discipline (where self-interpretation comes through institutions) to society of control (where self interpretations come immanently through capitalist means of production). In pre-modern naturalized social orders, one’s place was given by transcendent, natural order by birth. In disciplinary society identity comes from state institutions. In a society of control it comes immanently through the “abstract machines” of global capital. This transition from a society of discipline to a society of control causes a crisis of boundaries. “In the society of control, it is precisely these places, these discrete sites of applicability, that tend to lose their definition and delimitations. A hybrid subjectivity produced in the society of control may not carry the identity of a prison inmate or a mental patient or a factory worker, but may still be constituted simultaneously by all of their logics.”96 This “collapse of boundaries” leads to what they call a smooth space, an immanent plane of capitalist global economy. In a society of control, our identity “belongs to no identity and all of them.”97

Why the fluidity of identity? Late consumer capitalist economies aim to produce primarily immaterial and intellectual goods like knowledge, affect, communication, and language aimed directly at the formation of subjectivity: “needs, social relations, bodies, minds, producers.”98 Hardt and Negri call the machine through which empire operates “the economic industrial communicative machine.”99 It exercises a form of externally soft power, a completely immanent form of power that controls people from within because it forms their language, affect, and knowledge directly, creating new categories for a person to define herself. Because a softer form of identity-producing

96 Hardt and Negri, Empire, 331.
97 Ibid., 332.
98 Ibid., 32.
99 Ibid., 40.
power forms subjects from the inside, the global economy does what Hardt and Negri, echoing Deleuze, call “smoothing out” a striated plane. It deconstructs nationalist, racist, etc. boundaries that disciplinary institutions constantly set up even as it creates a new set of boundaries that are no longer imposed from the outside (by the previous form of sovereignty) but completely by the inside. Again, we see the logic that produces the refugee at work. Consumers begin to identify themselves by objects of consumption, by private, subjectively constituted relationships, by relations the new market creates rather than nationalist, class, or other boundaries. The genius of this system is that the very mechanisms of control, the machines of the capitalist economy, hide themselves. The individual therefore feels autonomous. All this, Hardt and Negri think, is enabled by the new completely immanent form of bio-power that global capitalist economies have learned to exercise. This new type of power exercised by the global market (accompanied by the production of money and the existence of the bomb) is the main way that biopolitics emerges in the present time. Global markets themselves become a technique of governmentality; they are the main way that “life” is regulated, affirmed, and destroyed. A new type of value or way of valuing therefore corresponds to the new type of production.

The dehumanizing possibilities of “Empire” are endless, but so is the potential for Marxist revolution. And here is the space for anarchist immanentism. Consider the way in which Hardt and Negri imagine the revolution from the way they analyze the contribution of postmodernism to the problem of Empire. They begin with two definitions of enlightenment, the first a Spinozist, immanentist affirmation of difference. The other definition, they argue, is founded in the construction of dualisms leading to paradigm of modern colonial sovereignty (inner/outer,

\[\text{In the move from imperial logic of strict inside/outside to world market of “smooth space of uncoded and deterritorialized flows,” we should expect that the world market would bring an end to imperialism and a “decline of the power of nation-states and dissolution of the international order.” Ibid., 333.}\]
public/private, black/white). Postmodern critiques of enlightenment normally focus on the second definition of enlightenment, but they tend to ignore the first. Hardt and Negri argue that postmodern critiques of enlightenment and the boundaries set up by colonial sovereignty should focus on critiquing the structure of modern sovereignty that has come out of the construction of enlightenment dualism.\textsuperscript{101} This enables a “postmodern” re-appropriation of enlightenment for what they call a more affirmative biopolitics.

How would this recovery of enlightenment help for a different political construction? Aristotle said, “one and the same is the knowledge of opposed pairs.” The discourses adopted by postmodern thinkers often have the problem of reinstating systems of power, inspiring new critiques of critiques into infinite regress. Their opposition to the enlightenment logics constantly reinscribes them. Post-modern, post-colonial, feminist, queer and other theorists criticize one type of boundary-construction (the racial, gender, and other hierarchies necessary for the liberation of white male subjects and the construction of the nation state following Hobbes, Locke, Mill and others—this is the modern paradigm) only to ignore the ways in which the discourse of a “politics of difference” dovetails so nicely with the global capital markets of Empire. Additionally, the Spinozist account enables people to cling to a concept of truth. On the bottom side of global capital, where the taking away of boundaries causes forced migration, degrading working conditions, and other evils, clinging to the primacy of the concept of truth is liberating and far from the repressive enlightenment master narrative.

For Hardt and Negri, the technological structure of the global economy they describe can be a condition of the possibility of an affirmative biopolitics. They do not expect the formal

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 139–140.
structure of Foucauldian governmentality to change. Instead, they envision a form of
governmentality directed to an unambiguous affirmation of life, a form of human community that
no longer produces refugees. For this to happen, they need the structure of the economy to change
so that it affirms something like a Deleuzian understanding of multiplicity, becoming, and
affirmation so that through the affirmation of differences and desires and the processes of
proliferation of life, a different biopolitical paradigm can be established. More concretely, this
means an economy that undoes the old binaries and idea of “nature” so that the very globalization
that capitalism causes and needs, and the way that it undoes the old binaries offers new possibilities
of liberation.102

11. Esposito

If Agamben tries to find a third option beyond Schmitt’s dualisms of transcendence and
immanence, sin and goodness, and if Hardt and Negri try to frame political-economy in a way that
makes sense of anarchist immanentism, Roberto Esposito is interested in accepting but improving
upon the order that has come to dominate by finding ways to soften or remove the negative
moment from biopolitics. The controlling question of Roberto Esposito’s analysis of biopolitics,
Bios, is, “why does the politics of life always risk being reversed into a work of death?”103 Why does
biopolitics become thanatopolitics? If that question can be answered, the dynamic it names might be
resisted. He maintains that Foucault leaves the question insufficiently answered, and he frames
Foucault’s two most influential interpreters on this point to show how. How is it that Agamen’s

102 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Minneapolis, MN: University of

103 Roberto Esposito, Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy, trans. Timothy Campbell (Minneapolis, MN: University of
Minnesota Press, 2008). In what follows, I rely heavily on Timothy Campbell’s excellent explanation of Esposito’s
theoretical thought.
“radically negative” biopolitics and Hardt and Negri’s “absolutely euphoric” can both flow from the same source? The debate between these two views does nothing but “make absolute (by spreading them apart) the two hermeneutic options between which Foucault never decided.” Alternatively, Esposito “bring[s] to light [a] lexical tradition” about biopolitics in order to construct relationship between biopolitics and sovereign power. That way, he can make the exact “relation between the politics of life and the ensemble of modern political categories” more transparent.

Specifically, Esposito wants to know whether biopolitics “precedes, follows, or temporally coincides” with modernity. It is unclear to him whether Foucault is describing a timeless relation of power or the way that power works in modernity. In response to the perceived theoretical open space that leaves the answer ambiguous, Esposito supplies a “missing link.” “Only when biopolitics is linked conceptually to the immunitary dynamic of the negative protection of life does biopolitics reveal its specifically modern genesis.” For Foucault, biopolitics can take its full form when racial characters can be made into enemy-characters and eliminated for the well-being of the population. Esposito seeks to offer a theoretical explanation of the phenomenon that Foucault names from the nature of what he calls “communitas.”

The logic of communitas begins with a problem: how can individuals form an identity in the context of the common? Esposito defines the common in opposition to privacy much like Arendt defines public: that which is not mine, not private, or not particular. But if community is not particular, why is it so often spoken about with the language of property? Dominant theoretical trends, including those who look for the common in an “intersubjective” relation or in communists

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104 Ibid., 8.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid., 9.
and communitarian thinkers who speak “the collective” or “the community,” make the “communitas” more like a collective property. But in that case, the common both is and isn’t a property.

The whole of the theory of communitas proceeds from the seeming contradiction: how can the communitas be both a property and no one’s property? Esposito analyzes three etymological transpositions of communitas. At first, he says, the term indicates something like “the communal,” something like “public” as opposed to “private.” A communal thing is a thing everyone owns. But communitas also has the root “munus” and thereby points to an entirely different conceptual space: the obligation (dovere). Munus, he asserts, is a species of donum—not a donum without expectation of return, however, but a donum that one gives. The munus denotes exchange: once someone accepts a munus, an obligation to perform a good or service is made. It is a gift one “must give and cannot not give.” The munus therefore indicates something like a loss or a pledge, a kind of giving that “assigns the one to another in an obligation.” He then superimposes his analysis of the munus back onto the public-private duality and asks, “What is the res of the publica? What is the common public thing? Is it an object?” He concludes from analysis of the munus that the common public thing is the common obligation, a common lack or pledge to be made. Communitas therefore implies pure relation and pure publicity without any way of accounting for individuality. The public thing is not a property, but an originary obligation, office, burden, task, or lack. Therein lies the problem.

The opposition that Esposito ends with is not public and private, but communitas and immunitas. The communis is the one with an office or obligation. The immunis is the one without an

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108 Ibid.

office or a debt and with a place of his own. Communitas implies that one pay; it is like “the hole into which the common thing continually risks falling” or “the no-thing that is our common ground.”\textsuperscript{110} Immunitas implies that one receives. It is intrinsic to the nature of community therefore that people will make a way out of the paralyzing effects of pure publicity. In a way, then, immunity is the search for privacy. The immunized one “enjoys originary autonomy or successive freeing from a previously contracted debt.”\textsuperscript{111} Immunization is therefore salutary, but at a cost. When one gets a vaccine, one is injected with an alien outsider, a virus. The virus strengthens the body by attacking the outsider in expectation of future, more dangerous outsiders. Immunity is the establishment of a negative boundary with respect to outsiders that keeps them away, which enables one to have a space of one’s own. It therefore includes both a negative moment of erasure, of negative boundary maintenance, and a positive moment of affirmation. The negative exists for the sake of the positive.

Immunitas opposes communitas in an originary, fundamental way, and Esposito thinks it especially “can be taken as the explicative key of the entire modern paradigm.”\textsuperscript{112} How so? Esposito, like Agamben, points to Hobbes’s drastic narrating of the communitarian problem, the state of nature in which “life is nasty, brutish, and short.” The Hobbesian response was to theorize the modern individual with strong borders, the “person.” The modern “person” on Hobbesian terms is defined precisely by his exemption from the state of nature and by the protection of the Sovereign. If “immune is he… who is exonerated or has received a dispensatio from reciprocal gift giving,” immunity becomes way of defending oneself against full absorption into the communitas. This immunity from the community is, on Esposito’s terms, the central characteristic feature of the

\textsuperscript{110} Esposito, Communitas, 8.

\textsuperscript{111} Esposito, \textit{Bios}, x–xi.

\textsuperscript{112} Esposito, Communitas, 12.
modern liberal subjects with rights. “The borders separating what is one’s own from the communal are reinstated when the ‘substitution of private or individualistic models for communitarian forms of organization’ takes place.”\textsuperscript{113} Modern liberal societies are fully invested in \textit{immunitas}, because “they live \textit{in} and \textit{of} their refusal to live together.”\textsuperscript{114} The modern racialized subject proceeds from this self-protective refusal.

Two more conceptual connections are necessary before we get to biopolitics. First, Esposito points to a “myth” that accompanies the process of immunity: the immune, modern, liberal self believes that the identity he has made for himself in the construction of the modern person is real, true, and inside.\textsuperscript{115} The myth creates an “interior” that is the metaphysical or objective expression of the principle of difference that the pure relationality of the \textit{communitas} demands. The private inner self therefore emerges in modernity in an unprecedented way; it is the substance, the property, the privacy that is able to resist the common.

The final conceptual connection requires an extension of the objectifying of the subject so that it creates a common subject. The “community is “identified … with a people, a territory, or an essence” so that “the community is walled in within itself and thus separated from the outside.”\textsuperscript{116} This enables Esposito to answer the second question I’ve been tracing: the basis of relationship in difference depends both on the positing of an immunitary boundary and the extension of that boundary to encompass outsiders, but always at the cost of the negation of the “outside.” The \textit{communitas} therefore becomes a common subject, almost like a common body.

\textsuperscript{113} Esposito, \textit{Bios}, xi.

\textsuperscript{114} Esposito, \textit{Communitas}, 15.

\textsuperscript{115} See Esposito, \textit{Communitas}, “The interiorization of this exteriority, the representative doubling of its presence and the essentialization of its existence,” (15).

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 16.
The establishment of the communal boundary is how Esposito explains the development of Foucauldian racism. The necessary injection of a community’s opposite, the creation of a “racialized other,” exists at the heart of all community; it is a timeless structure of communitas. But since “only modernity makes individual self-preservation the presupposition of all other political categories from sovereignty to liberty,” the paradigmatically modern subject with civil and political rights makes the boundary between himself and another the center of politics in a way that has never happened before. Immunity, therefore, is the central feature of modern political life, the central imaginary background in the development of liberal societies. It is also therefore the hidden, dark underside of the existence of modern societies.

Esposito relies on Foucault’s analysis of biopolitics to explain more precisely how societies extend from the modern bounded subject to the social body. He focuses instead on the concrete workings of the immunitary paradigm in the pure biopolitical state, Nazi Germany, demonstrating the way that the extermination of the Jews was the negative moment that can only be made sense of by the public health measures that the Nazis introduced, which were meant for more fundamentally affirmative purpose of the flourishing of the volk. Nazism is an absolute realization of biopolitics, because in Nazism, we see the positing of an absolute other to be attacked only for the purpose of the social body’s flourishing. At its deepest level, the universal philosophical structure combined with an analysis of modernity shows how Esposito explains the character of the refugee. The refugee is the paradigmatic outsider, and thus the condition of the possibility of the threat to the body-politic. Connecting back to Arendt, in The Origins of Totalitarianism, the character of the “refugee” produced in this way is what made the character of the “Jew” possible.

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118 See ibid., 110–143.
Esposito doesn’t think an uncomplicated, straightforward connection between community and self-destruction is necessary. He wants to imagine an affirmative biopolitics in which the immunity doesn’t fundamentally negate the existence of outsiders. In such a community, the “will of power” or the will to vitality and flourishing of an individual and social body can be “a fundamental vital impulse… means that life has a constitutively political dimension and that politics has no other object than the maintenance and expression of life.” The question is whether on his terms and in an immanent paradigm, the vital impulse can be had without sacrifice, and whose sacrifice it might require.

12. Conclusion

The primary purpose of the analysis in this and the preceding chapters is to provide a relatively thick heuristic narrative to set the terms of a discussion about the public/private distinction. The second purpose has been to ask a question: “What did Christianity do to the public/private distinction?” The third purpose is to trace some influential theoretical ways of narrating the distinction.

I have traced two ruptures. The first rupture of the classical paradigm was sack of Rome and the rise of Christianity as a historical force. This rupture conflated the public and private realms and created a “society” constituted by a new “political economy” in which subjects are specified no longer by action in a public world but by a new inner, private realm. It replaced the horizon of immortality with an indefinitely postponed eternity that secularized politics in a way that focused on the immanent concerns of life. The framework of the Augustinian saeculum depended on an ecclesial sphere that gave it direction.

119 Ibid., 9.
The second historical rupture was the medieval confessional, which anticipated the religious, political, and economic upheavals that constitute the modern era. The old paradigm of rule no longer accommodated the emerging economy, and the ecclesial sphere shattered. This paved the way for a reversal in which the *saeculum* existed without the ecclesial sphere. All that remained was the metaphysical residue of the inner private soul and a set of immanent concerns from an intensively secularizing political economy.

I have in this chapter narrated the development of three concepts: sovereignty, governmentality, and biopolitics in order to explain the character of the refugee. I have concluded that the grammar of modern sovereignty, which culminates in Schmitt, can be understood through a set of oppositions against which various thinkers have to navigate: the opposition between immanence and transcendence, and the opposition between good and evil.

Foucault frames governmentality and biopolitics through a three-fold transition from a sovereign paradigm to a society of discipline to a society of control. Each of these changes he describes is facilitated by technological developments that enable “life” to enter more fully into history.

Medieval Christian practice enabled the first technological development: the emergence of pastoral power in the confessional. In the confessional, the priest asks the individual to create an inner secret and then inserts the subject into the economy the moral manual prescribes. The creation of the inner secret this practice nurtures aids in the establishment of ever more complex ways of introducing the inner and bodily life of subjects more fully into history. It does so primarily by inserting the inner self into the modern economy.
The Reformation and emergence of capitalist nation-states set the terms for the development of a disciplinary society through disciplinary institutions. Disciplinary society individualizes through controlling the terms on which a set of descriptions are distributed: citizen, consumer, student, patient. A biopolitical society of control emerged with the development of the ability to measure the disciplined social body statistically, for statistical analysis of the social body enables the governing forces to think of the social body in singular terms. Not just the lives of the people, but the life of the people. The basis of differentiation within this body, however, is made possible by the disciplinary institutions—above all, the global capitalist economy—which is able to inflect what kind of inner private self people understand themselves to have. The technology therefore aids people in internalizing their distinctions to a greater degree so that the only basis for differentiation within the community becomes claims about identity. The figure of the homosexual replaces the habitual sin of sodomy, etc. A pervasive character-typing ensues, in which social distinctions come by way of an unending multiplicity of social types. This character-typing then functions as the basis on which the state can concern itself with sex and kill some citizens and non-citizens rather than others. The “type” of person becomes a threat to the “health” of the newly imagined social “body.” It is crucial to prevent the births that will hurt the body and kill the lives that threaten its existence. All war takes place on the basis of this racialized justification.

For Agamben, Foucault’s narrative fails to appreciate the continued exercise of sovereignty and the priority of politics in stripping people of their political standing. In Agamben’s biopolitics, the central metaphor is the concentration camp: we have all been stripped of political status and are left in a constant state of exception. The loss of the sacred makes us all lives that can be killed but not sacrificed. Biopolitics is the dark reality of modernity. Given the choice between immanence
and transcendence, goodness and evil, Agamben can’t choose. He has to find another way out. The only way out is to undo the structure of sovereignty by thinking an alternative to the law in the Pauline concept of the Messianic.

Given the choice between transcendence and immanence, between anarchy and sovereignty, Hardt and Negri opt for immanence and anarchy. They focus not on the way that sovereignty shapes us, but the way that the “abstract machine” of global capital shapes us by removing all the boundaries from a society of discipline. The technological structure necessary for the machine to operate serves as the hopeful basis of its undoing. They hope for the establishment of an anarchist Marxist utopia that exploits the connections global capital creates. They therefore try to imagine a purely affirmative biopolitics—naively according to some.

Esposito thinks there’s a way of cutting the negative moment from the biopolitical. He offers a mature quasi-metaphysical paradigm that gives him a basis to thematize the question Foucault leaves unanswered and to criticize what he thinks are inadequate ways of filling it. Agamben attends only to the negative moment and Hardt and Negri only to the positive, whereas they ought to see that in an immunitary way of constructing subjects out of the communitas requires the negation of boundary-setting for the positive nurturing of life.

This conceptual framework serves to offer a description of a modern development of the public/private distinction. A crucial term that most of the narratives leave inadequately theorized is life.

The argument I’ve made is that all the discussions about political responses to the grammar of sovereignty, governmentality, and biopolitics depend on choices set up by Schmitt. The dilemmas Schmitt’s grammar gives us, however, are false. Here I end the first part of my
dissertation, and in the second part I will develop an alternative grammar that shows how the options embraced by both Agamben and Hardt and Negri are false. The choices between immanence and transcendence and between goodness and evil are figured wrongly. The Augustinian grammar in the next four chapters does the work of texturing the grammar underlying these debates in sovereignty, biopolitics, and governmentality by showing (1) God’s difference is figured in a way that makes God maximally intimate with creation. Sovereignty is therefore misconstrued by these figures in a fundamental way, and they misconstrue it not because they are not Christians, but because their imaginations for the possibilities open to politics are limited to immanent ends. (2) The world is most fundamentally a gift that is nevertheless damaged in a way that it never stops being a gift. The goodness of the gift is more fundamental than the disorder of the damage. Because sovereignty is misconstrued, the entire grammar of biopolitics that creates the refugee is called into question. An alternative can be imagined. I do so around the figures of Jesus and Mary.

In the next chapters, then, I turn away from narrative to its terms and offer an analysis of the crucial terms from a theological perspective. I analyze meanings of the term “life” in Augustinian thought, then the Augustinian dichotomy “inner/outer” and finally the relation of “nature/grace” with Jesus (chapter five) and Mary (chapter six).

120 Another way of making a similar point: one is that Arendt’s solution neglects God (thus beyond public and private). And political theology, an improvement on Arendt, neglects the right account of God
Chapter 3: Meanings of Life

The principle of the sacredness of life has become so familiar to us that we seem to forget that classical Greece, to which we owe most of our ethico-political concepts, not only ignored this principle but did not even possess a term to express the complex semantic sphere that we indicate with the single term ‘life.’ Decisive as it is for the origin of western politics, the opposition… between life in general and the qualified way of life proper to men… contains nothing to make one assign a privilege or a sacredness to life itself.¹

1. Introduction

In the last chapter I outlined the grammar of sovereignty, governmentality, and biopolitics in order to make sense of the character of the “refugee,” the character without rights, without a place, both privatized and publicized, that only modernity can produce. I suggested that the core of proposals to subvert the distinctive grammar that creates the refugee rests on two conceptual mistakes having to do with the relationship between transcendence and immanence, and between goodness and evil.

Here I begin refiguring those concepts and drawing out their meaning for the anthropological and socio-political dimensions of the public-private distinction. The core of Augustine’s thought is an account of “life” controlled by an account of God. Whereas in the previous chapters, I’ve accounted genealogically for the difference Augustine made for thinking about the public/private distinction, in this section I begin what will take up the rest of the argument, which is a textured grammar of Augustine’s thought.²

² David Bentley Hart—in conformity with Brown’s analysis—has already nicely mapped the historical transformation. Arendt’s suggestion that this valorization of life is the basis of the re-thinking of how society is structured can be found in more detail in Hart, Atheist Delusions.
The first step in parsing out the deep grammar of Augustine’s thought is to note a conceptual transformation of public divine life into a form of domestic life. This is seen principally in doctrines of trinity, creation, and providence. God emerges in Augustine’s thought as the one who exercises “contemplative reason” in relation to God and “active reason” in relation to the world. There are two steps to the identification. First, God is identical with life. Second, all other life is participation in God’s life. If for Arendt and Aristotle, life is “private,” for Augustine (and here, I think, he represents the source of the deep ambiguity resisting the ancient public/private configuration in Paul and speaks the conceptual grammar of Christian faith), life is identical simultaneously with the most public object that there is and the deepest intimacy in any of our lives. Augustine calls God the “life” of his soul and the life of the world; divine life in trinity opens itself up to divine life of creation. Since the public/private distinction as I have described it so far is largely determined by the meaning and use of the concept life, looking into Augustine’s concept via his doctrines of God and creation opens up the concept to be used to answer the concerns raised in the previous chapter. Is life separate from a realm of public or political concern? For Augustine, since the “life” is irreducibly economic or domestic, life has to do with the flourishing of creaturely bodies, and since “life” is identical to the “object common to all,” care for creaturely bodies is identical with the central public and political concern.

This account of life I give is structured as follows: first, I provide a set of distinctions relating to the order of being and explanations of how those distinctions work. Second, I explain Augustine’s doctrine of God in two steps: through his account of divine simplicity and divine trinity. Finally I explain Augustine’s concept of created life. A definition of creaturely life is made possibly by virtue of Augustine’s definition of divine life. Creaturely life is the capacity to respond
to and organize a set of divinely implanted formulae for the sake of creaturely self-proliferation or flourishing. This abstract, highly formal, and ambiguous definition must immediately be qualified because life is a complex analogical concept; plant life, animal life, human life, angelic life, and divine life all differ in significant ways. My theological definition of creaturely life will be expanded and explained by Augustine’s theology. In following chapters I will outline how this relates to human life specifically and to human salvation. I will show that the deep grammar of Augustine’s thought subverts the main terms of the ancient public/domestic distinction and provides a set of ways forward for thinking about the political implications of interiority.

2. Structural Distinctions

Before discussing the analogical structure of life directly, I set up a lexicon here by which I make the terms Augustine uses to think of God more intelligible. I organize my account with four types of distinctions: the distinctions between God and the world, between matter and spirit, between sensible and intelligible, and between body and soul.

The first distinction is both the simplest to set up and the most complex to explain. It is the exhaustive distinction between God and the world, the distinction that organizes all other distinctions in the order of being. “Every substance that is not God is a creature, and that is not a creature is God.”


\footnote{\textit{Trin.} 1.6.9, “Omnis enim substantia quae Deus non est, creatura est; et quae creatura non est, Deus est.”}

\footnote{For two classic explications of this theme, see Tanner, God and Creation in Christian Theology; Robert Sokolowski, The God of Faith and Reason: Foundations of Christian Theology (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995).}
The second distinction is between matter and spirit. Near the beginning of his *Commentary on the Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Augustine obsesses over God’s first *fiat*, “Let light be made.” The disjunctive question about God’s first word helps illuminate this distinction: whether the light is “spiritual” or “bodily”? His reflections shine on a fertile passage of scripture, expose its texture, and draw from it in ways that bear theological fruit:

Was it in time or in the eternity of the Word? And if it was in time, then of course it involved change. So how could God be understood to have said this except through some created being? He himself, clearly, is not subject to change. And if it was through a created being that God [spoke], how can light be the first thing created? Or is light not the first thing created?

Despite various underlying assumptions about evolutionary biology, geology, and theoretical physics in the wider context of book I of Augustine’s commentary, this passage opens up a set of theological and philosophical assumptions about the way creation participates in Godhead.

First, some background to Augustine’s intellectual development is necessary. In the *Confessions*, Augustine first makes this kind of distinction between “spirit” and “body” or “spirit” and “matter” after reading the books of the Platonists. Through them, he recognized the existence of incorporeal natures.

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5 *Gn. litt.*, 1.2.4, “qua dicetur, *Fiat lux?* Quod si ita est, corporalis lux facta est ista, quam corporeis oculis cernimus, dicente Deo per creaturam spiritualam, quam Deus jam fecerat, cum in principio fecit Deus coelum et terram, *Fiat lux*; eo modo quo per talis creaturae interiorem et occultum motum divinitus diei potuit, *Fiat lux.*” cf. 1.3.7 “Et quid est lux ipsa quae facta est utrum spirituale quid, an corporale?”

6 *Gn. litt.* 1.2.4, “Et quomodo dixit Deus, *Fiat lux*? utrum temporaliter, an in Verbi aeternitate? Et si temporaliter, utique mutabiliter; quomodo ergo posit intelligi hoc dicere Deus, nisi per creaturam; ipse quippe est incommutabilis? Et si per creaturam dixit Deus, *Fiat lux*; quomodo est prima creatura lux, si erat jam creatura, per quam Deus diceret, *Fiat lux*? An non est lux prima creatura.”

7 For an explanation of the matter/spirit dualism’s chief rival for our attention, see book X of the *Confessions* and James Wetzel’s explanation of it in James Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
body and “infinitely diffused through finite space.”

Manichean Augustine was one of the Augustines that the newly Catholic Augustine of the 

Confessions sought to overcome. Manichean Augustine affirmed, Catholic Augustine tells us, “two substances” in place of the God/world distinction: an active evil and a passive good and a god to go with each. Manichaeism “created for itself” the god of Augustine’s former imagination, “a god pervading all places in infinite space (per infinita spatial). It imagined this god to be [the Christian God] and installed him at its heart (conlocaverat in corde suo).”

Upon recognizing the existence of intelligible truths through Platonism, Augustine identified the divine substance with eternal, unchanging, simple being. The Platonist distinction between immaterial or spiritual and material therefore gives him a basis to deny that the Manichean God is the Christian God. Because of the centrality of the pursuit of the vita beata, the (Catholic) theologically inflected Platonist dualism of spirit and matter became a center of his theological grammar.

Augustine’s intellectual development from dualistic materialism (substantial, radical evil) to spirit-matter dualism clarifies the grammar of the dualism. The development began with Augustine’s conversion to Stoic philosophy when he moved to Carthage and first read Cicero’s 

Hortensius. “It altered my prayers, Lord (mutavit preces meas), to be towards you yourself. It gave me

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9 On the myriad biographical issues with Augustine, see James Joseph O’Donnell, Augustine: A New Biography (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005). O’Donnell is wrong to take the disunity of Augustine’s self to imply a radical discontinuity to his thought. Certainly Augustine did not always understand the implications of his own thought, but there is no reason to posit radical discontinuity on the basis of post-structuralist epistemology alone! Ultimately, the unity of Augustine’s self is eschatological, and the unity of his thought depends only on the authenticity of its participation in the divine intelligibility.

10 conf. 7.14.20. O’Donnell draws attention to the intertext from 7.10.16: “numquid nihil est veritas, quoniam neque per finita neque per infinita locorum spatia diffusa est?” he also notes that the conlocaverat in corde suo is an allusion to Ezekiel 14.7: “quia homo . . . si alienatus fuerit a me, et posuerit idola sua in corde suo, et scandalum iniquitatis suae statuerit contra faciem suam, et venerit ad prophetam ut interroget per eum me, ego dominus respondebo ei.”
different values and priorities (*mutavit affectum meum*). Suddenly every vain hope became empty to me, and I longed for the immortality of wisdom with an incredible ardour in my heart. I began to rise up to return to you (*surgere coeperam*)." The ascent metaphor, written in light of his later, platonically inflected thought, is especially significant. It brings to light the important relationship between epistemology, ethics, and the order of being.

Augustine learned from Cicero to spend his life in pursuit of the *vita beata*, the philosophical life. He never abandoned this pursuit, though he radically revised its meaning. The *Hortensius*, a Stoic text, exhorted Augustine to pursue a life of virtue for its own sake. By living rationally and subordinating his habitual passions to the desire for justice, he could choose a life that would not be taken away. He would be “happy” rather than “fearful” because not even the torturer’s rack could rob him of his virtue if he endured. His happiness would be enduring so long as his virtue endured.

Since Augustine’s conversion to philosophy took place within his commitment to Christianity, newly philosophical Augustine still had to reckon with the scriptural books. But the combination of philosophical pursuit and scriptural reasoning proved frustrating for Augustine’s immature reading habits. Two problems continuously vexed him: the origin of evil and the baseness of scripture’s style and content. In order to move on in philosophical pursuit, Augustine would have to come up with a convincing answer to his problems: Whence evil, and how? How can one take scripture seriously? Manichaeism promised to help him progress, and his progress on the

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question of evil especially concerns the present discussion. Because the Manicheans rejected the
goodness of the Creator, and partly because Old Testament stories were so odd, they also rejected
the authority of the Old Testament books. Manichaeism was attractive to Augustine because it
answered the questions that haunted him.\footnote{Augustine gives us two reasons that he did not leave Manichaeism earlier, one moral and the other philosophical. First, he could not leave behind carnal life (his wife and his son, conf. 8.7.17). Second, he could not reconcile the philosophical problems of Christian faith (conf. 7.14.20). We can see in his decision to leave Carthage for Rome both layers: a move toward greater spiritual—moral and philosophical—integrity. Thanks to Tom McGlothlin for pointing this out to me.}

Besides converting to the Manichean sect, Augustine grew up, took a common-law wife,
had a son, and moved to Rome and then to Milan between his first and second conversions. In
Milan, he came under Ambrose’s influence and was given libri quorundam Platonicorum by a friend.
Whichever they were, they proved hugely influential for his intellectual and spiritual progress.\footnote{I searched for the origin of evil,” he says. He saw “creation as a single vast mass differentiated by various types of bodies” and “supposed your finite creation to be full of you, infinite as you are” conf. 3.4.8. The key, we’ll find is in a “spiritual” God. Augustine eventually became dissatisfied with Manichaeism, however. See conf., 7.9.13 and Jason BeDuhn, Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).}
In book VII of the Confessions, Augustine provides a description of the effect the Platonists had on him
that mimics the description of his initial conversion: he encounters truth, finds the truth he
encounters wanting, and is pushed further toward fullness of truth in Christ. Augustine is once
again “admonished to return to [himself].” The recurring “ascent” language in his description is
common to Platonism and pervasive in the Confessions and in Augustine’s early (and some late)\footnote{In addition to neo-platonic philosophical influence, Ambrose helped him to read scripture allegorically or philosophically and thereby overcome his objections about scriptural style and content.} works: “I entered into my innermost citadel (intima)… With my soul’s eye (oculo animae meae)… saw… the immutable light (lucem incommutabilem) higher than my mind… It transcended my mind,
not in the way that oil floats on water, nor as heaven is above earth. It was superior because it made me (*ipsa fecit me*), and I was inferior because I was made by it."\(^{17}\) Especially important is his connection between divine transcendence and the moral life to which the Stoics exhorted him. He must go “inward” in order to go “upward”.

Augustine came to see via the Platonists that materialism was an insufficient basis on which to maintain his Stoic understanding of virtue. According to James Wetzel, young Augustine who discovered Stoic virtue when he read the *Hortensius* then discovered the “philosophical insight lost on the Stoics, namely, that the source of human wisdom must transcend the world’s changing material nature” in a sort of second conversion after reading the *platonorum libri*.\(^{18}\) Augustine came to see that the Stoic goal requires a quasi-platonic notion of an immaterial, immutable “eternal.”

### 3. Sensible/Intelligible and Body/Soul

The epistemic correlate to the matter/spirit distinction is the sensible/intelligible distinction, “the cornerstone of Augustine’s natural philosophy.”\(^{19}\) “By ‘sensible’ we mean that which can be apprehended by bodily sight and touch, by ‘intelligible’ that which can be recognized by the mind’s eye.”\(^{20}\) Augustine’s most fully developed epistemology starts with this distinction

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\(^{17}\) *conf.*, 7.10.16.

\(^{18}\) Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue*, 11. I follow Robert O’Connell’s and James Wetzel’s argument that the “ascent” trope provides the relevant clues because it implies that he made the connection between the order of being and morality that came to form the “architectonic lines” of his thought. In reading the ascent trope this way, I assume that the upward metaphors name the gradual progression of the philosophical life, not a singular, incommunicable mystical experience. See Robert J. O’Connell, *St. Augustine’s Early Theory of Man, A.D. 386–391* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1968); Robert J. O’Connell, *Images of Conversion in St. Augustine’s Confessions* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 1996). See also O’Connell’s note on 7.10.16, Augustinus and O’Donnell, *Confessions II, Commentary on Books 1–7*.

\(^{19}\) Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue*, 17.

\(^{20}\) civ., 8.6.
understood in tandem with a body-soul dualism. Bodily senses apprehend data to be stored in the memory. The capacity to apprehend and retain sensory data does not suffice to explain human experiences of knowing fully. Some concepts can be apprehended through the senses alone, but it is also characteristic of humans to organize sense-apprehended concepts in a distinctive (rational) way. Evidence for this is the way that all human communities organize their worlds through natural languages. Consider, by contrast, how a dog, though able to organize her sense impressions in charming and personable ways, cannot organize them rationally. So she may learn the difference between a closet door and a back door leading outside, possessing a dispositional concept of each. But she cannot evaluate it or ascribe it meaning behind its immediate use for her; she cannot talk about it. As a dispositional concept, its perceived function exhausts its meaning.

Human animals make a set of value judgments that dogs and other non-human animals do not make: whether a thing is good or beautiful, whether it ought to be such-and-such, whether a statement is true, and what is meant by asserting that it is true. Characteristic of humans is that these transcendent, immaterial value judgments and words cannot be separated from immanent, immediate, every day use of objects. Transcendent rationality in the way Augustine develops it is simply how human creatures immanently relate to their worlds. It cannot therefore be easily opposed to every day life.

The sensible/intelligible distinction can only be explicated via a fourth distinction between body and soul. In our text in book VII of Confessions, Augustine explores this phenomenon, starting from the every day experiences of transcendence:

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21 Though Augustine sometimes talks as if his dualism is more rigid.

I asked myself why I approved of the beauty of bodies (*pulchritudinem corporum*), whether celestial or terrestrial (*ve caelestium sive terrestrium*), and what justification I had for giving an unqualified judgment on mutable things, saying ‘This ought to be thus, and that ought not to be thus’. In the course of this inquiry why I made such value judgments as I was making, I found the unchangeable and authentic eternity of truth to transcend my mutable mind (*inveneram incommutabilem et veram veritatis aeternitatem supra mentem meam commutabilem*). And so step by step I ascended from bodies to soul which perceives though the body (*atque ita gradatim a corporibus ad sentientem per corpus animam*), and from there to its inward force, to which bodily senses report external sensations, this being as high as the beasts go. From there again I ascended to the power of reasoning to which is to be attributed the power of judging the deliverances of the bodily senses. This power, which in myself I found to be mutable, raised itself to the level of its own intelligence, and led my thinking out of the ruts of habit. It withdrew itself from the contradictory swarms of imaginative fantasies (*inde rursus ad ratiocinantem potentiam ad quam refert iudicandum quod sumitur a sensibus corporis*), so as to discover the light by which it was flooded (*ut inveniret quo lumine aspergeretur*). At that point it had no hesitation in declaring that the unchangeable is preferable to the changeable, and that on this ground it can know the unchangeable (*cum sine ulla dubitatione clamaret incommutabile praferendum esse mutabili unde nosset ipsum incommutabile*).

The capacity to organize sensible data in order to make judgments implies for him a “soul” which “perceives through the body” (*ad sentientem per corpus animam atque inde ad eius interiorem vim*) and receives “sensations.” He notes that such powers took him to the limits of the other animals. But he could ascend higher and judge “the deliverances of bodily senses” or “sensibles” through a power of reason. Reason is the capacity to discern intelligible truth or to organize sensations in a series of enduring but still mutable judgments. The experience of judging supposes an eternal and immutable truth that acts as the criterion that the mutable judgments of reason always presupposes. Augustine’s practices of judging or organizing concepts therefore participated imperfectly and strained toward this truth.

Body-soul composites are thus “intelligible-making” creatures through participation in intelligibility, goodness, and beauty. Understanding intelligibles with the mind’s eye or participating in them enables body-soul composites to make judgments about sensibles. It is

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23 *conf.*, 7.20.7.
distinctively human to relate sensibles and intelligibles in this way because only body-soul composites can both apprehend sensible data and participate in intelligible concepts. The more that Augustine understood that the precise relationship between immutable eternal and changeable was that God created all things out of unchanging love, the more he came to see that he could not strictly contrast the value of earthly things with the value of heavenly things.

As the above passage from Confessions suggests, Augustine’s epistemic sensible/intelligible distinction implies a concept of human nature, albeit only minimal conclusions can be derived from it. By human nature, I mean that there is a definite structure to human creaturehood that transcends and encompasses any particular instance of that creaturehood. The structure of human being is universal, but limited in that it does not exhaust what can be said about any particular instance. Human animals order or interpret sensible data according to truth and goodness, that is, according to the way they apprehend the way in which the data is rooted in the divine mind or divine purpose. For Augustine, this illumination happens “inwardly,” by divine illumination. The two most fundamental ways that participation in intelligibility organizes the memory also have correlates in human nature; two distinguishable but inseparable powers correspond to the two ways of participation: the appetitive power (will) and the cognitive power (intellect). An open question is whether distinction here is purely stipulative or whether it is real, for some Augustinians like Anselm or Scotus, the will and intellect are thought to be two beings, for others, like Aquinas, they

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24 Perhaps this provides fodder for a Kantian-Platonist view of the organization of creation like what Anselm argues. Intelligibility-making creatures have a common predicate that must be explained by some one. The quality is only explainable by an ultimate intelligibility-making One.

are two aspects of the same being, the soul. My discussion here leaves the question open, though I think Augustine is closer to the former position than he is to the latter.

The appetitive power organizes concepts according to their goodness, and cognitive power organizes concepts according to their truth. Some appetites are oriented to and by the senses (cravings for food, for sex, etc.). Others are oriented to and by the intellect (desire to know the causes of effects). Some types of knowledge are oriented to and by the senses (biological sciences for example, or some forms of phenomenology). Others are oriented by the intellect (theoretical physics, philosophy, or systematic theology, for example). Images or other types of knowledge received through the senses are “sensible” forms of knowledge held in common with other sensate animals. Sensible desires are shared with other animals. But only humans can organize sensible forms abstractly and allow abstract judgments about goodness and justice to direct the will. Augustine thought that is simply belonged to human creatures as human creatures to encounter the world this way; for him, the will and the intellect were united such that to know the good is also to desire it.

The fact of interpretive or intelligible judgments made by body-soul composites led Augustine to reject a dualistic materialism in favor of matter-spirit dualism. The epistemic illumination of the soul implied a realm of non-physical intelligible truth that orders all matter for those who participate in it. The epistemic structure he appropriated therefore implicitly depends on a hierarchy in the order of being between immaterial “spirit” and matter. If value judgments exist, those value judgments cannot be accounted for materially. It also depends on an intuition about a

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hierarchy between changing (temporal) and immutable (eternal) reality. If there are value judgments that serve as ultimate standards, then those judgments are rooted in unchanging intelligible forms. These knowledges or reasons are of two types: speculative and practical. The two types come together in a single type of universal judgment. Augustine is concerned with both types of reasons. He wants to know what is true, and he wants to know what is good, and he thinks that one cannot really know one without knowing the other.

4. Being and Nature

Augustine’s conclusions appear to modern, post-Kantian thinkers to be illegitimate jumps from the structure of knowing to the structure of being and from fact to value. His view depends on a set of intuitions and arguments that are worth rehearsing and presenting (though I will not defend them against Kant). Anselm, a later Augustinian thinker and father of medieval scholasticism very helpfully narrates the logic of Augustine’s presuppositions about the order of being in the opening chapters of his Monologion in a more pointed, transparent, and condensed way than can be found in Augustine.28 Anselm’s scholastic narration also helps to set Augustine in relation to later thinkers.

Anselm begins with a common predicate, goodness. He poses a question by an imaginary dialogue partner: what explains the common predicate? “Given that there is such an unaccountable number of good things, the sheer multiplicity of which is simply a datum of bodily sense as well as something we perceive by means of the rational mind—given this, are we to believe that there is some one thing through which all good things whatsoever are good?”29 The question assumes the

28 What follows is indebted to Marilyn McCord Adams

29 Anselm, Monologion, 1, 11. Jean-Luc Marion criticizes this approach, but his criticism is only apparent. “The philosophical appropriations of Augustinian theses or themes always proceed by selecting texts, often the same ones,
distinction that Augustine’s epistemology relies upon: sensible data and intelligible perception by rational mind. It also assumes that a problem of predication requires a solution in the order of being, and it relies on the intuition that a transcendent “one” must explain a many. If “good” can be predicated of a large multiplicity of things, then perhaps there is some explanation in the order of being, some “one thing” that is the basis of the common predicate. Anselm affirms the suggestion and explains the logic of the position. “Take some things that are said to be (say) X, and relative to each other are said to be less, more, or equally X. It is through this X that they are said to be so, and this X is understood as the very same thing in the various cases and not something different in each case.”

The next step in the argument is to say that there must be one source of the common predicate in the order of being that has no source but itself. “Because, then, it is that through which every good thing is good, it is good through itself. It therefore follows that all the other good things are good through something other than what they themselves are, while this thing alone is good thought itself.” That through which all things are called “good” is “supremely good.” All good things are called “good” only because they share in or participate in this supremely good

always purged as much as possible of their biblical environment and their theological implications, obviously in opposition to the explicit declarations of Saint Augustine himself.” He cites, to my dismay, as the reader will see in the next chapter, book X of conf. especially. He goes on to argue in general “the philosophical recoveries of Augustinian arguments not only do not conform to the point of view of Saint Augustine himself but most often contradict it explicitly. See Jean-Luc Marion, In the Self’s Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine, trans. Jeffrey Kosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 5. Against this possible portrayal of what I’m doing here, I think that Anselm, for the most part, gets at some of the philosophical presuppositions guiding Augustine’s thought. The reader can determine that for herself based on the cogency of the claims. Whether or not Augustine would agree, however, seems irrelevant to me, as it should to him. But neither do I think that “theology can and must rest on a philosophy that would be appropriate to it” (5). Only that Augustine’s doctrines of God and creation rests on philosophical claims. The sense of the word “metaphysics” that I use in the following discussion can be distinguished from a Thomist understanding of the term. Thomists believe metaphysics results from directing the speculative intellect to “being qua being” as opposed to divine science through revelation. Here, I use metaphysics not as a “natural” phenomenon that is opposed to revelation, but as a structural phenomenon that is opposed to history. I take it that our account of what is “structural” is historically ensconced. All I wish to do is to identify the sorts of structural claims that Augustine’s thought relies on.

30 Monologion, 1, p. 12.
31 Ibid., 1.
thing. Their goodness is derived, and the supremely good thing’s goodness is not derived but identical with its nature.

Anselm then makes a similar argument about existence or being. “Whatever is, is through one thing.” Take the common predicate “existence.” If different things are said to exist in different ways, they either came into existence through nothing or through something. It is “impossible even to conceive of” the former possibility. Therefore, everything that exists exists through some one thing or through more than one thing. If more than one thing is the source of the common predicate “existence,” then there are three possibilities. First, the two things share a common predicate, which therefore requires a common source. Second, they are both the source of their own existence through “some single power-to exist-thought-oneself (or some single nature-of-existing-through-oneself).” Third, they “exist mutually through one another” and thereby defy reason. “For the notion that something could exist through that to which it gives existence, is just irrational.”

Anselm nicely shows how intimately the structure of how things are known is related to the structure of how things are and to the structure of how humans ought to live. To put it concisely: organizing sensible impressions in an intelligible way requires that Anselm posit a idea “supreme goodness” which he later concludes is identical to “that which exists through itself” and that which is greatest or most excellent. He concludes that there is a supreme being, the famous “that-than-which-none-greater-can-be-conceived.” The moral correlate (goodness) is intrinsic in

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32 Ibid., 3.
33 Ibid., 3
34 Ibid. This is very similar to the logic of Augustine’s argument against the idea that the Son is the divine wisdom and the spirit the divine power in *trin.* 6-7. Perhaps this sets up his doctrine of divine simplicity and his doctrine of trinity and explains why this argument seems needlessly complex.
the logic of being (existence), because judgments about being are identical to judgments about
goodness, value, and justice. They are all “that which exists through itself.” Another way of putting
it is that the moment something is shown to exist, the question, “What is it good for?” can be asked
of it. If “existence itself” or “being itself” is shown to exist, then the question, “what is it good for”
can be asked of Being itself. Goodness, we might say, is the structure and power of a thing. To say
that existence and goodness are identical is to say not only that all things have structure and power,
but that Existence itself is goal-oriented.

This connection can be seen more clearly though the lens of Augustine’s participatory
understanding of being. According to Norris Clarke, the starting point for talk of participation is
the claim that Anselm and Augustine rely upon: “wherever there is a many, there must also be a
one.” This is shown in the above logic when the common predicate is assumed to require a
common source. Clarke outlines a three-tiered structure to participation language. First, “a source
which possesses the perfection in question in a total and unrestricted manner,” second, “a
participant subject which possess the same perfection in some partial or restricted way, and, which”
third, “has received this perfection in some way from, or in dependence on, the higher source.”
The term is therefore a “condensed technical way of expression the complexus of relations involved
in any structure of dependence of a lower multiplicity on a higher source for similarity or nature.”

For Clarke, as for Anselm and Aquinas, the fundamental metaphysical question concerns
being or existence. The common predicate “existence” can only be explained by Being itself. But

36 Ibid., 152.
37 Ibid.
Augustine believed that “the good” gave structure (goal) and power (dynamism) to being. In a way, then, goodness explains being; it answers the question “Why?”. “Every being is goal-oriented, striving dynamically for its own actualization, and proceeding from the one Ultimate Source of perfection.” The goodness of being is closely related to its intelligibility, which is its inherent capacity for supra-rational organization. The intelligibility of being (which is also its identity with truth) is discovered through the intellect, which is the capacity to organize sensible data for a particular human body.

Clark correctly summarizes the consensus position among Augustine and the medievals I named when he says that goodness does not add anything to being, nor does goodness modify being relationally as if it is some separate entity. Rather, the goodness of being denotes being’s inherent structure and power much like the truth of being denotes being’s inherent intelligibility or inherent capacity for super-rational organization. In other words, the fact/value distinction was inconceivable for Augustine because that which is can only be good, lovable, intrinsically structured and drawing all things to itself. Just as it is impossible to talk about being that is not intelligible, it is impossible to talk about being that is not good and therefore rightly desired. Reasoning is therefore inherently practical, though reasoning can be removed by degrees of abstraction from practices. Like appetitive and rational powers, practical and speculative reason can be distinguished but never separated in reality. For both Augustinian traditions named above, organizing sensible data into

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38 From Marilyn Adams lecture.

intelligible truth cannot happen apart from acknowledgement of the goal-oriented nature of that truth.  

The difference comes in the relative independence of the will form the intellect. In On the Happy Life, Augustine’s “mountain” in the harbor of philosophy is a danger precisely because he came to place a much higher emphasis on the voluntary power than the Platonists did. For the Platonists, knowing the good was sufficient for living it. For Augustine, the good had to be willed. Anselm and Scotus represent the Augustinian position more clearly, and Aquinas, while maintaining its essential aspects, verges toward Aristotelian intellectualism. For Anselm and Scotus, the will is a being that can choose between two fundamental and de facto conflicting appetites, the appetite for justice and the appetite for advantage. The being of the will, then, explains disorder. For Thomas, the intellect is never separate from the will, and might be called the “appetitive intellect.” The goodness of being, that is, being’s structure and power, is discovered through our appetitive power, the capacity to organize our attachments, cravings, and benevolence for particulars. Likewise, the appetitive power cannot be isolated from rationality and might be called the “rational appetite.” The explanation for disorder has to come through a failure to control lower passions.

The account of participation outlined above is extremely important for understanding how Augustine is able to hold matter and spirit, sensible and intelligible, and body and soul together. This contrasts with both Kantianism and Platonism. If post-Kantian thought tends to separate practical and speculative reason (and thus body and soul, good and true), Platonic thought tended

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41 beata v., 1.1-1.6.
to contrast earthly things to intelligible good in ways Augustinian thought judges difficult to maintain, for the structure and power of being cannot leave embodied existence behind if the Creator of matter is good. Good for Plato was “beyond being” and certainly beyond individuated beings. But the structure in which intelligibility and goodness are identical to being, intrinsic to it in a way that makes them indistinguishable in their reality, cannot accommodate the contrast of absolute or infinite good to relative or finite goods. The relationship of dependence of beings on Being implies for Augustine that all things share something of the goodness of their cause.\textsuperscript{42} The value judgments are therefore not contrastive but inclusive in a particular way: they are participatory and hierarchically ordered.

Because they are participatory, the hierarchy is fundamentally affirmative. All hierarchies in the order of being are based on the God/world distinction. Nothing that exists exists except by virtue of participation in the life of Godhead. This principle of affirmative hierarchical ordering is especially evident in Augustine’s treatise \textit{On Christian Doctrine}, in which hierarchies in being correspond to value hierarchies on the journey of affections from signs to what is signified. Good things get a sort of intrinsic but ec-centric goodness from a common source. Augustine speaks of life as a journey among goods. The particular goods that share the common predicate are like signs that point to the Good itself. They have a real significance, a real goodness from their participation. It is therefore proper to enjoy them and to love them. Though some of his early writings tended to contrast beings with Being or God, Augustine’s doctrine of participation helped him to see that human love for God becomes invested in a particular way with the things God makes.\textsuperscript{43} The love of

\textsuperscript{42}This is also the intuition behind Thomas’s five proofs, and his way of naming God from eminence. See ST 1.1.3. See also Rudi A. te Velde, \textit{Aquinas on God: The “Divine Science” of the Summa Theologiae} (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006).

\textsuperscript{43}This is highly formal relationship of ethics and metaphysics and epistemology. It is consistent with various forms of skepticism (McCabe, \textit{Law, Love and Language}; Paul J. Griffiths, “How Reasoning Goes Wrong: A Quasi-Augustinian
God in Augustine’s thought becomes the basis of love of neighbor; there is a fundamentally affirmative relationship between beings and being, goodness and good things. The account of goodness in the order of being becomes a way to shore up desired outcomes in the every-day, to love things, to enjoy good things as they exist. These hierarchies, then, structure all “difference.” The broad Augustinian way of naming the way we are to relate to what is “different” or “other” is “love.” Everything, therefore, is at stake in the proper ordering of love.

Augustine came to see the way in which one could be invested in or legitimately desire certain earthly outcomes as a result of one’s love for God. This is so because of an implicit parallel in the text between Augustine’s claims about intelligibility and his claims about enjoyment and love. Just as God is the intelligibility-maker that gives all things their proper place in a whole, the signified that makes all signs truly but derivatively significant, so God is the value-giver or good-maker that makes it possible to enjoy and even love all things in a proper, ordered way. The characteristic human mistake, Augustine argues, is “enjoying” and “loving” particular goods in the wrong way. So, by virtue of the identity of being with truth and goodness, Augustinian epistemology (the sensible/intelligible distinction), account of the structure of being (the

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44 Here I am in fundamental disagreement with the claim that the trinity is the primary Christian way of structuring or theorizing difference for Christian thought. Trinity presupposes a hierarchical account of the order of being, which can account for difference, in the order of knowing.
matter/spirit distinction) and ethics (command to love God and neighbor) are intimately related. A modification of one necessarily modifies the other two.

5. Simplicity of Being

The claim that Being cannot be conceived apart from its goodness and intelligibility necessarily implies the essential simplicity of being, which is very important for Augustine’s doctrine of God and for conceiving the structure of Christian life. There are multiple ways of understanding the simplicity of being. I take no single material position here. Affirming a formal simplicity is sufficient. I propose several ways of talking about it. Judging from what I have already argued, consider the calibration of transcendental features (intelligibility, desirability) to distinctively human powers of the soul. The will is properly calibrated to the good and the intellect to the truth. Each power requires a correlate in the order of being. “The good appears as the objective correlate in being to our subjective inner dynamism of desiring, loving, valuing, admiring, both in the sensitive and spiritual orders.” It is therefore asserted that being is intelligible, dynamically ordered, and goal oriented. The predications “good” and “true,” I’ve argued, are essential predications of being. The good does not name a separate entity in addition to being. Rather, “the good signifies the object or being itself that is valued, but considered precisely as the object of valuation with relation to some valuer, as valued or valuable to something.” Clarke here assumes that the same for the intelligibility or truth of being. The words “true” and “good” signify something about being in relationship to distinctively human powers. Thus they do not name separate entities. In one way the assertion of the goodness, truth, and greatness of being implies

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45 Clarke, The One and the Many, 262.
46 Ibid.
everything else there is to say about Being: for any good, great, or true particular, one can predicate that particular to the highest degree of Being. Though, following Thomas, there is a sense in which transcendentals or perfection terms like “good,” “true,” and “excellent” name being more properly than identification of good with particular sensible objects.\(^{47}\) In this analysis of the correlates of the happy life, the distinction between orders of being and predication comes to the fore.

Anselm offers a more direct metaphysical argument in the *Monologion*.

(1) Whatever is compounded depends for its existence on its components.

(2) Therefore, whatever is compounded exists through its components. (1)

(3) \(S\) does not exist through another but exists through itself (*per se*). (*Monologion*, ch. 3)

(4) Therefore, \(S\) is not compounded.\(^ {48}\)

For third, complementary understanding, simplicity of being is a set of standards. Divine simplicity allows us to name a given quality \(X\) and to assert that God is the highest standard of the quality; it therefore asserts that God is an ultimate standard. Brian Leftow relates it to a platonic theory of forms: “to grasp a Form, and so be able to ‘see’ to what kind a thing belongs, is to ‘see’ what is required to be long to the kind, i.e., what something of that kind ‘ought to be.’ For Augustine, then, even in cases not involving obvious evaluations, Forms are in fact standards… So when Augustine identifies God with the Forms, he identifies God with a set of standards.”\(^ {49}\)

I have established and displayed the structure of Augustine’s thought about morality, the way being is ordered, and the way we come to know the ordering of being by means of making four

\(^{47}\) Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 77ff.

\(^{48}\) Lecture notes, Marilyn Adams.

types of distinctions: God/world, matter/spirit, sensible/intelligible, and body/soul. These distinctions are ultimately funded by the God/world distinction, which enjoys a preeminence and, for Christians, is the distinction that enables all other distinctions in the order of being. All creaturely distinctions are specified by it. More proximately, they are enabled in the order of being, I argue, by the fundamental dualism of spirit over matter that Augustine discovers in the Platonists.

There are other distinctions that come into play, like the eternal/temporal and the mutable/immutable distinctions. But before connecting it to his understanding of divinitas, it is helpful also to explore some of the implications of account of the structure of being for language and agency (to be explored more fully in the next chapter) before talking about what it means for how he construes divine life.

There is an important consequence of Augustine’s view of the simplicity of being for created agency. Each individual being derives its structure and power from the structure and power of being in general. All individual things are good and therefore rightly desirable only because of their participation in a meta-structure-and-power, i.e., the good. All particular cravings or desires are therefore ultimately participant in the Good itself. Similarly, the rational organization of individual beings participates in the inherent intelligibility of being. The truth of a thing is simply the way that a particular thing participates in intelligibility. True beliefs correspond to the meta-intelligibility. We crave something because it participates in Goodness. We believe something because it participates in Truth. Anselm shows how the structure of transcendental predication implies that the reality of being is like an explanatory posit that serves as a constitutive principle of rationality: wherever there is a many, there must be a one to explain the common predicate. This means that God (the Being in whom all beings participate) and creatures exist in non-competitive
relationship with one another. To love any good thing is to love God. To know any true thing is to
know God. To exist is to “live and move and have our being” in God.

But that is a separate question from a question about how we come to know God explicitly. How can anyone reliably thematize this One that does so much explanatory work in Augustine’s thought? Both post-Kantian (for which the One can only be a regulative principle of speculative rationality50) and classical reflections on metaphysics emphasize that sensible apprehension alone is insufficient warrant for knowledge of simple being (goodness, truth) in itself. Instead, one is always only confronted sensibly with particular things to be craved and with propositions to be believed.

For Augustine, divine light illumines the mind and divine good moves the will always in relation to the particular sensible things; the many points to the one. The will and intellect are therefore always moved by the Good and the True (which is to say, God) indirectly.

This illumination and moving, as I mentioned, are immanent in the acts. They cannot be contrasted to creaturely agency. The Augustinian tradition therefore does not rely on a metaphysical tertium to explain realities like movement and knowing. Through good things that

50 See Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W Wood (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Immanuel Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, ed. Lewis White Beck (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1993). Kant posits a highest being, an ideal that “includes all reality”; all “manifoldness” is determined only through limitation or negation (KrV A578/B606). The sum of possibility is an idea that can be instantiated or hypostatized and therefore made into an ideal of a most real being on the basis of the “totally determined” nature of reality (KrV A576/B604), but the hypostasis is not a necessary deduction from sensory experience and therefore not strictly legitimate if taken constitutively. There is no properly rational way to move from the idea to the ideal. Just as no ideal can be represented as actual within the realm of sensory experience without violence to the ideal, reason does not permit us to talk about God as if God, the highest being with all reality in Godself, the ground of all things, and an ideal that follows from the unity of reality, is an actual being like other beings. God cannot be deduced from or assumed for our sensible experience since such a deduction or assumption circumscribes God by sensual experience. We have “no warrant, not even for directly assuming the possibility of such a hypothesis” and “none of the consequences flowing from such an ideal have any bearing, nor even the least influence, on the thoroughgoing determination of things in general” (KrV A580/B608). A God portrayed by means of or within sensory experience would be a fiction similar to the portrayal of a Stoic sage. To speak more generally, Kant thinks that the realm of sense perception has no access to what is beyond itself. God is by definition beyond the realm of sense perception and therefore can be posited but not held to exist objectively, which is the only type of “knowing” that sense perception acknowledges. The basis of the unity of experience is therefore merely “regulative” through speculative reason because God is outside of transcendental experience.
participate in Goodness and True things that participate in Truth, we are brought into indirect contact with the Good and the True.

The indirectness of the relationship between sensory apprehension and access to truth and goodness implies a both an epistemic and an ethical problem—the characteristic problem of the platonic tradition: How do we embrace Goodness and Truth in their own reality and without (or with less) mediation? The self-identical “good,” “one,” and “beautiful” indirectly moves every thing in every action (see the section on divine providence below about how Augustine conceives God as transcendent cause of all things). The Good—by definition—always moves human body-soul composites in every action to the extent that they move because human action is intrinsically goal-oriented and the good is the dynamism and structure of the whole. By epistemically transcending all the good, beautiful, and true things in each judgment, the individual can better organize sensible reality and order moral experience according to intelligibility and value.

