

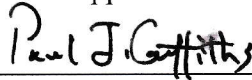
The Wages of Sin:
A Grammatical Theology of Death

by

Philip Gregory Porter

Date: May 6, 2020

Approved:




Paul Griffiths, Supervisor



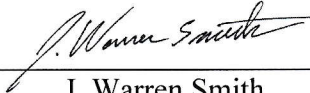
Sarah Beckwith



Stanley Hauerwas



Bruce Marshall



J. Warren Smith

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology
in the Divinity School of Duke University

2020

ABSTRACT

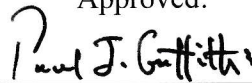
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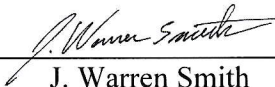
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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the origins of death. It does so by drawing on Augustine of Hippo's theology of creation, especially as expressed in his *De Genesi ad litteram*. It argues that recovering Augustine's theory of the *rationes seminales* as presented in *De Genesi ad litteram* is a useful tool that allows contemporary theology to engage with modern cosmology and evolutionary biology without compromising on Catholic magisterial teaching regarding the connection between sin and death. The work consists of five chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion.

The first chapter is methodological. It explains how one might read the text of *Genesis ad litteram* in the sense Augustine uses the term. To do this, it draws on the resources of Ordinary Language Philosophy. Chapter two investigates Augustine's use of the term '*rationes seminales*' and provides a speculative account of what they are. Chapter three connects the speculations on the *rationes seminales* to the fall of the angels, examining scriptural and doctrinal evidences concerning the nature of the demons. Chapter four remains focused on the angelic fall, but from a literary perspective. It uses Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* to flesh out a theology of angels, their fall, and the effects this has on the created order. The last chapter examines how the effects of the angelic fall play out in time. It connects the speculations about the angelic fall to the human fall, showing how the doctrine of original sin as taught by the Catholic magisterium is compatible with discoveries in evolutionary biology and modern cosmology.

For my wife, Kristi.

Si enim rebus deessent animae quae ipsum fastigium ordinis in universa creatura sic obtinerent, ut si peccare voluissent, infirmaretur et labefactaretur universitas, magnum quiddam deesset creaturae: illud enim deesset, quo remoto stabilitas rerum atque connexio turbaretur. Tales sunt optimae, et sanctae, et sublimes creaturae coelestium vel supercoelestium potestatum, quibus solus Deus imperat; universus autem mundus subjectus est. Sine istarum officiis justis atque perfectis esse universitas non potest.

For if the souls which occupy the very highest of ranks in the whole creation really had failed—if they would have willed to sin—the universe would have been weakened and ruined. Creation would certainly lack something great. For it would lack that thing the absence of which would have disordered the stability and connection of things. Such are the best, holy, and sublime creatures of the celestial and supercelestial powers, whom God alone rules, but to whom the whole world is subject. Without their just and perfect service the universe could not be.

St. Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, 3.11.32 (PL 32:1287)

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List of Abbreviations

General Abbreviations

<i>CCL</i>	<i>Corpus christianorum, series latina</i>
<i>CSEL</i>	<i>Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum</i>
<i>DS</i>	<i>Denzinger Symbolorum</i>
<i>NRSV</i>	<i>New Revised Standard Version</i>
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina</i>
<i>RSV</i>	<i>Revised Standard Version</i>
<i>Vulg</i>	<i>Vulgate</i>

Alcuin of York

<i>in Apoc.</i>	<i>Commentariorum in Apocalypsin</i>
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Augustine

<i>civ.</i>	<i>De civitate Dei</i>
<i>conf.</i>	<i>Confessiones</i>
<i>div. qu.</i>	<i>De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus</i>
<i>doct. chr.</i>	<i>De doctrina christiana</i>
<i>Gn. c. Man.</i>	<i>De Genesi contra Manichaeos</i>
<i>Gn. litt.</i>	<i>De Genesi ad litteram</i>
<i>Gn. litt. imp.</i>	<i>De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus</i>
<i>Io. ev. tr.</i>	<i>In Evangelium Ioannis tractatus</i>
<i>lib. arb.</i>	<i>De libero arbitrio</i>
<i>ord.</i>	<i>De ordine</i>
<i>pecc. mer.</i>	<i>De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum</i>
<i>retr.</i>	<i>Retractationes</i>
<i>trin.</i>	<i>De Trinitate</i>
<i>util. cred.</i>	<i>De utilitate credendi</i>

Cyprian

<i>dom. orat.</i>	<i>De Dominica oratione</i>
<i>zel.</i>	<i>De zelo et livore</i>

Gregory the Great

mor. *Moralia in Job*
reg. past. *Regulae pastoralis*

Gregory of Nyssa

De hom. op. *De hominis opificio*

Jerome

in Esaiam *Commentariorum in Esaiam*

John Cassian

con. *Conlationes*

Thomas Aquinas

pot. *Quaestiones disputate de potentia*
SCG *Summa contra Gentiles*
ST *Summa Theologiae*
super Iob *Expositio super Iob ad litteram*

All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. I've used the Revised Standard Version (RSV) of Scripture for all biblical citations unless otherwise noted. When I've used another version of Scripture those citations are given in line with the chapter and verse.

Acknowledgments

I owe a significant debt of gratitude to all who've made this work possible. The decision to leave a well-paying job for the unknown prospects of a terminal degree in theology wasn't an easy one. It wasn't mine to make alone. Without the support of my wife, Kristi, who willingly sacrificed a great deal of security and peace of mind when I began this process eight years ago, this dissertation would not have been possible.

Fritz Bauerschmidt, Jim Buckley, Angela Christman, Fr. John Conley, Steve Fowl, Claire Matthews-McGinnis, and Trent Pomplun on the faculty at Loyola University Maryland each contributed significantly to my grasp of the work of theology. They helped me see what it is you're doing when you're asking and answering questions about the LORD, and why it might be worthwhile to do so. Sarah Beckwith, Maria Doerfler, Susan Eastman, Reinhard Hütter, Thomas Pfau, and Warren Smith at Duke University each offered me new perspectives on the set of problems I'd confront while imagining the dissertation. Each introduced me to new skills not only in theology but also in history, literary studies, philosophy, and scriptural exegesis. I'd like to thank Bruce Marshall of Southern Methodist University in whom I've found an exemplar of precise theological thinking and writing for agreeing to be a reader for this project. Finally, special thanks are owed to Paul Griffiths and Stanley Hauerwas who've been to me as Doktorvater and Doktorgroßvater, each of whose influence was acutely felt throughout the writing, and without whom this project could neither have been started nor finished.

Introduction

I didn't expect to write a dissertation on death. Death took me by surprise. It started with a class taught by Maria Doerfler on death and dying in Late Antiquity. There I became fascinated by the deaths of the martyrs of the early Church. The particular ways those deaths imitated Christ's own compelled me to look closely at what it means to die as a Christian. It also turned my attention back to the passion and death of Jesus on the cross. But as I looked closer, at both the martyrs and the Christ, I realized what death was and where it came from were almost entirely opaque to me. My research into this question yielded an interesting gap in contemporary theology. There's very little written on the topic of death itself. By that I don't mean that there aren't a great many books dealing with death under different aspects—how to die well, how to deal with the deaths of loved ones, the medicalization of death, and so on, are all topics that have been explored at length. The questions being asked about death in this literature are primarily ethical in nature and in scope. I found fewer studies on what death is, where it comes from, and why we die. The conceptual theological work on the topic of death was lacking.

Bearing this in mind, I began an investigation of death. In order to answer the fundamental conceptual questions about death, it seemed right to begin at the beginning. This dissertation, then, is a theology of death that considers death's place in the doctrine of creation. Writing on this meant confronting a problem under a few different aspects.

I'll sketch the problem here, and then point out how I address it in the five chapters that make up this dissertation. It's a problem about creation. It goes something like this. The cosmos in which we all find ourselves seems, on the best accounts available, to be just shy of fourteen billion years old. The last three and a half billion years on earth have been the scene of a vast unfolding of all sorts of living things. This began very early with protein chains coalescing into single-celled organisms, these went on to evolve into multicellular organisms, plants, animals, every different kind of living creature. Something that belongs to that process, an integral, structural feature of that vast unfolding, is death.

Living things, in order to live, must kill other living things or at least outcompete them (killing them indirectly) in order to survive and pass on their genetic material to succeeding generations. Likewise, preceding generations (though there are some interesting exceptional cases here) die in various ways, making room for the next generation. Adaptations of creatures that make them capable of outcompeting others for limited resources or in the predation game results in the process of biological evolution. Charles Darwin called this process 'selection,' and though his heirs in the field of evolutionary biology have rightly complicated his ambitiously parsimonious picture, one thing remains true. Death plays an integral role in the evolution of species and so is bound up with the processes by which the whole panoply of living things has come to be. Death, it seems, belongs to the biological machinery of planet Earth.

We might scope this observation out even further, though. It's not just that successive generations of species must be done to death in order for all the kinds of creatures there are to come to be. It's also the case that we live in a dying cosmos. The

tick of the clock only counts down. At some point, entropy and decay will take its toll even on the life of the stars. The heat death of the cosmos—if not preceded by the second coming of Jesus Christ—will mean a barren, cold, lifeless universe. Utterly devoid of light and heat, the universe will also be necessarily devoid of life. But this process, too, that of decay and death at the cosmic level, belongs to the conditions for the possibility of life as we know it. It's the death of stars, the repeated deaths of stars over the course of billions of years, that created the heavier elements on the periodic table. Without entropic decay, then, there'd be no life, because there'd be none of its building blocks.

But, this doesn't sound like a problem, you might say. Why should we expect otherwise? Well, reflecting on this problem given the truths of the faith should bring you up short. It has me. This happened most explicitly when reflecting upon the problem of death in creation as it's portrayed in the Book of Wisdom. There we hear, "God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living. For he created all things so that they might exist; the generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them" (Wis 1:13-14). But how can it be that there's "no destructive poison in them" if death looms over all the processes that give us biologically differentiated life? That's the first aspect of the problem.

Its second aspect I'll illustrate by turning to St. Paul's letter to the Romans, where he says, "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). We might also look at his first letter to the Corinthians where he says, "The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Cor 15:26). Death is not only not made by the LORD, it also seems to be, in some way, caused by sin—the turning away from the LORD by rational creatures. Death's intimacy with sin means, on Paul's account, that death is an enemy in need of destruction. But, again, if

that's so, how is it that death also belongs to the functioning of the created order? The third aspect takes us back to the Book of Wisdom where we find something interesting. The LORD did not make death, we've already heard, but Wisdom tells us where it does come from. We hear, "through the devil's envy death entered the world" (Wis 2:24). But the problem is more complicated even than that, because in addition to the devil's envy, Scripture tells us, once again in Romans, "sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin" (Rom 5:12).

I hope you see this multifaceted problem clearly, as I've laid out. To sum up: We have reason to believe that death is integral to the processes that have brought about all the different kinds of life there are. At the same time, the LORD didn't make it. Not only did he not make it, it's an enemy of life, something caused by sin. And the origin of death by way of sin is attributed both to angelic and human sinfulness. In other words, we're in quite a muddle. How are we to make sense of all these data points together? Can we make them fit? That's the problem that informed this work from the start. And the following chapters are intended to chart a way through.

To make my way forward, I've looked backward. In order to answer questions posed to theology by the natural sciences, I've sought help in the Christian tradition. Reflection upon creation, and the Book of Genesis in particular, was a common occupation of the Church Fathers and the Scholastics alike. My inclination at the outset, was that they'd have resources to help me think through the problem of death. I wanted to do it in such a way that the answers I offered were answerable to the demands of Christian orthodoxy and also took what we now know about the cosmos by way of experimentation and observation seriously. I found support for this view of the

theological enterprise in Augustine's commentary on Genesis, *De Genesi ad litteram*.

The first chapter of my dissertation is a methodological one. There I show why it makes sense to look to Augustine on Genesis, what his unique (idiosyncratically so) reading of the text can teach us about how to read Scripture in light of discoveries about the natural world. In it, I also draw upon the philosophy of language, especially Ordinary Language Philosophy, to show that what Augustine does in *De Genesi ad litteram* makes sense and holds open significant possibilities for a contemporary theology of creation. Much of the first chapter is concerned with what it means for a reading of Scripture to be 'literal' and how metaphorical speech works.

The second chapter dives deeper into Augustine's theology of creation, especially as presented in *De Genesi ad litteram*. To do so, I also draw on Augustine's four other commentaries on the Book of Genesis. Two of these are found in works not primarily devoted to exegesis of Genesis, his *Confessiones* and *De civitate Dei*. Another is a standalone work, his earliest attempt to come to grips with the narrative of Genesis, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*. The last is an unfinished literal commentary on Genesis called, fittingly enough, *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus*. Augustine's theology of creation in *De Genesi ad litteram* builds on these other works. The heart of the second chapter is a study of Augustine's use of the word 'ratio' in *De Genesi ad litteram*. I flesh these thoughts out further by bringing both Augustine and Thomas Aquinas to bear on the divine ideas. This all results in some speculative suggestions about how best to understand what Augustine means by 'rationes seminales'—a key concept in his theology of creation. Augustine's treatment of the *rationes seminales* suggests they must be considered under at least two aspects: the order of eternity (which, for reasons I show

in chapter two, I'll call the *conditio*) and the order of time (which I'll call the *administratio*). This division between the two different kinds of discourse about creation—eternity talk and time talk—serve as an organizing principle throughout the remainder of the work.

Chapter three deals with some of the entailments of my interpretation of Augustine on the *rationes seminales*. It's here that I'll begin to look closely at the role of the angels and the angelic fall. What I want to determine is whether and how the angelic fall might be understood to damage the cosmos as a whole. Because I do take the effects of angelic sin to extend beyond damage done to the fallen angels themselves, I use this chapter to show just what kind of effects we could reasonably expect the angelic fall to have. Much of this draws explicitly on an Augustinian angelology, but also includes Jerome's and Gregory the Great's contributions to that subject. In this chapter there's also a considerable excursus on the problem of evil and the permission of sin. Getting clear on what the problem of evil is and is not, I then use my findings to clarify what we mean by the distinction between natural evils and voluntary evils. The upshot of this chapter is a theory of how the fall of the angels might affect the cosmos as a whole in all times and spaces. This theory opens up new possibilities for thinking about the unfolding the *rationes seminales* in the order of time.

The work I've done in chapter four is by far the most experimental. I felt a bit dissatisfied with my treatment of evil and the fall of the angels in chapter three. By disappointed, I don't mean I think those reflections are wrong so much as incomplete. I try to complete them, then, by drawing on some literary sources and putting them in conversation with the theological grammar I lay out in the first three chapters of the

work. In it, I use Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost* to show a bit more than I was able to tell in my treatment of the angelic fall in chapter three. This chapter concludes with some suggestions about angelic sin that identify its explicitly christological character. By cobbling together these literary sources with Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Francisco Suarez, Matthias Scheeben, and Jonathan Edwards on the angelic fall I try to give a more complete picture of angelic and human sin that will answer some questions while arousing a great many more.

The final chapter is about the working out of the LORD's creative act and the disobedience of his angelic creatures in the order of time. Here I show what the grammar I established in chapters one and two and applied to the order of eternity in chapters three and four can help us say about the order of time. The work here is meant explicitly to counter the tendency in contemporary theology to naturalize death. Most often this tendency takes the form of denying certain doctrines I take to be essential to Christian orthodoxy. This chapter builds upon the preceding four shows why Augustine's theology of creation leaves us better able to affirm both the positions taught definitively and repeatedly by the Church throughout its history and what the best scientific evidences teach about the natural world. It shows the value of taking very seriously the worry scientists, poets, and novelists have articulated, each in their own genres, about the problem of death. In particular, it's here that I get at the integral role death now plays in the shaping of the fallen cosmos. It does so by way of the LORD's providential care for all things, but not in such a way that we're unable to name death as an evil. The last chapter is also where I bring Darwin into conversation with some of his early Catholic reviewers. Critical and appreciative, these sources help show where the difficulties with

Darwin lie and also where they don't. By the end, I present some further speculations about the origin and nature of human beings. There I show how humans fit into this picture, where we stand in relation to nonhuman creaturely death, and what effects human sin has on the picture I've offered.

If I've done my job well, I'll have generated just as many—if not more—questions and points of departure as I have answers. This seems a good place to have ended up, as it's how Augustine understands his own *De Genesi ad litteram*. Looking back upon it in his *Retractationes* he says, “Many more questions than answers were found in that work, and of those that were found, fewer were certain, the rest having been put down so as to be looked into as they need to be.”¹ Not bad company in which to find oneself, certainly. With all this in mind, I offer this work to the Church, submitting to her judgment my speculations and suggestions, claiming all the errors as my own. I only hope it serves as a goad to further thinking and writing on the topic, including writing critical of what I say here.

¹ *retr.*, 2.50, CSEL 36:159-160: “*in quo opere multa quaesita quam inventa sunt et eorum, quae inventa sunt, pauciora firmata, certera vero ita posita, velut adhuc requirenda sint.*”

1. On the Literal Meaning of ‘Literal’

Reading Scripture *ad litteram* means attending to “the way the words run.”¹ This attention is rooted in a theological assumption. It assumes the words of Scripture are the LORD’s words. Being so, they manifest the will of the LORD to their reader. This assumption does not undermine the fact that the words of Scripture are human words, with human authors. Scripture is at once divine and human. Augustine affirms this non-competitive account of divine and human authorship in *De doctrina christiana*, a text that would inform the Western Church’s mode of scriptural interpretation for over a thousand years. Scripture is for salvation. For that reason, it’s translated and spread to the ends of the earth. In whatever language readers encounter it, Scripture brings them salvific knowledge. That knowledge is “nothing other than the thoughts and will of those who wrote it, and through them the will of God according to which we believe such writers

¹ I’m standing in a tradition of thinking about the plain sense Scripture and “the way the words run.” Like most of my best ideas, this one isn’t my own. I didn’t know—or couldn’t recall—where this way of putting what it might mean to read *ad litteram* came from, until my friend and mentor, Stanley Hauerwas, pointed out that I’d probably taken it from him. Sure enough, there it was in Stanley Hauerwas, “Why ‘The Way the Words Run’ Matters” in *Working with Words: On Learning to Speak Christian* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 108. But the lineage continues. Because as it turns out Stanley was there citing Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 32. Ayres, in turn, was citing Eugene Rogers “How the Virtues of an Interpreter Presuppose and Perfect Hermeneutics: The Case of Thomas Aquinas,” *The Journal of Religion*, 76 (1996), 64-81: 74. And in that piece, Rogers is translating “*litterae circumstantia*” from Thomas Aquinas’ *De potentia* (q.4, a.1, c., *post init.*). I assume the chain of inheritance does not end there. Thomas is nothing if not one to think with the tradition—receiving, puzzling over, and passing on the wisdom of ages.

have spoken.”² Attending to the text of Scripture *ad litteram*, to the way the words run, to where they take us when we run with them, is to attend to the LORD’s will.

In *De genesi ad litteram*, Augustine attempts to read the LORD’s will in the act of creation. He’s not only looking for what the LORD’s will is, but what that will does, what it accomplishes and how. Looking at how the words run doesn’t (necessarily) mean equating every passage of a scriptural narrative with a discrete, historical event. Here, Augustine’s *ad litteram* shows its distance from modern ‘literal’ readings of Scripture. We’ll return to this later, but I want to point out that a fundamentalist commitment to *the* ‘literal’ meaning of Genesis—if we take ‘literal’ to mean an unambiguous recounting of events in time and space—is a contrivance. It prizes the truth of particular readings of Scripture over the truth of Scripture itself. By contrast, Augustine gives the Church a faithful way of reading Scripture according to the letter. His investigations into the days of creation lead him to conclude that Genesis 1 is not a straightforward account of events in time. Rather, it’s a recounting of the LORD’s simultaneous and atemporal act of bringing into being all that is from nothing. To learn this is to learn something about the will of the LORD and the way that will is present in the created order.

I find Augustine’s claims about creation uniquely powerful and convincing, for reasons I’ll go on to explain. His way of approaching the Scriptures, no less than what he finds there, are important aspects upon which to allow our gaze to linger. So, I’ll begin by saying something more about how Augustine’s assumptions about Scripture have been

² *doct. chr.*, 2.5.6, PL 34:38: “*Scriptura divina...qua opportune potuit per orbem terrarum disseminari, per varias interpretum linguas longe lateque diffusa innotesceret gentibus ad salutem: quam legentes nihil aliud appetunt quam cogitationes voluntatemque illorum a quibus conscripta est, invenire, et per illas voluntatem Dei, secundum quam tales homines locutos credimus.*”

formalized as Catholic doctrine. From there, I'll show how those assumptions fund Augustine's decisions in reading Genesis 1 *ad litteram*. Augustine insists that his interpretation is not figural or allegorical, but *literal*. I'll show how this comports well with what Stanley Cavell, Donald Davidson, and Cora Diamond have to say about metaphor, interpretation, and meaning. But Augustine's interpretation of Genesis is not the only game in town. In fact, his is a startlingly nonpareil take on the first book of the Bible. With that in mind, I'll examine the relationship Thomas Aquinas has with *De genesi ad litteram* and the conclusions that relationship offers. The aim of this chapter is exegetical and critical. I intend to exposit Augustine's mature reflections on the Book of Genesis, and in doing so to present its enduring value to Christian reflection on creation. With that value established, I'll go on in subsequent chapters to extend his thought in directions not Augustine's own but certainly warranted and in some cases entailed by his positions. In this way, Augustine's thoughts on Genesis, and (often more importantly) his way of thinking them, will lay the foundations for a superstructure of my own theological speculations on the origins of death in the created order.

1.1 The Two Authors of Scripture

The Second Vatican Council formalized Augustine's non-competitive account of the two authors of Scripture, human and divine. In *Dei Verbum* you can find the twin affirmations of Augustine—the presence of the human will and divine will in the text of Scriptures—codified as Catholic doctrine.³ We must hold, *Dei Verbum* teaches, the books of the Old and New Testaments to be inspired texts. Because the Holy Spirit inspires them (we might say, by filling them with his own breath—*inspirante*) “they have God as

³ Cf. *doct. chr.*, 2.5.6.

author.”⁴ This must be taken together with the affirmation of the following section, where it’s explained that “God spoke in Sacred Scripture through humans in a human way.”⁵ For this reason, the interpreter of Scripture “ought to investigate attentively what the holy writers in fact intended to signify and God was pleased to manifest by their words.”⁶ Augustine’s own search for the literal meaning of the seven days of creation in Genesis 1 is mindful of Scripture’s human and divine authorship. It’s by investigating Scripture in this way that he discovers how to read the creation account of the first chapter of Genesis so that it coheres with the second chapter and with other explicit teachings in the biblical canon.⁷

Reading Genesis 1 *ad litteram*, Augustine concludes ‘creation’ names a timeless act of the LORD. The LORD’s creative work occurs in eternity, outside of all time. He begins the line of reasoning that leads to this conclusion in the opening chapters of the commentary. There he expounds the connection between Genesis 1 and the Prologue of the Gospel of John. The LORD’s first utterance in Genesis, “Let there be light” (Gn 1:3),

⁴ *Dei Verbum*, 3.11, DS §4215: “*Libros enim integros tam Veteris quam Novi Testamenti, cum omnibus eorum partibus, sancta Mater Ecclesia ex apostolica fide pro sacris et canonicis habet, propterea quod, Spiritu Sancto inspirante conscripti..., Deum habent auctorem, atque ut tales ipsi Ecclesiae traditi sunt.*”

⁵ *Dei Verbum*, 3.12, DS §4217: “*Deus in Sacra Scriptura per homines more hominum locutus sit.*”

⁶ *Dei Verbum*, 3.12, DS §4217: “*attente investigare debet, quid hagiographi reapse significare intenderint et eorum verbis manifestare Deo placuerit.*” Nicholas Lash has commented on the importance of not separating the “*quid*” of the holy writers’ intention from what “God was pleased to manifest to us by their words.” I’ve therefore left the translation somewhat awkward (excluding the second “what” that often appears before “God”). This preserves what’s clearer in the Latin, i.e., that we aren’t dealing with two things, ‘what’ the writers wrote and ‘what’ God intends to manifest. Rather, these levels of meaning are inextricably linked. For more on this see Nicholas Lash, “On Re-reading Vatican II,” in *Theology for Pilgrims* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 250-251.

⁷ The clearest scriptural warrant for this is Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 18:1, which in the Vulgate (new and old) reads “*Qui vivit in aeternum creavit omnia simul.*” Although standard scholarly practice is to divide the two creation narratives of Genesis 1-3 into the “priestly” and “yahwist” accounts, Augustine’s impulse is to harmonize them. He’s aware, of course, that they are distinct, but he takes this to indicate that the accounts have different purposes. It’s a theological not a compositional difficulty. Augustine harmonizes Genesis 1-3 by holding to the atemporality of God’s work in creating everything that is as described in the first chapter along with the temporal unfolding of that work in the second and third. Cf. *Gn. litt.*, 5.1.1-3.

is none other than God the Father speaking the Word of God himself. The Word of God is God, and so the Word is spoken in the LORD's own eternity. Because Augustine claims "Let there be light" is an eternal utterance, our manner of speech about this event (if we can call it an event) begins to break down. We can't get at the 'when' of it, because the word 'when' is already indexed to time. It's necessary to stipulate "the 'when' wherein something must be made is eternal in the Word of God, and 'then' it was made 'when' it must have been made in that Word, in whom there is no 'when' or 'sometime,' since that whole Word is eternal."⁸ From the start of the work he's bumping up against the boundaries of human speech about the LORD and the LORD's creative act. He'll return repeatedly to this difficulty throughout the commentary. What he thinks this indicates, however, is that the first verses of Genesis ought to incline the reader away from an interpretation that would take what follows in chapter one to be a straightforward description of a historical sequence of events in time.

As both Augustine and *Dei Verbum* make clear, the words of Scripture are human words given to humans so that they might understand the things of the LORD. The language in the opening chapter of Genesis uses spatiotemporal categories to describe something for which humans don't have categories, the LORD's utterance of the eternal Word.⁹ Talk of 'days,' therefore, shouldn't be taken to refer to twenty-four hour solar days. But Augustine doesn't simply dismiss that thought in his reading of Genesis.

⁸ *Gn. litt.*, 1.2.6, PL 34:248: "*Quod si ita est, aeternum est quod dixit Deus, Fiat lux; quia Verbum Dei Deus apud Deum, Filius unicus Dei, Patri coaeternus est: quamvis Deo hoc in aeterno Verbo dicente creatura temporalis facta sit. Cum enim verba sint temporis, cum dicimus, Quando, et aliquando; aeternum tamen est in Verbo Dei, quando fieri aliquid debeat: et tunc fit quando fieri debuisse in illo Verbo est, in quo non est quando et aliquando, quoniam totum illud Verbum aeternum est.*"

⁹ Edmund Hill, "Introduction" to *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, in *On Genesis*, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), 160.

Instead, he tries it on to see what it would be like were it the literal meaning of the text. It seems straightforward enough that talk of ‘day’ and ‘evening’ and ‘morning’ would lead an interpreter to think of the length of time we call a day. But reading the text this way causes more problems than it resolves. Augustine carefully points these out, one after another.¹⁰

Augustine continually asks questions of the text, and he’s not overly concerned with coming to an answer quickly or definitively. One of the most distinctive and attractive features of *De genesi* is Augustine’s willingness to let himself be led on by his questions without feeling the need to provide an irrefutable answer that would settle the matter of interpretation for all time. He also cautions fellow interpreters of the text of Scripture against any rashness or stubbornness in their own readings of the Bible.¹¹ If there’s a through line in this mature exegetical work of Augustine, it’s precisely the courage to dwell faithfully and humbly with Scripture. As he says of it in his *Retractationes*, “many questions were asked, fewer answers were found.”¹²

The questions do lead him to posit some answers about what it means for the LORD to create by speaking the Word. The answers are a long time coming, though he hints at them in the second book.¹³ It’s not until Book IV that Augustine returns to his initial line of questioning about the meaning of ‘day,’ ‘evening,’ and ‘morning.’ There he ventures to offer what he takes to be an entailment of reading the act of creation as an eternal speaking of the Word. He offers it first as a way to address questions surrounding

¹⁰ *Gn. litt.*, 1.9.17-1.10.21.

¹¹ *Gn. litt.*, 1.18.37, 20.40.

¹² *retr.*, 2.50, *CSEL* 36, pp. 159-160: “*in quo opere multa quaesita quam inventa sunt et eorum, quae inventa sunt, pauciora firmata, certera vero ita posita, velut adhuc requirenda sint.*”

¹³ Cf. *Gn. litt.*, 2.6.13.

what it means to say that the LORD ‘rests’ on the seventh day. And so he suggests, “maybe God just created one day, so that by its repetition many things called ‘days’ passed by and ran along, so there was no labor that created the seventh day, as it had been created, surely, by the seventh repetition of this single day?”¹⁴ He proceeds to give an account which expands upon his reflections on the nature of the light spoken into being in Genesis 1:3. The difficulties surrounding what that light might be—given there were as yet no heavenly bodies—led him to interpret that light as the beginning of the spiritual creation in Book I.¹⁵ Now, in the fourth book, he gives a fuller account of the movement from evening to morning and how the succession of days of Genesis 1 is to be read on those terms.

Augustine’s reading of these verses is ingenious and strikingly beautiful. The light the LORD creates when he says “Let there be light” is the spiritual light of the angels. The angelic creation is called into being and receives its form as created light by gazing upon and contemplating the uncreated light that is the LORD.¹⁶ In Book II, Augustine had already taken a textual cue from the “Let there be light, and light was made” of the first day in Genesis 1:3. Following this verse, Scripture proceeds directly to “And God saw that it was good” in Genesis 1:4. He finds here a hint, which leads him to conclude that this verse is an account of the creation of angels.

Unlike the other days of creation in Augustine’s text, which include a repetition of the LORD’s making, the verses for the first day do not run this way. So, for example,

¹⁴ *Gn. litt.*, 4.20.37, *PL* 34:310: “*An unum tantummodo diem creavit Deus, ut ejus repetitione multi, qui dicuntur dies, praeterirent atque transcurrerent; nec opus erat ut septimum diem crearet, quia illius quem creaverat, septima repetitio hunc utique faciebat?*”

¹⁵ *Gn. litt.*, 1.10.22, 17.32.

¹⁶ *Gn. litt.*, 4.22.39.

Genesis 1:9-10 in Augustine's text reads, "And God said, Let the water which is under heaven be collected into one collection, and let the dry land appear. And it was made thus." So far, so good, the same pattern as Genesis 1:3. But it continues, "And the water which was under heaven was collected into one collection, and dry land appeared. And God called the dry land earth and called the collections of waters he called sea." Only then do we hear, "And God saw that it was good."¹⁷ Augustine takes this particular detail, the intervening repetition of the creation after we hear "And it was made thus," to point out something distinctive. Specifically, its absence on the first day shows us that what's under discussion in the first day is rational, spiritual creation, i.e., the angels. In this instance, unlike the rest of created reality, enlightenment by the Word suffices to give them form. That is, the angels have the form of created Wisdom. Which Wisdom? The begotten Wisdom who is the Word being made in them and conforming them to that same Word. For the remainder of the created order, creation involves a threefold maneuver. First, creation exists in the LORD's begotten Wisdom, the Word of God. Next, and this is the force of "And it was made thus," it exists in the created wisdom of the angelic intellect. Then, and this is why the description of LORD's making is repeated, those things that exist in begotten Wisdom and angelic wisdom are created in their own nature. This whole threefold action is what the LORD then approves as good.¹⁸

Augustine picks back up with this discussion in Book IV to work out how the creation of things in the angelic intelligence relates to talk of 'evening' and 'morning' in

¹⁷ *Gn. litt.*, 2.11.24, PL 34:272: "Et dixit Deus, Congregetur aqua quae sub coelo est in congregationem unam, et appareat arida. Et factum est sic; et congregata est aqua quae sub coelo est in congregationem unam, et apparuit arida. Et vocavit Deus aridam terram, et congregationes aquarum vocavit mare. Et vidit Deus quia bonum est."

¹⁸ *Gn. litt.*, 2.8.16-19.

the succession of days. On his reading, these terms mark a kind of back and forth movement in angelic contemplation. It's an oscillation between contemplating themselves and the rest of the created order and contemplating the LORD himself. Contemplation of creaturely realities in themselves, whether angelic or otherwise, corresponds to "evening" knowledge. Contemplation of those created realities in the LORD corresponds to "morning" knowledge. Augustine explains it in this way:

So if that light which was created first is not bodily but spiritual, it was made after the darkness where it's understood that it turned from its own formlessness toward the creator and was formed. And so after the evening, morning was made when, after understanding of its own proper nature (that by which it is not God), it brings itself back to praise the light which is itself God, of which it is formed by contemplation. And because the other creatures, which are made below itself, are not made without its knowledge, certainly for that reason the same day is repeated in each place. So, by that day's repetition as many days may be made as there are kinds of created things to be distinguished, to be finished by the perfection of the number six. The evening of the first day, then, is also knowledge of itself, that it is not what God is. On the other hand, the morning after this evening, by which the one day is concluded and the second day begun, is its turning, by which it was created, to the praise of the creator, and that it might take into itself from the Word of God knowledge of the creature which it made after itself, that is, the firmament. That firmament is made first in its knowledge when it is said, *And thus it was made*, and following that the firmament in its own nature, which was made when just after it's added by saying, *And thus it was made, And God made the firmament*. Then the evening of that light comes about, when it knows the firmament itself in its own nature, and not in the Word of God as before. Since it is a lesser knowledge, it is rightly signified by the name of 'evening.'¹⁹

¹⁹ *Gn. litt.*, 4.22.39, *PL* 34:311-312: "ut si lux illa quae primitus creata est, non corporalis sed spiritualis est, sicut post tenebras facta est ubi intelligitur a sua quadam informitate ad Creatorem conversa atque formata; ita et post vesperam fiat mane, cum post cognitionem suae propriae naturae, qua non est quod Deus, refert se ad laudandam lucem, quod ipse Deus est, cujus contemplatione formatur. Et quia caeterae creaturae, quae infra ipsam fiunt, sine cognitione ejus non fiunt, propterea nimirum idem dies ubique repetitur, ut ejus repetitione fiant tot dies, quoties distinguuntur rerum genera creatarum, perfectione senarii numeri terminanda: ut vespera primi diei sit etiam sui cognitio, non se esse quod Deus est; mane autem post hanc vesperam, quo concluditur dies unus, et inchoatur secundus, conversio sit ejus, qua id quod creata est, ad laudem referat Creatoris, et percipiat de Verbo Dei cognitionem creaturae quae post ipsam fit, hoc est firmamenti: quod in ejus cognitione fit prius cum dicitur, Et sic est factum; deinde in natura ipsius firmamenti, quod conditur, cum additur etiam postea, jam dicto, Et sic est factum, Et fecit Deus firmamentum. Deinde fit vespera illius lucis, cum ipsum firmamentum, non in Verbo Dei sicut ante, sed in ipsa ejus natura cognoscit: quae cognitio quoniam minor est, recte vesperae nomine significatur."

This turning back and forth between knowing things in themselves and knowing them in the Word issues in the succession of the days of creation. It does this by way of *repetition* of the “one day” of Genesis 1:5, and does not indicate a sequence of events in time and space.²⁰

Augustine goes on to insist that this reading of the six days of creation is *not* a figural or allegorical interpretation.²¹ It is instead a reading *ad litteram*. Attending to how the words run in this text pulls the reader along toward the edges of words. This doesn’t mean these words are signifying something by association, something other than they’re saying. But how exactly do we go about speaking of the bringing into being all that is from nothing? You’d expect language to get a bit dicey here. We should not assume, however, based on what’s said of the spiritual light in Genesis 1 that we are “to come to the understanding of ‘day’ and ‘evening’ and ‘morning’ figurally and allegorically, only not properly.”²² The very nature of the object of the discussion, the LORD and how the LORD creates, means we ought to *expect* it to be an odd use of language. This use of language “is certainly different than the idiom in which we speak of everyday, corporeal light, but not such that here’s the proper and there’s the figural.”²³ Since this might all seem like a very odd way to speak of literal interpretation of Scripture, I’ll now turn to what some contemporary philosophers have to say on the concept of metaphor. This will help support Augustine’s contention that his reading is neither allegorical nor figural.

²⁰ *Gn. litt.*, 5.3.6.

²¹ *Gn. litt.*, 4.28.45.

²² *Gn. litt.*, 4.28.45, *PL* 34:314-315: “*Nec quisquam arbitretur, illud quod dixi de luce spirituali...non jam proprie, sed quasi figurate atque allegorice convenire ad intelligendum diem et vesperam et mane.*”

²³ *Gn. litt.*, 4.28.45, *PL* 34:315: “*sed aliter quidem quam in hac consuetudine quotidianae lucis hujus et corporalis; non tamen tanquam hic proprie, ibi figurate.*”

1.2 Excursus on Metaphor, Interpretation, and Meaning

In a section of *The Claim of Reason* called “The allegory of words; interpretation; seeing something as something,” Stanley Cavell works through the concept of metaphor.²⁴ He’s discussing how we speak about mind and soul. Something about ‘mind’ and ‘soul’ makes us feel as though much of what we say about them is metaphorical. And this would seem to be so. He provides a few examples: “grasping an idea,” “holding a belief,” “searching one’s memory.”²⁵ But what does it mean to say that these concepts are metaphorical? Cavell digs deeper:

If someone says “The mind has mountains”, I will not understand unless I know that this is a metaphor (i.e., that it is meant metaphorically), and not because its topic is the mind. It would not be quite right to say that I must *take* it metaphorically, because it is not quite clear how else I might take it. Sometimes the matter is not so clear. If I tell you that I tripped him up or waved a red flag at him I may not mean you to take me literally. How then?²⁶

We discover, then, something about metaphor, and about *taking* something metaphorically. At the same time, Cavell has uncovered something important about its relation to literal meaning. Saying I *take* something metaphorically presumes that it would be possible to take it some other way, for the statement to be put otherwise. The example “The mind has mountains” is apt because it’s not clear what one would have to say to convey the literal meaning of this phrase. On the other hand, it’s clearer where the difference lies between being “tripped up” literally or metaphorically.

²⁴ Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 354-370.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 361.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 361-362.

But Cavell further complicates this picture of metaphor. At this point he's commenting upon an idea that's been prompted by Wittgenstein's comments on 'private language' and 'aspect-seeing.' He says this: "The idea of the allegory of words is that human expressions, the human figure, to be grasped, must be *read*."²⁷ Is this a metaphor? For what exactly? "Surely," Cavell asks further on, "there can be no doubt that *that* is merely a metaphor? But I ask again: What is this idea of metaphor? The suggestion seems to be that my expression must be translated into others, even perhaps *reduced* to others."²⁸ What are we asking for when we ask for the literal meaning of a metaphor? It seems as though there might be a demand that we speak more plainly. It's clear though, from Cavell's emphatic "*reduced*," that there's a danger lurking in demands for translation. The danger is that translation into the literal from the metaphorical will miss something. We'll fail to mean what we've properly meant to say.

It may be that translation isn't the right way to put it. Cavell tries on "paraphrase" instead. "Certainly," he says, "it is essential to an expression's counting as a metaphor that it *can* be paraphrased. It is equally essential that the paraphrase not be treated as a reduction but rather as a certain sort of instruction."²⁹ Instruction rather than reduction, the aim is not to show you what I *really* meant by my words. Extending Cavell, I would say "instruction" includes the concept of invitation. My paraphrases are not for my benefit, but for yours. Or, rather, they are for *our* benefit. They are a kind of training in the use of the metaphor, so that you might understand how it is used, and so understand me. As he put it much earlier in the work, "our ability to project appropriately is a

²⁷ Ibid., 356.

²⁸ Ibid., 363. Emphasis original.

²⁹ Ibid.

criterion for our having learned a word.”³⁰ ‘Projection’ here means a certain kind of know-how. It’s knowing how to use a word in different contexts, including metaphorical ones.³¹ Part of learning a language is learning how to go on in this way. As Cavell says, “After a while we are expected to know when the words are appropriately used in further contexts.”³² The need for instruction in a metaphor marks a boundary of our common use of language. But the possibility of instruction means boundaries like these aren’t static.

Looking back to Cavell’s “allegory of words” we find him saying something more about the idea that human expressions and the human figure must be read. It’s not enough to say that by ‘read’ he means that “it can be interpreted, understood.”³³ It’s not enough because “the idea of reading seems to tell me what *kind* of understanding or interpretation I might aspire to.”³⁴ Here we encounter the danger of reduction to paraphrase head on. Cavell doesn’t just mean to say that the human figure can be interpreted or understood. He means to say that it will be interpreted or understood *by reading it*. The way someone will come to understanding is related to the interpretation of texts. To figure out what the word ‘read’ calls out, “what I need is not a paraphrase or translation of the word ‘read’,

³⁰ Ibid., 169.

³¹ In this earlier discussion Cavell is commenting on a remark from Wittgenstein’s *Blue Book*: “we learn words in *certain* contexts.” Cavell elaborates, “This means, I take it, both that we do not learn words in *all* the contexts in which they could be used (what, indeed, would that mean?) and that not every context in which a word is used is one in which the word *can* be learned (e.g., contexts in which the word is used metaphorically)” (Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 168-169). This would seem, on the face of it, to argue against what I’m saying about training in metaphorical usage. Isn’t he saying we can’t learn how to use these words metaphorically in the way I’m describing? But this would, in fact, render the whole concept of “projection” nonsensical. The point is not that we cannot learn how to deploy words in metaphorical contexts, but that we cannot learn all of the contexts in which a word might be used metaphorically *in advance*. Cavell’s use of “projection” points to the futurity of words. They might come to mean something that it’s not entirely obvious they could mean at present. Hence the impossibility of learning “every context.”

³² Cavell, 169.

³³ Ibid., 363.

³⁴ Ibid.

but an account of why it is that *that* word is the one I want.”³⁵ That kind of an account involves an initiation into a form of life, a form of life in which it makes sense to say that human expressions and figures can and ought to be read. This kind of initiation is integral to our life with words. As Cavell explains, “You cannot use words to do what we do with them until you are initiated in the forms of life which give those words the point and shape they have in our lives.”³⁶ The world, the life, and the words that go with them are a package deal.

Another, perhaps more controversial, way to understand how metaphor functions comes from Donald Davidson. His position is coordinate with the one proposed by Cavell, but he pushes the position further. The insight is this: the meaning of a metaphor is its literal sense, and only its literal sense.³⁷ He contrasts this with theories that claim an additional, metaphorical sense attributable to words used in certain circumstances.³⁸ Davidson canvasses the various manifestations of this initial error of attributing additional senses, dismissing each in turn. We cannot account for metaphorical uses by attributing their sense simply to the extension of a word in a new context.³⁹ This might seem to run afoul of Cavell’s interpretation of Wittgensteinian ‘projection,’ but I think not.⁴⁰ Metaphorical use also cannot be attributed to ambiguity of meaning, as it’s not

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 184.

³⁷ Donald Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean,” in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 245.

³⁸ Ibid., 246-247.

³⁹ Ibid., 248.

⁴⁰ What I’ve already said above on Cavell and ‘projection’ is principally concerned with the possibility of the *use* of a word in new, metaphorical contexts. Davidson’s disagreement with theories of metaphor that rely on “extended meaning” deals with something different. Extending the meaning of a word occurs when a word can apply in a *proper* sense to whatever it is we’re talking about. In this case, “there is no difference between metaphor and the introduction of a new term into our vocabulary: to make a metaphor is to murder

always the case that metaphors are ambiguous. And of course, not all ambiguity is metaphorical, it may simply be a double entendre.⁴¹ Related to the ambiguity approach is to suppose a word or words to have both a literal and a figurative meaning at the same time. But in this case we encounter something similar to the extension of meaning, and then there's nothing interesting to say about the difference between live and dead metaphors.⁴² Finally, we end up with the position Cavell exposes as a confusion, where the "figurative meaning of a metaphor is the literal meaning of the corresponding simile."⁴³ The problem with this is principally that it makes the meaning of the metaphor too easily discernible and accessible.⁴⁴ This is Cavell's danger of reduction to paraphrase all over again.

How, then, are we to take Davidson's assertion that the meaning of a metaphor is its literal meaning? And why would this be controversial in our discussion of Scripture? I'll take the second question first. What makes his point controversial is his explanation of metaphor in terms of "patent falsity."⁴⁵ Davidson explains that this is the usual case with metaphor. Metaphorical sentences are most often just clearly false in their literal sense. In that case, "the ordinary meaning in the context of use is odd enough to prompt

it" (ibid., 248-249.). An example of a dead metaphor (murdered or found dead of natural causes, in this case it makes no difference) makes this point clearer. Davidson looks at the cases of rivers and bottles (ibid., 252.). Both have mouths, and they have them literally. These are dead metaphors, supposing that is, that rivers and bottles did not always properly have them, but rather had them metaphorically at one time. The same might be supposed of heads of lettuce, eyes of needles, spines of books, etc. The point is, that no one thinks of these uses as metaphorical. They are properly said of all these things. This differs from Cavellian 'projection' in that the possibility of the use of a word in a new context does not hinge on that word being properly attributable to the subject under discussion. When Chaucer says, "fields have eyes and woods have ears," it's not necessary—the metaphor would be dead if it were—for fields to have eyes or for woods to have ears. Compare the fields' eyes to the needles' eyes, and mark the difference.

⁴¹ Ibid., 249-250.

⁴² Ibid., 250-252.

⁴³ Ibid., 253.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 254.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 258.

us to disregard the question of literal truth.”⁴⁶ It’s important that Davidson is here relying on a distinction between the meaning of a word (or words) and the use of those words.⁴⁷ Davidson also distinguishes the metaphor from the lie. But in doing so, he only treats adequately, to my mind, one part of the equation. In the lie, he rightly clarifies, the key is “not that what you say be false but that you think it false.”⁴⁸ He does not go on to say what I take to be the obverse of this statement, which is that in metaphor it is key that what you say be patently false but that you think it true. Or, in the case of a patently true metaphor—Davidson gives the example “Business is business”—you think it a truth worth saying.⁴⁹ I suspect the idiosyncrasies of Davidson’s own theory of truth keep him from wanting to say this explicitly. But I think it’s both an entailment of his position and necessary if we’re to apply his theory of metaphor to our discussion of Augustine and Scripture.

Are we, then, to take it that Scripture is in the habit of proposing patent falsehoods that we’re to take as truths? Maybe we are. “The LORD is my rock, and my

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 247. Again, it may seem we’ve run afoul of a Wittgensteinian approach to language, and so to metaphor. But again, I think not. The likeliest candidate for the relevant disjunction between Davidson and Wittgenstein would be §43 of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, the locus classicus for the “meaning is use” theory of language. But to talk of a theory of language is already to have made a mistake when reading Wittgenstein. Rather, we must take Wittgenstein’s advice that we “look and see” both what he’s written here and to what he’s pointing us (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), §66.). On what he’s written, it’s clear that the observation is not so simple as to simply ascribe to him a theory of “meaning as use.” As he says, “For a *large* class of cases of the employment of the word ‘meaning’ – though not for *all* – this word can be explained in this way: the meaning of a word is its use in the language” (ibid., §43, emphasis original.). As to what he’s pointing us, it’s clear that this is not a *theory* at all, but rather an empirical observation. It just is the case that much of the time when we talk about meaning we can explain it by way of use. I take Davidson’s drawing upon the still relevant, if attenuated, distinction between meaning and use is an example of just this descriptive drive. In metaphor, Davidson has located one of the cases of employment where meaning and use *aren’t* the same thing.

⁴⁸ Davidson, 258.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

fortress, and my deliverer, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold” (Ps 18:2). I don’t take it we ought to think ‘rock,’ ‘fortress,’ ‘shield,’ ‘horn,’ or ‘stronghold’ are properly predicable of the LORD. These are metaphorical uses that are patently false, and yet we think them true, we affirm them as true. The metaphors in these cases only do their work because they call to mind the literal sense of ‘rock,’ ‘fortress,’ etc. So, what kind of truth are we dealing with in this case? Clearly it’s not the same thing we mean when we call a proposition true. Instead, we can relate the sense in which the metaphors we utter are true to a different, but common, usage of the word ‘true.’ In addition to characterizing propositions, we also use the word ‘true’ to describe relationships between persons.

An example of the use of ‘true’ to describe human relationships can be found in the Catholic marriage rite. In it, both groom and bride must give their consent to the marriage, and a key element of this is a promise to be true. So, each in turn, they say, “I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health.”⁵⁰ In this context, we shouldn’t take “I promise to be true” to mean “I promise to only utter true propositions.” Rather, this is something more like a promise of faithfulness of one person to another. And because the sacrament of matrimony is understood by the Church “to signify and share in the mystery of the unity and fruitful love that exists between Christ and his Church,”⁵¹ it also makes sense to look to the person of Christ to understand further what the promise to be true might mean.

⁵⁰ International Commission on English in the Liturgy ICEL, “Rite of Marriage,” in *The Rites of the Catholic Church* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990), no. 25, p. 727.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, no. 1, p. 720.

The promise to be true in the context of matrimony is closely related to Jesus' self-identification as the truth. When Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6) he's revealing to us something about what truth is. As Bruce Marshall explains, "if Jesus Christ is the truth, then truth is borne, not only or chiefly by sentences and beliefs, but by a person. More than that: if the New Testament is right, then in the end the truth *is* a person."⁵² This understanding results in a more rather than less expansive concept of truth precisely because it's not only sentences that may be true, but persons as well. Persons will be true when they are conformed to the person who *is* the truth, Jesus Christ. This conformity makes human persons into "Christ's icons," and as such they may "be seen as truth bearers."⁵³ This relationship with truth is not just a matter of the conformity of the intellect but of the whole self. "As whole selves, they can become 'true' when the action by which the triune God enables them to have the relevant true beliefs brings about their conformity to the risen Christ."⁵⁴ It's in this sense of 'true' that we should take the promise to be true in the wedding vows. The promise is then best understood to be one of mutual conformity to the truth of Christ and so to one another as his icons and truth bearers.

But what does this all have to do with the truth of metaphors? I'd suggest, provisionally, that a metaphor is true when I utter it in good faith, with the intention of sharing something with you. What's being shared is a particular vision of the world. This will be the case even if the sentence I speak is patently false. In this sense, what I'm sharing when I share a metaphor is something of myself. Encounters with metaphor, their

⁵² Bruce Marshall, *Trinity and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 242.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 268.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

particular brand of patent falsehood, are encounters with persons. And persons, as we've discovered, can be true. What makes the metaphor true is not the sense of the sentence, but rather the intention with which a person speaks it.

For this reason I find a number of commonalities between this way of putting things and the way Cora Diamond has described Wittgenstein's use of the term 'nonsense' (*Unsinn*) in his early and late work. A key difference between her position Davidson's would likely lie in the characterization of metaphorical sentences given so far. Davidson's description of metaphorical sentences as "patently false" could be reasonably said to run afoul of Diamond's reading of Wittgenstein on 'nonsense,' especially as it's used in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. For Wittgenstein, Diamond explains, "if a sentence makes no sense, *no* part of it can be said to mean what it does in some other sentence which does make sense—any more than a word can be said to mean something in isolation."⁵⁵ Metaphor would seem to be a case in point for this understanding of nonsense. But I think there are grounds for taking what Diamond and Davidson have said to be compatible on this point.

If we take Davidson's adverbial modifier 'patently'—as in "patently false"—to distinguish the sort of falsehood he means from other kinds, we can connect it with Diamond's 'nonsense.' There remains, however, one further obstacle. For Davidson, metaphors have a literal meaning, albeit a false one. The metaphor's literal meaning is given by the literal meaning of the words that comprise the metaphor. On Diamond's view, though, if the sentence is nonsense, the words there don't mean what they do

⁵⁵ Cora Diamond, "What Nonsense Might Be," in *The Realistic Spirit* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991), 100.

elsewhere. Except they sort of do. In another essay, Diamond shows that the sorts of images a word conjures up for us when we hear a nonsense sentence don't do anything to change the logic of the sentence. They don't take it from nonsense to sense. But, "it is exactly those familiar mental accompaniments of the sentence that may give us the illusion that we mean something by a sentence which contains some familiar word, even though the word is not being used in its familiar logical role, and has not been given a new assignment of meaning."⁵⁶ Nonsense sentences can trade on these "mental accompaniments," and here's the part that's particularly interesting for this investigation, "in the service of an imaginative understanding of persons."⁵⁷ Nonsense sentences, and our imaginative engagement with them, might help us to see others and the world as those others see it. In this way, I find Diamond's 'nonsense' and Davidson's 'patent falsehood' to be in the same ballpark even if not identical.

To return to Davidson, we find him asserting something close to this. Metaphors are distinguished not by their meaning, but by their use.⁵⁸ What the various theories of metaphor Davidson dismissed were in fact up to was describing the effects metaphors have on us, even as they aimed to "provide a method for deciphering an encoded content."⁵⁹ We've come full circle, then, to the Cavellian description of metaphor. Like Cavell, Davidson thinks there is a role for paraphrase. It's important to note, however, that "what we attempt in 'paraphrasing' a metaphor cannot be to give its meaning, for

⁵⁶ Cora Diamond, "Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London: Routledge, 2000), 159.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁵⁸ Davidson, 259.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 261.

that lies on the surface; rather we attempt to evoke what the metaphor brings to our attention.”⁶⁰ And so we return to the idea of initiation or invitation.

Metaphor brings something to our attention, helps us to notice something, by way of a literal statement.⁶¹ Usually, Davidson has shown, that statement is patently false. We might also follow Diamond and call this statement nonsense. Those patent falsehoods or nonsense sentences are frequently in need of elucidation, and this task is performed by paraphrase. The paraphrase is not meant to replace the metaphor, but to help the reader to see what effects the metaphor might produce.⁶² As Davidson puts it, “The legitimate function of so-called paraphrase is to make the lazy or ignorant reader have a vision like that of the skilled critic.”⁶³ This is perhaps a bit more condescending than strictly necessary to get the point across, but the principle behind it is right.⁶⁴ We might put that principle this way: metaphors will not be perlucidly clear to every reader or hearer, but those for whom it is have the capacity (perhaps the responsibility?) to share that vision with others. The aim of paraphrase in those instances is not to replace the metaphor, but to help other readers see word and world differently.

1.3 Augustine, Interpretation, and Initiation

With these thoughts on metaphor and interpretation in mind, what can we make of Augustine’s reading of Genesis 1? Augustine repeatedly warns his readers against taking him to be offering the definitive explanation of the text.⁶⁵ At the same time, he clearly

⁶⁰ Ibid., 262.

⁶¹ Ibid., 263.

⁶² Ibid., 264.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ And, as we’ll see, it’s not far from what Augustine thinks to be the case of interpretations of Scripture and the difficulty some may have in grasping them.

⁶⁵ Cf. *Gn. litt.*, 1.18.37, 1.20.40-41, 4.28.45, 5.1.1, 7.28.43 *inter alia*.

thinks what he's offering is an interpretation that tells us something true about the LORD and his creation. But who is it for? In Book VIII, as he is discussing the narrative of Genesis 2, he tells us outright: "You see, I am speaking to those who obey the authority of these writings [Scripture]. Because some of them want to understand paradise not properly, but figuratively."⁶⁶ He also tells us explicitly who it's not for:

But for those who are completely opposed to these writings, we have had it out with them elsewhere and otherwise. Yet as much possible in this work of ours, we also aim to defend the literal meaning (*ad litteram*) of these writings. In this way those who, moved not by reason but by a stubborn or dimwitted mind, refuse to believe these things may find no reason at all by which they could show them to be false.⁶⁷

We have, then, evidence of two purposes. The first tells us something about what a text like this might do for a Christian, or at the very least someone who grants the authority of Scripture. The second, apologetic, purpose is interesting, but at this point I'll concentrate on Augustine's explicit audience. It's here that we find resonances with our contemporary philosophers' takes on metaphor and the interpreter's task.

Augustine, I'm suggesting, understands his reading of the text of Genesis 1, which I've sketched above, as a form of training. The language of the first chapter of the Bible is metaphorical, but in such a way that it doesn't make sense to say that we ought to *take* it metaphorically. What would it mean to say that I ought to *take* the ascription of 'evening' and 'morning' to the 'one day' of creation metaphorically before the lights are created in the heavens? Augustine's point on this is the same as Cavell's, "it is not quite

⁶⁶ *Gn. litt.*, 8.1.4., PL 34:373: "Ad eos quippe loquor, qui auctoritatem harum Litterarum sequuntur: eorum enim quidam non proprie, sed figurate paradisum intelligi volunt."

⁶⁷ *Gn. litt.*, PL 34:373: "Nam qui omnino adversantur his litteris, alias cum eis atque aliter egimus: quanquam et haec in hoc ipso opere nostro, quantum valemus, ita defendamus ad litteram, ut qui non rationabiliter moti, propter animum pervicacem vel hebetem, credere ista detrectant, nullam tamen inveniant rationem unde falsa esse convincant."

clear how else I might take it.”⁶⁸ As Augustine says himself, the language in the opening chapter of Genesis employs an unusual idiom, “but not such that here’s the proper and there’s the figural.”⁶⁹ The language is clearly metaphorical, but it’s not for that reason exclusively allegorical or figural.

Part of what the concept of metaphor helps us to understand is the metaphorical quality of so much of language. The language of Scripture is no exception. We can take as an example Jesus saying, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn 2:19). One way to hear this would be—as John tells us the crowd did (Jn 2:20)—as referring to the temple in which they were all standing. But John goes on to provide the reader with a piece of instruction about this saying, “But he spoke of the temple of his body” (Jn 2:21). Would it then be right to call John 2:19 allegorical or figural? Surely it’s metaphorical, even prophetic, but that doesn’t mean it was ever referring to anything other than the death and resurrection of the Christ. We might instead call it a statement in need of a context. After the resurrection, the disciples find a proper one, “When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken” (Jn 2:22). If I’m right to connect the thoughts of Augustine with those of Cavell, Davidson, and Diamond on metaphorical usages of language, then Augustine is providing the instruction necessary for “those who obey the authority of these writings.”⁷⁰ That instruction trains readers how the words of Genesis are being projected into a metaphorical context. Training readers in

⁶⁸ Cavell, 362.

⁶⁹ *Gn. litt.*, 4.28.45, *PL* 34:315: “*non tamen tanquam hic proprie, ibi figurate.*”

⁷⁰ *Gn. litt.*, 8.1.4., *PL* 34:373: “*qui auctoritatem harum Litterarum sequuntur.*”

this way is meant to show them how to grasp the impact of these words, to attend to their effects.

I take Augustine to have noticed some features in the text of Scripture that push him toward a Davidsonian position on the words of the first chapter of Genesis. Reading him in this way works best when we take Augustine's interrogation of some of the other interpretive strategies for Genesis 1 as a *reductio ad absurdum*. The *reductio* begins just after his first suggestion that the 'light' in Genesis 1:3 ought to be understood as spiritual light.⁷¹ He begins to interrogate his own proposal of timeless creation saying, in effect, "Look, it says right there in Genesis the creation of light took 'one day.' Of course this is dealing with creation in time."⁷² He then goes on to say in response, with characteristically biting irony, how very extraordinary it is (*permirabile est*) that the LORD might timelessly utter "Let there be light" but it take such a long time to make it. Or perhaps the length of the day should be ascribed to the dividing of light and darkness?⁷³ Well, if not that, then perhaps that the LORD spread out the speaking of the syllables over an entire day.⁷⁴ But maybe we ought to suppose the sun had to set and rise again for there to be a whole day, completed on the following morning. Of course in that case, we'd have to suppose that the LORD was situated in some particular spot on the earth so that a twenty-four hour day might pass. Otherwise, of course, we'll run afoul of those who know the earth is round and so it is always day somewhere even when it is night elsewhere.⁷⁵ This initial line of questions culminates in the rhetorical recognition

⁷¹ *Gn. litt.*, 1.9.17.

⁷² *Gn. litt.*, 1.10.18.

⁷³ *Gn. litt.*, 1.10.19.

⁷⁴ *Gn. litt.*, 1.10.20.

⁷⁵ *Gn. litt.*, 1.10.21.

that the whole line of thinking about light is “a monstrous thing to suppose” given there was “not yet a sun.”⁷⁶ He goes on like this for quite a while, but I won’t belabor the point.⁷⁷

What looking at Augustine’s rhetorical strategy is meant to show is how he sees the words of Scripture in this chapter of Genesis as related to Davidson’s thoughts on metaphor, literal meaning, and patent falsehoods. That is, if we’re convinced by the language of Genesis 1 that what we’re dealing with are solar days (because, well, that’s what it seems to say) we’ll miss that the point of the text is to elicit particular effects from the reader. A further connection with Davidson’s thoughts on metaphor lies in the role of the interpreter. Metaphors, like Scripture, and the metaphors in Scripture, require interpretation. Those who are competent to do so, who’ve seen and understood an aspect the metaphor conveys, can help others to see that way too. If the truth of metaphor can be understood to be true not as propositions are true but as people are true, what the good interpreter of metaphor helps you to see is the intention of the author in uttering it. When that author is the author of Scripture, what the interpreter helps you to see is the will of the LORD. Augustine’s reading of the first chapter of Genesis is meant to show you something about the LORD’s intentions. The truth of Scripture is preserved, on the reading I’ve provided above, by distinguishing between the metaphor’s meaning and its use. If you’re intent on getting to know the *persons*—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who used the metaphors of Scripture, and used them for our benefit, you can attend to the effects those metaphors are meant to produce in you. Those effects will be produced by,

⁷⁶ *Gn. litt.*, 1.10.21, *PL* 34:254: “*Sed hoc monstruosum est suspicari. Quid quod etiam sol nondum erat?*” “*Sed hoc monstruosum est suspicari. Quid? Quod etiam sol nondum est.*”

⁷⁷ I think there’s a case to be made for the *reductio* running all the way through *Gn. litt.*, 1.17.35.

yet separable from, the meaning of the metaphors themselves. Augustine's attempts to initiate us into a way of seeing and so into a form of life, bring about an awareness of these effects in just the way a skilled reader might help us to grasp a metaphor that has eluded us.

But what if Augustine's words still ring hollow? It's possible that someone will not or cannot accept his instruction on Genesis just as it's also possible for someone to refuse Cavell's paraphrases of his allegory of words. In this case the boundary of words and worlds remains in place. The invitation refused, the reader inevitably remains outside. What's been marked out here is a disagreement in *judgment*. In remark 242 of his *Philosophical Investigations*, Ludwig Wittgenstein explains the problem this way: "It is not only agreement in definitions, but also (odd as it may sound) agreement in judgements that is required for communication by means of language."⁷⁸ Toril Moi explains disagreement in judgments by appealing to Wittgenstein's notion of "criteria" in her book *Revolution of the Ordinary*. Our disagreements in judgment make it evident that we do not "*share criteria* for when and how to apply concepts."⁷⁹ That is, we don't accept or can't see how a particular word can be projected into a new context of use, in this case, the metaphorical context of Genesis 1. Augustine clearly recognizes this possibility. So while he's happy to offer instruction to those who want to grasp the truth of Scripture *ad litteram*, he also doesn't suppose that everyone will be able to understand what he's on about.

⁷⁸ Wittgenstein, §242, p. 94.

⁷⁹ Toril Moi, *Revolution of the Ordinary: Literary Studies after Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 224. Emphasis original.

Augustine doesn't think disagreement in judgments, failure to share criteria, on the interpretation of Genesis 1 means consignment to the outer darkness. In Book V of *De genesi*, where he's summarizing the findings of his investigation into the days of creation, he explains that it should now be possible to understand how the text of Genesis speaks of a simultaneous creation. The "one day" of Genesis 1:5 is repeated timelessly in seven iterations to create all things. "If you can," he says, "grasp it. If you can't yet," well then,

leave these things to be discerned by those who can. You, on the other hand, may make progress by walking more slowly, with Scripture not deserting you in your infirmity but keeping a motherly pace alongside you. She speaks in such a way that she jeers at the proud by her height, frightens the attentive by her depth, feeds the grown by her verity, and suckles the little ones by her courtesy.⁸⁰

Scripture is the agent in this passage. It works to chastise us if we've begun to think too highly of ourselves and our own comprehension of all that's contained within it. Scripture also gently leads along those who are not *yet* able to sound her depths. She takes us by the hand, as our mother, to show us the way and nourishes us according to our capacity. But supposing we do take ourselves to have grasped, ever so tentatively and cautiously, what Augustine is offering, what then? What are the implications of Genesis 1 narrating the all-at-once creation of everything that is not the LORD? What does it mean for angels, the heavens, earth, plants, animals, and even humans to be created by the LORD's eternal utterance? For the moment, these questions will have to be left unanswered,

⁸⁰ *Gn. litt.*, 5.3.6, PL 34:323: "*si possis, apprehendas; si nondum possis, haec relinquo conspicienda valentibus: tu autem cum Scriptura non deserente infirmitatem tuam, et materno incessu tecum tardius ambulante proficias; quae sic loquitur, ut altitudine superbos irrideat, profunditate attentos terreat, veritate magnos pascit, affabilitate parvulos nutriet.*"

suspended at the corner of our vision as we attempt to puzzle out just how unique Augustine's read of Genesis 1 is.

1.4 Augustine's Interpretation as Sui Generis

It is worth noting the radicality of Augustine's interpretation of the six days of creation. Insisting on the simultaneous creation of all things is a decision he makes for a number of theological and scriptural reasons. His distinctive reading of the creation account in Genesis 1 flows out of his conviction that 'creation' names the LORD's bringing into being *everything* that exists out of nothing. Genesis, he reasons, must be describing the creation of all things in the movement from the first day to the sixth. He emphasizes the importance of the LORD resting from all his works on the seventh day—nothing new is created on it or after it. Angelic creatures, as he'll say in *De civitate Dei*, form the "the greater and more blessed part" of the heavenly city, and must be accounted for in this sequence of days.⁸¹ He has to show where in the text the angelic creation is being described. Augustine thinks the most probable candidate for this is the "light" spoken into existence and separated from the darkness on the first day.⁸²

A second informing theological conviction is that the LORD is the LORD of time. To argue that creation took place at *a* particular time is to make the LORD subject to time. It would be to make the question, "What was the LORD doing before he created the world?" something intelligible to ask. Augustine clearly thinks this is an error, and explains why in *De genesi contra manichaeos*. There he says the LORD makes time along with the heaven and earth.

⁸¹ *civ.*, 11.9, *CSEL*, 40.1:522: "*quae huius civitatis et magna pars est et eo beatior.*"

⁸² *civ.*, 11.9, *CSEL*, 40.1:523.

