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# **Conceptual Certainty as Fallen Reality**

## **St. Augustine of Hippo and the Natural Law Tradition**

*by*

Miles Christian Hollingworth

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Thesis for the Degree of Master of Arts  
Submitted to the Department of Politics  
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# **Abstract**

## **Conceptual Certainty as Fallen Reality St. Augustine of Hippo and the Natural Law Tradition**

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Miles Christian Hollingworth

This thesis reinterprets the significance of the Doctrine of the Fall to Augustine's relationship with the Natural Law Tradition by arguing that his literal reading of events in the Garden of Eden supports not just the traditional narrative of a fall from righteousness, but also the description of a move from one epistemic condition to another. From such beginnings it is concluded that political society is remedial not just in relation to sinful nature but also a metaphysical fact; and in this way the Fall's diagnostic potential is broadened, setting it up as the premise for an intellectually solvent meta-narrative account of the human condition.

For my Father

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## Preface

This thesis aims to re-assess the significance of the Doctrine of the Fall to Augustine's relationship with the Natural Law Tradition by arguing that his literal reading of events in the Garden of Eden supports not just the traditional narrative of a fall from righteousness, but also the description of a move from one epistemic condition to another. From such beginnings it will be concluded that political society is remedial not just in relation to sinful nature but also a metaphysical fact. In this way the Fall's diagnostic potential will be broadened, setting it up as the premise for an intellectually solvent meta-narrative account of the human condition. Moreover, this treatment of the Fall will colour a particular approach to the Natural Law Tradition, in that the latter will be taken to comprise two distinct elements: the Natural Law Idea and Natural Law Theory. Before continuing, however, it is important to explain how this distinction will work itself out in practice, or more particularly, what is meant by the epistemological significance of the Fall.





In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve were subject to a voluntarist conception of law. The authority of God's commands was content independent and having known nothing else, Adam and Eve saw no reason to question this. The certainty and security they enjoyed was a form of blissful ignorance; wisdom was the fear of God. Had they persisted in this state of being they would have become wise after the manner of a child growing into adulthood. Looking back over the path of obedience, they would have perceived the goodness and righteousness of God's plan for their life; something they could not have conceived looking forwards. For them, the point of obedience was absent of any impulse to understand the rightness of the action they were launching out on. In the end, what led to the shattering of this paradisaical mode of certainty was the uttering of four simple words: 'Did God really say?' Adam and Eve were exposed to a question which could never have occurred to them had it not been put to them. For the first time, man faced the prospect of uncertainty; and for the first time, the wisdom of God was called into question.

Pride had necessarily to follow doubt as Adam and Eve faced the possibility of their becoming a source of truth independent from God. They had been corrupted but they had not yet sinned; it remained for them to will to disobey God, a choice that would be consummated in the biting of the apple. The effect of their choice was immediate: their eyes were opened and they lost their innocence. Before, as Hollingworth describes it, '...they had looked to God for all their seeing...'<sup>1</sup> Now, banished from His presence, they had to look to themselves for all their seeing. This left them to live out a disjunctive existence in what now appeared a hostile and mysterious world, and two consequences

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Hollingworth, *This Fragile Knowing* (Forthcoming).

pressed upon them with a terrible urgency. The first was the hitherto unimaginable fear of what the future may hold; the second the need for a criterion of truth. The former marked the move from eternity to temporality; the latter the abandonment of God as the source of wisdom.

That, very briefly, is what is taken to be the epistemological significance of the Fall. It should be clear in what way it lends itself to a meta-narrative account of the human condition. Human life, intellectual, cultural and social, is a quest for survival apart from God, which is effectively the impulse to remedy the fears and uncertainties thrown up by temporality. It is this disposition which is referred to by the term Natural Law Idea, and it should now be obvious why it is regarded as contingent upon a 'metaphysical fact'. However, one need not fear its broad application, or suppose that the Natural Law Tradition has been delimited beyond the bounds of political discourse. Although it might be admitted that on such a reading the Natural Law Idea stands as the spring for all human endeavour, by doing so, it merely sets Natural Law Theory in stark relief, as chief amongst a number of attempts to make good the events in Paradise.

The term Conceptual Certainty, as used in the title of this work, refers to the form taken by the criterion of truth called into being by the Fall. As has already been pointed out, to Adam and Eve, the authority of God's commands was content independent. In other words, they were to be obeyed not because they were good or just or true, but because they issued from God. Indeed such moral categories would have been anathema to Adam and Eve, for to them God was God, and His Will, the only reality they had ever known. The phrase 'blissful ignorance' has already been used to describe this state of being, and in the Book of

Genesis is found a negative affirmation of this idiom, where it is written that through disobedience, '...the eyes of both of them were opened'.<sup>2</sup> Yet as Augustine carefully elaborates, this occurred, '...not so that they might see... for they could see already, but so that they might distinguish between the good that they had lost and the evil into which they had fallen'.<sup>3</sup> In other words, they had indeed attained to the knowledge of good and evil, but not in the sense that the serpent had promised they would. His words had been: '...you will be like God, knowing good and evil'.<sup>4</sup> He knew full well that in biting the apple, they would come to know evil through experience, which is different to the knowledge of evil possessed by God in His infinite wisdom.

It was from this fallen perspective, no longer looking to God for all their seeing, that Adam and Eve could begin to perceive their previous state of being in distinction, as something lost. Where once it had been reality, it was now concept; where once God had been God, He was now good. This need to see and think independently from God imbued concepts and ideas with a hitherto unimagined importance, as they would become the units out of which Adam and Eve would construct a new, Fallen Reality. But now, with this definition of terms complete, it is time to turn to the layout of the thesis.

The above thoughts will be unpacked across four chapters. The first, *Law in Paradise*, will largely consist of a commentary on Augustine's narrative account of the events in the Garden of Eden. Particular attention will be given to observing how he assembles then disassembles the Paradisial cast of mind. This will be a propaedeutic exercise, with the object being to forge a link between epistemology and political behaviourism by viewing

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<sup>2</sup> Gen 3:7.

<sup>3</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, XIV, 17. Cf. *Enchiridion*, 3, 11.

the former as the cause of, and the latter as the response to, the metaphysical fact of temporality. In the second chapter, *Law Since Paradise*, these ideas will be developed in line with the aim of drawing out the meta-narrative potential implicit in Augustine's epistemic reading of the Fall. Granted the mythopoeic status of the events in Paradise, the method will be to treat Augustine's reading of them as a critical device. It will be asked whether the questions it raises do indeed resonate within the human compound. This approach will invoke the distinction between the Natural Law Idea and Natural Law Theory, for both will be regarded as paradigms, the former of the poverty of Reason and the latter, the rational foundations of ethics. The intention is for the third chapter, *The Political Animal*, to mark the conclusion of this approach. It will hopefully be shown that far from representing, to the analytical sensibility, the least satisfactory element in his socio-political thought, Augustine's Doctrine of the Fall presents the higher synthesis to reconcile the elements of thesis and antithesis (what is being referred to here is the clash between his dogmatic theology on the one hand, and his psychologically compelling politics on the other) evident throughout his writings. Finally, in the fourth and concluding chapter, an assessment will be made of how these findings impact upon Augustine's position within the Natural Law Tradition broadly conceived.

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<sup>4</sup> Gen 3:5.

## Chapter One

# Law in Paradise<sup>5</sup>

My people have committed two sins: They have  
forsaken me the spring of living water, and have dug  
their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold  
water.

Jeremiah 1:13

### 1.1 Man's Design and Equipment

As Augustine makes clear, 'The pre-eminence of man consists in this, that God made him to His own image by giving him an intellect by which he surpasses the beasts...'<sup>6</sup> And the purpose of this intellect, or Reason, was to enable him to attain to Wisdom. In *De Libero Arbitrio*, Augustine explains how this faculty is to relate to its purpose by setting out, at book 3, XXIV, an answer to the following question: 'If the first man was created wise, then why did he allow himself to be seduced? But if, however, he was created as a stupid fellow, then why isn't God the author of vices, since folly is the greatest of vices?' Immediately he perceives that so framed, the question harbours a very important

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<sup>5</sup> As was implied in the preface, this chapter will, in its initial stages, resemble a commentary on the relevant

presupposition, namely, that Wisdom is a quality of nature. However, this seems contrary to common sense; for, 'Just as it is senseless to call an infant stupid, so it would be even more absurd to call it wise, even though it is already a human being.'<sup>7</sup> In the light of this, Wisdom should clearly be thought of in terms of capacity. It is something that a man becomes, and in this sense implies a process; between potentiality and actuality sits a device by which what is innate achieves fullness of nature.<sup>8</sup>

Augustine has already shown that what is innate to man is that by which he shares in God's own image - intellect - whilst by fullness of nature is clearly meant Wisdom. Furthermore, this schema, by supporting the idea of Wisdom as a process of becoming or development proper to man carries with it the converse idea that foolishness or folly is a revolt against this process, and thus an explicit denial of innate potentiality. This would seem to be supported by the use of the term 'fool' in ordinary language. The qualification for calling someone a 'fool' is the belief that they have chosen to turn away from the course of action in accordance with Reason. What this suggests is that bound up with the ideas of Wisdom and folly is an element of choice or free will. But Augustine is well aware that this fact is lost on those who view Wisdom as a quality of nature. For if Wisdom is something man either has or does not have in full, then there seems little hope of understanding the events of the Fall. One is trapped by the logic of the premises: a wise man could not have fallen; God could not have created a foolish man. Thankfully, Augustine points towards a way out of the dilemma.

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Augustinian texts.

<sup>6</sup> *De Genesi Ad Litteram*, XII, 6.

<sup>7</sup> *De Libero Arbitrio*, 3, XXIV.

<sup>8</sup> *Confessiones*, XIII, 10.

The solution is once again found at *De Libero Arbitrio* 3, XXIV, where Augustine, picking up his previous train of thought, declares that, 'From this it appears that there must be some intermediate state through which a transition is made from Wisdom to folly, a state to which it is impossible to ascribe either Wisdom or folly.'<sup>9</sup> Next, he puts his finger on the difficulty, pointing out that, 'This intermediate state cannot be understood in this life by men, except through contraries.'<sup>10</sup> It is important that no ambiguities are left to cloud this characteristic of the move from Wisdom to foolishness, or vice versa, as may well be the case:

Thus, no mortal man may become wise unless he passes from foolishness to wisdom. If the passage itself is foolishly made, it is not well done – but this sounds like senseless talk, for if the transition is wisely made, then the man was already wise before he passed from folly to wisdom. This is no less absurd. From this we may understand that there is an intermediate state which we cannot call by either name. Thus when the first man passed from the citadel of wisdom to folly, the passage itself was neither wise nor foolish.<sup>11</sup>

This seems a puzzling proposition. Is one really to believe that the move from intellect to Wisdom is effected by a device wholly indifferent to either state of being? That certainly seems contrary to the Socratic ideal of knowledge as virtue. By banishing any possibility of understanding from the intermediate stage between intellect and Wisdom, Augustine appears in danger of bypassing the role of Reason altogether. Can he really be meaning to do this, or more to the point, what role does he envisage for the rational faculty in such a pursuit of Wisdom? Augustine's reply is perfectly frank:

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<sup>9</sup> *De Libero Arbitrio*, 3, XXIV.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* Cf. *Enchiridion*, 4, XIV.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

It is one thing to be rational (that is, to be capable of thought), and another to be wise. Through reason, everyone is capable of comprehending a command, obedience to which is the first duty of faith, so that he can do what he is commanded to do. Just as it is the nature of reason to understand commands, it is the will which carries them out. Just as the importance of a rational creature lies in its capacity to receive commands, so the value of obeying commands lies in the Wisdom thereby received.<sup>12</sup>

To the statement with which this chapter was begun, that 'God made man to his own image by giving him an intellect by which he surpasses the beasts', can now be added the following: 'For man... is better than the beasts because he is able to apprehend a command. He is better still when he has accepted a command, and again better when he has obeyed it. And he is above all better when he has been blessed with the Eternal light of Wisdom.'<sup>13</sup> This, then, is the equipment to match the design.

## 1.2 The Nature of Wisdom.

It is now necessary to explicate this 'Eternal light of Wisdom' that Augustine believes men are designed for. Thankfully, the discussion so far has at least produced a negative definition: it is clear that Augustine's austere command/obedience dynamic precludes any element of understanding in his notion of Wisdom. Intellect enables man to process a command, that is, to comprehend what it is that he is being asked to do. It does not equip him to uncover some deposit of rightness or goodness lodged within it, some criterion by which it can be judged worthy of obedience. As Augustine makes clear: 'Just as a command does not issue from the man who is subject to the command, but from the one

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<sup>12</sup> *De Libero Arbitrio*, 3, XXIV. One finds a similar idea in Aristotle's *Politics*, 1253 a, 9: '...language serves to declare what is advantageous and what is the reverse...' (tr. Sir Ernest Barker, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1948).



who commands, so also wisdom does not have its source in the man who is enlightened, but in Him who enlightens.<sup>14</sup> There is no room for a rational verification mechanism here.<sup>15</sup> This is voluntarist law plain and simple: 'Thus man, although now spiritual and "renewed unto knowledge of God according to the image of Him Who created him," ought to be "a doer of the law" and not a judge.'<sup>16</sup> And as Augustine continues, 'Nor does it seem just before You that in exactly the same way as Light unchangeable knows itself, so it should be known by the mutable being enlightened by it. Therefore, "my soul is like earth without water unto You." Just as it cannot of itself enlighten itself, so it cannot of itself be sufficient to itself.'<sup>17</sup>

Faced with this evidence, it is only possible to conclude that for Augustine, Wisdom is a state of being; for if it is a state of knowing, then it is devoid of all the qualities normally associated with understanding and intellectual certainty. This is not to say that there is no attraction in unquestioning obedience, faith and trust. These are, after all, the marks of childhood comfort and safety. It is rather that this form of bliss is indelibly associated with ignorance, which would seem to ally Augustine with anti-intellectualism of an extreme and pernicious sort. And after all, is one really supposed to believe that were it not for the serpent's words, Adam and Eve would have continued blind to their intellectual capabilities, living out the feeblest and blindest of faiths? This seems to be exactly what Augustine is saying. So just how does his support for voluntarist law relate to his understanding of Wisdom?

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<sup>13</sup> *De Libero Arbitrio*, 3, XXIV.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> See below, pp. 49-51 for a detailed discussion of this principal in relation to Logical Positivism.

<sup>16</sup> *Confessiones*, XIII, 23.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, XIII, 16. Cf. *De Civitate Dei*, XI, 10: '...just as the air grows dark when deprived of light (for what is called darkness in the corporeal sense is nothing but air lacking light), so the soul grows dark when it is

Concerning God's commandment to Adam not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Augustine has the following to say: 'But God's command required obedience, and this virtue is, in a certain sense, the mother and guardian of all other virtues in a rational creature. For man has been so made that it is to his advantage to be subject to God, and harmful to him to act according to his own will rather than that of his Creator.'<sup>18</sup> In fact, this disjunctive ethic issues in an even bolder assertion, namely, that the sovereign Will of God stands as a watershed between truth and falsehood. As such,

When a man lives according to truth, then, he lives not according to self, but according to God; for it is God Who has said, "I am the truth." When he lives according to self, however... he then certainly lives according to falsehood. This is not because man himself is falsehood; for his Author and Creator is God, who is by no means the Author and Creator of Falsehood. Rather, it is because man was created righteous, to live according to his Maker and not according to himself, doing his Maker's will and not his own: falsehood consists in not living in the way for which he was created.<sup>19</sup>

This distinction is the key to understanding Augustine's definition of Wisdom, for truth becomes no mystical principle or vision but rather seeing things as they really are. And here lies the rub: to see things as they really are is not to penetrate to some hidden depth of meaning concerning them, but to perceive them in the service of God's Will. The truth in any given situation becomes the course of action decreed by God; truth is known not through static contemplation but in the living of it: 'And Your law is the truth, and You are

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deprived of the light of wisdom.'

<sup>18</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, XIV, 12. Cf. *Contra Adversarium et Prophetarium*, Bk. I, 19: 'After all, we were given free choice in such a way that we have to live under the power of a better nature.'

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, XIV, 4.

the truth.<sup>20</sup> The point to grasp, and it is crucial in what follows, is that for Augustine, Wisdom can only unfold in the wake of obedience. In other words, it manifests itself as one looks back over the affairs of this world to perceive not chaos and disorder, but control and government. As Julian of Norwich wrote: 'Things which God's foreknowledge saw before creation, and which He so rightly and worthily brings to their proper end in time, break upon us suddenly and take us by surprise. And because of this blindness and lack of foresight we say they are chances and hazards.'<sup>21</sup> This belief is, of course, echoed in Augustine's writings, but in his case, worked to a stern rebuke in a sermon:

Consider a painter. Various colours are set before him, and he knows where to put each colour. The sinner, of course, wanted to be the colour black; does that mean the craftsman is not in control, and doesn't know where to put him? How many things he can do, in full control, with the colour black... As for you, just you think about what you want to be; don't worry about what order you will be put in by the controller who is incapable of going wrong; He knows where to put you.<sup>22</sup>

And again:

Someone or other has decided to be a burglar. The law applied by the judge knows he has acted against the law; the law applied by the judge knows where to put him... From being a burglar he will become a convict in the mines. How many public works are constructed from the work of the mine convict! The

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<sup>20</sup> *Confessiones*, IV, 9.

<sup>21</sup> Julian of Norwich, tr. Clifton Wolters, *Revelations of Divine Love* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1978), p. 80. At this point it is worth pointing out, especially insofar as the argument develops in the second chapter, that Heraclitus of Ephesus (500 B.C.) held a remarkably similar view: 'The Law (*Logos*), though men associate with it most closely, yet they are separated from it, and those things which they encounter daily seem to them strange.' Heraclitus, fgt. 72, in Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers: A Complete Translation of the Fragments in Diels*, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1948), p. 29.

<sup>22</sup> *Sermones*, CXXV, 5. Cf. *De Civitate Dei*, XI, 18; 10, II; *Enchiridion*, 26.

punishment of that convict contributes to the improvement of society... Is the  
One who knew how to create you going to be at a loss how to control you?<sup>23</sup>

### 1.3 The Metaphysics of Obedience

It is at this juncture that Augustine's definition of Wisdom begins to show its metaphysical import, for if his command/obedience dynamic is to result in the type of 'sanctified hindsight'<sup>24</sup> outlined above, then man must logically be restricted to a present moment. By this is meant quite simply 'fixed in time', that is, unable to fathom what the future may hold. It is possible to see this necessity at work in a conjecture of Augustine's concerning the beatitude of Adam in Paradise,

...as far as the enjoyment of present good is concerned, the first man in Paradise was more blessed than any righteous man in this condition of mortal infirmity. As regards the hope of future good, however, every man who not merely believes, but who knows as a certain truth, that he is to enjoy without end the most high God in the company of angels and free from every evil: this man, no matter what bodily torments afflict him, is more blessed than him who, even in the great happiness of Paradise, was uncertain of his fate.<sup>25</sup>

With regard to what has been said thus far, it is clear that short of this uncertainty concerning his fate, obedience would have sat very lightly on Adam's shoulders. Indeed, it could have had none of the significance attributed to it by Augustine's understanding of the proper use of the rational faculty. For simple obedience, premised on the fact that he had

<sup>23</sup> *Sermones*, CXXV, 5. Cf. *Confessiones*, VII, 11: 'You have told me that no man's sin either hurts You or disrupts Your government...'

<sup>24</sup> I came across this term in a little known book by Oswald Chambers called, *Not Knowing Whither* (London : : Edinburgh, Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1957), p. 12: 'The call of God only becomes clear as we obey, never as we weigh the pros and cons and try to reason it out. The call is God's idea, not our idea, and only on looking back over the path of obedience do we realise what is the idea of God; God sanctifies memory.'

<sup>25</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, 11, XII. However, too much should not be read into Augustine's mention of the 'man who not merely believes but knows that he is to enjoy without end the most high God'. He considered this an

never known anything else, was all that safeguarded Adam's innocence in the Garden of Eden. So long as his rational faculty remained humbled in the service of obedience, in a purely instrumental capacity, there could be no possibility of thought or action independent from God. In other words, there could be no disjunction between the Will of God and the will of man. For as Augustine observes, '...although, in Paradise, before his sin, man could not do everything, he did not at that time wish to do anything that he could not do, and therefore he could do all that he wished.'<sup>26</sup> And again, 'Your best servant is he who looks not so much to hear from You what he wants to hear, but rather to want what he hears from You.'<sup>27</sup> This is not to be pedantic; does not the convergence of the will of man on the Will of God, through the twin principles of instrumental rationality and perfect obedience, render obsolete that long standing dispute between philosophers and theologians as to the relationship between morality and religion? As Hudson describes it in the preface to Professor Bartley's monograph, *Morality and Religion*: 'How are religious beliefs about what God's Will *is* logically related to moral judgements as to what men *ought* to do? Is there a logical gap between the *is* and the *ought* here? Or is the *ought* groundless apart from the *is*?'<sup>28</sup> By the terms of the Augustinian narrative of the Fall, these questions become redundant, as they require for their maintenance one of two conditions, both of which are precluded by the Augustinian command/obedience dynamic. The first of these conditions is a static conception of God's Will and the second, a static conception of truth. Yet as has been shown, the Augustinian command/obedience dynamic cuts at the root of both by supporting a living Will and a living truth. It leaves no possibility for reason or to mark an irruption between man and God. Rather, it fulfills its role in the order of the

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exceptional case and cited it only to throw an aspect of Adam's Paradisial condition into stark relief.

<sup>26</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, XIV, 15.

<sup>27</sup> *Confessiones*, X, 26.

<sup>28</sup> W. W. Bartley III, *Morality and Religion* (London, Macmillan, 1971), p. ix.

sacramental life, receiving commands, then translating and presenting them to be freely acted upon.

It is only having reduced the Paradisial state of being into these, its crude mechanics, that it is possible to appreciate the full significance of free will. For as may reasonably be asked, 'if Adam was designed and equipped for perfect obedience, why did God bother with free will?' In reply, it is only necessary to consider man divest of his faculty for free choice. And by this is meant not just severe restrictions on the conditions of his choosing, but rather, an inability to choose altogether. He would clearly be left a mere automaton, a body devoid of its animating principle. In relation to a god demanding obedience within a scheme of divine providence, he would be no more than a robot, his lot to act out the programmes of his creator. He would be perfectly obedient, yes, but he would have no capacity to love or appreciate the goodness in what he was doing: '...right reason tells us... that that creature is good which has it in its power to control a forbidden pleasure that may arise, so that it rejoices not only in lawful and just actions but also in the control of pleasure.'<sup>29</sup> Perhaps most importantly, a closer analysis of the logic of the matter reveals much about Augustine's understanding of sin.

Any choice presupposes a chain of reasoning from some self interest to that which is perceived to suffice for its satisfaction. In Augustinian thought, a self interest is defined as an action or outcome calculated to result in maximum happiness. That this utilitarian ethic finds a place in the thought of so vaunted a Catholic saint is due entirely to the fact that Augustine took man to be designed for one thing, and one thing only, which was to obey

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<sup>29</sup> *De Genesi Ad Litteram*, XI, 7.