With the increased capacity to organize sensible impressions comes increased control over one’s relation to particular things, perhaps it is better to call it a fuller self possession: increased capacity of intelligible and appetitive organization implies a fuller and freer life less bound to momentary passions and erring judgments. Freedom on this account is the ability to act out of a more explicit sense of Being’s ordering, that is, to pursue justice always. The free person desires for her life to fit in a particular way and in each action with the structure of Being. The goal of life on this account is to move in symbiosis with reality, to desire the good knowingly and to allow it to direct her choices, and to know and be directed by the truth. “The happy life,” the way that the goal of human existence is named for both Augustine and classical philosophy, could be described as a type of appetitive attachment not merely to one’s own virtue, but to “the eternal” that transcends
and gives intelligibility and value to the whole. In this way, the ordering of being is intimate with morality (and sometimes spirituality) at the core of neo-platonic thought.\footnote{The pure nominalist, by contrast, solves the problem of many common predicates by claiming that there are only good things or true things and no Goodness Itself or Truth itself. It follows that there is no underlying mover of the intellect and the will. This issues in a more arbitrary divine command theory, and the commandments might have been entirely different on some accounts. It is crucial for Augustine that the order of being comport with the way of life his thought requires.}

The dialectical process of coming to thematize the good, which is a condition of the possibility of freedom, is difficult, if not impossible for body-soul composites. In general, epistemology is point of controversy among Augustinian traditions. Augustine, more platonically inclined, believed that God directly illuminated the intellect with ineffable divine light. Aquinas, an Aristotelian about epistemology, emphasized the slow dialectical slog through intellectual abstractions, through negations, and toward a proper apophatic moment. Both parts of the tradition are in agreement, however, that “unaided human reason” is incapable of meaningful thematic knowledge of the good. Augustine says that his encounter was like a flash: “What I saw is Being, and that I who saw am not yet Being.”\footnote{conf. 7.10.16.} In Augustine’s intellectual “vision” at Ostia he perceives Being, Plotinus’s One, “in the flash of a trembling glance,” but he is unable to maintain his vision. His understanding and control over his actions disintegrates the moment he thinks he achieves it. Aquinas allows only a “nominal definition” of God. \textit{Sacra doctrina} is necessary because, without divine self-revelation, knowledge of the good could be obtained only imperfectly, by a few, with much error, and over a long period of time.\footnote{ST 1.1.1.}

Augustine notes that a more lasting access to God, the source of all goodness and truth, comes counter-intuitively only through the humility of Jesus Christ and the inner, ineffable
sweetening of the Spirit. In *Confessions*, Christ somehow works on Augustine’s behalf to make his life good and his beliefs true through the indwelling of the Spirit. The trinity was able to give him the Good itself—Godhead itself, which alone could make happy because it could not be lost—and with it the good life in the only secure way.  

So far I have explained the terms on which Augustine thinks God and the soul. I have also filled out the distinctions (God/creation, matter/spirit, sensible/intelligible, and body/soul) and explained the progression by which Augustine came to understand and deploy these terms in his mature thought. Augustine came to see that this virtue was rooted in the real “Good.” The Good draws the will, and by attaching oneself to it by knowingly desiring it, one lives a happy life. So philosophical pursuit meant pursuing the happy life in which one owns one’s actions, understands the truth, and seeks to live justly. For Augustine, the difference comes when he asks what the nature of being is. Augustine’s understanding of good or happy life and its connection to the good that moves all things can be discerned by his (platonic) way of relating these distinctions.

6. The Grammar of Divine Life

As I said above, Augustine affirmed the ancient philosophical quest toward the “happy life,” though he radically revised it both in its mode of attainment and its definition. He believed that *beata vita* was derived, shared, borrowed from inexpressibly superlative Life. Livers of the happy life therefore participate in Blessed Life itself. The deep grammar of his view of happy life required

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54 The focus of Augustine’s early dialogue *beata v.* is how to have happiness through possessing a good securely.

55 Robert O’Connell thinks that as early as his reading of the Hortensius, “the architectonic lines of his thinking have taken form and will never substantially alter. He has located the center from which, henceforth, all his thinking and aspiration spring. He has come to the conviction that we are beings whose native air was once the loftier world where beauteous Wisdom dwelt with God,” O’Connell, *Images of Conversion in St. Augustine’s Confessions*, 40.
two logically distinct, asymmetrically related, and de facto inseparable ways of predicating *vita* of Godhead, each of which presents a different facet of the divine relationship to creation.

The first way identifies divine life with intelligible, structured, powerful Being. God’s life is identified with God’s essence or, Augustine’s term, *deitas* or *godness*: simple and therefore eternal, immutable, and immaterial. This identification enables Augustine to posit a high level intimacy between God and creation. In order to portray the intimacy, I will follow Augustine’s narrations and engage in what Norris Clarke calls “descriptive metaphysics” by relating theological claims analogically to various human experiences.

The second way identifies divine life with subsistent divine relations. These relations explain how divine life is shared perfectly in Godhead. They also serve as a fuller basis describing how God relates to the creation; creation is Logos-shaped. Also, and perhaps principally, divine relations explain God’s historical interactions with creation. The first way of predicating life of God does not require the second. Muslims and Jews, for example, may affirm something similar or even identical of God. The second way, however, requires the first in Augustine’s view. Both together portray God not primarily as a political leader or “Sovereign,” but as the public object, the “object common to all” precisely through God’s concern for matters domestic, by life-affirming love. God, Life Itself, is the ultimate affirmer of life. Because God affirms life, God is understood to be what holds together public and private, political and domestic, love and justice. God alone is both intimate in us and superlatively sharable among us; in Augustine’s terminology, the common object to all is also nearer to us than we are to ourselves. Augustine’s doctrine of God, then, sets up a

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condition of the possibility of breaking out of the dichotomies which plagued the accounts of the last chapter, allowing an affirmative politics of life.

7. Nature of Deitas

The logic of Augustine’s understanding of the divine life goes something like this: God is identical to Existence Itself, what gives all that is structure and power, and what makes various phenomena intelligible. God, therefore, must be simple because God is identical to being, immutable because God serves as an ultimate truth and value standard, eternal because immutable reality cannot be limited by time, and incorporeal or immaterial because material things are inherently changeable and limited. Thomas Aquinas is right, then, to suggest that immutability, eternity, and immateriality are negative claims and constitute the beginnings of a nominal definition of what *deitas* must be. A nominal definition excludes unfitness language of God through negating it, and it provides analogical clues for understanding through perfection terms. It functions to establish a hierarchy that checks all predications made of Godhead: the unchanging Light, immutable Being, is higher than creation because it is incorruptible, while creation is corruptible. “I considered the other things below you, and I saw that neither can they be said absolutely to be or absolutely not to be. They are because they come from you. But they are not because they are not what you are. That which truly is is that which unchangeably abides.” Augustine therefore completes the crucial connection between the intelligibility of being, the intrinsic oriented-ness of Being, of Being with the Creator, the eternity of Being, the immateriality of intelligible, and the

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58 Augustine, *conf.*, 7.11.17.
immutability of the incorporeal. All this platonic matter/spirit dualism enables and Christianity inflects (or, perhaps better, “bends”\(^{59}\)).

Since I have already explained arguments for the simplicity of being, which, in their Thomist, Anselmian, or other forms do not depend on revealed knowledge, in what follows I explore the implications of divine simplicity through the three characteristics of Being described above: immutability, eternity, and immateriality. In many ways, Augustine simply assumes the broadly platonic structure of divine simplicity in order to make sense of claims about God. Many philosophical arguments have been made about divine simplicity, but I am bracketing those here in order to make most sense of Augustine’s thought about God.\(^{60}\)

The argument will proceed as follows. First I articulate a set of judgments about the order of being: divine simplicity implies that “being itself” is identical to God and God is identical to what God has. “What he has he is.” There is therefore no real distinction between primary and secondary substance in God. Second, I describe a set of predicational judgments: all predications made of Godhead must be substance-wise and none can be accident-wise. Understood through these two types of judgments, talking about divine simplicity is different than talking about simplicity of being because what is simple is a divine life, analogous in some ways to a person.\(^{61}\) I then describe two

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\(^{59}\) Following David Kelsey, see ch. 1, note 44.


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objects to divine simplicity corresponding to the two types of claims I make. I include these objections because they help clarify the structure of Augustine’s thought about these matters.

8. Being

The doctrine of divine simplicity involves Augustine in almost all the claims about Being made by the Platonists and represented by Anselm above. The divine perfection names this simple identity of God with Being. For Thomas, perfection terms or transcendentals (being, goodness, unity, truth, and perhaps beauty) are properly analogous to the divine substance because they name formally what is most excellent, whereas other terms are merely metaphorical or analogical on a sliding scale. Immutability, eternity, and immateriality are like negative rules for understanding different aspects of this identity based on human (body-soul) modes of knowing. They are immediately implied by divine simplicity, which is immediately implied by divine perfection. Negative claims about divine simplicity, therefore, are necessarily prior to claims about divine perfection. Augustine says so more or less directly in relation to immutability: “Anything that changes does not keep its being, and anything that can change even though it does not, is able to not be what it was; and thus only that which not only does not but also absolutely cannot change deserves without qualification to be said really and truly to be.”

Thomas helpfully draws out the implications of divine simplicity more systematically and in a clearer way. For Thomas, Godhead is not composed of matter and form, essence and existence,

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Almost because, as the discussion of the trinity shows, he bends them in service of scriptural claims.

*trin.* 5.2.3. “Quod enim mutatur, non servat ipsum esse; et quod mutari potest, etiamsi non mutetur, potest quod fuerat non esse: ac per hoc illud solum quod non tantum non mutatur, verum etiam mutari omnino non potest, sine scrupulo occurrat quod verissime dicatur esse.”
potency and act, or substance and accident. Any individual can have abstract properties \( x, y, \) and \( z \) predicated of her by a relationship of individual, imperfect instantiation of \( x, y, \) and \( z \). God, however, is not an individual that exemplifies abstract properties either accidentally or necessarily, but the divine substance is identical to the properties that God has. God is not composed of primary and secondary substance in that God does not instantiate a nature; Godhead is the divine nature.\(^{64}\)

Mainly, it follows from simplicity that God is pure actuality: never acted upon, never in potentiality, and never subject to the flux and change of temporality. If God’s simplicity implies that God is absolute unity beyond number, Godhead cannot be part of an organic unity in which it is partially dependent on creation (panentheism), nor can Godhead be conceived to be in some form of identity with creation (pantheism). Rather, Godhead is distinct from, completely independent of, and intimate with everything that God makes. God lives, simply and fully.\(^{65}\)

Thomas holds the view that divine simplicity is the central attribution or predication of Godhead because it entails the other three “negative” predications made of the divine substance (and others besides).\(^{66}\) Divine eternity means that Godhead is without temporal sequence or “extension” in time.\(^{67}\) God holds all times perfectly in the divine purview. Divine immateriality means that no physical substance can limit God. Divine immutability means that Godhead is without significant change, and, understood through the divine simplicity and eternity, without any change at all, including alteration of awareness or design. “God cannot be modified in any way, and therefore the


\(^{65}\) See Arendt, Love and Saint Augustine, chap. 1.

\(^{66}\) See Velde, Aquinas on God, 77–85.

substance or being which is God is alone unchangeable.”

“There is nothing in [God] that can be changed or lost.”

Though it is more systematic than Augustine, it is helpful to include Thomas’s account in the following explanations for the sake of clarity.

9. Predicational Claims

Augustine emphasizes the point that an eternal, immutable, simple God cannot undergo substantial change so much that he nearly identifies God with immutability. There are no real distinctions in God. A point about the order of predication follows: nothing can be predicated of God modification-wise. No created thing can cause accidental change in God, since God has no accidents. Since all predications are made substance-wise, God’s essential attributes do not name different things in reality. Divine attributes are rather accommodations to human powers of naming. So every distinction made about God in natural languages is purely predicational and not real. “For God it is the same thing to be as powerful or just or wise or anything else that can be said about his simple multiplicity or multiple simplicity to signify his substance.”

10. Metaphysical Objection to Divine Simplicity

The claims about divine simplicity fall into two broad types. Positive claims have to do with divine perfection. Negative claims secure the divine perfection. A major objection touches both aspects of divine simplicity and illuminates how Augustine understood divine life. It extends the

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68 trin., 5.2.3.
69 trin., 5.4.5. “Nihil itaque accidens in Deo, quia nihil mutabile aut amissibile.”
72 trin., 6.6. This is also why Augustine rejects the trinitarian formula he is considering at that point in his treatise, that divine “attributes” of power and wisdom can be identified with members of the trinity.
intuition that a “classical” or “perfect” deity is not living, not personal. First, it considers the seemingly impersonal perfection terms “good” “beautiful” true” “being” and the static-sounding negations “eternity,” “immutability,” and “immateriality” and concludes that such a God is a very great thing, even “that-than-which-none-greater-can-be-conceived,” but is neither alive nor personal. Such a God is perhaps more like a magnet or an abstract quality. The Augustinian reply is that the perfection terms make whatever is more excellent more appropriate to say of God. It adopts a set of intuitions that make “living” more excellent than “non-living” and “personal” more excellent than “impersonal.”

This answer, however, is unsatisfying because, second, the objection implicitly trades on the major difference between the type of “existence” that could satisfy the negative and positive predications Augustine makes of God and all other living things. The claim that such a God could be “living” stretches the term beyond what is possible for it. It is very difficult (if not impossible) to think an individual (or really any unity) that is not asymmetrically related to its attributes by a relation of exemplification or instantiation. Things which have the negative predicates “eternal,” “immutable,” “simple,” and “immaterial” seem abstract and lifeless, easily and prima facie opposed to individual personality. This is unsurprising when considered against the human tendency to analogize simply from ordinary experience without the “negative moment” required to sustain Augustine’s account of God. 73

73 For an example of this tendency, see Plantinga, “Does God Have a Nature?”. The claim that God is alive, powerful, etc. is something that is only known in consequence of revelation and in a very specific, but analogous, understanding of divine personhood. Imposing a “commonsense” understanding of personhood on God to defeat divine simplicity begs the question. We know that God acts only because we know about the trinity (or only because the triune God reveals Godself), but we can only predicate “personhood” of God analogously subsequent to our knowledge of God’s revelation. All of this is to ask, “Who is God?” our answer is a personal name, “The LORD” or “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” But when we ask, “What is God?” or “What is the divine substance?” We get a set of Plantinga’s “properties.” God is what God has. God is beauty, truth, goodness, etc. When beauty moves us, it’s the same thing as God moving us. When truth moves us, it’s the same thing as God moving us. When goodness moves us, it’s the same thing as God
The structure of Augustine’s, Anslem’s, and Thomas’s thought prevents one from making other living beings the standard for God’s living in the universe, even if it makes God a very, very great being. In various ways, Augustinian traditions tend to require a process of intellectual negation. Eternity, immutability, immateriality, and simplicity name the results of this negation. The negative qualities offer no imaginative or analogical resources in themselves but rather function like rules to prevent against analogizing God to “a being” that is somehow part of the world and not its intimate other. They are purely negative. They serve to highlight what the perfection terms cannot mean. Elizabeth Johnson nicely explains how negative affirmations relate to the positive ones in a way that avoids making God a being among beings:

The moment of negation in analogy does not shut down thought but corrects the inadequacy of the positive affirmation, compels it to transcend itself, pushes it to its term: God who is always ever greater. The negation does not deny or revoke the affirmation, leading to an agnostic void, but powerfully invalidates its limits, in the end, giving off some light. In this sense analogical language is more akin to the reverential abstinence from the use of God’s name that characterized later Judaism, than to any exaggeration of divine aloofness from the world. At the end of the process the mystery of the living God is evoked while the human thinker ends up, intellectually and existentially, in religious awe and adoration.

As Johnson and other feminist theologians argue, the negations involved in claims about divine simplicity retain some ambiguity because of how they have been used to make God seem distant, other, and male. But they continue to be powerful and useful not only because they negatively moving us. And when we are moved in the deepest personal way possible, that’s God moving us. But God is not a person, and cannot be a person to be God. So Plantinga is correct that such properties are not personal, but for Thomas, these properties make up a nominal definition of God and are essentially negative. They do not help us understand the divine essence. Only revelation of the Triune God does that (16). God is intelligible only analogically. We have to have the concept of the three persons to understand the divine nature. Before, there is no way of demonstrating the “personality” of God.

check those in power and prevent them from pinning God down into a tool for oppression. They also provide a condition of a possibility of analogizing better, not least because they serve like a second-order rule for how to take all language about God. Some have resisted the tendency to talk about a “gap” between humans and God, but here something like a gap prevents us from taking, say, language about gender and God too seriously.

Still, an intuition underlying the objection remains unaddressed. In the order of knowing, lack of perceptual awareness of pure actuality makes it easier to imagine that creaturely life is a standard for judging divine life. The intuition makes creaturely self-movement paradigmatic of life. More precisely, we normally associate the activation of potencies with creaturely life, and we tend to think of the human activation of potencies is the paradigm or standard for actualizing potencies.

What can be made of this? In Augustine’s explanation of the days of creation, he concludes that when God says “let there be light,” God constitutes an angelic world and communicates to them timeless formulae about the creation. God had already created a world of matter out of nothing in a (logical) first stage of creation. But since the matter was unformed, it existed in unformed potentiality. A contrast implicitly underlies his claim: God is identical to divine existence, but the formulae communicated to the angels actualize the matter. God applies the formulae to matter through angelic mediation and thereby limits the timeless, undifferentiated matter into a world of things (approximating in one way Thomas’s Aristotelian discovery of the limitation of act by potency, perhaps in reverse, the limitation of potency by form). On Augustine’s

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terms, we might say that the objection from the intuition about activation of potencies almost imagines that God is like the abstract, timeless formulae that God communicates to the angels. The main difference between God and limiting formulae is that God is identical to God’s existence, whereas the abstract forms might not have existed. An eternal God ought not be confused with these timeless formulae that constitute angelic knowledge, for they might not have existed and therefore are partly in potentiality. They are derived.

The objection verges into a similar mistake: imagining that divine immutability implies that God is like absolute, inert potentiality living in some “static eternal now.” By allowing in principle any change, pure potentiality allows no significant change. Pure potentiality, therefore, is also without succession and change. Like Augustine’s concept of eternity, this anti-eternity also allows no meaningful differentiation of substance and accident or of potentiality and actuality. The main difference between divine eternity and the pure obedience of potency without form is that God created all matter. Unlike God, it admits one important difference between act and potency: it exists and is therefore actualized in one way and is potential in another. Divine eternity, by contrast, admits no distinction. God just is. Additionally, one wonders what it could possibly mean to imagine pure potentiality that is not pure nothingness, the void into which God calls forth all things?

From a negative perspective, divine simplicity means that God has no potencies to activate. It is, of course, impossible to imagine what it means for a living thing to have no potential, and it is therefore easy to conflate such a thing with other realities. From a positive perspective, divine simplicity means that God can be said “to be” without qualification. This implies that God is

77 For more on the claim that God is an abstract object, and a refutation of it, see Brian Leftow, “Is God an Abstract Object?,” *Noûs* 24, no. 4 (September 1, 1990): 581–598.
identical to Life Itself. Because of the relationship of divine simplicity and perfection, Augustine is able to associate God’s life with the gathering up of all things into one present reality, of all truths into their fullness, of all objects into their perfection. “Eternity... as the opposite of human time, is not God, but nature or rather Deus sive natura. In the Bible, God is not the opposite of time, but the end of time, its delimitation and discontinuity—and therefore its possibility.” Eternity, immutability, immateriality, and simplicity—when understood together with claims about divine perfection—imply dynamism and spontaneity and not a static, abstract, timeless object that does not live.

Consider, for example, how such claims about divine eternity and perfection might work by descriptive analogy. God’s eternity means that God’s existence is in-tense and therefore supremely constant. Eternal intensity is analogous to the moments of life when time seems to melt in the face of interest in a subject matter, in a shared time with a loved one, or in a moment of

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78 Re-imagining the concept of vitality for Augustine requires that “our minds to be purified before that expressible reality can be seen by them” (trin. 1.3). This re-imagination takes the form of a set of contemplative practices like the ones Augustine describes in the Confessions Book VII and of mediation on the meaning of scripture. Purgative contemplation was a continual practice for Augustine, and it constitutes the vocation of the theologian. Augustine practiced it by writing biblical commentaries, moving beyond the surface meaning of the words to the actual meaning of the text. For more on spiritual practices in relation to the meaning of scripture, see Hadot, Philosophy as a Way of Life, chap. 2–4.

79 conf., book 11.


81 Though, God’s personality is something that is only revealed in God’s actions in history. Thomas is thoroughly Augustinian when he emphasizes that apart from scripture, we would have only a nominal definition of a first cause without any knowledge of the essence of that cause. See ST 1.1.1. The history of Jesus becoming incarnate humbles all of our pretentions to knowledge of God from our own resources. By submitting ourselves to Christ’s particular history, we are raised up beyond where any reflection on the One or Being or Beauty would be able to lead us into the divine essence itself, the Trinity that alone makes sense of our freedom from the burdens that keep us from living a fully human life. Augustine insisted that the way of humility required a trust of credible authority about the events of Christ’s life in order to be raised by Christ into God’s life. “Your Word, eternal truth, higher than the superior parts of your creation, raises those submissive to him to himself. In the inferior parts he built for himself a humble house of our clay. By this he detaches from themselves those who are willing to be made his subjects and carries them across to himself, healing their swelling and nourishing their life. They are no longer to place confidence in themselves, but rather to become weak. They see at their feet divinity become weak by his sharing in our ‘coat of skin’. In their weariness they fall prostrate before this divine weakness which rises and lifts them up” (conf., 7.18.24).
ecstatic love that is tragic only because of its passing, such as Augustine’s time in Ostia with Monica when he gazed upon God in “the flash of a trembling glance” \((\textit{in ictu trepidantis aspectus})\).\(^82\) He later reflected: “without being coeternal with you, O Trinity, [creation] nevertheless participates in your eternity. From the sweet happiness of contemplating you, it finds power to check its mutability” \((\textit{quamquam nequaquam tibi, trinitati, coaeterna, particeps tamen aeternitatis tuae, valde mutabilitatem suam prae dulcedine felicissimae contemplationis tuae cohibet})\).\(^83\) In seemingly timeless moments, we have some sense of what it means for a thousand years to be like a day for God. Cheap entertainment (Augustine calls it “spectacle”) mimics the quality of existence in which a sense of time’s passing is lost even as sequence remains.\(^84\) Salvation is the gathering up of our dispersed times and purposes into one coherent whole, a more intense participation in the simple, eternal, immutable Life that is our supreme good. “Eternity is the complete possession all at once of illimitable life.”\(^85\) Predicating simplicity of the One who acts in history assures us that God is faithful to the world not only as its creator but also as its redeemer.\(^86\)

\(^82\) \textit{conf.}, 7.17.23.

\(^83\) \textit{conf.}, 12.9.9

\(^84\) “Why is it that a person should wish to experience suffering by watching grievous and tragic events which he himself would not wish to endure? Nevertheless he wants to suffer the pain given by being a spectator of these sufferings, and the pain itself is his pleasure” \(\textit{quid est quod ibi homo vult dolere cum spectat luctuosa et tragica, quae tamen pati ipse nollet? et tamen pati vult ex eis dolorem spectator et dolor ipse est voluptas eius. quid est nisi mirabilis insania?}\) \(\textit{conf.}\ 3.2.2\). “I wanted only to hear stories and imaginary legends of sufferings which, as it were scratched me on the surface. Yet like the scratches of fingernails, they produced inflamed spots, pus, and repulsive sores. That was my kind of life. Surely, my God, it was no real life at all \(\textit{talis vita mea numquid vita erat}\)” \(\textit{conf.}\ 3.2.4\).

\(^85\) This is Stump and Kretzman’s summary of Boethius’s understanding of divine eternity in Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, “Eternity,” \textit{The Journal of Philosophy} 78, no. 8 (August 1, 1981): 431.

\(^86\) See \textit{trin.} 4.1.1: “Changeable though I am, I breath in his truth the more deeply, the more clearly I perceive there is nothing changeable about it; not changeable in time and space like bodies, nor changeable only in time and quasi-space, like the wandering fancies of our spirits, nor only in time and not even in imagined space, like some of the reasonings of our minds. For God’s essence, by which he is, has absolutely nothing changeable about its eternity or its truth or its will; there truth is eternal and love I eternal; there love is true and eternity true; there eternity is lovely and truth is lovely too.” \(\textit{Quam in tantum licet mutabilis haurio, in quantum in ea nihil mutabile video, nec locis et temporibus, sicut corpora; nec solis temporibus et quasi locis, sicut spirituum nostrorum cogitationes; nec solis temporibus, et nulla vel imagine locorum, sicut quaedam nostrarum mentium ratione motiones. Omnino enim Dei essentia, qua est, nihil}\)
Consider also what sort of descriptive analogies flow from a juxtaposition of divine simplicity and a doctrine of creation from nothing. God created us from nothing such that we are everything that we are because of God and nothing that we are without God.\(^{87}\) The two doctrines enable us to see how the Augustinian doctrine of God gives resources to challenge flawed intuitions about a concept of life. I isolate two aspects of the doctrine of creation for reflection here, one positive and the other negative. The negative side of our createdness is that we live on the edge of nothingness. Our “life” is constantly in question, always ready to unravel and to slip into non-being.\(^{88}\) Human finite “life” is thereby (non-contrastively) other than the One whose life is absolutely inviolable. Divine simplicity and perfection function in this comparison to give rules for understanding how God lives in contrast to the ones whose lives are derived. Claims about divine simplicity or perfection cannot therefore be contrasted to divine life, as if a simple (and therefore timeless, unchanging, and immaterial) God must be static. That would imply that that partially potential, partially active life alone is true life. With the knowledge of the creator through knowledge of our createdness, we can contrast the fluctuating change of our ever-uncertain temporality to the “permanent solidity of [God’s] supreme bliss” (firmamenta beatitudinis tuae).\(^{89}\) God is always moving and never moved, spontaneous, active, in short, never being anything other than fully what God is and never threatened by non-existence. The tables are turned: we are often other than what we are. We remain in im-potentiality. We might at any point slide into nothingness. We are already almost nothing. This is part of what it means for us to be created.

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mutabile habet, nec in aeternitate, nec in veritate, nec in voluntate: quia aeterna ibi est veritas, aeterna charitas; et vera ibi est charitas, vera aeternitas; et chara ibi est aeternitas, chara veritas.”

\(^{87}\) Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*.

\(^{88}\) See *vera rel.*, 11.21.

\(^{89}\) *conf.*, 4.16.29.
Life is therefore more properly predicated of God not *in spite of* but *because of* divine simplicity and perfection. God’s life cannot merely be contrasted to our partly active, partly potential life, as if the two could be in competitive relation. Rather, human life is asymmetrically related to God’s. So the positive claim is that Godhead’s life is the condition of the possibility of any life or dynamism in us. God initiates and causes every move from potency to act. We live because God lives, and we act because God acts. In this way, God concurs in every efficient cause; human and divine acts are fully compossible. “You are the life of souls (*tu vita es animarum*), the life of lives (*vita vitarum*). You live in dependence only on yourself (*vivens te ipsa*), and you never change (*et non mutaris*), life of my soul (*vita animae meae*).”

The above Augustinian answer shifts the terms of the objection by challenging the objector’s intuitions about the meaning of the word “life” (*vita*). It shores up the point underlying the structure of this chapter: *deitas* or “godness” is only discovered through the pursuit of the happy life. Without something like the doctrines of divine simplicity and creation, human creatures are doomed to a constantly frustrated quest for value and intelligibility.

Our main access to the meaning of “life itself” (partly and fleetingly knowable through philosophical ascent) should be arrived at only the work of Christ and the Spirit in salvation. For Augustine, as I will discuss in the fifth chapter, this pursuit requires faith in the scriptural claim that God causes all beings—that all existing things are actualized only because God activates them. For only if God is the bestower of all value and intelligibility does it make sense to find such value and intelligibility for one’s life. Augustine pushes against the alternative, which is that we can know

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90 conf., 3.6.10. Augustine’s account of the order of being therefore leads us to deny the self-founding of being that Giorgio Agamben finds in Aristotle. Agamben may jump from aseity of being to sovereignty, but we cannot, for precisely the aseity of being prevents us from thinking in categories of dominating or competitive sovereignty, as if God reduces all participants in being. See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 39–47. Especially important is Agamben’s discussion of Aristotelian metaphysics in relation to Antonio Negri and the problem of sovereignty.
“life” apart from God, the prime instance and sharer of life. Any attempt to know what “life” is apart from Christ are part of a process of self-salvation, a (prideful) neo-platonic askesis.

11. Predicational Objection to Divine Simplicity

The objection to the claim about predicating simplicity of Godhead might go like this: “The Bible contains stories of God acting, relating, loving, even suffering. How does a simple God relate to us? Is our participation in God real from God’s side?” Even more important: how can Godhead be said to be conjointly constituted by three? This latter line of reasoning is important to debates with Arians, who maintained that Godhead could not be shared among equals but only (and barely) participated in by inferiors.

Augustine’s answer to the problem of act-ascription is twofold. His first answer is that, before the incarnation, God did not in fact manifest the divine substance directly to the human perception in any way. Rather, angels mediated divine presence. In book III of *On the Trinity*, Augustine explains how the creation of the world consists in a set of formulae implanted into matter so that the created becoming could constantly unfold by divine activity yet without ascribing any creative powers to anything but the Lord. So, in the times before the Incarnation, God acted by means of angels. He concludes that these angels sometimes simply symbolized the Lord, sometimes a particular member of the trinity. He shows from the interchangeability of the act-ascription to “the Lord” and “the angel of the Lord” that the angel stood in for divine activity, as a sort of finite actor mediating one whose infinite presence would overwhelm.91 The second part of his answer is found in the way he develops the doctrine of the trinity, which I will discuss below.

91 See *trin.*, 3.
Closely related to the problem of predicking acts of Godhead is a problem of talking about God. Given Augustine’s terms for talk about God, how can we say anything about God? Why should we not throw up our hands and confess that Augustine’s God, like the Plotinian One who is beyond being, cannot be expressed in any way. Certainly this intuition is on to something. Not entirely unlike an exemplary human person whose goodness may remain partially intangible and inexpressible, we cannot properly think the Supreme Goodness. “Our thoughts are inadequate to their object, and incapable of grasping him as he is... no words of ours are capable of expressing him.”\(^{92}\) Words strain to reach the divine life, but they fail. Augustine draws out the implications of his doctrine of God for human speech using Aristotle’s categories: God is “good without quality, great without quantity, creative without need or necessity, presiding without position, holding all things together without possession, wholly everywhere without place, everlasting without time, without any change in himself making changeable things, and undergoing nothing.”\(^{93}\) It follows that all possible discourse about an eternal, immutable, simple divine substance is metaphorical or figurative. There is no speech in heaven. Even speech about divine actions in scripture is not direct speech about the divine substance, for the speech about the divine actions makes up the regime of signs, which has to do with how God relates to us create us and redeem us. No created thing adequately expresses God, for God is what gives unity and meaning to all created signs. We see the same asymmetry that preserves both the size-gap and the intimacy between God and creatures: God gives all words and signs their meaning, and none of them adequately express God. This is so

\(^{92}\) *Trin.*, 5.1.1.

\(^{93}\) *Trin.*, 5.2.2. “Sine qualitate bonum, sine quantitate magnum, sine indigentia creatorem, sine situ praesidentem, sine habitu omnia continentem, sine loco ubique totum, sine tempore sempiternum, sine ulla sui mutatione mutabilia facientem, nihilque patientem.”
because of what Thomas calls an excess of intelligibility. The light is so bright it seems dark. The emphasis is on our inability to capture what always exceeds. It is not as if God is like some great but inanimate object that is not adequate to our language and must therefore be anthropomorphized. To get Augustine’s answer to the predicational objection, it is necessary to go more deeply into scripture, ultimately culminating with Augustine’s discussion of the trinity.

12. Divine Life: Trinity

The proximate occasion for Augustine’s formulation of the trinity is an answer to a reverse of the predicational objection to divine simplicity: given divine simplicity, how can we predicate “three” of the simple One? How can the simple One beget, or be begotten? It is very important to keep in mind that Augustine’s doctrine of the trinity is framed in On the Trinity in response to the Arian objection that natural human languages move into incoherence with talk about trinity. The formulation of the doctrine of the trinity proceeds more substantively from claims about divine simplicity and inexpressibility on the one hand and from a Nicene trinitarian grammar on the other hand. Augustin roots his discussion of trinity in talk about salvation or in the pursuit of the “happy life” in the eternal. They key Christological point upon which his trinitarian dogma rests is that the Son’s human vita is identical to the Father’s. Christian life is only possible because the Son’s life is the basis of our participation in the Father’s life. My analysis of the texts coheres with this essentially anti-Arian, pro-Nicene point.

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Recent scholarship has shown how firmly rooted Augustine’s trinitarian dogma is in an explicit and self-conscious pro-Nicene agenda. \(^{96}\) Recent interpreters of Augustine, especially Rowan Williams, Lewis Ayres and Michel Barnes, have explained and deconstructed two common misunderstandings of Augustine’s trinitarian dogma. First, they refute the notion that Augustine’s neoplatonism led him to prioritize the single divine substance over the trinity. \(^{97}\) Second, they take on the notion that Augustine’s anthropology in *On the Trinity* anticipates Cartesian dualism’s “inner private self” or replicates a Platonizing “ghost in a machine.” \(^{98}\) These analyses trace the subtle connections between neoplatonist philosophy and Augustine’s understanding of the self. In the next chapter, I will explore more fully what it means for Augustine to overcome the neoplatonic aporia and discover the common object “inside” and private property “outside” himself. More important for the immediate goal of the chapter, the new readings help us frame how Augustine’s doctrine of God enables a fuller understanding of what is involved in calling God “life itself,” of the way that life is shared, and the way that created life participates in divine shared life. The claims Augustine makes about the trinity are intimately related to claims he makes about creation in general and the human creature more specifically. Since all legitimate talk about God is ultimately self-involving

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sapientia, the claims Augustine makes about the sharing of divine life set up the discussion in the fifth chapter about the way in which the “history” of Jesus changes how we interpret ourselves. 99

My goal in what follows is to sketch the main lines of Augustine’s thought about the trinity in order first to show the power of his answer to the predicational objection to divine simplicity (which turned out to be an objection against the trinity by Christians who assumed the divine simplicity) and second to show how he thought the trinity revealed the structure of divine life in relation to creation and salvation. Trinity and Christology together explain how divine life is transmitted in creation and salvation, and they are for Augustine a starting point to “understanding” divine living.

13. Trinitarian Discourse

For purposes of clarity, it is helpful to be a bit schematic and posit four levels of discourse to explain the conceptual structure of Augustine’s doctrine of the trinity. The first level is the scriptural language itself. This language is derived from narrative and other descriptions of divine actions, and many discussions focus for positive content on passages from John’s gospel and a few passages like Colossians 1 or Hebrews 1 and more polemically on so-called “problem passages” or narratives throughout scripture. Individual claims can be based either on narratives (such as the narrative logic of the synoptic gospels) or on specific propositional statements “the Father will send another comforter” or “the Father sent me.” As a whole, scriptural language is ambiguous (how should one reconcile the line about Christ as “first born of all creation” with passages like “I and the Father are one”?), and it is inherently unsystematic. Scriptural language therefore lends itself to a

99 For a very nice explanation of this point, along with an a simple outline of Augustine’s argument in trin., see Rowan Williams, “Augustine on Christ and the Trinity,” in Saint Augustine (Brussels : Everlee: Mercatorfonds ; Augustinian Historical Institute, 2007).
variety of interpretations. In a way, scripture invites readers to take philosophical responsibility for its claims, to show at the very least that the texts need not be interpreted to leave readers in confusion. Various trinitarian controversies come out of philosophical and interpretive decisions made about how to cope with the ambiguities in the scriptural witness.

The second level is the language of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed: the “only begotten Son of God, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one being with the Father” and (in the future) the “Holy Spirit, the Lord the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father [and the Son] and with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified.” The grammar of Nicaea is taken to summarize the gains of the second level in a normative way. These summaries prioritize the narrative logic of the gospels in relation to our salvation. This explains why it is common practice to bring scriptural language together with the Nicene language in order to show that Nicene language sufficiently reflects the teaching of scripture in its entirety. To do this, one must propose a hermeneutic to interpret specific problematic texts and give interpretations of those texts that resist the two fundamental heresies that Nicaea resists: Arianism (explicitly) and Sabellianism (implicitly). This involves showing that the Son’s life is identical to the Father’s and the Spirit’s without conflating the Son, Father, and Spirit or making the Father independent of the Son in some way (the “unbegotten” essentially opposed to the “begotten”).

The third level seeks to support Nicene language by overcoming philosophical objections stemming from various intuitions about how language works that conflict with the conclusions derived at the second level of discourse. Augustine’s discussion is directed to affirming that the creedal language can be made intelligible to human patterns of language about other things. The
third level, like the second, seeks to undergird a set of claims by working on the level of predication. For our purposes, it explains how it is that each trinitarian member can be Life Itself and have life given claims about divine simplicity and claims about diversity in Godhead. It inevitably requires the use of analogical and metaphorical terms, but it offers no imaginative resources—which for Augustine would be to debase the trinity—nor does it directly move one to understanding. The second level is sufficient for the content of the faith. The third level makes the faith not-irrational by answering the predicational objection to trinity (given simplicity) or to divine simplicity (given trinity).

The fourth level seeks to move from wrangling with “faith” and the nature of predications to the understanding. It does so by offering analogies for trinitarian life in order to purify the mind so it can progressively move “inward” and “upward” into more “spiritual” and less “carnal” understanding of Godhead. It is worth contrasting the third and fourth levels. The terms on the third level are necessarily analogous because of divine incomprehensibility; they form a syntax primarily, a set of rules for talking about God in natural human languages, and they function to clarify the creeds and meet heretical objections to them. On the fourth level, Augustine moves to proper analogies rather than analogous terms. Proper analogies provide ways to understand what is being discussed using the analogous terms on the fourth level. The first three levels (and most directly the third) regulate the fourth level analogies. Contemporary debates rage about which analogies are most fitting. These debates take place on this fourth level of discourse, though they often confuse proper analogies and analogous terms and mistake claims about trinitarian hierarchy
at the third level, as if the analogous terms on the third level translated into an analogy of a hierarchy at the fourth level.\footnote{This conflation of levels of discourse, along with claims (and corresponding accusations) of an analogical hierarchy, is one reason some social trinitarians reject some of the more traditional aspects of trinitarian discourse. For example, Miroslav Volf, one of the most sophisticated social trinitarians, writes, “I have suggested elsewhere that hierarchy is not necessary to guard either the divine unity or the distinctions between divine persons, and here I want to add that in a community of perfect love between persons who share all divine attributes a notion of hierarchy is unintelligible. Hierarchical constructions of Trinitarian relations appear from this perspective as projections of the fascination with earthly hierarchies onto the heavenly community. They seem to be less inspired by a vision of the Triune God than driven either by a nostalgia for a ‘world on the wane’ or by fears of chaos that may invade human communities if hierarchies are leveled, their surface biblical justification notwithstanding.” This argument trades on exactly the conflation of the second and third levels of discourse. See Miroslav Volf, “‘The Trinity Is Our Social Program’: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement,” Modern Theology 14, no. 3 (1998): 407–408.}

These four levels correspond roughly to the structure of Augustine’s *On the Trinity*. The first and second levels are related to one another in the first four books, the third in books V-VII, and the fourth in books VIII-XV. Laying out the conceptual structure of Augustine’s thought according to these levels helps to set out Augustine’s doctrine of the trinity, to set up future claims I wish to make about Augustinian anthropology, and to depict with greater precision what Augustine means by divine life in a way that highlights the difference between naturally shared divine life and creation-participated divine life. The greater care in approach to Augustine’s trinitarian theology will enable greater ease in making sense of the divine intimacy with creation, which in turn helps to see what is wrong with the way that Schmitt and those following him misconceive the God-world relation. An effect of my analysis will be to warrant movement into a discussion of creation and to propose implicitly one procedure for judging trinitarian discourse.

Augustine spends much of the first four books engaging scriptural language, narrative patterns, and scriptural propositions in order to show the consistency of scripture with the overarching Nicene claim to divine unity. He does so by appeal to the unity of divine action in the
scriptural narrative. In the first book, he lays out the Nicene formula and then proceeds to show how the Nicene rules for reading scripture can be formulated in a way that is coherent with the scriptural text. In the second book, he reiterates and tweaks the language of partitive exegesis and he shows how no passages indicate the separation of divine action. He reaches the major conclusion that the missions are only revealed in the incarnation. In the third book, he focuses on theophanies in order to grapple with the twin conclusions of the late coming of the missions and the unity of all divine works. Which one was acting before the “missions” of the Son and Spirit? The question, he determines, is unanswerable. In God’s ad extra workings, the trinitarian actions are indivisible, though angels can be said to represent different members of the trinity prior to Christ’s coming. No particular Old Testament theophany can therefore be attributed with certainty exclusively to a particular member of the trinity. Augustine concludes that lack of scriptural evidence of appropriations makes the question unanswerable.

Book IV is an especially interesting example and culmination of the first and second levels of discourse. The saving work of Christ at its heart depends on an asymmetrical parallel. Christ’s relationship with the Father is designated by unum, whereas his relationship with humanity by unus. Christ is “aequalis Patri per Divinitatis unitatem” but “particeps noster per humanitatis susceptionem.” Christ’s life is the Father’s life by unity of substance, whereas God’s life can only be creaturely life through unity of will, and humans cannot share a unity of substance but only a unity

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103 This point is made in Isabelle Bochet, “The Hymn to the One in Augustine’s De Trinitate IV.”

104 *trin.*, 4.8.12.
of will. Already we can see his refusal to separate consideration of Christology from Trinity (the separation is a thoroughly modern move, according to Michel Barnes). The distinction in Letter 238 is helpful: the Son and Father are “one” because they are “unius eiusdemque substantiae,” they are “ipsa principaliter uita aeterna” and not merely “partakers of eternal life.”105 The whole of Augustine’s trinitarian dogma rests on the claim that the \textit{vita beata} we receive from Jesus is the very \textit{vita} of God because the \textit{vita} of Jesus is identical to the \textit{vita} of God.

So the first move, connecting level one and two, can be narrated to circle principally around the identity of Christ’s life and the Father’s and the difference between God’s co-equal co-constitution or sharing of divine life in Godhead and God’s sharing divine life with humans. It fills out the earlier claim that the foundation of the \textit{beata vita} had to be the divine simplicity.

In \textit{City of God}, Augustine makes his claim about divine life even more explicitly. “Thus each in himself is said to be living, because he has life (\textit{vita}); and at the same time he himself is life (\textit{vita}).”106 This poses the problem of explaining difference made explicit by the predicational objection.107 If Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each identical to life, are not each identical to the other, especially since all predications of Godhead are made substance-wise? Augustine has set himself up to proceed in a way that fits the “unchanging and invisible nature” and does not rely on analogies derived from bodies (a consistent theme in \textit{On the Trinity}).108 Augustine focuses exclusively on the problem of predication. “We usually give the name ‘modification’ [\textit{accidens}] to

105 Isabelle Bochet, “The Hymn to the One in Augustine’s De Trinitate IV.”
106 \textit{civ. Dei}, 11.10. \textit{In quo ergo ad semet ipsum dicitur, non ad alterum, hoc est quod habet; sic et ad se ipsum dicitur utius havendo utique utiam, et eadem uita ipse est.}
108 \textit{trin.}, 5.1.2.
something that can be lost by some change of the thing it modifies.” Because of divine simplicity ("what he has, he is"), there also can be no underlying divine substance common to the three. The nature of the “one” prevents this. “There is nothing in [God] that can be either changed or lost.”

The only reason to speak of an underlying substance is to provide a basis for continuity amidst changing accidents. God’s predicational uniqueness follows from divine inexpressibility, which is based on God’s simplicity, infinity, and perfection. All substance-wise predications of Godhead are therefore to some degree figurative. He says that there are some things said by “metaphor” or “simile” (“position, possession, times, places”), and other things may be said more properly, “if anything, that is, can be said properly about [God] by a human tongue.” Later Augustinians like Thomas will develop a more precise way of predicating words of Godhead and distinguish between proper analogy and metaphor.

Nothing modifies God in the order of being, and therefore nothing can be said “modification-wise” (Hill’s translation) or “accident-wise” of divine substance. It follows that all attributions of modifications to Godhead must be said under some other form of predication (metaphor, for example). How then, can the Son be called both “begotten” and “unbegotten”? Augustine introduces a third type of predication to clarify the naming and refute the Arians. Augustine lists all possible substance-wise predications before pointing out that Father and Son are not said “substance-wise,” but with reference ad aliquid: “Father with reference to Son and Son with

109 trin., 5.4.5.
110 trin., 5.8.9.
111 Trin., 5.10.11 “si tamen de illo proprie aliquid ore hominis dici potest.”
God could be called “Father” substance-wise only if fatherhood could somehow be completely self-referential and not require any other term, but the concept fatherhood necessarily implies begetting. Fatherhood, therefore, is an inherently relative term. Relative-wise predications do not necessarily imply an intrinsic determination of the subject. This quality gives Augustine a basis on which to construct a set of claims about the trinity that are consistent with divine simplicity.\textsuperscript{134}

The relativity of the term “father,” however, is not enough to predicate “Father” and “Son” of God and claim that there is no intrinsic determination of God by divine fatherhood or a filial relation. Though it is true that the name father does not imply intrinsic modification, it is de facto always the case that fathers become fathers when they have daughters or sons. Fatherhood therefore always de facto implies becoming and modification. But God is said (creedally) to beget eternally, and God is simple. Therefore the relative predication need not imply becoming in God, Augustine argues. “The one is always Father and the other always Son.” It follows that “what is signified by calling them Father and Son belongs to them eternally and unchangeably.”\textsuperscript{135} So a secundum relatiuum or relationship-wise predication can be a modification, but not of God because God is God and therefore simple, eternal, and immutable. The Father and Son are called “substance-wise” whatever they are in relationship to themselves. They are called “relationship-wise” whatever they are in relation to one another.

The introduction of a new type of predication clarifies the predicational problem that occasions his inquiry: “when we say ‘begotten’ we mean the same as when we say ‘son.’” and “to

\textsuperscript{133} trin., 5.5.6.

\textsuperscript{134} Rowan Williams explains this brilliantly in Williams, “Augustine on Christ and the Trinity.”

\textsuperscript{135} trin., 5.5.6.
call something unbegotten, then, is to show that it is not a son."  It can therefore be affirmed without contradiction that the Son is “unbegotten” or “not begotten” substance-wise, and that the Son is Son or “begotten” relationship-wise. Augustine then presents some rule-like propositions about predicating things of God that follow from his distinctions. First, the distinction implies a bare-bones grammar of relation, begetting, procession, and even “persons” or “substances” to enable him to make the Nicene claims intelligible to speakers of natural languages. The relationship-wise predications have a distinctive grammar, always qualified by divine simplicity so that they do not imply intrinsic modification in Godhead. This grammar includes the nature of the Son’s relationship to the Father, begetting, and the nature of the Spirit’s or Gift’s relationship to the Father, proceeding. Because eternal begetting and proceeding are unique, the terms are predicated analogously and understood only through the missions.

The second rule is that “as for things each of the three in the triad is called that are proper or peculiar to himself, such things are never said with reference to self but only with reference to each other and creation.” The Father is only Father in relationship to the Son; Father qua Father is nothing apart from relationship to the Son. If something is said of the Father qua Father, then, it must be said only in relationship to the Son and the Father’s eternal begetting of the Son. If anything is said of the Father in relationship to himself, whatever is said must also true of the Son and the Spirit. It follows that “whatever God is called with reference to self is both said three times over about each of the persons… and at the same time is said in the singular and not the plural about the trinity.”

A third rule explains how this works in relation to creation. The Father is

116 *trin.*, 5.7.8.

117 *trin.*, 5.8.9. “Quidquid ergo ad se ipsum dicitur Deus, et de singulis personis singulariter dicitur… et simul de ipsa Trinitate, non pluraliter, sed singulariter dicitur.”
called Origin relationship-wise with respect to Son because the Father begets the Son, but Father and Son are both called Origin relationship-wise with respect to creation because originating creation is a quality of the divine substance, the Holy Trinity.\textsuperscript{118}

In order to clarify, Augustine discusses an influential biblical text that refers to Christ as “the power and wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1.24) and undertakes an illuminating thought experiment to show what he has claiming by offering something to which the reader can contrast his claim. Is “wisdom” said relationship-wise such that the Father eternally begets his own Wisdom? Augustine concludes from divine simplicity that this cannot be the case. “It is not one thing that makes him great and another that makes him God; what makes him great is what makes him God, because for him it is not one thing to be great and another to be God.”\textsuperscript{119} Because the Father begets the Son, then, the Father begets God. The difference is the relationship of begetting, which immediately and necessarily implies a unity of substance in the divine simplicity. “What being wise is for wisdom, and being powerful for power, and being eternal for eternity, being just for justice, being great for greatness, that simply being is for being. And because in that ultimate simplicity to be is not different from to be wise, there wisdom is the same as being.” The Father, therefore, cannot beget the wisdom that his Godhead depends upon.\textsuperscript{120} Rowan Williams summarizes the argument well:

\textsuperscript{118} He also notes some problems with his view. It is hard to make “Holy Spirit” a purely relative name. He opts instead for Gift. He ends up distinguishes Son and Spirit by relationship of begottenness and procession. See Isabelle Bochet, “The Hymn to the One in Augustine’s De Trinitate IV.”

\textsuperscript{119} \textit{Iren.}, 7.1.2.

\textsuperscript{120} Ayres summarizes the argument in Ayres, “The Fundamental Grammar of Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology.”:

1. Given divine simplicity (which follows from divine immateriality and eternity), any predications made of God are identical to any other predications. God’s wisdom, therefore, is identical to God’s being or substance, which is identical to God’s divinity.

2. If the Son is the Father’s wisdom, then the Son is the source of the Father’s divinity.

Augustine’s alternative in book 7:
In our own mental life, what distinguishes the three actions of the spirit is not any kind of spatial difference (since we are talking about a non-material reality), nor is it the difference between acts with diverse objects or goals. It is one mind relating to itself in diverse ways; the distinction is in the relations. The category of relation does not add anything to the essence, it only specifies a sort of conceptual position. So, a fortiori, with the Trinity. The three agencies are distinct in virtue of their relation to each other. The Father is distinct from the Son because he stands in the relation of a source to what flows from it; the Son relates to the Father as a life or agency that is derived, not simply generative; Father and Son relate to the Spirit as giving agencies relate to gift. In Father, Son and Spirit, one identical life is lived; but it is lived as generating, as generated, as given. Only in these modes is it real. There is no divine essence prior to the three specific interdependent ways in which it is lived. ‘Being God’ is ‘being Father, Son and Holy Spirit,’ nothing more and nothing less—just as ‘being a spiritual subject, a mind’ is ‘remembering, understanding and loving,’ nothing more and nothing less... He never for a moment allows that you can separate divine life from the agents who live it; that life is essentially defined as eternal loving freedom and wisdom generating, generated and given. That loving wisdom cannot exist except in this interrelated threefold life (any more than a mind can exist except as the complex threefold action that constitutes it).

It is important to be clear about what Augustine has and has not achieved in his resolution of the Arian objections about predication. He has clarified rules for making predications of Godhead in a way that respects scriptural language and the Nicene formula. In the process he makes use of analogous terms. But his use of the terms is qualified and even hesitant. “The total transcendence of the godhead quite surpasses the capacity of ordinary speech. God can be thought about more truly than he can be talked about, and he is more truly than he can be thought about.”

1. To call the Father God means that the Father is God in himself. (granted by all)
2. The Father generates the Son. (part of received grammar)
3. The Son is the divine wisdom. (assumed by the thought experiment)
4. To say that the Son is both wisdom and God is (given the grammar of divine simplicity) to say that the Son is Wisdom itself and therefore God in himself.
5. Both the Father and the Son, therefore, must be God in themselves. If both are divine, and wisdom is identical with divinity, neither can be what they are—wise, powerful, etc.—by participation. (follows from 4)
6. If both are wisdom itself, then their essence must be identical.
7. Therefore, there is no underlying substance, but rather talk of the generation of persons leads immediately to talk of the unity of divine substance.

See Anselm’s argument against for a more formal version of this thesis in Monologian, 3.

121 Williams, “Augustine on Christ and the Trinity,” 244–246.
122 trin., 7.4.7.
hesitancy when he asks about what the three should be called. He rules out almost everything, and only begrudgingly allows “three persons and one substance” or “three hypostases and one ousia.”

Perhaps we just have to admit that these various usages were developed by the sheer necessity of saying something (ut fataemur loquendi necessitate parta), when the fullest possible argument was called for against the traps or the errors of the heretics. Human inadequacy was trying by speech to bring to the notice of men what it held about the Lord God its creator, according to its capacity, in the inner sanctum of the mind (in secretario mentis), whether this was held by devout faith or by the least amount of understanding (sive per piem fidel, sive per qualemcumque intelligentiam).123

He is clear that what he accomplishes, he accomplishes for “faith” and not “understanding,” and he does so purely on the level of predication. He explicitly rejects that his view gives a basis for the exercise of the imagination, since he thinks imagination cannot be used in service of contemplating Godhead. The analogies based on this grammar all necessarily fail because nothing approximates a begetting that is the eternal and immediate basis of complete equality.

There is an essential continuity from his earlier neoplatonic discovery of the immaterial eternal to his trinitarian dogma: understanding is impeded by the sensual imagination. The animal homo (sensual person) is limited to the imaginii corporum, which is completely useless for the task of contemplating God. In order to achieve sapientia, Augustine outlines a moral, ascetic journey of purification. Like in Plotinus, one is purified by moving to the interior and rejecting all images, but for Augustine the animal homo must rely on the given images and grammar of the faith. One must “just believe” the faith. Augustine proceeds to show how his third level arguments affects talk about the faith on the level of predication. “He said both “one” and “are”; “one” in terms of being, because he is the same God; “are” in terms of their relationship, because one is Father, the other Son.”124 If

123 trin., 7.4.9.
124 trin., 7.6.12. “Et unum dixit; et, sumus: unum, secundum essentiam, quod idem Deus; sumus, secundum relativum, quod ille Pater, hic Filius.”
one cannot understand because of vice or immaturity, Augustine has at least provided a set of linguistic tools that make Nicaea and then Scripture more comprehensible to natural language users, enabling the Christian to progress to the goal of understanding. The third level rules and grammar then serve like *preambula* for the next step. One important consequence is that the analogous terms that stretch and may even break speech that the completely unique trinitarian hierarchical language relies upon cannot be used except in a rule like way to analogize. “If this cannot be grasped by understanding, let it be held by faith, until he shines in our minds who said through the prophet, *Uneless you believe, you will not understand* (Is 7:9).”

Augustine’s discussion implies ways in which this third level is less determinate than the second level. It relies even more than Nicaea on concepts that are strictly extrinsic to the biblical text. Because it is less determinate, there are two possible ways to change it, the former softer than the latter. First, one can offer a different set of analogous terms that say something equivalent. One might decide that “subsistent relations” is better than “persons” or that “*ousia*” better than “substance” or “*hypostasis*” better than “person.” Because Augustine’s discussion relies upon claims about divine simplicity, the second type of change possible requires a different conception of the divine substance. Because scripture is primarily narrative, in principle (though not likely in reality), a refined or different understanding of divine substance may be compatible with Christian trinitarian claims. It is difficult, however, to see how. Such a change would mirror the Arian objection that trinity could not be predicated of a simple God. This option is attractive to contemporary thinkers, who find it easier to accept claims about the trinity than divine simplicity. This second move, attempted by someone like Richard Swinburne, is inherently more problematic.

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125 trin., 7.6.12. “Quod si intellectu capi non potest, fide tencatur, donec illucescat in cordibus ille qui ait per prophetam, *Nisi credideritis, non intelligetis.*”
and revisionist. It amounts to a departure from classical Christian doctrines of God and often, as in the case of Swinburne, subverts Christian talk entirely. His early arguments are, according to Coakley, “embarrassingly” tritheist.¹²⁶

The fourth level of proper trinitarian analogy is based on the third. The terms on the third level are necessarily analogous because of divine incomprehensibility. But they form a syntax primarily, a set of rules for talking about God in natural human languages, and they function to make the creeds predicationally intelligible. On the fourth level, the analogies are different; they are proper analogies or vestiges rather than merely analogous terms. Proper analogies provide ways to understand what is being discussed using the analogous terms on the fourth level. The first three levels (and most directly the third) function as a check on the fourth level analogies.¹²⁷ So the moment one imagines what it might be for God to be “person” or “hierarchical” or “equal” one moves from the third into the (far less determinate) fourth level.¹²⁸ This level seems more malleable, culturally specific, and the only theologically adequate basis of a Christian “imaginary.”¹²⁹

I have presented Augustine’s doctrine of the trinity in a way that answers objections to the problem of predication (but reverses it), completes Augustine’s explication of divine life, and provides a basis for talking about the way God relates to what is not God in both salvation (attainment of beata vita) and the next topic, creation. To say that God is life is to say that God is


¹²⁷ Common analogies are the Augustinian “psychological analogy” or the “social analogy” of the trinity.

¹²⁸ Sarah Coakley’s reflections on the multiplication of analogies takes place on this level. See Coakley, “‘Persons’ in the ‘Social’ Doctrine of the Trinity: A Critique of Current Analytic Discussion.”

simple. To say that God is trinity implies a complex set of claims about a set of relational predications made of the simple divine life that are relevant for talking about creation. The grammar of trinity is, for Christians, the grammar of divine action and divine self-gift.

Discourse about creation is grammatically related to the claims made about trinity. When we predicate something like “creation” of God, creation is not predicated directly of the divine substance, but it is a relational predicate. In this way, it is possible for a simple Godhead to posit various types of creatures that participate to varying degrees in the divine substance. The basic grammar of trinitarian discourse goes something like: first, God has an identity in relation to God. Second, God has an identity in relation to creation. Third, God has an identity in relation to creation because God has an identity in relation to God.

14. The Grammar of Created Life

For Augustine, the triune God, whose life is goodness, justice, love, beauty, and truth, is the life of the world. God shapes the world so that it reflects and imitates God’s goodness, justice, love, beauty, and truth—God’s being, God’s life. An important part of the grammar of Christian talk about creation—a piece that Augustine considers to be essential to it—is that God’s life is mediated to the world hierarchically. Augustine’s response to the problem of evil against the Manicheans is the occasion in which Augustine asserts the doctrines of divine simplicity, trinity, and participation in order to assert the goodness of creation. Simplicity, trinity, and participation become the theological basis of Augustine’s doctrine of creation. The language of participation implies that divine life is mediated to the world hierarchically. I will account for how Augustine thought of this. After outlining Augustine’s response to the problem of evil, I will give a thicker
description of his more developed doctrine of creation that emphasizes how divine life organizes creation.

There are two conceptual steps necessary to understand how divine simplicity helped Augustine to overcome his problem with evil. Recall Norris Clarke’s three-tiered description of participation language: a source identical to a perfection, a subject which possesses a perfection in a limited way, and a relationship of dependence of subject on the source. Augustine’s doctrine of divine simplicity is that God is identical to all the divine perfections and therefore cannot be said to be “imperfect” in any way. His doctrine of creation is that (to use metaphorical language) God parts the nothingness of non-being and forms a set of finite boundaries that keep the disordering nothingness out. Sometimes the nothingness surrounds inert physical objects like rocks. Other times divine delimitation results in a purely intelligible communication, as in the case of angels, or in a contingent truth, as in the case of what I will do after I finish writing this. In all cases, God “makes” something out of the nothing by extending Godself into the nothingness in various ways, drawing that nothingness into the divine life and thereby making it something.

Central to his idea of creation, then, is the formation of boundaries. Just as the silence between words makes speech intelligible, so the non-being bounding each thing makes it possible to be one thing and not another. Augustine analogizes: “for the form of the spoken word passes away and is replaced by silence, and yet our speech is achieved by the coming and going of passing words and is properly and pleasingly differentiated by measured intervals of silence.”

130 According to Norris Clarke, this is one of Augustine’s great transformations of neoplatonism. For Clarke, it reached its height in Thomas’s doctrine of the limitation of act by potency. See Clarke, “The Meaning of Participation in St. Thomas,” 1958.

131 c. ep. Man., 41.47. “Nam et species vocis emissae praeterit, et silentio perimitur; et tamen sermo noster ex praetereuntium verborum decessione ac successione peragitur, et moderatis silentiorum intervallis decenter suaviterque distinguitur.” The language Augustine uses is beautiful and worth quoting at length here because it evokes
between things, the affirmation of their proper non-being, is the condition of the possibility of the affirmation of a something. Augustine suggests that God creates a set of finite things by forming eternal ideas and then (thorough mediation) by negating the nothingness in order to bring that idea into its own particular being. The negation is merely the flip-side of divine affirmation. Since God, Being Itself, is the only truly existing thing, God is ultimately affirming a limited, integrated token or communication of God’s own existence or life. God is thereby the source of creation’s “shapeliness” though the form each individual double negation takes."

Since only God is unbounded in the right way and therefore incorruptible, creation is inherently fragile. Its fragility, which is its susceptibility to slide into non-existence through corruption, decay, or violence, testifies to its goodness. “Things which are liable to corruption are good. If they were the supreme goods, or if they were not good at all, they could not be so nicely what I wish to argue here: “Everything that tends toward destruction tends toward non-being. Since, therefore, we must believe that God exists immutably and incorruptibly, but that what is called nothing clearly does not exist at all, and since you set before yourself being and non-being, and know that form is increased the more anything tends to be, while corruption is increased the more it tends not to be, why do you hesitate to say what comes from God in each corruptible nature and what comes from nothing, since form is according to nature, while corruption is contrary to nature. When form is increased, it makes something to be, and we admit that God is in the highest way. But when corruption is increased, it makes something not to be, and what is not is clearly nothing. Hence I ask, why do you hesitate to state what in a corruptible nature, which you say is both a nature and corruptible, comes from God and what comes from nothing? And why do you seek a nature contrary to God since, if you admit that he is in the highest way, you see that he does not have any contrary. Why then, you ask, does corruption remove what God gave to nature? It does not remove it except where God permits. But he permits it where he judges it most well-ordered and most just in accord with the levels of being and the merits of souls. For the form of the spoken word passes away and is replaced by silence, and yet our speech is achieved by the coming and going of passing words and is properly and pleasingly differentiated by measured intervals of silence. The lowest beauty of temporal natures also exists in this way, so that what is achieved and differentiated by the passing of things and by the death of those that are born. If our mind and memory were able to grasp the order and measure of its beauty, we would be so pleased with it that we would not dare to call the losses by which it is differentiated corruptions, but because we labor on the side of that beauty when fleeting temporal things that we love abandon us, we pay the punishment for our sins and are taught to love everlasting things. … Let us, therefore, not seek in this beauty what it does not admit… Yet let us not cling to it as lover of it, but let us pass beyond it as lovers of God, in order that, situated above it, we may judge concerning it and may not be entangled in it and judged with it. And let us hasten to the good that is not spread out in space, and does not pass in time, and from which all natures in places and times receive beauty and form. … let us cleans that gaze and sight by which, to the extent that it is permitted in this life, we see what is just” (40.46-42.48).

\[132\] _vera rel._, 11.21.
corrupted… Corruption does harm and unless it diminishes the good, no harm would be done."\(^{133}\)

In fact, fragility is a condition of the possibility of there being any good thing that is not God. Making the connection explicit, Augustine argues that “all things [naturally!] suffer privation of some good. If they were to be deprived of all good, they would not exist at all. If they were to exist and to be immune from corruption, they would be superior because they would be permanently incorruptible.”\(^{134}\)

With this broad framework for thinking about creation, Augustine is able to come to his signature conclusion about evil: evil is the wrong type of privation, or a privation that deprives something of its proper boundary.\(^{135}\) Evil is when something lacks what it ought to have; evil is therefore not a “thing” that God might have created. Augustine’s doctrine of creation thus obviates his earlier perceived need for Manichean dualism. No separate evil god needs to be posited because evil does not require an explanation in the way that good does. “Whatever things exist are good, and the evil into whose origins I was inquiring is not a substance, for if it were a substance, it would be good… Hence I saw and it was made clear to me that you made all things good, and there are absolutely no substances which you did not make.”\(^{136}\) Though evil is nothing, it disorders what ought to be, and as its disordering work nears completion, it threatens total privation. Augustine

\(^{133}\) conf., 7.12.18. “et manifestatum est mihi quoniam bona sunt quae corrumpuntur, quae neque si summa bona essent neque nisi bona essent corrumpi possent; quia si summa bona essent, incorruptibilia essent, si autem nulla bona essent, quid in eis corrumpetur non esset.”