We cannot, therefore, say there was any time when God had not yet made anything. For how was there time that God had not made, when he himself is the maker (*fabricator*) of all times? And if time began to be with heaven and earth, it's not possible to find a time in which God had not yet made heaven and earth.⁸³

On the contrary, as he puts it in Book XI of *Confessiones*, addressing the LORD, “eternity is yours.”⁸⁴ This commitment to time’s creatureliness makes saying what needs to be said about creation all very difficult. As the LORD’s act in eternity, it makes no sense to speak of a before and after with respect to creation. And yet, that very same act gives rise to the whole succession of times, which are not themselves eternal. Augustine sums up the conundrum this way:

And therefore you say everything you say simultaneously (*simul*) and eternally (*sempiternae*) by the word coeternal with you. And whatever you say shall be made is made. You do not make in any other way than by speaking. Yet not all things you make by speaking are made simultaneous (*simul*) and eternal (*sempiterna*).⁸⁵

The key distinction in this passage lies between what is and what is not simultaneous and eternal. The speaking of the Word happens at once (*simul*) and eternally (*sempiternae*).

⁸³ *Gn. c. Man.*, 1.2.3, *PL* 34:175: “*Non ergo possumus dicere fuisse aliquod tempus quando Deus nondum aliquid fecerat. Quomodo enim erat tempus quod Deus non fecerat, cum omnium temporum ipse sit fabricator? Et si tempus cum coelo et terra esse coepit, non potest inveniri tempus quo Deus nondum fecerat coelum et terram.*” Cf. *Gn. litt.*, 5.5.12.

⁸⁴ *conf.*, 11.1.1, *CSEL* 33:280: “*tua sit aeternitas.*”

⁸⁵ *conf.*, 11.7.9, *CSEL* 33:287: “*et ideo verbo tibi coaeterno simul et sempiternae dicis omnia, quae dicis, et fit, quidquid dicis ut fiat; nec aliter quam dicendo facis: nec tamen simul et sempiterna fiunt omnia, quae dicendo facis.*” One of the manuscripts cited in the *CSEL* has both instances of *sempitern-* rendered *sempiternae*, in an adverbial use. I prefer to read it both *sempiterna* and *simul* as substantive uses. They are a matched pair for Augustine in this discussion. Translators have dealt with this in different ways. Henry Chadwick prefers to render both the first and second instances of *simul et sempiternae/a* as “in simultaneity and eternity,” Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). Sr. Maria Boulding translates the first and second instance “you speak all that you speak simultaneously and eternally” and “things which you create by speaking do not all come to be simultaneously, nor are they eternal,” Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997). I think both of these fail to capture something important about what’s being said here. The LORD speaks simultaneously and eternally but not everything the LORD speaks into existence is for that reason simultaneous and eternal. This doesn’t necessarily exclude creatures from simultaneity and eternity (see n86 *infra*), it just means the LORD’s eternal speech act doesn’t only make simultaneous and eternal things. It’s instead the eternal ground that holds all things—eternal and temporal alike—in existence.

What comes of that speaking does not (necessarily, anyway) have the character of being *simul* and *sempiternus*. The LORD's act of creation in eternity brings everything that exists temporally into existence.⁸⁶

These informing convictions lead to Augustine's *sui generis* interpretation of creation. 'Light' is taken to mean angelic creatures, 'evening' and 'morning' and the succession of 'days' describe a timeless event. The event doesn't occur in time but is the presupposition for all times. One way to show how distinct Augustine's reading is, and to understand it as a significant theological achievement, is to examine Thomas Aquinas' articles in the *Summa Theologiae* on the same subject. To keep the discussion manageable, I'll be looking at question 67 of the Prima Pars, which along with questions 68 and 69 treat the work of the first three days of Genesis 1. Thomas calls this the work of distinction (*opus distinctionis*) in his introduction to question 67.⁸⁷

He begins this series of articles with a discussion of whether 'light' is used metaphorically or properly when speaking of spiritual things.⁸⁸ In the *respondeo* of this first article, Thomas explains how the name 'light' may be used in two ways, "according to its first ascription" and "according to the use of the name."⁸⁹ What he says here is broadly congruent with the description of metaphorical usage as explained by Cavell and

⁸⁶ N.B. Augustine doesn't by this statement rule out the bringing into being things that exist simultaneously (*simul*) and eternally (*sempiternus*). The likely candidate for a class of things that might exist this way is, of course, the angels. Augustine says more than once in *De genesi ad litteram* that the angels enjoy LORD's own eternity. They do not partake of it by their own nature but rather by their contemplation of the LORD—cf. *Gn. litt.*, 2.8.17, *PL* 34:269: "*qui ex quo creati sunt, ipsa Verbi aeternitate sancta et pia contemplatione perfruuntur*"; *Gn. litt.*, 4.29.46, *PL* 34:315: "*Simul hoc totum possint, simul hoc totum faciant; possunt tamen et faciunt. Simul ergo habent et diem, et vesperam, et mane.*" In the latter citation we find the capacity for simultaneous (*simul*) contemplation attributed to the angels. The key distinction in the case of angels, bearing in mind Augustine's talk of the act of creation, seems to be that they are not *coaeterni* while still being *sempiterni*.

⁸⁷ *ST*, I.67.

⁸⁸ *ST*, I.67.1 1, *sed contra*.

⁸⁹ *ST*, I.67.1 *resp.*: "*secundum primam eius impositionem*" and "*secundum usum nominis.*"

Davidson. In particular, what he says about speaking according to the use of a name comports well with what Davidson has to say about usage and “dead metaphors.” By this Davidson means the transition in language that takes place when usage changes from metaphorical to literal. “Once upon a time, I suppose,” Davidson muses, “rivers and bottles did not, as they do now, literally have mouths.”⁹⁰ Thomas says something nearly identical about the word light: “For it was first instituted to signify what the sense of sight makes manifest, but afterward it was extended to signify everything that any kind of cognition makes manifest.”⁹¹ Whether what you say about light is said “properly” (*proprie*) or “metaphorically” (*metaphorice*) has everything to do with how it’s used.⁹² For Thomas, as for Cavell and Davidson, the lines separating these uses will be fuzzy. Sometimes it will be clear that what’s said about light falls under the rubric of “first ascription” (*secundum primam impositionem*) or “use of the name” (*secundum usum nominis*).

In the following two articles, Thomas meditates on the nature of light in its first ascription.⁹³ He’s seeking to resolve whether light is a body or a quality. This is a bit of stage setting for what will come in the fourth article and beyond. Augustine’s *ad litteram* reading of Genesis stands apart for Thomas, and in many ways requires its own treatment and commentary. In this article and the articles of the following questions treating the days of creation, the florilegial quality of Thomas’ *Summa* is on full display. Augustine’s

⁹⁰ Davidson, 252.

⁹¹ *ST*, I.67.1 *resp.*: “*Nam primo quidem est institutum ad significandum id quod facit manifestationem in sensu visus, postmodum autem extensum est ad significandum omne illud quod facit manifestationem secundum quamcumque cognitionem.*”

⁹² *ST*, I.67.1 *resp.*

⁹³ *ST*, I.67.2-3.

idiosyncratic reading of Genesis is presented alongside those of Basil of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, John Damascene, Origen, and Maimonides.⁹⁴ These sections of the *Summa* are interesting not only for the many interpretations presented but because Thomas appears less interested to resolve all of the differences between them. As we'll see though, it's also clear that Thomas hews closer to some interpretations of creation than others.

So, in the fourth article of question 67, Thomas presents the first of the two theological principles discussed above—the necessity of accounting for the creation of the angels—which govern Augustine's interpretation of Genesis. He explains, "For it seems to Augustine that it would not have been fitting for Moses to leave out the production of the spiritual creation."⁹⁵ This, Thomas says, leads Augustine to say that the light of the first day is spiritual light, the created light of angelic intelligence.⁹⁶ Thomas doesn't end the discussion there, ruling one way or another on the soundness of this interpretation. Instead he presents additional possible interpretations, introducing them with a telling, "On the other hand, it seems to others..."⁹⁷ He goes on to show how Basil's and Chrysostom's readings support, for various reasons, an omission of the angels in the narrative of creation. With this setup, Thomas presents his own positions on the matter in the replies to objections two and three. These replies indicate his preference for a less exotic interpretation of the days of creation than the one Augustine provides in *De genesi*.

⁹⁴ Cf. *ST*, I.67-74.

⁹⁵ *ST*, I.67.4 *resp*: "*Augustino enim videtur quod non fuerit conveniens Moysen praetermisisse spiritualis creaturae productionem.*"

⁹⁶ *ST*, I.67.4 *resp*.

⁹⁷ *ST*, I.67.4 *resp*: "*Aliis autem videtur...*" It would be possible to translate this even more strongly, perhaps, as "On the contrary, it seems to others..." but I'm not entirely sure contrariness is what's at stake here.

Perhaps even more telling is Thomas' presentation of one of Augustine's concerns about reading the days of creation straight, i.e., non-metaphorically, as an objection in question 67. As we've seen, Augustine decided that trying to connect the days of creation to solar days causes more problems than it resolves. This is especially true given the non-existence of the heavenly bodies before the fourth day of creation.⁹⁸ Thomas presents this concern as the second objection in article four of question 67, "It is through light that night is distinguished from day. But this is brought about through the sun, which is set down as having been made on the fourth day. Therefore the production of light ought not to be put on the first day."⁹⁹ Thomas is happy enough to reply to this objection, which can clearly be attributed to Augustine, by doubling down on the 'light' of Genesis 1:3 being light of the first ascription. He answers, citing Dionysius, "that the light was the light of the sun, still formless as of yet, but that it was already the substance of the sun and had a general illuminative power."¹⁰⁰ In this same reply, he'll affirm precisely those things Augustine finds problematic with the position that the days of creation are solar days. In particular, he affirms talk of illuminating the different hemispheres and so of the division of time according to solar days.¹⁰¹

What I've presented so far in this exegesis of the *Summa* is Thomas as a paragon of subtle critique and careful attention to multiple strains of argument in the tradition of interpretation. Reading him closely, it's clear that he has major disagreements with

⁹⁸ *Gn. litt.*, 1.10.21.

⁹⁹ *ST*, I.67.4 2: "*per lucem distinguitur nox a die. Hoc autem fit per solem, qui ponitur factus die quarta. Ergo non debuit poni productio lucis prima die.*"

¹⁰⁰ *ST*, I.67.4 ad 2: "*quod illa lux fuit lux solis, sed adhuc informis, quantum ad hoc, quod iam erat substantia solis, et habebat virtutem illuminativam in communi.*"

¹⁰¹ *ST*, I.67.4 ad 2. He elaborates this position further citing Basil in I.67.4 ad 3.

Augustine's interpretive strategy. He names it here and elsewhere as something that stands apart from other major figures.¹⁰² Basil and Chrysostom are much closer in agreement about the literal meaning of the days of creation. Thomas locates himself among their ranks by opting to read the *ad litteram* signification of 'light' in its first ascription. I hope I've shown these disagreements to be not merely cosmetic but substantive in nature. Thomas doesn't come right out and say Augustine's reading is wrong. But he clearly thinks there's something more edifying to be gained by taking Genesis 1 to be referring to something occurring in the order of time. This preference is apparent in his discussion of illumination from "solar substance." One of the distinctions already in play in LORD's creation of light is a distinction "*quantum ad tempus*"—as to time.¹⁰³

Immediately following his disavowal of an Augustinian atemporal creation narrative comes an important tip of the hat to the validity of Augustine's interpretive strategy. It shows that while there are fundamental disagreements at stake here, Thomas has a clear vision of what that disagreement does and does not mean. In the first article of question 68, Thomas cites some important Augustinian principles of scriptural interpretation, taken directly from *De genesi ad litteram*. "As Augustine teaches,"

Thomas begins,

two things are to be kept in mind in questions of this sort. The first is certainly that the truth of Scripture be unshakably held. The second is, when holy Scripture can be laid open in manifold ways, no one should cleave absolutely to an exposition such that if it were shown to be false by certain reason, someone might presume to assert it to be the sense of Scripture. So that Scripture might not be for this reason derided by the

¹⁰² Cf. esp. *ST*, 1.74.3

¹⁰³ *ST*, I.67.4 *ad* 2.

unfaithful, and that the way of believing might not be closed off to them.¹⁰⁴

What Thomas does mean by disagreeing with Augustine is that they do not share the same judgment about the meaning of the text of Genesis 1 *ad litteram*. What he does not mean is that this disagreement in judgment settles the matter or that it would be prudent to press this disagreement. This is precisely because “Scripture can be laid open in manifold ways.”

1.5 Truth in Interpretation

I suggest we take Thomas to be rising to a challenge Augustine levied in *De genesi*. In a number of places throughout the work, Augustine explains the method of his commentary as one that avoids hasty or rash conclusions.¹⁰⁵ What he means by this is precisely what Thomas outlines in I.67.1: the readings we give of Scripture must be provisional without in any way thinking the truth of Scripture itself to be provisional. As Augustine puts it in *De doctrina*, when we don’t understand the meaning of Scripture, we still ought “to think and believe what is written there to be better and truer—even if it is hidden—than what we ourselves can discern.”¹⁰⁶ Augustine’s challenge, then, is something like, “If you have a better explanation, please, let’s hear it.” He says as much toward the end of the first book of *De genesi*:

As far as I could, I unfurled and brought forth the many possible senses of the words in the book of Genesis, which were set down obscurely to discipline us, not rashly affirming any particular one so as to rule out

¹⁰⁴ *ST*, I.68.1 *resp.*

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *Gn. litt.*, 1.20.40, 5.1.1, 7.28.43, 12.1.1, 7.28.43.

¹⁰⁶ *doct. chr.*, 2.7.9, *PL* 34:39: “*cogitare potius et credere id esse melius et verius quod ibi scriptum est, etiam si lateat, quam id quod nos per nosmetipsos sapere possumus.*”

another, perhaps better, explanation. So that each person may pick out by his own lights what he's able to grasp.¹⁰⁷

He affirms again, later, that his explanations are put forward “without preventing anyone the freedom of understanding it better.”¹⁰⁸ This is the challenge to which Thomas is rising, the challenge of understanding the words of Genesis better than Augustine himself. A tall order to be sure, but one Augustine himself encouraged, so long as the interpretation did not become an idol and so a stumbling block.

How might an interpretation of Scripture become a stumbling block? There are, I think, two interrelated ways of answering this. First in relation to a person's own faith, and second in relation to the faith of others. If an interpretation of Scripture is held in such a way that upon learning that it cannot possibly be true someone feels inclined to abandon her faith altogether, the interpretation is clearly a stumbling block. Take, as a hypothetical, Thomas holding to his explanation of the creation of the *substantia solis* on the first day, along with his contention that its general illuminative power shone upon the earth and divided day and night. If Thomas, upon learning the earth wouldn't be around for, roughly, nine billion years following the birth of the cosmos, took it to mean not that he was wrong but that Scripture was untrue, he'd have a problem. This would indicate a malformed relationship to Scripture from the start. It would show that he understood first, that Scripture was subject to his interpretations rather than his interpretations being subject to it. Second, and in a related way, it would indicate a lack of trust in the LORD and the words of the LORD. It would be a lack of trust in that it would show he

¹⁰⁷ *Gn. litt.*, 1.20.40, *PL* 34:261: “*librum Geneseos multipliciter, quantum potui, enucleavi, protulique sententias de verbis ad exercitationem nostram obscure positis; non aliquid unum temere affirmans cum praejudicio alterius expositionis fortasse melioris, ut pro suo modulo eligat quisque quod capere possit.*”

¹⁰⁸ *Gn. litt.*, 5.1.1, *PL* 34:321: “*nulli intercludens melius intelligendi licentiam.*”

considered the truths of Scripture themselves liable to disproof by the discovery of facts about the world.

Now there's a flipside to this particular deformity. It still involves making the truth of Scripture subject to disproof via the natural sciences. It just refuses to admit the necessary evidence has been produced to disprove it. Cleaving to interpretations in this way attempts to settle the meaning of a particular scriptural text in such a way that no other interpretation of the text is possible. Genesis is a notoriously fraught example in this regard. Those who've succumbed to this particular form of idolatry maintain that *this* (*this* can be whatever you like) is the meaning of the text, and as goes the truth of the interpretation, so goes the truth of Scripture as a whole. When confronted, however, with well-founded evidence to the contrary, this kind of interpreter refuses to admit it as valid. Now there's something admirable, if extraordinarily misguided, about this kind of relationship to Scripture. To hold its truth so strongly as to reject all evidence that might undermine it indicates a rugged determination to follow Christ whatever the cost. Only, this way of reading the Bible isn't actually founded on the truth of Scripture at all. It's founded on the truth of an interpretation of Scripture. So, their fate is that of all idol makers and worshippers: "Who fashions a god or casts an image, that is profitable for nothing? Behold, all his fellows shall be put to shame, and the craftsmen are but men; let them all assemble, let them stand forth, they shall be terrified, they shall be put to shame together" (Is 44:10-11).

The properly Christian way to read and interpret Scripture weaves together the strengths of both these positions—pugnacious tenacity in the face of contradiction combined with a docile receptivity toward revisionary readings. It does so by insisting on

the truth of Scripture. This is distinct from an insistence on the truth of a particular interpretation of the same. At root, this is a conviction that the LORD is the truth (Jn 14:6). The words that pour forth from him to his people as a gift of himself cannot therefore be untrue. But by this principle—the principle of gift—the same applies to the created order as a whole. In other words, the truth of Scripture and the truth of creation cannot contradict one another, as both have their origin in the truth of the LORD.

Bonaventure, in his *Breviloquium*, puts this point beautifully,

The first principle may make himself recognizable to us through Scripture and through creation. He shows himself through the book of creation as the effective principle, through the book of Scripture as the restorative principle. That restorative principle cannot be known unless the effective principle is known as well. For that reason Holy Scripture, although it may principally deal with the works of restoration, ought to deal nonetheless with the work of creation, insofar as it may lead to knowledge (*cognitionem*) of the first making and remaking (*efficientis et reficientis*) principle. Therefore that knowledge is sublime and salvific: sublime, because it's about the effective principle, which is God the creator; salvific, because it's about the restorative principle, which is Christ the savior and mediator.¹⁰⁹

Knowledge of creation and knowledge of Scripture may both be knowledge of the LORD as *primum principium*. We relate to the LORD as first principle in different ways, as the creator and as the restorer of all things. It follows that different ways of knowing will be suitable to these different modes of relation. In no way, however, can the truths discerned

¹⁰⁹ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, vol. V, Opera Omnia (Quarrachi: Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1891), II.5: “*primum principium reddat se nobis cognoscibile et per Scripturam et per creaturam, per librum creaturae se manifestat ut principium effectivum, per librum Scripturae ut principium reparativum; et quia principium reparativum non potest cognosci, nisi cognoscatur et effectivum: ideo sacra Scriptura, licet principaliter agat de operibus reparationis, agere nihilominus debet de opere conditionis, in quantum tamen ducit in cognitionem primi principii efficientis et reficientis; et ideo ipsa est cognitio sublimis et salutaris: sublimis, quia de principio effectivo, quod est Deus creator; salutaris, quia de principio reparativo, quod est Christus salvator et mediator.*”

in creation or Scripture contradict one another, for in that case they wouldn't be truths at all.¹¹⁰

I've already given an account of the concept of truth as it relates to persons. Central to that argument is the idea that truth is a person, Jesus Christ. Part of the point of that discussion was to show how truth might still be an important concept in the deployment of metaphor. We had to be clear that what we were dealing with was not propositional truth but the truth that might obtain in the relations between persons. This was illustrated by using marital vows as an example. The promise to be true involved conforming oneself to the person of Jesus Christ. I now intend to return to Marshall and Davidson for help in discussing propositional truth. This part of the investigation aims at coming to terms with our failures to know the truth. In other words, I want to show how we can be and often are wrong about what Scripture or creation are telling us. Further, I hope to make clear that this epistemic failures don't undermine the truth of either.

It's entirely possible, even likely, for the truths of both creation and Scripture to remain opaque to us. This is so without doing any damage to their claims to truth. It's comparable to what we might find in examining the truth content of a sentence in an unfamiliar language. There's no requirement that I understand "Le chat est noir," to be translatable as, "The cat is black," in order for it to be true. We might rather identify the truth conditions for this sentence using what Donald Davidson calls "T-sentences."¹¹¹ In that case, we could establish the truth of the statement by framing it this way, "'Le chat est noir' is true if and only if le chat est noir." This tells us something about how the

¹¹⁰ Cf. Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus*, DS 3287: "*Nulla quidem theologum inter et physicum vera dissensio intercesserit, dum suis uterque finibus se contineant.*"

¹¹¹ For the background of this whole discussion, see Marshall, 233-241.

concept of truth is operative for this sentence, i.e., what makes the sentence true. It also gives us some information about the range of the concept of truth in a particular language. Each T-sentence marks out some territory for ‘truth’ as applicable to this or that sentence in the language.¹¹² What this definition provides us is a “purely extensional” approach to truth, by showing where and how it applies.¹¹³

What this definition of the concept of truth does not itself give, is a way of knowing whether and when we’ve got it right apart from knowing something about the language in which a sentence is uttered or written. So “Le chat est noir,” may be true and may be so based on conditions entirely independent of my knowing what those conditions are. To see how this is the case, let’s apply this concept in a thought experiment. Suppose I’m learning French. Once a week, I go to my tutor’s house and in this house there is a black cat. The tutor provides me with some of the rudiments of the language by pointing at everyday objects and saying something about them. “Le fourchette est dans l’évier,” “L’arbre est en dehors de la fenêtre,” “Le chat est noir.” But each time she points to the cat, it’s sitting on a mat near the back door. Let’s assume I’ve correctly grasped the meaning of the other two sentences—“Le fourchette est dans l’évier” and “L’arbre est en dehors de la fenêtre”—but that my grasp of them has also led me to make a mistake. The mistake I make is thinking “Le chat est noir” is meant to indicate spatial relations just like the other two sentences. My tutor’s black cat is always seated in the same place—on the mat—and so I take “Le chat est noir” to be translatable as “The cat is on the mat.” Another way to put this using the T-sentence formula is to say

¹¹² Ibid., 234.

¹¹³ Ibid.

I've made a mistake about the sentence's truth conditions. I think "'Le chat est noir' is true if and only if the cat is on the mat." Now, I'm wrong about this, but so far I don't suspect it and so don't see a need to go searching for a different definition of 'noir.'

What would it take for me to see that I'd made a mistake, that I'd misunderstood the truth conditions for "Le chat est noir"? Well, suppose the next time I go to my tutor's house, the cat has taken up residence on the window sill. Without missing a beat, my tutor points to various objects, rattling off French sentences. This time when she points to the cat, she says again "Le chat est noir." Puzzlement ensues. Perhaps I ask "Le chat est noir?" pointing at the cat. Maybe I also gesture toward the mat. It's now clear to me and to my tutor that I've misunderstood the sentence. At that point, it becomes reasonable to ask in English, "Well, then what does 'noir' mean?" When my tutor says, "It means black," I'll probably grasp the nature of my mistake quickly. Because I'm learning the language, it won't be hard to revise my sense of 'noir.' Language learners expect these kinds of mistakes of usage to occur. The revised T-sentence that properly represents the truth conditions would go, "'Le chat est noir' is true if and only if the cat is black." This was always the case for this sentence. My failure to know it was an epistemic failure. The sentence's meaning did not depend upon my knowing what it meant but instead on what "Le chat est noir" means in French.

This vignette is meant to illustrate something analogous that might occur when trying to grasp the truth of the book of creation or the book of Scripture. Neither depends on me knowing or understanding the truth in order for it to be true. To stick with the case of the black cat, it will sometimes happen that we realize our error. I was certain that "Le chat est noir" could be translated as "The cat is on the mat." In a similar way, I might

read the book of creation and be led to think a hierarchical cosmos composed of heavenly spheres rotating around the earth makes a lot of sense. Like the other French sentences—“Le fourchette est dans l’évier” and “L’arbre est en dehors de la fenêtre”—uttered around the same time as “Le chat est noir,” I might be fooled by the context of my investigation of creation. From my perspective upon the earth, it seems quite right to say the heavenly bodies rotate around it. Realizing this is incorrect would be related to realizing I was mistaken about the meaning of “Le chat est noir.” It might involve a great deal of puzzlement. More, I would think, than that of someone learning a foreign language, who therefore expects these kinds of mistakes. What’s required, though, is the same thing required of the language-learner. It requires a revision of the criteria used in applying my concept of creation. Mind you, this is not a revision of the truth of creation, but of my grasp of that truth.

The same is also true of the book of Scripture. This is what Augustine and Aquinas mean for us to understand when they describe the kind of assent we ought to give to particular interpretations of Scripture. Just as I don’t doubt the truth of my tutor’s statement, “Le chat est noir,” even when I realize I’ve failed to interpret it correctly, so too I don’t doubt the truth of Scripture when facts come to light that make a particular interpretation of it untenable. Augustine makes this point in the first book of *De genesi*. He explains that in the case where it’s unclear what Scripture might mean, where various interpretations account for the way the words run, it’s possible to hold to either one. An interpretation may be held, “so long as it is not against the faith, until it is refuted by most certain (*certissima*) truth. If that were to occur, then this [interpretation] was not

contained by Holy Scripture, but had been supposed by human ignorance.”¹¹⁴ What might count as a definite refutation “by most certain truth” of a particular interpretation of Scripture? Well, Augustine takes up this point and explains that Christians do not necessarily have any special insight on these matters. The knowledge that may be read from the book of creation is just as well had by pagans as by those who worship the LORD.¹¹⁵

There’s a structural point here as well. That point looks like this: however provisional our interpretations of the book of creation and the book of Scripture are, it’s important, if possible, to show they’re compatible, that one wouldn’t rule the other out. Granted, neither of the interpretations may be *contra fidem*, and when the chips are down, Augustine is clear on where his trust lies. But there’s something worthwhile in looking into pagan explanations of created phenomena and showing how they might comport with the Catholic faith. So, Augustine says,

we should show that whatever they have been able to demonstrate about the nature of things by way of accurate sources is not contrary to our literature. But whatever they may have produced from any of their volumes contrary to our literature (that is, the literature of the Catholic faith) we should either deftly show, or believe beyond a shadow of a doubt, to be absolutely false.¹¹⁶

Here lies Augustine’s commitment to the priority of the faith. But there’s something else at stake here, too. The theological point we’re returning to is that there can be no contradiction between the truth of creation and the truth of Scripture because theirs is a

¹¹⁴ *Gn. litt.*, 1.19.38, *PL* 34:260: “*tamdiu non est contra fidem, donec veritate certissima refellatur. Quod si factum fuerit, non hoc habebat divina Scriptura, sed hoc senserat humana ignorantia.*”

¹¹⁵ *Gn. litt.*, 1.19.39.

¹¹⁶ *Gn. litt.*, 1.21.41, *PL* 34:262: *ut quidquid ipsi de natura rerum veracibus documentis demonstrare potuerint, ostendamus nostris Litteris non esse contrarium. Quidquid autem de quibuslibet suis voluminibus his nostris Litteris, id est catholicae fidei contrarium protulerint, aut aliqua etiam facultate ostendamus, aut nulla dubitatione credamus esse falsissimum.*”

participation in the truth of the LORD. As Herbert McCabe has put it, Scripture is itself a theological interpretation of history, and “here we have a uniquely authentic interpretation because the author of the interpretation is also the author of the facts themselves.”¹¹⁷

This does not shield our interpretations of either creation or Scripture from error in the order of knowing. I take Augustine’s final point about believing *nulla dubitatione* to be a point about the order of being. This places the certainty of this conviction in the proper place, the truth of the LORD, rather than in our readings of that truth. It’s for this reason that Augustine can affirm:

It’s commonly the case that even a non-Christian will know something about the earth, the sky, the other elements of this world, the motion and revolution or even the magnitude and distances of the stars, the precise eclipses of the sun and moon, the cycles of years and times, the natures of animals, fruits, stones, and other things like this. And he knows these things by most certain (*certissima*) reason or experiments.¹¹⁸

What draws my eye here is the adjective *certissima*. It’s the same one used to describe the possibility of refutation in the preceding paragraph of *De genesi*.¹¹⁹ The non-exhaustive list of things pagans know also includes a specification of how they know them. And so, the *certissima* truth that shows an interpretation of Scripture to be false comes through *certissima* reason or experiments.

If we take it to be the case that reason and experiments, abstract cogitations and mundane tests alike, have demonstrated Aristotelian cosmology to be defunct, where

¹¹⁷ Herbert McCabe, *The New Creation* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 6.

¹¹⁸ *Gn. litt.*, 1.19.39, PL 34:261: “*Plerumque enim accidit ut aliquid de terra, de coelo, de caeteris mundi hujus elementis, de motu et conversione vel etiam magnitudine et intervallis siderum, de certis defectibus solis ac lunae, de circuitibus annorum et temporum, de naturis animalium, fructum, lapidum, atque hujusmodi caeteris, etiam non christianus ita noverit, ut certissima ratione vel experientia teneat.*”

¹¹⁹ *Gn. litt.*, 1.19.38.

does that leave us? By this I mean, if we accept the conclusions of modern physics that indicate a universe that's been around for roughly 13.7 billion years, that the earth itself is some 4 billion years old, that the heavens aren't comprised of celestial spheres rotating around the earth but rather planets and stars and galaxies dancing to gravity's tune in vast deserts of interplanetary, interstellar, and intergalactic space. It seems we can safely say that certain interpretations of the first chapter of Genesis are off the table. This in no way impugns the truth of the narrative, but places it in a new context. This context is informed by our complimentary grasp of the truths of the book of creation. It makes no sense to say Genesis 1 narrates the beginning of division of times if by that you mean, as Thomas explains he does, light shining upon the surface of the earth. Neither does this mean Thomas' explanation was a bad one. He offered it provisionally, in light of what he knew about the physical world. We can't, however, be happy with the same explanation. Something else must be offered if Christians are to keep from scandalizing pagans in ways that prevent them from trusting the truth of what Scripture says elsewhere.¹²⁰

We need an interpretation of Genesis that can bear the weight of a cosmos of unfathomable immensity. The readings proposed by Thomas and the Fathers he follows, who take the *ad litteram* meaning of the text to indicate a temporal unfolding over a week of solar days, buckle under this burden. What I'll show going forward is that Augustine's *ad litteram* reading *can* bear this weight. Because it can, it also provides the conceptual resources to answer pressing questions about the origins of death and death's relation to the double fall of angels and humans.

¹²⁰ *Gn. litt.*, 1.19.39.

2. What the *Rationes Seminales* Might Be

2.1 What does Augustine mean by ‘ratio’?

‘Ratio’ does a lot of work in theological Latin. One of Augustine’s translators has noted how its plural form ‘rationes’ dominates the whole of *De genesi ad litteram*. At the same time he confesses, “no single satisfactory translation can be provided.”¹ Given what we’ve already seen of Augustine’s interpretation of Genesis, though, something about ‘ratio’ in the singular should stand out. What should stand out is the connection of the Latin ‘ratio’ with the Greek ‘logos.’ As I showed, Augustine ties the “Let there be light” of Genesis 1 to the Prologue of the Gospel of John. In translation, the Greek ‘logos’ of John’s gospel becomes the Latin ‘verbum.’ And so, the Son is the Word, and the Father’s uttering that Word is the timeless act of creation. But in addition to ‘verbum’ or ‘word’ it’s also the case that some of the valences of ‘logos’ are better captured by the Latin ‘ratio.’ As Hill notes, this word can’t be translated into English without loss—much as ‘logos’ loses some of its connotations when rendered into Latin as ‘verbum.’ It’ll have to do, then, to keep in mind some of the words ‘ratio’ might conjure up. I’ll turn to Augustine’s own uses in the text of *De genesi ad litteram*, as the situation with ‘ratio’ is in no way resolved, and perhaps further complicated, by its uses in Medieval Latin.

¹ Augustine, “The Literal Meaning of Genesis,” in *On Genesis*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 2002), 175n9.

First, to look at a use I've already pointed out, Augustine uses '*ratio*' to mean 'reason' in the sense of human reckoning or cogitation. So, in Book I of *De genesi*, he explains that "*certa ratio*"—sound reason—might show an interpretation of Scripture to be true.² On the other hand, it might be the case that an interpretation is shown to be false "*certissima ratione*"—by most certain reason.³ This usage crops up in a number of places in the work,⁴ and in each case refers to something humans do.

A second, related, sense appears when Augustine is investigating the meaning of the 'evening' and 'morning' of Genesis 1. He has given some possible interpretations of these words. But now he wonders whether "there may be some other *ratio* of these words to be sought out more diligently."⁵ This complicates things a bit, as he's discussing the words of Scripture. As I've already shown, Augustine—and the Catholic magisterium along with him—has affirmed the divine and human authorship of the Bible. At the same time, these things aren't neatly parsable—here the divine, there the human. The words of Scripture are divine and human all the way down. So, when it comes to speaking of the *ratio* of these words, how are we to take it? That these words are human words argues for a fit with the first sense of '*ratio*' understood in terms of human reckoning or thought. That these words are divine inclines toward a sense of '*ratio*' understood in terms of the divine '*logos*.' This isn't exactly helpful, as I haven't yet shown how Augustine uses '*ratio*' in the divine sense. Perhaps it will have to do to settle on '*ratio*' used here to

² *Gn. litt.*, 1.19.38, *PL* 34:260.

³ *Gn. litt.*, 1.19.39, *PL* 34:261.

⁴ Cf. *Gn. litt.*, 8.8.16, 11.8.10, 11.16.21, 12.11.22.

⁵ *Gn. litt.*, 2.14.28, *PL* 34:275: "*aliqua alia ratio sit horum verborum diligentius vestiganda.*"

vaguely indicate ‘meaning,’ with the caveat that the meaning of the words of Scripture is both human and divine.

The third use of ‘*ratio*,’ pointed out in the last paragraph, is the one applicable to the LORD. In this case, the ‘*ratio*’ under discussion is *in* the Word of God. The *ratio* that is in the Word of God is the *ratio* of the things made through him, which is to say, the whole of the cosmos, “things visible and invisible” (Col 1:16). A few different uses of ‘*ratio*’ appeal to me here, some more controversial than others. I’ll enumerate them in the hopes of gaining a workable conceptual clarity to allow us to go on. In Book II of *De genesi ad litteram*, Augustine wonders how the text of Genesis 1 might indicate the three persons of the Trinity. He moves the discussion to the Prologue of John, verses 3 and 4, where his text diverges from modern versions. Asking whether the repeated “*fiat*” of Genesis 1 is the Word of the Father, he explains that in this word, the Father’s only begotten Son, “are all created things, even before they are created.”⁶ “Whatever is in him,” and here he’s referencing his version of John, “is life, because whatever was made through him is, in him, life—life the creator, though when below him, life the creature.”⁷ This phrase, “life the creator” (*vita creatrix*) is an affirmation, as I read it, of divine simplicity. Created things in the LORD must in some sense be identical with the LORD if we’re not to introduce composition. In him, in other words, created things just are life, the life that the Word of God is.

⁶ *Gn. litt.* 2.6.12, *PL* 34:268: “*unigenitus Filius, in quo sunt omnia quae creantur, etiam antequam creentur.*”

⁷ *Gn. litt.*, 2.6.12, *PL* 34:268: “*et quidquid in illo est, vita est; quia quidquid per eum factum est, in ipso vita est, et vita utique creatrix, sub illo autem creatura.*” For more evidence of this textual variant, see also Augustine’s Tractates on the Gospel of John, e.g., *Io. ev. tr.* 1.16 citing Jn 1:3, *PL* 35:1387: “*Omnia ergo, fratres, omnia omnino per ipsum facta sunt, et sine ipso factum est nihil. Sed quomodo per ipsum facta sunt omnia? Quod factum est, in illo vita est.*”

Divine simplicity, however, doesn't exclude the difference between created things and the LORD. Augustine explains that the things made through the Word are in him in one way, while what he is himself is in him in another.⁸ But what are we to make of this? You might also wonder what any of this has to do with his use of 'ratio.' The passage that asserts the existence of created things in the Word of God—as distinct from what the Word himself is—also describes how this is the case. The things made through him are in him because the Word “rules and holds them together.”⁹ I'd like to focus on the word 'rules' (*regit*) in this passage. While 'regit' could and be translated as 'governs,' 'guides,' or 'controls,' my choice to translate it as 'rules' is deliberate. This word links up with Augustine's third use of 'ratio' which appears in this very same paragraph of *De Genesi ad litteram*. The 'ratio' of created things is in the Word of God and alive with the very life of the LORD. Were it not, nothing at all could be created.¹⁰ Here, then, I'd like to translate 'ratio' as 'rule' also. And so “*creandi ratio*” may be Englished, “the rule of things to be created.” These two uses of 'rule' are fittingly coordinate. When these resonances of 'regit' and 'ratio' are drawn out together, they show us something about how created things exist in the Word of God. That is, they show us something about what Augustine could mean by saying all created things are in him but otherwise than he is in himself.

⁸ *Gn. litt.*, 2.6.12, PL 34:268: “*Aliter ergo in illo sunt ea quae per illum facta sunt...aliter autem in illo sunt ea quae ipse est.*”

⁹ *Gn. litt.*, 2.6.12, PL 34:268: “*quia regit et continet ea.*”

¹⁰ *Gn. litt.*, 2.6.12, PL 34:268: “*Quia ergo nihil creari posset sive ante tempora, quod quidem non est Creatori coaeternum, sive ab exordio temporum, sive in aliquo tempore, cujus creandi ratio, si tamen ratio recte dicitur, non in Dei Verbo Patri coaeterno coaeterna vita viveret.*”

To summarize, the ‘rule’ (*ratio*) of all created things is in the Word of God precisely as their measure. He himself ‘rules’ (*regit*) them in this way by being that by which they are made and reckoned (being a way of saying at once set right, known, and measured all at once). This use of ‘*ratio*’ shows up repeatedly throughout the rest of *De genesi ad litteram*. Having worked out, at least tentatively, how created things are in the LORD and yet in a way distinct from how the LORD is in himself, Augustine deploys this sense of ‘*ratio*’ as ‘rule.’¹¹ We shouldn’t forget, in our talk of differentiation, Augustine’s argument began on a note of identification. It’s worth dwelling on the precise wording of a citation I only paraphrased above, where Augustine observes, “nothing could be created...the rule (*ratio*) of which—if it is rightly called a rule (*ratio*)—was not enlivened with coeternal life in the Word of God with the coeternal Father.”¹² The life of these *creandi*, things to be created, is the life of the Word of God. In a very real sense they are identical with that Word. They have the ‘*Logos*’ as their ‘*ratio*,’ to return us to the theme that introduced this section. Keep that in mind as we continue to investigate the *rationes seminales*, which on this reading might best be translated seminal or seed-like rules.

We have, then, three distinct usages of ‘*ratio*,’ which Augustine deploys for different purposes throughout *De genesi*. One refers principally to cognition, and can be understood as way of saying ‘reason’ as in, “It can be known by human reason.” The second use, “*ratio horum verborum*,” when referring to the words of Scripture, could

¹¹ Cf. *inter alia Gn. litt.*, 2.8.17, 3.12.18, 4.32.50, 8.26.48, 9.2.3.

¹² *Gn. litt.*, 2.6.12, *PL* 34:268: “*nihil creari posset...cujus creandi ratio, si tamen ratio recte dicitur, non in Dei Verbo Patri coaeterno coaeterna vita viveret.*”

most nearly be translated as ‘meaning.’¹³ We’re now in a slightly better position to say something, though, about what the *ratio* of the words of Scripture is in divine terms. I want to say, the *ratio* of Scripture’s words, their rule, is none other than the Word of God, the *Logos* himself. The third use of ‘*ratio*,’ comes in the *creandi ratio*, the rule of things to be created, which is coeternal with the Word without simply being identical with him. These three uses of ‘*ratio*’ are not exhaustive of the term’s connotations, even in Augustine’s text, let alone in Late Antique Latin. They do, however, give us a sense of its scope. The “family resemblances,” to borrow a concept from Wittgenstein, between these three uses are all directly connected to the investigation underway here.¹⁴ Moving forward, I’ll be emphasizing the third connotation in an effort to account for the relation between *ratio* in the Word and the *rationes seminales* in the created order.

2.2 Augustine on the Divine Ideas

Identity and difference are each, in a certain way, transcended by linking ‘*ratio*’ in the third sense with the divine *Logos*. The *creandi ratio* is the LORD. And in that sense, all the things that are not the LORD are also in the LORD. They only are and only can be by virtue of this rule, the *Logos*, the Word of God who is with the LORD and is the LORD (Jn 1:1). That the things that are not the LORD are anything at all, however, is a function of their having been created. The *ratio* that is in the LORD and so identical with the LORD also has a differentiated existence in created things. Those created things have been given their existence precisely by this *ratio*, which, Augustine explains, is

¹³ *Gn. litt.*, 2.14.28, *PL* 34:275.

¹⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), §67.

“enlivened with coeternal life in the Word of God with the coeternal Father.”¹⁵ The LORD wills the existence of created things within and without himself. Within himself, they are by virtue of their coeternality with the Word of the LORD. Without himself, they are by virtue of the gift of creation. This is not the conferral of independent existence—whatever that would mean—but of dependent existence.

As creatures, they come to be and are preserved in being by the LORD’s gratuitous gift of self. The LORD is, as Thomas Aquinas puts it, “to be itself, subsisting through itself.”¹⁶ As such, the LORD gives of his very act of self-subsistent being to call creatures into existence out of nothing. We might say, then, that he is the *ratio* of all things that are not the LORD, and that he is so because he gives them a share of this same *ratio*. Within him, this *ratio* is the rule that is the Word of God. Without him, in the multiplicity of created things, this one *ratio* becomes many *rationes*. They are participations in the one *ratio* received as gift. The gift grants them existence not as absolute beings but as beings reliant on the continuous outpouring of the LORD’s self, the very act that constitutes them as creatures. All creaturely powers and potencies are downstream of that singular self-gift of the LORD.

But we might also consider the plurality of the *rationes* within the LORD. The *ratio* doesn’t simply go from unity to multiplicity in the act of creation. Rather, the created *rationes* have their source in the uncreated *rationes*, which Thomas Aquinas will call the “*rationes ideales*.”¹⁷ Augustine treats these uncreated *rationes* in question 46 of

¹⁵ *Gn. litt.*, 2.6.12, *PL* 34:268: “*nihil creari posset...cujus creandi ratio, si tamen ratio recte dicitur, non in Dei Verbo Patri coaeterno coaeterna vita viveret.*”

¹⁶ *ST*, I.4.1 *resp.*: “*Deus est ipsum esse per se subsistens.*”

¹⁷ *ST* I.115.2 *resp.*

his *De diversis quaestionibus* by explaining their connection to the Platonic ideas.¹⁸ It's clear, he says, that '*rationes*' is not a literal translation of Plato's term '*ideae*' since *rationes* are called *λόγοι* in Greek.¹⁹ But, in this case, the term '*rationes*' means the same thing as '*ideae*,' which is more literally translated as forms (*formae*) or species (*species*) in Latin.²⁰ And so we find,

whoever wants to use this word [*rationes*] will not be far from the thing itself. For in fact the original ideas are certain forms or reasons (*rationes*) of things, stable and immutable, which are not themselves formed. And so they are eternal and always bear in themselves their own proper measure, and they are themselves bound together and comprehended by the divine intelligence.²¹

These stable and immutable ideas can, then, be called *rationes*. "And where," he asks, "ought we suppose these rules (*rationes*) to be except in the very mind of the creator?"²² These rules, in the divine mind, do not change, but creatures made according to them do.²³ And it is by participating in them that any creature is whatever it is.²⁴

2.3 Thomas on Augustine on the Divine Ideas

In question 15 of the *Summa Theologiae*, where Thomas treats the divine ideas, he draws directly on Augustine's *De diversis quaestionibus*. The first article of the question asks whether any such ideas exist.²⁵ Like Augustine, he connects the Greek

¹⁸ *div. qu.*, 46, CCL 44A:70-73.

¹⁹ *div. qu.*, 46.2, CCL 44A:71: "*Si autem rationes eas vocemus, ab interpretandi quidem proprietate discedimus – rationes enim Graece λόγοι appellantur non ideae.*"

²⁰ *div. qu.*, 46.2, CCL 44A:71: "*Ideas igitur Latine possumus vel formas vel species dicere, ut verbum e verbo trasferre vedeamur.*"

²¹ *div. qu.*, 46.2, CCL 44A:71: "*quisquis hoc vocabulo uti voluerit, a re ipso non abhorrebit. Sunt namque ideae principales quaedam formae vel rationes rerum stabiles atque incommutabiles, quae ipsae formatae non sunt ac per hoc aeternae ac seomper eodem modo ses habentes, quae divina intellegentia continentur.*"

²² *div. qu.*, 46.2, CCL 44A:72: "*Has autem rationes ubi esse arbitrandum est nisi in ipsa mente creatoris?*"

²³ *div. qu.*, 46.2, CCL 44A:71: "*Et cum ipsae neque oriantur neque intereant, secundum eas tamen formari dicitur omne quod oriri et interire potest et omne quod oritur et interit.*"

²⁴ *div. qu.*, 46.2, CCL 44A:73: "*Quarum participatione fit ut sit quidquid est, quoquo modo est.*"

²⁵ *ST I.15.1*: "*Utrum ideae sint.*"

‘*idea*’ to the Latin ‘*forma*.’²⁶ The forms exist apart from the things themselves, either as their exemplars or as principles of knowledge of those same things.²⁷ To take the second distinction first—i.e., form as the principle of knowledge—Thomas means the forms are that by which we know a human is a human or a cat is a cat and so on. It has to do with the abstractive capacity of the intellect. And so, the form of something can be “in” the intellect in this way insofar as it’s something capable of being known.²⁸ When Thomas speaks of form in the first sense—i.e., in terms of a form’s exemplarity—he’s speaking of it in terms of a principle of action. In this case the form is “in” the agent in one of two ways, either according to the agent’s nature, or, in the case of those capable of intellection, in the intellect.²⁹ Thomas gives some examples of what he means by the form existing and acting “according to its natural being (*esse*).”³⁰ This is what happens when “a human comes from a human” as in procreation, or “as fire produces fire,” like when you put a lit match to a pile of kindling.³¹

The other way a form may exist as an exemplar “in” an agent is “according to its intelligible being (*esse*), as in those who act by intellect.”³² It’s this kind of exemplary form that is most closely associated with our investigation of the *rationes seminales*. According to Thomas, the exemplary form of a thing exists in an intellectual agent in a way that allows the agent to act in accordance with it. That the exemplar form is a

²⁶ *ST I.15.1 resp: “Idea enim Graece, Latine forma dicitur.”*

²⁷ *ST I.15.1 resp: “Forma autem alicuius rei praeter ipsam existens, ad duo esse potest, vel ut sit exemplar eius cuius dicitur forma; vel ut sit principium cognitionis ipsius.”*

²⁸ *ST I.15.1 resp: “secundum quod formae cognoscibilium dicuntur esse in cognoscente.”*

²⁹ *ST I.15.1 resp: “In quibusdam enim agentibus praeexistit forma rei fiendae secundum esse naturale, sicut in his quae agunt per naturam.”*

³⁰ *ST I.15.1 resp: In quibusdam enim agentibus praeexistit forma rei fiendae secundum esse naturale.”*

³¹ *ST I.15.1 resp: “sicut homo generat hominem, et ignis ignem.”*

³² *ST I.15.1 resp: “In quibusdam vero secundum esse intelligibile, ut in his quae agunt per intellectum.”*

principle of action means it differs from intelligible form as the principle of knowledge. Key to the treatment of both kinds of exemplary form, both *secudum esse naturale* and *secundum esse intelligibile*, is that their presence is what allows us to say a thing is not brought about by chance.³³ Here we see what Thomas' answer in the first article has been getting at. The preceding question of the *Summa Theologiae* dealt with the LORD's intellect.³⁴ In question 15, he stipulates that "the world is not made by chance, but by God acting as an intellectual agent."³⁵ In this case, then, as the idea of a house in the mind of a builder preexists the actual house he builds, so too does the idea of the world in the mind of the LORD preexist the world he brings into being. The LORD makes the world according to the form that exists within the divine mind, he shapes it to its likeness.³⁶

Following Augustine's identification of the *rationes* with the *ideae* in *De diversis quaestionibus*, we might say Thomas' treatment of form (in the singular), in the likeness of which the world is made, is the world's *ratio*. There's support, too, for aligning this view of an idea in the LORD with the one already discussed concerning the *creandi ratio*. When I worked through Augustine's use of '*ratio*' above, this use was marked as distinct

³³ *ST I.15.1 resp*: "In omnibus enim quae non a casu generantur, necesse est formam esse finem generationis cuiuscumque."

³⁴ *ST I.14*.

³⁵ *ST I.15.1 resp*: "Quia igitur mundus non est casu factus, sed est factus a Deo per intellectum agente." In the same sentence, Thomas goes on to say "this will be made clear below (*ut infra patebit*)."

The English Dominicans' translation points the reader to *ST I.46.1*, which has quite a bit to say about the world being made, but nothing in particular to say about the LORD making it as an intellectual agent. More usefully, some other English Dominicans, those at Blackfriars, point the reader instead to *ST I.19.4*, which deals precisely with the LORD's intellect and will as "the cause of things (*causa rerum*)" (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Knowledge in God (Ia. 14-18)*, trans. Thomas Gornall, vol. 4 (New York: Blackfriars & McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964).

³⁶ *ST I.15.1 resp*: "sicut similitudo domus praeexistit in mente aedificatoris. Et haec potest dici idea domus, quia artifex intendit domum assimilare formae quam mente concepit...in mente divina sit forma, ad similitudinem cuius mundus est factus."

for its identification with the second person of the Trinity, the Word through whom all things were made (Jn 1:3; cf. Col 1:16). In the reply to the third objection in question 15, Thomas supports this point by saying, “according to his essence, God is the likeness of all things. So, an idea in God is nothing other than his essence.”³⁷ Given that it’s reasonable to appropriate talk of that by which the LORD creates to the person of the Son, it’s fair to say there’s not much daylight between Thomas’ and Augustine’s thoughts here about the form or idea or *ratio* of the world. The rule of the things to be created, according to whose likeness all things are made not by chance but by intellect and will, just is the Son.

So, there’s an idea of the world, an *idea* or *forma* or *ratio mundi*, in the singular. Are there also ideas in the plural? If so, how? Thomas has already argued that any such idea is identical with God’s essence, which is unitary.³⁸ The implications of a multiplicity of ideas in the LORD for the doctrine of divine simplicity are Thomas’ chief concerns as he begins the second article of question 15. First, though, Thomas shows why it’s necessary for the LORD to have the ideas of particular things in mind. The argument moves from a presumption of the good of order to an explanation that such a good can only be had intentionally.³⁹ In other words, the LORD does not will the existence of

³⁷ ST I.15.1 ad 3: “*Deus secundum essentiam suam est similitudo omnium rerum. Unde idea in Deo nihil est aliud quam Dei essentia.*”

³⁸ ST I.15.1 ad 3.

³⁹ ST I.15.2 resp: “*Illud autem quod est optimum in rebus existens, est bonum ordinis universi, ut patet per Philosophum in XII Metaphys. Ordo igitur universi est proprie a Deo intentus, et non per accidens proveniens secundum successionem agentium.*” The *respondeo* of I.15.2 is specifically directed toward “those who have said that God only created the first creature, that the first creature created the second creature, and so on until the whole multitude of things was produced. According to that opinion, God only has an idea of the first created thing—*quidam dixerunt quod Deus creavit primum creatum tantum, quod creatum creavit secundum creatum, et sic inde quousque producta est tanta rerum multitudo, secundum quam opinionem, Deus non haberet nisi ideam primi creati.*” Thomas is pushing back against an emanationist account, and doing so by emphasizing the good of order, which requires the LORD’s willing of all the particulars of creation in the sum total of their relations to one another.

individual creatures apart from the ordering of the whole. The LORD does not only will to create singulars, he wills to create them in relation to one another and to himself. The LORD intends and wills the order of the universe.⁴⁰ The relations of order are a source of goodness. In fact, taken as a whole, the harmony of created things is not just *a* good. Thomas goes so far as to say, “what is best in existing things is the good of the order of the universe.”⁴¹

In intending to create an ordered world, it’s not enough to know things singularly, or conversely to know them in general. No, for Thomas knowing and intending the order of the universe means knowing and intending the parts and the whole together. And it’s in this context that Thomas will move our singular *ratio* into the plural *rationes* for the first time. As he says, “The idea (*ratio*) of any whole can’t be had, unless the particular ideas (*rationes*) of those things out of which the whole is constituted are had.”⁴² He then returns his reader to the image of the builder from the first article to give an example of this principle at work: “just as a builder may not conceive of the image (*speciem*) of a house, unless he were to conceive of the particular idea (*ratio*) of every part of it.”⁴³ For this reason, there must be many ideas in the divine mind. At the very least this must include everything that ever has existed, does exist, and will exist, as well as how those

⁴⁰ *ST I.15.2 resp: “Sed si ipse ordo universi est per se creatus ab eo, et intentus ab ipso, necesse est quod habeat ideam ordinis universi.”*

⁴¹ *ST I.15.2 resp: “quod est optimum in rebus existens, est bonum ordinis universi.”*

⁴² *ST I.15.2 resp: “Ratio autem alicuius totius haberi non potest, nisi habeantur propriae rationes eorum ex quibus totum constituitur.”*

⁴³ *ST I.15.2 resp: “sicut aedificator speciem domus concipere non posset, nisi apud ipsum esset propria ratio cuiuslibet partium eius.”*

things hang together. The “*propriae rationes omnium rerum*”—the particular ideas, or, to deploy my preferred usage, rules of all things—are in the mind of the LORD.⁴⁴

Thomas anticipates the likely flabbergasted objector, who has been shifting uneasily in her seat at the mention of multiplicity in the LORD. It’s easy enough to imagine the sentence, “And so it follows that in the divine mind there are many ideas,” sending her over the edge.⁴⁵ “But what about divine simplicity?!” we hear her shout. Thomas’ answer to this objection, an objection stemming from the seeming irreconcilability of simplicity and multiplicity in the LORD, is ingenious. It comes in a two part movement whereby Thomas first makes a distinction between “what is understood” and “the image by which something is understood,” and second shows how this applies in the case of the LORD.⁴⁶ As it turns out, this distinction between “*quod intelligitur*” (what is understood) and “*species qua intelligitur*” (the image by which something is understood) is a further specification of a distinction he made in the preceding article. That is, here we’re dealing again with the distinction between an idea as exemplar and an idea as principle of knowledge.⁴⁷

To make this connection with the previous article, Thomas reintroduces the example of a builder. The builder understands what it is he’s going to build; the form of the house is intellected by him.⁴⁸ But it’s not that the builder knows it by abstracting its

⁴⁴ *ST I.15.2 resp: “Sic igitur oportet quod in mente divina sint propriae rationes omnium rerum. Unde dicit Augustinus, in libro octoginta trium quaest., quod singula proprii rationibus a Deo creata sunt. Unde sequitur quod in mente divina sint plures ideae.”*

⁴⁵ *ST I.15.2 resp: “Unde sequitur quod in mente divina sint plures ideae.”*

⁴⁶ *ST I.15.2 resp: “si quis consideret ideam operati esse in mente operantis sicut quod intelligitur; non autem sicut species qua intelligitur, quae est forma faciens intellectum in actu.”*

⁴⁷ *ST I.15.1 resp: “Forma autem alicuius rei praeter ipsam existens, ad duo esse potest, vel ut sit exemplar eius cuius dicitur forma; vel ut sit principium cognitionis ipsius.”*

⁴⁸ *ST I.15.2 resp: “Forma enim domus in mente aedificatoris est aliquid ab eo intellectum.”*

form from a particular house. Rather, it's by knowing it, by understanding the form, idea, or *ratio* of the house that the builder is able to make a particular house. The builder builds it by conforming his materials to the rule of the house in his mind.⁴⁹ So too does the divine mind understand many things. The LORD understands them not by being formed from without "*per plures species*"—through many images—but by having in mind, as it were, the exemplary forms of all things that are not the LORD.⁵⁰ And here's where it gets really interesting. Because the question of what the *plures ideae* in the divine mind *are* is still looming. What are they ideas of, exactly? Thomas' solution is elegant. The ideas are, just as he's already said, identical with the LORD's essence.⁵¹ But they are plural—*ideae* or *formae* or *rationes*—because in knowing his own essence perfectly, the LORD knows himself as participable by creatures.⁵² As John Wippel puts it, "According to Aquinas a divine idea is nothing but a given way in which God understands himself as capable of being imitated by a creature. Hence the essence of any existing creature is an expression of a particular way in which the divine idea can be and in fact is imitated."⁵³ Every creature, then, participates in the divine essence. Each one can and does do so because the

⁴⁹ *ST I.15.2 resp.*: "*ad cuius similitudinem domum in materia format.*"

⁵⁰ *ST I.15.2 resp.*: "*Non est autem contra simplicitatem divini intellectus, quod multa intelligat, sed contra simplicitatem eius esset, si per plures species eius intellectus formaretur.*" In a discussion of the divine ideas and the metaphysics of participation, this leads John Wippel to conclude, "Participation by composition, as it is expressed in the intrinsic structure of any created entity, receives its final explanation in the order of extrinsic causality by leading one to recognize God not only as the first efficient cause but also as the extrinsic formal or exemplar cause of every participant" (John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being*, Monographs of the Society for Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 130. And cf. esp. *ST I.44.3 resp.*: "*Deus est prima causa exemplaris omnium rerum.*"

⁵¹ *ST I.15.1 ad 3.*

⁵² *ST I.15.2 resp.*: "*Potest autem cognosci non solum secundum quod in se est, sed secundum quod est participabilis secundum aliquem modum similitudinis a creaturis.*"

⁵³ Wippel, 130.

exemplar of that creature exists in the divine mind.⁵⁴ Creation is the result of the LORD's self-contemplation, his perfect self-knowledge, which enables him to intend and will the existence of everything that is not the LORD in all its multiplicity.

There's deep agreement between Augustine and Thomas on this point. The LORD is multiplicity in simplicity, plurality without composition, many yet one. The similarity in their thought, both the commitment to divine simplicity and to the LORD as the exemplar of all creatures, can be seen by comparing Thomas' discussion in question 15 to Augustine's reflections in Book XI of *De civitate Dei*. There Augustine says,

Now in Holy Scripture, the Spirit of wisdom is called manifold because she has many things within herself. But what she has, this she also is, and so she is the all-one (*omnia unus est*). For wisdom is not many things, but one. In her are boundless things and also for her a certain well-bounded treasury of intelligible things. In that treasury are all the invisible and immutable rules (*rationes*) of even visible and mutable things, which were made by her.⁵⁵

Augustine even goes on to use the image of the human maker (*artifex*), comparable to Thomas' image of the human builder (*aedificator*) in question 15. But for Augustine the human *artifex* serves principally as a point of contrast rather than comparison. For Thomas, the *aedificator* and the exemplar form of a house in his mind serve as an analogue for the LORD as creator, whose mind contains the *forma mundi* and the *propriae rationes*. Augustine, always less sanguine than Thomas when it comes to the possibilities of human knowledge, presents the *artifex* as a kind of foil. "God," he says,

⁵⁴ ST I.15.2 resp: "Unaquaeque autem creatura habet propriam speciem, secundum quod aliquo modo participat divinae essentiae similitudinem. Sic igitur in quantum Deus cognoscit suam essentiam ut sic imitabilem a tali creatura, cognoscit eam ut propriam rationem et ideam huius creaturae."

⁵⁵ civ., 11.10, CSEL 40.1:528: "Ceterum dictus est in scripturis sanctis Spiritus sapientiae multiplex, eo quod multa in sese habeat; sed quae habet, haec et est, et ea omnia unus est. Neque enim multae, sed una sapientia est, in qua sunt infiniti quidam eique finiti thesauri rerum intellegibilium, in quibus sunt omnes invisibiles adque incommutabiles rationes rerum etiam visibilium et mutabilium, quae per ipsam factae sunt."

“made nothing unknowingly, and this can’t rightly be said about any human maker.”⁵⁶ Still, there’s an undeniable relation between human and divine knowledge, and Thomas clearly draws this out in the case of the *aedificator*. In closing this chapter from *De civitate Dei*, Augustine sums up what will in Thomas come in the form of careful distinctions between the intelligible and exemplar forms. So he says, “this world could not be known by us unless it were, but unless it were known by God, it could not be.”⁵⁷

2.4 The Seeds of Creation

In attempting to identify what the *rationes seminales* are in Augustine’s *De genesi ad litteram* it’s been necessary to do quite a bit of conceptual clarification. I first treated the different possible uses of the word ‘*ratio*.’ I then showed the connection between one sense of ‘*ratio*,’ the one most closely associated with Christ as *Logos*, and Augustine’s treatment of the divine ideas. Finally, I looked at Thomas’ treatment of the divine ideas in the Prima Pars of the *Summa Theologiae*. This, in turn, led back to Augustine’s thoughts on divine simplicity in *De civitate Dei*. At this point, we have a workable concept of *rationes* of a particular sort. These *rationes* are the exemplar causes of all things that are not the LORD. They are in the divine mind by virtue of the LORD’s perfect self-knowledge, which includes the knowledge of himself as participable.

I won’t be going on to examine in depth the scope of this divine knowledge. That is, I won’t be delving into the nature of the LORD’s knowledge of non-actualized divine ideas, whether there are any or their ontological status. Questions about possible worlds

⁵⁶ civ., 11.10, CSEL 40.1:528: “*Quoniam Deus non aliquid nesciens fecit, quod nec de quolibet homine artifice recte dici potest.*”

⁵⁷ civ., 11.10, CSEL 44.1:28: “*iste mundus nobis notus esse non posset, nisi esset; Deo autem nisi notus esset, esse non posset.*”

follow too closely on the heels of that endeavor, and I'm not interested in treating them here, nor is there time or space to do so. I will mention something, however, which bears directly on questions related to the LORD's providential care for creation. The question is this, "How much can the LORD know about the past, present and future, the *histoire totale* of the created order?" Based on what we've covered to this point it must be said is that the LORD, in knowing himself perfectly, knows at least this, every actual creature and the sum total of creaturely relations that ever were, are, or will be. As should be clear, this is the minimum the LORD must know on the Augustinian and Thomistic view presented above, to have made the cosmos in all its ordered creaturely splendor. Thinkers who deny this basic premise will have a difficult time defending any meaningful doctrine of creation or providence, and so also anything resembling christology or soteriology.

What remains to be shown is what connection these *rationes ideales* have to the *rationes seminales*, which the LORD creates atemporally in Augustine's interpretation of the creation narrative of Genesis 1. In the last chapter, I argued that Augustine's interpretation of the hexaëmeron provides the contemporary theologian with the resources to engage modern cosmology and evolutionary biology. The commentary in *De genesi ad litteram*, his mature thoughts on the days of creation, can bear the weight of the changes to human understanding about the cosmos in a way accounts heavily reliant on an Aristotelean cosmology simply can't. Again, this isn't to say those other accounts aren't useful in their own ways, or that they were wrong to use the best scientific evidence available. It's just to say they're of limited value when trying to get a handle on the problem of human and nonhuman creaturely death. To do that requires tangling with

the unfolding of cosmic and evolutionary history on nearly unimaginable timescales.⁵⁸ I've identified the reasons why Augustine's reading of Genesis is more likely to be of use in this endeavor. Now it's time to examine some of the specifics of it.

You'll remember that key to Augustine's interpretation of Genesis 1 is his understanding that what's indicated by the succession of days is not a temporal sequence of events. Rather, what's indicated is the rhythmic motion of the angelic intellect. The angels contemplate the LORD, and know the things to be made in the Word of God. When the LORD "makes the creature itself in its own kind" the angels then contemplate those creatures by the light of their intellect (evening knowledge). But that light, the created light of the angelic intellect, by virtue of having known those things in the Word of God, knows also to refer what is known back to the LORD. And so, the angelic mind again turns back to contemplating all things in the mind of the LORD (morning knowledge). This pattern is repeated for all the kinds of things there are, making up the six days of creation.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ It's worth noting that whenever we're foolish enough to think we occupy a more sophisticated imaginative space (at least where space and time are concerned) than premodern thinkers, we quickly find such pride misplaced. An instance of this directly related to this discussion of cosmic or evolutionary timescales comes in Book XII of Augustine's *De civitate Dei*. Augustine is speculating about the timing of God's creation of humans and about the relation of time to eternity. There he explains given the difference between time and eternity, it doesn't matter whether you think it's been five or six thousand years, 600,000 years, or even 600,000 years multiplied repeatedly "until you reached a number for we have no name." Even then, "it could be asked, why did he not make man before?" This flags two important points. First, it's clear that Augustine doesn't find imagining the "deep time"—to borrow a phrase of Charles Taylor's—familiar to modern cosmology particularly outlandish or any more difficult to fathom than we do. Second, that focusing just on the temporal sequencing of events misses the point of reflecting on the relation between the LORD's eternality and creaturely temporality. Cf. *civ.*, 12.13, CSEL 40.1:585-586: "*Ac per hoc si non quinque vel ses, verum etiam sexaginta milia sive sescenta, aut sexagens, aut sescentiens, aut sescentiens miliens decerentur annorum, aut itidem per totidem totiens multiplicaretur haec summa, ubi iam nullum numeri nomen haberemus, ex quo Deus hominem fecit: similiter quaeri posset, quur ante non fecerit.*"

⁵⁹ *Gn. litt.*, PL 34:312: "*cum jam dictum esset, Et sic factum est, in suo genere ipsa creatura fit; quae item cum in suo genere facta cognoscitur ab ea luce, quae jam in Verbo Dei faciendam cognoverat, fit tertio vespera: et inde hoc modo caetera usque ad mane post vesperam sexti diei.*"

This poses a question: If the six days of creation in Genesis 1 are atemporal, what does the LORD make when “he makes the creature itself in its own kind?”⁶⁰ On Augustine’s read, it’s clearly something that can be known by the angelic intellect, but it also can’t be exactly what we mean when we typically think of creation. That’s because when we think of things in the created order we tend to think of particular things existing in space and time—rocks, trees, dogs, humans, planets, galaxies, stars. Augustine doesn’t simply mean creatures like these. He’s describing the conditions of the possibility of these kinds of things existing. In his *Confessiones*, Augustine identifies two things created by the LORD that meet these criteria. The first of these, as should be clear already, is the angelic creation. Formed for and capable of reveling in the contemplation of the LORD’s eternity and immutability though itself mutable, the angelic creation is the “heaven” created “In the beginning” (Gn 1:1). The second thing is the “earth” that “was without form and void” (Gn 1:2). This names a created formlessness. Though completely without form, it’s still not nothing. From this formlessness the LORD will create another heaven and earth, visible and corporeal.⁶¹

There’s still a problem here, as the created formlessness from which a formed, visible creation will be made, isn’t itself knowable. Because while it’s not nothing, it’s

⁶⁰ *Gn. litt.*, PL 34:312: “*in suo genere ipsa creatura fit.*”

⁶¹ *conf.*, 12.12.15, CSEL 33:319-320: “*duo reperio, quae fecisti carentia temporibus, cum tibi neutrum coaeternum sit: unum, quod ita formatum est, ut sine ullo defectu contemplationis, sine ullo intervallo mutationis, quamvis mutabile, tamen non mutatum aeternitate atque incommutabilitate perfuatur: alterum, quod ita informe erat, ut ex qua form in quam formom vel motionis vel stationis mutaretur, quo tempore subderetur, non haberet. sed hoc ut informe esset, non reliquisti, quoniam fecisti ante omnem diem in principio caelum et terram, haec duo quae dicebam. terra autem invisibilis erat et inconposita et tenebrae super abyssum. quibus verbis insinuatur informitas, ut gradatim excipiantur, qui omnimodam speviei privationem nec tamen ad nihil perventionem cogitare non possent, unde fieret alterum caelum et terra visibilis atque conposita et aqua speviosa et quiquid deinceps in constitutione huius mundi non sine diebus factum commemoratur, quia talia sunt, ut in eis agantur vicissitudines temporum propter ordinatas commutationes motionum atque formarum.*”

also not anything. There's not something to know about it. It's certainly not a candidate for what the angels know when the LORD "makes the creature itself in its own kind." As yet, it hasn't been made to be any kind of thing at all. It likewise holds that it can't be known as such. This "unformed matter (*informis materies*)" is not itself subject to time, as it has no order, "nothing subject to the vicissitudes of time."⁶² And still, from this "almost nothing (*paene nihil*)" comes everything that will be.⁶³

As early as his first commentary on Genesis, *De genesi contra manichaeos*, Augustine had been inclined to think of unformed matter as seed-like. He refers to the opening line of Genesis, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gn 1:1), as "a kind of seed (*quasi semen*) of heaven and earth, when the matter of heaven and earth was as yet in confusion."⁶⁴ This way of speaking might seem to indicate an inclination in the formless matter itself. But it's not necessary to read Augustine quite that decisively, as if the formlessness would become something as a matter of course, like a seed sown in rich tilth puts down roots. No, in his commentary against the Manichaeans, he explicitly identifies this as a manner of speech employed in Scripture about things which haven't yet been done but will be done.⁶⁵ And so, in this case, it's not because the formless matter is yet anything, but because it's capable of being made "the heavens and the earth" that Augustine makes the comparison to a seed.⁶⁶ He repeats this claim in his *De genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber*. He says again the unformed matter

⁶² *conf.*, 12.15.22, CSEL 33:324: "an quia erat informis materies, ubi propter nullam formam nullus ordo erat? ubi autem nullus ordo erat, nulla esse vicissitudo temporum poterat."

