

Economic and Transactional Language in the *Confessions*

Augustine employs a language of economy and transaction throughout his *Confessions*, both when describing the nature of God as well as in his descriptions of sin and human relations. Augustine bases this lexicon both in the classical writers of pagan Rome and in scripture. He straddles the line between the pagan world upon which his formative school years were based, and the Catholicism to which he turned as a man, using the language of both worlds to define his own conception of the divine and the human soul. The *Confessions* define the soul through a transactional relationship with the divine, repurposing a language of *fides*, patronage, and economy that echoes moments from the Gospels and Cicero, while drawing on his own contemporary cultural reality. Augustine embeds in the *Confessions* the daily domestic economies which would have been omnipresent throughout his own life, and thereby melds them with his understanding and explication of the soul.

Augustine's attempts in the *Confessions* at defining and understanding the nature of God must be examined in conjunction with his reflection on Manichaeism, the great religious presence in his life before converting to Christianity. The Bishop of Hippo fixedly contrasts the orthodox Catholic God¹ he came to later in life with a reflection on what he claims was his

¹ The confines of this paper do not allow for a full discussion of the exact nature and politics of Augustine's particular brand of Christianity. It should be noted, however, that African Christendom in Augustine's time was heterogenous. Augustine would spend much of his tenure as bishop attempting to quell the longstanding conflict and factionalism between the Donatist and Caecilianist sects; Augustine was associated with the latter. In terms of pure theological divergences there was scarcely any significant difference between the two groups (though there was strong disagreement on the role of baptism between them. James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005), 14. (Is this the right format to cite in a footnote in *Past Imperfect*? I went back to the 2018 edition of *Past Imperfect* and followed the style in Emily Tran's paper. See page 65 n.22) Rather, their mutual animosity sprung from a historical and political hatred resulting from the persecution of 303 AD. See O'Donnell, esp. 209–26, who goes into particular detail about Augustine's role in the ideological conflict. For a deeper study of the

misguided conception of the divine while a Manichee. This grappling with and rejection of Manichaeism is fundamental to Augustine's thought and purpose in the *Confessions*, to say nothing of in his other works.² Before delving into the nature Augustine's thought and the economic language present in much of the *Confessions*, it is beneficial to turn briefly towards Manichaeism alone. This erstwhile world religion, once stretching from China to Western Europe, now long extinct and elusive to modern study,³ was a central focus of the young Augustine's intellectual curiosity and passion. The religion, named for its founder Mani, born in Mesopotamia in the 3rd century AD, was deeply marked by Judaic and Christian influences of the time. This lent it a similarity to the Christianity to which Augustine was exposed to as a child by his mother, Monnica,⁴ and thus made it more palatable to the rebellious youth, while remaining exotic.⁵

Manichaeism was principally based upon a dualistic understanding of the universe as caught in an eternal battle between the forces of light and darkness. In brief, in the Manichaean belief system, it was the work of the group's faithful adherents to release particles of light that had become entrapped in the course of the war between good and evil in physical bodies on Earth. This was thought to allow the particles to rejoin the divine lord of light. The Manichees

history of the Donatists, see W.H.C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951).

² E.g. *Contra Faustum*, *Contra Fortunatum*, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* etc.

³ Studies on Manichaeism have made much progress, however, over the last century. See Jason David BeDuhn, *The Manichaean Body: In Discipline and Ritual* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002) and Michel Tardieu, *Manichaeism*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008). See esp. p. 59 of the latter work for a useful diagram of the Manichaean social and hierarchal structure.

⁴ Monnica was the primary connection for Augustine to the Christian world before his adult conversion. His father, Patricius, was not baptized until he was on his deathbed and in general seems to have been more firmly anchored to this world than to the spiritual (2.3.6): *nam ille adhuc catechumenus et hoc recens erat* (...for that man [Patricius] was to that point just a catechumen, and this was but recent). All translations are my own.

⁵ O'Donnell, *Augustine*, 47ff.

accomplished this task through an internal and social division of themselves. Believers were divided into two groups: an elite clergy whose members were called the ‘Elect’ (*electi*), and the laypeople known as the “Hearers” (*auditores*).⁶ The Elect essentially lived an ascetic lifestyle with severe dietary restrictions and enforced celibacy. Theirs was the task of both spreading Mani’s philosophy and freeing the aforementioned trapped particles of light. This was done through ritual eating and mastication of various foods, mainly fruits, that Manichees believed to contain high concentrations of light particles. The Hearers were to provide the necessary food and other resources to the Elect, but their lives were otherwise less severely restricted than those of the Elect. However, even for Hearers, celibacy was still considered morally preferable to sexuality, which was seen as an abomination for Manichees. Augustine himself never advanced beyond the rank of Hearer, though in the nine years he spent as a Manichee, Augustine made clear how deeply invested in the group he was for a time.⁷ Some scholars suggest, however, that Augustine’s self-confessed, excessive sexual appetites frustrated any hopes of advancement to the Elect that he might have had.⁸

Returning to the *Confessions* proper, it becomes quickly apparent that while Manichaeism permeates the text and Augustine’s memory, his attempts at defining God’s nature

⁶ *Conf.* 5.10.18 *et iungebar etiam tunc Romae falsis illis atque fallentibus sanctis, non enim tantum auditoribus eorum, quorum e numero erat etiam is in cuius domo aegrotaveram et convalueram, sed eis etiam quos electos vocant* (And I was then joined at Rome by those false and deceiving holy men, not even just by the “hearers” of them, from whose number was also he in whose house I had been sick and convalesced, but I was joined as well by those whom they call “elect”).