\(^{134}\) conf., 7.12.18.

\(^{135}\) There is much debate about how to imagine boundaries properly. Natural law debates concern the Scotist, and more Augustinian, position is that God creates rational substances to discern good, better, and best. That is, the nature of a rational substance is fulfilled in loving God. The Thomist view is that there is a naturally derivable morality intrinsic in human bodies. See “Duns Soctus” in Hare, God and Morality.

\(^{136}\) conf., 7.7.18. “vidi et manifestatum est mihi quia omnia bona tu fecisti et prorsus nullae substantiae sunt quas tu non fecisti.”
speaks frequently of the creation sliding or slipping back into the nothingness from which it came.\footnote{vera rel., 11.21.}

Each form of privation is contrasted differently to Godhead, who is “incorruptible.” The first, good form of privation is the structural basis of the participation of anything that is not God in divine life. It is necessary because in order to be something, a thing needs to be “not another thing.” This “not” is a good privation rooted in the divine activity of separating in Genesis 1.\footnote{See Genesis 1, see also Miroslav Volf’s reflections on divine boundary setting in Volf, Exclusion and Embrace, chap. 2.} The second form of privation, however, is not necessary to anything, and it potentially undoes everything. Godhead is incorruptible because God cannot be contrasted to anything. According to the logic of divine simplicity, God by definition has no boundaries, which is precisely what enables God to set boundaries for other things. The first form of privation therefore has a positive relationship to the structure and power of being; the boundaries of an individual thing delimit it and thereby position it in the whole. The second form of privation is properly contrasted to the divine goodness because it just is the disordering or re-ordering or de-ordering of the proper structure of a thing. Once again in Augustine’s thought, morality is a feature of being’s ordering.

15. Two-Stage Creation

As indicated in Augustine’s response to the problem of evil, his understanding of divine simplicity and trinity enable him in different ways to posit a high level of intimacy between God and creation. The description Augustine gives of creation depends on his view of divine simplicity. In my description of divine simplicity, the matter/spirit dualism is implicit; in Augustine’s description of creation, it moves to the center. Recall the question about the primordial light that starts the
chapter: Is the primordial light spiritual or bodily? Augustine thinks an intriguing possibility: if spiritual, God creates heaven and then “perfects” it by the divine utterance. Augustine points to the two statements at the beginning of Genesis. “In the beginning God made heaven and earth” and “God said, Let light be made; and light was made.” The heaven in the first was “unformed” and “basic” heaven. The “light” in the second is “converted” light, “enlightened” and called back to the creator. This passage accomplishes three things in laying out Augustine’s grammar of creation. First, it expresses Augustine’s belief in a two-stage creation. Second, it indicates the relationship of the created light to the Word. Third, it indicates how Augustine imagines the relationship between matter and spirit and between Word and creation.

Recall Augustine’s puzzlement at the structure of the first verses of Genesis. “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light.” What happens before “then”? Augustine stipulates a two-stage creation process. In a first stage of creation, God made “formless material,” a sort of changeless, inert potentiality. The water over which the Spirit broods represents “spiritual life (spiritualem vitam) in a fluid, shifting state, as it were (quasi fluitantem), before the form given it by its conversion (ante formam conversionis).”

In the second stage, simultaneous with the first, the matter is formed into distinct and diverse beings. The process for the formation of the matter is complex. Recall the above disjunctive question: was the light physical or spiritual? Augustine concludes that the light of God’s first fiat was spiritual, and his reading narrates the light’s interaction with matter. He tentatively concludes

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139 See conf. 12, Gn. c. man, Gn. litt.
140 Gn. litt., 1.5.11.
the light includes both the angels, who seem to be constituted by a finite but purely spiritual self-communication of Godhead, and a set of non-physical ideas about creation. Augustine calls these ideas “formulae.” They are like seeds that have in them the future form of all particular things, of all future combinations of things, and of the whole creation together. The “seeds” are the mechanism by which God delimits formless, finite matter to make it into something definite. The resulting view is an evolutionary view of creation’s unfolding, with strong overtones of ancient views of gestation and pregnancy. God is the principle of the world in the way that a Father is principle of the child. “All of these things around us have been seminally and primordially created in the very fabric, as it were, or texture of the elements; but they require the right occasion actually to emerge into being. The world itself, like mothers heavy with young, is heavy with the causes of things that are coming to birth.”

Two levels on which the formulae (and therefore perfected of formed creation) participate in Godhead correspond to the previous discussion of divine simplicity and trinity. Since anything that exists participates in the simple divine existence, the material of creation, the angels, and the formulae participate in the divine essence that is shared among the members of the trinity. Their goodness, being, intelligibility, etc. are derived from Godhead. Augustine uses the metaphor of “conversion” to what happens to the matter. He imagines that when God applies the formulae to the matter, each thing “turns, everything in the way suited to its kind, to that which truly and always is, to the creator that is to say of its own being.” He takes it past simple participation in divine simplicity and begins to appropriate the members of the trinity to principle creative tasks.

141 trin., 3.9.16. “Ista quippe originaliter ac primordialiter in quadam textura elementorum cuncta jam creata sunt; sed acceptis opportunitatibus prodeunt. Nam sicut matres gravidae sunt fetibus, sic ipse mundus gravidus est causis nascentium.”

142 Gn. litt., 1.4.9.
The Father is the principle. Then there is the “Word, always adhering to the Father, that God eternally says everything, not with the sound of a voice nor with the thoughts running through the time which sounds take, but with the light, co-eternal with himself, of the Wisdom he has begotten.”\textsuperscript{143} Formless matter does not imitate this Word perfectly, because nothing created and therefore intrinsically incomplete \emph{can}. But when it turns to the Word, “it really imitates the form of the Word which always and unchangingly adheres to the Father, and receives its own form, and becomes a perfect complete creature.”\textsuperscript{144}

Since God’s self-communicating to what is not God imitates an eternal imaging, a perfect-likeness, and the unique relationship of Father to Son, the creation participates from its beginning in the subsistent trinitarian relation which is the Word. Just as the Word is constituted by the divine imaging, and therefore the relationship is not prior to the substance or the substance to the relationship but both simultaneously and necessarily present in the divine sharing, so the creation participates in Godhead through participating in the relation that is the Word.

Because God is eternal, the two stages are not two separate works, but two moments of the same \emph{operatio}. A theological description of creation inevitably brings them together. “God does not work by time-measured movements… but by the eternal and unchanging, stable formulae of his Word, co-eternal with himself, and by a kind of brooding, if I may so put it, of his equally co-eternal Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{145}

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid. “quia formam Verbi semper Patri cohaerentis, quo sempiterne dicit Deus omnia, neque sono vocis neque cogitatione tempora sonorum volente, sed coaeterna sibi luce a se genitae Sapientiae.”

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid. “imitatur Verbi formam, semper atque incommutabiliter Patri cohaerentem, cum et ipsa pro sui generis conversione ad id quod vere ac semper est, id est ad creatorem suae substantiae, formam capit, et fit perfecta creatura.”

\textsuperscript{145} Gn. litt., 1.18.36, cf. 1.15.29.
In addition, the work of divine providence by which God continually cares for what God makes is part of the same primordial *operatio*. Creation is finite and therefore inherently unstable and fragile. It is almost nothing, and for that reason might at any moment slide back into the nothingness from which it came. But God is eternal, generous, and beneficent. God’s nature is to tenderly love the world that God makes. “In God there is a supreme and holy and just courtesy (*benignitas*) and a kind of love in his activity which comes not from any need on his part but from generosity (*beneficentia*).”\(^{146}\) This generous love is the initial and sufficient reason for the *operatio* of creation, and it continues to be God’s motive for sustaining what God has made. Augustine imagines that creation is *constantly* turning to and being converted by the eternal Word, the Wisdom that forms all forms. God’s courteous, “brooding” maternal love\(^{147}\) for creation therefore issues in a two-fold effect. “There are two things, in fact, on account of which God loves his creation: in order that it should be, and in order that it should abide.”\(^{148}\)

Providence in Augustine is therefore tightly connected to creation. Here the distinction between spirit and matter functions importantly. The combination of spiritual light/formulae and matter help Augustine to articulate the way that creation that is in principle dynamic, open to the workings of God and therefore in varying degrees open to the workings of lower levels of spiritual reality that participate in God. The divine intelligence knows all the formulae perfectly, sustains them, and by God’s providence is active in the moving of every potency to its proper set of activities or powers.

\(^{146}\) *Gn. litt.*, 1.5.11.

\(^{147}\) *Gn. litt.*, 1.18.36.

But the distinction between God and creation and the claim about divine simplicity raises a problem: how does an eternal, immutable God interact with anything that is not eternal and immutable? In the first *fiat*, Augustine suggests, God simultaneously constituted and then revealed the set of formulae to angelic intelligences. Angels are the means by which eternal God, for whom all things are simultaneous, brings about the activation of the potencies that the formulae indicate. Angels, because of the spirituality of their bodies, are highly intelligent creatures. They are able to discern the formulae that God implants in creation and are able to discern ways in which the formulae work together to bring about different outcomes. This high-level capacity to manipulate the formulae in order to put the potencies of creation to use is Augustine’s explanation for what we think of as miracles.¹⁴⁹ Miracles are not qualitatively different from any other creative becoming—they are not a “breaking” of the natural order—but they only seem so to us because they happen with less regularity. They “seem marvelous to us the more difficult and mysterious they are, though to the angels themselves, being their own actions, they are quite straightforward.”¹⁵⁰ The angels’ “keenness of perception” (*sensuum subtilitates*) enables them to image the Word, for their capacity to activate potencies and know formulae imitates the divine creative activity.¹⁵¹ Because of the distinctive nature of their imaging, they are uniquely equipped to carry out the divine will in creation. “Priority goes to your spiritual creation rather than the physical order, however heavenly and full of light.”¹⁵² The outworking of the hierarchy as Augustine has described it so far is that

¹⁴⁹ See Augustine’s fascinating discussion in *trin.*, 3.

¹⁵⁰ *trin.*, 3.10.20. “Itaque illa quae per Angelos fiunt, quo difficiliora et ignotiora, eo mirabiliiora sunt nobis illis autem tanquam suae actiones notae atque faciles.”

¹⁵¹ *trin.*, 3.9.17.

¹⁵² *conf.*, 3.6.10. “priora enim spiritualia opera tua quam ista corporea, quamvis lucida et caelestia.”
spiritual intelligences know how to use the material creation properly in carrying out the divine will. Their own flourishing consists in their attention to the divine will.

In the matter/spirit distinction, Augustine imagines “spirit” to have varying levels of existence. God, outside of and above this hierarchy, is the prime instance of spirit toward which all other spiritual life strains. God, the simple, infinite One, knows all potencies perfectly, for God alone has the power to separate the nothingness enough to communicate something of divine life. Angels, which are purely spiritual creatures, are next. They have a derived power to share divine life by activating potencies. Their intelligence is vastly superior to embodied creatures because they do not have the limitation of localized material-bodily perspective. In this way, angels share imperfectly in the relation that is the divine Wisdom. Human creatures have something of the same intelligence angels have, but they are limited by both the means of embodied apprehension and by their bodily passions, which are difficult to control. Augustine therefore extends the hierarchy to everyday life, instructing his reader to “use the [material] world and not enjoy it… so that by means of corporeal and temporal things we may comprehend the eternal and spiritual.” The spiritual (the “heaven of heavens” of pure forms God created) forms all material things so that they, too, are “spiritual” signs. Augustine differentiates spirit and matter as two types of substance that God creates, though they are not concretely separable. The purpose of the distinction is to show an order of priority; it can be argued that the latter receives relative value from the former insofar as the former simply is the latter’s turning to the Word. The hierarchy is affirmative because spirit does not properly diminish matter, but it names only what perfects it. Spirit just is the form that matter takes, the something in between the nothing that is the participation in divinitas.

153 doc. Chr., 1.4.4.
God’s work so that creation abides is providence. Book III of On the Trinity addresses the workings of divine providence indirectly but in a way that connects nicely to the present discussion. The immanent concern of the book is the question of whether or not God spoke through angelic messengers in theophanies under the old dispensation, and the implicit question it asks everywhere is whether the angelic message is exclusive of direct divine speech. Augustine answers these questions by means of a discussion of divine providence. For Augustine, all the functions of nature serve “the divine command, but in those changes and permutations of bodies which happen with steady regularity it ceases to astonish… Other events, however, though products of the same natural order, are less familiar because they occur at longer intervals.” Augustine denies that the natural ordering, that is, the initial formulae, of the cosmos must be suspended or violated for God to intervene or communicate in the world. The universe is not closed to the divine working, for God has formed the potentiality God made (the initial “formless and void” earth God made) so that creation remains plastic to the divine will and in varying degrees to all other rational wills even in its relatively formed state.

Augustine’s claim about creation’s plasticity to spirit does not undermine a high view of philosophical and scientific discovery. Scientists recognize events through a lens peculiar to the relevant capacities specified by their discipline. They explain the order of causality, discerning regularities through inductive inferences about proximate and secondary causes. But their capacities are relatively superficial in that they do not reach to transcendent causes; they do not even try to do

154 trin. 3.2.7 “Voluntas Dei causa superior omnis corporeae mutationis. Exemplo id demonstratur. Sed alius est ordo naturalis in conversione et mutabilitate corporum, qui quamvis etiam ipse ad nutum Dei serviat, perseverantia tamen consuetudinis amisset admirationem: sicuti sunt quae vel brevissimis, vel certe non longis intervallis temporum, coelo, terra, marique mutantur, sive nascentibus, sive occidentibus rebus, sive alias aliter atque aliter apparentibus: alia vero quamvis ex ipso ordine venientia, tamen propter longiora intervalla temporum minus usitata.”
so. Scientific and philosophical descriptions are parallel to and non-competitive with what can also be described slow progression of matter towards its form, which is given by the Word.

The transcendent cause of all things is a matter for theologians to discern, for the will of God, identical to the divine being, is the transcendent cause of all things. Divine will, because identical with God, is therefore spiritual and hidden from direct, empirical observation. Augustine gives his reader an example of transcendent causality in order to clarify the relation to particular efficient and angelic causes. His explanation shores up claims about non-competitive agency: he imagines a person who gets sick because she performed a work of mercy. Since she showed mercy out of loving obedience to God, the transcendent cause of her actions is her participation in God’s eternal Wisdom. A physician examining the patient, however, would only be able to discern proximate causes for this illness (i.e., the exhaustion of the body, etc.). The physician qua physician could not “see” not the transcendent cause. Augustine takes his illustration further. He imagines that the woman who works mercy enlisted others in her aid. These others do not share her pure motives and thus do not participate directly in divine wisdom. But even they—perhaps despite their own accounts of their action—would be moved by the divine wisdom because their motives could not be totally devoid of good. Say their motives were self-preservation or a desire to appear good. These desires, though disordered, are not without share in the divine love, which orders the cosmos. By means of the resources given by his account of creation’s being and his response to the problem of evil, Augustine is able to extend transcendent divine causality to include not only all human willing, but also to include all the non-rational instruments used in service of the divine end to the extent that they participate in any way in the divine goodness. “Nothing happens visibly and
in a manner perceptible to the senses which does not issue either as a command or as a permission from the inmost invisible and intelligible court of the supreme emperor…\(^{155}\)

The divine causality, unlike any other type of causality, makes all things good and moves them from the inside or non-violently to the extent that they move. Their failure to move results in their disintegration, and it is explicable only by a high degree of permissiveness God allows composed creation for the sake of its organization into rational personality.\(^{156}\) Augustine then relates God’s providence to human and angelic providence: the greater one’s rational ability to participate self-consciously in the divine use of creation (i.e., the more spiritual one is), the more one can obtain mastery from the “inside” over what is less good and therefore less alive.

Divine non-violent causality can be usefully contrasted to violent demonic causality.\(^{157}\) For Augustine, “nature” cannot be broken, but it can be put to “unnatural” and unhappy use. In an excursus in On the Trinity, Augustine relates angelic intelligences to creation through his discussion of how demonic powers might bring about “miracles” that imitate the divine causality. Augustine suggests that angels and demons have a greater degree of control over nature due to their understanding of creation’s formed-plasticity (to use Thomistic language, the set of specific natural passive potencies in creation). For humans, who are constantly discovering potentialities by science, creation’s possibilities (including possibilities to reckon with the scarcity of materiality) are underutilized for want of knowledge and because of the fragility of materiality. Had the world remained unformed, anything in principle would have been able to be caused. God alone retains the

\(^{155}\) trin. 3.4.9. “Nihil enim fit visibiliter et sensibiliter, quod non de interiore invisibili atque intelligibili aula summi Imperatoris, aut jubeatur, aut permittatur, secundum ineffabilem justitiam praemiorum atque poenarum, gratiarum et retributionum, in ista totius creaturarum amplissima quadam immensa republica.”\(^{156}\) For more on high-level divine permissiveness, see Adams, Christ and Horrors.\(^{157}\) I explore these concepts in more depth in chapter 5.
ability to cause anything, suspending the entire order of forms God has imposed on materiality, for God created them all. But God does not need to suspend the forms, for the “forms” that we perceive are far less determinate than they seem. Two points remain to underscore divine sovereignty and the difference even from angelic agency. First, God limits the scope of demonic activity. Second, all demonic or angelic activity works (relatively) from the “outside” according to the structure God has put in place. They mimic the devil, whose libido dominandi subverts the divine justice for the sake of power or personal advantage. God alone, the only Eternal One and “inmost and supreme pivot of all causes” can move creation from the inside in any absolute way. Angels participate in God’s internal moving of lower things by moving them for the sake of justice and therefore by the divine goodness. The demons, however, pursue personal advantage at the expense of justice. The question of the unjust misuse of creation will come up in chapter 5’s discussion of incarnation and atonement.

Given the distinction between transcendent and proximate causality, and given the control that higher rationality has over lower forms of life, we can see how God’s presence and will can be mediated to creation through an angel. Angelic and divine presence need not exclude one another. The two types of “presence” can be simultaneous and cooperative without competition because God and angels exist in an asymmetrical relation of dependent intimacy and therefore “exist” in fundamentally different ways. The assumption that the “direct” presence of God must operate by causing things only in an “external” way subsumes God into the created system of particular causes and in effect denies the universal nature of the divine causality (and therefore divine eternality, immutability, and simplicity). Having set up how God who is invisible and invariable acts generally and immediately in every cause, it is coherent for Augustine to say that the action of the angelic
messenger, which either presents its own body or “engineers” another body, is God’s own act and communication, a sort of illocutionary speech act. Even “natural” ways that God communicates (contrast, for example, the burning bush to the rock Jacob sets up at Bethel) serve as divine speech acts.  

This account fits best with the scriptural claim that God speaks when the angel of the Lord appears. Augustine thus concludes: “whenever God was said to appear to our ancestors before our savior’s incarnation, the voices heard and the physical manifestation seen were the work of angels.”

Augustine’s discussion of angelic communication helps us understand the hierarchical definition of life in Augustine. It shows nicely how divine life is mediated through angelic intelligences. Rationality (which transcends matter and can bring it under control) discerns how best to manipulate and use material creation for good ends. Because of the distinction between God and creation, God can act immediately in every cause. Because of the hierarchy of spirit over matter, varying degrees of rationality can activate different potencies in the creation without violating the order God alone can suspend. The more rational, the more internally God can act in a creature. Rationality, therefore, is connected to but does not fully explain freedom. To take a cue from Herbert McCabe, rational creatures are most free when only God moves them to act, for God is the life of our life. The hierarchy of spirit over matter, unlike the distinction between God and creation, is only relative. It implies not only a spectrum and intensification of animation culminating in rationality, but also the rule of rationality over materiality, or perhaps the formation


159 *trin.*, 3.10.27. “antiquis patribus nostris ante incarnationem Salvatoris, cum Deus apparere dicebatur, voces illae ac species corporales per Angelos factae sunt.”

of materiality by rationality. The following chapter will explore more carefully the nature of human life by examining the relationship of inner/outer more carefully. Human life, it turns out, is a different type of participation in the Word than angelic life, but the way humans can organize creation by means of rational use and discernment of the formulae is not qualitatively different than angelic use. Human technology participates in the same divine providence administered by the divine agency in the angels and divine permission in the demons.

16. Conclusion: Meanings of Life

It is now possible to fill out the definition of life offered above: “the capacity to respond to and organize the environment on which one depends for the sake of creaturely self-proliferation or flourishing.” What differentiates living things from non-living things is that living things are not determined to a single end, but can, to varying degrees, use different formulae so that they can go on living, self-proliferating, flourishing. Inert objects are not alive because they do not respond to stimuli, nor can they have anything analogous to intention. Classically, non-living things have only a “natural power” that determines them to a single end. Fire imitates life, but it cannot but burn; it has no access to the seminal formulae. Water cannot but do what its properties require. Augustine imagines that all living things are constituted by souls. Each higher life-form contains a qualitatively better soul. The lowest soul is vegetative. Vegetative life, which includes all plant life, responds to stimuli by moving, adapting, organizing matter so as to ensure that it will go on individually and self-proliferate for the sake of species-being. It has a sort of life by which the use of the formulae is pre-programmed in it. When it does not make use of the formulae and self-proliferate effectively, or when its time runs out, it dies or goes extinct. Animal life is vastly diverse, but it is distinguished by a metaphorical “sensitive soul.” The sensitive soul perceives stimuli from its environment and
responds intentionally in varying degrees. Because some animal life is closer to plant life than human life, some of these “intentional acts” are very far from what is normally considered intentional. But some approximate human life quite closely, even mimicking or possibly participating in human linguistic ability.

Human creatures organize the world not only through animal sense apprehension, but—to be broad—by making the world intelligible through use of concepts, language, etc. The use of the formulae can be spiritual not only in its ability to grasp intelligible truth, but also in its ability to grasp goodness. Unlike other animals, human creatures can desire justice. Other creatures can only desire their own happiness. Human rational use of created formulae enable remarkable, miracle-like technological advance when it is directed by justice, and it enables horrifying, destructive, demonic technical advance when it is (more often) directed by the devilish libido dominandi. Almost all human technological advance is ambiguous. Angels are pure rational spirits. They are therefore not limited by space or by time. They can only desire either justice or their own happiness, and without the possibility of progress or character development enabled by bodies, they have a single choice: either justice or their own power. Good angels can organize material creation (their environment in a way, but they do not depend upon it) according to the will of God, which is justice. Bad angels organize it from the libido dominandi, the desire for powers over others. God is identical to justice. God only always organizes creation out of and for the greatness of divine goodness in pure divine generosity. Since God is identical to God’s life, the divine justice that organizes creation (of which God is completely independent) that is identical to divine life, not the way creation relates to God. All life is most alive not only when it makes use of the formulae, but

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161 trin. 13, and see ch. 5 below.
when its use approximates the divine ordering or justice. When each thing is fully what it is, it exists and lives most fully. For Augustine, Irenaeus’s claim is fitting: “The glory of God is the human being fully alive.” Full human life always turns to the Word for form and to the world for justice.

The Son, after all, the Word, does not have an unformed life, seeing that for him not only is it the same thing to be as to live, but to lives is for him the same as to live wisely and blessedly. A creature, on the other hand, even a spiritual and intelligent or rational one, which seems to be closer to that Word than others, can have an unformed life, because while for it also to be is the same as to live, to live is not the same as to live wisely and blessedly; if it turns away from the unchangeable Wisdom, after all, it lives foolishly and miserably. It is formed, however, by turning to the unchangeable light of Wisdom, the Word of God; it is to the one, you see, from whom it received existence, just to be and to live anyhow, that it turns in order to live wisely and blessedly. Eternal Wisdom, of course, is the origin or beginning of the intelligent creation; this beginning, while abiding unchangeably by itself, would certainly never cease to speak to the creature for which it is the beginning and summon it by some hidden inspiration to that from which it derived its being, because in no other way could it possibly be formed and perfected. 162

Based on the account I’ve given in this chapter, three Augustinian claims can be made sense of. The first is that domestic life cannot be contrasted to public life, because God is the object common to all and the Living One. God organizes matter for the sake of creaturely self-proliferation and flourishing according to the logic of God’s own inner life. The received distinction between domestic and public that we see in the New Testament, the Church Fathers, and Arendt is destabilized. Second, God’s difference from the world cannot make God contrastable to creation like Schmitt’s political theology supposes. Sovereignty might be configured differently, as I will

162 Gen. litt., 1.5.10. 10. “Non enim habet informem vitam Verbum Filius, cui non solum hoc est esse quod vivere, sed etiam hoc est vivere, quod est sapienter ac beate vivere. Creatura vero, quamquam spiritualis et intellectualis vel rationalis, quae videtur esse illi Verbo propinquior, potest habere informem vitam; quia non sicut hoc est ei esse quod vivere, ita hoc vivere quod sapienter ac beate vivere. Aversa enim a Sapientia incommutabilis, stulte ac misere vivit, quae informitas ejus est. Formatur autem conversa ad incommutabile lumen Sapientiae, Verbum Dei. A quo enim exstitit ut sit utcunque ac vivat, ad illum convertitur ut sapienter ac beate vivat. Principium quippe creaturae intellectualis est aeterna Sapientia; quod principium manens in se incommutabiliter, nullo modo cessat occulta inspiratione vocationis loqui ei creaturae cui principium est, ut convertatur ad id ex quo est, quod aliter formata ac perfecta esse non possit.”
argue below. Finally, the world is conceived most fundamentally as a gift. The gift precedes the disorder and damage. There is no primal scarcity or primal competition, but primal generosity. The something that God calls out of nothing is continually overseen by a “supreme and holy and just courtesy and a kind of love… which comes not from any need… but from generosity.” To say that mortals look at outward appearances but that the Lord looks at the heart in part implies these three claims: God is both above and most interior, God’s difference makes divine intimacy a form of empowerment, and all creation, whose inner pivot is the Lord, is most properly organized for the creaturely flourishing of all.
This is another paradox, that many of the most important impressions and thoughts in a person’s life are ones that flash through your head so fast that fast isn’t even the right word, they seem totally different from or outside of the regular sequential clock time we all live by, and they have so little relation to the sort of linear, one-word-after-another-word English we all communicate with each other with that it could easily take a whole lifetime just to spell out the contents of one split-second’s flash of thoughts and connections, etc.—and yet we all seem to go around trying to use English (or whatever language our native country happens to use, it goes without saying) to try to convey to other people what we’re thinking and to find out what they’re thinking, when in fact deep down everybody knows it’s a charade and they’re just going through the motions. What goes on inside is just too fast and huge and all interconnected for words to do more than barely sketch the outlines of at most one tiny little part of it at any given instant.  

1. Introduction

Several recent influential readings of Augustine either directly or indirectly examine the meaning of Augustine’s concept of the inner self. Perhaps the most influential of them all, Charles Taylor has presented Augustine as the anticipation of the Cartesian “buffered self” that cuts itself off from the outside world and constantly gazes on the inner theater. Philip Cary, following the Augustine scholar Robert O’Connell, presents Augustine through the lens of neo-platonic metaphysics. Cary has argued both for an Augustinian ideal of “inner public self” and the unwitting creation of the “inner private self” that has come to dominate modern accounts of subjectivity. In both accounts, Augustine comes off as innovating within neo-platonist tradition and anticipating the way in which the separation of wills presages an inward turn. Decartes and Kant are heirs to this legacy on his reading. Jennifer Herdt has presented Augustine from a slightly different angle as the

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2 Taylor, Sources of the Self.
forerunner of the concern with inward motivation. Luther is the proper heir to this legacy. In biblical studies, Krister Stendhal famously declared Augustine the origin of the “introspective conscience of the west” as the preface to his influential re-reading of Paul.

In response to Charles Taylor’s portrayal of the Cartesian Augustine and the readings of Augustine either inspired or consistent with him, a set of revisionist readings of Augustine have emerged. Rowan Williams wrote some influential papers over a period of ten years. In his 1990 paper, “Sapientia and the Trinity,” Williams describes eastern criticisms of western trinitarian thought. The eastern criticisms connect the doctrine of God to theological anthropology. They criticize Augustine for starting (in the order of knowing and predication) with a unitary divine substance and making sense of the three only after making sense of the one. Augustine’s account of God is then related to theological anthropology by a set of moral norms. The unitary divine substance, the argument goes, underlies an important formal feature of all western norming practices: the “private self” as “arbiter and source of the value in the world.” The stakes are high, for the “private self”, buttressed by the “unitary substance” of the Holy Trinity, is the “fundamental illusion of modernity.” Williams accepts the eastern criticism of the views associated with this reading of Augustine, but he denies that the readings of Augustine are accurate. He concludes instead, “Augustine’s reflection on the trinitarian being of God opens up theological possibilities very different from the proto-Cartesian or proto-Kantian tendencies with which he has been

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4 Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*.


charged. By denying the link between Augustine and the proto-Cartesian reading, he is able to use Augustine over-against the Augustinian legacy. Augustine becomes a source of critique of the very inner private self associated with his thought.

Williams’s reading of Augustine has influenced the work Lewis Ayres, Robert Dodaro, Michel Barnes, and Luigi Gioia, all of whom offer careful exegetical refutations of long held claims about Augustine. They especially attack arguments that suggest that Augustine held a quasi-modalist understanding of the trinity and that the Augustinian self anticipated a (traditionally read) Cartesianbuffered self. These new Augustinian theologians tend to refuse the lure of reading Augustine through his genealogical relationship to neo-platonism or the present.

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8 Ibid., 318.


When the lens through which he is read shifts, Augustine emerges at the same time less systematically philosophical and more theologically useful than other more philosophical methods of reading him allow. Recently others have buttressed the impression of Augustine as a theologian first by mining Augustine’s letters and sermons, which expose Augustine the polemicist, the churchman, and the pastor. In doing so, they focus on his pro-Nicene trinitarian dogma and his account of Christ’s person. These dogmatic aspects become central to Augustine’s thought, interpreting all others. For example, Lewis Ayres re-reads Augustine’s trinitarian theology, taking a line very similar to the one Williams takes about the possibilities that Augustine’s doctrine of the trinity opens for debates about God and the soul. This rereading of the arguments in books V-VII of *On the Trinity*, in turn, has implications for both proto-Cartesian and social trinitarian critics. Robert Dodaro re-reads Augustine’s thought about justice and society through Augustine’s Christology in the *City of God* and other places. Gioia provides a reading of *On the Trinity* in which Augustine’s Christology is central. On their accounts, Augustine is not a strict or consistent Plotinian. Rather, he reads like he is conceptually bending received pagan thought even as he innovates further into Christian orthodoxy. These re-readings have breathed new life into the old debates. They confirm what Rowan Williams argues: Augustine’s “rhetoric remains Platonic and dualistic even when the substance of his thought is moving in a quite other direction.”

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15 An especially good example of this approach is Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine*.

16 Ayres, “The Fundamental Grammar of Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology.”

17 Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine*.


Cary’s *Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self* is an especially good example of the line of thought that the newer Augustinians attack. Cary shows persuasively how Augustine adapts most of his philosophical terminology from Plotinian thought. His approach is different than the revisionist Augustinians, however, because of different hermeneutical and philosophical assumptions. He subordinates Augustine’s theological and dogmatic claims to his broader philosophical and genealogical account of Augustine’s thought. When the philosophical and genealogical Plotinian lens is used, however, it yields a highly idiosyncratic Augustine. For example, Cary argues that Augustine had a quasi-Arian trinitarian theology, and he bases his claim on a genealogy of Augustine’s understanding of divine incomprehensibility. Since the Word is intelligible but the Father is not, the Word is subordinate to the Father, even though, as Ayres shows, Augustine’s doctrine of divine simplicity leads him to reject this option.

Cary often speaks about how certain Augustinian moves “fit into” certain ideas that Plotinus had, despite his argument that he ought to be fitting the philosophy into a more overarching theological argument. In this way, Cary’s account of the genesis of Augustine’s views seems to overdetermine the interpretation of Augustine’s views. I resist what I consider to be metaphysically constrained versions of Augustine in favor of an Augustine (and a Christian theology) that uses philosophy in an ad hoc and non-systematic way, that allows the philosophical and dogmatic directions of Augustine’s thought to diverge. I do not think Cary implies that Augustine has a systematic philosophy, only that my intuition in reading is to subordinate his reception of philosophical thought to the theological grammar of his thought. A doctrinal and even dogmatic

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21 Ayres, “The Fundamental Grammar of Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology.”
22 e.g., Cary, *Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self*, 57.
logic forestalls—or perhaps makes extremely difficult—the development of any systematic speculative Christian philosophy. The formal claim about how doctrinal claims work underlying my analysis, then, is that there is no such thing as “systematic Christian philosophy.” Various contemporary debates about transcendence and immanence, or about Karl Barth’s “protestant” non-metaphysical theology are therefore displaced in favor of the ad-hoc defense and explication of dogmatic assertion.\textsuperscript{23}

In the following, I wish to start from this broad approach or trend to think through how the “inner self” ought to be re-imagined if it no longer has to anticipate the western inner self that is normally associated with Descartes (but, in the end, is far more conducive to a certain understanding of global capitalism, as I argued in the second chapter).

I begin by discussing the structure of the inner self. My question in the first part of this chapter is twofold. What is the inner self according to Augustine? In what sense is the inner self private? I take it that Cary provides a convincing reading of the origin of Augustine’s thought and of his basic philosophical terminology. I lay out the terms and summarize Cary’s argument. Second, I offer a reading of Augustine’s account of memory in book X of the \textit{Confessions}. Book X provides a way of thinking through in general terms how Augustine imagines interiority. He relates memory to the question of its origin and its distortions, which amount to distortions of the self: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. How did our memories get to be the way they are? Two important conceptual issues emerge: the problem of the finitude or limitation of the self and the distortion of the self.

In order to get more insight on both issues, I present Augustine’s way of distinguishing the

\textsuperscript{23} For example of the protestant, non-metaphysical theology, see Bruce L. McCormack, \textit{Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).
body from the soul in book XII of On the Trinity. This helps to clarify how Augustine thinks of the inner self and outer self, and it also helps to clarify how he imagines what went wrong. I focus on sin as concupiscent dispersion—as opposed to prideful self-assertion or curious mathesis. Speaking at a high level of abstraction, sin a form of illegitimate trading of the common whole for private good, the choice of personal happiness over justice. As concupiscent dispersion, it scatters the self in the realm of unlikeness. In my analysis I wish to press a distinction between the high level, abstract definition of sin and an analysis and phenomenology of its effects. Though the abstract, philosophical definition remains underdeveloped in Augustine’s own writing, later Scholastic philosophers work out more technically precise language for the higher-level abstract way of talking about sin. Augustine seems more comfortable with phenomenological description, though the higher-level abstraction is consistent with all of Augustine’s ways of describing.

My analysis of these passages funds two conclusions about a distinction between inwardness and privacy in Augustine. First, the “inner self” proper to finitude—the memory in Confessions and the rational power in On the Trinity—is not private, but, in its deepest sense, finite and bounded so as to give way to the object that is common to all. Paradoxically, the only way to affirm its true nature is to refuse to make it the absolute source of coherence or self-identity, to cancel itself out in a way that gives way to God, the only true source of self-identity. Human creatures have the deepest “inside” of any embodied creature, and this feature of their constitution makes them most open to intimate closeness with the Lord. Whether the memory can be called “public” or “private” has to do with how it is exercised. It is not intrinsically either, though it was created to be public. It is therefore “naturally” public in an important sense, for the claim that the “inside” is properly

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24 See Gioia, The Theological Epistemology of Augustine’s On the Trinity. For more on mathesis, see Griffiths, Intellectual Appetite. Augustine’s terms are less systematic than mine—concupiscence, as I argue in the next chapter, can describe all sin.
public is equivalent to the claim that the whole self is intrinsically rational. Second, our inner self becomes private through a certain type of exercise: a choice of our own happiness over justice. This choice disperses us in the realm of unlikeness and collapses us in on ourselves. Augustine imagines a re-publicization of memory through the giving of reasons.\(^{25}\) In this way, for us humans, “public” and “private” are less structural features of reality than they are moral, indicating not so much something structural about us as the direction in which our affections tend.

2. Cary on Neo-platonic Architecture

According to Cary, Augustine’s “invention” of the inner private self is “an episode in the history of the Platonist concept of intelligibility.”\(^{26}\) Inwardness was first emphasized by the Stoics, who used the idea in their broadly determinist system to specify how virtue lies within our own power: “turn to yourselves.”\(^{27}\) The inward turn arose subsequently in Platonist tradition to signify the human ability to participate through knowledge in a world that is realer and truer than the world of sense, an “intelligible realm” and its corollary in humans, the soul.\(^{28}\) In this way, the dualism of body and soul arises from a prior dualism between intelligible and physical.\(^{29}\) According to Cary, Plato’s metaphysics and epistemology were underdeveloped in crucial ways. Aristotle offered one possible perfection of what Plato left incomplete. Aristotle argued that the soul is potentially identical to all its forms. Plotinus adopted Aristotle’s identity theory of knowledge and built a superstructure around it—Cary calls it an “architecture”—that makes sense of the inward

\(^{25}\) Ken Surin provides a significant challenge to this by criticizing doctrines of pre-established harmony in his chapter on radical orthodoxy, “Models of Liberation IV: The Religious Transcendent,” in Surin, Freedom Not Yet.

\(^{26}\) Cary, Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self, 9.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., 10. See also Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject; Hadot, Philosophy as a Way of Life.

\(^{28}\) Cary, Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self, 24.

\(^{29}\) Ibid.
Cary stipulates four levels of the imagined edifice. The first, bottom level is matter and the material world. The second level is incorporeal and therefore non-spatial: the soul. The third level is the divine mind, identical with known forms. This level is identical to the Aristotelian divinity, the agent intellect, which is identical with platonic forms as ideas in God’s mind. The highest principle, the One, is beyond mind. It can neither know nor be known. Important for our purposes is the development Cary traces in the second level. The soul, itself hierarchical, always contemplates what is above it and is therefore eternally identical with what it contemplates. With the Plotinian turn upward, the soul finds the intelligible world and the divine mind. The upward turn is crucial, and may be frustrated, for it also might look down to the material world.

How does Augustine get from a four-tiered edifice to an “inner” and an “outer”? Cary imagines three concentric circles, which correspond to the four-tiered edifice. On the inside is the One, and on the outside is the soul. Between the two is Mind. Outside of the largest circle is matter. The soul itself can be divided; it is in the crucial position to turn either inside or outside. Inside it finds the common world of intelligible truth with its vanishing point in the excess of intelligibility that is the unknowable One. Outside it finds the dispersed world of matter. Aristotle’s identity theory of knowledge adds a powerful mystical, almost religious aspect to Plotinian philosophy. The self-purification that is the inward-turn brings the soul to increasing knowledge of its true identity with Mind. On this view, then, the inward movement is always upward movement to a realm of increasing intelligibility and therefore publicity.\(^3\)

According to Cary, Augustine accepted this framework, but he rejected the Aristotelian

\(^3\) Ibid., 25.
theory that the soul is identical to what it knows by a correspondence of the mind to the thing.\textsuperscript{11} The Aristotelian framework would imply that the soul can become identical to God (as Mind), and it is therefore inconsistent with the Christian doctrine of creation and the distinction between God and creatures. Without the Aristotelian theory, then, Augustine avoided the idea that we human creatures could be made identical to a common God on the inside. His rejection of the Aristotelian element that made the Plotinian theory possible therefore both introduced a crucial distinction between Creator and creature, a central Christian distinction, and required something to replace the Aristotelian theory.

Augustine, we might say in summary of Cary’s argument, looked inside and found potential for both inner private and inner public selves depending on the self’s turn. Whether the self is public or private, Augustine thought, was not a metaphysical claim, but a moral one, roughly analogous to the way in which angels could either use their rational capacities for good or for evil. Augustine also might be credited with historicizing it, though his account of the origin and fall of the soul is notoriously difficult.\textsuperscript{12} He recollected a past transparency and looked forward to its future restoration. The present inside, however, was intransigently cloudy to him. He was enigmatic to himself, a mystery that could only be solved through resources not available to him in the present. He talked about the memory, then, as the source of both identity and difference. His memory was identical with his “self,” yet he found himself puzzling and forgetful. His memory was always opening up to God, apart from whom he made no sense, yet he constantly grasped for things that made him forgetful of God. In sum: like himself, like God, unlike himself, unlike God—both in good and bad ways.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 29.

\textsuperscript{12} O’Donnell, Augustine; Rombs, Saint Augustine & the Fall of the Soul: Beyond O’Connell & His Critics.
Cary’s detailed analysis of Augustine’s philosophical and theological development suggests the following conclusions about Augustine’s candidate for replacement.33 (1) Augustine needed to posit a separation between God and the soul. (2) One of Augustine’s first philosophical insights concerned the possibility of immaterial and incorporeal intelligible truth. This funded his initial platonic turn. (3) It also complicated things for him. He could not posit merely a spatial difference between God and the soul, or indeed, between the soul and intelligible truth. God, the soul, and intelligible truth are incorporeal and therefore have no spatial location. They cannot therefore be separated spatially. He quotes Augustine “The things which are understood [intelliguntur] are understood to be located nowhere else than in the very mind that understands them, for at the same time they are also understood not to be contained in space [non contineri loco].”34 This is “the fundamental point of departure for the development of Augustinian inwardness. Augustine forges the conception of the self as an inner space in order to have a place where these immutable and divine things are found.”35 (4) In order to avoid the implication that the human soul is immutable and divine like the truth found in it, Augustine has to reject the claim that the truth inheres in the soul like a property. The truth, he concluded like any good Platonist would, need not exist anywhere. It therefore can be conceived without thinking of it inhering in the soul as property. But then he had to find some other way of relating divine truth to the human soul.36 (5) Having already rejected the Manichean view that the soul is forced from the truth, he entertains a startling and heretofore unexplored possibility: the soul is joined—and separated—from the truth by means of

33 My presentation of the propositions is highly selective. I glide over more controversial aspects of Cary’s proposal in service of what is more immediately useful.

34 imm. an., 10.


36 Ibid., 107.
the will, the *voluntas*. The fate of soul and body are thereby connected. The soul is the life of the body, and intelligible truth the very life of the soul, for the Truth is identical with God. When the soul turns by its voluntary power to a world of lesser, sensible things, it turns away from the source of life and being, rapidly depleting its own meager resources for continued being.\(^6\) This argument proceeds from the assumption that the soul has a different kind of being from God. It is not nothing. But it is almost nothing in comparison to the divine majesty. (7) There are two types of inwardness depending on what resides in an imagined inner “space” of memory. When the finite soul takes in or absorbs immutable truth, it is inclined to the life of that truth, Life itself. When the finite soul takes in “external” and corporeal things, it inclines itself to the life of those things, which is really a sort of non-being. The “private” inwardness so emphasized by some contemporary readers of Augustine is, according to Augustine’s own categories, a feature of sin, for sin is turning from Life and therefore the source of the soul’s privation of its proper being. “Created rather than divine inner self” is “not necessarily a private inner self.”\(^8\) Inner privacy is therefore a temporary phenomenon. Inwardness, however, is a created and essential feature of the self. (9) Rightly understood, there are two types of “inward turns” possible in Augustine’s thought corresponding to the two types of inwardness. The first inward turn inclines the soul to its own private concerns and worldly cares. The second inward turn might be described as therapeutic, an attempt to find a lost good, God, in the space of the memory. Everything hangs on how this second type of inward turn is fleshed out and how it is related to the first.

Cary’s genetic account is helpful but its use is limited to the question of the philosophical

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 109.

\(^{38}\) See ibid., 181n28.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 122.
background of Augustine’s claims. In what follows, I wish first to keep asking the final question that Cary’s genetic account raises: how is the inner turn to God related to the inner turn to privacy? What does the Augustinian self do? What are its practices? How is it cognized? My analysis of this question has two steps. The first involves asking a question about the self’s structure: what is the self? It is important to keep in mind that for Augustine, the self’s structure is de facto always intertwined with a specific history and a future. This is because at the core of the self’s structure, Augustine discerned an instability that could only be settled with reference to the Lord.40 The structure of the self is perhaps described as the “place” where the created self opens to God. The second has to do with exploring the relationship between the self and God in two dimensions: finitude and sin. I conclude with a set of reflections on the more systematic issues raised before turning to On the Trinity.

The larger argument is that Augustinian tradition transfigures the public/private distinction by refusing to accept a separation between oikos and polis. The refusal is rooted deep in his understanding of God’s relationship to creation, and here I begin to extend that understanding to divine intimacy with human creatures. Augustine understood the polis as a family, and he politicized the oikos. This dynamic in Augustinian thought can be mapped on to second wave feminist claims about the political importance of care by transforming the polis, once opposed to the oikos, into a metaphorical family and a site of Christian charity. Augustinian politics is about caring—about loving. Rather than merely working toward a social order more accommodating of life, the social order includes concern over the once segregated body. Augustine’s thought is consistent with the slogan, “the personal is the political.” The next connection with feminist thought is less

straightforward. Augustine resists essentializing gender altogether and is closer in many ways to the views of third wave feminists on gender. This claim may seem strange in light of positions Augustine has taken. But the way Augustine uses gender categories destabilizes them and folds them in on themselves. When we ask, “What does Augustine’s use of gender language mean for what gender is and how relations should be ordered?” The proper answer is: nothing, or very little. I outline the philosophical and psychological framework of his claims about gender in this chapter and return to it in chapter 6 to pull out the implications, but I flag it here because the conceptual moves here do important work in chapter 6.

3. Memory: Place of Self, Opening to God in Confessions

What is the inner self? At the beginning of book X of Confessions, Augustine confesses about confession, setting the theme for the rest of his discussion. “Let me know you, O you who know me; then shall I know even as I am known” (cognoscam te, cognitor meus, cognoscam sicut et cognitus sum). What does it mean to “know thyself,” or to know the self of which one speaks in confession? Augustine radically revises the ancient philosophical quest in light of the claims about God I outlined in the previous chapter. His soul is at once sharply distinguished from God and at the same time intimately related to God. “The distinction” or metaphysical size-gap between creator and creature is precisely what enables God to be nearer to him than he is to himself. His philosophical/mystical quest takes us by degree to God.

First, Augustine asks where he can find God. He goes back to the basic distinction between spirit and matter discussed earlier: God is not to be found in bodily qualities, but rather in
something related to his “inmost self” (interioris hominis mei). He looks outside and finds nothing adequate to the Source of life and light. When he asks created things where he can find that Source, creatures respond: “We are not God. Seek higher” (quaere super nos). God is super precisely because “He made us.” This reply, creatures’ confession to their Creator, is “their beauty.” It is a real beauty. The Source, the Maker of all things, makes them good. The goodness is determined precisely by the relationship, the making—a form of what scholastic thinkers will later call “gratuity”—and the being made. Like a good Plotinian, Augustine searches inside to go higher. Specifically, he examines the faculty or power of memory itself. He finds an almost fantastic possibility, but only a possibility at this point: something with no place, no time, no changing. David Foster Wallace’s description is apt: “What goes on inside is just too fast and huge and all interconnected for words to do more than barely sketch the outlines of at most one tiny little part of it at any given instant.” He concludes that the immensity must be One who shares none of the qualities with creation precisely because it made them.

So Augustine searches “higher” by turning more fully to himself, vividly and beautifully depicting the fruits of his own search for identity with himself, that is, for a coherent narrative of his life. Maybe his confession will lead him to its object? “Toward myself I turned, and asked

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42 conf., 10.6.8.
43 conf., 10.6.9.
44 This is worked out more fully in doctr. chr. and in the whole complicated question of usus and frui. Suffice it to say that Augustine is here concerned with something like the way that the destination imparts significance to what they point to. See O’Donovan, “‘Usus’ and ‘Fruitio’ in Augustine, ‘De Doctrina Christiana’ I.”
45 O’Donnell notes “This is the first of nineteen paragraphs from here to 10.21.31 (exceptions: 10.8.15, 10.16.25, 10.17.26, 10.20.29, 10.22.32) without second person singular direct address to God. The mind ascending to God does not address God (cf. notably 9.10.25, also without direct address): that is the function of confessio. (This drought is otherwise unmatched in conf...).” Aurelius Augustinus and James J. O’Donnell, Confessions III, Commentary on Books 8-13. (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1992), sec. 10.6.9.
46 See the discussion in Wetzel, Augustine and the Limits of Virtue.
myself, “Who are you?” He answers with a “what”: “homo,” a human being. He then outlines the broad structural terms of his anthropology in order to show more properly how it is that the inner self is higher than all other created things. His analysis depends first on a distinction between inner and outer that roughly correlates to a distinction between body and soul: “See, here are the body and soul that make up myself, the one outward (exterius) and the other within (interius).” Having already searched for God per corpus, through his bodily senses, he found only God’s trace in creation’s confession, so he turns inward toward what is “better.” Sed melius quod interius.

The metaphorical imagery with which Augustine depicts a hierarchical relationship between bodily senses and the “inner self” is striking. The senses all “reported” (renuntiabant) to the interior self. It presided over and judged (prasesidenti et iudicanti) what they brought to him. Augustine then seems to identify himself with the interior (more on this later): “I, who was that inmost self, I, who was that [soul]” (ego interior… ego animus).

As if to forestall the accusation that Augustine denigrates the body by the hierarchical relationship, he rehearses once again his concept of life to focus his thought and conclude this part

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47 Augustinus and O’Donnell, *Confessions III, Commentary on Books 8-13.*, sec. 10.3.3. “et direxi me ad me et dixi mihi, ‘tu quis es?’ et respondi, ‘homo.’ et ecce corpus et anima in me mihi praesto sunt, unum exterius et alterum interius. quid horum est unde quaeerere debui deum meum, quem iam quasiveram per corpus a terra usque ad caelum, quosque potui mittere nuntios radios ocularum meorum? sed melius quod interius. ei quippe renuntiabant omnes nuntii corporales, praesidenti et indicanti de responsionibus caeli et terrae et omnium quae in eis sunt dicentium, ‘non sumus deus’ et, ‘ipse fecit nos.’ homo interior cognovit haec per exterioris ministerium; ego interior cognovi haec, ego, ego animus per sensum corporis mi, interrogavi mundi molem de deo meo, et respondit mihi, ‘non ego sum, sed ipse me fecit.’” See also Velde, *Aquinas on God.*


49 conf., 10.6.10.

of his inquiry.\textsuperscript{51} The relationship of God to soul and soul to life is purely affirmative. The soul is to the body what God is to creation. It is unlike the body in a way that God is unlike creation. The created unlikeness is almost as important as the likeness, and we will see later that sin is being unlike God in the wrong way, attaching oneself to bodily things, indeed, to oneself, illegitimately. The self is, so to speak, lost and even dispersed through attaching itself to things that pull it in different directions and away from itself. The key to perfected humanity is being both like and unlike God—but in the right ways.

This proper likeness involves attention to the soul. Material things are lower because materiality forms an “extended mass” and is therefore composite and intrinsically hierarchical—parts are smaller than in the whole. The soul is “better” (melior) because it imparts “vita” to the body. No bodily thing can do this for another bodily thing. God, however, is “above” the soul, for God is the life of life, vitae vita, the life of the soul.\textsuperscript{52} Again, it is the relationship that gives value, and the proper relationship that accords value in the right way. Since God is the life of life, God is above the soul, but can only be reached by means of the soul. If God were outside, Augustine notes, God would be forgotten. So Augustine then ascends to God by the only means he has available and by degrees (gradibus ascendens). The ascent is crucial, for it narrates two important and, in the end, happy failures. First, he fails to be like himself in the way he needs to be in order to be coherent. Second, he finds that he fails to be properly unlike himself in the way he needs to be in order to be properly human.

\textsuperscript{51} Augustinus and O’Donnell, \textit{Confessions III}, Commentary on Books 8-13., sec. 10.6.10.: “molest est, minor in parte quam in toto. iam tu melior es, tibi dico, anima, quoniam tu vegetas molem corporis tui praebens ei vitam, quod nullum corpus praestat corpori. deus autem tuus etiam tibi vitae vita est.”

\textsuperscript{52} See on Ibid. “3.6.10, ‘vita es animarum’, and cf. 7.1.2, ‘vita vitae meae’, and 10.20.29, ‘vivit enim corpus meum de anima mea et vivit anima mea de te.’”

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The ascent narrative thickens the terms for Augustine’s anthropology even as it complicates his account. His lexicon is confusing and inconsistent. There are degrees of inwardness, and, to the satisfaction of those who care about clarity, Augustine’s use of the terminology for different levels of inwardness matures between Confessions and On the Trinity. In the Confessions, Augustine diversifies the soul internally and groups the diverse “souls” as two powers. The powers he lists map on to distinctions between vegetative and sensory souls. First, he leaves behind the power (transibo vim meam) “whereby I am united to a body and animate its frame.” This he calls the “anima.” If the anima a power were capable of finding God, horses and mules would find God, he says, for all higher animals share it. He lists, second, “another power” which goes beyond mere life-giving to flesh. It endows “with sense the flesh that God has fashioned,” organizing all the sensory powers under one soul (unus animus). Horse and mule, he says, also have an animus “since they also have sensory organs throughout their bodies.” The hierarchy of the soul in On the Trinity XII builds on this classification while departing from it in interesting and helpful ways. For now I fill out Augustine’s use in Confessions.

His interior ascent begins in his memory—which he also shares with other animals, though differently. Here he leads his reader up through three kinds of memory: imprinted images, pre-taught liberal learning, and emotions. He starts with images from the senses. Augustine frequently uses spatial and sometimes architectural metaphors for the memory. At first, the memory is an “immense court” (aula ingenti) for these images. He finds that he is able to piece together many of

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53 conf., 10.7.11.
54 conf., 10.7.11.
55 conf., 10.8.12.
the disparate parts of his life and narrate or recall some of himself (me recolo) back to himself. The general capacity for self-recollection is notable. Through it, Augustine comes to “meet himself.” But the self he comes to meet is tragically forgetful. The mind is “too narrow to grasp itself.” He wrestles with the meaning of this forgetfulness—both created and sin-induced—and concludes that he cannot trust his ability to narrate himself back to himself. He is unable to organize his life adequately.

So he moves on. Perhaps the ability to narrate the happenings of his life back to himself is not the principle of his internal coherence or identity with himself, for the memory is not merely an immense court for the self’s narration of itself. It is also made up of “immense spaces” for liberal education. The intriguing possibility Augustine confronts is that he might unify himself and bring his longing to rest through the liberal disciplines. Augustine, like a good Platonist, imagines that his memory is the source of his understanding of liberal learning. Indeed, much has been made of his claim he has not come to learn from without, but rather already knows and remembers: “when I learned them I did not take them on trust from some stranger’s intelligence but recognized them as present in my own, and affirmed them as true, and entrusted them to my memory for safekeeping so that I could bring them out again when I wished. This means that they were there even before I learned them, but not remembered.” He toys with the idea that what was once bright but had become shadow-like might be known once again through the hard work of learning and contemplation.

But liberal disciplines are forgotten, never in this life to be known as they once were. They

58 conf., 10.8.16.
59 conf., 10.10.17.
may be recollected in part, but nothing can change the human state in which they lie “hidden, dispersed and neglected” (*ubi sparsa prius et neglecta latitabant*) and are “held in a scattered and disorderly way.”\[^{60}\] Like shadows on a wall, they cry to be recollected, cogitated (according to the proper Augustinian meaning).\[^{61}\] But what will do this re-collecting of the primal wisdom? And what will enable it? Augustine leaves his reader with the implicit question—almost a clue—and he moves to the second type of pre-known data: mathematic truth. He states: “everyone knows these truths, without a physical representation of any kind being involved. One recognizes them within oneself” (*intus agnovit eas*). One also recognizes how one came to learn (or should we say, relearn, them). But, again, how are they re-learned? And from whence were they first known?

Another almost-clue, and a third and final type of memory: one remembers emotions—happiness, sadness—but at a distance. “I can happily remember some sadness I suffered which is now over and done with, or sadly recall lost happiness.”\[^{62}\] Maybe Augustine intuited the greater staying power of feeling in his search for a more stable foundation to recollect a unified self. One more obvious point of the passage, however, seems to be that the emotions show an important capacity of the self to be dissimilar to itself. “The memory is the mind’s stomach, while joy and sorrow are like delicious or bitter food.”\[^{63}\] Not only does the self lack internal coherence. It can also

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\[^{60}\] *conf.*, 10.11.18.

\[^{61}\] See O’Donnell’s notes on this in Augustinus and O’Donnell, *Confessions II, Commentary on Books 1-7.*, sec. 7.1.1. “Etymology (from Varro) at 10.11.18, ‘*nam cogo et cogito sic est, ut ago et agito, facio et factito . . . cogitando quasi conligere*’. See B.1 16.606, note by Agaës on Trin. 10.5.7: ‘L’idée signifiée est donc celle de "grouper," de "rassembler." En raison de l’usage le mot en est venu à désigner l’acte par lequel l’âme rassemble les connaissances éparse et latentes dans la mémoire pour les poser en quelque sorte sous son propre regard et les amener ainsi à la conscience claire.”


(amazingly!) separate itself from itself. It can remember pain without feeling and forget sadness once felt.

This recognition of the internal fissure or, to stick with his metaphorical trope, distance from himself within himself, helps him once again to isolate and confront directly the main source of the distance, the proverbial elephant in his memory’s “measureless plains and vaults and caves” (campis et antris et cavernis innumerabilibus): forgetfulness.64 “When I remember “memory,” memory itself immediately makes itself available; but when I remember “forgetfulness,” both memory and forgetfulness are promptly present: memory since by means of it I remember, and forgetfulness since that is what I am remembering.65 The problem of memory, now more fully formulated, is its limits. How can we be identical with ourselves when we constantly forget? Augustine concludes: “this much is certain, Lord, that I am laboring over it, laboring over myself, and I have become for myself a land hard to till and of heavy sweat (terra difficultatis et sudoris nimii)… It is not surprising that whatever is not myself would be remote, but what can be nearer to me than I am to myself? Yet here I am, unable to comprehend the nature of my memory, when I cannot even speak of myself without it.”66

Perhaps memory’s limits can also be its salvation. Augustine’s failure to comprehend himself is translated into a type of longing, precisely what is needed to keep the ascent going. He

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66 conf., 10.16.25.
re-narrates the instability: “O my God, profound, infinite complexity, what a great faculty memory is, how awesome a mystery!... What am I, then, O my God? What is my nature?” Augustine catalogues the places that his search for coherence has failed (and here he repeats his earlier progression, to repeat it more times): (1) things present through images (physical things and events), (2) things present through themselves (liberal learning and math), and (3) things present “in some indefinable way” like emotional memory. In this large, wide-ranging interior space, Augustine concludes that he is himself distinct from all this content of what is in the end the most important human “power” (vis). Vis memoriae is vis vitae: to modify Boulding’s translation to bring out the parallel, “So great is the [power] of memory, so great the power of life in a person whose life is tending toward death.”

The power of memory is the power of (human and animal) life, but God is “true life” (tu vera mea vita, deus meus) that empowers the power. Here it is helpful to distinguish between the formal power of memory (the “place,” in Marion’s terminology) and the content of memory. Augustine himself does not distinguish so clearly, and the distinction breaks down somewhat. But it provides analytic clarity, and it is, in my view, faithful to how Augustine talks about these things. In the order of being, God always defines Augustine both as the empowerer of his power and (we will see) as the chief, first inhabitant of his memory.

First, the power. Simultaneously stuck with himself and yearning beyond himself, Augustine’s is the condition of one whose life is derived: the soul is the life of the body, but God is the life of the soul. Body, soul, and God cannot be separated. The “what”, the place where he can only be himself, always already includes a “who.” He is always already defined by another, a “tu”.

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He therefore cannot properly forget God. God is remembered here as the place of the self. That memory is a power “above” other types of powers and more deeply “within” emphasizes its limitation and finitude. As a power God empowers, it always presupposes God, yet it cannot contain God. He needs to pass beyond the things in it, yet he cannot bypass or surpass the power itself, for to do so would be either to deny his finitude and dependence or to forget the source of the power.

Second, Augustine also imagines that his memory is the three kinds of inhabitants that fill it: his memory is identified with his memories of events in his life, of liberal knowledge, and of emotions. God can likewise be known as an inhabitant, though God is different from all the others. In his discussion of the parable of the widow and the lost coin, he argues that the widow must have remembered the coin.\(^69\) How could she search for what she had forgotten? And how could she recognize it when she found it? There must, he concludes, be some “inward image” of the coin.\(^70\) God cannot be identified merely as a structural feature, the power of our memory.\(^71\) God is also an item of historical experience: an item that was once held but is now forgotten, though not completely. For God may be held once again.