⁶³ *conf.*, 12.15.22, CSEL 33:324: "et tamen hoc paene nihil in quantum non omnino nihil erat, ab illo utique erat, a quo est quidquid est, quod utcumque aliquid est."

⁶⁴ *Gn. c. man.*, 1.7.11, PL 34:178: "sic dictum est, In principio fecit Deus coelum et terram, quasi semen coeli et terrae, cum in confuso adhuc esset coeli et terrae materia."

⁶⁵ *Gn. c. man.*, 1.7.11, PL 34:178: "non quia jam factum erat, sed quia certissime futurum erat."

⁶⁶ *Gn. c. man.*, 1.7.11, PL 34:178: "non quia jam sunt, sed quia inde futura sunt."

“is called the seed (*semen*) of heaven and earth,” but in this later work he adds that in this state it’s prepared by the LORD “for receiving suitable forms.”⁶⁷

Looking again to his thoughts on Genesis in Book XII of *Confessiones*, we find a further development of this position. While angelic creatures and unformed matter— heaven and earth—are the first two things created, it’s also the case that he gives form to the latter outside of time. Augustine makes this case by distinguishing the different ways one thing might precede another. Precedence can be understood in terms of eternity, time, choice, and origin.⁶⁸ He gives examples of each of these. Precedence “in eternity is as the LORD is to all things. In time it’s as flower to a fruit. In choice it’s as a fruit is to a flower. In origin it’s as a sound is to a song.”⁶⁹ He takes the middle two, precedence in time and in choice, as easy enough to understand. When one thing happens before another, you’re dealing with temporal precedence. When one thing is preferred to another, you’re dealing with the precedence of choice. But imagining the priority of the LORD’s eternity to all things that are not the LORD is much more difficult. There you’re not dealing with temporal sequencing, but rather naming a kind of relation. This relation bears a bit more reflection before moving on to a discussion of the kind of precedence most directly involved in the question of formed and unformed matter.

⁶⁷ *Gn. litt. imp.*, 3.10, CSEL 28.1:464-465: “*ipsa vero materies caelum et terra, veluti semen caeli et terrae appellata sit et caelum et terra quasi confusum atque permixtum ab artifice deo accipiendis formis idoneum.*”

⁶⁸ *conf.*, 12.29.40, CSEL 33:340: “*cum vero dicit primo informem, deinde formatam, non est absurdus, si modo est idoneus discernere, quid praecedat aeternitate, quid tempore, quid electione, quid origine.*”

⁶⁹ *conf.*, 12.29.40, CSEL 33:340: “*aeternitate, sicut deus omnia; tempore, sicut flos frutum; electione, sicut fructus florem; origine, sicut sonus cantum.*”

2.5 Excursus on Creation as Relation

The LORD's act of creation is separable from the idea of a beginning in time. What this means is that the bringing into being and sustaining in being of all that is—the relation the word 'creation' names—is distinct from, though connected to, the temporal sequence of events we think of when we think of time. It's distinct from it in that creation is not a part of the sequence of temporal events. In this way, the word 'creation' is distinctively inflected for the Christian. In English 'to create' or 'creation' can mark a great number of activities, all of which seem to indicate the process or act whereby something goes from one state of affairs to another different state of affairs. This does not occur without the intervention of a creator. So, a carpenter might take pieces of wood and out of them create a box or a table or a chair or a spoon. This is distinct from what Christians mean when they say "God creates." It's distinct in at least two ways. First, and most obviously, the human who creates does not bring anything into being the material for which didn't already exist. The human creator, our carpenter again, rearranges things that already exist to bring about a new ordering with some purpose in mind. The LORD creates by bringing into being not by rearranging preexisting material, but by bringing the material itself to be out of nothing.

The second, and far less obvious, distinction between human and divine acts of creation is that to say of a human "she creates" or "she's creating a work of art" names a process. The process—most of the time—has a beginning and an end. So, it makes sense to say "she's going to create," "she's creating," or "that's something she created." Human creation is temporally indexed. It begins to happen, happens, then stops happening. None of this can be true of the LORD's act of creation. This is because as the LORD's act it is

itself identical with everything else the LORD has and also is. The LORD doesn't begin to do something, do it, and then think to himself, "well, I'm glad that's over with." No, for the LORD to create is to eternally stand in relation to everything the LORD creates. The LORD's act of creation is connected to time without itself being an event in the order of time. Time is, as I've already argued, itself a creature. Time therefore stands within and is part of the created order, intimate to the existence of space and motion. Time is connected to the LORD's act of creation in that this act is the presupposition for the existence of anything at all, including time.

2.6 The Seeds of Creation, continued

The last kind of precedence Augustine distinguishes is that of origin. Using his chosen example of the relation of sound to a song, he shows both the difficulty and usefulness of making this distinction. It's not, he explains, as though a sound is made first and then formed into a song, in the way something might be constructed out of raw materials. Sound and song appear simultaneously.⁷⁰ And still, the song is made out of the sound. It wouldn't make sense to say the opposite, that a sound could be made out of a song. It's a case of ontological dependence, you can have a sound without a song, but no song may be sung without a sound.⁷¹ Augustine finds this image a useful way of describing how unformed matter is prior to formed matter. No time elapses between the

⁷⁰ *conf.*, 12.29.40, CSEL 33:341: "*neque enim priore tempore sonos edimus informes sine cantu et eos posteriore tempore in formam cantici coaptamus aut fingimus, sicut ligna, quibus arca, vel argentum, quo vasculum fabricatur; tales quippe materiae tempore etiam praecedunt formas rerum, quae fiunt ex eis. at in cantu non ita est. cum enim cantatur, auditur sonus eius, non prius informiter sonat et deinde formatur in cantum. quod enim primo utcumque sonuerit, praeterit, nec ex eo quicquam reperies, quod resumptum arte componas: et ideo cantus in sono suo vertitur, qui sonus eius materies eius est. idem quippe formatur, ut cantus sit.*"

⁷¹ *conf.*, 12.29.40, CSEL 33:341: "*sed prior est origine, quia non cantus formatur, ut sonus sit, sed sonus formatur, ut cantus sit.*"

creation of unformed matter and giving it form. And it's here that we can see an important development of Augustine's earlier insight.

Whereas his earlier commentaries on Genesis referred to formless matter as itself *quasi semen*—a kind of seed—here he tweaks that understanding slightly. Something already explained in the unfinished literal commentary, unformed matter's readiness to receive forms, gets fuller treatment. So, he explains, "the matter of things is made first, and it's called heaven and earth because from it heaven and earth are made. But it's not made first in time, because time sprouts up (*exserunt*) from the forms of things."⁷² The word choice is important. Augustine uses the word *exsero*, which means to stretch out or put forth. But the root of this word, *sero*, means to sow or plant. It's not a stretch, then, already in the *Confessiones*, to think of Augustine imagining the forms of things as seeds sown in formless matter. Like seeds sown in fertile soil, they organize what's disorganized. The detritus of organic matter is given shape in new life. The seed grows. It becomes a plant. This idea, of the forms of things as seeds, as opposed to unformed matter itself as *quasi semen*, marks a real and important shift in Augustine's thought. It's only viable using the conceptual resources he deploys in *Confessiones*. Distinguishing between priority in origin and priority in time allows him to go on to say both that formless matter is created first and that this doesn't mean the forms come to be in time. This insight will prove an exceptionally powerful tool when it's honed and wielded in *De genesi ad litteram*. He uses it to explain what it means to say that on the seventh day "the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them" (Gn 2:1) and that time still

⁷² *conf.*, 12.29.40, CSEL 33:341-342: "hoc exemplo qui potest intellegat materiam rerum primo factam et appellatam caelum et terram, quia inde facta sunt caelum et terra, nec tempore primo factam, quia formae rerum exserunt tempora."

has not yet begun. For this, he'll need to further develop his picture of the forms as seeds. It's then that we'll be able to come up with a full-blown concept of the *rationes seminales*.

2.7 When are the *Rationes Seminales*?

Frank Robbins' useful dissertation about the commentary tradition on the hexaëmeron summarizes the key points of Augustine's position well. After reviewing Augustine's illustration of precedence of origin found in the relation of sound to song he says,

The universe thus made by God had in itself, just as the seed potentially contains the tree, not only heaven, earth and the *maxima mundi membra*, but also whatever these have produced, before they arose in periods of time into the form wherein they now exist. This was brought about by the fact that in the beginning God placed forms (*rationes*) in the universe which later produce things in their genera as we know them.⁷³

It's these *rationes*, the forms with which unformed matter is inseminated, that the angels know when they know the creaturely kinds in themselves. And with them we're approaching a culminating point of the investigation begun with the term '*ratio*,' which extended into the divine ideas—the *rationes* in the mind of the LORD. Making sense of these created *rationes* requires keeping one eye fixed on their source in the uncreated *rationes* and the *creandi ratio*, who is the Word of God. But the created *rationes* are different. They must be if we're to affirm, as both Augustine and Thomas do, that the divine ideas are nothing other than the LORD's essence. The created *rationes*, as creatures, aren't that. To determine exactly what they are, I'll turn back once again to *De genesi ad litteram*.

⁷³ Frank Eggleston Robbins, *The Hexaemeral Literature: A Study of the Greek and Latin Commentaries on Genesis* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1912), 67.

In Book V of *De genesi ad litteram*, Augustine clearly differentiates three ways created things can be known. First, it's possible to know them in the Word of God. Knowing them in this way means knowing them according to their "immutable rules (*rationes incommutabiles*).” This corresponds with morning knowledge in the angelic intellect. The second way something may be known is according to the works of the LORD completed in the six days of creation. By this Augustine means according to the created rules, the *rationes seminales*, with which formless matter is seeded. Knowledge of these corresponds to evening knowledge in the angelic intellect. The third way something may be known is as it is in the order of time. This last way of knowing is what's open to human sense perception. It's our ordinary way of knowing things in the world. The first two, "are so remote from the senses, and from the usual functioning of human thought" that they have to be believed on divine authority before they can be known. Even then, we'll be looking through the mirror darkly, knowing them only with the aid of the LORD.⁷⁴

In brief compass, Augustine has introduced another relevant distinction for correctly understanding the *rationes seminales*. It's a distinction between the LORD's work in the six days, and the LORD's work that occurs in the order of time. He makes it on scriptural grounds, as he sees the necessity of harmonizing seemingly contradictory passages from Scripture. Most glaringly, of course, are the two narratives of creation,

⁷⁴ *Gn. litt.*, 5.12.28, PL 34:331: "*Cum ergo aliter se habeant omnium creaturarum rationes incommutabiles in Verbo Dei, aliter illa ejus opera a quibus in die septimo requievit, aliter ista quae ex illis usque nunc operatur; horum trium hoc quod extremum posui, nobis utcumque notum est per corporis sensus, et hujus consuetudinem vitae. Duo vero illa remota a sensibus, et ab usu cogitationis humanae, prius ex divina auctoritate credenda sunt; deinde per haec quae nota sunt, utcumque noscenda, quanto quisque magis minusve potuerit pro suae capacitatis modo, divinitus adjutus internis aeternisque rationibus ut possit.*"

which Augustine divides into Genesis 1:1-2:5 and 2:6-3:24.⁷⁵ Are these two tellings of the same tale? Can the two narratives hang together? If so, how? Augustine looks to resolve these questions by searching for the logical dividing point between the creation accounts. He locates this in the first verses of Genesis 2, which read:

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation. These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth (Gn 2:1-5).

These verses, Augustine argues, belong to the first narrative of all things being created atemporally. Verses four and five, especially, are there as a sort of hinge between the two narratives. They set apart what's accomplished when the LORD, “who lives in eternity created all things at once” (Sir 18:1, Vulg.)⁷⁶—the works from which the LORD rested on the seventh day. But Augustine also points to the dominical word of John 5:17, which affirms, “My father is working still.”⁷⁷ What does it mean, then, to say the LORD rests from all his works if he is in fact still working? To reconcile these apparent differences—those between the two narratives of Genesis 1-3 and between the LORD's complete creation of the heavens and the earth with his continued activity in the world—Augustine makes a distinction. That distinction is between the work of seeding unformed matter with the *rationes* and the ongoing, providential work of governing the cosmos.

⁷⁵ Cf. *Gn. litt.*, 5.6.17-5.7.22.

⁷⁶ *Ecclus.* 18:1, Vulg: “*qui vivit in aeternum creavit omnia simul.*”

⁷⁷ *Gn. litt.*, 5.11.27, PL 34:331: “*Inter illa ergo opera Dei, a quibus requievit in die septimo, et ista quae usque nunc operatur, quemdam Scriptura interponens suae narrationis articulum, commendavit se illa explicasse, et coepit jam ista contexere.*”

He states this distinction clearly, again in Book V, where he says: “In the first making (*prima conditio*), God worked all creatures in one way, and from those works he rested on the seventh day; in another way, he works at the administration (*administrationem*) of those things, in which he works until now.”⁷⁸ The relation between these two kinds of works of the LORD is again one of dependence. The LORD administers in time those things he created outside of time. This distinction doesn’t, on my reading, actually name two separate ways the LORD relates to creation. I’m inclined to take these two terms—making (*conditio*) and administration (*administratio*)—to be descriptions of creation at two different levels of discourse. It’s the same act—or same relation, rather—seen from the perspective of eternity or that of time. It’s possible to link these two descriptions to the different ways of knowing things summarized above. What can be described in terms of *administratio* is what can be discerned of the will of the LORD in the outworking of his providence in time. This is the kind of thing that humans are able, in the ordinary course of things, to perceive sensibly. They’re the things we’re most familiar with. What’s described in terms of *conditio*—the *condition* for a temporal outworking of the LORD’s providence—are things according to their kinds.

One way to think about those is, as Augustine does, by comparing them to seeds. Something will sprout and grow from them in time. This is the force of arguing that the LORD rests from *all* his works on the seventh day. Everything is already created and contained *in nuce* when the first narrative ends. Augustine uses the metaphor of a seed

⁷⁸ *Gn. litt.*, 5.11.27, PL 34:330: “*Sed illud etiam atque etiam consideremus, utrum possit nobis per omnia constare sententia qua dicebamus, aliter operatum Deum omnes creaturas prima conditio, a quibus operibus in die septimo requievit; aliter istam earum administrationem, qua usque nunc operatur.*” The last clause, “*qua usque nunc operatur*” is a clear allusion to the relevant passage from John 5:17 quoted above.

growing into a tree in Book II of *De genesi ad litteram* to explain the kind of integrity the seed has. “For God is the author and maker of actual natures. But whatever each and every thing (*res*), by a natural growth, in some way puts forth and unfolds through suitable times, it contained even before as a hidden thing, though not in the aspect or mass of its body, still by the rule of nature (*ratione naturae*).”⁷⁹ A nature, he insists, is not imperfect simply on account of being at different stages of its development. And so a seed, having the integrity of an actual nature, is “where all things which in some way come forth by the advance of time, lie hidden in invisible ways.”⁸⁰

But we can’t push this analogy too far. Because while Augustine distinguishes between two levels—let’s call them the order of making and the order of time—if left alone, this distinction inclines us to think the LORD’s making is subject to time. First he makes it, then it develops. While this is perfectly normal way of describing things that are temporally indexed, it can’t be the case that the relation of the LORD to all the things that aren’t the LORD is itself timebound. As I’ve already argued, the LORD is the LORD of time; time is a creature. We need, then, another picture to complement the seed image of *conditio* and *administratio*. Augustine himself provides one. The picture comes in the discussion of the nature of time in Book XI of the *Confessiones*. It is fitting that the image is of a *canticum*, a song. You’ll recall the song was his chosen metaphor for describing the relation of precedence of unformed to formed matter. I’d like to keep that picture in mind as we apply the image of a song to the relation of *conditio* to

⁷⁹ *Gn. litt.*, 2.15.30, PL 34:276: “*Ipsarum enim naturarum est Deus auctor et conditor. Omnis autem res quidquid progressu naturali per tempora congrua quodammodo prodit atque explicat, etiam ante continebat occultum, etsi non specie vel mole corporis sui, tamen ratione naturae.*”

⁸⁰ *Gn. litt.*, 2.15.30, PL 34:276: “*ubi omnia quae progressu temporis quodammodo procedunt, modis invisibilibus latent.*”

administratio, and so to the creation of the *rationes seminales* to their unfolding in the order of time.

When Augustine describes the process of reciting a song, he begins with an image of the whole. His “expectation is directed toward the whole.”⁸¹ Before beginning to recite the verses line by line, he in a way holds all the parts in his mind as lines to be sung. Once the song has begun, however, he’s now moving through the song. There’s a past, present, and future to it. Now his expectation (*expectatio*) is directed toward the verses yet to come, while his memory (*memoria*) holds those which have passed by. His attention (*attentio*) is on the present, the moment of recitation that moves the verses, words, syllables, and phonemes from the future into the past. The whole motion of the song in the mind of the singer is one of shortening remaining expectation and lengthening memory. In the end, expectation will have vanished, and memory alone will remain.⁸² This image is valid not only for the song, pieces of which pass from future to past through a present. This same pattern of movement, from expectation to memory, also applies to “the whole life of a human, of which the parts are all the actions of a human.”⁸³ It applies further to “the whole age of the sons of men, of which the parts are all the lives of humans.”⁸⁴ Though Augustine doesn’t here, we might further extend the application of

⁸¹ *conf.*, 11.28.38, *CSEL* 33:307: “*in totum expectatio mea tenditur.*”

⁸² *conf.*, 11.28.38, *CSEL* 33:307-308: “*cum autem coepero, quantum ex illa in praeteritum decerpsero, tenditur et memoria mea, atque descenditur vita huius actionis meae in memoriam propter quod dixi et in expectationem propter quod dicturus sum: praesens tamen adest attentio mea, per quam traicitur quod erat futurum, ut fiat praeteritum. quod quanto magis agitur et agitur, tanto breviata expectatione prolongatur memoria, donec tota expectatio consumatur, quum tota illa actio finita transierit in memoriam.*”

⁸³ *conf.*, 11.28.38, *CSEL* 33:308: “*hoc in tota vita hominis, cuius partes sunt omnes actiones hominis.*”

⁸⁴ *conf.*, 11.28.38, *CSEL* 33:308: “*hoc in toto saeculo filiorum hominum, cuius partes sunt omnes vitae hominum.*”

this principle to the whole history of the cosmos, of which the parts are all the motions of the celestial bodies and everything they contain.

This image—the actions of parts and the movements of wholes—is entwined with Augustine’s picture of time itself. The song is an illustration in the story he’s been telling of the temporal order, which is “a kind of distention.”⁸⁵ For Augustine, the Latin ‘*distentio*’ connotes not just extension, but a painful stretching out, more like the distended belly of a starving child than a runner limbering up before a race. Andrea Nightingale explains it this way, “At the theological level, Augustine associates psychic distention with sinful dissolution and fragmentation. As O’Daly observes, Augustine links *distentio* with a cluster of verbs that express the human lament over being ‘poured forth’ and ‘torn apart’ into multiplicity: *effundo, dissilio, multiplico, gemo, ingemisco.*”⁸⁶ Augustine reaffirms his position on the nature of time even more forcefully a few chapters on when he says, “it seems to me time is nothing other than distention.”⁸⁷ A distention of what, though? Augustine asks himself this very question. He hazards an answer, though not a definitive one. He’s not sure, but thinks it’s most likely the distention, the painful pulling apart, “of the mind itself.”⁸⁸ I think it’s possible to understand this distention in another way.

Augustine is right, the human mind is stretched out from past to future. The objects of our present fly by as they move from expectation to memory. This condition is

⁸⁵ *conf.*, 11.23.30, *CSEL* 33:301: “*video igitur quandam esse distentionem.*”

⁸⁶ Andrea Nightingale, “Augustine on Extending Oneself to God through Intention,” *Augustinian Studies* 46, no. 2 (2015): 197. In this quotation Nightingale is citing Gerard J. P. O’Daly, “Time as *Distentio* and St. Augustine’s Exegesis of *Philippians* 3,12-14,” *Revue d’Etudes Augustiniennes et Patristiques* 23, no. 3-4 (1977): 268.

⁸⁷ *conf.*, 11.26. 33, *CSEL* 33:304: “*inde mihi visum est nihil esse aliud tempus quam distentionem.*”

⁸⁸ *conf.*, 11.26. 33, *CSEL* 33:304: “*sed cuius rei, nescio, et mirum, si non ipsius animi.*”

unique to the rational soul with the capacity to make present the past and the future.⁸⁹ But this threefold pattern Augustine describes has its roots in a more fundamental question, which he also asks: Do the past and the future exist? Are these times such that,

when the future is made present it comes forth from some hidden place, and then, when the present is made the past, it recedes into some hidden place? For where did those who sang of future things see them if they aren't yet? For it's not possible to see that which isn't. And those who tell of the past, would certainly not be able to speak truly, if they could not see those things with their mind. If past things were not, there would be no way at all to see them. Therefore the future and the past are.⁹⁰

One solution to this set of questions is the one he's already offered. The past and the future have a kind of existence in the mind of rational souls who can cast their present gaze into the future in expectation or the past in memory.

But is this enough to satisfy the strong claim Augustine makes, "*sunt ergo futura et praeterita* (the future and the past are)?" Perhaps it is for the past, memory having at least the benefit of being a kind of record of things that once were. But we're on shakier ground when we apply this to the future. Augustine knows this, and settles for the mind's *expectatio* being the capacity to predict future events by knowledge of causes and signs.⁹¹ But this isn't really a candidate for future knowledge, it's rather a knowledge of the past and present "*quae iam sunt* (the things that already are)". In *De Trinitate*, Augustine compares this human ability to predict the future to that of the demons, who because of

⁸⁹ *conf.*, 11.20.26, CSEL 33:298: "*sunt enim haec in anima tria quaedam et alibi ea non video, praesens de praeteritis memoria, praesens de praesentibus contuitus, praesens de futuris expectatio.*"

⁹⁰ *conf.*, 11.17.22., CSEL 33:295: "*an et ipsa sunt, sed ex aliquo procedit occulto, cum ex futuro fit praesens, et in aliquod recedit occultum, cum ex praesenti fit praeteritum? nam ubi ea videntur qui futura cecinerunt, si nondum sunt? neque enim potest videri id quod non est. et qui narrant praeterita, non utique vera narrant, si animo illa non cererent: quae si nulla essent, cerni omnino non possent. sunt ergo futura et praeterita.*"

⁹¹ *conf.*, 11.18.24, CSEL 33:297: "*cum ergo videri dicuntur futura, non ipsa, quae nondum sunt, id est quae futura sunt, sed eorum causae vel signa forsitan videntur, quae iam sunt.*"

their subtlety of intellect are able to make it appear as though they can divine the future.⁹² This comparison in *De Trinitate* is important, because almost in the same breath, Augustine provides two other possible ways of knowing the future.

The first possibility is that future things are announced to humans by the holy angels or that those humans to whom future things been announced have handed on the knowledge to other humans. The second possibility Augustine canvasses is that knowledge of future things is directly revealed to humans after being drawn up by the Holy Spirit to see “the immediate causes of future things in the very highest height of things.”⁹³ Both of these possibilities are more suited to Augustine’s description in Book XI of *Confessiones* of those “*qui futura cecinerunt* (who sang of future things)” than is the capacity for prediction shared by humans and demons. The reference to the sung future most readily suggests the prophetic witness of the Psalms, but is general enough to encompass the prophetic genre more broadly. The possibility of prophetic, not just predictive, knowledge is closer to Augustine’s declarative statements about the reality of past and future times.

This position is further borne out by the specific way Augustine talks about the revelation of prophetic knowledge through angelic intermediaries—the first possibility just discussed. In this case humans learn of future things “from the holy angels to whom God has announced them through his word and wisdom *where both future and past*

⁹² *trin.*, 4.17, CCL 50:189: “*an vero iam ventura praecesserint et longe visa venientia nuntientur pro acuto sensu videntium, quod cum faciunt aerae potestates divinare creduntur, tamquam si quisquam de montis vertice aliquem longe videat venientem et proxime in campo habitantibus ante nuntiet.*”

⁹³ *trin.*, 4.17, CCL 50:180: “*an ipsorum hominum quorundam mentes in tantum euehantur spiritu sancto ut non per angelos sed per se ipsas futurorum instantes causas in ipsa summa rerum arce conspiciant.*”

things stand.”⁹⁴ There’s an echo here from Book XI of *Confessiones* in the use of the Latin verb ‘*sto.*’⁹⁵ It’s one of a constellation of words Augustine uses in Book XI with reference to the LORD, the stable (*stabilis*) one,⁹⁶ who makes us solid (*solido*),⁹⁷ who will take hold our heart and fix it in place (*figo*),⁹⁸ and upon whom we can take a stand (*insisto*).⁹⁹ The fixity of all things, which are standing in the eternity of the LORD, provides another way of thinking about the actuality of the past and the future. Not only should we say that they have existence in the human mind, distended though able to remember the past and expect the future. Augustine also holds the door open to the reality of all things past, present, and future, in and for the LORD. Not distended in time, but eternally present, the LORD’s mind thinking and willing the existence of past, present, and future events just is their reality.¹⁰⁰

Augustine’s inclination, then, to cast the reality of things in terms of their presence, their existence in the present moment, is just right. All things are by virtue of existing in the present.¹⁰¹ And that present in which all things are is nothing other than the “today” of the LORD’s eternity.¹⁰² The LORD’s present is both like and utterly unlike the concept of the present Augustine works out in Book XI of *Confessiones*. It’s

⁹⁴ *trin.*, 4.17, CCL 50:189: “*an ab angelis sanctis quibus ea deus per verbum sapientiamque suam indicat ubi et futura et praeterita stant.*” Emphasis added.

⁹⁵ Cf. *conf.*, 11.11.13, 11.13.16, 11.24.31, 11.30.40.

⁹⁶ *conf.*, 11.8.10.

⁹⁷ *conf.*, 11.30.40.

⁹⁸ *conf.*, 11.11.13.

⁹⁹ *conf.*, 11.27.34.

¹⁰⁰ *conf.*, 11.11.13, CSEL 33:289-290: “*et videat omne praeteritum proelli ex futuro et omne futurum ex praeterito consequi et omne praeteritum ac futurum ab eo, quod semper est praesens, creari et excurrere.*”

¹⁰¹ *conf.*, 11.18.23, CSEL 33:296: “*ubicumque ergo sunt, quaecumque sunt, non sunt nisi praesentia.*”

¹⁰² *conf.*, 11.13.16, CSEL 33:291: “*anni tui nec eunt nec veniunt: isti autem nostri eunt et veniunt, ut omnes veniant. anni tui omnes simul stant, quoniam stant, nec euntes a venientibus excluduntur, quia non transeunt: isti autem nostri omnes erunt, cum omnes non erunt. anni tui dies unus, et dies tuus non cotidie, sed hodie, quia hodiernus tuus non cedit crastino; neque enim succedit hesterno. hodiernus tuus aeternitas.*”

like it in that the present of the LORD, like our own, has no duration. The present is the mirror of eternity in that in itself it cannot be measured by time.¹⁰³ But, unlike the human present, the LORD's present doesn't begin to be or come to an end. It does not move from future into past, but is always present. This distention of the present into a past and a future is what distinguishes time from eternity.¹⁰⁴ To be the present in time is to "tend not to be," as Augustine puts it.¹⁰⁵ This is why the only stability to be had is in the LORD, whose eternity is participable by his creatures. Some of these creatures, the holy angels, already partake of it. And it's his hope of finding this stability—not of the absence of a present, but of the fullness of the eternal present—that brings Augustine to meditate further on the image of the song at the close of Book XI.

What if, Augustine asks, there were a mind that could know the whole course of time the way Augustine himself knows the whole song before he begins to sing it? Even if we could imagine what this would be like—to know all past, present, and future events as they would unfold—we still wouldn't have imagined what it is for the LORD to know all times.¹⁰⁶ That's because the LORD knows all times without being in any way distended in those times. For "the maker of the universe, the maker of souls and of bodies" is the LORD of time, and of creatures who know things by way of temporal succession.¹⁰⁷ In the final lines of *Confessiones* Book XI, Augustine makes a direct

¹⁰³ *conf.*, 11.27.34, *CSEL* 33:304: "*praeteriens enim tendebatur in aliquod spatium temporis, quo metiri posset, quoniam praesens nullum habet spatium.*"

¹⁰⁴ *conf.*, 11.14.17, *CSEL* 33:292: "*praesens autem si semper esset praesens nec in praeteritum transiret, non iam esset tempus, sed aeternitas. si ergo praesens, ut tempus sit, ideo fit, quia in praeteritum transit, quomodo et hoc esse dicimus, cui causa, ut sit, illa est, quia non erit.*"

¹⁰⁵ *conf.*, 11.14.17, *CSEL* 33:292: "*ut scilicet non vere dicamus tempus esse, nisi quia tendit non esse.*"

¹⁰⁶ *conf.*, 11.31.41, *CSEL* 33:309: "*certe si est tam grandi scientia et praescientia pollens animus, cui cuncta praeterita et futura it nota sint, sicut mihi unum canticum notissimum, nimium mirabilis est animus iste atque ad horrorem stupendus.*"

¹⁰⁷ *conf.*, 11.31.41, *CSEL* 33:309: "*conditor universitatis, conditor animarum et corporum.*"

address to the LORD. He speaks of the way the LORD knows and makes his creation. What he says bears directly on this investigation's attempt to grasp what the *rationes seminales* might be. "Therefore just as you knew heaven and earth in the beginning without variation of your knowledge, so too you made heaven and earth in the beginning without distention of your action."¹⁰⁸ What the LORD makes in the *prima conditio* he makes eternally, outside of time. It's also true that the LORD's *administratio* of all times, while experienced by creatures in time is not, for the LORD, temporally indexed in any way. This suggests something about how these two terms, both important for explaining the LORD's relation to the cosmos, might be usefully differentiated as two different levels of discourse about the relation the term 'creation' names.

One speculative way of sorting out the work these different words do is to say that *creatio* marks the relation of creator and creature. It's the umbrella term for everything the LORD does in bringing all things that are not the LORD into existence *and* for sustaining them in existence. On this view, *creatio* is inclusive of both the *conditio* described by the "*factum/a est*" of Genesis 1 or, if you like, the "*condita sunt*" of Colossians 1:16 and the *administratio* Augustine picks out as the way of describing the way the LORD works until now (John 5:17).¹⁰⁹ *Conditio* marks specifically the "seeding" of creation. It's a description of the created conditions for the fulfillment of the will of the LORD, and is inclusive of all the things that are. This includes, necessarily, all past,

¹⁰⁸ *conf.*, 11.31.41, CCL 27:216: "*Sicut ergo nosti in principio caelum et terram sine varietate notitiae tuae, ita fecisti in principio caelum et terram sine distentione actionis tuae.*" Here I've used the CCL edition of the text of Augustine's *Confessiones*. The CSEL substitutes '*distinctione*' for '*distentione*.' There's a manuscript tradition supporting both variants, and there are good theological reasons to say both that there is no distinction and no distention in the LORD's act of creation. However, given the principal focus of the argument in Book XI has to do with the relation of time to eternity, and Augustine identifies the nature of time specifically with distention, I've opted for the CCL's '*distentione*.'

¹⁰⁹ *Gn. litt.*, 5.11.27, PL 34:330: "*qua usque nunc operatur.*"

present, and future events. These, as we've seen, "stand" in the LORD's eternal present. The LORD's being present to them is what gives them their existence. *Administratio*, on the other hand, is a description of the outworking of those created conditions in time, and under this aspect we'd need to also include things like miracles, the answering of prayers, and the creation of particular human souls *ex nihilo*. These are, of course, not absent from the *conditio*, they're part and parcel of it. The *conditio* and the *administratio* of the LORD's creative relation to everything that is not the LORD are interwoven, plaited together. It's possible to treat them as logically distinct, but they're never truly separable. The *conditio* is the condition for the possibility of an *administratio*, and the *administratio* is precisely of the *conditio*. The *conditio* contains all the possibilities for the LORD's administrative work *usque nunc*—there are no surprises along the way, at least not for the LORD. It's not that the LORD couldn't act otherwise than he has and does. But given the suppositional necessity of the LORD's having willed the *conditio* of creation eternally, it makes little sense to say that he'd destroy it in his *administratio* of all things. This is put nowhere more succinctly than in Thomas' laconic aphorism, "Grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it."¹¹⁰

If this is the case—that the *conditio* and the *administratio* are in fact two descriptions of the relation *creatio* is—we need to bring this distinction to bear on our talk of the creation and duration of the *rationes seminales*. This way of speaking about the created order disciplines the metaphor of the seeds. Instead of thinking of those seeds simply as things planted that develop in time, we need to take into account that their creator is not subject to time. A description of the unfolding of creation in the order of

¹¹⁰ *ST*, I.1.8 ad 2: "*gratia non tollat naturam, sed perficiat.*"

time, the *administratio*, only makes sense from the creaturely side of the equation. While the *administratio* offers us a view of the creator-creature relation under the aspect of temporality, we might also offer a provisional description of that relation under the aspect of eternity, in terms of the *conditio*. Like Augustine, I recognize at the outset that such speculations sit near the edges, and bump up against the borders, of language. But, as Wittgenstein observes, “These bumps allow us to understand the value of the discovery.”¹¹¹ The following attempt at a speculative solution to the question, “What are the *rationes seminales*?” proceeds on the basis of what’s already been said, extending it in likely and useful directions.

2.8 What are the Rationes Seminales?

The *rationes seminales* have active powers. In this way the comparison to seeds is quite useful. Given the right conditions—good soil, water, sunlight—a seed germinates and will grow into a plant. Similarly, the *rationes seminales* really have, in themselves, whatever they will be in time. Michael McKeough, convincingly argues for the active powers of the *rationes seminales* in a dissertation on the subject.¹¹² Drawing on clear evidence in the writings of both Augustine and Thomas, McKeough puts to bed the idea that the *rationes seminales* are merely passive.¹¹³ That is, he refutes the position that in addition to the natural capacities of the seminal rules implanted in unformed matter, the existence in time of all actual creatures depends upon a special intervention of the

¹¹¹ Wittgenstein, §119: “*Sie, die Beulen, lassen uns den Wert jener Entdeckung erkennen.*”

¹¹² Michael J. McKeough, O. Praem., *The Meaning of the Rationes Seminales in St. Augustine* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1926).

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 35-46.

LORD.¹¹⁴ Close examination of Augustine’s texts, as McKeough argues, makes this abundantly clear. Calling them seeds already suggests an active if latent power, but even a cursory survey of *De genesi ad litteram* shows that whatever the *rationes seminales* are for Augustine, they aren’t simply passive possibilities.¹¹⁵ They can’t be if, as Augustine says, the creation of the six days just is the creation of all things that will unfold in time. Unless, of course, one thinks it’s necessary to argue not just that the LORD creates and sustains all that there is, but must also somehow or other be constantly fiddling with his creation. But this picture of divine intervention rests on a category mistake. It relies on the presupposition that when the LORD creates, he’s doing something a lot like what humans do when they make something. It imagines the LORD’s omnipotence as something that interferes with the natural order of created things rather than being the condition for their possibility. It lacks, in other words, a sufficient account of secondary causality, whereby the LORD as primary cause wields his creatures precisely by giving them to be the kinds of things they are. Herbert McCabe expresses this point with characteristic clarity when he says,

It is clear that God cannot *interfere* in the universe, not because he has not the power, but because, so to speak, he has too much; to interfere you have to be an alternative to, or alongside what you are interfering with. If God is the cause of everything, there is nothing he is alongside....[And so]

¹¹⁴ This reading of Augustine on the *rationes seminales* is presented in Henry Woods, SJ, *Augustine and Evolution: A Study in the Saint’s De Genesi Ad Litteram and De Trinitate* (New York: Universal Knowledge Foundation, 1924; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009). In it Woods argues against Augustine’s account of creation being deployed to support Darwinian evolution.

¹¹⁵ Cf. *inter alia*, *Gn. litt.*, 5.4.11, *PL* 34:325: “*Causaliter ergo tunc dictum est produxisse terram herbam et lignum, id est producendi accepisse virtutem*”; *Gn. litt.*, 6.10.17, *PL* 34:346: “*In quibus omnibus ea jam facta modos et actus sui temporis acceperunt, quae ex occultis atque invisibilibus rationibus, quae in creatura causaliter latent, in manifestas formas naturasque prodierunt*”; *Gn. litt.*, 8.3.6, *PL* 34:374-375: “*quia tunc scilicet, quod scriptum est, ea produxisse terram, causaliter factum erat in terra; hoc est, quia tunc ea producendi virtutem latenter acceperat, qua virtute fit ut etiam nunc talia terra progignat in manifesto atque in tempore suo.*”

every action in the world is an action of God; not because it is not an action of a creature but because it is by God's action that the creature is *itself* and has its *own* activity.¹¹⁶

The *rationes seminales*, then, upon their creation, have the capacity to become whatever they will be in the order of time. These powers may be latent or hidden, only expressing themselves at particular times, under particular conditions. They are, nonetheless, present and capable of development without a miraculous nudge from their author.

The *rationes seminales* are also passive. While these seminal rules of the *conditio* govern the possibilities of the *administratio* and its unfolding in time, Augustine also thinks there's a certain indeterminacy about them. Discussing the creation of humans, and the two accounts given of this in the first and second chapters of Genesis, Augustine explains how he'd answer if asked how humans were made in the first narrative, in the hexaëmeron. To this he replies, "Invisibly, potentially, and causally, in the way future things not finished things are made."¹¹⁷ This statement is a perfect example of how the distinction between *conditio* and *administratio* is useful, but I'll return to that later. Right now I want to emphasize Augustine's description of being made potentially (*potentialiter*). It is true that the *rationes seminales*, given the right conditions, will develop in particular ways. It is also true that the conditions play an important role in the how that development occurs. To return to the image of a seed, plants grow differently in hard rocky soil than in rich loam. The Bonsai groomer works with the active powers of the plant to realize the possibility of a stunted yet beautiful tree. The *rationes seminales*, likewise, have the potential to develop variously in the order of time.

¹¹⁶ Herbert McCabe, OP, "Creation," in *God Matters* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987; reprint, London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012), 6-7.

¹¹⁷ *Gn. litt.*, 6.6.10, PL 34:343: "*Invisibiliter, potentialiter, causaliter, quomodo fiunt futura non facta.*"

Augustine illustrates the passive possibilities of the *rationes seminales* when he explains how it's possible to imagine the causal, potential creation in the *conditio* such that creatures might come to be in the *administratio* either through a process of growth and maturation or by an immediate and special creation. Again, this is a biblical argument. He wants to maintain both that the earth might put forth, under its own steam, grasses and trees. At the same time, the special creation of Adam needs accounting for.¹¹⁸ But he doesn't want to say, nor should we, that in creating Adam, the LORD was doing something altogether new—humans are created on the sixth day after all. Rather, the *rationes seminales* in the *conditio* contain both the possibility of development over time and the possibility of being brought about by the LORD's purposive and miraculous action. It's in this way that Augustine manages to account for the existence of miracles, not as an overturning of the natural order of things but as an actualization of what exists only potentially in the *rationes seminales*. The LORD is the one who makes nature, and so determines what belongs to it. Most importantly for our broader search for the origins of death, this idea of the seminal rules' potentiality is extensible to include possibilities that are not in fact actualized. But as Augustine says of the making of Adam, "it is clear, therefore, that he was not to be made man contrary to what was in that first making (*prima conditione*) of causes; because there it was determined that he could be made in that way, although not that he must necessarily be made in that way."¹¹⁹ Rather, the way

¹¹⁸ *Gn. litt.*, 6.14.25, *PL* 34:349: "*Quaeri autem merito potest, causales illae rationes, quas mundo indidit, cum primum simul omnia creavit, quomodo sint institutae: utrum ut, quemadmodum videmus cuncta nascentia vel fruticum vel animalium in suis conformationibus atque incrementis, sua pro diversitate generum diversa spatia peragerent temporum? an ut, quemadmodum creditur factus Adam sine ullo progressu incrementorum virili aetate, continuo conformarentur?*"

¹¹⁹ *Gn. litt.*, 6.15.26, *PL* 34:350: "*manifestum est etiam sic non factum esse hominem contra quam erat in illa prima conditione causarum; quia ibi erat etiam sic fieri posse, quamvis non ibi erat ita fieri necesse esse.*"

the seminal rules will unfold “was not in the making of creation, but in the pleasure of the creator, whose will is the necessity of things.”¹²⁰ The determinative necessity governing the *conditio* and its *administratio* is the will of the LORD. Which means while the *rationes seminales* have powers and potencies of their own, which might cause them to develop in various ways, those powers and potencies are given and governed by the will of the LORD. Again, it’s necessary to have a strong account of the efficacy of secondary causes. These do not undermine, but have their efficacy from, the will of the LORD as primary cause.¹²¹

And so the *rationes seminales* are both active and passive. But I now want to turn back to Augustine’s description of the them existing, “invisibly, potentially, and causally, in the way future things not finished things are made.”¹²² Here we can see again the limits of human language’s capacity to describe a making that’s outside of all time, that’s the condition for its possibility. What can Augustine possibly mean in saying Adam is made, “*quomodo fiunt futura non facta?*” Another equally valid, perhaps more useful for our purposes, way to translate this would be to say, “they are made the way future things not made things are made.” This translation is useful because it highlights that what’s being said here is a bit of nonsense.¹²³ That is, we have no idea what it means to say something

¹²⁰ *Gn. litt.*, 6.15.25, *PL* 34:350: “*non erat in conditione creaturae, sed in placito Creatoris, cujus voluntas rerum necessitas est.*”

¹²¹ This is just the account Augustine gives just two chapters onward at *Gn. litt.*, 6.17.28, *PL* 34:350: “*Hoc enim necessario futurum est quod ille vult, et ea vere futura sunt quae ille praescivit. Nam multa secundum inferiores causas futura sunt; sed si ita sunt et in praescientia Dei, vere futura sunt: si autem ibi aliter sunt, ita potius futura sunt, sicut ibi sunt, ubi qui praescit, falli non potest.*”

¹²² *Gn. litt.*, 6.6.10, *PL* 34:343: “*Invisibiliter, potentialiter, causaliter, quomodo fiunt futura non facta.*”

¹²³ I’m using ‘nonsense’ here in a technical sense, as deployed by the so-called “resolute readers” of Ludwig Wittgenstein. By calling this sentence of Augustine’s nonsense, I mean to highlight precisely that this sentence doesn’t have a determinate meaning, a sense in which it ought to be taken. As Cora Diamond argues in an essay meant to explain this view of nonsense, “for Wittgenstein there is *no* kind of nonsense

is not made the way made things are made but the way future things are made. Nonsense like this is useful though, for highlighting what we're inclined to say about the LORD creating everything that is at once, from nothing. We want to say it's like making something. But it's also clear that it's nothing like making something. It's like making future things, not made things.

But the fact that this sentence has no determinative meaning isn't to say that Augustine doesn't mean anything by writing it. Cora Diamond, describing a path we might take with respect to understanding those who utter nonsense explains, "To want to understand the person who talks nonsense is to want to enter imaginatively the taking of that nonsense for sense."¹²⁴ One way to begin entering imaginatively into taking Augustine's bit of nonsense for sense is to be willing to make the logical cut I've labelled as two different levels of description of a single relation, creation under the aspect of *conditio* and creation under the aspect of *administratio*. This distinction is suggested by Augustine's own thoughts on the matter, but this is certainly an extension of rather than a description of his position. But it's one that I think can be defended on the basis of distinctions in our everyday language and of some oddities presented in Scripture. I'll proceed to show that now.

The only way we, as timebound creatures, have of discussing future things is as things that aren't yet. That's how our language works. Imagine I said to you for example,

which is nonsense on account of what the terms composing it mean—there is as it were no 'positive' nonsense. *Anything* that is nonsense is so merely because some determination of meaning has *not* been made; it is not nonsense as a logical result of determinations that *have* been made" (Cora Diamond, "What Nonsense Might Be," in *The Realistic Spirit* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991), 106.

¹²⁴ Cora Diamond, "Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London: Routledge, 2000), 157.

“I am at the store,” when I clearly am not, and you said in reply, “No, you’re not, you’re in the library.” It wouldn’t be an adequate response on my part to say, “Oh, no, you’ve misunderstood, I am at the store tomorrow.” We’d have a case of miscommunication on our hands. Perhaps I don’t know how to use the verb ‘to be’ properly, or perhaps I’m insane. In either case, what I’ve said doesn’t work in English. Your instinct would be to either correct me or to get me professional help, as the case may be. This odd pattern of speech, however, is precisely the one deployed by Jesus Christ in the eighth chapter of the Gospel of John. There Jesus speaks in the temple in Jerusalem saying, “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad” (Jn 8:56). To this he receives an incredulous reply, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” (Jn 8:57). Jesus’ answer to their question is, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (Jn 8:58). This “I am” is a clear echo of the divine name given to Moses in Exodus 3:14, “I am who I am” or “*Ego sum qui sum*” in the Vulgate.

The LORD’s “I am,” whether from the burning bush or the mouth of Jesus Christ, has classically been taken to indicate the LORD’s peculiar mode of being. The LORD’s essence is not something distinct from the LORD’s existence. The same cannot be said about creatures, who have their existence not as an essential property but as a gift from the LORD. This “I am” also supports what’s been said above concerning the relation of time and eternity. There is no past or future for the LORD—the LORD is not temporally indexed in any way. Paul Griffiths takes these words of the LORD in John and Exodus as evidence of something even more radical, and at the same time quite commonsensical. If the LORD is eternal, and the LORD’s acts are indistinguishable from what and who the LORD is, then those acts are likewise eternal. This being so, then it’s also that case that,

with respect to the Incarnation, the LORD acts atemporally such that “the second person of the Trinity is eternally conjoined with a particular human nature, thus constituting the person Jesus Christ. That person, an indissoluble union of human and divine, is eternal.”¹²⁵ This conclusion follows from the LORD being the one who *is*, and is so in the eternal present tense. Griffiths goes on to give an account of creaturely four-dimensionalism which can be taken to undergird some of my forthcoming speculations.¹²⁶

But this much is essential to take away from these reflections on the LORD’s “I am”: It’s not—in either the case of Christ’s words in the temple, or the theophany to Moses—that these words should be understood with reference to time. As we’ve just seen, it doesn’t make sense to speak that way. “Before Abraham was, I am” (Jn 8:58) is another bit of nonsense, precisely because it has no determinate meaning. What it’s meant to do, however, is to get us to imagine what it is *to be* under the aspect of eternity. Augustine’s investigations of time and eternity in *Confessiones* Book XI serve a similar purpose, and though he himself might not have argued for a four-dimensionalist view of time, the building blocks are all there. Past, present, and future times stand in the eternity of the LORD. They have their reality from the one who is. Attempts to speak of how that might be leave us grasping for words. Like laying hold of the intricate latticework of a spiderweb, the structure of our thought collapses as soon as we’ve made contact.

Extending our imagination in the direction, then, of “how future things not made things are made” by the one who eternally *is* in his own divine present, let’s press the

¹²⁵ Paul J. Griffiths, *Decreation: The Last Things of All Creatures* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 77.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, cf. esp. 81-87.

question of the *rationes seminales* under the aspect of the *conditio*. More than once Augustine calls the creation described in the six days total and complete. Everything is made all at once, invisibly, potentially, causally. What's completed in the six days is then described as unfolding or unfurling in time. Those seminal rules, both active and passive, take shape in the times and ages, a process of becoming whatever it is they were, are, and will be. But if we take the LORD to be acting eternally in creating, and we take the *conditio* to be a description of that eternal relation, then it doesn't make sense—under the aspect of the *conditio*—to say the seminal rules are sown *in the past*. To say so would be to confuse the two levels of discourse. Yes, when referring to the *rationes seminales* under the aspect of the *administratio*, such a thing is perfectly fine to say. The unrolling of the ages takes place precisely because the *rationes seminales* “were made, so to speak, in the roots of time.”¹²⁷ But what should we say about them understood under the aspect of eternity, in the *conditio*?

The creation of everything that is from nothing described under the aspect of the *conditio* is nothing other than the creation of the total set of all creaturely relations—spatial, temporal, intellectual, and intentional.¹²⁸ At the heart of these relations is the one *ratio*, the *Logos*, the Son, incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus rules the created order from its center, the *sedes sapientiae*, which is the belly of the Virgin Mary. The divine ideas, the *rationes ideales*, in the mind of the LORD consist of the LORD's own knowledge of the infinite variety of ways in which he is participable. In a similar way, the *rationes seminales*, taking root in unformed matter outside of all time, are the

¹²⁷ *Gn. litt.*, 5.4.11, *PL* 34:325: “*In ea quippe jam tanquam in radicibus, ut ita dixerim, temporum facta erant, quae per tempora futura erant.*”

¹²⁸ Griffiths, 76.

actualization of the infinite set of relations of all things that are not the LORD to Jesus Christ, the *ratio* of the cosmos made flesh. The LORD is the exemplar cause of all possible things—every way that any cosmos might exist. The enfleshed LORD is the exemplar cause of all actual things—every way that this cosmos, the one reconciled by the blood of his cross, does exist. This is another way of saying with Paul in Colossians, “He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col 1:15-17). In the *conditio*, all things hold together in Jesus Christ, perfectly and atemporally. As Augustine says, there’s nothing else to be created after the six days. And yet, the LORD is working until now, under the aspect of the *administratio* (Jn 5:17).

If this view is right, then the *administratio* is nothing other than the distension of the *conditio*, the relations of all things that are to the flesh of Christ. It is the stretching out of the *rationes seminales* which then show forth the whole panoply of their active and passive capacities in the past, present, and future. Another way to think about the unrolling of past and future times from incarnate LORD is to return again to the metaphor of the seed. Most of what’s been said about seeds has focused on their ability to germinate, sprout, and grow upwards, out of the soil. But the growth of a seed is most often bidirectional, putting down hidden roots while the visible plant develops and blooms above ground. We might think of the distention of the *rationes seminales* in similar fashion, putting down roots in the past and blossoming forth into the future. All this from the single seed at the beating heart of the created order, the *ratio seminalis*,

conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. The farthest reaching racinated tendrils terminate at the beginning of times, the highest branches mark their end. All flow from one source, and stand in relation to the person of the God-man.

What I've suggested is a speculative enterprise that builds on Augustine's uses of the word *ratio*, his and Thomas' thoughts on the divine ideas, and Augustine's own speculations about the nature of time. I've also attempted to clarify the distinction between creation considered under two different aspects. The doctrinal archive of the Church's teaching on the subject of creation gives us a number of terms to describe the LORD's creation and sustaining of everything that's not the LORD. By deploying them in the way I have, which is to say, stipulatively, though not without justification, I'm offering something of a lexical toolkit for discussing creation from the point of view of eternity and from the point of view of temporality. Augustine's own thought, throughout his commentaries on Genesis contained in the *Confessiones* and in *De genesi ad litteram* both tend in this distinction, though there's often slippage in usage. Parsing it the way I've suggested makes his own insights clearer. It's this conceptual apparatus that I'll put to work in the following chapters. In those chapters I'll explain how it might be that sin, evil, and death enter the world if the *rationes seminales* are nothing but the relations of all creatures to the flesh of the LORD.

I have to offer a final, ancillary, reflection that can't be passed over in silence. Again, if what I've said above is true, then the observation made about the center of the cosmos being the Virgin's womb needs a bit more unpacking. One of the titles Mary the Mother of God is often given, though not without controversy, is co-Redemptrix. Mary and her *fiat*, so the reasoning goes, are deeply and intimately involved with salvation, the

redemption of the whole created cosmos. Without her willing submission to the will of the LORD to redeem all things through her son, no Jesus. If there's no Jesus then of course there's no sacrifice, no death on the cross, no resurrection. In short, the salvation of all is dependent on Mary's free, willing decision to behold herself as the handmaid of the LORD. But if these reflections of mine on the nature of seed-like rule at the heart of the cosmos are true, then Mary is not just co-Redemptrix, she's co-Creatrix as well. Without the *fiat* of Mary there's no enfleshed *Logos*, no Jesus Christ. If the *conditio*, being the LORD's all-at-once creation of all things just is, at its center, the sum total of the relations of all things to the incarnate one, then nothing that is would be or could be without Mary's, "*fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*" (Lk 1:38, Vulg).

3. What Demons are and How They Fell

Not every possibility contained in the creation of all things in the *conditio* is actualized. The *conditio*, you'll remember, is a description of creation under the aspect of eternity. When we speak of it, we're speaking of the all-at-once creation of everything that is. These descriptions aren't temporally indexed precisely because time is one of the things created and so subject to atemporal description. The seed-like rules (*rationes seminales*) that norm creation are the sum total of the spatial, temporal, intellectual, and intentional relations of all things to the person of Jesus Christ. The incarnate LORD is the *ratio seminalis*, the rule of the whole created order, who makes actual some of the infinite set of possible ways the LORD is participable. But in addition to the set of relations of all things to the enfleshed LORD, every individual creature stands in some combination of relations to every other creature. Every rock, for example, stands in a set of spatiotemporal relations to every other rock. Every human stands in a set of intellectual and intentional relations to every angel. These relations include the dispositions of ignorance and indifference as much as knowledge and delight.

This second tier of relations—those between creatures—is dependent on the first tier relations of all things to Jesus Christ. The first tier relations create the possibility of the second, but both belong to the order of the cosmos. Among other things, this means that one way to give an account of what a creature is occurs by way of this set of relations. That is, one way to say what a creature is is to specify its relations to other

creatures and to the LORD. This view is attractive for a number of reasons. Chief among them is that in it we find a way of speaking of what creatures are that's analogous to our way of speaking "about the Trinity that God is."¹ The point here being that what the LORD is as God is not something separate from who the LORD is as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Rather, what the LORD is as God *just is* the sum total of the relations between the three divine persons.² It also means that there are relations some creatures are capable of having but do not have. This might occur because other creatures have them (e.g., two stones can't have the same set of spatiotemporal relations because they can't occupy the same place at the same time). It might also occur because the way the total set of relations are constituted prevents some kinds of relations from occurring (e.g., angelic creatures are constitutionally capable of loving the LORD, but the fallen angels are not able to actualize this capacity).

In this chapter I set out to deal with the origins of nonhuman creaturely death considered under the aspect of the *conditio*. Key to this treatment will be the nature of the relations that constitute creatures as the things they are. This will include both their

¹ *trin.*, 1.4.7, CCL 50:34-35: "*de Trinitate quae deus est.*"

² John Zizioulas makes this point elegantly in John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), cf. esp. 36-41. The only problem with his approach is his failure to recognize that the "Western position" he pans and attributes to Augustine, is not in fact Augustine's position on the matter. In *De trinitate*, Augustine's equation of *Deus* with *Trinitas* emphasizes the point Zizioulas makes forcefully, when he says: "Consequently, the ontological 'principle' of God is traced back, once again, to the person. Thus when we say that God 'is,' we do not bind the personal freedom of God—the being of God is not an ontological 'necessity' or a simple 'reality' for God—but we ascribe the being of God to his personal freedom. In a more analytical way this means that God, as Father and not as substance, perpetually confirms through 'being' His *free* will to exist. And it is precisely His trinitarian existence that constitutes this confirmation: the Father out of love—that is, freely—begets the Son and brings forth the Spirit" (*ibid.*, 41.). The space between Augustine and Zizioulas doesn't strike me as having to do with the former's emphasis on 'being' as the substance of God as opposed to the latter's on personhood (*ibid.*, 41n35.). Rather, the difference rests on the insistence upon the Father's *monarchia*, as when Zizioulas says "Thus God as person—as the hypostasis of the Father—makes the one divine substance to be that which it is: the one God" (*ibid.*, 41.). Augustine's trinitarian logic stands opposed to this assertion, not that of the primacy of personhood.

relations to the LORD and to other creatures. It will also include a consideration of how the intentional relations of rational creatures to the LORD affect not only those relations, but by extension the relations of all things to one another and to the LORD. To do this, I'm going to focus on one particular set of creaturely relations: the set of relations of the reprobate angels to the LORD.

To examine the effects the angelic fall has on the rest of creation requires understanding what the angelic fall is. The broad strokes of what follows are Augustinian. That is, I continue to rely heavily on Augustine's angelology, particularly his insistence that the rebel angels fall atemporally. For Augustine, this argument is scriptural. His reflections on the angelic fall's atemporality have their source in John's Gospel. In the eighth chapter, we find a dominical word on the devil, when Jesus says, "He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him" (Jn 8:44, NRSV). What account can be given of this statement that doesn't result in a Manichaean dualism? Is John presenting his readers with a substantive account of evil? As you'll see, Augustine diffuses this tension by placing the fall of angelic creatures outside all time. This will allow him to maintain the orthodox Christian position that the LORD creates everything that's not the LORD *ex nihilo*.

Part of this chapter, then, will involve an exploration of the mystery of evil. By that I mean I'll be looking at the problem evil's presence seems to pose, and how we might account for its presence in the LORD's creation. The fact of evil is a source of great puzzlement. And even if, as I'll show, the persistence of evil does not undermine the goodness of the created order, even less so the LORD's, the impenetrable cloud of the LORD's inscrutable ways (Rom 11:33) remains a terrifying presence in Christian

theological thought. But “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Prov 9:10). If ever there were a reason to sally forth into the dark abyss that obscures the origins of evil in angelic sin it’s this.

3.1 Scriptural Evidence for the Angelic Fall

Before exploring any particular accounts of the fall of the angels, I want to look at the sources for thinking about the nature of the demons and their separation from the LORD. The scriptural warrant for an angelic fall is varied but consistent. There’s a through line in salvation history beginning in Genesis running through Revelation which refers to spiritual creatures, present and active in the lives of humans. More than that, some of these creatures are evidently corrupt, engaged in open conflict with the LORD’s creative purposes. So, in Genesis, we encounter the deceitful serpent, which the Christian tradition has nearly unanimously interpreted as the presence of Satan in the Garden of Eden (Gn 3). On its basis, we can say at least this. Nonhuman rational creatures exist. There is at least one nonhuman creature with the capacities of intellect and will present in the earliest chapters of Scripture.³ This creature acts to precipitate Adam and Eve’s fall by enticing them to disobey the LORD’s commandment. Not only can this creature act willfully, this creature can act in a way worthy of punishment, evilly (Gn 3:14-15).

There’s more information about angels in the Book of Job. The angels were there when the LORD “laid the foundation of the earth” (Job 38:4). Where were you, the LORD asks Job, “when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” (Job 38:7). But while the angels are there from the beginning, it’s also clear that

³ Angels make frequent appearances in Genesis. I won’t attempt to recount them all, but they’re alluded to in the story of Noah (Gn 6). They appear explicitly and implicitly throughout the Abraham cycle (cf. Gn 16, 18, 19, 21, 32).

some did not persist in their singing and joyful shouting. Apart from the presence of Satan in the first chapters (Job 1:6-12, 2:1-8), we also hear in the words of Eliphaz, “Even in his servants he puts not trust, and his angels he charges with error” (Job 4:18). While we should be cautious in accepting the word of Eliphaz, both Gregory the Great and Thomas Aquinas take his comments to articulate an important insight about angelic nature. As Gregory puts it, angels, unlike the LORD, are subject to change, “For if the substance of the angels were incompatible with movement from mutability, being well made by its author it would never have fallen in the reprobate spirits from the blessedness of its high state. But marvelously, almighty God made the nature of the highest spirits good, but mutable.”⁴ Thomas likewise explains, it’s Catholic doctrine that angels are created good and that some “fell through their own fault.”⁵ The Latin of the Vulgate, reflected in both Gregory’s and Thomas’ text, is even stronger in its assertion than the RSV. Job reads “*et in angelis suis repperit pravitatem*” (Job 4:18, Vulg.). It’s not just error that’s found in the angels but *pravitas*—depravity or evil. So, though the morning stars sang together, the tune grows discordant when the LORD discovers *pravitas* in some of them.

The reference to the singing of the morning stars points to Isaiah 14, where there is another reference to the angelic fall. From this prophet the name Lucifer comes into use as a way of identifying the devil. In the Vulgate we find, “*quomodo cecidisti de caelo*

⁴ *mor.*, 5.38.68, CCL 143:267-268: “*Nam si angelorum substantia a mutabilitatis motu fuisset aliena, bene ab auctore condita, nequaquam in reprobis spiritibus a beatitudinis suae arce cecidisset. Mire autem omnipotens Deus naturam summorum spirituum bonam, sed mutabilem condidit.*”

⁵ *super Iob*, ch. 4, lect. 3: “*quae quidem sententia secundum doctrinam catholicae fidei plana est: tenet enim fides catholica omnes angelos bonos fuisse creatos, quorum quidam per propriam culpam ceciderunt a rectitudinis statu.*”

lucifer qui mane oriebaris” (Is 14:12, Vulg.), which I’ll English as, “How did you fall from heaven, Lucifer, who rose in the morning?” Jerome’s reflections on this passage are fascinating and contain some notes on the translation choices of Aquila Ponticus. In Hebrew, says Jerome, the word for *lucifer*—Latin for the morning star, Venus—is *elil*. Aquila’s translation of Isaiah 14:12 renders the reference to Lucifer as “the lamenting (*ululantem*) son of the dawn.”⁶ Jerome likely appreciates the onomatopoeic symmetry of the Hebrew and the Latin in *elil* and *ululare*. And so he runs with this translation, tying the morning star, *lucifer*, to Satan. As he says, “For he indeed ought to lament and wail, who on account of his pride was hurled down from heaven and ground into the earth.”⁷ Augustine likewise interprets Isaiah 14:12 to refer to “the devil figured under the person of the prince of Bablyon.”⁸ Lucifer, then, is not just a what but a who.

Jerome’s writing ties this interpretation into New Testament thought about the devil and his fall. He shows that in this passage from Isaiah we’re dealing with the same fall recounted by Jesus himself. “And so,” Jerome says quoting Luke 10:18, “the Savior says to his disciples: *I saw Satan falling from heaven like lightning*. Not only *I see* but *I saw* when he fell...He is the prince of the age, who rose among the other stars in the morning, and by his own fault from the morning star (*lucifero*) was made the evening star (*vesper*), not rising but setting.”⁹ The terrible beauty of this passage is made only more

⁶ in *Esaiam*, 6.14.12, CCL 73:240: “*Pro Lucifero qui Hebraice dicitur Elil, Aquila transtulit: Ululantem aurorae filium.*”

⁷ in *Esaiam*, 6.14.12, CCL 73:240: “*Vere enim ululare debuit et eiulare, qui propter superbiam suam de coelo in terram praecipitatus est atque contritus.*”

⁸ *civ.*, 11.15, CSEL 40.1:534: “*sub figurata persona principis Babyloniae diabolum.*”

⁹ in *Esaiam*, 6.14.12, CCL 73:240: “*Unde et Salvator ad discipulos loquitur: Videbam Satanam quasi fulgur de coelo cadentem. Non modo video, sed prius videbam quando corruit...Iste est princeps saeculi, qui inter stellas caeteras mane oriebatur, et suo vitio de lucifero vesper effectus est, et non oriens, sed occidens.*”

profound with the added knowledge that *lucifer* and *vesper* are both, in fact, the planet Venus, just as Satan is the same angelic person who rose in light and fell into darkness.

The New Testament is full of references to demons beyond this dominical word on the fall of Satan in Luke 10. I'll focus on a few key passages which show Satan is not alone in his rebellion against the LORD. The different versions of the story of the Gerasene demoniac in the Gospels of Matthew (Mt 8:28-34), Mark (Mk 5:1-20), and Luke (Lk 8:26-39) are particularly illustrative in this regard. In them we're taught at least two things about the demons. The first is that the demons know who Jesus is. They identify him as "Son of the Most High God" (Mk 5:7, Lk 8:28, cp. Mt 8:29). The knowledge of the demons in these narratives stands in contrast to the ignorance of Jesus' own disciples, who in the preceding pericope are confounded by the identity of the man they're following. "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?" they ask one another (Mk 4:41, cp. Lk 8:25). There's no such hesitancy on the part of the demons. Fear rather than awe grips them. "Do not torment me," they cry (Mk 5:7, Lk 8:28). They know the Son of God has power over them. In Matthew's gospel this torment is coupled with further, perhaps eschatological, knowledge, when they ask, "Have you come here to torment us before the time?" (Mt 8:29).