God; and it followed from this that it was only through living out this purpose that man could be truly happy. Herein also lies the reason why for Augustine, sin was synonymous with falsehood. For as he observed, although, 'Man does indeed wish to be happy... he lives in such a way that it is not possible for him to be so. What could be more of a falsehood than this?'<sup>30</sup> It would seem, then, that the sinful life is to be distinguished not by its aims but by its methods, a fact which will be highlighted by turning back to an examination of the methods of the 'sacramental life', or the life lived in accordance with God's Will.

The motif which Augustine used to describe the sacramental life was that of 'form'. It was one of his more overtly Neo-Platonic ideas, though more Plotinus than Plato. In the *Enneads* (2.4.5 and 6.7.17), Plotinus adopted the concept of 'emanation' as the metaphor to explain the illumination of the lower hypostases from the One, in a process that Armstrong described as, '...a spontaneous and necessary efflux of life or power from the One, which leaves their source in itself undiminished.'<sup>31</sup> In the notes to his translation of *De Genesi Ad Litteram*, Taylor carefully points out that whilst Augustine was happy to use this idea to explain the formation of the rational creation, he did not follow Plotinus in imagining the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity to have emanated from God in the manner of the Nous from the One.<sup>32</sup> This was for a reason made clear by Brown, that, '...the outward-going diffusion of the One coincides with a continuous tension of every part to 'return' to the source of its consciousness.'<sup>33</sup> With such an idea of tension implying a degree of inferiority on the part of the lower hypostases, it would be an inadequate device by which

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<sup>30</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, XIV, 4.

<sup>31</sup> A. H. Armstrong, "'Emanation' in Plotinus", *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 46 No. 181 (Jan., 1937), p. 61.

<sup>32</sup> Augustine, *De Genesi Ad Litteram*, tr. John Hammond Taylor, S. J., 2 vols. (Ancient Christian Writers, The Works of the Fathers in Translation, No. 41; New York, Newman Press, 1982), p. 224.

describe the relations holding between the Blessed Trinity. Yet as has already been pointed out, these failings aside, Augustine found it perfectly suited to describing those relations holding between Creator and created. Indeed, he believed that in the case of a spiritual creature, either man or angel, it is by, '...turning towards its Creator that it receives its form and perfection, and if it does not thus turn, it is unformed.'<sup>34</sup>

Critically, this form and perfection was understood to be received by the creature as a stream of commands and inward promptings received from Christ Jesus, the Word of God:

The Word is the source of whatever being and life it has, and to the Word it must turn in order to live wisely and happily. The beginning of an intellectual creature's life is indeed eternal Wisdom. This Beginning, remaining unchangeably in Himself, would certainly not cease to speak by interior inspirations and summons to the creature of which He is the Beginning, in order that it might turn to its First Cause. Otherwise such a creature could not be formed and perfect. Hence, asked who He was, the Divine Word replied: "I am the Beginning, for I am even speaking to you"<sup>35</sup>

In the case of man, then, it is, 'By Your direction, [that] he himself establishes what is Your Will, what is the good, and the acceptable, and the perfect thing.'<sup>36</sup> This oneness of Will means that in effect a fully formed intellectual creature knows God's mind always: 'He does this by the mind's understanding, through which he "perceives the things that are of the Spirit of God."' Otherwise, "man when he was placed in honour did not understand; he has been compared to senseless beasts, and made like to them."<sup>37</sup> For, 'When men see

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<sup>33</sup> Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London, Faber & Faber, 1979), p. 98.

<sup>34</sup> *De Genesi Ad Litteram*, I, 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, I, 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Confessiones*, XIII, 22.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, XIII, 23.



these things through Your Spirit, you see in them. Therefore, when they see that they are good, You see that they are good, and whatsoever things are pleasing because of You, in them You yourself are pleasing, and such things as are pleasing to us because of Your Spirit are in us pleasing to you.<sup>38</sup>

Against this closely worked backdrop it should now be possible to appreciate the reasons why Augustine's statement that Adam was 'uncertain of his fate'<sup>39</sup> need carry no negative connotations. Quite to the contrary, it points up the nature of his innocence in God, and by doing so, prefigures the way in which it would eventually be lost: '...man was happy in Paradise before he sinned, although he was uncertain about his future fall... He was not filled with vain presumption, like a fool being certain about the uncertain, but he was strong in faith and hope... enjoying a happiness that was real.'<sup>40</sup> As can in fact be seen, Augustine reserves all negative connotations for that type of understanding committed to alleviating the temporal restrictions of time and space. The wise man, by looking to God for all his seeing, enjoys perfect certainty in the present moment; the fool, on the other hand, is 'certain about the uncertain'. George MacDonald furnishes a typically lucid description of the metaphysical ramifications of the wise man's certainty in God by way of an ingenious analogy with the non-rational creation. As he writes, 'The bliss of the animals lies in this, that, on their lower level, they shadow the bliss of those – few at any moment on the earth – who do not "look before and after, and pine for what is not" but live in the holy carelessness of the eternal *now*.'<sup>41</sup> It remains apposite in this case because it ranges itself against all that would be considered praiseworthy in Reason. It drives home the point

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<sup>38</sup> *Confessiones*, XIII, 31.

<sup>39</sup> See above, p. 13.

<sup>40</sup> *De Genesi Ad Litteram*, XI, 18.

<sup>41</sup> C. S. Lewis (ed.), *George MacDonald An Anthology: 365 Readings* (New York, Touchstone, 1990), p.

that living in the 'eternal *now*' of the present moment, and harbouring no fears, doubts or insecurities, Adam and Eve would have had no need to justify or quantify their existence. To them, eternity was vertical; though created in time, only the present moment was real, for they had no reason to look beyond it. They did not, in those words of MacDonald's 'look before and after, and pine for what is not', but instead looked upwards to behold the Face of the Lord. In so doing, they fulfilled their particular calling as intellectual creatures, receiving form in accordance with their design and equipment. With this idea of 'vertical eternity', the assembly of the paradisaical cast of mind promised in the preface is complete. What remains is to follow the course of Augustine's narrative as he disassembles it, and most importantly of all, to log the epistemological consequences.

#### 1.4 'Did God Really Say?'

Before continuing, it would probably be best to retrace the argument to this point. Very briefly then, in the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve remained subject to a voluntarist law. Their obedience was unconditional, with their rational faculty involved solely in processing commands. It was not that they did not think, far from it, but rather that they did not think apart from God. This complete dependence was the mark of the certainty they enjoyed. It was a certainty that from this present perspective cannot but appear infinitely naïve and foolish, for it existed in the absence of any criterion of truth.<sup>42</sup> Yet such a device would have been anathema to Adam and Eve, for to them, the Word of God was truth itself. They were happy in this state of perfect obedience because they had been created with free wills. Thus, in choosing to obey, they expressed both their love for their Creator

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130, Reading 314, 'Eternal Now'.

<sup>42</sup>As Augustine observes of Paul, at *De Civitate Dei*, XIV, 9: 'They behold him jealous for the Corinthians, and in that jealousy fearing that their minds should be corrupted from the simplicity which is in Christ,'

and their appreciation that only His Will could suffice for their needs as rational creatures. Moreover, loving God as the greatest good and looking to Him for all their seeing meant that they existed in concert with the ordained goodness of creation. Incidentally, in a very important series of papers on Natural Law Theory, C. S. Lewis would pick up on this feature of Augustinian thought, giving the following as the Augustinian definition of virtue: ‘...*ordo amoris*, the ordinate condition of the affections in which every object is accorded that kind and degree of love which is appropriate to it.’<sup>43</sup> However, it might well be thought that this statement contradicts the earlier proposition made at section 1.2, to the effect that ‘...to see things as they really are is not to penetrate to some hidden depth of meaning concerning them, but to perceive them in the service of God's Will.’ In other words, that C. S. Lewis’ understanding of Augustinian virtue as ‘ordinate affectation’ runs contrary to the notion of virtue as ‘perfect obedience’. Indeed, it might appear that the *ordo amoris* which C. S. Lewis is talking about has the capacity to override God's arbitrary Will by proposing an alternative basis for right action. Yet this is not so; for closer inspection reveals it to be a phenomenon pellucid only to those who are fulfilling the first condition of obedience: loving the Lord their God with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their mind. The *ordo amoris*, then, is contingent upon ‘looking to God for all one’s seeing’.<sup>44</sup> As Augustine would explain it: ‘The good you love is from Him, but only insofar as it is used for Him is it good and sweet.’<sup>45</sup> Further evidence can be garnered from his disputes with the Manichees, where he went to great lengths to emphasise the fact that God had created everything good to varying degrees, the universe displaying a natural hierarchy of goodness: ‘...it was made manifest to me that You have made all things good, and that there are no substances whatsoever that You have not made. Since You have not made all

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<sup>43</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, Harper Collins, 2001) p. 14.

<sup>44</sup> See above, p. 2.

things equal, it follows that all things, taken one by one, are good, and all things, taken together, are very good.<sup>46</sup> By not loving God as the greatest good, a man puts himself out of sync with this *ordo amoris*, or in other words, disregards its natural inequality. To return to that earlier definition of sin, he commits a falsehood by seeking happiness in some good other than God:

This life which we live here has its own allurements, which come from its own particular mode of beauty and its agreement with all these lower beauties. The friendship of men, bound together by a loving tie, is sweet because of the unity it fashions among many souls. With regard to all these things, and others of like nature, sins are committed when, out of an immoderate liking for them, since they are the least goods, we desert the best and highest goods, which are You, O Lord our God, and Your truth and Your law.<sup>47</sup>

As Augustine would reflect, 'I asked, "What is iniquity?" and I found that it is not a substance. It is a perversity of will, twisted away from the supreme substance, yourself, O God, and towards lower things, and casting away its own bowels, and swelling beyond itself.'<sup>48</sup> For, '...in comparison with the Creator's knowledge, the knowledge of the creature is like a kind of evening light. But when our knowledge is directed to the praise and veneration of the Creator, it dawns and is made morning; and night never falls while the Creator is not forsaken by the creature's love.'<sup>49</sup> In a word, the *ordo amoris*, still follows in the wake of obedience, and can thus in no sense challenge the Augustinian definition of Wisdom. While there will later be an opportunity to examine these matters in greater

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<sup>45</sup> *Confessiones*, IV, 12.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, VII, 12.

<sup>47</sup> *Confessiones*, II, 5.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, VII, 16.

<sup>49</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, XI, 7.

detail, for now, it is necessary to return to Augustine's disassembly of the Paradisial cast of mind.

For all its certainties and securities, Adam and Eve's knowing of God was fragile. This was because it was safeguarded only by their innocence to the splendour of their own souls.<sup>50</sup> The merest word, even the slightest suggestion, might lead to a catastrophic broadening of their horizons, for as Augustine warned: '...if the spirit of a rational creature should delight in its own power and excellence, it would be swollen with that pride by which it would fall from the beatitude of the spiritual paradise...'<sup>51</sup> The significance of this statement is obvious in relation to Augustine's understanding of the sacramental life. The state of beatitude that Adam and Eve enjoyed was wholly contingent on their spiritual faculties – both intellect and free will – being trained in the service of obedience. It was only in this loving subordination to God that Adam and Eve knew themselves truly, for in this way they knew themselves as creatures fulfilling the purpose for which they had been designed and equipped. Like the angels, who, '...know every created being not in itself, but in this better way: that is, in the wisdom of God, as if in the design by which it was created... [Adam and Eve knew] themselves better in God than in themselves, even though they also know themselves as they are in themselves. For they were made, and are different from Him Who made them.'<sup>52</sup> Clearly, such a state of being could only be shattered if Adam and Eve began to view themselves, and their faculties, apart from God. For, '...the spirit is even

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<sup>50</sup> As Vernon J. Bourke makes clear in the introductory to chapter iv of *The Essential Augustine*: 'Augustine's is not a faculty psychology; there are no distinct operative powers in the Augustinian soul... When Augustine describes the functions of man's soul in terms of memory understanding and will (*memoria, intelligentia, voluntas*), he is not at all thinking of different powers... the whole soul is memory, the whole soul is intelligence, the whole soul is will.' This is the exact sense in which I use the term. Cf. *De Genesi Ad Litteram*, XI, 14: '...pride is the love of one's own excellence...'

<sup>51</sup> *De Genesi Ad Litteram*, XI, 13.

<sup>52</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, XI, 29.

nobler when it forgets itself in its love of the immutable God.<sup>53</sup> Short of this, there could be nothing for them to proud of, no 'self' to take things to; and that this could only be achieved through a lie is obvious considering that in their state of beatitude, Adam and Eve had nothing to gain and everything to lose. Looking to God, they had the most complete understanding of good and evil possible, knowing it through the Wisdom of obedience. As Augustine would explain it using the physician as an analogue:

How necessary it is for leading a good life to learn that it is our misfortune to learn some things and that it is our advantage not to know others. How much better off would we be not to know diseases and pains. Suppose that a physician should forbid us some food that he knows would make us ill and, for this reason, calls it the food of the discernment of health and illness, because by experience human beings would discern through it, when they began to be ill, the difference between the poor health they have acquired and the good health they have lost. They would surely have been better off not to know this and to have remained in the health they lost, believing the physician by obedience, not the disease by experience... This discernment is not the wisdom of a happy man, but the experience of an unhappy one.<sup>54</sup>

As was noted earlier, in Paradise, Adam and Eve lived out the truth of God's Will. Completely engaged in His purpose for them, they had never stopped to think about what they were doing or why they were doing it. As Hollingworth observes:

There was a time... when Adam and Eve were unencumbered by any thoughts of life, the meaning of it or what it is. For a start, to them it was never an 'it' but

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<sup>53</sup> *De Libero Arbitrio*, 3, XXV.

<sup>54</sup> *Contra Adversarium et Prophetarium*, Bk. I, 19. Cf. *De Civitate Dei*, XIV, 17: 'Thus they learned what they would have been happier not knowing, had they believed in God and obeyed Him, and so not committed the act which compelled them to learn by experience the harm done by infidelity and disobedience.'

always the reality of God Himself. To think of God in terms of anything other than Himself, would be not to think of Him at all, a little like turning away from someone in order to see them more clearly; something that would only make sense if we wanted to see them more from our point of view, than face to face.<sup>55</sup>

To try and frame their own terms of understanding and to think independently from God would be tantamount to breaking in upon and disrupting the perfect flow of obedience. To bend their rational faculties to this purpose would be like throwing the metaphorical spanner in the works: everything would instantly grind to a halt. In *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine emphasised the sheer incongruity of the idea with the following example:

[It would be] rather as if someone wishing to give you rules about how to walk were to warn you not to lift the back foot until you have put down the front one, and then were to describe in detail the right way of moving the joints of your limbs and knees. Well, what he is saying is true, and there is no other way to walk. But people find it much easier to walk by doing these things than to notice them when they do them, and to understand when they are told about them.<sup>56</sup>

Only from this perspective is it possible to appreciate the full magnitude of those four simple words: 'Did God Really Say?' Quite clearly they were pitched precisely to endanger the concord and order of the sacramental life by suggesting the possibility of thought before action, for only such a mechanical change could result in the irruption of the rational faculty discussed in section 1.3. So, in the time it took to utter them, those words laid down the preconditions for pride, calling Adam and Eve out of their innocence.

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<sup>55</sup> Martin Hollingworth, *This Fragile Knowing* (Forthcoming).

Turning from God, they saw themselves in a new light. Where before they had known only fullness of nature, turning in upon themselves to perceive, for the first time, their own free will and intellect in isolation from God, they saw instead new, unimagined potential:

It is clear, therefore, that the devil would not have been able to lure man into the manifest and open sin of doing what God had prohibited had not man already begun to be pleased with himself. That is why Adam was delighted when it was said, "Ye shall be as Gods." But Adam and Eve would have been better fitted to resemble gods if they had clung in obedience to the highest and true ground of their being, and not, in their pride, made themselves their own ground. For created gods are gods not in their own true nature, but by participation in the true God. By striving after more, man is diminished; when he takes delight in his own self-sufficiency, he falls away from the One Who truly suffices.<sup>57</sup>

As such, '...they refused to obey His Law as if, by His prohibition, He jealously begrudged them an autonomy that had no need of His interior light, but used only their own providence, like their own eyes, to distinguish good and evil. This is what they were persuaded to do: to love to excess their own power.'<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps now, with these first principles on board, it is easier to see why Augustine held to such a broad definition of sin. In the case of Adam and Eve, pride sprang into being the moment they were faced with the possibility of knowing good and evil on their terms instead of God's, through experience not Wisdom. As such, sin arose out of the choice between the Will of God and the will of man, where both stood as mutually exclusive

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<sup>56</sup> *De Doctrina Christiana*, II, 55:

<sup>57</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, XIV, 13.

<sup>58</sup> *De Genesi Contra Manichaeos*, II, 15.



routes to happiness: '...any movement of the will away from You who are... is crime and sin.'<sup>59</sup> However, the route according to the will of man was premised on a lie; it could not possibly end in happiness because man was not created sufficient to be the ground of his own being. Of course, in terms of the rational foundations of ethics, this broad definition of sin - a misunderstanding as to what constitutes happiness - has some very interesting implications. For instance, if true happiness is obedience to God's Will, then where does that leave philosophies of right action? Or to put it more explicitly, if right action is action in accordance with God's Will, and if God's Will is subject to no criterion of truth, in other words, wholly arbitrary, then outside of the Pilgrim City, what is to be done? Even though the answers to these questions lie some way further on (in the third chapter to be precise), it is worth bearing them in mind, as they draw attention to the political import of what has so far been an overtly theological discussion. But before that political import can be elucidated in any great detail, there is first some metaphysical material to deal with.

### **1.5 Augustine's remarks on Time**

Thus far a great deal of time has been spent emphasising two things: 1) Augustine's belief that the rational faculty was designed to be of only instrumental significance and 2) that living under God's voluntarist law bought with it a sense of absolute certitude. Both have been taken as characteristic of Adam and Eve's state of existence in Paradise and it has been suggested, on a close reading of Augustine's texts, that both were jeopardised by the events of the Fall. An attempt will now be made to abstract the metaphysical first principles from these epistemological consequences. This will mean picking up one of the threads left dangling in section 1.3, namely, the idea of Vertical Eternity. If it is recalled,

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<sup>59</sup> *Confessiones*, XII, 11.

this idea was derived logically from the premise that looking to God for all their seeing, Adam and Eve had no reason to 'look before and after, and pine for what is not'.<sup>60</sup> However, something that was not pointed out at the time (although it was certainly implied) was that this premise presupposes a naïve, common sense understanding of time. This fact is of crucial importance, for it allows the argument to draw on the findings of an established Augustinian scholar, Dr. R. W. Dyson<sup>61</sup>, whose observations on Augustine's understanding of time that lend weight to what is here being said.

To begin with, the very idea of Vertical Eternity requires that time be passing by in the background in order for it to be set in relief. Or to put it another way, for Adam and Eve to have had the possibility of 'pining', to refer to Macdonald's analogy, there would have had to have been a 'before' and an 'after' of some sort. Recalling Augustine's example, for Adam not to have been 'filled with vain presumption', there would have to have been an 'uncertain' for him not to be certain about. Yet why labour what seems to so obvious a point? The answer is that ordinarily, Augustine's philosophy of time is taken to be far from straightforward. In an important article, Dyson pinpoints the chief problem.<sup>62</sup> He observes that in his discussions of time, Augustine seems to present evidence for two conflicting theories: an idealist and an internal-relational.<sup>63</sup> Yet as Dyson points out, '...the universal

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<sup>60</sup> See above, p. 18.

<sup>61</sup> Apart from producing the first new translation of *De Civitate Dei* for a generation [*The City of God Against the Pagans* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998)], Dyson has also authored a reader on Augustine's social and political thought [*The Pilgrim City: Social and Political Ideas in the Writings of St. Augustine of Hippo* (Woodbridge, Boydell, 2001)].

<sup>62</sup> R. W. Dyson, 'St. Augustine's Remarks on Time', *The Downside Review*, July 1982.

<sup>63</sup> By an idealist theory of time should be understand that subjectivist analysis most famously associated with Kant; that time, like space, is an *a priori* form imposed by our minds upon the objects of sense perception. As such, relations of precedence and succession antedate those of cause and effect. In this sense, time is absolute, existing independently of that which is in it. M. M. Schuster introduces his article, 'An Analysis of Relational Time', by setting the Relational theory in relief against the Absolute. Schuster informs us that absolute time, '...posits the existence of abstract moments which are arranged in serial order one before the other by virtue of relations of precedence (or succession) between them. Things and events participate in time only vicariously, so to speak, joined to their respective moments by another kind of relation which

practice (and it is clearly more than a mere verbal convenience) is to discuss his 'understanding' or 'analysis' of time in the singular.<sup>64</sup> This is indeed the case. The standard approach is to give Augustine's internal-relational material a good airing, before building towards some sort of subjectivist conclusion. But as Dyson explains, this is unsatisfactory:

In a word: when he is dealing with the puzzles set by the Manichaeans and Epicureans, it is apparently his view that time is physically real: that temporal relations would hold even if minds – even if, *ex hypothesi*, the mind of God – did not exist to be aware of them. But, if this be so, then it is surely not open to him, when he comes to consider the question of time's existence, to say that it is “nothing more than” an extension of mind: it cannot be both a being of nature and also *only* a being of reason.<sup>65</sup>

The problem, as Dyson sees it, is that Augustine does not commit either way. Having shown robust support for an internal-relational theory, he then, ultimately, 'fails to embrace the kind of idealist metaphysic which would be necessary to render his idealist theory of time tenable.'<sup>66</sup> That this incompatibility between Augustine's two theories of time is real, is true enough; but it is not intractable. Indeed closer inspection reveals that it rests upon a particular condition, which is that the incompatibility between the two theories can only persist if it is held that time is produced *either* in the mind of the beholder *or* in the world he beholds. If a different belief is adopted, namely, that time is real, in an internal-

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Whitehead calls “occupation” [Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature* (Michigan, 1957), p. 34]. The overall structure presented by the absolute theory is therefore thought to be as follows: one event is before another if both are respectively bound by relations of occupation to moments which are in turn so related as to be one before the other. Relational time mercifully simplifies this picture by a neat bit of surgery, cutting away the abstract moments and tying the relations of precedence directly to things and events themselves. As a consequence, the parasitic relations of occupation whither away.' M. M. Schuster, 'An Analysis of Relational Time', *Review of Metaphysics*, XV (1961), pp. 209-210. See also Catherine Rau, 'Theories of Time in Ancient Philosophy', *The Philosophical Review* Vol. 62 No. 4 (Oct., 1953), pp. 514-525 and Herman Hausheer, 'St. Augustine's Conception of Time', *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 46 No. 5 (Sep., 1937), pp. 503-512.

<sup>64</sup> R. W. Dyson, 'Augustine's Remarks on Time', *The Downside Review*, July 1982, p. 221.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, p. 229.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, p. 229.

relational sort of way but that its existence is subject to the mind's awareness of it, then the incompatibility disappears; and this is, of course, exactly what is being proposed with the idea of Vertical Eternity. In section 1.3 it was observed that, 'Living in the 'eternal *now*' of the present moment, Adam and Eve had no need to justify or quantify their existence, for they harboured no fears, doubts or insecurities. To them, eternity was vertical. Though created in time, only the present moment was real, for they had no reason to look beyond it.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps, though, in view of the above discussion, it would be more correct to say that for Adam and Eve, eternity was a state of mind. This tallies with Augustine's insistence that their uncertainty concerning their fate could not logically issue in a set of remedial presumptions (i.e. to cover the future unknown) for the reason that it was never able to engage their rational faculty. Rather enlighteningly, the term Augustine used to describe those presumptions was 'vain', and of course for Augustine, vanity or pride was an expression of selfwilling, or precisely the desire to engage the rational faculty apart from God and become the ground of one's own being.

