

Augustine's letters:  
*negotiating absence*



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#### ABSTRACT

Reading Augustine's letters as a collection proves useful for understanding his theory *in practice* of the significance of others—the moral status of love for others—particularly since the conditions of the letter (absence, writing) engender expressions of lack and desire for the other. With Augustine, this desire is frequently in tension with his Neoplatonic and Christian philosophical commitments which valorise the Creator over the creature, universally-directed love over private love, and the soul over the body. Following these tensions between theory and practice chronologically through the letters shows his changing responses to the significance of the other, in terms of their bodily presence and their individual interior experience. Moreover, Augustine's developing theory of the afterlife as a place of continued embodiment and the fulfilment of intimacy corresponds to and models Augustine's responses to absence and longing in this life.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

## Augustine's works

<i>Conf.</i>	<i>Confessiones (Confessions)</i>
<i>De civ. dei</i>	<i>De civitate dei (City of God)</i>
<i>De trin.</i>	<i>De trinitate (On the Trinity)</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae (Letters)</i>

## Other authors

<i>Ep. mor.</i>	Seneca's <i>Epistulae morales ad Lucilium</i> ( <i>Moral Epistles to Lucilius</i> )
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## INTRODUCTION

### Why the letters?

How that letter rouses us to seek you when it presents you to our sight! For it makes you both visible and desirable. After all, the more it in some sense reveals your presence, the less does it allow us to endure your absence. All of us love you in it and long to be loved by you.

—Augustine, *Ep.* 27

Derrida admits in his ‘Circumfession’ that as a youth he read Augustine out of love for writers ‘quick to tears.’<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Augustine frequently did philosophy and theology with one foot anchored in personal, ‘pre-philosophical experience’: to describe it with John Caputo and Michael Scanlon’s phrase, a ‘passionate phenomenology *avant la lettre* of the temporality of the heart’s restless love of God.’<sup>2</sup> And perhaps this attention to affective experience and sensitivity to gaps in relationships is one reason why contemporary readers still wade through his works, or at least his *Confessions*.<sup>3</sup> Admittedly, I first took note of Augustine’s letters not for his tears, but for his almost inordinate delight – his delight in a letter, of all things, and in its writer, whom he had never met. And such a letter! As he describes above, it makes his correspondent somehow present and lovable, yet tantalisingly absent. It evokes joy, but also longing, with that sense of incompleteness. Sometime later I would find the tears as well, widow tears familiar with the pain of absence.

What is happening in these letters, and in Augustine, the letter writer? How does this unconcealed longing for another fit with the Augustine of the *Confessions*, the Augustine so careful of the temptation to idolatry that the friend or lover poses? For the great relational principle of the *Confessions* is to love God first and others ‘in him.’ But that formulation leaves many questions unanswered. In such a love is there a place for another’s body? Or for longing for intimacy with another? Is there even a place for love of the other as a unique individual, or are we rather to love God ‘behind’ her? Perhaps, I thought, the letters – concerned as they are with bodily presence and intimacy of minds – may nuance our understanding of Augustine’s attitude toward loving the other.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Circumfession,’ trans. Geoffrey Bennington in *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 118.

<sup>2</sup> John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, ‘Introduction: The Postmodern Augustine,’ in *Augustine and Postmodernism: Confessions and Circumfession*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2005), 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Augustine and Postmodernism* (cited above) records the proceedings of a 2001 conference discussing ‘the “repetition” of Augustine’s *Confessions* in Derrida’s “Circumfession,” in Heidegger, Lyotard, Ricoeur, and Arendt.’

### The letters

But what precisely am I referring to by ‘Augustine’s letters’? Currently, the collection registers 249 letters written by Augustine, 49 written to Augustine, and 9 written by and for others but of some relevance to him. To be sure, these are not all the letters that he wrote, let alone had copied. After Augustine’s death, his biographer Possidius made a list of the letters, which are not yet all accounted for. Little is known with certainty about the collection’s original publication. Augustine was aware that many of his letters would have a wider audience than the addressee, whether or not he wished it,<sup>4</sup> and even encouraged the copying of some of the letters, particularly those dealing with theology or philosophy. It is likely that the letters were first published (i.e., copied) in sets: his philosophical correspondence with a good friend Nebridius, for example, and his correspondences with Paulinus and Jerome.<sup>5</sup> Though the earliest extant manuscript contains only 88 letters, by the seventeenth century, the Maurist edition included most of those we have currently: 270 letters. Migne’s edition of the late nineteenth century added three letters and a fragment. A. Goldbacher added an additional three in his critical editions that are still in use (1895-1923). Most recently, Johannes Divjak’s landmark find resulted in the publication of 31 new letters in 1981.

The content of the letters is difficult to generalise. The letters range from the briefest of paragraphs to full-blown treatises, including nine which Augustine reviews as ‘books’ (*Epp.* 54-55, 102, 140, 147, 166-167, 185, 187) in his *Retractiones*.<sup>6</sup> Wilfrid Parsons, the first to translate the entire collection into English, categorises them by subject as theological, polemical, exegetical, ecclesiastical, moral, philosophical, historical and familiar. Familiar is notably last: Parsons notes that the letters contain few indications of Augustine’s personal inclinations, besides ‘here and there his regret that he cannot have more personal contact with his dear friends.’<sup>7</sup>

That statement may help place my study into context, for such personal expressions are my focus. Though they form a small percentage of the total content, these expressions frequently frame the didactic or business content of the letters. And in a small number of the letters, Augustine lingers over these themes. This set of letters, forming the core of my study, can be grouped into three categories, roughly corresponding to my three chapters: letters to Augustine’s close friends, Nebridius, Severus and Evodius; letters to influential members of the Church whom he would never meet, Paulinus, Jerome, Pammachius and Darius; and, finally, letters to four widows or single women, Italica, Fabiola, Proba and Sapida. Though this small set of letters is most significant for my reading, I will draw relevant excerpts, which are most commonly found in the greetings and closings,

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<sup>4</sup> *Ep.* 162.1: ‘In addition there is the fact that we must bear in mind that it is not only you and persons like you who are going to read what we write, but there are of course also those persons who are endowed with a mind that is less sharp and less well trained but who are carried along by a desire to know our writings, whether with a friendly or a hostile intention, so that they can by no means be kept from them. You see how much care in writing one who ponders these questions ought to have, especially concerning topics so great that even great minds struggle with them.’

<sup>5</sup> Robert B. Eno, ‘*Epistulae*,’ in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, eds. A. Fitzgerald, John Cavadini, Marianne Djuuth, James J. O’Donnell and Frederick Van Fleteren (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 306.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Wilfrid Parsons, introduction to *Letters*, Vol. 1, by Saint Augustine, trans. Wilfrid Parsons (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1951), xii-xiii.



from the entire collection. But before proceeding to discuss my own approach to the letters, I ought to give you a sense of the scholarly work that has already been done.

*Previous scholarship*

Perhaps because the corpus of letters is so unwieldy, scholars have generally used them piecemeal to support broader theses about Augustine's life or thought. The exception is a group of works, largely dissertations, from German and American scholars of the early twentieth century. In Germany, Wilhelm Thimme produced the biographically-focused *Augustin: ein Lebens und Charakterbild auf Grund seiner Briefe* in 1910, while Gisbert Beyerhaus focused on the philosophical elements of the letters in 'Philosophische Voraussetzungen in Augustins Briefen' (1926), and Venantius Nolte on Augustine's ideal of friendship, *Augustins Freundschaftsideal in seinen Briefen: unter Hereinbeziehung seiner Jugendfreundschaften gemäss den Philosophischen Schriften und den Confessionen* (1936). In the United States, several dissertations focused either on Augustine's use of language or the historical interest of the letters. Thus, we have Wilfrid Parsons's *A Study of the Vocabulary and Rhetoric of the Letters of Saint Augustine* (1923), Julia Stokes's *Conditional sentences in letters of Saint Augustine* (1931), and Anthony Blase Paluszack's *The subjunctive in the letters of Saint Augustine* (1935), on the linguistic side, and R. Pierce Beaver's *Roman Society in North Africa in the Age of Saint Augustine: A Study Based on the Letters of the Bishop of Hippo* (1933) and M. E. Keenan's *The life and times of St. Augustine as revealed in his Letters* (1935) on the historical side.

Since then, Johannes Divjak's publication of 31 previously unknown letters in 1981 renewed some scholarly interest in the letters. In the 1980s, various scholars published papers discussing the implications of the new letters, which proved largely of historical significance. *Les lettres de saint Augustin découvertes par Johannes Divjak* (1983) features presentations from a colloquium on the subject in 1982. The 1990s saw various studies on Augustine's correspondences with individuals. Carolinne White and Ralph Hennings looked to Jerome, producing the studies *The Correspondence (394-419) between Jerome and Augustine* and *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Augustinus und Hieronymus* respectively. In a shorter essay, Yves-Marie Duval focused on 'La correspondance entre Augustin et Pélage.' The decade also saw Frank Morgenstern's valuable reference work for studying the letters: *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus von Hippo: Prosopographische, sozial- und ideologiegeschichtliche Untersuchungen*. In the last decade, the trend has been to focus on the political and disciplinary aspects of the letters. Daniel Edward Doyle investigated *The bishop as disciplinarian in the letters of St. Augustine* (2002), while R. J. Dodaro wrote his dissertation on *Political ethics in the letters of Augustine to public officials* (2004). The theme of discipline continues in Pierre Sarr's article, 'Administration et discipline ecclésiales dans l'Afrique chrétienne d'après quelques lettres de saint Augustin' and Jennifer Ebbeler's forthcoming monograph, *Disciplining Christians: Correction and Community in Augustine's Letters* (September 2011).

All this to say that studies focusing on the letters are generally concerned with social history, with the early exceptions of Beyerhaus and Nolte. Meanwhile, the scholarly interest in the epistolary novel of the 1960s through 80s has produced some notable studies of the letter genre. Janet Altman's *Epistolarity: approaches to a form* (1982) was followed by two feminist studies by Linda Kauffman.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Discourses of desire: gender, genre, and epistolary fictions* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); *Special delivery: epistolary modes in modern fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

Altman's exploration of six polarities of the letter form highlights the 'paradox and contradiction' inherent in the genre. Of particular relevance to my project is the 'bridge/barrier' polarity: the intermediary role that can highlight either the letter's ability to bridge absence or the realities of distance and even estrangement.<sup>9</sup> Carolinne White takes up this aspect of letters in her article on fourth and fifth-century Christian correspondences: 'Friendship in Absence: Some Patristic Views' (1999). In it, she identifies some common attitudes toward friendship in absence among the correspondents: a strong appreciation for spiritual friendship, yet a realistic awareness of the trials of absence, and often positive interpretations of those hardships in light of their theology.<sup>10</sup> Shortly after, Catherine Conybeare gave us a more in-depth study of one of the correspondents that White had touched on, Paulinus of Nola. In her work, *Paulinus Noster: Self and Symbols in the Letters of Paulinus of Nola* (2000), she reads Paulinus's letters with interest in their philosophical/theological and relational aspects, including the dynamics of presence and absence, the bodily and spiritual.

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Since the other line of scholarship that this thesis takes up and expands upon is much more popular, I will have to be more selective. It is, broadly, literature concerned with 'loving the other' or even 'the significance of the other.' Desire for another person is admittedly a contested area in Augustinian scholarship. Anders Nygren's classic assessment of *eros* and *agape* in Augustine's thought attributes a marginal status to love of neighbour. According to Nygren, Augustine's system of love is largely the acquisitive *eros* of the Platonists,<sup>11</sup> with elements of divine, gratuitous love gradually incorporated. Love of neighbour finds a makeshift home in love for God, where others are viewed as opportunities to love God in them, and in self-love, where loving a neighbour as oneself means aiding him to love God, in whom his happiness resides.<sup>12</sup> Important for Nygren's reading is Augustine's *uti – frui* distinction in *De doctrina christiana*: his division of objects of love into what is to be 'enjoyed' for its own sake, as an end (God alone is in this category), and what is to be 'used,' or loved not for its own sake but as a means of enjoying God (which covers everything else). Holding to such a dichotomy, Augustine conceives of no love for another human being which is 'unmotivated,' an end instead of the means.<sup>13</sup> Hannah Arendt comes to a similar conclusion in her study on love of neighbour in Augustine. Ultimately, she reads his love of neighbour as necessarily indirect – again, a way to love God – and provisional in light of eternity. J. B. du Roy's related position is motivated by *De trinitate* 8.12: 'Let no one say "I don't know what to love." Let him love his brother, and love that love; after all, he knows the love he loves with better than the brother he loves. There now, he can

<sup>9</sup> Janet Altman, *Epistolarity: approaches to a form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), 186-187.

<sup>10</sup> Carolinne White, 'Friendship in Absence: Some Patristic Views,' in *Friendship in Medieval Europe*, ed. Julian Haseldine (Thrupp, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1999), 84.

<sup>11</sup> Nygren explains this acquisitive love as follows: 'To love means to direct one's longing and desire to an object by the possession of which one expects to be made happy. The idea of love as desire and its connection with the search for happiness betray Augustine's original *Eros*-attitude and the eudaemonism of the philosophy of late antiquity.' The gloss is a fair reading of Augustine's statements in his early works *De diversis quaestionibus* XXIII, 35.2 and *De disciplina christiana* 6. See Anders Nygren, *Eros and Agape, Part II: The History of the Christian Idea of Love*, trans. Philip S. Watson (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939), 258.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 331, 335.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 333n5.

already have God better known to him than his brother, certainly better known because more present, better known because more inward to him, better known because more sure.’ From this Du Roy argues that love for God which requires an inward turn, the ‘voie régressive,’ is, in fact, a turn *away* from the neighbour.<sup>14</sup>

A significant response to this position has been Raymond Canning’s, *The Unity of Love for God and Neighbour in St. Augustine* (1993). Canning argues for a different reading of the problematic passage *De trinitate* 8.12, but his final recourse is to a neglected stream of Augustine’s reflections on Matthew 25:40,<sup>15</sup> including those in the less theoretical sermons.<sup>16</sup> In *Sermon* 25.8, for example, he writes, ‘You are all looking forward to greeting Christ seated in heaven. Attend to him lying under the arches, attend to him hungry, attend to him shivering with cold, attend to him needy, attend to him a foreigner.’ Canning finds the frequent recurrence of this verse significant enough to challenge du Roy’s position and require readers ‘to reflect more deeply on the significance of the neighbour for Augustine’s theology as a whole.’<sup>17</sup> Canning’s willingness to look outside Augustine’s theoretical works is in line with a recent trend in Augustinian scholarship, which finds in Augustine’s pastoral writings an often overlooked complement to his polemical writings.<sup>18</sup>

A less direct addition to this line of scholarship takes the form of various discussions of Augustine’s views on friendship, including the largely positive assessments of Augustine’s views on friendship by Marie McNamara, Carolinne White and Eoin Cassidy.<sup>19</sup> McNamara, after one of the first thorough studies of Augustine’s many documented friendships, *Friendship in Saint Augustine*, finds Augustine cherishing friendships and making every effort to maintain them.<sup>20</sup> Though she argues against the view that Christian charity (*caritas*) gradually replaced friendship (*amicitia*) for Augustine, she acknowledges that Augustine subordinates the claims of friendship to those of the more universal Christian love.<sup>21</sup> Cassidy, on the other hand, admits no conflict between *amicitia* and *caritas*; rather, he sees Augustine essentially interpreting *caritas* according to the classical ideals of *amicitia*.<sup>22</sup> For him, ‘Augustine’s emphasis on *caritas* and on the motif of the body of Christ never conflicted with or over-rode the importance which he attached to the love of friendship.’<sup>23</sup> Carolinne White’s chapter on Augustine in *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century* (1994) usefully contextualises

<sup>14</sup> J. B. Du Roy, ‘L’expérience de l’amour et l’intelligence de la foi trinitaire selon saint Augustin,’ *Recherches Augustiniennes: Hommage au R.P. Fulbert Cayré* II (1962): 415-445.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me’ (New International Version).

<sup>16</sup> Raymond Canning, *The Unity of Love for God and Neighbour in St. Augustine* (Heverlee-Leuven: Augustinian Historical Institute, 1993), 330.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Hubertus R. Drobner, ‘Studying Augustine: An overview of recent research,’ in *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner*, ed. Robert Dodaro (Taylor & Francis, 1999), 19-20.

<http://lib.mylibrary.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca?ID=13986>

<sup>19</sup> Marie Aquinas McNamara, *Friendship in Saint Augustine* (Fribourg, Switzerland: University Press, 1958); Carolinne White, *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Eoin Cassidy, ‘The Recovery of the Classical Ideal of Friendship in Augustine’s Portrayal of *Caritas*,’ in *The Relationship between Neoplatonism and Christianity*, ed. T. Finan and V. Toomey (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> McNamara, *Friendship in Saint Augustine*, 192.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>22</sup> Cassidy, ‘The Recovery of the Classical Ideal of Friendship in Augustine’s Portrayal of *Caritas*,’ 136-137.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 140.

Augustine's views on friendship and integrates them with his theoretical ethics. Like Nygren (above), she attends to Augustine's *uti – frui* distinction, but she places more significance on Augustine's eventual concession that other human beings may be enjoyed, with the proviso 'in God.' In her view, this development is a deliberate elevation of the value of love for others.<sup>24</sup> However, both White and McNamara admit some shadows in Augustine's attitude toward friendship. He sometimes doubts the possibility of genuine intimacy with friends in this life, and strains against the difficulty of fully expressing himself. McNamara identifies these shadows as the incommunicability, the imperviousness and the changeableness of the soul.<sup>25</sup>

In sum, critics of Augustine's stance toward others have often focused on Augustine's theoretical works, emphasising elements that suggest a rejection of loving another for his own sake, and an undermining of the significance of his concrete, societal existence. Though it may be less exclusive, a neighbourly love of that description elicits criticism as depersonalised. Raymond Canning and many scholars of Augustine's views on friendship present a more positive reading, often looking to less theoretical works, such as the *Sermons* and the *Confessions*.

#### *Approaching the letters*

In this paper I am picking up various threads of scholarship: the still open debate on the significance of the other (i.e., another human being),<sup>26</sup> the 'shadows' in Augustine's attitude(s) toward friendship, the scholarly movement towards looking beyond Augustine's theoretical works. Regarding the letters specifically, I am taking up a property of the letter-form detailed by Altman – the preoccupation with presence and absence – and treated with broad strokes by Carolinne White. By focusing in on Augustine's letters, however, I hope to attend to these uniquely epistolary themes in a way that may bear upon the important question of the other's significance for Augustine. I see my reading of Augustine's letters as a complement to readings of his theoretical works on the other's significance (such as Arendt's), because the letters provide a unique theatre for viewing Augustine practicing his theory of the other's significance. His theoretical works contain abstractions about love due to others, as the *uti – frui* distinction in *De doctrina christiana*. Such discussions exhibit Augustine's deep engagement with the problem of loving others while preserving preeminence for love of God. But the distinctions in the treatises and sermons that house these expressions are theoretical; it is only in the *Confessions* and the *Letters* that we can see the real relationships and struggles behind, or at least parallel to, this theory.

My concern with Augustine's negotiation of relationships in practice would likely not have been interesting to medieval readers of the letters, nor even to the early twentieth-century scholars who sought biography or Augustine's 'ideal' of friendship from the letters. Upon reflection, I acknowledge the influence – albeit indirect – of the last century's philosophical streams of phenomenology, which

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<sup>24</sup> White, *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century*, 200-201.

<sup>25</sup> Marie Aquinas McNamara, 'Some Problems in Friendship as Seen by Saint Augustine,' *Kentucky Foreign Romance Quarterly* 9:3 (1962), 147.

<sup>26</sup> I am using the term 'other' in the simple sense of other human beings – 'neighbours,' in the broad Christian sense – not the more charged sense of Emmanuel Levinas, for example, who focused on the destabilising experience of encountering otherness (see footnotes below), which could reasonably be extended to God. Since I am employing the simpler sense, I do not include God when I speak of the 'other.'

valorised ‘patterns of human experience as they are actually lived through in the concrete,’<sup>27</sup> and particularly the influence of Levinas, who stressed ethics’ rootedness in the experience of the Other.<sup>28</sup> Essentially, I pursue this line of study from a belief in the significance of the *personal* interaction, ethics lived out in the presence of the other. And how shall I convince you of its significance, in Augustine’s case?

In chapter one, I will first establish a rough baseline for Augustine’s views of the properly ‘ordered’ relationship to others from his accounts in the *Confessions*. Like the letters, the *Confessions* is a mixture of practice and theory, and, apart from the letters, our greatest source for details about Augustine’s relationships, particularly those with close friends and family members. Though the *Confessions* traces an integral aspect of Augustine’s approach to loving others *in practice* – namely, avoiding idolatry by loving others *in deo* (‘in God’) – most of the relationships Augustine describes are with individuals closely tied to him, each described as they were physically present in his story. The separations that follow in subsequent years, evidenced by the letters, allow us to observe him working out what loving others *in deo* means. So in the second half of the chapter I turn to the letters, with a view to how the different circumstances of his friendships bring out a new tension: the opposing obligations to friends and to the wider and often needier community.

The absences from friends that he experiences – even chooses – set the stage for the reflections of chapters two and three. For even those healthy relationships that escape the destructive tendencies described in the *Confessions* – idolising or instrumentalising the other – lack complete unity because of two great barriers to intimacy: physical absence and the isolation of interiority.<sup>29</sup> Augustine’s negotiation of these absences, and, importantly, the desire for others that they foster, involves coming to terms with yet more tensions between theory and practice. The second chapter deals with physical absence and its complement, desire for physical presence. In it Augustine grapples with the challenges that his commitment to a body-soul hierarchy presents to his longing for physical presence. Through this tension, he gradually negotiates the significance of the body in his relationships with others. The absence shifts in the third chapter to the isolation caused by the self’s interior, hidden nature. A decade into his ecclesial career, Augustine begins to feel the disparity between the Christian ideal of loving community in the one Spirit and the realities of misunderstandings and failures of love. Locating the ideal increasingly in the next life, he must negotiate how to relate to others in this world while anticipating the next. It is only in the letters that we see Augustine grapple with these practical challenges to living out his theoretical parameters of loving the other. To better understand the tensions between theory and practice, I will finish off this introduction with a brief survey of Augustine’s philosophical commitments.

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<sup>27</sup> John Wild, introduction to *Totality and Infinity*, by Emmanuel Levinas, trans. Alphonso Lingis, 11-20 (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 11.

<sup>28</sup> Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 43: ‘We name this calling into question of my spontaneity [i.e., as yet uncriticised freedom] by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics.’

<sup>29</sup> *Ep.* 249. See page 66.

## Philosophical context

### *Cosmology*

The particular themes and tensions of the letters extend from and engage the broader dichotomies of Augustine's understanding of reality. The broadest of these is the tension between the two worlds or levels of reality of Platonism: the realm of the eternal, immutable Ideas and that of temporal, mutable things. Therefore, it is necessary to deal with some fundamental questions about Augustine's cosmology: what is his perspective on the two 'worlds' of Plato, and the related dichotomies, the body and the soul, this world and the next?

#### *Two levels of reality*

Augustine ascribed wholeheartedly to the Platonic division of reality into the eternal and the temporal. His *Literal Commentary on Genesis* exhibits his integration of this schema with the Judaeo-Christian account of creation. God, the immutable and eternal, created all things, which change in time and space:

Living, then, in immutable eternity, He has created all things together, and from them periods of time flow, places are filled, and the centuries unroll in the temporal and local motions of real things. Among these things, He has established some as spiritual and others as corporeal, giving form to the matter that He Himself created without form but capable of being formed – matter which was made by no other being but which did have a Maker. (*Literal Commentary on Genesis* 8.20.39)<sup>30</sup>

Augustine does not simply replace Plato's eternal Ideas with God, however: he accepts the Neoplatonic revision of Plato,<sup>31</sup> locating the Ideas in the divine intelligence. Since God is the creator of all things, the Ideas, or 'primary reasons of things' (*rerum rationes principales*) do exist, and exist in God's mind. And since they are in the mind of the eternal, immutable God, they too must be eternal and immutable.<sup>32</sup>

An important consequence of the Platonic and Neoplatonic models is that they present us with a hierarchy of being. Scattered throughout Augustine's works are numerous variations of the *ordo naturae*, the ranked order of things.<sup>33</sup> One common formulation maintains the same divisions I noted above, organized according to degrees of unity and mutability, with God and the Ideas at the top (immutable), bodies or material things (mutable in time and space) at the bottom, and created spirits (mutable only in time) in between. In *Letter 18*, Augustine follows this division with an explanation:

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<sup>30</sup> Translation by Vernon J. Bourke, in *The Essential Augustine*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1974).

<sup>31</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.1.4.

<sup>32</sup> *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* 46.2: *quod si hae rerum omnium creandarum creaturarum rationes divina mente continentur, neque in divina mente quidquam nisi aeternum atque incommutabile potest esse, atque has rationes rerum principales appellat ideas Plato, non solum sunt ideae, sed ipsae verae sunt, quia aeternae sunt et eiusdem modi atque incommutabiles manent. quarum participatione fit ut sit quidquid est, quoquo modo est* ('But if these reasons of all things to be created or [already] created are contained in the Divine Mind, and if there can be in the Divine Mind nothing except what is eternal and unchangeable, and if these original and principal reasons are what Plato terms ideas, then not only are they ideas, but they are themselves true because they are eternal and because they remain ever the same and unchangeable. It is by participation in these that whatever is exists in whatever manner it does exist').

<sup>33</sup> See Gerard O'Daly for a sample of the variations: 'Hierarchies in Augustine's thought,' in *Platonism Pagan and christian: Studies in Plotinus and Augustine* (Aldershot; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2001), 45.

But since we say that everything that we say is existing exists insofar as it lasts and insofar as it is one, and since unity is the form of all beauty, you, of course, see what exists in the highest manner, what exists in the lowest, but still exists, and what exists in an intermediate manner, greater than the lowest and less than the highest. That highest being is happiness itself; the lowest is what can be neither happy nor unhappy. That in the middle lives unhappily by turning to the lowest, but lives happily by conversion to the highest. (*Ep.* 18.2)

The human soul inhabits an intermediate position in the hierarchy, but any given human<sup>34</sup> can choose to align herself more with corporeal things or the eternal. The last lines highlight the integral connection between the metaphysical and the moral in Platonism: the happy life involves conversion to what is eternal. Like Plotinus, Augustine sees the Fall as a fall from unity into multiplicity, from the prelapsarian reception of truth interiorly to a grasping outward at external things.<sup>35</sup> And as this disunity is morally evil, so the pursuit of goodness involves increasing unity. A line from the *Confessions* illustrates this integration of the metaphysical and the moral: ‘I will try now to give a coherent account of my disintegrated self, for when I turned away from you, the one God, and pursued a multitude of things, I went to pieces’ (*Conf.* 2.1).

#### *Body and soul*

The previous excerpts have already demonstrated the division and hierarchy of body and soul, based upon their differing mutability. I will discuss the development of Augustine’s thought, particularly in regard to the value of the body, in chapter two, but now it may be helpful to look at another of his explanations for the division, based on the ascending hierarchy of existing, living, and understanding.<sup>36</sup> To put it simply, inanimate objects *exist*, animals *exist and live*, and only reason – the rational mind – *exists, lives and understands*.

It is clear that we have a body, as well as some sort of life that animates and enlivens the body. We also recognize these two features in animals. There is a third feature, something like the ‘head’ or ‘eye’ of our soul – or whatever term is more suitable for reason and intelligence – which animal nature does not have. So please see whether you can find anything more exalted in human nature than reason. (*On the Free Choice of the Will* 2.6.13.53)

The possession of reason distinguishes humans from animals, positioning us closer to the eternal on the ontological hierarchy. Reason’s primacy becomes even clearer as Augustine and his interlocutor consider reason’s ability to see eternal concepts, such as numbers: ‘The intelligible structure and truth of numbers does not pertain to the bodily senses. It remains pure and unchangeable, and is seen in common by all who reason’ (*On the Free Choice of the Will* 2.8.24.93).

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<sup>34</sup> For the identification of the person with the soul, see the section ‘Augustine’s conception of the self’, page 53.

<sup>35</sup> *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 2.4.5. For Brian Dobell’s discussion of this passage, see *Augustine’s Intellectual Conversion: The Journey from Platonism to Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 53.

<sup>36</sup> *On the Free Choice of the Will* 2.6.13.53: ‘Therefore, a nature that only exists and neither lives nor understands, such as an inanimate physical object, is inferior to a nature that not only exists but also lives, but does not understand, such as the soul of animals. This nature is in turn inferior to one that at once exists and lives and understands, such as the rational mind in human beings.’

The rational mind is the highest part of human beings, then, able to participate in the divine ideas to the greatest extent,<sup>37</sup> while the body partakes of the lowest rung of being, participating in the ideas only meagerly. But the divide between body and soul is not only ontological, but, again, moral. Augustine, like his Neoplatonic influences, sees the body's capacity for taking pleasure in temporal things as a threat to moral progress toward unity and the eternal. A passage from Augustine's *Soliloquies* outlines Augustine's orientation to the body and the physical world as he understood it shortly after his conversion:

We must flee these sensible things completely and be on our guard earnestly while we occupy this body lest our feathers are held fast by the bird lime of sensibles. Our wings must be whole and perfect so that we may fly from these shadows to that light, which doesn't even condescend to show itself to those enclosed in this cage, unless they are such that they can escape into their own air, either when the cage is broken open or destroyed. Therefore, when you become such that absolutely nothing earthly delights you, trust me, at that very moment, at that very point of time, you will see what you desire. (*Soliloquies* 1.24, my translation)

This response to the material world, like that which motivated the ascetism of Porphyry and some of Augustine's Christian contemporaries, is in keeping with the Neoplatonic integration of metaphysics with morality. In contrast, the letters show a more complicated response to the value of the body than we might expect. Chapter two brings out this ambivalence and some of the developments in his philosophy that may have contributed to it.

*This world and the next*

The temporal-eternal divide likewise separates this world and its activities from the eternal realm. In Neoplatonism this often manifests itself as a question of the agent's attention: should one focus on the activities of this life or the eternal truths? But in Augustine, the eternal realm takes on a more strongly eschatological nature. Where the Platonic and Neoplatonic conceptions of the afterlife are nebulous, often couched in myth, as the accounts of reincarnation in Plato's *Phaedo* (81d) and Plotinus's *Enneads* (3.4.2),<sup>38</sup> Augustine develops a robust version of the biblical heaven or 'heavenly Jerusalem.' First, the members of the two 'cities' well-known from *City of God*, who are distinct on earth by their love not location, will be separated at the end of time:

And these two loves . . . also separate the two cities founded among the race of men, under the wonderful and ineffable Providence of God, administering and ordering all things that have been created: the first city is that of the just, the second is that of the wicked. Although they are now, during the course of time, intermingled, they shall be divided at the last judgment; the first, being joined by the good angels under its King, shall attain eternal life; the second, in union with the bad angels under its king, shall be sent into eternal fire. (*Literal Commentary on Genesis* 14.15.20)

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<sup>37</sup> Dobell, *Augustine's Intellectual Conversion*, 166-67.