The second thing these passages show is when dealing with demons we have to do with a number of discrete individuals. Each of the synoptics demonstrates this with a slightly different emphasis. In Matthew, Jesus is confronted with "two demoniacs" (Mt 8:28). Each, it seems, is possessed by a single demon. There's no indication in the text, anyway, that we're to think there's more than one demon per demoniac. Unless we take the casting out of the demons into a herd of swine to indicate that a number of demons

flood out of them before rousing the pigs to rush “down the steep bank into the sea” (Mt 8:32). Turning to Luke, however, this event takes on a slightly different hue. In his version of the story, there’s just one possessed man. Jesus asks him, “What is your name?” to which he responds, “Legion” (Lk 8:30). Luke offers the reader an explanatory gloss. The demoniac responds, “Legion,” because “many demons had entered him” (Lk 8:30). Here are good textual reasons to think not only that there are many demons but that they have together taken a single human captive by residing in him.

Mark’s account of this incident says more. There, when Christ asks, “What is your name?” he receives a confusing reply, “My name is Legion; for we are many” (Mk 5:9). The demons reply in both the singular and the plural—“my name is” and “we are.” There is, then, something individual and also something corporate about fallen angels. Unlike Luke who interprets the name, Legion, for his reader, in Mark it’s the demons themselves who provide the explanation. This language should resonate with the reader as a kind of inversion of Paul’s explanation of the corporate nature of life in Christ in First Corinthians. There Paul says, “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ” (1 Cor 12:12). In Mark we’re faced with a devilish simulacrum of the unity of the body of Christ. Commenting on the passage from First Corinthians, Augustine makes a similar observation about the corporate nature of the fallen angels, when he says, “In the same way the body of the devil—that is, the multitude of the impious and most of all those who fall from Christ or from the Church as from heaven—whose head is the devil, is called the devil. And many things are said figuratively in that very body which do not so much

fit the head as they do the body and members.”¹⁰ As it turns out, the demons are not only multiple, they are united in some way. They’re united enough at least, that it makes sense to refer to them in both the singular and the plural.

The last bit of scriptural evidence I’ll provide comes from Revelation 12. The picture given there further strengthens the corporate image of the demons. What’s recounted is also the most detailed description of the fall of the angels given in Scripture. Though, it is anything but a straightforward narrative. It’s better seen as a cosmic drama played out on two levels, in heaven and on earth. The chapter begins with “a great portent” (Rev 12:1). A woman appearing in heaven, “clothed with the sun,” is preparing to give birth (Rev 12:1-2). “A great red dragon” sets upon the woman, ready to devour the child upon delivery (Rev 12:3-4). The child is saved, “caught up to God and to his throne” while the woman flees “into the wilderness” (Rev 12:5-6). After this, a war in heaven ensues between “Michael and his angels” and “the dragon and his angels” (Rev 12:7). The dragon, “that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan,” is defeated and “thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown with him” (Rev 12:9). Being cast down, the dragon continues his fight, not against Michael and his angels, but against “the woman who had borne the male child” and “the rest of her offspring” (Rev 12:13, 17). In determining what this passage can teach us about the demons, I’ll do three things. First, I’ll look at the two levels of this drama, taking place as it does in heaven and on earth. Second, to lend further credence to the corporate nature of the demons, I’ll ask

¹⁰ *Gn. litt.*, 11.24.31, *PL* 34:442: “*eo modo etiam corpus diaboli, cui caput est diabolus, id est ipsa impiorum multitudo, maximeque eorum qui a Christo vel de Ecclesia sicut de coelo decidunt, dicitur diabolus, et in ipsum corpus figurate multa dicuntur, quae non tam capiti quam corpori membrisque conveniant.*” On the body of the devil cf. also *Gn. litt.*, 11.22.29, 11.25.32.

what we might gather from the image of the dragon's tail sweeping the stars from the sky. Third, I'll touch on what it means to say of the demons, "there was no longer any place for them in heaven" (Rev 12:8), and what this portends for the earth to which they've been cast down.

One way to read Revelation 12 is as a single narrative that takes place in two different settings: heaven and earth. The scene opens with the announcement of the two great portents "in heaven" (Rev 12:1, 3), the woman clothed with the sun and crowned with stars along with the seven headed, ten horned serpent. Likewise, the war between Michael and Satan and their respective angels is played out "in heaven" (Rev 12:7) and it's from heaven the demons are cast out (Rev 12:8-9). But the heavenly narrative ends, it seems, after the twelfth verse. With the thirteenth verse, the story picks up on earth (Rev 12:13). It might seem as though Revelation 12:13-17 just picks up where 12:6 leaves off, but that's not entirely clear from the text. If that is the case, the pursuit is no longer on the same turf. The woman, and the devil's pursuit of her, has traversed heaven and earth, ending with the promise of continued war upon the woman's offspring.

Reading this as a two-level drama has some advantages over a single narrative that simply changes from a heavenly to a terrestrial backdrop. The two levels I'm suggesting reflect the two ways of describing the created order, considered as *conditio* and *administratio*. Taking it like this makes a cut at the transition from the twelfth to the thirteenth verse. Everything before that cut belongs to the description of creation under the aspect of eternity. The events described there aren't described in terms of a temporal sequence of events. On this view, Revelation 12:1-12 is getting at something closer to the nature of the cosmos considered as a whole, created good but also the site of an epic

battle. After the cut, and beginning at verse thirteen, the events are described under the aspect of time. They point to a sequential unfolding of discrete happenings in the temporal order.

Alcuin of York's *Commentariorum in Apocalypsin* inclines in this direction, though his thoughts on Revelation 12 remain incomplete. What we have of his commentary ends after five books midway through chapter twelve, precisely at the cut I've suggested. Two things he says in this commentary are suggestive. First, of the woman introduced in the first verse, he says, "The woman clothed with the sun is the Blessed Virgin Mary, covered by the power of the Most High, and in her a type is also understood, that is the Church."¹¹ Alcuin doesn't make as much of this insight as he might. His interpretation emphasizes the Church signified by the Virgin Mary rather than the Virgin Mary herself. His thoughts on this first verse comport well, however, with Pope Pius XII's recognition in *Munificentissimus Deus* that in these words from Revelation there is scriptural evidence of Mary's Assumption into heaven and crowning in glory.¹²

Alcuin's commentary contains another detail that prompts the reader to think about the relation between time and eternity. He says, of the moon under Mary's feet, "Through the moon, which wanes by increments of time, the mutability of time is expressed, which the Church—because it despises it—presses down as if beneath her

¹¹ *in Apoc.*, 5.12, *PL* 100:1152d: "*Mulier amicta sole beata virgo Maria est, obumbrata Altissimi virtute, in qua etiam genus, id est Ecclesia, intelligitur.*"

¹² Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*, §§27-28, Accessed at http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/la/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-xii_apc_19501101_munificentissimus-deus.html, last accessed October 25, 2018.

feet.”¹³ This fits with the idea, expressed in the last chapter, that the unfurling of things in the *administratio*, under the aspect of time, is something painful, a distention. The Church, with her emphasis on things eternal, including especially the consummation of all things eschatologically, tramples upon mutability. She puts it under foot. This trampling of the moon and mutability should conjure up another classical image of Mary found in devotional statuary and paintings. I’m speaking of those representations of Mary crushing the head of a serpent under foot. These images are a visual form of scriptural interpretation, which recognizes Mary as the fulfilment of the LORD’s words in Genesis 3:15 in the Vulgate, “*ipsa conteret caput tuum*”—she shall crush your head. The words in Genesis come as a promise of ongoing conflict between Satan, under the guise of a serpent, and Eve’s offspring. This makes it immediately relevant to the reading of Revelation 12, itself a description of pitched battle between a woman and a giant serpent.

Aside from noting that Mary’s feet are suitable for crushing both the devil and the changeableness of time, these observations illuminate some aspects of the two-level drama of Revelation 12. The first is that Mary has a key role in the life of the cosmos. I’ve already argued for this in the idea of Mary as co-creatix. The centrality of Mary comes to the fore again in her confrontation with the Satan and his angels. This confrontation takes place precisely because she bears in her womb and gives her flesh to the one who is the life of the world. I’ll spend more time in the next chapter examining how this perspective relates to a theologoumenon which links the fall of the angels with the Incarnation. For now, suffice it to say Mary, both in her person and as a type of the

¹³ in *Apoc.*, 5.12, *PL* 100:1152d: “*Per lunam vero, quae per incrementa temporum deficit, mutabilitas temporis exprimitur, quam Ecclesia quia despicit quasi sub pedibus premit.*”

Church, is at war with the demons, a war that plays out in heaven. It's a war that also plays out on earth. The cosmic nature of Mary's war under the aspect of the *conditio* has its counterpart in the *administratio*.

The battle fought in time is found in the narrative of Revelation 12 from verse thirteen onward. Here I'll emphasize that the "dragon (*draco*)" once thrown down from heaven, pursues the woman and her offspring precisely as a "serpent (*serpens*)," humanity's ancient enemy (Rev 12:13-15, cf. Gn 3:15). More clearly even than in the first twelve verses, the woman here typifies the Church, specifically the Church on pilgrimage in this world. She's pursued to the ends of the earth by the enemy, an enemy who targets those "who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus" (Rev 12:17). But a strong separation between Mariology and ecclesiology here would be a mistake. For again, the flesh of Jesus, which unites the Church as the mystical body of Christ, is taken from Mary. Those "who bear testimony to Jesus" in the face of demonic onslaught do so fortified by that flesh present in the eucharist.

The second aspect of Revelation 12 I'd like to look at is the tail of the dragon, which "swept down a third of the stars of heaven" (Rev 12:4). As I've already shown, Scripture sometimes refers to the angels as stars (Jb 38:7, Is 14:12). So it's reasonable to think this reference has to do with Satan's role in the fall of some of the host of heaven. In this, I follow Thomas Aquinas, who not only thinks it probable that Satan was the highest of all the angels before his fall, but also that his fall caused the fall of the lower angels.¹⁴ In article 8 of question 63 in the Prima Pars of the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas cites Revelation 12:4 as an authority to support the claim that Satan causes the other

¹⁴ Cf. *ST*, I.63.7-8.

angels to fall.¹⁵ It's not that the highest angel's sin forces the others to sin, but that his sin was a "kind of exhortation, leading them into" sin.¹⁶ Because the other angels follow Satan in this, they are made his subjects. Thomas argues this point on scriptural grounds, citing Matthew 25:41, where Jesus refers to "the devil and *his* angels."¹⁷ This is the same pattern of speech deployed in Revelation 12:7, where the angels are divided into two groups, "Michael and his angels" who are fighting, "the dragon and *his* angels."

This lends further support to the corporate nature of the demons discovered in Mark's account of the Gerasene demoniac and Augustine's reading of First Corinthians. Thomas' interpretation gives us reason to think the demons' subjection to Satan fits their sin. And because Thomas thinks it likely that Satan was himself the highest of the angels, he finds that "it was not contrary to the demons' pride that they willed to be under an inferior [Satan rather than the LORD]...especially because even then, in the order of nature, they were subject to the highest angel."¹⁸ The turn away from the LORD occurs first in Satan and second in the rest of the fallen angels. But this is not a first and second in the order of time. Satan's sin is causally but not temporally prior to the others' sin. For Thomas, this is due to the nature of angels as intellectual substances. It's possible to affirm both that "the demons sinned all at once" and that "the sin of one could be the cause of the others sinning."¹⁹ Angels, unlike humans, do not need time to make choices. While human reason acts discursively, deliberatively, angelic reason grasps and chooses

¹⁵ *ST*, I.63.8, *sed contra*.

¹⁶ *ST*, I.63.8, resp: "*peccatum primi angeli fuit aliis causa peccandi, non quidem cogens, sed quadam quasi exhortatione inducens.*"

¹⁷ *ST*, I.63.8 resp.

¹⁸ *ST*, I.63.8 ad 2: "*Sic igitur non fuit contra superbiam daemonum quod subesse inferiori voluerunt...praesertim quia supremo angelo naturae ordine etiam tunc subiecti erant.*"

¹⁹ *ST*, I.63.8 ad 1: "*licet simul daemones peccaverint, tamen peccatum unius potuit esse aliis causa peccandi.*"

instantaneously, intuitively. Thomas compares this to the way even humans are able to seize upon first principles.²⁰ And so Scripture provides us with reasons to hold that demons are not only fallen angels, but that they together form a kind of body united under the headship of Satan as *princeps*.

The last element of Revelation 12 I'll examine before turning to the Church's doctrinal resources on the fall of the angels is what it means to say that once the demons were defeated, "there was no longer any place for them in heaven" (Rev 12:8). Not only are the angels who turn away from the LORD defeated, this defeat signals the loss of their proper place. Angels, like all creatures, are made according to the *ratio*, the *Logos*, of the LORD. This *ratio* does not simply belong to this or that individual creature. It's a *ratio* best understood in terms of the entire set of creatures considered as an ordered whole.²¹ For this reason, we shouldn't underestimate the calamitous effects brought about by the angelic fall. Angels belong in heaven. When some of them fall away, and there's no long any place in heaven for them, it's a disruption of the ordered whole. It's for this reason that Augustine and Anselm both speculate that the number of lost angels will be made up by humans reconciled in Christ.²² Both have a keen sense that were the celestial hierarchy, or any of the grades of that hierarchy, to be vacated, it could only mean

²⁰ *ST*, I.63.8 ad 1: "*Angelus enim non indiget ad eligendum vel exhortandum vel etiam consentiendum, temporis mora; sicut homo, qui deliberatione indiget ad eligendum et ad consentiendum, et locutione vocali ad exhortandum, quorum utumque tempore agitur. Manifestum est autem quod etiam homo simul dum aliquid iam corde concepit, in eodem instanti incipit loqui. Et in ultimo instant locutionis, in quo aliquis sensum loquentis capit, potest assentire ei quod dicitur, ut patet maxime in primis conceptionibus, quas quisque probat auditas.*"

²¹ Recall from the last chapter Thomas on the ordered whole, *ST*, I.15.2 resp: "*Illud autem quod est optimum in rebus existens, est bonum ordinis universi.*"

²² *civ.*, 22.1, CSEL 40.2:583: "*qui de mortali progenie merito iusteque damnata tantum populum gratia sua colligit, ut inde subpleat et instauret partem, quae lapsa est angelorum.*" Cf. Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 1.17-18, *PL* 158:382A-389B.

damage to the cosmos. For Anselm and Augustine, in order for the cosmos to be properly ruled—brought back into alignment with the *ratio* of its maker—the emptiness left by the angelic fall needs to be filled back up.

Speculations on humans repopulating the angelic hierarchies aside, we can by no means overlook the disorder wrought by angelic disobedience. There will be more to say on this when we come to some of the theological opinions concerning the role of the angels as ministers of the created order. For now, I want to observe that when there is no longer any place in heaven for some of the angels, we are dealing with something akin to a soldier abandoning his or her post. A duty that ought to be carried out diligently is left undone. Not only that, as Revelation 12 shows it's not mere abandonment we must worry about. The fallen angels are not just deserters but turncoats. A battle with origins outside time, now plays out in the temporal order. The devil's ongoing war with the Church in time is characterized precisely by its rejection of the rule of the LORD. His enemies are those "who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus" (Rev 12:17), who is the rule of the cosmos. Whatever role angels do and should play in the cosmos as the variegated expression of the LORD's gift of self, the demons have rejected it. Because they have, the battle is most pitched where the demons encounter those who, by grace, bear witness to the rule of creation which they seek to undermine by their turn away from the countenance of the LORD.

3.2 The Doctrine of the Angelic Fall

How has the Church interpreted the biblical witness of the existence of nonhuman, rational creatures, some of whom are at war with the LORD himself upon the battleground of the LORD's good creation? One of the earliest authoritative statements

on the issue of fallen angels clearly recognizes the stakes involved. Pope Leo I, in the letter, *Quam Laudabiliter*, to Bishop Turribus of Astorga puts it this way: “The true faith confesses the good substance of all creatures—whether spiritual or corporeal—and that there is no nature of evil, because God, who is the maker of the universe, made nothing not good. So even the devil would be good, if he had remained in the good which he was made.”²³ What Leo recognizes is that the existence of evil, incorporeal beings presents a *prima facie* challenge to the Christian doctrine of creation by an omnibenevolent deity. For that matter, the existence of any evil, corporeal or spiritual, poses such a challenge. The note Leo rings here will sound continually in the Church’s teaching on angels and demons. The LORD, being all good, only creates good things. There is no nature of evil.

In this letter, Leo is responding to the contrary claim, attributed to the Priscillianists, who say, “that the devil never was good, nor was his nature the work of God, but that he emerged out of the chaos and darkness because surely he has no author, but is himself the principle and substance of all evil.”²⁴ Evil, according to the Priscillianists, *is* something. The devil is that something’s source. Now, it’s important to see why the position in this passage is an attractive one. It has great explanatory power. In it, the problem of evil is not resolved but dissolved without remainder. Evil, on this read, is definitively not from the LORD. It is from an opposing force, one whose characteristic marks are chaos and darkness. It sits well with the imagery of cosmic

²³ Leo I, *Quam Laudabiliter*, DS §286: “*fides vera...omnium creaturarum sive spiritualium sive corporalium bonam confiteatur substantiam, et mali nullam esse naturam: quia Deus, qui universitatis est conditor, nihil non bonum fecit. Unde et diabolus bonus esset, si in eo quod factus est permaneret.*”

²⁴ Ibid.: “*quod diabolus numquam fuerit bonus, nec natura eius opificium Dei sit, sed eum ex chao et tenebris emersisse: quia scilicet nullum sui habeat auctorem, sed omnis mali ipse sit principium atque substantia.*”

warfare, the battle for souls and *imperium* over creation. Surfacing time and again, versions of this heresy claim adherents for a reason. Augustine himself was held captive by the glamour of this Manichaean worldview—the ongoing struggle between light and darkness.

But the attractiveness of this view and what it seems to explain cannot survive contact with the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. The price for dissolving the problem of evil is simply too great. To give evil substantial, independent existence—existence apart from the LORD’s creative act—is to rob the LORD of his lordship. If, that is, evil is a something rather than a privation, we’re faced with a decision, either evil has a source other than the LORD, who is all good and so creates only good creatures. Or, even more deplorable, the LORD himself is not wholly good. The substantial darkness present in the created order is just one more reflection of an uncreated darkness at the heart of creation. In the first case the LORD is not the source of all that is; there is a *tertium quid* standing apart from the LORD and everything the LORD creates. In the second case, while all things find their source in the LORD, that source is corrupt, itself shot through with darkness, a darkness that expresses itself in the brokenness of creation. Neither of these views is compatible with Christian orthodoxy.

What we find in Leo’s letter constitutes a doctrinal development, an explicit elucidation of what’s implicit in Scripture and the creedal affirmations of the first three ecumenical councils. That is, the LORD is the creator of everything that is not the LORD. There is “one God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth, of all things visible

and invisible.”²⁵ If that is the case, then the first possibility, canvassed by the Priscillianists and the Manichaeans alike, of a *tertium quid* apart from the LORD and his creatures is excluded. But what of the second position? Could not the evil in creation be created by a God who is not all good? The Augustinian tenor of Leo’s contribution to Church doctrine on this point is evident in his asseverations, “*mali nullam esse naturam*” and “*nihil non bonum fecit.*” I want to turn now to Book VII of Augustine’s *Confessiones* to highlight the pattern of questioning that leads to these hard won answers. Leo’s ability to teach it as the doctrine of the Church depends upon them. But there’s another reason to look closely at Augustine’s questions and answers. Augustine’s thoughts on these matters in *Confessiones* show, perhaps more clearly than anywhere else, that the contrary view is something not just to be rejected but surmounted. And it’s precisely his recognition of the real temptation to see the world as a struggle between a substantial goodness and a substantial evil that allows him to move beyond it.

Moving beyond the Manichaean worldview cannot entail a simple rejection, any more than dissolving the problem of evil counts as an answer to it. What’s called for, and what Augustine provides, is a refashioning of a dualistic metaphysics into something Christian. To deny the hold that the conflict between light and darkness has on the imagination would not only deny its obvious explanatory power, it would fail to make sense of the Scripture’s use of those images. This move might smack of an overly developed Augustinian pessimism, or seem to fall victim to the recurring trope that Augustine never fully abandons his Manichaean roots. While I’m certainly susceptible to

²⁵ The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, *DS* §150: “*Credo in unum Deum, Patrem omnipotentem, factorem caeli et terrae, visibilium omnium et invisibilium.*”

the first accusation, I contend the second simply misunderstands the nature of Augustine's rejection of the school of Mani. It's precisely because Augustine understands the problem evil poses and the power of dualism to explain it that he's willing to push his speculations to the brink. Precisely because Augustine had been taken with the Manichaeans and inhabited their imaginative world he was prepared to offer a rebuttal.

3.3 Augustine on the Problem of Evil

In Book VII of the *Confessiones*, Augustine examines the two ways of offering a substantive account of evil. Engagement with both approaches is woven together, so part of the task is to disentangle them. Since I've already shown, albeit briefly, that the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed rules out a *tertium quid* standing apart from the LORD and his creatures, I'll first look at the way Augustine deals with the second possibility, that the LORD himself might be evil or corruptible. The questions he asks and the ways he goes about answering them are just as interesting for their epistemological commitments as they are for their conclusions. As you'll see, the answers he gives are not neatly separable from epistemology. After that, I'll return to his treatment of the idea of evil as an independent substance and show how his critique results in a view of the origins of evil in the will of rational creatures. This volitional account of evil's origin allows Augustine to maintain many of the insights of his Manichaean past by appropriating them into a new kind of dualism. Rather than a dualism of substance, we're presented with a dualism of the will. Augustine's account of the turning will as the source of evil is essential to grasp what Leo I says in *Quam Laudabiliter*. Further, we need it to

makes sense of Augustine's account of the angelic fall, which as Serge-Thomas Bonino has argued, simply is the starting place for theological speculation on the topic.²⁶

At the start of Book VII, Augustine lays out the problem. He's unsure how to think of the LORD in terms other than corporeal. "I could not conceive (*cogitare*) of any substance except such as is normally seen by these eyes."²⁷ He's lost, and how else he might think does not occur to him.²⁸ Though just a man, he "tried to conceive (*conabar cogitare*)" of the "highest and sole and true God," but continued to fall short.²⁹ Unable to think of the LORD as something other than an object in the world, something available to sense perception, Augustine is driven to confusion. If the LORD is not the source of all existing things, but rather one of those things, even the biggest, greatest thing around, then it's possible for him to be in conflict with other existing things. And being in conflict with other existing things, it's possible for the LORD to suffer change. But, Augustine says, "I believed (*credebam*) with my whole heart you to be incorruptible and inviolable and immutable, because not knowing (*nesciens*) why or how I saw clearly and was certain what can be corrupted is worse than what cannot, and what cannot be violated I put unhesitatingly above violable things, and what suffers no change is better than what can change."³⁰ Augustine believes, he says, but does not know why or how. In this

²⁶ Serge-Thomas Bonino, *Les anges et les démons: quatorze leçons de théologie*, Bibliothèque De La Revue Thomiste (Paris: Éditions Parole et Silence, 2007), 201: "Soulignons simplement que saint Augustin, même s'il a beaucoup hésité sur le scénario exact de l'histoire angélique, a donné à la réflexion théologique sur la chute du diable sa forme quasi-définitive."

²⁷ *conf.*, 7.1.1, CSEL 33:140: "qui cogitare aliquid substantiae nisi tale non poteram, quale per hos oculos videri solet."

²⁸ *conf.*, 7.1.1, CSEL 33:140: "quid te aliud cogitarem non occurrebat."

²⁹ *conf.*, 7.1.1, CSEL 33:140: "et conabar cogitare te homo et talis homo, summum et solum et verum deum."

³⁰ *conf.*, 7.1.1, CSEL 33:140-141: "et te incorruptibilem et inviolabilem et incommutabilem totis medullis credebam, quia nesciens, unde et quomodo, plane tamen videbam et certus eram id, quod corrumpi potest, deterius esse quam id quod non potest, et quod violari non potest, incunctanter praeponere violabili, et quod nullam patitur mutationem, melius esse quam id quod mutari potest."

opening chapter of Book VII, he's made a notable distinction between two kinds of knowledge. Relating these two ways of knowing, the task of bringing them into alignment, is integral to Augustine's overcoming a corporeal image of the LORD and so of his definitive rejection of a vision of the LORD admixed with the evil of corruption.

The two ways of knowing Augustine juxtaposes are what we might call cogitative, scientific knowledge and authoritative, volitional knowledge. Augustine identifies the first kind with thinking verbs. His use of '*cogitare*' and '*nesciens*' flags it. With these thinking verbs, he's highlighting a certain kind of inability, something he can't do. Augustine can't, that is, "think" an incorporeal substance—" *cogitare aliquid substantiae nisi tale non poteram, quale per hos oculos videri solet.*" And he believes because he does not understand—" *credebam, quia nesciens.*" Not having penetrative, cognitive command of his subject does not, however, prevent Augustine from knowing something about it. The second kind of knowledge Augustine describes rests on an act of will—belief—rather than intellect. He believes with his whole heart—" *totis medullis credebam.*" And though you might think this would lead him to be less sure of this kind of knowledge, that is emphatically not the case. Lacking discursive knowledge of the LORD, he claims still to see clearly and with certainty—" *plane tamen videbam et certus eram.*"

Is Augustine just talking out of both sides of his mouth? He's certain but he doesn't understand. What are we to make of this? What's clear from the text is that at this point he is placing these two ways of knowing in opposition to one another. His volitional knowledge, his belief, continually runs up against his discursive knowledge. "My heart cried out violently against all my mental images and by this one blow tried to drive the

spiraling roar of impure thoughts away from my mind's eye. And hardly was it dispersed, when, in the blink of an eye, here it was gathered back up again, and it pressed in upon my vision and darkened it."³¹ His firm belief beats back the bodily phantasms of intellectual habit, the well-trod paths of Augustine's Manichaean materialism, only to just as quickly find itself playing defense to a resurgent swirling mass of confused thoughts. The cry of his heart—"clamabat violenter cor meum"—is in conflict with his mind's eye—"acie menti meae."

This text reminds me of the familiar aphorism from Blaise Pascal's *Pensées*, "The heart has its reasons, that reason knows not."³² But it's actually a less well-known, though related, comment of Pascal's on the reasons of the heart that bears more precisely on Augustine's situation. Pascal says this: "We know the truth, not only through reason, but even through the heart. It is by this latter kind that we know first principles, and it is in vain that reasoning, which plays no part, tries to oppose them."³³ Pascal offers some examples of first principles known in this way: space, time, movement, number. They are not less certain because they belong to the heart's knowledge.³⁴ The skeptics who claim the incertitude of all knowledge on account of our reliance on these reasons are confused when they point out the inability to prove them rationally. This doesn't constitute an

³¹ *conf.*, 7.1.1, CSEL 33:141: "*clamabat violenter cor meum aversus omnia phantasmata mea et hoc uno ictu conabar abigere circumvolantem turbam immunditiae ab acie menti meae: et vix dimota in ictu oculi ecce conglobata rursus aderat et inruebat in aspectum meum et obnubilabat eum.*"

³² Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. Michel Le Guern (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), §397: "*Le cœur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connaît point.*"

³³ *Ibid.*, §101: "*Nous connaissons la vérité, non seulement par la raison, mais encore par le cœur. C'est de cette dernière sorte que nous connaissons les premiers principes, et c'est en vain que le raisonnement, qui n'y a point de part, essaie de les combattre.*"

³⁴ *Ibid.*: "*Car la connaissance des premiers principes, comme qu'il y a espace, temps, mouvement, nombres, <est> aussi ferme qu'aucune de celles que nos raisonnements nous donnent.*"

inability to know, but simply shows the weakness of human reason itself.³⁵ They, the skeptics, have got it the wrong way round. Our knowledge of first principles, known *par le cœur*, “is as firm as any that our reasoning gives to us, and it is upon this knowledge of the heart and of instinct that reason supports itself and there that it bases all its discourse.”³⁶ The heart does not depend first upon the reason for its knowledge, instead reason needs the knowledge of the heart to do its work. It would therefore be as ridiculous for reason to demand rational proofs of the heart before consenting to first principles as it would be for the heart to demand a feeling or sentiment for the conclusions of reason’s own operations.³⁷ Pascal observes, in conclusion, that the inability of the heart to offer a rational demonstration of what it knows, “should therefore only serve to humble reason, which would like to judge everything, but not to oppose our certainty as if only reason were capable of instructing us.”³⁸ Pascal’s position, that heart and reason both offer certainty but by different paths, is a deeply Augustinian conviction. One which Pascal commends with characteristic clarity.

Armed with this respect for the heart’s knowledge and a humbled reason, let’s turn to Augustine’s *De utilitate credendi*. In this early treatise, Augustine is attempting to convince an old friend of his, Honoratus, that the Manichaeans (like Pascal’s skeptics)

³⁵ Ibid.: “*Nous savons que nous ne rêvons point, quelque impuissance où nous soyons de le prouver par raison; cette impuissance ne conclut autre chose que la faiblesse de notre raison, mais non pas l’incertitude de toutes nos connaissances, comme ils [pyrrhoniens] prétendent.*”

³⁶ Ibid.: “*<est> aussi ferme qu’aucune de celles que nos raisonnements nous donnent, et c’est sur ces connaissances du cœur et de l’instinct qu’il faut que la raison s’appuie et qu’elle y fonde tout son discours.*”

³⁷ Ibid.: “*Et il est aussi inutile et aussi ridicule que la raison demande au cœur des preuves de ses premiers principes pour vouloir y consentir, qu’il serait ridicule que le cœur demandât à la raison un sentiment de toutes les propositions qu’elle démontre pour vouloir les recevoir.*”

³⁸ Ibid.: “*Cette impuissance ne doit donc servir qu’à humilier la raison, qui voudrait juger de tout, mais non pas à combattre notre certitude comme s’il n’y avait que la raison capable de nous instruire.*”

have made the mistake of thinking reason ought “*juger de tout.*” The Manichaeans, Augustine explains, “promise they will offer a rational account of the most obscure things to those whom they attract. And for that reason especially they accuse the Catholic [Church], that whoever comes to her is enjoined to believe. They, however, pride themselves that they do not impose the yoke of believing, but instead open a fount of teaching.”³⁹ The claim the Manichaeans are making, to offer reason apart from any belief, is not only misguided but false. It’s false because in pursuing true religion, one has already conceded to believe there is one. More than that, “No one doubts him who seeks the true religion either to believe there is an immortal soul—for which that religion is a boon—or even that he wants to find precisely that belief in that same religion.”⁴⁰ To be in pursuit of the true religion is to believe there is some point to it. Augustine identifies at least two, the belief in an immortal soul or the desire for that belief.

While Jason BeDuhn doesn’t find Augustine’s overall epistemological stance particularly convincing (BeDuhn’s wrong about this), he does an excellent job summing up what Augustine thinks is at stake in the priority of belief in matters of religion. “The Manichaeans,” he explains,

leaped over the necessary preliminaries, and offered access to truth at the beginning, rather than at the end, of personal reform. In this way, Augustine claimed, their followers were fooled into thinking that they had arrived before they had even begun. They reversed the proper order of progress; first must come the moral and intellectual disciplining by which people learned to give up ‘love of anything besides God and the soul.’⁴¹

³⁹ *util. cred.*, 9.21, *CSEL* 25.1:26: “*quod illis, qui ad eam veniunt, praecipitur, ut credant, se autem non iugum credendi inponere, sed docendi fontem aperire gloriantur.*”

⁴⁰ *util. cred.*, 7.14, *CSEL* 25.1:19: “*nemo dubitat eum, qui veram religionem requirat, aut iam credere immortalem esse animam, cui prosit illa religio, aut etiam id ipsum in eadem religione velle invenire.*” Cf. *util. cred.*, 14.30.

⁴¹ Jason David BeDuhn, *Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma: Making a “Catholic” Self, 388-401 C.E.*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 95, quoting *util. cred.*, 16.34.

The ambition of the Manichaeans has overleaped itself, as it were. Promising their adherents good reasons, they render true understanding unattainable. Offering not only the adept but also the beginner access to their “fount of teaching” they have consigned all to eat solid food for which they are not ready (1 Cor 3:2). What’s worse, with their attractive veneer, preying upon the vanity of the multitudes, “they ingratiate themselves by employing the name of reason.”⁴² Without any regard for their capacity, the crowds, to whom the Manichaeans have pandered, “seize upon the poisons of the deceivers.”⁴³ Augustine’s counterpoint, and a common theme in his early anti-Manichaean writings, is to hold up belief as the basis of a great deal of human knowledge. It is certainly the foundation of all interpersonal relationships and life together in human society.⁴⁴ There’s no way to make a friend or know who your parents are without belief.⁴⁵ All the more reason, then, when the stakes are highest, to put your trust in an authority.⁴⁶

Augustine’s *De utilitate credendi* provides its reader with a taxonomy of human knowledge. Three kinds of knowing—to understand, to believe, and to opine—border one another in the human mind.⁴⁷ This is a hierarchical ordering. For Augustine, to understand is better than to believe, which is itself better than to opine. That Augustine describes them as bordering one another—“*velut finitima sibimet*”—is not incidental.

He’s not making a casual observation. Rather, he clearly sees these three states of mind

⁴² *util. cred.*, 9.21, CSEL 25.1:26: “*sed ut aliquam concilient multitudinem nomine rationis.*”

⁴³ *util. cred.*, 9.21, CSEL 25.1:26: “*inruit in venena fallentium.*”

⁴⁴ *util. cred.*, 12.26, CSEL 25.1:34: “*multa possunt adferri, quibus ostendatur nihil omnino humanae societatis incolume remanere, si nihil credere statuerimus, quod non possumus tenere perceptum.*”

⁴⁵ Cf. *util. cred.*, 10.23, 12.26.

⁴⁶ *util. cred.*, 12.27, CSEL 25.1:35: “*nam et res humanae promptiores ad dinoscendum sunt quam divinae et in quibuscumque sanctioribus et praestantioribus, quo maius eis obsequium cultumque debemus, eo sceleratius periculosiusque peccatur.*”

⁴⁷ *util. cred.*, 11.25, CSEL 25.1:31: “*tria sunt item velut finitima sibimet in animis hominum distinctione dignissima: intellegere, credere, opinari.*”

are bound up with one another, and he spends a chapter tracing their interrelations. To understand—*intellegere*—he explains, is reserved only for those things which are known with scientific precision. You can only properly understand what you can also offer a demonstration of. This kind of knowledge Augustine describes using the verb ‘*scire*.’ He gives a negative example of it in his accompanying description of what it is to believe—*credere*. “For,” he says, “I believe (*credo*) the most wicked conspirators to have been killed at one time by the virtue of Cicero. And yet not only do I not know (*nescio*) it, but I even know with certainty (*certo scio*) there is no way for me to be able to know (*scire*).”⁴⁸

You can see here the high bar Augustine sets when it comes to understanding. This kind of knowing belongs to things demonstrably true, which, in a clever turn of phrase, he shows to include his knowledge of the impossibility of knowing (in this strong sense) matters of historical record. What we can know about Cicero or any other person from history is properly called belief, not scientific knowledge. On the other hand, what we can know about our knowledge—i.e., whether it is belief or understanding—is something we can know with the level of precision required to say *intellego* or *scio*.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *util. cred.*, 11.25, CSEL 25.1:32: “*credo enim sceleratissimos coniuratos virtute Ciceronis quondam interfectos: atqui id non solum nescio, sed etiam nullo pacto me scire posse certo scio.*”

⁴⁹ I’m going to insist on using ‘knowledge’ to describe what we know by belief and what we know by understanding. The reasons for this are twofold. First, it’s clear that English usage favors ‘know’ in both these cases. Here’s an example: Suppose I take it upon myself to learn the periodic table of elements, along with the atomic weights corresponding to each individual element. Afterwards, if someone were to ask me whether I ‘knew’ the atomic weights of each element, my answer would be an unequivocal yes. It’s also clear that this kind of knowledge wouldn’t yet rise to the level of knowledge required by Augustine’s taxonomy to say *intellego* or *scio*. Why? Because at that point my knowledge of atomic weights would not be rooted in my understanding why it’s correct to say the atomic weight of strontium is 87.62. I could not offer a demonstration of my knowledge, but it would still be right to say, “I know the atomic weight of strontium is 87.62.” My knowledge of strontium, like Augustine’s of history, is actually a matter of belief. But in English it would be an affectation to constantly insist upon using the verb ‘to believe’ instead of ‘to know.’ That’s because in English we regularly refer to both as knowledge. Now, unlike Augustine’s example of Cicero and the executed conspirators, in this case I could also affirm that I *do* know that there is a way for me to know (*scio* or *intellego*) the atomic weight of Strontium. I could undertake a study of

It's clear from the foregoing discussion on understanding that Augustine gives belief a much wider scope than we might expect. Belief isn't a thing we do only sometimes concerning relatively uncertain phenomena. Believing in fact accounts for most of the things we know, the field of things knowable with scientific precision being relatively small and the chance we spend the time it would take to learn them all even smaller. But it would be wrong to think you couldn't know something simply because you lacked scientific knowledge of it. Part of the epistemic stance Augustine labels 'to believe' involves knowing what you do and don't know and how it is you know it. As we saw in the example of our knowledge of Cicero, belief involves understanding. In this case it's understanding that we do not have scientific knowledge about the facts. Provided, then, you understand that you do not know (*nescire*) it, there's no problem having the epistemic stance of belief toward it.⁵⁰ This shouldn't be taken as an excuse to hold any beliefs whatsoever. Augustine explains that believing unworthy things about the LORD or being too quick to believe them of your fellow humans is blameworthy.⁵¹ What it does mean is that belief qua belief isn't a problem, though it may be put to problematic uses.

physics or chemistry, after which I'd be capable of giving an answer rising to the level of understanding. The second reason for maintaining the usage of knowledge in both cases is that it hews close to Pascal's use of *connaître* to refer to what's known *par la raison* and *par la cœur*. For Pascal, the reason's knowledge and the heart's knowledge are clearly both ways of knowing the truth, each with its own standards of proof. These map nicely onto Augustine's division of *intellegere* and *credere*. By recognizing both as forms of knowledge, it seems clear to me that Pascal grasps the Augustinian distinction and develops it further.

⁵⁰ *util. cred.*, 11.25, *CSEL* 25.1:32: "*in ceteris vero rebus si quis quid credit, si se id nescire intellegat, nulla culpa est.*"

⁵¹ *util. cred.*, 11.25, *CSEL*, 25.1:32: "*credere autem tunc est culpandum, cum vel de deo indignum aliquid creditur vel de homine facile creditur.*"

One of the problematic uses of belief is having an opinion. The trouble with opinion is you believe you know what you do not or cannot know. This makes *opinari* the worst possible epistemological position in which to find yourself. Whereas *intelligere* means to know by reason and *credere* to know by authority, *opinari* is not properly to know at all but to be in error.⁵² But Augustine has something fascinating to say about the role belief plays in both understanding and opining. “Everyone who understands also believes, and everyone who opines believes, but not everyone who believes understands, and no one who opines understands.”⁵³ I want to gloss this in two directions, and in so doing to summarize what I take to be Augustine’s basic epistemological position. The first direction deals with the belief involved in opining. When you opine, you believe yourself to understand when you do not. In doing so you not only fail to understand, but make it impossible to understand were an occasion for learning to present itself.⁵⁴ In the other direction, Augustine explains, understanding doesn’t do away with belief—“everyone who understands also believes.” But what does he mean by this? Surely, once you’ve understood, once you know in the strong sense of ‘*scire*,’ the need for belief is adumbrated. Augustine doesn’t think so, and it’s important to see why he doesn’t.

There are at least two reasons Augustine doesn’t think understanding does away with belief. The first has to do with the possibility of knowledge in general. The second has to do with the possibility of religious knowledge in particular. I’ll take the second

⁵² *util. cred.*, 11.25, CSEL, 25.1:32: “*quod intellegimus igitur, debemus rationi, quod credimus, auctoritati, quod opinamur, errori.*”

⁵³ *util. cred.*, 11.25, CSEL 25.1:32: “*intelligens omnis etiam credit, credit omnis et qui opinatur,; non omnis qui credit intellegit; nullus qui opinature intellegit.*”

⁵⁴ *util. cred.*, 11.25, CSEL 25.1:32: “*opinari autem duas ob res turpissimum estL quod et discere non potest, qui sibi iam se scire persuasit, si modo illud disci potest, et per se ipsa temeritas non bene adfecti animi signum est.*”

item first. Augustine's *De utilitate credendi* is about the pursuit of the true religion. He's writing it to a friend of his who, like him, was taken in by the Manichaeans' promises to reveal religious truth by way of reason alone. The aim of the work is to show the rash and sacrilegious character of Manichaean critiques of Catholic belief. Catholics, Augustine contends, follow the authority of the Church. By believing that authority, they are made ready—"strengthened and prepared"—to receive truth from the LORD.⁵⁵ Belief is beneficial, even if you're unable to understand. "For," he says, "as I see it, to believe before reason—that is, when you are not capable of perceiving the reasons—and to cultivate the mind by that faith for the seeds of truth to be received, is not only very healthy, but indeed without it health cannot return to sick minds."⁵⁶ To believe is to prepare the way for understanding the truth. Belief tills the soil of the mind when believers are "moved by authority so that [their] life and character might first be purged and in that way be made fit for the reasons to be received."⁵⁷ In a reversal of the Manichaean ambition which promised to all, even the unprepared, a rational account of the truth of religion, Augustine prioritizes the remaking of the person. Belief will continue to play an important role in understanding this side of the eschaton because the remaking of the human person that will make it so that "I may know as I also have been known—*cognoscam sicut et cognitus sum*" (1 Cor 13:12, Vulg.) will only be complete when we see the LORD "face to face" (1 Cor 13:12).

⁵⁵ *util. cred.*, 1.2, CSEL 25.1:4: "*Est igitur propositum, ut probem tibi, si possum quod Manichaei sacrilege ac temere invehantur in eos qui catholicae fidei auctoritatem sequentes, antequam illud verum, quod pura mente conspicitur, intueri queant, credendo praemuniuntur et inluminaturo praeparantur deo.*"

⁵⁶ *util. cred.*, 14.31, CSEL 25.1:38: "*nam ego credere ante rationem, cum percipiendae rationi non sis idoneus, et ipsa fide animum excolere excipiendis seminibus veritatis non solum saluberrimum iudico, sed tale omnino, sine quo aegris animis salus redire non possit.*"

⁵⁷ *util. cred.*, 15.33, CSEL 25.1:42: "*commotorum auctoritate hominum prius vita moresque purgarentur et ita rationi accipiendae habiles fierent.*"

A mind stuck in its loves of things other than the LORD cannot “cleave to the truth” and so remains incapable of understanding in the area of religion.⁵⁸ But Augustine’s account of belief applies more generally as well. So we come back to the first reason belief remains even when understanding emerges. I’ve already pointed out his observation that friendship and many of the social truths we hold most dear depend upon belief.⁵⁹ The *a fortiori* argument for belief’s necessity in matters of religion has the force it does because it builds upon this most basic fact about human knowledge. Dig deep enough and you discover that what we know, about the LORD and each other, sooner or later rests on a foundation of belief. It’s here that Pascal’s insights on first principles help to illuminate what Augustine means when he says “everyone who understands also believes.” The heart’s reasons, by which we know the truth—“*nous connaissons la vérité*”—give us the first principles upon which all other knowledge rests.⁶⁰ To grow in understanding first requires belief, this volitional move of the heart. By the very nature of the thing, first principles are not themselves susceptible to rational explanation. As you grow in understanding it becomes possible to give a rational account of some things once held simply on authority. But the basic structure of human thought rests upon those principles for which no further explanation can be offered. So, for Augustine, belief remains essential in matters religious and mundane.

The structure of human thought as Augustine describes it corresponds to something like Pascal’s distinction between the truth known by reason and by the heart. I

⁵⁸ *util. cred.*, 16.34, CSEL 25.1:43: “*sed id nunc agitur, ut sapientes esse possimus, id est inhaerere veritati: quod profecto sordidus animus non potest.*”

⁵⁹ cf. *util. cred.*, 12.26.

⁶⁰ Pascal, *Pensées*, §§397, 101.

think there's ample support for this position in Augustine's description of the means by which authority comes to take hold of those drawn to believe. The Church's authority to teach impresses itself upon the seeker of religious truth on the basis of miracles, the blood of the martyrs, the lives of the saints, and even the fact of sheer numbers.⁶¹ That a great mass of people look to her as an authority is itself a kind of evidence for it being so. But these are not truths demonstrable by reason. And even if we do want to consider them all, taken together, as a sort of proof for the Church's authority, their scope is limited. As Pascal puts it, "Faith is different than proof. The one is human, the other is a gift of God. *The just man lives by faith.* It is this faith that God himself puts in the heart, for which proof is often the instrument, *faith comes from hearing*, but this faith is in the heart, and it makes one say not 'I know' (*scio*), but 'I believe' (*credo*)."⁶²

This presentation of Pascal and Augustine on how we know has been meant to show the strength of the position. As I've read them, I take their thought to be right. There are important parallel strands of argument in the work of John Henry Newman, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Stanley Cavell. This is especially so in Newman's investigations of implicit and explicit reasons, the nature of assent, antecedent probabilities, and the illative sense. You'll find this also in Wittgenstein's and Cavell's important insights on the public nature of knowledge and our various dependencies that do not so much constitute impediments to knowledge but instead the conditions for its possibility. Further exegesis of Augustine, particularly his *De fide rerum quae non*

⁶¹ *util. cred.*, 16.34, 17.35, 7.15-16

⁶² Pascal, *Pensées*, §5: "*La foi est différente de la preuve: l'une est humaine, l'autre est un don de Dieu. Justus ex fide vivit. C'est de cette foi que Dieu lui-même met dans le cœur, dont la preuve est souvent l'instrument, fides ex auditu, mais cette foi est dans le cœur et fait dire non scio, mais credo.*"

videntur, would also add more flesh to this skeletal epistemology. But what I've said above should be enough to allow me to answer one of the two main questions posed by this excursus. You'll remember, perhaps, that we're asking after Augustine's rejection of the LORD's corruptibility in *Confessiones* VII. Keeping in mind the sketch above, this is a question we should now be prepared to tackle.

Applying Augustine's taxonomy of human knowledge to the progress he makes in Book VII of *Confessiones*, his initial juxtaposition of the thinking verbs '*cogitare*' and '*nescire*' with the believing verb '*credere*' makes more sense.⁶³ While Augustine has not yet arrived at an epistemic stance of understanding, he does believe. The opening chapter of Book VII highlights how these remain at odds for a time, warring against one another. Augustine must wait for the reasons of his heart, "*que Dieu lui-même met dans le cœur*,"⁶⁴ to remake his understanding from the ground up. As Stanley Hauerwas has rightly claimed,

We can only act within the world we can envision, and we can envision the world rightly only as we are trained to see. We do not come to see merely by looking, but must develop disciplined skills through initiation into that community that attempts to live faithful to the story of God. Furthermore, we cannot see the world rightly unless we are changed, for as sinners we do not desire to see truthfully.⁶⁵

This is an Augustinian insight which runs counter to the Manichaean impulse to prioritize ratiocination over formation. The act of knowing, in the sense of '*intellegere*,' requires training. In Augustine's case, it requires retraining an intellect formed by his previous Manichaean convictions. He sees the world and his LORD in the false categories given

⁶³ *conf.*, 7.1.1.

⁶⁴ Pascal, *Pensées*, §5.

⁶⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 29-30.

by his former teachers. Book VII is in large part the narrative of Augustine learning to see, to understand, the world in a way that comports with the reasons of his heart.

This is why Augustine never offers an argument for the unadulterated goodness of the LORD. To do so would be to treat it as something that could be argued for rather than the premise from which all faithful argumentation flows. Instead, what we find here are the roots of what's often called Anselm's ontological argument. Though again, Anselm, like Augustine, isn't in the business of defending the LORD's goodness so much as assuming it. Note how Augustine's version of this line of thought proceeds:

I had already discovered the incorruptible to be better than the corruptible, and for that reason I confessed you, whatever you are, to be incorruptible. Neither was there, nor will there ever be, any soul able to think something better than you, who are the highest and best good. When, however, the incorruptible is ranked most truly and certainly ahead of the corruptible, as I had already ranked it, were you not incorruptible I would have been able to touch something in thought that was better than my God.⁶⁶

There's no effort to prove or defend the LORD's goodness here. Rather, it's clear he considers it to be fundamental. His observations about the nature of things are to be brought into alignment with this basic truth. What's inconceivable to him is the idea that he'd be able to imagine something better than his LORD. Though he still hasn't arrived at understanding of how or why this is the case.

What this means, too, is Augustine is not offering his readers a defense of the LORD's goodness *in spite* of the fact of evil in the world. He's rather assuming it as a given, and a particular kind of given that rests on the certainty of his belief. Against the view that would have Augustine presenting a theodicy in Book VII (as anachronistic as

⁶⁶ *conf.*, 7.4.6, *CSEL* 33:145: "ut iam inverneram melius esse incorruptibile quam corruptibile, et ideo te, quidquid esses, esse incorruptibilem confitebar. neque enim ulla anima umpquam potuit poteritue cogitare aliquid, quod sit te melius, qui summum et optimum bonum es."

that would be), I'd like to relate what Augustine is doing here to what D. Z. Phillips offers as a way to avoid trying to "justify the ways of God to men."⁶⁷ For Phillips, Scripture gives us "a conception of human life."⁶⁸ To believe in the LORD, then, "is to embrace that whole way of looking at the world."⁶⁹ It would be foolhardy, on this account, to attempt to defend the LORD's goodness in general terms. What the believer recognizes is that there is no way of speaking of 'good' that could oppose it to what the LORD is and does. And so, belief in the goodness of God "is not a belief 'built up' out of standards prior to it. It is offered as a system of reference in itself, one that is not a hypothesis about the world, but an element, a light, that is constitutive of a vision of the world. It offers a spirit in which to see the world, and believers call that spirit, God."⁷⁰ Conceiving of the LORD's goodness in this way prevents the instrumentalist and consequentialist mistakes pervading the work of theodicy.⁷¹ Mistakes which in turn flow from the prior mistake of imagining the LORD's goodness could be judged by a standard external to the LORD himself.

One source of this confusion comes from treating the covenant with the LORD as a temporal as opposed to an eternal reality. The LORD is not, Phillips insists, "a member of our moral community."⁷² Our dealings with the LORD are not *quid pro quo*. To think of them as such is to imagine the LORD responding to our petitions and rewarding our

⁶⁷ John Milton, "Paradise Lost," in *The Poems of John Milton*, ed. Helen Darbishire (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), I.26.

⁶⁸ D. Z. Phillips, *The Problem of Evil & the Problem of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 254. Phillips is developing a comment of Simone Weil's, "The Gospel contains a conception of human life, not a theology" (quoted in *ibid.*, 139.).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* Cf. *inter alia*, 40, 59.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 40.

behavior as if the LORD were another creature alongside us, from whom we could legitimately stand in expectation of receiving what is our due according to the terms of the covenant. To treat the covenant as temporal is to treat it as a contract, something we might have with another human but not with the creator of the cosmos. Against this, Phillips presents the idea of an eternal covenant. “An eternal covenant,” he says, “offers a *conception of human life*, such that *anything* that may happen within it is understood in a certain way. *What happens in history will be the occasion for such an understanding, but not the criterion of it.* In this way, what happens in history can still be of eternal significance.”⁷³ Another way to put this is to say, with Phillips again, “To believe in a Creator *is* to believe in the givenness of life as a grace.”⁷⁴ Like Hauerwas, Phillips is insisting that the Gospel offers a way of seeing, and so of coming to understand, the world. History matters, but not in the way theodicians think it does. The history of the LORD’s relations with his creatures cannot be used either to defend or impugn the LORD’s character because the criteria for such an evaluation are simply lacking. Attempting to do so is to fundamentally misunderstand the kind of relation the LORD bears to everything that is not the LORD.

This perspective on the creator-creature relation is shared by Augustine in one of his early anti-Manichaean works, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*. In it, Augustine shows how the question, “Why did it please God make heaven and earth?” is malformed if what you are after in asking it are reasons the LORD himself would be answerable to.⁷⁵ It’s worth quoting Augustine’s manner of dealing with this question at length, as it shows two

⁷³ Ibid., 162. Emphasis original.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 183. Emphasis original.

⁷⁵ *Gn. c. Man.*, 1.2.4, *PL* 34:175: “*Quid placuit Deo facere coelum et terram?*”

things clearly. First, that what we're dealing with when we're dealing with the goodness of the LORD is not something, as Phillips said, "built up out of standards prior to it."

Second, because the LORD isn't answerable to reasons outside himself, it's clear that the LORD cannot be a "member of our moral community." The LORD is rather the ground upon which all moral considerations rest and from which they take their measure. Look at Augustine's response to those who ask, "Why did it please God to make heaven and earth?":

They seek to know the will of God, when the will of God is the cause of everything there is. For if the will of God has a cause, there is something that comes before the will of God, which is impious to believe. Therefore, to someone who says: 'Why did God make heaven and earth?' You ought to respond, 'Because he willed it.' For the will of God is the cause of heaven and earth, and for that reason the will of God is greater than heaven and earth. However, someone who says: 'Why did God *will* to make heaven and earth?' is searching for something greater than the will of God, but nothing greater can be found. She, therefore, should restrain her human thoughtlessness, and not seek what is not, as then she might not find what is. And if anyone desires to know the will of God, let him be a friend to God. Because if he were to want to know the will of a human to whom he was not a friend, everyone would deride his impudence and stupidity.⁷⁶

Note especially how he turns his reader's attention once again to the theme of friendship we first encountered in *De utilitate credendi*. Augustine is *not* saying it's impossible to know why the LORD made heaven and earth. He's saying it's impossible *if* you insist on searching for reasons that aren't the LORD's own, or rather the nature of the LORD

⁷⁶ Gn. c. Man., 1.2.4, PL 34:175: "*Causas enim voluntatis Dei scire quaerunt, cum voluntas Dei omnium quae sunt, ipsa sit causa. Si enim habet causam voluntas Dei, est aliquid quod antecedit voluntatem Dei, quod nefas est credere. Qui ergo dicit, Quare fecit Deus coelum et terram? respondendum est ei, Quia voluit. Voluntas enim Dei causa est coeli et terrae, et ideo major est voluntas Dei quam coelum et terra. Qui autem dicit, Quare voluit facere coelum et terram? majus aliquid quaerit quam est voluntas Dei: nihil autem majus inveniri potest. Compescat ergo se humana temeritas, et id quod non est non quaerat, ne id quod est non inveniat. Et si voluntatem Dei nosse quisquam desiderat, fiat amicus Deo: quia si voluntatem hominis nosse quisquam vellet, cujus amicus non esset, omnes ejus impudentiam ac stultitiam deriderent.*"

himself. This is a way of saying, “God’s nature is the grammar of God’s will.”⁷⁷ And the only way to learn the LORD’s nature is to become the LORD’s friend. Like any friendship, this depends upon belief.

With this in mind, Augustine’s assertion in Book VII of *Confessiones* that were the LORD a corruptible substance he simply would not be the LORD comes into focus.⁷⁸ This is precisely because, trusting the LORD to be the *summum bonum*, and knowing corruptibility to be inferior to incorruptibility, there was no way for him to attribute corruption to the LORD. To do so would be to imagine the LORD’s will to be one thing and his power to accomplish it to be something else. But Augustine is here laying out what the grammar of the LORD’s will demands we say. The first point already established is that the LORD is good. But when ‘good’ is predicated of the LORD, it is not done evaluatively. We don’t refer to the LORD as good in the same way we do of a good meal, or a good book, or even a good man. The goodness of all these particulars have their goodness from him! The LORD’s goodness does not depend on anything outside himself in the way the goodness of created things does. Rather the LORD is the very good the LORD wills.⁷⁹ Now, it would be wrong, I think, to say that Augustine’s conviction that the LORD wills for himself the very good that he is tells us something about what the LORD is like. To do so would be to mistake the work ‘good’ is doing for an evaluative claim. What we have here is instead a grammatical remark that bears a

⁷⁷ Phillips, *The Problem of Evil*, 114.

⁷⁸ *conf.*, 7.4.6, CSEL 33:146: “*et ut quid multa dicimus, cur non sit corruptibilis substantia, quae deus est, quando, si hoc esset, non esset deus?*”

⁷⁹ *conf.*, 7.4.6, CSEL 33:145: “*ipse est deus, et quod sibi vult, bonum est et ipse est idem bonum.*”

resemblance to Wittgenstein's remarks in the *Philosophical Investigations* about the standard meter in Paris.

The standard meter (before it was redefined with reference to the speed of light) was a metal bar kept and measured under certain conditions. As the name suggests, the standard meter was the norm against which mensurated things were whatever length they were. It would be a mistake, Wittgenstein explains, to say the standard meter was a meter long. It neither was nor wasn't. The criteria for such an evaluation were lacking, since the standard meter's length *was* the criterion. What this marks is the standard meter's "peculiar role in the game of measuring with a metre-rule."⁸⁰ We can say something analogous about the statement: the LORD is good and the very goodness the LORD wills. This doesn't tell us that the LORD is really, really good. Instead, it tells us something about the nature of the LORD, what the LORD is, not what the LORD is like.⁸¹ Likewise when Augustine goes on to say the LORD's will and power are identical with the LORD's self, he's giving us grammatical guidelines about what can and can't be said about the LORD.⁸²

On these grounds, Augustine is claiming the LORD is good in such a way as to be the measure of all goodness and that he wills it indefectibly because his will and power are identical with it. Again, there's no getting behind the reasons of the LORD here. And so just as he asserted in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, we find a familiar refrain as Augustine begins to grow in friendship with the LORD. He says, upon seeing the

⁸⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), §50.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, §373: "Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar.)"

⁸² *conf.*, 7.4.6, *CSEL* 33:146: "*voluntas enim et potentia dei deus ipse est.*"

immutable light of the LORD with the eye of his soul, “It was superior, because it made me, and I was inferior, because made by it. He who knows the truth knows it, and he who knows it knows eternity. Love knows it.”⁸³ In this passage you can see what Augustine means by becoming friends with the LORD. It involves knowing yourself in relation to the creator, as *your* creator. Notice how he repeatedly deploys a thinking verb, ‘*novit*.’ To know you are made, that your life is from another, is to know truth and eternity. The truth about yourself: you are a creature. The truth about the LORD: it’s the LORD who created you. And that the one who created you is good, and so you too are good. All this the one who knows, knows by love.

At the same time, it’s apparent to Augustine that being a creature, though good, means not existing in the same manner as the LORD. It’s in hearing the “I am who I am” (Ex 3:14) of the LORD that Augustine comes to grasp this.⁸⁴ And in grasping it, he realizes he’s had things the wrong way round: “And I heard, as something is heard in the heart, and there was absolutely no way I could doubt. It would have been easier for me to doubt my own life than for there to be no truth, the truth which is seen and understood through the things that are made.”⁸⁵ It’s not the LORD’s goodness that is rendered doubtful by evil in the world, but my own. This passage is something of a climax for Book VII. In arriving here, he’s answered the first question we put to him concerning the goodness of the LORD in the face of evils in the world. It’s impossible to think of the

⁸³ *conf.*, 7.10.16, CSEL 33:157: “[erat] superior, quia ipsa fecit me, et ego inferior, quia factus ab ea. qui novit veritatem, novit eam, et qui novit eam, novit aeternitatem. caritas novit eam.”

⁸⁴ *conf.*, 7.10.16, CSEL 33:158 “et clamasti de longinquo: ego sum qui sum.”

⁸⁵ *conf.*, 7.10.16, CSEL 33:158: “et audivi, sicut auditur in corde, et non erat prorsus, unde dubitarem faciliusque dubitarem vivere me quam non esse veritatem, quae per ea, quae facta sunt, intellecta conspicitur.”

LORD as corruptible, susceptible to evil, not fully and completely good. To think it is not to be thinking of the triune LORD of Christian confession at all. It's to imagine, as Augustine couldn't help but do at first, the LORD as something alongside creatures, as a part of the furniture of the cosmos. And importantly, it's only by believing the truth, which he comes to through the authority of the Catholic Church, that he begins to understand.⁸⁶ He can only learn to see and understand the world he believes is there.

With these key assumptions about the nature of the LORD in place, I'll now turn back to address the first way of thinking about the problem of evil, as a substance with an existence independent of the LORD. Augustine's thoughts turn in this direction also, immediately after his recognition of the true significance of the creator-creature distinction. He admits, importantly, that his Manichaean sympathies were born of a desire not to do an injustice to the LORD by attributing evil or corruptibility to him. For this reason, he says, he came to think there were two substances, good and evil.⁸⁷ He then passes through the iteration examined above, conceiving a spatially infinite god. Finally, he says to the LORD, "I awoke in you and saw you to be infinite in another way, and that vision did not come from the flesh."⁸⁸ In this process of ascent, he comes to realize that the LORD made all things good and that there is nothing that exists that the LORD did

⁸⁶ Augustine's journey throughout Book VII of *Confessiones* is one he's accompanied on by the *libri Platonici*, the Platonic books. It's from them he learns "to seek incorporeal truth" ("*quarere incorpoream veritatem*"). And though there's much he can't learn from the Platonists, Book VII offers a rousing defense of philosophy in service to conversion and theology. They're instrumental in his coming to think rightly about the LORD. At the same time, he's clear that the difference between Platonism and Christianity is a stark one. Though the philosophers have discovered much that is true, they lack a way to make themselves at home in the truth, which can only be done by becoming friends with the LORD (*conf.*, 7.20.26-21.27, *CSEL* 33:165-168).

⁸⁷ *conf.*, 7.14.20, *CSEL* 33:160: "*et inde ierat in opinionem duarum substantiarum.*"

⁸⁸ *conf.*, 7.14.20, *CSEL* 33:160: "*et evigilavi in te et vidi te infinitum aliter, et visus iste non a carne trahebatur.*"

not make.⁸⁹ Evil, then, is not something in its own right, but a corruption of something good created by the LORD. I won't get into the particulars of how Augustine talks about the good of the whole and the existence of evil that results from the competition amongst goods. I'll have more to say on that later. Here I'll just reiterate that on Augustine's own terms, what he says about this isn't a theodical account intent on explaining the LORD's goodness in the face of recognizable evils. His thoughts on this point are descriptive in character. His point is simply that the LORD doesn't create the recognizable evils of the world, *qua* evil, because *qua* evil they aren't anything at all. They're instead an absence of something that ought properly to be there.

Augustine also directs our attention to the particular problem of the *iniquitas* of rational creatures. I will translate '*iniquitas*' as 'instability' rather than something more straightforward like 'iniquity.' 'Instability' captures an important valence of the Latin that's lost in 'iniquity.' This is because the badness of '*iniquitas*' comes from imbalance, unevenness, or disorder. When Augustine looks at the disorder of voluntary agents, he sees an instability which makes them "apt for the lower parts of creation insofar as they are dissimilar" to the LORD and "apt for the higher parts of creation as they become more like" the LORD.⁹⁰ Augustine finds that the source of this instability is the turning away from the supremely stable one. In doing so, creatures unbalance themselves, directing their attention and love toward things that are not the LORD.⁹¹ Note that this

⁸⁹ *conf.*, 7.12.18, CSEL 33:159: "*itaque vidi et manifestatum est mihi, quia omnia bona tu fecisti et prorsus nullae substantiae sunt, quas tu non fecisti.*"

⁹⁰ *conf.*, 7.16.22, CSEL 33:161: "*apta inferioribus creaturae tuae partibus, quibus et ipsi iniqui apti sunt, quanto dissimiliores sunt tibi, apti autem superioribus, quanto similiores fiunt tibi.*"

⁹¹ *conf.*, 7.16.22, CSEL 33:161: "*et quaesivi, quid esset iniquitas, et non inveni substantiam, sed a summa substantia, te deo, detortae in infima voluntatis perversitatem proicientis intima sua et tumescentis foras.*"

instability is not the *result* of the turning away, as if turning away from the LORD had as its consequence an instability. Rather, Augustine finds the instability *is* the “contorted perversity of the will.”⁹² Degrees of perversity exist along a continuum of similarity and dissimilarity to the LORD.

The recognition that evil is nothing in itself and that the imbalance of voluntary agents is one of evil’s principle causes, leads Augustine to a classic and important axiom of Christian thought. Put succinctly: Everything that is, insofar as it is, is good. Put another way, evil is strictly privative. “All things that are corrupted are deprived of a good.”⁹³ Were they so corrupted that they lacked all goods what would be left would not be the substance of evil, but nothing at all! “And so,” Augustine says, “whatever things are (*sunt*), are good (*bona sunt*), and that evil—whose source I sought—is not a substance, because if it were a substance it would be good.”⁹⁴ All this lies in the background of Leo’s assertion in *Quam Laudibiliter* that “there is no nature of evil, because God, who is the maker of the universe, made nothing not good.”⁹⁵ This bedrock assumption is central to any Christian theology of creation. To suppose otherwise is already to have courted the idea that there is something other than the LORD and his creatures or that the LORD himself is corruptible. With these positions sufficiently interpreted and supported, I’ll now turn back to the doctrinal witness of the Church’s

⁹² *conf.*, 7.16.22, CSEL 33:161: “*detortae in infima voluntatis perversitatem.*”

⁹³ *conf.*, 7.12.18, CSEL 33:158: “*omnia, quae corrumpuntur, privantur bono.*”

⁹⁴ *conf.*, 7.12.18, CSEL 33:159: “*ergo quaecumque sunt, bona sunt, malumque illud, quod quaerebam unde esset, non est substantia, quia, si substantia esset, bonum esset.*”

⁹⁵ Leo I, *Quam Laudibiliter*, DS §286: “*et mali nullam esse naturam: quia Deus, qui universitatis est conditor, nihil non bonum fecit.*”

Magisterium before showing at last what difference this all makes for the origins of death.

3.4 The Doctrine of the Angelic Fall, continued

Leo's basic metaphysical claim about the nature of the demons is that they were originally good. How could they not be, if the alternative is to be nothing at all? This succeeds as a strategy for showing the compatibility of the presence of evil (again, in a descriptive rather than apologetic key) with a LORD who creates nothing but good creatures. But in another sense, all we've succeeded in doing is pushing the most important question back a level. The problem, we find, has never really been the existence of evil per se. Rather, the problem always was the LORD's permission of it. That is, there's nothing inherently contradictory in the presence of privative evil in a cosmos created by an all good LORD. Not, at least, the kind of contradiction that comes from affirming substantial evil or a corrupt creator of everything that is. Without simply advertent to the mysteriousness of the LORD's permission of evil, I do want to forewarn you that what I'll go on to say here takes this mystery to be epistemically primitive. Nothing I'll proffer in the way of doctrinal formulations or theological speculations is meant to get behind it—as if the correct response to divine mystery were to solve it. No, I'd like to attend to the evident evil of the angelic fall in order to look and see what it tells us about angelic nature before turning to a description of the kinds of effects this has on the created order as a whole.