It would seem, then, that the Paradisial cast of mind had a direct bearing on how Adam and Eve perceived time, not in a subjectivist or idealist way, but rather because it conditioned how they perceived the present moment. Support for this view is found in Augustine's famous conclusion at book XI of his *Confessiones*, to the effect that only the present moment is real:

It is now plain and clear that neither past nor future are existent, and that it is not properly stated that there are three times, past, present, and future. But perhaps it might properly be said that there are three times, the present of things

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<sup>67</sup> See above, p. 18.

past, the present of things present, and the present of things future. These three are in the soul, but elsewhere I do not see them.<sup>68</sup>

It might be said that if one is looking to God for all one's seeing, then the present moment serves only to point up the glory and eternal significance of a free will exercised in obedience. In *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis, putting words into the mouth of George Macdonald, provides a very clear illustration of what is meant: 'Time is the lens through which ye see – small and clear, as men see through the wrong end of a telescope – something that would otherwise be too big for ye to see at all. That thing is Freedom: the gift whereby ye most resemble your Maker and are yourselves parts of eternal reality.'<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, if one has turned away from God's voluntarist law to become a law unto oneself, then the present moment stands immediately symbolic of what it is that law apart from God must try and achieve; and that men will always strive to live under laws of some shape or form is simply a reflection of the fact that to live subject to law is the end for which they have been both designed and equipped. Here, then, is an instance of the meta-narrative potential in Augustine's analytical reading of the Fall: human endeavour takes a particular form in relation to a metaphysical fact, whose exposition is the subject of the next section.

## 1.6 The Temporalisation of the Present Moment

In book IV of his *Confessiones*, Augustine set out to describe what he called the 'Fleshly Sense'. In what follows, it will be presumed that this term refers to the Fallen cast of mind, but before continuing, some justification ought to be given for this.

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<sup>68</sup> *Confessiones*, XI, 26.

<sup>69</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, (London, Harper Collins, 2002), p. 105.

In *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine devoted a whole chapter to untangling the uses of the term 'flesh' in Scripture. In his rhetoric, he drew on the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers as examples of men living 'according to the flesh'. For instance, he conjectured that one, '...may certainly suppose that the Epicurean philosophers live according to the flesh; for they place man's highest good in the pleasure of the body. And he may also suppose that it is true of the other philosophers who hold in some way that the good of the body is man's highest good.'<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, he entertained the idea that the Stoic philosophers provided an example of men who did not live according to the flesh but rather the spirit. This is because they professed to place, '...man's highest good in the mind... [and] what is man's mind if not spirit?'<sup>71</sup> However, essaying the Scriptural evidence, Augustine came to the conclusion that in fact, '...all of these live according to the flesh in the sense intended by Divine Scripture when it uses the expression.'<sup>72</sup> The reason for this was because, '...Scripture does not use the term 'flesh' to mean only the body of an earthly and mortal creature...'<sup>73</sup> There are other usages, and amongst these was, '...that by which man himself – that is, the nature of man – is designated by 'flesh': a manner of speaking in which the whole is represented by a part...'<sup>74</sup> A little further on, Augustine would give free reign to this idea, linking it to his doctrine of the Two Cities: 'I divide the human race into two orders. The one consists of those who live according to man, and the other of those who live according to God.'<sup>75</sup> And as he would elsewhere state, these two cities, '...different from and inimical to one another, have arisen because some live according to the flesh, and

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<sup>70</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, XIV, 2.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, XIV, 2.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, XV, 1.

others according to the spirit.<sup>76</sup> Clearly, then, the term 'flesh', when used by Augustine as a moniker, was intended to refer to a quality of human nature postdating the Fall. As such, when in book IV of his *Confessiones* he observes that although, '...the soul wishes to be and it loves to find rest in things that it loves... such things... flee away, and who can follow them by fleshly sense,'<sup>77</sup> it can be assumed that he is referring to the Fallen cast of mind. However, before continuing, it would be best to relate what has just been said to the main argument as developed thus far.

It was stated that the purpose of this chapter as a whole would be to return the Augustinian narrative of the Fall as the premise for an intellectually solvent meta-narrative account of the human condition, and in particular, man's socio-political endeavors. This would naturally involve analyzing the needs and wants peculiar to the Fallen cast of mind, before watching them crystallize into the single, remedial impulse represented by The Natural Law Idea. At the present stage, these needs and wants are in the process of being enumerated. Having turned from God, Adam and Eve are, to recall that motif of Augustine's, formless.<sup>78</sup> Deaf to God's Word, they are for the first time in their lives truly lawless. Seduced out of the reality of God's presence by a lie, they have turned inwards to discover their individual selves, and in so doing, have found something new and intoxicating to love: thoughts of self-sufficiency, independence and an infinite broadening of intellectual horizons. However, this opening of their eyes has not come without a cost, for the bliss they have been designed for can only persist through ignorance, or indeed innocence, to anything other than the reality of God's presence. But thankfully, this

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<sup>76</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, XIV, 4.

<sup>77</sup> *Confessiones*, IV, 10.

<sup>78</sup> See *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, V, 5: 'The truth is that we are lost to Him, not because He was absent Who is everywhere present, but because we turned our backs on Him.'

argument conducts itself on two distinct levels: the epistemological and the metaphysical. This is important because whilst the epistemological is related to Augustine's understanding of the sacramental life, and so is open to interpretation, the metaphysical is related to his theory of time, which is irrefutable in its contradictions. From this perspective, one might say that this thesis is an attempt to show that an epistemological theory could make sense of this metaphysical contradiction, and that it is in Augustine's narrative of the Fall that just such a one is found.

In book IV of his *Confessiones*, Augustine's understanding of the term fleshly sense plays centre stage in an investigation into the nature of temporality. Augustine begins by presenting a distinctly relational theory of time. He describes the inevitability with which things in this world grow and develop unto decay. This process he calls the 'law of their being':

They rise and they set, and by rising, as it were, they begin to be. They increase, so as to become perfect, and when once made perfect, they grow old and die, and even though all things do not grow old, yet all die. Therefore, when they take their rise and strive to be, the more quickly they grow so that they may be, so much the faster do they hasten towards ceasing to be. This is the law of their being. So much have You given them, because they are parts of things that do not exist all at once, but all of them, by successive departures and advents, make up the universe of which they are parts.<sup>79</sup>

Next he observes how the human soul is tortured by the transient nature of this reality. For above all, '...the soul wishes to be and it loves to find rest in things that it loves. But in such

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<sup>79</sup> *Confessiones*, IV, 10. Cf. *De Peccatorum Meritis et Remissione et De Baptismo Parvolorum*, I, 21: 'For time does not stand still even for a moment. Rather, it unceasingly slips past, and everything involved in constant change gradually moves, not towards an end that perfects, but towards one that destroys.'



things there is no place where it may find rest, for they do not endure.<sup>80</sup> As was noted earlier, 'They flee away, and who can follow them by fleshly sense?'<sup>81</sup> This fact that the soul wishes to find rest in the things that it loves should be no surprise, for as was observed in section 1.3, the desire for happiness is built into man's design as a rational creature. The problem, though, is that the happiness man really craves, the happiness that would match his design, can only be found in freely chosen obedience to the Creator. As Augustine exhorts:

Do not be foolish, O my soul... the Word Himself cries out for you to return, and with Him there is a place of quiet that can never be disturbed, where your love cannot be forsaken, if itself does not forsake that place. Behold, these present things give way so that other things may succeed to them, and that this lowest universe may be constituted out of all its parts. "But do I depart in any way?" asks the Word of God.<sup>82</sup>

In trying to find happiness anywhere other than in God, the 'fleshly sense' comes up against a difficulty prefigured above, for, 'It suffices for a certain thing, for which it was made. It does not suffice for something different, namely, to hold fast things running their course from their proper beginning to their proper end.'<sup>83</sup> This statement certainly seems to support what has been said so far about Augustine's understanding of the rational faculty. Indeed, in the example above, it seems quite overwhelmed by the demands being placed on it by the nature of temporality, buckling under the demand of having to rescue some stability of meaning as life flits by.<sup>84</sup> That it could never hope to do so was obvious to Augustine, as it had taken on an impossible task: nothing less than trying to replace the

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<sup>80</sup> *Confessiones*, IV, 10.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Confessiones*, IV, 11.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, X.

<sup>84</sup> See *De Peccatorum meritis et Remissione et de Baptismo Parvolorum*, I, 21, '[Adam and Eve] lost the

happiness and certitude peculiar to Vertical Eternity. And further on, in this same passage, Augustine would stress that this hopeless mismatch had come about through punishment: '...if fleshly sense had been capable of comprehending the whole, and had not, for your punishment, been restricted to but a part of the universe...'<sup>85</sup> This, then, was the nature and the magnitude of the task Augustine believed was faced by the rational faculty in the formless, Godless life. The moment Adam and Eve lost the certainty of looking to God for all their seeing, the present moment sheds its infinitude, as the new uncertainties of time and space rushed in upon them. However, it is not to be supposed that Vertical Eternity equated to the eternal perspective enjoyed by God and the angels in the 'Heaven of Heavens'. As Augustine pointed out, '...the supercelestial peoples, who are Your angels... always behold Your Face, and, without any syllables of time, they read upon it what Your eternal Will decrees.'<sup>86</sup> However, the fact that they exist in the absence of any syllables of time or present moments in no sense undermines the role of their free will or the importance of obedience: 'They read Your Will; they choose it; and they love it. They read forever, and what they read never passes away. For, by choosing and loving, they read the actual immutability of Your counsel.'<sup>87</sup> This was the end for which intellect was created. Had Adam and Eve remained obedient, they would have earned eternal felicity with the angels in, '...the intellectual heaven, where it belongs to intellect to know all at once, not in part, not in a dark manner, not through a glass [C. S. Lewis' lens of time, see above, pp. 28-29] but as a whole, in plain sight, face to Face, not this thing now and that thing then, but... all at once, without any passage of time.'<sup>88</sup>

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stability of the life in which they were created and began to move towards death in ages subject to change.'

<sup>85</sup> *Confessiones*, IV, 11.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, XIII, 15.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*.

In conclusion, only the following need be said: Adam and Eve were created into a world that operated according to real, internal-relational time, which God had decreed should run a course, from a beginning to an end. As such, reality for them *did* constitute a series of present moments, but equipped with free wills and intellects, they had the choice to eternalise them through obedience. In other words, to devolve all responsibility for the future unknown to God. This is the reason why the two examples that have been given of the type of bliss and certainty enjoyed by Adam and Eve both offend against the intellectual sensibility; if I envy children and animals it is because they sometimes appear not to have a care in the world. No surprise then that Augustine, heeding Scripture, would use the example of 'little ones' to describe the nature of the beatitude enjoyed by the angels:

Let no-one doubt... that the holy angels in their sublime abodes, though not, indeed, co-eternal with God, are nonetheless secure and certain of their eternal and true felicity. It is to their fellowship that the Lord teaches that His little ones belong. Not only does He say. "They shall be equal to the angels of God"; but He also shows what manner of contemplation the angels themselves enjoy, when He says; "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you, that in Heaven their angels do always behold the Face of my Father which is in Heaven.<sup>89</sup>

Though denied God's eternal perspective, and thus prone to all the uncertainties associated with a restricted present moment, so long as they obeyed God, Adam and Eve would not be in a position to give them a thought.

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<sup>88</sup> *Confessiones*, XII, 13.

<sup>89</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, XI, 33. Cf. *De Quantitate Animae*, 28: '...the soul ...must not fall back on the senses any more than necessity demands; but it should rather retire into itself, away from the senses, and become a

### 1.7 The Natural Law Idea and Conceptual Certainty

The Natural Law Idea describes exactly the impulse to 'give a thought' to temporality, and bearing in mind its negative connotations, not just to give any thought, but a remedial one. As was observed in the preface, this makes it seem an impossibly broad idea; and certainly, if Augustine's disjunctive logic is followed, then it must be admitted that in the same sense that any action outside of God's Will is sinful, then any thought apart from God must be remedial. Is this an unworkable delimitation? Or to put it more bluntly, given that the aim of this argument is to produce from Augustine's narrative of the Fall an intellectually solvent meta-narrative account of the human condition, too dogmatic a premise? There are disquieting echoes of Augustine's infamous dismissal of Cicero's justification for Rome's status as a commonwealth. In *De Republica*, Cicero claimed that a commonwealth is formed from a body of men bound together by a shared conception of what is right. In reply, Augustine argued that because the Roman commonwealth contained Christian and non-Christian worshippers alike, its citizens could never be united in imputing the Christian God the worship due Him. Thus, according to the Classical definition of justice – to each his due – a portion of the Roman citizenry were guilty of the most heinous injustice.<sup>90</sup> It hardly seems a fair rebuttal; yet it should be remembered that the argument thus far has placed no onus of proof on Augustine's narrative of the Fall. The strategy all along has been to place it upon this present mode of being, for in the interests of objective scholarship, Augustine's account of events in the Garden of Eden should only be taken in a mythopoeic sense. This does not, however, mean that it cannot be used as a critical device, an intellectual tool by which to reflect upon certain aspects of this present condition, and, perhaps, to interpret and order them in a new way.

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child of God again.'

<sup>90</sup> Augustine begins the argument at book II, 21 of *De Civitate Dei* and completes it at book XIX, 21.

If nothing else, Augustine's understanding of the Paradisial state of being throws up a number of important questions. In describing man as a creature designed and equipped for obedience to voluntarist law, it asks whether such determinations do indeed resonate within the human compound. In other words, what is it that man has tried to achieve by Reason, and more to the point, can he in any way claim to have been successful? As this argument sees it, the Natural Law Idea would, of course, be the answer to the first question: man has deployed Reason to counter the temporalisation of the present moment. But this still leaves the problem that such an answer is so broad as to be practically meaningless. By way of mitigation it should only be pointed out that the aim of this thesis is to investigate the Natural Law Idea not in terms of its bearing on all human activity, but rather on a particular kind, which is Natural Law Theory. This pitches the investigation firmly into the domain of ethics, or to recall some of the earlier comments, 'right action'. For as Barry observes, 'The history of jurisprudence reveals a great variety of theories of Natural Law and perhaps the only common factor in the conflicting doctrines is an aversion to legal positivism.'<sup>91</sup> What this means is that Natural Law theorists believe the content of law affects its validity. As Barry goes on to point out, this content can come from one of two sources. Either the belief that certain values or judgements of worth are objectively valid, that they express not empty sentiment but moral truth, or from some organic law of use and wont, his example being the English common law.<sup>92</sup> For the purposes of this argument, though, the latter source will be understood as having derived from the former, leaving all Natural Law Theory sourced in Value-Cognitivism. With this

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<sup>91</sup> Norman P. Barry, *An Introduction to Modern Political Theory* (London, Macmillan, 1994), p. 32.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

matter dealt with, it can now be considered how the Natural Law Idea goes about its business.

It was Bertrand Russell who observed that, 'The civilised man is distinguished from the savage mainly by *prudence*, or, to use a slightly wider term, *forethought*. He is willing to endure present pains for the sake of future pleasures, even if the future pleasures are rather distant.'<sup>93</sup> This definition clearly catches the mood of The Natural Law Idea, but where Russell's definition is most useful is in pointing out that the use of forethought necessarily involves the prostitution of the present moment in the name of future contingency. Where he would take it that the savage lives from hand to mouth, the civilized man subordinates the instinctual element to the rule of reason, a sentiment which Aristotle keenly proclaimed:

We ought not to listen to those who exhort us, because we are human, to think of human things, or because we are mortal, think of mortal things. We ought rather to take on immortality as much as possible, and do all that we can to live in accordance with the highest element within us; for even if its bulk is small, in its power and value it far exceeds everything.<sup>94</sup>

This belief was, of course, a staple of Classical thought, so no surprise that it turns up in Augustine's *De Quantitate Animae*:

The human soul... because of the instruments it uses, reason and knowledge... are far superior to the senses, makes itself independent, as far as it can, of the body, and gives first preference to joy experienced within; and according as it turns aside to the senses, the greater the likeness it gives man to beast.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1946), p. 33.

<sup>94</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, tr. Roger Crisp (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 196.

<sup>95</sup> *De Quantitate Animae*, 28.

Although making a strong appeal to common sense, it is not altogether clear what the term 'rule of reason' denotes. If it conveys anything of moral significance, then it is only through having invoked ethical preconceptions. Yet on the other hand, it might be argued that all it can reasonably convey is the sense of such a rule promoting an apodeictic standard of behaviour, with the understanding that this standard will take the form of a body of laws or axioms. If this is indeed the case, and considering the esteem in which rules of Reason have traditionally been held, then this form must embody some intrinsic appeal. However, in order to understand what it might be, it is first necessary to run through a definition of terms.

A law, then, is a behavioural norm binding irrespective of time and place until such time as it has been rescinded; a system of law is a closely related ordering of such norms for application to some specific sphere of human, or natural, activity. If the defining characteristic of law is taken to be its binding quality, then it would surely not be remiss to think its appeal must lie somewhere in the region of regularity or predictability. After all, laws provide that stable framework within which men can go about their business. More to the point, in accounting for certain fundamental human needs, such as security and economic wellbeing, they ensure that men are freed from the travails of subsistence to have a business to go about in the first place. In this sense, it could be said that laws serve to impose over what men do not know the mark of what they do know, or, in other words, that they project into remote futurity the conditions of the present moment. As such, this is how the Natural Law Idea goes about its business. It involves precisely the type of action that was so sternly rebuked by Augustine in section 1.3: '[Adam] was not filled with vain

presumption, like a fool being certain about the uncertain...<sup>96</sup> In place of Vertical Eternity it promotes the ideal of Horizontal Eternity. Both address the issue of the present moment, though whereas the former does so with a state of being, the latter opts for a state of understanding. If the discussion in section 1.1 is recalled, it becomes clear that the difference between the two states turns on a perception of Wisdom. In the Paradisial state of being, Wisdom is obedience and the point of obedience, the end of understanding. In contrast to this it would appear that the Natural Law Idea supports systems of law in which obedience is conditional on understanding the rightfulness or truthfulness of individual laws. This observation brings the discussion round to the idea of Conceptual Certainty.

To understand the rightfulness or truthfulness of individual laws clearly requires a prior conception or standard by which to judge such qualities. As has been shown, in Paradise, this was not necessary; for truth was a function of God's Will. In turn, reality was a function of obedience. The defining characteristic of this reality has already been described as a truly childlike indifference to the temporal restrictions of time and space. These conditions could not support an *ought-is* problem. An *ought* can only stand in relation to an *is* if it is possible to cultivate a perspective in distinction from the *is*. In terms of the created perfection of the Garden of Eden this could never have spontaneously occurred. The Greek Atomists faced a similar problem in accounting for the original motion of atoms in the void. Only once they had started moving could laws governing the nature of their subsequent collisions and interactions come into play. Even Newtonian physics had to work from the premise of a mechanistic first cause. According to Newton, it was the hand of God that originally hurled the planets. In the same sense, it would take some first cause

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<sup>96</sup> See p. 17 above.



to abuse the innocence enjoyed by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In their case, it would be the fact of having God's monopoly on truth being called into question by the serpent. Only then, with their eyes opened to the splendour of their own souls, could they begin to look back on God. The reality of God's presence had been something that could only be known in the living of it. It was not something that could be abstracted or reduced to formula or creed; Adam and Eve could not have held forth on the identity of Christianity, nor spun out some fundamental truths, for they had not yet been sold the idea of knowing God in concept. It was only once the deal had been closed with the biting of the apple that Reason could begin to mark that irruption between man and God mentioned in section 1.3. In that instant, Adam and Eve moved from becoming God-conscious to self-conscious. They became naked, God became good and His Word became truth. Before, they had no need of such concepts. They knew all these things in the fullest sense possible: in the lived reality of obedience. In other words, and not a little ironically, by not knowing them at all: Thus, they learned what they would have been happier not knowing, had they believed in God and obeyed Him, and so not committed the act which compelled them to learn by experience the harm done by infidelity and disobedience.<sup>97</sup> By way of illustration, it is worth recalling Augustine's example of the person learning to walk: '...people find it much easier to walk by doing these things than to notice them when they do them, and to understand when they are told about them.'<sup>98</sup> Where this particular illustration is so useful is in highlighting the fact that concepts take men out of reality. They are parasitic upon lived experience. Combined and ordered into frameworks and apparatuses they represent a world stretching out in a horizontal sweep, either side of the present moment. This is the world in which opinions and beliefs move; for having spurned God as a source of truth,

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<sup>97</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, XIV, 17.

<sup>98</sup> See above, p. 23.

man must discover meaning and shore up understanding outside of the present moment. It is in this world that criteria of truthfulness and rightfulness are constructed then reconstructed, and by virtue of being constructed within it, they become examples of Conceptual Certainty.

### 1.8 The *Ordo Amoris*

Back in section 1.4 this phenomenon was mentioned in passing, as something incidental to Adam and Eve's love for God. There was, however, time enough to explain that it in no sense overrode the Augustinian understanding of the sovereign Will of God. For as Augustine was forced to assert in his debates with the Manichees, God had created everything good, but to varying degrees, such that the created order constituted a hierarchy of goodness.<sup>99</sup> So long as Adam and Eve continued to love God as the greatest good, they would remain in perfect alignment with this order. Looking to God for all their seeing they would, as it were, see things in a true light: 'For if the will had remained unshaken in its love of that higher and immutable Good by which is bestowed upon it the light by which it can see and the fire by which it can love, it would not have turned aside from this Good to follow its own pleasure.'<sup>100</sup> However, the moment Adam and Eve became intoxicated by the splendour of their own souls and were persuaded to 'love to excess their own power'<sup>101</sup>, they were thrown out of alignment with the *ordo amoris*.<sup>102</sup> In this sense, 'It was in secret that Adam and Eve began to be evil; and it was because of this that they were then able to

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<sup>99</sup> For an excellent account of Augustine's refutation of the Manichaean cosmogony, see N. Joseph Torchia, O. P., *Creation ex nihilo and the Theology of St. Augustine: The Anti-Manichaean Polemic and Beyond* (New York, Peter Lang, 1999), ch. 3.

<sup>100</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, XIV, 13.

<sup>101</sup> See above, p. 24.

<sup>102</sup> See *De Quantitate Animae*, 34: 'He alone is to be adored Who is the Creator of things that are, from whom all things come, by whom all things are made, in whom all things exist.'

fall into overt disobedience.<sup>103</sup> Yet as a result of this disobedience, '...man did not fall away from his nature so completely as to lose all being.'<sup>104</sup> Through an act of unmerited Grace, God allowed him to retain a semblance, almost a Platonic recollection<sup>105</sup>, of the ordained goodness of creation: 'Nonetheless, the image of God has not been removed from the human soul by the stain of earthly loves to such a point that not even the faintest outlines of it remain... That is, what was impressed upon the soul by the image of God, when it was created, has not been entirely removed.'<sup>106</sup> This impression of the image of God upon the soul of man was that selfsame law which Paul talks of being written on the hearts of the Gentiles at Rom 2:14-15. As Augustine explained it: '...the law of God, which through the Old Testament was written on tablets, is written on the hearts of the faithful through the New.'<sup>107</sup> Had God not allowed this impression to remain stamped upon the hearts of men, they would have been left nothing by which to curb their destructive tendencies. It operates through the Conscience and its findings represent the one ethical resource intrinsic to humanity.