⁷ Serious doubts about the veracity of the Manichaean teachings begin to creep into Augustine’s mind after his disappointing meeting with Faustus (5.6.10), an important and respected Manichee ‘bishop’ (*episcopus*). While Faustus was certainly a better speaker than most, Augustine found him completely unable to answer any of the nagging metaphysical questions he has had: *nec ideo mihi meliora videbantur quia melius dicebantur* (and so neither did things seem better to me just because they were said in a better way). While this interview does not persuade Augustine to completely abandon Manichaeism on the spot, it does shake his faith in the sect.

⁸ O’Donnell, *Augustine*, 49: “He presents his detachment from the sect as a matter of his own choice ... [but] Augustine, living with his common-law wife and their child, was very likely too much of a man of the flesh for the Manichees to take seriously.”

often create an image opposed to that of the Manichaeian divine, while also remaining innovative from a Christian perspective. In addition, quotidian economic language features prominently in Augustine's definitions of God, as is clear from the prominent position he gives to such language in section 1.4.4, a passage that begins with the question *Quid es ergo, deus meus?* (So what are you, my God?). Augustine begins to answer the question with an extended description of God, using an ostensibly familiar lexicon: *summe, omnipotentissime, misericordissime et iustissime* (most high, most omnipotent, most merciful, most just).⁹ This section focuses in part on the unbounded nature of God, and the insurmountable separation between Him and humanity, the former being unchanging, the latter fully mutable under the hand of God: *stabilis et incomprehensibilis, immutabilis mutans omnia* (stable and incomprehensible, immutable while changing all things). It is important for Augustine to establish these aspects of God early in his text precisely because it invites comparison and contrast with the Manichean philosophy.

A primary reason for Augustine's focus on his time spent as a Manichee was undoubtedly to address the criticisms and suspicions of the Christian world that he entered into so abruptly on

⁹ Cf. Macrobius, roughly a contemporary of Augustine's, uses similar terminology of God (*somn. Sci* 1.17.12): *Quod autem hunc istum extimum globum, qui ita volvitur, summum deum vocavit, non ita accipiendum est ut ipse prima causa et deus ille omnipotentissimus aestimetur, cum globus ipse quod caelum est animae sit fabrica, anima ex mente processerit, mens ex deo qui vere summus est procreata sit* (This last though, that sphere which is thus turned, he has called the most high God. It should not thus be accepted that it is the first cause and God most omnipotent, since the globe itself, which is to say the sky, is the fabric of the soul, and since the soul sprang from the mind, the mind was created from God, who is truly the most high). While it is unlikely that Macrobius himself was a Christian, his origin is generally traced to Africa and his birth to around 360 AD, placing him in remarkably close proximity to Augustine (Stahl, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio by Macrobius*, 4–5). Despite the assumption that Macrobius was not a Christian, it bears noting the intimate similarity in language between this passage and Augustine's *Confessions*. Notable too, as pointed out by Stahl, is a plausible connection here to Book 1 Chapter 6 wherein Macrobius writes about the properties of the number 7 (1.6.18): *ex his δυάς, quia post monada prima est, primus est numerus. Haec ab illa omnipotentia solitaria in corporis intellegibilis lineam prima defluxit...* (From these is the number two, because it is the first after the monad it is the first number. This one first flowed out from that solitary omnipotence into the sketch of an intelligible body...). The words *monada* and *omnipotentia* are certainly worth thinking about, especially in conjunction with the monad and dyad of *Conf.* 4.15.24. On further similar language to *Conf.* 1.4.4 see also *Ps.* 114.5 *misericors dominus et iustus, et deus noster miseretur* (The Lord is merciful and just, and our God has pity). All references in this paper to the Bible will be taken from the Vulgate, however, Augustine himself would likely have consulted the *Vetus Latina* (see Chadwick's introduction to his translation of the *Confessions*).

his return from Italy to Africa—many would have been wary of his break with Manichaeism. He claims now in the *Confessions* that his youthful worldview effectively denied God’s omnipotence by opposing it to an equally powerful lord of darkness, both defined corporally and thus inadequately for Augustine’s later Catholic understanding of his God. At 1.4.4, we see Augustine attempting to define his Christian conception of God as utterly unbounded, even paradoxically so, thus eliminating any real possibility of equality or contention with an opposite force of evil. Nonetheless, within this same descriptive paragraph, Augustine also introduces more jarring conceptions of God’s nature (1.4.4): *numquam inops et gaudes lucris, numquam avarus et usuras exigis, supererogatur tibi ut debeas: et quis habet quicquam non tuum? reddis debita nulli debens, donas debita nihil perdens* (You are never destitute and you take joy in your riches, never greedy you demand the interest on loans, it is paid back to you with the result that you owe: and who possesses anything that is not yours? You give back what is owed though you are indebted to no one, and you return what is owed, losing nothing).¹⁰ The mercantile description of God exemplifies His relation to humanity, a relationship partially comprehensible only because of its grounding in daily life while the full nature of God remains *incomprehensibilis*. It is essential for Augustine to argue that while God is omnipotent and merciful, He is still as exigent as a tax collector or landholder, not because this fully encompasses what God is, a question Augustine cannot answer, but because it demarcates how Christians are to define themselves in relation to God. Put simply, God’s flock is indebted to Him and thus bound to Him. On this point, particular attention ought to be paid to *usura*, a *hapax*