<sup>38</sup> See also Augustine's representation of Porphyry's views on the afterlife in *De civ. dei* 10.27: 'You have made yourself the preacher and the angel of those unclean spirits who pretend to be gods of the ether; and they have promised you that those who have been purified in their 'spiritual' soul, by theurgic art, although they cannot, indeed, return to the Father, will have their dwelling among the gods of the ether, above the levels of the air.'



One might easily anticipate how this eternal citizenship may seem to trump the relatively transient affiliations of this life.

Augustine's brand of other-worldliness is rather different from that of his Neoplatonic influences. Plotinus had anticipated an afterlife of permanent abiding with the universal soul for the souls who had fully purified themselves from attachments to the body and the material world. And, if we take his account of reincarnation at face value, the soul will keep re-assuming bodies until it completes this purification.<sup>39</sup> The direction of love or attachment is critical for Augustine as well in determining one's afterlife, but the afterlife of those with a rightly-directed love is distinctly more social – and more bodily – than Plotinus's vision. In fact, it is closer to a fulfillment or perfection of *relationships*: with God, with others, and even that of the soul and body:

For this peace [the peace of heaven] is the perfectly ordered and completely harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God, and of each other in God. When we arrive at that state of peace, there will be no longer a life that ends in death, but a life that is life in sure and sober truth; there will be no animal body to 'weigh down the soul' in its process of corruption; there will be a spiritual body with no cravings, a body subdued in every part to the will. This peace the Heavenly City possesses in faith while on its pilgrimage, and it lives a life of righteousness, based on this faith, having the attainment of that peace in view in every good action it performs in relation to God, and in relation to a neighbour, since the life of a city is inevitably a social life. (*De civ. dei* 19.17)

The influence of the Christian tradition and the anticipation of a restored Jerusalem in the Psalms and prophets certainly informed this social conception of the life to come. The last sentence brings out Augustine's view of the impact this expectation ought to have on life here on earth: the Christian should do good to others and God in order to attain this perfection. As with the Neoplatonists, this eternal perspective certainly has the potential to demote this worldly life, making it merely provisional, yet the continuation of social life in the afterlife suggests a less clear-cut dichotomy. I will take up this tension in the second half of chapter three.

#### *The moral response*

I previously noted the strong connection between the metaphysical and the moral in Platonism and Augustine's thought. Though I cannot attempt a full discussion of this integration in the Platonic tradition,<sup>40</sup> it will be important in the following chapters to have some idea of what makes a proper moral response. Influenced by the Platonic tradition of *eros*, Augustine views love as the soul's moral response or orientation. So the two cities in the section above were divided by the loves of their members: 'The earthly city was created by self-love reaching the point of contempt for God, the Heavenly City by the love of God carried as far as contempt of self' (*De civ. dei* 14.28). And, in the simpler expression of a sermon: 'The only things that make good or bad lives are good or bad loves' (*Sermon* 313A.2).

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<sup>39</sup> *Enneads* 4.3.24 and 3.2.15. For a reading that takes Plotinus's account of reincarnation literally, see Audrey N. M. Rich, 'Reincarnation in Plotinus,' *Mnemosyne*, Fourth Series 10 (1957), 234.

<sup>40</sup> For a good introduction, see *The Ethics of St. Augustine*, ed. William S. Babcock (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991) – particularly, Frederick S. Carney's chapter, 'The Structure of Augustine's Ethic.'

A. H. Armstrong rightly observes that the dichotomies of both Platonism and Christianity are problematised by their shared conviction of the goodness of the material world, as created by a good divinity.<sup>41</sup> Individual authors respond differently to this tension. The letters, as a taste of Augustine's theory *in practice*, his negotiation of relationships with others and with the bodily world as brought to the fore by the absence of friendships, allow us to observe some of these tensions play out.

### *Language*

Before beginning his work on interpreting and teaching scripture in *De doctrina christiana*, Augustine thought it necessary to write briefly on sign theory, or what is now known as semiotics. So, before interpreting his letters, I will follow his example. In particular, since letters are so many words put together, it is necessary to attend to Augustine's theoretical considerations of language: namely, what is Augustine's theory of signs, and specifically that subset of signs, words?

Immediately it is apparent that language does not escape the tensions of the dualities I have shown at work in Augustine's cosmology. Note this excerpt from the dialogue *De quantitate animae*, for instance:

Then, since a word consists of sound and meaning, and the sound has to do with the ears and the meaning with the mind, do you not think that in a word, just as in some living being, the sound is the body and the meaning is, as it were, the soul? (*De quantitate animae* 66)

Though this passage suggests that for Augustine words correspond with the modern term *sign* (signifier + signified), in later works (see below) Augustine speaks of words primarily as signifiers. The important point here is that uttered words are material yet convey a meaning which is immaterial. Nor does language escape the hierarchy that accompanies that body-soul, material-immaterial duality. In an early dialogue with his son Adeodatus, Augustine leads him to acknowledge the superiority of knowledge to the signs that represent it: 'You grant that the knowledge of things is better than the signs of things' (*De magistro* 27). The sign, Augustine says, is the means to the end, which is knowledge.

So words too are split between the two worlds. But more importantly, they bring us to the place of signification, and thus the possibility of mediation between the two. In a sense, all things (not just words) point beyond themselves, or *signify*, for Augustine:

Others, in order to find God, will read a book. Well, as a matter of fact there is a certain great big book, the book of created nature. Look carefully at it top and bottom, observe it, read it. God did not make letters of ink for you to recognize him in; he set before your eyes all these things he has made. Why look for a louder voice? Heaven and earth cries out to you, "God made me." (*Sermon* 68.6)

But though he rhetorically denies the need for a 'louder voice' here, he firmly believes that there *is* a louder voice: the *verbum carnem factum* (Word made flesh) and the scriptures, the Word of God. Augustine's theology of the Incarnation had a substantial influence on his thoughts on language. In

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<sup>41</sup> A. H. Armstrong, 'St. Augustine and Christian Platonism,' in *Augustine: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. R. A. Markus (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1972), 9.

*De doctrina christiana*, he seeks to understand language through the Incarnation and the Incarnation through his experience of language:

She [God's wisdom] is present everywhere, indeed, to inner eyes that are healthy and pure; but to those whose inner eyes are weak and unclear, she was prepared to be seen by their eyes of flesh as well. . . . How did she come, if not by the Word becoming flesh and dwelling amongst us? It is something like when we talk; in order for what we have in mind to reach the minds of our hearers through their ears of flesh, the word which we have in our thoughts becomes a sound, and is called speech. And yet this does not mean that our thought is turned into that sound, but while remaining undiminished in itself, it takes on the form of a spoken utterance by which to insert itself into their ears, without bearing the stigma of any change in itself. That is how the Word of God was not changed in the least, and yet became flesh, in order to dwell amongst us. (*De doct. christ.* 1.11-12)

Signs thus help make sense of Christ's Incarnation, even as the Incarnation grounds all signs as the 'primordial source of signification.'<sup>42</sup>

Words have a privileged position among signs in this mediatory role. This is certainly evident in Augustine's own life, in the integral role various *logoi* had in each of his conversions. Take, for example, the well-known conversion scene in *Confessions* 8, where he interprets the voice singing *tolle lege, tolle lege* ('pick it up and read, pick it up and read') as a divine command to open the Bible and read, since he had heard Antony's conversion *account* which played out similarly. When he subsequently reads a single verse, it is sufficient to resolve his doubt: 'No sooner had I reached the end of the verse than the light of certainty flooded my heart and all dark shades of doubt fled away' (*Conf.* 8.29). Thus, his conversion comes through a 'reading' of three texts, the first two leading to and giving significance to the climactic reading of the divine text. To better understand this role of mediation, a brief look at Augustine's sign theory may be of use.

#### *Development of Augustine's sign theory*

In the early treatise *De dialectica*, Augustine identifies a word (*verbum*) as a sign (*signum*) of a thing (*res*), that is, 'something which is itself sensed and which indicates to the mind something beyond the sign itself' (*quod et se ipsum sensui et praeter se aliquid animo ostendit*).<sup>43</sup> The *verbum* here refers to the sound; thus, a written word is a sign of a sign – that is, a sign of the uttered word.<sup>44</sup> In addition to the *verbum* and the *res* which it signifies, Augustine identifies two more elements in his account: the *dicibile* and the *dictio*. For my purposes, it is sufficient to note that these terms convey the mental referents of words. So the *dicibile* (the 'sayable'), his translation of the Stoic *lekton*, refers to 'what is understood in the word and contained in the mind' (*quidquid autem ex uerbo non aures sed animus sentit et ipso animo tenetur inclusum*). It becomes a *dictio* when it is spoken.

This inclusion of the mind as a third locus between signs and things becomes increasingly important in Augustine's discussion of signs in *De doctrina christiana*. After distinguishing *signa data*

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<sup>42</sup> Mark D. Jordan, 'Words and Word: Incarnation and Signification in Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*,' *Augustinian Studies* 11 (1980), 187.

<sup>43</sup> *De dialectica* 5.7.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

(given or ‘conventional signs’) from *signa naturalia* (natural signs, such as smoke indicating fire), he emphasises the *expressive* function of conventional signs – their primary use for conveying thoughts:

Conventional or given signs, on the other hand, are those which living creatures give one another in order to show, as far as they can, their moods and feelings, or to indicate whatever it may be they have sensed or understood. Nor have we any purpose in signifying, that is in giving a sign, other than to bring out and transfer to someone else's mind what we, the givers of the sign, have in mind ourselves. (*De doct. christ.* 2.3)

In *De trinitate*, he takes this interior emphasis further by positing an inner, language-less word, ‘which is neither uttered in sound nor thought of in the likeness of sound which necessarily belongs to some language, but which precedes all the signs that signify it and is begotten of the knowledge abiding in the consciousness, when this knowledge is uttered inwardly just exactly as it is’ (*De trin.* 15.19). This may seem to explain only a small part of the range of communication, but he uses this rather mystical account (made so by his endeavour to understand through analogy the Word of God) to explain all speech acts and, in fact, all actions: ‘there is nothing that we do with our bodies in deeds or words to express approval or disapproval of the behavior of men, which we have not anticipated with a word uttered inside ourselves’ (*De trin.* 9.12). A *verbum* is true when it contains no more and no less than the inner word. For instance, when someone does not really know what he is talking about, the true word would express this doubt; the mistaken or false word would claim knowledge.<sup>45</sup>

#### *Gaps in communication*

Being mistaken and lying are two causes of slippage between the inner word and its expression. In his early dialogue *De magistro*, Augustine identifies two others: speaking familiar phrases (e.g., a hymn) while thinking of something else, and using a word in a different sense than your listener is aware of.<sup>46</sup> The latter is an inconvenience, certainly, but as Augustine says, definition is generally considered a good solution. This relatively untroubled view of communication does not persist in Augustine’s writings. In fact, the *inadequacy* of language becomes a more prevalent theme.

One of his most striking expressions of this idea explains the disjunction in terms of time: the intuitive versus the discursive. Converting the instantaneous intuition into time-consuming syllables is problematic at best. As he confesses in a later work:

For my part, I am nearly always dissatisfied with my discourse. For I am desirous of something better, which I often inwardly enjoy before I begin to unfold my thought in spoken words; but when I find that my powers of expression come short of my knowledge

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<sup>45</sup> *De trin.* 15.24: *cum autem dubitamus nondum est uerbum de re de qua dubitamus, sed de ipsa dubitatione uerbum est. quamuis enim non nouerimus an uerum sit unde dubitamus, tamen dubitare nos nouimus, ac per hoc cum hoc dicimus uerum uerbum est quoniam quod nouimus dicimus. quid quod etiam mentiri possumus? quod cum facimus utique uolentes et scientes falsum uerbum habemus ubi uerum uerbum est mentiri nos; hoc enim scimus. et cum mentitos non esse confitemur uerum dicimus; quod scimus enim dicimus. scimus namque nos esse mentitos* (‘When however we are in doubt, there is as yet no word about the thing we are doubtful of, but there is a word about the doubt itself. We do not know whether the thing we are doubtful about is true, but we do know that we are doubtful, and thus when we say so our word is true, because we are saying what we know. What about our also being able to lie? When we do this we willfully and knowingly have a false word, where the true word is that we are lying; this after all is what we know. And when we admit that we have been lying we are saying something true, because we are saying what we know; we know that we have been lying.’)

<sup>46</sup> *De magistro* 42-43.

of the subject, I am sorely disappointed that my tongue has not been able to answer the demands of my mind. For I desire my hearer to understand all that I understand; and feel that I am not speaking in such a manner as to effect that. This is so chiefly because intuition floods the mind, as it were, with a sudden flash of light, while the expression of it in speech is a slow, drawn-out, and far different process, and while speech is being formed, intellectual apprehension has already hidden itself in its secret recesses. (*The First Catechetical Instruction* 2.3)

So words cannot always keep up, then. But, as is evident in his commentary on Psalm 26, nor can they do justice to either the material world or to God.

Who can praise heaven and earth, the sea, and all things in them as they deserve? And these are only the visible things. Who could worthily praise Angels, Thrones, Dominions, Principalities and Powers? Who could praise as it deserves this force which pulses in us, enlivening the body, moving the limbs, activating the senses, embracing so many things in the memory, sifting out so many by the understanding: who can worthily praise that? And if human speech has such a struggle with these creatures of God, what is it to say of the Creator, unless rejoicing alone remains when speech has fallen silent? (*Expositions on the Psalms* 26, 2.12)

His list is quite comprehensive: language is ‘incommensurable’<sup>47</sup> with things, with spiritual beings, including the soul and reason, and, of course, with God. I will leave to the side the problems of communicating about things and incorporeal entities, since the themes that I will be tracking in the letters intersect for the most part with the remaining problem of communicating about the ‘self,’ or one’s thoughts. Augustine’s frequent characterisation of words as expressions of one’s thoughts overlaps with one of the problems of the letters: the isolation of the self. For the isolating barrier between individual selves because of the self’s interiority can only be overcome by attempting to share one’s thoughts. But this is a matter for chapter three.

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We have only to consider the prodigality of Augustine’s writings to conclude that he thought discourse a worthy endeavour, and the briefest glance at those writings will suffice to see that he considered it even a moral obligation. Referring his linguistic efforts to Christ, the Word, he tells his congregation at Hippo: ‘He spoke, let us speak too. He, because he’s the Word, we, because we are from the Word’ (*Sermon* 126.7). The excerpts above on Augustine’s views on language are but a small sample of Augustine’s reflections on signs and words, a subject important to an erstwhile rhetoric professor, a prolific writer, and a commentator on sacred texts, not to mention theologically suggestive due to John’s characterisation of Christ as the *verbum carnem factum*, the Word made flesh.<sup>48</sup> To put it simply, Augustine took words seriously; he wrote reflectively. His attention to the possibilities and shortcomings of language bids us take *his* words, his attempts at communicating through letters, seriously.

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<sup>47</sup> See James K. A. Smith’s reading of Augustine’s problems of communicating in terms of incommensurability: *Speech and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation* (Taylor & Francis, 2002), 114-15.

<sup>48</sup> John 1:1, 14.

## CHAPTER 1

# Shifting tensions: relationships in the *Confessions* and the letters

Or would we, since we do make a concession to *celebrated* love in comparison with *commanded* love, meagerly praise Christianity's levelheadedness and understanding of life because it more soberly and more firmly holds itself down to earth, perhaps in the same sense as the saying 'Love me little, love me long'?

—Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*

I am not starting with the *Confessions* by the same ineluctable pull that makes the *Confessions* almost everyone's first experience of Augustine. Or, if I am, I can at least offer two good reasons in addition. First, the narrative of the *Confessions* develops the predominant tension at work in Augustine's views on loving others: the tension between love due to God as Creator and love appropriate for others, creatures. This is a tension I will continue to follow throughout my analysis of the letters. Second, starting with a work that receives so much scholarly attention allows me to establish a kind of baseline on the question of loving others. From this baseline it will become more clear what the letters can contribute to this question. It is my argument that they provide a more nuanced view, a more dynamic wrestling with the tensions of relationships from right in the midst of them than we find elsewhere in Augustine's writings. The abstract conclusions on loving others that Augustine comes to by experience or revelation in the *Confessions* must be re-interpreted in the changing circumstances of his relationships, which present new challenges to putting his theory into practice, as I noted in the Introduction. In this chapter, after looking at the *Confessions*, I will turn to some of the concrete aspects of the letters to observe one of these challenges: resolving the conflict between obligations due to close friends and family and those due to all. Incidentally, looking at the narrative of the *Confessions* and letters will furnish us with knowledge of some significant events and relationships of Augustine's biography.

### **Relationships in the *Confessions***

#### *Disordered loves*

One can read the relationships described in the *Confessions* as illustrating the Augustinian principle of the *ordo amoris* (order of love), progressing from the disordered loves of his adolescence and early adulthood to evidence of progress in 'ordered loves' throughout the process of his conversion. But first, disorder – and, for Augustine, this begins quite early. Though experiences of infancy may seem tangential at best to a discussion of friendship, Augustine's perception of his innate jealousy and unreasonable demands as an infant suggest the enduring human inclination to view

relationships as instrumental. Augustine frames his outbursts of tears as revenge ‘because my elders were not subject to me, nor free people willing to be my slaves’ (*non subditis maioribus et liberis non seruientibus et me, Conf. 1.8*). He relies on observation of infants to identify the disorder already apparent in the so-called innocent: the jealousy of a child who ‘could not even speak, yet he glared with livid fury at his fellow-nursling’ (*nondum loquebatur et intuebatur pallidus amaro aspectu conlactaneum suum, Conf. 1.11*).

These reflections take a turn into regions more natural to friendship in Augustine’s recollections of adolescence in Books II and III, but the insatiable hunger of the infant continues in the form of sexual desires which undermine the integrity of friendship. Augustine expresses this perversion of friendship in vivid imagery:

*et quid erat, quod me delectabat, nisi amare et amari? sed non tenebatur modus ab animo usque ad animum, quatenus est luminosus limes amicitiae, sed exhalabantur nebulae de limosa concupiscentia carnis et scatebra pubertatis et obnubilabant atque obfuscabant cor meum, ut non discerneret serenity dilectionis a caligine libidinis.*

What was it that delighted me? Only loving and being loved. But there was no proper restraint, as in the union of mind with mind, where a bright boundary regulates friendship. From the mud of my fleshly desires and my erupting puberty belched out murky clouds that obscured and darkened my heart until I could not distinguish the calm light of love from the fog of lust. (*Conf. 2.2*)

In a similar passage in Book III, he connects these friendships not only with a physical lust for pleasure but with a profound hunger which he hoped to fill by loving – or with the deep misery of a soul *ulcerosa* (full of sores), which he hoped to soothe. He was seeking out an object of love *quo cupiebam capi* (‘which I hoped would hold me captive’) *quoniam fames mihi erat intus ab interiore cibo, te ipso, deus meus* (‘because I was inwardly starved of that food which is yourself, O my God,’ *Conf. 3.1*). The older Augustine, admitting that he did not recognise the ‘pangs of hunger’ at the time, yet associates the inclination to use sexual love in order to fill or heal oneself with the ‘pollut[ion] of the stream of friendship.’

Whereas this description distinguishes a boundary between the pollution of lust and the pure stream of friendship, the well-known incident of the theft of pears draws out the possibility of group bonds fostering – even legitimating, in a way – reprehensible actions that an individual would be unlikely to perpetrate on his own. As Augustine tells it, he and his friends made a nocturnal raid on a neighbour’s pear tree for the sheer pleasure of the crime. Augustine gives a surprising amount of attention to the incident, framing it as an exemplum of the impulse to do wrong with no thought of gain, since he already had better pears of his own. Gerald Schlabach emphasises the social nature of the theft, marking Augustine’s confession of the attraction of solidarity with his friends: *quod me solum facere prorsus non liberet, nec facerem* (‘To do it alone would have aroused no desire whatever in me, nor would I have done it,’ *Conf. 2.17*).<sup>1</sup> Friendship proved to be less pure than suggested earlier – *o nimis inimica amicitia* (‘O friendship too unfriendly!’ [Schlabach’s translation]); rather, *seductio mentis inuestigabilis, ex ludo et ioco nocendi auiditas* (‘It was a seduction of the mind hard to understand, which

<sup>1</sup> Gerald W. Schlabach, ‘Friendship as Adultery: Social Reality and Sexual Metaphor in Augustine’s Doctrine of Original Sin,’ *Augustinian Studies* 23 (1992), 130.

instilled into me a craving to do harm for sport and fun,' *Conf.* 2.17). This incident supports Schlabach's reading of friendship as 'adultery,' particularly when Augustine reflects on seeking the pleasure of belonging as an attempt to find elsewhere what can only be found in God. Regarding such an attempt, he does not mince words: *fornicatur anima* ('a soul ... lapses into fornication,' *Conf.* 2.14).

Gerard O'Daly convincingly reads the image of the *luminosus limes*, the bright path or boundary, in light of the pear theft account and the rest of Book II, as a moral boundary between *dilectio* and *libido*. These two concepts are species of *amor*, love. For Augustine, the difference lies in the object of the love: here, *dilectio* connotes a love rightly related to the divine, while *libido* seeks fulfilment apart from God.<sup>2</sup> The recurrent images of boundaries, connected to the abuse of friendship (*amicitia*) throughout the book,<sup>3</sup> accumulate to show the tendency of the soul apart from God towards transgression. Augustine closes Book II with two more vivid images of the ensuing disorder. Who, he asks, can straighten out *istam tortuosissimam et implicatissimam nodositatem* ('this most snarled, knotty tangle' *Conf.* 2.18)? But, at this point, instead of finding 'his own supreme good in God,' he became to himself a *regio egestatis* ('land of famine'), thus aligning himself with the story of the prodigal son.<sup>4</sup>

Book IV is particularly notable for its disordered loves, narrating the premature death of Augustine's hometown friend and the pleasant companions that eventually help him recover from his grief. Though Kim Paffenroth seems willing to take at face value his traditional, often Ciceronian expressions of the unity between souls and the disinterested pleasures that friendship can foster, I believe that Caroline White is right to problematise this reading by pointing out the use of these classical *topoi* in the context of what Augustine will come to lament as imbalanced friendships that fell 'short of true friendship' (*Conf.* 4.7).<sup>5</sup> Augustine writes first of the depth of his regard to which 'similarity of outlook lent warmth' and separations were unbearable: in sum, 'a friendship sweeter to me than any sweetness I had known in all my life' (*suavi mihi super omnes suavitates illius uitae meae*). Augustine then employs the commonplace that he was like 'another self' (*ille alter*) and that they were 'one soul in two bodies' (*unam ... animam in duobus corporibus*), leading to the strangely literal consequence that *mihi horrore erat uita, quia nolebam dimidius uiuere, et ideo forte mori metuebam, ne totus ille moreretur, quem multum amaueam* ('I shrank from life with loathing because I could not bear to be only half alive; and perhaps I was so afraid of death because I did not want the whole of him to die, whom I had loved so dearly,' *Conf.* 4.11).

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<sup>2</sup> Augustine contrasts the two terms in *Expositions on the Psalms* 9:15: *pes animae recte intellegitur amor; qui cum prauus est, uocatur cupiditas aut libido; cum autem rectus, dilectio uel caritas. amore enim mouetur tamquam ad locum quo tendit* ('The foot of the soul is properly understood as love. When it is misshapen it is called concupiscence or lust; when it is well formed it is called love or charity. Love moves a thing in the direction toward which it tends').

<sup>3</sup> Gerard O'Daly, 'Friendship and Transgression: *Luminosus limes amicitiae* (Augustine, *Confessions* 2.2.2) and the themes of *Confessions* 2,' in *Reading Ancient Texts. Volume II: Aristotle and Neoplatonism: Essays in honour of Denis O'Brian*, eds. Suzanne Stern-Gillet and Kevin Corrigan (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007), 222.

<sup>4</sup> See Boulding's note in *The Confessions*, by Augustine, trans. Maria Boulding, ed. John E. Rotelle, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1997. Reprint, Charlottesville, Va.: InteLex Corporation, 2001, electronic edition), 75n54.

<sup>5</sup> Kim Paffenroth, 'Friendship as Personal, Social, and Theological Virtue in Augustine,' in *Augustine and Politics*, eds. John Doody, Kevin L. Hughes, Kim Paffenroth (Lanham, MD; Oxford: Lexington Books, 2005), 57-59; Caroline White, *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century*, 187-88.



Through his use of this *topos*, Augustine represents himself as living out the classical ideal of friendship to the hilt – and showing its rather desperate conclusion: the preceding description of his grief is one of unalloyed misery and darkness. And his response in retrospect? *o dementia nescientem diligere homines humaniter!* ('Woe to the madness which thinks to cherish human beings as though more than human!' *Conf.* 4.12). More literally: 'O madness which does not know to love humans in a manner appropriate to humanity!' Augustine's explanation of the ravaging of his grief in the next paragraph clarifies the meaning of this phrase. He asks: *unde me facillime et in intima dolor ille penetrauerat, nisi quia fuderam in harenam animam meam diligendo moriturum acsi non moriturum?* ('How had that sorrow been able so easily to pierce my inmost being, if not because I had poured out my soul into the sand by loving a man doomed to death as though he were never to die?' *Conf.* 4.13). The corresponding gloss of loving humans *humaniter* would thus seem to be loving them as persons bound to die.

In this respect, Augustine's experience of grief and regret over grief echoes Seneca's briefer confession of inordinate grief over his friend Annaeus Serenus's death. The explanation that Seneca offers for his grief exhibits this similarity:

*hodie autem factum meum damno et intellego maximam mihi causam sic lugendi fuisse, quod numquam cogitaueram mori eum ante me posse. Hoc unum mihi occurrebat, minorem esse et multo minorem, tamquam ordinem fata seruarent.*

To-day, however, I condemn this act of mine, and I understand that the reason why I lamented so greatly was chiefly that I had never imagined it possible for his death to precede mine. The only thought which occurred to my mind was that he was the younger, and much younger, too, – as if the Fates kept to the order of our ages! (*Ep. mor.* 63.14)

For Seneca the problem of inordinate grief is intellectual (and Stoic): if he had adequately reflected on the mortality of his friend, then he would have been less heavily hit by his friend's sudden passing. The regret and waste suggested by Augustine's image of pouring his heart into the sand has no analogy in Seneca's letter. On the contrary, Seneca encourages a hearty appreciation of friends who are still living – the gifts of Fortune: *ideo amicis auide fruamur, quia quamdiu contingere hoc possit, incertum est* ('Let us greedily enjoy our friends, because we do not know how long this privilege will be ours,' *Ep. mor.* 63.8). Finally, a variation of the same idea will complete our picture of Seneca's response to grief for comparison with Augustine's. *Quem amabas extulisti: quaere quem ames. Satius est amicum reparare quam flere* ('You have buried one whom you loved; look about for someone to love. It is better to replace your friend than to weep for him,' *Ep. mor.* 63.11). Here, Seneca encourages the grieving Lucilius to find solace in other friends.

And that is precisely what Augustine does after escaping to Carthage, but in retrospect he views this consolation with less approval than Seneca, since the means of consolation came with *causae . . . aliorum dolorum* ('the seeds of fresh sorrows,' *Ep.* 4.13). His subsequent reflection brings us to the crux of his divergence from Seneca:

*maxime quippe me reparabant atque recreabant aliorum amicorum solacia, cum quibus amabam quod pro te amabam, et hoc erat ingens fabula et longum mendacium, cuius adulterina confricatione corrumpebatur mens nostra pruriens in auribus. sed illa mihi fabula non moriebatur, si quis amicorum meorum moreretur.*

What restored and re-created me above all was the consolation of other friends, in whose company I loved what I was loving as a substitute for you. This was a gross fable and a long-sustained lie, and as our minds itched to listen they were corrupted by its adulterous excitation, but the fable did not die for me when any of my friends died. (*Conf.* 4.13)

His error, therefore, was not due to a lack of intellectual preparation, but to a grave misjudgment in choosing his object of love. Why does he identify the object with the phrase *quod . . . amabam* instead of with his friends? Schlabach's attempt to identify the *ingens fabula* may be of help here: he argues that the fable is that 'of human society, the illusion of self-transcendence.'<sup>6</sup> His reading explains why Augustine says that he was loving something (*quod*) with (*cum*) his friends instead of the friends themselves; Augustine's attribution of *adulterina confricatio* ('adulterous excitation') to the fable provides further support for reading the illusion as the real object of love.

The passage above continues with Augustine's much-quoted portrait of the mutual satisfactions of congenial friendship:

*alia erant, quae in eis amplius capiebant animum, conloqui et conridere et uicissim beniuole obsequi, simul legere libros dulciloquos, simul nugari et simul honestari, dissentire interdum sine odio tamquam ipse homo secum atque ipsa rarissima dissensione condire consensiones plurimas, docere aliquid inuicem aut discere ab inuicem, desiderare absentes cum molestia, suscipere uenientes cum laetitia: his atque huius modi signis a corde amantium et redamantium procedentibus per os, per linguam, per oculos et mille motus gratissimos quasi fomitibus conflare animos et ex pluribus unum facere.*

There were other joys to be found in their company which still more powerfully captivated my mind – the charms of talking and laughing together and kindly giving way to each other's wishes, reading elegantly written books together, sharing jokes and delighting to honor one another, disagreeing occasionally but without rancor, as a person might disagree with himself, and lending piquancy by that rare disagreement to our much more frequent accord. We would teach and learn from each other, sadly missing any who were absent and blithely welcoming them when they returned. Such signs of friendship sprang from the hearts of friends who loved and knew their love returned, signs to be read in smiles, words, glances and a thousand gracious gestures. So were sparks kindled and our minds were fused inseparably, out of many becoming one. (*Conf.* 4.13)

The account is a marked improvement from the unbridled *libido* and group crime of Book II; indeed, it seems to sketch a rare and superlative camaraderie. Paffenroth finds in this passage Augustine's appreciation of a Ciceronian ideal of friendship as 'a most healthy, pleasant, and necessary part of human life.'<sup>7</sup> In contrast, Schlabach less sanguinely links the *conflare* (kindle, inflame) and the *adulterina confricatio* above with Augustine's more clearly critical assessment of the lust component of human sexuality, reading the exchanges of friendship as the means by which he and his friends 'created the illusion of transcendent unity out of their self-serving use of one another,' their 'mutually instrumental treatment.'<sup>8</sup> Augustine's verdict seems to support the latter reading; directly after the passage quoted above, he writes: *hoc est, quod diligitur in amicis . . . hinc ille luctus, si quis moriatur, et tenebrae dolorum et uersa dulcedine in amaritudinem cor madidum* ('This [i.e., the pleasures of friendship, including the union of minds] is what we esteem in our friends. . . . From this springs our grief if

<sup>6</sup> Schlabach, 'Friendship as Adultery,' 128.