There's one last, doctrinal point I'd like to highlight on the nature of demons before looking at some theological treatments of them. The point remains rooted in the metaphysics of participation and the privative account of evil already given. But instead

of relating to the possibility of evil in general—which is not inherently contradictory and yet deeply mysterious—it deals with the question of how privative evil comes about in the case of angelic creatures. The point can be summarized this way: angelic beings fall by an exercise of will. Turning back briefly to Leo’s *Quam Laudibiliter* we already find the beginnings of this formulation. It says this of the devil: “But because he used his natural excellence badly ‘and did not stand in the truth,’ he was not changed into the opposite substance, but departed from the highest good to which he ought to cling, just like those...who are damned for their voluntary perversity.”⁹⁶ The devil is not only not an independently existing principle of evil, but is evil through an exercise of his created power of volition. This point is reaffirmed in the *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua* compiled in the 5th century by Gennadius of Marseilles. There it says prospective bishops were to be asked whether they “believe...the devil was made evil not through a natural condition but through choice.”⁹⁷ The Fourth Lateran Council, too, and this time with the weight of an ecumenical council, affirms, “God certainly created the devil and the other demons good by nature, but they were made evil by themselves.”⁹⁸ Here it’s no longer just the devil mentioned in the singular, but all the demons who are said to be created good and yet to fall. In each of these instances, the doctrinal pronouncements come in the context of affirmations of the LORD as creator of all things. At Fourth Lateran, the force of this is

⁹⁶ Leo I, *Quam Laudibiliter*, DS §286: “*Sed quia naturali excellentia male usus est ‘et in veritate non stetit’ [Io 8:44], non in contrarium transiit substantiam, sed a summo bono, cui debuit adhaerere, descivit, sicut ipsi...pro sua voluntaria perversitate damnantur.*”

⁹⁷ Gennadius of Marseille, *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua*, DS §325: “*credat...si diabolus non per condicionem, sed per arbitrium factus sit malus.*”

⁹⁸ Fourth Lateran Council, DS §800: “*Diabolus enim et alii daemones a Deo quidem natura creati sunt boni, sed ipsi per se facti sunt mali.*”

even greater, coming on the heels of the first conciliar specification of the LORD as the one who creates “at once” and “from nothing.”⁹⁹

This teaching, that the demons are angels who fell as a result of their own volition is a critical point for understanding the origins of evil. As I’ve argued at length, drawing on Augustine’s insights into the problem of evil, the existence of a good LORD is not something to be argued for, but assumed. This is a first principle of Christian theological reflection upon creation and the evils found there. Kenneth Schmitz, in his 1982 Aquinas Lecture, argued that reasoning upon the given of the LORD’s goodness in a way that takes evil seriously results in “a paradox that is a ground for hope” as “it should be recognized that there could be no evil in a universe created by an absolutely benevolent love, *if* its creatures did not possess their own integrity, and were not bent upon realizing their own possibilities, including for some of them their free possibilities.”¹⁰⁰ This claim is not defending the LORD in the face of evil but stating an entailment of the fact of evil. At the same time, it tells us nothing definitive about why there is evil. That is, evil can’t possibly be necessary for the actualization of creaturely freedom. So even though—given what we know about the LORD—the presence of evil is a negative proof of creaturely freedom, this does not make the presence of evil any more explicable.

What do I mean when I say evil isn’t necessary for the actualization of creaturely freedom? The answer is an extension of a point I made in chapter two concerning secondary causality and the LORD’s non-interference in the created order. To recapitulate, I drew on Herbert McCabe’s thoughts on creation to explain why it’s

⁹⁹ Fourth Lateran Council, *DS* §800: “*qui sua omnipotenti vitute simul ab initio temporis utramque de nihilo condidit creaturam, spiritualem et coroporalem.*”

¹⁰⁰ Kenneth L. Schmitz, *The Gift: Creation* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1982), 91.

impossible for the LORD to interfere in his creation. It's impossible because the LORD is the active cause of everything that is not the LORD, including all our creaturely powers. In other words, our creaturely freedom is a capacity not only given but also actualized by the LORD's agency. Not in such a way that it's not our own. Rather, it's our own because it's been given to us to be our own.¹⁰¹ This is a fundamental truth about being a creature. To want a freedom that is not given, not utterly dependent on the LORD's free gift of it, is to desire to be the LORD himself. It's for this reason McCabe can say, in another essay, "There can be no doubt, then, that had he wished to do so God could always have prevented me from sinning – without, of course, in any way interfering with my freedom."¹⁰² Freedom itself being given by the LORD, it would be no interference were the LORD to give along with it the actualization of it toward exclusively good ends. This would, rather, be a truly great gift, to have not only freedom but the desire and motivation to direct it always and everywhere properly.

But this is not, it seems, the (only) kind of creatures the LORD has willed to create. Ones, I mean, that only and always employ their freedom toward good ends. The particular kind of creaturely integrity that marks all humans (save two) and the fallen angels is one in which free creaturely *actualities* include sin. Looking again at what Schmitz has to say about this situation, we find that the LORD "freely determines to create a creature of a certain sort with integrity and freely determines to respect that integrity. In creating creatures who have freedom, he even determines to respect the

¹⁰¹ Herbert McCabe, OP, "Creation," in *God Matters* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987; reprint, London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012), 6-7.

¹⁰² Herbert McCabe, OP, "Evil," in *God Matters* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987; reprint, London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012), 37.

capacity to flaw the original gift.”¹⁰³ I have to stress, again with McCabe, “that there is no question of God *having* to permit me to sin in order to leave me with my freedom. *That* kind of argument belongs to a theory that freedom makes me independent of God. In fact God could have made a world in which nobody ever sinned at all and everyone was perfectly free.”¹⁰⁴ Schmitz is right when he insists creaturely freedom includes the “capacity to flaw the original gift,” *and* in saying that we have evidence of this freedom from the fact of evil. But McCabe is also right that this capacity need never be realized in order for there to be authentic freedom. The holy angels, Mary, and of course Jesus Christ are clear evidence that this is the case.

Now I am going to switch gears, moving from an exposition of the Church’s positive doctrinal teachings on the angelic fall and their elucidation to a more speculative theological enterprise. Aided by Herbert McCabe, Paul Griffiths, Thomas Aquinas, and Augustine, I intend to plait together the many threads I’ve spun so far into cord capable of supporting the task I’ve set before myself of attributing the origins of death to the angelic fall. This will involve pulling in what we’ve learned about the nature of angels and demons from Scripture and the tradition to support a theological exposition and reflection on some key texts. What we can glean from these texts should, I’ll argue, incline us in a definite direction in our thinking about the consequences of the angelic fall. Consequences that, I claim, include the origins of death.

¹⁰³ Schmitz, *The Gift*, 96.

¹⁰⁴ McCabe, “Evil,” 37. Emphasis original.

3.5 *Natural and Voluntary Evils*

The first thing to lay out here is a serious disagreement about the status of so-called ‘natural evils’ in the created order. Calling something a natural evil is a way of marking a distinction from the evils brought about by the voluntary actions of rational agents. The distinction is useful in that it helps to sort and separate the evils that occur in creatures due to their being what they are from those caused by creatures failing to be what they are. This might seem a roundabout way of looking at it, but let’s see what kind of work this distinction does. I’ll begin to illustrate the concept of natural evil using one of Thomas Aquinas’ preferred examples, then clarify it by looking to Herbert McCabe’s treatment of it. Following that, I’ll look at what Paul Griffiths has to say about the very idea of natural evils. The overarching point of this discussion is to determine at what level of discourse the concept of ‘natural evil’ has purchase. Does, that is, natural evil obtain absolutely, as a necessary feature of the cosmos? Or, might we say it picks out something useful for us to distinguish in the cosmos as it stands, but doesn’t rise to the level of a necessary feature of the created order? Knowing which is the case should give us a sense of what’s at stake in the description of the effects of the angelic fall that is the subject of this section.

So, first to Thomas on natural evil. In question 49 of the Prima Pars of the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas distinguishes between evils caused by voluntary and natural things. The latter, he explains, come from things producing an effect similar to themselves.¹⁰⁵ So, to use an example Thomas returns to repeatedly, fire burns a piece of wood. As fire (the

¹⁰⁵ *ST*, 1.49.1 ad 3: “*malum habet causam deficientem aliter in rebus voluntariis, et naturalibus. Agens enim naturale producit effectum suum talem quale ipsum est.*”

agent) produces fire (the effect), it consumes the wood. This is bad (evil) for the wood, because as the fire continues to burn, the wood is corrupted until finally, if the fire burns long enough and hot enough, the wood is reduced to smoke and ash and it ceases to be wood at all.¹⁰⁶ This is how natural evils work. They are produced by creatures being the kinds of things they are. Fire burns, ice freezes, and by extension, bacteria infect, and lions kill and eat lambs. The effects in these cases, a tree burnt, the small bird that drops “frozen dead from a bough,”¹⁰⁷ a person infected with meningitis, and the lamb dead and consumed are all, on this account, natural evils.

This differs from the former case, that of voluntary evils. The defect or privation that occurs in the case of natural evils is caused by the creature being the kind of thing it is. The good of the fire causes a privation of the good of the tree. Not so in the case of voluntary evils. In the case of voluntary evil, the privation is caused by and in the agent itself, the result of a deficient will. The will is deficient, Thomas says, “insofar as it does not actually subject itself to its rule (*suae regulae*).”¹⁰⁸ Privation, in the case of voluntary evils, does not lie in the effect. That is, though an act of voluntary evil may have bad (privative) effects, this isn’t what makes it a voluntary evil. Actions produced by an agent’s defective will are evil because, as the quotation from Thomas above suggests, they are not properly ordered to their rule (*suae regulae*). As Thomas also says, the

¹⁰⁶ ST, 1.49.1 resp: “*Sicut ergo, quanto ignis fuerit perfectior in virtute, tanto perfectius imprimit formam suam, ita etiam tanto perfectius corrumpit contrarium, unde malum et corruptio aeris et aquae, est ex perfectione ignis.*”

¹⁰⁷ D. H. Lawrence, “Self-Pity” in *The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1994), 382.

¹⁰⁸ ST, 1.49.1 ad 3: “*Sed in rebus voluntariis, defectus actionis a voluntate actu deficiente procedit, inquantum non subiicit se actu suae regulae.*”

defective will *itself* is not blameworthy—“*non est culpa*”—but blame follows from acting with a disordered will—“*sequitur culpa ex hoc*.”¹⁰⁹

Herbert McCabe takes up this distinction between natural and voluntary evil. He’s committed to drawing a hard line with it, as doing so allows us to speak intelligibly about nonhuman creaturely death before human sin. He’s arguing against a view that attributes all death, human and nonhuman alike, to Original Sin. Here’s what he says:

Let us look first at the evil suffered in the world. Let us be clear that by no stretch of the imagination can this be attributed to the viciousness of men and women, or hardly any of it can. For millions upon millions of years before the human race even appeared, dinosaurs were setting upon each other or upon harmless plants and chewing them up, undoubtedly inflicting evil on them; a plant that has been chewed by a dinosaur is nothing like as good a plant as it was before. The lamb that is attacked by a lion speedily becomes a very defective lamb.¹¹⁰

Now, on the one hand, this is a good corrective to a certain kind of Christian thinking. This is the kind of Christian thinking I criticized in chapter one, which privileges its own interpretations of Scripture to the point of affirming it in the face of certain evidence to the contrary. McCabe does two things in this extract. He at once denies young earth creationism and affirms the presence of death well before the existence of humans in the order of time. It’s precisely the distinction between natural and voluntary evil that allows him to do this.

Since natural evils arise from the competition of created goods with their own integrity and ends, it’s possible to affirm *both* that the LORD creates all things good and very good *and* that the existence of those created goods entails certain evils. It therefore

¹⁰⁹ *ST*, 1.49.1 ad 3: “*Qui tamen defectus non est culpa, sed sequitur culpa ex hoc quod cum tali defectu operatur.*”

¹¹⁰ McCabe, “Evil,” 31.

makes sense to say, as McCabe does, “Thus if God is to make a lion, and a good lion, he cannot but allow for the defect of the lamb, that is the kind of things that lions and lambs are. It is no reflection on God’s omnipotence that he cannot make good lions without allowing for damaged lambs.”¹¹¹ This observation is right. It belongs to what we mean by ‘lion’ that ‘eats meat’ is a suitable predicate. Were you to insist lions were at one time vegetarians but only became carnivorous as a result of the human fall, you’d be insisting lions weren’t lions. You wouldn’t, that is, be saying much at all.

But, on the other hand, following this observation, McCabe goes on to say something unwarranted. He does this when he attempts to extend his observations about lions into the realm of metaphysics. He insists not just that what we mean by lions is something that eats lambs, but further “that you cannot make material things that develop in time without allowing for the fact that in perfecting themselves they will damage other material things.”¹¹² This is, I think, an unhelpful metaphysical extension of the concept of natural evil. McCabe is here subliming what he says about it out of a context in which it has a use and applying it to materiality in general. He claims asking after the source of a lion’s lethality ends with us “thinking that it would be better not to have any material world at all.”¹¹³ It seems to me better to think of this as an instance of language “idling.”¹¹⁴

My dissatisfaction with McCabe’s use of the concept of natural evil in the extended sense was prompted by Thomas Aquinas’ treatment of suppositional necessity

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., 32.

¹¹⁴ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §132.

in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. In the second book of that work, which deals with creation, he uses the example of animal death to explore the relation between suppositional and absolute necessity. There he says: “For nothing at all keeps principles from being produced not from necessity, for which—when put in place—a certain effect follows necessarily. Just as the death of this animal has an absolute necessity on account of this, that it is at present made up of contraries. Although it was not absolutely necessary the animal be made up of contraries.”¹¹⁵ Now, what exactly Thomas thinks an animal not composed of contraries might be is unclear. The way I prefer to parse this statement is to take Thomas to be imagining an order to the material world as a whole which wouldn’t involve its being composed of contraries. Not being composed of contraries—in an Aristotelian conception of physics—would mean you’d have corporeal creatures not susceptible to dissolution or corruption. And apparently he can imagine a way in which it would still be intelligible to call these creatures animals. While this is obviously not the case for the material world as it stands at present (*iam*), this state of affairs is the result of a suppositional not an absolute necessity.

Thomas’ insistence that being composed of contraries is not itself an absolutely necessary precondition for the existence of animals doesn’t mesh well with McCabe’s account. Remember, he was opposed to the very idea of a material cosmos that didn’t involve corruptible bodies and natural evils. He goes even so far as to say, “A world without any defects suffered...would be a world without any natural order in it.”¹¹⁶ It

¹¹⁵ *SCG*, 2.30.7: “*Nihil enim prohibet aliqua principia non ex necessitate produci, quibus tamen positis, de necessitate sequitur talis effectus: sicut mors animalis huius absolutam necessitatem habet propter hoc quod iam ex contrariis est compositum, quamvis ipsum ex contrariis componi non fuisset necessarium absolute.*”

¹¹⁶ McCabe, “Evil,” 33.

would in fact be “a world without *any* natural causes, entirely consisting of miracles” and so “would not be a natural material world at all.”¹¹⁷ I won’t take us too far afield to point out the major problems this poses for eschatological thinking. If, that is, we’re to stick with the Thomistic dictum, “grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it.”¹¹⁸ McCabe might just wish to demure and say simply he’s speaking precisely of the *natural* material world. The matter caught up *supernaturally* into the LORD’s own life in the eschaton won’t be that kind of thing at all. Are we to think, then, that the supernatural elevation of resurrected flesh will preclude its having a natural order? What, precisely, would the subject of that elevation be?

It’s better, I think, to say Thomas’ imagination is simply more developed than modern cosmological sensibilities are likely to allow. That is, Thomas clearly does take there to be things that are both material and in no way subject to defect. These are the heavenly bodies. Heavenly bodies are not subject to corruption because they are not composed of contraries and their matter is entirely attuned to the reception of their form.¹¹⁹ Now, of course, we know Thomas is wrong in the particular case. Heavenly bodies aren’t the kinds of things he thought they were. They are subject to change and corruption in the same way sublunary things are. But this doesn’t eclipse the value of his insight on this point. Thomas has the ability to imagine, in a way we can’t (easily anyway), what it would mean to talk about bodily creatures immune from corruption.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ *ST* 1.1.8. ad 2: “*gratia non tollat naturam, sed perficiat.*”

¹¹⁹ *pot.*, 5.1 resp: “*Si quae autem formae sunt non in materia, ut sunt substantiae intellectuales, vel in materia nullo modo indisposita ad formam, ut est in corporibus caelestibus, in quibus non sunt contrariae dispositiones.*” cf. *ST*, 1.58.1 resp: “*corpora superiora, scilicet caelestia, non habent potentiam ad esse, quae non sit completa per actum.*”

This is something we're all called to do when we meditate on the resurrected and ascended flesh of Jesus Christ and the assumed flesh of Mary. We're called to do it, that is, if we think these bodies are immune from corruption and that they are so not unnaturally but supernaturally. Jesus and Mary, and we too will—*deo volente*—one day, have human, viz. material, bodies perfected by grace. As Paul says in First Corinthians, “*Seminatur in corruptione, surget in incorruptione*” (1 Cor 15:42 Vulg.).

McCabe unnecessarily equates materiality with the necessary sufferance of natural evil. Thomas' cosmology allows for incorruptible, material things, but his cosmology is factually incorrect. Does this mean we're bidden to incline toward McCabe's view of things? No, not entirely. Consider instead the view of things proposed by Paul Griffiths in *Intellectual Appetite*.

The corporeal world is out of joint, not as it should be; that is why the ensemble of causal connections that constitutes its activity is so often destructive to beings like us, and indeed to the harmony of the whole. Earthquakes, and tsunamis, and plagues are, at least in part, the world not working as it should. We tend to call such things “natural disasters,” but this is misleading. They are not natural if by that is meant that they belong to the world as it should be, the world as it was brought into being by its creator. Rather, they are anti-natural, instances of the chaos that disorder the world's nature rather than of the order that constitutes its beautiful harmony.¹²⁰

This is a different world than the one McCabe offers. Griffiths paints it with a darker brush. His somber hues resolve into an image where so-called natural evils are in fact marks of a deep and abiding disorder. And so you don't think he limits this talk to evils affecting humans, he also says, a few pages earlier,

The lacks to which the world is subject, the vitiation of its created goodness, are evident most clearly in death, violence, and pain, which are

¹²⁰ Paul J. Griffiths, *Intellectual Appetite: A Theological Grammar* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 47-48.

not part of the divine gift but are instead clear signs of its corruption. And those signs are everywhere. The nonhuman animate world is an ocean of blood flowing from violent death; and the human world differs from it in this only in the scale of the violence and the ingenuity of its performance, in both of which our world far exceeds the nonhuman one.¹²¹

Griffiths' account requires an act of imagination similar to Aquinas'. This is more challenging than it might seem. Not only because there's no object for comparison—it's not clear what the world would be like without these "clear signs of its corruption"—but also because to hold this view requires us to utter something intelligible about the origin of that "ocean of blood."

What, you may ask, are we to say about those dinosaurs McCabe rightly pointed us to? How can we claim the deaths of all nonhuman creatures are the result of ontological disorder when the origins of life (and so death) on Earth precede the origins of human life by, say, three and a half billion years? This offers some *prima facie* evidence in favor of McCabe's view on the natural evil of death resulting from the competition among good creatures. But note what seems to be an entailment of this view. Thomas used the example of fire and what it consumes to describe natural evil. Are we prepared to extend the use of this concept to all instances of nonhuman creaturely death? What would that look like? Perhaps something like this. You might want to say there is no reason at all to think the fire consuming the stick differs in any meaningful way from the death of your dog after contracting rabies. As the fire destroys the stick by propagating itself, so too the rabies virus your dog. The destruction of nervous function, encephalic swelling, eventual paralysis, and death are just the epidemiological equivalent of a stack of dry tinder going up in smoke.

¹²¹ Ibid., 43.

This way of thinking about the deaths of plants and animals has its advantages. On this view, it's relatively easy to assimilate the facts of the known world to a neat division into natural and voluntary evil. It still wouldn't be necessary to extend the concept of natural evil metaphysically to include materiality in general. You'd do just fine to stick with mundane cases. Dinosaurs eating plants, dinosaurs eating other dinosaurs, the mountain being weathered by water and wind, the dead branch burnt up by a campfire, the live tree consumed by a forest fire, and your dog's death from disease are all instances of the same kind of thing. Created goods bump into one another, come into conflict, and one comes out ahead. But what if we're disinclined to accept that the deaths of plants and animals are the same sort of thing as the Colorado River carving the Grand Canyon? Griffiths is so disinclined, as am I. At the same time, it's clear the concept of natural evil has a place in our discourse. It *is* distinct from voluntary evil, and in important ways.

What I'm naming in these two different worlds is a disagreement in judgment. The difference between these linguistic, and so moral, universes is profound and will have serious implications for the doctrine of sin accompanying each one.¹²² What's needed, then, to pull off Griffiths' account, are reasons that can account for the cosmos being deeply fractured in this way. It needs to manage that while also, ideally, maintaining a place in the discourse for a distinction between natural and voluntary evil.

¹²² Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §242: "It is not only agreement in definitions, but also (odd as it may sound) agreement in judgements that is required for communication by means of language."

3.6 What Happens When the Angels Fall

So far in this chapter, I've cobbled together some of the scriptural and doctrinal evidence pointing to the existence and nature of fallen angelic creatures. It's time to fit those creatures and their fall into an account of evil and disorder and so of death. For this, I'll turn back to Augustine. In chapter one, I treated the creation of the angels. You'll remember in Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* this is traceable to Genesis 1:3, with the LORD's utterance, "Let there be light." The light is the enlightenment of intellectual creation. Its light is the created form of the uncreated light of the LORD.¹²³ So far, so good. As we've seen in Church's doctrinal account, the angels are created with a good nature. What I didn't treat in the first chapter was Augustine's account of the angelic fall. For that we need to turn to *De civitate Dei*.

In *De civitate Dei* Augustine says many things about angelic nature that are also said in *De Genesi ad litteram*. In the former work, however, he offers an interpretation of Genesis 1:4 that extends the use of referring to the angels as 'light.' When Scripture says, "God separated the light from the darkness" (Gn 1:4) this is describing the LORD's separation of the holy and impure angels.¹²⁴ The LORD alone can make this division because his foreknowledge includes the demons' sin of pride.¹²⁵ The fallen angels are, then, good by their nature and evil by their will. The LORD's division of light and darkness is between those angels who remain true to their good nature, gazing upon the

¹²³ *Gn. litt.*, 4.22.39.

¹²⁴ *civ.*, 11.19, *CSEL* 40.1:538: "*non mihi videtur ab operibus Dei absurda sententia, si, cum lux prima illa facta est, angeli creati intellegentur, inter sanctos angelos et immundos fuisse discretum, ubi dictum est: Et divisit Deus inter lucem et tenebras; et vocavit Deus lucem diem et tenebras vocavit noctum.*"

¹²⁵ *civ.*, 11.19, *CSEL* 40.1:538-539: "*Solus quippe ille ista discernere potuit, qui potuit etiam priusquam caderent praescire casuros et privatos lumine veritatis in tenebrosa superbia remansuros.*"

light of truth, and those who turn away from that light and so make themselves darkness.¹²⁶ As in Augustine's earlier works, there's a strong anti-Manichaean thrust here. He manages this by showing what you get in his account is a way of saying "the devil sinned from the beginning" (1 Jn 3:8) and "he was a murderer from the beginning and did not stand in the truth" (Jn 8:44) without lapsing into the Manichaean error of assuming evil has a nature.¹²⁷

Augustine works it out this way. He explains the passages that seem to indicate the devil's very nature is sinful have been misunderstood. For "if sin is natural, it's in no way sin."¹²⁸ Instead we need to take the 'beginning' to refer to the start of his sin, not the start of his existence.¹²⁹ But we've got a problem here, or you might think we do, if you compare what Augustine has to say about the beginning of the devil's sin in chapter 15 of Book XI with what he says on the same subject in chapter 13. In both chapter 13 and 15 Augustine uses the verbal construction "since he was created (*ex quo creatus est*)" to describe the devil's sin.¹³⁰ In both places he's commenting on 1 John 3:8, "The devil sinned from the beginning." But while in chapter 15, we find him saying he "should not be thought to have sinned from the beginning, that is, since he was created, but from the beginning of his sin," in chapter 13 he says the opposite.¹³¹ There we find, "The devil

¹²⁶ *civ.*, 11.19, CSEL 40.1:539: "*ipse dividere potuit, cui etiam futurum non naturae, sed voluntatis malum occultum aut incertum esse non potuit.*"

¹²⁷ *civ.*, 11.13, CSEL 40.1:532: "*Ab initio diabolus peccat*" and "*Ille homicida erat ab initio et in veritate non stetit.*"

¹²⁸ *civ.*, 11.15, CSEL 40.1:534: "*Ab initio diabolus peccat, non intellegunt, si natura talis est, nullo modo esse peccatum.*"

¹²⁹ *civ.*, 11.15, CSEL 40.1:534: "*non ab initio, ex quo creatus est, peccare putandus est, sed ab initio peccati, quod ab ipsius superbia coeperit esse peccatum.*"

¹³⁰ *cp. civ.*, 11.13, 15, CSEL 40.1:532, 534: "*Ab initio diabolus peccat, hoc est, ex quo creatus est, iustitiam recusavit*"; "*non ab initio, ex quo creatus est, peccare putandus est, sed ab initio peccati.*"

¹³¹ *civ.*, 11.15, CSEL 40.1:534: "*non ab initio, ex quo creatus est, peccare putandus est, sed ab initio peccati.*"

sinned from the beginning, that is, since he was created he rejected justice.”¹³² How can both of these statements be true at once? The answer lies, once again, in the mode of angelic creation and existence.

As I’ve already argued, the LORD’s creative work occurs outside of all time. Time comes into existence with the movement of creatures through space. Eternity is not a time-when, and we shouldn’t think of eternity as a whole lot of time, even an infinite stretch. In Book XII of *De civitate Dei* Augustine reiterates this point. What he says there is crucial for resolving the apparent paradox of the two instances of “*ex quo creatus est*” I just juxtaposed. The angels have always existed, he says. That is, “they have been in all time, as they were created before all time; if at least, time began with the heavens, and the angels already were before the heavens.”¹³³ This does not make the angels coeternal with the LORD, but it does mean there is no *time* when the angels are not.¹³⁴ This mode of being, present to all times because created from nothing before all times, helps us to make sense of why Augustine needs to utter both that the devil did and did not sin “*ex quo creatus est*.” Just as I showed the fall of Satan could be causally but not temporally prior to the fall of the rest of the reprobate angels, so too it makes sense to say the angels are created prior to their fall. In this way, it resembles my discussion of priority in origin and priority in time from chapter two. The LORD’s creative act occurs in eternity, the angels are created before all time, and likewise the fall of the devil and his angels happens before any time has elapsed.

¹³² *civ.*, 11.13, *CSEL* 40.1:532: “*Ab initio diabolus peccat, hoc est, ex quo creatus est, iustitiam recusavit.*”

¹³³ *civ.*, 12.16, *CSEL* 40.1:592: “*isti omne tempore fuerunt, ut etiam ante omnia tempora facti sint; si tamen a caelo coepta sunt tempora, et illi iam erant ante caelum.*”

¹³⁴ *civ.*, 12.16, *CSEL* 40.1:594: “*verum tamen non de ipso genitam, sed ab ipso de nihilo factam nec ei coaeternam: erat quippe ante illam, quamvis nullo tempore sine illa.*”

For this reason it makes sense to say both the devil and his angels did and did not sin “*ex quo creatus est.*” They did so because their fall occurs atemporally. There’s no time-when of the angelic fall. They did not because as we’ve seen already, the LORD creates only good things. The demons are not evil from their creation forward, but from their sin forward. Because our ‘before’ and ‘after’ talk are indexed to time, it’s difficult to see what this comes to. But one of the entailments of this position, if we’re to follow Augustine on the atemporal creation and fall of angelic creatures, is there’s never a time when the created order is undamaged by sin. Remember earlier I mentioned Augustine’s Manichaeism is overcome not by eliminating or dissolving the Manichaeism’s dualistic metaphysics but by finding a new place for that dualism. Instead of a cosmos composed of warring principles, good and evil, light combatting the darkness, we’re left with a dualism rooted in the will of rational creatures. Good creatures pervert themselves by turning away from the one who made them and become darkness exactly by lacking the good of being oriented toward, cleaved to—Augustine likes to say—the LORD. The upshot is angelic creation is and is fallen “*ante omnia tempora,*” which means the created order with which we have to do is always shot through with darkness. This provides a different starting place for examining the relationship between voluntary and natural evils.

But, you might ask, what does it matter if the angels are fallen and are so before there’s even a place for discussing the unfurling of the *rationes seminales* in the order of time? Or, what difference does angelic sin make for the cosmos? As I’ve argued so far, the *rationes seminales* name the set of relations of created things to the person of Jesus Christ. Let’s bracket until the next chapter how it is the angels can be said to bear

relations to Jesus Christ atemporally. Instead assume, for the sake of argument—and referring to the incident with the Gerasene demoniac I treated earlier—that their fall puts the demons in bad stead with the incarnate LORD. Their fear at his coming and mention of future torment show this amply enough. If this is the case, we have reason to suspect the relations of the fallen angels to Christ are disordered. But as I also said at the beginning of this chapter, such disorder has cascading effects on creation as a whole. This is because creatures are not only related to the person of Jesus Christ but to one another. And the relations of angelic creatures to the material world are very important indeed.

Thomas Aquinas' extended treatment of angels in the Prima Pars of the *Summa Theologiae* bears out these observations about the impacts of the angelic fall. He clearly thinks, for instance, angels exercise a presidential role over both celestial and sublunary bodies.¹³⁵ This fits into Thomas' more general observations about creaturely hierarchies, that within the ordered whole of creation it's proper for superior things to govern the actions of inferior things. Unlike Aristotle, he thinks the governance of spiritual substances (i.e., angels) is exercised not only at a distance, giving the heavens their motion, but also immediately. His disagreement with Aristotle is over the Philosopher's naturalism. Whereas Aristotle thinks the movements of inferior bodies are strictly natural, flowing from the superior motions of heavenly and finally of spiritual substances, Thomas thinks "many things are done in inferior bodies in addition to the natural actions of bodies, for which the powers of the celestial bodies do not suffice."¹³⁶ There are more

¹³⁵ *ST* 1.110.1, ad 2: "necesse est ponere quod angeli habeant immediatam praesidentiam non solum supra caelestia corpora, sed etiam supra corpora inferiora."

¹³⁶ *ST* 1.110.1 ad 2: "multa in corporibus inferioribus fieri praeter naturales actiones corporum, ad quae non sufficiunt virtutes caelestium corporum."

things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in Aristotle's philosophy, it seems. Thomas is here insisting on the LORD's providential governance of and miraculous action in the created order. More than that, though, he's insisting on the angel's ministerial role in this regard. The angels are spiritual creatures who nonetheless have a role to play in the material world and who can act in it to accomplish the will of the LORD.

This position, that the angels have a role to play in the governance of the material world has a long pedigree. Thomas cites Augustine's *De Trinitate* and Gregory the Great's *Dialogorum libri quatuor* in the *sed contra* of the first article of question 110.¹³⁷ He also points us to Augustine's *De diversis quaestionibus* where Augustine very explicitly presents a vision of angelic power appointed by the LORD for the governance of the material cosmos.¹³⁸ Augustine goes so far as to say "each and every visible thing in this world has an angelic power set over it."¹³⁹ He affirms this position in *De genesi ad litteram* as well, when he discusses the activity of the angels. "Through [the activity of the angels]," he says, "all the kinds of things, and most especially humans, are looked after, seen to, by the providence of God."¹⁴⁰ They are able to act in this way because bodily things have been subjected to the authority of the angels.¹⁴¹ Thomas also finds support for this view in John of Damascus' *De fide orthodoxa* and Origen's *Numeros homilia*.¹⁴² And while it's unclear whether Damascene would have received it from

¹³⁷ *ST* 1.110.1 *sed contra*.

¹³⁸ *ST* 1.110.1 ad 3.

¹³⁹ *div. qu.*, 79.1, *CCL* 44A:225: "unaquaeque res visibilis in hoc mundo habet postestatem angelicam sibi praepositam."

¹⁴⁰ *Gen. litt.*, 8.25.47, *PL* 34:391: "per quam universarum rerum generibus, maximeque humano providentia Dei prospicitur."

¹⁴¹ *Gen. litt.*, 8.25.47, *PL* 34:391: "ipsa extrinsecus adjuvat, et per illa visa quae similia sunt corporalibus, et per ipsa corpora quae angelicae subjacent potestati."

¹⁴² *ST* 1.110.1 ad 3.

Origen directly or via Gregory of Nyssa, the idea is also clearly on display in Nyssen's *Λογος Κατηχητικος*, where he explains that the LORD assigned angelic powers roles in the administration of the universe.¹⁴³ All this to say, the position that angels can and do effect the material cosmos, that part of their role as ordained by the LORD is carrying out his providential care for creation, is an early and continuous stream of thought in angelology.

When discussing the question of how this is accomplished by angelic power, that is, how material bodies are moved by the angelic will, Thomas cites Augustine. The *sed contra* of article three in question 110 says, "that angels employ bodily seeds (*semina corporalia*) to produce certain effects."¹⁴⁴ Here Thomas refers his reader to Book III of Augustine's *De Trinitate*, and what I've found there is very interesting. Augustine doesn't exactly call the things moved by angelic willing "bodily seeds." Instead he says, "You see, in all things which are born bodily and visibly certain hidden seeds (*occulta quaedam semina*) lie in the corporeal elements of this world."¹⁴⁵ As this discussion continues Augustine makes a necessary distinction. While the LORD administers his creatures internally, as their first cause, it's also the case that creatures are administered externally, by other created powers as secondary causes.¹⁴⁶ Angels can act in this capacity, according to Augustine, because "they know the seeds of things which are

¹⁴³ Grégoire de Nysse, *Discours Catéchétique*, trans. Raymond Winling, vol. 453, Sources Chrétiennes (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2000), §6, p. 175. PG 45:28: "*La création intelligible existait antérieurement à l'autre et chacune des puissances angéliques se vit assigner, par l'autorité qui dirige toutes choses, une part d'activité en vue de l'organisation de l'univers.*"

¹⁴⁴ ST 1.110.3 *sed contra*: "*quod angeli adhibent semina corporalia ad aliquos effectus producendos.*"

¹⁴⁵ *trin.*, 3.8.13, CCL 50:140: "*Omnium quippe rerum quae corporaliter visibiliterque nascuntur occulta quaedam semina in istis corporeis mundi huius elementis latent.*"

¹⁴⁶ *trin.*, 3.9.16, CCL 50:143: "*Aliud est enim ex intimo ac summo causarum cardine condere atque administrare creaturam, quod qui facit solus creator est deus; aliud autem pro distributis ab illo viribus et facultatibus aliquam operationem forinsecus admovere ut tunc vel tunc sic vel sic exeat quod creatur.*"

hidden to us.”¹⁴⁷ They are able to act upon the seeds and, so to speak, “scatter them in a hidden manner.”¹⁴⁸ As may already be clear, these seeds are none other than the *rationes seminales* discussed in *De Genesi ad litteram*, which I covered in the second chapter.¹⁴⁹ In fact, in the ninth book *De Genesi* Augustine makes the same point found here in third book of *De Trinitate*. The *rationes seminales* are the means by which angels carry out their administrative duties.¹⁵⁰ When Thomas refers to the *semina corporalia* in articles three and four of question 110, we should understand him to be referring to the seed-like rules relating the whole of the created order to the person of Christ. Following Augustine, Thomas says, it’s by acting on these seeds “that spiritual powers are able to bring about those things which happen visibly in this world.”¹⁵¹

The case I’ve been making in these first three chapters has been leading up to this. I want to say that angelic creatures have a place in the administration of the created order and they carry this out by acting on the *rationes seminales*. This much is clearly affirmed by the tradition of reflection on the nature and mission of the angels. As we’ve also seen, some angelic creatures have fallen, and this fall occurs before (or as) time starts ticking. The effects of this fall are significant for our thinking about creation as a whole. We might say, with Augustine, creation as a whole is both good and fallen *ex quo creatus est*.

¹⁴⁷ *trin.*, 3.8.13, CCL 50:141: “*pro subtilitate sui sensus et corporis semina rerum istarum nobis occultiora noverunt.*”

¹⁴⁸ *trin.*, 3.8.13, CCL 50:141: “*ea per congruas temperationes elementorum latenter spargunt.*”

¹⁴⁹ On the relationship of the *rationes seminales* in *De Trinitate* and their discussion in *De Genesi ad litteram*, cf. Michael J. McKeough, O. Praem., *The Meaning of the Rationes Seminales in St. Augustine* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1926), 39-43.

¹⁵⁰ *Gn. litt.*, 9.15.28, PL 34:404: “*Voluntas vero angelica obediens Deo subdita, ejusque exsecuta jussionem, naturalibus motibus de rebus subjectis tanquam materiam ministrare, ut secundum illas principales in Verbo Dei non creatas, vel secundum illas in primis sex dierum operibus causaliter creatas rationes aliquid in tempore creetur, more agricolandi vel medendi potest.*”

¹⁵¹ *ST* 1.110.4 ad 3: “*quod spirituales potestates possunt facere ea quae visibiliter fiunt in hoc mundo, abhibendo coporalia semina per motum localem.*”

We can say this because it belongs to the proper ordering of the cosmos that angelic creatures administer it, and some of these creatures have, as I put it earlier, abandoned their post. It's an entailment of this position that certain creaturely possibilities lying dormant in the *rationes seminales* are foreclosed, the conditions for their actualization failing to obtain precisely because of the disorder caused by angelic sin. One of these possibilities is that imagined by Thomas in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, when he speaks of animals not being composed of contraries and so not subject to corruption. Angelic sin, by disordering the cosmos and foreclosing certain latent potentialities in the *rationes seminales*, introduces this corruption and with it death into the cosmos. And so we can say, "through the devil's envy death entered the world" (Wis 2:24). In this way death in creation both is and is not *ex quo creatus est*. The relations of all things to the LORD are created good and are so from before all time. They are also damaged by the angelic fall and so broken from before all time. Just as there's no time-when of the angelic fall, there's no time-when of the origin of death. It makes sense to speak of death as unnatural. And yet, it makes no sense to try to pinpoint "when" the break with nature occurred. These are the consequences of the demons being cast out of heaven and ground into the earth. They are not playing their role, gazing upon the face of their creator and enacting his eternal plans in the temporal order. Instead, no longer participating in the LORD's eternity, they're thoroughly timebound like the rest of us. And having forsaken their duties, they actively work to frustrate the LORD's designs by acting in time.

The fall of the angels is an instance of voluntary evil perpetrated by rational creatures before all time, and it has severely damaged the LORD's cosmos. This is true, at least, under the aspect of the *administratio*. I've yet to offer a complete account of the

role the role this damage plays under the aspect of the *conditio*. Also, given the position I've staked out with respect to creaturely freedom, it's still the case that I need to offer some account of the LORD's permission of this first evil. I'm going to hold off on these tasks until the next chapter. Here I'm content to claim I've offered a perspective on the nature of demons that allows us at once to affirm, "God did not make death and he does not delight in the death of the living" (Wis 1:13), while also maintaining a distinction between natural and voluntary evils—even if calling the former 'natural' tends to introduce some confusion over its ontological status. Further, it makes sense, given the view I've offered, to say, "the generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them" (Wis 1:14). It makes sense because in creating the cosmos the LORD establishes all things in right relation to the person of Jesus Christ by way of the *rationes seminales*. When some of the angels fall, the relations those angels bear to the incarnate LORD are disrupted. These disruptions play out in the order of time. By extension, the relations between creatures are also thrown into disarray. It's not a total lack of order—fallen creation is not utter chaos—but in some sense (however problematic) we can say the world is not as it's intended to be. Or, perhaps better, we might say, not as it will be eschatologically. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Given this conclusion, there's a final piece of the doctrinal witness about the demons which needs attention. The fallen angels, as I've said, are a kind of corporate body with Satan at its head. The scriptural and doctrinal witness bears this out. Satan's body is a devilish simulacrum of Christ's body, the Church. Being subject to the head of this body, part of Lucifer's demonic burlesque of the heavenly kingdom, is what it means to be under the dominion of the devil, a dominion whose principle marks are sin and

death. This dominion is strongly attested by the Church's Magisterium beginning at the Council of Florence where, in the Bull *Cantate Domino*, we're told men and women are "liberated from the dominion of the devil...through faith of the mediator of God and humans, Jesus Christ."¹⁵² This view is taken up again at the Council of Trent in its decrees on Original Sin, Justification, and Penance—captivity, the devil's power, and bondage to sin and death are the refrain.¹⁵³ But it's in the Second Vatican Council's *Gaudium et Spes* that the cosmic scope of the devil's dominion is clearly recognized. It says,

For an arduous struggle against the powers of darkness pervades the whole of human history. The struggle began from the origin of the world, and will persist until the last day, by the Lord's telling. Man, thrust into this battle, ought continually to struggle that he might cling to the good. Nor is he able to obtain integrity in himself without great labors, being aided by the grace of God.¹⁵⁴

In this account, the struggle against the powers of darkness precedes human history. Humans enter a drama already raging, we are "inserted" (*insertus*) into a battle whose roots lie in the origins of the world. Humans are taken captive in this cosmic war by way of Original Sin, about which I'll have more to say in chapter five. The powers of darkness are the "body of death" (Rm 7:24), the corporate, demonic body, which holds us in bondage. It's a body warring against the Church and the holy angels (Rev 12:7-9, 17), and it's from that body we're set free by Christ (Rm 7:25).

I take it this is one important way of talking about the power that holds us captive before we're freed by the grace Christ makes available to us in his passion, death, and

¹⁵² Council of Florence, *Cantate Domino*, DS §1347: "*neminem umquam ex viro feminaque conceptum a diaboli dominatu fuisse liberatum, nisi per fidem mediatoris Dei et hominum Iesu Christi.*"

¹⁵³ DS §§1511, 1521, and 1668.

¹⁵⁴ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, §37, DS §4337: "*Universam enim hominum historiam ardua collectatio contra potestates tenebrarum pervadit, quae inde ab origine mundi incepta, usque ad ultimum diem, dicente Domino, perseverabit. In hanc pugnam insertus, homo ut bono adhaereat iugiter certare debet, nec sine magnis laboribus, Dei gratia adiuvante, in seipso unitatem obtinere valet.*"

resurrection. What's included in the 'us' of my last sentence is what this chapter is all about. Griffiths' thoughts on death and natural evil offer a maximalist view of how we might interpret it. Death, destruction, violence, even when they can be meaningfully spoken of as natural evils, are primordially the result of voluntary evil. The fall of the angels precipitates the unfurling of the LORD's creation in time as a place of conflict, a vast charnel house whose brokenness frequently obscures and sometimes entirely occludes our ability to see it as the LORD's good creation. The whole of the cosmos, shot through with darkness *ex quo creatus est*, "has been groaning in travail together" (Rm 8:22). And it's not just humans who have been enslaved to the powers of sin and death, who are in bondage to the devil and his angels. No, "creation itself was subjected to futility" (Rm 8:20) and Jesus Christ's reconciliatory work extends to the whole of it, "because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rm 8:21).

I hope what I've said in this chapter makes clear the importance of reflecting on the nature of angels, the sin of the demons, and how this meaningfully contributes to our talk about evil and death. More than that, however, I hope I've convinced you how it might be possible to speak of the created order as both good and fallen from before all time. On this view, certain problems about pinpointing the origins of death are shown to be confusions which fade away when we're clear about what can and can't be said about the relations between time and eternity, creature and creator. Moreover, some of the promised payoff of Augustine's way of reading the opening chapters of Genesis has materialized. If this reading is right, not only do the problems surrounding the origins of death begin to fade, the supposed conflicts between theology and evolutionary biology

and modern cosmology should seem much less interesting. We have a way of saying “the wages of sin is death” (Rm 6:23) which allows us to include nonhuman creaturely death as a part of this paradigm. It gives us a way of accounting for our visceral sense that things are not as they should be when the lion tears at and consumes the flesh of a still living gazelle, or when we walk along the White Cliffs of Dover and realize we’re standing atop a mountain of death, the discarded skeletons of prehistoric algae.

The next two chapters of this work will continue to build upon the framework I’ve laid out in the first three. I’ll be examining the implications of my speculations on the effects of the angelic fall in three different ways. The first way, in chapter four, will involve peering a bit deeper into the origins of angelic sin. This will involve once again panning out to examine the created order under the aspect of eternity. In it, I’ll try to get clear on what it means for us to say that the world is not as it should be and whether this can be meaningfully said of the *conditio* at all. The second way, in chapter five, will involve shifting aspects back to the *administratio* to look closely at how the *rationes seminales* unfurl in time that’s always already damaged. There I’ll also show how what I’ve said so far does and does not apply to human creatures. That is, even given what’s been said about angelic sin, I’ve work yet to do in order to place and describe the consequences of Original Sin.

4. Literary Myths of the Angelic Fall

I'm conscious of the fact that so far in my discussion of evil and the angelic fall, I've avoided saying—or been as yet unable to say—what it teaches us about the LORD's ways with his creation. As I wrote the preceding chapters, what needs to be said and what can be said became clearer. But in the course of brushing away a certain construal of the problem of evil and insisting creaturely freedom is in no way dependent upon the LORD allowing sin, I've grown worried about going on. To this point, my principal interlocutors have been theological and philosophical thinkers. There are limits to that approach. I take it that I arrived—or nearly arrived—at some of them concerning the problem of evil in the last chapter. There I also promised to say more about the very possibility of an angelic fall. So I'm faced, now, with twin difficulties, which I'll pose as two questions. How might we go on saying what needs to be said about the origins of evil? And, how far can we peer into the abyss of the *mysterium iniquitatis* without losing ourselves—or the language of Christian orthodoxy—along the way? Keeping both these questions in view, I'd like to propose one possible way of answering both, by recourse to literature.

One of the determinative presuppositions of this chapter is that turning to literature is not only warranted but often necessary in theological work. I won't attempt to prove this, but I will say a bit about it. I've found a literary approach necessary because the purely conceptual treatment of evil I've given to this point threatens to leave the reader cold, unconvinced. This is how it leaves me. It does so because even if what I've said is true, as I take it to be, it is also unsatisfying. While this chapter won't resolve

the mystery of angelic evil—that’s explicitly not what I’m aiming to do—it may shed some much-needed light on this mystery. In doing so, I’ll try to “Tell all the truth but tell it slant.”¹ Donald MacKinnon presents his thoughts on the need to engage literature—specifically tragedy—in his essay “Atonement and Tragedy.” For MacKinnon, theology and philosophy treat moral evil but fail to reckon adequately its depths. Not, I think, because what philosophy and theology say about evil isn’t true, but that it’s often unclear what that truth comes to. The picture we’re left with is an abstract one. This is useful to a point. It helps us get the grammar of evil right—no small feat—but it doesn’t give us much to go on. The conceptual treatment of evil shows that the problem never was a logical problem but a moral one. What remains to be seen (for me to show) is how to live in the world I’ve described. This is why I’m turning to literature, to picture the kinds of response available to creatures inhabiting a broken cosmos.

Tragedy deals with evil in a concrete way. It shows us things about evil that are easily overlooked. In tragedy, MacKinnon says,

there is a presence to the reality of moral evil, to the ways in which its power is experienced as a destructive force which makes the writings of most philosophers and theologians seem somehow trivial...Even if we are tempted to write them off as works of imagination, the imagination displayed in them is one powerful in the disclosure of what is; it is not the servant of idealist fantasy in the way in which we must surely judge that the comfortable musings of theologians and metaphysicians often are.²

This picture, of imaginative work deployed to counteract idealist fantasy, is compelling.

I’m counting on the literary works I engage to put flesh on the bones of the “comfortable

¹ Emily Dickinson, “Tell All Truth but Tell It Slant — (1263),” Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/56824/tell-all-the-truth-but-tell-it-slant-1263>.

² Donald M. MacKinnon, “Atonement and Tragedy,” in *Borderlands of Theology and Other Essays*, ed. George W. Roberts and Donovan E. Smucker (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1968), 101.

musings” of the last chapter. At the same time, I don’t see these two modes of engaging evil as contradictory or incompatible. What I want to say instead is that it’s possible for each to serve the other. ‘Conceptual abstraction’ might be a less pejorative way to describe what MacKinnon dubs “idealist fantasy.” If the work of the last chapter was that—conceptual abstraction—this chapter is meant to traffic in concrete particulars. But I’ll do so with reference precisely to the grammar established by examining the problem in the abstract. There are limits to this approach. It risks reducing the literary witness to data points in an argument. I’ve tried to avoid that kind of reduction by allowing what these texts teach about responding to and acknowledging evils to interrogate the grammatical argument, putting it to the test.

In this chapter I draw on three principal literary sources, each of which helps me with the first question—how to go on speaking. This chapter is structured around two characters from Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*. Both characters, Ulysses and Troilus, serve as types to highlight two kinds of response to evil. To show this, I’ll match the characters with a reading of another text. The position voiced by Ulysses, especially his concern over the disordered cosmos in his “Degree Speech,” receives an answer from J. R. R. Tolkien’s creation myth in *The Silmarillion*. Troilus, and his fetishization of “constancy,” meets his match in the Satan of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. There’s movement in this chapter, too, from reflections made *sub specie aeternitatis* to those made about the order of time and flux. My observations will move from what I’ve called Augustine’s concern for the *conditio* into his concern for the *administratio*. This chapter ought to position me to undertake the remainder of the investigation in the next chapter under the aspect of the *administratio*. Having offered a theoretical account of sin’s and

death's origins and a literary account of responses to it, it will be time to deal with the deaths of creatures. Actual nonhuman and human death, and death's relation to the evolutionary account of the origins of life, are the subject of the next and final chapter.

4.1 Ulysses and the Drive for Order

In the first act of *Troilus and Cressida*,³ Ulysses is in council with the other Greek leaders. They're conferencing with Agamemnon over the continued failure to bring the Trojan war to decisive issue. Agamemnon wants to know, "What grief hath set these jaundies o'er your cheeks?" (1.3.2). How is it, he wonders, that his captains fail to realize what kind of thing their ongoing war is? Above all, Agamemnon argues, what the Greeks have in Troy is a chance to prove their mettle—the "fineness" of their "metal" (1.3.22)—in the midst of trials. He asks,

Why then, you princes,
Do you with cheeks abash'd behold our works,
And call them shames which are indeed nought else
But the protractive trials of great Jove
To find persistive constancy in men?
(1.3.17-21)

"Constancy" and its failures are central themes of the play, which have special reference to the title characters. Agamemnon sees the war as a test which will show who proves resolute in the face of uncertainty. He's concerned to find whether, when all is said and done, "Distinction, with a broad and powerful fan" (1.3.27) will have winnowed all away to nothing, or whether we'll find upon the threshing room floor "what hath mass or matter, by itself/ Lies rich in virtue and unmingled" (1.3.29-30). But Ulysses is not

³ All citations from Shakespeare's plays are taken from William Shakespeare, *The Riverside Shakespeare* Second Edition (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company). I give all citations to the text in-line, using three Arabic numerals that indicate, in order, act, scene, and line numbers.

content with this explanation for the Greeks' continued failure to take the city. He offers a different diagnosis in his "Degree Speech."

Nothing prevents the conquest of Troy but internal strife among the Greeks themselves. But for that, Ulysses claims, "Troy, yet upon his bases, had been down,/ And the great Hector's sword had lack'd a master" (1.3.75-76). The Greek failure has a specific pathogenesis—disease is another of the play's major themes—"The specialty of rule hath been neglected" (1.3.78). Order, the ruled whole, has been lost because individuals have forgotten their place. The differences of degree between men have been shrouded in confusion and chaos abounds. There's little chance Agamemnon's "Distinction"—another word specifying degree—or her winnowing fan will be able to tell the wheat from the chaff. The whole cosmos, Ulysses argues, depends on degree,

The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre
Observe degree, priority, and place,
Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,
Office, and custom, in all line of order...

But when the planets
In evil mixture to disorder wander,
What plagues and what portents, what mutiny!
What raging of the sea, shaking of the earth!
Commotion in the winds! frights, changes, horrors
Divert and crack, rend and deracinate
The unity and married calm of states
Quite from their fixture!

(1.3.85-88, 94-101)

He offers a macrocosmic view. All things have a place, a fit, a rule to keep in the ordered cosmos. We might wonder at and press Ulysses on the inclusion of "office" and "custom" as rightly applied to the heavens. Are these hints of an overblown fulmination or a sly attempt to sneak the present order of society into the very fabric of the cosmos? Whatever

the case may be, they give the reader the idea that Ulysses' earnest descriptions of the rightly ordered world don't escape Shakespeare's pen without an ironizing.

Ulysses is right, to a point. By that I mean I can and do follow his response. This claim about disorder seems right to me. I feel its appeal. The cosmos is disordered, and that disorder brings "frights, changes, horrors" with it. In this, he's very close to the position sketched in the last chapter. Unruly angelic creatures introduce a deep rent into the fabric of the created world. Abandoning their ministerial role to order creation according to the designs of divine wisdom, they introduce the conditions for the possibility of death and destruction. And those conditions are introduced from the very beginning, *ex quo creatus est*, as Augustine says.⁴ We might take Ulysses to be expressing the very same angst in the face of the damaged world that any of us feels when confronted with the death or disease of a loved one, the extinction of a species, or the horrors of war. It's no idle utterance when Agamemnon takes Ulysses to have found, "The nature of the sickness" (1.3.140). What Ulysses sees is the corruption, the rot of the world gone wrong. In this, he's not unlike Thersites, the great proclaimer of the play's "rotten diseases" (5.1.18), who recognizes the world of *Troilus and Cressida* for what it is, a "Sweet sink, sweet sewer" (5.1.75-76).

But is there more yet to say about the way we left things with the fall of the angels? Ulysses' reaction to the sickness of the world offers one possible way forward. He attempts to locate the root cause of the problem. What's causing the disorder? he asks. Or, rather, Agamemnon wants to know, if this is the disease, "What is the remedy?" (1.3.141). At which point Ulysses launches into a diatribe about "The great Achilles,

⁴ *civ.*, 11.13, *CSEL* 40.1:532: "*Ab initio diabolus peccat, hoc est, ex quo creatus est, iustitiam recusavit.*"

whom opinion crowns/ The sinow and the forehand of our host” (1.3.142-143). But here we find Shakespeare’s earlier, subtle ironizing of Ulysses’ position redeployed more blatantly. Ulysses is exposed as a bickering, petty, small man. Mixing servile flattery of Agamemnon and his “topless deputation” (1.3.152) with whinging over Ajax’ and Achilles’ failures to take seriously his very important work as a war planner. You can almost hear Ulysses’ voice pitching upward as you read his lines,

They tax our policy, and call it cowardice,
Count wisdom as no member of the war,
ForeSTALL prescience, and esteem no act
But that of hand. The still and mental parts,
That do contrive how many hands shall strike
When fitness calls them on, and know by measure
Of their observant toil the enemies’ weight—
Why, this hath not a finger’s dignity.
They call this bed-work, mapp’ry, closet-war
(1.3.197-205)

So run the complaints of every staff officer ever to feel underappreciated by the infantryman. It puts the lie to Ulysses’ noble concerns. Or, we might say, it almost does. It’s still possible Ulysses will decide to embark on the right course for the wrong reason. But what does he actually do?

After the conversation is interrupted by the arrival of Aeneas bearing Hector’s challenge to the Greeks, Ulysses and Nestor scheme together. Achilles, as he’s already said, is overproud and thinks himself un beholden to Agamemnon and the rest of the Greeks. His “neglection of degree” (1.3.127) has imperiled their cause. Ulysses’ solution? He’ll knock him down a peg or two. But he plans to do so precisely by furthering disorder, putting forth Ajax as the Greek’s best man, which he knows to be false. As he says,

Therefore 'tis meet Achilles meet not Hector.
Let us like merchants first show foul wares,
And think perchance they'll sell; if not,
The lustre of the better shall exceed.
By showing the worst first.
(1.3.357-361)

In order to make right Achilles' relation to Agamemnon, to restore degree, Ulysses is prepared to introduce more disarray. He does so because he worries Achilles' victory over Hector would only serve to advance the already proud Myrmidon's opinion of himself. All the glory of the win would accrue to Achilles alone. At the same time, if Achilles were to be defeated by Hector, this could only damage the reputation of the Greeks in general.

If he were foil'd,
Why then we do our main opinion crush
In taint of our best man. No, make a lott'ry,
And by device let blockish Ajax draw
The sort to fight with Hector; among ourselves
Give him allowance for the better man
(1.3.371-376)

So much, then, for Ulysses' idealism. As it turns out, he's happy to swap degree for device when it suits his interests. Putting forward Ajax instead of Achilles might conceivably correct one ill, but the sickness and disorder he's identified runs much deeper than Achilles' pride. So deep, in fact, that Ulysses' imagined solution is only further evidence of the problem.

In the end, Agamemnon's observation holds true. "The ample proposition that hope makes/ In all designs begun on earth below/ Fails in the promis'd largeness" (1.3.3-5). Ulysses' schemes, for all their craftiness, cannot bring about their object. I'm tempted to say Ulysses has diagnosed the problem rightly but has failed to respond to it correctly.

Degree, order, rule, these are all important concepts—they've served as a kind of leitmotif for my work so far. So, too, could Ulysses' utterance, "Take but degree away, untune that string,/ And hark what discord follows. Each thing meets/ In mere oppugnancy" (1.3.109-111), be taken to summarize the last chapter's findings. The cosmos, robbed of the ordered relation of all things to the incarnate LORD becomes a vast battleground of contraries. It's in this steaming miasma of oppugnancy that the temporal unfolding of the cosmos occurs. The world we know is as Ulysses describes,

Then every thing include itself in power
Power into will, will into appetite,
And appetite, an universal wolf
(So doubly seconded with will and power),
Must make perforce an universal prey,
And last eat up himself.
(1.3.119-124)

A more Augustinian sentiment would be hard to find—the *libido dominandi* as "an universal wolf," whose last act is solipsistic self-consumption.

But Ulysses is only partly right. I take it Shakespeare hints at this for us with the subtle and not so subtle ironies of the "Degree Speech." I've pointed to some subdued irony already, but one more hint that we can't take Ulysses perfectly seriously comes on the lips of Agamemnon. Before Ulysses launches into the speech, he offers Agamemnon and Nestor what can only be called a "tortive and errant" (1.3.9) introduction to his thought. The fawning Ulysses commends Agamemnon, "great commander," "nerve and bone of Greece," "Heart of our numbers," "soul and only sprite," "most mighty for thy place and sway," and "the hand of Greece" (1.3.54-64) all in the space of ten lines. But just before the "Degree Speech" begins, we catch a glimpse of Agamemnon's impatience

with what borders on courtly buffoonery. He gives Ulysses permission to speak, but with this proviso,

Speak, prince of Ithaca, and be't of less expect
That matter needless, of importless burthen,
Divide thy lips, than we are confident,
When rank Thersites opes his mastic jaws,
We shall hear music, wit, and oracle.
(1.3.70-74)

One way to take these lines is as a vote of confidence in Ulysses' counsel: "Only needful and important matters come from the mouth of Ulysses." But the mention of Thersites challenges that reading. If instead you take Agamemnon's "be't" in the subjunctive rather than the indicative mood, the comparison to the play's fool is more apt. Read this way, Agamemnon is saying: "I'd better not hear needless and unimportant matters coming from your mouth, Ulysses." Or, even more aggressively, it could be read as an imperative, "Get on with it." There are good reasons, then, internal and external to the speech—apart even from the general tone of the play—to make the reader question how far she ought to follow Ulysses on degree and disorder.

Nevertheless, I find myself tempted by Ulysses' response to the world. I'm inclined to accept his explanation for the world's ills, locating them in disorder *simpliciter*. But this approach fails on two accounts. First, while it has great explanatory power for dealing with particular manifestations of evil, we're still no closer to being able to account for evil's origins in the rational creature's disordered will. The original untuning of the cosmic instrument remains entirely opaque. Second, distinct yet not unrelated, this view of the untuned cosmos does not provide expansive enough a view for the Christian thinker. That is, Ulysses is uninterested in or unaware of the way particular

disorders might contribute to, or be necessary for, the accomplishment of a greater, more encompassing order. I'll take these two failures one at a time. I'll deal with the second one by turning now to the creation myth of Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*. The first will have to wait until we can look more closely at the character of Troilus.

4.2 Nostalgia and the New Creation

Ulysses suffers from a failure of imagination. You see this failure when he says, "O, when degree is shak'd/ Which is the ladder of all high designs,/ The enterprise is sick" (1.3.101-103). If this is a failure, though, it's one to which we're all disposed, or at the very least tempted. Whenever we see particular failures, sins, or evils as clear evidence of the world's disorder, whenever we're confident the whole "enterprise is sick" as a result, we've succumbed to that temptation. Hamlet, on the other hand, offers a different response, by catching a glimpse (not a clear vision, mind you) of the broader field on which human lives and designs are played out. Think, for instance, of his comments to Horatio in Act 5 of *Hamlet*,

Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well
When our deep plots do pall, and that should learn us
There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will—
(*Hamlet*, 5.2.8-11)

That indiscretion sometimes serves us well isn't a view countenanced by Ulysses. Disorder is something to be corrected, by subterfuge if necessary. More often than not, our responses to the unruly cosmos incline toward Ulysses rather than Hamlet. And it's worth observing that it takes nearly the whole action of *Hamlet* to bring the young prince to see things aright. To be able to say, "There is a special providence in the fall of a

sparrow” (*Hamlet*, 5.2.219-220), he has to overcome the twin temptations of fatalistic despair and its opposite number, Ulysses’ nostalgic utopianism.

The creation myth that prefaces J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Silmarillion* is an astute piece of theology and angelology. It offers a response more akin to Hamlet’s view of providence than to Ulysses’ nostalgic paean for degree. In doing so, it provides a third way of responding to disorder. Tolkien calls his myth the *Ainulindalë* or “The Music of the Ainur.”⁵ In a letter to Milton Waldman, as part of an effort to convince his publisher that both *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings* should appear in print, Tolkien says this about the *Ainulindalë*:

The cycles begin with a cosmogonical myth: the *Music of the Ainur*. God and the Valar (or powers: Englished as gods) are revealed. These latter are as we should say angelic powers, whose function is to exercise delegated authority in their spheres (of rule and government, *not* creation, making or re-making). They are ‘divine’, that is, were originally ‘outside’ and existed ‘before’ the making of the world. Their power and wisdom is derived from their Knowledge of the cosmogonical drama, which they perceived first as a drama (that is as in a fashion we perceive a story composed by some-one else), and later as a ‘reality’.⁶

The Ainur of Tolkien’s cosmogonical myth bear a strong resemblance to Augustine’s description of the angels as the created forms of uncreated Wisdom called into existence on the first day when the LORD says, “Let there be light.”⁷ In the *Ainulindalë*, the Gods⁸

⁵ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 15.

⁶ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981), 146.

⁷ *Gn. Litt.*, 2.8.16-19.

⁸ In order to keep the confusion to a bare minimum in what follows, I’ll refer to the Triune LORD of Christian confession—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as the LORD. Tolkien’s Eru, though bearing a number of similarities to the LORD, is not identical. Tolkien himself says, in another letter to Michael Straight, “The Incarnation of God is an *infinitely* greater thing than anything I would dare to write” (Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 237.). So, I’ll refer to the God of Middle Earth as either Eru, Ilúvatar, or God. Tolkien himself refers to the Ainur (Valar once they’ve entered the order of time) as “gods,” and I’ll stick with this practice.

is “Eru, the One, who in Arda is called Ilúvatar.”⁹ The Ainur “were the offspring of his thought, and they were with him before aught else was made.”¹⁰ Like Augustine’s angels, the Ainur are intellectual creatures, made first by the one God. Notice also that the Ainur do not create but “exercise delegated authority,” much as the angelic powers were said in the last chapter to be ministers of the LORD’s cosmos, governing it as secondary causes.

In the *Ainulindalë*, the gods exercise this ministerial function through song. Eru teaches the Ainur to sing. Each individual Ainur sings a piece of music corresponding to part of the mind of Eru. As they sing, they begin to understand one another’s music. Eventually, they learn to harmonize. At that point, Eru instructs them in a musical theme. After giving them the theme, he tasks them with making “a Great Music” together, each performing the portion allotted using the powers gifted by Eru.¹¹ As they played their music, “the places of the dwelling of Ilúvatar were filled to overflowing, and the music and the echo of the music went out into the Void, and it was not void.”¹² Creation, in Tolkien’s myth is ordered by harmonious music, played according to the wisdom and power of the one God. Eru’s spiritual creatures, the Ainur, use their powers—those powers being themselves created and derivative—to shape and form a cosmos according to the will of God.

So far, so good. The harmonious music of the Ainur, woven together by the will of Eru, is perfectly ordered. There are no mistakes of degree here—until there are. In

⁹ Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 15.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

Tolkien, we read that, “as the theme progressed, it came into the heart of Melkor to interweave matters of his own imagining that were not in accord with the theme of Ilúvatar; for he sought therein to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself.”¹³ So begins an attempted usurpation of Eru’s prerogatives. In doing so, Melkor introduces disorder. Not because Melkor is not great and powerful—Tolkien explains that he’s the most powerful and knowledgeable of the Ainur¹⁴—but because he’s not God. Like Ulysses’ description of Achilles playacting as Agamemnon, his disregard for degree results in a mimicry that can only be called mockery. “Such to-be-pitied and o’er-wrested seeming/ He acts thy greatness in; and when he speaks,/ ’Tis like a chime a-mending, with terms unsquar’d” (1.3.157-159). Melkor’s seeming, when he desires “to bring into Being things of his own,” has the effect of weaving “discord” into the song of the Ainur.¹⁵ Like the chime in need of repair, that rings “with terms unsquar’d” Melkor’s voice disturbs the music. The other Ainur attempt to change keys, to salvage the music by following Melkor’s lead. The perturbations spread farther and wider until “the melodies which had been heard before foundered in a sea of turbulent sound.”¹⁶

Now, here’s the crucial difference between Ulysses’ response to this problem and Eru’s. The possible responses are, of course, delimited in advance by the role each plays in his respective narrative. Ulysses is a creature and so has a small set of possible responses to the upsetting of degree. His attempt to “correct” the disorder with deceit is not the only creaturely response available, but it’s one that makes Ulysses eminently

¹³ Ibid., 16.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

relatable. All too often, this or similar courses of action draw us in. We imagine the disorders we perceive in the world to be things that can be corrected straightforwardly, by returning things to a state of affairs in an idealized past. Earlier, I called Ulysses' response a nostalgic one. Nostalgia is the fundamental logic at work in his desire to put things back the way they were.