¹⁰ O’Donnell’s excellent commentary (*Confessions*. 3 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) is surprisingly quiet on these lines. On *usuras exigis* O’Donnell cites the Gospel according to Matthew (25:14–30) and Ambrose’s *De Officiis Ministrorum* (1.32.168). On *supererogatur* he similarly cites the Gospel according to Luke (10:35).

legomenon in the *Confessions*.¹¹ The word evokes the parable of the talents from the Gospel of Matthew 25:14–30, an indictment against those who do not pay back to God what is His, and with interest: *oportuit ergo te mittere pecuniam meam nummulariis et veniens ego recepissem utique quod meum est cum usura* (So you ought to have entrusted my money to the money changers and then when I came back I would have at least received what is mine with interest). Proceeding, then, from Augustine’s definition of the nature of God, the relationship between Him and humanity is understood as transactional. God, of course, still has the ability to forgive debts (*reddis debita nulli debens*), but this does not automatically absolve humanity of its obligations. From this point, all further transactional, debt, and economic language becomes particularly charged throughout the *Confessions*.

Augustine’s conception of debt and transaction was profoundly drawn from the realities of life in the late Roman Empire, realities which played a significant role in his upbringing at Thagaste. Once subsistence was relatively secured, the major motivation for people both rich and poor was the hope of social advancement. Some measure of personal wealth was necessary to access the higher echelons of society even at the local level, however, it is an oversimplification to say that wealth defined political office.¹² In Augustine’s 4th century world, power filtered down from the imperial capital to the local councils in every provincial town in the Empire, Thagaste included. These town councils represented power and authority in more visceral terms

¹¹ The word does however appear fairly frequently in Augustine’s other works: 24 occurrences in the *Sermones*, 24 in *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 6 in *Speculum*, 6 in *De Baptismo*, 5 in *Contra Cresconium*, 5 in *Epistulae*, 5 in *Contra Epistulam Parmeniani*, 3 in *Contra Iulianum*, 3 in *Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum*, 2 in *Locutionum in heptateuchum libri septem*, 1 in *Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum*, 1 in *Contra Gaudentium*, 1 in *Gesta cum Emerito*, and 1 in the *Confessions*.

¹² Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 5.

for most people than the emperor ever would. Membership on the town council imposed both important responsibilities and provided significant opportunities for even further advancement.

Augustine's father Patricius presents a model example of one such man. The members of the town council, the *curiales*, were responsible for raising taxes and meeting the quotas conveyed to them through the local governor, who was, in turn, beholden to the decrees and demands of the Empire.¹³ Although the emperor and the central government authorities were responsible for the imposition of taxes on the provinces, they were entirely dependent on local governors and town councils to enforce their demands.¹⁴ The prerequisite for membership on such a town council was "sufficient wealth for their property to act as surety for any shortfall in the taxes."¹⁵ This sum, though beyond the means of most, was, according to Augustine's account of his upbringing, not particularly ostentatious (2.3.5):¹⁶ ... *sumptus praeeparabantur animositate magis quam opibus patris, municipis Thagastensis admodum tenuis* (...the expenses [for my education] were taken care of more through my father's tenacity than his wealth, seeing as he was a fairly modest citizen of Thagaste). Augustine's self-portrait unsurprisingly departs slightly from the reality of his childhood; while his family's wealth certainly did not rival that of the truly opulent of the time, he was no pauper and his family possessed its own estate and slaves (1.19.30).¹⁷ This does, however, situate the economic world of Augustine's time as one based on

¹³ Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 25–6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁶ All that was required to be made a member of a town council was capital of three hundred *solidi* (gold pieces). This amounted to an income of around twenty-five to thirty *solidi* per year." (Brown, 6). Brown illustrates the relative attainability of a curial position with the example of an African farmer who, after more than twelve years of labour on his small plot of land, managed to accumulate enough capital to claim a spot on the council of his town (3–4).

¹⁷ *Conf.* 1.19.30: *nam in illis iam quid me foedius fuit, ubi etiam talibus displicebam fallendo innumerabilibus mendaciis et paedagogum et magistros et parentes ... furta etiam faciebam de cellario parentum et de mensa* (For amongst them, what was fouler than me? when I was even disappointing my *paedagogus* and my teachers and my

a series of steps, with each subsequent level exerting pressure on that beneath it, even at the level of the modestly prosperous townsmen of places like Thagaste. Life was defined by a struggle to ascend upwards, thereby gaining better social privileges;¹⁸ greater wealth would follow not far behind.¹⁹ As we shall see, Augustine is profoundly influenced by this system in his later theological thoughts as he replaces the worldly forces exerting pressure downwards with God. He creates a supreme authority to whom all are indebted, bypassing the worldly debts heretofore definitive of secular life.