<sup>7</sup> Paffenroth, 'Friendship as Personal, Social, and Theological Virtue in Augustine,' 58.

<sup>8</sup> Schlabach, 'Friendship as Adultery,' 128.

someone dies, from this come the darkness of sorrow and the heart drenched with tears because sweetness has turned to bitterness,' *Conf.* 4.14). Essentially, this version of friendship is still a failed attempt, a disordered love. And it is upon reflecting on this failure that Augustine formulates his version of the correct order of love: *beatus qui amat te et amicum in te et inimicum propter te. solus enim nullum carum amittit, cui omnes in illo cari sunt, qui non amittitur* ('Blessed is he who loves you [God], and loves his friend in you and his enemy for your sake. He alone loses no one dear to him, to whom all are dear in the One who is never lost'). Here Augustine exposes friendship as haunted by loss unless mediated by the eternal God. The subsequent passages develop this idea through reflections on the transience and mutability of created things. Individuals must be loved *in deo* since *et ipsae mutabiles sunt et in illo fixae stabiliuntur: alioquin irent et perirent* ('they too are changeable and gain stability only when fixed in him,' *Conf.* 4.18). But it is not solely a matter of stability; rather, it is a matter of justice, of ordering loves to reflect true value: *bonum, quod amatis, ab illo est: sed quantum est ad illum, bonum est et suaue; sed amarum erit iuste, quia iniuste amatur deserto illo quidquid ab illo est* ('The good which you love derives from him, and insofar as it is referred to him it is truly good and sweet, but anything that comes from him will justly turn bitter if it is unjustly loved by people who forsake him.')

The final instance of disordered love is not Augustine's, but Monica's. Augustine had devised to leave for Rome without his mother by convincing her to stay overnight in a chapel while he secretly departed. The description of her ensuing grief is redolent of the grieving Dido, the Carthaginian queen of the *Aeneid* who commits suicide when Aeneas abandons her, sailing away (like Augustine) to Italy:<sup>9</sup> *flavit uentus et impleuit uela nostra et litus subtraxit aspectibus nostris, in quo mane illa insaniebat dolore et querellis et gemitu implebat aures tuas contemnentis ista* ('So the wind blew for us and filled our sails, and the shore dropped away from our sight as she stood there at morning light mad with grief, filling your ears with complaints and groans', *Conf.* 5.15). Augustine reflects that God did not answer her at the time, in part 'chastising her too-carnal desire with the scourge of sorrow' (*illius carnale desiderium iusto dolorum flagello uapularet*). Her grasping love, her bitter weeping betrayed *reliquarium Euae* ('what there was left of Eve') in her. Though Augustine attributes more value, and even a role in his salvation, to the intense love and tears of his mother in other passages, in these lines he acknowledges a carnal element to her love, a part that had not yet learned to love him *in deo*.

#### *Ordered loves*

The last section ended with Augustine's vision of ordered loves, in which God is to be loved first and others in him. In the second half of the *Confessions*, Augustine's relationships begin to move toward this ideal. Though the change is most plainly dramatised in another account of mourning, Monica's death, Augustine's relationships with Alypius and Nebridius before his conversion already begin to exhibit a different orientation. He calls Alypius a friend who cleaved (*inhaerebat*) to him, but also who *mecum[que] nutabat in consilio, quisnam esset tenendus uitae modus* ('concurred with me as we debated the right way to live,' *Conf.* 6.16). Nebridius even left Africa for Milan solely *ut mecum uiueret in flagrantissimo studio ueritatis atque sapientiae* ('to live with me and share in our fiercely burning zeal for truth and wisdom', *Conf.* 6.17). The three were closely bonded, but they were not self-sufficient, not

<sup>9</sup> For one of many commentators who remark on this, see William Werpehowski, 'Weeping at The Death of Dido: Sorrow, Virtue, and Augustine's "Confessions"', *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 19:1 (1991), 181.

delightedly complacent as was the circle in Carthage. No, they were acutely disillusioned with their pursuit of honour and position and *congemescib[ant] in his qui simul* ('together sighed deeply over these experiences,' *Conf.* 6.11). They had stopped looking to each other, to the experience of friendship, as an end, but instead looked outwards together: *et erant ora trium egentium et inopiam suam sibimet inuicem anbelantium et ad te expectantium, ut dares «eis escam in tempore oportuno »*<sup>10</sup> ('So then there were three gaping mouths, three individuals in need, gasping out their hunger to one another and looking to you to give them their food in due time,' *Conf.* 6.17). And their philosophical quest proved to be remarkably in sync. Alypius converted to Christianity at the same time as Augustine, and Nebridius shortly after. The difference between these friendships and that with his unnamed friend is suggested in Augustine's account of Nebridius's premature death. Instead of seeing 'black grief' and death wherever he looked, the older Augustine sees Nebridius living *in sinu Abraham* ('in Abraham's bosom') – *quidquid illud est* – drinking the wisdom of God, and even thinking of Augustine: *nec eum sic arbitror inebriari ex ea, ut obliuiscatur mei, cum tu, domine, quem potat ille, nostri sis memor* ('Yet I cannot believe that he is so inebriated as to forget me, since you, Lord, from whom he drinks, are mindful of us,' *Conf.* 9.6).

The account of Nebridius's death is a brief mention; it is the narrative of Monica's death that functions as a fuller analogue to the loss of his unnamed friend in Book IV. A line echoing the former account – *quasi dilaniabatur uita, quae una facta erat ex mea et illius* ('It was as though my life was rent apart, for there had been but one life, woven out of mine and hers,' *Conf.* 9.30) – seems to invite the comparison. Most apparent is the moderation in his grief: the morass of sorrow is replaced by pain that he could suppress before others, then therapeutically release in tears for 'a brief part of a single hour' (*Conf.* 9.33). But Augustine does not present their relationship as fully spiritualised; rather, he describes a thorough mingling of the spiritual and 'this-worldly' aspects of their relationship, acknowledging elements that were likely carnal, yet wavering on condemning these. Their mystical vision at Ostia shortly before Monica's death exemplifies their spiritual connection. No longer is Monica grasping and Augustine fleeing, but both are united in ardent longing directed toward *id ipsum* ('That which is'), even touching *eam modice toto ictu cordis* ('the edge of it by the utmost leap of our hearts', *Conf.* 9.24).

But Augustine recognises that the pain at her death did not rise from the spiritual unity that had developed between them, but *ex consuetudine simul uiuendi dulcissima et carissima* (from their 'exceedingly gentle and dear custom' of living together, *Conf.* 9.30), which he had lost. Though he initially resists the pain as inappropriate (retrospectively interpreting it as a reminder of the chain [*uinculum*] of every habit [*consuetudinis*], *Conf.* 9.32), Augustine eventually allows himself to remember her good qualities and to weep for her, and for his loss. This ambivalence is also evident in his anticipation of how readers will interpret his tears. For instance, he felt relief in weeping *quoniam ibi erant aures tuae, non cuiusquam hominis superbe interpretantis ploratum meum* ('because there were your ears only, not the ears of anyone who would judge my weeping by the norms of his own pride,' *Conf.* 9.33). Even as he addresses his reader, asking him to weep for his sake if he should find Augustine's sorrow sinful, he defends his tears: *si peccatum inuenerit, fleuisse me matrem exigua parte horae, matrem oculis meis interim*

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<sup>10</sup> Psalm 145:15.

*mortuam, quae me multos annos fleuerat, ut oculis tuis uiuerem, non inrideat* ('If he finds it sinful that I wept over my mother for a brief part of a single hour – the mother who for a little space was to my sight dead, and who had wept long years for me that in your sight I might live – then let such a reader not mock,' *Conf.* 9.33). So the narrative of the *Confessions* closes, not with the elegance of a perfectly ordered relationship, but with the honesty of one still in tension, albeit past the days of inordinate grief.

Thus, through the treatment of his relationships in Books VI to IX, Augustine demonstrates the altered orientation of 'true' friendships, of loving others *in deo*. Two tableaux perhaps express the idea best: the three gaping mouths looking together for food, and Augustine and Monica gazing out the window at Ostia, matched in their desire for and partial vision of *That which is*. But God is not only the focus of these relationships, he is also the one whom Augustine credits with bringing friends together,<sup>11</sup> a point he most plainly expresses when reflecting that the friendship he shared with his friend from Thagaste was not 'true' friendship: *uti est uera amicitia, quia non est uera, nisi cum eam tu agglutinas inter haerentes tibi caritate diffusa in cordibus nostris per spiritum sanctum, qui datus est nobis* » ('Friendship is genuine only when you bind fast together people who cleave to you through the charity poured abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us,' *Conf.* 4.7).<sup>12</sup>

Quite apart from the commentary on his friendships up to his thirty-third year, Augustine's act of and reflections on writing the *Confessions* ten years later may constitute an attempt to extend the bounds of intimacy beyond his close-knit circle. David Konstan has noted how Ambrose transformed the classical ideal of self-disclosure among friends by encouraging it among the larger Christian community.<sup>13</sup> But Augustine followed this advice to a degree unparalleled among Ambrose's candidates for baptism. Some of his clerical peers would claim intimacy by means of a single letter, but this did not satisfy Augustine.<sup>14</sup> He writes of his past deeds, he says, so that readers may take heart from the transformations he had experienced by God's grace; but he writes of *who he is* at the time of writing (the subject of Book X) so that those who have come to know *of* him may understand him better, thanking God for the good in his life and praying for him in his continuing struggles:

*multi hoc nosse cupiunt, qui me nouerunt, et non me nouerunt, qui ex me uel de me aliquid audierunt, sed auris eorum non est ad cor meum, ubi ego sum quicumque sum. uolunt ergo audire confitente me, quid ipse intus sim, quo nec oculum nec aurem nec mentem possunt intendere.*

<sup>11</sup> McNamara, *Friendship in Saint Augustine*, 225; Donald X. Burt, *Friendship and society: An Introduction to Augustine's Practical Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Cambridge U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 66; Carolinne White, *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century*, 196; Frank Vander Valk, 'Friendship, politics, and Augustine's consolidation of the self,' *Religious Studies* 45 (2009), 142.

<sup>12</sup> Frank Vander Valk draws attention to the historical significance of Augustine placing God in such a mediating role, thus reframing friendship as apolitical. By 'separat[ing] friends before bringing them back together before God,' Augustine ascribes a dignity and value to the individual independent of socio-political bonds and participation. (See Valk, 'Friendship, politics, and Augustine's consolidation of the self,' 143.) One can acknowledge this separation of friendship from the polis, while keeping in mind the new socio-political bonds of the Church.

<sup>13</sup> David Konstan, 'Problems in the History of Christian Friendship,' *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4:1 (1996), 113.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London: Faber, 1967), 160.

There are many people who desire to know what I still am at this time of writing my confessions, people who know me without really knowing me, people who have read my works or know me only by hearsay. None of these have laid their ears to my heart, though it is only there that I am whoever I am. They therefore want to hear from my own confession what I am within, where they can venture neither eye nor ear nor mind. (*Conf.* 10.4)

So, with the prayer to God, *amet in me fraternus animus quod amandum doces, et doleat in me quod dolendum doces* ('Let a fraternal mind love in me what you teach us to be worthy of love, and deplore in me what you teach us to be deplorable,' *Conf.* 10.5), Augustine extends to the whole Church the self-disclosure native to close friendship. With what motivation, one might ask? He frames the work as a response to Christ's command and example of service, in which all whom God counts as children, Augustine must count as his masters. Of the risks of such exposure, he writes: *id ago sub alis tuis nimis cum ingenti periculo, nisi quia sub alis tuis tibi subdita est anima mea et infirmitas mea tibi nota est. paruulus sum, sed uiuit semper pater meus et idoneus est mihi tutor meus* ('I do it under your outstretched wings and would do it in grave peril, were it not that under those wings my soul is surrendered to you and to you my weakness known. I am a little child, but my Father lives for ever and in him I have a guardian suited to me,' *Conf.* 10.6). Augustine's attempt at self-disclosure through writing the *Confessions* thus expands the scope of friendship conveyed in the narrative.

### Relationships in the letters: universal vs. private loves

In the remainder of this chapter, in continuity with the narrative of the *Confessions*, I will look at some of the actions that Augustine effects by means of the letters. The most striking of these actions involves Augustine *ending* correspondences with two of his close friends. At work is a conflict between the claims of friendship and obligations to the larger community. The clear decision in favour of universal obligations suggested by ending a correspondence is complicated when viewed beside Augustine's regretful description of their separation. After getting a sense of Augustine's views on universal vs. private claims, I will proceed to the letters' account of his decisions in practice – and his emotional responses.

In his inquiry into 'The Good of Friendship,' Alexander Nehamas takes note of the tension between friendship and morality. Friendship's interest in the individual as distinct from all others is at odds with morality's universal scope, which requires fair and objective treatment of all.<sup>15</sup> The terms of this tension are different in Augustine, as in his Christian contemporaries – different enough that many of his commentators have argued that there is no tension. In place of the impartial treatment of 'morality' is the universal love expressed in Christ's command, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'<sup>16</sup> This universal extension of love gives rise to an integration of morality and friendship, as Augustine expresses in a letter to Proba:

*itemque amicitia non angustis finibus terminanda est; omnes enim, quibus amor et dilectio debetur, amplectitur, quamuis in alios propensius in alios suspensius inclinatur; peruenit autem usque ad inimicos, pro quibus etiam orare praecipimur. ita nemo est in genere humano, cur non dilectio etsi non pro mutua*

<sup>15</sup> Alexander Nehamas, 'XII – The Good of Friendship,' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* CX (2010), 290.

<sup>16</sup> Luke 10:27.

*caritate pro ipsa tamen communis naturae societate debeatur. sed hi nos multum inique delectant, a quibus vicissim sancte casteque diligimur.*

Likewise, friendship should not be bounded by narrow limits, for it embraces all to whom we owe affection and love, though it is inclined more eagerly toward some and more hesitantly toward others. It, however, extends even to enemies, for whom we are also commanded to pray. Thus there is no one in the human race to whom we do not owe love, even if not out of mutual love, at least on account of our sharing in a common nature. But these persons by whom we are loved in return by a holy and chaste love are a great source of delight, and rightly so. (*Ep.* 130.13)

Passages such as these likely lie behind readings of Augustine that recognise no conflict between the two categories (morality and friendship). Eoin Cassidy, one of the more recent proponents of this idea, expresses this claim (which he shares with earlier scholars who focused on friendship in Augustine: Ilsetraut Hadot, Venantius Nolte and Marie MacNamara) as follows:

There is no conflict in Augustine's writings between *amicitia* and *caritas*, even though the former is restricted to the few, while the latter desires a universal extension. The lack of any possible conflict is simply to be explained by the fact that Augustine always recognized that true friendship is characterized by the desire for the universal extension of that relationship.<sup>17</sup>

Now, I am certainly willing to admit this theoretical ideal of extending friendship, but not the conclusion that there is no conflict between *amicitia* and *caritas*, in the universal sense. For when the ideal is brought into real life, with its limitations on time and space, something must give. Augustine himself had admitted in *De doctrina christiana* that you cannot perform the actions of love toward everyone: 'All people are to be loved equally; but since you cannot be of service to everyone, you have to take greater care of those who are more closely joined to you by a turn, so to say, of fortune's wheel, whether by occasion of place or time, or any other such circumstance' (*De doct. christ.* 1.29). But it would be only partially true to interpret this as advice to love those around you, for Augustine would then have had good reason to remain in communal living with his friends at Thagaste instead of tearfully accepting the bishop of Hippo's injunction that he serve as priest. No, such an interpretation leaves out the idea of vocation, the calling to serve in a particular place, which determines the 'occasion[s] of place' to which Augustine referred above. So he writes to Laetus, whose mother was urging him to abandon his vocation: *si est in te caritas ordinata sciens praeponere maiora minoribus et misericordia moueri, ut pauperes euangelizentur* ('If you have a well-ordered love, you should know how to prefer more important to less important things and to be touched by mercy in order that the gospel may be preached to the poor,' *Ep.* 243.12). The addition of vocation makes the dichotomy of private and universal love less clear, for vocation stems from the imperative to love those beyond conventional circles of family and friends, yet it is lived out in the particular, often focusing on a certain group of people. Nevertheless, I will still follow this tension, with a small adjustment of terms, as the pull between private loves and *caritas*, which extends beyond them. In the letters, this tension is evident first in Augustine's negotiation of his friend Nebridius's absence,

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<sup>17</sup> Eoin Cassidy, 'The Recovery of the Classical Ideal of Friendship in Augustine's Portrayal of *Caritas*,' in *The Relationship between Neoplatonism and Christianity*, eds. T. Finan and V. Toomey (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1992), 132.

second and more broadly in his choices of correspondents, and third, in Augustine's description of separation from friends in *Letter 84*. It will become clear that obligations to friends and obligations to 'all' were often at odds, and Augustine consistently favoured his wider obligations.

First, Nebridius, then. Augustine was a teacher of rhetoric before his conversion. His Cassiciacum dialogues, written shortly before his baptism, exhibit his continuing role as tutor of a motley group of family members, friends and pupils. It is perhaps no surprise then, that his early letters to his newly-absent friend Nebridius express a tension between obligations to friends and obligations to those with greater needs. Augustine keenly feels Nebridius's accusation that he has been neglecting efforts to be together: he writes that such neglect would be *magnum crimen et . . . periculosissimum* ('a grave wrong and one filled with danger') if it were not false (*Ep.* 10.1). Yet he makes no plans to move, since reason indicates that he can best live *sententia* ('in accord with our purpose') in Thagaste. Part of this purpose comes to light a few lines down: *hic sunt, qui neque uenire mecum queant et quos deserere nefas putem. tu enim potes et apud tuam mentem suaviter habitare; hi uero ut idem possint, satagitur* ('Here there are those who could not come with me and whom I think it would be wrong to abandon. You, after all, can dwell comfortably in the chambers of your mind. But it demands hard work for these to be able to do the same'). Equality of intellect and virtue is no longer the dominant pull towards presence, as in the Aristotelian ideal of friendship which Augustine had pursued since his school days: deficiency and immaturity now exert a strong force for Augustine. More precisely, Augustine has become aware of obligations to those beyond his immediate circle, and the possibility that obligations to those in need even take precedence over obligations to closer connections. The trade-off is not without pain, particularly, in Augustine's case, on account of Nebridius's hurt. 'Never has any of your questions kept me in as much turmoil,' he writes. And in a subsequent letter: 'I had decided to write back to you on this point alone and to demand a response from you and not to turn our pen aside to any other issue pertinent to our studies until this one was brought to an end between us' (*Ep.* 11.1). Augustine's unveiled relief when Nebridius relents suggests, however, that the 'weakness' for presence was largely on the latter's side.

This feeling of obligation gains formality and scale upon Augustine's ordination as a priest, then bishop at Hippo. For the first time he was tied down to a particular place and group of people. And this group, at least as Augustine perceived it, was rather needy of his presence. The people feared his absence 'deeply and excessively' (*Ep.* 22.9). They were so weak that a slight trial could shake them critically; after a time away, he found them 'scandalized over [his] absence to their very grave peril' (*periculosissime scandalizatum comperi de absentia mea, Ep.* 124.2). And even in his later years, he writes that the people 'were complaining greatly concerning my absence' (*de mea multum absentia murmurabat, Ep.* 25\*). Despite complaining about their complaining, he views himself obliged to concede his presence. His favoured metaphor of the chains of ministry neatly conveys the obligation: chains constrain him to serve the infirm, and, taking the metaphor more literally, keep him physically with them (*Ep.* 95.1).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *sed id uincula nostra non ferrent, quibus religati sumus infirmorum seruire languoribus nec eos praesentia corporali relinquere* ('But our chains, by which we are bound to serve the weaknesses of the infirm, would not tolerate that we should leave them by our physical presence').



Soon the letters show the effects of a changing orientation to friendship. His early correspondence with Nebridius reflected the close philosophical relationships he had been cultivating around the time of his conversion: when Nebridius must return to his family's estate apart from the community, Augustine solicitously observes the Peripatetic insistence on the need for regular correspondence to maintain friendships in absence.<sup>19</sup> But the situation changes a decade or so later. Though Augustine was fortunate to have many of his friends join him in a monastic community at Hippo when he was snatched up as a priest by the bishop there, eventually he was forced to contend with absence, as his closest friends left to fill positions as clerics or bishops. But he no longer keeps his friends close through correspondence: after the early set of nine letters to Nebridius, Augustine writes surprisingly few letters to his intimate friends. Letters to his life-long friend Alypius, whose episcopate in Carthage was relatively near, largely concern church business. Evodius, another native of Thagaste who joined the circle of Augustine's friends in Italy and returned with them to Thagaste,<sup>20</sup> is the recipient of four letters during the period of 414-15 in response to his fervent requests for Augustine's opinions on theological questions. Finally, Severus, who shared the same hometown, the same connection in Italy and return to Africa, but continued with Augustine at Hippo before becoming a bishop, receives only three letters, and two of those on business.

The third letter to Severus, however, is significant for understanding Augustine's tendency away from the intimate letter. In response to Severus's effusive letter filled with his praises and demands for a long letter, Augustine reflects on the obligations that come with such a letter – and such an affection. But now, even the time that it takes to write a letter is contested. After admitting that yes, he does owe Severus a long letter, he appeals to a prior debt:

*cernis prius esse, quod et tibi et aliis quam quod tibi tantum modo debeo; et tempus ad omnia mihi non sufficit, quando nec ad illa, quae priora sunt. unde omnes carissimi et familiarissimi mei, quorum in nomine Christi inter primos mihi es, rem facient officii sui, si non solum mihi alia scribenda ipsi non inponant, uerum etiam ceteros quanta possunt auctoritate et sancta benignitate prohibeant, ne uidear ego durus, cum a singulis petita non dedero, dum ea magis uolo reddere, quae omnibus debeo.*

You see that what I owe to you and to others is more important than what I owe only to you, and I do not have enough time for everything since I do not have enough even for the more important things. Hence, all those who are very dear and very close to me – and you are for me among the first of them in the name of Christ – will do something that is truly their duty, if they not only do not impose upon me other things to write, but also prevent others from doing so with as much authority and holy kindness as they can. Otherwise, I may seem hardhearted when I do not grant individuals what they request, since I prefer to repay the debt I owe to all. (*Ep.* 110.6)

And Severus heeds him, if the lack of subsequent letters between them is any indication. Moreover, the correspondence with Evodius ends in a similar manner. After describing the numerous theological and polemical books that he has been working on, he urges Evodius to stop sending him esoteric questions to answer: *me autem permitte his uacare quaerendis atque dictandis, quae quoniam multis sunt necessaria, praeponenda esse arbitror ualde ad paucos pertinentibus inquisitionibus tuis* ('But allow me the free

<sup>19</sup> Caroline White observes this feature of the Peripatetics in her summary of Aristotle's views on friendship in *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century*, 26.

<sup>20</sup> James J. O'Donnell, 'Evodius of Uzalis,' in *Augustine through the Ages*, 344.

time to investigate and dictate the works that, since they are needed by many people, I think I should place before your questions, which concern very few,' *Ep.* 169.13). Thus, with these two letters, Augustine puts his 'universal' obligations before those of friendship. Though *amicitia* and *caritas* may not be at odds theoretically, in practice Augustine must choose between them, since his time and presence are finite.

But, looking further, it becomes apparent that the choice is not as straight-forward as those letters suggest. In a letter to the cleric Novatus, in which he encourages him to endure separation from his brother, Augustine speaks of his own separation from Severus.

*nam ut longe mittam cognationem tuam, quantum libet ualeat germanitas tui sanguinis, non uincit amicitiae uinculum, quo nobis inuicem ego et frater Seuerus inbaeremus; et tamen nosti, quam raro mihi eum uidere contingat. atque hoc fecit non utique uoluntas uel mea uel illius, sed dum matris ecclesiae necessitates propter futurum saeculum, quo nobiscum inseparabiliter conuiuemus, nostri temporis necessitatibus antepoñimus. quanto ergo aequius te tolerare oportet pro utilitate ipsius matris ecclesiae eius fratris absentiam, cum quo non tam diu cibum dominicum ruminas, quam diu ego cum dulcissimo concine meo Seuero, qui mecum tamen nunc uix et interdum per exiguas chartulas loquitur et eas quidem plures aliarum curarum et negotiorum refertas quam portantes aliquid nostrorum in Christi suauitate pratorum.*

For, in order that I might send your blood relative away, despite all that blood brotherhood can do, it does not surpass the bond of friendship by which Brother Severus and I are bound to each other, and you, nonetheless, know how rarely it happens that I see him. And the reason for this is not my will or his. Rather, for the sake of the world to come, in which we will live with each other inseparably, we set the needs of our mother, the Church, before the needs of our own time. How much more rightly, therefore, ought you to tolerate for the benefit of mother Church the absence of that brother, with whom you have not tasted the Lord's supper for nearly as long a time as I have not with my most dear fellow citizen, Severus, who speaks to me now hardly at all or at times by means of very short messages, and more of them are filled with other cares and concerns than carry to me something from our meadows with the sweetness of Christ. (*Ep.* 84.1)

Augustine portrays his friendship with Severus as very close: he boldly asserts that the brothers' bond does not surpass the bond he has with Severus. And what is left of this friendship? Not even decent letters, it seems. The choice here is between private needs and those of the Church. Augustine does not try to make the choice attractive; in fact, he anticipates that Novatus may experience the pain he himself feels when he sends his friends to serve distant churches: *tunc senties, quibus desideriorum stimulis fodiar, quod quidam mihi maxima et dulcissima familiaritate coniuncti non sunt etiam corporaliter mecum* ('Then you will feel the stings of desire by which I am pierced because certain people bound to me by the closest and deepest friendship are not also physically present with me,' *Ep.* 84.1).

So Augustine's stance on the conflict between universal and private obligations looks something like this: the claims of universal love take precedence over those of personal bonds when the limits of time and space force a choice. But the ties of personal relationships are not thereby diminished: 'stings of desire' mark their absence. The consolation is the hope of resuming and perfecting friendship in the next life, where presence will be unbroken.<sup>21</sup> In effect, this letter to Novatus sketches tensions that surface in the two motifs that I will be unpacking in the next two chapters: the

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<sup>21</sup> For further discussion of the eschatological dimension of friendship, see the section 'Deferment of Intimacy' in chapter three, page 65.

significance of physical presence (body–soul), desire for individuals (Creator–creature), and the eschatological perspective (this world–the next). This chapter has prepared the ground, I trust, for exploring those tensions. The concerns of the *Confessions* – the re-ordering of relationships in recognition of the Creator–creature divide – continue throughout the letters. I would argue that the letters, as transactions of real relationships, can help answer the ‘how?’ of the *Confessions*’ abstract moral: ‘Blessed is he who loves you, and loves his friend in you and his enemy for your sake.’<sup>22</sup> From this first venture into the letters, I have shown how loving friends *in deo* may result in relegating the claims of friendship. In the inquiries of the following chapters, the letters will further our understanding of the status left to love for the individual.

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<sup>22</sup> *Conf.* 4.14.

## CHAPTER 2

# Negotiating absence: desire and fulfilment

Well I know you were not born to pass all your days with me; but I would that the necessity of absence gave you as much horror as it gives to me; that you could not think of it but with trembling; and that inevitable as our separation must appear, you could not believe yourself able to sustain it. . . . Your understanding is enchanting; you have said the same of mine; but I would forego seeing it in either of us, did it oppose the progress of our folly.

—*Letters from a Portuguese Nun*

Augustine's deep awareness of the spiritual world disposes him to embrace the letter-reader's appreciation of the correspondent's 'presence' in his letter. But, for all his early professions of the spiritual's primacy over the physical, Augustine can bemoan a correspondent's absence with the best of them. This typical epistolary preoccupation with presence and absence is significant in Augustine's letters because of the desire for others it exhibits – desire, which for Augustine is of great moral importance.<sup>1</sup> The motif brings out Augustine's engagement with some fundamental tensions between this desire and his philosophical commitments: his adherence to a hierarchical ontology minimising the value of the body, as well as the Creator–creature tension of the *Confessions*. For the sake of clarity, I will formulate this engagement in two questions: Is it morally acceptable to long for another's bodily presence? And, can desire for another be justified, considering the primacy given to love for God? And I add a third: How does Augustine's use of the language of desire communicate this engagement? These questions will undergird my investigation of the presence-absence motif.

The *Confessions* intimates an ambivalence regarding the desire for physical presence in the face of its absence, but does not develop it: longing for physical presence enters the narrative substantially only in his accounts of mourning. In the death of the unnamed friend, the longing is compromised by the 'adulterous' nature of the friendship<sup>2</sup>; in Monica's death, the longing is less plainly reprehensible, but still associated with the 'carnal' element of his attachment. It is only the subsequent separations from friends and expansion of his connections to individuals he has never met, particularly after becoming bishop, that reveal this ambivalence. After introducing the typical epistolary concern with presence and absence and discussing Augustine's addition of a 'spiritual'

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<sup>1</sup> *Sermon* 313A.2: 'The only things that make good or bad lives are good or bad loves. "That's a great man," someone will say, 'he's good, he's great.' In what way, I'd like to know? 'He knows so much.' I'm asking what he loves, not what he knows.'

<sup>2</sup> Refer back to Chapter 1, page 20 for friendship's potentially 'adulterous' or idolatrous character.

presence to the mix, I will follow a roughly chronological selection of the letters, attending first to the tension between Augustine's early philosophical commitments and his natural affection, then to its gradual resolution.

### Expressions of presence, absence and desire

In her work on epistolary theory, Janet Altman calls epistolary language 'the language of absence' for good reason: letters almost exclusively connect people who are distant from each other.<sup>3</sup> How a correspondent negotiates that absence says a good deal about how they understand the nature of human relationships. Augustine's diverse correspondence is largely concerned with church business and theological or moral questions, yet the 'language of absence' and its accompanying concern with presence pervade the corpus from the second extant letter to a letter written in his last years. Variations of the paradigmatic assertion of presence common in French epistolary fiction, 'je crois te parler,'<sup>4</sup> crop up in Augustine's letters. For example, he appreciates how the monk Paulinus of Nola discusses a question by letter *tamquam si praesens praesenti inter dulces loquelas obderem*, 'as if we were present to one another in sweet conversation' (*Ep.* 80.1-2). And, pleased with the court official Valerius's attentive reading of his works, he sends him a work on marriage, trusting that Valerius will be even more pleased with 'something written for you, in which I may speak to you as if you were present!' (*quod ad te scribitur, ubi tamquam praesenti loquar*) and something lengthier *quod legendo diutius sis nobiscum*, ('so that by reading it you may be with us for a longer time,' *Ep.* 200.3).