When the memory itself loses some item, as for instance when we forget something and try to remember, where are we to search in the end but in the memory itself? And if some other thing is offered us there, we brush it aside, until the thing we are looking for turns up. When it does, we say, “That’s it!” which we would not be in a position to say if we did not recognize the object, and we could not recognize it if we did not remember it. Yet we had undoubtedly forgotten. Is this the explanation: that the thing had not fallen out of the memory entirely?\(^72\)

\(^{69}\) *conf.*, 10.18.27.

\(^{70}\) “ex imagine quae intus est recognoscitur,” *conf.* 10.18.27.

\(^{71}\) An interesting question raised by Thomas and other Thomists is, whether under what Thomists call a different providential order, God might have been known this way. Augustine seems unaware of this possibility.

\(^{72}\) *conf.*, 10.19.28.
So far, Augustine has brushed aside inadequate candidates for God—the memory of sensory images, the memory of liberal learning, and the memory of emotions—hoping that God will turn up. These memories have provided not mainly unity within but distance from himself.

Augustine more explicitly contrasts God with everything else inhabiting his memory. His claim can be read to contrast both types of memory to God. God is not like any others inhabiting the memory. As in a vast field or a cavernous space, Augustine is distant from the other inhabitants, yet God is remembered as the ground that makes his roaming possible. God alone is his true home, yet remembered by second nature like animals remember their lairs and birds their nests. The purpose of the lingering traces of God is the possibility of return. God is ground, it seems, both as the structure of our living and the home we have abandoned. The contrast continues: Augustine constantly emphasizes the separation between himself on the one hand and physical images, liberal learning, and his emotion on the other. God, however, is the immensely attractive dulce lumen to whom Augustine wishes to “cleave” and to “hold fast.” It is precisely this ability to cleave in knowledge and love to God that distinguishes us from the animals. It is also the basis for Augustine’s finding both the structural and lost unity with himself: acknowledgement of his creaturehood and restoration of a lost intimacy.

But in what sense is God “lost”? God is not beyond memory, for if God were forgotten, how would God ever be found again? Augustine provides two analogies, one cognitive, the other quasi-affective. First, God is like the name of the acquaintance we search for. We go through names until we hit upon the right one. Augustine does this as he searches through his memory’s catalogues, eliminating unfitting candidates. Second, God is like a lost happiness. Here the discussion shifts to a

phenomenology of happiness or desire. His account of memory is closely related to his account of
happiness, because emotional states (happiness is something like that) inhabit memory.\textsuperscript{74}

Augustine wants to know whether the possession of happiness “resides in the memory”. The
stakes are high “because if it does, that must mean that we were happy once upon a time—though
whether each of us was happy individually, or we were all happy in the man who committed the
first sin… I am not now inquiring.”\textsuperscript{75} Augustine wants to know if the desire for happiness, which he
takes to be broadly universal (though not in its content, for true happiness is found in God alone),
comes from a historical state of existence, the reason he has to bracket the nature of the existence
and the origin of the soul.\textsuperscript{76} What kind of memory is the memory of primal happiness? Incorporeal,
it is not a sensitive memory. Nor is it like the way we remember eloquence or well-executed
rhetoric, a type of liberal learning. It “may be the case” that it is like a memory of enjoyment. He
rehearses the argument for remembering one emotion while feeling another. This desire for lost
happiness, perhaps a restlessness, whatever it is exactly, is de facto unstable. On the one hand, “all
agree that they want to be happy, just as they would, if questioned, all agree that they want to enjoy
life, and they think that a life of happiness consists of this enjoyment.”\textsuperscript{77} Yet, on the other hand, not
everyone wants to be happy because “this is the happy life, and this alone: to rejoice in you, about
you, and because of you. This is the life of happiness, and it is not to be found anywhere else.”\textsuperscript{78}

Reflection on the instability of the already unstable desire moves Augustine closer to the

\textsuperscript{74} See Wolterstorff’s explanation of Augustinian enjoyment in Wolterstorff, \textit{Justice}.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{conf.}, 10.20.29.
\textsuperscript{76} Augustine frequently indulges in debates over the origin of the soul. He never resolves it. See O’Donnell, \textit{Augustine};
O’Connell, \textit{The Origin of the Soul in St. Augustine’s Later Works}; Rombs, \textit{Saint Augustine & the Fall of the Soul: Beyond
O’Connell & His Critics}.
\textsuperscript{77} \textit{conf.}, 10.23.31.
\textsuperscript{78} \textit{conf.}, 10.22.32.
limits of where human reason will take him. The present condition is one of self-denial and self-disunity. Even reflection on the desire will not get us where we need to go. So he returns again to his question: where is God’s dwelling place? He re-orders and re-organizes (and seemingly re-defines) the three types of inhabitants of memory into a hierarchy: he identifies memory of images with animal memory, which he distinguishes most immediately from emotional states, and finally rises to “the mind itself” (ipse animus). Here, however, he seems to mean a specifically human power of liberal learning and reflection on the self. Whatever he means precisely, through his discussion of forgetfulness, he has identified the highest seat of the mind as a place of lingering dissimilarity. God is not dissimilar to Godself. Therefore, God is not to be found even here. Rather, God, eternally unchanging, is “Lord and God of the mind.”

So Augustine has set his reader up for what seems at first to be a “complete, baldfaced flipflop” immediately before the climax of book X. O’Donnell seems to think that Augustine thought of God as an item in the memory and identified the “inner” with a “private” and therefore “solipsistic” realm. On those terms, when Augustine says, “You could not have been in my memory before I learned to know you” (neque enim iam eras in memoria mea, priusquam te discerem), he conflates his earlier claims to find God in the soul. But Augustine has prepared his reader for his difficult conclusion: God could not be known before God was “first learned.” This begs the already-bracketed question of when God first came to inhabit memory’s cavernous vaults. But Augustine’s point seems not to bring up questions he has already dealt with. Instead, it is that as empowerer of the power and the source of knowledge and love characterizing the state of primal human

79 conf., 10.25.36.
81 “habitas certe in ea, quoniam tui memini, ex quo te didici, et in ea te invenio, cum recordor te,” conf. 10.25.36.
happiness, God is not a feature of the world immanent in human experience. God therefore cannot be identified with an inner solipsistic or mystical experience. God is rather supremely public, the unchanging perfection toward which we yearn, the barely sayable goal of all our longings.82

The problem, as Augustine so elegantly characterizes it, is that God was in fact within (intus eras), but he himself was outside (foris) of himself, searching in the world of sensible and intelligible goods as if God is one among many. Augustine was searching (quaerebam) for God in this outside, and he was rushing headlong (inruebam) into the formed things God made (ista formosa quae fecisti). Augustine did not remember God properly because he was (metaphorically) sick (aeger sum) and in need of a physician to heal what Augustine considers diseases of deafness and blindness. His sickness was characterized by claim: “you were with me, but I was not with you” (mecum eras, et tecum non eram). The solution: “by continence (per continentiam) the scattered elements of the self are collected and brought back into the unity (quippe conligimur et redigimur in unum) from which we have slid away into dispersion (a quo in multa defluximus); for anyone who loves something else along with you, but does not love it for your sake, loves you less.”83

4. Creation, Gender, and Dispersion in the On the Trinity

To summarize the terms of the anthropology and what Augustine does with them: Augustine rests his distinction between body and soul on a distinction between spirit and matter. He sometimes talks as if there is no single soul, only several souls within, all distinct from God and one another. These souls are sometimes grouped (though sometimes not) under the term “memory.”84

82 See doct. Chr., 1.5.5.

83 conf., 10.29.40. That the solution to the problem of memory lies in love suggests that the problem is one of will rather than intellect. I will discuss this more in the next chapter.

84 I wonder if this is possible by metonymic transfer in which part and whole are transferrable, especially given the anthropology of the next chapter.
The human “soul” is multiple, but the multiplicity seems purely nominal. At the beginning of book X of *Confessions*, Augustine distinguishes animating power, sensitive power, and memory, and the memory is higher than the other two. Then he distinguishes three types of memory: sensitive memory, emotional memory, and memory of liberal learning and mathematics. All, importantly, are a source of forgetting and disunity with the self. Later in the book, Augustine says that emotional and sensitive memories are shared with the animals, while memory of liberal learning is not. How does God relate to these different types of memories? God cannot be the source of self-disunity. Rather, God is related to the memory structurally—the empowerer of the power—and inhabits the memory in a way that is fundamentally unlike all the others. God is remembered in a certain longing for a lost happiness. Augustine concludes after having “found” God through Christ that his scattered self-disunity prevented him from finding God, and the search for God in the wrong places (outside) captivated him, preventing him from going “within.”

O’Donnell’s commentary takes the distinction between the word *anima* (the power of life) and the *animus* (the sensory power) to be insignificant in the *Confessions*. Whether it is or not, Augustine certainly does not seem philosophically consistent in his use of the terms. The above sketch is one plausible way of lending a bit more philosophical coherence to Augustine’s discussion. By the time he gets to book XII of the *On the Trinity*, he adopts a more technical (though still not completely consistent) lexicon. In it, more distinctive faculties of the mind and their relation to one another are laid out. By analyzing the workings of the soul, Augustine is able to narrate not only what it means more precisely that we are outside and what it is for God to be inside, but also how it is that we have been dispersed.

Intriguingly, his discussion is also ensconced within an important discussion of gender. That
he would relate gender and interiority to one another is unsurprising, for both are rooted in the
Genesis texts about the *imago dei*. “In the image of God he created him, male and female he created
them.” So before moving on to Augustine’s phenomenology of dispersion’s effects, it will be
helpful to get a clearer sense of how Augustine thinks of the sliding away into dispersion and the
scattering of the self. It not only sharpens the lexicon; it also offers an interesting and plausible way
of conceiving a public rather than private inner self (through a moral lens) and of understanding the
sense in which Augustine has a concept of “privacy.”

In the previous chapter, I explained what I take to be the structure of the first seven books
of *On the Trinity*. It will suffice here to summarize my earlier claim that, though Augustine uses
analogous terms in books V and VII, those terms serve a rule-like function and do not themselves
provide any way of depicting or understanding the trinity. Trinity remains incomprehensible and
more unlike than like any possible human analogy. Augustine sets himself at the beginning of book
VIII to try move from the rule of (and, in reading, the rules provided by) faith to understanding of
the reality. He achieves this through a certain kind of contemplation. Through the contemplative
process, he and his reader are released from a “flesh-bound habit of thought”85 (*capit consuetudo
carnalis*) by moving through the lower parts of creation to the highest *imago trinitatis*. Each of the
proper analogies fails.86

At the end of book XI, he comes to a point of transition in his search for analogy. He gives up
searching for an adequate “coupling” of parent and offspring in anything “animal and fleshly” in the
“outer man” (*animali atque carnali, qui exterior dicitur*) and he turns “inward”. The *imago trinitatis*, the

85 *trin.*, 8.1.2.

object of his search, is not to be found in “fleshly” relations between parent and offspring. Rather, the analogy of parent and offspring is two steps removed from the reality of the divine parent and divine offspring. To use later Thomist language, God is prime exemplar or prime instance, the human interior is the secondary analogate, and “carnal” copulation a tertiary analogate, distantly removed from the reality. It is useless, Augustine thinks, to try to move from the tertiary analogate to the prime instance, so he turns inward.

He begins book XII by searching for the “border” (confinium) “between the outer and the inner man” (quoddam hominis exterioris interiorisque). Here he distinguishes more consistently between anima, animus, and mens. Edmund Hill includes a helpful explanation of the terms in his translation. I rely mostly on his use of the terms, though I also flag the Latin terminology. His translation of interiority and gender is often confusing because he made the unfortunate decision to translate both vir and homo as “man.” He translates “mens” as “mind” with consistency. The mens refers to a function of reason: specifically, reason’s function of contemplating “higher” things. Augustine therefore also calls it the “higher” reason. The animus he translates—problematically, because of later philosophical usage—“consciousness.” The animus also refers to reason, but reason’s functioning in relation to “lower” or “bodily” concerns. Animus is the way that rationality goes all the way down to the basest functions. Mens and animus are the two functions of the one rationality—contemplation and action, speculative and practical reason. The anima is far less consistent in Augustine’s use. It generally connotes the sensitive soul as it shared by humans and animals.

I will narrate the hierarchy according to Augustine’s own explanation and then say what he

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87 trin., 12.1.1.
88 See Hill’s discussion on 260 and his chart on 261 of Augustine, The Trinity.
does with it. “Anything in our consciousness (animo) that we have in common with animals is rightly said to be still part of the outer man.” I take it that Augustine is saying that anything falling within the scope of the animus that is common to humans and animals is “outer.” The distinction is important because it signals that humans and animals share not only body but sensitive soul as well. “It is not just the body alone that is to be reckoned as the outer man, but the body with its own kind of life attached, which quickens the body's structure and all the senses it is equipped with in order to sense things outside.” Here Augustine, similar to the Confessions, includes all the images imprinted on the memory in the “other man.” Humans hold the capacity to “compose fabricated sights” and “sew” diverse experiences together in common with non-human animals. The only distinction is that in humans, these capacities “share in reason” (sunt tamen rationis expertia) and so, in that way, are not common to beasts and animals. His theme emerges more clearly when he says,

it pertains to the loftier reason to make judgments on these bodily things according to non-bodily and everlasting meanings (rationes incorporales et sempiternas, rationis incorporalis et sempiternas); and unless these were above the human mind they would certainly not be unchanging, and unless something of ours were subjoined to them we would not be able to make judgments according to them about bodily things (corporalibus). But we do make judgments on bodily things in virtue of the meaning of dimensions and figures which the mind knows is permanent and unchanging.

Two items of interest emerge in the above passage: (1) non-bodily and everlasting meanings (intelligibles) and (2) bodily things (sensibles). A distinctively human quality, isolated in the “loftier reason,” which I do not think is to be confused with the mens, all reason pertains to loftier things, makes judgments on the latter according to the former. So the three human capacities emerge: the capacity to take in sensible, corporeal things (anima), the capacity to contemplate eternal and

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90 trin., 12.1.1.
90 Ibid.
91 trin., 12.3.3.
unchanging things (mens), and the capacity to make judgments about the corporeal things with reference to the eternal things (animus). The latter two capacities are two aspects of the single rational power, both inward.

The animus, “which is occupied with the performance of bodily and temporal actions in such a way that it is not common to us and beasts, is rational” but it “has been deputed” (deputatum est) to attend to the lower, corporeal things and events. Augustine imagines that this capacity, the animus, was made as a helpmeet for the mens like the woman was made as a helpmeet for the man in Genesis 2. Therefore “something rational of ours is assigned the duty of this work, not in the sense of being divorced from the mind in breach of unity, but as derived from it in a helpful partnership.” Interestingly, he groups both under the “mind” parallel to the language of “two in one flesh” is “duo in mente una.” The mind, therefore is “one thing” but diverse in its “functions” (nisi per officia geminamus).

His use of the Genesis language about male and female and his concern with finding the image of God leads him to qualify his claim. The image is not to be found in a human family: father, mother, child. He thinks that using a quasi-social or familial analogy for the trinity is “absurd.” One reason for the absurdity—beyond the obvious narrative problems with the analogy—is that “it would seem to follow that man was not in fact made to the image of God until a wife was made for him and until they had produced a son.” Making the image, the analogy, and thereby God “social” in this way will not do because each human individual needs to be the divine image. One reason against the social logic is scriptural: Genesis 1 makes mention of only the two bodies, not of a third.
The other main problem, which occupies Augustine for most of the chapter, is that it excludes women from the divine image more directly than it does men. He accesses this problem through Paul: what are we to think of Paul’s claim in 1 Corinthians 11.7 that woman is not the image of God? “Why is the woman too not the image of God? That, you see, is why she is told to cover her head, which the man is forbidden to do because he is the image of God.”

Augustine assumes that the surface of the Apostle’s assertion that women are not made in the image of God contradicts the claim of Genesis 1.26 that God created both the man and the woman in the divine image. He tries to avoid the scriptural contradiction and the theological inelegance (or, stronger, heresy) that women and men are not both the divine image, and he does so primarily by reading the text figurally. Augustine’s explanation is complex, and it is easy to reify the figures and then map Augustine’s thought onto conventional feminist critiques of Augustine and ancient Christian thought.

On my reading, it is very difficult to figure out how Augustine defines or regulates gender. He makes a set of symbolic connections and a hierarchy, but it is difficult to figure out how those symbols function and how the hierarchy maps on to social reality. I will defend this claim more fully in chapter 6. Augustine, for example, does not here identify men with the rationality and women with the body. He says so explicitly: “I did not think the woman should be made to stand for the senses of the body which we observe to be common to us and the beasts.” He makes far more interesting claims: for him, women’s bodies symbolize political action and men’s contemplation. The nature of the symbolism is also interesting to flesh out a bit more. At the very least, Augustine’s discussion opens up interesting questions about the nature of interiority and also

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\textsuperscript{95} trin., 12.7.9

\textsuperscript{96} trin., 12.13.20.
about gender. Here I focus on the claims about interiority. I will return to the discussion of gender and respond to the ambiguities in his approach in chapter 6.

He has already laid his groundwork to say that the “man” in 1 Corinthians symbolizes the “mens” and the “woman” the “animus.” Just as the man needed a helpmate in the woman, so the mens, which only knows how to contemplate eternal truths, needs help applying reason to matters of bodily life humans share with nonhuman animals. So the Lord endowed human creatures with two functions of reason. The animus on these terms is the way that the human soul properly animates its body, because it is how the “one mind,” or single capacity of reason, reasons about the body through the body in relation to all other “exterior” things. The “lower” reason, identified as lower based on what it reasons about, is the way that reason goes all the way down to the “basest” external functions. One important implication is that there is nothing merely bodily for Augustine, nor is there a soul separate from any part of human embodied existence.97

Mens and animus necessarily subsist together is “one image.” If they did not, and if they could be separated, Augustine would have to separate action from contemplation. His thought would descend into a quasi-Manichean Gnosticism that it is designed to avoid. Only when the animus is considered in its function apart from contemplation does it fall short of the proper title “divine image.” Not so with the capacity of contemplation of eternal truths, which is conceptually prior and can be exercised apart from, though not without, attention to bodily matters. Angels, it would seem, have the intrinsic capacity for rational contemplation apart from the intrinsic capacity for embodied rational action without special divine dispensation or sending. Augustine extends his analogy so that when the “function” of woman as helpmeet is considered, “she is not the image of

God.” He explains:

We said about the nature of the human mind that if it is all contemplating truth it is the image of God; and when something is drawn off from it and assigned or directed in a certain way to the management of temporal affairs, it is still all the same the image of God as regards the part with which it consults the truth it has gazed on; but as regards the part which is directed to managing these lower affairs, it is not the image of God.\(^8\)

Augustine suggests that the reason for this symbolism, per the 1 Corinthians text, is the angelic predilection for symbols and not anything in God, who is unaffected by temporal events. Perhaps it is also for the human benefit.

How might the symbolism benefit humans? The Apostle, Augustine asserts, has devised a complex “symbolism of something more mysterious in the obvious distinction of sex between male and female.”\(^9\) He appeals to another problematic claim: the Apostle’s suggestion in 1 Timothy 5.5 that not having children or having badly behaved children would count against a widow’s goodness. Paul also makes the bizarre claim in 1 Timothy 2.14 that women will be saved through bearing children, but then he qualifies: “if they remain in faith and love and sanctification with sobriety.” Augustine takes these two texts together, especially the qualification of the latter, to suggest that “children” should not be taken literally, but rather that the children symbolize “good works.”\(^10\) The “works” symbolized are works in the conducting of temporal affairs, “the life which the Greeks call \textit{bios} not \textit{zoe}” (\textit{quam vitam Graeci non \zoe\nu, sed \bio\nu vocant}).\(^11\)

His use of the terms \textit{bios} and \textit{zoe}, which I have developed in previous chapters, is suggestive.

At the end of book XII, Augustine expands on the distinction between action and contemplation. It

\(^8\) \textit{trin.}, 12.7.10.

\(^9\) \textit{trin.}, 12.7.11.

\(^10\) As he says at the end of the section: \textit{manifestum est quid Apostolus significaret voluerit; ideo figurate ac mystice, quia de velando mulieris capite loquebatur, quod nisi ad aliquod secretum sacramentorum referatur, inane remanebit. trin.}, 10.7.11.

\(^11\) \textit{trin.}, 12.7.11.
starts with a distinction between two kinds of reasoning. Contemplation correlates with *sapientia*, or wisdom—the appropriate object of the higher function of reason—and action correlates with *scientia*, or knowledge—the appropriate object of the lower function. Augustine summarizes nicely: “wisdom is concerned with the intellectual cognizance of eternal things and knowledge with the rational cognizance of temporal things” (*sapientiam pertineat aeternarum rerum cognitio intellectualis; ad scientiam vero, temporalium rerum cognitio rationalis*). Both are necessary for embodied creatures. *Scientia* and *sapientia*, additionally, are not hermetically sealed from one another. Though the rationality was made for happiness in God, identified with intelligible truth, that truth is difficult to access for embodied creatures. Human creatures must move from knowledge to contemplation. “Few,” after all “have the acuteness of mind to reach these ideas, and when someone does manage as far as possible to attain them he does not abide in them, because his very acuteness of mind gets blunted so to say and beaten back, and there is only a transitory thought about a non-transitory thing.” Action is subordinate to contemplation and knowledge to wisdom as a means to an end, for knowledge of bodily and historical data is necessary for the eternally happy life of contemplation. “Without knowledge one cannot have the virtues which make for right living and by which this woeful life is so conducted that one may finally reach the truly happy life which is eternal” (*sine scientia quippe nec virtutes ipsae, quibus recte vivitur, possunt haberi, per quas haec vita misera*).

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103 *trin.*, 12.15.25.

104 Augustine will here reject the platonic doctrine of pre-existence and transmigration of souls. “The nature of the intellectual mind has been so established by the disposition of its creator that it is subjoined to intelligible things in the order of nature, and so it sees such truths in a kind of non-bodily light that is *sui generis*, just as our eyes of flesh see all these things that lie around us in this bodily light, a light they were created to be receptive of and to match.” (*trin.*, 12.15.24).
sic gubernetur, ut ad illam quae vere beata est, perveniatur aeternam). In other words, embodied virtue is a means to the end of the beatific vision.

In Aristotle and Arendt in *The Human Condition*, the active life is the political life. It is a typically male sphere. Augustine’s symbolic reading of Genesis and 1 Corinthians turns Aristotle’s way of distinguishing *bios* and *zoe* on its head. This is what we should expect after careful attention to Augustine’s doctrines of trinity and creation, which conceive God as inseparably both life-transmitter and sovereign. For Aristotle, the two functions were strictly separate. Only men could have *bios politikos*, the *vita activa*, the political life. By making women’s bodies the representation of the *animus* and *bios*, Augustine may question the basic foundation of Aristotle’s politics, the distinction between the *oikos* and *polis*, by not only blending them together but also symbolically identifying both with women, and, more distantly, women with the divine life-transmitter. Either the “proper function” of the “woman” is the political function or the proper function that women symbolize is a political function. If the proper function is political, Augustine reverses Aristotle simply and denies that women and, by implication, the laboring classes, are confined to a private sphere. What men’s bodies symbolize is still prioritized hierarchically, but it is not clear what the hierarchy means, especially because Augustine says other things that contradict conventional ways in which the hierarchy might map on to social reality.

If the woman’s body merely properly symbolizes the political function, which seems to be Augustine’s position, then (1) women are neither confined nor more properly engaged in either contemplation or action and therefore (2) the hierarchy between action and contemplation does not map on to actual roles or functions of men and women. Indeed, his claim that the two are

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inseparable implies a blending or even conflating of private and public, and it provides a genuine theological alternative to the conceptual foundations of Arendt’s mapping. This position also undoes Aristotle by denying both women’s confinement to the *oikos* and by conflating the two spheres. Indeed, the rest of the text makes clear that Augustine wishes to forestall the belief that women are either exclusively or primarily associated with the “function” symbolically assigned to them. But still one wonders how the symbol functions. I leave that unresolved here, but I return to it in chapter 6.

Augustine’s central insistence is that the *imago dei*, the main analogy for the trinity, is the ability of the human creature to recognize God. No animal function of the *anima* can image God because no mere body can contemplate eternal reasons. And surely, Augustine says, women can recognize and contemplate God. Women, after all, are baptized. They are not mere bodies, but fully rational human creatures. His evidence for this claim is from embodied church practices: who would exclude women from the baptismal benefits of renewal when the Apostle specifically declared “no male and female” in baptism? After clearing up these possible confusions, Augustine goes back to the problem at hand: why should the woman leave her head uncovered? Is it because she is not the image? Augustine is clear:

Well, it is only because she differs from the man in the sex of her body that her bodily covering could suitably be used to symbolize that part of the reason which is diverted to the management of temporal things, signifying that the mind of man does not remain the image of God except in the part which adheres to the eternal ideas to contemplate or consult them: and it is clear that females have this as well as males. So in their minds a common nature is to be acknowledged; but in their bodies the distribution of the one mind is symbolized.  

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106 “nulli dubium est, non secundum corpus, neque secundum quamlibet animi partem, sed secundum rationalem mentem, ubi potest esse agnitio Dei, hominem factum ad imaginem ejus qui creavit eum,” *trin.*, 10.7.12.

107 *trin.*, 12.7.12.
5. Sin and the Two Wills in *On the Trinity*

So Augustine establishes the allegory to explain the relation of Genesis 1 and 1 Corinthians 11. Then he extends the allegory to cover the topic at hand, the border between inner and outer. His narration is remarkable. He maps the terms “inner” and “outer” onto the three parts of the soul. The inner human (*homo interior* in 12.8.13, “inner man” in Hill) is composed of the two higher parts, and the outer human the lowest part. Women symbolize the middle, “reason which has been delegated to administer temporal affairs” (*rationem cui temporalium rerum administratio delegata est*). So the inner human has two main aspects, the *mens* and the *animus*. The “masculine” portion is placed “over” the “feminine” because, to translate Augustine’s conceptuality, politics ought to be controlled by philosophy, action by contemplation, and knowledge by wisdom. Yet, we will also see, the only way to the latter in each instance is through the former. On this reading “that carnal or animal sense” (*carnalis ille sensus vel animalis*) shared between humans and animals is identified with the serpent but neither male nor female bodies.

The serpent through the flesh, i.e., the *anima*, reaches out to the reason delegated with curbing bodily passions, the *animus*. This *animus* reaches back to take the forbidden fruit and offers it to her higher partner, the *mens*, who was delegated with curbing her from unrestrained advances in her regular dealings with the outside. Both consent to the temptation, though, he consents through her. Both cover themselves with good words stripped of good works (leaves). Both traded the eternal good for a piece of fruit. Augustine strikingly describes the sinful transaction: “the soul, loving its own power, slides away from the whole which is common to all into the part which is its own private property” (*communi universo ad privatam partem prolabitur*).108 But the “private property”

turns out to be almost nothing: the rational soul “strives to grab something more than the whole” (plus aliquid univerno appetens), but the soul\textsuperscript{109} is deceived “because there is nothing more than the whole” (quia nihil est amplius universistate). What, then, is the soul actually getting in its exchange? “Anxiety over a part”—and not a very significant part. We have “part ownership” in our own bodies, but our bodies, apart from direction by God, are disintegrating, sliding toward the nothingness of non-being from which we came. Augustine’s conclusion smarts: “and so by being greedy for more it gets less” (et sic aliquid amplius concupiscendo minuitur).\textsuperscript{110}

This passage explicitly correlates inner with public and outer with private. Augustine depicts inner goods as intelligible goods and intelligible goods as sharable goods. He refers to “inner and higher things that are not possessed privately but in common by all who love them, possessed in a chaste embrace without any limitations or envy” (interiora et superioa percipienda, quae non privatim, sed communiter ab omnibus qui tali cola).\textsuperscript{111} Intelligible things are then identified with God: “For man’s true honor is God’s image and likeness in him, but it can only be preserved when facing him from whom its impression is received. And so the less love he has for what is his very own the more closely can he cling to God.”\textsuperscript{112}

What exactly is exchanged? Wisdom for a semblance of knowledge. Public and common goods for private and individual anxiety. Divine rule for the semblance of human power. Perhaps the best way to organize it is with reference to the three main sins of curiositas, superbia, and cupiditas. The soul through bodily sense (per corpus sentiuntur) is greedy “for experience or for

\textsuperscript{109} I take it that Augustine’s use of anima is just a general term for the soul here

\textsuperscript{110} trin., 12.9.14.

\textsuperscript{111} trin., 12.10.15.

\textsuperscript{112} trin., 12.11.16.
superiority or for the pleasure of physical contact” (propter experiendi vel excellendi vel contractandi cupiditatem). Augustine sexualizes all of them. They are types of fornication through which one joins oneself inappropriately with earthly things. How does one so join? Two clues are relevant. The soul “inheres” in worldly goods. It does so teleologically, by setting “its end or proper good in them” (ut in his finem boni sui ponat). The rational power (here associated with the power to adhere by will) makes the created things the goal of its existence.

Most broadly, the inner self turns in on itself and moves toward individual self-possession and therefore privation, non-being. This can be depicted in multiple ways. Augustine characterizes the three types of sin briefly in On the Trinity book XII. They three types of sin are each connected to a human power: the soul’s powers of intellect and will and the will’s sensual and rational appetites. The sin of curiositas is the chief intellectual sin. It exchanges eternal intelligible objects for temporal objects of knowledge with which it fakes intimacy. Curiositas reverses the proper direction of reason, “greedy for experience,” it “drags the deceptive semblances of bodily things inside, and plays about with them in idle meditation until it cannot even think of anything divine except as being such, and so in its private avarice (privatim avara) it is loaded with error and in its private prodigality (privatim prodiga) it is emptied of strength (viribus).” The other distinctively human power is the will or appetite. The appetite has two aspects: lower and higher. The sin of the lower, sensitive appetite is the sin of concupiscentia. The sin of the higher, rational appetite is superbia or pride.

Superbia reverses the proper direction of dependence. It is, in the end, a denial of

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113 trin., 12.10.15.
114 trin., 12.10.15.
115 trin., 12.10.15.
creaturely finitude: “This is the special province of pride,” but it doesn’t seem to be different from the others: “greedy to experience his own power he tumbled down at a nod from himself into himself as though down to the middle level. And then, while he wants to be like God under nobody, he is thrust down as a punishment from his own half-way level to the bottom, to the things in which the beasts find their pleasure.” Augustine is unhesitatingly severe: “from a distorted appetite for being like God they end up by becoming like beasts.”

Curiositas, concupiscientia, and superbia are ways of the depicting the effects of a single dynamic. For Augustine, the characteristic feature of human creatures is that their rationality goes all the way down from the mind’s highest capacity to the body’s “lowest” functioning (more on this later as the correlate of how public reason-giving infiltrates into the Aristotelian “oikos”, blurring the distinction between public and private). Sin’s overall effect is to cut both the body and the soul off from true reason, to privatize the “self.” “The carnal, or if I may so put it the sensual, motion of the soul which is channeled into the senses of the body, and which is common to us and the beasts, is shut off from the reasoning of wisdom” (in corporis sensus intenditur, sensualis animae motus, qui nobis pecoribusque communis est, seclusus est a ratione sapientiae). Augustine suggestively uses the metaphor of seclusion. Sin identifies passions and functions of the body with a private realm, cutting off the body from what men and women each symbolize, cutting reason off from itself, and cutting men and women off from one another. In some ways, one can say that the Aristotelian/Arendtian ordering of oikos and polis—or, alternatively, the vita activa and the vita contemplativa—is the institutionalization of sin on these terms. By so secluding, these sins push us

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116 trin., 12.11.16.
outside of ourselves. Sin inverts us, confusing our cares for earthly things like our own knowledge and experience or status in relation to God and others over the proper objects of our contemplation.

Augustine’s account allows us to offer a generalized account of sin that takes advantage of the alternative metaphorical trope of exchanging something public for something private. Sin is “enjoying something as one’s very own private good and not as a public and common good which is what the unchangeable good is; this is like the serpent addressing the woman. To consent to this temptation is to eat of the forbidden tree.”¹¹⁹ It is illicit exchange, illicit sequestering. Privatization deprives and threatens the whole self with an eternal unraveling. On these terms, privatization of the self is also a privatio boni.

What explains reason’s inversion? Does the will’s desire for privacy map onto the lower, sensual appetite? Augustine here does not offer an explanation for why or how the soul does what it does. He stays metaphorical, but his account grasps for something more structural. Later Augustinians have tried clarify his account. The most successfully faithful to Augustine’s narrative have been those who have emphasized the fact that the exchange is a feature of Augustine’s suggestion that the rational appetite is the appetite that can adhere to things and that can choose. They identify the rational capacity with the will rather than the intellect. Aquinas, an intellectualist, nears an account of sin the makes the (feminized) body the agent of deception of the rational mind. It has a hard time explaining the origin of sin, and opts for the theological inelegance of resorting to what sound now like tired Aristotelian prejudices—now proven unscientific.¹²⁰ The voluntarist tradition represented by Anselm and then Scotus latches onto texts like the one above about the

¹²⁰ On non-theological presumptions about perfection, see Adams, Christ and Horrors, 55–59.
private good over the common good.

The generalized account of sin combined with the typology based on Augustine’s anthropology enables a wide phenomenological diversity of sin’s effects. Sin is basically responsible for the undoing of created ordering, and this undoing can be talked about in a lot of ways. As some feminist theologians have pointed out, male theologians have typically emphasized the effects of sin in a way that highlights typically male experience of pride and power.\textsuperscript{121} The most helpful feminist accounts have revised the doctrine of sin by drawing on alternative tropes that are present in but have not dominated traditional accounts. Traditionally, those who write about Augustine on sin have focused on the sin of \textit{superbia}. But \textit{superbia} is only one of three tropes Augustine employs, and in this way the reception has not always adequately explored the resources of Augustine’s understanding of \textit{concupiscentia}. Augustine’s alternative and under-explored possibility is on the surface of his text and near the center of his thought. Both his generalized description of sin and his phenomenology of concupiscence emphasize the way that the self is lost or scattered through sin. This is especially helpful when concupiscence is separated from exclusive attachments to sexual desire and generalized. The following discussion prioritizes concupiscence and reads the other two types of sin through it. Augustine does as much in \textit{Confessions} X. Seen through the metaphor of scattering, all three types of sin can emphasize the way that the privatization of the inner self loses the self.


Augustine’s phenomenology of the three types of sin in \textit{Confessions} X is suggestive,

especially his reflections on the third type of sin, *concupiscientia*.

All the types of sin contain an element of scattering, but *On the Trinity* emphasizes this way of thinking about it less than in *Confessions*, where the goal is to piece together the scattered self.

I read Augustine’s claim that “seeking to get more, they got less” next to his confession “You were in me. I was outside of myself.” Adam made a trade, a whole common to all for some individual items. But this trade has an unanticipated consequence: with the loss of the state of original justice, God—justice itself—is lost. Private things are outside things. By binding itself and its happiness to temporal things rather than the only true good, the transcendent truth, the self has made a bad decision that it cannot undo. When Adam trades the whole for the particular, he also trades inside for outside, one thing for many scattered things. The whole of Adam’s family (somehow) inherits Adam’s trade and all its consequences. Augustine’s stated goal in *Confessions* is to gather up the fragments, to try to put himself back together again. But his received forgetfulness prevents him from doing so. The farther out he ventures into the realm of unlikeness, the darker it gets, the less able he is able to see and the less able he is to gather. He is simultaneously unable to unbind himself from the things to which he adheres (and inheres) and unable to gather all those things into something of coherence. This helps frame book X of *Confessions*’s scattered self, lost in the things to which it has clung. Augustine thinks that he is unlike God in all the wrong ways, unable to re-attain the proper likeness and unlikeness that characterized the first happiness. God is “within” and we are “outside of ourselves.” So “dispersion” is my controlling metaphor, but

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122 The typology of sin that follows is overly cleaned-up, and, in fact, Augustine uses *concupiscientia* (as I am suggesting readers should) to stand in for a generalized account of sin, including the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes (*concupiscientia oculorum*), and the pride of life. In that way, it would be a mistake to suggest that *concupiscientia* is only a sin of the sensitive appetite. The larger point I’m making (and that I continue to make in the next chapter) is that it is a pretty good candidate as a stand-in for sin in general.

Augustine’s text is rich in its metaphorical evocations.

In his quasi-phenomenology of dispersion in book X of *Confessions*, he organizes his description of sin’s scattering by attention to the three types of Johannine sin: “lust of the flesh,” “lust of the eyes,” and “pride of life.” His discussion of lust of the flesh is by far the longest, and takes the form of a description of Augustine’s past and present struggles with each of his five senses. Several rhetorical themes emerge. First, underlying them all, the self-scattering in worldly things is accomplished through an inappropriate “clinging” or “love.” Augustine begins his discussion by declaring that originally and appropriately, Augustine clings to God. He holds out the possibility of continued clinging in this life. When he adheres to God, he lives (*cum inhaesero tibi ex omni me, nusquam erit mihi dolor et labor, et viva erit vita mea tota plena te*). The language of proper clinging sets the metaphorical framework for Augustine’s discussion of inappropriate clinging. The inappropriate objects of attachment keep him from himself and from God. Obsessing over these things on the “inside,” trying to get it right by his own efforts at re-arranging his loves, is the source of the problem’s continuation. He goes through and describes each type of desire, showing how dispersed desire for earthly things cancels itself out eventually, or yields to its true home in God, the beauty that makes all things beautiful, the life that enlivens all things.

There are three other major themes emerging that I wish to highlight. The second theme takes the form of a repeating narrative: thinking that he could be in control of some earthly thing, that thing took hold of him. A subtheme can anachronistically be said to be Lutheran in its emphasis: the very efforts to regain control once lost led only to a further loss of control. There is no way out save God’s mercy.

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124 Marion’s account of pondus in Marion, “Resting, Moving, Loving.”
A third closely related theme is the theme of the thicket. Earthly things combined with Augustine’s weakness prove to be sticky. He regularly refers to being “caught” or “trapped” by the earthly things. Sin, on this view, is like walking into a rosebush. The price of smelling the rose is that the bush’s defenses capture you. In sin’s case, it is impossible to extricate oneself.

The fourth theme pervading his discussion is the theme of opacity of the self. Augustine gives a reliably fair accounting of his sin. He seems to think that some are more knowable than others. But even when he thinks he knows, he can never be sure. Augustine is haunted by the possibility that his sin is hidden and unknown to himself. “I am sorely afraid of my hidden sins, which are plain to your eyes, but not to mine” (multum timeo occulta mea, quae norunt oculi tui, mei autem non). The nature of the problem is, after all, that he has forgotten himself, forgotten the empowerer of his power of memory, forgotten its chief and original inhabitant. All else is darkness and distortion.

He begins with the sense of touch, noting that sexual images from his past survive in his sleep. He laments that even in his state of sexual continence he is not free from the “sticky morass of concupiscence.” Past taking of flesh inappropriately ended up taking him. He can only hope for the day when it all will be taken away by the Lord, when “death shall be swallowed up in victory.” Note the pairing of themes: sin’s tendency to take control after offering to submit and then its stickiness. During the day, he struggles with a different kind of lust, greed for food: gluttony. Again, thinking he owns food, food owns him. Since “eating and drinking are not

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125 See conf., 10.37.60.
126 conf., 10.37.60.
127 conf., 10.30.41.
128 conf., 10.30.42.
something I can decide to cut away once and for all,” food constantly threatens to “drag” Augustine “beyond the bounds of what is needful.” His lust for food is not at severe as his lingering sexual desire. But still, he cannot know. In the less severe sin, Augustine must confess his own self-perplexity and therefore the possibility that he estimates himself wrongly. “I call upon your right hand and submit my perplexity to you, because as yet I do not know where I stand on this matter.”

Augustine says that he is not so much troubled by smells, but he cannot be sure if he is or not. “So it seems to me” (ita mihi videor). He takes his lack of perception to be an occasion not for self-confidence but to muse more deeply on his opacity to himself. He brings out a more general claim from his doctrine of sin: “Whatever discernment there is in me is shrouded by dismal darkness and hidden from my sight” (sunt enim et istae plangendae tenebrae, in quibus me latet facultas mea, quae in me est). The solution? “No one should be complacent, for we cannot tell whether someone who has perhaps made progress from a bad state to a better may not also degenerate from that better state to something worse.” There are two ways of taking such declarations. Either non-complacency means more gazing on the inner theater, more introspection. But this would be futile. I take it rather as a prompt to turn away from what cannot be known anyway, a turn away from introspection, which is, on his terms, trying to remember what is forgotten. Augustine says as much. “There is but one hope, one reliance, one solid promise, and that is your mercy” (una spes, una fiducia, una firma promissio misericordia tua).

129 conf., 10.31.47.  
130 conf., 10.31.44.  
131 conf., 10.32.48.  
132 conf., 10.32.48.
Augustine is more ambivalent about the sins of hearing: “I vacillate between the danger of sensuality and the undeniable benefits.” The “pleasures of the ear” in rhetoric and music can deceive, but they can also ennoble and even aid in catechesis through music, depending on whether one is distracted by the art or by the substance of the singing. Yet still he calls his reader to weep with him, and the reason is, once again, his inability rightly to know himself. “I have become an enigma to myself, and here in lies my sickness” (oculis mihi quaestio factus sum, et ipse est languor meus).

His eyes transition his discussion into the next type of sin. His eyes are both a source of “lust of the flesh” and “curiositas.” The two sins map onto the distinction between “work” and “contemplation.” First, the eye’s sin pertains to the lust of the flesh. Though God alone is the all-enlightening truth, lesser lights attract Augustine’s sensuality. The “seductive zest” of earthly light is that “people pursue outside themselves what they are making, but forsook the One within by whom they were made, and so destroy what they were made to be by driving it out of doors.” The theme of “trading” again emerges: by adhering to strongly to the objects of one’s work or craft, the makers exchange not only God for object, but they lose themselves, driving “what they were made to be” “out of doors.” In this way, the light constantly threatens to ensnare the looker. Augustine confesses that he is “miserably entangled,” and the true extent of it must be hidden from him. Again, he throws himself on the mercy of the “beauty which transcends all minds.”

It is not only makers that get ensnared in the work. Physical things are not the only

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111 conf., 10.33.50
114 conf., 10.33.49.
115 conf., 10.33.50.
116 conf., 10.34.53.
117 conf., 10.34.53.
temptation. Augustine lists three types of curiosity, which he rebrands (highlighting the fluidity of the categories of sin) the “concupiscence of the mind” (*anima*): (1) the shows in which “monstrous sights” of violence are portrayed, (2) knowledge of the natural world that cannot be put to human use (*mathesis*), and (3) the occult. These things are a “thicket full of snares and perils,” catching those who flirt with them.138 *Curiositas* or *concupiscentia oculorum* differs from simple *concupiscentia* not only in its effect, but also in its object, a “craving not for gratification of the flesh but for experience through the flesh.”139 He distinguishes between two types of sense activity “pleasure-seeking and curiosity; for sensuality pursues the beautiful, the melodious the fragrant, the tasty and the silky, whereas curiosity seeks the opposite to all these, not because it wants to undergo discomfort but from lust to experience and find out.”140 Last is the pride of life—another short section. Notable for my purposes is that plaudits also “trap us” because we exchange divine glory for our own.

Lust of flesh, pride of life, and lust of the eyes are ways in which we try to take “in” what’s outside and attach ourselves to it. Each new attachment promises singularity, coherence, and agency but in the end it disperses and cripples us; it pushes us outside of ourselves, causing us to lose ourselves among those things. The more we search in those things for ourselves in them, the darker it gets, and the more we lose. The cycle is vicious, and it probably goes far deeper than anyone imagines. “I am dragged down again by my weight of woe, sucked back into everyday things and held fast in them; grievously I lament but just as grievously I am held. How high a price we pay

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138 *conf.*, 10.35.54-55.
139 *conf.*, 10.35.54.
140 *conf.*, 10.35.55.
for the burden of habit! As I suggested earlier, the three types of sin are different metaphors for the same thing, an exchange of the direction of the will to justice for the direction of the will to happiness. They make the self, variously, “a bin…stuffed with a load of idle rubbish” or a forgetful and forgotten mess. Either way: lost and unlike. “When our heart becomes a bin for things like this, stuffed with a load of idle rubbish, our prayers are often interrupted and disturbed by it, and though the pleading of our heart is addressed to your ears, worthless thoughts intrude from who knows where to cut short the great business on which we are engaged in your presence.” Here is the (sinful) Augustinian self: dispersed among temporal things, forgetful of itself, opaque to itself, caught in nearly every thicket it can find, and even when it thinks it might be okay, it does not know for sure.

7. The Inner Public Self

What does the redeemed Augustinian self look like? In the midst of his lament over the three-fold sin, Augustine expresses hope in a future realized in the present: “from time to time you lead me into an inward experience quite unlike any other, a sweetness beyond understanding.” Given Augustine’s account of sin and the modern tendency to make religion a feature of private interiority, it is tempting to read into this text a private mystical-experience of sweetness. I think it would be mistaken to interpret Augustine that way. After explaining why I think Augustine leads us in a different direction, I interpret Augustine’s claim about the inner self through Jeffrey Stout’s account of “giving reasons.”

141 conf., 10.40.65.
142 conf., 10.35.57.
143 conf., 10.40.65.
I highlight four clues Augustine gives us. The first has to do with whether sweetness is an inward experience. Much later in his career, when Augustine reflected on the way in which we cannot move out of our sinful dispersion on our own in opposition to the Pelagians rather than the Platonists or Manicheans, he reflects on what it means that God pours the Holy Spirit into our hearts and identifies a certain sweetness. The Spirit, he argues, produces or pours out “an ineffable sweetness in the depths and interior of the soul, not merely through those who externally plant and water, but also through himself who gives the increase secretly.” In this, the Spirit “imparts love.”

This point is mostly suggestive of the direction that the next chapter will take, but it is worth postulating a connection between the “sweetness beyond understanding” and the “sweetness” of love and truth imparted by the Holy Spirit. The sweetness of the Holy Spirit, is, of course, the sweetness of God, the object common to all.

Second, what Augustine says about “externality” provides a set of clues about the nature of created and redeemed inwardness. The opposite of sin’s opacity is the new creation’s transparency. The opposite of self-inflicted dispersion is gifted unity and gratitude. The opposite of habituated externality is habituated attachment to worldly goods for human animals is habituated use of worldly goods for the sake of attachment to eternal goods.

Third, Augustine holds the view is that the self is forgotten and irretrievable in this life. The discussion in Confessions takes place after humankind’s lapse. Often Augustine expresses that there is nothing he can do about his opacity to himself except hope in the Lord and cry out for deliverance. He may be overstating his case. Augustine’s performance, after all, contradicts it: he confesses a fair degree about himself. Whether or not confession or articulation can make one more

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144 gr. et. pecc. or., 13.14. See the discussion of this in chapter 5.
transparent in this life is less important than the contrast between the opacity of this world and the transparency of the world that was and the one that will be. Augustine imagines a very different relationship to the self protologically and eschatologically. I take my cues from his eschatology. In *City of God*, he argues that we will be transparent to ourselves and others. “The thoughts of our minds will be lie open to mutual observation… for he will light up what is hidden in darkness and will reveal the thoughts of the heart.”\textsuperscript{145} Once we were, and again we will be.

Fourth, Augustine indirectly suggests what it means to be transparent to ourselves in *On the Trinity*. Recall the two functions (mens and animus) of the one rational power working in harmony with one another. The upshot of his account is that there was once a seamless continuity between the function of mens (contemplation of eternal truths) and animus (the commitments underlying any practical syllogism). The mens once adhered perfectly to justice and communicated justice perfectly to the animus. Virtue was second nature. According to his account of fallenness, sin causes a rupture principally between those two functions so that practical reasoning is cut off from speculative reason. Recall the way that Augustine maps sapientia onto the mens and scientia onto the animus. The active life is constantly informed by the contemplative life:

If you neglect to hold dear in charity the wisdom which always remains the same, and hanker after knowledge through experience of changeable, temporal things, this knowledge puffs up instead of building up. In this way the consciousness is overweighted with a sort of self-heaviness, and is therefore heaved out of happiness, and by that experience of its half-wayness it learns to its punishment what a difference there is between the good it has forsaken and the evil it has committed; nor can it go back up again, having squandered and lost its strength, except by the grace of its maker calling it to repentance and forgiving its sins.\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{145} *civ.*, 22.30.
\textsuperscript{146} *trin.*, 12.11.16. “Cum enim neglecta charitate sapientiae, quae semper codem modo manet, concupiscitur scientia ex mutabilium temporaliumque experimento, infiat, non aedificat: ita praegravatus animus quasi pondere suo a beatitudine expellitur, et per illud suae mediatis experimentum poena sua discit, quid intersit inter bonus desertum malumque commissum, nec redire potest effusis ac perditis viribus, nisi gratia Conditoris sui ad poenitentiam vocantis et peccata donantis.”
This break leads to a severing of decision-making processes from reasoning, causing a willed disharmony in our reasoning faculties. This willed disharmony is the source of self-opacity, the source of dissimilarity with ourselves and with God. Our reasons for acting are cut off from justice. It is also the source of self-forgetfulness: one cannot know “inside” anymore because one is obsessed with one’s life in the material world. So the “inner self” is like whatever it is like always to act habitually and for true commitments to underlie all one’s habits (and the implicit practical syllogisms that determine the habits).

From the latter two points, primarily, I re-construct an account of how we might think of a “public” inner self. The idea of a public inner self implies, among other things, that rationality goes “all the way down” into the basest bodily functions and, therefore, the most “personal” is also, in its own way, public.

Jeffrey Stout’s *Democracy and Tradition* offers a “philosophical account of democratic political culture.”147 I am interested in how Stout, following Robert Brandom, thinks “reason giving” works. Consider the following examples of practical reasoning that Stout, following Brandom, offers:

(a) Going to the store is my only way to get milk for my cereal, so I shall go to the store.

(b) I am a lifeguard on the job, so I shall keep close watch over the swimmers under my protection.

(c) Ridiculing a child for his limp would humiliate him needlessly, so I shall refrain from doing so.

Each of these examples is materially proper in that all competent participants in deliberation would

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take them to be so. Each also contains a premise that would need to be added to them to make them formally valid arguments. Consider:

(a) I desire to have milk for my cereal.

(b) If I am a lifeguard, it is my responsibility to keep a close watch over the swimmers under my protection.

(c) One ought not to humiliate people needlessly.\textsuperscript{148}

Each of the above propositions makes the implicit inferential commitment explicit. By offering up the claim explicitly, it allows the implicit claim to be “challenged or justified inferentially in light of other considerations.”\textsuperscript{149} Challenging and justifying is important when there is conflict about the right course of action.

Stout makes the varying natures of the above commitments explicit. The commitment underlying (a) has to do with individual desire. The commitment underlying (b) is role-specific. It has nothing to do with subjective desire of the lifeguard, nor does it have anything to do with the desire to remain a lifeguard. Reasons for action are strictly independent of desire. Role-specific responsibilities can conflict with personal desires and with other role-specific responsibilities. The commitment underlying (c) is, if true, an unconditional obligation. It is independent of role-specific responsibilities and subjective desires. Nor is it restricted to a single group.

Though an obligation may be in fact unconditional in the order of being, some might fail to acknowledge it in the order of knowing. The norm can be considered “a license for making inferences of a certain kind.”\textsuperscript{150} Issuing a license is the same as offering the reason for it, and the

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 188.

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 189.

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 196.
license may involve an appeal to authority. The epistemological warrant may therefore be particular, and so one need not think that others will acknowledge its truth.  

For Stout, the important point is that to ask someone for a reason is to ask her to make explicit the commitments of her practical reasoning. No such reason-giving is possible apart from a set of authorities and a community that acknowledges those authorities. The offering of reasons or making explicit of practical commitments always allows the reasons to be examined, questioned, justified, and more deeply understood. The last item is significant, because there is no reason to think that one should ever understand the full significance of the inferential commitment one holds.

So far I have identified two features of Stout’s account. First, there is the process of making practical inferential commitments. Second, there is the universal commitment that is independent of either role or subjective desire. Universal commitments are, we might say, the requirements of justice. The language of commitment is especially fitting in light of Augustine’s insistence that an element of will is involved, and because we can be held responsible for them. They can be challenged, and we must give an account in order to entitle ourselves to them.

I focus on what Stout calls “practical commitments,” which are “commitments to act” as opposed to “cognitive commitments,” which are “commitments to a claim or judgment.”

Entitling oneself to a practical commitment, like entitlement to any commitment, can and often does involve an appeal to authority. “What is it to be entitled to a belief or an intention? It is not the

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151 In this way, Stout denies the claims underlying Kant’s second critique and his Religion that unconditional obligations must be universalizable in the order of being and the order of knowing. No foundationalist epistemology is necessary.

152 Stout, Democracy and Tradition, 198n15.

153 Ibid., 211.
same thing as being able to justify the commitment to someone else, let alone being able to justify it compellingly to all rational agents.\textsuperscript{154}

The most obvious way moral authority plays a role in entitlement to commitments is through the ways in which moral communities form their members. Moral communities train (catechize, habituate) actors within them to reason about their own actions and to evaluate the actions of others.\textsuperscript{155} They tend to do this through “stories, catechisms, rituals, and spiritual exercises” and by instituting “special regimens of perception for those who occupy specialized roles of moral authority.”\textsuperscript{156} The goal of these practices of habituation is to train members to become what Stout calls “sages.” A sage is someone who is able “to reach reliable moral judgments inferentially.”\textsuperscript{157} For example, Stout appeals to his experience of training to become a referee. His catechesis took the form of a three-day course, and, though he received the top score on his final examination, he is not a good referee. He is able to apply to rules well in any situation when he can think about it, and he is a good “retrospective critic” of other referees. He is a poor referee in action, however, because he makes judgments too slowly. He reaches too many of them inferentially, taking too much time to think about the rules and their proper application. Alternatively, “good referees are able to make nearly all of the normative judgments they need to make in soccer match without inferring those judgments from premises. When challenged, of course, they are also able to defend their decisions inferentially. It is a mistake, however, to think that their retrospective arguments reflect the perceptual process that led them to their judgments in

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 221.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid. See also Foucault, Society Must Be Defended; Hadot, Philosophy as a Way of Life.
\textsuperscript{157} Stout, Democracy and Tradition, 221.
A sage, like a good referee, is able to reach reliable moral judgments intuitively and immediately because she is so deeply habituated into the moral wisdom of a community.

A sage is one for whom it seems like nothing to be deciding and acting rightly. It is, on Augustinian terms, to be transparent to oneself in an important way: one does not think about oneself, but only God. The two components I mentioned above, (1) the process of practical reasoning and (2) the universal practical commitments, can be applied fairly straightforwardly to Augustine’s animus and mens. The mens discerns sapientia, and sapietia includes true universal practical commitments. Augustine believes that wisdom consists in the good known to the divine mind. This good is convertible into truth, beauty, being, and is ultimately identical to God’s divinitas or “godness.” Importantly, the good known to the divine mind is commanded by God. It is therefore also a law by virtue of divine authority. The mens that contemplates God, therefore, also contemplates (among other things) the universal moral truths of the eternal law. The properly functioning animus habitually applies the commitment to the eternal law to quotidian existence.

If the mens and animus were seamlessly functioning and perfectly symbiotic, and if the mens were perfectly attached to God, there would be no need for agents ever to stop and infer the commitment underlying an action. All moral action would be perfectly habituated. No one would ever need to construct practical syllogisms, for we would be perfectly habituated to act on our practical commitments (in the animus) and the commitments would always be reliable (in the mens). This is what it means to say that the state of original justice involves a perfect adherence to the eternal law in the mens and a perfect habituation to act in the animus. The pre-lapsarian and

158 Ibid.

159 For more on natural law, see Russell Hittinger, The First Grace: Rediscovering the Natural Law in a Post-Christian World (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2003), 4ff.
eschatological self that Augustine conceives is perfectly transparent to herself not because she rightly gazes on an inner theater but because no such theater exists. That theater is a product of the realm of unlikeness, of scattering, of opacity. If all action and knowledge are perfectly coherent, so is the self. Or so I think Augustine argues, and so he suggests explicitly in the penultimate chapter of *City of God*: “perhaps God will be known to us and visible to us in the sense that he will be spiritually perceived by each one of us in each one of us, perceived in one another, perceived by each in himself; he will be seen in the new heaven and the new earth, in the whole creation as it then will be; he will be seen in every body by means of bodies, wherever the eyes of the spiritual body are directed with their penetrating gaze.”

Stout’s account helps us fill out Augustine’s understanding of practical reason. On Augustine’s terms, we were once on the way to sagacity, and one day we will be sages. The practice of going “inside” to find God is the practice of being habituated into acting on reliable practical commitments. These practical commitments are received in this life on the authority of the church. The church is also the primary means of our habituation through word and sacrament.

One implication of this account of interiority is that it heightens the degree to which reason and “the inner self” is embodied. Though Augustine seems to talk like a Cartesian dualist, he hopes and instructs for just the opposite: a seamless continuity between soul and body. If one is perfectly habituated to act on reliable moral commitments, the contents of one’s soul—intelligible truths about what goodness and God are—are always and automatically reflected in one’s embodied action. The process of catechesis aims not at a dualistic mysticism disinterested in physical events, but rather at the closest integration of the body with the divine mind possible. Good confessors do

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160 *ciu.*, 22.30.
not gaze on a private interiority in order to repair it. Rather, the practice of confession is best understood as a remedial narration of the self in light of the authority of the moral community into which the self is integrated through baptism.

Augustine’s talk about the body is sometimes negative because he thinks that in the present age the “lower nature” is temporarily out of control. The lack of control results from the loss of original justice. We are made unaware of the commitments underlying our actions. Our self-opacity consists in our inability to connect actions with truths. We will be transparent to ourselves and to others when we know and give reasons perfectly. This vision, it seems, is opposite of the Foucauldian confessor who creates inner truths to master the subject. Rather, confession haltingly articulates the self in order to receive God’s life precisely through the freedom that articulacy brings.

So far I have given a highly formal and quasi-metaphysical account of public interiority. But there are strong material and ethical implications. When we are perfectly habituated to act on reliable practical commitments, we never prioritize our desire for our own well-being over the common good. Augustine thinks that through Christ, we were able to trade personal advantage back for justice (this is the argument of On the Trinity XIII). The re-trade released us from our attachment to things in the realm of unlikeness and implied, among other things, a transformation of human social relations: an order of charity, which is also an order of justice. A world of natural limits perpetually retains the possibility of agonistic social relations. But a world of agents perfectly habituated to reliable practical commitments never sees conflict because the common good of justice always subordinates desire for personal advantage. All this happens in and through Christ, who secures it for us in this world and is already preparing the many mansions in which it will be
eternally confirmed.

Finally, this account of public interiority also has implications for Arendt’s claim that Augustine undid a shared world of action. By fusing action and contemplation in the closest possible way, he provided an alternative by which worldly affairs can be made intelligible without thereby needing to segment large sections of life (the oikos) off from reason. *The Human Condition* sometimes laments a death of the public. In some ways, the lament is shown to be misplaced. Augustine does not kill a public, shared realm. Instead, he destabilizes the boundary in a way that makes bodies simultaneously the objects of greater self-possession and of greater public rationality.

### 8. Some Systematic Conclusions

How should we “place” the above discussion doctrinally? David Kelsey helpfully distinguishes between three types of anthropological questions, “What are we, metaphysically speaking?” “Who are we?” and “How should we be oriented to the world, existentially speaking?” He also alerts us to the location of our question in what he calls the doctrinal home of theological anthropology. In the classical theologians, the primary home was in the doctrine of creation. Theological anthropology was subsumed in doctrines of creation as reflection on the image of God. In the mid-twentieth century, the typology shifts: the theological innovations of Karl Barth moved theological anthropology to the doctrine of reconciliation by making the question of the human inseparable from question of Christology and soteriology. For Barth, we are God’s covenant partners, patterned for fellowship with God after the Elect One. Later on, in the “theologians of

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hope” such as Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann, the doctrinal home shifted once again to eschatology.\(^{163}\) For them, what we are is only revealed in hope. It is almost an extension of Barth’s claim about Christ’s true humanity. Not only will we be like Jesus when we see him as he is (1 John 3.2–3), but also we will only really know what we are and have always been as creatures when we see him.

On Kelsey’s terms, my analysis of Augustine shows that he asks all the questions and that his answers cannot be contained primarily in one doctrinal locus. In this way, Augustine undermines a strict typology, and he does so in useful ways. The structural question I ask here is the “what” question, and it is usually located in discussions of creation. Augustine’s anthropology both fits in and breaks out of Kelsey’s typology, mostly because his doctrine of creation is difficult to separate from his eschatology. For Augustine, we shall be what we once were. When thinking about what we once were, we should attend to what we are, however enigmatic we are to ourselves in the present. We can only truly understand what we are in light of the humility of God in Christ. Augustine’s discovery of the humility of God can be heard in his famous words—when he finally is able to discover himself paradoxically by renouncing the misguided quest of self-discovery: “Late have I loved you, Beauty so ancient and so new, late have I loved you! Lo, you were within, but I outside, seeking there for you, and upon the shapely things you have made I rushed headlong, I, misshapen. You were with me, but I was not with you. They held me back far from you, those things which would have no being were they not in you.”\(^{164}\) For the pattern of both, we should look


\(^{164}\) conf., 10.27.38.
to the One who exhibited true humanity, the One in whom alone our humanity can be completed. Only when he finds Christ can Augustine find himself and know fully “what” he was: “You called, shouted, broke through my deafness; you flared, blazed, banished my blindness, you lavished your fragrance, I gasped, and now I pant for you; I tasted you, and I hunger and thirst; you touched me, and I burned for your peace.” Faith in Christ knows the pattern, love of Christ participates in the reality of complete humanity through a bond of union with him, and hope in Christ expects and even lives into the completion of the self.