The relationship between the *curiales* like Patricius, and the taxpaying majority of their towns was not defined solely by an extortionist force the agents of the government imposed on the poor. To maintain a balanced patron-client dynamic, as well as to avoid revolts in the face of extreme fiscal pressures, the governors and *curiales* had to ensure that they provided adequate services and privileges to their townsmen. As Brown argues, “the town councillors were ‘fathers’ of the *demos*, the *plebs*. The good notable was a ‘nourisher,’ a *tropheus*, to his city. He repaid the ‘nurture’ which his city had bestowed upon him in his youth by means of a continuous stream of

parents by deceiving them through innumerable such lies... I was even stealing from my parents’ cellar and table ...). As noted by O’Donnell (1992) *ad* 1.19.30, the *paedagogus* referred to here was “Presumably the family servant who accompanied the young boy to school” and was almost certainly an enslaved person; cf. Quint. *Inst.* 1.1.8. For a brief overview of the role of slaves as guardians and educators, see Kyle Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World AD 275–45* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 114–16. O’Donnell sees in the *furta de cellario parentum* the infamous pear theft in Book 2 (1992, *ad* 1.19.30). Looking further afield, however, we might see a connection with Monnica’s own youth and her pilfering of wine from her parents’ stock (9.8.18). It is notable there that Monnica’s early experimentation with alcohol was only suppressed by an observant slave’s reprimand, proving that Monnica herself grew up in a slave-owning family. For Augustine’s family property, see Josef Lössl, “Augustine’s Family as a Space of Religious Experience,” *Augustiniana* 54, no. 1/4 (2004): 401–15. Lössl even suggests that Augustine’s need to briefly interrupt his schooling at the age of 16 as being due not to real poverty but “probably cash flow problems, serious no doubt, but temporary...” (405).

¹⁸ In the context of a *rusticulus* from the African town of Mactar ascending to the town council, Brown remarks on the benefits of occupying this post: “...he could no longer be flogged or tortured. That, in itself, was no small privilege, which the average subject of a notoriously cruel empire could not claim (Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 4).

¹⁹ Those who held official positions were often able to “shield their assets from state demands” and thereby accumulate greater wealth over time, giving them access eventually to even higher rungs of the social ladder; see Walter Scheidel, *The Great Leveler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 265.

gifts. These gifts were directed to the city as a whole ... in the form of distributions of money and food.”²⁰ This patronage relationship was a traditional institution in Rome from the time of the Republic,²¹ and had continued to Augustine’s day, who personally benefited from Symmachus’ patronage and support early in his career.²² The ability of the town councillors, as the patrons of their cities, to provide sufficient services diminished greatly in the 4th century,²³ creating a growing rift between the people and the *curiales*. Riots and lynching were not uncommon, and Ammianus Marcellinus recounts several instances of disgruntled citizens torching the homes of governors and prefects.²⁴ The breakdown of the patron-client relationship, in this case, left open an opportunity for the increasingly influential church of the 4th century to assume the position that the governmental authorities previously held. Augustine perhaps anticipates or reflects this change by substituting God where the secular authorities and patrons of the Roman world once stood.

²⁰ Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 82.

²¹ There is no lack of sources to draw from when examining Roman patronage. Cicero gives an idealized image of how he will, as patronus, attend to the complaints of his *clientes* in *De Legibus* (1.3.10).

²² Symmachus helped Augustine secure an appointment in Milan as a professor (5.13.23). On this relationship, Brown writes that “Men such as Symmachus and his Roman friends thought of themselves as the ‘élite of the human race’. They would only be too glad to patronize, and eventually co-opt, a man such as Augustine ... These men represented the peak of Augustine’s ambition as a young man ... without such men, Augustine might well have remained in Carthage ...” Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*. Forty-Fifth Anniversary Edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 55–60. For further discussion on Symmachus’ support of Augustine and a view of the relationship as being based on Roman *amicitia* rather than essentially religious grounds as Brown contends, see Jennifer V. Ebbeler, “Religious Identity and the Politics of Patronage: Symmachus and Augustine,” *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, Bd. 56, H. 2 (2007): 230–42.

²³ Brown illustrates that hosting games had become more difficult, often being carried out with imperial subventions and thus intended to curry favour among the populace for the emperor rather than the local authorities: “The actual staging of the games ceased to be a purely local matter ... The cost of mobilizing animals and pedigreed racehorses from all over the empire had increased dramatically ... The great hunting shows offered by one of the leading families at Antioch had to be postponed for as many as seven years” (Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 86).