The opposite, yet equally typical sentiment that Altman identifies – bemoaning the inadequacy of the letter as a substitute for presence – is also a feature of Augustine's letters. An uncharacteristically vulnerable expression of this sentiment issues from his early years of priesthood: *multa sunt, quae de nostra uita et conuersatione deflerem, quae nollem per litteras ad te uenire sed inter cor meum et cor tuum nulla essent ministeria praeter os meum et aures tuas* ('There are many things concerning our life and conduct over which I would shed tears, but which I would not want to come to you by letter. Rather, I wish that there were no other means of communication between my heart and your heart but my lips and your ears,' *Ep.* 22.9). In this case, the inadequacy of the letter may also stem from the lack of privacy typical of the letter at that time, a fact epitomised by Augustine's letter to Jerome which became widely known throughout Christian circles before a copy finally reached its consequently offended addressee nine years later. Augustine's response to Jerome regarding this failed communication (and cause of considerable tension) vividly illustrates the frustrations of epistolary communication:

*uide, quid faciant terrae ac maria, quae nos corporaliter dirimunt. si haec epistula mea, quam legis, ego essem, iam mihi diceres, quod quaesivi; nunc uero quando rescribes? quando mittes? quando perueniet? quando accipiam?*

See what the lands and seas that physically separate us do. If I were this letter of mine that you are reading, you would already have told me what I asked for. But now when will you write back? When will you send it? When will it arrive? When shall I receive it? (*Ep.* 73.7)

The greater hazards of letter delivery in late antiquity intensified the awareness and accompanying laments of the letter's inability to substitute for a person's presence.

<sup>3</sup> Janet Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), 140.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

Augustine's use of the trope brings out his engagement with the problems that absence creates for relationships, and his negotiation of the significance of physical presence for friendship. Is it consistent to long to see someone in person when you believe that what is eternal merits your undivided attention? The questions change as Augustine's attitude towards the body changes: does physical absence even matter when the spiritual connection you share is what is important?

*Spiritual presence*

An important twist in Augustine's use of the motif hinges on the meaning of absence and presence. The epistolary novelists of Altman's study were well aware of the blurriness of the line between the two – and the letter's intermediary existence, emphasising the one or the other – but Augustine adds a spiritual dimension to this paradox. Of course, he is not alone in this. Through his education Augustine had been exposed to the classical tradition of friendship in absence, from Epicurus to Cicero and Seneca, which accorded value to the incorporeal aspects of friendship. But closer to Augustine – in fact, bursting upon him in countless letters – was the discourse of his Catholic peers. As early as Paul, Christian correspondents had asserted a spiritual presence among fellow believers that persisted despite bodily absence.<sup>5</sup> In the more immediate context, the proliferation of 'friendships in absence' in the fourth century made the concern particularly common among Augustine's Catholic peers. Such friendships grew out of the cosmopolitanism of the empire and the need for support among Church leaders defending doctrinal and geographical borders.<sup>6</sup> So then, it is necessary to consider Augustine's rhetoric as participating in a discourse of presence and absence shaped by the epistolary milieu of the fourth-century Church.

Caroline White's brief study of fourth-century Christian views on friendships in absence sketches some commonalities among the correspondents. In general, they shared an emphasis on and preference for a spiritual basis of friendship which stemmed from a common love of Christ, to the extent that friendships not infrequently developed between individuals who had not met. (There seems to be no precedent for this in the classical tradition.)<sup>7</sup> Even so, they readily lamented the trials of absence. Some looked to theology to resolve this tension, sometimes affording the body some place in the largely spiritualised domain of friendship.<sup>8</sup> With each of these common traits Augustine is very much in tune; indeed, he is among the chief witnesses. But it is the particular development and shading of his thoughts on spiritual presence that I will briefly trace.

Early in the correspondence, this connection is effected by individuals. As each, though distant from the other, turns inward and seeks to enter the presence of God, he finds the other in God more surely than in the images of his memory. So Augustine bids his distant friend Nebridius to ease his loneliness by lifting his mind to God: *confer te ad animum tuum et illum in deum leua, quantum potes* ('Enter

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<sup>5</sup> As Augustine quotes in his commentary on Colossians 2:5: «*nam etsi corpore », inquit, «absens sum, spiritu uobiscum sum gaudens et uidens uestram ordinationem et id, quod deest fidei uestrae in Christo »*. ('The apostle says, *For, even if I am absent in terms of the body, I am present with you in spirit, rejoicing and seeing your discipline and what is lacking in your faith in Christ,*' Ep. 149.25).

<sup>6</sup> Caroline White, 'Friendship in Absence: Some Patristic Views,' 68-69.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 76-77.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 80, 84.

into your mind, and raise it up to God as much as you can,' *Ep.* 9.1).<sup>9</sup> What makes this any better than memory, one might ask? Augustine answers this only obliquely: the understanding that *non loco esse nos simul* ('It is not by place that we are together'). This answer accords well with the dualism of his early post-conversion years, but more significantly with the importance Augustine placed on the 'ascending' intellect at that time. The exclusive nature of this unity is clear from his determination to remain in Thagaste to help those who cannot yet enter their minds *suaviter* ('comfortably'), as Nebridius can – who cannot yet understand this spiritual presence (*Ep.* 10.1).

Augustine's first letter to Jerome contains three variations of incorporeal togetherness, two well-established in the classical tradition and one in the Christian tradition. As context, Augustine, as a relatively new and unknown priest, is attempting to initiate a correspondence with the famous Biblical scholar Jerome. The first and most common expression of 'spiritual' presence is Augustine's observation of the acquaintance one can gain by reading another's writing. In fact, he values Jerome's pursuit of Biblical scholarship as acquainting them much more effectively than physical presence could: *numquam aequè quisquam facie cuiuslibet innotuit quam mihi tuorum in domino studiorum quieta laetitia et uere exercitatio liberalis* ('Never has physical presence made anyone as well known to someone else as your peaceful joy and truly liberal pursuit of your studies in the Lord has made you known to me,' *Ep.* 28.1). The second is a commonplace of discourse on friendship: the single soul between close friends. Augustine writes of his friendship with Alypius, who had visited Jerome: *non enim animo me atque illum sed corpore duos, qui nouerit, dixerit, concordia dum taxat et familiaritate fidissima* ('For one who knows us would say that we are two, not in mind, but in body, at least in terms of our harmony and most trustworthy friendship'). He goes on to assert that he 'saw' Jerome through his union with Alypius.

This assertion of presence despite absence paves the way for the third, and decidedly Christian, variation of incorporeal presence. He claims the love of Jerome, whom he had never met, through the *communio spiritus*, the communion of the Spirit. He writes: *me primitus communione spiritus, quo in unum nitimur, deinde illius ex ore iam diligis* ('You already love me, first, because of the communion of the Spirit by which we strive for unity, second, because of his [Alypius's] words,' *Ep.* 28). It was not uncommon to conceive of the Church as the *catholica* (universal) *communio*, yet Augustine's early conflicts with the Donatist sect made him particularly concerned with the basis and limits of this communion.<sup>10</sup> For now it is enough to observe that the *communio spiritus* he invokes is a basis for presence (*simul esse*) significantly different from the union of ascending intellects in God in *Letter* 9. At the very least, it seems to be less dependent on the efforts of the intellect. Is this an adaption to audience or a change in understanding? I will move on with an eye to evidence of further movement.

Not long after (late 396 or 397), Augustine again invokes this spiritual presence in absence. This time he is quoting a letter of the converted monk Paulinus of Nola. His correspondent is significant, since Paulinus was possibly the most enthusiastic devotee of the spiritual (Spiritual) community of

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<sup>9</sup> The beginning of this counsel is strikingly reminiscent of Seneca's *Ep. mor.* 7.8, which ends in an outward rather than upward movement: *recede in te ipse quantum potes; cum his versare qui te meliorem facturi sunt, illos admitte quos tu potes facere meliores* ('Withdraw into yourself, as far as you can. Associate with those who will make a better man of you. Welcome those whom you yourself can improve').

<sup>10</sup> See page 36 for more on the Donatists.

the Church. He initiated correspondences with several prominent Catholics whom he had not met in person, including Augustine, seemingly quite convinced of a pre-existing spiritual connection. Augustine is clearly pleased with Paulinus's formulation when he adopts it in response. Separation would be unbearable, he writes,

*nisi a nobis ista discessione non discederemus, nisi unius essemus corporis membra, unum haberemus caput, una perfunderemur gratia, uno pane uiueremus, una incederemus uia, eadem habitaremus domo.*

were it not that we would not be separated from one another by this departure, were it not that 'we are members of one body, have one head, are filled with one grace, live by one bread, walk one way, and dwell in the same house.' (*Ep.* 31.3)

He proceeds to mention the single Spirit that animates them,<sup>11</sup> but the figures of unity are noticeably, well, material: a body, bread, a path, a house. They can all certainly be construed metaphorically – and Catherine Conybeare finds Paulinus generally preferring the spiritual<sup>12</sup> – but the concreteness of the Eucharist (the bread), the walking out of the faith in the world, even the institution of the Church cannot quite be erased from this conception of unity.

Admittedly, the act of quoting may destabilize inferences about his views, but Augustine follows the quote with an appropriation of the statement, in as much as it is true. *sed cur potius haec uestra sint uerba quam mea, quae utique quam uera sunt, tam nobis ab eiusdem capitis communionem proueniunt?* ('But why are these your words rather than mine? For, just as they are true, so they come to us from our union with the same head'). And so they *are* his, so to speak, since Paulinus's lines were a combination of phrases from New Testament epistles and the Psalms.<sup>13</sup> Their common familiarity with the word of God is not only the source of a language to express purified or ordered affection, as will be apparent in the next section,<sup>14</sup> but a source of shared truth. Fellowship with the same head resembles Nebridius's seeking his absent friends by lifting his mind to God, but the metaphor evoked is the body of Christ, made up of all believers. The *communio* of each member with Christ, the head, gives each access to the same arbiter of truth. Yet this common source of truth does not completely elide what is individual. Augustine continues:

*et si aliquid proprium uobis donatum haberent, tanto magis ea sic dilexi, ut obsiderent uiam pectoris mei neque a corde ad linguam meam uerba transire sinerent, donec tanto puriora, quanto sunt uestra, procederent.*

And if they [Paulinus's words] had something personal that was given to you, I loved them much more so that they occupied the road of my heart and did not allow words to pass from my heart to my tongue until your words came first, more pure to the extent that they were yours.

<sup>11</sup> *quis dubitet nos uno spiritu uegetari, nisi qui non sentit, qua nobis dilectione uinciamur?* ('Who would doubt that we are kept alive by one Spirit except someone who does not experience the love by which we are bound to one another?' *Ep.* 31.3).

<sup>12</sup> Catherine Conybeare, *Paulinus Noster: Self and Symbols in the Letters of Paulinus of Nola* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 135-36.

<sup>13</sup> 'Members of one body': Romans 12:4 and 1 Corinthians 12:12; 'have one head': Ephesians 4:15; 'one grace': Romans 5:2, 17 etc.; 'live by one bread': 1 Corinthians 10:17; 'walk one way': 1 Corinthians 14:1, Ephesians 5:2; 'dwell in the same house': Psalms 27:4.

<sup>14</sup> See below for a discussion of Augustine's language of desire: page 38.



We might question how personal words could be that were ‘given,’ but Augustine does not seem to conceive of a conflict between *donatum* (given) and the adjectives of particularity and possession, *proprium* (personal) and *vestra* (yours). Then again, few who read the letter would refuse Paulinus a claim to a distinctive style in his appropriation of the sources. The truth of his words which Augustine recognised from its scriptural sources convinced Augustine of their connection, their kinship in truth and the Church; but Paulinus’s personal touches – his open-hearted expressions of love for Christ and Augustine, his extravagant use of scriptural images – drew out Augustine’s affection, perhaps. Regardless, it is evident that the recognition of another soul in whom love for God was pre-eminent could sanction a language of desire, especially expressed through scriptural quotation and allusion.

Augustine’s appreciation of this formulation of spiritual communion is evident as he subsequently begins to appeal to the image of the Body of Christ as a uniting principle among Christians. The spiritual aspect of this communion has less to do with reason and contemplation than faith. Thus, in *c.* 412, he can exhort the converted Donatists Saturninus and Eufrates to embrace the close connection they have in the Body, the world-wide Church, which absence cannot alter. The point of connection is still divine – Christ, the head<sup>15</sup> – but the enactment of the connection no longer seems to require dwelling comfortably in one’s mind. Nor, in his exhortation, does he start at a common communion with the divine; rather, he starts with the Church.

*in illa enim ecclesia sumus, quae propitio deo, licet usquequaque porrecta et toto orbe diffusa sit, unum tamen corpus est magnum unius capitis magni, quod caput eius est ipse saluator, sicut apostolus dicit.*

For we are in that Church that by God’s mercy, though it stretches in every direction and is spread throughout the world, is nonetheless the one great body of the one great head, and that head is the savior himself. (*Ep.* 142.1)

The connection is an objective fact if you are part of the Church, and nonexistent if you’re not, however developed your intellectual life may be. Members are together conditionally; they must not withdraw from the *corporis unitas*, the unity of the Body.<sup>16</sup> Thus the spiritual presence has acquired some worldly accoutrement, as I could only speculate in Augustine’s quotation of Paulinus: namely, continuous alignment (at least in a commitment to unity) with the concrete institution of the Catholic Church. I should also note the material nature of his metaphors, and his uninhibited extensions of the analogies:

*si enim nos una domus haberet, utique simul esse diceremur; quanto magis simul sumus, cum in uno corpore simul sumus. quamquam etiam in una domo nos esse ueritas ipsa testatur, quoniam sancta scriptura, quae corpus Christi esse dicit ecclesiam, ipsa itidem dicit eandem ecclesiam esse domum dei.*

For, if we were in one house, we would, of course, be said to be together. How much more are we together when we are together in one body! And yet the Truth himself testifies that we are in one house because holy scripture, which says that the Church is the body of Christ, also says that the same Church is the house of God. (*Ep.* 142.1)

<sup>15</sup> *unde, etiam si remotissimis terris mea longinqua esset absentia, in illo simul essemus, a cuius corporis unitate recedere non debemus* (‘Hence, even if I were absent far away in most remote lands, we would be together in him from the unity of whose body we ought not to withdraw,’ *Ep.* 142.1).

<sup>16</sup> See *Ep.* 142.1 above.



Spiritual separation is the other side of spiritual connection, the side more static throughout the letters. Augustine's perception of such a divide between him and close friends and family issues in letters of lament and persuasion. He writes to his Donatist relative that he has long suffered pain over their separation and desired to talk with him about it (*Ep.* 52.4). To his straying former pupil Licentius he suggests that lamentation would be the proper genre for his response, deploring that such a mind and soul as his resists God. Could any day be happier than that in which I could enjoy your genius in the Lord, he asks, *aut uere tu nescias, quod te esuriam et sitiam* ('or do you really not know how I hunger and thirst for you,' *Ep.* 26.4)?

The idea of spiritual separation finds graphic expression in letters to heretics. Since I previously mentioned the influence that Augustine's interactions with the Donatists had on his views of Christian communion, a brief sketch of the sect may be of use. The Donatists were a group of African Christians who originally split off from the Catholic Church after the Diocletian persecutions because they refused to accept the ecclesial authority of church leaders who had handed over the Scriptures (*traditores*) to Roman officials to be destroyed. When Augustine became bishop in Hippo almost a century later, they were a formidable opponent of the Church, outnumbering Catholic Christians and not above using violence.<sup>17</sup> It is evident that Augustine views them as outside Catholic communion and thus salvation (even as they viewed him) when he encourages Macrobius to consider the eternal separation from the Body that he risks by ascribing to Donatism (*Ep.* 106). Again, when the Donatists of Cirta convert to Catholicism, effectively eliminating this spiritual distance between them, Augustine brings out the heat and flame. He cannot express, he writes, *quanto . . . caritatis ardore accendamus ad uisendos uos* ('how much we are set aflame with the ardor of love for seeing you,' *Ep.* 144.3).

Augustine betrays the same sensitivity about boundaries between communion and separation regarding that other great heresy that occupied him: Pelagianism. The issues at stake in this case were the doctrines of grace and original sin. In response to moral laxity among nominal Christians, the ascetic Pelagius promoted the ability of the individual to freely choose to do right and, potentially, lead a sinless life without divine grace. This was troubling to many within the Church, not least among them Augustine, whose struggles with a conflicted will are recorded in the *Confessions*.<sup>18</sup> Though followers of Pelagius had not yet been condemned by Pope Zosimus in 414/415 when Augustine wrote *Letter* 157, Augustine believed that such a situation could not last. In it, he relays his

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<sup>17</sup> For further historical discussion of Donatism, see W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: a movement of protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952) and Peter Brown, 'Religious Dissent in the Later Roman Empire: the Case of North Africa,' in *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972). For Augustine's interactions with Donatism, see Gerald Bonner's chapter, 'Augustine and Donatism,' in *St Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> The theological clash is evident in Pelagius's angry disapproval (recorded in *The Gift of Perseverance* 20.53) of Augustine's prayer in *Confessions* 10.40: 'On your exceedingly great mercy rests all my hope. Give what you command, and then command whatever you will. You order us to practice continence. A certain writer tells us, *I knew that no one can be continent except by God's gift, and that it is already a mark of wisdom to recognize whose gift this is.*' Again, Gerald Bonner's book cited above includes a useful discussion of the historical development of the heresy in the chapter 'The Pelagian Controversy: the Course' and of the doctrinal issues at stake in 'The Pelagian Controversy: the Issues.'

hopes to Hilarius that supporters of Pelagius might be healed before the spreading infection would make amputation necessary (*Ep.* 157.22). Similarly, in a late letter (c. 427 or 428) to the Catholic layman Palatinus, he exhibits much more concern for a separation of souls than of bodies:

*nos autem te siue absentem corpore siue praesentem in uno spiritu habere cupimus, per quem «diffunditur caritas in cordibus nostris», ut, quolibet loco fuerit caro nostra, nullo modo separata esse possit anima nostra.*

But we desire to possess you, whether absent or present in terms of the body, in the one Spirit by whom love is poured out in our hearts (Romans 5:5), in order that, wherever our flesh may be, our soul may in no way be separated. (*Ep.* 218.4)

Considering the letter's emphasis on grace as a gift of God, and thus its unmistakeable anti-Pelagian thrust, Augustine likely considered Palatinus in danger of ascribing to heretical teachings, which he believed would effect a spiritual, eternal separation. The pope's official condemnation of Pelagianism in 418 would certainly have supported this belief.

In summary, Augustine's understanding of the spiritual unity of friends and their communion through contemplation developed into a broader spiritual connection, realised by the Holy Spirit. Separation from those outside the increasingly ecclesial bounds of this connection increased in significance because of the eternal perspective. From the eternal view, one must be more concerned about spiritual than physical separation.

#### *Language of desire*

I ought to acknowledge another significant twist in Augustine's use of the trope, however. Of the trope's most typical contexts – letters between intimate friends or lovers – there are few in Augustine's correspondence. Instead, most of the instances fall into two categories: those in letters to Catholic men he had not met in person and those in letters to widowed or single women with whom his interaction was quite small. Yet, as will soon be apparent, the language of desire is by no means lacking on this account. Augustine employs a rather vivid rhetoric of desire, in fact. Ardent is a ubiquitous adjective; flames frequently accompany longing. Indeed, his language occasionally sidles over the boundaries of the erotic. To be clear, he uses these potent words and figures to describe desire with disparate objects: God and righteousness are as likely to be the objects as other individuals, nor are the negative desires to harm or possess neglected. But it is still striking that he addresses them to practical strangers. What precisely do words and images of longing more common to lovers convey in these distanced relationships? Perhaps absence is sufficient to foster such longing; Anne Carson certainly credits distance and inaccessibility with strengthening eros.<sup>19</sup> As I look to the letters, I must ask how the language of desire is functioning in them. Does it mark a moral slip from the one appropriate object of desire? Or the conscious (or unconscious) adaptation of the language of desire for the aim of encouraging Catholic unity and *caritas*? Or does it in fact show a reconciliation of desire for the other with love for God? Here, I will briefly situate Augustine's use of erotic language generally, then return to these questions as I encounter noticeably 'erotic' passages throughout my discussion of presence and absence.

<sup>19</sup> Anne Carson, *Eros the bittersweet: an essay* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 19.

Precedent for a broad application of the erotic is not lacking. Eros woos the lover of beautiful bodies to a love for eternal forms in Plato's *Symposium*, for one. But much nearer Augustine's world was the tradition of Christian eros, quite possibly confronting him in the writings of Origen, but certainly in the person of Ambrose. The pervasiveness of the allegorical reading of the *Song of Songs* in Ambrose's sermons and baptismal instruction makes it unlikely that Augustine missed an introduction to this tradition as a catechumen.<sup>20</sup> Ambrose embraced the image of lovers as a passionate expression of the individual's relationship with Christ, particularly that of the virgin.<sup>21</sup> But Asiedu has rightly pointed out a surprising restraint on Augustine's part in this domain: Augustine does not embrace the conjugal or erotic metaphor of the *Songs* as dominant or ideal, but employs various manifestations of longing to express love for God, including hunger and thirst, and yearning for one's homeland.<sup>22</sup> Even the flame, perhaps Augustine's most characteristic image of desire, he removes from the domain of lovers, to, in one of its fullest formulations (*Conf.* 13.10), that of pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem<sup>23</sup>: *dono tuo accendimur et sursum ferimur; inardescimus et imus. ascendimus ascensiones in corde et cantamus canticum graduum. igne tuo, igne tuo bono inardescimus et imus, quoniam sursum imus «ad pacem Hierusalem»*<sup>24</sup> ('Your Gift sets us afire and we are borne upward; we catch his flame and up we go. In our hearts we climb those upward paths, singing the songs of ascent. By your fire, your beneficent fire, are we enflamed, because we are making our way up to *the peace of Jerusalem*'). The image certainly bears Augustine's inward turn ('in our hearts'), yet it remains a communal image, evoking the masses of Israelites travelling to Jerusalem for pilgrim feasts. This communal understanding of divine love may well be, as Asiedu suggests, one reason for Augustine's reluctance to embrace the erotic image for love of God, in its exclusive connotations.<sup>25</sup>

This relative reticence makes Augustine's erotic language in the letters all the more striking. Though he extends the language of desire to a variety of Catholic laypersons, as well as individuals or communities outside orthodox Catholicism, the mechanics of this rhetoric are most apparent in a few letters of unusually extravagant expression. For the most part, recipients of such as these were a small number of Catholic laymen whom he had never met in person. A provokingly partial glimpse of virtue, an impossible stretch of land and sea separating him from such virtue: these may have fostered that revelation of lack so fundamental to desire.<sup>26</sup> But the *expression* of this desire – our concern – is often in the language of scripture, the word of God. In the *Confessions*, Augustine had reached for the words of the Psalms over 400 times to express his desires and experiences. In this he displayed both his internalisation of the Church's daily practice of psalter reading<sup>27</sup> and his appropriation of scripture as the best expression of experience, despite his early disgust with its

<sup>20</sup> F. B. A. Asiedu, 'The Song of Songs and the Ascent of the Soul: Ambrose, Augustine, and the Language of Mysticism,' *Vigiliae Christianae* 55:3 (2001), 301.

<sup>21</sup> Boniface Ramsey, *Ambrose* (Taylor & Francis, 1997), 47, 71.

<sup>22</sup> Asiedu, 'The Song of Songs and the Ascent of the Soul,' 314-15.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 315-16.

<sup>24</sup> Psalm 122:6.

<sup>25</sup> Asiedu, 'The Song of Songs and the Ascent of the Soul,' 316.

<sup>26</sup> Carson, *Eros the bittersweet*, 10.

<sup>27</sup> Michael C. McCarthy, 'Augustine's Mixed Feelings: Vergil's *Aeneid* and the Psalms of David in the *Confessions*,' *Augustinian Studies* 41:1 (2010), 468.

vulgar Latin.<sup>28</sup> Michael McCarthy suggests that Augustine's extensive borrowing may have been due to the psalmists' orientation toward God instead of self, a focus that allows for emotions and affections even as it orders them.<sup>29</sup>

In the letters Augustine continues this tendency, but he now includes others in its scope. Thus Augustine quotes Psalm 84:2 to describe the deep yearning to see Paulinus that his letter stimulated: *quo modo nobis anhelant sitim tuam et desiderium defectumque animae tuae «in atria domini!* ('How it creates a thirst for you and a longing and fainting of the soul in the courts of the Lord!' *Ep.* 27.3). But Psalm 84 is unquestionably a song of desire for God. The psalmist writes: 'My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.' Here *Paulinus* is the object of his thirsting and longing, in place of God. If Augustine seems bold in this substitution, his following words situate this love for another firmly within love for God. *quid est, quaeso te, aut quid tibi pro eis rependam, nisi quia totus sum tuus in eo, cuius totus es tu?* ('Why is it, I ask you, or what shall I give you to repay you for it, if not that I am wholly yours in him to whom you wholly belong?'). The scriptural source of the 'erotic' expression and its embeddedness in love for God deactivates the potential conflict. Furthermore, it is likely that Paulinus's use of the language of scripture to convey affection for others had a significant impact on Augustine's subsequent use of the same. This will be evident when I examine Augustine and Paulinus's correspondence in more detail in a following section.<sup>30</sup>

### Longing for physical presence – ambivalently

With that orientation on the language of the motif, I will shift to the motif itself, particularly as it deals with the physical aspect of presence. The typical epistolary laments of absence and wishes for presence participate in a dialectic with Augustine's understanding of the Platonic intelligible-sensible divide and his evolving valuation of the body. Before turning to specific instances of the trope, I should briefly outline these underlying strands of thought. John Rist has done us the service of tracking the development of Augustine's theoretical understanding of the body. The hostility toward the body of his early Cassiciacum dialogues and the doctrine of the soul 'falling' into the body still evident in the *Confessions* give way to a more generous assessment of the body, beginning in the early years of the fifth century.<sup>31</sup> Study of the doctrine of resurrection was likely integral in this. Instead of deeming the sinless bodies of Adam and Eve before the Fall as spiritual ('Neoplatonic envelopes' for the soul), he began to view them as flesh – and eventually as sexualized flesh – a flesh that persists in the resurrection.<sup>32</sup> Such reflections fostered his growing appreciation of the soul's rightful affection for the body. A verse from the New Testament stands out for its influence at this time (*c.* 407):

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<sup>28</sup> *Conf.* 3.9: *cum attendi ad illam scripturam, sed visa est mihi indigna, quam Tullianae dignitati compararem. tumor enim meus refugiebat modum eius et acies mea non penetrabat interiora eius* ('When I studied the Bible and compared it with Cicero's dignified prose, it seemed to me unworthy. My swollen pride recoiled from its style and my intelligence failed to penetrate to its inner meaning').

<sup>29</sup> McCarthy, 'Augustine's Mixed Feelings,' 470.

<sup>30</sup> See page 34 and 41.

<sup>31</sup> John M. Rist, *Augustine: ancient thought baptized* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 98, 111.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

simply, ‘No one hates his own flesh’ (Ephesians 5:29).<sup>33</sup> A few years later, Augustine begins to refer to the ‘mixture’ of body and soul as a *persona*, thus associating it with the *persona* of Christ, that mixture of God and man, flesh-intact after his resurrection. Rist justly draws attention to the significance of this comparison, since it marks the body-soul union as ‘fully integrable’ in the resurrection and consequently justifies loving care for the body.<sup>34</sup> With these broad strokes in mind, I turn to the letters, with an eye to the interaction of theory and the practical negotiation of relationships. As we may expect, practice is less orderly than theory. The letters initially exhibit a tension between Augustine’s philosophical commitment to the soul’s primacy over the body and his desires for the physical presence of others.

From the beginning, then: an early letter (*c.* 386) to his Milanese friend Zenobius, while Augustine was away from the philosophical action of the city at Cassiciacum, best illustrates this tension. At this point, just after his conversion, his understanding of reality still included a sharp value divide between intelligibles and sensibles. Brian Dobell convincingly argues that despite his conversion, Augustine was still committed to the idea of the ascent of the soul through reason.<sup>35</sup> The letter’s preamble certainly supports that view: since everything sensible is transient and mutable, he writes, the ‘true and divine philosophy’ teaches us to cast off love for such things and ascend to the changeless and eternal (*Ep.* 2.1). But this creates a tension between the desire he feels for his friend’s physical presence and the negligible value he attributes to the sensible. After admitting his affection, he ponders the inconsistency of their behaviour:

*quod profecto vitium, si te bene noui, amas in nobis et, cum omnia bona optes carissimis et familiarissimis tuis, ab hoc eos sanare metuis. si autem tam potenti animo es, ut et agnoscere hunc laqueum et eo captos inridere ualeas, ne tu magnus atque alius. ego quidem quamdiu desidero absentem, desiderari me uolo. inuigilo tamen, quantum queo, et nitor, ut nihil amem, quod abesse a me inuito potest.*

If I know you well, you, of course, are fond of this defect in us, and though you desire for your dearest and closest friends everything good, you are afraid that they will be healed of this defect. But if you are so strong of mind that you can recognize this snare and laugh at those caught in it, you are truly a great and different man. As for myself, when I long for someone who is absent, I want to be longed for too. I am, nonetheless, as vigilant as I can be and strive to love nothing that can be absent from me against my will. (*Ep.* 2.1)

Here he represents his longing for physical presence as being caught in a noose or trap, and even as a *vitium*, a moral fault. Yet, though the individual who evades this trap would be *magnus atque alius* (‘great and different’), he asserts that we would rather have friends who fail in this application of philosophy just as much as we do. To add to the mixed signals, Augustine then announces his efforts to love nothing ‘that can be absent from me against my will,’ which would logically seem to involve freeing himself from this amiable fault of desiring physical presence.<sup>36</sup> In the end, Augustine leaves

<sup>33</sup> Rist, *Augustine: ancient thought baptized*, 108.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>35</sup> Brian Dobell, *Augustine’s Intellectual Conversion*, 121.