This is the resource from which the Natural Law Idea plunders the premises it requires for the formulation of Natural Law Theory proper. As was observed in the previous section, the term Natural Law Idea describes no more than the impulse to tame the wild unknowns of eternity by making them subject to laws of order and procession. The Natural Law Idea cannot of itself produce the content for these laws because it is a product of Reason, and

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<sup>103</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, XIV, 13.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* Cf. V, 11: '...neither did He abandon him without mercy. To good and evil men alike He gave being, in common with the stones; and He gave life capable of reproducing itself, in common with the trees; and sentient life, in common with the beasts; and intellectual life, in common with the angels alone.'

<sup>105</sup> Though we should note that this analogy only works up to a certain point. Plato's Theory of Recollection presupposed the existence of souls in an anterior life, whereas Augustine went to great lengths to emphasise that human souls are created good out of nothing.

<sup>106</sup> *De spiritu et littera*, 48.

<sup>107</sup> *De spiritu et littera*, 48.

Reason, as was seen in section 1.1, was designed to be of only instrumental significance. It was created to fulfill an interpretive rather than a creative role, to be a means to an end, not an end in itself. In Paradise, God Himself was the premise from which Reason worked, but with Adam's disobedience, Reason was denied this source of inspiration. In the Conscience it found a possible replacement. Here was a ready deposit of moral material that might surely form the basis for a new, intellectualist form of law to replace the old, voluntarist law of God. At this point, as things look in danger of becoming complicated, it helps to bear in mind that in the midst of these variables, one thing remains constant: time. For whilst subject to voluntarist law, what might lie beyond individual present moments was of no concern to Adam and Eve. They simply moved from one to the next in an eternal procession, with God taking full responsibility for what lay beyond each one. However, in choosing to become the ground of their own being, they took upon themselves this responsibility, or perhaps it would be truer to say that it was the lure of responsibility which tempted them into disobedience in the first place. Either way they were doomed to make the fatal discovery that Reason does not suffice 'to hold fast things running their course from their proper beginning to their proper end.'<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> See above, p. 33.

## Chapter Two

# Law Since Paradise

I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

Ecclesiastes 3:10-11

### 2.1 The Rational Foundations of Ethics

It is possible to reduce to a single proposition the premises developed in the preceding chapter:

ethical speculation is generated by the interplay between the Natural Law Idea and the conscience.

This proposition could be reduced to a yet more gnomic form:

man possesses both an Intellectual and a Moral Conscience.<sup>109</sup>

This further reduction illuminates an important dimension to the argument, namely, the sense of opposition between the two consciences. If it is the case that they represent the

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<sup>109</sup> I first came across the term 'intellectual conscience' in a paper by Olaf Stapledon, entitled, 'Mr Bertrand

two elements at work within any given ethical speculation, then they are disparate elements. In order to understand why, an important ambiguity must first be cleared up. It is commonplace to label the moral content of the human heart a 'law of nature'; and in section 1.8, this convention was upheld in order not to confuse matters. However, this practice tends to distort things. As the Natural Law Idea demonstrates, Reason assumes lawful form whenever addressing the temporalised present moment, which, it must be admitted, is the greater part of the time. As such, to say that the moral content of the heart constitutes a 'law of nature' is to have already interpreted it through this lens – a little like observing an oar in the water and not taking refraction into account, presuming its crookedness. In actual fact, it could not be more inimical to law; for not only does the heart constitute a source of moral propositions, but it also intimates an awareness, the briefest glimpse, of the certainty that Adam and Eve enjoyed whilst living a life of form in Paradise. This can be seen in the way that it flaunts in the face of Reason's hard won principles an effortless, almost chimerical virtue: '...and the delight and effortlessness with which we obey in that final peace will be as great as our happiness in living and reigning,'<sup>110</sup>

The clue as to why this should be surfaces the moment one considers what it is that the Moral Conscience requires in order to function. In a word, action. Its counsel is only invoked either in the build up to or the aftermath of a choice. F. H. Bradley famously stated that, 'We see in it at once the idea of a man's appearing to answer. He answers for what he has done, or (which he need not separately consider) has neglected and left undone. And the tribunal is a moral tribunal; it is the court of conscience, imagined as a

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Russell's Ethical Beliefs', *International Journal of Ethics*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Jul., 1927), pp. 390-402.

<sup>110</sup>*De Civitate Dei*, XIX, 27.

judge, divine or human, external or internal.<sup>111</sup> In this sense, the certainty that it so imperfectly conveys is the living truth talked about in section 1.3: the truth that is a function of God's Will. To act out of heart, on impulse, again, need it be stressed, like a child, is to come close to the certitude enjoyed by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.<sup>112</sup> As Rousseau lamented, 'Virtue! Sublime science of simple minds, are such industry and preparation needed if we are to know you? Are not your principles graven on every heart? Need we do more, to learn your laws, than examine ourselves, and listen to the voice of conscience, when the passions are silent?'<sup>113</sup> However the concern is less with substantive morality than with the model of certainty it conveys. This is in keeping with the distinction between the Moral and the Intellectual Conscience that began this section. Indeed, if the terms of reference are widened to embrace the argument of the preceding chapter, it is evident that the issue the two consciences come to loggerheads over is in fact time. Both offer their own solutions to the metaphysical fact of temporality, though whereas the one is circuitous, and only addresses the problem indirectly, the other is mercifully straightforward. In the case of the former, the answer is God, and the form of the solution, Vertical Eternity. In the case of the latter, the answer is the Natural Law Idea, and the form of the solution, Horizontal Eternity.

In the following section there will be an opportunity to examine in more detail how Augustine interpreted the salvific potential in these ideas, and in section 3.3, there will follow an explicit discussion of their implications to political philosophy. It is terribly

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<sup>111</sup> F. H. Bradley, *Ethical Studies* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 3.

<sup>112</sup> As K. E. Kirk wrote in *Some Principles of Moral Theology* (London, Longmans, Green & Co, 1926), p. 179: 'It is a first principle of morals that wherever conscience gives a clear ruling for or against an act, it must be unhesitatingly obeyed...'

<sup>113</sup> Jean Jacques Rousseau, *A Discourse on the Moral Effects of the Arts and Sciences*, in G. D. H. Cole, tr. *Rousseau's Social Contract Discourses* (London, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1930), pp. 153-154.

important, though, to dispel at this juncture any fears that the former enterprise may, in relation to the intended political import of this argument, be entirely gratuitous. To this end, it needs only be pointed out that the salvific mechanism affords a very useful example of these ideas in practice. If it can be shown that Augustine believed God worked His salvific purpose through both the Moral and the Intellectual Conscience, then that is all the more proof for the argument being developed here. Moreover, it makes the point that Augustine's secular and ecclesiastical thoughts both drew on the same set of metaphysical first principles. Yet before this can be undertaken in any great detail, it is first necessary to inquire whether any developments in the field of ethics lend support to the distinction, made on the grounds of certainty, between the Moral and the Intellectual Conscience.

With regard to this matter, A. J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* springs immediately to mind. This work created a tremendous stir when it was first published in England, in 1936. It laid out, for the first time in the English language, the full import of the Logical Positivist programme. Logical Positivism grew out of an original desire to wipe from the philosophy of science, and indeed the natural sciences, all metaphysical traces. This agenda was originally championed by the Austrian physicist, Ernst Mach, who held a chair in the philosophy of inductive sciences at the University of Vienna. When his chair was inherited in 1922 by Moritz Schlick, also a physicist, the movement started proper. Schlick quickly became the focus of a discussion group which by 1928 had produced a coherent programme for the reduction of all science to physics. It was at this point that the group became known as the 'Vienna Circle'. The term Logical Positivism was coined in 1931. During the 1920's, both Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein took part in the group's discussions. The publication of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, in 1921,



hugely influenced the group's maturation. It was whilst attending discussions of the Vienna Circle, in 1933, that Ayer picked up the ideas that would later appear in *Language, Truth and Logic*.<sup>114</sup> Of these the most important was the Verification Principle.<sup>115</sup> In Ayer's words, 'The principle of verification is supposed to furnish a criterion by which it can be determined whether or not a sentence is literally meaningful. A simple way to formulate it would be to say that a sentence had literal meaning if and only if the proposition it expressed was either analytic or empirically verifiable.'<sup>116</sup> The first thing to be said is that this principle is clearly an example of what I have termed Conceptual Certainty. Leaving aside, for the time being, the question of analytic propositions<sup>117</sup>, it needs hardly be said that the qualification of empirical verification evinces a particular standard of truthfulness or rightfulness. In this case it is, '...that a sentence is factually significant to any given person, if, and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition it purports to express – that is, if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain conditions, to accept the proposition as being true, or to reject it as being false.'<sup>118</sup> As such, for a sentence to be literally meaningful, it has to represent an hypothesis; it must be capable of either verification or falsification by the ordinary methods of science.<sup>119</sup> Metaphysical propositions clearly fall outside this category, and as such, are deemed meaningless or nonsensical. The result is that ethical predicates such as 'good' and 'right' are regarded as having only emotive meaning. They express a subjective point of view rather than any objective truth. It might not unfairly be said that this theory represents the apotheosis of the

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<sup>114</sup> This potted history is based on the account given in the *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Modern Christian Thought*, ed. Alister E. McGrath (Oxford, Blackwell, 1995), pp. 345-346.

<sup>115</sup> In section 1.2, a 'rational verification mechanism' was referred to. The intended meaning was that of Ayer's Verification Principle.

<sup>116</sup> A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, p. 7.

<sup>117</sup> They are returned to below, p. 52.

<sup>118</sup> A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, p. 48.

<sup>119</sup> Included in this qualification are all of Ayer's careful disclaimers concerning the difference between practical verifiability and verifiability in principle, and weak and strong verifiability.

Intellectual Conscience, for in taking the physical sciences as the modern paradigm of truth, it ends up exhausting morality. Ethical predicates such as those mentioned above simply refuse to be pinned down and made answerable in the same way factual statements do. A static conception of truth evinces nothing from them. Labelling them 'emotive' only highlights their consanguinity with the world of choice and action: It is admitted that they fall outside a jurisdiction and left at that. And what is this if not brutal honesty? Have not the Logical Positivists merely called the bluff on man's use of Reason? For they say that if what he craves is the type of certainty obtained in the physical sciences, then he must start weeding. Out must go all that is neither analytic nor empirically verifiable. What is left, the neat beds and borders, well, that is all he has a right to know by the terms of the Verification Principle. Ayer's response to the mystic claiming an intuition of truth would be to, '...say that his intuition has not revealed to him any facts... For we know that if he really had acquired any information, he would be able to express it. He would be able to indicate in some way or other how the genuineness of his discovery might be empirically determined.'<sup>120</sup> Man has little right to complain; this is truth on the only terms by which he would have it, as a function of the Natural Law Idea. Augustine's famous exhortation concerning the teachings of Ambrose springs to mind: 'He would state things which I would not as yet know to be true. I held back my heart from all assent and died all the more from that suspense. I wished to be made just as certain of things I could not see, as I was certain that seven and three makes ten.'<sup>121</sup> In a short speculation but revealing speculation, G. E. Moore probed the impetus and methods presupposed by such yearning:

What, after all, is it that we mean to say of an action when we say that it is right or ought to be done? And what is it that we mean to say of a state of things

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<sup>120</sup> A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, p. 157.

<sup>121</sup> *Confessiones*, VI, 4.

when we say that it is good or bad? Can we discover any general characteristic, which belongs in common to absolutely *all* right actions, no matter how different they may be in other respects? And which does not belong to any action except those which are right? And can we similarly discover any characteristic which belongs in common to absolutely all 'good' things, and which does not belong to anything except what is good? Or again, can we discover any single reason, applicable to all situations equally, which is, in every case, *the* reason why an action is right when it is right?<sup>122</sup>

But if this is indeed the kind of certitude that the Intellectual Conscience demands – one law holding true for every conceivable instance – then surely it cannot but appear inimical to the Moral Conscience? Whereas the latter operates in the heat of the (present) moment, presiding over those considerations and reflections that accompany choices, the former resides in the static world of concepts and ideas; for only in this world, where the flux and change of reality has been broken down and routinised, can be found the necessary preconditions for criteria of truth. For instance, if ethics were to be placed on the kind of rational foundations envisaged by Moore, morality would first have to be reduced to a set of universal properties, and what is this if not a route to that certainty inspired by the Natural Law Idea? What else would be the reason to define moral properties if not to produce a set of markers for future moral action? Such considerations bring the argument round to arguably the most important characteristic of the Intellectual Conscience: that its relationship to its moral counterpart, though antagonistic, is nonetheless symbiotic.

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<sup>122</sup> G. E. Moore, *Ethics* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 2.

As was observed in section 1.8, Reason cannot itself be the source of anything. Moore's questions show that it can reduce, clarify and redefine what it is given, but that it must be given something is a fact of its operation. For Reason is a means to an end, a way of getting from A to B, of producing one truth statement from another. Its business, as Quine puts it, '...is the pursuit of truth. What are true are certain statements; and the pursuit of truth is the endeavour to sort out the true statements from the others, which are false.'<sup>123</sup> It is interpretive not creative, put to work in the name of truth, and as Ayer rather spectacularly shows, the results are every bit determined by the premises taken. This thesis provides a perfect example. In form and content it is simply a series of deductions from Augustine's proposition 'man is designed and equipped to obey a command'. The conclusions, as they are arrived at, should be regarded 'true' only insofar as they do not contradict this premise. If by the end of this process it can be claimed that anything new has been created, then strictly speaking, it is only a new set of premises, their 'truth' dilute in proportion to their remove, by degrees of abstraction, from the original. The point that is being made is that in matters of ethical import, rational thought, far from evincing new truth, serves only to spread an original deposit yet thinner; and that whilst this 'original deposit' is discovered by the Moral Conscience in the present moment, it is spread either side of it by the Intellectual Conscience.

What is meant by this can be made clear with reference to Ayer's definition of analytic propositions. For him, an analytic proposition is one whose, '...validity depends solely on the definitions of the symbols it contains.'<sup>124</sup> In other words, a proposition that can be recognised as true solely on the basis that conventions govern the use of its symbols. Ayer

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<sup>123</sup> W. V. Quine, *Methods of Logic*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 1.

<sup>124</sup> Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, p. 105.

gives the following example: "Either some ants are parasitic or none are" is an analytic proposition. For one need not resort to observation to discover that there either are or are not ants which are parasitic. If one knows what is the function of the words 'either', 'or', and 'not', then one can see that any proposition of the form "Either  $p$  is true or  $p$  is not true" is valid, independently of experience.<sup>125</sup> In effect, the key to the truth of such propositions is that they lie beyond the reach of the Verification Principle. If they are to be true by virtue of symbolic meaning, then they cannot harbour any factual content, and if that is the case, then, '...no experience can confute them.'<sup>126</sup> To Ayer, this is taken as proof that in effect, '...every logical proposition is valid in its own right. Its validity does not depend on its being incorporated in a system, and deduced from certain propositions which are taken as self-evident.'<sup>127</sup> By the terms of this argument, however, it would appear that this remains true only so long as the metaphysical fact of temporality is left out. What is meant by this is the following: if it is accepted that the symbols making up analytic propositions, and the analytic propositions making up logical systems, need convey nothing of factual import, then it must be accepted that the truth espoused by such propositions and systems must be the exclusive function of the logical relationships involved. And such relationships take time. This is not a facetious remark. Take, for instance, the analytic proposition ' $p = q$ '. Clearly in this case, truth is not a property of the symbols ' $p$ ' or ' $q$ ' considered in isolation. Rather, it comes into being the moment they are related by the symbol '='. However, for this to be able to take place at all, a further qualification must be imposed upon the symbols ' $p$ ' and ' $q$ '; and in light of the discussion of Augustine's remarks on time in section 1.5, it will be called it the Law of the Fleshly Sense. It goes as follows: 'Logic enjoins the most reduced of terms/symbols to stand for one thing, and one thing only'. In

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<sup>125</sup> Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, p. 105.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

other words, useful meaning can only accrue if a symbol such as  $\beta$  is understood to represent some finite property or collection of properties. If this were not the case, then logical relationships could simply not convey truth. What is perceived as true in a logical proposition or series of propositions is that some definite property, distinguished by the mind in principle, i.e. not necessarily factual, is transported intact through a series of present moments. For instance, the logical thought process 'if this then that' necessarily invokes two present moments for the truth to 'span'. And what is true in such an instance is simply the fact that the mind has perceived (or perhaps imagined would be a better term to use in the case of analytic propositions) some irreducible property moving through time. The point is that short of such movement, there is nothing to set the property in distinction. The effect is not unlike a man startled by the sudden movement of a hitherto camouflaged beast. This becomes clear if it is imagined the second half of the proposition clipped off to leave only 'if this'. Where has the truth gone now? Little more is left than a percept in the present moment. But is it true, or more to the point, is it usefully true? The distinction is made because in the case of a simple sense percept, either moral or no, where truth could quite reasonably be explained on the hypothesis of existence, it may well seem enough to reply in the affirmative: 'Yes, it is certainly true that at this moment in time I am, for example, tasting something sweet or experiencing the emotion of pity'. But it would be contended that this naïve form of truth, whilst a common enough occurrence in everyday language and experience, is not the currency of rational or logical thought. This is because the latter takes place in the world of concepts and ideas, and its object is precisely to ensure that man does not remain a slave to the naïve truth of the present moment. Whilst analytic propositions and logical tautologies are ordinarily regarded immune from the

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<sup>127</sup> Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, pp. 108-109.

problems associated with inductive reasoning, it pays not to be squeamish when it comes to facing the poverty of Reason.<sup>128</sup>

## 2.2 The God-Shaped Hole

At this point it is imperative to appreciate that it is not one of the aims of this thesis to make the term Conceptual Certainty carry any anti-intellectualist sentiment. Those pragmatic philosophies that take as their central idea the rugged concepts of 'life' or 'action', though putatively endorsed by what is here understood by the term, tend to diverge from the purpose of this argument.<sup>129</sup> Whilst it is true that their broad critique of intellectualism seems implicit in the definition of Conceptual Certainty, this is where the similarities end. For they work to a diametrically opposed purpose. They tear down intellectualism in order to raise something new in its place. In contrast to this, it is a major concern of this thesis to show that the definition of Conceptual Certainty can never tend towards such positive restatement. What is, after all, being constructed here is a meta-narrative. The aim is to discover whether problems anticipated by Augustine's analytical reading of the Fall do indeed resonate within the human compound. The accuracy of a diagnosis is being checked, not a cure being developed. To that end, some confirmation of the disparity that exists between the Moral and the Intellectual Conscience has been received in the preceding section. Reviewing the Logical Positivist thesis has shown that the reduction of sentiments, emotions and values into working premises can be a tricky business; for if Reason is to gain a decent foothold, and intellectual credibility to be maintained, these premises must be of an *a priori* nature. Much depends on the criterion of

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<sup>128</sup> See John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive* (London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1925), book III.

<sup>129</sup> The work of Bergson, Blondel, Dewey and James spring to mind.

truth chosen. Adopting one so severe as Ayer's runs the risk of seeing right through morality; but clearly the spectrum contains room for a great number. To return to Moore:

On questions of this sort different philosophers hold the most diverse opinions. I think it is true that absolutely every answer that has ever been given to them by any one philosopher would be denied to be true by many others. There is, at any rate, no such consensus of opinion among experts about these fundamental ethical questions, as there is about many fundamental propositions in Mathematics and the Natural Sciences.<sup>130</sup>

The ramifications of these thoughts were drawn out in new and alarming ways by Heinz W. Cassirer:

...while philosophy is supposed to be on all sides a purely rational activity, relying upon the intellect and upon the intellect alone, without ever allowing itself to be swayed by any personal or emotional bias, there remains this disturbing fact: utterly different conclusions are reached by various thinkers, each philosopher arguing with great vehemence and ingenuity in favour of the position he wishes to uphold, while yet the possibility is wholly excluded that agreement might be reached between him and his opponents. This, of course, raises the crucial problem whether any such thing as a reliable criterion of truth is available within the compass of philosophical thinking at all.<sup>131</sup>

Such thoughts from so renowned an authority on Kant and Aristotle mark a serious pause for thought. But perhaps Augustine's understanding of the Fallen cast of mind can offer

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<sup>130</sup> G. E. Moore, *Ethics*, p. 2.

<sup>131</sup> Heinz W. Cassirer, *Grace and Law: St. Paul and the Hebrew Prophets* (Michigan, 1988), pp. xiii-xiv. Jean Jacques Rousseau puts the challenge more directly in his *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*. I quote from the Everyman edition translated by G. D. H. Cole, *Rousseau's Social Contract Discourses*, pp. 150-151: '...What is philosophy? What is contained in the writings of the most celebrated philosophers? What are the lessons of these friends of wisdom... One of them teaches that there is no such things as matter, but that everything exists only in representation. Another declares that there is no other substance than matter, and no other God than the world itself. A third tells you that there are no such things as virtue and vice, and that moral good and evil are chimeras; while a fourth informs you that men are only beasts of prey,



some hope here. After all, this is just the type of problem that a meta-narrative should be able to accommodate, and besides, in section 2.1, it was promised that the salvific potential implicit in the ideas of Vertical and Horizontal Eternity would be drawn out.

As has been shown, the Augustinian narrative of the Fall portrays man as a creature thirsting after nothing short of action on the literal Word of God. By the terms of Augustine's disjunctive reasoning, every other philosophy and religion has to be regarded inadequate as a means to this end. However this news need not meet with despair, for although they cannot provide the solution, these religions and philosophies can, in their various forms, help to delineate the problem. They are, after all, each and every one of them, case studies in man's abject failure to replicate by his own means the certainty lost with the Fall. According to Augustine, that he even finds himself capable of such enterprise in the first place is because he has, through Grace, been gifted that impression of God's image upon his heart. It is this fact which catalyses his desire for certainty, though he is disadvantaged from the first by taking for his paradigm of truth the idea of Horizontal Eternity. For the critical absence that man has by Grace been equipped to mourn is not of this nature. Those brief glimpses of certainty he wins through the Moral Conscience are of the type only possible under voluntarist law: 'And it [the mind] remembers the Lord its God...But it is reminded, that it may be turned to God, as though to that light by which it was in some way touched, even when turned away from Him. For hence it is that even the ungodly think of eternity, and rightly blame and rightly praise many things in the morals of men.'<sup>132</sup> Unfortunately, though, this fact is often lost in translation from the Moral to the Intellectual Conscience. Although it might appear so through the lens of Reason, man's

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and may conscientiously devour one another. Why, my great philosophers, do you not reserve these wise and profitable lessons for your friends and children?"

awareness of the ordained goodness of creation does not come to him as a set of luminous axioms, that is, as a set of laws that could be written down and stored away for future reference. It works more like Bradley's 'moral tribunal': it forces him to answer for 'what he has done, or has neglected and left undone.' What it calls for is obedience in the present moment, and in this sense it does indeed possess all the infuriating qualities of an arbitrary will. In a word, what is good one day may be bad the next, what is right for one man may be wrong for the next. Little wonder ethical predicates prove so difficult to pin down, for denoting action in accordance with the Moral Conscience, i.e. as gifts of Grace, their efficacy and force of value remains contingent on conditions of time and place. Perhaps it is now easier to see the role that Reason or intellectual honesty might play in Augustine's scheme of redemption. It is only by discovering and accepting the poverty of Reason that man can realise his need to live under voluntarist law, or indeed to believe before he can understand, for what he can understand amounts to precious little.<sup>133</sup>

The despair which this honesty uncovers is not merely the failure to live up to a moral standard. It is worse than that: it is the failure of the standard itself. It is the consequence, as Paul warned at Rom 2:17-28, of separating the law from the Literal Word of God. The gift of the New Covenant is that every man might discover, by nothing more than a scouring intellectual honesty, that a life lived on the basis of the Natural Law Idea simply does not work; and the reason for this is not because of some general impairment of will, but rather because the Moral Conscience does not lend itself to intellectually solvent codification. In other words, its precepts cannot be made to stand to Reason, and as has

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<sup>132</sup> *De Trinitate*, XIV, 21, quoted in Herbert A. Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine*, p. 282.