The responses available to Eru are different. As the creator God of Tolkien's narrative, Eru's options for reestablishing order are not limited to what has gone before. When Ilúvatar perceives Melkor's discordant music, he rises and lifts his left hand, "and a new theme began amid the storm, like and yet unlike to the former theme, and it gathered power and had new beauty."¹⁷ To which new theme, Melkor responds with further strife, with such violent music that Tolkien goes so far as to say, "Melkor had the mastery."¹⁸ But once more Eru rises up, this time raising his right hand, introducing a further theme. With its introduction there now seem to be two separate pieces of music. One is sweet and beautiful. The other lacks artistry, trying instead to drown out the subtle, soft music.¹⁹ Finally, with both pieces of music vying against one another, Eru rises one last time. He raises both his hands, "and in one chord, deeper than the Abyss, higher than the Firmament, piercing as the light of the eye of Ilúvatar, the Music ceased."²⁰

What I find in these passages from Tolkien is an anti-nostalgic response to discord. Instead of attempting a backward-looking restoration, the God of Middle Earth

¹⁷ Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 16.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

looks quite like the LORD who says, “Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Is 43:18-19, cf. Rev 21:5). But to understand Eru’s response to Melkor, and so also the LORD’s response to the rebellion of Lucifer and his angels, it’s necessary to clarify what we mean by ‘response.’ Properly speaking, the LORD does not respond to his creatures’ actions, if response is taken to indicate a kind temporally sequenced reaction. You can see that this is usually what we mean when we say so-and-so responded to someone else. Consider a televised debate, where one participant is given thirty seconds to respond to a point made by his opponent. Think, too, of the responsorial psalm sung during Mass, which follows in answer to the first reading. The point-counterpoint of the music of Eru and Melkor shouldn’t be understood in this way. How could it be if the LORD (and in this case, Eru) knows all things because they are created and sustained by his creative act? This necessarily includes all Melkor’s creaturely possibilities. If that’s the case, then it’s not clear what would count as a ‘response’ from the LORD in the ordinary sense of the word. For the things that are to be is for the LORD to will them to be as they are.

Comparing Ulysses’ response to Eru’s, then, is bound to fail. Eru isn’t responding to Melkor in the ordinary sense. He’s instead wielding him, even and especially in his freely willed disobedience, to bring about the ordered whole of his creation. He says as much to the Ainur after the final, trembling chord comes to a halt. Tolkien writes,

Then Ilúvatar spoke, and he said: ‘Mighty are the Ainur, and mightiest among them is Melkor; but that he may know, and all the Ainur, that I am Ilúvatar, those things that ye have sung, I will show them forth, that ye may see what ye have done. And thou, Melkor, shalt see that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter

the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined.²¹

Here, we've come to a deep point of Christian grammar, carefully portrayed by Tolkien. In brief we might characterize it this way: The LORD permits evils that greater goods might come about. Even a cursory look at Scripture shows this to be the usual way the LORD acts providentially to bring about goods. Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers only to save those same brothers and so the line of Abraham from famine (Gn 37-50). Holofernes lays siege to Bethulia and Uzziah makes oaths that put the LORD to the test, causing Judith to singlehandedly defeat the attacking army (Jdt 1-16). The man born blind is without sight, not because of his or his parents' sins, "but that the works of God might be made manifest through him" (Jn 9:3). This logic is embedded in the liturgy of the Church as well, when she proclaims the ancient hymn, the *Exsultet*, at the Easter Vigil. There we hear, "*O certe necessarium Adæ peccatum,/ quod Christi morte delétum est!/ O felix culpa,/ quae talem ac tantum méruit habére Redemptórem!*"²² The English missal for use in the United States renders this, "O truly necessary sin of Adam,/ destroyed completely by the Death of Christ!/ O happy fault/ that earned so glorious a Redeemer!"²³ What the Church here unabashedly acclaims follows the same pattern as Eru's declamation to Melkor. Adam's sin is, in some way, *certe necessarium* and *felix*, so that—*mirabile dictu*—Jesus Christ, the incarnate LORD, might bring about humanity's salvation from sin and death.

²¹ Ibid.

²² *Missale Romanum Cum Lectionibus*, vol. 2 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1977), 332.

²³ *The Roman Missal*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 351.

In Tolkien and the *Missale Romanum* we discover the role evil is made to play in the ordering and reordering of the cosmos. This problem of the goods to be had, *that can only be had*, by way of evils (the *felices* only possible as the result of *culpae*), is a vexing one. In the last chapter I spent quite some time giving reasons why the problem of evil isn't the kind of problem we tend to think it is. There's nothing logically inconsistent about a LORD who is all good and yet permits evils to perdure. But there I also said the fracturing of the cosmos since its inception by the angelic fall, and the resultant damage done to all creaturely relations, is the origin of death. Death, I take it, is a great disordering, the result of an untuning of the cosmos which ends in discord. The last chapter showed, too, that we have (or can have) an intuitive grasp of this when we reflect upon the scope and so the horror of death and disintegration. But this item of the Christian grammar of creation and evil so well depicted by Tolkien, so vividly affirmed in the *Exsultet*, means that's not all there is to say about it. Astonishingly, frighteningly even, we find we must say that the evils afflicting the cosmos, with their source in the voluntary evil of angelic and human creatures, are permitted even if not positively willed by the LORD.

To say more on this, I want to turn back to Augustine and Gregory the Great. The theme of the cosmos rightly ordered by the LORD not despite the presence of evils, but precisely through their presence, frequently recurs in Augustine's work.²⁴ A careful statement of his position appears in Book XI of *De civitate Dei*. There he says,

But just as God is the perfectly good creator of good natures, so also is he the perfectly just orderer of evil wills. So, while evil wills use good natures badly, he uses even evil wills well...That is, the temptations, by

²⁴ cf. *inter alia*, *ord.*, 1.1.2; *lib. arb.*, 3.9.25-28; *civ.*, 11.17-18, 22-23, 33; 12.4; *Gn. litt.*, 8.9.18, 23.44; 11.3.5, 9.12, 12.16.

which the devil wanted to do harm, are good for his saints. And since God, when he made him, was not ignorant of the use of his future malignity, he also foresaw those good things he himself was to bring about from the devil's evils.²⁵

The thought expressed here is quite close to the one found in Tolkien, but it points up something only hinted at in the *Silmarillion*. That is, the devil proves to be the LORD's instrument precisely because the LORD foreknows both the evil of the devil and the goods he'll bring out of it. And Augustine will go further than this. While it's true that if none had sinned there would only be good natures, the fact of sin does not detract from the LORD's ordering all things rightly. "Because," Augustine says, "just like a painting with dark color in its proper place, so too the whole universe of things—if someone were able to see it—is beautiful even with sinners, even though considered in themselves their ugliness is hideous."²⁶ The beauty of the whole—and remember, according to Thomas, creation's highest good is the ordered whole²⁷—includes the negative space caused by sin and evil.

The position I'm trying to draw out becomes clearer if we turn once again to the relation of time and eternity this discussion presupposes. In chapter two, I showed what I take to be entailments of Augustine's position in *De trinitate* on knowledge of future things. There I provided a speculative answer to this ticklish problem: the LORD's eternal knowledge of (past, present, and future) things is their reality. Gregory the Great

²⁵ civ., 11.17, CSEL 40.1:536-537: "*Sed Deus sicut naturarum bonarum optimus creator est, ita malarum voluntatum iustissimus ordinator, ut, cum illae male utuntur naturis bonis, ipse bene utatur etiam voluntatibus malis...id est, ut prosint tentationes eius sanctis, quibus eas obesse desiderat. Et quoniam Deus, cum eum conderet, futurae malignitatis eius non erat utique ignarus et praevidebat quae bona de malo eius esset ipse facturus.*"

²⁶ civ., 11.23, CSEL 40.1:545: "*quoniam sicut pictura cum colore nigro loco suo posito, ita universitas rerum, si quis possit intueri, etiam cum peccatoribus pulchra est, quamvis per se ipsos consideratos sua deformitas turpet.*"

²⁷ ST, I.15.2 resp: "*Illud autem quod est optimum in rebus existens, est bonum ordinis universi.*"

seems to have seen something similar. In Book XX of the *Moralia in Job*, in a section bearing a strong resemblance to Augustine's list of paradoxical predicates for the LORD in Book I of *Confessiones*,²⁸ Gregory has this to say about the LORD's foreknowledge:

And because he sees the things which to us are in the future, but which to him are always present, he is called 'foreknowing.' Even though he does not in any way foresee the future, which he sees happening at once. For certainly all the things that are, are not seen in his eternity because they are, rather they are because they are seen. When, therefore, his eternity is brought down to our mutable words, out of those words a kind of stairway is made that he who can may climb up to the immutability of God so that he may see one jealous without jealousy, irate without ire, sorry without sorrow and grief, full of pity without a pitiable heart, foreknowing without foresight. For in him neither past nor future can be found, but all mutable things endure immutably. And things which, in themselves, cannot be at once, at once all stand together for him, and nothing that passes by passes away, because in his eternity in a certain incomprehensible manner, the whole roll of ages remains while passing, while running stands still.²⁹

As Gregory says, words like 'foreknowing' can't be properly predicated of the LORD.

This doesn't mean the words are useless for talking about the LORD's eternity. Quite the contrary, our attempts to express the unchangeable in changeable (tensed) words give us a foothold, a step by which we can begin to mount up to eternity. There, and only there, do these apparent contraries hang together. Most importantly, in Gregory's account we find all times present to the LORD. In all their variability, they stand firm in his eternity.

²⁸ *conf.*, 1.4.4.

²⁹ *mor.*, 20.32.63, CCL 143A:1049-1051: "Et quia ea quae nobis futura sunt videt, quae tamen ipsi semper praesto sunt, praescius dicitur, quamvis nequaquam futurum praevideat quod praesens videt. Nam et quaeque sunt, non in aeternitate eius ideo videntur quia sunt, sed ideo sunt, quia videntur. Dum ergo ad verba mutabilitatis nostrae descenditur, ex eis quibusdam gradibus factis ascendat qui potest ad incommutabilitatem Dei, ut videat sine zelo zelantem, sine ira irascentem, sine dolore et paenitentia paenitentem, sine misero corde misericordem, sine praevisionibus praescientem. In illo enim nec praeterita, nec futura reperiri queunt, sed cuncta mutabilia immutabiliter durant; et quae in seipsis simul existere non possunt, illi simul omnia assistunt nihilque in illo praeterit quod transit, quia in aeternitate eius modo quodam incomprehensibili, cuncta volumina saeculorum transeuntia manent, currentia stant."

What we're trying to get at with talk of the LORD's foreknowledge is the entirely unique way the LORD relates to things existing in our temporal future. Gregory unpacks this, as I read him, to say the LORD's foreknowledge is of things that have not yet occurred in the march of time, but which already are in the LORD. They already are because 'creation' doesn't mark the beginning of things in time. Rather, 'creation' names the relation any creature you like and the whole set of creatures considered as a cosmos bear to their creator.³⁰ Creatures are made out of nothing and without movement from one state to another—as there are no states prior to creation.³¹ In keeping with my speculations about the reality of past, present, and future times hanging together in the “whole roll of ages,” as Gregory says, it makes sense to say the simultaneous creation of all things without change³² includes all spatiotemporal, intellectual, and intentional relations considered as a whole. To say the LORD makes this world is to say he makes it *this* ordered whole. And this ordered whole, the one the LORD wills, just is the one in which great evils occur.

But what does it mean to talk about evils this way, as unable to frustrate the LORD's intention? The evils are unable to do so because the LORD allows them to

³⁰ This distinction between 'creation' as beginning in time and 'creation' as relation to the Creator forms a the whole subtext for Augustine's treatment of Genesis 1:1-2:5 in *De Genesi ad litteram*. On this point, see especially *Gen. litt.*, 5.6.19, *PL* 34:327: “*Haec enim jam per moras temporum fiunt, quae tunc non erant, cum fecit omnia simul, unde etiam tempora inciperent*—For these things now happen through intervals of time, of which there were none when he made all things at once, from which moment even times began.” Thomas gives it a scholastic specificity in article 45 of the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*. On creation as relation, Thomas says in *ST*, 1.45.3 resp: “*creatio in creatura non sit nisi relatio quaedam ad creatorem, ut ad principium sui esse*—creation in a creature is nothing but a certain relation to the creator, as to the principle of its act of being.”

³¹ *ST*, 1.45.2 ad 2: “*creatio non est mutatio nisi secundum modum intelligendi tantum. Nam de ratione mutationis est, quod aliquid idem se habeat aliter nunc et prius*—Creation is only a change according to a mode of understanding. For it belongs to the idea of change that the same something is different now than it was before.”

³² *ST*, 1.45.2 ad 3: “*cum creatio sit sine motu, simul aliquid creatur et creatum est*—since creation is without motion, a thing is created and being created simultaneously.”

occur, though he doesn't intend the evils themselves, in order to bring about greater goods. I say that he doesn't intend the evils themselves because an evil is a privation, a lack. It makes little sense to say the LORD wills to bring about a privation. Nor would he need to. In order for a privation to be, the LORD need simply do nothing at all. This seems to belong to the grammar of the LORD's permissive will. The LORD allows a privation to occur by doing nothing at all to prevent it. In this way, the LORD's permissive will is utterly distinct from the LORD's positive will, which—according to the doctrine of simplicity—is identical with himself. The LORD's positive will for creatures is a matter of self-gift, whereas his permissive will is a matter of creaturely possibilities that are a function of being created from nothing, possibilities the LORD does not impede, and so result in privation.

That the LORD permits evils to bring about greater goods is a statement of faith and explicitly not one of sight. I mean this way of presenting things—consonant though it is with the deep structure of Christian thought—is not an act of describing the world we see. It's easy to read Augustine, and probably my own account, as overly sanguine. Talk of sin and evil as the dark spots of a chiaroscuro, lending beauty to the whole, might even seem morally deranged. This would be true if what he or I meant was that it were somehow obvious how it's the case, or if the order of the whole somehow excused or justified the evils. But that's not what I take Augustine to be doing, though he sometimes swerves further in this direction than seems advisable. Instead, what he and I are expressing is a commitment to the goodness of the LORD, appearances notwithstanding. What we find in his account of the beautifully ordered whole is what he takes to be demanded in the light of faith. He says so explicitly in Book XII of *De civitate Dei*.

We're often incapable of seeing how the evils of the world contribute to its beauty, how our *culpa*e are the source of our *felices*. But it's when we're least certain, least able to perceive it, that we're "most rightly directed to believe in the providence of the Creator."³³ To do otherwise is to find fault in the LORD and his creation.

Augustine is aware of the brokenness of the world. He also believes the LORD created all things very good (Gn 1:31). When the LORD, in Genesis 1, looks upon "everything that he had made" (Gn 1:31) and sees its goodness, what other perspective should we take these words to be expressing but the one from the LORD's eternal vantage? For Augustine, this "very good" comes as a description of things under the aspect of the *conditio*. What else could its subject be but "the whole roll of ages" as yet to be unfurled in the order of time? Read this way, Augustine's almost cavalier discussions of rape in Book I of *De civitate Dei*, my reframing of the problem of evil as no problem at all, Hamlet's confident "the readiness is all...let be" (*Hamlet*, 5.2.222, 224) before rushing to meet his death all have something in common. They share the same expansive horizon, a recognition that on some level protology *is* eschatology. This is the third kind of response, which avoids the appeals of both nostalgia and despair. It takes the world to be the LORD's good creation, even in its evident brokenness.

But even if this third kind of response to disorder is available to, indeed necessary for, Christians, it cannot be allowed to occlude the damage done to creation. We must be able to say in the same breath, good yet broken, beautiful yet terrible, perfect yet costly. Tolkien's vision does not flinch. He's prepared to say both things at once. In doing so, his

³³ *civ.*, 12.4, CSEL 40.1:571: "*Unde nobis, in quibus eam contemplari minus idonei sumus, rectissime credenda praecipitur providentia Conditoris, ne tanti artificis opus in aliquo reprehendere vanitate humanae temeritas audeamus.*"

story models a kind of creaturely response to the fact of evil that trusts no particular evil could finally disorder the world the LORD creates. Nor, however, does it imagine the final, perfected beauty of the cosmos as unmarred. Rather, the created order, damaged and healed, mimics the risen Christ, whose wounds remain even when glorified. Or, like the martyrs whose resurrected bodies, Augustine speculates, retain the marks of the stripes they receive for Christ.³⁴ The final perfection of the LORD's creation is scarified and somehow more beautiful for it.³⁵

Tolkien expresses both sides of this by pointing to the beauty of Ilúvatar's third musical theme. The beauty of this theme comes, he says, from "an immeasurable sorrow."³⁶ Melkor's music attempts to stand apart, "but it seemed that its most triumphant notes were taken by the other and woven into its own solemn pattern."³⁷ The deep and beautiful music of Ilúvatar does not refuse or destroy by drowning out what stands opposed to it. The God in Tolkien's myth instead allows the music to continue and weaves an audible lament into his all-encompassing theme. Michael Elam picks up on the importance of sorrow in Tolkien's work in an article on the *Ainulindalë*. Drawing on Thomas Aquinas and Augustine, he shows how the beauty of the third theme comes from the sorrow itself. "Sorrow for evil is good," he explains, because it's the only appropriate

³⁴ *civ.*, 22.19.

³⁵ My "somehow" here has in the background a line from one of Flannery O'Connor's letters to "A" written on July 20, 1955. There she says, "I think that the Church is the only thing that is going to make the terrible world we are coming to endure; the only thing that makes the Church endure is that it is *somehow* the body of Christ and that on this we are fed" (Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being: The Letters of Flannery O'Connor* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979), 90. Emphasis mine). O'Connor's "somehow" and mine are both, I take it, meant to signal the presence of a mystery, the fact that it's been revealed and offered to us as an article of faith, and the persistent difficulty of accepting it as such.

³⁶ Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 16-17.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

response to a lack of a good that ought to be present.³⁸ As Elam says, “In the context of the *Ainulindalë*’s conflict, therefore, it may be the case that beauty rises according to sorrow’s function: i.e., that sorrow properly recognizes the contrast between what-is-and-shouldn’t-be (the actual) with what-ought-to-be-but-isn’t (the ideal).”³⁹

Paul Griffiths describes the function of lament similarly, but he points out something else important in this discussion that’s only nascent in Tolkien’s narrative and Elam’s treatment of it. Sorrow and lament are appropriate responses to particular evils. By this I mean lament shows “that we recognize the marks of damage in the devastation for what they are.”⁴⁰ When we lament those marks, we recognize particular instances of damage. Proper sorrow requires perceiving a specific lack and lamenting it as a lack. For this reason, Griffiths identifies lament as kind of understanding, “an understanding that this, whatever is being lamented now, is not the way things should be.”⁴¹ The “whatever” of that last sentence is important, because it shows lament’s specificity. You might feel sad about nothing in particular, sadness being an emotion. It makes much less sense to say you are lamenting nothing in particular. Cries of lament have to do with things gone wrong, and things don’t go wrong in general, but in identifiable ways. When something is evil, it is so because it lacks a particular good. Lamentation is a form of judgment about these lacks.⁴²

³⁸ Michael Elam, “The *Ainulindalë* and J.R.R. Tolkien’s Beautiful Sorrow in Christian Tradition,” *VII: An Anglo-American Literary Review* 28, no. 1 (2011): 68.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁴⁰ Paul J. Griffiths, *Decreation: The Last Things of All Creatures* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 327.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, 332.

The reason to distinguish sorrow or lament for particulars from the way things are *in toto* is that it's precisely here that we see how the Christian grammar functions with respect to the permission of evils. It makes sense to say, and the tradition has affirmed magisterially, that the LORD permits evil and that his permission of it is good insofar as it brings about greater good or prevents greater evil.⁴³ We have a way to say, "*O, felix culpa.*" What we don't have—and oughtn't to desire—is a way of affirming the particular evils permitted as good. In other words, what's *felix* is not the *culpa* itself, but what's wrought with it. Having a place in the overall ordering of the cosmos doesn't make those evils good or excusable or somehow not as bad as they appear. Instead, the proper response to permitted evils, as we find in Tolkien, Elam, and Griffiths, is sorrow. Specific evils always remain just that, privations of particular goods. Even if the LORD wields these evils to bring about a greater good than would otherwise have been possible, the evils that allow it to be so remain in themselves lamentable.

Romano Guardini sees the same inexorable logic at work in what we say about the crucified one—call it the exacting demands of speech about the LORD in his eternity. He asks about Jesus' mission, "Does God know that it will result in the death of the Messiah? Certainly, from eternity. And yet it should not happen. Does he will the death of Jesus? Certainly, from eternity. If the people close themselves off, his love has to go that way. But they should not close themselves off."⁴⁴ And in commenting on Jesus' own prophetic knowledge of this death's necessity—necessary in the way things which are

⁴³ cf. *ST* 1.19.9 ad 3 and Leo XIII, *Libertas praestantissimum*, *DS* §3251.

⁴⁴ Romano Guardini, *Der Herr: Betrachtungen Über Die Person Und Das Leben Jesu Christi* (Würzburg: Werkbund-Verlag, 1949), 266: "*Weiß Gott, daß es zum Tode des Messias kommen wird? Gewiß, von Ewigkeit. Und dennoch soll es nicht geschehen .. Will er den Tod Jesu? Gewiß, von Ewigkeit. Wenn die Menschen sich verschließen, muß seine Liebe diesen Weg gehen. Aber sie sollen sich nicht verschließen.*"

willed from all eternity and yet also occasions for lament are necessary—in Luke 13, Guardini explains, “what God wills and what ought not to be are intertwined.”⁴⁵ In the same passage he also says, speaking still of Christ’s going to, suffering in, and dying outside Jerusalem, “in the event that at last accomplishes the will of God, goods and evils are woven together.”⁴⁶ This interweaving of good and evil in the accomplishment of the LORD’s will, coupled with the requirement for lamentation of those evils knotted into the tapestry, is an encounter with mystery. We feel our understanding begin to fragment in the attempt to hold the pieces together.⁴⁷

The fragmentation we encounter in the face of these twin obligations—to see the whole as good (to thank the LORD for it) and to recognize the evils for what they are (products of rebellion against the LORD)—marks the tragedy at the heart of the Christian life. The Christian form of life is tragic because we have to say, “*O certe necessarium Adæ peccatum.*” What kind of necessity is this? Just a moment ago I called it “necessary in the way things which are willed from all eternity and yet also occasions for lament are necessary.” Necessary, then, because the LORD wills the goods he brings about with it—necessary in order for those goods to be. Not absolute necessity, if by that we mean things cannot have been otherwise. It’s precisely the fact that they could be otherwise, but aren’t, that makes them possible objects of lament. But they *are* necessary. I want to say they’re necessary supposing the fact of this world, supposing the LORD *intends* this

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 262: “*Wie das, was Gott will, und das, was nicht sein dürfte, ineinandergeht.*”

⁴⁶ *ibid.*: “*wie in dem Geschehen, das zuletzt doch den Willen Gottes vollbringt, Gutes und Böses sich verweben.*”

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 266: “*Wir merken, hier kommen wir mit unserem Menschenverstande nicht durch. Gottes ewiges Wissen und unsere Freiheit; das, was nicht geschehen soll, aber geschehen wird; die Gestalt, die das Erlösungswerk eigentlich haben sollte, und jene, die es tatsächlich haben wird — alles das liegt in einem für uns unscheidbaren Geheimnis ineinander.*”

world and not another. The LORD intends it always as the world created and redeemed by him. The lamb is slain “from the foundation of the world (*qui occissus est ab origine mundi*)” (Rev 13:8, Vulg). The world is, in this sense, created *so that* it might be redeemed by him. The sin of Adam and the sin of Lucifer are not less blameworthy because of this kind of necessity. They are not because this necessity is obtained only with respect to the “whole roll of ages,” the ordered whole the LORD brings about in his act of creation. It’s within this cosmos that created freedom is exercised.

In another letter, to Michael Straight, Tolkien claims that the LORD’s (or Eru’s) actions in the order of time, “produce realities which could not be deduced even from a complete knowledge of the previous past, but which being real become part of the effective past for all subsequent time (a possible definition of a ‘miracle’).”⁴⁸ In the case of the *certe necessarium Adæ peccatum*, its necessity derives precisely from the salvific action of the LORD’s incarnation, life, death, and resurrection in Jesus Christ. Adam’s sin is necessary *because* “it was destroyed by the death of Christ (*Christi morte deletum est*),” *because* it “merited such and so great a redeemer (*talem ac tantum meruit habere Redemptorem*).”⁴⁹ The LORD’s action in Christ makes it part of “the effective past.” This is the same trajectory of thought Paul offers in Romans 11. There, he says, “God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all” (Rom 11:32). It’s no wonder this verse is followed quickly by, “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” (Rom 11:33). Paul’s recognition that it’s the LORD who has consigned all to

⁴⁸ Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 235.

⁴⁹ *Missale Romanum Cum Lectionibus*, 2, 352.

disobedience and the *Exsultet*'s insistence on the necessity of Adam's sin follow a similar pattern. Both turn our usual ways of thinking about sequentially ordered causes and effects on their heads. The LORD intends from all eternity to destroy death, to redeem, to have mercy. These have necessary antecedents. To destroy death, there must be dying things; to be redeemed, there must be someone who needs redemption from something; to have mercy, there must be someone who deserves punishment. What we're taught to say by the liturgy and Scripture is that what the LORD accomplishes in Jesus Christ somehow makes necessary the sin of his creatures. That is, if the LORD is to make this world and save it gratuitously, to have mercy upon all, it's also true that there must be a fall.

But we must also cry out, "Deliver me from my necessities (*de necessitatibus meis erue me*)" (Ps 24:17 Vulg). For again, according to the lines sketched above, the kind of necessity we're dealing with is not made less lamentable for being necessary. Neither do the goods they occasion mean lament is no longer called for. Acknowledging this is the course Augustine recommends in Book XIX of *De civitate Dei*. There he looks at the impossible task of the judge, who must act according to his duty in support of human society and who at the same time should recognize the limits to his capacity to know. Even in the case where the judge's decisions do not proceed from an from an evil will, they are often accompanied by evils. His necessities in this case are twofold, the necessity of human ignorance coupled with the necessity of judging. "How much more circumspect, how much worthier a human who acknowledges misery in that necessity,

who despises it in itself and, faithfully wise, cries to God, *Deliver me from my necessities!*”⁵⁰ The wise man knows his duty and knows what doing it entails.

This kind of necessity, the kind we wish to be delivered from because it need not have been and (we hope) won’t be in the future, is at the very heart of tragedy as described by Terry Eagleton and Stanley Cavell. Sorrow’s knowledge, the understanding that occasions lament, depends on our being able to recognize things would have been better had they been otherwise.⁵¹ Eagleton is right to say, “‘as it happens’ is an essential qualification” for tragedy, since “most tragic episodes which prove inevitable do so for contingent reasons.”⁵² This fits with the grammar of Christian talk about evil. It’s the will of voluntary creatures that brings evil about—a contingent reason if ever there was one. And this is so even if the primordial evil is situated in an ancient or even pretemporal past. Ancient evils develop the stink of inevitability, even as we remain capable of seeing how a particular evil need not have been perpetrated. It’s also the case, though, that now we are, as Augustine noted, slaves of our necessities. Cavell thinks tragedy exists because we’re able to see this sorry state of affairs. As he puts it, “There is nothing and we know there is nothing we can do. Tragedy is meant to make sense of that condition.”⁵³ Cavell, of course, knows there is *something* we can do. We can write and perform tragedy, for one. Tragedy, we might say, is the literary genre most fit to elicit the cry of the psalmist,

⁵⁰ *civ.*, 19.6, *CSEL* 40.2:383: “*Quanto consideratius et homine dignius agnoscit in ista necessitate miseriam eamque odit in se et, si pie sapit, clamat ad Deum: De necessitatibus meis erue me!*”

⁵¹ As Eagleton puts it, commenting on Jaspers, “It is not quite true, then, as Karl Jaspers claims, that ‘when man faces the tragic, he liberates himself from it’. It is rather that the whole liberation is part of the tragedy; but it would be better if the whole action had not been necessary in the first place,” Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 61.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 127.

⁵³ Stanley Cavell, “The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*,” in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 304.

“Deliver me from my necessities!” It does so by laying those necessities bare. It offers them to view and asks us to see them as our own. It calls on us to acknowledge those necessities—something Augustine’s example of the judge demonstrates so clearly—and weep. And if tragedy is meant to make sense of knowing there’s nothing we can do, perhaps weeping is the way we bear it.

Bearing our necessities by acknowledging them as tragic, as something to be delivered from, is the proper Christian response to the disorder of the cosmos. The alternative, given perfect expression by Mammon in Book II of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*,⁵⁴ is to cease to see the evils that confront us and demand something from us as evil at all. In counselling his fellow demons away from repeated war against the LORD, he attempts to assuage their fears about the fallen state, saying,

Our torments also may in length of time
Become our Elements, these piercing Fires
As soft as now severe, our temper chang’d
Into their temper; which must needs remove
The sensible of pain.
(II.274-278)

To become used to our fallen state, to cease to be troubled by it, to no longer be pained by hell, that is the devil’s reasoning. The judge who did not lament the twin necessities of ignorance and duty would be a pitiable figure indeed. So too, Ulysses, who fails to see how he’s implicated in the disorder when he embraces it as a tool for his stratagems—his torments are truly become his elements. And we also, when the disorder and death that permeate the cosmos fail to elicit tears—Milton’s “our temper” pointing out a certain

⁵⁴ John Milton, “Paradise Lost,” in *The Poems of John Milton*, ed. Helen Darbishire (London: Oxford University Press, 1958). All subsequent references to Milton’s *Paradise Lost* will be given in-line using a roman numeral and arabic numeral indicating, respectively, book and line numbers.

hard-heartedness—succumb to callousness that can be nothing but a failure of faith and hope.

Before we move on to Troilus' response, I want to look at one more scene in the creation narrative of the *Silmarillion*. It's one thing to say greater goods come about as the result of evils, but what does something like that look like in the context of creation? After their singing has come to an end, Eru shows the Ainur a vision of what they've wrought with their voices.⁵⁵ One of the Ainur, Ulmo—charged with stewardship of water—sees the effects of Melkor's discordant music on his own singing once both are caught up into Eru's architectonic theme. Ulmo wove the waters of the seas, rivers, and fountains. Melkor's music was bitter cold and blazing hot as he attacked the work of Ulmo and the other Ainur.⁵⁶ His assaults on the waters issue in something neither Ulmo nor Melkor expected. The cold did not destroy Ulmo's work. Instead it produced snow and frost. The heat did not dry up the seas. It brought clouds and mist and the musical patter of rain upon the earth. Creation's beauty is not lessened but increased by Melkor's evils when put to good use by Eru. So much so that Ulmo is moved to say, "Truly, Water is become now fairer than my heart imagined, neither had my secret thought conceived the snowflake, nor in all my music was contained the falling of the rain."⁵⁷ Ulysses' nostalgic response to disorder can't imagine this. The world coming apart at the seams brooks no hope for anything but an unapproachable past. Insofar as we're tempted to Ulysses' response, we've failed to understand how the LORD responds to evil. Until we

⁵⁵ Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 17.

⁵⁶ We might say, to pick up on a theme from the last chapter, that Melkor introduced contraries into the fabric of the created order.

⁵⁷ Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 19.

understand our responsibility to recognize and weep over the ills of the world and at the same time turn our faces in faith and hope to the one who can bend even radical evil toward the accomplishment of his ends, we've failed to grasp the tragedy of the Christian life evident even especially in the orientation of our fallen wills toward the LORD.

4.3 Troilus on Being the Truth

In my reading of Ulysses' "Degree Speech" I mentioned Agamemnon's words, asking his captains why they look so glum at the prospect of ongoing battle with the Trojans. There he mentioned a possible purpose for the constant trials of wars, "To find persistive constancy in men" (1.3.21). At the time, I said the reference to 'constancy' bore particularly upon the two title characters, Troilus and Cressida, who attempt a courtship in the midst of war. The question of whether "persistive constancy" is possible in the fractured world of the play is, as you might imagine, an important one for the pair of lovers. Tony Tanner, in his *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, answers in the negative, "It is not to be found in this play, in which there is more discontinuity and instability of character than anywhere else in Shakespeare."⁵⁸ This does not prevent Troilus from developing a kind of obsession with constancy, which itself threatens to overturn the whole enterprise of love. And in Troilus' relentless pursuit of constancy—from Cressida—he ends up proving himself inconstant. If this play is a tragedy (and it's not clear that it is) this is why.

It's his continual demands for Cressida to "be true" (4.4.74) that bespeak what John Kerrigan calls Troilus' "fetishization of constancy."⁵⁹ It's simply not enough for

⁵⁸ Tony Tanner, *Prefaces to Shakespeare* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 591-592.

⁵⁹ John Kerrigan, *Shakespeare's Binding Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 264.

Cressida to plight her troth; playing with the senses of ‘plight,’ Troilus doubts her capacity “to keep her constancy in plight” (3.2.161). He demands of her persistent, uninflected, even absolute constancy. If Tanner is right, no such thing is available in the world of this play. What I’d like to ask, though, is whether the constancy demanded by Troilus ever makes sense, whether it’s ever a live option, not just in the play but in our world as well. If it’s not, what does the desire for it mean, for Troilus and for us? This brings me to a second sort of response to the disordered cosmos. Troilus illustrates this response, which might be summed up like this: In the seeming absence of order—having no eye for providence—Troilus takes it upon himself to *be* the order of the cosmos. Troilus recognizes this kind of hubris as demonic when he worries over the possibility of Cressida’s temptation, saying, “And sometimes we are devils to ourselves,/ When we will tempt the frailty of our powers,/ Presuming on their changeful potency” (4.4.95-97). He’s unable, however, to see how these words apply to himself, only others. He demands an inhuman constancy from Cressida, removed from all consideration of circumstance. Fear that she will betray him prevents Troilus from receiving the sort of constancy creatures of “changeful potency” are able to offer. He’s again condemned by his own words, “Fears make devils of cherubins, they never see truly” (3.2.70). In the end it’s he who’s found wanting, not for demanding too little but too much from himself and others.

There are a few key moments in the play that illustrate Troilus’ presumption. I’ll highlight these before showing how Troilus, in his characteristic response to the disordered cosmos, bears a resemblance to the Satan of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. This, in turn, opens up a much broader discussion meant to address one of the failures that comes from an inclination to accept the Ulyssean view of the disordered cosmos.

That is, I'll try to make good on the promise to give an account of evil's origin in a rational creature's (Satan's) disordered will. To do so, I'll draw in some theological treatments of Satan's sin and offer my own speculative account relating Troilus' desire to be the truth to the primordial angelic sin.

The first hint of Troilus' desire to transcend human limitation comes during the Trojan council. The occasion makes a matched pair with the Greek war council in which Ulysses delivers his "Degree Speech." Where the Greeks wonder why the war must continue with no hint of resolution, the Trojans debate the cost of the conflict and the worth of Helen. Hector argues at the outset that they ought to let Helen go, having received a promise from Nestor that this will end the hostilities. The cost of continued fighting, he says, is more than Helen is worth (2.2.1-25). To this suggestion, Troilus replies,

Fie, fie, my brother!
Weigh you the worth and honor of a king
So great as our dread father's in a scale
Of common ounces? Will you with compters sum
The past-proportion of his infinite,
And buckle in a waist most fathomless
With spans and inches so diminutive
As fears and reasons? Fie, for godly shame!
(2.2.25-32)

Troilus' response to Hector's claim that the cost in blood is too great "To guard a thing not ours nor worth to us" (2.2.22) changes the register of the claim to value. We're not arguing over Helen's worth, but Priam's and so all Troy's. And that, Troilus declares, simply offers no scale for drawing Hector's conclusion. Priam is "infinite," "fathomless," and all forms of measure are against him "diminutive," especially cowardly "fears and reasons." But Troilus is making demands of his father's legacy and honor that can't be

met. Troilus desires to be without limit. He demands his father be so, too. The casualty in this fight is the ability to offer reasons for your actions. He goes so far as to repudiate the attempt. “Reason and respect,” Troilus says, “Make livers pale and lustihood deject” (2.2.49-50). His brother, Helenus, is a coward, Troilus argues, as much for attempting to reckon his father’s limits as for fear of the enemy’s sword.

Hector insists on his original assessment of Helen, that “she is not worth what she doth cost/ The keeping” (2.2.51-52). Troilus replies with one of the play’s crucial lines, “What’s aught but as ’tis valued?” (2.2.52). Tanner comments, “Troilus is saying, or implying, that there are no intrinsic values, only attributed ones. Coming from a young man who regards himself as exemplifying, as incorporating, an absolute standard of fidelity, this is somewhat inconsistent—but inconsistency prevails in the play.”⁶⁰ It strikes me, though, that this need not be seen as evidence of Troilus’ inconsistency. Instead, in the face of what he sees as the disordering of valuation, Troilus retreats into an entirely subjective mode of judgment. You can see this change clearly by looking back to the play’s first act. After an interchange with Pandarus about his unfulfilled desire for Cressida, Troilus hears an alarum. Here is his reply,

Peace, you ungracious clamors! peace, rude sounds!
Fools on both sides, Helen must needs be fair,
When with your blood you daily paint her thus.
I cannot fight upon this argument;
It is too starv’d a subject for my sword.
(1.1.89-93)

Troilus is unprepared to fight for Helen on the terms given him. She can’t be fair as she must be for so much blood to be spilt on her account. What change occurs between this

⁶⁰ Tanner, *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, 595.

scene and the Trojan council in the second act? He's determined, it seems, to find a subject less starv'd than Helen's fairness. Troilus is looking for something that might account for the whole world being turned upside down.

If we read Troilus's "What's aught but as 'tis valued?" as a genuine and not a rhetorical question, his words seem less inconsistent and more like a drive for consistency, or constancy. We might say he's trying to make sense of the war up to this point. He rejects the "cramm'd reason" (2.2.49) of his brothers that would attempt to determine whether to continue the war based on the worth of Helen herself. If that's the reason we're fighting, war never made sense. At the same time he rails against the council's inconsistency,

If you'll avouch 'twas wisdom Paris went—
As you must needs, for you all cried "Go, go"—
If you'll confess he brought home worthy prize—
As you must needs, for you all clapp'd your hands,
And cried "Inestimable!"—why do you now
The issue of your proper wisdoms rate,
And do a deed that never Fortune did,
Beggard the estimation which you priz'd
Richer than sea and land?
(2.2.84-92)

Priam's youngest son has come to a decision. To make sense of his father's and brothers' decision to support the "fair rape" (2.2.148) of Helen, he cannot believe they ever did so on account of her beauty. He "cannot fight upon this argument" and neither could they, if they're being honest. The fact of the war points to other criteria. To make sense of the lives lost in combat, it must be that value does dwell, contra Hector, "in particular will" (2.2.53). That particular will must make its object not Helen, but the honor of Priam and Troy herself. Even then, he must suppose that value infinite, fathomless, if he's to kill

and die for it. Helen is but “A spur to valiant and magnanimous deeds” (2.2.200) not the source of valuation of the action. Troilus shows himself opposed to the “cramm’d reason” of his brothers that would attempt to decide on the basis of Helen. By contrast, his reason is capacious, reclining on its own estimations of worth coupled with an inflexible commitment to the will’s judgments once made. “There can be no evasion/ To blench from this and to stand firm by honor” (2.2.67-68). Absolute constancy and infinite valuation are his answer to the uncertain, disordered world of *Troilus and Cressida*.

The effects of Troilus’ turn to subjective value, coupled with the demand for unflinching commitment to the will’s determination, is a powerful tool. It offers Troilus a way to make sense of the scale of bloodshed. It’s at once a protective mechanism and a goad to continued heroic action when the objective reasons he’s able to muster surely fail. Neither Priam’s honor nor Helen’s fairness are things of infinite value in themselves. But, as Troilus says, there’s a limit to what reason can accomplish in cases like this. He’s arguing against the straightforward moral calculus of his brother Hector, which would reduce Helen’s situation to a syllogism: “Nature craves/ all dues be rend’red to their owners” (2.2.173-174). The wife’s due should be rendered to the husband, “What nearer debt in all humanity/ Than wife is to the husband?” (2.2.175-176). Ergo, “If Helen then be wife to Sparta’s king,/ As it is known she is, these moral laws,/ of nature and of nations speak aloud/ To have here back return’d” (2.2.183-186). If this is simply true, though, then it never made sense to take Helen in the first place. Troilus, in an attempt to make sense where none seems to lie, overshoots his target and settles on constancy of will. I say he overshoots his target because his way of dealing with the predicament lands

him somewhere else nonsensical (though not inconsistent). The costs, the demands of his solution, we'll see, end up being too high.

In what way are the demands too high? Troilus has settled on a form of valuation rooted in the "particular will" (2.2.53). Hector is right to accuse him of a shaky voluntarism. But we need to look beyond the Trojan council to see all the implications of Troilus' new moral posture. It's in Act III, Scene 2, when Troilus and Cressida meet for the first time in the play, that the limitations of his stance become apparent. After Pandarus promises to bring Cressida to meet him, Troilus soliloquizes, giving us a look at his state of mind. "I am giddy; expectation whirls me round;/ Th' imaginary relish is so sweet/ That it enchants my sense" (3.2.18-20). What he might mean by having his sense enchanted is answered a few lines later, when he explains the fear, "That I shall lose distinction in my joys,/ As doth a battle, when they charge on heaps/ The enemy flying" (3.2.27-29). Is this merely a reference to the fog of war, the difficulty in discriminating friend from foe in pitched combat? I think his reference to battle here might be read as further commentary on Troilus' attempt to save the appearances of the Trojan war by attributing worth to subjective valuation. If so, you can take this comparison between the two as Troilus' recognition that the same method of reckoning value might soon overtake his relationship with Cressida.

The Troilus of the first act of the play, in the same soliloquy in which he explains he cannot wage war on the basis of Helen's fairness alone, also says this of Cressida,

Her bed is India, there she lies, a pearl;
Between our Ilium and where she resides,
Let it be call'd the wild and wand'ring flood
Ourselves the merchant, and this sailing Pandar

Our doubtful hope, our convoy, and our bark.
(1.1.100-104)

Cressida is a pearl, then, but still stands apart from Troilus. Her uncle, Pandarus, is the go-between. Troilus sees the commercial quality of this transaction and bemoans it. Yet looking forward again to the Trojan council we find similar words on the lips of Troilus,

Is she worth keeping? Why, she is a pearl,
Whose price hath launch'd above a thousand ships,
And turn'd crown'd kings to merchants.
(2.2.81-83)

There's a lot going on here, with references to both to Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and the Gospel of Matthew in addition to the callback to Troilus' words in Act I. If the reference to merchants and pearls from the first act did not spur the memory of Matthew 13, where the merchant finds "one pearl of great value" (Mt 13:46), these lines from Act II leave the reader with little doubt. But is Troilus speaking of Helen or Cressida? The *misquotation* of Marlowe, having "launch'd *above* a thousand ships" makes the referent doubtful.⁶¹ But the mention of the pearl in the lines from both Act I and Act II inclines me toward imagining Troilus' mind wandering toward Cressida even as he argues in defense of Helen. Is she worth keeping? he wonders. And what do we learn from this conjunction of allusions? We're able to see the same sort of shift in valuation I described above in Troilus' attempts to make sense of the Trojan War. Cressida, as the pearl, is identified with the "kingdom of heaven" (Mt 13:45). She's imputed with an infinite value by Troilus. A valuation that still rises and falls on his "particular will."

⁶¹ Faustus' lines from Marlowe's play run, "Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships/ And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?" (Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* (London: Routledge, 1965), 18.99-100.).

In both cases—his love for Cressida and his dedication to ongoing war over Helen—Troilus has laid a trap for himself. In retreating from the moral calculus of his fellow Trojan nobles, he's landed in a place where no distinctions are possible. He fears, in Act III, Scene 2, "That I shall lose distinction in my joys" (3.2.27), but the truth is he's already lost the ability to make them. The switch to purely subjective valuation, an absolute determination, insulated by force of will from any external considerations, makes any such distinction impossible. This becomes increasingly evident in his interchanges with Cressida in this scene. Troilus seems to see this impossibility, and recognize the horror of it, when he says, "This is the monstrosity in love, lady, that the will is infinite and the execution confin'd, that the desire is boundless and the act a slave to limit" (3.2.81-83). Here again, Troilus casts the terms of discussion as limitless. Cressida, perhaps a bit taken aback, replies with a bawdy joke (3.2.84-89). Uncowed (perhaps also oblivious), Troilus answers her in earnest, ending with the assurance that "what truth can speak truest not truer than Troilus" (3.2.97-98). This is Troilus' repeated claim. All of Cressida's worries and uncertainties, which seem genuine enough in the world of the play, are dismissed. She the daughter of a traitor in the midst of an endless war, he the son of the king, whom her father has betrayed. What stability can truly be had? She doubts even herself (cf. 3.2.147-151). But then comes Troilus' insistence, "I am as true as truth's simplicity" (3.2.169). Not only that, but "True swains in love shall in the world to come/ Approve their truth by Troilus" (3.2.173-174). At this point, a brazen sequence follows. Troilus rehearses the ordered relations of creatures—and their witness to the nature of truth—in the natural world. Those swains who find their truth in comparison to Troilus' would discover,

When their rhymes,
Full of protest, of oath and big compare,
Wants similes, truth tir'd with iteration,
As true as steel, as plantage to the moon,
As sun to day, as turtle to her mate,
As iron to adamant, as earth to th' centre,
Yet after all comparisons of truth
(As truth's authentic author to be cited)
'As true as Troilus' shall crown up the verse,
And sanctify the numbers.
(3.2.174-183)

This claim is nothing short of astonishing in its forthrightness. Coupled with the two preceding references to Troilus' truthfulness, or rather, Troilus *as* truth, he's saying a whole lot more than, "Sure, I'll be true to you, Cressida." Troilus, confronted by cosmic disorder, has taken it upon himself to *be* the truth.

It's in these verses that Troilus makes explicit what up to now was only implicit in his attempts to make sense of the war and of his own limitless love for Cressida. He judges himself "truth's authentic author" whose infinite will is the yardstick against which all truth is not only measured, but even sanctified! Putting up so radical a claim, Troilus has issued a direct challenge to the LORD, who is, in fact, invoked in the preceding scene by a servant in a comical exchange with Pandarus (3.1.5, 8). Shakespeare's reminder, perhaps, that though the play's setting lies in pagan antiquity, its context remains a squarely Christian one. Troilus' attempts to make sense of his world, a world wrecked by war, by the hunt for glory premised on a confrontation in which "All the argument is a whore and a cuckold" (2.3.72-73) results in total retreat into the self. His refusals are twofold. Troilus will not countenance the possibility that the war is what Thersites recognizes it to be. There must be more, he thinks, to all this bloodshed. In doing so, he also refuses his human limits. The only way to make sense of things, as far

as Troilus is concerned, is to locate the source of value in his own will, ascribing to himself the role of the LORD who is the truth (Jn 14:6). In this he shares Ulysses' inability to see (or imagine) an order that could encompass tragedy and redeem it. But even Ulysses' response didn't sway into this territory. He attempted to correct disorder, yes, but never to *be* the order of the world. Troilus is guilty not just of misprision but of pride. It's this difference that makes Troilus' response diabolical.

4.4 How Lucifer Became Satan

John Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost* is a lot like Shakespeare's Troilus. One of the most pronounced similarities is found in his response—when faced with the (apparent) disorder of the cosmos—to take the task of ordering upon himself. In Milton, it's during the angel Raphael's recounting to Adam Lucifer's rebellion that this similarity comes into focus. In Book V of *Paradise Lost* Raphael is sent by the LORD to warn Adam and Eve of their danger. By this point in the poem Satan has made his way from hell through Chaos, arrived at Earth, and penetrated its angelic defenses. He's done all this in the hope the fallen angels might more successfully “wage by force or guile eternal Warr” (I.121).⁶² In the first book, the fallen Satan sees that the LORD in his providence plans to bring about good from the evil of the angels' turn, explaining,

Our labour must be to pervert that end,
And out of good still find means of evil;
Which oft times may succeed, so as perhaps
Shall grieve him, if I fail not, and disturb
His inmost counsels from their destined aim.
(I.164-168)

⁶² From this point forward all references to Milton, “*Paradise Lost*.” will be given in line.

And so already in Book I Satan shows that he misapprehends the LORD, the role his providence plays and how, as in Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*, even great evils are only ever permitted by the LORD to bring about greater goods. There's no getting behind the LORD's will to "disturb/ His inmost counsels from their destined aim." But what of the story of Lucifer in Book V, still in heaven, recruiting angels to his cause? While we may be able to see how a fallen angel could be mistaken about the nature and scope of the LORD's providence, it makes much less sense to say so before the fall, for reasons I'll get into shortly. Attending, then, to Raphael's account of the angelic fall, and so to the origin of Lucifer's rebellion on offer in Milton, might yet help us to see how such a thing is even possible.

Raphael begins by explaining that what he has to tell Adam can't be told straightforwardly, and so "what surmounts the reach/ Of human sense, I shall delineate so,/ By likening spiritual to corporeal forms,/ As may express them best" (V.571-574). I take this as Milton's own apology for the treatment that follows. In the next few lines, Raphael (Milton?) wonders whether "Earth/ Be but the shadow of Heav'n, and things therein/ Each to other like, more than on Earth is thought?" (V.574-576). With this caveat and its tentative recision in place, Raphael presses on with his tale. All the heavenly host is arrayed before the LORD, when God the Father makes this proclamation:

Hear all ye Angels, Progenie of Light,
Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Vertues, Powers,
Hear my Decree, which unrevok't shall stand.
This day I have begot whom I declare
My onely Son, and on this holy Hill
Him have anointed, whom ye now behold
At my right hand; your Head I him appoint;
And by my Self have sworn to him shall bow

All knees in Heav'n, and shall confess him Lord
(V.600-608)

Critical for what follows is establishing the subject of this decree. That is, is the “onely Son” referred to in this passage Jesus Christ, the incarnate LORD? There are good reasons to think so. An alternative approach might suppose that the Father here issues a decree about the Son in his divine nature only, the *Logos asarkos*. There’s much to recommend this view. Raphael has just told Adam the events he’s recounting took place when, “As yet this World was not, and *Chaos wilde/ Reignd* where these Heav’ns now rowl, where Earth now rests/ Upon her Center pois’d” (V.577-579). But this is only straightforwardly true if we’re dealing with events occurring in the order of time. Remember, Raphael said he’d have to make spiritual things intelligible in terms corporeal. He mentions the “Time” of heaven, but also says it’s time “in Eternitie” (V.580), which argues for thinking of it as something less pellucid than the sequential order of time here below. This, in turn, argues for Raphael trying to express something to Adam in terms he will understand.

The way I prefer to read this text takes the “onely Son” to be Jesus Christ, ascended to his heavenly throne “in Eternitie.” The first clue supporting this reading comes in the description of the Son having been anointed “on this holy Hill” (V.604-605). The reference to the Son being the LORD’s anointed, his Christ, the Messiah, seems a clear reference to the incarnate Son, Jesus. Jesus, not the fleshless Son in his divinity alone, is the Christ. The “holy Hill” could then be one of two places. It’s could be Golgotha, the place of Jesus’ death on the cross. Golgotha is a good candidate because it’s there Jesus fulfills his mission as the LORD’s anointed. Another possibility, which I

favor, is to take the holy hill to be Mount Tabor. This is a better candidate because it's on Tabor that time and eternity seem to touch for just a moment in the transfiguration. Peter, John, and James who accompanied Jesus, "saw his glory" (Lk 9:32, cf. Mt 17:2, Mk 9:3) on that hill. There, too, Moses and Elijah converse with Jesus (Lk 9:30-31, cf. Mt 17:3, Mk 9:4). From where? we might ask. Finally, here we also have a proclamation of the Father affirming, in Luke, that Jesus is his Son, the chosen one (Lk 9:35), and in Matthew and Mark, that Jesus is the Father's beloved Son (Mt 17:5, Mk 9:7). This forms a parallel to the Father's proclamation to the angels in heaven as described by Milton. The Transfiguration is a moment in the narrative of Jesus' life that reveals his divinity to some of his followers. But the way this is done, alongside two of the LORD's greatest prophets, long dead, point to this occurring in a time outside of time. Likewise, the descent of a cloud, with echoes of the events upon Mount Sinai, point to a coincidence of the order of time and the order of eternity.

The second bit of evidence can be found when the Father locates the Son "At my right hand" (V.606). This again seems to be an explicit reference to Jesus. In the New Testament, the one seated at the LORD's right hand is always the resurrected and ascended Jesus. The New Testament writings themselves are citing Psalm 110, "The LORD says to my lord: 'Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool'" (Ps 110:1).⁶³ Apart from the five direct quotations of Psalm 110 in the New Testament, this locution identifying Jesus as the one "at the right hand of God" occurs at least fourteen

⁶³ This verse appears as a quotation of the Psalm in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and again in Acts and Hebrews (Mt 22:44, Mk 12:36, Lk, 20:42, Acts 2:34, and Heb 1:13).

times.⁶⁴ It's the enfleshed LORD whom Stephen sees "standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56) when the heavens open up before his martyrdom. And it's at God's right hand that Jesus Christ "sat down" after he "had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins" (Heb 10:12). The reference, then, to the Son being at the LORD's right hand, should immediately incline our thoughts toward the incarnation.

I'll treat the third and fourth pieces of evidence together. Saying the Son has been appointed "Head" is again a reference to Jesus Christ, who, as Paul says, "is the head of the body, the church" (Col 1:18, cf. Eph 1:22, 5:23). Add to that Milton's reference to Philippians 2 with the Father's declaration that "to him shall bow/ All knees in Heav'n, and shall confess him Lord" (V.607-608). In Paul's letter to the Philippians, it's precisely to Jesus that knees "in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Phil 2:10), and it's Jesus Christ whom every tongue will confess is Lord (Phil 2:11). Milton, then, clearly wants to draw our attention not just to the second person of the Trinity in his divinity, but to the second person of the Trinity who is the God-man, the Word-flesh. With this in mind, I have two things to do. First, I need to show how this emphasis on the incarnate LORD colors our reading of Lucifer's rebellion recounted in Book V of *Paradise Lost*. And second, I need to situate these reflections on angelic rebellion—rebellion precisely against the person of Jesus Christ—in the broader theological tradition. As it turns out, although it's a minority report, Milton is inheriting a long theological line in his treatment of Lucifer's rejection of Christ.

⁶⁴ Mt 26:64; Mk 14:62, 16:19; Lk 22:69; Acts 2:33, 5:31, 7:55-56; Rm 8:34; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 8:1, 10:12, 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22.

Satan—we need to call him Satan now, Milton says (V.658)—hears the proclamation of God the Father to his great dismay. Like Thomas Aquinas, Milton thinks it likely that Lucifer was made at the pinnacle of the created order, “hee of the first,/ If not the first Arch-Angel, great in Power,/ In favour and præeminence” (V.659-661). The light-bearer turned deceiver envies the Son of God (V.662). It’s an envy born of pride, says Milton (V.665). He “could not bear” the sight of the Son elevated as he was (V.664). Raphael says Satan “thought himself impaired” (V.665) by the Son’s advancement. One of the payoffs of reading the subject of the Father’s speech as Jesus and not the discarnate Word is the sense it makes of these verses. Lucifer, situated at the pinnacle of the created order, sees himself subordinated to another and is envious. Now this other, were he the second person of the Trinity considered in his divinity apart from his humanity, would simply not be a candidate for this kind of envy. Lucifer knew the LORD as only an angel can, immediately and intuitively. The LORD’s triunity is one of the things he would apprehend in this manner. That the second person of the triune LORD should be considered before him in honor can hardly have been a matter displeasing to even the highest angel. That is, there’s no reason to think he would resent the Son’s divinity any more than he would resent the Father’s or the Holy Spirit’s.⁶⁵ What is it about the Son that caused Satan to think himself impaired?

The text of *Paradise Lost* illumines Satan’s rebellion by pointing precisely to the enfleshment of the Son—his assumption of a creaturely nature and that nature’s

⁶⁵ The refusal of the LORD as creator and sustainer of all creation is, of course, a perfectly respectable line of speculation about Satan’s rebellion against the LORD. The line I’m taking here is not meant to discount those explanations, simply to offer the one I find the most compelling, with a respectable lineage of its own.

elevation—as its precipitating cause. Satan awakens his sleeping companion, “his next subordinate” (V.671) in heaven, and so it seems the one named in hell as “One next himself in power, and next in crime” (I.79), the demon Bëelzebub (I.81). To him Satan complains of the LORD’s “new laws” (V.679) instituted during God the Father’s proclamation. But the most interesting lines come at the close of his discourse. Satan has his second go forth to assemble those under his command:

The Quarters of the North, there to prepare
Fit entertainment to receive our King
The great *Messiah*, and his new commands,
Who speedily through all the Hierarchies
Intends to pass triumphant, and give Laws.
(V.689-693)

Again, there’s an explicit reference to the Messiah, but even more determinatively we find Satan’s complaint that the Messiah intends to pass “speedily through all Hierarchies.” This is a complaint that could only be addressed to the Son possessed of both a divine and creaturely nature, which is to say Jesus Christ. The principal difficulty for Satan is the elevation of a human creature, the created nature of Jesus Christ, above all other created natures. Humans, made of both corporeal and incorporeal elements, both flesh and spirit, stand below angels by nature. By grace, however, human nature is elevated “through all the Hierarchies” and enthroned with glory above even the highest angel.

The letter to the Hebrews says of Jesus Christ: “When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs” (Heb 1:3-4). This, I’ve shown, motivates Satan’s envy in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Seeing a created

nature placed above his own to “give Laws” (V.693) seems unbearable to him. He “thought himself impaired” (V.665). It’s unendurability will incline him to the diabolical sin, and I’ll attend to this when we begin to situate this theologoumenon within the tradition. Right now, I want to point out how Milton’s Satan begins to resemble Shakespeare’s Troilus in his response to the perceived disorder of the cosmos. It’s worth noting that the concept of ‘degree’ features heavily in this section of *Paradise Lost*. In setting the stage for Satan’s council in the North of heaven, Raphael says of him, “great indeed/ His name, and high was his degree in Heav’n” (V.706-707). Satan himself then asks, addressing the host he’s gathered to rebel against the LORD,

Will ye submit your necks, and chuse to bend
The supple knee? ye will not, if I trust
To know ye right, or if ye know your selves
Natives and Sons of Heav’n possest before
By none, and if not equall all, yet free,
Equally free; for Orders and Degrees
Jarr not with liberty, but well consist.
(V.787-793)

Satan considers degree itself good, yet successfully convinces his companion angels that to presume to rule over those “who without law/ Erre not” (V.798-799) is a grave violation of their freedom. Satan’s deception is successful in the case of all but Abdiel, who again affirms the LORD created all things “in thir bright degrees” (V.838), through his Word. Satan is aware, and embraces the idea, of hierarchical ordering by degree. He sees, however, the elevation of a created nature above his own as a fundamental overturning of the order of things. Much like Troilus it’s what he perceives as an overvaluation of a particular person—in Satan’s case Jesus Christ and in Troilus’ case Helen—that precipitates a crisis.

Abdiel, the lone faithful holdout of Satan's host, sees Satan's mistake with respect to degree, and attempts to offer a correction. Far from "impaired" (V.665), Satan should understand that in making all things and marking them out by degree the LORD,

Crownd them with Glory, and to their Glory nam'd
Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Vertues, Powers,
Essential Powers, nor by his Reign obscur'd,
But more illustrious made, since hee the Head
One of our number thus reduc't becomes,
His Laws our Laws, all honour to him done
Returns our own.
(V.839-845)

The rule of the LORD, far from infringing on created freedom, glorifies it, with the honor redounding to him serving only to elevate the creature who submits to it. Abdiel also returns here to the heart of the matter, the incarnation, when he refers to "hee the Head" who "One of our number thus reduc't becomes." It's the honor done to him, the Head who has become one of our number, a creature, that is sure to magnify the glory of the angels. It's Satan's rejection of the incarnate Word against which Abdiel inveighs.

Satan's rejection of the incarnate Word comes as the result of what seems to him a disturbance of the created order. But what he thinks of as a disordering of the hierarchy of creation is, if we follow Abdiel, a revelation of creation's proper order. It is "more illustrious made" (V.842) by the incarnation and ascension into heaven of the God-man Jesus. In this there's a dissimilarity between Troilus and Satan. While the epistemic condition of the two characters follows a similar pattern—it seems wrong to each that one person be elevated above what's naturally called for—in the order of being the situation is not the same. Troilus is a sympathetic figure insofar as we can recognize the psychic wound done to him by the war when he says, "I cannot fight upon this argument"

(1.1.92). There's a real difficulty for him to overcome. It's reasonable to wonder—even if his response is wrong—whether Helen's life is worth the blood daily spilt on her behalf. Satan's situation, on the other hand, is much less ambiguous. He's confronted with a direct command from God the Father that he ought to bend the knee to the incarnate Son. But he will not. Satan is wrong to see the LORD's command as a disordering of the cosmos, while there's good reason to think Troilus perceives the state of affairs in Troy rightly.

Satan's attempt to be the LORD is on full display in his response to Abdiel's admonition. Instead of receiving his correction on the proper ordering and making of the cosmos through the Word, Satan replies with the voice of the skeptic, “who saw/ When this creation was? rememberst thou/ Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?” (V.856-858). He demonstrates his doubts about the LORD's trustworthiness and his own nature as a creature. Then he continues, with a more extravagant claim,

We know no time when we were not as now;
Know none before us, self-begot, self-rais'd
By our own quick'ning power, when fatal course
Had circl'd his full Orbe, the birth mature
Of this our native Heav'n, Ethereal Sons.
(V.859-863)

Not knowing when or how he was created—and with the revelation of Jesus' elevation no longer trusting in the proper ordering of the cosmos by the LORD—he appropriates the role of creator to himself. Satan refuses to be the handiwork of another. Where Troilus claimed to be the truth, here Satan claims to be the creator. And he doesn't stop there. He sends Abdiel to act as messenger “to th' anointed King” (V.870), Christ himself, to tell him,

Our puissance is our own, our own right hand
Shall teach us highest deeds, by proof to try
Who is our equal: then thou shalt behold
Whether by supplication we intend
Address, and to begirt th' Almighty Throne
Beseeching or besieging.
(V.864-869)

Satan counts on his own strength to determine what is right, to “teach us highest deeds.” It’s clear he’ll no longer evaluate his actions against any standard but his own might. In doing so he issues a threat. This “self-begot” angel will confront the LORD himself with arms.

4.5 Situating Milton’s Satan

Milton’s Satan and Shakespeare’s Troilus attempt usurpations. Each takes a perceived disorder as license, an occasion for reordering. In this way, each character is trying to remake the cosmos around himself, seeking to make himself the *regula* or *ratio* of the created order. It’s particularly telling in Milton’s narrative that this rebellion originates in a confrontation with the one who is the *ratio* of the cosmos. Where does this situate Milton’s Satan in the broader theological tradition? Is this portrait simply fanciful? I’ll answer this by looking to Jonathan Edwards, Matthias Scheeben, and Francisco Suarez. To my knowledge, the Church’s magisterium has not weighed in determinatively on the precipitating cause of the angelic fall, other than to say it’s accomplished voluntarily by the angels. For this reason, it is a properly speculative matter. With the help of these thinkers, I will place Milton’s account of the angels’ fall within the theological tradition. In doing so, I’ll also be looking for the roots of the doctrine and examining some of its entailments.

Apart from the occurrence in Milton, I first encountered the idea that Satan's fall was precipitated by his knowledge of the incarnation in the writings of Jonathan Edwards. He has a number of entries in his *Miscellanies* on the fall of the angels. In a section called "Devils" Edwards glosses the angelic fall this way:

It seems to me probable that the temptation of the angels that occasioned their rebellion was that when God was about to create man, or had first created him, God declared his decree to the angels that one of that human nature should be his Son, his best beloved, his greatest favorite, and should be united to his eternal Son, and that he should be their head and king; that they should be given to him and should worship him and be his servants, attendants and ministers. And God, having thus declared his great love to the race of mankind, gave the angels the charge of them as ministering spirits to men. ¶Satan, or Lucifer, or Beelzebub, being the archangel, one of the highest of the angels, could not bear it, thought it below him and a great debasing of him; so he conceived rebellion against the Almighty and drew away a vast company of the heavenly hosts with him.⁶⁶

Like Thomas and Milton, Edwards is inclined to place Lucifer at the apex of the created order. In another place Edwards says, commenting on Isaiah 14:12, "This angel, before his fall, was the chief of all the angels, of greatest natural capacity, strength, and wisdom, and highest in honor and dignity, the brightest of all those stars of heaven, as is signified by what is said of him under that type of the devil, the king of Babylon."⁶⁷ We find in Edwards, too, an affirmation of the position taken in the last chapter. The angels minister to the created order to bring about the LORD's providential plan. Edwards goes so far as to say that Lucifer, in his high estate, is given a certain dominion over the whole of

⁶⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *The "Miscellanies": (Entry Nos. A-Z, Aa-Zz, 1-500)*, Works of Jonathan Edwards Online (Yale University: Jonathan Edwards Center, 2008), no. 320, pp. 401-402.

⁶⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *The "Miscellanies": 833-1152*, Works of Jonathan Edwards Online (Yale University: Jonathan Edwards Center, 2008), no. 936, pp. 190-191.

creation.⁶⁸ In this, his position resembles that of Nyssen, who likewise took Satan to have had governance over the world prior to his fall.⁶⁹

In his *Die Mysterien des Christenthums*, Matthias Scheeben calls this idea, that the LORD revealed the incarnation of his Son to the angels, “a pretty commonly taught opinion.”⁷⁰ He does not cite any sources, but Scheeben does say that the opinion is something of an entailment of the teaching of “several Fathers” who “posit the sin of the angels in the envy of man.”⁷¹ This comment turned my attention back to Gregory of Nyssa’s *Oratio catechetica*, where the devil’s envy is a critical theme. To summarize Gregory’s view, the angel given power over the earth grows envious upon witnessing the creation of humans and the LORD’s gift of his own image and likeness. The angel had been given the task of governing the world, and yet one beneath him was honored with a dignity surpassing even his own.⁷² But, Scheeben argues, there’s nothing in humanity itself—even the dignity of the image and likeness of the LORD—that could incite the envy of the highest angel. The only thing that could produce such envy from Lucifer would be the knowledge “that a member of the human race was destined to the dignity of the Son of God and so to be head and king of the angel.”⁷³ The revelation of the LORD’s hypostatic union with human nature proves too much to bear for Lucifer, the highest of

⁶⁸ Ibid., no. 936, p. 191.