<sup>36</sup> This thought shows the influence of Stoicism. Cf. Seneca’s *Ep. mor.* 9.15 regarding the wise man’s ability to cultivate friendships while maintaining self-sufficiency: *Hos cupit habere quam plurimos, non ut beate vivat; vivet enim etiam sine amicis beate. Summum bonum extrinsecus instrumenta non quaerit. Domi colitur, ex se totum est. Incipit fortunae esse subiectum, si quam partem sui foris quaerit* (‘He craves as many friends as possible, not, however, that he may live

the desire and the knowledge that ought to deactivate it in tension, amiably unresolved. And the balm for his unresolved longing? At this point, letters.

The language with which he expresses desire deserves some attention, since it flirts with the boundaries of the erotic. Augustine expresses his desire for Zenobius's presence as approaching the limit of what is appropriate in friendship: he admits that, when absent, he *congressum istum atque conspectum tuum . . . quaerere nos eoque, dum licet cupere fratribus* ('seek[s] this contact with and sight of you to the extent that brothers are permitted to desire it'). And then in his closing, he plays with a figure more conventional for lovers than friends. With the support of his old friend Alypius he will seek through letters, he claims, to hold (*teneamus*) Zenobius, whom he pictures as trying to flee his grasp: *non enim est humanitatis eius non mecum operam dare, ut in quam multis possemus litteris te nobiscum teneamus nescio qua necessitate fugientem* ('It is, after all, not typical of his humanity to fail to make the effort with me to hold you with us by as many letters as possible, though you try to escape on the pretext of some necessity or other,' *Ep.* 2.1). Admittedly, this desire looks rather like that of the congenial group of friends from *Confessions* 4.13. The letter is a brief, elegant piece: a light touch of metaphysics, a playful tone – easily one of the 'thousand gracious gestures' that kindle the minds of friends, fusing them into one. But he prefaces his admissions of longing for his friend's presence with the proper Platonic desire (albeit in Christian garb) for the eternal, and this with a verb of stronger erotic connotation: *aestuo*, to burn with desire. The soul is to calm its destructive loves so that it may be inflamed, may burn with desire for what is eternal, and be borne towards it (*Ep.* 2.1). Similarly, the reason Augustine seeks to 'hold' Zenobius is philosophical: they must finish the discussion they had begun, *si curae nobismet ipsis sumus* ('if we have any care about ourselves'). As one of the earliest letters, then, this letter sketches Augustine's register of erotic language: his nonchalance in extending terms and figures with erotic connotations to friendship, but also his use of these terms in the context of the philosophical ascent. Beyond this, I will note that his sentiment here, his expression of desire, is of a piece with the later narrative of the *Confessions*.

A significant development in his attitude toward physical presence occurs in *Letter 27* to the monk and erstwhile senator Paulinus of Nola. Around the year 394, Paulinus and his wife Therasia had initiated a correspondence with Augustine after reading some of his writings that they had received from his friend Alypius. Paulinus's letter is effusive, to put it mildly. Augustine's reply to Paulinus's first letter is so much more extravagant in style than his other letters that one suspects that Paulinus's style rubbed off on him. For this reason, it may be best to look first at the letter from Paulinus.

*vides, frater unanime admirabilis in Christo domino et suspiciende, quam familiariter te agnoverim, quanto admirer stupore, quam magno amore conplectar, qui cotidie conloquio litterarum tuarum fruor et oris tui spiritu uescor. os enim tuum fistulam aquae uiuae et uenam fontis aeterni merito dixerim, quia fons in te aquae salientis in uitam aeternam Christus effectus est. cuius desiderio sitiuit in te anima mea et ubertate tui fluminis inebriari terra mea concupiuit.*

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happily; for he will live happily even without friends. The Supreme Good calls for no practical aids from outside; it is developed at home, and arises entirely within itself. If the good seeks any portion of itself from without, it begins to be subject to the play of Fortune?.

You see, my admirable brother, with whom I am one in heart, who are to be loved in Christ the Lord, how I acknowledge you as a friend, with what great awe I admire you, with what great love I embrace you, I who daily enjoy the conversation of your writings and am fed by the spirit of your mouth. For I would be right to call your mouth a pipe of living water and a vein of eternal truth because Christ has become a fountain of living water springing up in you unto eternal life. Out of a desire for him my heart has thirsted for you, and my earth has desired to be inebriated by the richness of your river. (*Ep.* 25.2)

This excerpt gives a taste of the imagery and emotive language that fills the letter. In it, Paulinus expresses strong desire for Augustine, but his desire is ultimately for Christ whom Paulinus believes is present in Augustine's writings. Paulinus transfers rather intimate language to an entirely spiritual plain. 'Hold me close to you' (*fove*), he writes, but then continues, 'and strengthen me in the sacred writings and spiritual pursuits' (*et conrobora me in sacris litteris et spiritalibus studiis tempore*). At no point does he express the longing for physical presence so apparent in Augustine's letters. What he seeks is Augustine's spiritual guidance and love, which he experienced first from Alypius: *qui incognitos sibi nos et longinqua soli uel Sali intercapedine disparatos spiritu verae dilectionis, qui ubique et penetrat et effunditur, et uidere diligendo potuit et adloquendo pertingere* ('By the Spirit of true love, who both penetrates and is poured out everywhere, he was able to see us by loving us and to touch us by conversation, though we were unknown to him and separated from him by a long stretch of the land or of the sea' (*Ep.* 25.5).

Augustine matches Paulinus's intensity. His response in 396 begins with a lament: *cur ergo me excruciat desiderium tui apud ipsam intus animam?* ('Why does the longing for you torture me interiorly within my very soul?,' *Ep.* 27.1). Longing torments (*excruciat*) him: a strong claim concerning someone he had never seen – an erotic one, too, more native to the discomforts and wounds inflicted by love in elegy. Ovid, as just one example, pictures Amor as a military commander in triumph, inflicting wounds and burning bystanders with his flame (*Amores* 1.2). So then, Augustine, whose letters to his closest friends generally lack expressions of intimacy, follows Paulinus's lead in reaching for erotic language to describe their burgeoning connection. But for him longing involves pain. He continues, *doleo, quod te non uideo, et me ipse consolatur dolor* ('I am in pain because I do not see you, and my pain itself consoles me'), then defies that anyone could bear to prevent the pain of absence by repressing the joy bound to accompany his presence. Perhaps it was love at first read, the words presenting the flickering outline of an individual quite attractive to the converted Augustine: one exuding a passion for Christ to match his own and (I cannot deny the potential effect of this) blatant admiration of Augustine's writings. But the more important question is how this desire fits into his more theoretical understanding of the *ordo amoris*. No one could deny that Augustine deemed *caritas* owed to all, but longing?

### Reconciling with longing

Here it may be helpful to observe two features of Augustine's 'eroticism': its communal nature and its mediation in Christ. A single passage from the letter to Paulinus exhibits both:

*legerunt fratres et gaudent infatigabiliter et ineffabiliter tam uberibus et tam excellentibus donis dei, bonis tuis. quotquot eas legerunt, rapiunt, quia rapiuntur, cum legunt. quam suavis odor Christi et quam fragrat ex eis, dici non potest.*



The brothers have read it, and they rejoice tirelessly and ineffably over your good qualities, which are rich and excellent gifts of God. All who have read it seize upon it, because they are seized by it when they read it. I cannot express how sweet is the scent of Christ and how it radiates from it. (*Ep.* 27.2)

Here is an account of a communal reading of the letter – and communal ‘seduction.’ Company does not seem to hinder genuine desire; the yearning for a reciprocal love gives it away: *te omnes in eis et amari abs te cupiunt* (‘All of us love you in it and long to be loved by you’). The second feature, mediation in Christ, is evident as Augustine traces the seductive force, that sweet scent, to Christ, as well as the attractive qualities of the individual. The powerful concept in Augustine’s thought of God’s giving – expressed concisely in the verse that proved so influential for Augustine’s understanding of grace, ‘What do you have that you did not receive?’ (1 Corinthians 4:7) – links love of the good in others to love for God. The brothers’ delight in God’s gifts to Paulinus is later echoed by Augustine’s attitude towards Pammachius’s good deeds in *Letter 58*: after crediting God with the inspiration, Augustine quotes 2 Corinthians 9:15, ‘Thanks be to God for his ineffable gift’ (*Ep.* 58.2). Thus, Augustine embraces the language of desire where longing is communal instead of private, and cognisant of God as the source of the other’s goodness. In a sense, these transformations of the erotic are justifications of desire for individuals.

But Augustine provides his own defense as well. He confirms the pertinence of my question by doggedly seeking to justify the intensity of his response. His first defense is one of value: to not long for someone or something as good as Paulinus amounts to insensibility of goodness. In his words: *sed quando tu talis es, esse sine te fortasse intolerabilius toleraretur* (‘But since you are the sort of person you are, it would perhaps be more intolerable that I tolerate being without you,’ *Ep.* 27.1). For his second defense, he turns to a distinctly Christian analogy of appropriate longing for the future Jerusalem. Earlier, I noted this motif in the *Confessions*, but here Augustine extends it to desiring other individuals.

*ita mihi displicet fortitudo, qua patienter fertur absentia bonorum, sicuti es. nam et Hierusalem futuram desideramus utique et, quanto impatientius desideramus ipsam, tanto patientius sustinemus omnia propter ipsam. quis igitur potest non gaudere te uiso, ut posset, quamdiu te non uidet, non dolere? ergo neutrum possum et, quoniam, si possem, immaniter possem, non posse delector atque in eo, quod delector, nonnullum solatium est.*

For I do not like the courage by which one patiently bears the absence of good persons, like yourself. For we, of course, also long for the Jerusalem to come, and we long for it more impatiently to the extent that we more patiently put up with all things for its sake. Who, then, can refrain from joy when he sees you in order that he may be able not to feel pain when he does not see you? Hence, I can do neither one, and since, if I could, I could do so only inhumanly, I am delighted at my inability, and there is some consolation in the fact that I am delighted. (*Ep.* 27.1)

Whereas the man who could refrain from longing for physical presence in Augustine’s early letter to Zenobius was *magnus atque alius* (great and different), here he could only do so *immaniter*, inhumanly or monstrously (which expresses the negative connotations of both ambiguous adjectives). He would not be good and strong, but cold and insensible. But even more striking is the image of the heavenly Jerusalem. The figure is a favourite of Augustine, which he developed most fully in *City of God*, but

employed sparingly in the letters. What the few other instances tell us, however, is that longing for the future Jerusalem and longing for an individual are intimately connected. The unity among Jerusalem's citizens that Augustine anticipates comes through in *Ep.* 212, when Augustine commends a widow and her daughter to a bishop's care by reminding him of their common citizenship and fraternity in the heavenly Jerusalem. Furthermore, *Ep.* 249 anticipates the *true* fraternity and perfect unity of the citizens. These examples suggest that the longing for the future Jerusalem contains within itself the longing for intimacy with others.

His defense of longing for bodily presence is more rhetorical than logical. Perhaps aware that the analogy does not justify this conclusion, he anticipates Paulinus chiding him for not understanding the greater importance of knowing his 'interior self' (*ipsum interiorem*) which he reveals in the letter. In his defence, Augustine employs analogy, appealing to the natural desire one feels to visit the home of an esteemed friend:

*si uspiam te uel in terrena tua ciuitate didicissem fratrem et dilectorem meum et tantum in domino ac talem uirum, nullumne me dolorem sensurum fuisse arbitraberis, si non sinerer nosse domum tuam? quo modo ergo non doleam, quod nondum faciem tuam noui, hoc est domum animae tuae, quam sicut meam noui?*

If I had learned either anywhere or in your earthly city of you as my brother and friend – and a man so great and so good in the Lord – do you think that I would feel no pain if I were not allowed to come to know your home? How, then, should I not feel pain that I do not as yet know your face, that is, the home of your soul, as I know my own face? (*Ep.* 27.1)

In a treatise, this would have been yet another disappointing argument. After mentioning the *sanctior grauitas* ('holier earnest sincerity') of Paulinus who prefers interior knowledge, Augustine does not choose to address the arguments that he is well aware would support Paulinus's view; instead, he appeals to a practical analogy. Since no one would find fault with the innocuous desire to see a friend's home, surely the desire to see a friend's face, the home of their soul, is just as natural, just as innocent. Such a holistic view of the person was certainly current where Stoicism's influence extended. But this argument may be a significant development for Augustine – a concession of the value of the physical for knowledge of another. Why do we care to see a friend's home? Perhaps because the way they order it gives us a fuller understanding of their character, tells us things that they would not or could not share in speech or letters. And, analogously, the face may express aspects of the interior self that speech alone cannot communicate. In his approach in this first letter to Paulinus, Augustine exhibits a movement away from the Neoplatonic sensible-intelligible divide as a challenge to the physical aspect of human relationships.

Before Augustine was able to send his response, Paulinus sent a second letter, containing an important variation on the presence-absence theme. It is essentially a Christian argument for the value of the physical body, based on the doctrine of the resurrection:

*quantulum ergo est quod absentia corporalis nobis inuidet nostri nisi sane fructum istum, quo pascuntur oculi temporalium expectatores? quamuis ne corporalis quidem gratia temporalis in spiritalibus dici debeat, quibus etiam corporum aeternitatem resurrectio largietur, ut audemus in uirtute Christi et bonitatis dei patris uel indigni praesumere.*

How small a part of us it is that our bodily absence denies each other! It is, of course, only this fruit by which those eyes are fed that look for temporal rewards. And yet, the grace of bodily presence ought not to be called temporal in spiritual persons to whom the resurrection will also bestow eternity on their bodies, as we dare to presume because of the power of Christ and the goodness of God the Father, though we are unworthy. (*Ep.* 30.3)

In light of the resurrection, then, the body is promoted from the temporal to the eternal. Paulinus has justified his subsequent wish to see Augustine in person, although his exclamation, ‘How small a part of us it is that our bodily absence denies each other!’ suggests that his longing is not quite as acute as Augustine’s.

In his response, and perhaps because of Paulinus’s nod to the body, Augustine unapologetically fills his letter with wishes for Paulinus’s physical presence. He writes that the presence of Paulinus’s friends and letter carriers conveyed his presence ‘like another letter of yours’ (*aliam epistulam uestram*) and revealed his character more than any letter could (*Ep.* 31.1). This was due in part to the efficiency of presence – they could immediately answer all his questions – but also because *aderat etiam, quod nulli chartae adesse potest, tantum in narrantibus gaudium, ut per ipsum etiam uultum oculosque loquentium uos in cordibus eorum scriptos cum ineffabili laetitia legeremus* (‘there was also present – something which could be present on no page – so great a joy in them as they told us of you that from their very faces and eyes as they spoke we read with an inexpressible joy you yourselves, who were written in their hearts’, *Ep.* 31.2). Thus, their features added to what their words could communicate of their interior selves, and of the sort of person Paulinus must be to affect them so. Moreover, Augustine laments how the difficulty of letting them go increased in proportion to their desire to return to Paulinus, since this desire made Paulinus *praesentius* (‘more present’) to Augustine and those with him (*Ep.* 31.3).

*uidete enim, quaeso uos, quibus quatiebamur affectibus. tanto utique dimittendi erant ocius, quanto uobis impensius oboedire cupiebant; sed quanto id cupiebant magis, tanto uos nobis praesentius exhibebant; eo quippe indicabant, quam cara uiscera uestra essent; tanto eos minus igitur dimittere uolebamus, quanto iustius, ut dimitterentur, instabant.*

See, after all, I beg you, the loves between which we were torn. They should, of course, have been sent off more rapidly to the extent that they desired to obey you more urgently. But to the extent that they wanted this more, they made you more present to us. By that desire they, of course, showed how dear your heart was to them. We, therefore, wanted less to send them off to the extent that they more justly insisted on being sent off.

Thus, this letter exhibits a freedom from doubting the value of physical presence, and, with his first letter to Paulinus, marks a high point in the intensity of Augustine’s expression of longing for physical presence and of optimism in the pursuit of knowing another.

Might this correspond with the more favourable assessment of the body that developed in Augustine’s theoretical works? Chronology inevitably becomes a problem here. Rist dates Augustine’s replacement of the unfallen ‘spiritual body’ with a fleshly one to 402 (in *Against Faustus* 11.3), though possibly as early as 398.<sup>37</sup> Strong evidence for his appreciation of the idea that ‘no one hates his own flesh’ occurs in writings from 407. Thus, this letter to Paulinus – dated late 396 or 397 – expresses a sentiment that he had not yet justified in his theoretical writings. Typical, one might

<sup>37</sup> Rist, *Augustine: ancient thought baptized*, 98-99.

say. But are there any concurrent strands of his thought that support this instance as a more stable intellectual movement, instead of an anomaly? Rist focused on the doctrines of creation and resurrection, but perhaps Augustine's reflections on the Incarnation, that third body-affirming act of God, may shed further light on the matter.

Again chronology becomes an issue, for the way Augustine narrates his intellectual development in *Confessions* 7 is a mixture of narrative and reflection. He expresses regret that he missed the rich meaning of the Incarnation at first, but when precisely did he apprehend it? The most apparent inference is that he had come to terms with it before his conversion experience, as narrated in Book VIII. But Dobell's close comparison of the narrative with Augustine's early works suggests that the transition in his understanding of Christ from an exemplum for the salvation of the masses (who needed a 'way of authority' since they lacked the education necessary for the 'way of reason') to the essential mediator between God and men occurred during his intense study of Paul's epistles in 395-96.<sup>38</sup> It is not necessary to accept Dobell's entire argument to appreciate his demonstration that Augustine's first formulation of the union of humanity and divinity in Christ – and his first use of the name Mediator for Christ – is in a work dated 394-95, almost ten years after his conversion, and shortly before the letters to Paulinus. The fearless wise man has become the humble God-man, crucified.

Is this shift in Augustine's Christology significant for the value Augustine places on the body? The Augustine of the early dialogues and treatises was committed to the ascent of the soul by reason, as noted above; he sought perfection through the turning of his soul away from corporeal things to contemplate the eternal. The Augustine of the mid 390s, however, looked for his salvation to an event rooted in the body and time: the bloody crucifixion of Christ. Augustine's description of this change in the *Confessions* emphasises the bodily nature of Christ and, quite markedly, the humility that was part of the Incarnation. He writes:

*et quaerebam viam comparandi roboris, quod esset idoneum ad fruendum te, nec inueniebam, donec amplecterer «mediatorem dei et hominum, hominem Christum Iesum »,<sup>39</sup> «qui est super omnia deus benedictus in saecula »,<sup>40</sup> uocantem et dicentem: «ego sum uia et ueritas et uita »,<sup>41</sup> et cibum, cui capiendo inualidus eram, miscentem carni, quoniam «uerbum caro factum est »,<sup>42</sup> ut infantiae nostrae lactesceret sapientia tua, per quam creasti omnia. non enim tenebam deum meum Iesum humilis humilem nec cuius rei magistra esset eius infirmitas noueram. uerbum enim tuum, aeterna ueritas, superioribus creaturae tuae partibus supereminens subditos erigit ad se ipsam, in inferioribus autem aedificauit sibi humilem domum de limo nostro, per quam subdendos deprimeret a se ipsis et ad se traiceret, sanans tumorem et nutriens amorem, ne fiducia sui progredierentur longius, sed potius infirmarentur uidentes ante pedes suos infirmam diuinitatem ex participatione tunicae pelliciae nostrae et lassum prosternerentur in eam, illa autem surgens leuaret eos.*

Accordingly I looked for a way to gain the strength I needed to enjoy you, but I did not find it until I embraced the mediator between God and humankind, the man Christ Jesus, who also is God, supreme over all things and blessed for ever. Not yet had I

<sup>38</sup> Dobell, *Augustine's Intellectual Conversion*, 104.

<sup>39</sup> 1 Timothy 2:5.

<sup>40</sup> Romans 9:5.

<sup>41</sup> John 14:6.

<sup>42</sup> John 1:14.

embraced him, though he called out, proclaiming, *I am the Way and Truth and the Life*, nor had I known him as the food which, though I was not yet strong enough to eat it, he had mingled with our flesh; for the Word became flesh so that your Wisdom, through whom you created all things, might become for us the milk adapted to our infancy. Not yet was I humble enough to grasp the humble Jesus as my God, nor did I know what his weakness had to teach. Your Word, the eternal Truth who towers above the higher spheres of your creation, raises up to himself those creatures who bow before him; but in these lower regions he has built himself a humble dwelling from our clay, and used it to cast down from their pretentious selves those who do not bow before him, and make a bridge to bring them to himself. He heals their swollen pride and nourishes their love, that they may not wander even further away through self-confidence, but rather weaken as they see before their feet the Godhead grown weak by sharing our garments of skin, and wearily fling themselves down upon him, so that he may arise and lift them up. (*Conf.* 7.24)

Here Christ is the mediator, but also the fleshly food, the milk, the disturbingly weakened, skin-clad God. Augustine wrote this not long after his letters to Paulinus (c. 397-). His recognition of the bodily nature of Christ and the centrality of the crucifixion are consonant with a more sympathetic view of bodies. Attempting to ascend by reason and turn away from bodies is presumption (*praesumptio*, *Conf.* 7.26), in contrast to the humility of Christ, who did not despise union with flesh. And the pride behind that presumption is the very thing Christ was seeking to counter, Augustine asserts. Admittedly, bodies are still frail things in this passage, with little suggestion of the dignity with which his subsequent study on resurrection endows them. Yet I believe that Augustine's new understanding of the Incarnation in the mid-late 390s may indeed have contributed to the more positive attitudes toward the body evident in the early letters to Paulinus. If I am barred from arguing this much, since bodies are still looking none too noble, I may at least argue that the reframing of the body in terms of a necessary humility would free Augustine to set aside his 'presumptuous' attempts to wean himself from things that can be taken away from him against his will (as in *Ep.* 2).

### **Longing for physical presence – gratuitously**

The ambivalence about longing for physical presence is not a part of Augustine's letters after 396. Instead, two variations in the rhetoric of desire are prevalent: increasingly spiritualised expressions of desire, extended more broadly with little sign of longing for physical presence, and extensions of the practical sentiment suggested by the house analogy in his letter to Paulinus,<sup>43</sup> the body's role in revealing the mind.

The first variation is evident in a letter to Pammachius probably written in 401, but certainly not after 410.<sup>44</sup> In the letter, Augustine expresses joy and love in response to the interior beauty of the Roman senator. He had never met the man, but counted his actions – namely the successful exhortation of his tenant-farmers to embrace Catholicism – sufficient for extravagant expression. He begins in a way similar to his first letter to Jerome, crediting his correspondent's action with revealing more of himself than his physical features could reveal. He then writes: *cum interiorem tuum pacis decorem pulchrum ac ueritatis luce radiantem in unius tui facti candore conspexi, conspexi et agnoui, agnoui et amaui* ('When through the brilliance of this one action of yours I looked into your interior that is fair with the

<sup>43</sup> See previous section, page 44.

<sup>44</sup> Roland Teske, trans., *Letters 1-99*, 239.

beauty of peace and radiant with the light of the truth. I looked and I recognized you; I recognized you and I fell in love,' *Ep.* 58.1). Nor does he deny his own 'interior' to Pammachius: *perfectam transi hanc epistulam transitu invisibili, qui intus fit, et perge cogitando in pectus meum et cerne, quid illic de te agatur* ('Pass beyond this letter, once you have read it, by an invisible and interior passage, and by thought continue on into my heart, and see what my heart feels about you,' *Ep.* 58.2). This is certainly an instance of the incommensurability of language and thought that I noted in the Introduction: we give signs to 'transfer' our thoughts and emotions to the mind of another, but the transfer always comes up short.<sup>45</sup> Yet here the sentiment looks rather like a rhetorical flourish, unlike the more earnest expressions that I will address in chapter three.<sup>46</sup> Pammachius may have been relieved that Augustine did not leave him to his own powers of passing beyond letters, but hinted that there he would observe his inexpressible delights *calentes atque flagrantes* ('ardent and aflame') at Pammachius's deed.

A bared heart, burning pleasures – this language certainly exceeds the goodwill and respect we might reasonably expect to be addressed to a stranger. Again the two features of Augustine's transformation of the erotic that I noted in his letters to Paulinus are apparent. First, he clearly links his love to the presence of God in Pammachius and his actions. His delights burn, but as part of an attempted 'sacrifice' of praise to God, whom he credits with inspiring and enabling Pammachius's good deeds. He 'fell in love,' but as a recognition of the spiritual connection they already had, together 'rooted' in Christ's love. Second, he communalises the erotic, which is possible because of the shared focus of Christ. This letter is no private token of infatuation. Augustine's love is public. In fact, he bids Pammachius to read the letter to any of his friends who could be encouraged to follow his example (*Ep.* 58.3). Perhaps from his praises they would see the value and possibility of such a deed, as he hopes. And perhaps they may prove not entirely immune to a bit of Christian 'seduction.' In the end, however, the erotic tenor of this letter is accompanied by no corresponding expressions of desire or longing. The corpus contains no further letters between Augustine and Pammachius, and I may reasonably infer that this letter was the sum of their interaction.

Augustine employs the second variation – the body's role in revealing the mind – in *Letter* 71 to Jerome: *nunc mittere uolui, ut scias, in tua conloquia quam olim inardescam et quam uim patiar, quod a me tam longe absunt sensus corporis tui, per quos adire possit ad animum tuum animus meus* ('I have decided to send this letter now as well in order that you may know how ardently I then desired to converse with you and how much I suffer because the senses of your body are so far distant from me by which my mind might have access to your mind,' *Ep.* 71.2). The possible date of 403 places this letter in the beginnings of Augustine's apprehension of the resurrection as a resurrection of the flesh. The unembarrassed desire to be with Jerome in person is in harmony with the dignity the resurrection would bestow on Jerome's body: his body is not a prison to be escaped, but an intended and persisting part of who he is. Of course, I must note that the mind is still the focus. Conversation and expression are desirable because they reveal the mind.

With that in view, I may not seem too hasty in discerning further development in appreciation for the body in a letter two decades later. By 419/20, Augustine has crafted his justification for loving

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<sup>45</sup> Refer to Introduction, page 14.

<sup>46</sup> See the section 'Incomplete knowing' in chapter three, page 59.

care of the body and has further elevated the body-soul union by the Incarnation-echoing term *persona*. The letter begins in a manner quite similar to *Letter 71*, but adds a twist that may arguably indicate this increased value of the body. But first it rather neatly summarises Augustine's negotiation of the physical and spiritual aspects of relationships:

*quantum ad oculos adinet corporales, quosdam uidemus nec nouimus, quorum a nobis uita studiaque nesciuntur; quosdam nouimus nec uidemus, quorum nobis caritas et affectus innotuit, in quibus et te adnumeramus; et ideo te magis uidere desideramus, ut in his sis, quos et uidemus et nouimus. nam illi, qui ignoti nostris oculis ingeruntur, non solum desiderabiles non sunt, sed uix tolerabiles sunt, nisi aliquibus signis pulchritudo in eis hominis interioris appareat. quorum autem sicut tuus nobis prius animus intellegendo quam uidendo corpus apparuit, iam quidem nouimus eos,*

In terms of the eyes of the body we see certain people and do not know them, since we do not know their interests and life. Others we know, though we do not see them, since their love and affection has become well known to us, and among these we count you. . . . For those who are thrust before our eyes without being known are not only not desired but are hardly tolerable, unless from some signs we see the beauty of the inner person in them. But we already know those whose mind, like yours, we know through understanding before seeing their body. (*Ep.* 205.1)

Knowledge of another pertains to their soul, their 'inner person,' and such knowledge is clearly more important to Augustine than familiarity with their appearance. Yet Augustine, counting Consentius<sup>47</sup> among those well-known despite absence, expresses his desire that Consentius could be among those whom he both knows and sees. Why? *sed ideo etiam uidere desideramus, ut per illud, quod conspicitur oculis, multo incundius et familiarius eo, quem iam nouimus, amico interiore perfruamur* ('But we desire to see them also in order that, through what we see by the eyes, we may enjoy with much more delight and familiarity that inner friend whom we already know,' *Ep.* 205.1). This concession to the body may seem more like an accessory than an integral part of relationships. I am inclined, however, to take his words with some earnestness, since Augustine did not use the verb *fruo* (to enjoy) lightly. Early on he tended to reserve the verb for God, using it for others only after reflection on the twofold commandment ('Love your neighbour as yourself'<sup>48</sup>), and most often with the addition of *in deo*.<sup>49</sup> But here he uses the emphatic form of the verb – to enjoy thoroughly – without the *in deo* addendum. And he expects his physical presence to augment this enjoyment, to make it *much* more delightful and intimate. This is far from the intensity and pain of longing that Augustine expressed in his early letters to Paulinus (and perhaps I ought to make some allowance for the effects of aging), yet here there is finally an unapologetic admission of the pleasure afforded by physical presence.

Augustine's lengthy *Letter 130* to Proba, an illustrious noblewoman of the gens Anicii, further develops the positive role bodily presence may have in the moral life. Though the subject of the letter is prayer, Augustine covers a good deal of ground while discussing the character of the person who prays, including, as it happens, one of his clearest tributes to friendship:

<sup>47</sup> Consentius was a layman from the Balearic islands with a healthy appetite for theological inquiry – and Augustine's opinions.

<sup>48</sup> Luke 10:27.

<sup>49</sup> Rist, *Augustine: ancient thought baptized*, 163-65.

*nam si paupertas angit, si luctus maestificat si dolor corporis inquietat, si contristat exilium, si ulla alia calamitas uexat, adsint boni homines, qui non solum «gaudere cum gaudentibus» uerum etiam «flere cum flentibus»<sup>50</sup> norunt et salubriter adloqui et conloqui sciunt; plurimum illa aspera leniuntur, releuantur grauia, superantur aduersa. sed ille hoc in eis et per eos agit, qui spiritu suo bonos facit.*

For, if poverty pinches, if grief saddens, if bodily pain disturbs, if exile discourages, if any other disaster torments, provided that there are present good human beings who know not only how *to rejoice with those in joy*, but also *to weep with those who weep* (Romans 12:15) and can speak and converse in a helpful way, those rough spots are smoothed, the heavy burdens are lightened, and adversity is overcome. But he who by his Spirit makes them good does all this in them and through them. (*Ep.* 130.4)

After listing a set of favourable circumstances that would nevertheless seem joyless without any friends, he expansively concludes that *in quibuslibet rebus humanis nihil est homini amicum sine homine amico* ('in no human affairs is anything dear to a human being without a friend'). Though his addressee would not likely have demanded a defense, he makes a significant addition to his valuation of physical presence by treating it as the site where the Biblical command to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep is practiced. Moreover, God himself consoles the afflicted in and through the present friend.