²⁴ Amm. *Res Gestae*. 27.3.8: *Hic praefectus exagitatus est motibus crebris, uno omnium maximo, cum collecta plebs infima domum eius prope Constantinianum lavacrum iniectis facibus incenderat et malleolis, ni vicinorum et familiarum veloci concursu a summis tectorum culminibus petita saxis et tegulis abscessisset* (This prefect was disturbed by frequent tumults, the greatest of them all being when the lowest of the plebs were collected together and would have burned down his house near the baths of Constantine by tossing burning torches and darts onto it, if the mob had not fled, attacked in a swift onslaught of the man's neighbours and relatives from the tops of the roofs with rocks and rooftiles); cf. 27.3.4.

The transition from Book 1 to Book 2 is marked by a reference to the biblical prodigal son in section 1.18.28, a reference that will become thematic throughout much of the *Confessions* and which Augustine will use as a reflection on his past failings.²⁵ Augustine's interpretation of the prodigal son narrative is heavily intertwined with his economic and transactional language as well as with an indebtedness towards God. To illustrate this point, Book 1 of the *Confessions* closes with a gesture to the nature of God in a similar vein to that of 1.4.4 (1.20.31): *gratias tibi, dulcedo mea et honor meus et fiducia mea* (I give thanks to you, my sweetness, my honour, and my confidence). *Fiducia* here is used "of the person in whom one reposes confidence,"²⁶ but it also recalls the economic metaphor for God from 1.4.4 because of its common meaning of a 'pledge' or 'mortgage.'²⁷ In the *Confessions*, however, Augustine prefers to use the word in the metaphorical sense noted above at section 1.20.31. *Fiducia* appears on nine occasions in the *Confessions*,²⁸ and the meaning "confidence" or "trust" in the abstract, as opposed to the literal, usurious meaning is ubiquitous. This alone is not particularly remarkable as other writers often use *fiducia* in this way as well.²⁹ However, the overlapping definitions of the word in Latin point to a Roman conception of transactional faith embedded within their culture. Augustine's life in many ways marks quite sharply the rise of the Catholic Church within the

²⁵ See O'Donnell (1992) on 2.5.10 *non est egrediendum abs te, domine* (There is no turning away from You, Lord): "The metaphor drawn from the prodigal is so pervasive that a phrase such as this, with no verbal echo of any authoritative text, continues the metaphor without even (probably) consciously invoking it for most readers."

²⁶ O'Donnell *ad* 1.20.31.

²⁷ For an example of this use of the word, see Cic. *Pro Flacco* 51: ... *pecuniam adolescentulo grandi faenore, fiducia tamen accepta, occupavisti. Hanc fiduciam commissam tibi dicis; tenes hodie ac possides* (...you lent money to the youth at a high interest rate, yet only after taking collateral. You say that what was given as collateral has been forfeited over to you; you hold and possess it still today...).

²⁸ 1.20.31, 5.10.19, 6.1.1, 6.8.13, 6.13.23, 7.18.24, 8.2.5, 9.11.28, and 10.32.48.

²⁹ For one of many such examples (Caes. *B.C.* 3.96): ... *tabernacula protecta hedera multaque praeterea, quae nimiam luxuriam et victoriae fiduciam designarent* ... (... the tents were covered in ivy and there were many further things that attested to excessive luxury and faith in victory...).

Roman Empire, but he illustrates with his use of the word *fiducia* not a departure from traditional Roman values and conceptions of faith, but rather that he has grafted these same ideas onto a Christian model, wherein faith must above all be contracted with God.

Several of Augustine's uses of the word *fiducia* in the *Confessions* highlight the contracting of a transaction with God as opposed to the pursuit of worldly affairs, such as (6.8.13): *et inde tamen manu validissima et misericordissima eruisti eum tu, et docuisti non sui habere sed tui fiduciam, sed longe postea* (Nevertheless, you tore him away from there with your most powerful and merciful hand, and you taught him not to have faith in himself but in you, but this was much later). Augustine recounts here his friend Alypius' salacious introduction to the amphitheatre. The anecdote is vivid in its own right but is especially important for its parallel with and encapsulation of Augustine's own life in the *Confessions*,³⁰ and his transition from worldly to spiritual pursuits.³¹ The section begins with Alypius' arrival at Rome to pursue a legal career: *Non sane relinquens incantatam sibi a parentibus terrenam viam, Romam praecesserat ut ius disceret ...* (In no way abandoning the earthly path set out for him by his parents, he had gone to Rome that he might study law...). Before Alypius fell prey to the violent allure of the games, he was already pursuing the gains of this world at the urging of his parents, reminiscent of Patricius' hopes for Augustine. This alone is perhaps not damning, but Augustine wastes no time in showing where it led his friend: *... et ibi gladiatorii spectaculi hiatu incredibili et incredibiliter abreptus est* (... and there he was incredibly taken by an incredible attraction to the gladiatorial

³⁰ Alypius at the gladiatorial games undoubtedly recalls Augustine's arrival at Carthage and love for the theatre there (3.1.1–2.2): *Veni Carthaginem, et circumstrepebat me undique sartago flagitiosorum amorum ... Rapiebant me spectacula theatrica, plena imaginibus miseriarum mearum et fomitibus ignis mei* (I came to Carthage, and on all sides a frying pan of profligate loves surrounded me ... the theatre shows, full of images of my own miseries and the kindling of my fire, they took me).