⁶⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Catechetical Oration of St. Gregory of Nyssa*, trans. J. H. Srawley, Early Church Classics (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1917), §6, pp. 40-41. PG 45, col. 28.

⁷⁰ Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *Die Mysterien Des Christenthums: Wesen, Bedeutung Und Zusammenhang Derselben Nach Der in Ihrem Übernatürlichen Charakter Gegebenen Perspective* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1865), §X.42, p. 254: “Nach einer ziemlich allgemein gelehrten Meinung hatten die Engel vor ihrem Falle die Offenbarung der zukünftigen Menschwerdung des Sohnes Gottes gehabt”.

⁷¹ Ibid., §X.42, p. 255: “Nur in diesem Sinne läßt es sich erklären, wenn einige Väter die Sünde des Engels in den Neid gegen den Menschen setzen.”

⁷² Gregory of Nyssa, *The Catechetical Oration of St. Gregory of Nyssa*, §6, pp. 40-41. PG 45, col. 28.

⁷³ Scheeben, *Die Mysterien*, §X.42, p. 255: “wenn nicht den, daß ein Glied seines Geschlechtes zur Würde des Sohnes Gottes, und damit zum haupte und könige der Engel ausersehen war.”

the angels, and those who follow him. Scheeben recognizes the revelation as “a great humiliation.”⁷⁴ The angels must acknowledge the source of the grace they’ve received in a nature below their own. As he says, they must come to terms with the LORD establishing his “*Gnadenstrol*” in Jesus of Nazareth.⁷⁵

In this context perhaps the best way to English ‘*Gnadenstrol*’ would be “throne of His grace.”⁷⁶ But this fails to capture the Old Testament allusion to the “mercy seat” atop the Ark of the Covenant as described in Exodus 25. ‘*Gnadenstrol*’ or ‘*Gnadenstuhl*’ are German words used to translate the Hebrew in this passage from Scripture. And in the directions the LORD gives Moses for building the Ark, the LORD includes the specification for two golden cherubim, angels, whose wings are to overshadow the mercy seat (Ex 25:19-20). The instructions include the orientation of the angels and their faces. One on each side of the mercy seat, with wings outstretched toward the middle, “their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be” (Ex 25:20). This precision, the repeated command concerning the direction of the angels’ faces shouldn’t be overlooked, especially given Scheeben’s comments about the *Gnadenstrol* the LORD makes for himself in Jesus. The golden, shining faces of the angels are to be turned not toward themselves but toward that place, “from between the two cherubim upon the ark of the testimony,” where, the LORD says, “I will speak with you” (Ex 25:22). To be an angel is to be turned toward the *Gnadenstrol* of the LORD, to see him, as the source of angelic radiance.

⁷⁴ Ibid., §X.42, p. 254: “*eine große Demüthigung.*”

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ This is, in fact, how it’s Englished in Cyril Vollert’s translation, Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *The Mysteries of Christianity*, trans. Cyril Vollert S.J. (New York: Herder & Herder, 1946), 269.

But some of the angels are envious that the LORD has condescended so far to establish his *Gnadensthron* in human nature, for singling it out in Jesus Christ, “as the center of the universe.”⁷⁷ For Scheeben, this solves the quandary of diabolical envy’s source. And, he argues, the solution is intimately linked to the devil’s pride.⁷⁸ Like Milton’s Lucifer, Scheeben’s glories in his own goodness and rebels against what he takes to be an inordinate elevation of another created nature above his own. Scheeben’s treatment of it, however, does more than this. His account foregrounds the malevolence of the rebel angels. On this view, the rebellion is occasioned precisely by the revelation of the LORD’s love for his creatures exemplified by the incarnation.⁷⁹ Sin, then, as a response to the love of the LORD “takes on...a new, more terrible, more horrific character of malice.”⁸⁰ This primordial hatred of Jesus Christ also accounts for the devil’s relentless pursuit of humanity and in particular his continued persecution of the Church. Satan’s hatred of the Son of God extends also to those who belong to Jesus as members of his body.⁸¹

There’s a hint of a premodern source for this tradition in Scheeben’s reference to the Fathers. Nyssen serves as a model for this kind of thinking about the *invidia diaboli*, with Scheeben offering the revelation of the incarnation to the angels as a logical

⁷⁷ Scheeben, *Die Mysterien*, §X.42, p. 254: “Ja sie sollten Gott dafür danken, das er gerade mit der Menschheit sich so innig vereinigt, in ihr die Sonne der Gnade niedergelegt, sie zum Mittelpunkte des Universums ausersehen hatte.”

⁷⁸ Ibid., §X.42, p. 255.

⁷⁹ Ibid., §X.42, pp. 255-256.

⁸⁰ Ibid., §X.42, p. 256: “dann gewinnt auch ihre Sünde einen neuen, noch furchtbarern, grauenvollern Charakter der Bosheit.”

⁸¹ Ibid.: “Er verfolgt den Menschen nicht bloß deßhalb, weil derselbe die Herrlichkeit zu erlangen bestimmt ist, welche er selbst verloren, sondern noch ungleich mehr, weil der Mensch ein Glied am Leibe des Sohnes Gottes ist.”

extension of this Patristic position.⁸² For our purposes, Scheeben's and Milton's speculations lend a certain specificity to the devil's envy. If, as I've said, death enters the world *ex quo creatus est* as the result of angelic sin, then giving an account of what might occasion that envy is essential. That's because one way to read the text from Wisdom in its immediate context is to think of it as a description of an Edenic scene. "God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity" (Wis 2:23) might refer to the creation of Adam and Eve. The Vulgate is even more explicit in its connection to Genesis, "God created the human imperishable and according to his image and likeness he made him" (Wis 2:23 Vulg).⁸³ The following verse, "through the devil's envy death entered the world" (Wis 2:24), might just be seen as a gloss on Genesis 3, where death comes to Adam and Eve through the deception of the devil. The idea that it's the LORD's revelation of the incarnation to the angels in the beginning that precipitates the angelic fall allows something more in line with the Augustinian reading of Genesis 1. In that account, remember, all the days of the hexaëmeron are the result of the cyclical motion of the angelic intellect in the one day of the LORD's creative act. If in the very same moment of their creation the end of humanity and of all creation is revealed to them in the person of Jesus Christ, then Wisdom 2:23-24 can support the reading offered by both Milton and Scheeben. As Scheeben notes, that the source of the devil's envy could

⁸² This theme of the *invidia diaboli*, also occurs, as Francisco Suarez notes, in the works of Irenaeus of Lyons, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Basil the Great. cf. Francisco Suarez S.J., "Tractatus de angelis," in *Commentarii Et Disputationes in Primam Partem D. Thomae*, Opera Omnia (Paris: Vivès, 1856), 7.13.16, p. 886.

⁸³ Wis 2:23 Vulg: "*Deus creavit hominem inextiminabilem et ad imaginem suae similitudinis fecit illum.*"

lie in the LORD's revelation of himself as the God-man to his heavenly host while purely speculative also "has a great intrinsic probability."⁸⁴

Scheeben's comment, calling this a commonly taught theological opinion about the fall of the angels, sent me searching for material deeper in the tradition. I found it while reading Serge-Thomas Bonino's *Les anges et les démons*, a learned volume with an extensive bibliographic range.⁸⁵ In it Bonino refers to Francisco Suarez' *Tractatus de angelis* to provide an example of a thinker who attributes the origins of Satan's envy to the revelation of the hypostatic union. Suarez' position, as Bonino says, "gives a christological connotation to the fall of Satan."⁸⁶ A faithful Thomist, Bonino prickles a bit at the suggestion that the "angels *in via*" might have this knowledge of the incarnation, tied as it is (in Thomas' system) to the sin of Adam.⁸⁷

As it happens, in addition to Bonino, Jonathan Edwards also drew upon Suarez for his thoughts on the angelic fall. Edwards and Suarez agree on the christological dimension of angelic sin. Edwards goes as far to call Suarez "the best of the Schoolmen"⁸⁸ in another of his entries about the fall of the angels. In that entry, he recapitulates the position of his earlier *Miscellanies*. This time he does so with direct reference to Suarez' position. Unlike Bonino, Edwards does not mention the *Tractatus de angelis* by name, but he's likely referring to the same text. So, while it's altogether

⁸⁴ Scheeben, *Die Mysterien*, §X.42, 258: "Indeß geben wir diese ganze Theorie über den Ursprung und die Geschichte der Sünde nur als das, was sie ist, als eine achtungswerthe theologische Meinung, die sich nicht stringent aus der Offenbarung be gründen läßt, aber eine große innere Wahrscheinlichkeit besitzt."

⁸⁵ Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P., *Les Anges Et Les Démons: Quatorze Leçons De Théologie*, Bibliothèque De La Revue Thomiste (Paris: Éditions Parole et Silence, 2007).

⁸⁶ Ibid., 207: "Certains pensent même qu'il a envié tout spécialement à l'homme la grâce insigne de l'union hypostatique, ce qui donne à la chute de Satan une connotation christologique."

⁸⁷ Ibid.: "mais on peut hésiter, dans une perspective thomiste où l'Incarnation est liée au péché adamique, à reconnaître aux anges *in via* une connaissance du mystère de l'Incarnation rédemptrice."

⁸⁸ Edwards, "Miscellanies": 833-1152, no. 1261, p. 198.

probable Edwards read Milton,⁸⁹ who might be thought the source Edwards' demonology, it's certain he's heard the position from a scholastic theologian he holds in high regard.

Suarez addresses the question at hand in Book VII of his work on the angels in a chapter entitled, "Whether Lucifer's sin was about inordinately desiring the excellence of the hypostatic union for his nature."⁹⁰ There Suarez first establishes the possibility of Lucifer sinning in this way. He argues that it is possible, but only if the LORD were to reveal the hypostatic union to him.⁹¹ Following that, Suarez shows that desiring the hypostatic union for himself is not actually in opposition to Lucifer's natural desires as an angel. In desiring the hypostatic union, he's after a "mode of existing" that's "better by a long shot [than his own] and brings with it many perfections."⁹² There is, he goes on to say, nothing intrinsically sinful about desiring the hypostatic union. Intimate union with the LORD is eminently desirable, "the most lovable thing in itself."⁹³ So if he can desire it, the desire is not contrary to his nature, and it's not sinful to want it for himself, what can Lucifer's sin be?

⁸⁹ *Paradise Lost* appears twice in Jonathan Edwards, *Catalogues of Books*, vol. 26, The Works of Jonathan Edwards (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), nos. 20, 225. As Peter Theusen says in his introduction to the *Catalogues*, "Whether he [Edwards] owned Milton's epic himself is not certain, but by the end of Edwards' life, Milton had become part of what one scholar has called a 'canon of the religious sublime'" (ibid., pp. 105-105, quoting David Shields).

⁹⁰ Suarez S.J., "Tractatus de angelis," 880. My citations of Suarez' text will be by book, chapter, and section number (e.g., 7.13.1, for the first section of this question about whether Lucifer's sin is the result of his desire for the hypostatic union).

⁹¹ Ibid., 7.13.1, pp. 880-881: "*quia nec peccari potest sine cognitione, nec cognitio talis mysterii imo fortasse nec illius apprehensio sine aliqua revaluatione haberi potest.*"

⁹² Ibid., 7.13.2, p. 881: "*Nec refert, quod non maneret eadem persona, quia per hoc solum variaretur in me quidem modus existendi meae naturae, et loco illius daretur modus unionis cum divina persona, qui longe excellentior est, et secum quam plures perfectiones affert.*"

⁹³ Ibid., 7.13.3, p. 881: "*Hinc vero dixerunt alii, licet potuerit Angelus illud bonum sibi appetere, non tamen in eo peccare, quia ille appetitus non esset malus, neque peccatum, quia est de bono honestissimo, et maxime amabile propter seipsum.*"

Lucifer's sin, according to Suarez, lies in desiring the right thing for the wrong reason. Suarez gives some examples of bad reasons for an angel to desire the hypostatic union for himself. Lucifer might, for instance, desire it in order to dominate others or out of contempt for creatures less perfect than himself or by desiring it against a contrary ordinance of the LORD.⁹⁴ With each of these cases, Suarez shows how Lucifer might sin through inordinate desire. His desire is marked out as disordered in each case due to the sin of pride—*superbia*.⁹⁵ But following Thomas Aquinas, Suarez does not want to attribute erroneous judgment to the angels.⁹⁶ And so, he says, “To sin with this kind of pride was not by some necessary error of judgment or speculatively false, but an imprudent practical judgment, or it was not sufficiently considered.”⁹⁷ Instead, “it was enough and more than enough,” that all of his considerations, “cloud the eyes of his heart.”⁹⁸ With the eyes of his heart clouded he “considers, with his whole intention, that dignity [of the hypostatic union] to be most fitting for himself and—by reason of his own natural existence—sort of owed, and the other order prescribed by God as though it were of little account, and falls in contempt of his own nature.”⁹⁹ This, according to Suarez, is not the result of a speculative error, but rather a “rash practical judgment” by which he saw the greatness of the union with a divine person and desired it for himself as if it were

⁹⁴ Ibid., 7.13.4, pp. 881-882.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 7.13.4, p. 882: “*quia talis appetitus unionis hypostaticae sub tali motivo gravissima superbia est.*”

⁹⁶ Ibid., 7.13.6, p. 882: “*Sicut ergo tale iudicium Angelus habere non potuit, ita neque peccatum, quod illud supponit*”; cf. *ST* 1.63.1 ad 4: “*Hoc autem modo in angelo peccatum esse non potuit, quia nec in angelis sunt passiones, quibus ratio aut intellectus ligetur...nec iterum primum peccatum habitus praecedere potuit ad peccatum inclinans.*”

⁹⁷ Suarez, “Tractatus de angelis,” 7.13.10, p. 884: “*ad peccandum hoc genere superbiae non fuisse necessarium iudicium aliquod erroneum, aut speculative falsum, sed iudicium practicum imprudens, seu inconsideratum fuisse sufficiens.*”

⁹⁸ Ibid.: “*satis, superque fuit, ab his omnibus objectis, et considerationibus oculos cordis claudere.*”

⁹⁹ Ibid.: “*et tota intentione considerare dignitatem illam sibi convenientissimam esse, et ratione suae naturalis existentiae, quasi debitam, et alium ordinem a Deo praescriptum, quasi in vilipendium, et contemptum suae naturae cedere.*”

his final end.¹⁰⁰ Suarez tries to show that it's by desiring something good according to the wrong rule that Lucifer errs and becomes Satan. He goes further than Thomas though, by arguing that the rule he rejects is the *ratio* of the whole created order, to whom he refused to be subjected.¹⁰¹

I think it's possible to say something else here. That is, I don't choose to follow Thomas or Suarez on the nature of diabolical sin. Frankly, they're both too ready to make sense of it. They do so by imagining the angelic intellect to be something quite similar to the human intellect. As Thomas tries to home in on the source of angelic sin in the *Summa Theologiae*, he suggests that an angel might freely choose "something which is good in itself, but not with the order of proper measure or rule."¹⁰² Thomas is trying to give reasons for angelic sin, to explain how it might come about in the first place. But the way he describes it—and Suarez follows him on this—tends to anthropomorphize the angels. Scheeben, who inherits Thomas' view of the angelic fall, does so explicitly. The only instance we have, his argument goes, for reasoning upon the question of how rational creatures fall comes from our knowledge of what it's like for humans to turn away from the LORD.¹⁰³ Humans can do this because they're created in a state that, while

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.: "*Quae omnia potuit Lucifer, vel explicite, vel saltem implicite judicare sine proprio speculativo errore, praecise spectando congruitatem illam, quae ex parte excellentioris naturae resultare potest, et quid sibi esset commodius, indeque precipitando iudicium practicum, et consequenter affectum in tali commodo suo, tanquam in ultimo fine constituendo.*"

¹⁰¹ Ibid.: "*et nollet Christo voluntarie subdi: vel illum, ut caput, et dominum voluntarie recognoscere.*"

¹⁰² ST 1.63.1 ad 4: "*Alio modo contingit peccare per liberum arbitrium, eligendo aliquid quod secundum se est bonum, sed non cum ordine debitae mensurae aut regulae.*"

¹⁰³ Matthias Scheeben, *Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik*, Buch 3, Band 2 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Verlagshandlung, 1878), §181, p. 484: "When so-and-so and so-and-so frequently speak of an original beatitude of the angels, then that is only intelligible in the manner of the human paradise: namely 1) by the freedom from all evil, 2) by the full use of their higher natural virtues, and 3) by the self in a state of being on the way (in statu viae) to supernatural community with God resulting in beatitude—*Wenn VV. und TT. vielfach von einer ursprünglichen Seligkeit der Engel reden, dann ist das nur in analogem Sinne zu verstehen, wie beim paradisischen Menschen: nämlich 1) von der Freiheit von allem Uebel, 2) von dem*

graced, is not the condition of their final end. The first humans weren't, in other words, created seeing the LORD face to face, seeing the LORD as he is. On this model, humans are able to turn away from the LORD in part because they lack this immediate apprehension of the LORD. The angels must, then, be created in an analogous position, graced yet not supernaturally elevated. As Scheeben puts it, "To merit the supernatural beatitude, however, the angels require no less of actual and habitual supernatural grace than humans."¹⁰⁴ If this obtains, angels, like humans, could choose according to the wrong rule or measure, lacking, prior to their elevation to supernatural beatitude, a perfected awareness of that rule. They'd only attain that perfected awareness once they'd chosen to turn themselves to the LORD and received the gift of being raised to this new and different state.

But why think this? Augustine, for instance, didn't. In *De civitate Dei* Augustine claims instead that the angels are created beholding the LORD himself.¹⁰⁵ In the same way, in *De Genesi ad litteram* he argues the very nature of angels, as intellectual creatures, is to behold the LORD.¹⁰⁶ It's what angels do and are. The only thing angelic

Vollgenusse ihrer höheren natürlichen Vorzüge, und 3) von der selbst in statu viae aus der übernatürlichen Gemeinschaft mit Gott resultierenden Seligkeit."

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.: "Zum Verdienste der übernatürlichen Seligkeit aber bedürfen die Engel nicht weniger, als die Menschen, der aktuellen und habituellen übernatürlichen Gnade."

¹⁰⁵ *civ.*, 11.9, CSEL 40.1:525: "certainly they have been made participants of the eternal light, which is the itself the unchangeable wisdom of God, through which all things are made, which we call the only begotten Son of God—*profecto facti sunt participes lucis aeternae, quod est ipsa incommutabilis sapientia Dei, per quam facta sunt omnia, quem dicimus unigenitum Dei filium.*"

¹⁰⁶ *Gn. litt.*, 1.9.17, PL 34:252-253: "If, however, light—which was the first thing about which is was said that it should be made, and it was made—should be understood to hold the first place in creation, it is itself intellectual life. Which life, unless it were turned to the Creator to be illuminated would have been formlessly fluid. When, however, it was turned and illuminated what was said in the Word of God happened: 'Let there be light.'—*Si autem lux, quae primum dicta est ut fiat, et facta est, etiam primum creaturae tenere intelligenda est, ipsa est intellectualis vita; quae nisi ad Creatorem illuminanda converteretur, fluitaret informiter. Cum autem conversa et illuminata est, factum est quod in Verbo Dei dictum est, Fiat lux.*" cf. inter alia, *Gn. litt.*, 2.8.17, 4.24.41, 5.4.10.

creatures lack at the moment of their creation, Augustine says, is knowledge of their perseverance in the LORD.¹⁰⁷ Whether, that is, they'll persist in cleaving to him for all eternity is opaque to them. Angels don't need to do anything but continue loving the LORD in order to be assured of their eternal communion with the LORD. That is, unlike the Thomistic position, Augustine doesn't think there's a decision for the angel to make for or against the LORD resulting in a corresponding elevation or fall. There's instead faithful adherence to the LORD who made them or a turning away from the LORD's countenance, which is the angelic fall.¹⁰⁸ The holy angels aren't elevated further, they're simply given the surety of their continued persistence in the LORD's truth just as they are.¹⁰⁹

But on this reading, the Augustinian one, we'd have to challenge an intellectualist account of the good. We'd have to say it's possible to misdirect our wills in such a way that on final analysis we wouldn't be pursuing a good, but a lack. Put another way, we'd have to be able to succeed at failing.¹¹⁰ Augustine presents this terrifying possibility in his most famous analysis of sin in Book II of *Confessiones*. While trying to understand the motivations for stealing some pears as a young man, Augustine gropes along for something intelligible to hold on to in the sinful act. He begins with a confession to the

¹⁰⁷ *civ.*, 11.13, CSEL 40.1:532: "*Cuius illi alii quia certi non fuerunt (non enim erat eorum aeterna felicitas cuius certi essent, quae finem fuerat habitura), restat, ut aut in pares fuerint, aut, si pares fuerint, post istorum ruinam illis certa scientia suae sempiternae felicitatis accesserit.*"

¹⁰⁸ *civ.*, 12.9, CSEL 40.1:579: "*eoque sunt isti ab illorum societate discreti, quod illi in eadem bona voluntate manserunt, isti ab ea deficiendo mutati sunt, mala scilicet voluntate hoc ipso quod a bona defecerunt.*"

¹⁰⁹ *civ.*, 11.13, CSEL 40.1:531: "*procul dubio multo est durius nunc putare angelos sanctos aeternae suae beatitudinis incertos, et ipsos de semet ipsis ignorare, quod nos de illis per scripturas sanctas nosse potuimus.*"

¹¹⁰ Paul Griffiths, *Intellectual Appetite: A Theological Grammar* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 43: "The drama of the world of darkness and light is that the tragedy of human existence is neither getting nor not getting what you want, but rather the real possibility that you will guarantee yourself success at failure by seeking the darkness of absence that you can in fact obtain."

LORD, “Let my heart tell you here, what it was searching for there: that I was evil for nothing (*gratis*) and the cause of my malice was nothing (*nulla*) but malice.”¹¹¹ He goes on to rule out the idea that it’s his love of a lesser good that motivates his action. It’s not that he loves *something* other than the LORD; he loves *nothing*. So, he says, “I loved to come to nothing. I loved my fall, not what I fell for. I loved my fall itself.”¹¹² He spends quite a bit of time trying to sort out how this could be the case. Augustine is horrified by the discovery. You get the sense when reading these sections of the *Confessiones* that he’d like to be able to make sense of it. He’s looking for solutions. First, that it’s the pursuit of lower order goods—loving things, but not loving them rightly. But he dismisses this solution, comparing himself negatively to Catiline, who could at least give a sense to his evils.¹¹³ Then, he attempts to frame the action with reference to the gang with whom he committed the evils—“alone, I never would have done it.”¹¹⁴ But he finally dismisses this view as well, admitting the love of the gang to be nothing at all.¹¹⁵

This capacity to turn toward nothing is best understood as a negative possibility of creatures possessed of intellect and will. It doesn’t belong to freedom itself. Freedom is being able to choose your final end. But when freedom breaks, when we sin and in so doing fail to be free, we turn away from our final end. Being creatures made from nothing, this negative possibility includes the possibility of returning—at least attempting to return—to nothing. What Augustine realizes, to his great consternation, is that while it

¹¹¹ *conf.*, 2.4.9, CSEL 33:36: “*dicat tibi nunc ecce cor meum, quid ibi quaerebat, ut essem gratis malus et malitiae meae causa nulla esset nisi malitia.*”

¹¹² *conf.*, 2.4.9, CSEL 33:36: “*amavi perire, amavi defectum meum, non illud, ad quod deficiebam, sed defectum meum ipsum amavi.*”

¹¹³ *conf.*, 2.5.10-11.

¹¹⁴ *conf.*, 2.8.16, CSEL 33:41: “*solus omnino id non fecissem.*”

¹¹⁵ *conf.*, 2.8.15, CSEL 33:41-42: “*non ergo nihil aliud quam furtum amavi; inmo vero nihil aliud quia et illud nihil est.*”

might seem like something to us to sin, sin is not an orientation toward something, but an orientation toward nothing. When I say sin might seem like something to us, I mean we're tempted to make sense of it. But this is self-deception. While we might offer explanations for our actions, these are accounts of what it seems like to us to be sinning, not accounts of what sin is.

I want to say specifying the sin of the angels as pride falls into this trap. It's a trap that we might very well avoid on Augustinian grounds, if we take what Augustine says in Book II of *Confessiones* to be right. But Augustine also famously identifies the sin of the devil as one of disordered love, specifically pride. It's a matter of Satan preferring himself to the LORD, Augustine will argue.¹¹⁶ The angels who fall love themselves more than they love the LORD. But what do they love? If we follow Augustine's own rationale from Book II of *Confessiones*, this love is at root the love of nothing at all. That's because to love yourself for what you are apart from the LORD just is to be in love with nothing. On its own, apart from the LORD, that's all any creature is. Angelic sin turns out to be more stupefying than once thought exactly because it's nonsensical. Pointing to pride is a way of trying to save the intentionality of the act. Without an object, it's not clear what could be moving the will. Augustine's attention to pride, and Thomas' and Suarez' specifications of angelic inattention are each attempts to make too much sense of sin.

In order to capture the absurd quality of sin, I suggest giving some attention to the older tradition to which I've already adverted in Nyssen's writings, which names the

¹¹⁶ *civ.*, 12.6, CSEL 40.1:573: "*Noluerunt ergo ad illum custodire fortitudinem suam, et qui magis essent, si ei qui summe est adhaerent, se illi praeferendo id quod minus est praetulerunt.*"

devil's characteristic defect as envy rather than pride. Cyprian, too, in his treatise *De zelo et livore*, identifies envy as the primordial sin of Satan. At the beginning of the world, the devil saw humans made in the image of God.¹¹⁷ And “from envy he launched into a malevolent jealousy.”¹¹⁸ His fall is the result of his envy, in Cyprian's telling. Gregory the Great inherits this line of thought as well, in his *Regulae pastoralis*. There, while offering advice to pastors on how to deal with the envious, he cites Wisdom 2:24, “Through the devil's envy death entered the world.” As in Cyprian, the devil envies the making of humans.¹¹⁹ But unlike Cyprian, Gregory doesn't attribute the devil's fall to envy itself. For Gregory, envy is a consequence rather than a cause of the fall. But from Gregory we're able to learn something about the character of envy. The envious person doesn't desire anything for himself. Rather, envy begrudges another his good things. As Gregory says, “How very unhappy they are, who become worse by the improvement of their neighbors.”¹²⁰ He explicitly compares it to a plague (*peste*) and rot (*putrescere*).¹²¹ Envy is a sort of infection. When it takes root, it tends toward the undoing of the one who has it, not by being directed outward toward some good, but by being consumed internally by the desire that another experience a lack.

This makes envy an ideal way of specifying what angelic sin is. It doesn't require the added machinery of angelic misapprehension or inattention, both of which have the significant drawback of anthropomorphizing angels. John Cassian provides an excellent

¹¹⁷ *zel.*, 4, CSEL 3.1:421.

¹¹⁸ *zel.*, 4, CSEL 3.1:421: “*in zelum malivolo livore prorupit.*”

¹¹⁹ *reg. past.*, 3.10, PL 77:63c-63d: “*Quia enim ipse caelum perdidit, condito hoc homini invidit, et damnationem suam perditus adhuc alios perdendo cumulavit.*”

¹²⁰ *reg. past.*, 3.10, PL 77:63b: “*Quantae infelicitatis sunt, qui melioratione proximi deteriores fiunt.*”

¹²¹ *reg. past.*, 3.10, PL 77:64a-64b.

description of the envious person in his *Conlationes*: “For however much more another might have made progress in the obedience of humility or the virtue of patience or in the attainment of generosity, so much will he be incited by the greater torments of envy, because he desires nothing except the ruin or death of him whom he envies.”¹²² Envy grows in proportion to another’s attainment of perfection, and its object is nothing. That is, what the envious person wants is nothing for someone else. Now, it’s possible to attempt an appropriation of this sin to pride. You could say the reason an envious person wants this for someone else is a relative increase in his own state. But it’s not necessary to make this leap, unless you’re committed to the intelligibility of sinful action. And it’s not clear we ought to be, or should want to, on Augustinian grounds. Cassian, in fact, thinks the fact that the envious person doesn’t want anything for himself is precisely why it’s the most difficult vice to overcome.¹²³

If this is the case, you can see how Suarez’ solution to the cause of the devil’s fall might fit. Lucifer, seeing the incarnation in the divine light in which he as an angel is created, perceives the elevation of human nature in the hypostatic union above his angelic nature. We can even keep Cyprian’s insight that what Lucifer sees is the human being made in the image of God, achieved perfectly in the person of the incarnate Son. In seeing it, Lucifer’s will is not inclined toward himself, toward a good. It instead desires ruin, nothing, the absence of this great good bestowed upon human nature. We might be

¹²² *con.*, 18.16.10, *CSEL* 13:529-530: “*quanto enim amplius alius aut humilitatis subiectione aut patientiae virtute aut munificentiae laude profecerit, tanto ille maioribus invidiae stimulis incitatur, quia non nisi ruinam aut mortem eius cui invidet concupiscit.*”

¹²³ *con.*, 18.16.8, *CSEL* 13:528: “*sciendum sane est invidiae morbum difficilius ad medellam quam cetera vitia pervinire. nam eum quem semel veneni sui peste corruperit paene dixerim carere remedio.*” Cf. also *con.*, 18.16.11, *CSEL* 13:530.

tempted to say he wants the good for himself. That's where Suarez' thought inclines. But perhaps it would be better to say simply that his will defects precisely in his desire not for his own misperceived good but for nothing at all. It's a culpable failure of perseverance in the love in which he was created. The diabolical sin is not properly an act but a failure to act as he ought given the powers and capacities he possesses. It's the vision of Jesus Christ that precipitates this movement of the will, but the movement remains entirely deficient, obsessed with the destruction of another rather than any particular good to be obtained by him in his angelic nature.

While we might try to make sense of Troilus' sin by recourse to pride, trying to do the same for the primordial sin of the angels requires some leaps that do more harm than good. By pointing to envy rather than pride, we're left with a sin that can be specified without rendering it intelligible. There's no reason for Lucifer to defect and become Satan, and that's precisely the point. Troilus has a history—one we need to make sense of—which becomes an occasion of his pride. Lucifer does not. Neither does he have the sorts of limitations Troilus has in his knowledge of the good—Lucifer is face to face with the LORD after all. While pride remains a sort of coping mechanism in Troilus' case, lending intelligibility to an action that at root has none, applying the same mechanism in the case of Lucifer creates more problems than it solves. How is Lucifer able to make this mistake? What does it mean for an angel to misapprehend the good ordering of creation? Does he perceive the good order when created, and then fail to? And if so, why? Envy leaves us instead at the heart of the mystery without being able to solve it. It retains the origin of the fall in the will of a Satan as a free creature. But it shows us what sin, turning away from the LORD, is: a turn toward nothing.

Like Scheeben, Suarez admits speculations about the fall of the angels because they've seen the incarnation are just that, speculative. He doesn't think there's enough in Scripture or in the writings of the Fathers to show it definitively, or that it's possible to prove it as a necessary deduction of reason.¹²⁴ Still, he thinks it is a probable doctrine congruous with both Scripture and the Fathers, and so one that can be freely held.¹²⁵ Again, like Scheeben, Suarez thinks this position is able to account for the patristic position on the *invidia diaboli*, by showing how the envy of the devil is intimately linked to his pride in desiring the hypostatic union for himself.¹²⁶ I'm pushing the position further by asking whether the *invidia diaboli* must be subordinated pride. As Suarez asks, "If probable conjectures or deductions from Scripture and the Fathers are enough in other cases, why not on this point?"¹²⁷ Leaning on the insights of Augustine on sin itself and Cyprian, Gregory, and Cassian on the nature of envy, I think there are good reasons to affirm this as a probable speculative position. Suarez' final answer on the question of the origin Lucifer's sin is christological, which returns us to Bonino's Thomistic worry. Against Thomas, Suarez argues the coming of Christ was not merely a remedy for sin. In fact, Suarez says,

the advent of Christ in the human nature assumed by the Word viewed absolutely and in itself was not in itself first to abolish the work of the devil, nor on the pretext of human or angelic sin, but on account of itself, and because of the excellence of the mystery, and for the manifestation of

¹²⁴ Suarez, "Tractatus de angelis," 7.13.13, p. 885: "*Fateor enim non esse certam, quia nec ex Scriptura vel Patribus sufficienter ostenditur, nec ratione convinci potest.*"

¹²⁵ Ibid. "*nihilominus tamen inter eas [Scripture and the Fathers] huic tanquam probabiliori libenter adhaereo.*"

¹²⁶ See especially Suarez' treatment of the occurrence of this patristic *topos* in the works of Bernard of Clairvaux, Ibid., 7.13.17-22, pp. 886-888.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 7.13.27, p. 889: "*Assumptum ostendo, interrogando, quodnam objectum superbiae Luciferi sit nobis in Scriptura clare propositum, aut magis significatum, vel quod possit sola ratione convinci? nullum profecto. Si ergo in aliis rebus probabiles conjecturae, vel deductiones ex Scriptura et Patribus sufficiunt, cur non in hoc puncto?*"

divine goodness, and for the sake of the sanctification of humans and of the angels accomplished through faith in him.¹²⁸

The incarnation, in other words, does not depend on human or angelic sin. As a matter of fact, in this world, Christ comes to heal its brokenness. But his incarnation is not contingent upon the fact of the world's brokenness. Jesus Christ is, quite simply, the means of sanctification for humans and angels considered apart from the freely chosen evil actions of rational creatures. For this reason, Suarez goes on to say the revelation of Christ's incarnation "was most able to be the occasion of offense and pride and foolishness."¹²⁹ Christ's incarnation can be the occasion of angelic sin precisely because the LORD's taking human flesh is not *simply* the result of angelic sin or the consequent temptation and fall of humans (though I'll have more to say on this in the next chapter). Rather, as I've argued so far, the incarnation of the Son is the condition for the possibility not only of the sanctification but of the creation of all that is not the LORD.

4.6 Passed over in Silence

My turn to literature in this chapter is meant to illustrate more concretely, though still perhaps only "By lik'ning spiritual to corporeal forms" (*Paradise Lost*, V.573), the mystery of sin and evil. These are (some of) the things that can and must be said by Christians about evil's disfiguring blight on the cosmos. The greater part, which can't be said, remains much more mysterious. By that I mean, of course, nothing I've said here can make sense of the origins of the voluntary evil of rational creatures. Why the

¹²⁸ Ibid.: "Adventus autem Christi in humana natura assumpta a Verbo absolute, et secundum se spectatus on fuit per se primo ad dissolvenda opera diaboli, nec occasione peccati hominum, vel Angelorum, sed propter se, et propter excellentiam mysterii, et divinae bonitatis manifestationem, ac summam communicationem, et propter hominum, et Angelorum sanctificationem per fidem in ipsum factus est."

¹²⁹ Ibid.: "et ita optime potuit esse occasio, et offensionis superbum, et insipientium Angelorum."

revelation of the God-man, Jesus Christ, to Lucifer should provoke such a response, should be the source of his self-destruction remains incomprehensible. And it remains incomprehensible even if we can specify what occasions it and how it might do so. This is a good thing. If we were able to make sense of sin, we'd no longer be dealing with evil as an absence, a *privatio boni*. Explicable sin is an oxymoron. To think we can give reasons for it is to imagine sin as something rational. It's to imagine Augustine's incident with the pears in Book II of the *Confessiones* ends with a solution rather than an aporia. Instead we ought to recognize every sin as a flight from the LORD, who is intelligibility itself. To recognize our sin for what it is instead requires we say, with Augustine, "I became to myself a region of deficiency."¹³⁰

But recall once more Tolkien's treatment of the kind of care the creator is capable of exercising over his creation. The reason Christians remain enjoined to hope is that our deficiencies are no limitation on the LORD's action. They in fact become—in the LORD's providential care of his created order—the means by which he brings about greater goods. This point of Christian grammar is embedded deep in the Church's liturgical practice and her Scriptures. It may be, then, that the only way to give any sort of reason for the angelic fall is to exhibit the goods brought about by it, the *felices* occasioned by the demons' *culpae*. If there are any reasons for the devil's fall, they are the LORD's in bringing these felicities about. Which is to say, sin remains unintelligible in itself, but makes certain intelligible goods possible. Goods which cannot be had without the evils that antecede them. To specify how this is so is beyond me, and (it seems to me) beyond what it is possible to say. What I will try do instead is show what

¹³⁰ *conf.*, 2.10.18, *CSEL* 33:43: "*factus sum mihi regio egestatis.*"

the devil's fall and the resultant disordering of the cosmos brings about in our world, whose beauty, as Tolkien suggests, comes in large part from its sorrows. But that is the subject of the next chapter.

5. “There is a crack in everything”¹

“He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken” (Is 25:8). The LORD is the one who will bring death to nothing. In the verse before this one from Isaiah, death—if you take verse 8 to be a further specification of verse 7—is called, “the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations” (Is 25:7). Death is something which weighs us down and obscures our vision. But this state of affairs is temporary. That’s the force of the LORD’s promise to swallow it up forever. Or, perhaps even more appropriate, the Vulgate—both old and new—says death will be cast down—“*praecipitabit*” (Is 25:8 Vulg). Death’s dominion must come to an end. The claim that death needs destroying is implicit in Isaiah. It pairs well with Paul’s claim in the Letter to the Romans that “death no longer has dominion” over Jesus (Rom 6:9). That death did—or seemed to—have dominion over Jesus is assumed by Paul. That this is a future state, something achieved in Christ but not yet in us, can be seen in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, where he says, “The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor 15:26). The prophecy of Isaiah is accomplished and not yet fully realized in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.

¹ Leonard Cohen, "Anthem," in *The Future* (Columbia, 1992).

We might also say, in addition to being temporary—a state of affairs which will come to an end—death is also temporal. Its dominion extends precisely as far as the distention, the painful stretching out, of fallen spacetime. This is not the only kind of spacetime there is. In addition to it, I want to say, there's also the spacetime of heaven. By way of formal definition, I mean by 'heaven' wherever the ascended flesh of Jesus Christ and the assumed flesh of the Blessed Virgin are. Having bodies, they occupy space. In occupying space, we should also want to say, they occupy time. Space and time are intimate with one another in just this way. To be in one is to be in the other conjointly. Best to say, then, that death's dominion over spacetime obtains precisely where the spacetime of heaven does not. The spacetime over which death wields power is fallen. Death's dominion in fallen spacetime is, in itself, entirely negative. Its rule is one of lack. This lack manifests itself in distention. What fallen spacetime lacks is the wholeness, the all-at-onceness, of heaven, a wholeness that makes it the image of the LORD's eternity.

Nothing in fallen spacetime, including spacetime itself, escapes the effects of the angelic fall. The distortion set in motion by angelic rebellion—a distortion that logically precedes the ticking of fallen time's clock—ramifies outward such that no creatures escape its grip. No creatures, that is, but heavenly ones. The holy angels are not—and have not ever been—distended in spacetime. This is not to say they don't occupy spacetime at all. They occupy it precisely at its center—the still eye around which the hurricane rages. The holy angels, distinguished from their diabolical counterparts by their recognition and embrace of the incarnate LORD as the *ratio* of the cosmos, cleave to Jesus Christ. That same Jesus Christ, who puts an end to death's dominion, “bore our

death and slew it by the abundance of his life.”² He did so precisely by being the Word made flesh—the eternal made timely. The LORD enters into fallen spacetime as a creature, *the* creature. He is the *ratio* of the cosmos because he is both God and man. But not only are space and time “created through him and for him” (Col 1:16), they are also redeemed by him who reconciles all things to himself, “whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col 1:20). Not only does Jesus make time and space, he makes them right as well.

The holy angels, then, are gathered to Jesus Christ, ministering to him during his time on earth. The events of his earthly life are marked by the presence of the angels. Angels are present at the annunciation, the nativity, the temptation in the desert, the agony in the garden, the resurrection, and the ascension. In this way the unfallen angels are active in the temporal order, active even in fallen spacetime, and yet we shouldn’t think they suffer the effects of temporal distention. This is because even while acting in the fallen order, they remain fixed in heaven. The most direct evidence for this view comes in the Gospel of Matthew. There we find a dominical word on the matter. “See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 18:10). The angels given the task of guardianship accomplish it without ceasing to also gaze upon the face of the LORD.

I’d like to suggest an analogy for how we might think of the angel’s actions considered both inside and outside fallen spacetime. Remember, in the first chapter’s treatment of Augustine’s *De Genesi ad litteram* I showed how Augustine takes the “Let

² *conf.*, 4.12.19, *CSEL* 33:79: “tulit mortem nostram et occidit eam de abundantia vitae suae.”

there be light” of Genesis 1:3 to be an account of the creation of angels. He explains how the angels are themselves the created form of the uncreated light of the LORD. What if, then, we take the scriptural language of the angels as light and press it a bit further? I’d like to compare the intellectual light of the angels in heavenly spacetime to a beam of white light in the visible spectrum. Crisp and simple, it illuminates what it touches. In heaven what it illuminates will include other angels, the souls of the saints, and the bodies and souls of Our Lord and Our Lady. But a beam of visible white light, while simple in appearance, is also a complex of electromagnetic radiation, oscillating at various frequencies along the visible spectrum. When that beam of white light passes through a prism, it refracts. The different frequencies of visible light, of which the beam of white light is composed, bend at different angles. They exit the prism along different trajectories and—if you set up a screen on the far side of the prism to catch the light—the different colors of light land in different places as a rainbow.

Angels in heaven, so my analogy goes, are like beams of unrefracted white light. Entering fallen spacetime is like passing through a prism. The single beam of created intellectual light is refracted. The unitary action of the angel in heaven, the unceasing praise and worship of the LORD in the “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” (Rev 4:8), reveals its component frequencies. The various “colors” of the angelic light spectrum land in different locations in fallen spacetime. So, the angel Gabriel’s actions when he helps Daniel to interpret his visions (Dan 8-9) and when he announces the birth of Jesus Christ to Mary (Lk 1:26-38) are discrete events within fallen spacetime. They are also ingredient in the composite “white light” that is the angel’s unending hymn of praise before the face of the LORD. As Gabriel says to

Zechariah, when Zechariah questions him about the birth of his son, John the Baptist, “I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you and bring you this good news” (Lk 1:19). He is standing in the presence of the LORD, and he is speaking to Zechariah. The angel touches down in the devastated temporal order without being dragged into it. In so doing, we might also go on to say, the angel snatches those moments up into the heavenly liturgical act.

This idea comports well with the Church’s liturgical practice. Each time the Mass is celebrated, the Church invokes the angels, uniting the prayer of the earthly liturgy to that of the heavenly one. This happens first in the preface to the eucharistic prayer. So, for example, in Preface I for Sundays in Ordinary Time, the priest says, “And so, with Angels and Archangels, with Thrones and Dominions, and with all the host and Powers of heaven, we sing the hymn of your glory, as without end we acclaim.”³ This is followed by the people’s singing of the “Holy, Holy, Holy” in unison with the angels in heaven. But while you might think the liturgical action of the Church simply points upward, straining to sing with the angels on high, it’s also true that the angels themselves play an active role in the eucharistic sacrifice. In the Roman Canon, Eucharistic Prayer I, the priest, after he’s consecrated the elements asks the LORD for the aid of an angel. He says, “In humble prayer we ask you, almighty God: command that these gifts be borne by the hands of your holy Angel to your altar on high in the sight of your divine majesty, so that all of us, who through this participation at the altar receive the most holy Body and Blood of your Son, may be filled with every grace and heavenly blessing.”⁴ The angels

³ *The Roman Missal*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 572.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 641.

are active in the offering of the sacrifice of the Mass. At the LORD's command, they allow the sacrifice offered on the altar on earth to be offered at the heavenly altar. And it's this angelic action that allows the worshipping Church to receive "every grace and heavenly blessing."

It appears we should say the angels touch down with their various colors, refracted out of that one intellectual light in heaven, during each instance of the Mass. Angelic action dapples fallen spacetime with light from heaven. At the same time, refracted angelic light catches those moments of liturgical sacrifice and draws them into the heavenly worship of unfallen spacetime. This view offers a speculative account of what the dominical word of Matthew 18:10 might mean. On this model, any angelic action in the fallen world belongs to the singular act of that angel's continual worship of the LORD in heaven. An angel can act in fallen spacetime without becoming mired in it and stretched out painfully by it. This view also gets us some of the way toward understanding what the fall means for angelic creatures who cease to gaze upon the face of the LORD.

In chapter three I suggested reading Revelation 12 as a two-level drama. The events in Revelation 12:1-12 are best understood as cosmic in scope. They are a narrative of the battle demons have waged against the LORD under the aspect of the *conditio*—the order of eternity. Michael and his angels throw down the dragon and his angels. They conquer Satan not by their own power, nor by some abstract might of the LORD. Rather, a voice from heaven says, "they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony" (Rev 12:11). The devil has been defeated, the victory is won, and the victory is Christ's and, it seems, the martyrs who bore witness to the Lamb, "even

unto death” (Rev 12:11). The angelic war is made effective, the devil is cast down, “thrown down to earth” (Rev 12:9), by Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary. But in this chapter we’re dealing with events under the aspect of the *administratio*. What does it mean to say the angels are cast down from heaven to earth considered in the order of time? Here, I think, an answer has already suggested itself in my remarks on the holy angels. That is, the most immediate effect upon the fallen angels who are cast down from heaven is that they no longer behold the LORD’s countenance. Unlike the holy angels, whose perpetual adoration of the face of the LORD in heaven allows them to act in fallen spacetime without being distended in it, the demons’ punishment includes being turned out of their heavenly participation in the LORD’s eternity and painfully stretched out in the order of time.

The fall of the angels from heaven is not only into the successiveness of fallen spacetime, it is also the cause of its distention. Time, you’ll remember, is one of the LORD’s creatures. “For you have made time itself,” Augustine says to the LORD in Book XI of his *Confessiones*.⁵ It is created and created good by the LORD. The fall of the devil and his angels corrupts time’s goodness. As Paul Griffiths has put it, the time that belongs to the devastation, “metronomic time,” is nothing other than time damaged.⁶ It is, as such, “an artifact of the fall.”⁷ The ticking of metronomic time “is what time is like when it has been devastated. The principal mark of that devastation for us—the sign that shows us most clearly that metronomic time is devastated—is that time is a metronomic

⁵ *conf.*, 11.13.14, *CSEL* 33:291: “*id ipsum tempus tu feceras.*”

⁶ Paul J. Griffiths, *Decreation: The Last Things of All Creatures* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 89-93.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

countdown to death.”⁸ This identification of the ticking of time and the reign of death is an Augustinian claim. In Book XIII of *De civitate Dei*, where Augustine deals most explicitly with the fact of death, he says something coordinate with Griffiths’ remark on death’s countdown. “And daily,” Augustine says, “what remains becomes less and less, so the whole time of this life is nothing other than a march toward death in which no one is permitted either to stand still for a little while or to go a bit slower.”⁹ The claim I’m making is that the fall of the angels is itself an atemporal event that damages all creation apart from the holy angels. This includes the fabric of spacetime itself.¹⁰ The angels being thrust out of heaven is coincident with the painful stretching out of the fallen temporal order.

The light of the demons, the created form of uncreated light, is not extinguished. Instead, it’s distended in the order of fallen spacetime. We might say, to stick with the analogy of light we used with the holy angels, that their light is diffracted rather than refracted. Passing out of the spacetime of heaven and into the medium of fallen, earthly time, their light is occluded, but not entirely. Were their light to be completely occluded, they’d simply cease to be. Instead, we might think the light of the angels, their former glory, is forced to pass through tiny openings in a barrier. Because light behaves like a wave, passing through these narrow openings means their angelic light no longer illuminates clearly. Instead, the light waves, exiting the far side of the barrier end up fragmented. When a beam of light passes through two or more slits in a barrier,

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ *civ.*, 13.10, *CSEL* 40.1:626: “*et cottidie fit minus minusque quod restat, ut omnino nihil sit aliud tempus vitae huius, quam cursus ad mortem, in quo nemo vel paululum stare vel aliquanto tardius ire permittitur.*”

¹⁰ In this I follow Griffiths in his reflections on the fall of the angels and the damage this does to the temporal order. Cf. Griffiths, *Decreation*, 131-135, esp. 133.

diffraction occurs. It happens because the ripples of light, like intersecting ripples on the surface of a pond, bump into one another and cause interference. When the peak of one light wave intersects the trough of another—provided they are of the same intensity—they cancel one another out. The light caught by a surface on the far side of the barrier will not appear as a differentiated spectrum of the colors of visible light as in refraction through a prism. Instead, what you find are bits of light interspersed with darkness, spread out in order.

What's important to note is that the bits of darkness caused by diffraction are not themselves caused by the slits in the barrier they pass through. Two slits in the barrier do not issue in two points of light on the far surface. The far surface receives many points of light and darkness in a wave interference pattern. The absences are instead caused by the light itself, interfering with its own activity. The light shines, the waves roll, and when peak and trough meet, the light cancels itself out. This makes it a fitting analogy for the fallen angels. Passing out of the participated eternity of heaven and into fallen time they themselves are the cause of their own darkness. Their light, powerful and beautiful as it is, is marred when it comes into conflict with itself. In doing so, that light ceases to be what it's created to be. The light of the fallen angels is spread out in fallen time space—the ripples extend to its edges—but it's a broken, ineffectual light. The light of the fallen angels does not help us to see, at least not clearly. Rather, the light interspersed with darkness, illuminates just enough to deceive, “for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light,” says Paul (2 Cor 11:14).

The punishment of the devil and his angels is self-imposed and self-inflicted. Looking back one more time to chapter three, the essential piece of this argument is that

this is an event occurring *ex quo creatus est*—since the devil was created. Time begins ticking in its metronomic, death-dealing fashion from the moment of the fall, which fall happens outside of the clock-ticked temporal order. This is important because I'm arguing against a time of idyllic perfection in the created order. The LORD creates all things from nothing and makes them good, but that's a claim made under the aspect of eternity. In the temporal order, where things have a beginning and an end the LORD's creation is stretched out and unfolds in a cosmos that's good and fallen at all times. The great disjunction, the event that causes spacetime to fall happens outside fallen spacetime and so permeates it. The always already fallen world means the good things the LORD creates will have certain possibilities and eventualities foreclosed to them. Entropy and decay are woven into and corrupt the fabric of the cosmos from the very beginning, the beginning of fallen time, that is.

What I plan to do now is this. I am going to offer a speculative account of this world, the one both good and fallen—the only world we know—from the beginning of time. I want to show what it might look like for fallen spacetime, seeded with the *rationes seminales* to develop, for the ages to unroll. In last chapter's discussion of Tolkien's creation myth in *The Silmarillion*, the LORD's providential care for, and wielding of, his damaged creatures formed a central part of the reflection. In this chapter, I'll look at how Augustine's talk of death as an *instrumentum* implemented by the LORD during the crucifixion of Jesus can clarify death's role in the whole history of the cosmos. This will also include a reflection on a move in contemporary theology to naturalize death, along with an argument for why this is a tremendous mistake. Last, I'll offer an interpretation of Genesis 2-3, which builds on the foregoing conversation, to explain the role of human

creatures in a cosmos already shot through with nonhuman creaturely death. This brief foray into theological anthropology will conclude with a treatment of the human Fall and Original Sin, and its importance for Christian theology for thinking about human death in the light of the Cross of Jesus Christ.

5.1 Cosmology

I do not have much invested in a particular origin story of the mechanics or physics at the beginning of spacetime. It's not my specialty, and it makes little difference to me whether things began with an infinitely dense primordial pinpoint or an oscillation occurring at the level of quantum phenomena—or both. I'm perfectly content to leave that work to astrophysicists and cosmologists. The consensus view seems to have coalesced around the theory proposed by the Catholic priest George Lemaitre, whose observations of the red-shift in the electromagnetic radiation emanating from the observable universe led to the theory of an expanding universe. The Big Bang, so the story goes, is an event traceable, by way of the presently measurable doppler effects and the rate of expansion of the observable universe, to a time roughly thirteen and a half billion (give or take a couple hundred million) years ago. This time horizon accounts for the unthinkably vast recesses of interstellar space. The distances of which boggle the mind and make the space between the planets that make up our solar system seem cozy by comparison.

No, I'm not invested or even interested in adjudicating any particular theory that purports to make sense of the vastness of the cosmos in the terms of physics. I do think, however, something like the narrative offered by Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age* about the effects of the human encounter with the seemingly infinite expanse of timespace is

useful. His account, which includes the tagline naming the shift in the way modern people experience the world as one from “cosmos to universe,”¹¹ names a real phenomenon. It’s an important one for this investigation because the problem of death becomes more pressing once you recognize the sheer quantity of it contained in the ever-expanding universe. The world feels less tidy and comprehensible as a result. For those of us committed to the position that all death, without remainder, is a product of sin—angelic and human—the burden of that sin begins to look immeasurably weighty. Time and space are now much deeper. As Taylor puts it, “we have moved from a world which is encompassed within certain bounds and static to one which is vast, feels infinite, and is in the midst of an evolution spread over aeons.”¹² With those bounds removed, or at least put at such a distance that they cease to be meaningfully present, Christian thinking about death could not avoid being affected.

Taylor identifies the publication of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* in 1859 as the last major event in a long series of scientific discoveries, beginning in the seventeenth century, that solidified an evolutionary universe as a background assumption for modern people.¹³ Darwin and his approach to evolutionary theory are important because they highlight some key developments that make a study like the one I’m writing now necessary. I’ll focus on two. The first is this, the role death plays in his treatment of evolution in terms of natural selection. If it’s the case not only that death and dying have been around for at least three and a half billion years—considered in terms of plant and

¹¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 323.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 327.

animal life on earth—but also that it’s a *structural* feature of the coming-to-be of all the kinds of living things there are, then we need to give an intelligible account of how this fits into the LORD’s providential care for the cosmos. The second development I’ll treat is a flaw specific to Darwin’s approach. That is, while all things seem to indicate Darwin was a good scientist, it’s also reasonably clear he was a lousy metaphysician. As some of the earliest Catholic responses to Darwin show, his unfortunate and unreflective thoughts about the nature of the LORD and how the LORD works and can work in the cosmos tended to infiltrate his scientific conclusions.

Before discussing the problems associated with death being a structural feature of the created order, I’d just like to draw your attention briefly to the early Catholic responses to Darwin I mentioned in the last paragraph. By early responses, I mean almost immediate. The first edition of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* hit the shelves in November 1859.¹⁴ *The Rambler*, an English Catholic periodical, published a review of the work by Richard Simpson the following March. The review begins inauspiciously enough,

The infidelity we have to combat is no longer the grinning sarcasm of Voltaire, or the blasphemous buffoonery of a half-sceptical libertine; but it is the calm philosophic discussion of men with their minds stocked with facts and instances, who, if they are without metaphysics enough to see the fallacies of their induction, yet earnestly believe the cogency of their proof.¹⁵

Given the tension that often obtains—warranted or not—between faithful Christians and apologists for evolutionary theory, a contemporary American reader is primed for an all-

¹⁴ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (London: John Murray, 1859).

¹⁵ Richard Simpson, “Darwin on the Origin of Species,” *The Rambler* 2, no. 6 (1860): 361.

too-familiar conflict. The Christian and the scientist have entered the lists once again. Who will emerge victorious? It's too soon to tell. But the familiar—not to say tired—bout of jousting never comes to pass. At least, not on the terms we're primed to expect given the present state of the discourse. Simpson will take Darwin to task, but not for a lack of faith or a submission to the authority of Scripture or Tradition.

What Simpson points out is instead Darwin's extraordinary credulity with respect to his own theory of evolution. He pairs this with a very satisfying critique of Darwin's metaphysical presuppositions and simplistic notions of how the LORD would act in order to create the cosmos and all life within it. All this is coupled with a genuine readiness to receive, gratefully even, the scientific data, the genuine empirical work Darwin presented in the *Origin of Species*. In a pointed critique of the "theory of simplicity," which argues against intellectual subtlety in defense of doctrine (all the while receiving the subtlest of critiques of those same doctrines from without), Simpson concludes,

Those believers, on the contrary, who have confidence that all truth will be ultimately found to harmonise, will enter into the controversy without fear either of the subtleties with which they will be forced to repel his subtle attacks, or of admitting whatever truths in the physical order he seems to have established on a fair foundation.¹⁶

Though Darwin's theory has the advantage of simplicity, an elegance in its parsimony (a parsimony, however, which will eventually open him up to critique from the scientific community), the Christian shouldn't fear his findings. The harmony between the truths established in the physical order might require subtle argumentation to show how they hang together. But the confidence of the Christian, if you'll remember from the first chapter, is that all truth has a single source. And so, they will hang together. The LORD

¹⁶ Ibid., 363.

who created the cosmos and who reveals himself through it is the same LORD who reveals himself in Scripture. And that LORD is himself the truth of both.

As Simpson shows, Darwin's work can be divided into two distinct elements. These elements are confusingly arrayed because intertwined throughout. The first is "his accumulation and arrangement of scientific facts," which is "most striking."¹⁷ The second is "the mythological conclusion" he claims to have derived from that same accumulation of scientific facts, but which Simpson argues is "fabulous."¹⁸ It is so because Darwin has built up a *metaphysical* conclusion based upon his *physical* observations about the biological differentiation of species. A conclusion which Simpson claims is, "subversive of psychology, metaphysics, and theology, all these sciences must cover their mouths, and await with resignation the decision of physical science, their new 'mother and mistress.'"¹⁹ But it's precisely Darwin's willingness to ascribe so much explanatory power to his theory of natural selection that allows him to punt, in the conclusion of his work, on the decisive question of the origins of life itself.²⁰ As Simpson points out, the mythos of Darwin's theory seems to have enamored him of its infinite applicability, to include the origins of life, without feeling the need to explain how that would be the case.²¹ Or, as Simpson says further on, "He allows full play to his own imagination, while he requires his opponents to adhere strictly to proved facts."²²

¹⁷ Ibid., 365.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 483.

²¹ Simpson, "Darwin on the Origin of Species," 366.

²² Ibid., 369.

I'll return to the metaphysical problems with Darwin's approach in a moment. Now, though, I want to again emphasize Simpson's readiness to accept the empirical claims Darwin makes. After highlighting, once again, how Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection can be divided into two parts, mythological and scientific, Simpson quite straightforwardly insists that a Christian who holds to the doctrine of creation is free to receive the scientific facts, or even supposed facts, if they rest upon good authority.²³ I'm reminded here of Augustine's insistence that those things provable by "most certain reason" can and should be accepted by Christians, and factored into the interpretation of Scripture.²⁴ Christians are relieved, on Simpson's account, from thinking of the LORD as continually fiddling with his creatures—as though it were necessary to help things along here, or polish something up there. Instead, Simpson claims, invoking the authority of the Church Fathers, "On one point they were agreed, and that is, that the law of creation is no exceptional rule that acts by fits and starts, by catastrophes and miraculous interpositions; but an equitable ever-present force, embracing all nature as the ocean embraces the land, and active throughout the whole duration of the world."²⁵ The point here is that the LORD's governance of all things does not come in bits and pieces. The *administratio*, in other words, is just the working out in time of the LORD's eternal will for creation considered under aspect of the *conditio*.

²³ Ibid., 373.

²⁴ *Gn. litt.*, 1.19.39, PL 34:261: "*Plerumque enim accidit ut aliquid de terra, de coelo, de caeteris mundi hujus elementis, de motu et conversione vel etiam magnitudine et intervallis siderum, de certis defectibus solis ac lunae, de circuitibus annorum et temporum, de naturis animalium, fructum, lapidum, atque hujusmodi caeteris, etiam non christianus ita noverit, ut certissima ratione vel experientia teneat.*"

²⁵ Simpson, "Darwin on the Origin of Species," 374.

This line of reasoning leads Simpson to his strong claim concerning the scientific (though not the mythological) results of Darwin's work. "It is clear, then," he says, "that the doctrine of creation does not prevent us from recognizing as truths, not only the universal reign of law, but also the most strange origin for different races. If the ancient saints did not adopt the conclusions of modern science; it is not because they condemned them, but because they knew nothing about them."²⁶ He shows precisely how a Christian might appreciate Darwin's scientific work, and attempt to fit it into his understanding of the cosmos, without taking on board the metaphysical baggage Darwin unnecessarily imports. And if the metaphysical presumptions of Darwin are implicit—though pervasive—in the *Origin of Species*, they become explicit in some of his later work. His 1868 *The Variation of Animals and Plants Under Domestication* provides a very clear example, in the concluding remarks.²⁷ Pushing back against those who declare, "natural selection explains nothing," he offers an image of teaching "a savage utterly ignorant in the art of building" why stones with certain shapes are used in particular structures—arches, roofs, etc.²⁸ Would he have explained nothing to this man, if the "precise cause of the shape of each fragment could not be given"?²⁹ The point here is true, as far as it goes. One need not give a complete account of the entire historical lineage, to account for the entirety of the events on the timeline, in order to have provided an explanation of how to construct a building. A description of how the bits of rock go together and why just is what it means to explain how to build a structure.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Charles Darwin, *The Variations of Animals and Plants under Domestication*, vol. 2 (London: John Murray, 1868).

²⁸ Ibid., 430.

²⁹ Ibid., 431.

But Darwin runs into trouble here. He's laid a trap for himself by giving an account of the kind of explanation he's offering. The claim, if his example can be counted as one, is that the theory of evolution by natural selection is a limited description of what best explains the available data—the features found in extant species (the buildings, if the analogy holds up). But just as quickly as this description is offered, Darwin transposes his reasoning into another key. Returning to the image of the stones used for building, he explains how the shape of any given rock fragment used for building is accidental. This does not, as he says, mean that the shape is uncaused, just that we need not assume any particular shape of rock is there *for the purpose of* being used in his building.³⁰ But it's right here that he begins to make a mistake, precisely by switching the register of his discourse. He moves from talk of secondary causes—rockslides and cliff faces—to talk of the primary cause—the LORD—without seeing the need to modify his manner of speech. And he knows he's wading into contested and unfamiliar territory! He says, “And here we are led to face a great difficulty, in alluding to which I am aware I am travelling beyond my proper province.”³¹ Darwin marks the departure and its dangers, but he presses on.

Before continuing with his analogy, Darwin adverts to the omniscience of a creator who knows all the consequences of the laws he establishes.³² Everything that comes about, the LORD knows. Darwin calls this foreknowing, but as I've already shown with the help of Gregory the Great, it's helpful to specify 'foreknowing' as shorthand for the LORD's knowledge of all the things that are in his eternal present. But Darwin

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

presses this picture. He asks, incredulously, “But can it be reasonably maintained that the Creator intentionally ordered, if we use the words in any ordinary sense, that certain fragments of rock should assume certain shapes so that the builder might erect his edifice?”³³ It’s not exactly the knowledge of the LORD Darwin is questioning, but rather his knowledge as enacted in the providential ordering of all things. One response to his question might be to point out that what he means by the “ordinary sense” of “intentionally ordered” is what’s at issue here. He’s moved from talk about the secondary causes of the shape of stones to talk about the LORD as their primary cause. He wants, however, to retain a kind of talk about ordering and causing that doesn’t fit this new context. There’s no specification of what the “ordinary sense” of ordering might be, but we might infer, from his analogy, that it looks like the kind of thing the builder is doing when he’s selecting stones to construct an edifice. This is a perfectly reasonable way to talk about ordering. The art of building is just this kind of thing, the imposition of an order upon the building materials, an order that wasn’t there before. But this is always a derivative and dependent sort of order. It requires that there be something capable of being ordered. Because humans can’t create *ex nihilo* this translates into a dependence upon the LORD for not only the existence and order of the materials, but also of ourselves and our powers of ordering. You should see already how quickly the analogy breaks down. The kind of ordering the LORD does is radically different from the kind a human builder does. To demand that our descriptions of it fit with an “ordinary sense” of ordering is to miss this point entirely.

³³ Ibid.

From his analogy of the builder and the rocks, he returns to the matter at hand: the variations in domesticated animals and plants. Taking himself to have proved his point in the case of the shapes of the rocks, why, he wonders, would we suggest that the variations of in organisms are ordained by the creator? And here he does ask a question that demands an answer. Because while the Christian tradition of reflection upon who the LORD is as creator claims that the LORD knows and ordains all things, having created them from nothing, we need also to take a hard look at what that entails. As Darwin says, we'd have to establish the LORD's claim over not just the beneficial variations in any given species, but also those that do them injury.³⁴ This is a theme I'll have to return to. At the moment, I still have to sort out what it is Darwin's elision of talk about secondary and primary causes does to his discourse.

It's easy enough to see where this leads Darwin. And in seeing it, we might also see why he thought his mythological teaching—so identified by Simpson—must attend his scientific discoveries. As Darwin puts it,

If we assume each particular variation was from the beginning preordained, the plasticity of organisation, which leads to many injurious deviations of structure, as well as that redundant power of reproduction which inevitably leads to the struggle for existence, and, as a consequence, to the natural selection or survival of the fittest, must appear to us superfluous laws of nature.³⁵

This way of putting it—preordination rendering the mechanism of selection superfluous—confirms the inference I made above. Darwin doesn't see, or doesn't distinguish, between primary and secondary causes. For this reason, preordaining and selection stand in opposition to one another. But there's no reason to think this. In fact,

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 432.

there's good reason to think that anyone so describing creation just isn't speaking about the LORD. Darwin's creator is no creator at all, he's a builder, operating on the same level of causality as the human builder constructing a building's edifice. His analogy has swallowed his conclusion whole.

Darwin's contemporary, St. George Mivart,³⁶ saw the same problem. His is one of the early Catholic responses to Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, *On the Genesis of Species*.³⁷ It has an entire chapter dedicated to theology and evolution. There he cites this same passage from Darwin's *Variations* and identifies the same weakness, a "low anthropomorphism."³⁸ From there he issues a flamboyant rebuttal to Darwin's dubium:

Why, surely every theist must maintain that in the first foundation of the universe—the primary and absolute creation—God saw and knew every purpose to which every atom and particle of matter should ever subserve in all suns and systems, and throughout all coming aeons of time. It is almost incredible, yet nevertheless it seems necessary to think that the difficulty thus proposed rests on a sort of notion that amidst the boundless profusion of nature there is too much for God to superintend; that the number of objects is too great for an infinite and *omnipresent* being to attend singly to each and all in their due proportions and needs!³⁹

Mivart has rightly diagnosed the major theological difficulty in Darwin's work. It has a number of consequences. First, as I said already, to adopt this picture of a creator means the you're no longer speaking of the LORD. Second, it leads people to say things about death—the association being built right into Darwin's talk of injurious variations and survival of the fittest—that aren't compatible with a Christian view of the cosmos. This

³⁶ For the record, he's not a saint, just British.