A final example demonstrates the close association of the doctrine of resurrection with a positive evaluation of bodily presence. Augustine wrote this letter of consolation to the virgin Sapida who was mourning her deceased brother. In it, Augustine affirms the body as he explains the resurrection that he anticipates for Timothy's body:

*deus, qui spiritum eius iam suscepit, restituet ei corpus suum, quod non perdendum abstulit, sed reddendum distulit. nulla est igitur causa tristitiae diuturnae, quia potior est causa laetitiae sempiternae, quando quidem germani tui nec pars ipsa mortalis, quae in terra sepulta est, tibi peribit, in qua tibi praesentabatur, per quam te adloquebatur tecumque conloquebatur, ex qua promebat uocem sic tuis auribus notam, quem ad modum faciem tuis oculis offerebat, ita ut, ubicumque sonuisset, etiam non uisus soleret agnosci.*

God who received his spirit will restore to him his body, which he did not take away to destroy but set aside to restore. There is, therefore, no reason for prolonged sadness. There is better reason for everlasting joy. For even that mortal part of your brother that was buried in the earth will not be lost to you. In that part he was present to you; through that part he addressed and conversed with you. Just as he presented his face to your eyes, he produced by that mortal part of his that voice so familiar to your ears that, wherever you heard his voice, you recognized him even if you did not see him. (*Ep.* 263.4)

Though this letter can be dated only to the broad period of Augustine's episcopacy (i.e., between 395 and 430), from its treatment of the resurrection and benign attitude to the body, I may reasonably place it near or after 407, when Augustine exhibits the influence of the verse, 'No one hates his own flesh.' More importantly, it demonstrates the culmination of Augustine's practical sentiments on the value of bodily presence, and their connection to his theoretical understanding of the body.

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<sup>50</sup> Romans 12:15.



As was evident in chapter one, desire is never far from the narrative of the *Confessions*. In fact, Robert Edwards sees desire as a pervasive theme of the book, linking the problematic disjunction between the autobiographical Books 1-9 and the theoretical/exegetical Books 10-13.<sup>51</sup> But in the *Confessions* desire is disciplined. Desire among friends is shown to be 'polluting,' instrumental, often destructive. Its only appropriate object, in fact, seems to be God. This is problematic for Edwards; such attention on the divine diminishes the particular, elides the detail of private relationships, including the names of Augustine's mistress and the friend who died prematurely.<sup>52</sup> And perhaps he has a valid point, for Augustine has certainly received variations of the same objection.<sup>53</sup> The letters, however, present a less drastic face than the *Confessions*: they communicate desire for the individual, even for the corporeal individual.

And what in particular has my investigation of these expressions of desire shown us? Can I answer my first two questions: is it morally acceptable to long for another's bodily presence, and can *any* desire for another be justified, considering the primacy given to love for God? Perhaps, in the end, I cannot, because to answer them would be to take Augustine's 'practice' and convert it back to theory. Rather, what I *can* say is that Augustine expressed desire for others, even for their bodily presence. In his early letters, he expresses this desire with a certain ambivalence, doubtful whether he can integrate it with his philosophical commitment to an ontological hierarchy in which the temporal has little significance. But a decade later, he is so sure that his desire for Paulinus is fitting, it is as if he starts with that conviction (intuition?) and expansively throws out sundry justifications, no longer needing to convince himself. Subsequent letters show that he has adopted the language of desire as appropriate for addressing Christians in general, even those he has not met. I suggest that this truce with physical longing correlates with Augustine's increasingly positive understanding of the body, which I trace to his new emphasis on the Incarnation in the mid 390s. Whether his intellectual developments affected his relational practice or vice-versa is less clear. In fact, I think it may be a mistake to think of them as entirely discrete.

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<sup>51</sup> Robert R. Edwards, *The Flight from Desire: Augustine and Ovid to Chaucer* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 13.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>53</sup> Among them Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 95-96; and Martha Nussbaum, *Upbeavals of Emotion*, 549.

## CHAPTER 3

# Negotiating isolation: lament and deferment

These two primordial spheres, mine which is for me as ego the original sphere, and his which is for me an appresented sphere – are they not separated by an abyss I cannot actually cross, since crossing it would mean, after all, that I acquired an original (rather than an appresenting) experience of someone else?

—Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*

Though Augustine did not explain isolation in terms of Husserl's original and appresenting experiences, he came to conceive of a comparable gulf between individuals. Expressions in the letters communicating this gulf – this isolation – form the core of this chapter. As background for the discussion, I will first look outside the letters at Augustine's understanding of the self and the way that we acquire self-knowledge. Though Augustine addresses this question at a basic level in *De trinitate* – we know ourselves because we are present to ourselves – he provides a richer phenomenological description in the *Confessions*. There Augustine marvels at the vast complexity of the inner life, reaching for the image of the abyss to communicate its depths: the *abyssus humanae conscientiae*.

In the letters, however, Augustine is more concerned with knowing others. The second section poses the following question: given Augustine's understanding of the self and self-knowledge, to what extent can we come to know others? Augustine was not so sensitive that he couldn't bear uncertainty in relationships: the greater part of the letters display his participation in the optimistic language of 'knowing' his correspondents regardless of whether or not they had met. But in a set of the letters, he does reflect on the reality that one can never truly know another in this life. Alongside those reflections, Augustine frequently directs unfulfilled longings for intimacy to the prospect of the next life. In the third section I investigate this upward gaze, asking whether Augustine anticipates a *social* afterlife involving intimacy with others. Moreover, how does this eschatological perspective affect the way Augustine deals with imperfect intimacy in this life? Finally, in the remaining section of the chapter, I consider the significance of Augustine's expressions of isolation for his understanding of relationships in *this* world, engaging with Hannah Arendt's critique of his view as isolating and diminishing individuality. Is isolation a natural consequence of the goal of being in the presence of God, as Arendt reads Augustine? And is the corollary true, that the other becomes merely an 'occasion to love God,'<sup>1</sup> insignificant to the lover as an individual? First, to provide sufficient

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<sup>1</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 96-97.

background in Augustine's psychology to answer these questions, I will proceed to an overview of Augustine's view of the self.

### Augustine's conception of the self

Augustine has been credited with inventing the idea of the self, or the 'inward turn.'<sup>2</sup> John Cavadini rightly points out that Augustine never uses a term corresponding to the English word 'self', nor manages to identify any stable or delimited entity that we might call the self.<sup>3</sup> Though Cavadini's critique of a scholarly movement connecting Augustine with the birth of selfhood is a needed check, Augustine was frequently concerned with an inward turn, whether or not its object can be properly called the *self* or his formulation considered seminal. In fact, the question of his conception of the self is a massive study in itself, one which I can hardly do justice to in this brief orientation.<sup>4</sup> Part of the difficulty is that Augustine's own reflections are by no means systematic. Sometimes, he seems content to identify self-knowledge with a basic first-person consciousness; at other times, he evokes images of the self as an unfathomable depth that defies comprehension. Following his lead, I will look first at the simpler conception, then move to the abyss, as it were.

Answering the question 'who are you?' in the *Confessions*, he speaks of both a body (*corpus*) and soul (*anima*) – an exterior and interior man (*homo*). But as he switches from *homo* to the first person 'I' (*ego*), it is evident that he identifies *ego* with the interior part, and specifically the mind (*animus*).

*et direxi me ad me et dixi mihi: tu quis es? et respondi: homo. et ecce corpus et anima in me mihi praesto sunt, unum exterius et alterum interius. . . . quem iam quaesiveram per corpus a terra usque ad caelum, quousque potui mittere nuntios radios oculorum meorum? sed melius quod interius. ei quippe renuntiabant omnes nuntii corporales praesidenti et iudicanti de responsionibus caeli et terrae et omnium, quae in eis sunt, dicentium: non sumus deus et: « ipse fecit nos ».<sup>5</sup> homo interior cognovit haec per exterioris ministerium; ego interior cognoui haec, ego, ego animus per sensum corporis mei.*

Then toward myself I turned, and asked myself, 'Who are you?' And I answered my own question: 'A man.' See, here are the body and soul that make up myself, the one outward and the other within. . . . With my body's senses I had already sought him [God] from earth to heaven, to the farthest place whither I could send the darting rays of my eyes; but what lay within me was better, and to this all those bodily messengers reported back, for it controlled and judged the replies of sky and earth, and of all the creatures dwelling in them, all those who had proclaimed, 'We are not God,' and 'He made us.' My inner self recognized them all through the service of the outer. I, who was that inmost self, I, who was mind, knew them through the senses of my body. (*Conf.* 10.9)

<sup>2</sup> Notably by Charles Taylor in *Sources of the self: the making of the modern identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989) and more recently by Phillip Cary in *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> John C. Cavadini, 'The Darkest Enigma: Reconsidering the Self in Augustine's Thought,' *Augustinian Studies* 38:1 (2007), 123.

<sup>4</sup> After Charles Taylor's interpretation of Augustine's conception of the self as seminal, more recent scholarship has sought to situate Augustine's views more firmly in his intellectual context. In addition to the works by Taylor and Cary, see Richard Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life and Death* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); John C. Cavadini, 'The Darkest Enigma: Reconsidering the Self in Augustine's Thought,' *Augustinian Studies* 38:1 (2007); and Sara Byers, 'Augustine on the 'Divided Self': Platonist or Stoic?' *Augustinian Studies* 38:1 (2007).

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 100:3.

In *De trinitate*, Augustine provides further detail on his reasoning for associating *ego* with his interior part. There Augustine remarks about the famous imperative ‘know thyself’ that the mind obeys as soon as it understands to what ‘thyself’ refers, since it is always present to itself. That is, he clarifies, when it comprehends the command, it performs it.<sup>6</sup> The problem is separating that core from the many images that the mind accumulates. Using these, the mind *thinks* that it may be air or a sort of body or a particular organ, but it *knows* only ‘that it is and that it lives, in the way intelligence is and lives’ (*sic ergo se esse et uiuere scit quomodo est et uiuit intellegentia*).<sup>7</sup> And, as Richard Sorabji points out, Augustine employs this test of certainty to establish the incorporeality of the soul.<sup>8</sup> Knowing something is knowing its essence, he writes. Therefore, since the mind knows itself – its essence – yet is not certain that it is air or anything material, it *cannot* be anything material.<sup>9</sup> Edmund Hill notes that this argument is saved only by the premise of the mind’s presence to itself,<sup>10</sup> which Augustine develops as follows:

*si quid autem horum esset, aliter id quam cetera cogitaret, non scilicet per imaginale figmentum sicut cogitantur absentia quae sensu corporis tacta sunt, siue omnino ipsa siue eiusdem generis aliqua, sed quadam interiore non simulata sed uera praesentia – non enim quidquam illi est se ipsa praesentius – sicut cogitat uiuere se et meminisse et intellegere et uelle se.*

But if it were one of these things it would think that thing differently from the others, not that is to say with a construct of the imagination as absent things are thought that have been contacted by one of the senses of the body, either actually themselves or something of the same kind; but with some inner, non-simulated but true presence (nothing after all is more present to it than itself), in the same way as it thinks its living and remembering and understanding and willing. (*De trin.* 10.16)

With immediate presence making self-knowledge possible, it would seem that a search for one’s self is, well, unnecessary.

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<sup>6</sup> *De trin.* 10.12: *sed cum dicitur menti: cognosce te ipsam, eo ictu quo intellegit quod dictum est te ipsam cognoscit se ipsam, nec ob aliud quam eo quod sibi praesens est. si autem quod dictum est non intellegit, non utique facit. hoc igitur ei praecipitur ut faciat quod cum praeceptum ipsum intellegit facit* (‘But when the mind is told Know thyself, it knows itself the very moment it understands what ‘thyself’ is, and for no other reason than that it is present to itself. If it does not understand what is said, then naturally it does not do it. So it is being commanded to do something which it automatically does the moment it understands the command’).

<sup>7</sup> *De trin.* 10.13: *cum ergo uerbi gratia mens aerem se putat, aerem intellegere putat, se tamen intellegere scit; aerem autem se esse non scit sed putat. secernat quod se putat, cernat quod scit; hoc ei remaneat unde ne illi quidem dubitauerunt qui aliud atque aliud corpus esse mentem putauerunt* (‘And so when it thinks, for example, that it is air, it thinks it understands air, it knows it understands itself; and it does not know but only thinks it is air. Let it set aside what it thinks it is, and mark what it knows it is; in this way it will be left with something that even people who have thought mind is this or that sort of body can have no doubt about’).

<sup>8</sup> Sorabji, *Self*, 221.

<sup>9</sup> *De trin.* 10.16: *nullo modo autem recte dicitur sciri aliqua res dum eius ignoratur substantia. quapropter dum se mens nouit substantiam suam nouit, et cum de se certa est de substantia sua certa est. certa est autem de se sicut conuincunt ea quae supra dicta sunt. nec omnino certa est utrum aer an ignis sit an aliquod corpus uel aliquid corporis. non est igitur aliquid eorum* (‘Now properly speaking a thing cannot in any way be said to be known while its substance is unknown. Therefore when mind knows itself it knows its substance, and when it is certain of itself it is certain of its substance. But it is certain of itself, as everything said above convincingly demonstrates. Nor is it in the least certain whether it is air or fire or any kind of body or anything appertaining to body. Therefore it is not any of these things’).

<sup>10</sup> Edmund Hill, trans., in *The Trinity* by Augustine, ed. John E. Rotelle, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A translation for the 21st Century* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: New City Press, 1991. Reprint, Charlottesville, Va.: IntelLex Corporation, 2001, electronic edition), 298n26.

But, as I mentioned previously, there are ‘deeper’ conceptions of the self in Augustine’s works, particularly in the *Confessions*. Augustine may seem to be brushing aside several centuries of philosophy for an intuitive approach when he insists that we all know ourselves through immediate presence, but his simple solution does not prevent him from unpacking the nature of this focus of intelligent life. In the *Confessions*, he explores just how complex the self is, of which each person has immediate knowledge. It has a history, for one thing. Book X exhibits how closely Augustine associates memory with the self:

*nis est memoriae, nescio quid horrendum, deus meus, profunda et infinita multiplicitas; et hoc animus est, et hoc ego ipse sum. quid ergo sum, deus meus? quae natura sum? uaria, multimoda uita et immensa uehementer.*

O my God, profound, infinite complexity, what a great faculty memory is, how awesome a mystery! It is the mind, and this is nothing other than my very self. What am I, then, O my God? What is my nature? It is teeming life of every conceivable kind, and exceedingly vast. (*Conf.* 10.26)

Augustine asks the same question that he asked earlier in Book X,<sup>11</sup> but his answer goes beyond identifying the interior and exterior ‘man’. With his identification of self with memory, the self expands to immense proportions and variation. The variety and immensity are easy to understand when Augustine remarks how such massive things as the sea and sky inhabit his memory, as well as every detail of his perceptions of them (that he has not forgotten).<sup>12</sup>

The chief direction of expansion, however, is temporal. The self extends beyond an isolated point of present consciousness to encompass its past and future. Memory, or at least its content, is not identical with the self, but amid the remembrances, you encounter yourself. You encounter yourself in all your actions and experiences, beliefs and emotional responses:

*ibi mihi et ipse occurro meque recolo, quid, quando et ubi egerim quoque modo, cum agerem, affectus fuerim.*

And there I come to meet myself. I recall myself, what I did, when and where I acted in a certain way, and how I felt about so acting. (*Conf.* 10.14)

As Maria Boulding glosses, ‘memory is the place of self-awareness.’<sup>13</sup> Yet it is also the place for shaping, to a certain extent, the future self. Augustine observes that you use these experiences to piece together expectations of the future and plan what your future self will do.<sup>14</sup> And so the self expands further.

<sup>11</sup> See page 53.

<sup>12</sup> *Conf.* 10.14: *intus haec ago, in aula ingenti memoriae meae. ibi enim mihi caelum et terra et mare praesto sunt cum omnibus, quae in eis sentire potui, praeter illa, quae oblitus sum* (‘This I do within myself in the immense court of my memory; for there sky and earth and sea are readily available to me, together with everything that I have ever been able to perceive in them, apart from what I have forgotten’).

<sup>13</sup> Maria Boulding, trans., *The Confessions*, 247n48.

<sup>14</sup> *Conf.* 10.14: *ex eadem copia etiam similitudines rerum uel expertarum uel ex eis, quas expertus sum, creditarum alias atque alias et ipse contexo praeteritis atque ex his etiam futuras actiones et euenta et spes, et haec omnia rursus quasi praesentia meditor* (‘Moreover, I can draw on this abundant store to form imaginary pictures which resemble the things I have myself experienced, or believed because my own experience confirmed them, and weave these together with images from the past, and so evoke future actions, occurrences or hopes; and on all these as well I can meditate as though they were present to me’).

At this point Augustine cannot scoff at the aphorism ‘know thyself’ as in *De trinitate*, for he finds the task impossible to complete. The awareness that he cannot fathom the depths of his memory, a part of his mind, raises some disconcerting questions:

*ergo animus ad habendum se ipsum angustus est, ut ubi sit quod sui non capit? numquid extra ipsum ac non in ipso? quomodo ergo non capit?*

Is the mind, then, too narrow to grasp itself, forcing us to ask where that part of it is which it is incapable of grasping? Is it outside the mind, not inside? How can the mind not compass it? (*Conf.* 10.15)

Here Augustine, the self-conscious soliloquist, turns to his audience of sorts, God. And here his psychology meets his theology. Though each is best known to himself, none can ever comprehend his whole – but God does: *tu autem, domine, scis eius omnia, qui fecisti eum* (‘But you, Lord, know everything about a human being because you have made him,’ *Conf.* 10.7). What might be the implications of this complete knowing? Augustine mentions one for self-knowledge:

*confitear ergo quid de me sciam, confitear et quid de me nesciam, quoniam et quod de me scio, te mihi lucente scio, et quod de me nescio, tandiu nescio, donec fiant «tenebrae» meae «sicut meridies»<sup>15</sup> in uultu tuo.*

Let me, then, confess what I know about myself, and confess too what I do not know, because what I know of myself I know only because you shed light on me, and what I do not know I shall remain ignorant about until my darkness becomes like bright noon before your face. (*Conf.* 10.7)

In this formulation, God is the source of the intellectual ‘light’ necessary for self-knowledge. The last line, alluding to several scriptural passages,<sup>16</sup> anticipates the light of God completing this job in heaven. In the third section of this chapter, this eschatological perspective will surface regarding the possibility of knowing others as well. The passage above brings up an important distinction in terms, or at least species, of knowing. In Latin, the verb *scio* is the broader term, denoting understanding or having knowledge of something, while *nosco* has the sense of becoming acquainted with something or someone. Though Augustine employs both the verbs *scio* and *nosco* for describing self-knowledge, he uses *scio* above when considering that we only *know* that we exist and live and think (and we cannot know that the self is made of fire or air), for we only properly know something when we know its essence.<sup>17</sup> But knowing the ‘thick’ self of the *Confessions* more often involves verbs of acquaintance: in memory, he ‘meets’ (*occurro*) himself, and, as I will discuss later, each person is best known (*notus*, from *nosco*) to himself by gazing on his consciousness. This knowing requires neither knowledge of essence nor the perfect knowledge only accessible to God, as in the passage directly above.

Before proceeding, let me review the points of Augustine’s view of the self pertinent to the main problem of this chapter, the isolation of selves. Augustine asserts that you know yourself

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<sup>15</sup> Isaiah 58:10.

<sup>16</sup> Among them, 1 Corinthians 4:5 (‘Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart.’) and Isaiah 58:10 (‘And if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.’)

<sup>17</sup> See *De trin.* 10.16 on page 14.

because you are directly present to yourself. You conceive of your own thinking, remembering, understanding, etc., differently than you think of things outside yourself, as *De trinitate* 10.16 made clear above. In its faculty of memory the self extends temporally into the past and future, to the extent that no one can fully comprehend her whole. God alone comprehends each self completely, but we are ‘acquainted’ to varying degrees with ourselves through awareness of our present thoughts and reflection on our past thoughts and actions.

### Knowing others

I have demonstrated Augustine’s perception of the difficulty of knowing one’s self fully, given its immensity, but what of knowing others? If knowing oneself results from direct presence, by what means do we know others? Something separates the self from God and others. Here, Augustine’s ontological hierarchy may be useful. In it, the soul inhabits an ontological rung above bodies, but distinctly below God, in as much as it is still mutable in time, if not in space.<sup>18</sup> This is significant because, as Phillip Cary points out, space cannot separate souls, which are immutable in space. ‘Inner privacy,’ therefore, is a consequence of the Fall, a consequence of a sinful will, which separates the soul from God and others whether or not it is embodied.<sup>19</sup> In the letters, however, Augustine is more concerned with the affective experience of this isolation than its cause. There are seeds of this meditation in the *Confessions* – the impossibility of complete self-knowledge and faint insecurities about how his audience will respond to his admissions – but the very act of publishing such a book shows his openness and optimism about communicating the inner self to others. The letters, as I will show, contain similar expressions of optimism about knowing others, but they also express Augustine’s awareness of the incompleteness of this knowledge and his laments over the real consequences in relationships.

### *A baseline of optimism*

Let me return to the question that I asked above: if we become acquainted with (*nosco*) ourselves through direct presence to our present thoughts and memories, then how or to what extent can we come to know others? Augustine provides an answer in the process of explaining the distinction between seeing and believing. We *see*, in the broad sense of perceive, things present to our senses or our minds; but we can only *believe* things absent, or not presented (*praesto*) to our senses or minds.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self*, 116. See *Epistle* 18.2: *est natura per locos et tempora mutabilis, ut corpus, et est natura per locos nullo modo, sed tantum per tempora etiam ipsa mutabilis, ut anima, et est natura, quae nec per locos nec per tempora mutari potest, hoc deus est. quod hic insinuaui quoquo modo mutabile, creatura dicitur; quod inmutabile, creator* (‘There is a nature mutable in terms of places and of times, such as a body. There is also a nature mutable in no way in terms of places, but only in terms of times, such as the soul. And there is a nature which cannot be changed either in terms of places or in terms of times; this is God. What I have here said is mutable in some way is called a creature; what is immutable is the creator’).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-22. Cary explains it as follows: ‘Therefore what the soul sees when it turns into itself is first of all an interior that is its own: a created rather than divine inner self. It is not necessarily a private inner self, however. For sin is not necessary—and a soul without sin, having no evil will to separate it from God, could not possibly be separated from other souls either. If there were no Fall, we might have bodies but we would not have inner privacy.’

<sup>20</sup> *Ep.* 147.7: *num satis est, ut inter uidere et credere hoc distare dicamus, quia praesentia uidentur, creduntur absentia? plane forsitan satis est, si praesentia illa hoc loco intellegamus dicta, quae praesto sunt sensibus siue animi siue corporis, unde etiam ducto*

While he uses this distinction to reaffirm that we ‘see’ our own will, for example, since it is present to us, he notes that we can only *believe* propositions about another’s will. He writes:

*si quis uero mihi indicet uoluntatem suam, cuius os et uox mihi praesens est, tamen, quia ipsa uoluntas, quam mihi indicat, latet sensum corporis et animi mei, credo, non uideo aut, si eum mentiri existimo, non credo, etsi forte, ut dicit, ita sit.*

But if someone whose lips and voice are present to me reveals his will to me, because the will that he reveals to me is, nonetheless, hidden from the sense of my body and of my mind, I believe; I do not see. Or, if I think he is lying, I do not believe, even if things are perhaps as he says. (*Ep.* 147.7)

It is an observation quite innocent of angst and, despite its philosophising context of a treatise-letter entitled *De uidendo deo* (‘On Seeing God’), quite down to earth. Since we cannot see another’s mind, we can only evaluate the indications of it (*testimonium*), then choose what to believe.<sup>21</sup> The testimony may be directly given, as above, or in the form of actions, letters or the witness of others.

But Augustine is not, at least initially, pessimistic about this gap in knowing others. Despite his theoretical distinction of seeing and believing, Augustine does not shy from asserting that he knows or ‘sees’ someone as a result of these various testimonies. In the previous chapter, I drew attention to assertions of acquaintance ‘despite absence’ in letters to Jerome and Pammachius. The latter, in fact, employs the certainty associated with ‘seeing’ to emphasise the insight that indirect evidence – in this case, actions – can provide:

*neque enim, si cotidie faciem tuam uiderem, notior mihi esses, quam cum interiorem tuum pacis decorem pulchrum ac ueritatis luce radiantem in unius tui facti candore conspexi, conspexi et agnouii, agnouii et amauii.*

Not even if I saw your face daily would you be better known to me than when through the brilliance of this one action of yours I looked into your interior that is fair with the beauty of peace and radiant with the light of the truth. I looked and I recognized you; I recognized you and I fell in love. (*Ep.* 58.1)

As Augustine tells it, Pammachius’s good deed overcame the gap of absence, the normal impossibility of ‘seeing’ another. He ‘caught sight of’ Pammachius’s interior and recognised him as someone he knew well (*agnouii*).

And, though I tried to cast some doubt on whether this optimism persists, even to his last years Augustine continues to use similar expressions to convey the ‘seeing’ that *testimonia* can effect. Of the *testimonia* of third parties Augustine still conveys warm confidence in his late letter to the court official Darius (c. 429/30). He ‘sees’ (*uiderem*) Darius interiorly, he writes, through the good reports of

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*uocabulo praesentia nominantur. sic enim hanc lucem corporis sensu, sic et meam uoluntatem plane uideo, quia praesto est animi mei sensibus atque intus mihi praesens est* (‘Is it enough that we say that there is this difference between seeing and believing, namely, that present things are seen while absent ones are believed? This is perhaps quite enough if we understand that those things are in this passage said to be present that are available (*praesto*) to the senses of the mind or the body for they are called ‘present’ because the word is derived from this. For in that way I see this sunlight by the sense of the body, and in that way I clearly see my will as well, because it is available to the sense of my mind and is present to me interiorly’).

<sup>21</sup> *Ep.* 147.7: *creduntur ergo illa, quae absunt a sensibus nostris, si uidetur idoneum, quod eis testimonium perhibetur* (‘We believe those things, then, that are not present to our senses if the testimony that is offered to them seems suitable’).



two fellow bishops. Yet the testimony of the principal is even more weighty in Augustine's view. In his subsequent response this is evident when he speaks of Darius's letter: *non corpus sed animum in ipsis tuis litteris uidi, ubi de te non sicut antea fratribus meis sed mihi credidi* ('I have seen not your body but your soul in your letter, in which, when it came to you, I believed not my brothers, as I had done before, but my own self,' *Ep.* 231.5).<sup>22</sup> Thus, writings and letters offer other ways to 'see' another. Similarly, Augustine looks into (*inspexo*) the heart of Marius Mercator through his writings and finds a heart that he ought to embrace (*amplectendum*).<sup>23</sup> To the end of his life, then, he is sensible of the power of words to convey the inner person, as he expressed in a more theoretical context in *De doctrina christiana*.<sup>24</sup>

All this to establish that Augustine, despite his objective assessment of the gap of certainty in knowing others, generally participated in the realm of 'belief' quite optimistically, often representing it with more certainty than the evidence warrants. Generally. And that is why less sanguine reflections stand out. One is a strong response to the fallout of two well-known Biblical scholars, Jerome and Rufinus. The others are in letters to women, often widows. In them Augustine deals with the ramifications of the gap – the isolation of interiority.

#### *Incomplete knowing*

Yes, the ready-to-please correspondent who 'knows' and 'sees' his unmet addressees occasionally considers the real distance between selves that his association of knowing with presence entails. Two comparable reflections occur in letters to Roman laywomen, one recently widowed and the other feeling the distance between friends. Their experiences of loss were likely the stimuli for Augustine's reflections, as well as directing the implications Augustine emphasises, which differ significantly.

*Letter* 267 supplies the faintest interior portrait of the Roman heiress Fabiola: from Augustine's response, it seems that Fabiola had lamented the *peregrinatio*, the travelling abroad, of this life, desiring the heavenly homeland where *non terrarum spatio diuidemur* ('we will not be separated by earthly expanses'). Augustine approves this desire, but uses the rest of the brief letter to consider what it actually means to be present. Everyone is more present to himself than to others, he writes, because each is better known to himself by virtue of looking at his own consciousness:

*quocirca intellegis ideo unumquemque sibi esse praesentiorum quam alterum alteri, quod unusquisque sibi magis quam alteri notus est non faciem suam, quae, nisi adsit speculum, gestatur et latet, sed conscientiam contuendo, quam et clausis oculis uidet.*

Hence you understand that each person is more present to himself than one person is to another. For each person is better known to himself than to another – not by gazing upon his own face, which he carries about although it is concealed from him, unless a mirror is present, but by gazing upon his consciousness, which he sees even with eyes closed.

<sup>22</sup> Roland Teske's translation of *mibi* as 'my own self' may be a bit misleading in the context of our discussion of the self. Here *mibi* is simply a reflexive pronoun, more literally translated as 'myself,' or even more simply, 'me,' if English did not require the suffix -self on reflexives.

<sup>23</sup> *Ep.* 193.2.

<sup>24</sup> Refer to the excerpt from *De doctrina christiana* in the Introduction, page 14.

Augustine is concerned here with presence and a possible consolation of interiority. The thought quoted above follows his attempt to lessen the keenness with which Fabiola feels absence: if being together is a matter of sharing interior selves – thoughts, essentially – then physical separation merits less lament.

*puto enim, quod licet longinquis regionibus corpore separati, si nostras cogitationes nosse possemus, magis essemus nobiscum, quam si uno in loco alter alterutrum conspicantes taciti sederemus nulla in uocibus signa sensus intimi proferentes, nullis corporum motibus nostros animos indicantes.*

For I think that, though separated in body in distant regions, if we could know each other's thoughts, we would be together to a greater degree than if we sat silent in one place, looking at each other but not bringing forth in words any signs of our interior thoughts and revealing our minds by no gestures of the body. (*Ep.* 267)

Perhaps he is thinking of letters here – even this particular letter and its power to convey his thoughts from North Africa to Fabiola in Rome. Despite the shadow of isolation, his tenor is consoling, assuring Fabiola that the presence of friends can still be enjoyed despite physical separation. He follows the thought that each is more known to himself with the closing exclamation or question, *quanta est igitur etiam uita, quae pro magno habetur, nostra* ('How great, then, is our life itself, which we so highly value?').

Augustine's consolatory letter to Italica, written sometime prior to 408, contains a passage with a strong likeness to the one from his letter to Fabiola. But Italica was dealing with a more acute and unnegotiable absence: the recent death of her husband. Augustine employs a similar expression of the individual's isolation, but to somewhat different effect, as will soon become clear.