³¹ Brown goes so far as to describe Alypius as Augustine's "alter ego for the rest of their lives" (*Augustine*, 57).

spectacles). Though he set out with noble intentions, Alypius was easily corrupted by the sensory excesses of the amphitheatre.³² Moreover, Augustine highlights that Alypius' weakness was ignorance or a rejection of God in favour of his own presumptions and desires: ... *eo infirmior quo de se praesumserat, qui debuit de te* (... he was all the weaker as he had trusted in himself, he who ought to have trusted in you). This line parallels the aforementioned *fiducia* at the end of the section (*docuisti non sui habere sed tui fiduciam*) but the connotations of *debuit* should not be passed over lightly here—section 1.4.4 seems to linger in the air, leaving one to wonder whether Augustine is returning with Alypius to the *usuras* which God demands from his people. The rapid transition to the future remedy of God's *fiduciam* in conjunction with *debuit* accents the transactional nature of *fiducia* in this context despite the overt, and perhaps unsatisfactory, understanding of it as “faith” here. Finally, with *non sui habere sed tui fiduciam*, Augustine seems to refer to a passage in Isaiah (Is. 57:13): *qui autem fiduciam habet mei, hereditabit terram, et possidebit montem sanctum meum* (However, he who has faith in me will inherit the earth and he will possess my holy mountain).³³ The word *terram* is especially prominent when

³² The senses being a subject which greatly fascinated Augustine and to which he will devote much attention in Book 10. Moreover, Augustine's brief moment of spiritual enlightenment alongside his mother in Book 9 points to a rejection of the physical senses and a belief that it is through turning inwards upon one's own mind and soul that real knowledge is attained (9.10.24): *et adhuc ascendebamus interius cogitando et loquendo et mirando opera tua* (and we were ascending now inwardly by contemplating and talking and marvelling at Your works).

³³ Cf. O'Donnell for the phraseology. In comparing the Latin Vulgate to the Septuagint, it is to be noted that the emphasis on ‘inheritance’ is equally present, albeit inversed in its formulation. Where the Latin has an inheritance of the earth and a possession of the holy mount (*hereditabit terram, et possidebit montem sanctum meum*) the Greek text has a possession of the earth and an inheritance of the mount: οἱ δὲ ἀντεχόμενοί μου κτήσονται γῆν καὶ κληρονομήσουσι τὸ ὄρος τὸ ἅγιόν μου (But those who cleave to me will possess the earth and will inherit my holy mountain). The difference between the Latin *fiduciam habet mei* and the Greek ‘cleaving to me’ ἀντεχόμενοί μου is, of course, also notable. The similarity between Augustine's *docuisti non sui habere sed tui fiduciam* and the Latin translation of Isaiah would certainly suggest an intimate familiarity with the Latin translation, however, it should not be assumed that Augustine was unaware of the Greek text. His knowledge of Greek has long been a point of contention, with much scholarship over-exaggerating his ineptitude with the language: “Augustine ... will become the only Latin philosopher in antiquity to be virtually ignorant of Greek” (Brown, *Augustine*, 24). Augustine did in fact use Greek as an adult and the principle reason for his reluctance to do so except when absolutely necessary seems to have simply been a time-saving measure, at least while bishop: “Wir denken an die von allen Seiten auf den seeleneifrigen Bischof einstürmenden, unaufschiebbaren kirchlich-praktischen Arbeiten und erinnern uns daran, daß er wohl griechisch

taken in conjunction with the *terrenam viam* which carried the young Alypius to Rome. Assuming Augustine indeed wrote with Isaiah in mind, it would seem that he deliberately contrasts the misguided attempts at procuring *earthly* wealth and success with which Alypius began, against the true inheritance provided by God. This inheritance, however, can only be had through a transaction of *fiducia*.

Augustine further elucidates Alypius' spiritual development and rejection of the economy of the material world when describing his friend's early legal career. After recounting Alypius' narrow escape from being mistaken for and punished as a thief,³⁴ Augustine proceeds to his friend's naïve incredulity at the corruption at the heart of Rome's legal system, and how Alypius distinguished himself by his integrity when faced with gold and bribes (6.10.16):

et ter iam adsederat mirabili continentia ceteris, cum ille magis miraretur eos qui aurum innocentiae praeponerent. temptata est quoque eius indoles non solum inlecebra cupiditatis sed etiam stimulo timoris. Romae adsidebat comiti largitionum Italicianarum. erat eo tempore quidam potentissimus senator cuius et beneficiis obstricti multi et terrori subditi erant. voluit sibi licere nescio quid ex more potentiae suae quod esset per leges illicitum; restitit Alypius. promissum est praemium; inrisit animo. praetentae minae; calcavit ...