Similarly, who we are and how should we live cannot be answered apart from appeals to creation, eschatological consummation, and redemption. How, for example, could we answer the question of how we are supposed to be oriented to the world apart from reference to our perfect habituation to reliable practical commitments in the garden and in the eschaton? And who can we begin to answer such a question now apart from reference to Christ?

Augustine resists attempts to fit him in the premodern “what” question, too. The self, after all, is fundamentally unstable, only found through an Outside that is really the most intimate partner. Take, for example, the trajectory of Confessions. Confessions is, among other things, a discussion about how Augustine came to realize what he was. But it cannot answer the “what” question without a strong claim about what Jean-Luc Marion calls the “disequilibrium” of the self. “Inquietem est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te.” The self is fundamentally unstable, always opening up to God but in need of divine grace to achieve its rest. As such, the self is also enigmatic to itself, unable to find itself—what it is—in the order of knowing without also asking who it is, or who God makes it. Augustine wrestles with the implications of the self’s instability and lack of

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165 Ibid.
166 Marion, “Resting, Moving, Loving,” 33.
transparency in the most sustained way in book X. After the narration of his history before God, Augustine’s more theoretical discussion of “memory” continues the theme of the instability at the heart of the self.\textsuperscript{167} The memory negates itself when it turns to the self. It is always only properly executed in remembrance of God\textsuperscript{168} and in a certain type of denial of its own capacity to lend itself coherence. When the self turns to itself in futile attempts to collect itself, it always loses what it seeks. It cannot be itself and remain private, wrapped up in its separation from all others—at least not for long. Private selves lose themselves—by degrees in the present, forever in eternity. Rather, the self is always already opening up to God and incomplete apart from its openness.\textsuperscript{169}

Jean-Luc Marion makes much of the point Augustine draws out from Genesis that God does not make us to reproduce according to our own kind, but according to God’s kind. For Marion, this moves past questions of metaphysics, which cannot recognize that at the heart of the self is a “most intimate other.”\textsuperscript{170} To put Marion’s claim in Kelsey’s terms, the main Augustinian question is “who?” There is no such thing as an Augustinian account of “pure nature.” I take it that Marion is right in that Augustine’s “metaphysics” (which I have mostly referred to as questions of the self’s structure of what the self is like in the order of being), insofar as he can be said to have any, are relatively bare and in service of a different type of question. Questions about the self’s structure serve as the condition of the possibility for the more interesting and determinative “who” and “how” questions, but the structural account of human being Augustine funds, as I suggested above, is ad hoc and non-systematic.

\textsuperscript{167} For a discussion of the distinction between self and soul in Augustine, and of the history of interpreting the self independently and through the soul, see Brian Stock, “Self, Soliloquy, and Spiritual Exercises in Augustine and Some Later Authors,” \textit{The Journal of Religion} 91, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 5–23.

\textsuperscript{168} \textit{conf.}, 10.5.8.

\textsuperscript{169} \textit{conf.}, 13.32.22.

\textsuperscript{170} Marion, “Resting, Moving, Loving,” 28.
The Augustinian self, then, is always already conceived in a certain relationship with the Triune God at its core. Analyzing the disequilibrium and God as most intimate other has been the purpose of this chapter. The discussion has helped to answer not only the question, “what are we?” and “who are we?” but also, “how should we orient ourselves to the world?” We can only get to a sense of what it means to be inward in Augustine by answering all three. In some sense, as the first two questions are closest to the surface of theological discussion, the third is most crucial: how is the self properly executed? How do we live fully human lives?

In order to ask this question, I have spent the bulk of the space articulating “what is the inner self?” Starting with Augustine’s account of memory in book X of the Confessions, I have argued that Augustine conceives a complex relationship between memory and God. The memory is related to God in that God is the life of the soul the way that the soul is the life of the body. God is the infinite empowerer of the finite power of memory. God is also the chief and original inhabitant of the memory. The memory is also unlike God in a good and necessary way: it is limited. Its “natural” forgetfulness is a function of the difference between creature and creator. Sin is the memory’s contingent and unhappy unlikeness to God. We forget the ground and source of our being and thereby forget ourselves. We are lost in our attachments to finite things. We are stuck, caught up as in a thicket. On our own, we become increasingly dissimilar from the source of Life itself and therefore, if we are not stopped, we hasten toward non-being, a final disintegration. Two types of relationships are severed: relationship between God and the self, and the relationship between mens and animus, the capacity to reason practically from the capacity to make reliable moral judgments. Because God is the source of both, the severing of God from self is sufficient to cause the internal fissure.
Under the conditions of finitude and sin, we relate to ourselves as outsiders. The only way we can get back in is through knowledge and love of God in the divine humility of Jesus. Humbling ourselves is intellectual submission to church authority. Only through the humility of mind and will can we know ourselves rightly, and we only know ourselves rightly when we are not thinking of ourselves. The goal of the Christian life, therefore, is to go deeper inside and to know more fully the only Object that is common to all, to find ourselves by losing everything to find God.
**Chapter 5: Natures and Graces**

They fuck you up, your mum and dad.
They may not mean to, but they do.
They fill you with the faults they had
And add some extra, just for you.
But they were fucked up in their turn…¹

_Persuadendum ergo erat homini quantum nos dilexerit Deus, et quales dilexerit: quantum, ne desperaremus; quales, ne superbiremus._

**1. Introduction**

The goal of this chapter is to explicate the deep grammar of Augustine’s understanding of beatitude—narrating thereby how Augustine thinks the will moves from its scattering in worldly things to its resting in God. The explication consists of four steps. First, I gather up the dispersed fragments of an Augustinian anthropology from the early chapters, bind them together, and add to them in order to restate (again) Augustine’s account of human nature and sin. I do some stripping down in order to display the conceptual framework Augustine builds. Second, I use the terms gathered in the anthropology to propose a way of understanding the person and work of Christ in books IV and XIII of _On the Trinity_. Christ restores the primal harmony and defeats the devil, persuading us to love God and overcoming our despair by showing us how much God loves us. Third, I discuss Augustine’s view of the work of the Holy Spirit in moving our wills; here I pick up a strand about God’s power and miracles from the third chapter. In a fourth section, I pull the various strands of Augustine’s account of beatitude and offer a more conceptually driven account of nature and grace in his thought. I relate it to a set of contemporary debates about nature and grace in order to map the conceptual grammar of some useful Augustinian traditions.

The interpretive thesis about Augustine’s thought is that nature and grace are analogically

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diverse terms. Talk of nature and grace in a univocal sense confuses any meaningful discussion of the issue: so, not “nature” and “grace” but “natures” and “graces.” Further, by attending to the different senses of “nature” and “grace,” it is possible to get a better grasp on how Augustine thought of beatitude. The term “nature” is used in three different ways in the account of Augustine’s thought I offer below. Nature is a structure of the self, it is a state of original perfection in the garden, and it is the state of human creatures after sin. Grace also has multiple senses. Grace is sometimes used to refer to creation itself,\(^2\) to the “objective” work of Christ, and to the subjective work of the Spirit. Texts were chosen mainly from *On the Trinity*, but were supplemented insofar as it was necessary to bring out the relevant aspects of Augustine’s views for the purpose of offering one more or less coherent theological reading of Augustine. The substantive thesis in relation to the public/private distinction is that Jesus, especially through his death and resurrection, shows the whole order of the devil’s domination to be contingent. By doing so, he opens up a new moral and social space in which we can re-think human relationships. The next chapter on the Virgin Mary will explore one aspect of the social implications of Christ’s work.

2. Recap

In the third chapter, I outlined a broad metaphysical and epistemic framework for Augustine’s participation metaphysics. The framework showed how body-soul composites were related to God and to angels by means of the claim: the soul is the life of the body, but God is the life of the soul. In Augustine’s thought, the soul mediates (divine) life to the body via the soul (*anima*). In the third chapter, I made a set of claims about the soul’s proper ordering and about its disordering. The soul, understood in intimate relation with human memory, is finite, and

\(^2\) Thomas refers to this as “gratuity” in order to distinguish it from “grace.”
dependent on God for its existence and its proper function. Second, God resides in the memory/soul not only as the “empowerer of the power,” but as its chief, primordial inhabitant. The distinction between the memory as a “structure” and the memory as a set of items emerged as the basis for the distinction between the structure of the self and the state of the self that I will explain in this chapter.

Regarding the soul’s structure, Augustine posited a hierarchy of animation: mens, animus, and anima. The anima is shared with humans and animals, and the mens and animus designate two types of rational power. The mens, which Augustine argues is symbolized in 1 Corinthians 11.2-16 by the male body, is the image of God—speculative reason or contemplation of eternal truths. Here I call it “contemplative reason.” The animus, symbolized by the female body, is the practical reason, which undertakes the role of prudence (counsel, judgment, and command). Here I call it “active reason.” Augustine affirms that both men and women possess contemplative and active reason in equal degrees; the reason for his symbolism is to explain the biblical text in a way that affirms that both men and women are made in the imago dei.

His discussion the hierarchy of reason-giving opens him up to a way of narrating a transition in the “state” or “condition” of the soul. By virtue of the contemplation of eternal truth, the contemplative reason is properly most intimate with God, since God is identical to eternal truth. The contemplative reason, then, provides a set of universal judgments to inform active reason in its decision-making about particulars. In the pre-lapsarian state of “original justice” that Augustine imagines, God was perfectly present to both the contemplative and active reason. We were

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1 See Aquinas on prudence, ST 2-2 Q. 47-50.

4 This is somewhat anachronistic, but becomes a major theme in medieval scholastics influenced by Augustine. In Thomas’s schema, for example, we might say that the active reason provides the middle term of a practical syllogism, while the contemplative reason provides the universal judgment “Do good and avoid evil.”
transparent to ourselves and to God; the principles of practical reason, arrived at through speculative reason, were fully known to us, and the fact of our knowing them was also known to us. But the active reason rebelled and left its proper place. That is, it ignored the universal principle of justice and sought to have something of its own, its own personal advantage or private property. What made something its “own” is a lack: it did not seek to relate to what was held privately through knowledge and love of God, who is “the whole that is common to all.” Rather, the active reason sought these things directly, unmediated. It sought its “own private property,” even though “there is nothing more than the whole.” More can be had in common than in private, for all things depend on God, in whom they find their true value. By privatizing them, cordonning them off from the source of their existence, value, structure, and power, the poor use of goods mediates self-diminishment and death, moving our souls and bodies back towards the nothingness from which they came. Augustine makes it clear that active and contemplative reason are two aspects of one rational soul. It is the soul that rebelled, the soul that cut itself off from not only the finitely understood principle of justice, but divinity identical with Justice itself.

According to the above description, Augustine posits two “states” together with the single “structure” of the self. The first state is a state of original justice in which the hierarchies of reason function properly, not only in the order of being but also in the order of submission. The contemplative reason submitted to God and the active reason to the contemplative reason. The second state is the state of what Augustine calls concupiscence. In concupiscence, the soul rebels against God by rejecting justice and pursuing private (and therefore privative) goods instead by using them as if they had no source or structure and power. Augustine says that the main commandment is non concupiscies because the problem is on the “inside,” not a matter merely of
doing the wrong thing externally, but of becoming disordered in one’s attachments.\footnote{sp. et. litt., 4.6.}

The state of concupiscence Augustine describes is remarkable in two ways. First, in light of Augustine’s participation metaphysics outlined in chapter three, sin has no substance of its own. It “exists” as a sort of parasite that undoes the terms of the original state of happiness, bliss, self-transparency, and delight. Sin moves finite creatures, constantly dependent on God, back to the nothingness from which they came. Second, in this movement from being to nothingness, sin subverts the structure of the self. “Seeking to have more, it gained less, because there is nothing more than the whole.” In \textit{Nature and Grace}, Augustine vividly presents sin as a lack that undoes us:

Not eating is… not a substance… One abstains, of course, from a substance, since food is a substance. But abstaining from food is not a substance. And yet, if one completely abstains from food, the substance of the body wastes away; it is destroyed by an imbalance in health, is drained of strength, and is weakened and broken by exhaustion to the point that, even if one somehow continues to live, he can scarcely be enticed back to food, though by abstaining from it his health was injured. So too, sin is not a substance, but God is a substance and the highest substance and the only true food of a rational creatures… Because it has withdrawn from this food by disobedience, [it] is unable to take, by reason of weakness, what it ought to have enjoyed…\footnote{nat. et. gr., 20.22. “nonne attenditur, ut alia omittam, etiam non manducare, non esse substantiam? A substantia quippe receditur; quoniam cibus substantia est. Sed abstinere a cibo non est substantia, et tamen substantia corporis, si omnino abstinetur a cibo, ita languescit, ita valetudinis inaequalitate corrumpitur, ita exhaustitur viribus, ita lassitudine debilitatur et frangitur, ut si aliquo modo perduret in vita, vix possit ad eum cillum revocari, unde abstinento vitia est. Sic non est substantia peccatum: sed substantia est Deus, summaque substantia, et solus verus rationalis creaturarum cibus; a quo per inobedientiam recedendo, et per infirmitatem non valendo capere quo debuit et gaudere, audis quemadmodum dicat.”}

Like not eating, sin is a lack that wastes creatures away, a nothing that moves them to become more like it by unraveling or undoing the creatures. Sin has no efficient cause. It cannot have one, and would it be oxymoronic for it to have one, for sin is a nothingness that undoes what is, the contrary freedom enables, the bondage that is liberty’s dark underside.\footnote{civ., 12.6-7.}

My description of the second state, the state in which our nature is “wounded” by sin...
primarily adverts a high level abstract definition of sin: sin is the choice of personal power or happiness over divine justice. Augustine piles a set of metaphors on this high level definition. Some of these metaphors directly indicate the abstract definition, e.g., the chief metaphor of an unsalutary trade of the whole that is common to all for the sake of one’s own private property. Augustine also provides a phenomenological account of sin. In *Confessions* X, he gives three primary descriptions of what sin is like following 1 John’s account of the three sins: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life. I have shown in the last chapter why and how I think that the abstract definition of sin underlies the phenomenology. What binds all these accounts together is a description of an improper mode of attachment to finite realities.

The last chapter therefore narrated part of the way Augustine thought the “self” described (imprecisely, probably, by metonymic transfer) as “memory” maintained its structural coherence and began to be incoherent. But more can be said about the mechanics of the transition. Specifically, I left out an account of the “will,” the main locus of sin. For Augustine, “will” (*voluntas*), is the capacity to desire, to love, to want; through the will, the soul attaches the body to the world. The will as the way that the individual soul attaches the body to the world is crucial. In the original state, the self was bound to the external world through love of and desire for God. Because of this prior binding, the common good, the requirements of justice, dictated the terms under which human creatures “used” the world. The account of will adds texture to the description already offered. Once again, claims about “structure” will be brought together with

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8 There is no word for “self” in Augustine’s vocabulary. See discussion in Matthew Drever, “Created in the Image of God: The Formation of the Augustinian Self” (Ph.D., The University of Chicago, 2008).

9 Augustine uses these words interchangeably.

10 Arendt puts this elegantly: the will “unites the mind’s inwardness with he outward world.” See Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 101.

11 See *doct. chr.*, book 1; see also O’Donovan, “Usus’ and ‘Fruitio’ in Augustine, ’De Doctrina Christiana” I.”
claims about “state” in order to make sense of how Augustine thinks of “God and the soul.”

3. Augustine on the Will and Intellect

For Augustine, beatitude is identical to coming to know the trinity. Modern attempts to describe knowledge of God focus on the conceptual or cognitive access to God in isolation from the volitional aspect. For Augustine, the cognitive and the volitional cannot be separated for reasons that will be given below.

“The mind knows nothing so well as what is present to it, and nothing is more present to the mind than itself.” Augustine thinks that the mind has a certain type of relation with itself. It can and ought to be intimate with itself. The earlier chapter discussed at length the fissures disrupting the inner intimacy. Here I show the other side, the structure of this mind that enables the self-intimacy.

Several terms of art will help to understand this structure. Augustine posits that there are three powers of the “inner man” (mens), the powers of cognition (intellectus), of memory (memoria) and of desire or will (voluntas). Memoria was described extensively in the last chapter. When one understands (intelligere) or comprehends (comprehendere) something, it is immediately and exhaustively present to my mind (mens). When one understands, one can “see” it fully, or, in this

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12 sol., 2.7.
13 “What other reward is promised us but eternal life, which, after all, is the knowledge of God?... For, though the soul is immortal, its turning away from the knowledge of God is nonetheless rightly said to be its death, and, when it turns back to God, it merits to attain eternal life, so that eternal life is, as I said, that knowledge. But no one can turn back to God unless he turns away from this world.” de civ. an., 8.10.
14 In book VIII of trin., Augustine sets up not only his understanding of the self, but also of how the self comes to know God in a set of generalizable epistemological reflections. Augustine begins the book, which begins a major shift in the treatise, with the goal to “try to think of [God] as far as he enables us” (8.2.3) and to turn “in a more inward manner than the things that have been discussed above” (8.1.1).
15 trin., 14.4.7. For an example of a treatment of the cognitive aspects apart from the volitional aspects, see Hector, Theology Without Metaphysics.
life, more fully; Augustine frequently pairs metaphors of vision (*videre*) and light (*lux*) with his discussion of understanding. No one can possibly “understand” in this life, and no one but God comprehends God absolutely, but people will understand God (in a human way) only when God is “seen” face to face in the beatific vision.

Augustine thinks that many things are comprehended in a human way in this life based either on inner or outer perceptual experience. Outer perceptual experience is sensual. Inner perceptual experience is a grasp of what it belongs to intellectual creatures to know (like what it is for something to exist, or to be good, or to be beautiful). To “believe” (*credere*) means to accept an account of something or some set of propositions, historical or otherwise, on the basis of authoritative testimony. One “knows” something (*scire*) either when one believes based on testimony or when one has either inner or outer perceptual contact with it. I can know either what I understand or what I believe on the basis of reliable testimony. One does all this with the intellect (*intellectus*). One “loves” or desires (*amare, diligere*) with one’s will (*voluntas*).

The reason we are intimate with ourselves is that to be a human, Augustine thinks, is to exhibit a certain kind of self-awareness, even if it is murky and clouded. The moment of self-knowing subsists in “understanding.” It is co-present with the memory, existing as long as we are self-aware. The moment of self-loving subsists in will (*voluntas*). Will is co-present but conceptually dependent upon memory (standing here for the self or soul as a whole) and understanding. I attend to myself, find myself interesting, recognize the goodness of my soul, attach myself to myself by my will. Augustine uses *amor, diligas*, and *caritas* interchangeably to describe the nature of willing.¹⁶

It is significant for understanding how Augustine talks about the powers of intellect and

¹⁶ *civ.*, 14.7, *ep. Jo*. It is important not to metaphysically overdetermine these concepts. For Augustine, there is one unified self (metaphysically) that is dispersed (morally).
will that the three powers of the *mens* can be imperfectly analogized to the trinity. He thinks that this structure of the inner self is a *vestigium* or *analogia* of the trinity in the specific sense that each power of the mind stands for the mind as a whole, just like each person of the divine trinity stands in for *deitas*. “When memory (*memoria*) is called life (*vita*), and mind (*mens*), and substance (*substantia*), it is called so with reference to itself; but when it is called memory, it is called so with reference to another. I can say the same about understanding and will; both understanding and will are so called with reference to another. But each of them is life (*vita*) and mind (*mens*) and being (*essentia*) with reference to itself.”¹⁷ This means that the distinct powers each name a single reality, a single “what.” “For this reason these three are one (*unum*) in that they are one life, one mind, one being; and whatever else they are called together with reference to self, they are called it in the singular, not in the plural.”¹⁸

The “metaphysics” of the inner self divides it up, but it implies something like an anthropological monism, for any moment of knowing is simultaneously a moment of loving and remembering, and any moment of loving a moment of knowing and remembering.¹⁹ Just as with the members of the trinity, all three “parts” of the mind (*mens*) are active in each of the mind’s functions. The memory’s immediate knowledge of itself and its immediate attention to itself can each stand in for the “self.” It follows that the will does not exist apart from the self-understanding or the memory. Rather, what any one of these parts does, the other does as well.

Therefore, one’s attachment to anything—the carnal world, a spiritual power, an abstract concept—is an attachment of an entire self through the will. One has adhered and inherited, thrown

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¹⁷ *trin.*, 10.11.18.

¹⁸ *trin.*, 10.11.18.

oneself in. Augustine does not seem too concerned with establishing strict definitions and speaks of the different parts of the self interchangeably—which is why the discussion of memory in Confessions X is a discussion of the “inside.” Loving is volitional, but one can believe with the will. Believing and knowing and understanding are perceptual, conceptual, and cognitive, but knowledge requires intentio, which is willed.

As I suggested earlier, when one comes into contact with a bodily creature “outside” of oneself (and all creatures, bodily and spiritual, are outside to some extent), the creature forms an imprint in the memory through one’s senses. Augustine says that when he uses the word “Carthage,” a sense-induced image of Carthage is already present to his memory because he has been there and seen it. “Its image in my memory is its word.” Similarly, though Augustine has not seen Alexandria, he has heard about it, and he can fabricate an image of it from analogies to the sense-descriptions. In book XIII, he uses another example, a sort of hybrid of the first two: “When we think about the man John we do it with an image which has been impressed on our memory from our notion of human nature.” “We know,” he says, “what a man is”—a body-soul composite. We can therefore picture a man when one is described to us on the basis of this judgment.

In order to recall the imprint, or come into contact with one thing and not another in a sustained way, or to call to mind one thing and not another, one has to develop an interest (intentio) in a subject matter or a thing. One has to pay attention to it, to extend oneself toward it. In order to know, then, one must also desire. Otherwise, how can we explain the choice to know one thing and not another? Consider the experience of reading a book. I pick up a book and I recognize or

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20 Augustine offers an account of perception in *trin.*, 11.1-5.
21 *trin.*, 8.6.9.
22 “hominem autem Joannem in phantasia cogitamus, quae de humanae naturae notitia impressa est nostrae memoriae,” *trin.*, 13.1.2.
understand the words. But the experience of recognizing words is not sufficient to explain what gets the book read. I have to keep reading it. I have to “cling” to the book. “Will” or “desire” (and perhaps even “love”) names the cause of our clinging to something—really, to anything we cling to at all. *Amore inhaeseris.*

On Augustine’s terms, we have no choice about whether we attach ourselves to things. Loving or desiring taken by itself, therefore, is neutral and formal.\(^{23}\) We are never unattached, but the capacity to attach has no pre-sets. Everything hangs on the objects to which we attach ourselves and on how we attach ourselves to them. We can be trained to attach ourselves to any constellation of things; we can learn to desire anything at all.\(^{24}\) There are many books that I could read. Why this one? The answer is always the same: the book, any book, is lovely. It is intrinsically good. By virtue of its existence, the book has structure and power, a *telos* that draws me in. I recognize its goodness and I desire it. So it must be with any love: *non amas certe nisi bonum.* “You [the reader] do not love what is not good.”\(^{25}\) I keep reading it because it is good; something about it—the style of the writing, the subject matter, the character development, the author herself—keeps my interest. For all books, and all things, insofar as they exist, participate in the structure and power of being in general, the Good itself. “Only good … that can diminish or increase is one that gets its being good from another good.”\(^{26}\)

Intelligible things are known differently than sensible things. One of Augustine’s favorite examples to illustrate the difference is the case of the just man. It is not hard to identify the man.

\(^{23}\) See *Trin.*, 9.6.13: the inner word is conceived in love either in charity or concupiscence.

\(^{24}\) See Griffiths, “The Nature of Desire.”

\(^{25}\) *Trin.*, 8.3.4. “You certainly only love what is good.” It is, of course, possible to love sinning, as Augustine does in *Conf.* 2. But in that case, there is no “what” that is loved, only a disordered set of goods. He loves, in that case, the disorder, which is a nothing. See the discussion in chapter 4.

\(^{26}\) *Trin.*, 8.4.5.
But justice cannot be experienced externally, nor can we know it only if we are already just (for how could we ever become just if we could not know what justice was apart from already being just?). So how can we identify a “just man”? Do we have to be just ourselves in order to do it?

Augustine believes that the structure of our mind and the trace of our created condition form the basis of our ability to recognize justice in an exemplar of justice. First, the structure of our minds: for Augustine, there is a connatural or “inner,” almost intuitive knowing of concepts. Augustine calls it “inner truth present to the mind.” He believes it belongs to the structure of rational creatures to be able to know transcendental concepts like truth, good, and beautiful. We know justice, then, in the way we know any true “form”: connaturally and immediately, as if an inner light shines from above.

I am perceiving something that is present to me, and it is present to me even if I am not what I perceive, and many will agree with me when they hear me. And anyone who hears me and knowingly agrees with me also perceives the same thing in himself, even if he is not what he perceives... What is wonderfully surprising is that a mind should see in itself what it has seen nowhere else, and see something true and see something true that is a just mind, and be itself mind, and not be the just mind which it sees in itself. 27

Augustine thinks that it is not just a structural feature to know justice. In our created state, we had full access to it, so a trace of it remains in our memoria.

Because justice is good, it has a natural drawing power. Given the relation of the mind’s powers, knowing justice from the structure and trace implies that there is a limited sense in which we want to know it. Justice is a “form” and a “truth” that immediately has its own structure and power identical with it. So when we encounter justice exemplified in the “just man,” we encounter this natural draw. Justice’s draw, however, is eminently resistible. And we almost always do resist it even as we constantly create justifications for violating it.

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27 trin., 8.6.9.
To summarize: Augustine thinks that our capacity to know is bound to our need to love. When we love something, we bind ourselves to it in order to become familiar with it. The things we love take up space in our memory. We mull over them, bind ourselves to them more deeply. become more like them.

4. Sin

With these pieces in place, we can better narrate Augustine’s doctrine of sin. He frequently uses the term “vitiated” to describe what sin does to our nature (the structure of the self). Sin renders our structure inoperable, or unable to function properly. On Augustine’s view, we function properly only when we know and love the Triune God, for that is what we were made to do. Having desired to have things of our own apart from God, we lost the ability to know God. Even if we could know God, our capacity to love God has been distorted. We are disordered because, though we still know and love things, we have chosen and constantly choose the wrong things to love. In On the Trinity X, he offers a powerful description of these dynamics:

Yet such is the force of love that when the mind has been thinking about things with love for a long time and has got stuck to them with the glue of care (curae glutino inhaeserit), it drags them along with itself even when it returns after a fashion to thinking about itself. Now these things are bodies which it has fallen in love with outside itself through the senses of the flesh (per sensus carnis adamavit) and got involved with through a kind of long familiarity. But it cannot bring these bodies themselves back inside with it into the region, so to say, of its non-bodily nature; so it wraps up their images and clutches (rapit) them to itself, images made in itself out of itself. For it gives something of its own substance to their formation (dat enim eis formandis quiddam substantiae suae); but it also keeps something apart by which it can freely make judgments on the specific bearing of such images; and this is more truly mind (mens), that is rational intelligence (rationalis intelligentia) which is kept free to judge with. For we observe that we share even with animals those other parts of the soul (illas animae partes) which are impressed with the likenesses of bodies.28

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28 “tanta vis est amoris, ut ea quae cum amore diu cogitaverit, eisque curae glutino inhaeserit, attrahat secum etiam cum ad se cogitandum quodam modo redit. Et quia illa corpora sunt, quae foris per sensus carnis adamavit, eorumque
Note several features emphasized above: the binding of the self to the world by love, the way in which habituated practice, “long familiarity,” leads the will to “wrap up their images and [clutch] (rapit) them to itself.” In doing so, the soul “gives something of its own substance to their formation,” mimicking the divine gift of seminal formulae to provide the form of the cosmos. The language is obviously sexual, but not reductively so. It borrows the images from the concupiscent dispersion of sin outlined in the previous chapter. Here we see the soul “take” (rapit) things in the form of images imprinted on the memory and “give” (dat) its substance to the images. Elsewhere Augustine pictures this as tangling in a thicket, a loss of self through seeming gain. I take it that in his summary statements like the one above, Augustine gives us a relatively complete account of how he thinks of our condition, the state of sin in which we find ourselves.

5. Beatitude and Knowledge of God

On the Trinity is written in light of this account of sin, and it is about what it means for sinful creatures to know God. The above account of knowing in general is therefore ultimately in service of understanding what it would mean to know God. Knowledge of God is a problem for Augustine because, in one sense, knowing God is impossible without God’s help. The structure undergirding Augustine’s claims has been outlined above: there are two simultaneous moments in coming to intimacy with the true, the good, and the beautiful. The first is a knowing and the second is a loving, an act of intellection and an act of volition. Because of the structure of the human mind, when we use the word “knowing”—as in, “beatitude for Augustine is knowing God,” we always
already intimate “loving.”

Knowing God is impossible without God for two reasons that should be familiar. First, deitas is very, very difficult for body-soul composites to conceive. A near axiom of Augustine’s epistemology is “nobody loves what he believes and does not see except by some standard of generic or specific notions.” God is difficult to know for body-soul composites because we do not possess generic or specific notions for God. God is not like a basic item of perceptual experience. “He is not a body, that we can perceive through the eyes of our head.” (Non enim corpus est, ut carneis oculis inquiratur.) But if that is so, how can we know God? “What does knowing God mean but beholding him (mente conspicere) and firmly grasping (firmeque percipere) him with the mind (mente)?”

Without knowing God, we cannot love God. Sed quis diligit quod ignorat?

So the metaphysical basis of the first problem is the God/world distinction. A metaphysically simple One does not share in our world; our world shares in God. While we possess immediate knowledge of the transcendentals, which are identical to God, our immediate knowledge is fragmentary and cloudy.

Striking in his early discussion book VIII is the repeated phrase si potes—if you can. It nicely depicts the futility of human struggle for the self-cleansing necessary to see God without divine aid. See the truth si potes. Evanescent, it sparkles in you mind when you hear it, but it just barely grazes, a tangent—almost as if the point of touching you is to dazzle and then vanish. See (vides) the good si potes. You can see all the earthly goods: good farms, good food, good trees, good land, good wine.

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29 Augustine begins trin. by listing three mistakes people make when thinking of God. The list is a helpful way of separating out different types of realities or substances for the purposes of discussion. He distinguishes between thinking of God according to “bodily substance,” to “created spirit,” or to incoherent concepts (self-begetting, etc). Since the third category is simply incoherent and can be refuted on formal logical grounds alone, first two categories only are of concern here: we can know bodily and spiritual creatures.

30 trin., 8.6.9.

31 trin., 8.4.6.

32 trin., 8.4.6.
You even “see” spiritual goods by your capacity to comprehend and understand: good angels, good mind, and good friendship. But you know immediately that each of these things is but a limited instantiation of the good that you understand. “Only good … that can diminish or increase is one that gets its being good from another good.” Take away the limitations so you can see the bonum bonum, the good good. Try it si potes. If you can. But non potes. You cannot.

But we once had access to the good good, so what happened? The second problem is that access to divine justice is the only hope for rightly ordering our soul and therefore for rightly attaching ourselves to God and creation. Our active reason needs our contemplative reason to gain access to God. Yet that access, primordially given, has been lost by our will to attach ourselves to earthly things apart from God. Try as we might, we cannot love as we ought, for the disordered will prevents us from knowing. Our sin-induced bodily decay “weighs us down” (Augustine quotes Ws. 9.15, an important passage for him). Our fixation on material things (a direct consequence of concupiscence) stunts and even deceives our intellective capacities by filling our memories with junk. “Do not ask what truth is; immediately a fog of bodily images and a cloud of fancies will get in your way and disturb the bright fair weather that burst on you the first instant when I said ‘truth.’” In this way, our habitual self-binding to created realities prevents us from understanding God. The truth coruscates not only because we are finite, but mainly because of sin, and the best we can do in this condition is catch the glimmer “from the corner” of our eyes. Like his “flash of a

33 trin., 8.4.5.
35 See praed. sanct., persever.
36 trin., 8.2.3.
37 One wonders if this is not also a consequence of our finitude, as Thomas seems to think (1.1.12-13).
trembling glance” encounter with God in book 7 of *Confessiones*, Augustine challenges his reader to hold her gaze on the sparkle: “stay there if you can... But you cannot; you slide back into these familiar and earthy things. And what weight is it, I ask, that drags you back but the birdlime of greed for the dirty junk you have picked up on your wayward wanderings” (*sordium contractarum cupiditatis visco et peregrinationis erroribus*). 38

We have so firmly attached ourselves to things in the world through the power of our will, now figured as sinful desire, *concupiscentia*, which is unambiguously bad, 39 that we cannot come to know God even if God does self-present or manifest Godself. Even if we could know God, even if we could sustain our eyes on the sparkle through our own capacities, we might not love what we see. 40 For having loved things apart from God, we can no longer come to be intimate with God, no longer know God in a way that would help us. For having rejected our spiritual food, our *appetite* has been lost. Presented with God in our concupiscent dispersion, we are repulsed by the sight.

The spiral into which Adam’s family has entered is vicious, and the stakes of undoing it are high, for God is the empowerer of our powers and our memory’s primordial inhabitant. Separation from God devastates our being and debases our action. In sum: the only way to be rightly attached to the world is to love God, who is Justice and Love itself. But our wills are incapable of this reattachment. Further, we do not even know what we are supposed to be attached to, and we cannot desire if our desire is not elicited. Our wills are therefore doubly incapable in the state of sin: we do not know, and, even after knowing, we cannot love. The purpose of the second half of *On the

38 *trin.*, 8.2.3.
39 See the discussion of the passions in *cit.*, 14.7.
40 Augustine thinks it obvious that we can know something without really loving it. That is to say, we can have awareness of something without attending to it, without desiring a sort of intimacy with it. Some Augustinians like Scotus speculated that our wills are so firmly attached to the world that even if they knew God they might not desire God.
Trinity is to show how God has overcome these problems in Jesus and in the Spirit.

The account of the self, knowing, loving, sinning, and knowing God above provides the basic terms for understanding Augustine’s account of beatitude. Beatitude consists most fundamentally as in the restoration of knowledge and love of God. Augustine piles a set of metaphors to describe what it means for God to “heal” us, to “reconcile” us to God, and to “rescue us” from the devil. All of these metaphors describe what God does in Christ to “persuade” us to get over our despair and pride and re-attach ourselves to God.

We can see how this works if we return to the example of the just man. Since one can know justice and the man, when one loves the just man, one loves two things: the form by which he is just and the man who is just. More often than not, I come to believe (credere) that he is just based on faith (fides). And I know the form of justice and truth intimately based on my interior access to it, which is the divine illumination. All of this follows from what has been said.41

Sometimes, one loves the just person because one loves his justice. When one “sees” it enacted or believes it to be so, one has the opportunity to bind herself to it more fully, for seeing more of its dimensions, the variety of its enactments, the fine texture of the exemplary life is a condition of the possibility of loving the form more for what it is. It helps one see the ways in which one’s own training in the virtue up until that point has been limited or distorted, and it opens up a new set of possibilities previously closed off by ignorance and negligence. If one binds oneself to the justice of the life, one is able to love it, and by loving it and seeing it, to come to know it. The

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41 trin., 8.9.13. “What is it that fires us with love for the apostle Paul when we read this, if not that we believe he himself lived like that? But that God’s ministers should live like that we do not believe on hearing it from someone else, we observe it within ourselves, or rather above ourselves in truth itself. So it is from what we see that we love the man we believe to have lived like that; and unless above all we loved this form which we perceive always enduring, never changing, we would not love him merely because we hold on faith that his life when he lived in the flesh was harmoniously adjusted to this form.”
more one loves justice, the more intimate still one’s knowledge of it becomes because one attends to the exemplary life even more carefully. The exemplar of the virtue of justice, therefore, creates the possibility of virtuous cycle in one’s loving and knowing, spiraling up until the lover of justice, too, becomes just.\footnote{We should not despair of justice, Augustine tells his readers, because God provides exemplars suited to the capacities of our minds. “Yet I do not know how it is, but we are stirred all the more largely to love of that form by the faith with which we believe that someone lived like that, and by the hope that does not allow us to despair of ourselves living like that, men though we are, seeing that other men have lived like that; so that we desire this all the more ardently and pray for it all the more confidently. Thus on the one hand love of that form we believe they lived up to makes us love their life, and on the other belief in their life stirs us to a more blazing charity toward that form; with the result that the more brightly burns our love for God, the more surely and serenely we see him, because it is in God that we observe that unchanging form of justice which we judge that a man should live up to. Faith therefore is a great help for knowing and loving God, not as though he were altogether unknown or altogether not loved without it, but for knowing him all the more clearly and loving him all the more firmly.” trin., 8.9.13.}

The more one loves something, the more one becomes like it, for in loving something, one binds one’s whole self to it, one fills up one’s memory with it, one mulls it over, understanding it more deeply. This attention and love simply turns out to be the process of moral formation by which the virtue “justice” is acquired.

How does this relate to the problem of the state in which love for God has been lost? What does sin have to do with justice? Augustine thinks that justice is the way we talk about how we organize our attachments, organize our loves. Justice is loving the right things in the right order. It is therefore intimately connected to loving God, for when I have justice, I love God rightly. More technically, Augustine holds a doctrine of the unity of the virtues in which all virtues reduce to love of God. Consider the way Augustine relates the happy life to the pursuit of virtue in On the Morals of the Catholic Church, where he argues that all the virtues are forms of love, and specifically, forms of love for God.

But if brings us to the happy life, I would say that virtue is absolutely nothing but the highest love for God… Temperance is love offering itself in its integrity to the beloved. Fortitude is love easily tolerating all things on account of the beloved. Justice is love...
serving the beloved alone and as a result ruling rightly. And prudence is love that wisely separates those things by which it is helped from those by which it is impeded. But we said that this love is not a love of just anything but of God, that is, of the highest good, the highest wisdom.41

Since deitas is identical to justice and love, one’s love for justice is a love for God. Through seeing justice enacted, one’s dispersed love and fragmentary knowledge is gathered together to give one something more of God. Through the just person’s exemplification of justice, not only does one become just, but one becomes more like God.

Knowing God, therefore, should be conceived as a type of moral formation that depends (for reasons I specify below) especially on the exemplification of the virtue of justice and the moving of our desire to bind itself to the exemplar of justice. It is not, as a characteristically modern account of knowing God through “speculative” or “theoretical” reason may presume,44 merely cognitive access to God by which we have to ensure that the God made available must overcome all cognitive “gaps.”45 In the elegant phrase of Khaled Anatolios, Christ “makes of the gap a way” toward the full vision of God.46


Jesus is the just man. By coming to know him, we come to know God. The main theme of Augustine’s Christology is the distinctive way that Christ exemplifies justice and thereby leads us back to love and knowledge of the holy trinity. In the next two sections I organize, substantiate,

41 mor., 15.25.
44 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason.
45 See Hector, Theology Without Metaphysics.
46 Khaled Anatolios, Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 244.
and extend the claims I made above. I organize them by explicating Augustine’s account of how God justifies us in Christ through the power of the Spirit. I substantiate them by analyzing the finer texture of Augustine’s account of Christ’s death. I extend them by discussing the ways in which the particularities of Christ’s and the Spirit’s identity in relation to the trinity and to bring us to beatitude. In the final section, I synthesize and try to lend systematic coherence to Augustine’s thought about what we are and how God saves us.

The broad theological framework here picks up on the argument of the third chapter. Trinity extends itself in two ways toward dispersed and scattered creatures in order to gather them back into the divine love by meeting both the intellectual and volitional needs outlined above. Augustine calls these self-extensions of God into creation the “missiones” or missions of God; in the missiones, the Father sends the Son and the Spirit and thereby reveals the divine essence.  

Revelation, therefore, properly finds its “doctrinal home” within the doctrine of salvation.

Recall that above, the reason we cannot acquire justice maps broadly onto separate issues with knowing and willing. We cannot know God, but, even if we could know God, we might not love God. The twin responses to this problem are despair (desparatio) and pride (superbia); they are the main inhibitors to our reception of grace. We despair because in our dis-attachment, we think ourselves unable to return. We neglect divine gifts because we think it impossible to wrest ourselves from the thicket of our sin. We are prideful because in our alienation from God, we neglect the fact that our lives are gifts. The generosity of God in creation alone demands our worship and adoration. But in addition to our idolatry, we neglect divine attempts to restore us

47 Augustine spends the first three books of trin. talking about the missions of God prior to the incarnation.

because we do not think them necessary. Despair and pride do not name the main effects of sin. That was discussed earlier under the categories of dispersion (concupiscent mis-attachment), curiosity, and pride. Rather, despair and pride are the two main inhibitors to our return because they prevent us from being receptive to or recognizing of divine grace.

The mission of the Son is to resolve our despair and pride so that in humility we can receive God’s gift, which is the justice of the Son. As Mark Jordan says, “incarnation is divinely chosen because it is the most seductive speech.” Augustine depicts the Son’s humanity in terms of its power to persuade us back to God, and the divinely chosen acts make up the objective content of the persuasive action, which can be analogized to the Word’s speech-act. “First we had to be persuaded how much God loved us, in case out of sheer despair we lacked the courage to reach up to him. We also had to be shown what sort of people we are that he loves, in case we should take pride in our own worth, and so bounce even further away from him and sink even more under our own strength.” More succinctly: “We needed to be persuaded how much God loves us, and what sort of people he loves; how much in case we despaired, what sort in case we grew proud.”

Augustine’s discussions of Christ in books IV and XIII of On the Trinity explain how Jesus sets his sights on undoing the two main inhibitors of return to our homeland through his justitia (justice) and humilitas (humility). The rhetorical goal of persuasion is crucial for understanding it.

51 “Ac primum nobis persuadendum fuit, quantum nos diligeret Deus, ne desperatione non auderemus erigi in eum. Quales autem dilexerit, ostendi oportebat, ne tanquam de meritis nostris superbientes, magis ab eo resilieremus et in nostra fortitudine magis deficeremus.” trin., 4.1.2.
52 “Persuadendum ergo erat homini quantum nos dilexerit Deus, et quales dilexerit: quantum, ne desperaremus; quales, ne superbiremus” trin., 4.1.2.
correctly. “God sent us sights suited to our wandering state.” Through the humanity of God in Christ, we are able to “breathe in [God’s] truth the more deeply.” By loving the truth, we possess it more intimately until our possession culminates in vision. Until then, they are given to us as forms of scientia, a history and set of propositions to be “believed” rather than “understood.” This is transmitted through the authority of the Catholic church, a necessity for believers to be connected to Jesus.

It will become clear that there are two separable acts, two separable graces: the exemplification of justice in a persuasive way, and the renewing of ability to love the justice and be persuaded by it. This distinction maps broadly onto objective and subjective aspects of grace and on to the missions of the Son and the Spirit. So besides structuring the next two sections of the chapter according Augustine’s account of the missions and focusing each section on one trinitarian persona, I also structure it according to the distinction Augustine makes between fides quae creditur (faith which is believed) and fides qua creditur (faith which believes). The fides quae creditur consists of a set of claims that are made about what God does that we must believe in order to be led to sapientia. In this way, the mission of the Son is calibrated primarily to the intellectual problem outlined above. The main problem is a love-deficit. But one cannot love what one does not know. In the Son, God provides one condition necessary to make God known. Because Augustine fits his discussion of Christology not only in the context of the trinitarian missions, but also in the crucial discussion of the relation between scientia and sapientia, my account of his Christology and atonement will focus

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53 *trin.*, 4.1.2.
54 *trin.*, 4.1.1.
55 See util. cred., f. invis., vera rel.
on “objective” faith which is believed and taken on authority. In this way, grace comes to us as a sort of “object,” a set of historical claims to be believed. This objective grace is the divine response to the problem of lost cognitive access to God because of sin. The Son’s mission therefore maps on to fides quae creditur.

The fides qua creditur refers to the disposition by which we come to believe and love God. The discussion of pneumatology later will focus on subjective faith because it has to do with the way that objective grace is applied to human hearts by the Holy Spirit. Augustine says that even if we could come to have visual access, our wills would still resist loving God; God would be unappetizing to us. The Spirit, identified as “donum” and as “caritas,” is the “love of God poured into our hearts.” Holy Spirit persuades us to believe by producing the sweetness for the will necessary to move our souls to faith, hope, and love of God and eventually to carry us to wisdom and the beatific vision. In this way, Holy Spirit meets our will’s most fundamental obstacle to grace.

The objective/subjective structure of the following two sections is somewhat artificial in that both are understood to be undivided actions of the one trinity and both aspects are two moments in the one great work of persuasion undertaken by the Holy Three. In both the missions of the Son and the Spirit, God wills to be with God’s creatures and give them hope.

7. General Terms for Augustinian Christology: Justice and Humility

Because this response to our problem is not merely cognitive and epistemic, Jesus not only teaches us something we would not know in its fullness apart from him, but in such a way that we

56 Authority is a major theme in Augustine’s thought. In c. ep. Man. 5, where he says he wouldn’t believe the gospels if the catholic church told him otherwise. See util. cred. For a succinct argument for his account of the relationship between authority, faith, and understanding.
will love the truth and Christ’s embodiment of divine justice.\textsuperscript{57} So this breathing-in eventually leads to a resolution of the moral problem of sin, on the far side of which God can be fully known because fully loved. But that cannot come until after death. In Jesus, God begins this process in this life by simultaneously (1) pointing us back to God, the true source, “to admonish us that what we seek is not here” and (2) unfastening our desire from earthly things, because “we must turn back from the things around us to where our whole being springs from.”\textsuperscript{58} This unfastening, importantly, necessitates a re-fastening, but in different order. Augustine’s Christianity may lead the believer to abandon “the world’s network of bodies,”\textsuperscript{59} but it does not for that reason cause her to abandon the bodies themselves—only the way that they are networked or configured in their attachments. The problem is not bodies or even attachment to created things. The problem is how we relate to those bodies and to God. Ultimately, the proper way to desire the world is expressed in charity, the highest expression of which is martyrdom, followed by consecrated virginity, almsgiving, and participation in the church. In demonstrating proper networking or organization of bodies, i.e., divine justice, Jesus creates a set of conditions of possibilities of changing our minds.

It is in the context of offering and effecting a different way of arranging attachments, of fitting into a network of loyalties,\textsuperscript{60} Augustine fits his discussion of Christ’s justitia and humilitas, the primary terms he uses to depict the power of the divine persuasion, into a revision of the philosophical quest for the beata vita. Everyone wants to be happy, but in order to be happy, one needs not only to be able to get what one wants, but one has to desire the right thing in the right

\textsuperscript{57} “missa sunt nobis divinitus visa congrua peregrinationi nostrae, quibus admoneremur non hic esse quod quaerimus, sed illuc ab ista esse redeundum, unde nisi penderemus, hic ea non quareremus,” \textit{trin.}, 4.1.2.

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{trin.}, 4.1.2.


\textsuperscript{60} Here we can place the church/world distinction fits for Augustine, see \textit{ep. Jo.}, where he talks about different definitions of the word “world,” and fits it into the Christian/pagan distinction.
way. In his very early dialogue *On the Happy Life* written at Cassiciacum, he relies on what comes to be a persistent distinction between will and intellect.\(^61\) on the way in to the “harbor” of the happy life, it is possible to be “shipwrecked” on a mountain in which philosophers who pridefully think that knowing is sufficient for having the happy life. His essentially anti-platonist, voluntarist claims in *Confessions* mirror this critique.\(^62\) It is not sufficient to know; one also has to want, and wanting is even more difficult than knowing. In his treatment of the happy life in *On the Trinity* XIII, he shows what the “good will” looks like against bad will. The essence of sin is to choose to prioritize personal “power” (*potentia*) over “justice” (*justitia*). Virtue, by contrast, the good will, “is absolutely nothing but the highest love of God” by which all things are loved through God.

So the first term Augustine will use to describe Christ’s work is *justitia*. The revelation of justice plays a crucial role in Augustine’s soteriology, especially as the “metaphysical” relationship of Christ’s natures faded from emphasis in light of the “revelation of a healing, mediating love.”\(^63\) Christ is the prime exemplar of justice, the figure of the “just man” discussed above, the one who faithfully enacts justice when he could choose not to, and by enacting it, shares it with us. “We call God’s justice not only that by which he is himself just but also that which he gives to man when he justifies the godless.”\(^64\)

Since all virtues reduce to perfections, extensions, and enactments of love suited to our nature (structure), justice is central to his account because it functions as a sort of a stand-in for all

\(^{61}\) See also *lib. arb.* Philip Cary traces this in Cary, *Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self*.

\(^{62}\) See also *civ.*, 14.6 for Augustine’s discussion of the relationship of will to emotions.


\(^{64}\) *trin.*, 14.3.5.
the virtues. Justice is “love that serves only God and, for this reason, correctly governs other things that are subject to a human being.” It is “being subject to” the nature “in which nothing is better or more to be loved… which created and established all other natures.” It has to do with the maximally affirmative re-organization of our earthly attachments necessary to flourish. Justice, then, is God’s way of networking bodies that supplants a dehumanizing demonic way of networking bodies. Augustine’s understanding of justice might be read “conservatively” to be a source of social oppression, but his doctrine of justice can also be a source of liberation because of the difference his account of equality makes. Specifically, Augustine can be seen as a source of a doctrine of intrinsic worth of the human being in direct relation to God.

Christ exemplifies humilitas alongside justice. Christ’s humility is “the distinctive element of the Christian Gospel” and the “most fundamental truth in the Gospel of salvation for the late Augustine.” For according to Augustine’s description, humility approximates to the character of God. Humility is the necessary correlate of justice because it is the posture of reception appropriate to finite creatures.

In his extensive treatment of humilitas in the latter half of the treatise On Holy Virginity, Augustine presents humility not only as the correlate of justice, but of greatness. Indeed, greatness is almost a precondition for humility. His key text is Sirach 3.18: “The greater you are, the more...

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65 mor., 15.25.
67 See Wolterstorff, _Justice_, esp. chapters 7-9 for an account of Augustine’s crucial role in the development of rights discourses. For an account of Augustine’s relation to liberalism, see Eric Gregory, _Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship_ (University Of Chicago Press, 2010). Augustine’s account of justice is one of the places in which his thought is problematic for contemporary readers, who read after natural hierarchies have been abandoned and replaced by market forces. For an account of these hierarchies, see Kathryn Tanner, _The Politics of God: Christian Theologies and Social Justice_ (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), chap. 2.
humble you must always be, and then you will find favor with God.”⁶⁹ There, God in the person of
divine Wisdom is portrayed as the ultimate exemplar of greatness. As incarnate Wisdom,
therefore, Christ is the doctor humilitatis, the teacher of humility, for his heart’s humility directly
reflects his greatness. Augustine relies on the logic of Philippians 2: “Christ, first emptied himself,
taking on the form of a slave, becoming like men and women, and being perceived as human; he humbled
himself, becoming obedient even to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”⁷⁰ The logic of his
humiliation and subsequent exaltation teaches us “the greatness of being lowly” (magnum est esse
parvum).⁷¹

How does Christ teach humility? In Augustine’s account of atonement in On the Trinity and
in his exhortation to the virgins in On Holy Virginity, he teaches it in two ways. First, he teaches by
what he does in light of who he is: he empties himself. Humility presupposes greatness according to
the logic of Philippians 2 because only someone who has something can empty herself. This kenotic
model is the main sense in which Augustine uses the word “humility.” But the first sense of humility
cannot be separated from a second sense. Humility has to do with what happens to Christ in light of
what he does: Jesus not only humbled himself. He was also humiliated and killed. I refer to this
second understanding of humility as “humiliation.” Christ alone could make himself humiliated,
because he was God. We “follow at a distance” because Jesus rescues us from our humiliation, and
our humility can be re-thought as an enactment of the greatness that makes humiliation impossible.

First, the kenotic model of humility depends on the point that lowliness proceeds

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⁶⁹ “Quanto magnus es, tanto humilia te in omnibus, et coram Deo invenies gratiam” (Vulgate, eccl. 3.20).
⁷⁰ “Doctor itaque humilitatis Christus primo semetipsum exinanivit formam servi accipiens, in similitudine hominum
factus, et habitu inventus ut homo; humiliavit semetipsum, factus obediens usque ad mortem, mortem autem cruces.”
virg., 31.31.
⁷¹ virg., 35.35.
ultimately from divine strength. As the Wisdom of God, Christ shares deitas fully and therefore is uniquely capable of exemplifying humility. After all, he has nothing to lose. Therefore it does not detract from his greatness to be lowly, to exalt others, or to teach others to be like him. “Although the Father had handed everything over to him, and no one knows him except the Father, and no one knows the Father except him and those to whom he chooses to reveal him, he does not say, ‘Learn from me how to create the world and raise the dead to life,’ but because I am gentle and humble of heart.” His claim in On Holy Virginity is mirrored in On the Trinity VIII. The “powers that rule the world” are described according to their capacity to amaze and exert power, using an “outer route” and “forsaking their own inwardness” in order to attain “divine rest.” But divine rest is an always-receding horizon when sought through displays of human power. Jesus is the opposite but efficacious route to God:

though the Lord Jesus Christ himself [performed wonders], he wished to open the eyes of men who were amazed and spellbound by such unusual temporal deeds to larger perspectives, and convert them to eternal and more inward realities; so he said, Come to me, you who toil and are heavy burdened, and I will refresh you; take my yoke upon you—and he did not add “Learn of me, because I raise those who have been four days dead,” but he said Learn of me because I am meek and lowly of heart (Mt 11:28). A down-to-earth lowliness is stronger and safer than a wind-swept hauteur. Only the insecure and bullying find lowliness and the exalting of others a threat to their greatness or goodness. God’s greatness is absolutely unthreatened by anything that others might think or say about Christ’s low estate.

Humility counters pride and thereby makes virtue possible. Augustine suggests that all Christ’s teaching can be reduced to humility: “Do all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden in you (Col 2:3) reduce to this, that the great thing we should learn from you is that you are gentle and

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72 virg., 35.35
73 trin., 8.7.11.
humble of heart?” He answers in the affirmative. “There is no way for the soul to find peace except by ridding itself of the troublesome swelling, which has made it think it was big, when in your eyes it was diseased.” Augustine can make this claim because he thinks that virtue is a gift. If all the virtues reduce to love, then the main inhibitor to reception of the gift is pride. Pride isolates gifts from the source of meaning and value and is therefore the primary injustice in relation to God; it is ultimately our failure to acknowledge that we are creatures, most pernicious when it induces us to imagine something of our own in the acquisition of virtue.

Humility is ultimately the complement of justice because of what deitas is. That is, humility only makes sense in the context of the proper network of social relations, specifically, a network that empowers the weak so that they can become dignified givers. Godness, divine substance, divine vita, divinitas are all synonyms for the greatness and majesty of God. God’s greatness is the inexhaustible fund for creation and the self-extension of God into what God is not, even into the damage in order to heal and rescue. God can empty Godself for the sake of loving us precisely because the divine self-emptying does not mean real loss to God. We mirror the divine Wisdom whose greatness does not mean distance but intimacy, the one who can condescend, give herself, and elevate others precisely because she cannot lose anything she has. Humility is a sign of security that gives itself, a sign, that is, of love. It is not meant as a denial of human limits, but as a moral framework for thinking of reciprocal relations of love.

The second way Christ teaches humility is implicit in the logic of the Philippians 2 passage: Christ was humiliated, but was exalted on the far side of it. Augustine stresses that the good will has to precede the quest for power. By dying out of justice in humility, the resurrection is seen as

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74 *vrg.*, 35.35.
the vindication of the divine strategy. It is also the exaltation of the humiliated and the freedom of the captives.

The first definition of humility presupposes strength and equality; the second does not. It has to do with the humiliation of already vulnerable people. In the Philippians passage, the vindication of Christ’s humility is seen in his exaltation of the humiliated and the freedom for those made captive by the devil. The second definition is not a kenotic self-emptying from the position of strength, nor is it a norm or command for the faithful; Augustine does not tell the virgins to humiliate themselves. Instead, the first definition of humility is a moral description necessary to condemn humiliation, for Christ’s humility is the way he saves us out of our humiliation. Christ’s humility is therefore a gift to the already humiliated, who are disempowered under the devil’s power, for his humility opens the space for them to be made powerful by grace by offering them a way to live their lives toward intimacy with God. Christ’s humility undoes our humiliation by exposing the network of lies that keep the humiliated in despair of ever acting on the central, funding intimacy that gives them all their dignity. They are made into givers precisely by the call out of their humiliation to true humility, which always presupposes dignifying justice.

Augustine refers to Matthew 25:31-46 some 275 times in his corpus. It makes sense that he would. Not only the poor and disempowered, but we also are in the position of humiliated sinners. Augustine’s sense of humiliation is therefore inclusive. The spiritualizing does not

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76 See Joan Acocella, “Rich Man, Poor Man,” The New Yorker, January 14, 2013, http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2013/01/14/130114crbo_books_acocella?currentPage=all. “In a document called his “Testament,” written shortly before he died, Francis said that his conversion was due to his work with lepers, a number of whom lived outside Assisi. He explained, ”God allowed me to begin my repentance in this way: when I lived in sin, seeing lepers was a very bitter experience for me. God himself guided me into their midst and among them I performed acts of charity. What appeared bitter to me became sweetness of the soul and body.” Lepers were horrifying to people at the time, not only because of their unsightly affliction—black boils, truncated limbs—but because the disease was thought to be caused by sin. If a leper wanted to approach a town, he had to do so at night and
mitigate the real problem. For “love” and “virtue” are the way we are saved. How we got in the position of the humiliated (by a type of divine justice—a type, but maybe not the real thing) is one thing. How we get out of it is another.

8. Christ our Harmony

So I have explained the lexicon Augustine employs in describing how Christ resolves the moral problem by persuading us to true virtue. A “high level” metaphysical description might just come in relating his account of acquiring the virtue of justice. But Augustine instead layers two central metaphorical tropes in order to talk about the work that Christ does. The purpose of explicating the tropes is to show how underlying them is the deep structure of the exemplification of justice in Christ’s death and resurrection and thereby to substantiate the claim I wish to make about Christ’s “grace” and the way that the grace that is Christ restores us to intimacy with God. First, Christ effects a restoration of the primal harmony that sin distorted; his death and resurrection serve as sacrament and model. Second, Christ rescues us from the power of the devil.

In the first main trope, Augustine uses the imagery of the mismatched double re-mixed with a new single to produce a harmonious chord. We cooperated with the devil in a way that led not to a “single” death like the devil’s (who dies a purely spiritual death) but a “double” death of both soul and body. The harmony of our created state was brought down in a “crashing discord” by

ring a bell to warn people of his presence. In Roberto Rossellini’s “The Flowers of St. Francis” (1950), the best of the many movies made about the saint, a leper, sounding a bell, goes past the hut where Francis and his fellows are bedded down. Francis rouses himself, catches up with the man, and embraces him. We see the leper only darkly: his blackened skin, its clammy sheen. We see Francis’s face directly, with no tears, just an ardent gaze. This is one of the most appalling and thrilling scenes in Western cinema, and it epitomizes the idea that evidently fired the young Francis. As he saw it now, the more a person was despised, the more he or she resembled Jesus in his last agonies, when he was abandoned by almost all the people he had come to save. To obey Jesus, therefore, you had to join those who were abandoned.”

I take it that there are others, but I subordinate them to the two I list here.
the double death of body and soul. The double death, then, is conceived as a form of ugliness that hurts ears made for beauty—like petulant children relentlessly pounding on the piano, sour note after sour note, discord piled on discord in potentially unremitting sequence.

Harmony is a form of intimate unity. Augustine emphasizes three types of intimacy: self-intimacy, God-soul intimacy, and social intimacy. Later thinkers like Aquinas will attach specific virtues to each form of unity. Self-intimacy is brought about by cardinal virtues of fortitude and temperance, which bring about self-intimacy through perfecting the concupiscible and irascible appetites. Charity restores God-soul intimacy, for the virtue charity is habituated friendship with God. The virtue of justice brings about social intimacy, because justice has to do with equality in social relations. Augustine’s thought is illuminated by this conceptual machinery, and, though there are intimations of it, he does not display it with clarity.

My emphasis here is simpler, and it traces how Augustine redescribes our moral problem in aesthetic terms: whereas divine intention was to sum up all things together in God, relating human creatures to the whole through God, the human family descended into the irreducible multiplicity of attachments unmediated by the only possible source of any of these unities: “By wickedness and ungodliness with a crashing discord we had bounced away, and flowed and faded away from the one supreme true God into the many, divided by the many, clinging to the many.” The disharmony of will, then, is also a social disharmony. He might have also quoted the epistle to James 4.1-3: “Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and

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78 trin., 4.7.11.  
79 trin., 4.7.11.
conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.” Conflicting desires lead to personal conflicts, personal conflicts to social divisions. We are “split…from each other by clashing wills (voluptates) and desires (cupiditates), and the uncleanness of … sins.”

Augustine thinks that Jesus makes “good use” of the double death of ours, the discord that crashes harmony and destroys beauty, by his humiliation and death. This is the first sense in which humility perfects charity. Sticking with the trope, Christ’s “single” death “balances” “this double death of ours.” The goal is to undo the crashing and crushing disharmony.

But how is it possible for the single to harmonize the double? The single death—death of body but not of soul—exercises a transformative power on our double death. It “undoes” our death by taking away its sting. Christ’s single death is absolutely unique because Christ alone is without sin. By virtue of this uniqueness—and here Augustine introduces an important sub-trope—it is able to act as a “sacrament” (sacramentum) and a “model” (exemplum) for us, both “inwardly” and “outwardly.”

To achieve each resurrection of ours he pre-enacted and presented his one and only one by way of sacrament and by way of model.”