<sup>133</sup> See below, pp. 109-110.

been shown, this is the result of the Fallen cast of mind's commitment to Conceptual Certainty - to a horizontally extended criteria of truth.

It would seem, then, that by the terms of the Augustinian narrative of the Fall, the path to salvation is an intellectual spiral into first disillusionment then despair, and because the end result is a subjection to voluntarist law, this means that for Augustine, Christianity is a Person not an argument; less a 'way of life' than the onus of perfection through obedience (corollary to this being the belief that imperfection is no Christian virtue<sup>134</sup>). Significantly, this safeguards Christianity against the charges ordinarily and correctly levelled at systematic theology: that it requires reasoning from premises that due to their extra-empirical nature, can only be taken on faith. Clearly a notion of Christianity placing emphasis on belief (i.e. belief in the existence of God) rather than obedience cannot circumvent these charges, for in the end it fails at the point all philosophies fail: demanding of the disciple an intellectually disingenuous leap of faith. The implications for systematic theology are stark: if it is to remain intellectually solvent, it can do no more than mark out the limitations of human knowledge, a task it shares with philosophy.<sup>135</sup> This in turn means that Intellectual honesty must bring a man, by whichever route, to a gaping chasm, which will henceforth be referred to as the 'God-shaped hole'. This term is particularly apt because the chasm is, of course, the image of God impressed upon the heart, or as it was earlier described, 'the briefest glimpse of the certainty of living under voluntarist law': He

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<sup>134</sup> Oswald Chambers makes the point with characteristic unambiguity in *My Utmost for His Highest*, (Devon, Nova, 1991), p. 170: Pride is the deification of self, and this today in some of us is not of the order of the Pharisee, but of the Publican. To say, "Oh, I'm no saint," is acceptable to human pride, but it is unconscious blasphemy against God. It literally means that you defy God to make you a saint. "I am much too weak and hopeless, I am outside the reach of the Atonement." Humility before men may be unconscious blasphemy before God. Why are you not a saint? It is either that you do not want to be a saint, or that you do not believe God can make you one.'

<sup>135</sup> This is by no means to preclude positive assertions of faith from Christian doctrine, but rather to make the point that such statements in no way replace or override the literal Word of God as the fundamental fact

will teach us, to know and love Whom is happiness of life, and this is what all proclaim they are seeking, though there are but few who may rejoice in having really found it.’<sup>136</sup>

Where all philosophies, religions and belief systems become spurious, is when they attempt to fill this hole with positive propositions, offering themselves as solutions to the problem. This is why this section began with the statement that it was not intended for the definition of Conceptual Certainty to imply its own positive restatement. If this disclaimer had not been issued, then the Augustinian meta-narrative would have laid itself open to the same charge levelled at Marx’s critique of ideology: that of having foregone its objective platform to become yet another example of the phenomenon it was criticising. On the contrary, the Augustinian meta-narrative escapes this charge because to promote subjection to voluntarist law is not to put forward an interpretation of God’s Will. It is rather to leave such matters entirely up to God. As for all the other religions and philosophies (and ‘belief-centred’ Christianity is included amongst them), they become of interest only insofar as they help delineate perimeter sections of the ‘God-Shaped Hole’. They may prove fascinating at the point at which they highlight some legitimate problem, but the moment they call for that intellectually disingenuous leap of faith, one instinctively draws back. One may ponder with Plato the question of intelligibility, but dismiss his ‘World of the Forms’; or applaud the sensible ethic of Aristotle’s ‘Golden Mean’, but find it impractical in the application; perhaps set out to Stoically endure this life as a citizen of the Cosmos, but struggle to translate the content of the Divine Reason; One may decide to free oneself from moral obligation through Nietzsche’s ‘will to power’, but find oneself appalled at the result; one may even restrict one’s curiosity to empirical matters, but find that in the end one has

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of Christianity.

<sup>136</sup> *De Magistro*, XIV, 46.

turned one's back on all that is human. It would seem that each of these philosophical attempts at truth entails a compromise, and it is at the point of compromise that they lose intellectual credibility.

Yet in order for the philosophy or religion to move beyond the problem it has identified and become the solution, it must advance its particular claim to (ethical) certainty, the problem becoming subsumed within a newly ordered reality. But as has been shown, this re-ordering proves restricted by the very operation of Reason itself - conclusions cannot contradict premises and premises must be sought if one is to move from the welter of experience to precision of thought. It is helpful to think of it as a zero-sum game. The body of human wisdom presents countless possible premises, each packaged as an *a priori* moral truth. Yet the History of Ideas shows that as the bases for ethical systems such premises, far from grounding reality on surer foundations, tend only to distort it. The minutiae of human life become sacrificed on the altar of utility. As C. S. Lewis put it: 'There never has been, and never will be, a radically new judgement of value in the history of the world. What purport to be new systems (or, as they now call them) "ideologies", all consist of fragments from the [Natural Law] itself, arbitrarily wrenched from their context in the whole and then swollen to madness in their isolation...' <sup>137</sup> These selfsame consequences are spelled out by Augustine in a passage describing how one's understanding of goodness is re-aligned when one looks to God for all one's understanding:

...it follows that all things, taken one by one, are good, and all things, taken together, are very good... Let me never say, "These things should not be!" If I considered them alone, I might desire better things; but still... because I thought of all things, and with a sounder judgement I held that the higher things are

indeed better than the lower, but that all things together are better than the higher things alone.<sup>138</sup>

The lessons are clear: the Moral Conscience constitutes the one ethical resource intrinsic to humanity. It provides for brief glimpses of that reality where, '...all things together are better than the higher things alone.' However, as an intimation of the ordained goodness of creation, it can neither be added to nor improved upon. The best that can be hoped for is to maintain and nurture it in the knowledge that it is the one moderating influence within the human compound. On the other hand, the intellectual conscience does prove open to refinement and improvement, though by the term 'improvement', is implied its capacity to mark out man's epistemological limitations. It follows from this last remark that all the great religions and philosophies could be diachronically arranged in the service of this principle, each one marking out perimeter sections of the 'God-shaped' hole. In section 3.2 is found a discussion of arguably the greatest single contribution to this project in the pioneering thought of the Pre-Socratic philosophers.

Not surprisingly, it is possible to see a close approximation to this method employed by Augustine in his *Confessiones*. In books three through eight he runs the gauntlet of all the religions and philosophies that were available to him at the time. What it is clear to see through this period is the repetition of the same process. Namely, Augustine first encountering a new philosophy or religion promising to satisfy his desire for truth (kindled by that momentous reading of Cicero's *Hortensius*<sup>139</sup>), then said philosophy or religion

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<sup>137</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, (New York, Harper Collins, 2001), pp. 43-44.

<sup>138</sup> *Confessiones*, VII, 12-13.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, III, 4: 'How I burned, O my God, how I burned with desire to fly away from earthly things towards you....' In *de Trinitate Dei*, Augustine would quote from Cicero's *Hortensius* to the effect that, '...if the souls which we have are eternal and divine, we must conclude, that the more we let them have their head in their natural activity, that is, in reasoning and in the quest for knowledge, and the less they are caught up in the vices and errors of mankind, the easier it will be for them to ascend and return to Heaven

shaping a section of the God-shaped hole before being discarded at the point where it spuriously attempts to fill it. At any point along this pilgrimage, Augustine could have fallen in with the philosophy or religion of the moment, but at each critical juncture, his Intellectual Conscience drove him to reject that which did not accord with the glimpse of Wisdom he had won with the *Hortensius*. This was a tortuous journey: ‘...I walked in darkness, and upon a slippery way, and I sought for you outside myself, but I did not find you, the God of my heart... I lost confidence, and I despaired of finding truth.’<sup>140</sup> It would have been far easier to have accepted, like so many others, the ready certainties and solutions proffered along the way. Nothing more than scouring honesty kept Augustine on the move: ‘...no hostile and slanderous questions, so many of which I had read in philosophers who contradict one another, could extort from me the answer that You do not exist, whatsoever might be Your nature (for this I did not know), or that the governance of human affairs did not belong to You.’<sup>141</sup> And the more so as he homed in on Plato. Here was a philosopher who had taken Reason to the metaphysical edge, prefiguring Christian doctrine in all but terminology: ‘Certain of our brethren in Christ’s grace are amazed when they hear or read that Plato had an understanding of God which, as they see, is in many respects consistent with the truth of our religion.’<sup>142</sup> Indeed, Augustine found within the Platonist system support for the following propositions: ‘...that there is one God, the Author of this universe, Who is not only above every bodily thing, being incorporeal, but also, being incorruptible, above all souls, and is our first principle, our light and our good...’<sup>143</sup>

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(Cicero, *Hortensius*, fgt. 97 (Opera, IV, 3, ed. Müller, 1890, p. 325), cited by Augustine in *de Trin.* XIV, xix, 26, taken from Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p. 40).

<sup>140</sup> *Confessiones*, VI,1.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.* VI,5. Cf. *De Utilitate Credendi*, XIV: ‘I am not, am I, sending you to fables? I am not, am I, forcing you to believe rashly? I say that our soul entangled and sunk in error and folly seeks the way of truth, if there be any such. If this be not your case, pardon me, I pray, and share with me your wisdom; but if you recognize in yourself what I say, let us, I entreat, together seek the truth.’

<sup>142</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, VIII, 11.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII, 10.

What these Platonists beheld then, with the eye of their mind, was the God-shaped hole as fenced by such negative affirmations.

This, therefore, is the reason why we prefer the Platonists to all others: because, while other philosophers have exhausted their ingenuity and zeal in seeking the causes of things and the right way to learn and live [in their attempt to posit solutions], these, by knowing God, have discovered where to find the cause by which the universe was established, and the light by which truth is to be perceived, and the fount at which we may drink of happiness.<sup>144</sup>

This Platonist achievement should come as no surprise, being little more than a product of intellectual honesty. Augustine believed that such understanding lay open to all men, for, 'That which may be known of God is manifest among them, for God has manifested it to them. For His invisible things from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, also His eternal power and Godhead.'<sup>145</sup> But as has been stressed, the God-shaped hole provides for no more than the rudiments of Christian doctrine, and even these through the device of negative affirmation only. Yet because won through due intellectual process, these rudiments retain about them an aura of credibility denied those elements of Christian doctrine dependent upon Divine revelation (and which have been the target of the Positivist bent in modern theology<sup>146</sup>). This is

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<sup>144</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, VIII, 11.

<sup>145</sup> Rom. 1:19f in *De Civitate Dei*, VIII, 10.

<sup>146</sup> See, G. W. H. Lampe, 'Athens and Jerusalem: Joint Witnesses to Christ?', in Brian Hebblethwaite and Stewart Sutherland (eds), *The Philosophical Frontiers of Christian Theology: Essays Presented to D. M. MacKinnon*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 14-15: 'The theological revolution of modern times is centred upon changes in the Christian understanding of revelation and, in particular, upon the widespread abandonment of the traditional belief that revelation is communicated by God to man in the form of propositions, so that it is possible to speak of revealed doctrines ... That consensus has now been broken down and can never be put together again. Doctrinal statements, that is, propositions about God and His relation to the world and to ourselves, are not commonly believed today to be communicated by God in such a way that somewhere, in the Bible or the creeds or the authoritative teaching of the Church, they are accessible to us as a store of unchanging and guaranteed truths.'



because the God-shaped hole is not implicitly God-shaped. It can take whatever shape one wishes. The final shape will always correspond to whichever philosophy or religion has been chosen to fill the breach, a move which must appear intellectually disingenuous. From a socio-political perspective, this sums to a broadly realist position. In other words, it is impossible to move from what one does know – a moral sense of good and evil – to any ideal form of human association without engendering the kind of compromise envisaged by both C. S. Lewis and Augustine. From the realist front line, Norberto Bobbio has the following words, which provide a classic example of the move from intellectual honesty to disillusionment:

I reflect on the history of mankind, which is a history I am part of. This history has something tragic about it that I try to understand, in spite of its complexity. For me everything is so human that I even believe that religion itself is a product of humanity... I am pessimistic about the question of evil. The struggle for life... is based on violence. Can original sin provide an explanation[?].... When, on the other hand, you put your faith to one side and start to use reason, you become aware of the uncontainable evil of this world... I can understand an omnipotent God. I can understand calling God the enormous mystery of the universe of which science knows so little. The greater our knowledge becomes, the greater the awareness of our ignorance. We know nothing. We only know that there is this great power. Consider the star-covered sky, the famous image used by Kant... When faced with all this you know that you know nothing, and therefore you tell yourself that something is eluding you. But this is beyond good and evil. Good and evil are categories invented by human beings in order

to live together. Can you imagine the Ten Commandments in relation to the immensity of space?<sup>147</sup>

So for Bobbio, all must end in misery and dissatisfaction, which, according to Augustine, was to be regarded the one avenue of hope left open to fallen men. He believed that men, through the use of their hearts and minds, might come to know a critical absence. That they might then come to appreciate this absence as God-shaped, was solely dependent on the action of God's operative Grace in their lives: 'Behold where He is: it is wherever truth is known. He is within our hearts, but our hearts have strayed far from Him... And He departed from our own eyes, so that we might return into our own hearts and find Him there.'<sup>148</sup> As Scripture promises, all find who they truly seek; Augustine took this quite literally. The thief on the cross looked into Christ's face and recognised Him as the Messiah; the Pharisees were told, 'You do not know me'.<sup>149</sup> Salvation was dependent not upon works or a way of life, but on recognition of the Son of God; and recognition of the Son of God could only take place if one had come to the point of mourning the absence of the real, to having recognised the hole as implicitly God-shaped: 'Can you imagine the Ten Commandments in relation to the immensity of space?' As Augustine relates the value of his own disillusionment in the *Confessiones*:

It [was] for this reason, I believe, that You wished me to come upon those [books of the Platonists] before I read Your Scriptures, so that the way I was affected by them might be stamped upon my memory. Hence, later on, when... my wounds had been treated... I would be able to distinguish how great a difference lies between... those who see where they must travel, but do not see

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<sup>147</sup> Norberto Bobbio & Maurizio Viroli, tr. Allen Cameron, *The Idea of the Republic*, (Oxford, Polity, 2003), pp. 60-61.

<sup>148</sup> *Confessiones*, IV, 12.

<sup>149</sup> John 8:19.

the way, and those who see the way that leads not only to beholding our blessed fatherland but also to dwelling therein.<sup>150</sup>

Plato had deviated from the truth and fallen in with Conceptual Certainty the moment he conjured up his Theory of Recollection and World of the Forms in order to explicate the problem of intelligibility. For him, then, the hole became 'Good-shaped'. But what would he have had to have done in order to move from simply, '...beholding our blessed fatherland...' to also, '...dwelling therein'? What would Conceptual Certainty have to give way to? Augustine's answer was the person of Christ:

What shall an unhappy man [such as Plato or Bobbio] do? "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death," unless it is by your grace, "through Jesus Christ, our Lord"... this those writings of the Platonists do not have... They scorn to learn of Him because he is meek and humble of heart. "For you have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them to little ones."<sup>151</sup>

Plato had come so agonisingly close to the truth by (negatively) affirming that, '...the wise man is an imitator, knower and lover of this God, and is blessed by participation in Him.'<sup>152</sup> Yet, as has been shown, he sided with a notion of participation inimical to the 'foolish' definition of Wisdom given in Scripture<sup>153</sup>, and implicit to Augustine's narrative of the Fall. Indeed Augustine, following Plato, had had similar close encounters with immutable truth:

Then indeed I clearly saw your "invisible things, understood by the things which are made." But I was unable to fix my gaze on them. In my frailty I was

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<sup>150</sup> *Confessiones*, VII, 20.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*, VII, 21.

<sup>152</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, VIII, 5.

<sup>153</sup> Job 28:28.

struck back... I took with me only a memory, loving and longing for what I had, as it were, caught the odour of, but was not yet able to feed upon.<sup>154</sup>

And as he goes on to say:

I sought for a way of having strength sufficient for me to have joy in you, but I did not find it until I embraced “the mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus...” He called to me, and said, “I am the way of truth, and the life.”<sup>155</sup>

What Augustine slowly came to understand was that by taking upon Himself the mantle of flesh, Jesus became subject to the full vitiating potential of human nature: ‘For at their feet they see the Godhead, weak because of its participation in our “coats of skin”.’<sup>156</sup> Yet He persisted in holiness and perfection, ‘...a humble man clinging to Him who was humble...’<sup>157</sup> At this point, Augustine’s biggest struggle would be to fathom, ‘...in what thing His lowliness [could] be my teacher.’<sup>158</sup> For he failed to understand how Jesus could have participated so completely in the will of His Father; and how that will translated to law, and to the wisdom so desired by Plato. These questions troubled Augustine as he pondered them in his heart. Of one thing he knew for certain, that, ‘...that flesh did not cleave to your Word except together with a human soul and mind. Any man who has knowledge of the immutability of your Word knows this.’<sup>159</sup> Here is found testament to the importance of Augustine’s philosophical rigour; his Intellectual Conscience had driven him to accept that in the mystery of the Incarnation and the Atonement must lie the only possible key to a wisdom lying outside the suffocating constraints of Conceptual Certainty. Initially, he had, ‘...conceived [his] Lord Christ only as a man of surpassing wisdom,

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<sup>154</sup> *Confessiones*, VII, 17.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, VII, 18.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*.

whom no other man could equal. Above all, because He was born in a wondrous manner of the Virgin, to give us an example of despising temporal things in order to win immortality, He seemed by the godlike care He had for us, to have merited such great authority as a teacher.'<sup>160</sup> But such thoughts could in no wise dispel the question of how? For, '...in Christ there was a complete man: not merely a man's body, not an animating principle in the body but without mind, but a true man.'<sup>161</sup> So far as Augustine could make out, the story of Jesus' life through Scripture bore this out as fact:

Now to move one's bodily members at the command of the will, and now not to move them; now to be affected by some emotion, and now not to be affected; now to utter wise judgements by means of signs, and now to remain silent – such things belong to a soul and a mind that are subject to change.<sup>162</sup>

In conclusion, Augustine, '...accounted Him a person to be preferred above all other men, not as the person of Truth, but because of some great excellence of his human nature and a more perfect participation in wisdom.'<sup>163</sup>

Upon this the whole meaning and purpose of the Christian Faith turned, for, 'If these things were written falsely of Him, then all else would be in danger of being false, and no saving faith for mankind would remain in those Scriptures.'<sup>164</sup> Born into flesh and knowing His Father, Jesus was the second Adam, and like the first, He shared in the temptation to step out of His Father's will. Yet, right to the very end, He persisted in obedience to His Father's commands. How then could His lowliness be Augustine's teacher? Very simply: Jesus remained docile before a voluntarist conception of law,

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<sup>159</sup> *Confessiones*, VII, 19.

<sup>160</sup> *Confessiones*, VII, 19

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

obeying the literal Word of His Father. So too should Augustine, for this constituted the only route to that certainty desired by he and Plato – the only route to that certainty for which the rational creation had been designed.

It would seem, then, that outside the walls of the Pilgrim City, the symbiosis holding between the Moral and the Intellectual Conscience is an uneasy one. A man should not commit too far either way. To try to live too much in the spirit of the Moral Conscience would leave him prey to an irresponsible vitalism; too far in the direction of the Intellectual Conscience and he would lose touch with morality altogether. A balance must somewhere and somehow be struck. It is at this point that those words of David Hume spring to mind: 'Be a philosopher: but amidst all your philosophy, be still a man.'<sup>165</sup> Indeed it is to Hume that attention now turns, for having set the relationship between the two consciences in its broad, salvific context, it is now necessary to investigate the very issue over which they have supposedly been thrown together: the temporalisation of the present moment. To this end it will be necessary take for a critical apparatus Hume's so called Problem of Induction.

### 2.3 Hume's Problem of Induction

Before beginning, a word on context. Hume first postulated this problem in his *Treatise on Human Nature*, published in three volumes from 1739 to 1740. It was not originally a success, in his own words falling, 'dead-born from the press'. It was only once he had re-packaged these volumes into the shorter *Inquiry into Human Understanding* that his ideas met with the reaction he was hoping for. It would be fair to say that the work created as

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<sup>164</sup> *Confessiones*, VII, 19.

<sup>165</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, I.

great a stir in his time as Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* did in his. And as Hume's many commentators would concur, his Problem of Induction still presents an insuperable obstacle to empirical reasoning, going, for the large part, grudgingly uncontested. It occurs in book I of his *Treatise on Human Nature*, as part of a discussion of the philosophical relationship of cause and effect.

Hume begins from the premise that, 'There is no object which implies the existence of any other, if we consider these objects in themselves, and never look beyond the ideas which we form of them. Such an inference would amount to knowledge, and would imply the absolute contradiction and impossibility of conceiving anything different.'<sup>166</sup> This would imply that it is, '...by *experience* only that we infer the existence of one object from that of another.'<sup>167</sup> Hume then provides an example of what he means: '...we remember to have that species of object we call *flame*, and to have felt the species of sensation we call *heat*. We likewise call to mind their constant conjunction in all past instances. Without further ceremony we call the one *cause* and the other *effect*, and infer the existence of the one from that of the other.'<sup>168</sup> But as Hume goes on to argue, 'We cannot penetrate into the reason of the conjunction. We only observe the thing itself, and always find that, from the constant conjunction, the objects require a union in the imagination.'<sup>169</sup> This means that,

...probability is founded on the presumption of a resemblance betwixt those objects of which we have had experience, and those of which we have had none; and, therefore, it is impossible this presumption can arise from probability. The same principle cannot be both the cause and effect of another; and this is,

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<sup>166</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Book I, 6.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

perhaps, the only proposition concerning that relation, which is neither intuitively or demonstratively certain.<sup>170</sup>

In *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach*, Karl Popper produces a very clear reformulation of Hume's argument by separating it into two distinct problems, which he calls the 'logical' and the 'psychological'. Because this compartmentalization works so well to highlight the epistemological issues at stake, I include it below:

*Hume's logical problem is:*

Are we justified in reasoning from (repeated) instances of which we have experience to other instances (conclusions) of which we have no experience?

*Hume's answer... is:* No, however great the number of repetitions...

*Hume's psychological problem is:*

Why, nevertheless, do all reasonable people expect, and *believe*, that instances of which they have no experience will conform to those of which they have experience...[?]