³⁷ St. George Mivart, *On the Genesis of Species* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1871).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 258.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 258-259. Emphasis original.

second problem maps onto considerations of nonhuman creaturely pain, suffering, and death. But it comes into even sharper focus when considering the death of humans.

And it's along these lines—the connection to death and suffering—that I want to turn my attention to some contemporary theologians who've been captivated by Darwin's mythological picture of the cosmos. The first instance I'll point out comes from Celia Deane-Drummond's work. Deane-Drummond is an interesting figure in this conversation because she is both a trained evolutionary biologist and a theologian. Sadly, she's just as prone to Darwin's "low anthropomorphism" as he is. In *Christ and Evolution: Wonder and Wisdom*, Deane-Drummond falls victim to the mythological element of Darwin's evolutionary theory. Mirroring Darwin's own skepticism of the LORD's omniscience and omnipotence, she says,

as someone trained in biological science, I find the possibility that God might influence mutation in a particular direction for usefulness perhaps many thousands of years hence somewhat strange...It would seem to anticipate, if it is to work, that God knows the whole history of the intervening period, which goes against how I would interpret the action of God in creation and history.⁴⁰

Strange indeed to think of the LORD's panoptic view of all creation—in fact, it's never entirely clear we know what we're doing when we're doing it. But, as Mivart explained, this is just what Christians have taken to be characteristically true of the LORD.

Imagining that the LORD *doesn't* know "the whole history of the intervening period" is simply to say he's not the LORD. The LORD's knowledge of that history—all the particulars that occur within it—just is their existence. Attempts to speak of the LORD's "action" in "creation and history" that lose sight of the LORD's causative knowing and

⁴⁰ Celia Deane-Drummond, *Christ and Evolution: Wonder and Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 27.

willing of all the things that are in all the times that are serve to show how far a given attempt has gone astray from Christian discourse about the LORD.

Her theological positions are even more problematic when she extends her evolutionary theology into the question of sin, suffering, and tragedy. In her essay for a volume called *Evolution and the Fall*,⁴¹ Deane-Drummond makes a consequential error. She mistakes theological positions on original sin for theologoumena.⁴² It seems she thinks there's nothing Christians are obliged to think about original sin that might norm or govern what it would be possible to say respecting the scientific evidence for death and evolution. Now, she's not entirely wrong. It does seem to me Christians can hold a variety of views about what original sin brings about, what its consequences are. But, whatever position you do hold is answerable to the Church's magisterial instruction on the subject, if there is any (there is). Against Deane-Drummond's view that there's nothing "required or necessary for Christian faith" about any specific teaching on original sin,⁴³ let's turn to the sources and see if that checks out.

There are some non-negotiable elements to the doctrine of original sin, and they aren't compatible with the opinion offered by Deane-Drummond, which I'll examine more closely in a moment. Look, for instance at the Synod of Carthage in 418. The first canon of the synod very clearly anathematizes the idea that humans were created so that whether or not they sinned, they would die a bodily death.⁴⁴ The synod explicitly

⁴¹ *Evolution and the Fall*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2017).

⁴² Celia Deane-Drummond, "In Adam All Die?: Questions at the Boundary of Niche Construction, Community Evolution, and Original Sin," in *Evolution and the Fall*, ed. William Cavanaugh and James K. A. Smith (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2017), 45.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Synod of Carthage, DS §222: "*ut quicumque dixerit, Adam primum hominm mortalem factum ita, ut, sive peccaret sive non peccaret, moreretur in corpore, hoc est de corpore exiret non peccati merito, sed necessitate naturae, anathema sit.*"

condemns the idea that human bodily death comes about “by the necessity of nature (*necessitate naturae*).”⁴⁵ This Synod of Carthage also condemns two positions concerning the inheritance of original sin. Those who say either that infants ought not to be baptized, or that they should be baptized but that original sin does not come from Adam are both anathematized.⁴⁶ The Second Synod of Orange, too, has something to say about original sin. There we’re taught it’s not only the body that suffers a change for the worse, but that the soul too is diminished by Adam’s sin.⁴⁷ The teachings of both Carthage and Orange are taken up and taught definitively by the Church at the Council of Trent, in session five’s “Decree on Original Sin.” And there we learn death is not only a consequence of sin, it’s also a kind of captivity, in which the devil holds us.⁴⁸ Physical death and the damage done to the human soul in sin are held together. Both, the death of the body and the death of the soul (i.e., separation from the LORD), must be held to be diffused into the whole human family from Adam’s sin, under threat of anathema.⁴⁹

How does this compare with what Deane-Drummond offers? Here’s how she puts things:

My own view is that original sin can be reinterpreted to mean that a person is born in each generation into an imperfect community of others,

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.: “*Item placuit, ut quicumque parvulos recentes ab uteris matrum baptizandos negat aut dicit in remissionem quidem peccatorum eos baptizari, sed nihil ex Adam trahere originalis peccati, quod lavacro regenerationis expietur, unde fit consequens, ut in eis forma baptismatis ‘in remissionem peccatorum’ non vera, sed falso intellegatur, anathema sit.*”

⁴⁷ Second Synod of Orange, DS §371: “*Si quis per offensam praevagationis Adae non totum, id est secundum corpus et animam, ‘in deterius’ dicit hominem ‘commutatum’, sed animae libertate illaesa durante, corpus tantummodo corruptioni credit obnoxium, Pelagii errore deceptus adversatur Scripturae.*”

⁴⁸ Council of Trent, “Decree on Original Sin,” DS §1511: “*amisisse incurrisseque per offensam praevagationis huiusmodi iram et indignationem Dei atque ideo mortem, quam antea illi comminatus fuerat Deus, et cum morte captivitatem sub eius potestate, ‘qui mortis’ deinde ‘habuit imperium, hoc est diaboli’ [Heb 2:14].*”

⁴⁹ Ibid., DS §1512: “*‘Si quis Adae praevagationem sibi soli et non eius prpagni asserit nocuisse’ ...aut inquinatum illum per inoboedientiae peccatum ‘mortem’ et poenas ‘corporis tantum in omne genus humanum transfudisse, non autem et peccatum, quod mors est animae’: anathema sit.*”

including other creaturely kinds. That community shapes the particular tapestry of sin as expressed in the life of an individual sinner, where sin represents a cutting off from relations with God and with each other, leading to concrete wrongful acts to which each person can be held to account. It is not so much that guilt is inherited through original sin, but that original sin creates the distorted social context in which it is impossible not to be a sinner.⁵⁰

Now, it's possible to affirm much of what she says here as true. Our sins will be shaped by the sins of our community. These particular sins, the toll they take on our lives and the lives of others, do affect our relations with the LORD. But saying this much is not enough. There's nothing here you couldn't discover about human persons from a sociology or political science textbook. The radical claim the Church is making is that sin and death hold us captive and that to be freed from it you must be baptized, "so that what they contracted by generation, might be cleansed in them by regeneration."⁵¹ Not only that, but original sin has damaged our human nature. This damage is a sort of congenital defect belonging to all humans. It's something from which we need to be cured, something from which we must be saved.

Deane-Drummond suggests that "we might balk at the early church's supposition that the fall is also a fall in physical capacities as well as moral capacities."⁵² There's something right about the doctrine of original sin, she thinks, it's just not this. What's needed, in her estimation, is a reconfiguration of the theology of original sin that takes into account what we know from evolutionary science. Here, she and I agree. We have to say something to account for our changed perspective on the natural world. At the same

⁵⁰ Deane-Drummond, "In Adam All Die?," 45.

⁵¹ Council of Trent, "Decree on Original Sin," *DS* §1514: "*ut in eis regeneratione mundetur, quod generatione contraxerunt.*"

⁵² Deane-Drummond, "In Adam All Die?," 45.

time, any such reinterpretation can't abandon the magisterium by scoffing at the primitive, early Church. As she sees it, though, the "classic accounts" of original sin contain a major flaw.⁵³ They assume "that suffering and the tragic follow from the fall into sin, rather than precede it. Evolutionary theory demands, then, an adjustment in such a perspective, so that sin takes place in a tragic context and the unity hoped for is an eschatological expectation of the end, rather than a return to a paradisiacal state."⁵⁴ Like Darwin, Deane-Drummond's moral impulses are attuned to creaturely suffering and death. She's right to see a problem. But she blinks too soon. Instead of asking whether the Christian tradition might have resources internal to itself to answer the question of moral tragedy—here I mean the moral tragedy of the millions of years of creaturely suffering and death evolutionary science presents us with—she assumes we must pitch overboard the teaching of the Church.

This kind of thinking about original sin and death isn't exclusive to Deane-Drummond, though. I'll point out another example in contemporary theology. In *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology*, David Kelsey attempts a theology of creation and the human person that can account for contemporary scientific knowledge about human origins. He does so by drawing on the accounts of creation in Scripture's wisdom tradition. Kelsey presents arguments for human creaturely existence that is, from the start, fragile and finite. Though humans and all other creatures have a proper integrity, our finitude and our death go hand in hand. As Kelsey puts it, "Such creaturely finitude makes their [human creatures'] deaths essential possibilities. Relating to us

⁵³ Ibid., 46.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

creatively, God creates dying life.”⁵⁵ The language gets stronger as he goes. Further along, he pushes back against the idea that original sin leads to human death. Drawing on the creation accounts in the biblical Wisdom literature he argues for “an understanding of human creaturely finitude according to which mortality and dying are inherent features of what it is to be a personal body. Hence it cannot be said that somehow adventitious distortion of personal identities [i.e., sin] causes personal bodies to die.”⁵⁶ But we should be skeptical about this approach. In an attempt to make sense of what we know of the cosmos by way of the natural sciences, the author ends up abandoning a central axiom of the Christian faith: we’re in need of salvation from death and death’s mistress, sin.

But couldn’t this reinterpretation of original sin, which emphasizes its spiritual, moral, and communal rather than the physical, biological, and inherited aspects, be a sort of natural development in Christian thought about the nature of human beings? Now that we’ve come to understand more fully what humans are and where we’ve come from in evolutionary terms, isn’t it necessary to reconfigure our doctrines accordingly? Wasn’t this what Augustine argued about the relation between biblical interpretation and scientific knowledge in the first book of *De Genesi ad litteram*? Here I’m forced to say both yes and no. We do need a way of speaking about the LORD and creation that can account for what the natural sciences have taught us. And yet, we have to recognize the priority of the rule of faith in our speculative suggestions of how that might go. Casting to one side the teaching of an ecumenical council on the origins of human death in sin, especially when it’s claiming to offer a definitive interpretation of the scriptural witness

⁵⁵ David H. Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology*, vol. 1 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 284.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 437.

of St. Paul at Romans 5:12,⁵⁷ can't be a live option. Sin and death—physical death—go hand in hand.

And, of course, the Council of Trent is simply codifying as doctrine what can be found throughout the Old and New Testament. Sin and death must be held together, else the gospel turns out to make very little sense. Remove death from the network of evils consequent upon sin and you'll have a very hard time saying why creation needs salvation from it. Let me put it this way. If death is a natural reality, intrinsic to what it is to be a finite creature, and in particular of what it is to be a human, how can it also be “the last enemy to be destroyed” (1 Cor 15:26)? Is there a way to speak intelligibly of sin as “the sting of death” (1 Cor 15:56) or of death as “the wages of sin” (Rom 6:23) without connecting physical, bodily death with the voluntary evil of rational creatures? It's not clear we can give reasons why the LORD should become a human, suffer, and die in order to save us from death, if it's also the case that he created us to die. In Deane-Drummond's view, tragedy precedes sin—death is just part of what it means to be a creature. For Kelsey, finitude and death go hand in hand. But the Word becomes flesh so that “he might taste death for every one” (Heb 2:9). In Jesus Christ, the LORD tastes death to “deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage” (Heb 2:15). But why fear what belongs to us properly? How can our natures as created by the LORD constitute bondage?

The short answer is they can't. These positions can't be reconciled with the Christian witness to a crucified LORD, who is crucified—who goes to his death willingly—to save us from death. It's more than a little ironic, then, that Darwin's

⁵⁷ cf. *DS* §§1512, 1514

Variations ends with a comparison of the problem he's presented—of natural selection and its compatibility with divine foreknowledge—with another perennial problem, free will and predestination.⁵⁸ I mention this—the very last line in Darwin's work—not because it seems to me Darwin has anything useful to say on the matter. Dealing with a confused picture of the LORD it's not clear he could say anything interesting. But the questions of free will and predestination—the compatibility of the LORD's saving action and human free choice of the LORD as our true and final end—is at the heart of the Pelagian controversy. Pelagius, who thought and taught the faculties of human creatures hadn't suffered diminution from the fall of Adam and Eve, imagined it was possible to keep the commandments of the LORD apart from the help of grace. The passages I've cited from the Synods of Carthage and Orange and the Council of Trent are all addressing the question of original sin from this angle. The Church's definitions of original sin, its interpretation of the relevant passages from Scripture, are meant to put to bed a particular heresy.

At the heart of the Pelagian heresy is the very question I've been treating: the effects of the human fall. And in Augustine, that most vocal and persistent opponent of Pelagianism, we find a stout defense against the tendency to naturalize death. It's on this very note that he opens his *De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum*. "They say," Augustine says, "Adam was so created that even without sin it would be his due to die, not as punishment for guilt, but by the necessity of nature."⁵⁹ Those who follow the teaching of Pelagius claim human death is a natural phenomenon,

⁵⁸ Darwin, *Variations*, 2, 432.

⁵⁹ *pecc. mer.*, 1.2.2, CSEL 60:1: "Qui dicunt 'Adam sic creatum, ut etiam sine peccati merito moreretur non poena culpae, sed necessitate naturae.'"

not the punishment due to original sin. The death promised to Adam and Eve for disobedience in the garden, say the Pelagians, is a soulish death, not something affecting the human body.⁶⁰ Here and elsewhere Augustine does not claim human creatures are made with something other than a mortal body. In *De civitate Dei*, for instance, drawing on the teaching of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:42-50, Augustine says the first man was made “from the earth, earthly, into a living soul not into an enlivening spirit, which was laid up for him after being earned by obedience.”⁶¹ Not yet clothed with immortality, Adam has an animal body—alive by way of an *anima*, a soul. But were he to persist in obedience—to return to *De peccatorum meritis*—he would have been “changed into a spiritual body and into that incorruption, which is promised to the faithful and the saints, without having to pass through the punishment of death.”⁶² The Pelagian position is consistent, though, with their more fundamental position on the nature of original sin.

Death is not an effect of original sin, argue the Pelagians. It can’t be, because sin isn’t transmitted by propagation, but rather by imitation.⁶³ Augustine makes a clever argument to refute this position. Now, the textual conflicts around Romans 5:12 are interesting in their own right. David Hart, for example, has levied a straightforward critique of the “mistranslation” of Romans 5:12, which he finds responsible—in part, at

⁶⁰ *pecc. mer.*, 1.2.2, CSEL 60:1-2: “*profecto illud, quod in lege dictum est: qua die ederitis, mori moriemini, non ad mortem corporis, sed ad mortem animae, quae in peccato fit, referre conantur.*”

⁶¹ *civ.*, 13.23, CSEL 40.1:648 “*Primus autem homo de terra terrenus in animam viventem factus est, non in spiritum vivificantem, quod ei oboedientiae meritum servabatur.*”

⁶² *pecc. mer.*, 1.2.2, CSEL 60:2: “*si non peccasset, in corpus fuerat spiritale mutandus et in illam incorruptionem, quae fidelibus et sanctis promittitur, sine mortis supplicio transiturus.*”

⁶³ *pecc. mer.*, 1.9.9, CSEL 60:10: “*ipsum peccatum non propagatione in alios homines ex primo homine, sed imitatione transisse.*”

least—for the trajectory of western theological reflection on the topic of original sin.⁶⁴ Augustine’s reading of the text is intriguing, though, because while he does deploy the text of Romans 5:12 in his argument against the Pelagians, he doesn’t first tack to the controversial “*in quo omnes peccaverunt*.” Instead he points back to Wisdom 2:24, “through the devil’s envy death entered the world.” Imitation is how the first sin occurs. The devil tempts, and humans fall by following him away from the LORD. But then why not name Satan in Romans 5? Augustine asks. “If the apostle had wanted to call to mind the sin, which entered into this world not by propagation but by imitation, he would have called its originator not Adam but the devil.”⁶⁵ This is a subtler move than what he’ll do with “*in quo omnes peccaverunt*” in the next section.⁶⁶ It’s worth attending to because the claim that Augustine, or the western tradition following him, has built its theology of original sin on a shaky foundation is less convincing once you see the range of arguments Augustine deploys to support it—this being just one of them. Romans 5:12 is one piece (a big piece to be sure) in a much larger puzzle of doctrine and practice.

The upshot of Augustine’s reading of Wisdom 2:24 and Romans 5:12 together—two verses we’ll need to look at more closely soon enough—is that Adam is being identified as the *princeps*, the originator, of sin. He’s drawing a distinction between the

⁶⁴ David Bentley Hart, *The New Testament: A Translation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 296-297 note p. An interesting situation presents itself here, however, as the Council of Trent offers a decisive interpretation of Romans 5:12 in its “Decree on Original Sin.” Whatever the Greek manuscripts say, the Roman Catholic Church has codified not only the text of the Vulgate, “*Per unum hominem peccatum intravit in mundum, et per peccatum mors, et ita in omnes homines mors pertransiit, in quo omnes peccaverunt*” (Rom 5:12), but also its meaning (especially what it means to say “in whom all have sinned”) as part of the doctrinal deposit of the Church. Whatever your position on the Greek is, Catholics cannot resolve the difficulty simply by returning to the text of Paul’s letter.

⁶⁵ *pecc. mer.*, 1.9.9, CSEL 60:10: “*Sed si peccatum apostolus illud commemorare voluisset, quod in hunc mundum non propagatione, sed imitatione intraverit, eius principem non Adam, sed diabolum diceret.*”

⁶⁶ cf. *pecc. mer.*, 1.9.10.

way sin comes through Adam's imitation of the devil and the way it comes to us. Were Paul speaking of sin that comes through imitation, were we in no way subject to inherited guilt, he would have had us all marked out as imitators of the devil. As it happens, he's connected death to Adam's sin, and so it must come to us in a way distinct from imitation. We do, in fact, imitate Adam each time we sin, Augustine says.⁶⁷ But Adam also passes along his sin to all humans who come after him. Here he deploys his full text of Romans 5:12 to drive home the distinction he's made between imitation and propagation. Adam "in himself corrupted by the hidden corruption of his carnal concupiscence all who were to come from his lineage"⁶⁸—and this is why the devil isn't named in as the *princeps* by Paul.

The Pelagian rejects death as punishment for sin precisely because of the rejection of original sin as something that's contracted and propagated through inheritance. And this is parallel to the move in contemporary theology that seeks to naturalize human death. Both Kelsey and Deane-Drummond want to reinterpret the doctrine of original sin, decoupling it from death. Being born into a context that's ineluctably tragic and so also drinking in the sins of the human family, as Deane-Drummond's reinterpretation offered, sounds an awful lot like the position Augustine is critiquing in *De peccatorum meritis*. I can't shake the feeling that this all comes back to the worry in both Darwin's and Deane-Drummond's work that if the LORD is omniscient and omnipotent and therefore knows and wills (either positively or permissively) all the things that are, that something of the

⁶⁷ *pecc. mer.*, 1.9.10, CSEL 60:11: "Imitantur quidem Adam, quotquot per inoboedientiam transgrediuntur mandatum dei."

⁶⁸ *pecc. mer.*, 1.9.10, CSEL 60:11: "occulta etiam tate carnalis concupiscentiae suae tabificavit in se omnes de sua stirpe venturos."

drama of life, both human and nonhuman, is lost. It seems to me they both are in search of a world that could surprise the LORD himself. And that's, come to think of it, exactly the sort of worry Pelagius has when he encounters Augustine's theology of grace. The story of Pelagius hearing Augustine's words from Book X of the *Confessiones*, "grant what you command, and command what you will,"⁶⁹ centers on a worry that the LORD might know and will too much, leaving no room for his creatures to be themselves. Where does the moral seriousness of the Christian life lie if the ability to do the good is something the LORD must grant us? Darwin's inclination to tie natural selection and species variation to the vexed question of free will and predestination represents the same set of concerns at the level of biological processes rather than the life of faith. The structure is roughly similar in each case. In response, I'll merely repeat the thoughts of Herbert McCabe, which I quoted in my second chapter. McCabe says, "every action in the world is an action of God; not because it is not an action of a creature but because it is by God's action that the creature is *itself* and has its *own* activity."⁷⁰ The desire to be yourself, to have your own activity that isn't also an action of the LORD is to desire to be nothing at all. There's something demonic, then, in the Pelagian demand for moral autonomy as there is in Darwin's for physical autonomy. In each case, the hearer wants himself or the world to be what it is apart from the LORD. But, apart from the LORD and what he brings about, there is just nothing.

Now I want to return to the moral problem identified in both Darwin's and Deane-Drummond's work. I want to turn back to it because it seems to me the desire to

⁶⁹ *conf.*, 10.29.40, *CSEL* 33:256: "*da quod iubes et iube quod vis.*"

⁷⁰ Herbert McCabe, OP, "Creation," in *God Matters* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987; reprint, London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012), 7.

naturalize death and to exclude the natural processes by which things come to be, propagate themselves, and die, from the LORD's providence might come from a particular set of worries. These worries coincide with those I expressed in chapter three. That is, I've the inclination to view all death, not just human death as a kind of evidence things aren't as they should be. To say the death of the zebra in the jaws of a lion is simply the-way-things-are, that this can be explained by recourse to natural evil, misses something of the evolutionary biologist's horror at finding all the various forms of life on earth have their origins in a kind of colossal meat grinder. This seems clearly to be on Darwin's mind when he notices that if all the variations of plant and animal life are superintended by the LORD, this includes those that are "not beneficial" and "far more injurious to the creatures themselves."⁷¹ So, too, in Deane-Drummond's desire to preserve the tragic, we see an awareness of the moral difficulty posed by the sheer scope of nonhuman creaturely death.

This moral impulse, this judgment about the nature of creation, is expressed in a number of genres. Alongside Darwin's worries we can place his more polemical heir, Richard Dawkins, who takes the evidence of the vast scales of evolutionary death, dismemberment, and general suffering to argue decisively against the idea of beneficent (or at least an omnipotent) creator. In a section of his book *The Greatest Show on Earth*⁷² called "Evolutionary Theodicy?" Dawkins gives the example of Ichneumon wasps. The females of the species paralyze their victims before laying their eggs within the living, but immobile, bodies of their prey. The larvae of the wasp then hatch within the still-

⁷¹ Darwin, *Variations*, 2, 431.

⁷² Richard Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Earth: The Evidence for Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 2009).

living victim and devour it from the inside out.⁷³ According to Dawkins, Ichneumon wasps were a common cause of worry among Victorian biologists, including Darwin himself.⁷⁴ And it's easy to see why. How, we might ask, could such a thing come about? Why would the LORD devise such a cruel mechanism for the propagation of the species—governing, as he does, all things by his will? In this section Dawkins cites another of his works with a description that seems an accurate portrayal and ought to dissuade us from hasty or glib dismissals of the very real concern expressed. He says,

The total amount of suffering per year in the natural world is beyond all decent contemplation. During the minute that it takes me to compose this sentence, thousands of animals are being eaten alive, others are running for their lives, whimpering with fear, others are being slowly devoured from within by rasping parasites, thousands of all kinds are dying of starvation, thirst and disease. It must be so. If there is ever a time of plenty, this very fact will automatically lead to an increase in population until the natural state of starvation and misery is restored.⁷⁵

All of this is right, and rightly terrifying. It ought, that is, to give Christians pause. Do we have answers to objections of this kind?

Because it's not only Dawkins or Darwin who are shaken in this way. Tennyson, too, sees the difficulty, in a poem called *In Memoriam A. H. H.* The work begins "Strong Son of God, immortal Love,/ Whom we, that have not seen thy face,/ By faith, and faith alone, embrace,/ Believing where we cannot prove."⁷⁶ Faith, and faith alone, is what's required by the fifty-fourth canto. Looking upon the ills of death, Tennyson says, perhaps trying to convince himself? "Oh yet we trust that somehow good/ Will be the final goal of

⁷³ Ibid., 395.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 391.

⁷⁶ Alfred Tennyson, "In Memoriam A. H. H. Obit MDCCCXXXIII," in *Tennyson: Poems and Plays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 230.

ill.”⁷⁷ Faith in the goodness, and perhaps also of the strength of the “Strong Son of God” is necessary when staring nature in the face. By the end of this same canto, he’ll find there are no words to express what it is he sees, “And with no language but a cry.”⁷⁸ But he does continue to speak, or rather to limp along, now asking, “Are God and Nature then at strife,/ That Nature lends such evil dreams?”⁷⁹ How, he wonders, can he hold together the strength and “immortal Love” of the LORD with the brutality of Nature? He offers a solution, one which fits the suggestion from the last canto that good is the goal of ill. “So careful of the type she seems,/ So careless of the single life.”⁸⁰ Maybe, then, species are the goal, the final goal, the good that comes from ill. This doesn’t quite satisfy, though, so now we hear, “I falter where I firmly trod” and “I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope.”⁸¹ Tennyson feels his own weakness in the face of death, registering the feebleness of his own attempt at resolution.

He ends the fifty-fifth canto with, “And faintly trust the larger hope.”⁸² His attempts at speech—to offer something more than wordless cry—don’t even satisfy him. And it gets worse. The larger hope, that of the preservation of the type at the expense of the individual, is also shattered by the voice of Nature herself, in the next canto. I’ll quote this one at length, as it includes the best-known line from the poem, and sums up the poet’s difficulty in the face of the world depicted for him by evolutionary biology.

‘So careful of the type’? but no.
From scarped cliff and quarried stone
She cries, ‘A thousand types are gone:

⁷⁷ Ibid., Canto LIV, p. 243.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., Canto LV, p. 243.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

I care for nothing, all shall go.

‘Thou makest thine appeal to me:
I bring to life, I bring to death:
The spirit does but mean the breath:
I know no more.’ And he, shall he,

Man, her last work, who seem’d so fair,
Such splendid purpose in his eyes,
Who roll’d the psalm to wintry skies,
Who built him fanes of fruitless prayer,

Who trusted God was love indeed
And love Creation’s final law—
Tho’ Nature, red in tooth and claw
With ravine, shriek’d against his creed—

Who loved, who suffer’d countless ills,
Who battled for the True, the Just,
Be blown about the desert dust,
Or seal’d within the iron hills?⁸³

Not even the type can save him, for the types themselves perish at Nature’s hands.

Wielding life and death, Nature confronts Man. Man, who trusted in the immortal Love of the LORD, now sees Nature for what she is, gorged on the flesh of not just individuals but whole species.

I’ll point out one more striking instance in Graham Greene’s *The Power and the Glory*, where the lieutenant in pursuit of the whisky priest feels, viscerally, the cruelty of the world. Greene writes,

The lieutenant sat down upon his bed and began to take off his boots. It was the hour of prayer. Black beetles exploded against the wall like crackers. More than a dozen crawled over the tiles with injured wings. It infuriated him to think that there were still people in the state who believed in a loving and merciful God. There are mystics who are said to have experienced God directly. He was a mystic, too, and what he had experienced was a vacancy—a complete certainty in the existence of a

⁸³ Ibid., Canto LVI, p. 243.

dying, cooling world, of human beings who had evolved from animals for no purpose at all. He knew.⁸⁴

The absurdity of a beetle maiming itself by repeatedly bashing into the wall until it loses the ability to fly provokes a rage in the lieutenant. This vision—a mystical vision—presses in on him as a felt lack. The lieutenant experiences the LORD's absence in the suicidal beetles as palpably as the Christian mystic does the LORD's love. Who could insist a loving and merciful creator made them?

I'll insist on it. But it's a mistake to insist on it by dismissing the moral concerns of Darwin, Deane-Drummond, Dawkins, Tennyson, and Greene's lieutenant. Mivart makes this mistake in his critique of Darwin. If you weren't already worried about dismissing the concerns outright, the form this dismissal takes ought to be enough to disturb you into reconsidering. Mivart decides to tackle Darwin's questions about variations that prove detrimental to a creature's survival. These maladaptations might be the source of pain or suffering for the animal. Mivart's gruesome response is to explain the pain away by insisting the specter of animal suffering is something of a canard. Suffering can be directly correlated, he claims, to the mental acuity of the sufferer. He, unfortunately, continues,

The Author has been assured that lower races of men appear less keenly sensitive to physical pain than do more cultivated and refined human beings. Thus only in man can there really be any intense degree of suffering, because only in him is there that intellectual recollection of past moments and that anticipation of future ones, which constitute in great part the bitterness of suffering. The momentary pang, the present pain, which beasts endure, though real enough, is yet, doubtless, not to be compared as to its intensity with the suffering which is produced in man through his high prerogative of self-consciousness.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 24.

⁸⁵ Mivart, *The Genesis of Species*, 260-261.

Not only does Mivart think anecdotal pseudoscience sufficient evidence for hierarchically ordering the pain of nonhuman animals, he applies the same standard to talk of human pain and suffering. While I think his characterization of the phenomenology of pain suspect, this isn't the place to show why. It's enough to offer an example of a certain kind of response—and a particularly distasteful one—to the concerns of those struck by the insights of evolutionary biology, who aren't able to easily reconcile what they've learned about the world with what they've heard about the LORD.

It's no wonder—with the view of pain and suffering Mivart offers—that he's able to cheerily respond to Darwin, "The natural universe has resulted in the development of an unmistakable harmony and beauty, and in a decided preponderance of good and happiness over their opposites."⁸⁶ The point of Mivart's manly, rational dismissal of Darwin's sentimentalism toward plants and animals is to paper over the concern altogether and simply *insist* on the world's goodness and beauty. Never mind how one would measure goodness and happiness so as to be able to announce so blithely their preponderance. Never mind, that is, the sound of the lieutenant's exploding beetles.

Perhaps I'm just a bit morose (I am). How could I have set out to write a dissertation on death otherwise? But on this point, I find myself siding with those who see the horror of the natural history of carnage. It's something that needs to be made sense of, not something to be brushed aside. It doesn't seem at all obvious to me that there's a preponderance of goodness and happiness. I'm more inclined to hear the whole creation groaning (Rm 8:22). At the same time, I want to affirm the cosmos created by the LORD is good and very good. The task now is to see—and to show—whether the

⁸⁶ Ibid., 261.

work I've done to interpret Augustine's theology of creation provides us with something robust enough to bear the weight of evolutionary biologist's discoveries. There is a way through the confrontation of Greene's lieutenant with the vacancy he experiences when confronted with the realities of death and suffering. But to take this path you can't deny these evident evils. Averting your eyes won't make them disappear, and the attempts to lessen their significance are grotesque. What I'm proposing is that we head straight for the death and suffering. We have to see it, that is, as the working out in the order of time of the real consequences of the angelic fall identified in chapter three. The rest of this chapter will be a speculative attempt to see how that plays out and what the theological payoff this view might be.

5.2 The Rationes Seminales in the Order of Time

First, a recap. The devil is fallen *ex quo creatus est*—from the moment he's created. That was the conclusion of chapter three. This isn't to be misunderstood as a claim that the devil was created evil. Rather, the devil was created good and yet falls in the blink of an eye. Because of this fall the world is always already broken, shot through with the devil's sin. There's never a time when the good and very good creation of the LORD is not also damaged. This because the creation of the angels occurs before all times and so affects all times. There I also made the provisional claim that because the angels administer all things, and do so through the *rationes seminales*, there'd be good reason to suppose the damage the demons do to themselves in falling is not limited to themselves. The damage inflicted by the fall of the angels ramifies outward in a cascade of effects, leaving no part of the cosmos untouched by the effects of sin.

But what are these effects? I'm offering a reading of Paul's claim, "the wages of sin is death" (Rm 6:23), that applies it to the entirety of the cosmos. The principal effect of the fall of the angels, with respect to all other creatures, is to incline them to die. "Through the devil's envy death entered the world" (Wis 2:24), and when the good and very good creation of the LORD—made all at once in the *conditio*—marches along in the order of time, it does so with a limp. In other words, the *rationes seminales* the LORD created in the *conditio* unfurl in the *administratio* in a cosmos with a tendency toward dissipation and dissolution. This is the "bondage to decay" Paul identifies holding creation captive in Romans 8:21. It's a tendency toward death that affects all creatures, living or otherwise. Entropic decay, the movement of the physical universe toward a thermodynamic equilibrium state, is a structural feature of the cosmos. It begins, so far as we can tell, at the very beginning. It will end, so it seems, with a cold, dark, and lifeless material world. Augustine's claim that, "the whole time of this life is nothing other than a march toward death,"⁸⁷ applies equally well to the whole physical world as it does to any individual human life.

Let's say, then, that the march begins just shy of fourteen billion years ago with a big bang. The decay begins right away. Things start to cool down, but they also start to take shape. Eventually galaxies and stars form—all the heavenly bodies dancing to gravity's tune. But how do they form? There's one level at which to ask this question where I'm simply unqualified to answer. Astrophysicists, I assume, can give perfectly cogent explanations of the how of stellar and galactic genesis. This isn't my primary concern. That it happens, and happens predictably, is something I'm willing to trust them

⁸⁷ *civ.*, 13.10, *CSEL* 40.1:626: "ut omnino nihil sit aliud tempus vitae huius, quam cursus ad mortem."

on. I'm interested in another kind of how question. How do the *rationes seminales*—those seed-like rules at the heart of creation, relating all things to Christ—give this cosmos its particular shape after the fall of the angels? They do so while always being marked, marred, by the sin of the angels. Augustine's thinking about the *rationes seminales* in *De genesi ad litteram* is congruent with this thought. There Augustine looks into a couple of possible ways of interpreting the *rationes*. Is each thing created in its seed-like state with the tendency to develop in the course of time, through the normal periods of growth? Or, is it that the LORD prescribes that things will emerge already developed, fully formed, without passing through any intermediary stages?⁸⁸

“But why should we not believe they had both possibilities?” Augustine asks.⁸⁹ Why not, that is, assume the LORD creates the *rationes* with aptitudes (*habiles*) toward either mode?⁹⁰ If the LORD acts to bring an event about miraculously, we needn't suppose he acts against his own original creation of all things in the *conditio*. Instead, we might assume a latent possibility toward either the timebound or the miraculous. Or perhaps, even better, we'll be inclined to reflect upon the miraculous fact that there is anything at all! Just before these thoughts, Augustine gives the example of Jesus' miracle of turning water to wine. In this case, it's not as though water isn't apt to become wine. Just that to do so normally involves temporal processes: being drunk in by the roots of a vine, budding into grapes, being pressed into juice, and fermenting into an alcoholic

⁸⁸ *Gn. litt.*, 6.14.25, *PL* 34:349: “*Quaeri autem merito potest, causales illae rationes, quas mundo indidit, cum primum simul omnia creavit, quomodo sint institutae: utrum ut, quemadmodum videmus cuncta nascentia vel fruticum vel animalium in suis conformationibus atque incrementis, sua pro diversitate generum diversa spatia peragerent temporum? an ut, quemadmodum creditur factus Adam sine ullo progressu incrementorum virili aetate, continuo conformarentur?*”

⁸⁹ *Gn. litt.*, 6.14.25, *PL* 34:349: “*Sed cur non utrumque illas credimus habuisse?*”

⁹⁰ *Gn. litt.*, 6.14.25, *PL* 34:349: “*Restat ergo ut ad utrumque modum habiles creatae sint.*”

beverage.⁹¹ But, Augustine asks, “Did the maker of time need the help of time?”⁹² Is it not the case that the LORD can bring about things in a way that seems unusual to us by acting upon the latent possibilities contained in the *rationes*? And might not these be what we call miracles?

I want to develop this concept of aptitude, and apply it to more than just the possibility of the LORD acting miraculously or letting time run its course. I want to say what Augustine’s thoughts on the *rationes*—and their indeterminacy—give us is a way of talking about what happens when certain possibilities for the created order are foreclosed from the very beginning with the fall of the angels. As soon as that happens, what we have on our hands is a decaying cosmos, a dying cosmos. The aptitudes toward which the *rationes* are disposed will unfurl, then, within that structure. Because the fall of the angels and the introduction of sin into the world isn’t a surprise to the LORD, we should also want to say that what is actualized, the aptitudes that come to fruition, are pleasing to the LORD.⁹³ Though, they are what the world will look like under the conditions of slavery to sin. What would a world without angelic sin have looked like? Can we see in the *rationes*’ possibilities the unactualized aptitudes? It’s not clear to me that we can know the answers to these questions. What is clearer to me is that this world is the one with which we have to do. And this world is a world in which sin and sin’s damage play a role. One role they seem to play—to pick up the illustration Tolkien’s *The Silmarillion*

⁹¹ *Gn. litt.*, 6.13.24, PL 34:349: “*Quis enim nescit aquam concretam terrae, cum ad radices vitis venerit, duci in saginam ligni illius, atque in eo sumere qualitatem, qua in uvam procedat paulatim erumpentem; atque in ea grandescente vinum fiat, maturumque dulcescat, quod adhuc fervescat expressum, et quadam vetustate firmatum ad usum bibendi utilius jucundiusque perveniat?*”

⁹² *Gn. litt.*, 6.13.24, PL 34:349: “*Numquid adjutorio temporis eguit conditor temporis?*”

⁹³ *Gn. litt.*, 6.14.25, PL 34:349: “*Sed cur non utrumque illas credimus habuisse, ut hoc ex eis futurum esset, quod factori placuisset.*”

provided us in the last chapter—is putting the musical score of the LORD’s creation into a minor key. How, then, does the LORD catch the disruption and damage of sin up into something even more glorious, something which wouldn’t have been apart from the damage done?

To understand this I want to turn to Book XIII of *De civitate Dei*, where Augustine describes what the grace of Jesus Christ accomplishes with respect to death. There he explains, “So, through the ineffable mercy of God the very punishment of sins becomes the armor of virtue, and even the death sentence of the sinner becomes the merit of the just.”⁹⁴ He’s exploring the strange state of affairs that obtains because of the grace of Christ. The LORD having gone down to death in the second person of the Trinity, death takes on a new character. Martyrs who go to their death now do honor to the LORD by the very thing that once was a shameful punishment for sin. In this passage we see what the LORD is able to do with death. He puts it to good use. Augustine is careful. He doesn’t want his reader to make the mistake of assuming death is no longer evil: “It’s not that death, which once was bad, became something good.”⁹⁵ Instead, he explains, “God showed so much grace to faith that death, which is known to be opposed to life, has become the instrument (*instrumentum*) by which one may pass over to life.”⁹⁶ The LORD wields death like a tool. He uses it, his own death, to put death to death. He doesn’t make death good, but he turns it toward a good end.

⁹⁴ *civ.*, 13.4, CSEL 40.1:620: “*Sic per ineffabilem Dei misericordiam et ipsa poena vitiorum transit in arma virtutis, et fit iusti meritum etiam supplicium peccatoris.*”

⁹⁵ *civ.*, 13.4, CSEL 40.1:620: “*non quia mors bonum aliquod facta est, quae antea malum fuit.*”

⁹⁶ *civ.*, 13.4, CSEL 40.1:620: “*tantam Deus fidei praestitit gratiam, ut mors, quam vitae constat esse contrarium, instrumentum fieret, per quod transiretur ad vitam.*”

This is the logic of the incarnation. The LORD descends to take on our infirmity. He makes our weakness the means by which we can attain eternal life. Death plays a crucial role. Christ's death stands at the center of the liturgical life of the Church. Through death he comes to the resurrection—but only through death. I want to suggest the same logic is always at work in the always already fallen creation. The LORD created the *rationes* with certain aptitudes. The aptitudes actualized in a cosmos whose rule is death and decay are those that put death to work. The LORD uses death, catches it up into his own purposes. When he does so, he creates the whole panoply of living things. Living things that only are what they are because they've come to be in a dying world. But it's a dying world whose true rule, whose *regula* and *ratio*, is life. As Augustine explains in Book IX of *De Genesi ad litteram*, the seminal rules written into the cosmos at their inception and relating all things to Christ, determine what creatures are capable of.⁹⁷ Everything the LORD will work in his providential governance of the cosmos—to include what we'd call miracles—is a possibility already there in the *rationes seminales*.⁹⁸

This matches up pretty well with what we see at work in the natural processes of the world. It's through the decay and death of stars that heavier elements come to be. Planets form and cool off making possible the kinds of living thing we find on earth, plants and animals, bacteria and fungi. And on the coming to be of the most primitive forms of life, say three and a half billion years ago, is there any need to posit a special

⁹⁷ *Gn. litt.*, 9.17.32, PL 34:406: “*Omnis iste naturae usitatissimus cursus habet quasdam naturales leges suas, secundum quas et spiritus vitae, qui creatura est, habet quosdam appetitus suos determinatos quodammodo, quos etiam mala voluntas non possit excedere. Et elementa mundi hujus corporei habent definitam vim qualitatemque suam, quid unumquodque valeat vel non valeat, quid de quo fieri possit vel non possit.*”

⁹⁸ *Gn. litt.*, 9.17.32, PL 34:406: “*Super hunc autem motum cursumque rerum naturalem, potestas Creatoris habet apud se posse de his omnibus facere aliud, quam eorum quasi seminales rationes habent, non tamen id quod non in eis posuit ut de his fieri vel ab ipso possit.*”

intervention of the LORD in the ordering of the cosmos? I don't think there is precisely because, as we've seen in Augustine's account of creation, everything has already been made, sown into the world as seeds. Their coming to be in time is nothing but the outworking of the LORD's hidden act of creation. Hidden from us, that is, apart from the narrative of the hexaëmeron in Genesis 1, and not hidden from the angels who grasp it in its all-at-onceness. Those first living creatures, primitive plants and animals which came to be in the order of time, are no less a product of the LORD's intentional creation of the cosmos if the LORD didn't have to prod at a puddle of primordial goo in order to bring it to life. The LORD brought into being the very laws by which they'd be governed, the context in which they'd exist, the time in which they'd live and die. A strange demand, it seems to me, that the LORD do this by what's called special creation. As if the LORD could only govern his cosmos immediately and not through secondary, created causes.

But the damage of the cosmos evident in the death and decay of all things doesn't stop with the advent of life. No, while life resists entropic decay, it remains the case that living things undergo this evil at the hands of time and one another. Predation, the sustenance of life through the death and consumption of other creatures, is a mark of the fallen cosmos. So is the necessity of competition for finite resources like sunlight, water, or soil. This is the case in single-celled creatures and complex organisms alike. The struggle for survival, the push to stave off decay and death by boxing out other creatures or actively killing them, is evidence of the damage wrought by the fall of the angels. But the LORD uses this very feature to bring about marvelous things. The bright colors and eye spots of the Io Moth, the delicate, flowing elegance of the Leafy Seadragon, the powerful jaws of the American Alligator, the sleek, streamlined body of the Bottlenose

Dolphin, are all the product of the LORD's putting death to good use. The variations of species, the evolutionary successes that allow creatures to avoid death in another's jaws or by starvation are also the source of the multiplicity of life. Remembering the necessary caveats from chapter three about natural and voluntary evils, it's possible to affirm at once the competition among created goods is a feature of the world as it stands, without needing to say these evils aren't a cause for alarm, disgust, or horror.

Greene's lieutenant and his exploding beetles, Tennyson's "Nature, red in tooth and claw," Deane-Drummond's awareness of the tragic context of biological speciation, and Darwin's concern for maladapted plants and animals all recognize something true. This world is a broken one. It's the occasion of unimaginable suffering. Not just individuals but entire species blink in and out of existence, often dying horribly. There's no need to deny the moral outrage of the biologist trying to reckon with what she knows to be the very processes by which life has staked its claim. As I've shown, these attempts often end up not only wrong but nearly as horrifying as the realities they're trying to ameliorate. But we can direct the outrage. We can do so by pointing out that it's the sin of rational creatures that create the conditions in which *rationes* unfold in time in just this way. As I want to show now, though, this means our outrage must be self-directed. Because while the angelic fall *ante omnia tempora* gives us a way of talking about the deaths of nonhuman creatures before—in the order of time—the sin of humans, this doesn't let humanity off the hook.

5.3 The Creation and Fall of Humans

If it's through the processes of death and decay that nonhuman creatures are given their particular shape. If, that is, the unfurling of the *rationes seminales* in the order of

time means their unfurling in a world already marked by sin and death. Then couldn't we also suppose that this same process is the one by which human creatures come to be? This connection between human and nonhuman creatures is one we can see in Scripture and in the Fathers. Augustine, in *De civitate Dei*, affirms humans are created with animal bodies.⁹⁹ And in *De Genesi ad litteram* he explains that the human body when first created could be said to be both mortal and immortal: "That is, mortal, because it was able to die; immortal, because it was able not to die."¹⁰⁰ Mightn't we say, then, that the LORD uses death as his instrument to shape, to bring about by physical processes, the animal body of the human being?

This position is compatible with the text of Genesis 2 and with the position offered by Augustine in *De Genesi ad litteram*. Now, Augustine seems to have at least two and possibly three versions of the scriptural account in front of him in Latin. None of the texts match the Vulgate's text describing the making of humans, which begins, "The LORD God formed man from the slime of the earth (*formavit igitur Dominus Deus hominem de limo terrae*)" (Gn 2:7, Vulg). Augustine's two texts contain components of this. One of them reads, "God formed the man, dust of the earth (*formavit Deus hominem pulverem terrae*)."¹⁰¹ Another looks like, "And God shaped the man, dust from the earth (*Et finxit Deus hominem pulverem de terra*)."¹⁰² And a third, "And God shaped the man from the slime of the earth (*Et finxit Deus hominem de limo terrae*)."¹⁰² I'm mainly interested

⁹⁹*civ.*, 13.23, CSEL 40.1:648: "*non spiritale, sed animale fuisse non dubium est.*"

¹⁰⁰ *Gn. litt.*, 6.25.36, PL 34:354: "*id est mortale, quia poterat mori; immortale, quia poterat non mori.*"

¹⁰¹ *Gn. litt.*, 7.1.1, PL 34:339.

¹⁰² *Gn. litt.*, 3.22.34, PL 34:293.

in this last one. First, because it tracks closest to the Vulgate.¹⁰³ Next, because it presents a provocative possibility. I've translated "*de limo terrae*" as "from the slime of the earth," but the Latin *limus* is a rich word, with a semantic range including plain old mud as well as something closer to "shit in the intestines." Being formed not just from mud or dust, but from the cycle of ingestion, digestion, and excretion is exactly the angle I'm looking for.

Georges Bataille recognized this intimacy of decay and life. One line from his *L'histoire de l'érotisme* stands out as particularly astute. There he says, "death is that putrescence, that stench...which is at the same time the source and the repulsive condition of life."¹⁰⁴ Interpreting "*de limo terrae*" as intestinal filth or digested matter opens up the possible meanings of this verse. Death, decay, and rot become the means by which the LORD brings about life, human life—at least in its bodily, animal dimension. While Augustine doesn't interpret Genesis 2 this way, his teaching on the aptitudes of the *rationes seminales* certainly doesn't preclude it. I'd prefer to think, rather, that this is just the kind of reading Augustine would be inclined to accept as an alternative to his own thoughts in Book VI of *De Genesi ad litteram*. I think this because it remains focused on the *ad litteram* meaning of the text. It's precisely by attending to the word *limus* that we are led to the conclusion that the timebound processes of predation and digestion, the accumulation of critical masses of organic material on our planet, might be just how the LORD brings about human life. What the text of Genesis should incline us toward is

¹⁰³ Though not the Nova Vulgata, which reads "*formavit Dominus Deus hominem pulverem de humo*" (Gn 2:7).

¹⁰⁴ Georges Bataille, "L'histoire De L'érotisme," in *Œuvres Complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 69: "*la mort est cette corruption, cette puanteur... qui est en même temps la source et la condition repoussante de la vie.*"

exactly the insight of Augustine’s already shared above. Humans have animal bodies. We are, as he says, “from the earth, earthly.”¹⁰⁵

Like all plants and animals—living things which resist the pull of death for a time—humans remain implicated in death. It’s both the condition for the coming to be of our material bodies and also the means by which we sustain them. But this isn’t all human beings are. Genesis 2:7 doesn’t end with the shaping of the human out of the dust or mud or slime or shit. The verse continues, “he breathed into his face the breath of life and the human was made a living soul (*inspiravit in faciem eius spiraculum vitae et factus est homo in animam viventem*)” (Gn 2:7 Vulg).¹⁰⁶ One way to read this verse is simply as a description of the bringing to life of inanimate matter generally. To live is to be animated, to be given an *anima*, a soul. But it’s also the case that this occurs in a description of the making of the human in particular. The LORD breathing into Adam’s face, the action that makes the human a living soul, is omitted in Genesis 2’s account of the creation of “every beast of the field and bird of the air” (Gn 2:19). The LORD still forms creatures “out of the ground” (Gn 2:19)—“*de humo*” (Gn 2:19 Vulg) in the Latin. In this way they resemble the human, or humans resemble them. Both are made of earth—the digested organic matter that makes the continuation of life possible. The human form of life takes something extra, something that marks it out from plants and animals.

¹⁰⁵ *civ.*, 13.23, *CSEL* 40.1:648: “*de terra terrenus.*”

¹⁰⁶ Augustine’s text also has a few different possibilities here, to include, *Gn. litt.*, 7.1.1, *PL* 34:339: “*et insufflavit in faciem ejus flatum vitae; et factus est homo in animam viventem*”; and *Gn. litt.*, 6.11.19, *PL* 34:347: “*et inspiravit sive insufflavit in ejus faciem spiritum vitae, et factus est homo in animam vivam.*”

Augustine was notoriously unwilling to offer a definitive teaching on the origin of the human soul. In Book VII of *De Genesi ad litteram*, however, he does go as far as to say what he thinks can be said with certainty about the human soul—the soul breathed into the Adam in Genesis 2. What he thinks can be said definitively is that the soul is made by the LORD from nothing. In this way it’s from the LORD but it’s not the same substance as the LORD. At the same time, the human soul is incorporeal. It doesn’t come about in the same manner as animal bodies or non-rational souls. It is both immortal and also mutable—capable of living forever and also of changing for better or for worse. But it can also be called mortal, insofar as true immortality belongs to the LORD alone.¹⁰⁷

This fits well with the position I’m offering here. The LORD shapes the animal body of the human, using the processes of birth, death, and decay to bring it about, just as he does for all other plants and animals. Death is a feature of the fallen cosmos, but one which the LORD puts to work. Having shaped the human body using this process, the LORD does something new, giving humans a soul distinct from the souls of plants and animals.

There’s a beautiful moment in Gregory of Nyssa’s *De hominis opificio*, where he reflects on how this situates humans between heaven and earth. Being a commingling of things divine¹⁰⁸ and earthly, humans are disposed by nature toward the enjoyment of the LORD

¹⁰⁷ *Gn. litt.*, 7.28.43, PL 34:372: “Nunc tamen de anima, quam Deus inspiravit homini sufflando in ejus faciem, nihil confirmo, nisi quia ex Deo sic est, ut non sit substantia Dei; et sit incorporea, id est, non sit corpus, sed spiritus; non de substantia Dei genitus, nec de substantia Dei procedens, sed factus a Deo; nec ita factus ut in ejus naturam natura ulla corporis vel irrationalis animae verteretur; ac per hoc, de nihilo: et quod sit immortalis secundum quemdam vitae modum, quem nullo modo potest amittere; secundum quamdam vero mutabilitatem, qua potest vel deterior vel melior fieri, non immerito etiam mortalis possit intelligi; quoniam veram immortalitatem solus ille habet, de quo proprie dictum est, Qui solus habet immortalitatem.”

¹⁰⁸ Gregory shouldn’t be read here to be saying something opposed to Augustine’s claim that the human soul is not of the same substance of the LORD. In the same sentence he’ll say humans enjoy God “through the more divine nature (*per naturam diviniorem*)” (*De hom. op.*, 2.2, PG 44:133-134). By ‘divine’ Gregory seems to be referring to that which is not material or earthly. He doesn’t mean humans are by nature divine.

and also toward things of the earth.¹⁰⁹ Cyprian points out this twofold makeup of the human creature in his treatise *De Dominica oratione*. There he says, “For we have a body from earth and a spirit from heaven, we are ourselves earth and heaven, and we pray that the will of God may be done in both, that is in both body and spirit.”¹¹⁰ Humans are also, in this way, created to stand at the midpoint of the whole created order, an admixture of what’s heavenly and earthly, material and immaterial, physical and spiritual.

I’m not going to venture into the question of monogenesis or the existence of an aboriginal community of hominins. That is, are Adam and Eve the first humans or do the biological requirements of genetic diversity necessitate a population minimum significantly higher than two? Incidentally, I think the reading of Genesis 2 I’m giving is compatible with both.¹¹¹ Instead I want to focus on what the situation of humans at the midpoint of creation might indicate, given the picture of the cosmos we’ve painted so far. I want to suggest this tells us something about the role of humans, given to them by the LORD by virtue of this position. The LORD calls humans out of the cycle of death and destruction. He does so by giving them a new possibility, one distinct from the other creatures of the corporeal world. The LORD makes humans capable of knowing and of loving him. Humans have the capacity to cleave to the LORD, in a manner similar to that of the angels. They are able, as Augustine says, not to die.

¹⁰⁹ *De hom. op.*, 2.2, PG 44:133-134: “Propterea duabus ut rebus hominis opificium constaret, fecit commistis nimirum divinis ac terrenis, ut ipsi tam Dei quam terrestrium rerum fruitionem naturae suae consentaneam ac propriam statueret: Deoque per naturam diviniorem, bonis autem terrenis per sensum, qui eiusdem esset generis, frueretur.”

¹¹⁰ *dom. orat.*, 16, CSEL 3.1:278: “Nam cum corpus e terra et spiritum possideamus e caelo, ipsi terra et caelum sumus et in utroque id est et corpore et spiritu ut Dei voluntas fiat oramus.”

¹¹¹ Separating, that is, the shaping of our animal bodies *de limo terrae* from the creation out of nothing of the human soul would allow us to say there was both an original community of hominins and that the LORD made Adam and Eve human, plucked them out of that community, by giving them rational souls.

But humans are corporeal creatures, too. Adam is given the garden of Eden to till and keep (Gn 2:15). He's also given charge of the animals, naming them (Gn 2:19), a mark of the dominion he has over them (Gn 1:28). But what does that dominion come to? What is the charge the LORD levies upon humans when he hands them the world? Something parallel to the case of the angels seems to be going on here. The LORD governs his creation not only immediately but through secondary causes as well. Humans have an administrative role, a mandate to care for and rule the material cosmos in accordance with its rule, who is Christ. But this cosmos, as I've said, is already off kilter, and always has been, due to the sin of the angels. The position humans occupy, then, when they are first created is a mediatorial one. Humans are given care of a creation that's groaning from the first. The LORD is bringing about through humans the reconciliation of a fallen cosmos. That's the intention. Humans have a soul that's like that of the angels, and like the angels, they are given charge of a piece of the LORD's cosmos—to bring what's out of order back into alignment with its *ratio*.

That's the intention, but humans fail at this task, just as some of the angels failed at theirs. Like the fall of the angels, the fall of humans means a turning away from the LORD. Humans fail in their duty to serve in a mediatorial role between the fallen material cosmos and things divine by failing to be what they are. Unlike the angels, the human fall is precipitated by temptation. Satan in the garden, pursuing humanity out of malice and envy, beguiles Eve (Gn 3:13) and Adam follows her into sin (Gn 3:6). The die is cast, and the possibilities of obedience are once again foreclosed. The fall of humans recapitulates the fall of the angels in just this way. Certain potencies lying dormant in the *rationes seminales* are cut off for this creation. The wound at the heart of the cosmos

opens wider. The cracks in the architecture of the universe penetrate deeper. Humans, who might have served to reconcile the fallen cosmos to the LORD by keeping his commandment, are given over to the possibilities of their animal bodies. They fall back into the cycle of violence, death, and decay out of which they'd been called.

You might think there's a problem here. I mentioned earlier that we'd need to return to the comparison of Wisdom 2:24 and Romans 5:12. There are a few possibilities for reading them alongside one another. The first would be to simply see "through the devil's envy death entered the world" (Wis 2:24) as a description of how "sin came into the world through one man and death through sin" (Rm 5:12). But I staked out a position in chapter four and this chapter that rules this out. That is, I want to take the devil's envy and death's entrance into the world to be an event that occurs before fallen time starts ticking away. Another possibility, then, would simply be to limit the scope of what's being described in Romans 5:12. The "world" into which sin and death enter refers only to the human world. Before human sin, the necessity of human death wasn't there; with human sin, death follows of necessity. But what if we want to retain the cosmic scope of both verses? I think there's a way to reconcile them, one that ties together the human and angelic fall more intimately than before, and which points forward to the saving work of Jesus Christ.

In the last chapter I specified the devil's envy as the envy the devil has when he sees, immediately upon his creation, the person of Jesus Christ in the LORD's eternal present. He sees, that is, himself supplanted as the highest creature by the God-man Jesus Christ. Human nature is united to divinity in the second person of the Trinity. Satan's desire for this to be otherwise, for humans to lack this dignity, is what turns him away

from the LORD, causing him to fall, and so to tear the fabric of the cosmos from the beginning. But Satan's fall from heaven into the order of fallen time is what makes possible his temptation of humans. Humans are prompted to fall by the devil. Temptation is what distinguishes the human fall from the angelic fall. But the human fall, too, has consequences. It is the "truly necessary sin of Adam," the "happy fault/ that earned so glorious a Redeemer!"¹¹² In other words, what Satan sees in the eternal present of the LORD—the incarnation of the Son—which causes him to fall, is something Satan himself brings about through his temptation of humans. And human sin, succumbing to the temptation of Satan in the garden, is also what makes necessary the reconciling work of the LORD in the person of Jesus Christ. This is not a claim about whether or not the LORD would have become incarnate apart from human sin—again, I'm not trafficking in possible worlds. The incarnate LORD is the heart of this cosmos in the person of Jesus Christ. The incarnation is the LORD's act of creation and it is also that of recreation. The incarnation, which follows upon human sin as the LORD's saving act, is the very thing Satan sees when gazing upon the light of the LORD. The thing Satan despised in the order of eternity is the very thing he brings about in the order of time.

Human sin is also thereby implicated in the original fall of the cosmos that occurs in the devil and his angels. It's what necessitates the salvation of humans through the God-man, which elicits Satan's envy. And so it's possible to say both "through the devil's envy death entered the world" (Wis 2:24) and "sin came into the world through one man and death through sin" (Rm 5:12). The cosmic scope of human disobedience is revealed. Human failure to carry out the mediatorial task has consequences that permeate

¹¹² *The Roman Missal*, 351.

the whole of timespace. The rent yawns wide, wide enough for the natural history of carnage to take its toll within it. But that's not the end of the story. The mediatorial role of the human being is not left abandoned by the LORD. Instead, he sends "the last Adam" (1 Cor 15:45), Jesus Christ, the true mediator, who can accomplish the mediation of fallen humanity to the LORD precisely because he is divine and who can accomplish the mediation of the rest of the fallen cosmos to himself precisely because he is a human. The God-man stands at the heart of creation, a creation that is fallen, broken, and dying because of the voluntary evil of his rational creatures. And it's as both the LORD and as a human that he comes to save it—"in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5:19). Death does not have the last word.

Conclusion

Two types of people will likely be scandalized by these last chapters. The first are those who insist the LORD's omnipotence is such that he could have accomplished all the goods of creation without allowing evil. He chose this way, the way of our world, for reasons opaque to us yet clear to him. But it would have been possible to achieve his purposes for us otherwise than through the permission of sin. Against this view I'd simply insist that the particular goods of this created order—some of them, anyway—are goods that can only be had because of certain evils. It makes no more sense to say the LORD could have been merciful without the need for mercy than to say the LORD could make a four-sided triangle. There are created conditions necessary for the achievement of created goods, and the insistence that the LORD is the *bonum commune*, the good of all things in general, does not negate the fact that goods in particular, which created goods are, have certain logical dependencies.

The second group of people who will likely take issue with what I've said are those who insist sin, to be the action of a rational creature, must have an object. The fall of the angels, so they might say, can't be the result of a turning away from the LORD toward nothing. In order to properly be an action, sin must be oriented toward some good—a lesser good than the LORD, but a good nonetheless. Were it not to be so oriented, it would fail to be an act at all and so be no more culpable than a sneeze or a yawn. But I want to continue to press this line. If we take seriously Augustine's thought

about what angels are, something like my account follows. It's possible to take another view on the nature of angels, but the Augustinian one has excellent scriptural and traditional bona fides. Augustine's thoughts incline toward sin as a kind of negation when he says sin has no efficient cause, but rather a deficient one.¹ Defect, failure, lack, are the marks of the primordial sin of the angels. And they mark it out even from the sin of Adam and Eve, which while imitative of the first sin, has proximate causes that can't have obtained for the angels: ignorance, distraction, and deception.

The worry that angelic sin might not be explicably narratable as an act has only so much purchase with me. I'm interested only in its possibility, not its rationale. On this view, I think it's only necessary that I affirm angelic sin results from a culpable failure of will. A failure, that is, to love the LORD rightly and persistently given the full knowledge, capacity, and power necessary to do so. That rational creatures are culpable for such failures, for ceasing to act as they ought, seems straightforwardly clear enough. If my only task were to stand firm on the solid ground at the edge of a cliff, but I instead opted to hurl myself off the edge, it'd be a moral failure. It would be so even if I were unable to specify the reasons for my leap into the void. Now, you might insist these were simply the actions of a madman. But perhaps the devil undertook his leap knowing full well what it entailed.

These points aside, I hope it seems clear that I've accomplished what I set out to do in this dissertation. My aim in asking after death was to see if the resources of the Christian tradition, especially Augustine's account of creation in *De Genesi ad litteram*,

¹ *civ.*, 12.7, *CSEL* 40.1:577: "*Nemo igitur quaerat efficientam causam malae voluntatis; non enim est efficiens sed deficiens, quia nec illa effectio sed defectio.*"

might be put to work to discover death's origin. I found this task particularly pressing because Scripture's insistence that "God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living" (Wis 1:13) seems to stand in *prima facie* contradiction with what natural scientists have been able to discover about the cosmos. Death is not just something we find in the world, it's a structural element by which all the various kinds of life come to be what they are. Thomas Aquinas' gloss on this verse, that the LORD did not intend death for its own sake,² turns out to be both true and false. It's true in my account, insofar as the LORD ends up wielding death as an instrument, as a tool he uses to accomplish his ends for creation. It's false if it's taken as support for a vision of the cosmos that sees death as necessary, strictly speaking, for the existence of any material cosmos.

What we're left with instead is a vision that's both bleaker and more hopeful than many of the ways of approaching the phenomenon of death in the created order. It's bleaker because we're forced to say the good cosmos created by the LORD is deeply damaged, and has been since it was created. The LORD made all things good and very good. Yet, due to the fall of rational creatures, there's never a time when the ravages of sin and decay and death haven't been felt. There is no idyllic past, certainly none to which we can return. This is true not just for human creatures, prevented by the flaming sword of the cherubim from returning to Eden (Gn 3:24), it's also true for all creatures taken together as a whole. Reconciliation, the healing of the cosmos' original wounds, is the work of the Christ, who will heal the brokenhearted and bind up their wounds (Ps 147:3). He stands at the heart of the created order, the *ratio* of all things. The relations

² ST I.49.2 resp: "*Sed quod dicitur Sap. I, quod Deus mortem non fecit, intelligitur quasi per se intentam.*"

things bear to him just is their reality. It's what it is for them to be made and also what it is for them to be redeemed. In him this creative and reconciliatory work is already accomplished, when viewed under the aspect of the LORD's eternity. It's also still to come for those of us making our way through time.

This work has proceeded under these twin aspects—viewing all things considered as *conditio* and as *administratio*. This division is the powerful tool afforded us by Augustine's imaginative and difficult account of the days of creation. Insisting on an *ad litteram* reading of the hexaëmeron in Genesis 1 means interpreting the text as metaphorical speech about the LORD's eternal act of creation. That act creates all things, all times, everything that's not the LORD from nothing. This offers us a way to read the first creation account in Scripture in a way that can bear the stresses of a modern cosmology. The LORD, by allowing us to see what the angels see, the vast ordered beauty of the past, present, and future of the cosmos oriented toward its final rest in him on the seventh day, points out the mysteriousness of us to ourselves. To be creatures is to be what we always will have been in the LORD's eternal knowing and willing of us in our particularity.

With this division between time and eternity in place, we can look with fresh eyes at the LORD's administration of all things in the order of time. We're able to see the source of natural evils in the voluntary evil of rational creatures—the sin of the angels. We can also see how the existence of natural evil is no threat to the LORD's providential care of his creatures. He works in and through time and the countdown toward death to make *this* cosmos. He uses death to shape his creation according to his purposes. He does not make death, but he won't let the possibilities the sin opens up go to waste. He wields

death as a tool—his *instrumentum*—just as he does on the cross. In doing so, he brings about the existence of the many and various kinds of life we encounter in the natural world. This is also how the LORD shapes humans *de limo terrae*. Molding us out of the evolutionary processes common to all living creatures on earth, humans are both like and unlike all other living things on planet earth.

If I'm right, the Augustinian reading of Genesis is uniquely able to answer the kinds of questions contemporary Christians are interested in throwing at the doctrine of creation. It allows us to take very seriously the darkness that permeates this fallen world. We're not forced into half-answers or dismissing the concerns of those like Tennyson, who tremble in the face of the horror of death. We're able to see the damaged cosmos for what it is, and also see it for what it might be. Knowing that "in everything God works for good" (Rom 8:28), we're also able to hope the real evils confronting us, natural or otherwise, are not finally determinative.

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Biography

Philip Gregory Porter was born March 5, 1985 in Lansing, MI. He attended the University of California, Berkeley earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science in 2006. After graduation, he was commissioned as an officer in the United States Marine Corps. He was honorably discharged as a Captain in 2012, when he began the Master of Theological Studies program at Loyola University Maryland. Philip graduated with his MTS in 2015 and was awarded the Loyola University Graduate Student Medal for Excellence in Theological Research. He matriculated at Duke University's Divinity School that same year, in the Doctor of Theology program. He received a fellowship from Duke Divinity School that included full tuition and a living stipend. He completed his preliminary examinations in 2018 with competencies in philosophical theology, historical theology, the theology of death and martyrdom, and Shakespearean tragedy. As of May 2020, Philip has two published articles:

“Inheriting Wittgenstein’s Augustine: A Grammatical Investigation of the Incarnation,”
New Blackfriars (Vol. 100, Issue 1088, July 2019)

“Liberated by Doctrine: Augustine’s Approach to Scripture in *De Doctrina Christiana*,”
Pro Ecclesia (Vol. 26, No. 2, Spring 2017)