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80 “Sequitur de eodem argumento. Non dixit, Ego et ipsi unum; quamvis per id quod Ecclesiae caput est et corpus ejus Ecclesia (Ephes. I, 22, 23), posset dicere, Ego et ipsi, non unum, sed unus, quia caput et corpus unus est Christus: sed divinitatem suam consubstantialem Patri ostendens (propter quod et alio loco dicit, Ego et Pater unum sumus [Joan. X, 30]), in suo genere, hoc est, in ejusdem naturae consubstantiali parilitate, vult esse suos unum, sed in ipso; quia in se ipsis non possent, dissociati ab invicem per diversas voluptates et cupiditates et immunditias peccatorum: unde mundantur per Mediatorem, ut sint in illo unum; non tantum per eamdem naturam qua omnes ex hominibus mortalibus aequales Angelis fiunt, sed etiam per eamdem in eamdem beatitudinem conspirantem concordissimam voluntatem, in unum spiritum quodam modo igne charitatis conflatam. Ad hoc enim valet quod ait, Ut sint unum, sicut et nos unum sumus: ut quemadmodum Pater et Filius, non tantum aequalitate substantialis, sed etiam voluntate unum sunt; ita et li inter quos et Deum mediator est Filius, non tantum per id quod ejusdem naturae sunt, sed etiam per eamdem dilectionis societatem unum sint. Deinde id ipsum quod Mediator est, per quem reconciliamur Deo, sic indicat, Ego, inquit, in eis, et tu in me, ut sint consummati in unum (Id. XVII, 23).” trin., 4.9.12

81 “interioris hominis sacramentum, exterioris exemplum.” trin., 4.3.6.

82 trin., 4.3.6.
On Augustine’s terms, God would have confirmed our obedience, virtue, and love of God by gifting us with immortality in the garden. Because we sinned, we were denied that gift. Our bodily death is therefore the result of our “inner,” spiritual death. Jesus, however, had no inner death and therefore was exempt from bodily death. Because he died the only truly undeserved death, his death was only a single death—a death of body that did not in any way involve the death of soul. Because of this unique feature of his person, Jesus’ death serves as a “sacrament” or effectual sign of a revealed future/past mystery for us. It reveals the way for the “inner man” to move forward through the disharmony by the mortification of sin. Seeing it, we recognize it as good, and having recognized it, we bind ourselves to it in love so that we can imitate it. We are led by his death to put our “earthly nature” to death (Col. 3.5). Augustine says that the cry of dereliction from the cross is the sacrament of the mortification of the soul. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” on this reading becomes sacrament for the sorrow over sin and repentance. Crucifixion symbolizes repentance “and a kind of salutary torment (salubris cruciatus) of self-discipline, a kind of death to erase the death of ungodliness in which God does not leave us.”

Christ’s resurrection is a sacrament of the resurrection of the inner person. Augustine thinks that Christ’s resurrection took place because his death was truly undeserved. His soul remained living, and his dead body followed in the power and wisdom of God. The resurrection of Christ’s flesh, then, serves as a sign for the re-vivification of our mortified and renewed souls. We set our minds on things above, not on earthly things (Col. 3). Augustine specifically cites Christ’s encounter with Mary in the garden, when he tells her she cannot touch him. So we cannot touch our inner resurrection until the last time.

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83 *Gn. litt., corrept.*, 10.28.
84 *trin.*, 4.3.6.
Christ’s death and resurrection also serves as a “model” for the outer person. He shows that we should not fear death, but rather confront it with courage. The devil wants to hold us down by fear of death. Jesus shows us how not to fear it. He also serves as the model for our future resurrection, showing us in his own body what will happen to ours. “This model of our bodily resurrection to come has been pre-enacted in the Lord’s case.” Through his model, we can be assured of our future and live more confidently into the life he calls us into.

Together, the sacrament and model bring about harmony because they are meant to persuade us to turn our double death into repentance, mortification, transformation, and hope. His single death therefore effects a transformation of our double death and provides the way out by teaching us to live differently in its light. It is almost as if, in Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection, God plays a resounding note that brings the sour notes of our lives into conformity with it and makes them beautiful. Christ’s death is therefore suited not only to our capacities, but also to our condition.

The strength of the aesthetic claim about Christ’s death-leading-to-resurrection is based on the sense that all of created reality—numerical, historical, aesthetic, everything—anticipates the incarnation, death, and resurrection of God in Jesus Christ. “All creation” “utters” and “acclaims” Jesus, whose life and death restores Adam’s family to life from death and to harmonious unity from irreducible multiplicity. Augustine appeals to numerology—a second sub-trope—but it applies to the whole of creation. “The many” therefore “testify together that the one had come.”

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85 I talk about this more in the next section.
86 trin., 4.3.6.
87 “Hoc sacramentum, hoc sacrificium, hic sacerdos, hic Deus, antequam missus veniret, factus ex femina, omnia quae sacrare atque mystice patribus nostris per angelica miracula apparuerunt, sive quae per ipsos facta sunt, similitudines hujus fuerunt, ut omnis creatura factis quodam modo loqueretur unum futurum in quo esset salus universorum a morte reparandorum.” trin., 4.7.11.
Their utterance, acclamation, and testimony to the beauty of God’s action to re-harmonize the world provides the basis for all the peoples to reattach themselves to Christ by love, restoring themselves to the primal unity.\textsuperscript{88}

The humility of God in the death and resurrection of Christ provide both the affective\textsuperscript{89} and intellectual\textsuperscript{90} bases for this reattachment. The resurrection unblocks the way to this reattachment by love by solving the problem of despair: “we should not despair of ourselves rising in the flesh when we observed that we the many members had been preceded by the one head, in whom we have been purified by faith and will then be made completely whole by sight, and that thus fully reconciled to God by him in the mediator, we may be able to cling to the one, enjoy the one, and remain forever one” (per Mediatorem Deo reconciliati haereamus uni, fruamur uno, permaneamus unum).\textsuperscript{91}

It also unblocks our pride, for in Christ’s innocent death, we see the model for our own mortification of everything that causes our spiritual death. By overcoming the inhibitors of sin and pride, Christ’s death provides the way to restore our wills to harmony with the One God and to harmonize of our active with our contemplative reason, and ultimately, give life to our mortal bodies.

\textsuperscript{88} This gives a clue as to how social unity can be brought about. Because Christ’s single effects a transformation of our desires, it also provides the basis for a renewed social harmony, since the desires are the cause of disharmony in the first place. He therefore holds out the hope not only of bringing our loves together into God, but our society out of disarray and into unity. Having been “cleansed by the mediator” all “may be one in him.” Augustine says that in the church, all different types of people are made “one” not just in the “same nature,” as human creatures inevitably already are, but by being bound together in the “same love.” Christ therefore restores not only the individual soul, but all human creatures into the trinity’s unity by means of the church.

\textsuperscript{89} “Being dead in soul through many sins and destined to die in the flesh because of sin, we should love (amaremus) the one who died in the flesh for us without sin.” \textit{trin.}, 4.7.11.

\textsuperscript{90} “believing in him raised form the dead,” we can rise “with him in spirit through faith” and be thereby “made one in the one just one (justificaremur in uno justo facti unum).” \textit{trin.}, 4.7.11.

\textsuperscript{91} \textit{trin.}, 4.7.11.
9. Christ and the Devil

The devil signifies a seduction to inappropriate and dehumanizing ways of organizing our attachments. The devil keeps us in his power by pushing us ever deeper into the vicious cycle of injustice: we try to get out of it, but cannot, so we plunge ever deeper in despair, over and over again. The devil persuades us that there is nothing we can do to extricate ourselves from the sticky mess, the thicket of our sin, and that no one else can help us.

Some might think it remarkable that Augustine had a strong Satanology and Demonology, especially since belief in angels and demons has mostly been rejected by modern theologians and seems out of place with his strong doctrine of providence. But it is impossible to explain Augustine’s account of providence or his understanding of how we came to sin or why Christ died without appealing to his Satanology. Augustine believed that the devil explains how our will chooses injustice. We got caught in the devil’s grasp the same way we got caught in the thicket of worldly attachments: through the will, freely, foolishly, and in a way that negates our true life. Augustine narrates the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus as his freeing us from the grasp of the devil by his humilitas and justitia. He does so by providing the remedy for our despair and our pride, which pulls us back into virtue, into the love of God.

Augustine portrays the devil primarily as an anti-persuader and a mediator of death, though his persuasive and mediatory activities are parasitic. Three features about the devil’s “nature” are

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93 This is especially apparent in the explanations we give of how we came to sin. We might say, for example, that our wills were seduced by the world, but the power for opposites does not explain why one opposite, and the most harmful one, was chosen. After all, we originally enjoyed the world through God. What gave us the idea to think otherwise. Augustine’s answer is that we were deceived.

94 He is described as false mediator in ep. Jo.
important for understanding Augustine’s view of the devil’s role in sin and death. First, the devil’s body, like any angelic body, is “airy,” which enables him to perceive the created formulae and act in ways that mimic divine providence. Second, unlike human body-soul composites, when the devil “dies,” it is a purely spiritual death, since he has no “flesh” of which his spirit is the life. Third, though the difference between God and the devil is as vast as the gulf between God and any other creature, and though divine love constantly sustains the devil’s existence, he is the ultimate exemplar of the bad use of creaturely agency. The devil’s acquired moral nature is the paradigm of sin and the exemplar of the libido dominandi. By virtue of his excessive pride, he tries to set himself against all that God does and is. Despite the natural limitations that inhere in his creaturely nature, the devil is a(n insecure) lover of power—a bully. He is always consumed by trying to express power over others, trying to “pull down” those who consent to him and lead them on the road to death.

He acts on human agents in three ways that correspond to the points I made about his nature. First, his superior intelligence enables him to use wonders to trick people (more on this shortly) so that they participate in his death. His death transfers to their souls through moral imitation. This works to his advantage, since for body-soul composites, the soul is the life of the body. Bodies die because their souls lose justice. Second, the devil is able to use his natural immortality to exercise power over people by making them fear bodily death over spiritual death. Like a bully, he takes perverse pleasure in the exercise of strength over others for the sake of domination, pitifully consolidating power over the weak. “Being himself liable to no corruption of flesh and blood had held in thrall in his weakness and poverty and the frailness of this mortal body,

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95 *trin.*, 4.11.13.

96 See *trin.*, 13.13.17.
like one seemingly rich and powerful, and all the prouder for that, lording it over a wretched ragged slave.97 Third, the devil is the paradigm of all vice. Recall that for Augustine, the most basic moral decision is between the priority of justice and of personal power. The devil exemplifies what it means to choose his own happiness (which seems to be synonymous with “his own power”) over justice, which is the right ordering of things under and within the love of God. He spreads his acquired moral nature into human social systems by re-enacting and re-articulating his rebellion, which is most fundamentally configured as the choice of power over justice. Deceiving others through signs and wonders to spread his moral nature is his strategy for consolidation of power. In doing so he exemplifies not only pride, but also fraud and craftiness. The vice of fraud has to do with calculating for the sake of an evil end against others.98 The vice of craftiness has to do with improper means for getting to a good or evil end.99 The devil is fraudulent, a liar, insofar as he pursues his own lust to dominate above all else.

The devil’s end is really nothing, literally non-existence. Because he is a creature, his characteristic mode of activity is strictly non-sensical. For the devil exists (still!) only in the love and providence of God, and his existence is essentially good. He thoroughly and in every way makes bad, contradictory, and, in the end, self-subverting use of creation. The devil’s telos is therefore a dead end, the prime instance of counteracting the structure of his being. His absolute viciousness is also social. It ends up killing us (with our cooperation) and it killed Jesus (with his cooperation). It will eventually even kill him in eternal fire (quite apart from his cooperation). The

97 “ipse nulla corruptione carnis et sanguinis septus, per istam corporis mortalis fragilitatem, nimis egeno et infirmo, tanto superbior, quanto velut dition et fortior, quasi panono et aerumnoso dominabatur, in ipsa morte carnis amisit.” trin., 13.13.17.
98 ST 2-2.55.5
99 ST 2-2.55.3.
devil is crafty insofar as he uses improper means, “a crooked argument,” to get us to go on the road to his dead end. When he encounters Christ, it is fitting that his crookedness is the means of his own undoing.

For Augustine, the devil’s craftiness is manifested in the way he persuades humans to lead vicious lives that imitate his viciousness by subtly choosing power over justice. His fraudulence is demonstrated in the fact that his chosen end is bad but that it masquerades as good. He exercises a “dominion of deceit.” In the Garden of Eden, the devil first persuaded the human beings to enter this road. Why would anyone consent to his temptation? The devil persuaded them to “set [their] hearts on one thing, and the other followed on [their] heels.” Augustine, then, thinks that the devil initially convinced us to desire the wrong thing, by portraying it as a good. Did God really say that you would die? … I tell you that you will have knowledge of good and evil.

In order to persuade us, he employs multiple training tools, forms of moral instruction that counter humanity’s flourishing. All the training tools are used to fixate our understanding and affection onto the wrong things so that we network our attachment to earthly things wrongly. Another way of expressing the same thing is to say that the devil constantly seduces us to idolatry. It does not matter what the idols or the tools of seduction are—the devil is extremely crafty and will use whatever tools he has available (which, we will see, is his undoing). He may use familial relationships, paternal love, love of country—noble things. He may also use addictive vice, lust, base passions—ignoble things. C. S. Lewis’s portrayal of this is classic, and Augustinian in C. S Lewis, The Great Divorce (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).
portray the gods, and the gods lead condemnable lives because they are not gods but demons.102 They exercise magic power over everyone else, but they do not use the creation properly. By setting forth an example on the stage, the demons mislead those who watch into calling good evil and evil good. Additionally, seemingly neutral philosophy can be especially crafty, because it involves a lot of truth but, first of all, is consistent with worship of false gods. The philosophers do not integrate philosophy and religion properly.103 It leads to pride because it gives the impression that our own moral efforts can lead us to know the truth and love the good and perceive the beautiful harmony of the All. The common element in the devil’s deception is a masquerading of vice as virtue, subtle ways of leading people into idolatry.104

By persuading us to attach ourselves wrongly to the world by presenting vice as virtue, the devil acts as a “false mediator” who pulls us down into death. “For the false mediator does not draw one to higher things, but rather blocks the way to them by inspiring men with proud and hence malignant desires to be his associates. Such desires cannot strengthen wings of virtue to fly with; all

102 *civ.* , book I.
103 *vera relig.* , 1.1-3.5.
104 His counter-persuasion continues. Augustine gives specific examples, but we should not limit our concept to his examples. The key moment is the devil’s persuading us to idolatry. Idolatry can be defined simply as the improper use of any created thing, relating to any created thing for the sake of our own power and happiness apart from the mediation of the Creator. To persuade us to idolatry and vice, the devil uses “blasphemous symbols.” Augustine spends a lot of space in *civ.* talking about the way that the devil and the demons uses theater and theurgy to convince people to live vicious lives. The devil also convinces people to become his associates us to “blasphemous curiosities” and “magical consecrations” (*trin.* , 4.11.14): he convinces people to become his associates (*suae societati*) by his and his demons using their “airy bodies” to “astonish the flesh” and deceive them that good is evil and evil good (*trin.* , 4.11.14). Augustine says that if the use of carnal, human bodies can astonish through acrobatics, the crafty, fraudulent miracles of demons can be used to astonish and deceive mortals. These miracles show a sort of false or anti-providence by which the devil moves us to *curiositas*. Augustine also names “false philosophy” as a means of the devil’s counter-persuasion. False philosophy is a sure way to *superbia*, it is the mountain by which we can all too easily be shipwrecked on our way to the safe harbor of the *beata vita*. By convincing us that the vision of God is available through our own self-discipline and self-purgation, the devil subtly turns us away from the only hope we have of knowing and loving God and therefore of living just and happy lives. Through all these means, then, the devil holds us in subjection by “swollen self-esteem” and “preference for power over justice.” Through these means, the devil promises an apparent good, the “purgation of the soul,” but he delivers nothing but vice, death, and judgment.
they can do is load down the soul with weights of vice to sink with, and insure that the higher the soul considers itself to be borne up, the heavier its collapse will be.\footnote{falsus mediator non trajicit ad superiora, sed potius obsidens intercludit viam per affectus, quos tanto maligniores, quanto superiores suae societati inspirat; qui non possunt ad evolandum pennas nutrire virtutum, sed potius ad demergendum pondera exaggerare vitiorum, tanto gravius anima ruitura, quanto sibi videtur evecta sublimius.}^{105}

10. Our Humiliation

When we consented to the devil’s temptation to trade the whole for the part, we were handed over to the devil’s power “by a kind of divine justice” (quadam justitia Dei).\footnote{trin., 13.12.16.} The devil acquired “full property rights (jure integro possidebat) over us.”\footnote{trin., 4.13.17.} “By right” (jure) the principalities and powers held us until we paid the “penalty” (supplicia) to them.

The penalty is divine. Augustine makes it clear, however, that this penalty is not divinely inflicted but permitted, not a consequence of God’s turning from creatures—as if the Unchanging would somehow regard creatures differently!—but rather the consequence of creaturely turning to the demonic consolidation of power before justice. God is not beholden to a standard of justice above God, nor is God angry with creatures.\footnote{See Janet Soskice’s beautiful portrayal of this in Soskice, The Kindness of God, 84ff, 125ff.} Rather, God passively permits this process to take place, so the “penalty” is not divine in its execution. It is just one another way—a very important one—that demonic activity is taken into divine purposes.

Augustine does speak about divine “retribution” (tamen per ejus retributionem justissimam mors), where he analogizes divine justice to the justice of a judge—but note the passive nature of the judgment even here: “In the same way a judge imposes a punishment (supplicium) on a guilty man, and yet the cause of the punishment (supplicii) is not the justice of the judge but the deserts of
the crime." God, likewise, in justice—almost out of deference to human agents!—passes us on to the devil’s “power,” which can be defined negatively: the devil’s power is the power of a bad will. God “merely permitted” our captivity to happen. God “withdrew” and sin “marched in.” He is careful to qualify the sense in which God withdraws so as not to undermine his entire theology of creation. God remains life-giver and judge. Humankind remains ultimately under divine jurisdiction, even when it is under the devil’s. “Not even the devil is cut off from the jurisdiction of the Almighty, or from his goodness either for that matter.”\(^\text{109}\) Any “spiritual warfare” that takes place is no threat to God, who is unchanging and unthreatened by any creature, no matter how powerful in relation to other creatures. But the devil remains a very real and constant threat to the creatures God loves, posing an indirect threat to God’s designs for creation.

In what, then, does the judgment on us consist exactly? “The devil was holding on to our sins, and using them to keep us deservedly fixed in death.” We might also say that the devil was humiliating us, making us more vulnerable. By keeping us focused on our sin and therefore in despair and pride, he had us by “property rights” in this subjective sense only; these property rights were exclusively based in our willing submission to the devil’s deceit. God invests the divine energies in rescuing us from the devil’s dominion. In what follows, I will trace Augustine’s answers to two questions before reflecting more deeply on justice and humility of Christ.

First, he asks Boso’s later question to Anselm: “Was there no other way available to God of setting men free from the unhappiness of this mortality, that he should want his only begotten Son, God coeternal with himself, to become man by putting on a human soul and flesh, and, having

\(^{109}\) trin., 13.12.16.
become mortal, to suffer death?" It is not enough, Augustine argues, to claim that it was “good” (bonum) and “befitting the divine dignity” (divinae congruum dignitati) that Wisdom incarnate and die. He rejects the answer that “no other possible way was available to God,” for “all things are equally within [God’s] power.” He more modestly demonstrates that it was the most “suitable” (convenientia) way of healing our “unhappy state.” Since we were “disheartened by the very condition of mortality” and “despairing of immortality,” the divine mission in Christ was to make a demonstration of the divine love. By demonstrating divine love and the extent of divine valuing of us, Christ would be able to “[raise] our hopes” and “[deliver] the minds of mortals.” In many ways, the remedy for the devil’s humiliation of us vulnerable human creatures was for God to dazzle us with divine humility-with-justice and thereby undo the devil’s unjust humiliation. “What,” Augustine asks, “could be clearer and more wonderful evidence” of divine love than that the Son of God, unchangeably good, remaining in himself what he was and receiving from us what he was not [a beautiful blending of Augustine’s concept of humility with orthodox Christology], electing to enter into partnership with our nature [nostre dignatus intre consortium] without detriment to his own, should first of all endure our ills without any ill deserts of his own; and then once we had been brought in this way to believe how much God loved us and to hope at last for what we had despaired of, would confer his gifts on us with a quite uncalled for generosity, without any good deserts of ours, indeed with our ill deserts our only preparation. Augustine considers and dismisses another possibility: that the Son died to reconcile the Father to enemies. We were enemies, Augustine says, but enemies on our side, and not on God’s. Augustine replies: “Does this mean then that his Son was already so reconciled to us that he was


111 “Quid enim tam necessarium fuit ad erigendam spem nostram, mentesque mortalium conditione ipsius mortalitatis abjectas, ab immortalitatis desperatione liberandas, quam ut demonstraretur nobis quanti nos penderet Deus, quantumque diligeret?” trin., 13.10.13.

112 trin., 13.10.13.
even prepared to die for us, while the Father was still so angry with us that unless the Son died for us he would not be reconciled to us? ... Would the Father have not spared his own Son but handed him over for us, if he had not already been reconciled? ... I observe that the Father loved us not merely before the Son died for us, but before he founded the world...”

Having made the divine motive for death clear, Augustine outlines the way in which the desired result of Christ’s demonstrative and persuasive work is “in order that faith might work through love.” The goal of Christ’s death is our “justification.” He cites Romans 5.9: we are “justified in his blood” (justificati in sanguine ipsius). The justification is not making us acceptable to one member of the trinity by means of another as vulgar doctrines of penal substitution might suggest. Rather, “the Father and the Son and the Spirit of them both work all things together and equally and in concord.” When the text says that we are reconciled to God by means of the Son, therefore, it has to mean something other than that the Father was angry with us.

But what does the metaphor of reconciliation mean if it cannot mean reconciliation with an angry Father? In the terms of Augustine’s second question, “what is the efficacy of the blood?” When we came under the devil’s rule, we became “dead” in our “transgressions and sins” and started “doing the will of the flesh and of the feelings” (facientes voluntates carnis et affectionum). We became “bent by sin,” not as “created in the beginning.” We could only be delivered from the “bent” nature by the “kindly reconciliation of God,” for as long as we remained under the devil’s power, we could not be unbent. Augustine notes “the essential flaw of the devil’s perversion,” his

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114 trin., 13.11.15.

115 trin., 13.12.16.

116 trin., 13.12.16. “natura scilicet ut est depravata peccato, non ut recta creatae est ab initio.”
inordinate love of power (amator potentiae, his libido dominandi). We might call “inordinate love of power” “domination.” One cannot love both domination and justice for two reasons. First, justice requires equality in one’s relations. Domination requires and enacts inequality. Second, justice is the essence of virtue, which directs how one uses power over earthly things for the sake of love. The devil is a lover of power to the exclusion of justice. He is therefore a “deserter and assailant of justice” (desertor oppugnatorque justitiae), the one who opposes love. The devil holds us in his power by convincing us to imitate him, to “studiously devote” ourselves “to the power, rejoicing at the possession of it or inflamed with the desire for it.”

In order to be released from the devil’s power, we must be released from the desire for power that excludes the proper ordering of our attachments to things within the love of God. That is, we must be released from sin. But in order to be released from sin, we must be released from pride and despair, which are the main inhibitors to our reception of grace. The language of justice shows that desire for power, of course, is a good. It is only pursuit of power that excludes justice that causes us to be bent. “Not that power is to be shunned as something bad, but that the right order must be preserved which puts justice first.” “Power, for its part, should follow justice and not precede it.” God would deliver us from our studious devotion to power by the justice of Christ. By doing so, Christ would deliver us from domination to the love of God.

How does Christ release us? Augustine narrates both an “exchange” that takes place—Christ’s death for ours—and an act of persuasion—we see Christ’s justice, sacrament of divine justice, and we desire it. Desiring it, we become more like it. The “exchange” and the “persuasion”

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117 *trin.*, 13.13.17: “sic enim et homines eum tanto magis imitantur, quanto magis neglecta, vel etiam perosa justitia, potentiae student, ejusque vel adeptione laetantur, vel inflammantur cupiditate.”

118 *trin.*, 13.13.17.
mutually implicate one another. Recall the earlier discussion of the justice of the just man in which the “justice” is connatural to the intellect and is what is loved when the just man is loved. By loving the just man, the lover comes to know him better, and, knowing him, loves him more. The virtuous cycle created by the exemplar of justice communicates justice to the one who recognizes and loves it. In this context, we can read that Jesus perfectly exemplified divine justice so that “men might imitate Christ by seeking to beat the devil at the justice game, not the power game.” Christ, and Christ alone, is the perfect exemplar of justice through which we acquire the virtue of justice. Given Augustine’s doctrine of the unity of the virtues, coming to acquire the virtue of justice is also acquiring love for God and being justified.\footnote{119}

Christ’s exemplification of the virtue of justice in a world of sin and sickness is expressed as humility. Christ’s humiliation is only temporary, Augustine emphasizes, for the good will will ultimately be given power. This gives us hope that our humiliation by the devil will only be temporary. That is what the resurrection shows (recall the earlier claim about the exemplum or model). “Let mortals hold on to justice; power will be given them when they are immortal.” On that day, the power of the powerful will be exposed as “ridiculous weakness” (\textit{ridicula infirmitas}).\footnote{120} In the mean time, the power we seek should be power to be “cleaned of faults” rather than to “overpower others.” Augustine says that the power of virtue, which is the power of Christ, empowers us to be “against ourselves for ourselves.”

Let a man will to be sagacious, will to be brave, will to be moderate, will to be just, and by all means let him want the power really to manage these things, and let him seek to be powerful in himself and in an odd way against himself for himself. As for the other things that he does well to want and yet is not able to get, like immortality and true and full

\footnote{119} See \textit{Simpl.}

\footnote{120} \textit{trin.}, 13.13.17.
felicity, let him not cease to desire them and patiently await them.\textsuperscript{121}

So Augustine re-establishes the notion of the right order for seeking power—a good will—the condition of the possibility of the happy life. He also establishes in broader terms how it is that Christ overcomes the devil through justice: by providing the objective conditions that make it possible for us to pursue justice rather than power, Christ is a necessary component in our release from the devil’s power and consequent acquiring of eternal happiness. But how does the persuasion work? The language of exchange or substitution enters at this point. “What then is the justice that overpowered the devil?” It had to be justice of one who was never deceived: “the justice of Jesus Christ—what else?” The devil was overpowered because “he found nothing in him deserving of death and yet he killed him.” In this way, Christ’s “innocent blood” was “shed for the forgiveness of sins,” because the death of Christ is our release from captivity.\textsuperscript{122}

The mechanics become clearer when Augustine asks whether the devil would have been overpowered if Christ had chosen to deal in power rather than justice. Here is where humility is important, because it shows why Augustine thought it not sufficient just to give an example of justice, but a true sacrament of divine justice, which displayed with it the divine humility-greatness. It was precisely because he “did not have to” but because he “wanted to” that we can be persuaded that his sacrifice was voluntary and proceeded not from a lamentable injustice,\textsuperscript{123} but out of supreme, eternal justice and love. Recognition of the divine humility is necessary in order to know that the humility of Christ is also the humility of God. As it was, “the justice of humility” (\textit{humilitate justitia}) was “set before us” (\textit{commendata est}) by Christ’s voluntarily dying. The power that follows

\textsuperscript{121}“Velit homo prudens esse, velit fortis, velit temperans, velit justus, atque ut haec veraciter possit, potentiam plane optet, atque appetat ut potens sit in seipso, et mirò modo adversus se ipsum pro se ipso.” \textit{trin.}, 13.13.17

\textsuperscript{122} \textit{trin.}, 13.14.18.

\textsuperscript{123} Since, according to Thomas, one cannot voluntarily be the recipient of injustice or inflict injustice on oneself.
that justice was demonstrated by his rising from the dead. “What could be more just than to face even death on the cross for justice’s sake? And what could be a greater show of power than to rise from the dead and ascend into heaven with the very flesh in which he had been killed.” By willingly submitting to death that he did not deserve, Christ served as the perfect exemplum of virtue in a world of sin, the perfect example of what it is to choose justice rather than power and to be vindicated by eternal beatitude.

The combination of humility and justice, the double exemplification, is what makes Christ the ultimate persuader of our souls. Augustine uses the imagery of substitution, exchange, and debt to describe what this voluntary dying means for us. When one really understands the proper ordering of justice and power, one is able “to see the devil overcome when he thought he himself was overcoming” (videre diabolum victum, quando sibi vicisse videbatur). Before Christ died, the devil held us “deservedly” (eos diabolus merito tenebat), but he was “obliged” to give us up “deservedly” (hos per eum merito dimitteret) because he killed Jesus “undeservedly” (immerito). He took “the blood of Christ” as “a kind of price,” and “when the devil took it he was not enriched by it but caught and bound by it.” This transaction is more than a metaphor. By exemplifying perfect justice, Christ served as a persuader of all those caught under the devil’s power, the overcoming of the devil’s anti-mediation.

Since God the Father did not need to reconcile with humanity, for the Father always and unchangeably loved us, and since the source of our captivity to the devil was not the Father’s will in any absolute sense, the Son’s “transaction” releases us from the devil precisely by opening our blind
eyes so that we can see, opening us to true justice, and therefore opening us to our previous blindness. “Nor for that matter were we really God’s enemies except in the sense that sins are the enemies of justice.”127 The only way, then, to make us God’s friends was to reconcile us to justice, “so that we might be disentangled from [the devil’s] toils.”128

In his sacrifice, Jesus shows us what it is to love God, what it is for God to love us, and what it looks like in this world when our loves are rightly ordered. He uses the examples of the martyrs as an analogy for Christ’s work, since they are the continuing exemplification of Christ’s justice. “They provide man with something to struggle against for truth sake; they train the faithful in virtue, so that the new man may be prepared through the new covenant for the new age amid the evils of this age, …faithfully and patiently awaiting the happiness which the emancipated life of the future is going to have without end.”129 The devil, no longer able to keep us “fixed” on death, was forced to give us up when we became persuaded to follow Christ’s justice and the martyr’s example.

Christ’s death might be analogized to various historical instances in which the patient submission to injustice sets the conditions for exposing the set of lies and ideologies used to keep people in injustice. One thinks of the peaceful witness of the hosed-down civil rights marchers who nevertheless persisted, of the demonstrators in Tiananmen Square who were mowed down by communist tanks, of the contemporary martyrs whose innocent deaths expose the superstructure of lies and deceptions necessary to kill them. Sometimes, the image of the justice is so powerful and the demonstration of its enactment so clear that the exemplars of the virtue expose the forces of

127 trin. 13.16.21.
128 trin. 13.15.19.
129 trin., 13.16.20.
deception for what they are and provide the condition of the possibility of release for those victimized by the lies necessary to maintain the order that dominates them. It is in this sense that Augustine thinks that the devil was tricked, and that the moment of his victory was really the beginning of his defeat. By patiently, powerfully, justly, humbly shedding his blood, he revealed the futility of the devil’s whole mode of being, of the amassing of power without a good will. He showed the contingency of the arrangement in which the devil humiliates us. He also showed us how the devil humiliates us and thereby opened a way to live without despair of wholeness and in grateful recognition of God’s gift, which is ultimately divine love. In this way, Jesus gave a way out of the devil’s power. In Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection, we can see exactly the exercise of humility and justice that we needed to see in order to escape from the devil’s humiliation, releasing us from despair and pride. In one sense, then, Jesus’ task is chiefly to expose the deception and machinations, the fraud and craftiness, of the devil in order to open up a space for us to be free from them, since exposing the false power at work is an important part of demystifying it and helping those bound by it to go free.

So Jesus, especially in his death, is the truly just man. We come to believe the stories of his life through reliable authority. And, upon believing them, we love the one that they depict so that we move more and more deeply into the meaning of justice and humility, what it means to be truly human and truly God. This is the objective work that Christ does in order to persuade us to turn back to God, to restore us to virtue.

In the above discussion, Augustine narrates Jesus in a way that shows how he is able to overcome despair and pride by demonstrating divine humility and justice and thereby revealing how much God loves us. This justice and humility set up the conditions of the possibility of
persuading us to return to virtue, which consists in love of God and love of neighbor. By setting these conditions, Christ sets the condition for the restoration of our wills. By restoring our wills, God will lead us from the knowledge (scientia) to the wisdom (sapientia) in which the life of our souls consists. In narrating Christ this way, Augustine does not establish an “atonement theory” in a way that they are commonly thought of. Augustine provides what might be called a “literal” account of the atonement in terms of his anthropology, but this literal account needs the various tropes he relies upon to make sense. It is only as the exemplum and sacramentum (aesthetic trope, moral example) that Christ is able to exchange his life for ours by entering into our place (substitution, but not penal) and thereby secure a release from the devil (Christus victor). Augustine does not impose a comprehensive theory of atonement and work his account of the divine image around that. Rather, given his doctrine of God, scriptural data, and his understanding of the human structure and condition, he shows what it might mean for us that Christ paves our way back to God.

11. The Grace of the Spirit: Compossibility of Human and Divine Agency

So far, in my description of the mission of Christ I have described conditions of possibilities. That is because of an earlier aporia that Augustine left open. “Yet I do not know how it is” that one comes to love justice. The present section will explicate Augustine’s account of “how it is” that we come to love Jesus in order that we can know God.

I showed in the third chapter how the grammar of Christian faith begins by supposing a primary, exhaustive distinction between God and creation. The distinction requires the claim that the creation is nothing without God and everything that it is because of God. Further, I showed

what it means that the creation exists derivatively; it participates in God at every moment of its being, for it comes from nothing and remains hovering over the edge of nothingness. Only God exists a se, which is to say that God is identical to being, and therefore to all the transcendental s (beauty, goodness, truth). There is no generic “existence” in which both God and creation participate, because strictly speaking there is no self-subistence other than God. Creation exists only by God’s free, gratuitous decision to create a world that participates in divine being. Each natural whole participates in the divine being, goodness, truth, and beauty in a distinctive way.

All the hidden potencies of the creation reflect a single purpose: to participate in the divine existence. But they can be activated in a way that subverts this goal. Improper activation of potencies—we might call it “bad power,” or bad use, of which the devil is the paradigm and our sin constantly reenacts—is exercised when the creation is used when the intentional act opposes existence. Bad power is always violent or violating power. Good power is exercised when the integrity of the creation (the “nature” of each particular thing understood as part of creation) is respected. Good power affirms the existence of all that is. Divine power, exercised through incarnate Sapientia, is the paradigm of good power. God maximally respects the integrity of creation, for God’s affirmation of what exists is the condition of the possibility of its existence. Only God, therefore, can move things entirely from within. That is to say, God moves all things according to their created structures and in line with divine originary purposes and never contrary to them.131 We exist properly so long as we participate in God by reflecting the affirmative aims

131 Some things require very little to respect their proper existence. They are therefore less prone to manipulation. A rock, for example, has no powers to be activated except from the outside, for a rock has no proper agency. A sculptor activates a rock’s passive potentiality by bringing a beautiful sculpture out of it. An architect uses the natural heaviness of rocks to build a cathedral. There is nothing “higher” in a rock by which it can be moved, though we may say a rock is improperly moved when it is used improperly, such as in murder. An animal can be “moved” in accordance with its instincts because it can be trained. Moving an animal through training is superior to forcing it by external compulsion (i.e., dragging a dog along the floor to get it to go outside, putting a bit and bridle on a horse, and so on).
with which God created the world. Free, rational creatures have the ability to use creation (activate its potencies) in a way that subverts existence, causes it to unravel, brings it closer to the nothing from which it came. The desire for something apart from God (in idolatry and its corollary, superstition) is the desire for nothing. Dis-ordered desire results in the improper activation of potencies when it is allowed to determine action. It is important to note that nothing ever does unravel fully in this life, nor does anything attain to the divine perfection. It might be better to label actual, concrete uses of “good” and “bad” power “better” and “worse” power.

We can say that divine power is the paradigm for good power not only over lower creatures but also among human agents. God exists not just as the empowerer of the power of the memory, but as the primordial inhabitant. Simply as Creator, that is, even if God had not destined human creatures to participate in God through revealed knowledge of the trinitarian life, God could move the rational creature in a way that is higher than any other human agent can move.

132 My description of the difference between good power and bad power is critically informed by Foucault. See Schuld, *Foucault and Augustine*, 33ff. See especially the examples of powers between lovers and teachers. The difference between Schuld’s account and mine is that I try to explain Augustine’s view not just of the abstraction “power” in relation to Foucault, but, by explaining the metaphysics of it, to set it in the framework of Augustine’s thought and thereby make it plausible to those who might share Augustine’s framework.

133 My descriptions of “good power” and “bad power” below derive from the framework of Augustine’s thought as I have described it. There is, however, another set of questions pertaining to human ability to recognize the exercise of good and bad power. This is where some of the points made in chapter 4 are important: the world is murky to us, and we are perhaps especially unaware of our “insides” once they have been made private. This skepticism applies especially to the internal structure of our motivations. Further, and a fortiori, we do not understand or recognize adequately the motivations of others in order to judge them. So, when it comes to the question of judgment or recognition of the exercise of good power and of bad power, we should have very little confidence that we can know it. Further, it follows from the structure of Augustine’s thought as I’ve set it up that the world is consistently and universally damaged, but never so damaged as to stop being most basically a gift. While it is certainly good news that even bad power never fully subverts divine power, it is also the case that we should not expect any exercise of either good or bad power to be “pure.” The best we can give (and this is how I understand the examples that follow) are ideal types or examples of what better use of power would look like. So there are three levels of necessary suspension of judgment: about our own motivations, about others’ exercises of power, and about the purity of any exercise of power. For more on the deferral of such judgments in politics, see Paul J. Griffiths, “The Quietus of Political Interest,” *Common Knowledge* 15, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 7–22; Paul J. Griffiths, “The Cross as the Fulcrum of Politics: Expropriating Agamben on Paul,” in *Paul, Philosophy, and the Theopolitical Vision: Critical Engagements with Agamben, Badiou, Zizek, and Others*, ed. Douglas Karel Harink (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010); Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
another, because the creature’s *mens* gives it a deeper, more public inside. In the concrete providential order, God moves human creatures to a goal beyond the realm of human possibility by making Godself available to be known and loved thematically in the person of Jesus. This is the highest type of affirmation of creaturely being possible. The more God relates to an individual, the more that person becomes fully herself, fully human.

Divine power over human agents is therefore the paradigm for the exercise of good power. This is because, on Augustinian terms, human agents have a deeper, more textured “inside” than other creatures. God moves us from this inside, that is, from the center of our agency. Consider, by way of analogy, an ideal-typical act of persuasion: when someone convinces someone else in a conversation in which both equal sides lay bare their premises, acknowledge the vulnerability of their arguments, admit their personal prejudices, and open themselves up to critique. In such an encounter, the freedom and the integrity of the one persuaded is respected even if one exercises persuasive “power” over the other, perhaps influencing a course of action. The character of the course of action taken as a result of “internal” persuasion testifies to the type of influence it is: the persuader cannot be held accountable for the actions of the one persuaded, even though the persuader can be understood in some sense to participate fully in the actions of the persuaded. For the influence of the one is not external to the other in the way it would be if one forced the other to do something. This is what it means to say that one moves the other internally. The one moved retains all her freedom precisely in the way that she is moved. Contrast this to even ordinary instances of deception or sophistry.\(^{134}\) When a person so acts after having been deceived, we do not think that she has been respected, and we think that the deceiver shares in the blame for the action.

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\(^{134}\) For more on manipulation/deception/sophistry, see Eugene Garver, *For the Sake of Argument: Practical Reasoning, Character, and the Ethics of Belief* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 44–68.
Similarly, when a beloved asks her lover to do something, and out of love, the lover performs a series of actions for the beloved, the beloved has moved the lover by what is highest, the capacity the lover has to find her own good in the good of another. If the beloved were to manipulate her lover by threatening or lying, she would be moving her lover by what is lower, more distantly removed from her rationality, and therefore “externally.” Loving action is characterized by the sense of freedom in being bound to the beloved.

Ideally, one human body can relate non-competitively to another human body only insofar as the one affirms the existence and personal identity of the other truthfully and in a way that respects all the capacities of the other. The closer one person gets to another, the more she is able to move him by what is internal to him like God does, though never perfectly as God does.

By moving us through what Augustine calls the mens (which, though “male,” exists only by way of participation in the divine Wisdom, Sapientia, the Word), the way God calls for our response is radically nonviolent. Often, divine power over human persons is analogized to human power over inanimate objects or animals. In such schema, God limits Godself if God wishes to respect the freedom of rational agents. But this reinscribes the possibility of violence between God and creatures that Augustine wishes to deny, at least in his better moments. God does not relate to living human bodies like living human bodies relate to rocks or animals—at least not in the most fundamental ways God calls for human response to God. This would constitute a divine exercise of bad power. God alone moves from the center of human agency in a way analogous to how living human bodies in close, healthy, affirming relationships relate to one another. When God acts most fully in rational creatures, they are most free, just as we ought to become most free in our closest relationships, and just as we would if our personal relationships had remained undistorted by
estrangement from God, ourselves, and others. To the extent that human actions fail to approximate to the good (of which they are never completely devoid so long as they continue to exist), divine agency in that action does not obtain as fully as it could have.

God alone is able to act “internally” in a subject in a perfectly non-competitive way. Since God moves internally, the best human action resembles God’s agency. God does not force or “program” bodies from the outside and that power that resorts to doing so is a lower, less effectual form of bad power. If God moved an individual externally (through compulsion), when God could have moved the individual internally, God would be treating human persons as irrational bodies that had not been given a supernatural destiny, contradicting the terms of God’s own creation in this providential order. God would be denying the constitutive relationship with them that God initiates. Indeed, God would become just another isolatable historical force. If persuasion and love are modeled on divine agency, authorization to torture, we might say, is the ideal type of the treatment of divinely constituted persons as pure bodies. It is an objectivization of bodies for the purpose of dominating them. It is thus the basest, most existence-denying form of “bad power,” an ultimate admission of weakness, and the furthest one can get from exercise of “good power.”

For present purposes exercise of good power on human agents implies the compossibility of human and divine agency. Human willing does not exclude God. Augustine would say that anything that could compete with a human agent such that divine moving would supplant human willing is less than God. Sometimes Augustine’s rhetoric implies that God exercises divine “bad power.” Here I wish to develop his account of affirmative relationship between human and divine agency by presenting the work of the Spirit. Augustine figures the resolution to his aporia—“yet I

do not know how it is…”—by presenting the mission of the Spirit, which complements the mission of the Son in the one persuasive action of the Holy Trinity for our salvation.

12. Subjectivity and Spirit

Augustine’s understanding of nature and grace relies on two central points. First, apart from the Mediator, the objective conditions of our right desiring cannot be met. Second, apart from the Spirit, the subjective conditions of right desiring cannot be met. Recall the example of the just man: in order to become just, one needs the just man to exemplify justice, but in order to be transformed by the justice so exemplified, one needs the will to love it. Augustine thinks that the objective happening is not enough. As Calvin put it in his *Institutes*, “We must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us.”  

The Spirit gives us the gifts of faith and love by an act of persuasion that extends the trinity’s work in Christ into the “now” wherein salvation lies. Augustine depicts the Holy Spirit as “*Donum*” and “*Caritas*.” Just as Christ’s death showed how much God loved us to reverse despair and pride, bind the will to God, restore the unity of active and contemplative reason, and provide hope for the resurrection, the Holy Spirit makes God “sweet” to our wills so that we can believe and be “justified” by faith. Having been justified, we are able to grow in knowledge and love of God, into the unity of active and contemplative reason, and live in the hope of eternal life in our mortal bodies. Here I outline what I take to be the relevant points for the present discussion of this second mission of the trinity in the Holy Spirit.

Augustine offers a helpful heuristic framework to think of the debate with Pelagius at the

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beginning of *On the Grace of Christ*. Pelagius, according to Augustine’s account, \(^{137}\) “lists and distinguishes three things by which he claims we fulfill God’s commandments: the ability (*possibilitatem*), the will (*voluntatem*), and the action (*actionem*).” \(^{138}\) The position is explicated with clarity and precision. The ability “by which one can be righteous” is part of “nature,” divinely “given” apart from our power (*potestate*). “We have it, even if we do not want it.” \(^{139}\) The will and the action “are ours” and “they come only from ourselves.” The grace of God does not assist the will and action directly; will and action are “entirely ours” (*quae nostra omnino vult esse*). Rather, God gives us the ability in creating us, and the ability “is so weak that it always needs the help of grace” (*semper gratiae adjuvetur auxilio*). On these terms, grace comes to us by the internal gift of the ability and the external gift of teaching, which assists the ability to will and to act.

In *On the Spirit and the Letter*, Augustine introduces a second, complementary way of explaining the issue that pushes deeper into his thought. Augustine extends a Pelagian claim to show its logical consequences: for Pelagius, divine “help” is in the creation of “beings with free choice” and in “giving the commandments.” God certainly helps them, insofar as by Christ’s teaching God removes ignorance so that people know what they should avoid and what they should pursue in their actions. Thus, by following the path he pointed out to them, they may, by the free choice implanted in their nature, live chaste, righteous, and pious lives and merit to attain to the blessed and eternal life.” \(^{140}\) Pelagius is able to resort to divine teaching (which Augustine re-figures in *On the Spirit and the Letter* as law or the letter that kills) because he believes that if we know what

\(^{137}\) Here I am interested only in the Augustinian account, and I bracket what Pelagius actually thought and focus on Augustine’s portrayal of and response to those arguments.

\(^{138}\) *gr. et pecc. or.*, 3.4.

\(^{139}\) *gr. et pecc. or.*, 3.4.

\(^{140}\) *sp. et. litt.*, 2.4.
to do we will want to do it.

The source of the disagreement between Augustine and Pelagius is (according to Augustine) four-fold. First, Augustine and Pelagius disagree about sin’s nature and its effects. What does sin do to us? Augustine says that nature is “vitiated” by sin. The fundamental human problem is that, while we should be attaching ourselves to things through our love of God, sin attaches us to the world wrongly without God. The crucial point is that we are thereby lost in and caught by the multiplicity. Ability to desire properly is lost, and concupiscence tarnishes even our legitimate loves, relentlessly distorting even the best of our lives. Augustine says that the main commandment, which he repeats throughout On the Spirit in the Letter, is non concupiscer. Do not desire wrongly. We cannot obey it.

For Pelagius, sin weakens but does not vitiate our nature (understood as structure of the self). External teaching aids a weakened “ability” by external teaching. The process by which God restores us to right desiring is far less complicated because sin’s effects are less complex. On these terms, Pelagius is able to recommend the grace of divine teaching (which Augustine re-figures in On the Spirit and the Letter as law or the letter that kills) because he believes that if we know what to do we will want to do it.

In response, Augustine contends that the teaching or the law of God does not aid us in becoming better, but, quite the opposite of what Pelagius thinks, will serve only to condemn us. For on Augustine’s terms, the will has lost its ability to attach itself to justice. It can at best imitate justice. But knowledge and love for God, and therefore for justice are lost. Liberum arbitrium for Augustine is a corrupted “gift.” The trace of the divine image remains in our vitiated nature,

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but it is in need of radical restoration. We therefore misuse the law (on Pauline terms) if we think that by it alone we can be “made righteous” or “justified.” Perhaps I can re-state the disagreement this way: Pelagius seems to think that Christ need only be a sort of external example, whereas Augustine needs not only the radical persuasive work of Christ’s death (though he does not criticize Pelagius for making Christ’ death unnecessary), but of the work of the Spirit “within” us to re-orient our desiring and re-vivify our souls.

Augustine’s doctrine of sin is an early feature of his thought, and his critique of Pelagius sounds similar to his critique of the Platonists in book VII of Confessions. There, he says, he was not yet humble enough to submit to the humble Christ. It makes sense if Pelagius was an intellectualist. The difference between them would then reflect a broad difference between European and African theology. The former tended to be more optimistic about human “nature,” whereas the signature doctrine of the latter was the doctrine of original sin. Without getting into a deep analysis of Augustine’s doctrine of sin, it should be enough rehearse Augustine’s argument for the baptism of infants.

Augustine took his point of departure from the fact that (1) baptism was for the forgiveness of sins and (2) the church baptized infants. Therefore, the church baptized infants for the forgiveness of sins. On his view either infants were baptized for sins that had already been committed, or they were baptized for sins that had not yet been committed.\textsuperscript{143} Ceasing the practice of infant baptism was unthinkable for him, and giving up the idea that baptism was for the

\textsuperscript{142} “Thus the great abundance of his sweetness, that is, the law of faith, his love written and poured out in hearts, is made perfect in those who hope in him so that the soul, healed not by the fear of punishment, but by the love of righteousness, performs good works.” (“Ita multa multitudo dulcedinis ejus, hoc est, lex fidei, charitas ejus conscripta in cordibus atque diffusa, perficitur sperantibus in eum, ut anima sanata non timore poenae, sed amore justitiae operetur bonum.”) \textit{sp. et litt.}, 29.51.

\textsuperscript{143} \textit{praed.}, 24-26. See also his extensive discussions of the difference between predestination and foreknowledge and his rejection of what is now called middle knowledge, \textit{praed.} 9.17-11.21.
forgiveness of sins was similarly unthinkable. Since it is too destabilizing to the moral life to introduce a sort of middle knowledge view about sin (how could we ever know if we would have sinned after we died in a way that would potentially retroactively strip us of beatitude), and since some infants die before committing any personal sin, baptism has to be for the forgiveness of past sins. Augustine tended to conflate “original sin” and “original guilt” in ways that most churches no longer wish to maintain. Further, and partially for this reason, his beliefs about original sin were not always consistent. For example, he never decided how original sin was transmitted. This problem was closely connected to another: his life-long obsession with understanding the origin of the soul. If souls were specially created for each new person (and not all present somehow in the first parent), then it is hard to see how sin could be transmitted. Because his beliefs are unformed about these matters, he never fully entitled himself to the view that the guilt of sin is transmitted.

One way of reading Augustine more plausibly would to stress his concern with how language shapes the soul. According to Robert Dodaro, “Augustine never abandons the conviction, dear to the classical rhetoricians, that human behavior is largely conditioned by the effects of language on the soul.” Original sin may be thought to be transmitted via language and linguistic categories (like the binaries black/white, man/woman, American/non-American, etc.) that define us from before we are born, down to the core, and shape the possibilities for our desiring. On these terms, all natural languages are either the result of sin or have been transformed

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144 O’Donnell, Augustine, 296ff.
147 Dodaro, Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine., See also Kolbet, Augustine and the Cure of Souls., Augustine “came to identify the soul’s sin less with a loss of self-control than with its active grasping to impose an order of its own making upon itself or others” (129).
by it such that natural language limits the possibilities for right desiring. We are inevitably trapped in the world that our parents give to us by teaching us language—a poisonous gift if there ever was one.\textsuperscript{148} Through acquired language use, which is the source of free action, sin is both shared in common among all participants in linguistic communities, and yet deeply personal because of the way it shapes individual agency and desire. So we can be sinful from conception in the basic ways we are interpreted and learn to interpret. This characterization of sin, language, and practical reason resists any conception of the autonomy of reason or desire independent of how language shapes us to interpret our lives.

Baptism of infants, on these terms, introduces children into a new linguistic community in which there is “neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female” (Galatians 3.27) because all are one in Jesus. The fundamental conceptions shaping our self-interpretations are formed by a set of categories that directs our free action back toward intimacy with God, with ourselves, and with one another.\textsuperscript{149} We can be forgiven original sin by the bath of baptism, yet the original sin can be conceived without guilt because of underdeveloped agency. This modified Augustinian doctrine of

\textsuperscript{148} Consider Serene Jones’ example of the birth of her daughter: “When I looked down to meet the face of this new human being, to my surprise what I first encountered was a little head covered by a bright pink hat printed with the words, ‘It’s a girl.’ All doubts about the pervasive and constitutive pressure exerted by gender codes in our culture were banished in that moment as I held a little human being already marked by cultural inscriptions of ‘pinkness’ and ‘girl’ and all the potentially restrictive, sexist assumptions that go with them. In the first ten seconds of her life, my daughter had been placed in a web of social meanings that shaped expectations about her,” Jones, \textit{Feminist Theory and Christian Theology}, 117. Or consider Philip Larkin’s poem “This Be the Verse,” “They fuck you up, your mum and dad. / They may not mean to, but they do. / They fill you with the faults they had / And add some extra, just for you. / But they were fucked up in their turn / By fools in old-style hats and coats, / Who half the time were soppy-stern / And half at one another’s throats. // Man hands on misery to man. / It deepens like a coastal shelf. / Get out as early as you can, / And don’t have any kids yourself.”

\textsuperscript{149} In this context, I think of the experience of reading through Thomas’s phenomenology of Christian life in the \textit{Secunda secundae}. He helps the confessor help the one confessing name her actions, both good and bad, in a way that can redirect her agency, freeing it toward charity. In this way, Foucault’s critiques of the confessional are misplaced. The confessional, which may indeed be a site of dehumanizing “pastoral power” and governmentality, can also be the site in which we learn to re-name our lives in accordance with our baptism, naming our actions in a way that helps us see the affirmation that comes with intimacy with God. See Michel Foucault, \textit{The Government of Self and Others} (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
original sin brings out some of the ambiguities and helps to distinguish the Augustinian view more sharply from the Pelagian.

Augustine and Pelagius not only disagree about the nature of sin, but also about the “nature” of the human creature. For Augustine, it is significant that Pelagius limits divine “grace” to teaching and created capacity. Pelagian grace is inadequate to the problem because, after creation and fall, it provides a merely external help that does not do anything about changing the will. Teaching partially solves only an intellectual problem of ignorance. On Augustine’s terms, this solution is completely unworkable, because will, intellect, and memory are co-present and co-active in any moment of knowing, desiring, and remembering. So the teaching of Christ will only empower us if it can solve the problem of the will. “We can know or believe something and not love it, but we cannot love what we neither know nor believe.”150 The reason for the disagreement about the extent of sin is partially explainable by Augustine’s much fuller and more textured account of the “inner” self.

Third, Augustine thinks that terms by which Pelagius understands human nature do not take seriously the natural “distance” between humans and God. When Augustine repeats, “What do you have that you have not received?” he is alluding to a defect in the Pelagian doctrine of creation. The problem is not that Pelagius has too robust a concept of creation—that our nature for Pelagius is too strong because he was an optimist about our capacities. Rather, Pelagius places a natural gulf between humans and God such that some things come from God and others come from us.151 Divine and human action are not fully compossible on Pelagian terms. God is therefore forced either to self-limit or exercise bad power. That God has those options says less about a doctrine of

150 sp. et litt., 36.64.
151 See Tanner, God and Creation in Christian Theology, chap. 4.
God than it does about a doctrine of the human. Through this lens, Augustine wishes to respect and highlight human agency as God gets closer to it. “It is not that this comes about without our will; rather, the law shows that our will is weak so that grace may heal our will and so that a healthy will may fulfill the law, without being subject to the law or in need of the law.”

It is worth lingering on this point about the impossibility of divine and human agency. Augustine thinks that God the Spirit persuades our wills. The Spirit is presented as God’s way of subjectively changing our desires so that we conform to divine desire. The Spirit on these terms is the persuader of the faithful, the one who enters into the seat of our agency, our will, and heals it, re-directs it, allows us to act freely and according to our created purposes. Augustine consistently uses the metaphor that the Spirit makes things “sweet” or is an “ineffable sweetness” for doing the things of God.

Besides the teaching by which they are commanded how they ought to live, they receive the Holy Spirit, so that there arises in their minds a delight in and a love for the highest and immutable good that is God, even now while they walk by faith, not by vision. By this [love] given to them like the pledge of a gratuitous gift, they are set afire with the desire to cling to the creator and burn to come to a participation in that true light, so that they may have their well-being from him from whom they have their being. For free choice is capable only of sinning, if the way of truth remains hidden. And when what we should do and the goal we should strive for begins to be clear, unless we find delight (delectet) in it and love (ametur) it, we do not act, do not begin, do not live good lives. But so that we may love (diligatur) it, the love of God (charitas Dei) is poured out in hour hearts, not by free choice which comes from ourselves, but by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom 5.5).

Elsewhere, the will is “helped” and “raised up through the gift of the spirit of grace” (adjuvetur et erigatur impartito spiritu gratiae). The sweetness, though “caused” by another, makes us “delight.”

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152 sp. et litt., 9.15.
154 sp. et litt., 3.5.
155 sp. et litt. 12.20
“One begins to find delight in the law of God in the interior human being. This delight is a gift, not of the letter, but of the Spirit, even if another law in one’s members resists the law of the mind, until the whole old condition has passed over into the new condition.”

This insight of Augustine’s reads differently against the backdrop of contemporary theorists of biopolitics as well as feminists and neo-Marxists who locate our lives at the intersection of influences over which we have no control. The claim that we are somehow fully autonomous and therefore independent of external influence is a fiction. The question to ask is not whether we are formed on the inside or not. Indeed, Augustine’s doctrine of sin is perfectly compatible with the Foucauldian, neo-Marxist claims that we are shaped by external influences in ways that dominate and reduce us to objects. Against this backdrop, the Pelagian doctrine seems like a self-deceived, bourgeois attempt to assert what may seem like the reality to the very few whose external influences work in their favor. For Augustine, the devil and the world are constantly getting inside our heads, constantly trying to shape us for our harm apart from the true basis of our being, making vicious things seem virtuous and sweet——sugarcoating their domination and our humiliation so that we want it and can’t imagine another way of living. If Christ is the exemplar that shows these powers for what they are, the Holy Spirit is the agent who moves us to the height of our potential.

156 “si adsit fides quae per dilectionem operatur (Galat. V, 6), incipit condelectari legi Dei secundum interiorem hominem, quae delectatio non litterae, sed spiritus donum est; etiamsi alia lex in membris adhuc repugnat legi mentis, donec in novitatem.” Ibid.

157 J. Joyce Schuld puts it nicely when she contrasts both Foucault’s and Augustine’s resistance to the full reduction of human agents into objects by power relations. “A purely unconditioned freedom that is in essence untouched and unmoved by everyday power struggles is, on [Foucault’s] view, an empty, lifeless, abstraction. Such a freedom is completely devitalized, stripped of its generating and sustaining capacities” (27). Both Foucault and Augustine, she claims, think that “individuals are shaped by relations of power and that this shaping percolates all the way down into the smallest micro-dynamics as they interactively formulate personal as well as sociohistoric desires, dispositions, and habits” (29). The difference comes in the space they construct for freedom. Foucault “repeatedly tries to create space for a nonreductive potentiality.” Augustine, on the other hand “is much less embattled than Foucault” because “he depicts the personal integrity of individuals as being nonreducible in light of rather than in spite of power relations” (30). Schuld, Foucault and Augustine.
making us more fully what we are by helping us want rightly. In one limited way, Luther’s picture that we are beasts ridden either by God or the devil is apt.\textsuperscript{158} For the Spirit to direct the seat of our agency is for God to activate our highest potential. The Spirit is the true persuader who offers the way out of the devil’s clutches. The sanctifying Spirit is also the maximally affirming Spirit. We might even turn Deleuze’s account of Nietzsche on his head: through the Spirit’s persuading work, we are made over into the powerful, active, and free promise-makers and gift-givers that Christ died for us to be.\textsuperscript{159} “Are we then doing away with free choice through grace? Heaven forbid! Rather, we make free choice stronger.”\textsuperscript{160} The Marxist theorists and the immanentists discussed in the second chapter worry that emphasizing the transcendent divine pleasure simply creates a situation of bad passions and brings divine and human into competitive relation. But this framework ignores the fact that it is absolutely impossible to be in competitive relationship with Augustine’s God, who makes us everything we are, desires to make us everything we could be, and apart from whom we are nothing that we are.

This account of the Spirit’s work leads to the fourth major area of disagreement I wish to identify and illuminate, which is the basic concept of salvation. For the Augustinian account of Pelagius, grace simply aids in the correction of an important defect. Salvation is the aiding of human

\textsuperscript{158} See Martin Luther, “On the Bondage of the Will,” in \textit{Luther’s Works}, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Hilton C Oswald, and Helmut T Lehmann (Saint Louis, MO; Philadelphia, PA: Concordia Publishing House; Fortress Press, 1955), 65. “In short, if we are under the god of this world, away from the work and Spirit of the true God, we are held captive to his will…so that we cannot will anything but what he wills… And this we do readily and willingly, according to the nature of the will, which would not be a will if it were compelled; for compulsion is rather (so to say) “unwill.” But if a Stronger One comes who overcomes him and takes us as His spoil, then through his Spirit we are again slaves and captives—though this is royal freedom—so that we readily will and do what he wills. Thus the human will is placed between the two like a beast of burden. If God rides it, it wills and goes where God wills… If Satan rides it, it wills and goes where Satan wills; nor can it choose to run to either of the two riders or to seek him out, but the riders themselves contend for the possession and control of it.”

\textsuperscript{159} Gilles Deleuze, \textit{Nietzsche and Philosophy} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

\textsuperscript{160} “Liberum ergo arbitrium evacuamus per gratiam? Abis: sed magis liberum arbitrium statuimus,” \textit{sp. et litt.} 30.52.
nature in gaining the virtue that creation makes possible. There is a much stronger link between the self of “nature” and what is understood to be restored. For Augustine’s nature/grace paradigm, the stain and distortion of sin causes him to posit another paradigm: a creation/redemption scheme. I think it is helpful to explain the relation of these two paradigms by distinguishing senses of nature which have so far been implicit. The seamless, metaphysical Pelagian framework requires very little novel divine action. On the Augustinian framework, our history made a real difference to the development of our powers and our ability to exercise them well. With Pelagius, one gets the sense that the human face is still bright and youthful, our senses intact, our energy easily replenished, and our stride consistent and wide. We can turn toward the heavenly Jerusalem with a bit of encouragement and arrive there somewhat easily. For Augustine we, with our leathery faces, dulled hearing, and cloudy eyesight can barely hobble in the direction of the good life even some of the time before we fall with the sheer exhaustion of focusing our energies on goodness. Our past has not slid off our backs, but has rather made its way to our bones. A radical infusion of power is needed if we are ever to arrive at the destination that we still knowingly or unknowingly aim all our energies at attaining.