*Hume's answer... is:* Because of 'custom or habit'; that is, because we are conditioned, by *repetitions* and the mechanism of the association of ideas; a mechanism without which, Hume says, we could hardly survive.<sup>171</sup>

According to Hume, man's restriction to the present moment leaves him no rational grounds for inducing the causal relationships between events. What is ordinarily taken to be the logic of cause and effect is a function of experience imposed in order to bring meaning and predictability into a life that is lived in the face of overwhelming uncertainty.

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<sup>170</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Book I, 6.



Every night the pig goes to bed dreaming of the slop bucket, then one day he's bacon. Russell recognised the gravity of Hume's challenge to science and those philosophies claiming high levels of empiricism:

It is... important to discover whether there is any answer to Hume... If not...  
The lunatic who believes that he is a poached egg is to be condemned solely on  
the ground that he is in a minority, or rather – since we must not assume  
democracy – on the grounds that the government does not agree with him. This  
is a desperate point of view...<sup>172</sup>

Hume's conclusion is that short of anarchic chaos, men are psychologically compelled to base their lives on propositions of irrational faith. In reply, Russell admits that if man is to avoid an impasse, he will simply have to live the lie, accepting that, '...induction is an independent logical principle, incapable of being inferred either from experience or from other logical principles...' <sup>173</sup>

It would seem, then, that man holds to an ideal of certitude that could in no wise have arisen from the world of empirical fact, making Russell's 'logical principle' quite indistinct from Augustine's 'vain presumption'.<sup>174</sup> Man's determination to live in a certain way, that is, to believe that (to put a new spin on Russell's famous phrase) future present moments will resemble past present moments, must logically have preceded the principle of induction. This would surely mean that in point of operation the principle of induction is really rather similar to the Natural Law Idea. After all, both address the temporalisation of the present moment, and both do so by imposing over the eternal unknown laws of order

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<sup>171</sup> Karl Popper, *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach*, (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1975), p.4.

<sup>172</sup> Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, p. 699.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid*, p. 700.

and procession. From this perspective, what Hume's Problem of Induction reveals is the sheer incongruity of Horizontal Eternity. In relation to the temporal restrictions of time and space it appears quite non-sensical. One should not sneer at the man risking all on chance and probability in the casino, for there is no reason to presume one's money is any safer in the bank. Both are a case of the odds being played.<sup>175</sup> As Edwards observes:

The number of positive and negative necessary conditions for the occurrence of any event is infinite or at any rate too large to be directly observed by a human being or indeed by all human beings put together. None of us, for example, has explored every corner of the universe to make sure that there nowhere exists a malicious but powerful individual who controls the movements of the sun by means of wires which are too fine to be detected by any of our microscopes.<sup>176</sup>

On this matter, it seems only right to allow Hume to have the last word: 'Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity, has determined us to judge as well as to breathe and feel.'<sup>177</sup> Life as man knows it, and as it is represented to him in the practices and institutions of social organisation, is built on the belief that tomorrow the sun will indeed shine. Humanity could not have achieved what it has, could not have moved beyond the level of hand to mouth subsistence, had it not chosen to take a leap of faith, prostituting the present moment in the name of future contingency. What remains is to turn to a closer appraisal of the relationship that holds between the Moral and Intellectual consciences under these conditions, and to start drawing out the socio-political implications of the

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<sup>174</sup> See above, p. 17.

<sup>175</sup> It is worth pointing out that Hume's argument can be continued *ad infinitum*. In the context of my example, if the man in the casino were to win, then he would have no reason to infer (from past experience) that he should be paid out.

<sup>176</sup> Paul Edwards, 'Bertrand Russell's Doubts About Induction', in A. G. N. Flew (ed.), *Logic and Language* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 58.

conclusions reached thus far.

## 2.4 C. S. Lewis and the *Tao*

In 1943, C. S. Lewis gave the Riddell Lectures at the University of Durham. These were later collated into a single publication entitled *The Abolition of Man*. In section 2.2 above, the following extract was cited from the work: 'There never has been, and never will be, a radically new judgement of value in the history of the world. What purport to be new systems (or, as they now call them) "ideologies", all consist of fragments from the [Natural Law] itself, arbitrarily wrenched from their context in the whole and then swollen to madness in their isolation...'<sup>178</sup> The intention was to provide an illustration of how the interaction between the Moral and the Intellectual Conscience works itself out in practice. Indeed, it may be felt that not enough has been done to tidy up the loose ends. In the preface, it was proposed that Natural Law Theory was simply one of a number of attempts to make good the events in Paradise. In that context, the intention was to pillory it. Yet, when viewed in relation to Fallen Reality, it has consistently been regarded in a favourable light; following Augustine, as nothing less than *the* moderating influence within the human compound. It is, of course, a question of perspective. Augustine's narrative of the Fall shows that man was designed and equipped to live under the voluntarist law of God. From this it can only be concluded that any other state of being must be of his own making, an example of his will to survive apart from God. This has very important implications for Augustine's position within the Natural Law Tradition. Later, there will be opportunity to discuss this in far greater detail, but for now, it is enough that an outline of the matter is provided below.

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<sup>177</sup> David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, part iv, sec. i.

Augustine is ordinarily made to fit a ready synthesis for the period spanning the Stoic School of Ethical Philosophy, in the fourth century B.C., to St. Thomas Aquinas' Philosophy of Law, in the thirteenth century A.D. More than that, in relation to the Patristic response to Stoic Natural Law Theory, he is regarded as something of a founding father. As Anton Hermann-Chroust puts it, he is the thinker attributed with having given the theistic spin to the Stoic Divine Reason, thereby responsible for having, '...laid the foundations for the whole natural (moral) law of the following centuries by introducing the basic concept of a theistic "*lex aeterna*".'<sup>179</sup> It is by no means the intention to challenge this synthesis outright (for in broad essentials it is certainly true) but rather to point out that it is only half the story; and that by passing over the epistemological consequences of Augustine's narrative of the Fall in silence, the risk is taken of reading too much into his understanding of the *lex aeterna*. As will be shown in section 3.3, the fact that the Augustinian scheme of Divine guidance accommodates a wholly arbitrary and irrational Divine Will seriously questions the shared rationality between God and man that is normally taken to be the mark of theistic Natural Law Theories. However, enough has now been said on this matter to justify the original comment and a return should, without further delay, be made to C. S. Lewis' argument in *The Abolition of Man*.

As would have been clear from the extract which began this section, it is C. S. Lewis' contention that the *Tao*, for that is what he calls the Law of Nature, is the sole source of

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<sup>178</sup> C. S. Lewis, pp. 43-44.

<sup>179</sup> Anton Hermann-Chroust, 'The Philosophy of Law in St. Augustine', *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Mar., 1944), p. 196. See also his, 'The Function of Law and Justice in the Ancient World and the Middle Ages', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Jun., 1946), especially pp. 310-14 for a detailed summation of how the traditional interpretation of Augustine's contribution plays itself out in the context of Medieval legal theory.

value within the human compound. It presents man with a set of moral propositions that, '...are nowhere else. Unless you accept these without question as being to the world of action what axioms are to the world of theory, you can have no practical principles whatever. You cannot reach them as conclusions: they are premises.'<sup>180</sup> This is the striking feature of C. S. Lewis' work: the sense of tension and fragility that provides the backdrop to his defence of Natural Law. He knows from the start that he cannot fight the Value Non-Cognitivists on their own terms, that, 'You must not hold a pistol to the head of the *Tao*.'<sup>181</sup> To try to provide some sort of rational proof for its existence would be to play into their hands; for that is precisely what they are contending is impossible. And they are of course right. C. S. Lewis knows this; and in light of the fact he decides for a negative argument: to show what would be lost with the destruction or radical reconstitution of the *Tao*. For him this is quite simply the abolition of man:

There are progressions in which the last step is *sui generis* – incommensurable with the others – and in which to go the whole way is to undo all the labour of your previous journey. To reduce the *Tao* to a mere natural product is a step of that kind. Up to that point, the kind of explanation which explains things away may give us something, though at a heavy cost. But you cannot go on "explaining away" for ever: you will find you have explained explanation itself away.'<sup>182</sup>

The key is preservation: it is simply not possible for there to be a harmonious conjunction of the Moral and the Intellectual Conscience, as they hold to diametrically opposed ideal-types of certainty. In lieu of the discussions in section 2.1, it might be said that they hold to

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<sup>180</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, p. 40.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*, p. 49.

<sup>182</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, p. 80-81.

two diametrically opposed ideal-types of truth. What should never be forgotten, though, is that the ideal-type associated with the Moral Conscience represents a fundamental irritation to man, a direct snub to his intellectual ambitions; and the situation only deteriorates when it is considered that it is in fact this ideal-type of certitude that he is striving to replicate with the Natural Law Idea. In fact, it was precisely *this* type of certitude which Hume's philosophy revealed could in no wise have arisen from the world of empirical fact. This is not ordinarily taken to be the case. Within the social science discourses, it is common to hear talk of the 'mathematical paradigm of truth', understood as the ultimate standard of truth or certitude available within the human compound. However, it is believed that the Augustinian meta-narrative does enough to confute this view. It all comes down, as might have guessed by now, to a question of time. As was shown in section 2.1, (and will be followed up in section 3.3) the mathematical paradigm of truth, as an example of Horizontal Eternity, is in fact a copy of Vertical Eternity; and of course it is Vertical Eternity that is glimpsed in the findings of the Moral Conscience. This is thoroughly disorientating; Augustine seems to have turned matters on their head. For from this perspective, it would seem that it is man's belief in Reason rather than Augustine's Doctrine of the Fall which is irrational. The opportunity should, however, be taken to forestall any misapprehensions that may have arisen out of this portrayal of the Moral Conscience as an infallible source of truth. The Law of Nature is not indestructible; it can impose no sanction stronger than guilt, and although this can be very powerful indeed, unless it resonates with the feelings current in society, it is quickly overcome. It is not inconceivable that man may, at some not too distant point in the future, outstrip the received wisdom of the ages in one fatal burst. What philosophers have hitherto confined to the pages of books might be taken and applied beyond the library, the classroom and the

quad. The bluff might well get called on the whole giddy enterprise and in some hideous superman will appear the first child parented exclusively by progress and enlightenment.

This state of affairs lies closer than might be thought, for every use made of the Moral Conscience in the secular sphere constitutes a step in that direction. Indeed, some of the Law of Nature's greatest achievements have come about, rather ironically, through appeals to human self interest. The virtue of peace is a classic example, and one which Augustine held particularly dear as nothing less than a precondition of life itself. This is why he stressed that: '...every man seeks peace... even robbers... if only to invade the peace of others with greater force and safety...' <sup>183</sup> It seems that even wars were conducted in the name of peace, '... for what else is victory but the subjugation of those who oppose us? And when this is achieved, there will be peace.' <sup>184</sup> Such unflattering comparisons were designed to belittle the specialness and importance of the Classical state in general, and its Roman incarnation in particular. For unlike Aquinas, Augustine placed no hope in the Earthly City. His efforts as a theologian were concentrated solely on pulling in citizens for the Pilgrim City, and as might by now be anticipated, outside of its walls, all human endeavour was taken to form a single piece. For example, In *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine related the tale of the pirate who answered Alexander the Great's question as to what he meant by infesting the sea, with the following riposte: 'The same as you do when you infest the whole world; but because I do it with a little ship I am called a robber, and because you do it with a great fleet, you are an emperor.' <sup>185</sup> Augustine then went on to

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<sup>183</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, XIX, 12.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, IV, 4.

declare that, 'Justice removed, then, what are kingdoms but great bands of robbers? What are bands of robbers themselves but little kingdoms?'<sup>186</sup>

As a condition of life itself, peace will arguably be the last of the great virtues to go; but before that day, many lesser examples will have slipped away unnoticed into the night. For the fact remains that it is almost impossible to resurrect what has already been sacrificed on the altar of utility. The Law of Nature is supported, reflected and ultimately constituted in the institutions, conventions and traditions of a society: whatever happens to it happens in the name of progress and enlightenment, which means that any redress must be put through against the social current. As Aristotle counseled, the wisdom of experience should not be ignored: 'We are bound to pay some regard to the long past and the passage of the years, in which these things would not have gone unnoticed if they had been really good. Almost everything has been discovered already; though some of the things discovered have not been coordinated, and some, though known, are not put into practice.'<sup>187</sup> Or as Edmund Burke rather more passionately voiced it:

By this unprincipled facility of changing the state as often, and as much, and in as many ways as there are floating fancies or fashions, the whole change and continuity of the commonwealth would be broken. No one generation could link with the other. Men would become little better than the flies of a summer.<sup>188</sup>

In the same vein, examining the Republican ideal of liberty for contemporary relevance, Quentin Skinner concludes that, '...The reason for wishing to bring the Republican vision of politics back into view is not that it tells us how to construct a genuine democracy... It is simply because it conveys a warning... that unless we place our duties before our rights, we

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<sup>186</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, IV,4.

<sup>187</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, tr. Sir Ernest Barker (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1960), 1264a.



must expect to find our rights themselves undermined.<sup>189</sup> This really is the crux of the matter. If man neglects his duty to safeguard the Law of Nature in its entirety and instead becomes infatuated with rights considered in isolation from it, in other words, if, '...he merely snatches at some one precept, on which the accidents of time and place happen to have riveted his attention, and then rides it to death...' <sup>190</sup> he runs the risk of distorting the moral edifice out of all recognition. In the *Republic*, Plato was particularly anxious to make this point with regard to the principle of liberty or freedom. In fact, Plato saw the unwarranted elevation of this principle as the most deleterious aspect of the democratic constitution, and indeed the very reason for its eventual descent into anarchy: '...does not this excess, this obsession with freedom to the neglect of everything else, revolutionize the democratic constitution and stimulate a demand for tyranny?' <sup>191</sup> Like C. S. Lewis, Plato believed that such single-minded devotion to a principle would eventually lead to prevailing societal norms being turned on their head (it is worth noting the great irony at work here – for surely the supreme example of this phenomenon is Plato's ideal republic, founded as it is on a ruthless conception of natural justice?):

Obedient citizens... will be reviled as no men at all but willing slaves. Praise and honour in public and private go to rulers who behave like subjects and subjects who behave like rulers... the father will acquire the habit of imitating his children; he will fear his sons. The sons, in turn, imitate the father, showing their parents neither deference nor fear... All in all, the young mimic their elders, competing with them in word and deed. The old respond by descending to the level of youth... In sum, you will note that all these things taken together

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<sup>188</sup> Edmund Burke, (ed.) Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Reflections on the Revolutions in France* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976), pp. 192-193.

<sup>189</sup> Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner and Maurizio Viroli (Eds), *Machiavelli and Republicanism* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 309.

<sup>190</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, p. 47.

make the souls of the citizens so hypersensitive that they cannot bear even to hear the mention of authority. At last they end up ignoring all laws, written or unwritten, so that they may be spared the sense of having any master whatsoever.<sup>192</sup>

It would seem that in order to avoid so gross a distortion, and given the fact that no society can be wholly inflexible, it would be necessary to employ a very conservative maxim, 'change in order to preserve'. C. S. Lewis illustrates the point with an analogy concerning the development of language:

A theorist of language may approach his native tongue, as it were from outside, regarding its genius as a thing that has no claim on him and advocating wholesale alterations in its idiom and spelling in the interests of commercial convenience or scientific accuracy. That is one thing. A great poet, who has 'loved, and been well nurtured in, his mother tongue', may also make great alterations in it, but his changes of the language are made in the spirit of the language itself: he works from within.<sup>193</sup>

It is the case, then, of maintaining a tenuous equilibrium. As was noted in section 2.2, something is always lost in the translation from the Moral to the Intellectual conscience, from a living to a static criterion of truth. When a particular principle is culled from the Law of Nature, such as 'Liberty' or 'equality' or 'The greatest good of the greatest number', it is not just removed from a single context (even though C. S. Lewis' quote above seems to imply that the Law of Nature does constitute a finite body of *a priori* maxims) but rather from an infinite number, all of them different and all of them contingent on unique

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<sup>191</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, tr. Richard W. Sterling & William C. Scott (Ontario, W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), 562c.

<sup>192</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, 562d-563e.

<sup>193</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, p. 45.

sets of conditions. As Isaiah Berlin noted en route to formulating his two concepts of liberty: 'Freedom for an Oxford don is not the same thing as freedom for an Egyptian peasant.'<sup>194</sup> Yet by placing the principle in a conceptual context, these vicissitudes of time and place are ignored in an effort to evince from it an eternal stability of meaning. In so doing, the finer judgments of the present moment are prostituted in favour of the wide principles of future contingency. Freedom, to remain with Berlin's example, becomes less an expression of the life lived in accordance with the Law of Nature and more something to be extracted from life at all costs, and in the greatest possible quantities. The sense of balance and compromise which is the key to the Law of Nature's moderating influence is lost; and it is quickly forgotten that in order to enjoy the greater goods (such as peace) the lesser goods must not be desired to destruction. For as Augustine warned:

Reason makes its judgements in one way, and common sense in another. Reason judges by the light of truth so that, by right judgement, it subordinates lesser things to the more important ones. Common sense, on the other hand, inclines toward the habit of convenience, so that it puts a higher value on those things that truths proves to be of lesser value. While reason places celestial bodies far over terrestrial ones, what carnal man would not prefer that the stars be missing from the sky, rather than a single bush from his field, or a cow from his herd? <sup>195</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 124.

<sup>195</sup> *De Libero Arbitrio*, 3, V.

## Chapter Three

# The Political Animal

“What is truth?” Pilate asked.

John 18:37

### 3.1 *Primus Inter Pares*

In the first chapter of this dissertation, an attempt was made to show that Augustine believed man was designed and equipped to live according to voluntarist law. In the second, efforts were made to discover whether this hypothesis could in any way be borne out by certain aspects of the human condition. It was hoped that two things in particular might be highlighted by this exercise: 1) the remedial character of Reason and 2) the fragility of the Law of Nature. Borrowing arguments from C. S. Lewis, it was shown why genuine progress in the moral sciences is impossible. Indeed, the agenda was taken on one step further by declaring that even to see the *ordo amoris* in lawful form, through the lens of Reason, is a step in the wrong direction. This was not by way of being pedantic, but merely to point up the difference between a living and a static conception of truth; that a lawful 'ought', i.e. the idea that something is always right for an infinite number of future

instances, requires a context quite different from that in which the Law of Nature arises. However, it may well be felt that this thesis does Reason a disservice, and that it even conflicts with the esteem in which Augustine seems generally to have held the faculty. To say that it is of merely instrumental significance, that it is interpretive and destructive, is surely to go too far. Yet throughout his career, Augustine held to the belief that any intelligible truths grasped by Reason are themselves gifts of God's Grace. Not dissimilar to the 'seeing' Adam and Eve enjoyed whilst in the Garden of Eden, what men perceive with the 'eye of their mind' they see, as it were, through God's own eyes. As such, any truth apprehended by the right use of Reason is a gift of Grace: 'I read that the soul of man, although it gives testimony of the light, is not itself the light, but the Word, God Himself, is "the true light, which enlightens every man that comes into the world."' <sup>196</sup>

This is what Augustine meant when castigating the Platonic philosophers with the following words: '...they did not rightly worship God Himself, because they paid the divine honours which are due to Him alone to other things also, to which they should not have paid them. "Because, knowing God, they glorified Him not as God; neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise they became fools..." <sup>197</sup> This view of intelligibility was expounded at greater length in Augustine's *De Magistro*, whose purpose as a dialogue was to show that,

Regarding... all those things which we understand, it is not a speaker who utters sounds exteriorly whom we consult, but it is truth that presides within, over the mind itself... And He Who is consulted, He Who is said to "dwell in the inner

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<sup>196</sup> *Confessiones.*, VII, 9.

<sup>197</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, VIII, 10.

man,” He it is who teaches – Christ – that is, “the unchangeable Power of God and everlasting Wisdom.”<sup>198</sup>

Augustine reached this conclusion by first establishing that words are but signs, in the sense that they signify certain realities: ‘...speech serves only to remind, since the memory in which the words inhere, by recalling them, brings to mind the realities themselves, of which the words are signs.’<sup>199</sup> And as such, ‘...realities signified are to be esteemed more highly than their signs. For whatever exists for the sake of something else must be inferior to that for whose sake it exists...’<sup>200</sup> This is all very well in the case of objects and actions of which one has indeed had prior experience, but what of intelligible realities? How is the role of the memory to be explained in such instances?

This matter was especially important for Augustine because he believed that the business of teaching was to remind, and that learning is really a process of recalling from memory realities previously perceived. To learn was thus to acknowledge oneself the truth of a proposition; and so to believe that one’s teacher was a source of truth was simply fallacious: his words could serve only to signify the realities to which assent had already been given: ‘If one who hears me has personally perceived these things and become aware of them, he does not learn them from my words, but recognises them from the images that are stored away within himself. If, however, he has had no sense knowledge of them, he clearly believes rather than learns by means of the words.’<sup>201</sup> It follows, then, that when it comes to learning intelligible truths, there must be a sense in which a reality is being called

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<sup>198</sup> *De Magistro*, XI, 38.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid*, I, 2. Cf. *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, 2: ‘For instance, anger is designated by one word in Latin, by another in Greek, and by others again in the various other tongues; but the expression on the face of an angry man is neither Latin nor Greek.’

forth from memory. But how can this be the case? From whence comes the knowledge of the reality which is matched to the proposition of the teacher?

Augustine's answer was that it is God Who illuminates these realities: '...if the one who hears me likewise sees those things with an inner and undivided eye... he is taught not by my words, but by the realities themselves made manifest to him by God revealing them to his inner self.'<sup>202</sup> As such, anything a man learns by use of Reason he should attribute to Christ the Word of God and source of all Wisdom; for, '...He alone teaches who when He spoke externally reminded us that He dwells within us.'<sup>203</sup>

It is clear, then, that Reason should never be regarded the source of anything it apprehends. It is that instrument through which Christ teaches and admonishes men whether they realise it or not. The truth about any matter is only ever a gift of Grace, which perhaps makes more sense of the argument in section 2.2 above; for the very intellectual honesty that compels a man to reject in religions and philosophies that which appears irrational is the Word of God within him! For Augustine, Plato was the measure of just how far a man could advance by Reason alone. In the end, though, where his speculations should have driven him to distraction, he adopted a fantastical expedient to reconcile the dichotomy he had discovered between the intelligible and sensible worlds. This is yet more proof for the claim that to Augustine, God worked His salvific purpose through both the Moral and the Intellectual conscience. Interestingly enough, it also provides grounds for claiming that in relation to the Christian Faith, an A. J. Ayer or a Bertrand Russell is in no worse a position

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<sup>200</sup> *De Magistro*, IX, 25.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid*, XII, 39.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid*, XII, 40.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*, XIV, 46.

than a Plato, as their scepticism only removes from the radar what Christianity is not, namely an argument. And as Augustine showed with regard to the Platonists, it is pride not disbelief that stands in the way of a man subjecting himself to the Person of Christ.