And three times already had he served amongst the others with admirable temperance, although he wondered much at those who placed gold before innocence. His natural disposition was also tried not only by the enticement of desire but also by the goad of fear. At Rome he served as an assistant to the overseer of the Italian treasury. There was at that time a certain extremely powerful senator and many people were both bound to him through his bribes and subdued through terror. The senator wanted something to be permitted for himself as usual through the force of his own influence, something which was forbidden by law;

verstand, aber nur im Notfall und nicht gerade gern an das zeitraubende Studium von original griechischen Werken heranging" (Altaner, "Die Benützung von original griechischen Vätertexten durch Augustinus," 73). Oftentimes finding a seasoned translator of Greek philosophy or patristic texts was infeasible in places like Hippo and Augustine would have found it more expedient to serve the needs and questions of his Latin-speaking congregation by interpreting the texts himself. Cf. Stock (2010), 48n146. Even O'Donnell (1.13.20) admits that Augustine's "own remarks are strongly marked by rhetorical self-depreciation" when it comes to his comfort in Greek.

³⁴ Augustine's opinion of the affair is that God machinated it in order that Alypius learn to be a fair judge in the future when he eventually becomes bishop (6.9.14).

Alypius resisted him. A bribe was promised; Alypius scoffed at him. Threats were then extended; Alypius scorned them...

The emphasis not only on the exceptionality of Alypius' refusal to take part in the corruption but also on the venality of the *potentissimus senator* indicates that Alypius is not simply resisting one particular case or institution that has been spoiled,³⁵ but Rome and the Roman political order itself. Within the span of a few pages Alypius, under Augustine's influence and tutelage,³⁶ has moved quite far from the *terrenam viam* on which he started. Unlike Catiline, for whom the incessant allure of the consulship as the pinnacle of the traditional *cursus honorum* and personal ambition never disappeared nor was ever repressed, Alypius eventually succeeds in turning away from the attractions and transactions of the material world. Personal cupidity and ambition have fallen by the wayside for him just as they do for Augustine, and duty to the state will follow suit. As letters exchanged between the two men many years later while both are serving as bishops show, they bemoan their inability to do more to shield the destitute of their dioceses from the exigent tax collectors of the Empire: "Bishops who allowed fiscal debtors to take refuge in the churches were prosecuted by the Imperial government for obstructing 'the public necessity' of taxation."³⁷ According to Augustine, the bishop's view of obligation by this point has transcended the prosaic demands of the government, defined instead only by duty to the exigent but forgiving God he presented at 1.4.4.

³⁵ Although see O'Donnell's note regarding the position of *comes largitionum Italicianarum*.

³⁶ Augustine makes no qualms in describing Alypius' dogged devotion to him (6.10.16): *Hunc ergo Romae inveneram, et adhaesit mihi fortissimo vinculo mecumque Mediolanium profectus est, ut nec me desereret ...* (So I had found him at Rome, and he clung to me with the strongest bond and went with me to Milan, so that he should not desert me...).

³⁷ Brown, *Augustine*, 470.

Continuing from the transactional shift at the close of Book 1, Book 2 is similarly rooted in transactional language, bookended as such by its opening and closing passages (2.1.1 and 2.10.18): *recordari volo transactas foeditates meas et carnales corruptiones animae meae* (I want to record my foulness that I have transacted and the carnal corruptions of my soul), and *factus sum mihi regio egestatis* (I have been for myself into a destitute land). Within the book are included many general references to monetary and transactional themes, with literal references to the financial means of his family (2.3.5–6), the value of worldly goods and pleasures (2.3.8) a continued emphasis on the prodigal son (2.5.10), equated even to Catiline (2.5.11), and many more besides.³⁸ In tandem then with Augustine’s own view of himself within the transactional relationship defining his soul opposite God, he likens himself at this period of his life to the prodigal son,³⁹ thereby incorporating the scriptures, as well as to Catiline, an integration of his classical education.

Catiline is for Augustine the example *par excellence* of the rupture of *fides*, of greed incarnate, and of the corruption of the soul. This is an image which he retools from a Roman

³⁸ Patricius evidently went far beyond his expected paternal duties to pay for Augustine’s education (2.3.5): *ultra vires rei familiaris suae impenderet filio quidquid etiam longe peregrinanti studiorum causa opus esset*; and yet, the young student still had to interrupt his studies for lack of money (2.3.6): *ex necessitate domestica*. Elsewhere in Book 2 Augustine highlights not just the power of worldly temptation and carnal pleasure, but the fiscal value of those pleasures (2.3.8) *in cinnamis et unguentis pretiosis, ... et prodiebat tamquam ex adipe iniquitas mea* (cf. *prodiet quasi ex adipe iniquitas eorum*, Ps. 72.12). In general, however, the Book abounds with a vocabulary of luxury and wealth: 2.4.9 *copiosus, inopia, compulsus egestate, penuria et fastidio*; 2.5.10 *auro, argento, aviditas oritur, egrediendum* (a reference back to the prodigal son analogy from Book 1, according to O’Donnell); 2.5.11 *praedium, depraedari*; 2.6.12 *meliorum copia*; 2.6.13 *luxuria* (a marked word, reappearing in the *Confessions* only at 5.3.4, 8.10.24, and 13.21.30), *tu es autem plenitudo et indeficiens copia, largitor affluentissimus, avaritia multa possidere vult: et tu possides omnia, litigat*; 2.7.15 *retribuam, qua donas peccata*; 2.9.17 *ioco nocendi aviditas, lucri mei*. Much further investigation would be necessary to fully unpack each of these instances in Book 2 alone, to say nothing of examples in the entire work. Nevertheless, even a cursory examination appears to yield a confluence of such luxury and monetary vocabulary in Book 2. (Why are these quotes from *Confessions* not translated like in other footnotes/text?)