This fourth major area of disagreement takes us to the heart of the original problem, the most basic disagreement for his account in On the Grace of Christ. Augustine thinks that humanity has been wounded by sin, that together we have formed a massa peccati, a mass of sin. This fall into concupiscence has affected our basic capacities for desiring and therefore requires a radical restoration. Augustine nicely reframes the Pelagian argument: whereas Pelagius thinks that the “ability” is from God in the grace of creation, the will and action are ours (from the gifted ability), Augustine argues that God moves the will by means of the Spirit’s sweetening power, and, by
moving the will, also fully moves the action, even as God restores our agency to us. He cites Philippians 2: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good pleasure.” By so restoring the will, we are able to enter fully into the virtuous cycle of Christ’s humility and justice, restoring thereby the union of active and contemplative reason and promising the future union of soul and body. The moment of Christ’s incarnation and the Spirit’s redeeming work is absolutely crucial. The stronger account of divine interposition meets the stronger account of sin’s interruption. Pelagius has no such interruption, requiring no such intervention.

13. Natures and Graces

In the above account, I have narrated divine missions in terms of the restoration of creatures to knowledge and love of God. I have done so by identifying three different senses of nature. Here I bring them together in a more systematic way.

Human nature is first a structure of the self, the distinctively human “power pack.” Augustine talks about the powers and the way that they are hierarchically configured primarily through distinctions between body and soul (structural but not anthropological dualisms), the three-tiered structure of the soul (anima, animus, mens), and the tripartite structure of rational parts of the soul (memoria, intelligentia, voluntas). The term thus indicates all the powers possessed by to the type of creatures we are. To say that these powers are a “nature” is to say that their exercise doesn’t depend on any special divine intervention over and above the ways God constantly sustains us. Nature also then denotes the resources available to the types of creatures we are unaided by extra divine help.

In this first sense, then, nature is therefore a properly definitional term, an answer to the
question, “What are you?” or “What kind of thing are you?” For Aquinas, this term is explicit: God imagines a set of “essences” (conceptually) prior to creation. God creates a set of kinds that together image divine being. Augustine sometimes speaks of nature in this way, and he often assumes the concept. For example, in *On the Trinity* III, when discussing the way angels mediate divine presence and that demons work within divine permission, he says “it is difficult for us to ascertain what these angels can do by nature (*naturam*), but cannot do by divine prohibition, and what their own natural (*naturae*) limitations prevent them from doing.”

Much of his earlier writing on free will can be read as a reflection on the possibilities of human nature in this sense.

There are multiple issues at stake in the discussion of nature as a structure, explaining the divergent Augustinian traditions. The question of “human nature” is at the same time a question about human limits: what are human creatures empowered to do? More specifically, what can they do in relation to God? Are we intrinsically oriented to knowledge of God? Is knowledge of God present in us as a sort of natural terminus? The question of human nature is also a question about human moral possibilities: what does it mean to live the good life? Is it possible with the resources available to us? Much of the descriptive work has already been done. The present chapter is structured with a view to placing a reading of Augustine within those debates, though I have not

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162 *trin.* 3.9.18.

163 The ascent scene in *conf.* is a paradigm case of human limitation and of powers available to the human. Augustine affirms that we are unable to ascend. He does so, I think, with reference to human finitude. That is, the claim that he makes famously in *conf.* 7 is that we are not able to ascend to knowledge of God because the resources made available to us, the kind of creatures that we are, are intrinsically unable to get there.

engaged them directly.  

Second, nature is used in a non-technical way to denote an original condition or state, the state in which we were created. This sense of nature tends to be the most controversial. Sometimes, controversy surrounding it transfers also to the first sense of nature, as in mid-twentieth century debates about “the supernatural.” In general, it is uncontroversial to say that talk of a natural state, whether mythological or historical-literal, depending on one’s approach to evolutionary biology, implies some sort of innocence with respect to sin and some sort of actual or possible confirmation in that innocence that would persist so long as human obedience to divine commands persisted. In this sense, it is natural to us is to love God and live lives of justice. But this is where the agreement stops. I think three types of views can be identified with regard to this. I use the doxographic terms “Anselmian,” “Thomist,” and “Jansenist” to describe the three views.

The Anselmian view resembles the view of Augustine I have described above most closely. Human nature in the first sense is roughly identical to what I described in chapter 1. Human creatures were placed in the garden—whether literally or figuratively, it does not matter here—and were given the command, which, at its heart, was a command to love God. By being obedient to the command, Adam and Eve would have undergone some sort of eschatological transfiguration.

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166 For a very nice explanation of how this continues to happen with regard to de Lubac, see David Braine, “The Debate Between Henri De Lubac and His Critics,” Nova Et VETERA 6, no. 3 (2008): 543–589.

in which their obedience would have been confirmed for eternity. In Augustine’s terms, they would have transferred from an “ensouled” body to an “enspirited” body. The following passages from Augustine’s literal commentary on Genesis make this position clear: “It is indeed true that he would not have died even in the body, unless he had sinned… All the same, it could still be merely ‘ensouled’ (animale) before his sin, and after a life lived justly be ‘enspirited’ (spirituale) when God willed.”

Clearly, there is a way in which we get this back, and there is a way in which we do not get this back. And so it is not the immortality of an ‘enspirited’ body (corpus spirituale) that we get back, which the man did not yet have; but what we get back is the justice from which the man fell through sin. So we shall be renewed from the staleness of sin, not to the original ‘ensouled’ body (corpus animale) which Adam had, but to something better, that is, to an ‘enspirited’ body, when we are made equal to the angels of God (Lk 20:36) fit for heavenly mansions, where we will not need any food that decays. So then we shall be renewed in the spirit of our minds (Eph 4:23), according to the image of him who created us (Col 3:10), which Adam lost by sinning. We shall also be renewed in the flesh, though, When this perishable thing puts on imperishability (1 Cor 15.54) so that it may be an ‘enspirited’ body, into which Adam had not yet been changed, but into which he was to have been changed if he had not earned the death of his ‘ensouled’ body by sinning.

The first state in which the corpus animale was placed we can call “original justice.” Original justice is the state in which one’s own advantage is subordinated to justice such that one does not neglect one’s advantage, but prioritizes justice more highly. If Adam had lived according to the gift of original justice, he would have been given the grace of the beatific vision and the corpus spirituale necessary for it. Thus, had he sought justice first consistently, he would have been transfigured into eternal happiness as well.

On a second view, which I call “Thomist,” Adam was gifted with an “enspirited” body from the start (to use Augustine’s terms). In Thomas’s language, he was given the theological virtues and

\[168 \text{ Gn. litt. 6.23.34 (note the difference in scripture citation between PL and Hill. Hill thinks the gospel is Luke, while the PL says it is Matt 22.30.)}

\[169 \text{ Gn. litt., 6.24.35.}\]
all the help needed to cooperate with sanctifying grace. Original creation was not a test, was not innocence, but rather fully-fledged virtue. The Aristotelian-Thomistic framework adds to the conversation a crucial set of distinctions that explain how this works and ultimately reshapes the Anselmian position, with which it is working: the distinction between natural and supernatural.

Corresponding to the distinction between natural and supernatural is the distinction between original justice and original blessedness. Original justice is a *natural* good for Aquinas, because it is just the optimal arrangement of natural human powers. Original blessedness is a supernatural good in which the natural good of original justice obtains, but it goes beyond what is possible for human natural powers. In a state of original blessedness, God graced Adam and Eve sanctifying grace, a sort of “metaphysical upgrade” that gave all the spiritual resources necessary to be confirmed forever in grace. This is conceived as a set of ends and desires. The supernatural end was the beatific vision. The desire that dominated was the desire for the beatific vision. Sin was made more severe when they rejected their supernatural end, causing the original justice to disintegrate and the self to lose its optimal arrangement and to be burdened with a stain of sin (*macula animarum*), original guilt, and rebellion against God that leads the soul to greater and greater vice.\(^{170}\) The original blessedness was so tied to the original justice that loss of the former causes loss of the latter.

A Thomist “pure nature,” in which we might have been given original justice without original blessedness, and our potential would climax with a state of lower happiness natural to our creaturely kind.\(^ {171}\) In this framework, in a different providential order, human creatures would have been imperfectly happy with a purely natural beatitude of natural knowledge God as the

\(^{170}\) See ST, 2-1 Q.109-114.  
^{171} Bonino, *Surnaturel*. 

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maker of the world.

The difference between Anselmian and Thomist views about the original state leads to a different account of sin, of freedom, and of fall. The precise details go beyond the scope of this chapter. Suffice it to say that in the Augustinian and Anselmian picture, which is broadly voluntarist, angels and original sinners, weak and lacking foresight, were fooled into thinking that willing personal advantage or happiness would bring a greater advantage than the promise of beatitude. Of course, the loss of justice brought the opposite: bestial life. The fissure is in the *voluntas* itself, conceived as two wills, two *affections*, which make it possible to prioritize one’s personal advantage over virtue. Anselm echoes Augustine’s claim that sinners do not get what they think they are getting—seeking something more than the whole, they get less. He concludes that willing advantage over justice lost all advantage, while willing justice would have been justice itself, for justice causes no evil, and it causes only and always good, even if sometimes evil seems to follow it. Indeed, all goodness in the world proceeds from just wills, including the supremely just fount of all goodness, Justice and Goodness, who is God. Original justice was the original “grace” to lose for Anselm. Once lost, justice was lost entirely. On this view, one either has virtue or loses virtue entirely; one is either a Christian or a pagan, with or without virtue.

On Thomas’s view, which we might identify as intellectualist, the intellect is the rational power. The will is initially attracted to the good, moves the intellect, which specifies the good that the will then pursues. The explanation for sin is similar in that the lower power, conceived differently as the passions, led the soul from its contemplation of supernatural goods to a complete loss of the supernatural end and of the natural good of original justice. But the will and intellect

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172 See, *ST* 2-1 Q. 1-5.
work much more closely together. On the Anselmian and Augustinian view, it makes sense to say that one who sees God might choose not to love God, while on the Thomist view, this is impossible. The Thomist view, because it does not conceive nature in a way that leaves a built in mechanism for disobedience, has a harder time explaining sin and fall.

The first two views are most basic and traditional among Christian theological views. A third view is a hybrid between the first two. Some attribute it to Duns Scotus, but I call it Jansenist, but perhaps Baianist would be better. Like the Thomist view, it works within a natural/supernatural framework. But like the Anselmian view, it claims that there was a natural orientation to God. So, whereas Thomists affirm a natural desire for the vision of God in the sense that human nature as a power-pack has a natural studiousness which wants to know the ultimate cause of all things, the Jansenist view claims that there is a natural desire for the beatific vision. In this way, human creatures are, to use Reinhard Huetter’s term, “hardwired” for the beatific vision. The second sense of nature as an original state in this view is conflated with nature as a power pack or structure of the self. The Anselmian view avoids this conclusion because it does not think within a natural/supernatural framework, but rather a Christian/pagan framework. Our initial gifting with justice is, like Irenaeus, properly thought of as a sort of innocence that must be confirmed. But by introducing the natural/supernatural framework, the Jansenist view wants a fully realized desire, a “supernatural nature,” which then works according to some accounts like a “debitum naturae.” God chose to give it, and having chosen to give it, God will always give grace just like God’s choice to create trees ensures that God will sustain those trees with sunlight, water, air, and soil. Many debates have surrounded the meaning of the gift on this view, arguing whether or not

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173 See “Scotus” in Hare, God and Morality.

174 Feingold, The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas and His Interpreters.
God’s hardwiring creatures obligates God to give grace.\textsuperscript{175} I think they are misplaced, because I think it is a basic mistake to conflate the first and second senses of nature.\textsuperscript{176}

Third, nature is also understood as a state of sin. In this sense, human possess a “sinful nature.” Augustine sometimes seems to conflate the first and third sense of nature in some of his later works. This sense of nature is the de facto human state. Because of original sin, Christ’s death solves two problems: the problem of our natural inability to live lives of obedience to divine commands on our own, and the problem of our distortion, by which we lost the inclination even to try. Augustine everywhere presupposes these twin problems. But in the de facto post-lapsairian world in which all live, by including these latter two senses of “nature” in the grouping of “nature,” it is possible to see why Augustine’s claim about including a robust sense of what sin does to nature is important.

Talk of nature and grace gets extremely complicated partially because of these varying senses of the term nature. It gets even more complicated because of the basic disagreement about the original state. The way one understands grace depends partially on how one parses the original state.

For Augustine, one has to talk about all three senses of nature.\textsuperscript{177} Nature as structure has to do with the question “What kinds of things does God create human creatures to be?” Created nature has to do with the question, “Who did God create us to be in relation to God and one another?” Sinful nature has to do with the question, “Who have we become by virtue of our

\textsuperscript{175} For an example of this view, see Milbank, The Suspended Middle.

\textsuperscript{176} Most of the debates have surrounded interpretation of de Lubac’s texts, stemming from his Surnaturel. See Lubac, Augustinianism and Modern Theology, 1969; Lubac, The Mystery of the Supernatural.

\textsuperscript{177} In the same way that the talk of creation and eschatological consummation always de facto have to go together for Kelsey, Eccentric Existence, 2009.
alienation from God?” When the claim is made that human nature is incapable of arriving at grace, that is true of first and third senses of nature, but it is not true of the second sense, which was gifted with original justice and therefore did not need the radical supplement (it already contains it) or redirection that the first and third senses need. The locution “supernatural nature” is incoherent with regard to the first sense, but it makes sense with regard to the second sense. The phrase “we are by nature sinful” is totally incoherent when applied to first and second senses, but it is the heart of the claim of the third senses. The claim “God heals our nature” can be applied to the third sense but not really the first or second.

The equivocation with regard to the term nature also helps identify different meanings of grace. Grace in this chapter has meant the gift of creation. Pelagius and Augustine both use it in this sense. Grace can also mean the mission of Christ either to heal us (Anselm, Aquinas) or to supplement our nature (in the first sense, as in Scotus). Grace in this sense has been portrayed above as the “objective” work of Christ on our behalf. Grace, third, can mean the work of the Spirit by which the Spirit moves us internally. Talk of nature and grace gets confused when the third sense is used to substitute for the second. In Augustine’s later anti-Pelagian works, he constantly relies upon but rarely refers to the second sense of grace. This often leads to accounts of salvation that happen in a completely internal manner.

This way of distinguishing natures and graces suggests is a partial resolution to an aporia in Christian talk about salvation. It is typically Protestant to claim a Sin-Redemption model of salvation. It is typically Catholic to claim a Nature-Grace model. Both models appeal to and are in

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178 Marilyn Adams explores this account in Adams, Christ and Horrors.

fact found in Augustine, and they are responses to different aspects of his thought. Nature-Grace models describe what God does structurally to restore human capacities. Sin-Redemption models describe what God does in relation to the falling of the original creation. With the conceptual tools I give, the two models can be deployed differently depending on the rhetorical occasion.

If they are separated, one either so vitiates nature that the result is not a redeemed human being, but a monster made an angel (as one would think in response to some protestant accounts). Or, on a pure “nature-grace” model, ultimately Pelagian, overdetermined concepts of metaphysical nature find very little need for Jesus to die and rise again. Christ fits in to the already conceived roles he must fill in order to “restore” nature. I suspect that Karl Barth condemned the analogy of being precisely because of how he saw it allowed this anti-Christian neglect of Jesus by allowing, in its pure form, a philosophical idea of human nature to dominate the concrete way in which Jesus works. The human creature works her way to beatitude from the resources that have been metaphysically frontloaded (as in Pelagian, late-nominalist, or, paradoxically, Jansenist ideas of grace). The perceived threat of Pelagianism was that it was a system of salvation that required nature and grace, but obviated the need for redemption. “We ought to be afire with a much more ardent zeal that the cross of Christ not be done away with. But it is done away with, if one says that it is possible to attain righteousness and eternal life in some other way than by the sacrament of Christ.”

180 A set of revisionist Barthian thinkers reading Barth politically in response to Nazism are reviving the critique of the analogy of being along racial lines. See a very interesting essay by Ronald A. T Judy, (Dis)forming the American Canon: African-Arabic Slave Narratives and the Vernacular (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), chap. 3. “Writing Culture in the Negro: Grammatology of Civil Society and Slavery,” where he attributes colonialism to a Thomist doctrine of “analogy.” Thanks to Professor J. Kameron Carter for directing me to this book.

181 For more on a nice way of thinking through this question, see David Aers, Salvation and Sin: Augustine, Langland, and Fourteenth-Century Theology (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009).

182 nat. et gr., 7.7.
Augustine affirmed both continuity and difference. The grammar of “natures” and “graces” shows how he is able to do this. The power-pack “human nature” can be said to have been “vitiated and altered, so that he experienced the rebellion of desire in his body,”\textsuperscript{183} precisely because of the transfer from the first to the second state and the loss of original justice. The two “states” of nature allow Augustine the conceptual room to be able to talk about what happens to the structure without absorbing the structure into the states.

\textsuperscript{183} \textit{civ.}, 13.1.
Yea, mark you this:
It does no prejudice.
The glass-blue days are those
When every colour glows,
Each shape and shadow shows.
Blue be it: this blue heaven
The seven or seven times seven
Hued sunbeam will transmit
Perfect, not alter it….

So God was god of old:
A mother came to mould
Those limbs like ours which are
What must make our daystar
Much dearer to mankind;
Whose glory bare would blind
Or less would win man’s mind.
Through her we may see him
Made sweeter, not made dim,
And her hand leaves his light
Sifted to suit our sight.¹

“It may not be possible to undo your social positioning, but it is possible to own it, to take advantage of it, to reorient it, to turn it to perverse reuses.”²

1. Introduction

If Jesus shows the contingency of the arrangement of humanity under the devil and opens up a space for us to live more freely, he also shows the contingency of the received social order as it is codified in the public/private distinction. The Virgin Mary mediates this aspect of Christ’s work to the world. I argued in the first chapter that the social order refracted through the public/private distinction is rooted in a set of gender definitions. These definitions and a set of characters they produced, “the woman,” “the laborer,” and “the slave” have traditionally been taken to reflect a


² Halperin, How To Be Gay, 376.
“natural” ordering of creation and human society. Here I return to the ideas of “nature” and the “natural” as they relate to gender and sexuality in Augustine’s thought on Mary and *On Holy Virginity*. My goal in this chapter is to question the idea that the way that the public/private distinction has traditionally sorted men and women is “natural.” There is nothing natural about the characters I listed, who are specified by the more complete identification of their bodies with the transmission, nurturing, and sustenance of life. In this chapter, then, my first task is to lay out what it means to present the Virgin Mary as a “character” that subverts the identities of the woman, the slave, and the laborer. My explication of the character of Mary, then, offers a theological reason internal to Augustine’s thought for the historical change effected by Augustinian Christianity.

Recall that in the second chapter, I argued that the character of the “refugee” resulted from a radicalization of the Christian terms based on a fundamental misunderstanding of God’s relation to the world, which resulted in a truncated account of the relationship between immanence and transcendence and between goodness and evil. In chapters 3, 4, and 5, I provided a thick Augustinian grammar of what the world is, what we are, what sin is, and how God overcomes sin in Christ and brings us to beatitude. This grammar comes together more concretely in this chapter, and it informs what I argue, though often below the surface. Here the character of the Virgin Mary also provides an alternative to the character of the refugee. If the refugee is one of the distinctive characters of modernity, Mary shows the way in which the grammar of Augustine’s thought resists the tendencies to the simultaneous over-publicization and complete privatization that specify the refugee. The character Mary in many ways responds to and fulfills the basic feminist criticism of the public/private distinction that I outlined in the introduction. Rather than making some parts of life apolitical, the character of the Virgin Mary enacts the way in which God, who is sovereign, cares
for creation “all the way down.” Because of the re-definition of life, there is no apolitical sphere, and therefore no room for the character of the refugee as a right-less character, to whom justice cannot be done. Justice and charity cannot be separated, and therefore there are no apolitical people. In Mary, “the personal is the political.”

The grammar I have offered, then, not only subverts the way traditional societies are organized into public and private, but it also has built-in defenses against the radicalization that creates the figure of the refugee. On the terms I use here, Mary’s performance of her virginal maternity undermines the character of the woman, which I portrayed as the chief character in chapter 1. Here my focus is narrow and directed not to social roles in general, but gendered performance of public and private roles. I do not wish to make claims that involve arguments about gender constructivism or essentialism. As far as my purposes here are concerned, and according to what I’ve argued, it is sufficient to say that a closed idea “what” we are as sexed bodies is not yet available to us, and so questions of essentialism or constructivism are unanswerable. On theological terms, the Lord may have some goal in the sexed bodies that goes beyond anything we could ever have thought and that will only be revealed in the resurrection body, which, for Augustine, retains sexual organs. The argument is that by subverting the order that produces the character of the “woman” the way she does, Mary also subverts the received terms of the public/private distinction and becomes the social basis on which the way society is organized through public and private is transfigured. She transfigures the social world that I described in the first two chapters in a way that complements Christ’s redemptive work and aids in opening up a rhetorical space for us to begin the journey to beatitude by participating in Christ’s humility and justice and, through them, God’s love for us. Mary can only be made sense of if the relations between immanence and transcendence,
goodness and evil are figured rightly. Her character therefore does the double duty in this dissertation of showing how Christianity resists the flattening of social relations that I described in chapter 2.

My argument in what follows about Augustine’s thought is not primarily historical, nor is it aimed to establish Augustine’s views about Mary or women. I have no doubt that Augustine himself was earnest in his embrace of the gender codes of his society, and he gives scant evidence of explicit questioning of the characters of the woman, the laborer, or the slave. What alternative was there for him? One could easily portray Augustine as the detached observer of lesser human beings: as the one from North Africa who was oblivious to the fact that North Africa supplied the empire with olives, as the one who flippantly declared that God would have made another man if it weren’t for reproduction (as if there would be male sexual organs even without reproduction!), as the one who left his wife of 16 years in order to get engaged to a 10 year old girl that better reflected his social standing. How would a reading of *On Holy Virginity* go through Augustine the Aristocrat? Well, the holy virgins would be remarkable women who served as the ultimate confirmation of a gender ideology of purity, an ideology that looked to intact hymens in order to assess female virtue.

I take a different approach. I read Augustine against Augustine, attending to the conceptual grammar of his thought, as I have done up until this point, in order to show how his substantive theological positions sometimes subvert the attitudes that he and other readers often display. I begin by detaching the grammar of Augustine’s thought from the social ideologies that framed Augustine’s historical existence. I refuse to acknowledge the dignity that aristocratic attitudes claim, insofar as they are found in Augustine. Most readers already do this, and they see

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3 For an example of this approach, see O’Donnell, *Augustine*. 

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Augustine’s attitudes toward gender and sexuality as anachronistic. Contemporary western culture is so Christianized that we are horrified at the exclusion of women from consecrated virginity because they’re raped. Rape, we think, isn’t primarily a sexual act, but a violent act. To exclude someone from the religious life for that reason seems deeply wrong. We tend to care more about the woman than the system that regards her “purity.” The ability to discriminate the dignified lament over violence as opposed to the lament over a system that cares more about a woman’s purity than the woman herself makes for the beginning of a moral revolution.4 Augustine’s treatise *On Holy Virginity* is simultaneously the refusal of the dignity of the mother insofar as it is dependent on the ancient character of the “woman” and a re-mapping of women based on a new way of networking bodies that attention to Mary’s maternal body introduces. In my reading, it begins to reimagine a social system based on justice, which is identical to God’s love. The part of of the refiguring of the social system that questions the character of woman that the public/private distinction creates is based on a refusal of the “naturalness” of the character of the “woman.” It rather transforms the character from stable, universal, natural identity into a contingent and plastic role, and, by doing so, opens those who find themselves occupying it (or other roles like it) to possibilities that are still not fully apparent. Just as Jesus exposes the whole system of lies and deceit by which the devil keeps us in his power, Mary exposes the whole system that confuses overly reified social characters for natural identities. The point, however, is not simply to destabilize, but to form the condition of the possibility of being made over more completely into Christ’s likeness and living into the freedom of his resurrection. The resurrection is where we see most clearly the

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4 See Hart, *Atheist Delusions*.
social space Augustine’s thought opens “beyond” public and private, but I will stop short of the positive step, focusing mostly on the deconstructive work that Mary does.

Recall that in the first chapter, I quoted a passage from Oliver O’Donovan’s Desire of the Nations, which I think reflects the New Testament’s attitudes toward the prevailing social order:

Imagine an official of the Russian Government in October 1991, confronted with some demand from the foundering Soviet authorities. ‘This is ridiculous!’ he thinks to himself. ‘We will be running that ourselves by next week!’ Yet to display open contempt would give the impression that the new authorities did not believe in constitutional government at all. So confident is he in the shape of the coming order, that he has no need of an insolent posture to assert it against the order that is vanishing. Jesus, similarly, believed that a shift in the locus of power that was taking place, which made the social institutions that had prevailed to that point anachronistic. His attitude to them was neither secularist nor zealot: since he did not concede that they had any future, he gave them neither dutiful obedience within their supposed sphere of competence nor the inverted respect of angry defiance. He did not recognize a permanently twofold locus of authority. He recognized a transitory duality which belonged to the climax of Israel’s history, a duality between the coming and the passing order.5

Here I wish to expand on the idea with the help of some work in recent queer theory. I focus on the work of David Halperin in his book How to be Gay, with special focus on the relationship between queerness and irony in order to reflect more explicitly on the deconstructive moment for the type of moral community Christian faith produces. The main criticism one might make of O’Donovan’s view is that it sugarcoats oppression. I use Halperin to show how it can be conceived as a much deeper questioning of the terms on which a moral community speaks and thereby creates character possibilities.

5 O’Donovan, The Desire of the Nations, 92–93.
2. Lemonade out of Lemons, Castles out of Mud, Beauty out of Pain

In a moving essay about the homophobic verbal abuse he experienced from his grandmother, poet Richard Blanco describes what it means for him to be a “gay writer”: “thematically I feel I’ve unconsciously been a very gay writer all along in this sense: trying to make lemonade out of lemons, castles out of mud, beauty out of pain.”6 Halperin’s book is about the connection between being gay and making lemonade out of lemons, castles out of mud, beauty out of pain. He does so, in classic gay style, with reference to Mildred Pierce. Why is *Mildred Pierce* a gay cult film? Why do gay men feel a connection with Joan Crawford? What explains Halperin’s experience of going to a screening of *Mommie Dearest*, the film about Joan Crawford’s tumultuous home life, and watching all the men in the room shout along with it, “WHY CAN’T YOU GIVE ME THE RESPECT THAT I’M ENTITLED TO!”7 Or my experience of asking a gay friend about Joan Crawford, *Mommie Dearest*, and *Mildred Pierce*, none of which I had heard of before reading Halperin’s book, and hearing his response: “Of course I know that stuff! I’m gay!”? Why do the gay men Halperin describes identify with images of abject femininity, and why is a significant aspect of “the gay community” formed around those images, from Mildred Pierce to drag to camp?

Halperin’s answer is, in short, that gay men are given a social identity by the type of culture modern westerners inhabit, and that camp is the way of navigating that received identity. Gay men identify with figures like Mildred Pierce and Joan Crawford on Halperin’s account because gay men are placed in the position of women by the dominant social and sexual ordering that they find themselves in. This is not to make the psychologizing claim that gay men are gender

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“inverts” who need only to be cured of their gender misidentification. Rather, it is to suggest that gay men are given a distinct social role that makes them more conscious of society’s ordering of gender norms.

Halperin uses Michael Warner’s term “heteronormative” to describe the dominant gender/sexual ideology underlying the way modern western people tend to organize social life. The term “heteronormative” embraces not only a set of sexual practices (heterosexual vaginal intercourse, for example) but also additional gender incidentals (modes of dress, speech, affect, etc.) that tend to accompany, signify, and code those practices. Heteronormativity tends to conflate the orientation of one’s sexual desire with the way in which one figures one’s gender. So the first step in Halperin’s argument is to show the ways that gay men suffer a social system that places them in a position of otherness and difference in a way that often exposes them to violence, shame, and ridicule. More than the violence, shame, and ridicule—those are external effects—the real threat of the heteronormative system is that gay men are placed in what Halperin calls the “subject position” of women.

Consider what it is like to be someone who easily fits the heteronormative sexual and gender ideals of mainstream society. For a man, this might involve not only desire for the opposite sex, but affect in speech, style of gait, interest in sports, etc. More importantly for Halperin’s purposes, all of this is universal and natural. Men who “fit in” are able to take the coding of their sexuality and their gender identification “straight,” or unironically, as if the typical heteronormative cultural standard is natural and universal. But gait, voice, interest in sports, and other qualities

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8 Jordan, Recruiting Young Love.

9 I take it that this is not armchair psychoanalysis, nor is it supposed to apply in a universal individual way, but is a claim about cultural production.
typically associated with straight men are accidental to being straight. What is universal and analytic in being straight for men is identification by exclusive sexual desire for women. Because boys are supposed to like only girls, and gay men find, often to their horror,\textsuperscript{10} that they do not fit this definition of “boy” and therefore cannot fully identify with the definition, the natural subject position for boys who like boys instead of or in addition to girls is the position of “girl.” Gay boys are therefore placed in the subject position of girls, who also like boys.

The feminine subject position in which gay men are placed, however, is not simple femininity. It is \textit{queer} femininity. Gay men are not “naturally” women any more than they are “naturally” men on heteronormative standards. Their queerness puts them in a subject position opposed to the ideal set out for them. Gay men are given “little choice but to occupy that abject, feminized realm.”\textsuperscript{11} That is why some gay men identify with images of abject femininity like Joan Crawford. They can understand the sentiment behind, “WHY CAN’T YOU GIVE ME THE RESPECT THAT I’M ENTITLED TO!” They thus embrace the main alternative available to them without fitting into that alternative in any natural way. Because of their very early consciousness of a dissident relation to the traditional gender norms, gay men know that their catechesis into the dominant gender roles of their society requires them to play a \textit{role}. The consciousness of playing a role can generate an ironic attitude toward that role that opens up possibilities of resisting it.

The only option gay men have, Halperin argues, is to embrace the alternative—the subject position of women—ironically. They cannot embrace the role simply, because not only are they not able to be women “straight,” but the type of subject position into which they are placed is abject


\textsuperscript{11} Halperin, \textit{How To Be Gay}, 377.
femininity. That is why, Halperin thinks, gay men are disproportionality interested in period art, floral arrangements, cooking, or gardening. Rather than stereotyping or essentializing, he wishes to explain gay affect as it is produced by the heteronormative system. It is a position that they should not want to occupy “straight,” for it makes them vulnerable to self-hatred, violence, and ridicule. By an ironic embrace of their social positioning, which Halperin labels “camp,” gay men are able to critique the heteronormative gender ideology that so positions them. “The cultural practice of male homosexuality often aims to forge a particular, dissident relation to the heteronormative cultural values, a necessary and determined resistance to the dominant sexist and heterosexist coding of them, and a distinctive, perverse recoding of them—which is to say a queering of them.”

So Halperin describes a set of contemporary characters: the “man,” the “woman,” and the “queer.” The character of the man and the woman are partially defined not only by a set of contingent qualities, but also by their belief that those qualities are somehow natural. Further, the characters of the man and the woman are specified by identification according to exclusive sexual desire for the opposite sex. The queer character is specified by a failure to be one of the other two characters, an outside character in society that by definition does not fit. Halperin’s argument is that camp is the way that queer identity, especially gay men, have responded to this social setup. Rather than trying to open up a space beyond social position, camp functions “to own [social position], to take advantage of it, to reorient it, to turn it to perverse reuses.”

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12 Ibid. “Gay male cultural practices therefore tend to lace their subjects, whether those subjects be gay or straight, in the position of the excluded, the disqualified, the performative, the inauthentic, the unserious, the pathetic, the melodramatic, the excessive, the artificial, the hysterical, the feminized. In this, gay culture simply acknowledges its location—the larger social situation in which gay men find themselves in straight society—as well as its unique relation to the constellation of social values attached to that society’s dominant cultural forms.”

13 Ibid., 376.

14 Ibid.
fantastic display, camp resists without resisting, offering neither “dutiful obedience” nor “angry
defiance.” Rather, camp resists by “queering.” For my purposes, I define “queering” as “perversely
recoding dominant sexual heterosexual and gender norms.” Really, in any context, queering will
bear a formal relation of perverse recoding of heternormative sexual or gender ideologies.

The bulk of Halperin’s book is taken up with identifying how queering happens, thus the
title How to be Gay. He explains the process in a way that should be helpful for any people group
that conceives of itself in an uneasy relationship to a dominant social ideology; the epigraph is, “Let
the pagans beget and the Christians baptize.” According to the line of thought I’ve been tracing, the
way that gay culture has been constructed as a response to this situation is by “taking on the hated
social identity that has been affixed” to it.16

The most prominent and interesting example of camp in the book is the tendency toward
melodrama. The melodramatic on his terms is an overwrought, consciously performed reaction to
pain or indignity. One striking example of melodramatic camp is the Fire Island Italian Widows, a
group of gay men who dress in the traditional Italian dress of widows—black frocks, veils, etc.—as
a sign of mourning their husbands. In southern Italy, widows permanently dress this way and so
command dignity in their mourning, seniority, and authority in the community. Rather than
reading the drag performance as a spoof, Halperin emphasizes the reality of the men’s grief over
their loss of their lovers and friends from AIDS. They were both mock-mourning and really

15 The term was first popularized by Michael Warner in his article Michael Warner, “Introduction: Fear of a Queer
Compass 6, no. 1 (2012): 1–13; Keith Harvey, “Camp Talk and Citationality: A Queer Take on ‘Authentic’ and
Presidential Address: ‘Fleeing the Uxorious Kingdom’: Augustine’s Queer Theology of Marriage,” Journal of Early

16 Halperin, How To Be Gay, 377.
mourning. “Their grief was at one parodic and real.” In a sort of liturgy of mourning, the Fire Island Italian Widows annually parade and over-perform their grief. Why would they simultaneously mock and display their pain? Because they are aware of two things. First, given the culture of heternormativity, they are not entitled to the dignity of lost love. “Gay love constitutes a public obscenity, and so the pain of gay lovers evokes smirks at least as often as it elicits tears. Gay loss never quite rises to the level of tragedy. Nor would-be gay tragedy can escape a faint tinge of ridiculousness.” Second, and because of the first reason, the “emotions they felt and displayed were necessarily consigned by conventional cultural codes to the realm of the incongruous, the excessive, the melodramatic, the hysterical, the inauthentic—at any rate, the less than fully dignified.” So the Italian widows embrace this devaluing through a performance that emphasizes the role. “For to forgo any claim to social dignity is also to preempt others’ efforts to demean you, and it is to strike an ironic attitude toward your own suffering. It is to refuse the cultural dichotomy that treats the suffering of others as either tragic or (merely) pathetic, according to their label of social prestige. It is to know one’s own hurt to be laughable, without ceasing to feel it.” If suffering is either tragic or pathetic, the men whose lovers died of AIDS are pathetic. That is how the grief of a queer character is coded. But Halperin finds another way forward. He quotes Esther Newton, “Only by fully embracing the stigma itself can one neutralize the sting and make it laughable.”

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17 Ibid., 179.
18 Ibid., 180. Halperin draws attention to the AIDS quilt as an example of a “feminine (that is, devalued) cultural production” used as the central symbol of gay mourning for AIDS.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 378.
21 Ibid., 181.
The fundamental intuition underlying the social posture produced by camp and the complex of practices related to it is “you can’t overcome social denigration merely by inverting its terms, by attempting to substitute positive images for negative ones.” He uses the example of the quick cultural re-shaping of second wave feminist ideals of strong women into “an impossible, unattainable paragon” or a power hungry, castrating, love-starved unfeminine monster. The camp intuition is that there is no outside to power, that minorities and stigmatized groups cannot choose how we are regarded and what value our society sets on our lives. We are subject, like it or not, to social conditions and cultural cues that we do not have the power to alter... only the power to resist. Taking up a position in which we are inexorably situated is not to consolidate it, nor is it to accept the adverse conditions under which we accede to representation. It is the beginning of a process of reversal and resignification: it is a way of claiming ownership of our situation with specific purpose of turning it around, or at least trying to turn it to our account. As we have already observed, dominant social roles and meanings cannot be destroyed, but they can be undercut and derealized: it is possible to learn how not to take them straight.

The intuition is, as Halperin says, “resistance to [the dominant order] requires us to engage with it, to find value in it, and to invent opportunities for self-affirmation in the limited but very real possibilities that it makes available to us, which include possibilities of manipulating, redeploying, renegotiating, resignifying, and perverting it... Gay culture typically assumes an abject position only to redefine it, to invert the values associated with it, to take an ironic distance from them, to challenge them, and to turn them against themselves.” Lemonade out of lemons. Castles out of mud. Beauty out of pain. Neither secularist nor zealot. It’s ironic: finding value in the dominant order that puts you in an abject position, finding opportunities for self affirmation not by resistance, but by a redemptive perversion.

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22 Ibid., 380.
23 Ibid., 380–381.
24 Ibid., 377–378.
When Halperin talks about dismantling the claims to dignity of the empowered, how gay camp can “level the social playing field,” he could have referred to Magnificat:

My soul doth magnify the Lord,
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden:
for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
For he that is mighty hath done to me great things;
and holy is his name.
And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.
He hath shewed strength with his arm;
he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He hath put down the mighty from their seats,
and exalted them of low degree.
He hath filled the hungry with good things;
and the rich he hath sent empty away.
He hath helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;
As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.

What characterizes camp is “a principled disrespect for all socially constructed and asymmetrical gender polarities, for the cultural prestige that accrues to those who embody them, and for all social performances that demand to be taken straight—and that are the privileged domain of those with the authority to impose such demands on others.” Camp is the gay way of living into O’Donovan’s refusal of either defiance or respect. “By taking up, while ironically redefining, the social roles and meanings traditionally assigned to women, gay male culture performs a unique, immanent social critique and effects a characteristic but recognizable form of political resistance.”

In the same way that gay men act so as to “undo the seriousness with which our society treats its own gender constructions” by “denaturalizing” gender constructions and combatting “the cultural symbolism of femininity by magnifying its absurdities,” so does Augustine’s use of Mary

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25 Ibid., 381.
26 Ibid., 184.
27 Ibid., 378.
and the holy virgins. Mary’s body gives life to the life of the world. But it’s an ironic body, the body of a Virgin Mother, the “woman,” defined by what goes into or comes out of the vagina is now redefined by what comes out even though nothing has come in it. What could be more absurd than that? What could magnify the political absurdities of the Magnificat or the social absurdities of the Virgin’s womb more than the symbolism of virginal maternity?

Mary does and does not fulfill the social expectations of the character she is supposed to inhabit. As such, she “denaturalizes” the femininity that she receives as a “woman.” “Feminist politics requires the partial desymbolization and derealizing of femininity as it is currently defined, practiced, and enforced. It demands the disaggregation of femininity from womanhood and femaleness. Which means that feminist politics depends on the possibility of seeing gender as a role, as a performance, as something other than natural or authentic.” The holy virgins follow Mary in that their bodies continue to symbolize virginal maternity and thereby offer a symbolic resistance to the characters they are expected to inhabit. “Only Mary, then, is mother and virgin both spiritually and physically, both Christ’s mother and Christ’s virgin.” The holy virgin who follows in Mary’s footsteps “is to be honored in her body for two things, virginity and motherhood, since she both remained a virgin and became a mother.” By following Mary precisely in the continuance of virginal maternity, they continue to symbolize the disaggregation of femininity from womanhood and femaleness, from the character of the “woman.” For virginal mothers are mothers precisely apart from conjugal relationships to men—except the man Jesus, the male mother from whom

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28 Ibid., 382.
29 Ibid., 383.
30 virg., 6.6.
31 virg., 7.7.
Mary was born (*natus est*). Women who perform their identity this way can be neither daughters nor wives in any of the ways their characters make possible. Instead, on Augustine’s startling account, they live as fully as it is possible for a human being into the future human life that Jesus gives, the way of bodily agency opened when the cross deconstructs the social terms of “public” and “private.”

By questioning the connection between maternity and intercourse so central to the character of the “woman,” holy virgins mock a whole host of societal conventions structured around the relationship between what goes into and what then comes out of the vagina. That is, they mock and parody the power structures surrounding the production and transmission of life: women can fulfill a coveted role “mothers” without a man, even in such a way as to make the man who is the head of the church possible! In this way, they call into question the definition of women as private bodies based on what goes into or comes out of their vaginas, as those who are the ones who sustain life, as those who need to wear veils to protect themselves from the male gaze, protect the male gaze from their bodies, and protect society from the chaos the lack of protection would introduce. As such, they with Mary are placed in a complex and contrary relation to the natural characters produced for them by their society: both attending constantly to their vagina (preserving the virginity) and yet refusing to be defined by it (acting by the expected standards) by living into the pure absurdity of the claim that they, like Mary, can be virgin mothers. Not domestic, not “woman”—queer. A different social space is opened for them. The social space is small, inadequate, and formed precisely around the purity codes that the script they forge eventually undoes. It’s like camp: maneuvering rather than upending. Lemonade out of lemons. Castles out of

In what follows, I will depict, first, the place of Mary in Augustine’s thought as it pertains to the present discussion, then the way Augustine’s thought about gender can be queered on Halperin’s terms, and finally, the way in which his thought can be construed to embrace the “vein of misogyny in the ambient sexism of the larger society for the purpose of staging [an] act of social defiance.”32 By attending to the form of Mary’s social defiance against the figure of the “woman” and the holy virgins following her, we can better determine the social script for the rest of us Christians in relation to other characters that do not enable us to live fully into God’s love, humility, and justice. In one sense, the characters that prohibit us from following Christ “wherever he goes” will be any character that society presents to us in this sinful world, for the devil still constantly exerts his power on social structures and social definitions. In another sense, there are better and worse characters, and Christian identity in the earthly city is often about maneuvering and doing one’s best rather than attaining a standard of perfection. We should not have much confidence in our capacity to discern these characters adequately. We can only hope to become more faithful in reason-giving in the ways I describe at the end of chapter 4. Augustine’s thought as I’ve laid it out doesn’t lend itself either to a perfectionist politics or a perfectionism in Christian life. My claim is much more modest than perfection: Mary as Christ’s first follower shows us the beginning of the way Christians can begin—haltingly, inadequately, ad hoc, and without much confidence that they’re “getting it right”—living into the space Jesus opens up beyond public and private. Even more modest than that, my argument provides a (neglected) piece of the Augustinian grammar

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32 Halperin, How To Be Gay, 184.
whereby we can make sense of the moral revolution of society that early Christians experienced and show one way in which it makes sense that Augustinian thought transfigures the public/private distinction. My argument is therefore limited to providing one way of showing one piece of a Christian social grammar of public and private.

3. Mary

Before I get deeper in discussion of the holy virgins, it is necessary to spend some time ironing out some claims about Mary. She is relevant because she receives the character “woman” and thereby symbolically embodies the central private character in public/private distinction. In the introduction, I laid out the feminist criticism of the public/private distinction, which is that while it cannot be completely left behind, the distinction is intrinsically conservative. It is the main tool for organizing society in a way that systematically privileges some types of bodies over others. Male bodies get prioritized over female bodies, rich bodies over poor bodies, white bodies over black bodies, abled bodies over disabled bodies, normative bodies over bodies falling outside the norm. The bodies at the top of the hierarchy are taken to be “natural” and “neutral,” and the bodies at the bottom are sexed, raced, classed, queered. Insofar as they are sexed, raced, classed, and queered, they are, to varying degrees, privatized. One reason to think about the Virgin Mary is that she has been a powerful tool to help do this.33

So how can Mary help? Mary is the paradigmatic “woman.” In Christian theological imaginary, she is also the paradigmatic body of a human mortal, for what her body does limits or expands the scope of what woman can do and what all mortal human beings who are not hypostatically united to eternal Wisdom can do. My argument is that, insofar as the character

33 See the discussion of Marcella Althaus-Reid below.
“woman” is a stand-in or exemplification of the privatized body, Augustine’s depiction of Mary’s role in our salvation helps to clarify what Augustine’s Christianity might do to the way we imagine the whole cast of characters in chapter 1 who are identified by their private bodies. By extension, she also gives hints of the response to what Jesus does for the character of the refugee. Recall my basic thesis: the claim that God is nearer to us than we are to ourselves undermines the cast of characters created from antiquity to modernity: the mother, the daughter, the slave, the laborer, the refugee, are transfigured in light of Jesus. Here, Mary makes concrete the theological grammar that might be used to navigate a different set of character formations: a theological, historical, rhetorical, moral, and conceptual grammar formed not only by the abstraction of interiority, but by the startling claim (too often under-emphasized in readings of Augustine) that God comes nearest to us in the moment of the humiliation that exalts the humiliated with the goal of ending humiliation.

How does she do this? The late-antique configuration of the public/private distinction set aside in the oikos all those activities that coped with bodily vulnerability (food, bodily care, animal needs). The polis was precisely the realm of argument and action in which bodily vulnerability had no place. In stark contrast, Augustine’s Christianity has at its center the ultimate moment of humility: a naked, weak, stumbling, thirsty, oozing body that is the locus of divine strength and the site of the world’s redemption. This particular public enactment of bodily vulnerability exposes the economic, political, social, interpersonal, and spiritual vulnerable-making powers for what they are and thereby breaks their stranglehold on Adam’s race. Mary exemplifies the moral grammar in which this moment and the subsequent drawing of humanity into it by the Spirit re-shapes the types of characters that can be inhabited. Augustine portrays the cross as an exercise in divine
persuasion—an exercise of divine rhetoric. The incarnation and cross are “seductive speech”—the most seductive divine speech possible when sweetened by the Spirit. To paraphrase Augustine: God wanted to show us how much God loves us, and of what sort we are, how much so that we do not despair, and what sort so that we do not grow proud. For Augustine the task of the moral life is to learn what it means that the deepest reality of our lives is that we are loved beyond what we could ever imagine. Learning what it means to be loved the way that God loves us just is accepting what the cross means. And it helps us re-see reality. We begin to see each other, see ourselves, in our particularity, but not constrained by it.

The dialectic—what I take to be a faithful interpretation of Augustine by Kierkegaard—is difficult to maintain. As Kierkegaard writes in *Works of Love*, “The distinctions of earthly existence are only like an actor’s costume or like a traveling cloak and that every individual should watchfully and carefully keep the fastening cords of this outer garment loosely tied.” In this way, “Christianity has not wanted to storm forth to abolish distinctions,” but “it wills that differences shall hang loosely about the individual,… loosely as the ragged costume in which a supernatural being has disguised itself.” Learning to recognize the “eternal likeness” that makes the supernatural being beneath the garments is more a type of theological prudence than it can be a rule. A healthy dose of Augusutinian skepticism and pessimism is in order here: we cannot know fully what “natural” is, for what we are will be revealed in the eschaton. In this sinful world, our perception is dim. Even if we did understand what we ought to be, we should be pessimistic about the possibility of

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34 See Jordan, “The Word, His Body.”
36 Ibid., 95.
37 Ibid., 96.
getting it right. Freedom starts not with getting it right, but by acknowledging failure and letting
God be God. In Kierkegaard’s terms, how does one know where the costume ends, and where the
likeness begins? How does one know where to prioritize the costume, and where to see through it
to the light that shines through its cracks? How can one identify a healthy chiaroscuro as the
shadows interplay? Yet we are placed in such a way as to do the best we can with the help of the
Spirit and in the company of the church, where being in the wrong—even in our halting, ad hoc
maneuvering—can be an invitation for a deeper reliance on divine grace and a fuller acceptance of
God’s love.

So Mary writes a theological script for a new type of “private” character not only because
she is the paradigmatic “private body,” but because she is the one in whom humanity is most
exalted. Because of Christ’s work on the cross, being a “woman” and being exalted are related. This
is so first because of the relation between the character woman and the transmission of life. If Jesus
is the paradigmatic relation between God and human beings, Mary is the paradigmatic relation of
Jesus to all other human beings. Her body is the source of Christ’s humanity. Her training the
source of his obedience. Her fiat the source of his prayer in the garden. With her “let it be with me
as you have said,” she is the first, the scriptures and various Christian traditions affirm, to move into
the social space beyond public and private opened up by the cross. Indeed, her permission can be
said to have made Christ’s cross possible. Second, her mediation of Christ’s redemption is only
because of what I’ve argued women have come to symbolize. Christians discover in the Virgin Mary
that God in Christ raises up the lowly and topples the proud, that the Lord fills the hungry with
good things and sends the rich away empty. I try to narrate the Virgin Mary in a way that displays
this logic in the form of a character and a script such that white heterosexual men, the
paradigmatically “public” and “neutral” characters, discover that in Christ, their gender identity is queered: they are made brides of Christ by their participation in Christ’s bride. Their souls become his virgin wife. Their life-goal is to fall in love with this man, who woos them into deeper intimacy and closer relationship through his flesh on their tongue and blood in their throat until he brings them to rest on his breast. Not only is white heterosexual male gender identity queered, but so is white heterosexual male sexuality. The logic of the distinction is an erotic logic that transgresses sexual boundaries by re-forming all of our loves around love for Christ.

The holy virgins show how this attachment can be radical: subverting the structure of the nuclear family and “traditional” heterosexual relationships as the basis for political structures. Queer bodies and queer relationships may become in Mary a sign of Christ’s reign, for Mary shares her eternal heavenly queenship with other mortals. We might say that Mary queers men by making them all heavenly queens, puts them in a wedding dress, and that she queers women by opening up the parodic space of virginal maternity to them. She reveals masculinity and femininity not as natural kinds, but as roles or scripts. As such, the scripts are contingent and lose their determinative power. None of us know yet who we shall be when perfected by love and

38 See Franz Fanon’s feminizing of black men in Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks. (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1967). I’ve been influenced in my understanding of this by a paper I heard Amey Victoria Adkins, “Silencing Simone: Between Franz Fanon and The Second Sex” (presented at the Simone de Beauvoir Today, Franklin Humanities Institute, 2011).

39 “White heterosexual male” is a stand-in for a broader formal identification of a position of sexual dominance. The concept “white heterosexual man” is a fiction about a dominant subjectivity that some types of bodies get to inhabit better than others. Of course, the concepts “whiteness” “heterosexuality” and ”maleness” have no real existence outside of the social advantages that they confer on certain types of bodies. But also, I just doubt that there’s such a thing as a non-plastic sexual desire that the binary position ”heterosexual-homosexual” invites us to imagine.

40 See Kahn, Putting Liberalism in Its Place, chap. 5, “The Erotic Body.”

transparent to ourselves and others. Until then, we should let charity, which forms all the virtues, shape our lives.

To put it somewhat differently, on the cross, Christ identifies with and dignifies the private characters of woman, laborer, slave, poor, and refugee. Mary’s life, read as a sort of maneuvering like camp, shows us what comes next for those characters. The first step (logically, not sequentially) is a moral revolution, a sort of ad hoc questioning of the received characters that aims at social reversal. The second step is learning Christ’s charity, his humility, and his justice in the community of the baptized. Here I focus more on the first part of the dynamic to show how I think Christian theology transfigures the public/private distinction.

So the remainder of my argument will depict the Virgin in a way that displays the connection between God, Christ, sex, and politics that helps imagine the beginnings of a set of characters and scripts that move beyond public and private and into virtue. First the logic of the Virgin’s priority on which I rely: the closer the Lord comes to us, the more ourselves we become, and the freer we become to love in ways that the world’s way of networking bodies did not make possible. The bond of Charity, which unites us to the Holy Trinity, God’s own life-giving Spirit, makes Mary blessed. Mary is the one to whom the Lord draws nearer than any mortal that ever lived. Unlike her Son, she does not share divinity fully with the Father. But she is brought to share


42 Luke Bretherton uses Barth’s discussion in CD 3/4 to posit three concentric circles of sociality involved in neighbor love: two have to do with commonality, one with difference. The dynamics of neighbor-love involves “a threefold pattern whereby while we are the same as all other creatures, we are more like some persons than other and we are also like no other person; each person is unique… The call to respond to an other as neighbor at times attends to what we share with them as fellow creatures, at other times to what we share within a common culture or kinship group, and at other times to an other’s dissimilarity and uniqueness… This basic threefold structure of human being as at once assumed and affirmed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the one who is truly human. Jesus is human; Jesus is unique; and Jesus, as a historical person, is more like some than others” (147). Here, Mary is the one who is closer to Christ
in God’s divinity as much as is possible for any mortal who does not share divinity with God essentially. God has literally gone deeper inside her than anyone else—residing in amniotic fluid, moving through her birth canal, suckling at her breast. In her, then, we can see who we might be, for she is a sort of limit character that shows us what sort of scripts and spaces of agency that the Lord might open for any of us.43

4. Sex and Salvation

In order to more fully explicate the significance of Mary for my thesis, I have to analyze the specific consequences of what I’ve argued for thinking about sexed bodies. Here we go into the belly of the beast, since (anachronistically) both Augustine and the New Testament presumed something like the character of “woman.”

Two paradigms for thinking about the gender of Jesus relate Christ’s gendered embodiment to two accounts of salvation. The first is paradigmatically eastern. It is represented by Gregory Nazianzen’s claim “what is not assumed is not healed.”44 The idea is that the male body of Jesus is irrelevant for talking about salvation, for Christ’s body must assume both the male and female bodies in order to save them. Christ’s male body is in an important way sexually neutral, for his body is able to contain all other bodies in the incarnation and on the cross. Feminist theologians

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43 In her review of recent approaches to feminist theology Joy Ann McDougall cites Kathryn Tanner’s view that there are three ways that feminist theologians can engage the past. “First, they can dispute a patriarchal theological tradition’s legitimate continuity with the past; second, they can claim a rival authorizing past and demonstrate its salutary implications for present practice; and third, they can reconfigure the same cultural elements of their hegemonic tradition for feminist ends.” Joy Ann McDougall, “Keeping Feminist Faith with Christian Traditions: A Look at Christian Feminist Theology Today,” Modern Theology 24, no. 1 (2008): 105. See Kathryn Tanner, “Social Theory: Concerning the New Social Movements and the Practice of Feminist Theology,” in Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition, and Norms, ed. Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 179–197.

44 See third theological oration in Gregory Nazianzen, On God and Christ.

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have found potential in this view of the incarnation by positing that if Christ’s maleness not relevant to salvation, neither is it relevant socially.  

Various scholars of antiquity have contextualized this view by noting how various ancient ideas of androgyny functioned. Christ’s virgin-born, Adamic body is understood to contain the extra rib and therefore the whole spectrum of sexed bodies, for this type of male body is uniquely capable of encompassing all other types of bodies. Such a conception understands the sexes to be complementary and therefore for female bodies to be lacking. Salvation is depicted as growing into Christ’s person, which, like the gospel of Thomas, means becoming a man. In Gregory of Nyssa’s Life of Macrina, Macrina aspires to the gender-neutral angelic life in one way, and in another is depicted as manly precisely because of her spirituality, transcending the limits of her sex. The idea of androgyny brings these two claims together implies the formal claim that manliness just is gender neutrality. A second type of argument against the erasure of sexual difference is “an approaching future in which... difference will be eradicated from the heavenly kingdom.”

The second paradigm is represented by Augustine, who claims in his early On Faith and the Creed that Jesus assumed our humanity in its entirety but did not assume the woman’s sexed body. The “unchanging wisdom of God assumed our changeable nature so as to make possible our salvation and redemption.” He denies the claim that “if a certain part of our nature is not included

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48 *f. et symb.*, 4.6.
in that assumption, then that part is not saved.” How can it be that he assumed our whole humanity and yet he did not necessarily assume all parts of our nature? Augustine specifies that Jesus was a man and not a woman. Both sexes, therefore, have honor in divine economy in his account because a man’s body was assumed through a woman. Together, Jesus and Mary save us.

The relevant questions here are how Jesus and Mary complement one another, whether Mary plays a separate and subordinate role to Christ’s, and how the two can narrated such that their identities can be stipulated properly apart from one another. The questions have to do with how the characters of Jesus and Mary are linked, and whether Mary’s female body is narrated in a way that constrains future women’s bodies.

Just as the view “what is not assumed is not healed” neutralizes or erases gender difference in either potentially affirming or problematic ways, the western, Augustinian view can be taken to argue for gender complementarity or a destabilizing of sexual difference altogether. In some ways, both views are present in his writing. Since the conservative consequences have been discussed and criticized at length, here I tease out the latter view as a possibility. I think the complementarian view ought to be rejected because gender complementarity tends to overly reify sexual difference in ways that it cannot entitle itself to. The woman tends to be subordinated, identified by her procreative and domestic potential, and consigned, even if not limited, to the sphere of the home.

Hans urs von Balthasar, for whom the essential difference between the sexes is a sign of eternal

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49 Ibid.


51 In *nat. et gr.*, 42 Augustine claims that Mary was impeccable.

52 See, for example, the near caricature of this view Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 442ff.
subordination of women and a reason to deny them ordination to the priesthood, is an example of a problematic account of sexual difference.\textsuperscript{51}

Another strategy, signaled intriguingly by Sarah Coakley, Amy Hollywood, and others, calls for pushing the gendered language and imagery to the point that the language undermines itself, thereby destabilizing the categories at play.\textsuperscript{54} By attending to the ambiguities of Augustine’s view, I opt for a similar strategy, arguing here the limited point that the Augustinian understanding of Mary in salvation undermines a strict separation of public and domestic and therefore of a relegation of women to domesticity. Because the political/domestic distinction is the main way that the public/private distinction gets expressed (despite major cultural changes), I take the ambiguities here to open a space for constructive work in general and a re-thinking not only of Augustine, but of Christianity’s relation to the public/private distinction through his thought.

In one way, the account of the public/domestic distinction seems reaffirmed by Mary’s virginal maternity. Just as we expect, Mary (and in her, all women) is defined by what goes in and then comes out of her vagina—what comes out and what does not go in! She is defined by her relationships to men, specifically by the formal relationship of a mother to a son. The traditional doctrine of the perpetual virginity ups the ante because Mary can be seen as especially pure, especially holy because her hymen remains intact even after Christ moves through her birth canal. But on what value system does an intact hymen matter for its own sake? What moral formation would be necessary in order to make such an evaluation?


Recall Augustine’s much later treatment of gender in *On the Trinity*, where Augustine identifies the image of God with the rational mind that consists of two parts, *mens* and *animus*, contemplative and active reason. For Augustine, human rationality pervades human bodies, and the pervading is symbolized by the differentiation of the sexes (Augustine assumes a binary understanding of the sexed body, which is commonly recognized as more complicated today due to the existence of intersex bodies on both a biological and cultural spectrum of maleness and femaleness). The male body symbolizes the contemplative reason and the female body the active reason. If the sexed body symbolizes these two functions of reason, then is it possible to see not only how humanity can be assumed even if a woman’s body isn’t assumed by the Word, but also why Augustine would then think it fitting that the woman and man both play separate symbolic roles in salvation. The question that will be of concern below is whether Augustine’s understanding of Mary’s role in salvation ought to be reduced to the stereotypically domestic functions with which she is normally identified. Augustine ends up narrating Mary in such a way as to expand the scope of women’s activity and question the very basis of sorting the sexes as his society did, and he can still provide a paradigm for questioning gender stereotypes today.

Three features of Augustine’s thought on sexual difference are relevant for my argument. First, foundational to all Augustine’s thought about sexual difference is the claim that both men and women are made in the *imago dei*, which is the *imago trinitatis*. He envisions a future equality of the sexes in the eschaton, yet he believes that the sexes must remain in hierarchical subordination for the preservation of order (*de continentia*) in this life.

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55 Augustine thinks he needs to provide a different—and sometimes tortured—reading of 1 Corinthians 11 in *trin.* 12 precisely because the Apostle seems to contradict the claim that both men and women are equally image-bearers.
Second, though much has been written about the patristic way of stereotyping the “rational” man and the “passionate” woman, I do not think that Augustine can be accused of falling into these stereotypes. Rationality should not be taken in its post-Cartesian sense to imply a mental substance to the exclusion of bodily substance, nor should the metaphysical distinction between body and soul be taken to imply an anthropological dualism between the rational and the bodily. For Augustine, perhaps in a less philosophically developed way than Thomas, “rational” denotes the type of bodies human creatures have in a way that does not map on to gender difference. For Augustine, a “rational” soul without some connection to a body is not a human soul, nor is a body without rationality a human body. There is no reason, given what Augustine says, to think that “rationality” can be used as a criterion to determine whether a body counts as a human body (as if someone could make the judgment that since women seem less rational to him, they are therefore less fully human). Rather, and much more modestly, the concept “rational body” is analytic to the concept “human.” In this way, Augustinian thought opens itself up to forms of non-reductive materialism.\(^56\) Rationality, then, cannot possibly be conceived in opposition to the passions or to the body.\(^57\) Instead, as I argued in the third chapter, it signifies the way Augustine thinks human bodies participate in God. In an important way, rationality ought not be defined independently from its goal, which is to know and love the trinity. So I do not think Augustine is fitting women into an essentially male understanding of rational subjectivity. Rather, when he says that men and women are equally rational, he is saying that men and women are both equally capable of participating in divine life in a human way at every level of their humanity. Far from pushing areas

\(^{56}\) See McCabe, “Soul, Life, Machines and Language.”

of human life away from God, then, this view implies a fundamental agential integrity for human creatures. It implies also a basic parity and an equality of agency between men and women, and, indeed, between every other possible binary that societies might construct.