In a short exposition of Russell's philosophy, A. J. Ayer recounted the following anecdote: There is a story that Russell was once asked at a public meeting what he would say if after his death he found himself confronted by his Maker. He replied without hesitation: 'I should say: "God! Why did You make the evidence for Yourself so insufficient?"'<sup>204</sup> The anecdote brings immediately to mind those words of Pascal's:

The metaphysical proofs of the existence of God are so remote from men's methods of reasoning and so involved that they produce little impact; and even if they did help some people, the effect would only last for a few moments while they were actually watching the demonstration, but an hour later they would be afraid that they had made a mistake. "What they had gained by their curiosity would be lost through pride" [St. Augustine, *Sermons*, CXLI]. That is the result of a knowledge of God which is reached without Jesus Christ... Instead of which those who have known God through a mediator are aware of their own wretchedness.<sup>205</sup>

Pascal makes a stark point: the moment in which a man turns to God is not marked by ecstasy. It is a sober throwing in of the towel; for what else but complete scepticism could make him turn back, like a child, eschewing all notions of Horizontal Eternity, to live under a voluntarist conception of law?

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<sup>204</sup> A. J. Ayer, *Russell* (London, Fontana, 1972), p. 128.

<sup>205</sup> Pascal, *Pensees*; trans. Martin Turnell (Harvill Press, 1962), p. 212, in Colin Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (London, The Tyndale Press, 1969), p. 59.



This, then, is the other half of the story hinted at in section 2.4. Though Natural Law Theories are to be regarded very great goods indeed, they are no replacement for the Vertical Eternity experienced when 'looking to God for all one's seeing'. If anything, they represent paradigmatic solutions to the ethical equation with which the second chapter was begun. Following C. S. Lewis' cue in *The Abolition of Man*, they search out some moral axiom (or body of axioms) of suitably *a priori* character, and then, by various processes of deduction, produce from it legislation to cover all aspects of human activity. However, it is terribly important to bear in mind that *all* ethical speculation exhibits the same dynamic, the same interplay of the Natural Law Idea and the moral conscience. What separates the different systems in practice, is only the severity of the criterion of truth adopted in each case; an Ayer and an Aquinas are both after the same thing, though whereas Ayer's criterion obliterates morality, Aquinas' only redefines it. It follows that on these grounds, i.e. that they most perfectly embody principles of ethical speculation, it would not be inopportune to regard Natural Law Theories as *primus inter pares*. Stoic Natural Law Theory provides a case in point, for the circumstances of its genesis present a remarkable analogue to the Augustinian narrative of the Fall. As the walls of city-state came tumbling down, the Greek's eyes were opened and the innocence which had for so long sustained his charmed circle of use and wont was sacrificed on the altar of moral relativism.

### 3.2 Stoic Natural Law Theory

The Stoic was one of four great schools of ethical philosophy that emerged with the gradual decline in importance of the Greek city-state, from the fifth century onwards. This process, begun with the humanist turn given philosophy by Socrates, was completed by the

conquering genius of the Macedonian Kings. Philip, having made himself master of Greece with his defeat of the joint army of Thebes and Athens, was assassinated on the eve of his departure to liberate the Greek cities of Asia Minor and bring the Persians and Barbarians under his dominion. It was left to his son, Alexander, to complete his father's work; and this he did in imperious fashion, far extending the boundaries of the Hellenic world. As Fisher notes of the nature of his conquests: 'No military career, not even that of his imitator Napoleon has exercised a wider influence on history, opening out as it did the whole of hither Asia to Hellenic speech and culture, and bringing to the West a flood of new facts relating to Oriental lands and peoples...' <sup>206</sup>

It was of the essence of Alexander's rule that he should strive to strike a note of cosmopolitanism in his governing of the peoples of East and West. This conciliatory policy, based upon his far-sighted belief in a fundamental equality of man, led to a hitherto unimagined intercourse of ideas and religions. Such an influx of cultural data served only to press an already volatile philosophical situation to breaking point. By the time of Alexander's conquests, the Greek had become preoccupied by the discrepancy he perceived between the eternal stability of the laws governing the physical world and the flux and change of human custom and tradition. That these doubts and insecurities could come to pass was due to the development of his analytical sensibility. Where previously his rational engagement with the institutions of political society had been of a purely practical bent, it had, in the last one hundred years or so, begun to assume a theoretical edge. For Cornford, this development represented the florescence of the modern, scientific inclination: The problem – something to be done – gave place to the theorem – something to be

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<sup>206</sup> H. A. L. Fisher, *A History of Europe* (London, Edward Arnold & Co., 1949), p. 42.

contemplated... The rise of science, then, meant that the intelligence became disinterested and now felt free to voyage on seas of thought strange to minds bent on immediate problems of action.<sup>207</sup> This heightened Intellectual Conscience was the Greek's inheritance from the Pre-Socratic philosophers. They constituted an eclectic group of thinkers, all sharing an interest in the physical world and all tracing a lineage from the Greek city-states of Ionia, on the coast of Asia Minor. They had begun their speculations back in the sixth century, employing methods coloured, not a little ironically, by a raft of presumptions drawn from their experience of life in the city-state.

Foremost amongst these, and perhaps exercising the greatest influence over their investigations, was the principle of justice or *dike*. As Guthrie points out, this principle had enjoyed a long and distinguished career in Greek thought, though not exclusively in its moral sense. He regards its earliest significance in Greek literature as being, '...no more than the way in which a certain class of people usually behaves, or the normal course of nature.'<sup>208</sup> And as he goes on to show, this was precisely the definition that Plato would eventually return at the completion of the *Republic*. The reason for dwelling on these etymological matters is because the justice which so impressed the pre-Socratic philosophers as they looked upon the city-state was of this order. In the concord of its institutions and the regularity of its laws, the city-state contrasted sharply with the flux and change of the natural world. However, it is important to remember that this view could not yet amount to a theoretical outlook (for that would have to wait till after the pre-Socratics) but issued instead in a sense of familiarity. As Barker put it: 'Men were born, and lived, and died, under ancient customs, whose origin no man knew. It was dimly felt that they

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<sup>207</sup> F. M. Cornford, *Before and After Socrates* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1950), pp. 6-7.

<sup>208</sup> W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Greek Philosophers: From Thales to Aristotle* (London, Methuen, 1967), p. 6.

were divine: it was certainly recognised that they were rigid and fundamental.<sup>209</sup> What the Pre-Socratic philosopher hoped to do was to render the natural world equally familiar; and there are, of course, obvious parallels between this notion of familiarity and the definition of the Natural Law Idea. For if the excrescences of scientific or theoretical understanding are cleared away, what was there left for the Greek to be familiar with other than the regularities of everyday life? Perhaps, in this sense, 'predictability' would be a better term to use. Within the walls of the city-state the Greek felt secure and greatly comforted not in the substance of his traditions and beliefs, for those went unquestioned, but in the routinised existence they afforded him. Thus, when the pre-Socratics turned to consider the world outside the walls, it was its unpredictability which struck them above all else. Little surprise, then, that they sought to remedy this situation by an application of the Natural Law Idea, determining to seek out a material substratum to which all the surface machinations of the natural world could relate. It is true, they could have gone high rather than low, devolving responsibility to gods rather than material causes, but, as Democritus insisted, they fervently believed that, 'Men have fashioned an image of Chance as an excuse for their own stupidity. For Chance rarely conflicts with Intelligence, and most things in life can be set in order by an intelligent sharp-sightedness.'<sup>210</sup> Such was born the analytical sensibility, not as something new in itself, but as a refinement upon the Natural Law Idea; for the pre-Socratics could never have asked the questions they did without first presuming, as Hume called it, 'the constant conjunction of cause and effect.'<sup>211</sup>

In section 2.2 was moved a very Socratic motion, namely, that all supposed advances in the name of the Intellectual Conscience are significant only insofar as they help delineate

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<sup>209</sup> Sir Ernest Barker, *Greek Political Theory* (London, Methuen, 1960), p. 63.

<sup>210</sup> Democritus, fgt. 119, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, p. 104.

man's epistemological limitations. In other words, that the wiser one gets, the more one realises one doesn't know. In section 2.3, with reference to Hume's Problem of Induction, these limitations were shown as traceable to the metaphysical fact of temporality. The object was to prove that the beating heart of every intellectual development has to be the Natural Law Idea, which is the same as saying that all notions of enlightenment and progress are based on a fundamental misconception. In section 2.2, things had actually been taken a step further, where it was proposed that 'all the great religions and philosophies could be diachronically arranged in the service of this principle, each one marking out perimeter sections of the 'God-shaped' hole. All this is recounted because the pre-Socratic 'discovery' of Western science (or modern philosophy) would obviously constitute a major part of this project. This is because the problems which the new philosophy laid up for the Greek were of an exclusively epistemological nature. The Intellectual Conscience he received back from the pre-Socratics was barely recognisable, tuned, as it was, to an uncommonly high pitch. As a tool for the elucidation of truth it now possessed a far sharper cutting edge, but this meant that once wielded, it would clearly leave very little standing. This certainly proved to be the case, and in the Sophists of the fifth century, it is possible to catch the mood of the time.

As was the case with the pre-Socratics, the Sophists did not represent a coherent school of thought. Their most distinguishing feature was the fact that they taught, indeed, that they were the, 'first professional teachers in Greece.'<sup>212</sup> In matters of doctrine and belief they were seldom dogmatic, and in terms of the syllabus they taught, happily gave over to consumer interest. With their students being young and ambitious Greek men, this meant

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<sup>211</sup> See above, p. 71.

<sup>212</sup> Barker, *Greek Political Theory*, p. 67.

lessons in the art of rhetoric and on the more practical side, in how to swing the political process. Outside their professional duties they represented the whole spectrum of Greek thought at the time, and were largely responsible for disseminating the new advances in philosophy and science. This earned them reproach from men such as Plato, who, in the *Republic*, would roundly condemn them for elevating public opinion and belief to the status of wisdom: 'Each of these private teachers... in fact teaches nothing but the opinions and beliefs the public itself expresses when it crowds into a meeting.'<sup>213</sup> However, it was only the more radical of the sophists, men such as Hippias of Elis and Antiphon, who directly applied the pre-Socratic programme to questions of ethical import. The result was a rampant individualism that laughed to scorn the received wisdom of political discourse. Their attempt to see through the welter of human laws to a pre-Socratic like substratum, far from setting those laws in more intelligible relations to one another, succeeded only in making them appear ridiculous and ineffectual in proportion to their remove, by degrees of abstraction, from the original substratum. Burnet saw the full poverty of this method as lying in its naïve materialism, pointing out that, '...just as cosmological speculation had been forced to deny the reality of the every-day world because it sought for ultimate reality in something corporeal, so the new ethical speculation was soon forced to deny the validity of ordinary morality, and for just the same reason, because the underlying principle it sought was of one kind with the facts it was meant to explain.'<sup>214</sup> Yet this ontological criticism succeeds only in explaining things up to a point. What it does provide is a clear illustration of the effect of seeking out a real 'nature' beneath the conflicting welter of custom and law. But at the same time, what it does not do is explain why the sophist would

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<sup>213</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 493. Cf. Heraclitus, fgt. 104, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, 104: 'What intelligence or understanding have they? They believe the people's bards, and use as their teacher the populace, not knowing that "the majority are bad, and the good are few",'.

<sup>214</sup> John Burnet, 'Law and Nature in Greek Ethics', *International Journal of Ethics*, Vol. 7 No. 3 (Apr., 1897),

choose to adopt this method in the first place. It simply draws attention to the fact that when pondering questions of ethical import, he adopted the methods developed by the pre-Socratics, thus following the divorce between appearance and reality and the production of a naturalistic ethic. The real solution to this matter lies with the Natural Law Idea.

In section 1.7 was produced the following definition of the Natural Law Idea: that it projects into remote futurity the conditions of the present moment. It was developed during a discussion of an exclusively socio-political bearing, namely, the innate attraction of legislative order; but since then, in attempts to draw out the meta-narrative potential of the Augustinian reading of the Fall, the idea's broader application has been hinted at - the 'spring to all human endeavour' of the preface. Within this scheme, the pre-Socratics obviously occupy an important position; their discovery of theoretical reasoning marking a milestone in the development of the Intellectual Conscience. It is, however, important to remember that for them the paradigm of the Natural Law Idea was the city-state itself. Indeed it could be said that political society, whatever its form, represents the purest, pre-scientific embodiment of the idea. For apart from the sociable aspect, the advantage which men acknowledge in human association is the fact that a division of labour possesses the potential to account for far greater tracts of remote futurity than a subsistence lifestyle. Whilst the smallholder remains at the mercy of seasons and tempests, the city-dweller, as the beneficiary of numerous economies of scale, is cushioned against such eventualities. Of course these benefits do not come without costs. Whilst temporality may be drawn tight around the smallholder's plot, he nonetheless enjoys complete responsibility for, and power over, his own destiny. Not so with the city-dweller. He may have succeeded in banishing

temporality to a distant prick on the horizon, but only for having devolved great amounts of responsibility over his life to external agencies. Laws must be obeyed, taxes paid, traditions respected and allegiance given, even, in the case of war, unto death. Such curtailments of his individual liberty are required if the boundaries of the present moment are to be pushed back; but for the majority of men this is a price they are happy to pay, indeed until the pre-Socratics came along, it was a price they were quite unaware of having paid. It was only with the conscious efforts of men such as Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes to try and reproduce outside the walls what they had always known within them that the next stage in the development of the Natural Law Idea could take place. This was its incorporation in a wholly theoretical apparatus designed to evince truth by the same methods that the city-state had evinced security and wellbeing. In other words, to explain things on the hypothesis that they held to fixed laws of order and procession. As the first chapter made clear, Reason cannot operate short of some sort of premise. So being thoroughgoing materialists, the pre-Socratics spun their cosmogonies out as variations on the theme of a substratum; and as was the case with the city-state, justice was the expression of each law holding to its path. In the words of Heraclitus: 'The sun will not transgress his measures; otherwise the Furies, ministers of Justice, will find him out.'<sup>215</sup> As such, when a radical sophist such as Antiphon sought to get at the 'real' nature underlying human custom and law, he did so in order to arrive at an axiom by which to re-found morality, employing much the same method outlined by C. S. Lewis in section 2.4 (and briefly summarised in section 3.1 above). In Antiphon's case, the axiom turned out to be that men, '...should seek the things that promote life, or comfort, and shun the things that involve death, or discomfort.'<sup>216</sup> From here he was able to draw his famous nihilistic

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<sup>215</sup> Heraclitus, fgt, 94, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, p. 31.

<sup>216</sup> Barker, *Greek Political Theory*, p. 77.



conclusions to the effect that, 'A man, therefore, would practise justice in the way most advantageous to himself if, in the presence of witnesses, he held the laws in high esteem, but, in the absence of witnesses, and when he was by himself, he held in high esteem the rules of nature.'<sup>217</sup> It is not difficult to imagine the powerful, iconoclastic alloy that was forged from the combination of sentiments such as these and the cultural data heaped up in the Greek cities by the sweep of Alexander's conquests. It took away from the Greek the crutch of convention and left him to stumble his way through a maze of moral relativism.

It was into this breach that the Stoic ethic stepped, offering a new form of certainty for a new epoch. Ignorance had been bliss: the 'charmed circle of use and wont' had persisted so long as the Greek felt no urge to produce a rationale for its existence. His joy had been in discussing and debating the received wisdom of political discourse; it would take the confluence of those circumstances outlined above to force him to make this wisdom stand to answer at the bar of Reason. That it could not, left him receptive to a new breed of philosophies, all drawing on the burgeoning sense of individualism, and all offering their followers, '...the same good under different names, a self-sufficient, imperturbable tranquility proof against all the shocks and changes of Fortune, the shifting, restless insecurity of human affairs.'<sup>218</sup> These were the so called ethical schools of the Cynics, Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics; but it was only the Stoics who packaged their claim to ethical certitude within a theory of Natural Law. This fact meant that of the four ethical schools, they were best placed to deal with the most pressing concerns of the day. Sabine describes them thus: 'Political thought had... two ideas to make clear and to interweave into a common scheme of values: the idea of the individual, a distinct item of humanity with his

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<sup>217</sup> Barker, *Greek Political Theory*, p. 95.

<sup>218</sup> A. H. Armstrong, *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy*, (London, 1965), p. 115.

purely personal and private life, and the idea of universality, a world-wide humanity in which all are endowed with a common human nature.<sup>219</sup> Of great significance was the fact that, as Fr. Copleston points out<sup>220</sup>, the Stoics largely derived their idea of a Law of Nature from the pre-Socratic, Heracleitus. This made them direct heirs to the pre-Socratic refinement of the Natural Law Idea outlined above. Indeed, Heracleitus' notion of the *Logos* or intelligible Law of the Universe could in many senses be regarded as the highwater mark of the pre-Socratic programme, at least insofar as it has been defined as an attempt to produce a theoretical version of the Natural Law Idea (for Heracleitus was, of course, violently opposed to the strict rationalism of the Milesian philosophers); positing, as it did, a universe pellucid for being ordered to a rational good. So far as can be adduced from his extant writings, true happiness consisted in living in accordance with this law, though the problem, as Heracleitus saw it, was that, '...although the Law is universal, the majority live as if they had understanding peculiar to themselves.'<sup>221</sup> The simile he often uses is that of 'waking and sleeping'. Men who do not make the effort to seek out and follow the Law of the Universe, '...are unaware of what they are doing after they wake, just as they forget what they did while asleep.'<sup>222</sup> Furthermore, Heracleitus seems to equate this law with the will of a sovereign god. First he states the following proposition: 'That which is wise is one; to understand the purpose which steers all things through all things.'<sup>223</sup> Then he adds a theistic qualification: 'That which alone is wise is one; it is willing and unwilling to be called by the name of Zeus.'<sup>224</sup> Finally, he seems to recommend a kind of voluntarist

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<sup>219</sup> G. H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory* (London, 1949), p. 130.

<sup>220</sup> Frederick Copleston, S. J., *A History of Philosophy: Greece and Rome, part II* (New York, Image Books, 1962), p. 124.

<sup>221</sup> Heracleitus, fgt. 2, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, p. 24.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid*, fgt. 1, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, p. 24.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid*, fgt. 41, p. 27.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid*, fgt. 32, p. 27

law: 'To obey the will of one man is also Law.'<sup>225</sup> And of course, as with all the pre-Socratics, Heracleitus held to a materialist metaphysic: 'This ordered universe (*cosmos*), which is the same for all, was not created by one of the gods or of mankind, but it was ever and is and shall be ever-living Fire, kindled in measure and quenched in measure.'<sup>226</sup>

In terms of the Stoic brief – to offer to the individual an unprecedented level of certainty and security – such a metaphysic was too good to pass up. The Stoics quickly adapted Heracleitus' *Logos* to their Cynic-based ethic, turning it into the law of Right Reason, the archetype of all localised and personal systems of law. This was a standard of right action applicable to all men, whether Greek, slave or Barbarian, by virtue of their shared humanity. The contrast with the parochialism of the city-states could not have been more marked. What was good and right and just was no longer an accident of time and place, station or citizenship, but determined by an eternal standard of truth. All men had access to this standard because their souls were composed of the same fiery 'stuff' as the World Soul or Divine Reason, the *logos* that had ordered the world to a rational good. The possibility of virtue was thus open to all men, consisting as it did, of action in accordance with Reason. By this scheme the Stoics succeeded in satisfying Sabine's two criteria. Virtue, security and wellbeing, as a function of right action, had become a matter of personal responsibility, whilst the universal applicability of the Law of Nature supported notions of an 'international brotherhood of man'.

There are clear parallels here with the Augustinian narrative of the Fall. In relation to events in the outside world, life in the Greek city-state could certainly be described as a

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<sup>225</sup> *Heracleitus*, fgt. 33, p. 27.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid*, fgt. 30, p. 26.

state of blissful ignorance; and as was the case with Adam and Eve, this innocence was shattered with the blossoming of the rational faculty and the development of a new hitherto unimagined self consciousness. Where Adam and Eve first conceived themselves apart from God, in the Greek's case, it was a question of conceiving himself apart from the constitution of the city-state. His freedom and his identity were no longer a function of his citizenship, but were now a product of his will. As was the case with Adam and Eve, this change issued in an immediate and debilitating loss of certainty. The heavily prescribed routine of the polis and the unquestioned status of its laws and customs had gone a long way towards loosening the grip of temporality. But when these stumbled then fell at the bar of Reason, the Greek was left to try and recreate outside the walls the certainty he had enjoyed within them. That this could never be achieved in the same manner as before was obvious; for once lost, innocence can never be regained. In that instant, the present moment ceased from being a source of comfort and wellbeing and came instead to symbolize his dislocation within a hostile and mysterious world. In relation to the acuity of this predicament, the appeal of Stoic Natural Law Theory was obvious. By advancing the ideal of a legally circumscribed Cosmos, the Stoics took the edge out of traditional notions of Fate and Eternity. As Cicero proclaimed, '...we must now conceive of this whole universe as one commonwealth of which both gods and men are members.'<sup>227</sup> That the Natural Law Idea was at work here is obvious when it is considered that for the Stoic, law was merely an expression or a quality of Reason. It was the outward form of the stability of meaning that permeated the universe from the Divine Reason downwards. To return to Cicero:

...most learned men have determined to begin with Law, and it would seem that they are right, if, according to their definition, Law is the highest Reason,

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<sup>227</sup> Cicero, *De Legibus*, tr. Clinton Keyes, Loeb Class. Lib. (Cambridge Mass., 1968), i, 23.



implanted in Nature, which commands what ought to be done and forbids the opposite. This Reason, when firmly fixed and fully developed in the mind, is Law... Law is a natural force; it is the mind and reason of the intelligent man, the standard by which justice and injustice are measured.<sup>228</sup>

Of course, Stoic Natural Law Theory was only a more explicit version of what had gone before. Its genius lay in awakening man to the criterion of truth within him, so that he might confidently take upon himself the responsibility for goodness, justice and ultimately, temporality, that had previously been devolved, in great measure, to the constitution of the city-state.

### 3.3 The Political Animal

As many of his commentators have pointed out, Augustine considered the existence of political society the surest indication of man's fallen condition. Unlike Plato and Aristotle, who believed that man was a political animal by nature, Augustine believed he was one by necessity. In relation to his sinful condition, the State was a necessary, external imposition. In the preface, a desire was stated to append to the received orthodoxy of this interpretation a further dimension: that for Augustine, the State was not only remedial in relation to human sinfulness but also a metaphysical fact. This offered a chance of reinterpreting what is ordinarily taken to be the least satisfactory element in his socio-political thought: his dogged commitment to the Doctrine of Original Sin. Within the social science discourses, Augustine's narrative of the Fall is invoked only insofar as it is necessary to explain his intransigent views on human sinfulness. Whilst his pessimistic psychology of man has long been respected, it is usually felt that his theology of man goes too far in its condemnation

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<sup>228</sup> Cicero, *De Legibus*, tr. Clinton Keyes, Loeb Class. Lib. (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), i, 18-19.

of human nature.<sup>229</sup> By re-assessing the significance of Augustine's Doctrine of the Fall from an epistemological point of view, it is hoped that the gap between these two elements in his thought might be closed by showing that both contribute in equal measure to an intellectually solvent account of secularity. In fact, the method employed has not been unlike the Hegelian dialectic – elements of thesis and antithesis being resolved in a higher synthesis. In this case, the 'higher synthesis' has been a set of metaphysical first principles emanating from certain epistemological limitations. In essence, these first principles describe the nature of man's restriction to the present moment; the most pressing consequence of the Fall. By pursuing this line of attack it has hopefully been shown that the question of sin is something of a red herring in Augustinian thought. When it is considered that any action performed outside of God's Will is technically a sin, then from an analytical point of view, it becomes a useless concept. In light of this, it is felt far more beneficial to regard sin as an expression of selfwilling, and as such, the desire to survive apart from God's Will. This effectively allows for a positive rather than a negative assessment of the State's remedial role; that it is less imposed upon men than imposed by them as a way of attaining to a measure of Horizontal Eternity. Augustine's narrative of the Fall provides, then, a number of important insights into political behaviourism. Taken together, it might not unfairly be said that they constitute the limits to political philosophy. In the second chapter, there was opportunity to allude to many of them; what follows is a more direct treatment.