³⁹ John M. Quinn, *A Companion to the Confessions of St. Augustine* (New York: Peter Lang Inc., 2002), 115: “Like the prodigal son, he wandered off from the stability of virtue that is the Father’s house, not only drifting into but becoming a region of want, a wasteland.”

context to the Christian philosophy of the soul he paints in the *Confessions*. Augustine's explanation for the motivation behind Catiline's wickedness is telling (2.5.11): '*cur ita? ut ... divitias adsequeretur et careret metu legum et difficultate rerum propter inopiam rei familiaris et conscientiam scelerum*' ('Why thus?' ... so that he might obtain riches and be free from the fear of the laws and the difficulty of things on account of the 'poverty of his family and the consciousness of the crimes'). The emphasis on *divitias* and *inopiam rei familiaris* is crucial as it recalls the bracketed nature of Book 2 (*transactas foeditates meas* and *regio egestatis*) and likewise the nature of Augustine at this point. Just as Catiline was caught up in his worldly ambition, so too was Augustine fixated on the desires and impulses which he later will recall only tore him further away from God.⁴⁰ The underlining of familial poverty is striking as well because it recalls more specifically Augustine's portrayal, exaggerated though it might be,⁴¹ of his own family's circumstances, mentioned a few sections previously (2.3.6): *sed ubi sexto illo et decimo anno, interposito otio ex necessitate domestica, feriatu ab omni schola cum parentibus esse coepi* ... (But when I was sixteen years old, with break in my studies imposed by domestic necessity, I took leave of all schooling and began to live with my parents). The fixation on the supposed indigence of his family is striking because Augustine himself relates the privileges of his youth, provided for by his family. The comparison between Catiline and Augustine appears unambiguous on this point. What is odd, however, is that Augustine reframes Catiline's

⁴⁰ Augustine's reflection on his theft of the pear says as much (2.4.9): *... turpis anima et dissiliens a firmamento tuo in exterminium* ... (...a soul both foul and breaking away from your firmament into destruction).

⁴¹ Also noteworthy is the relative normalcy even for a wealthy family to interrupt a child's studies because of financial hardship. For all but the extremely wealthy, fiscal circumstances ebbed and flowed often with the quality of the harvest of any given year, sometimes forcing temporary cost-saving measures to be taken: "In the agrarian economy that was at the base of Patricius' household, lean years were a recurrent phenomenon which produced periodic liquidity problems..." (Shaw, "The Family in Late Antiquity," *Past and Present*, no. 115 (May 1987): 9).

transgression against the *res publica* as projected by Cicero, into a transgression against God.⁴² For Cicero, seeking the common good of the *res publica* was of the highest virtue, and the good of the Republic was always at odds with the “tension between the public and the private good.”⁴³ Catiline and his seeking of *divitias* was the antithesis of this common good and shattered the covenant between the public and private spheres.

Augustine was of the same mind as Cicero, though during his tenure as bishop he advocated for a stronger secession from worldly wealth. While for Cicero wealth was not an evil in itself being “a fact of life ... [coming] to an aristocrat from birth, almost like a robust character trait,”⁴⁴ for Augustine wealth, ill-gotten or not, was a distraction from the common good, a good which now has shifted from the *res publica* to the Catholic Church and union with God. Augustine made this concern for the repression of private wealth a key tenet of his monastic community in Hippo, a community bound by the rejection of both marriage and private property.⁴⁵ The faith that Augustine constructs for himself is still rooted in Rome’s transactional preoccupations—something is always owed to a superior force or figure. He has shifted this authority, however, from the obligations to the state, imposed through the systematically exerted force of government officials both at the local and statewide levels, as well as from the culturally instilled duty to one’s own ambition, embodied best by Catiline, to an obligation to God.

⁴² O’Donnell (1992) seems to disagree on this point (2.5.11): “Why Catiline? ... He offered an entirely ‘pagan’ exemplum of evil, wicked among the wicked. His is a story in which no impiety against the divine is part of the tradition, hence there is no complicating question of love or hatred for a divine law-giver ... Only the natural law applies to Catiline, and his action is explicable in rational terms. So much the more likely that Augustine’s action is explicable in similar terms.”

⁴³ Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 178.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 179.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 174.

Augustine's transactional and economic language in his *Confessions* points to intimate knowledge and engagement with the works and ideals of his pagan predecessors. The Roman themes evoked by such language are wedded to Augustine's newly formed Christian philosophy in an attempt to better define and demarcate the relationship between the human soul and the divine, a relationship predicated on transaction and adherence to a particular way of life that finds its roots in Roman culture and society, but which Augustine brings to blossom in his text. Augustine's notion of *fides* and *fiducia* is not a modern conception of faith, but one predicated on an obligation and debt to a superior force. Augustine never fully separated the tax-collecting *curialis* of his childhood in Thagaste from the God he came to as a man in Italy.

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