*hic autem etsi tuus coniux, cuius abscessu uidua diceris, tibi notissimus erat, notior tamen erat sibi quam tibi. et unde hoc, cum tu eius corporalem faciem uideres, quam ipse utique non uidebat, nisi quia notitia nostri certior intus est, ubi nemo «scit, quae sunt hominis, nisi spiritus hominis, qui in ipso est»?*

But here, even if you knew your husband very well, because of whose death you are called a widow, he, nonetheless, knew himself better than you did. And why is this except that, though you saw his bodily face, which he himself, of course, did not see, the more certain knowledge of us is within where no one knows what belongs to a human being but the spirit of the human being who is in him. (*Ep.* 92.2).

His approach is questionable by modern standards of consolation (Dear Judy, I'm sorry for your loss, but if you think about it objectively, you didn't really know your husband all that well), but he is concerned with fostering expectation of future reunion. I will consider the relocation of intimacy to the afterlife in the next section, but it does not entirely deactivate this discomfiting assertion of the individual's isolation. He is making her consider the incompleteness of her intimacy with her husband – preventing her, even, from idealising their past relationship. Unlike in the letter to Fabiola, an expression of the individual's interiority does not bring out the possibilities for overcoming distance in this life, since that is no longer an option for Italica, but emphasises lack and incompleteness in this life, encouraging a view to the next.

*Consequences of incomplete knowing*

Though the reflections on isolation in the above letters to Fabiola and Italica are relatively dispassionate observations, Augustine's responses to real breakdowns of relationships due to interiority are quite similar. From evidence of Augustine's friendships, such painful break-ups as he observed and imagined did not occur between him and his close friends. Marie McNamara's comprehensive study of Augustine's friendships, however, does contain a short section on friendships lost, covering fallouts of looser connections with Honoratus, Fortunatus, Julian of Eclanum and Count Boniface. Thus, the letters include a few fond words directed to the young Julian, who would later become his chief opponent in the Pelagian controversy, as well as the pleased beginning of correspondence with the deferent official Boniface that would give way to a disappointed warning a decade later.<sup>25</sup> More worthy of discussion, however, are three events of the early fifth century recorded in the letters: Jerome's offense at the criticism of Augustine's first letter, the hostile dissolution of Jerome and Rufinus's friendship, and the noblewoman Albina's veiled accusation that Augustine was involved in coercing her son-in-law Pinian to serve as a cleric in Hippo. The failures were all the more painful in that the persons involved were exemplary members of the Church, all of whom Augustine had esteemed. Whether or not the events influenced his observations in the letters to Fabiola and Italica,<sup>26</sup> they certainly provoked analogous expressions of the incompleteness, even fragility, of knowing others.

I begin with Jerome, then. In 402, Augustine's enthusiastic claims of knowing Jerome despite his absence,<sup>27</sup> and consequently, the liberty he felt to criticise Jerome's work as a colleague, received a rather cold reception in Bethlehem when a copy finally arrived ten years later. Though the lack of address on the copied letter made the authorship uncertain, Jerome did not veil his offense at Augustine's criticism: 'It is the mark of childish boasting – something that children were once in the habit of doing – to seek a reputation for one's own name by attacking illustrious persons' (*Ep.* 68.2). Between Jerome's sensitivity and the difficulties of sending letters across such a distance, Augustine conciliated Jerome only gradually, never quite establishing the trust required to freely critique one another's scholarship.

Rufinus did not even get that far, or did not try. The dissolution of the scholarly friendship between Jerome and Rufinus into polemics earned two laments from Augustine in a letter to Jerome. The first is sufficient to indicate his crisis of faith in the reliability of Christian friendship, whose spiritual bonds and knowing despite absence he had celebrated with Paulinus. The problem, as he interprets it, is the impossibility of knowing who another will become: their *future* self. He writes:

*quis denique amicus non formidetur quasi futurus inimicus, si potuit inter Hieronymum et Rufinum hoc, quod plangimus, exoriri? o misera et miseranda condicio. o infida in uoluntatibus amicorum scientia praesentium, ubi nulla est praescientia futurorum. sed quid hoc alteri de altero gemendum putem, quando ne ipse quidem sibi homo est notus in posterum? nouit enim utcumque nix forte, nunc qualis sit; qualis autem postea futurus sit, ignorat.*

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<sup>25</sup> See *Ep.* 220.3.

<sup>26</sup> The uncertain dates of *Ep.* 92 and *Ep.* 267 (the former, possibly c. 402 and the latter, sometime prior to 408) make it difficult to identify clear links.

<sup>27</sup> See page 33.

Finally, what friend should not be feared as a future enemy if there could arise between Jerome and Rufinus this hostility we deplore? Oh, our wretched and pitiable state! Oh, how unreliable is our knowledge of the wills of present friends where there is no foreknowledge of their future! But why should I suppose that I should lament this to one person about another when a man's own future is not even known to himself. For each of us knows somehow, perhaps hardly at all, the person he now is, but he does not know what he will be afterward. (*Ep.* 73.6)

Augustine's optimism in the pursuit of knowing another wavers. No friendship is secure when you cannot know what a friend will be in the future. And, if you know your own self 'hardly at all,' the prospects of knowing another become increasingly bleak.

The same sentiment surfaces again in a more objective context, a didactic letter on prayer. It follows one of Augustine's most notable tributes to friendship, which I examined in the previous chapter,<sup>28</sup> praising its ability to make hardships more bearable and good fortune more enjoyable, and culminating in the strong assertion that nothing is pleasing or dear to a human being without a friend.<sup>29</sup> Immediately, Augustine poses the question: but where do you find a friend whom you can thoroughly trust? His response echoes that of *Letter 73* to Jerome: 'For no one is known to another as each is known to himself, and yet no one is known to himself so that he can be confident about his own manner of life tomorrow' (*nam sicut sibi quisque nemo alter alteri notus est et tamen nec sibi quisque ita notus est, ut sit de sua crastina conversatione securus, Ep.* 130.4). Again the double uncertainty of knowing another self and one's future self is apparent. By alluding to words of both Christ and Paul, he acknowledges the value of outward signs of character or 'fruits' (*ex fructibus suis multi cognoscantur*),<sup>30</sup> while approving Paul's exhortation to avoid making judgments before Christ comes and brings everything to light.<sup>31</sup> As I shall investigate further in another section,<sup>32</sup> this present state where darkness and belief must do in place of light and vision warrants frank acknowledgment, and even a sense of loss, of widowhood.

Both passages evoke the 'thick' self of the *Confessions*, the self associated with and bearing its history in the memory, which also carries the raw material for thoughts of the future. Already in the *Confessions* Augustine had admitted that despite his presence to himself he did not even know which temptations he would resist and which would subdue him.<sup>33</sup> He is not present to his future self; as with his knowledge of others, belief must suffice. So friendship is looking less and less certain: not only do I lack sure knowledge of another, but the indications of their 'interior' are compromised, or at least hindered, by their own lack of knowledge of who they *will* be. The preoccupation with the future seems a bit odd: is there really enough discontinuity between the present and future self to legitimate this concern? Should he not rather have lamented how easy it is to misjudge character, missing flaws, as Jerome misjudged Rufinus? But then, Jerome was matching blow with polemical blow. (Perhaps the real lesson is that polemicists don't necessarily make good friends.) On a more

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<sup>28</sup> See page 25.

<sup>29</sup> *Ep.* 130.4: *ita in quibuslibet rebus humanis nihil est homini amicum sine homine amico* ("Thus in no human affairs is anything dear to a human being without a friend").

<sup>30</sup> Alluding to Matthew 7:16-20.

<sup>31</sup> See 1 Corinthians 4:5.

<sup>32</sup> Page 70.

<sup>33</sup> *Conf.* 10.7.

earnest note, I believe that Alexander Nehamas answers this question with considerable insight while discussing the significant role of future expectations for friendship. He writes:

If we are friends, I am of course attracted to what I already know about you, but I also expect that what I don't yet know will be attractive as well and, with that expectation, I want to come to know you better and more intimately. Friendship, like every kind of love, is a commitment to the future, based on a promise of a better life together than either one of us can have alone. . . . That promise of a better future for us both, which depends specifically on our relationship, is exactly that most important thing that every explanation necessarily leaves out: how can we possibly express what we don't know?<sup>34</sup>

This element of expectation in relationships helps explain Augustine's concern with the future and grief over the potential in relationships for disappointment.

Jerome and Rufinus's fallout forced Augustine to acknowledge the element of uncertainty present even in relationships between Catholics, in which love presumably has been 'ordered.'<sup>35</sup> I pointed out his first response of lament, but he also shares with Jerome his thoughts on negotiating the tension between trust and discernment, and a contingency plan for breakdowns in friendship. Strikingly, he begins with trust and abandonment. On a friend who loves God, Augustine admits, he feels free to utterly abandon himself to his love, believing that he can rely on God, in whom his friend is such a person. In his words:

*cum enim hominem christiana caritate flagrantem eaque mihi fidelem amicum factum esse sentio, quicquid ei consiliorum meorum cogitationumque committo, non homini committo sed illi, in quo manet, ut talis sit; «deus» enim «caritas est et, qui manet in caritate, in deo manet».*<sup>36</sup>

For, when I perceive that a man is aflame with Christian love and has become my loyal friend with that love, whatever of my plans and thoughts I entrust to him I do not entrust to a human being, but to him in whom he remains so that he is such a person. For God is love, and he who remains in love remains in God, and God in him. (*Ep.* 73.10)

He can afford the risk because, in a way, God is backing his friend – or, better, God is the security behind all loves. The contingency plan I mentioned is more of a non-retaliatory resolution than anything. Augustine does not deny that his choice to trust and enjoy friendship will make it all the more painful if a friend abandons (*deseruerit*) God and becomes an enemy.<sup>37</sup> In that case, the only plan is to refrain from publicising the former friend's wrongs and to endure any slander *consolante conscientia* 'with the consolation of a good conscience.'

But a decade later finds Augustine rethinking this strategy. Perhaps he has gained more experience negotiating the misunderstandings that come with the territory of leaders amid opposition, not to mention controversialists. In any case, in 411 a wealthy and influential member of the Church, Albina, made it clear that she suspected Augustine of participating in the forceful ordination of her son-in-law as a cleric at Hippo on account of his wealth. Nor was she unknown to Augustine: not long before the misunderstanding, Augustine had written his apologies for not visiting

<sup>34</sup> Nehamas, 'The Good of Friendship,' 278-79.

<sup>35</sup> See Chapter 1, page 23.

<sup>36</sup> 1 John 4:16.

<sup>37</sup> *Ep.* 73.10: *quem si deseruerit, tantum faciat necesse est dolorem, quantum manens fecerat gaudium* ('And if he abandons God, he necessarily causes as much sorrow as he had caused joy when he remained in him').

in affectionate terms.<sup>38</sup> The accusation was from a friend, or at least one previously inclined to esteem him. While discussing the delicate matter with his old friend Alypius, Augustine does indulge in a lament of some pathos over the misunderstanding, as in the letter to Jerome: *ubi enim nobis a spinis talibus securitas et requies praeparari uel praeberi potest, si aduersus nos in tam sanctis nobisque carissimis cordibus nostris pullulare potuere?* ('After all, where can we procure or find security and peace from these thorns, if they can sprout up in persons who are so holy and so very dear to our hearts?' *Ep.* 125.2). But as a whole he assesses the situation with a touch more realism, or at least pragmatism. We can hardly blame them, he essentially says, since what they suspect is not terribly far-fetched. In fact, he emphasises the nativeness of this situation to the human race:

*homines enim sunt et de hominibus talia licet falsa non tamen incredibilia suspicantur.*

For they are human beings, and concerning human beings people have such suspicions that, though false, are not beyond belief.

He is not angry (the tone of the letter supports him on this) and he understands the impulse, so the proper course of action is not to take the offensive, but to cure or allay her suspicion. Cure. Three times he uses the gerundive of the verb *sano*. While it can convey a quieting or allaying action, its principal sense is healing or 'making sound.' The metaphor is apt: suspicion is all too easy for humans to 'catch' since we can only guess another's motives, and its symptoms can be quite harmful, even if isolated to the moral condition of misjudging another. Perhaps more important, however, is Augustine's distinct step away from contentment with the consolation of a good conscience.

*si enim serui dei non reprobi sumus, si aliquid uiget in nobis illius igniculi, quo «caritas non quaerit, quae sua sunt»<sup>39</sup> prouidere utique debemus bona non solum coram deo sed etiam coram hominibus, ne tranquillam aquam bibentes in nostra conscientia pedibus incautis agere conuincamur, ut oues dominicae turbidam bibant.*

For, if we are not bad servants of God, if there burns in us a little of that fire by which *love does not seek its own interests* (1 Corinthians 13:5), we certainly ought to exercise foresight for what is good not only in the eyes of God but also in the eyes of human beings, so that, while drinking clear waters in our conscience, we are not proven guilty of acting carelessly with our feet with the result that the Lord's sheep drink muddied waters. (*Ep.* 125.2)

The idea is scriptural,<sup>40</sup> certainly, but Augustine clothes it rather more vividly. The realities of interiority require vigilance, particularly for leaders, to ensure that appearances reflect inward intentions as much as possible.

I consider it established, then, that the letters reveal Augustine's sensitivity to shadows or gaps that persist in friendship or neighbourly love even after conversion, after its ordering of loves, after

<sup>38</sup> *Ep.* 124.1: *quid enim graue ac molestum uel etiam periculosum habent imbres isti, quod non mihi subeundum ac ferendum fuit, ut ad uos uenirem, tanta in tantis malis nostris solatia, in hac generatione tortuosa ac peruersa tam ardentem accensa de summo lumine lumina suscepta humilitate sublimia et contempta claritate clariora?* ('For what burden or trouble or even danger do these rains have that I would not endure and bear in order to visit you? For you are such great comforts amid our great woes and are in this twisted and perverse generation lights most ardently alight from the highest light, lights sublime because of the lowly status you have taken on and brighter because of the brilliance you have scorned?').

<sup>39</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:5.

<sup>40</sup> For example, 2 Corinthians 8:21: 'For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man.'

the *Confessions*. The letters show him facing the pain of being misunderstood – and the risk that colours all relationships after such experiences – but also the possibility of communicating one’s thoughts and intentions, and of ‘healing’ misjudgments. And I have shown how Augustine views these failures of knowing – of love – through his understanding of the self. The failures and uncertainty are the consequences of interiority. For Augustine, who felt them keenly, they evoke longing, sometimes grief.

### Deferment of intimacy

So then, how do we deal with this unfulfilled longing for intimacy? In the previous chapter I noted evidence for Augustine’s shaky truce with desire for other humans by means of communalising the experience of desire, expressing it with scriptural language, and invoking Christ as an integral element of that desire.<sup>41</sup> It is to be expected, then, that repression is not his strategy. What begins to accompany expressions of isolation is rather a readjustment of focus to the next life, the ‘heavenly Jerusalem.’ This cannot be taken for granted, however, as if it were a natural step to displace relational fulfillment to an idealised place, since Augustine, or at least some of his commentators, do not. As Richard Sorabji reads Augustine’s eschatology in the *Confessions*, the saints in heaven will be ‘rapt in contemplation of God,’ without memory of this life and its ties, although he admits an ambivalence cast by Augustine musing that a deceased friend has not forgotten him, and by the treatment of his relationship with his mother.<sup>42</sup> As I proceed to instances from the letters, I will first ask whether they shed more light on Augustine’s view of the social (or asocial) dimension of the after-life. Second, and more importantly, I seek to understand his management of loss and longing through the eschatological perspective.

#### *A social heaven?*

The last section yielded glimpses of Augustine’s view of the next life – suggestions of its desirability, certainly – but now I would like to engage more fully the question of how souls interact there, if they do. Four of his letters aid us in this task: *Letters* 249 and 155 to Restitutus and Macedonius provide further details of the social nature of heaven, while two letters of consolation, *Letter* 92 and 263 exhibit Augustine integrating these ideas with his understanding of the self.

*Letter* 249 begins with this world, however, where disunity and falseness among members of the Church had evidently disturbed Augustine’s addressee, the deacon Restitutus. Augustine looks on his agitation favorably, as evidence of the ‘pious flame’ of his heart,<sup>43</sup> but he insists that the problem will not be fully resolved in this life and consequently requires a certain tolerance. Such is the state of things on this lengthy journey (*longinqua peregrinatio*), but at its close in the heavenly Jerusalem, peace and plenty of true brothers and sisters will be the order of the day: *in uirtute Hierusalem matris aeternae securissima pace perfruamur et in turribus eius abundantia uerorum fratrum* ([until] in the strength of Jerusalem, our eternal mother, we enjoy in her towers a most secure peace and an abundance of true

<sup>41</sup> See page 43.

<sup>42</sup> Sorabji, *Self*, 127.

<sup>43</sup> *Ep.* 249: *aestus indicantes piam flammam cordis tui indicauit mihi fidelissimus, ut scis, particeps eorum, frater Deogratias* (‘As someone who, as you know, is most trustworthy and shares in it, Brother Deogratias has disclosed to me the turmoil that reveals the pious flame that burns in your heart’).

brothers and sisters'). The fact that Augustine anticipates the citizens *enjoying* each other indicates, if briefly, the social nature of his conception of heaven. He states it more strongly in *Letter 155* in which he describes the heavenly Jerusalem as a source of *vera amicitia*, true friendship, in as much as it can be truly gratuitous, freed from the calculus of temporal advantages.<sup>44</sup>

The discussion of heaven in *Letter 155* ends there, on a rather humanistic note, but as *Letter 249* continues, it becomes evident that God has an integral role in this unity:

*quae est autem uirtus illius ciuitatis nisi deus eius deus noster? uides igitur, in quo solo fiat pax et singulis hominibus, qui secum sine illo bellum gerunt et in nullo extrinsecus oborto scandalo, et omnibus simul, qui quamquam se in hac uita diligant et amicitiae fidae nexibus teneantur, tamen nec praesentia corporis nec consensione animi summe perfecteque copulentur.*

But what is the strength of that city except its God, our God? You see, then, in whom alone peace may be obtained both for individual human beings who, without him, wage war against one another, even when no external scandal has arisen, and for all together who, although they love one another in this life and are bound by the ties of loyal friendship, are still not united in the highest and perfect manner by either bodily presence or agreement of heart. (*Ep.* 249)

Here he describes no process by which God does this, only that God alone is able to bring together individuals variously isolated/separated in this life. And this union is indeed ideal: it is safe to infer that it involves being united 'in the highest and perfect manner,' in presence and agreement of mind. Though he does not anticipate future readers' questions of 'how?', he still makes it clear that he conceives of a social after-life, with God as the agent.

Augustine's letter to the widow Italice confirms this fulfillment of knowing and loving through God's mediation in the next life. The fuller development of the heaven-ward view is likely thanks to the natural tendency of Christian consolation. Augustine skips rather hastily from condolences to the controversial question of whether or not we shall see God with bodily eyes. Though indelicate by our standards of consolation, he is operating from a view that death effects a temporary absence which shortly yields to a more perfect presence. And it is even more evident in this passage than the last that the presence (togetherness) is not only God's, but that of others.

*quosdam nostros migrantes non amisimus, sed praemisimus, . . . ubi nobis erunt quanto notiores tanto utique cariores et sine timore ullius discessionis amabiles*

We have not lost those of ours who have departed, but have sent them on ahead, where they will be dearer to us to the extent that they will be better known and where they will be lovable without any fear of our losing them. (*Ep.* 92.1)

He does not represent this presence together as a melding of souls which have lost all individuality; rather, this presence seems to effect a deeper knowing of individual souls, and with it, a deeper appreciation and love. Is it then a knowing effected by direct presence, the same means by which we know ourselves? Previously, I noted Phillip Cary's point that non-spatial entities, as the soul, can only

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<sup>44</sup> *Ep.* 155.1: *inde quippe manat etiam uera amicitia, non pensanda temporalibus commodis sed gratuito amore potanda* ('From it, of course, there also flows true friendship that is not to be judged by temporal advantages but is to be valued as gratuitous love').



be separated by a fallen will,<sup>45</sup> and it would be reasonable to infer that in heaven the healing of wills would effect this presence. But as Augustine continues the letter, he explains the mechanism of knowing in rather different terms:

*sed cum «uenerit dominus et inluminauerit abscondita tenebrarum et manifestauerit cogitationes cordis »,<sup>46</sup> tunc nihil latebit proximum in proximo nec erit, quod suis quisque aperiat, abscondat alienis, ubi nullus erit alienus.*

But when the Lord comes and brings light to things hidden in the darkness and reveals the thoughts of the heart, then nothing in our neighbor will be hidden from us, nor will it be possible that we disclose something to our friends, but hide it from strangers where there will be no stranger. (*Ep.* 92.2)

These are not the terms of his psychology; they are Biblical terms.<sup>47</sup> The gap in presence is here overcome not by a healing of wills among selves, but by the mediating presence of God, the ‘light of minds that have been purified’ (*lux mentium purgatarum*). Does this knowing of others effected by God lighting up each self on display save the individual self? In this passage it is unclear from what the minds will be purified: the accretions of sin or, more drastically, all earthly connections and memories. In the next section I will return to this question of the continuity of the individual.<sup>48</sup>

Finally, *Letter* 263 indirectly addresses the question of whether souls will retain their memories and relational ties after death. In the previous chapter, I mentioned Augustine’s letter to the consecrated virgin Sapida, who was mourning her deceased brother. She had sent Augustine a tunic that she had woven for her brother, and Augustine wrote back, assuring her that he would wear it as she requested. The letter is Augustine’s only particularly comforting letter of consolation. One of the reasons may be his recognition of the pain that Sapida feels at the physical loss of her brother: the sight of him ‘coming and going’ in the course of his duties as a deacon, the kind attentions and respect he paid her for her consecrated life, the fact that he died before he could wear the garment that she wove for him. His consolation beautifully affirms their bond:

*neque enim, quia ista, quae tibi maeres esse subtracta, suo temporali cursu praeterierunt, ideo periit illa caritas, qua Timotheus Sapidam dilexit et diligit; manet illa seruata in thesauro suo et «abscondita est cum Christo in domino ».<sup>49</sup>*

For the love by which Timothy loved and loves Sapida has not perished because those things, which you mourn as having been removed from you, have passed away over time. That love remains, preserved in its repository, and *is hidden with Christ in the Lord* (Col. 3:3). (*Ep.* 263.2)

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<sup>45</sup> See page 57.

<sup>46</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:5.

<sup>47</sup> See 1 Corinthians 4:5 (“Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.”) and 1 Corinthians 13:12 (“For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”)

<sup>48</sup> See page 73.

<sup>49</sup> Colossians 3:3.

One might question whether ‘that love’ which remains is, in fact, personal and not merely the divine movement of love. But, as I quoted in the last chapter,<sup>50</sup> Augustine clarifies its personal nature by bringing in the body:

*quando quidem germani tui nec pars ipsa mortalis, quae in terra sepulta est, tibi peribit, in qua tibi praesentabatur, per quam te adloquebatur tecumque conloquebatur, ex qua promebat uocem sic tuis auribus notam, quem ad modum faciem tuis oculis offerebat, ita ut, ubicumque sonuisset, etiam non uisus soleret agnosci. haec enim uiuorum sensibus subtrahuntur, ut dolorem faciat absentia mortuorum. sed quando nec ipsa in aeternum peribunt, ubi «capillus capitis non peribit », <sup>51</sup> et ad tempus deposita sic recipientur, ut numquam ulterius deponantur, sed in melius demutata firmentur,*

For even that mortal part of your brother that was buried in the earth will not be lost to you. In that part he was present to you; through that part he addressed and conversed with you. Just as he presented his face to your eyes, he produced by that mortal part of his that voice so familiar to your ears that, wherever you heard his voice, you recognized him even if you did not see him. For these things are taken away from the senses of human beings with the result that the absence of those who have died causes sorrow. But even our bodies will not perish for eternity, just as *not even a hair of your head will perish* (Lk 21:18), but, after having been laid aside for a time, they will be received back so that they will never again be laid aside, but they will be changed for the better and made strong. (*Ep.* 263.4)

The continuity of the body from this life to the next – even to the single hair – is strong evidence for the continuity of individuality. Augustine treats this subject thoroughly in *City of God* (including the problem of shed hair, clipped nails and the intractable circumstance of cannibalism),<sup>52</sup> but he does not address the continuity of personal relationships. In this letter to Sapida, however, Augustine follows his discussion of the resurrection with a return to the *caritas* which proved ambiguous above: *haec tecum sermocinetur fides tua, quoniam non fraudabitur spes tua, etsi nunc differatur caritas tua* (‘Your faith speaks to you of these things, because your hope will not be stolen from you even if your love is now postponed for a time,’ *Ep.* 263.4). This expression does not permit a universal reading of their love. Evidently, her love (*caritas tua*) is put on hold until she is reunited with Timothy. This assurance is difficult to reconcile with a post-mortem wiping of memory. Instead, it harks back to *Confessions* 9 and Augustine’s belief that his deceased friend Nebridius remembers him.<sup>53</sup> In both cases, the enduring connection between the two is God. Sapida and Timothy’s love persists beyond the grave because it is – or, they are – both ‘hidden’ in an eternal being; Nebridius drinks in God, who is mindful of us (*nostris memor*), and thus remembers his friends on earth.

#### *Longing like a widow*

All four of the letters to women that I discussed above contain an eschatological element alongside their expressions of lack and uncertainty. The consolatory letters to Italica and Sapida were concerned with the nature of the next life, as I pointed out. The letters to Fabiola and Proba, on the

<sup>50</sup> Chapter two, page 50.

<sup>51</sup> Luke 21:18.

<sup>52</sup> *De civ. dei* 13.16ff, 22.4-5.

<sup>53</sup> See page 22. *Conf.* 9.6: *nec eum sic arbitror inebriari ex ea, ut obliuiscatur mei, cum tu, domine, quem potat ille, nostris memor* (‘Yet I cannot believe that he is so inebriated as to forget me, since you, Lord, from whom he drinks, are mindful of us’).

other hand, are more concerned with living in this world properly related to the next. In the letter to Fabiola this first takes the form of a brief approval of her anticipation of heaven:

*doluiſti enim peregrinationem, qua contingit perpetuo gaudere cum ſanctis, et deſiderium ſupernae patriae, ubi iam non terrarum ſpatio diuidemur, ſed ſemper unius contemplatione laetabimur, merito praetuliſti. felix es talia fideliter cogitando, amando felicior et ideo eris etiam feliciffima conſequendo.*

For you lamented the pilgrimage on which it falls to our lot always to rejoice with the ſaints, you correctly preferred the deſire for the heavenly fatherland where we will not be ſeparated by earthly expanſes but will always be happy at the contemplation of the One. You are happy becauſe you ponder ſuch things in faith, and more happy becauſe you love them, and ſo you will be moſt happy when you have attained them. (*Ep.* 267)

Here Augustine does not conteſt her (or perhaps his) conjunction of contemplating God and enjoying the preſence of others, confirming our concluſions from the previous ſection. Yet he approves not only her eſchatology, but alſo her *deſiderium*, her deſire. She laments travelling abroad – that is, her life on earth – yet he calls her *felix*, happy, becauſe ſhe directs her thoughts and love to the next life. Ah, here it is eaſy to ſee how Augustine earns accuſations of undermining this world in preference for the next.<sup>54</sup> He could have advised her to move on, make new friends and cultivate the late-antique verſion of mindfulness, but inſtead he affirms her feeling of lack, her grief over abſences: being away from thoſe for whom ſhe cares, and from God. The ſentiment echoes the paradoxical logic of the Beatitude, ‘Bleſſed are thoſe who mourn, for they will be comforted.’<sup>55</sup> But, as I noted earlier, he does proceed to offer a little this-worldly comfort, reminding her of the intimacy ſtill poſſible by ſharing thoughts, if only through letters.

Before moving to the letter addreſſed to Proba, it is worth noting that Augustine actually ſeems to take his own advice. In the firſt chapter, I pointed out the gradual diſperſal of Augustine’s cloſeſt circle of friends, as they left to ſerve as prieſts and biſhops in other areas, and the pain thoſe ſeparations cauſed him. I looked briefly at a letter to Novatus in which he repreſents this pain as *deſideriorum ſtimulis* (‘ſtings of deſire’) piercing him, but of more intereſt to us now are the following lines, in which he reveals how the eſchatological perſpective affects the way he thinks of theſe ſeparations. Augustine deſcribes the ſtate of his relationship with a particularly cloſe friend, Severus, as reduced to the occaſional ſhort letter, generally about church buſineſs.<sup>56</sup> But he proceeds to explain why they accept this, deſpite its pain: *hoc fecit non utique uoluntas uel mea uel illius, ſed dum matris eccleſiae neceſſitates propter futurum ſaeculum, quo nobiſcum inſeparabiliter conuiuemus, noſtri temporis neceſſitatibus antepoſimus* (‘And the reaſon for this is not my will or his. Rather, for the ſake of the world to come, in which we will live with each other inſeparably, we ſet the needs of our mother, the Church, before the needs of our own time,’ *Ep.* 84.1). Augustine finds conſolation in the eternal perſpective, which he recommends to others. For him, the proſpect of living together *inſeparabiliter* in the future makes the barriers to intimacy in this life endurable.

<sup>54</sup> See, for inſtance, Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 14; Annette Baier, ‘Moralism and Cruelty: Reflections on Hume and Kant,’ in *Moral Prejudices* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Preſs, 1994), 268–293; Martha Nuſſbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Preſs, 2003), 553.

<sup>55</sup> Matthew 5:4.

<sup>56</sup> See page 28.

Augustine's letter to the noblewoman Proba develops this theme. I have looked at *Letter* 130 twice already: in the previous chapter, for its positive assessment of physical togetherness as the site of friendship and ministry, and in the preceding section of this chapter, for its adjacent admission of uncertainty in friendship on account of interiority. Following these reflections, however, Augustine turns, as in his letter to Italice, to a future hope – to *uera uita post mortem uerumque solacium post desolationem* ('true life after death and true consolation after desolation,' *Ep.* 130.5). But, unlike in his letter to Italice, his primary concern is how one should live in the meantime – in his words, the darkness.