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<sup>229</sup> The terms 'psychology of man' and 'theology of man' are of course borrowed from Deane's *The Social Political Thought of St. Augustine*, where they head up two chapters; though in this instance I do not intend any reference to their content. For an excellent appraisal of modern Realism's debts to St. Augustine, see Michael Loriaux, 'The Realists and St. Augustine: Skepticism, Psychology, and Moral Action in International Relations Thought', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36 No. 4 (Dec., 1992),

### 1. *The difference Between the Moral and the Intellectual Conscience*

Much clarity is gained by marking a separation of the two consciences. This becomes an obvious necessity when one considers how radically they differ at the point of operation. Most importantly, this exercise clears away the confusion that surrounds statements of the type ' $\chi$  stands to Reason'; where  $\chi$  is a moral proposition. Such statements, though very comforting, are false. The fact is that moral propositions stand to Conscience, not Reason. A great deal turns on this difference. To state that the proposition 'to kill a man is wrong' stands to Reason, is to grant it *a priori* status. In other words, the implication is that it has held true for all time. But surely in such an instance one is guilty of appealing to a criterion of truth different to that ordinarily associated with Reason? For what is in fact being appealed to is universality of belief, which is very different from being able to prove that the proposition is true in itself; and it is just this latter type of proof which Reason demands, the type of proof (apparently) satisfied only in the physical and mathematical sciences. However, this should not be confused with the issues of proof surrounding that oft quoted syllogism 'all men are mortal; Socrates is a man; therefore Socrates is mortal'. In that example, the issue is the impossibility of empirical verification. Until such time as the world has run its course and all men have indeed proved mortal, no-one has a right to presume the truth of the defining clause 'all men are mortal'. However, the problem with moral propositions is quite different. Namely that there exists no conceivable experiment by which to verify the truth of the proposition. The implication here is that objective knowledge can only emerge through experimental (empirical being a subset) verification. It follows that moral propositions must always be regarded as a class of purely subjective knowledge. This conclusion introduces the important question of what is actually mean

when it is said 'χ stands to Conscience'. There seems little more that such a statement can imply other than conviction. Under interrogation, the only appeal could be to various abstractions of authority: 'it is what my brother/parents/ teachers/society/God taught me to do'. And a clever interrogator would quickly reduce these authorities to examples of conventions or conveniences, and what is more, serving interests other than one's own.

Yet at the same time there seems little point in denying that a man can hold an irrational belief with just the same degree of certitude that he can hold a rational one. In fact, it could quite successfully be argued that irrational beliefs hold by far the greater sway over men's lives and actions, as in the case of martyrs going to the stake. It seems, then, that men are prepared to hold to two markedly different criteria of truth with equal tenacity. The first is that of objective, the second that of subjective truth. Yet why the attempts to confuse them, to claim objective status for subjective truths?

The simple answer is that the kudos lies with objective truth, for only it possesses the capacity to push back the boundaries of the present moment. In contrast, subjective truth exists only in the present moment. If it is claimed that a moral proposition stands to Conscience, then what is meant is that said proposition will be believed by an infinite number of men in an infinite number of present moments. The present moments are not, if the expression may be excused, tampered with themselves. In no way is an attempt made to alter the effects of temporality. This, however, is exactly what objective truth seeks to do. It aims to inflate the present moment until it literally fills eternity. What is true now has to be true then. If β means some one thing in this present moment, then it must mean the same thing in the next present moment *ad infinitum*. And what is this if not the truth of



logic? A logical relationship merely transports a finite property, or finite body of properties, through a series of present moments. But this of course begs the question: is truth a quality of the 'some one thing' in the present moment, or does it refer to its subsequent extension through time? Is truth the fact that  $\beta$  equals  $\alpha$  now, or is it the fact that if  $\beta$  equals  $\alpha$  now, then that relationship will still be found to hold in ten minutes or even ten years time? Perhaps now it is easier to see the importance of distinguishing between the two consciences. For whereas moral propositions can only stand true in the present moment, factual propositions can only do so either side of it. The truth of the proposition 'a ball thrown in the air will eventually come down to earth' (leaving aside the problem of induction) could be proved either with reference to experiments conducted in the past, such as those of Sir Isaac Newton, or by a new, future experiment. The point being that short of such appeals to verification, its truth in the present moment remains, so to speak, suspended. This is obviously not the case with moral propositions of the type 'it is wrong to kill a man'. Their truth is apprehended immediately, and it is binding without any recourse to processes of verification. Yet the fact remains that within the bounds of socio-political discourse, this type of certainty is of little use. What men require in these instances is precisely the type of truth that can 'push back the boundaries of the present moment'. And so, in the name of metaphysical necessity, moral propositions are made to stand to Reason – are turned from inexplicable apprehensions into *a priori* premises. This is why it was hinted at in section 3.1 above that in terms of Augustine's meta-narrative account of the human condition, Natural Law Theory might quite profitably be viewed as the paradigm of ethical speculation.

## 2. *Broadening the Compass of Natural Law Theory*

Ordinarily, Natural Law Theory is granted a very narrow compass. This is because those who analyse it make no separation between the moral and the intellectual conscience. As such, they view the issues at stake as solely epistemological rather than metaphysical. This blinds them to the similarities at work, to the fact that Natural Law Theorists are guilty of the same crimes against the present moment as their debunkers. As Felix E. Oppenheim makes clear:

All the proponents of the Natural Law thesis agree that there are normative statements in the area of law and politics which are demonstrably true or false; that there are certain kinds of political behaviour that can be proven to be morally right or wrong; that there are political institutions which are objectively just or unjust... The natural law thesis does not therefore belong to normative ethics; it consists of assertions about the truth or falsity of normative statements, rather than of the statements themselves.<sup>230</sup>

The point Oppenheim is trying to make is that normative debate in the spheres of ethics and politics is not, as some Natural Law Theorists would claim<sup>231</sup>, denied the Relativist, but rather that he must justify his normative pronouncements with claims other than to their objective validity.<sup>232</sup> However, this very important difference is underscored by a far more striking similarity. Namely, that both sides, not satisfied with a moral proposition standing to Conscience in the present moment, subject it to criteria of truth that would establish or disestablish its validity for eternity. To both the Natural Law Theorist and the

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<sup>230</sup> Felix E. Oppenheim, 'Natural Law Theis: Affirmation or Denial?', *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (Mar., 1957), p. 42.

<sup>231</sup> In his paper, Oppenheim cites Emil Brunner as an example..

<sup>232</sup> As Maurizio Viroli points out in *The Idea of the Republic* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 62: 'There is no need of absolute moral truths founded on some revelation to give meaning to life and to commitment. The truths are the ones that each of us feel to be moral truths. A profound conviction, although not absolute, can make someone act with strength and consistency comparable to those of someone who lives by religious inspiration.'

Relativist, morality, as it is discoverable by men in moments of introspection, represents a substantial incongruity. It calls for nothing other than obedience in the present moment, and does not invite understanding. To neither side can this appear satisfactory, for men no longer live 'in the holy carelessness of the eternal *now*'.<sup>233</sup> As such, if this crisis is to be resolved, then morality must somehow be taken out of its straightened context and viewed on an eternal stage. This sees both the Natural Law Theorists and their debunkers attempting to make moral propositions stand to Reason, and as was said in section 2.2 above, the Positivist approach is by far the more honest of the two, if only because it dares follow the intellectual conscience through to its logical conclusion. This was, after all, the point Augustine had to reach before he could appreciate the necessity of having to believe before he could understand (and as Wittgenstein concluded his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.'<sup>234</sup>). Only from such a point onwards could faith effect the crossing of the bar; only having first uncovered the full poverty of Reason could moral propositions appear so incongruous and so immutable as to be the result of Divine revelation.

In contrast, the Natural Law Theorist, by confusing apprehension for understanding, sees no reason to so delimit the scope of his knowledge. The findings of his moral conscience, corroborated with those of others, are taken to be proof that the world has been ordered by a mind as rational and benign as his. Yet as the Augustinian meta-narrative shows, he labours under a catastrophic misapprehension; for the world that men inhabit is a world of their own creation: 'For all the arrangements that are in force among men. Because they have agreed among themselves that they should be in force, are human institutions; and of

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<sup>233</sup> See above, p. 18.

<sup>234</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus-Logico Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London,

these, some are matters of superfluity and luxury, some of convenience and necessity.'<sup>235</sup> The institutions, practices, laws and conventions of this world all work to the agenda of ensuring that future present moments will resemble past present moments. An ordered, reasonable, pellucid world is the peculiar fabrication of the Fallen cast of mind, and as Augustine made clear on countless occasions, God did not mean for there to be political society; men were not created to have dominion over each other. From this perspective the (conditioned) position of the Natural Law Theorist is rather like a colour blind man who having got to Heaven, tries to convince God that the grass on earth is in fact red. But then this topsy-turvy state of affairs is inevitable when it is considered that men come into this world having never known God. Augustine would have agreed with Feuerbach's dictum that, 'theology is anthropology'.<sup>236</sup> As he understood it, men, '...because they do not imagine God, Whom they cannot imagine, but themselves instead of Him, they compare not God, but themselves, and not with Him, but with themselves.'<sup>237</sup> In fact the germ of this idea can be traced all the way back to Xenophanes of Colophon, writing in the sixth century B.C., who declared that, '...if oxen (and horses) and lions had hands or could draw with hands and create works of art like those made by men, horses would draw pictures of gods like horses, and oxen of gods like oxen, and they would make the bodies (of their gods) in accordance with the form that each species itself possesses.'<sup>238</sup>

Consumed by the Natural Law Idea when apprehending the moral conscience, the Natural Law Theorist imagines first a rational universe, then a rational god. In *The Elements of*

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1981), p. 74.

<sup>235</sup> *Contra Faustum Manicheum*, XXII, 47.

<sup>236</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, tr. George Eliot, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York, Harper & Row Publishers, 1957), p. 270.

<sup>237</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, XII, 18. Cf. XIX, 14: [man] ...has need of divine guidance, which he may obey with confidence, and of divine aid, so that he may obey it freely. Otherwise, in his zeal for knowledge, he may

*Moral Theology*, R. C. Mortimer began Chapter V, entitled 'Conscience', by echoing just such a sentiment: 'As the objective standard or norm of morality is the Will of God, as that is perceived by right reason, so the subjective norm for each individual is his own conscience.'<sup>239</sup> As Cicero declared, 'Law is the highest Reason, implanted in Nature'.<sup>240</sup> There is a great irony here, especially when the close historical relationship between Natural Law Theory and Christian morality is taken into account; for between the Positivist and the Natural Law Theorist, between, say, a Wittgenstein and an Aquinas, who shows the greatest reverence for the immutability of moral propositions, that is, of truth in the present moment? It is arguable that Wittgenstein's silence is the more powerful of the two responses. Indeed it all harks back to Bobbio's statement, quoted in section 2.2: 'For me everything is so human that I even believe that religion itself is a product of humanity... Can you imagine the Ten Commandments in relation to the immensity of space? You would have your work cut out, if you tried to show that there is order in the universe.'<sup>241</sup>

The lesson seems clear enough: the promptings men receive through their Conscience should not be confused with the ethical systems and moral categories that result from them. The former are gifts of God; the latter products of the Natural Law Idea. After all, as was pointed out in section 3.2 above, the presumptions concerning law and order which were projected by the pre-Socratic philosophers upon the Cosmos were those they had inherited from the nature of political society. Perhaps, then, the single most important insight to emerge from the Augustinian narrative of the Fall is that rational thought itself, i.e. thought apart from God, is a product of the Fallen cast of mind; and that political

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fall into some deadly error because of the infirmity of the human mind.'

<sup>238</sup> Xenophanes, fgt. 15, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, p. 22.

<sup>239</sup> R. C. Mortimer, *The Elements of Moral Theology* (London, Adam & Charles Black, 1947).

<sup>240</sup> See above, p. 101.

society is the result of its interaction with an immutable and indispensable body of moral propositions whose absence would render life, in those infamous words of Hobbes', 'nasty, brutish and short'.<sup>242</sup> There is thus no such thing as an objective thought; every movement of the mind is charged with a remedial dimension and truth itself, is a function of verification through time. To live in the 'eternal *now*' of the present moment requires the abandonment of all the safeguards, both religious, philosophical and institutional, dreamt up to arrest the encroachment of a paralysing uncertainty. This is why Augustine repeatedly preached that at all costs, the individual pilgrim must avoid being conformed to the ways of the world. But by this he did not just mean the ways of the flesh, the outward sins and vices, but rather the ways of the Fleshly Sense<sup>243</sup> itself:

But Your Word , O God, is the fountain of eternal life, and it does not pass away. Therefore, this departure of the soul is restrained by Your Word, when it is said to us, "Do not be conformed to this world," so that the earth may bring forth in the fountain of life a living soul, a soul continent in Your Word through the evangelists, by imitating the imitators of Your Christ.<sup>244</sup>

This was an uncompromising call not to arms but to defeat, to a present moment in which the *is* need never be qualified by an *ought*, with there being no possibility of a perspective apart from God's. And as was shown in section 2.2 above, Augustine eventually came to realise that the example of Christ's life to the disciple was in His unquestioning obedience to his Father's Will, which is the crux of the matter. Thus, if Fallen Reality is to be forsaken, then out must go Conceptual Certainty and the fabrication of truth; and when this *ought* has been removed only the *is* remains: the voluntarist law of God's literal Word.

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<sup>241</sup> Norberto Bobbio and Maurizio Viroli, *The Idea of the Republic* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 61.

<sup>242</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathon*

<sup>243</sup> See section 1.6.

<sup>244</sup> *Confessiones*, XIII, 21.

## **Chapter Four**

# **Conclusions**

The time has arrived to assess the impact of this thesis on Augustine's position within the Natural Law Tradition. In section 2.4 above, it was explained that the orthodox view accords Augustine a very prominent role indeed, as none other than the thinker responsible for having personalised the Stoic Divine Reason, making it the sovereign Will of God. At the time this was questioned, as the shared rationality between God and man presupposed by this view, indeed presupposed by all theistic Natural Law Theories, contradicts the epistemological conclusions from Augustine's narrative of the Fall. Why this was felt this to be the case should now be a lot clearer, for as chapter three shows, 'rationality', as a predicative value, is an irreducibly fallen concept. It carries with it a raft of presuppositions, all of them remedial in relation to the temporalised present moment. This objection aside, there is little question that Augustine's writings accommodate a solid Natural Law Theory. All the important elements are there. One finds a, '...law called the

highest reason, which ought always to be obeyed, the law through which evil men deserve a wretched life and good men a happy one, and through which, finally, the law... called temporal is rightly passed and rightly changed.<sup>245</sup> This is a truly universal, eternal law, from which men derive, through the right use of Reason, the immutable principles of justice: 'One man in the east understands justice, another man in the west understands justice; is justice which the one understands a different thing from that which the other understands? In body they are far apart, and yet they have the eyes of their minds on one object.'<sup>246</sup> And as was pointed out in section 3.1 above, in terms of the the Augustinian meta-narrative, there is every reason for regarding Natural Law Theory as the paradigm of ethical speculation; for it provides a perfect example of that alloy of Grace and the Natural Law Idea which is the one moderating influence left Fallen man. However, as Deane points out, unlike Aquinas, Augustine never insisted that the validity of temporal laws should depend on their moral content.<sup>247</sup> This fact was, of course, the radical feature of the Thomist system. H. L. A. Hart summed it as comprising a, '...a twofold contention: first, that there are certain principles of true morality or justice, discoverable by human reason without the aid of revelation even though they have a divine origin; secondly that man-made laws which conflict with these principles are not valid law.'<sup>248</sup> But of course, the major difference between the Augustinian and the Thomist systems of Natural Law is the fact that the former is only *primus inter pares* - one of countless possible comings together of the moral and the intellectual conscience. For outside of the Pilgrim City, all human endeavour forms a single piece; all men are engaged in fashioning replacements for the Paradisial state of being, of obtaining, by whatever means, to some degree of Horizontal

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<sup>245</sup> *De Libero Arbitrio*, 1, VI.

<sup>246</sup> *In Ioannis Evangelium*, XXXV.

<sup>247</sup> Herbert A. Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (Columbia, 1963), p. 90-91.

<sup>248</sup> H. L. A. Hart, *The Concept of Law* (Oxford, 1961), p. 152.



Eternity. And whether this is achieved by aid of religious beliefs, philosophical precepts or political institutions is really of very little consequence; for citizenship of the Pilgrim City is solely dependent on subjection to a voluntarist form of law, of perfect obedience to the Literal Word of God. It follows from this that any scheme of Divine guidance which makes provision for an independent authority for the verification of revealed truth fails to move much beyond the premises of Natural Law Theory. This is an avowedly bold statement to make, but one based entirely on the epistemological line laid down by Augustine in his narrative of the Fall. Perhaps it would be best if a suitable example could be provided.

In 1973, Professor Packer first published *Knowing God*; it has since gone on to become a modern classic. In its final chapters it provides a clear outline of the acceptable limits to God's communication with His rational creation. To start with, Packer affirms that, '...guidance is a reality intended for, and promised to, every child of God.'<sup>249</sup> Yet, 'Earnest Christians seeking guidance often go wrong about it... Their basic mistake is to think of guidance as essentially *inward prompting by the Holy Spirit, apart from the written Word*.'<sup>250</sup> It is clearly Packer's intention to treat the 'written Word' as the primary check upon spurious interpretations of God's Will. Naturally, the outdated socio-historical context of Scripture proves a severe restriction on the modern applicability of said check. It proves particularly inadequate in the face of what Packer terms 'vocational choices', which are, '...between competing options, all of which in themselves appear lawful and good.'<sup>251</sup> Examples Packer gives include questions of marriage and career choice. The difficulty with such choices is that both options are morally credible, such that an unambiguous 'either-or' answer is required: it is not the case that one of the options could be rejected on

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<sup>249</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1974), p. 212.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*

a matter of principle, falling outside a moral framework. Clearly, ‘...these problems cannot be solved by a direct application of Biblical teaching. All one can do from Scripture is circumscribe the lawful possibilities between which the choice has to be made.’<sup>252</sup> Thus the written Word serves to delineate a morally acceptable arena for action, the specifics of which have yet to be determined. So what happens next? Well, ‘...just because Scripture cannot decide one’s choice directly, the factor of God-given prompting and inclination, whereby one is drawn to commit oneself to one set of responsibilities, rather than another, and finds one’s mind settled in peace as one contemplates them, becomes decisive.’<sup>253</sup> The checking action of the written Word is, on this account, its ability to filter through only those choices that conform to Biblically coherent patterns of morality: ‘The basic form of divine guidance, therefore, is the presentation to us of positive ideals as guidelines for all our living.’<sup>254</sup> In effect, the written Word functions to rationally circumscribe the final decree of God’s Will, such that, ‘Only within the limits of *this* [written] guidance does God prompt us inwardly.’<sup>255</sup> It is thus not possible for God to communicate with one outside this Biblical paradigm of truth. Scripture, notwithstanding its outdated context, conveys a moral framework that stands to Reason. This becomes the litmus test of God’s voice; and to not put God’s voice to the test, indeed, ‘The idea of a life in which the inward voice of the Spirit decides and directs everything... leads only to frantic bewilderment or lunacy.’<sup>256</sup> In effect, one is being explicitly warned against unthinking action on a voluntarist conception of law. It is unequivocally ruled out on the premise that it falls outside of any rationally credible test or paradigm of truth.

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<sup>251</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 212.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid*, p. 213.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid*, p. 214.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid*, p. 215.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid*, p. 215.

Against the received orthodoxy of this position, the terms of this thesis stand out in sharp relief. To begin with, Vertical Eternity appears inimical to the careful qualifications of Packer's 'written Word'. The term sees truth as a quality of God's literal Word, not something existing independent of it. By Packer's reckoning, Scripture mediates, '...positive ideals as guidelines for all our living'<sup>257</sup>; in other words, a moral-rational context antecedent to the inward prompting of the Holy Spirit, and whose precepts it can never contradict. As he makes clear: 'The Spirit leads within the limits which the Word sets, not beyond them.'<sup>258</sup> In conclusion: 'It is false piety, super-supernaturalism of an unhealthy and pernicious sort, that demands inward impressions that have no rational base...'<sup>259</sup> It would appear that this 'rational base' levels both man and God on a single, horizontal plane of understanding. But more to the point, does this epistemological stance, the 'shared rationality between God and man', have a metaphysical consequence? Indeed it does; God may have the advantage of an all-seeing eternal perspective, but He can never act out of turn: 'So never expect to be guided to marry an unbeliever, or elope with a married person, as long as 1 Corinthians 7:39 and the seventh commandment stand!'<sup>260</sup> Thus, by Packer's scheme, God cannot lay up any surprises in the future. He cannot, for instance, command anything so irrational as building an Ark or sacrificing a son, or indeed, as was the case with Hosea, marrying a prostitute.<sup>261</sup> As Christians, it is possible to rest safe in the knowledge that the shared rationality between God and man means a separation of degree, not kind. Between the ethical variables of eternity and temporality,

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<sup>257</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 214.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid*, p. 215.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid*, p. 215.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid*, p. 215.

<sup>261</sup> Hosea 1:2: 'When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, "Go, take to yourself an adulteress wife and children of unfaithfulness...'

Reason stands as a reassuring constant. On this reading, the 'shared rationality between God and man' implies the logical precedence of the rational element over both Creator and created, and what is this if not the root of Natural Law Theory?

It is worth recalling again the words with which the third chapter was ended: 'if Fallen Reality is to be forsaken, then out must go Conceptual Certainty and the fabrication of truth. And when this *ought* has been removed only the *is* remains: the voluntarist law of God's literal Word'. What Packer's scheme of Divine Guidance shows is that so long as the slightest semblance of an *ought* is retained, theology reduces to politics, or at least to a very special form of ethics. This leaves this thesis to answer for having so delimited the Natural Law Tradition as to make it less a species than a genus: the umbrella under which all left outside the Pilgrim City may shelter. Very briefly then, if the Natural Law Tradition is interpreted in its narrow sense, as denoting the career of a particular type of legal theory based on Value-Cognitivism, then there is every reason to include Augustine within it. However, if it is taken in its broad sense, as referring to all theories and belief systems aspiring to a measure of Horizontal Eternity, then Augustine very obviously stands outside it. As always with Augustine, it is a question of perspective.

Is it true that Augustine's view of the Fall does real harm to his argument, or is it consistent with his logical mind? Perhaps this is where the real divide between Reason and Belief is uncovered. We tend not to question that what prevents us from going along fully with Augustine, is an intellectual regard for Reason. The question that that this thesis has tried to raise is if it is less to do with Reason that dictates our response to Augustine's 'flawed'

argument, and more to do with our essential Belief, that is so profoundly at odds with his.

A Belief that in the light of temporality appears alarmingly naïve.

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