Third, Augustine’s account of sex is irreducibly teleological. He provides, however, two different and conflicting accounts of the teleology of sexual difference. This is the main way the aforementioned inconsistency of his views comes out. I think that it is a productive inconsistency. On the one hand, Augustine argues that divine motivation for created sexual difference is procreation.58 He roots the deep sociality of human nature in sexual difference, which is, for him, the basic form of difference after the difference between God and creatures.59 Our essential and intrinsic sociality cannot be conceived apart from our sexuality; sociality is written, so to speak, on and indeed by the sexed body. Augustine seemed to think that the social hierarchies between men and women that characterized his society reflected this “natural” teleology of the sexes. Today, we can see with Liz Clark that this naturalizing is much more a “strategy of containment” meant to reify the possible characters open to women than what could be considered a neutral and scientific observation.60

5. Teleology of the Sexed Body

Augustine sometimes reads the sexed body in ways that puzzle contemporary readers, especially those who, on Augustine’s terms, don’t distinguish the gift of the sexed body from the gift of life’s transmission through the sexed body. Augustine uses the pretext of sexual difference to make disparaging comments about women, because he seems to think that the difference implies

58 Gn. litt., 9.5.9, c.f. 9.3.5.
59 b. coniug., 1.1.
60 Clark, “Ideology, History, and the Construction of ‘Woman’ in Late Ancient Christianity.”
hierarchy. For example, multiple times he suggests that if God wanted to create someone just for suitable company, God would have created another man. This implies that a woman is not fully suitable for male company apart from what she provides him sexually, and it suggests that there would still be men even if there were no need to procreate. Does Augustine think that the penis would have otherwise been an appendix? Or does he think that it would have had another use apart from procreation? I wish to bracket his disparaging comments, not because they don’t give us insight and due cause for suspicion of Augustine’s views. They do. How can we trust the attitudes of someone who left his wife of fifteen years to get engaged a 10 year old? Rather, because Augustine, who was murky to himself, may have thought more trustworthy thoughts over which he had no interpretive control and which contradicted his own explicit attitudes. Thus my motivation for tracing a theological logic. I want to think with Augustine against Augustine. And here, my sensibility is that these types of comments about women are not particularly insightful, are useful mainly as a cause for suspicion, and may be helpful precisely for the contradiction with the deeper grammar of his thought. They should not be taken to be exhaustive of Augustine’s view; if they were, reading him constructively on these matters would be a waste of time.

The other reason I do not want to focus on Augustine’s explicit attitudes is because a much better and more interesting line of criticism is possible, and focus on his explicit attitudes can hide the more interesting and potentially more devastating line of critique about a matter over which Augustine has in fact had far more influence. The criticism is that if we answer the question, “What is the reason for God to create both male and female bodies?” with exclusive appeal to procreation, it reduces men qua men and women qua women exclusively to their reproductive function. The

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functionalist-teleological answer to sexual difference, however, goes further when it becomes obvious that male and female bodies can do things besides reproduce. At least in western societies through history, the sad reality is that appeal to this type of reason combined with the need to do things beside procreate ends up reducing female bodies to their maternal and domestic functions. Male bodies, because of their relative distance from the transmission of life, tend not to get defined by reproductive and domestic processes in the same way.² In fact, the way that the sexed body is understood forms the basis of sorting people into domestic and public spheres.

These attitudes have the function of helping us to see how historicized Augustine’s understanding of gender relations must remain. The only way to discuss him theologically is to attend to the ways in which we cannot follow him, not in order to purify the concepts, as if it were possible to dehistoricize ourselves, but rather to situate him so that we can better hear interesting, helpful, and true things he might have to teach us still.

The second way that Augustine approaches the reason for sexual difference is symbolic or sacramental. In his discussion of sexual difference and trinity in On the Trinity XII, he reads sexual difference to be teleologically oriented to some other deeper reality in symbolic/sacramental system much like he reads the purpose of the covenantal instructions in the Old Testament to the Jews. A sacrament is sign, and it also has to do with a mystery that is revealed. God placed hidden signs in the past that can only make sense in light of things that God would do in the future. For Augustine, history and scripture are both arranged according to a sacramental logic. So, God fills scripture and the history of Israel with a set of signs that can only be discerned by prophets or future generations. The signs really happened. They are irreducibly embodied and make sense on

² Richard McKeon makes this broad claim and then argues that the distinction gets reified in modernity in Michael McKeon, The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).
their own terms, Augustine insists. But God endows them (by grace) with more meaning than they can have on their own, for God arranges them into a history of salvation.

Sexual difference, then, is for Augustine a sign of a deeper reality, specifically, the structure and organization of the human mind. The rules for bodily comportment—in the case of 1 Corinthians 11, wearing veils—in the scriptures may have value apart from their sacramental function, but we do not know what that value is. Augustine leaves the literal sense of the text almost entirely behind and directs his argument against the claim that there is a “natural” hierarchy of the sexes, despite what the biblical texts seems to say when it claims that women must wear veils because men are more properly the \textit{imago dei}. Rather, women wear veils as a sign of the subordination of the active to the contemplative intellect, not as a sign of the essential subordination of women to men socially or naturally. Augustine did think women were subordinate in other ways, but those thoughts have no bearing on his exegesis here. On Augustine’s view, Paul is saying that women ought to comport their bodies in a way that signifies a deeper symbolic reality. Because Augustine roots gender difference at the level of the symbolic, however, regarding possession of the image of God, there is no real, essential difference between men and women besides this extrinsic order that the body signifies. Since he argues that both men and women possess active and contemplative reason equally, it is impossible to find some relation besides the bodily and symbolic difference.\footnote{A possible third reason is aesthetic, but I will not trace that here.}

This raises the question, “What is the relation between the symbolic and biological reasons for sexual difference?” One could argue that the symbolic reason is based in procreation such that it reduces to it. On this view, the symbolic reason for difference is a convenient illustration of some
other reality given the more basic biological difference. In that case, symbolic difference is not a reason for sexual difference, but an effect of it. This account would have the effect of reinscribing the political/domestic distinction and implying the same limitation to the characters open to women and, by implication, all privatized bodies. After all, it is no mistake that women are on the surface defined according to their domestic function, by active reason, which organizes earthly affairs. There are two reasons not to think that the symbolic reason reduces to the procreative reason.

First, Augustine thinks that sexual difference persists after the eschaton. Why does it persist? Sexual difference will exist without procreation, for there will be no marrying or giving in marriage in the City of God. Augustine appeals most directly to an aesthetic reason: we would think ourselves unhuman and ugly without sexed bodies. On its own, this reason is weak, for, presumably, aesthetic preferences can change, and we do not know what heaven will be like. It is strange to insist on such a specific point of continuity between this life and the next the way Augustine does. It follows that the aesthetic reason for sexual difference reduces to the symbolic and procreative reason. In my view, we can read Augustine to argue that a reason for sexual difference remains even when the procreative reason is taken away. So Augustine is giving an account of sexual difference for which symbolic reasons are sufficient. But what will the sexed body signify when we know as we are known, when we are perfectly transparent to ourselves and to one another, when the active reason is fully consistent with the contemplative reason such that we always act on the true practical premises and we do so automatically? In that world, sexual difference will not be necessary either as a witness to a present or a future reality. Rather, sexual

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64 civ., 22.17.
65 civ., 22
difference participates directly in the reality itself. Since it will still exist, perhaps the most we can read Augustine to imply that there is some unspecified reason that the difference is a good in its own right, and that it, unlike accommodations to sin, will not be erased. For it must somehow participate directly in God’s joy in ways that we cannot yet know. This line, again, is possible, but not necessary. We cannot determine the content of the symbolic system, and Augustine’s epistemology gives us reason to be suspicious of our own attempts to do so. Here it is sufficient to point out the abiding ambiguity.

Second, and more significantly, the symbolic does not merely reinscribe a reductively procreative meaning of sex, because Augustine does not map the symbolics of gender difference on to the political/domestic distinction as one would expect in his historical context. His readers are wise not to read it into his thought about these matters because, in an important way, he is subverting and rejecting a simple biological symbolics of sexual difference. In this case, his explication of his thoughts is very helpful. He maps sexual difference onto a distinction between active reason and contemplative reason. Augustine, despite assuming salient aspects of the ancient domestic/political distinction, especially his emphasis on intact virginity, ultimately subverts and replaces the distinction. By subsuming and replacing it, he opens up the space for a new cast of characters, a new set of scripts, a new social logic and space for agency. On these terms, the difference between holy virgins and married couples is far more illuminating about the implications of his thought for sexuality than the distinction between men and women, which isn’t so illuminating. This space in-between domestic and political, men and women, active and contemplative, married people and consecrated virgins, is the space that opens us up to a way of thinking “beyond” public and private.
Now I can return to the distinction between active and contemplative reason: women’s bodies symbolize active reason and men’s contemplative in a way that doesn’t finally reduce to the biological. At first, according to the lights of a contemporary, well-educated, western liberal, the symbolic system still seems hopelessly misogynist and conservative. Augustine claims that the male, contemplative reason is the “higher” reason and that the lower “female” reason must submit to it. But if we push beyond the surface account, interesting things happen.

Consider first what happens if the symbolic order and the hierarchy that goes with it are reified: women, when acting in their characteristic functions, would not be exercising the image of God on Augustine’s terms, for the contemplative reason is properly the divine image. They would only be exercising the divine image when performing the characteristically male function. We might take the claim to imply that men are better at exercising the image and that women are better at exercising the function their bodies symbolize in 1 Corinthians 11. Each, then, should perform the functions God has appropriated: men imaging, women managing. But what exactly would that entail about social ordering? Men could be monks, philosophers, and teachers. Women would exercise the functions of the *bios politikos*, organizing not only their homes, but their families, churches, and states as well. Women would be the societal bearers of Arendtian “action” and “speech,” more appropriately bishops and rulers than men, who would be suited to hole away in monasteries. Men would have the honor of the image, but women the power of political organization. Perhaps some would not so much mind that kind of hierarchy. The history of the west would certainly be different. More Elanore of Aquitaines and Elizabeths. Fewer Henrys. Pope Joan would be the rule. Pope Boniface VIII the exception.
Here we can see most clearly how Augustine calls into question the way Aristotle orders the sexes, the way Arendt narrates the nature of the distinction, and Foucault’s and Agamben’s refugees in a biopolitical age. Augustine, surprisingly, calls these characterizations explicitly into question by identifying the women’s symbol with the *bios politikos*, political life, and the men’s with *zoe*, which Agamben has problematized so effectively as bare life. But, of course, to separate the orders misses the whole point. The purpose of the symbolic separation is to effect a deeper, nonviolent unity. Augustine denies that the *oikos* can be separated from political justice and that the *polis* can be separated from the caring for life involved in the *oikos*. *Bios* and *zoe* cannot be separate from one another, but they fold into one another, combining in ways that nevertheless maintains their distinction, in ways that subverts both the classical distinction between public and private as well as contemporary deployments of it; the cross symbolizes this, and so does Mary’s virginal maternity. His transfiguration and destabilization of the distinction is much more comprehensive because it is rooted in what sorts of lives God in Christ makes possible. We must go deeper into Augustine to understand how he helps us arrive at these conclusions, which take us beyond the public and the private, but this is a crucially important step.

Augustine explicitly insists that the bodily symbolism is *only* symbolic. What drives him here seems not to be questions about gender, but the shape of the scriptural texts. The problem here is a problem of interpretation, and it is difficult to separate Augustine’s substantive positions from his interpretations of scripture. He blurs the symbolic distinction even more when he constructs an actual moral hierarchy (and not merely a symbolic gender hierarchy): the martyrs are followed by
the consecrated virgins who follow Christ “wherever he goes.” The consecrated virgins are seen as the “spiritual” mothers of us all. They participate in Christ’s maternity and embody the contemplative life and the love associated with that life to a degree that no one else can match. So on the one hand, the symbolic order is controlled by the scriptural text (whose “literal” meaning Augustine is trying to reshape in the first place), and it hierarchically places male contemplative reason above female active reason. But when the symbolic order is embodied, the genders bend and the male mens is embodied by the female virgin, who turns out to be the maternal source of all the actual men who symbolize the mens precisely by her spiritual exemplification of the mens! And, lest we think that Augustine is just conveniently preserving male power while positing a new male hierarchy—refusing the monastery even as he claims the honor of it, sugarcoating oppression—we should note that the only examples he gives of people who explicitly embody this ideal are consecrated female virgins who take after Mary’s maternity and virginity. This is how Mary plays her role in salvation: in her, Christ brings humanity to its exaltation and shares it with others through her example and active sharing of her life the way a mother nurtures. It is fitting that her body should symbolize this spiritual maternity. This spiritual maternity names precisely the space for public agency opened for all Christians. The crucial question for social order is: when a concrete symbolic order is undermined by a symbolic order or vice versa and leads us to a place where it no longer makes much sense, which symbolic order wins? The embodied one or the imagined one, the old one or the new one? Which imaginary is at the forefront of peoples’ minds? Do we need to decide definitively? After all, we’re going to believe what we want to believe.

66 According to Margaret Miles, there’s a close relationship between virginity and martyrdom in Augustine’s thought. He portrays asceticism as “daily martyrdom.” See Margaret R. Miles, Rereading Historical Theology: Before, During, and After Augustine (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 139.
67 virg., 6.6ff.
anyway; and no idea can immunize itself from violent and oppressive uses. In the long run, can this way of thinking about Mary be used as a justification for limiting women? Or have the boundaries between public and private, active and contemplative been sufficiently blurred in Augustine’s imaginary that Augustine’s thoughts have led us to a place where the symbolics—both imagined and concrete—make little sense? Here, I am just drawing attention to the deconstructive potential in Augustine’s view, a potential that bears out in some ways in the actual history of Christianity’s moral revolution in the way that Peter Brown and others have described it.

6. Maternity and Virginity

But I wish to pause because two extremely problematic concepts are now functioning as I follow Augustine’s thoughts. I have moved from sexual difference to social roles. My argument has been that the way Augustine depicts sexual difference makes it difficult to reify in such a way as to fund the public/private distinction, and the grammar of his thought can be read to blur all sorts of the boundaries normally associated with patristic accounts of sexual difference. I suggest that Mary is honored in our redemption because she, together with Christ, embodies and enacts our salvation. The theological logic of this is both difficult and treacherous. Christ is the spiritual mother of us all, and therefore Mary not only symbolizes the human participation in salvation in which our humanity is exalted, but she mediates it insofar as she opens up a space for us to participate in our own salvation by her relationship to Christ. It was her willingness, her “let it be with me as you have said,” that gave God permission to come inside her, share her body, and therefore come inside of and share our humanity. Karl Barth says that Christ was fully divine insofar as he humbled himself
and fully human insofar as he exalted our humanity. Mary is the condition of the possibility of his 
exalting of our humanity within the order of God’s election. She is the humanity whom Christ 
exalts. Because she shares Christ’s humanity most closely both morally and physically in their 
shared DNA, she is the highest, most exalted human being that ever lived. Her grace-funded 
obedience is the beginning of our grace-funded obedience. She has become our mother because she 
is the highest possible human participation in Christ’s maternity. Augustine’s point that Jesus was a 
man and not a woman and therefore didn’t assume a woman’s body might be rephrased: Christ has 
a penis and not a uterus, so he can’t symbolize maternity and therefore the redemption of our 
natality and our bodies in his body given the social symbolics he inhabited. He can’t symbolize the 
privatized characters, but Mary can. Ironically, Christ’s own penis is exactly what prevents him 
from symbolizing and enacting the highest participation in human exaltation possible for a mere 
mortal. For the symbolics of that, he is dependent on his mother. Only together with Mary can 
Christ be our mother, because he depends on her for his humanity and his maternity.

It is still a major problem that the central concepts Augustine relies upon to describe the 
woman who honors all other women are “maternity” and “virginity.” Does this language function 
within a patriarchal language system that cannot point toward anything but the subordination of 
women to the domestic sphere? Once again, my strategy is to push Augustine’s language further 
than he does in order to show it intrinsically destabilizing. I do so with the aid of two readings of 
Mary’s maternity by feminist theologians. Both take their starting point from Simone de Beauvoir’s 
famous claim, “I was made a woman.”

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The first reading by Christina Grenholm starts from the sensibility that maternity should neither be abstracted nor reduced. The second, more provocative, reading by Marcella Althaus-Reid argue that images of the Virgin Mary in Latin America have functioned as a source of oppression for women. Althaus-Reid claims, against the liberation theologians and other Latin American feminists, that the Virgin has been made a source of sexual and therefore political and economic oppression. The problem, Althaus-Reid proposes, is that official discourses of the Virgin have separated the “Virgin from the vulva.” She looks instead to a “transvestite theology” which questions the gendered performance of Mary by drawing attention to Santa Libre, a saint who is either a transvestite Christ or Mary on the cross. In other words, Althaus-Reid’s solution is to blur the boundaries between Mary and Christ by using queer gender performance in a way that complements what I wish to do. Both of the treatments of Mary, one focusing on her maternity and the other on her virginity and femininity, provide critiques that help us to discern more clearly what is going on in Augustine’s account of Marian salvation.

Through the refusal to abstract from the particularities of the body, the refusal to separate the virgin from the vulva, we can more fully explore a non-subordinating account of the view of salvation which insists on the simultaneous maintenance and blurring of gender difference in a way that ultimately destabilizes and natural, biblical “gender paradigm.” The intuition is that by pushing the gendered language, the result is to destabilize and de-gender theology. This produces a new type of character, the Marian character, who neither needs to stop being a woman to be like Christ, but who cannot be contrasted to Christ because of her maternity but rather is able better to symbolize the very exaltation of her humanity uniquely in her own body.
7. Mother Jesus?

Grenholm’s caveat to the use of Marian theology in the way I’m proposing is that focus on Marian maternity inevitably prevents us from moving beyond public and private because it subordinates women by sentimentalizing motherhood. I’ll discuss why Grenholm thinks this, how she thinks the subordinating dynamic plays out, and how she thinks it can be avoided. The question that controls Grenholm’s approach is, “Is it possible to reinterpret the ideal of motherhood so that it no longer encompassed the subordination of women to their husbands and other males?”

Grenholm thinks that Mary can too easily be subsumed into a sentimental ideal of motherhood: the “idea of extraordinary in ordinary life. In this view, the mother provides warmth, sustenance, and new life possibilities, and her unlimited care never ceases even when all other sources have run dry.” Focus on the Virgin Mary not only makes domesticity/motherhood unrealistic (especially because Mary was a Virgin!), but it ends up abstracting maternity from the particularities and limitations of women’s bodies. Ultimately, such a sentimental view cannot acknowledge the limits of embodied motherhood, and it thereby seeks to bring women’s reproductive ability under societal control; Mary in late modernity becomes the basis for a new type of Christian biopolitics. The blurring of public and private works the wrong direction once again. And, worse, it’s hard to see how Jesus can make any difference for what Mary’s humanity might mean.

Grenholm proposes a delicate dance in which the realities and particularities of women’s bodies are acknowledged but in which women are not reduced to the biological function and the biological function is neither abstracted nor sentimentalized. Paradoxically, both the reduction and


70 Ibid., 2, quoting McFague.
idealization are two sides of the same coin. “It is important that we should be able to promote 
gender equality in care without thereby disregarding the fact that women, not men, are pregnant 
and give birth.”\textsuperscript{71} She imagines a publicly relevant domesticity that doesn’t reduce domesticity to a 
domestic sphere considered unimportant. By valorizing domesticity and acknowledging its public 
relevance, she is able, paradoxically, to open up ways to receive Mary’s life differently beyond her 
physical motherhood. Mary can become the paradigmatic human because and not in spite of her 
maternity. Is this sort of reading possible? Grenholm thinks so. “Just as gender scholars and 
feminists express non-stereotypical conceptions of common gender stereotypes, scholars of 
Christianity express non-stereotypical conceptions of traditional doctrine.”\textsuperscript{72}

But again, it requires a sort of theoretical or theological prudence to know when and how 
to negotiate the received characters. I look at one aspect as an example. Mary’s virgin maternity is 
the paradigmatic case of unrealistic expectations of women’s bodies. Have children without sex! 
Have the baby without breaking the hymen! No one says these things to actual women, of course, 
but (as I argued above) the focus on women’s virginity and purity is a way of drawing women into 
an imagined economy of male ownership.\textsuperscript{73} The imaginary functions to constrain how sex and 
maternity and therefore how women’s bodies are understood. For Grenholm, theological prudence 
leads her to emphasize the distances between Mary and Jesus and Mary and everyone else: “the 
belief that Mary is a virgin mother is not primarily a belief in Mary, but rather a belief in the one 
she bore. Contrary to popular conception, it is not the Virgin Mother who brings forth the Son of

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 34–35.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 65.
God, but the Son of God who brings forth the Virgin Mother.”

By reversing the priority of the dogma, rooted ultimately in Christology, we can then talk about Mary without making her maternity unrealistic for other women by focusing on the particularity of her intact hymen. Rather, what comes to the fore is the way her body makes her uniquely capable of being the source of Christ’s humanity. The focus of Mary’s maternity is Christ’s, her, and our humanity, not Mary’s virginity, yet this humanity is irreducibly embodied as Mary’s female, Jewish humanity.

Again, it can be problematic to prioritize her virginity in the first place. Virginity for its own sake has no intrinsic value outside of an economy of male domination and desire: “the idea that only the father can confer legitimacy upon a child, and that he does so by accepting paternity, belittles the mother. This is a patriarchal notion, in which someone’s value as a human being is dependent on the male gender, in that a child is regarded as illegitimate unless an honorable man accepts paternity.” But in light of Augustine’s claim in *On Faith and the Creed*, we can see that the virginity emphasizes the fact that Mary is the sole human contributor to Christ’s humanity. She shares human exaltation with no man. Joseph comes in a distant second. The one who carries Mary’s DNA but not Joseph’s saves them both.

The conceptual background of Althaus-Reid’s critique of discourse about the Virgin Mary is that sexual ethics is at the root of political ethics. As Paul Kahn argues, the foundation of politics is neither a common rational agreement nor common interest, but an erotic bond of a community...

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75 Ibid.
76 According to Simone de Beauvoir, the dominant sentimental framework “requires that mother and child belong exclusively to one another.” That sense is exactly what the Augustinian logic undoes. Simone de Beauvoir imagines a non-patriarchal social setup in which society takes over the traditional roles of mothering. This is exactly what Augustine imagines and enacts in his discourse on Mary. It is precisely the spiritualizing of Mary’s maternity that enables such a move. She gives birth to Christ, but Christ first gave birth to her, and in her, the church gives birth in such a way that people identified by their relationship to Christ. See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1953), 540.
which makes it a mystical body.\textsuperscript{77} Family, politics, and economics are inseparable. Althaus-Reid’s critique centers on the way that Mary gets caught up in a set of political and sexual meanings that end up disembodying her and using her for oppressive political and sexual ends.

Althaus-Reid criticizes the way that the Virgin Mary has been imagined, imaged, and used in Latin American settings in relation to women. Her starting point is that the concepts “virginity” and “maternity” and “women” have a history, which has not been life-giving to Latin American women. The wrong kind of theological prudence dominates: “the symbolic action of the Virgin Mary throughout the history of Latin America is part of the problem, not the solution.”\textsuperscript{78} She thinks that the Virgin is in “solidarity” with women only on the surface. But uses of the Virgin in liberationist discourses are flawed because they do not get to the heart of the problem, which is the domestication of women due to the “patriarchal definitions of what it is to be a heterosexual, monogamous, faithful woman with a motherly vocation.”\textsuperscript{79} Althaus-Reid therefore goes not after Mary herself, but the ideology of sexual purity and virginity that informs how Mary is portrayed by mostly male theologians. This ideology, she thinks, is the basis of a conservative politics and a status-quo economics, both of which are bad news for Latin American woman in the post-colonies. Women’s domesticity is an important part of the Latin American economies and political setups that the theology is working to uphold, and the Virgin Mary is an important part of maintaining women’s domesticity. Her claim is bold: “the identification of ‘woman’ and everlasting virginity, is the foundation of the theological and political enterprise of Europe in the Americas.”\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{77} See Kahn, \textit{Putting Liberalism in Its Place}, chap. 5.

\textsuperscript{78} Marcella Althaus-Reid, \textit{Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics} (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 46.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 65.
One concrete example of her claim is what she says about the Virgin of Guadalupe, who for her has become a religious symbol used by powers to keep poor women in their positions of subservience. She recounts a haunting scene: a priest sends women who are defending themselves against violence and abuse home to “pray to the virgin.” What has happened when Mary becomes a tool to keep women from praying the Magnificat? “To start with [this] Mary [of sexual purity and conservative politics] is to start with an idea, a gas-like substance, a myth of a woman without a vagina which discloses in a hilarious way the fact that half of humanity has been constructed around ideas of ghostly simulacras.” “Used to rape and incest in their poor overcrowded conditions of living, Latin American women are not necessarily the ones to question why a young woman needs to fulfill a vocation of accommodating God’s desire when God pleases.” The claim startles and offends, but it raises the way in which Mary, precisely in her virgin maternity, the source of her exaltation, has been used to reinforce a subtle conflation between justice-cum-power-presupposing humility and of humiliation, which disempowers. Mary becomes “gender without sexuality,” “a supposed woman who does not have a recognizable sexual performance is made into a sexual code,” a source of oppression.

The problem, Althaus-Reid diagnoses, is separating “the Virgin from the vulva.” Her critique is thus formally similar to Grenholm’s in that both think that disembodiment of the Virgin is a source of oppression of women. On a deeper level, underlying all her criticisms is a claim about God. She thinks that even Liberationist discourses subtly erase the distinction between God and the

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81 Ibid., 51.
82 Ibid., 39.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid., 53.
world in their hetero-normativity. “The heterosexually constructed God is obviously a God in solidarity with a system to which God belongs. Solidarity with the poor cannot be built around the same parameters.” When the “nuclear family” becomes part of a political economy, and God becomes the guarantor of the nuclear family for the sake of that economy, God becomes a tool for the immanent guarantee of a particular societal order. This way of ordering society, on Althaus-Reid’s terms, conflates merely human margins with the margins of God’s kingdom, and the system that excludes some cannot remain properly open to the ways in which marginalized characters, even those characters labeled sinners, might open us up to the love of God. Further, and more significantly, it neglects exactly the ways in which those outside characters and the official theological reactions to them might open society up to the workings of renewed divine grace by effecting a deeper critique of the political-economic setup. The political economy cannot be separated from sex, and often sexual characters’ camp becomes a way of maneuvering and calling into question the whole political-economic order.

Althaus-Reid’s criticism is a twist on a basically Augustinian claim: the male theologians are trying to conceive the trinity after a bodily image, the chief of the mistakes Augustine lists at the beginning of On the Trinity. Further, this theological distortion is met with a set of social distortions in how women are regarded even by the male theologians. Because the category of gender is not usually acknowledged by male and male-perspective theologians, theology becomes another carrier of gender oppression. When Althaus-Reid finally lifts up the Virgin of Guadalupe’s skirt, no one should be surprised that she finds a phallus hiding underneath. The Virgin has been co-opted.

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85 Ibid., 91.
86 For example, she reads Boff’s understanding of the trinity as “solidarity” as an instance of male dominated desire, in which a God figured primarily as male impregnates a woman. See Leonardo Boff, Trinity and Society (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988).
Mary, then, has been taken up in a general process of abstraction from bodies. Is she useless to save us? What is necessary to rescue the theological concept is a thick description of the realities of poor women’s bodies in order to open up a space for new types of political agency. Mary the symbol of private womanhood, the symbol by which women, the poor, and queer bodies are burdened with a set of definitions and norms, needs a new symbolic order. The liberation emphasis on the poor falters exactly at this point for Althaus-Reid because it isn’t able to fully account for the reality of the bodies, characters, possible scripts that Mary is supposed to intervene in!\(^\text{87}\)

Salvation may not solely mean “confronting the abstraction process of women’s life into patriarchal categories.”\(^\text{88}\) But it at least means acknowledging it. And so Althaus-Reid suggests that theologians make the Virgin indecent by pointing to her vulva, which is not a source of shame, but a holy, constituent part of Mary’s embodied agency. How can we refuse the separation of the Virgin from the vulva? The first is the refusal to romanticize the poor, especially by ignoring their sexual lives and practices in a way that enables their covert, back-door humiliation. Instead, it means allowing the marginalized characters to help the church question the political-economic ordering of their society. A Virgin without a vulva aids in a univocal and mendacious vision of the poor in which their sexual practices are incidental to their identity. “If we keep falsifying human relationships in the name not only of God… we must remember that we do it also in our love for justice.”\(^\text{89}\)

“Systematic theology is full of assumptions. Why do we assume what we assume? Mariology

\(^{87}\) Consider the withering critique of the trivialization of women’s bodies. Though the Virgin in cold war condemned communism, there “has not bee a single apparition of the Virgin in Latin America condemning abuses of human rights or exploitation” (60). The Virginal word is always a devalued, small word. It is about good manners and obedience to ecclesial hierarchies and gestures of courteous submission, because Mariology belongs to the discourse of motherhood, in which mothers “do not write, they are written.” Under her skirt, she’s hiding her support of the political status quo: “patriotism, cultural links, and the devotion of the poor” Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 61.

\(^{88}\) Ibid., 39.

\(^{89}\) Ibid., 66.
assumes a certain relation between Jesus and a family group integrated around certain sexual identities, but it does not need to be so, especially if we are talking about a group of people who show the location of divine and human interrelations? Why, for example, should we assume that “the Virgin Mary and Jesus could not be in the same person as my neighbour the cross-dresser who was an Umbanda worshipper who used to cover himself with the cloak of his statue of Mary.” Why, in other words, figure and reinforce heteronormative sexual identities as paradigmatically divine? Mary’s sexual performance in the theological tradition is decidedly queer, nicely represented by the icon of Santa Libre, the transvestite Christ or the bearded Mary.

8. Holy Virginity

In light of these potential dangers, I wish to present my re-reading of Holy Virginity as camp performance. I have already set up the basic terms, showing what it means to say about the irony of the virgin mother. In light of Grenholm and Althaus-Reid, it is ironic that a Virgin Mother who gets married but remains perpetually a virgin is used to reinforce whatever normative sexual codes a society has.

First, a propositional summary of the argument of On Holy Virginity in Augustine’s own framework, then a few comments on its meaning in light of the above considerations. I’ll start with a few definitions, and I take them to be Augustine’s working definitions, though he doesn’t say so.

A mother may be defined as one who transmits life through her flesh. A virgin is one who renounces marriage to a man and preserves the intactness of her hymen. The significance of her virginity is that she voluntarily anticipates the future heavenly life in which there will be no

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marrying or giving in marriage. She does so by metaphorically “marrying” Jesus. She then expresses her sexuality spiritually by keeping her body intact for an aesthetic reason: to symbolize the spotlessness of Christ’s bride.

Jesus is the prime instance or exemplar of maternity.92 As the one whose flesh transmits to us the divine life, all spiritual life derives from him. Mary, Christ’s mother, was therefore born from him spiritually, as are all who believe in him. He, the maternal bridegroom, is the spiritual mother of his own physical mother. Augustine describes the relationship between Christ and Mary this way: natus est. She is born of him.

Mary is the prime sacrament of maternity. To say that Mary is a sacrament of maternity is to say that she is the symbolic, space-opening, character-defining enactment of Christ’s maternity and therefore of his natality and his humanity. She is the physical mother of Christ and, by virtue of her charity and cooperation with grace, she participates uniquely in both Christ’s spiritual and physical maternity precisely as the source of his flesh. Through her, the Word became flesh and lived among us. Through her agency in her fiat, our humanity is exalted. She is the closest any human being has come to Christ. She is, in this way, the paradigmatic human being in the Christ-other human relationship. Mary is also the prime sacrament of virginity because her virginal life of devotion was brought to perfection in the bearing of God’s human flesh.

The church is the bodily means by which spiritual life is transmitted to all by the sacraments. It therefore participates in Christ’s maternity through Mary. Its embodiment owes itself to her. The church, therefore, is rightly called “mother.” The church’s whole sacramental existence anticipates future heavenly life in concert with Mary. The church is metaphorically

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92 virg., 6.6.
Christ’s bride, which will one day be presented to Christ without any blemish. It is therefore rightly (though queerly) called “virgin.” Because Jesus is true human and true God, all faithful mothers—whether spiritual mothers or physical mothers, men or women—participate in the queer maternity of Mary.

Now to the argument for the superiority of the holy virgins: It is better to transmit spiritual life than fleshly life. It is better to anticipate future life through consecrated virginity than to obey divine command in marital chastity. Because virgins anticipate future heavenly life in their bodies, their spiritual offspring participate in Mary’s virginity and her maternity. Married Christian women participate in her maternity directly but not directly in her virginity. They participate in her virginity through their membership in the church. Married chastity is good, for a woman participates directly in Mary’s maternity. Consecrated virginity is better, because a woman participates directly in Mary’s virginity and in her maternity.

Note three things about Augustine’s argument. First, he dances the dance of theological prudence in which Mary is irreducibly embodied, but her very maternity is the basis for a wider sphere of action that does not require her to be a physical mother in order to be fully woman. She is therefore neither abstracted nor biologized, but sacramentalized in a way that introduces an edge to all subsequent definitions of gender, for her enactment of her humanity, while singularly and exemplarily human, also happens to be queer. It destabilizes the received definition of “woman.” In that way, it performs maternity in a way that undoes the “naturalness” of the category of both maternity and virginity. Who can’t be a mother? Who really can be the mother that Christ and Mary are?
Second, Augustine’s claims have unexpected implications for the public/domestic distinction. Augustine’s goal is to affirm sexuality and gender. Sex is most basically a social good. Sex exists for the nurture of the human race. Augustine goes even further. He thinks that the sexed body is a good in itself. The sexed body remains in the eschaton even when no one will reproduce. This implies that women’s bodies are not reducible to their procreative potential. To say that there is no sex in heaven for Augustine and Jesus is important because, formally, sex means death for them and for us. We only procreate because we need to continue our species after we die. We need children to aid our domestic production. We want people to carry on our memories. Materially, sex meant death for them in way that it doesn’t any longer mean death for people in the industrialized world (high infant mortality rates, high rates of death while giving birth). Sex also symbolizes the place of women. Women’s bodies always carry around potential shame of illegitimate pregnancy. Women’s bodies mean home, and home is the sphere not just of life, but of mortal life. They lived lives of relative bondage.

Augustine thinks of God as a transmitter of unending life—properly a Mother according to the working definition, even if he never names her that way. He calls that life “spiritual,” though it cannot, as I have shown, thereby be taken to exclude bodies. God transmits physical life through the act of creation in which God implants the seminal formulae and nurtures it to maturity through angelic intelligences, and God transmits spiritual life through the work of drawing human creatures into the trinity through bringing them to the love of God. God’s maternity is spiritual in terms of the mode of embodied performance it transmits. That is, it is a spiritual life in that it connects us to virtue. This makes a huge difference for how we think of God, of life, and of the old world.
Through the lens of divine transmission of spiritual life, consecrated virginity, insofar as it actually produces love in the virgins, is a sign and an enactment of liberation not only for women, but for all of humanity. Mary’s virginal maternity becomes on this view the point of liberation of Adam’s race: Mary signifies the new dispensation and the climax of the old simultaneously. Through her, we enter into a new era where women are no longer confined to the choice of daughters or wives and mothers. As spiritual mothers and physical virgins (before the advent of reproductive technologies), they no longer have to be physical mothers and risk death of physical wives and submit to their husbands. They become, in Augustine’s words, “unbodily.” They anticipate in their bodies in this world the freedom Augustine envisions in the next world: “making the sensuality within them impotent, following a heavenly and angelic way of life while still in their earthly mortal condition.”\textsuperscript{93} The consecrated virgin is a sacramental enactment that is a space-opening beginning for the holiness of all women and men. The virgins follow Christ “wherever he goes.” The rest of us follow Christ “wherever we can.”

At this point, it is helpful to bring up Halperin’s distinction between camp and kitsch.\textsuperscript{94} Kitsch is a term of class hatred; it is a way of referring to the art of lower classes so as to make fun of it. Kitsch performance of identity identifies the abject character in order to criticize it or avoid it, to make fun of it, further debase it. Some of Augustine’s dismissive attitudes toward women might

\textsuperscript{93} virg., 24.24.

\textsuperscript{94} See Paul J. Griffiths, “A Defense of Christian Kitsch,” Divinity Magazine, Fall 2011, http://divinity.duke.edu/community-student-life/divinity-magazine/fall-2011/defense-christian-kitsch. “The term \textit{kitsch} is usually intended as an insult. To call a painting or a musical composition or a piece of decorative art “kitschy” suggests that it’s crude, cheap, unsophisticated, unoriginal, mass-produced, and above all sentimental. It’s Norman Rockwell’s urchins, Soviet-era statues of heroic workers, angels and kittens (especially together), velvet Elvises, flesh-colored Christs that glow in the dark, and Kylie Minogue. And, it’s the crucified coat hanger and the Sacred Heart you can see on this page… Kitsch is, by this account, trash; and you, to the extent that you like it, are trashy. You ought to be ashamed of yourself and go to some art appreciation classes at once. So runs the anti-kitsch argument. It’s usually a finely tuned instrument of class hatred. Those who offer it are typically people who know what kitsch is, don’t like it, and want to educate others out of liking it. They’re rarely far from contempt for kitsch-lovers.”
be labeled aesthetically as kitsch. Camp, on the other hand, identifies the abject object and pushes the abjection to the point of absurdity as a way of critiquing the social system that produces the abjection. How does this relate to Augustine? I read his call to humility as a call to a camp rather than a kitsch performance of the character “woman.” The entire second half of Augustine’s treatise on virginity is directed toward the inculcation of humility, as I discussed in chapter 5. One can easily imagine how the kitsch line of thought would go: by transcending the embodied agency of women, being made eschatological bodies, neither wives nor daughters, Augustine’s holy virgins may be tempted to look down on the mothers that their spiritual maternity transcends. They leave behind the natural identity, recognize it as a role, but only for themselves. Those poor physical mothers! Pity them! They have not yet moved to the next step in holiness and Christlikeness. Augustine will not allow such an attitude for two reasons.

First, virginity is a gift. Their life is a sacrament of something greater. And their ability to embody it enacts something greater. This will require a slight detour of argument into Augustine’s thought about what sex is and what it’s for. Some, such as St. Jerome, took it that, since celibacy was understood to be more meritorious to marriage, that marriage must be bad. Others, such as the monk Jovinian, assumed that since Paul allowed marriage, it must be just as possible to live the life of virtue as a married person. The Augustinian compromise, which is really just a re-reading of 1 Corinthians 7, became the official position of the church for a long time. Marriage, Augustine argued, was allowable because of three goods. Proles, fides, sacramentum. Proles is the good of procreation. The primary purpose of marriage in creation was for the extension of the human species. Marriage is intended primarily as the relationship in which children come into the world.

\footnote{\textit{bono coniug.} The entire treatise is set up as a reading of 1 Corinthians 7 to correct the two extremes.}
Fides, the good of fidelity, is the idea that the husband and wife who are burning with passion have an outlet for that passion in a monogamous relationship. The husband and wife own each others’ bodies, so to speak. Sacramentum, the sacrament, is Christianity’s special contribution to marriage. The relationship between husband and wife is understood to be an effectual sign of Christ’s relationship to the church.  

Here we get to the heart of what became the Augustinian theology of marriage, and, by extension, of sex. Christ’s relationship to the church as bridegroom to bride is ultimately an extension of the trinity’s love for the world. The trinity’s love for the world is an extension of a more primal ecstasy, the mutual, eternal, joyful interpenetration of the Holy Three that allows us to call God the Holy One. The language at its most luxurious and excessive is the language of sexual intercourse. The trinitarian ecstasy is like sexual desire, and the desire God has to bring the world into the eternally extended intensity of the divine delight is like a desire for God and the world to be intimate the way that lovers are intimate.  

God brings the world to intimacy with God in the body of Jesus. “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth,” the author of the Song of Songs says. Let God kiss the Virgin with the kisses of God’s mouth and produce out of her humanity the God-man. Let God kiss humanity with the kisses of God’s mouth, and in that kiss form the hypostatic union by which human nature is brought eternally into God’s joy, in the person of the Word. The body of Jesus, God’s very kiss, makes the body of the church his bride and thereby brings a whole people into the life of the trinity. Right now we are in a period of betrothal in which God desires to make us spotless in Christ by the

96 The classic contemporary magisterial statement on marriage and sexuality is Pius XI’s Encyclical Casti Connubi.  
power of God’s Spirit. That spotlessness and purity is refigured in scripture not as the intactness of a hymen, but as the love that gives itself for the affirmation of the beloved. It is same love that is God’s ecstasy, the same love that is God’s kiss in Christ, the same love that is God’s sacrifice on the cross, the same love that is the bond of unity in the Church. This love is sacramentally enacted in the relationship of every marriage. The fruit-bearing intercourse of husband and wife becomes not merely a means of procreation or of the fidelity that contains unruly passion, but a sign God’s joy in creation and love in our salvation. This is what the church calls the nuptial mystery, and the nuptial meaning of the body is exactly the way in which human desire re-enacts the deepest mysteries of Christian faith.

Consecrated virginity, on this understanding, is an even higher, more meritorious calling, for the celibate is able to take the body’s nuptial meaning to its highest possible expression. By allowing the bridegroom, Christ himself, to care for her directly, to be her only lover, her body becomes a sign of the future in which there is no male or female. In her, we can see in a more direct way what it means for God to desire us, to direct all the divine passion toward us. And in her, we have a model of what it means to re-direct human sexual desire directly back to God in prayer. It is a charism, a gift. Most of us are unable to faithfully so direct our desires. But those who can, and who are called to take up this painful but rewarding ascetic task, serve as an even clearer picture of what it means for God to be a lover, our lover, and to have become in Christ our partner, our spouse.

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98 For an explication of how this works, see virg.

So Augustine’s first appeal to humility in this context is to remind them that their performance of the charism, including gift of greater, more intense sexual affirmation like the affirmation the sexed body will receive in the heavenly life, is a gift. It makes them greater, but their greatness is a direct result of divine agency. He relies on Sirach: “the greater you are the more humble you should be.”¹⁰⁰ In the economy of the gift, greatness and humility are directly rather than inversely proportional.

He also appeals to the fact that ultimately, what makes the virginity meritorious is not that there is an intrinsic value to purity, but that it is a form of obedience, which is the way creatures like us fittingly respond to God. And they do not know what God has called other women to, and what ways God has gifted others. Who knows? A virgin may not have the disposition to martyrdom, a greater gift, that the married woman does possess. Ultimately, the reason greatness leads to humility and that obedience is the core of the Christian life is because the heart of Christian faith is to attach ourselves properly to the triune God in love. The whole purpose of virginity is to enact what God’s love means for the world and for society. To enact the virginity without the love is self-subverting.

On this view, Augustine must be resisted if he is taken to romanticize virginity for its own sake. He can be challenged on his own terms, for his thought opens up questions and ambiguities that I’ve asked above. Does Mary become just another way to consign women to a domestic sphere, to reduce them to their maternity? Mary is a virgin mother. Can she be anything else? Can’t women be a lot of other things besides mothers and sexual objects? Is Mary the virgin mother then still seen through a gaze which reinscribes her as “domestic? Is there any way to emphasize

¹⁰⁰ virg., 31.31.
purity that does not pull all women back into the economy of the intact hymen? Is the emphasis on virginal purity such that victims of sexual violence can be excluded from consecrated virginity and all that that implies intrinsically bound to the pagan distinction between domestic and public that so pervades the writings of the church fathers and the New Testament? Because she is a destabilizing force, however, it seems that the figure of the Virgin Mary is a camp figure, who maneuvers in the social system she inherits and exerts power not by upending a system, but by redefining, destabilizing, and questioning its terms. She can be understood not to reinforce the social system that produces the character “woman,” the basis of the other privatized characters, by demeaning them even more by her more perfect instantiation of the idea. Rather, she draws attention to a different way of living, of ordering life, and of valuing it. She is the extension of Christ’s identification with the margins. She maneuvers in a way that ends up redefining character possibilities over the long term.101

9. Conclusion

Augustine’s account of holy virginity brings together the various strands of the grammar I’ve analyzed above to show how he subverts the public/domestic distinction. In one sense, he reaffirms it, as he must. But in another sense, it opens up the space for a new type of character. Mary’s participating in Jesus’ maternity ends up domesticating the public and thereby publicizing what was private. It blurs a set of previously stable boundaries. The long-term effects of this are unpredictable.102

101 In this way, I’ve been arguing that Marian camp might be understood as a form of “slow rhetoric” rather than “fast rhetoric.” See the conclusion of Jordan, Recruiting Young Love.

102 How should we think of the way that the Christian community implicitly comes together under the body of the male bishop, the basis of Christian unity? How does the body of Mary relate to the body of the bishop? Augustine leaves unresolved how the bishop and Mary participate in one another. The bishop can participate in Mary’s maternity? Can
Augustine earnestly theorizes this performance in the context of sexist codes relating to the intactness of a hymen, even as the entire basis for his thought pushes us so that we can’t help but seeing the consecrated virgins’ performance of virginity, imitating the Virgin Mother herself, as the ultimate performance of full embrace of the stigma, of the economy of purity and the intact hymen. By fully embracing her virginity, and all it means, and the entire conceptual world behind it, she follows Christ, not because of the value of virginity, but because she, and women, and all private characters, know what it means to have an abject identity. They therefore are best suited to rebel against it. And Jesus helps them do it without simply rebelling. That we have women following a male in doing this is neither an acceptance or a flat out rejection of the code. It is rather the code’s disarming. The cross, as I argue in chapter 5, is the disarming of the pride that causes us to take the social codes, the logic of social relationships into which we’ve been catechized, for granted. That is why the great threat in the latter half of Augustine’s treatise On Holy Virginity is the proud virgin. Unless she can see that her life has become in Jesus and Mary God’s very laughter—without an embrace of her own campiness, her own over-performance of the gendered codes and all the codes that privatize her—she misses all the benefit of the life she has chosen. Her life is a sacrament of the code’s undoing. In that way, the reward in virginity is immanent in its humble performance, and it redounds to all our benefit, maybe even our beatitude.

Mary’s body and the bodies of all Christian women participate in the bishop’s work? Perhaps feminists should advocate the elevation of Mary to co-redemptrix, acknowledging her participation in Christ’s redeeming work in a way that doesn’t reduce her to her maternity.
CONCLUSION: Beyond Public and Private

What I have written can be sorted into two separate parts: a genealogy of one strand of the public/private distinction and an analysis of the deep grammar of one representative church father, Augustine. Here I want to tie the parts together. The first part of my dissertation establishes three points. In the introduction, I laid out a framework for how I think about the distinction, focusing on feminist arguments, which I think bring together a wide set of debates in the literature. I have not addressed all the debates directly, but by focusing on the feminist arguments, I have laid out a basis for doing so. Second, I wrote a genealogy that involves both a history of the development of the distinction and an analysis of several related topoi in contemporary political theory. The history focuses on the difference Augustinian Christianity made in two major “revolutions”: antiquity and modernity. It discusses how the distinction has worked out socially by attention to the development of the characters of the woman, the slave, the laborer, the private person. Each revolution created a set of characters and a new set of scripts for those characters to live into and to manage societal expectations. The analysis of the topics in political theory focuses on discussions of sovereignty and the figure of homo sacer, the refugee, along with the concepts of governmentality and biopolitics. In this way, I have addressed some of the ways in which the distinction manifests socially and politically in the figure of the “refugee.”

Conceptually, I’ve argued that the public/private distinction can be seen both as an anthropological distinction and as a socio-political distinction. Socio-political claims have anthropological dimensions, and anthropological claims have socio-political dimensions. If the moral-anthropological question is, “How do I organize my life and its attachments,” the socio-political question is, “how does a community organize itself and its attachments?” Claims about the
structure, nature, and history of selves have implications for how society ought to be organized, and claims about how society ought to be organized have implications about the structure, nature, and history of selves. Whereas most studies of Christianity and politics in general and Augustinian political theology in particular focus on the socio-political implications of Christian faith, I focus on the political significance of anthropological claims.

As I have suggested above, I am concerned with the sorts of characters that Christian faith imagines and enables. My argument in the first part is that Christianity created new character scripts and with them, new socio-political possibilities. This happened principally in late antiquity, and it rehashed itself in early modernity. In dialogue with Foucault, Agamben, and Schmitt, I named how modern characters are distinguished by a fusion of possibilities that were once both Christian and liberating but became politicized in a way that denied a classical account of God’s transcendence.

The second part of my argument has displayed in thick, descriptive texture one possible social meaning of the claim: “mortals look at outward appearances, but the Lord looks at the heart.” The scripture is summarized by Augustine’s claim, “you were with me, but I was not with you. I was outside of myself.” In this part, I have done a sort of prolegomena to political theology “from below” by attending not to Augustine’s abstract account of justice, nor the res publica, nor his critiques of paganism, but by the claim that God is nearer to us than we are to ourselves. So I have not tried to get the public-private distinction “right,” as if I were in a position to pronounce on what a truly Christian society ought to look like. My perspective is far too limited, my vision too dim, and my surroundings too murky to see with any clarity. Better to analyze questions and think about possibilities rather than indulge in the sort of “visionary dreaming” that imposes a new sort of
Christian ideal on the church or on society, an ideal far too consistent with misanthropy than with Christ’s love.\(^1\) Rather, I’ve gone to the heart of Augustine’s thought about “God and the soul,” nothing else,\(^2\) and traced out a set of claims that are the condition of the possibility of knowing what sorts of characters and scripts Augustine’s theological grammar makes possible and even likely.

What motivates my methodology is the contention that, in absence of any standard of objective truth that is discernable from the outside, and in absence of any actually existing human being that can separate her rationality from embodied agency, human beings are constituted in time primarily by how they desire, what they love, and what moves them. As created body-soul composites, our histories are histories first of wanting and not of knowing, for we almost always believe what we want to believe anyway. At the very least, this means that the truth of Christianity is accessible to people primarily via their affections. More specifically, I think the main apologetic question of Christian faith goes something like this: does the set of character formations and scripts that Christianity makes possible seem good or beautiful? The main apologetic task is to suggest ways in which the goodness whose trace ever haunts even the most disordered lovers is amplified and magnified by Jesus and the way of living that he makes possible. The main apologetic appeal, then, is the gospel itself: that Jesus, through his death and resurrection, has opened up a space to live into God’s own goodness and beauty in a way that makes us more ourselves the further we move into it. In other words, since I don’t know how I would begin to show that the gospel is true, I can try to show that the characters it makes possible are good, and perhaps even beautiful. In that way, this dissertation is part of a work of evangelical persuasion.

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2 *s.d.*, 1.
In chapter three, “Meanings of Life,” I argued (against Schmitt’s conception of sovereignty) that for Augustine, the Lord’s relationship to creation is such that the closer creation gets to God, the more itself it becomes. In a singularly affirmative hierarchy—reflecting the trinitarian hierarchy in which the Son and Spirit are brought to full, intimate union with the Father so that the three are incomprehensibly equal without remainder—the world is made all that it is only by its intimacy with Godhead. Creation and trinity are therefore closely linked in Augustine’s imaginary: the God-world difference reflects the way in which the world is everything that it is because of God and nothing that it is without God. I trace three sets of asymmetrically related intimacies: God’s intimacy with God, God’s intimacy with creatures, and creatures’ intimacy with creatures. I argued that because of these intimacies, God’s closeness to us is the very condition of our being, life, agency, and freedom in relation to God and to one another. So what are normally taken to be dualisms—matter and spirit, natural and supernatural—might be better understood as ways of explaining the mechanics of how God loves the world and how we creatures are brought close to God and therefore to ourselves by knowledge and love of the Lord. Rather than creating divisions, the dualisms are the condition of the possibility nonviolent unities.

In the fourth chapter, “The Inner Public Self,” I extended my argument about the God/creation relationship directly into the anthropological claims I began to make in the third chapter. Through analysis of Augustine’s arguments in Confessions X and On the Trinity XII, I suggested that the founding intimacy, which is just the love of God who is God’s very self given to us, is the basis of our self’s “structure.” In this very limited sense, I examine the relationships between a set of metaphysical claims—the structure of the self—and historical claims about the self’s past and its possible futures. The memory, shorthand for how Augustine talks about the
“inside,” stands for a structure of the self in the inner relations of memory, intellect, and will. It also stands for the primordial inhabitant—the Lord—who was once near in our awareness by knowledge and by love. The Lord provides the deepest basis of the self’s structure as well as the first episode in each individual’s history: we are who we are because from the beginning, One has loved us into being and related to us in love and freedom-bestowing affirmation. From the twin metaphysical and moral claims rooted in the same understanding of “memory,” which stands in for the mind, I suggested what it is for our freedom to be both an objective fact about our constitution and an eschatological telos, a goal of our nature. Freedom is therefore both structural and substantive. We are who we are because of the Lord. We might be most ourselves by pursuing the recovery of our lost identity, by reconciling with that chief, primordial inhabitant of our memory, the source of our deepest desire and of our freedom. Augustine therefore imagines the possibility of a fully integrated self, though not in this life. Because the inside ultimately refers to God, what Augustine calls the “interior” in this once and future self is properly public, for God is “that which is common to all.” Through sin, we keep on becoming “private.” The chief consequence is that through sin, our insides become scattered, dispersed, and attached to demeaning particulars rather than the One who is the basis for the affirmation of everything and the type of integration that makes real free agency possible. In Augustine’s vision, though not in mine, a set of social hierarchies becomes necessary to rein in the awful consequences of our interior disorder. I wish to resist Augustine’s social hierarchies by means of appeal to a radicalization of Augustine’s thought about society, which posits that all social hierarchies are contingent, and none of them mirrors heaven.
The fifth chapter, “Natures and Graces,” traced the recovery of our relationship of knowledge and love with the Lord, suggesting that despite our sin, God (in either a feminizing or queering affirmation of our agency) abides deep inside of us, penetrating us, and discerning our hearts in such a way that God heals them and makes them more fully ours. I described and analyzed the mechanics of how Augustine thought that healing works, tracing what “grace” does to nature objectively in the work of Christ, who restores the primal created harmony and defeats the devil so that we could be released from sin’s snares and the devil’s deception. He does so by opening a space for action—a new and renewing script—that Augustine calls “the just life.” Then I described the subjective work of the Spirit—God coming close to us, nearer to us than we are to ourselves, making our lost love and justice’s script sweet to us again so that we pursue the new script that Christ has made possible. We find that God coming near to us in our awareness (God, of course, is always equally near to everyone in the order of being) brings us near to divine Wisdom in such a way that she absorbs our distortion without herself becoming distorted, that God’s love is the reality big enough in Christ to remove causes of pride and of despair. No need for pride, because in God we couldn’t be any bigger or more significant. No need for despair, because in God’s love, we find that the very source of our life will carry us all the way through it in fierce and gentle kindness. I identify three senses of nature (a structure of the self, a created, historical condition, and a claim about our damage) and three senses of grace (the gratuity of creation, the objective work of Christ, and the subjective work of the Spirit) alongside a typology of the way nature/grace debates work (Anselmian-Thomist-Jansenist) in order to provide more clarity about how God heals us.

In the sixth chapter I laid out what this description of Augustine’s thought about God, creation, the human, and salvation has to do with the specifically social implications of the claim that
“mortals look at outward appearances, but the Lord looks at the heart.” Using David Halperin’s understanding of camp, I pulled together the two sections together to test out what all this theology might mean for political agency by suggesting that the Virgin Mary and the holy virgins in Augustine ought to be read as embodying or exemplifying a transformation of a social script from within in such a way as to call into question received private characters. I focuses on the character of the “woman,” which I argued is the primary private character. The questioning of received gender and sexual identities enacts the way Augustine’s thought refuses a sharp distinction between *polis* and *oikos*, between political and domestic. In exemplifying the transformation, Mary and the holy virgins following her show us what redeemed humanity looks like.

In order to understand more fully how this concludes the dissertation, it is useful to restate the way I mapped public and private.

The first type of distinction is between public and market where the neo-liberal capitalist market is construed the “private” sphere. This maps on to a more individualist conception and to Kahn’s liberalism of interest. In light of Augustine’s thought, this way of talking turns out to be mendacious. It separates interests artificially in a way that re-enacts the original fall: opposing justice (public) to personal advantage (private).

The second way of forming the distinction is between political and economic. This has been a major strand of ways of thinking of the distinction, articulated most compellingly by Hannah Arendt. It is, in many ways, the precursor of what Kahn names a liberalism of reason, more fully articulated by Rawls and Habermas. This way of speaking about public and private is more promising. When we put it into dialogue with the claims about the inner public self in chapter 4,

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we can see that it gets at the truth in some important ways. But it misses something important. The argument in chapter 2 about the nature of sovereignty and governmentality in modernity shows that this way of speaking is inadequate to the task of describing political and social life because of the power of market forces in a society of control. Construals of the public and private as political and economic artificially separate a masculine realm of freedom, self-determination, and action from a feminized realm of necessity, labor, and desire. Further, if the neo-marxists (and Augustine) are right, societies are not so much structured on the basis of reason as on desire. To put it in a theological key, Arendt’s account can’t explain how we could be possibly be bound to the devil’s snares. People believe what they want; they can’t be brought to want primarily on the basis of public reason. In Paul Kahn’s terminology, politics is intrinsically and most basically erotic.4

A third way of thinking the distinction is to transmute it into a trifecta: Public/social/private. According to this view, a realm of the social or of civil society moderates the distinction. This way of speaking tends to focus on the sphere of the social and contrast it to the public sphere of government and reason and private sphere of family and interest. The social sphere is the textured realm of interpersonal engagement. This way of speaking also brings forward crucial elements, but it neglects to integrate the restoration of reason with passion and therefore of justice with happiness. After all, we believe that Christ’s vindication came in the form of a resurrected body and a new and unending life.

Finally, I described feminist ways of speaking about the distinction, which draw in various ways from all of the above, and, depending on influences, are subject to the same limitations. What distinguishes feminist accounts of the distinction is their criticism of its gendered component: the

4 Kahn, Putting Liberalism in Its Place, chap. 5.
way public tends to get identified with male rationality and action and the way private gets identified with female domesticity. By prioritizing the gendered component of the distinction, feminist accounts are capacious enough to highlight and integrate the effect of global capital’s shaping of desire in the way that rational plans for society are structured, to acknowledge the need for a textured social life in its valorization of domesticity and interpersonal spheres of relationship, and still to posit needs for development of characters for women’s agency that open up spaces for public action. In this way, the feminist accounts of public and private tend to want to push past the distinction. The title of this essay, “Beyond Public and Private,” takes its inspiration from the perceived need to move past the public/private distinction as a way of sorting society even as it assumes the inevitability of thinking in those terms. Given my focus on the anthropological distinction, my question is inevitably going to be, “Can there be characters and scripts that open up spaces that creatively question and subvert the distinction even if they sometimes seem to maintain it?”

Peter Brown helped to show the ways in which Christianity made a difference in how both women and the poor or “low-born” were understood, received, and dignified in surprising and unexpected twists in late antiquity. I returned to those themes as the test-sites for how to think of the difference Jesus makes for an account of public and private. Given the theological logic displayed above, I read Augustine’s treatise On Holy Virginity to show how a “woman” who is close to God will find her body and its functions affirmed and her life pushed beyond her body into the spirit in such a way that she can desire to use her body in ways that are not limited to their biological functions. Indeed, the body and its functions are made publicly relevant without thereby bringing sexuality under either public, external control or the internal biopolitical control of
capitalist markets in a Foucauldian society of control. The biopolitical is a parody of they type of agency Augustinian thought imagines. Further, weakness, whether social, political, gendered, abled, etc. are for Christians not the basis of exclusion, but of special care (1 Corinthians 12).

Jesus and Mary are two private bodies: the body of an executed criminal, and the body of a mother. Both help us read the other. I explained Augustine’s claim about the complementarity of Jesus and Mary by saying that Mary’s agency makes sense of Christ’s, and Christ’s agency makes sense of Mary. Though in the order of salvation, Christ is more basic. In the end, the gendered dimensions of their agency are so blurred that the bible tells us almost nothing essential about gender, nor gender God. Rather, by pushing the gendered imagery all the way, I was able to talk not about gender, but about the way that public and private, and along with them, male and female, are re-figured in surprising and unknown ways by grace. My focus on Mary has been to show what it looks like. I think Oliver O’Donovan rightly names the attitude, and I use camp to re-read Augustine’s account of Mary and holy virginity to show what form the Christian questioning and re-negotiating of public and private look like for Augustine.

In the current testament, the sacrament of the future life is the one in which the woman is liberated from her physical maternity and has a space opened beyond domestic definitions of wife and mother normally associated with her character. This is the fundamental script Mary enacts, and, I think, it is the basis for her participation in exalted humanity. By her identification with Christ, she is able to live a life that is disciplined not primarily by worldly definitions and codes of performance, externally imposed character scripts, but by Christ’s own ongoing life, God’s transcendence, and the promise of immortality. In short, it is a life disciplined by charity and virtue, which is constantly binding us to God in order to free us from the world’s and the devil’s
domination. Though the priority in the order of being is on virtue, on love, which I have not discussed sufficiently here, the priority in the order of presentation here has been on clearing the way for a defensible account of love and virtue by destabilizing some of the slowly drawn character formations that continue to get in the way of virtue. Constant vigilance needs to be maintained that the theological conceptualities are not pulled in to a set of stable hierarchies that demean and therefore back into domination. It is exactly the stability of these hierarchies which Augustine’s thought about Jesus everywhere resists.

As with Mary, so with all privatized bodies. The fundamental question in her becomes: what spaces of faithful action does Jesus open up that don’t require us to abandon our bodies and their functions but don’t limit us to received scripts about how they are to be used? This is not so much a normative definition as a clarification of a systematic theological point. I’m not trying to outline what this means morally (that would be an account of charity understood through Mary’s relationship to Jesus), but only to point out something like a more negative rule: if my reading of Mary and Augustine on virginity is right, the use of Mary for status quo arguments that can be made independently of Mary’s relationship as co-mediatrix of our salvation with Christ cannot possibly be opening up the sorts of spaces for Christian characters, but instead depend for their constitution of colonial, sexist, heteronormative, masculinist, ableist, classist or other characters that are not from God. Mary moves the human race into an eschatological space beyond public and private, which is also the space of divine transcendence. This conceptuality, I think, is essentially modest and conservative, as it is rooted in the heart of Augustine’s thought and comes out of the center of Christian orthodoxy.

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Biography

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