*in his igitur uitae huius tenebris, in quibus «peregriamur a domino »,<sup>57</sup> quam diu «per fidem ambulamus non per speciem »,<sup>58</sup> desolatam se debet anima christiana deputare, ne desistat orare et scripturarum diuinarum sanctarumque sermoni «tamquam lucernae in obscuro loco positae » fidei oculum intendere, «donec dies luceat et lucifer oriatur in cordibus »<sup>59</sup> nostris.*

In the darkness, then, of this life in which we are journeying away from the Lord while we walk by faith and not by vision, the Christian soul ought to regard itself as desolate so that it does not cease to pray, and it should learn to turn the eye of faith to the words of the divine and holy scriptures, as if to a lamp set in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts. (*Ep.* 130.5)

Regard oneself *desolata*? In the letter to Italice he had specifically urged her *not* to feel desolate: *non enim te desolatam putare debes, cum in interiore homine habes praesentem Christum per fidem in corde tuo* ('After all, you ought not to think that you have been abandoned, since in your interior self you have Christ present in your heart through faith,' *Ep.* 92.1). The change in emphasis, the assertion of Christ's presence instead of the incompleteness of it in this life, is likely an adjustment to his audience: that is, a response to the acute sense of loss and abandonment that Italice may have been experiencing after her husband's death. Augustine offers the eternal perspective as an antidote to despair.<sup>60</sup> Evidently, the illustrious Proba was not so desolate, despite her widowhood. The rest of the letter makes it clear that Augustine is bringing up the uncertainty of relationships with the intention of destabilising the complacency that good fortune and the presence of friends and family can foster. He wants Proba and the greater audience that he doubtless anticipated to think of themselves as desolate, to embrace a certain feeling of absence and its accompanying longing for the presence of God. Augustine takes care to demonstrate from the scriptures that the widow is particularly suited for prayer, but in a sense he takes the widow as another figure or type for the Christian in this world, with his call to each Christian soul to regard herself desolate.

But this is a movement from a feeling of disconnection from others to a broader conviction of incompleteness – a persisting lack closely connected with being 'away from the Lord.' Augustine addresses this absence further in a letter to the bishop Hesychius in 419-20, through Christ's parable

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<sup>57</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:6.

<sup>58</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:7.

<sup>59</sup> 2 Peter 1:19.

<sup>60</sup> *Ep.* 92.1: *aut sic te contristari oportet quem ad modum gentes, quae spem non habent, cum ueracissima promissione speremus nos in hac uita, unde migraturi . . . ad eam uitam esse uenturos* ('Nor should you be sad in that way like the pagans who do not have hope, since because of his most true promise we hope in this life, which we will leave, that we will come to that other life').

of the servants waiting for the absent master, which he unfavorably combines at one point with his favoured figure of travellers absent from their heavenly homeland. Incoherence aside, the parable clarifies that it is insufficient to acknowledge the absence of the master, as the servant who takes advantage of his absence to beat the other servants and indulge in feasting and drinking. Rather, awareness of his absence ought to engender desire for his return. The good servants 'longed for his revelation and gave their fellow servants food at the proper time, and they did not strike them by lording it over them, nor did they behave dissolutely with the lovers of this world, saying, *My master is slow in coming*' (*diligebant eius manifestationem et dabant conseruis in tempore cibaria nec percutiebant eos dominando eis nec luxuriabantur cum amatoribus mundi dicentes: «moram facit dominus meus»*),<sup>61</sup> Ep. 199.1). To the relatively passive figures of the widow and the pilgrim, Augustine thus adds the responsible servant. Each is a figure for the soul defined by absence and longing.

In this section I have drawn attention to a consistent eschatological perspective in the letters that complements Augustine's reflections on the incompleteness and uncertainty of relationships on earth. The heaven or 'heavenly Jerusalem' of the letters is distinctly social, with earthly ties not forgotten. And it is God who makes this fellowship possible – indeed, perfects it – both in his role as a secure storage or 'hiding place' for loves, and as a light which illumines each self, initiating a fuller knowing and thus loving. But living on earth with this knowledge evokes – or should evoke, in Augustine's estimation – longing, and even a feeling of absence or bereavement. From the corporate perspective of *City of God*, Christians are members of the *civitas peregrina*, the 'community in exile,' a figure he borrowed from the prophets addressing the Jewish exiles in Babylon.<sup>62</sup> The connection illustrates how the preservation of identity and unity depends on the common vision of a distant city,<sup>63</sup> but it also intensifies the sense of bereavement since the Jewish exiles had lost their city, their temple, their loved ones. The desolate widow, then, is a figure for both the individual and the community, longing for the day prophesied in Isaiah:

You will forget the shame of your youth  
and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood.  
For your Maker is your husband – ...  
'For a brief moment I abandoned you,  
but with deep compassion I will bring you back.' (Isaiah 54:4,7)

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<sup>61</sup> Matthew 24:48; Luke 12:45.

<sup>62</sup> The translation 'community in exile' is James Dougherty's in the article, 'The Sacred City and the City of God,' *Augustinian Studies* 10 (1979), 88. See Augustine's *Expositions on the Psalms* 64 for an example of his adoption of the exile image. It begins as follows: *sed quoniam dicit apostolus: «haec in figura contingebant in illis; scripta sunt autem propter nos, in quos finis saeculorum obuenit», debemus et nos nosse prius captiuitatem nostram, deinde liberationem nostram; debemus nosse Babyloniam, in qua captiui sumus, et Ierusalem, ad cuius reditum suspiramus* ('The apostle warned us, however, that *all these things happened to them, but with symbolic import, for they are written down as a rebuke to us, upon whom the climax of the ages has come* (1 Cor 10:11); and therefore it is our business to understand first of all in what sense we are captives, and then to know our liberation. We must know what Babylon is, this city by which we are enslaved, and also be aware of Jerusalem, whither we long to return').

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89.

### Holy or fallen isolation?

In the last chapter Augustine was reaching out to the other, embracing a knowing based on signs of the interior person: actions, the responses of others, and their own words expressing what they love, particularly if Christ is the prominent love.<sup>64</sup> I have since followed the incompleteness of this knowing and the potential for misunderstanding resulting from the imperfect connection between exterior signs and the interior self. In this section, I would like to weigh the significance of his sensitivity to isolation, specifically as it affects what Hannah Arendt calls ‘the neighbor’s relevance for the believer.’<sup>65</sup> Why dialogue with Arendt, you may ask: she is best known as a political theorist, and her work on Augustine, *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin (Love and Saint Augustine)*, is a dissertation from 1929. Yet the work is a thoughtful reading of Augustine, stimulating more critical engagement from Augustinian scholars after its translation and publication in English in 1996.<sup>66</sup> Of particular note, despite its distance from Augustinian scholarship proper, is Martha Nussbaum’s adoption of elements of Arendt’s reading in her influential *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*.

Arendt, and Nussbaum who follows her reading, find in Augustine’s concept of *caritas* a movement toward rather than away from isolation.<sup>67</sup> In coming to God and denying oneself, the believer rejects the particulars of her earthly life and the natural dependence on and identity with human society. And in loving her neighbour as herself, she rejects their concrete particulars as well, loving them – as she can now love all human beings – only in their status as created by God.<sup>68</sup> Confirming her reading with Augustine’s words, ‘For you love in him not what he is, but what you wish that he may be,’<sup>69</sup> she concludes: ‘This not only preserves the isolation of the lover who is concerned about even those nearest to him only insofar as he loves God in them. It also means that for the neighbor as well love is merely a call to isolation, a summons into God’s presence.’<sup>70</sup> The thought is rather chilling: we would not like love to be called *merely* anything, let alone merely a call to isolation.

Admittedly, there are traces of this idea in the previous sections. Augustine does not tell the widows and lonely Fabiola to go out and make new friends, as Seneca might have,<sup>71</sup> but bids Italica to find comfort in Christ’s presence in her heart, and Proba to divert her feelings of loss and longing to prayer. The desolate widow is hardly a model of successful social integration. Yet, at the same time, I have identified evidence of a strong social element in the letters, testified to not least by the

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<sup>64</sup> One’s loves are closely connected to one’s character for Augustine. See note on page 30.

<sup>65</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 4.

<sup>66</sup> For some recent engagements with Arendt’s reading of Augustine, see: Peter Burnell, *The Augustinian Person* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005) and ‘Is the Augustinian Heaven Inhuman?: The Arguments of Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt,’ *Augustinian Studies* 30:2 (1999): 283-292; Lauren Swayne Barthold, ‘Towards an ethics of love: Arendt on the will and St Augustine,’ *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 26:6 (2000), 1-20; Charles Mathewes, ‘A Wordly Augustinianism: Augustine’s Sacramental Vision of Creation,’ *Augustinian Studies* 41:1 (2010), 333-248.

<sup>67</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 94-96; Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 552.

<sup>68</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 94.

<sup>69</sup> *Homilies on the First Epistle of John* 8.10, as cited by Arendt in *Love and Saint Augustine*, 95.

<sup>70</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 95-96.

<sup>71</sup> See page 19. Seneca, *Ep. mor.* 63.11: *Quem amabas extulisti: quaere quem ames. Satius est amicum reparare quam flere* (‘You have buried one whom you loved; look about for someone to love’).

interpersonal act of writing the letters. Examining some of these instances may suggest an alternative reading to Arendt's that comprehends both tendencies in his thought.

Before turning to individual instances, I ought to pose the broader question: if Augustine believes that he can love all people through a simple awareness of their createdness, why does isolation bother him? Sure, we can easily understand his laments over the distress of miscommunications due to interiority, but why meditate on the fact that you can never fully know another person in this life when all that is important is their createdness and thus equality? In fact, for Augustine, in the letters at least, love does not depend on these facts alone; love is closely connected to knowing. I think that Arendt is right to identify an element of isolation in Augustine's view of knowing another: 'I deny the other person so as to break through to his real being, just as in searching for myself I deny myself.'<sup>72</sup> But she believes that this knowing has very little to do with the beloved, who is flattened into 'only an occasion to love God,' the source of his true being.<sup>73</sup> Here I disagree. Even in the *Confessions*, Augustine's own self-denial – his re-evaluation of self through confession to God – yielded an 'exceedingly immense' life, even the hidden parts of which he expected to learn in the next life, or upon Christ's return. The letters provide similar indications regarding knowing others, to which I will turn after grappling with a witness key to Arendt's reading.

The witness – Augustine's words from *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, 'For you love in him not what he is, but what you wish that he may be'<sup>74</sup> – certainly seems to undermine the value of the individual self as well as its relevance to its neighbour. But context is important here. Augustine is addressing the rather extreme problem of loving one's enemy. He assumes that loving involves desiring their good, but he rejects wishing them riches, marriage, sons and health because such may or may not be advantageous in the end. Desiring their good, for Augustine, means desiring that they obtain the more certain good of eternal life and thus become 'brothers' instead of enemies.<sup>75</sup> His narration of an imagined encounter with a hostile person is useful for assessing whether or not Augustine is conceiving him as a more or less transparent envelope through which God, as the ultimate object, can be seen and loved.

*sic et tu respicis inimicum tuum aduersantem, saeuientem, mordentem uerbis, exasperantem contumeliis, insectantem odiis; attendis ibi quia homo est. uides ista omnia quae aduersa sunt ab homine facta; et uides in illo quod a deo factus est. quod autem homo factus est, a deo factus est. quod autem te odit, ipse fecit; quod inuidet, ipse fecit. et quid dicis in animo tuo? domine, propitius illi esto, dimitte illi peccata; incute illi terrorem, muta illum. non amas in illo quod est, sed quod uis ut sit. ergo cum inimicum amas, fratrem amas.*

So too you regard your enemy—adversarial, furious, biting in his speech, provoking in his slander, railing in his hatred. You are attentive to the fact that he is a human being. You see all those things that are adverse, that were done by a human being, and you see in him that he was made by God. On the one hand, that he was made a man means that he was made by God. On the other, that he hates you is something that *he* has done; that he is envious is something that *he* has done. And what do you say in your soul? 'Lord, be gracious to him, forgive him his sins. Strike him with terror, change him.' You don't love what is in him but

<sup>72</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 95-96.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-97.

<sup>74</sup> *Homilies on the First Epistle of John* 8.10.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

what you want him to be. When you love your enemy, therefore, you are loving your brother. (*Homilies on the First Epistle of John* 8.10)

Augustine certainly makes a distinction between what is of God – his opponent’s createdness – and what is distinctly his opponent’s – hostility. But he does not conclude that when you love an enemy, you love God in him; rather, when you love an enemy, you love a brother. A brother: an ontological peer, a person who has moved in the direction of goodness and thus acquired some lovable qualities. This is not a generic love: you do not love your enemy simply as a generic envelope of createdness and equality. You see him in his lack, including qualities that would naturally evoke resentment or hatred in return, but desire his growth and fulfillment.

Returning to the letters, then, I see confirmation of love’s strong connection to knowing. Recall *Letter* 92, in which Augustine assures Italica that in the next life loved ones ‘will be dearer to us to the extent that they will be better known’ (*notiores*). Such a statement is inconsistent with love’s gaze merely grazing the beloved as it looks beyond him to God. And again, in *Letter* 205, he expresses the same idea in terms that practically undermine his concern with loving each person in as much as they are created by God. He writes:

*nam illi, qui ignoti nostris oculis ingeruntur, non solum desiderabiles non sunt, sed uix tolerabiles sunt, nisi aliquibus signis pulchritudo in eis hominis interioris appareat.*

For those who are thrust before our eyes without being known are not only not desired but are hardly tolerable, unless from some signs we see the beauty of the inner person in them. (*Ep.* 205.1)

The *beauty* of the interior person: this is no generic envelope, but sufficient cause (when discovered) for indifference to change to love and even desire. What makes an inner person beautiful, one might ask? Augustine feels no need to specify, of course, but he does indicate the aspects of a person he considers relevant for knowing them:

*quantum ad oculos adinet corporales, quosdam uidemus nec nouimus, quorum a nobis uita studiaque nesciuntur; quosdam nouimus nec uidemus, quorum nobis caritas et affectus innotuit, in quibus et te adnumeramus.*

In terms of the eyes of the body we see certain people and do not know them, since we do not know their interests and life. Others we know, though we do not see them, since their love and affection has become well known to us, and among these we count you.

The first aspects Augustine names suggest little denial of the other’s earthly existence: their way of life (*vita*), their interests or pursuits (*studia*). But closer, perhaps, to the interior person and its beauty are the *caritas* and *affectus* which enable Augustine to know his addressee, Consentius, without having seen him. I have shown that love depends on knowledge, but now it also seems that the pertinent knowledge of another is what they love. *Caritas* here, as most often in Augustine,<sup>76</sup> likely refers to love for God. Such a criterion for knowledge accords well with the prominence of Christ’s two-fold commandment (‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength,’ and ‘Love your neighbor as yourself<sup>77</sup>), and thus love, in

<sup>76</sup> Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 235.

<sup>77</sup> Mark 12:30-31. For variations in the letters, see *Ep.* 140.45, 189.2, 233, 258.4.



Augustine's ethics. But *affectus* is likely a less elevated love or affection – one that may cover Augustine's self-conscious interest in how Darius feels about him: *quis enim esses, iam quidem acceperam, sed qualis erga me esses, nondum tenebam* ('For I had already heard who you were, but I did not yet grasp what sort of a man you would be toward me,' *Ep.* 231.5). (I am inclined to think that Augustine counted Darius's effusive affection for him an indication of excellent character, but, to be fair, he shows himself a cautious recipient of praise throughout the letters.)

With the support of the previous sections, then, these thoughts from the letters suggest an alternative to Arendt's reading of isolation in Augustine. Whereas Arendt draws attention to the isolation from others that a dominant love for God effects, the letters attest to an isolation from others that God will ultimately dispel. Knowing loved ones more fully and enjoying true brothers and sisters feature prominently in Augustine's eschatology. Moreover, Augustine's strong association of love with knowing undermines the characterisation of his concept of neighbourly love as a shallow love, in which the other is only an occasion to love God. The self that Augustine expects God to reveal more fully in the next life is immense, while in the meantime we begin to love when we see signs of a beautiful self, and we love in earnest when we come to *know* that self, albeit imperfectly, through their way of life and affections. Yet there is no denying the widow figure of his thought, the movement upwards, the isolation of prayer. These are elements of his thought, but they certainly do not overwhelm his strong social tendency.

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In the letters, the vast self which had played the leading role in the *Confessions* enters society, so to speak. That is, the issues of interiority and isolation resurface in the context of relationships – usually negatively. In the decades after he wrote the *Confessions*, Augustine began to reflect in his letters on the interiority of the individual which marks all relationships with an element of uncertainty by preventing each from fully knowing the other. The fellowship even of good friends is undermined by absence, imperfect agreement or the miscommunications inevitable on account of interiority. After earnest reflections on this incompleteness, Augustine frequently turns to the hope of the perfection of social life in the next life. The conviction of absence and longing for true communion in heaven become appropriate responses of the soul to this life, as imaged by the figures of the pilgrim, the widow, the waiting servant.

Why must the world be a desert and I a widow? Why must I try to feel desolate when I am content and not desolate when I would grieve? That Augustine should be responsive to the picture of isolation presented by the widow is no surprise. Had he not been struck by the same ideas in Neoplatonism – the same stirrings of lack and desire? So to the question why should I be desolate, he would answer: because you're absent from God and your homeland, where you will have perfect fellowship with others. If you don't feel that absence, if you forget to remind yourself of it, perhaps your love is smaller than you think. And to the question why shouldn't I feel desolate, he might point out the blessings of the interior, trinitarian self: you are made with the capacity of God so that even on earth you may experience the presence of Christ, and even if absent from friends, you may enjoy each other's presence by sharing thoughts through letters or intermediaries.

## CONCLUSION

### The weight of absence

Can love of our own city be revived in us, if through being abroad so long we have forgotten it? Yes, it can, for our Father has sent us letters. God has provided the scriptures for us, so that by these letters from him our longing to return home may be aroused.

—Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms*

For Augustine, absence and longing are not just subjects of meditation for the occasional sentimental moment of writing a letter. Rather, as he phrases it in the epigraph above, they are ideas that define his understanding of the broader human condition. Augustine's experience of absence from individuals is a subsidiary of this overarching absence from God and the heavenly homeland. The 'letters' that God has sent – the scriptures and Christ, the Word made flesh – mediate this absence, suggesting the happiness of that homeland without fully revealing it, at once giving recipients hope and making them yearners. The absences from individuals are a part of this larger condition. Here too language must mediate, by letters between those distant, conversation with those present. Even as language helps to bring individuals closer together, however, it fails to fully communicate one self to another, and cannot provide a substitute for physical presence across distance.

These themes of presence and absence are by no means unique to Augustine or Christianity. The greater reality of the intelligible world and the philosopher's 'ascent of love' towards presence with the eternal (ultimately the Good or the One) are the legacy of Platonism. So too is the recognition of writing's inadequacy, distanced as it is from all incorporeal truths worth signifying. But where Plato deems writing unfit for communicating any serious truth,<sup>1</sup> Augustine has the precedent of God's Word to justify his attempts at writing and even his feeling of obligation to write. Gary Genosko locates Augustine's turn from the 'seductions of speech' as a rhetorician to the period shortly after his conversion, when various ailments first forced him to retire from teaching rhetoric, then temporarily prevented him from participating in philosophical dialogues with his friends and

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<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Letter VII* 344b-c: 'Only when all of these things – names, definitions, and visual and other perceptions – have been rubbed against one another and tested, pupil and teacher asking and answering questions in good will and without envy – only then, when reason and knowledge are at the very extremity of human effort, can they illuminate the nature of any object. For this reason anyone who is seriously studying high matters will be the last to write about them and thus expose his thought to the envy and criticism of men. What I have said comes, in short, to this: whenever we see a book, whether the laws of a legislator or a composition on any other subject, we can be sure that if the author is really serious, this book does not contain his best thoughts; they are stored away with the fairest of his possessions.' Refer also to *Phaedrus* 275-76 for Plato's critique of writing as providing a deceiving *appearance* of wisdom in contrast to the 'discourse that is written down, with knowledge, in the soul of the listener' (*Phaedrus* 276a).

pupils at Cassiciacum. From speech he turned to writing as a sign system removed from the temptations of ‘logorrhoea’ and closer to the silence of contemplation. Writing kept him responsible for his arguments and prevented the tendency in dialogue to employ a hodgepodge of philosophy to gain one’s point.<sup>2</sup> Thanks, perhaps, to this elevation of writing, he wrote an abundance of letters (not to mention the volumes upon volumes of his other works).

Approaching the letters as a collection, I have had to ask how they ought to be read. The letters are full of philosophical and doctrinal content that could be investigated more efficiently by studying Augustine’s theoretical works; they also contain details of biographical interest for understanding his role as bishop. But the elements most distinctive to the letters are personal expressions of Augustine’s relationships to specific individuals: expressions of affection, expressions of desire for others. These barely surface in his theoretical works and sermons, where such feelings are understandably generalised. In the letters, expressions such as these provide a window into the actions of Augustine’s relationships – his relational practice, if you will. In Catherine Conybeare’s study of Paulinus’s letters, she was justified in reading his letters as evidence for Paulinus’s theory on topics such as Christian community, largely because none of his few theoretical works survive. With Augustine, who left behind such a massive collection of theoretical writings, I cannot pretend to derive his theory from his practice. In his case, the investigation must go the other way around. His letters should be read with some knowledge of his theory. This approach reveals the extent to which his theory informs his practice, as well as inconsistencies and ambivalences. It is one thing to theorise, quite another to practice that theory in the presence of the other. As Adriaan Peperzak writes, summarising a point from Lévinas: ‘In addressing myself to another, I cannot detach myself from this address and orientation *from me to* this other in which I am engaged. I am not capable of leaving behind or overcoming my finite and obliged selfhood by a transcendental stepping back nor by a sublation (*Aufhebung*) that would establish me as a master of myself and the whole situation of my involvement.’<sup>3</sup> This tension between theory and practice in the presence (or at least imagined presence) of the other, as well as its alteration or resolution, is what I endeavoured to show through a close reading of the letters, as I will now reprise.

Love, or rather the object of love (i.e., desire seeking happiness), is of great moral importance for Augustine. In the simple expression of a sermon, ‘The only things that make good or bad lives are good or bad loves’ (*Sermon 313A.2*). In chapter one I explored the predominant theoretical principle that Augustine strove to put into practice in relationships: his understanding of the transcendence of God, of God as the only proper object of love. Augustine illustrates some of this process in the *Confessions*, showing through the relationships of his youth how love without this ‘vertical axis’ ends up instrumentalising others by seeking happiness from them. But what place is left for loving others? Augustine’s answer in the *Confessions* is the rather vague ‘in God.’ We can picture that answer diagrammatically, but it nonetheless remains nebulous. From that baseline of the *Confessions*, I endeavoured to show how Augustine’s letters can help us understand how he negotiated his theory in practice. I asked: What must give when the claims of friendship and Christian *caritas*

<sup>2</sup> Gary Genosko, ‘Augustine, Illness and Writing,’ *The American Journal of Semiotics* 6 (1989), 200-202.

<sup>3</sup> Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Lévinas* (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1993), 29.

conflict? Does loving another *in God* permit desire for another, or for another's bodily presence? Does it permit longing for intimacy with another? Is there even a place for love of the other as a unique individual, or are we rather to love God 'behind' him or her?

To answer the first question, I picked up a thread of the *Confessions*' narrative in the second half of chapter one, drawing attention to the choices Augustine had to make regarding where to allocate his time and presence. For one consequence of placing God before other loves for Augustine was placing obligations to the wider community before those to close friends. Previous studies of Augustine's friendships have neglected the letters' evidence for Augustine's relegation – even sacrifice – of some of his closest friendships. He consistently chose to place his obligations to the wider community before those to his close friends, even to the point of ending correspondences with friends that took him from his duties. But he also describes the pain of longing accompanying these absences from friends.

Chapter two followed this theme of physical absence and longing. In it I explored Augustine's changing responses to physical absence and the significance of bodily presence for the Christian. As the Introduction demonstrated, Augustine was strongly influenced by Neoplatonism, to the extent that some scholars argue that he first converted to Neoplatonism rather than Christianity. With that influence comes an ontological hierarchy that ascribes greater value to the eternal realm (comprising God and the Platonic Ideas) than to the material world and, analogously, to the soul than to the body. These ideas are evident in Augustine's early letters, but in their first appearances a tension is apparent between theory and practice. It is easy to anticipate how such a hierarchy may seem to diminish the value of other human beings. Since the appropriate gaze is upward toward the eternal realm, the other, particularly as a whole, embodied person, merits little attention. And so the letters show Augustine longing for his friend's physical presence, while berating his longing as a weakness. But as I followed similar expressions chronologically through the letters, they exhibited a development in this dialectic with himself. It is in his first letters with Paulinus (mid 390s) that I locate the sea-change. In them Augustine enthusiastically embraces his desire for Paulinus as the only just response to Paulinus's value. In his justification of longing, Augustine evokes his reading of the Christian's proper desire for the heavenly Jerusalem. This connection of longing for a future homeland with longing for the presence of 'kindred spirits' functions not only as a justification of desire for others but also as a means of dealing with absence and such desires. Believing in a heavenly Jerusalem of perfect happiness is an act of hope amid much unhappiness; so, longing for another like one longs for Jerusalem is an act of hope amid absence. Moreover, in this longing there is a place for the body. In the years shortly after these letters, this truce with the body becomes evident in Augustine's theory as well, first in his new appreciation of the Incarnation in the mid to late 390s, then in his increasingly corporeal understanding of the resurrection and the next life, which appears in the early fifth century. For Augustine, the Incarnation also redeems those other 'bodies' – physical disturbances of air waves and scratches on surfaces – that we call words. For through the Incarnation, God bridges the gap between himself and humans by sending a 'letter,' by making his Word material (flesh) and thus perceptible. Augustine's acceptance of a theoretical basis for the value of the body all but neutralised the former tension between theory and practice. So in the late letter to Consentius (*c.* 419/20), he can unconcernedly wish for the physical presence of his friends: 'But we

desire to see them also in order that, through what we see by the eyes, we may enjoy with much more delight and familiarity that inner friend whom we already know' (*Ep.* 205.1).

Those early letters to Paulinus of Nola also exhibit Augustine embracing an ideal of Christian community in which Paulinus wholeheartedly believed: a deep spiritual connection independent of acquaintance, exemplified by friendships between individuals who had never met in person. In chapter three, I examined this Christian ideal – even doctrine (the Body of Christ) – as it underwent some strain in Augustine's practice. For how do you reconcile such an ideal with the realities of misunderstandings and broken relationships? The letters record Augustine's saddened responses to breaches of friendship among Christians in the early fifth century. But Augustine was a philosopher at heart, and, at least as he appears in his writings, seldom responded emotionally to inconsistencies without trying to make sense of them. In the letters he appeals to the interiority of each self to explain the uncertainty in every human relationship. Interestingly, it is a group of letters to widows and single women that feature this refrain. Though the dates of some of the letters are unknown, their sentiments are in accord with the one of known date (shortly after 411), suggesting that these expressions of isolation are a response to Augustine's increasing conviction of uncertainty and the incompleteness of intimacy in relationships. The fact that the recipients of these expressions were women suggests in addition the greater social barriers preventing intimacy between women and men (particularly celibate ministers guarding against old temptations). Regardless, Augustine's expressions of this isolating interiority are generally a means of treating grief or longing for absent loved ones. The incompleteness of intimacy in this life will give way, Augustine writes, to another life where loved ones will be better known and thus dearer. This deferment of intimacy to the next life corresponds to Augustine's fuller theoretical reflections on the afterlife, most developed in *City of God* (c. 413-27). In his letter to Proba, he inverts his pattern, bringing up isolation to highlight the imperfections of this world. His goal is the same – evoking desire for the next life – but in the case of a wealthy, aristocratic woman, his means involves shaking her complacency with the comforts of this life. Augustine embraces the image of the desolate widow to convey the necessity of feeling a certain emptiness, a certain absence.

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But why does it matter how Augustine related to the other in practice? Certainly, it is his theory and ethical teaching that have merited comment over the centuries. Am I merely adding a few pages to his biography, shading his portrait? Perhaps that is all that I can do, but I must confess to being more ambitious. For I would have Augustine's critics read his ethical theory alongside his ethical practice, as we see it in the letters. And I would have them judge the former in light of the latter. Few would deny the influence of Augustine's ethics on subsequent generations. Even in relatively recent scholarship, Augustine's critics Hannah Arendt and Martha Nussbaum are both concerned about whether Augustine's ethical theory could foster 'good' individuals and societies *in practice*. Nussbaum, believing that emotions must be taken into account in any workable ethics, asks the good question, how does Augustine's ethics deal with emotions, and particularly that problematic emotion of love/desire? The answer that she finds does not meet her criteria for a salutary ethical system. An element of her critique, in fact, is her belief that Arendt found reason in Augustine's writings to

distance herself from the injustices of anti-Semitism as a Jewish academic in Germany in 1929. In other words, she charges Augustine's *theory* with motivating morally reprehensible or at least morally enervated *practice*.

I have looked instead to evidence of *Augustine's* practice. Certainly this may be done (and likely has been done) from a broader study of his biography, but for questions of the other's significance the letters are most relevant. Practice is particularly important here because Augustine's theoretical writings about these issues often seem inconsistent or too abstract: it is relatively easy to support either negative or positive readings of his theory. But from evidence of his practice in the letters, I think that we have seen a creditable negotiation of desire for others. Despite Nussbaum's criticisms of the eschatological perspective as soporific (recalling Zarathustra's scorn of morality concerned only with 'sleep[ing] well' in Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*), it helped Augustine dedicate himself to the greater needs of the wider community, even while feeling the pain of absences from close friends. In dealing with these absences, Augustine gradually accepts that it is appropriate to long to be together in the body, supporting his intuition with the humility of Christ's Incarnation and the future glory of the resurrection. He treats the deeper disappointment of misunderstandings and failures of intimacy again with the consoling hope of true community in the next life. And in these various negotiations of absence, the final point of chapter three becomes clear, that Augustine longs for others not merely as occasions to love God which become irrelevant in an eternity of contemplating God, but as individuals – individuals who will be dearer in as much as they will be better known in the next life. For *presence* is at the heart of perfection and happiness for Augustine. He anticipates a next life defined by the presence of God and, as the letters have shown, of others. For now, as he sees it, we use language to mediate as well as we can, and sometimes, feeling the absence, long like widows.

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<i>De animae quantitate</i>	CSEL 89,131-231
<i>De cathecizandis rudibus</i>	CCL 46,121-178
<i>De civitas dei</i>	CCL 47,1-314
<i>Confessiones</i>	CCL 27,1-273
<i>De dialectica</i>	Pinborg 83-120
<i>De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus</i>	CCL 44A,11-249
<i>De doctrina christiana</i>	CCL 32,1-167
<i>Ennarationes in Psalmos</i>	CCL 38,1-616
<i>Epistulae</i>	CSEL 34,1,1-122; 34,2,1-744; 44,1-736; 57,1-655; 58,XCIII
<i>Epistulae ab I. Diinjak repertae</i>	CSEL 88,3-138
<i>In epistulam Iohannis ad Parthos tractatus</i>	PL 35,1977-2062
<i>De Genesi ad litteram</i>	CSEL 28, 1,3-435
<i>De magistro</i>	CCL 29,157-203
<i>Sermones</i> (25, 62, 126, 313A)	CCL 41,335-339; PL 38,414-423; RB 69 (1959) 183-190; s. Denis 14
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