De Genesi ad litteram 2: The Second, Third and Fourth Days of Creation

Gerald P. Boersma

In the first book of *De Genesi ad litteram* Augustine (1) establishes *exegetical principles* for his "literal" exposition of Genesis and (2) relates the fundamental *theological principles* that will inform his reading of the text. These latter theological principles particularly inform how one articulates the relation between Creator and creature and, by implication, the relation between eternity and time, the immutable and the mutable, the immaterial and the material, etc. Such theological questions necessarily arise from even a cursory glance at the initial verses of Genesis. (For example, how we are to understand God speaking?) In Book 2 Augustine applies these exegetical and theological insights as he enters into the text of the creation of the elements. Augustine presents a close textual analysis of Genesis 1:6-19: the second, third, and fourth days of creation. The recurring motif of this exposition is that a literal exposition of these verses corresponds to the natural order of the world that we experience. That is to say, a coherent, rational, and even scientific account of the world can be corroborated with the *ad litteram* reading of Genesis.

Augustine follows the sequence of Gen 1:6-19. Book 2 considers (1) the nature of the firmament, which separates the waters above the earth from the waters below the earth formed on the second day (vs. 6); (2) the separation of the water from the dry land, which seems to stand apart from the days counted (vs. 9); (3) the creation of vegetation on the third day (vs. 11-12); and, finally, (4) the creation of the heavenly lights on the fourth day (vs. 14-18). I will consider five important theological features that come to the surface of Book 2 as Augustine follows the narrative of the second, third, and fourth days of creation. First, Augustine insists that the created order exhibits integrity and intelligibility (or "proper nature"). This theme comes to the fore in Augustine's elaborate discussion of how a scientific account of water above the heavens might corroborate Scripture's description of the water above the firmament (vs. 6). Second, the natural order is intelligible on account of its preexistence in the divine Word. Augustine's doctrine of the divine ideas safeguards the fundamental distinction between Creator and creature and avoids imagining God as subject to time such that he is involved in a *process* of creating in time and space. Third, Book 2 serves as a hermeneutical guide for reading Scripture

aright with an eye towards the spiritual *ratio* of Scripture. This implies that questions that may appear relevant to a "literal" account of Genesis are, in fact, beyond the intention of Scripture. Fourth, Augustine introduces the doctrine of the *rationes seminales*, which is a mainstay of the commentary as a whole. The *rationes seminales* are primordial "seeds" implanted in creation at the beginning of time, from which creation receives a certain "power" (*uirtus*) to produce and reproduce life. Fifth, in dealing with the "signs" of the heavenly bodies, Augustine concludes with an excursus on the spiritual danger of astrology.

1. Literal Meaning and the Natural Order: Waters Above the Firmament

Augustine spends a considerable portion of Book 2 dealing with how to interpret Genesis 1:6. ("And God said: Let a solid structure be made in the midst of the waters and let it be dividing between water and water.") The obvious quandary is that water does not have natural properties whereby it might be suspended above the sky: "Many people, you see, insist that these waters by their very nature (*aquarum naturam*) cannot be above the heaven of the constellations, because their specific gravity dictates that they must either flow and float over the earth, or be carried up as vapor into the air that is nearest the earth."[1] The nature of water has gravitational properties that do not allow it to rest above the air. This is a problem that Augustine considers necessary to address in a "literal" commentary. Water flows and its specific gravity (*pondus*) is such that it flows *down*. Augustine will not countenance any *deus ex machina* explanation to solve this riddle. An immediate appeal to divine omnipotence ("with God all things are possible") is not sufficient, not because it is untrue, but because it does not belong to the genre of "literal" exegesis:

> Nor should we try to refute them by appealing to the omnipotence of God, *for whom all things are possible* (Mk 10:27), and saying we just have to believe that he can cause even water, as heavy as what we know by our own experience, to spread over the substance of the heaven or sky in which the stars have their place. Our business now, after all, is to inquire how God's scriptures say he established

1 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,1,2 (CSEL 28,1, 32,18-21 Zycha; trans. Edmund Hill, *On Genesis* [The Works of Saint Augustine 1,13; New York 2002], 190): *Multi enim asserunt istarum aquarum naturam super sidereum coelum esse non posse, quod sic habeant ordinatum pondus suum, ut uel super terras fluitent, uel in aere terris proximo uaporaliter ferantur*.

> things according to their proper natures, and not what he might wish to work in them or out of them as a miracle of his power.[2]

An appeal in faith to God's *omnipotentia would not be out of keeping with Augustine's theology. Indeed, for Augustine, the fact that God calls creation into being at all may be considered miraculous.*[3] *But the genre of a "literal" exege*sis requires an intelligible account of the actual existing order. Augustine, therefore, feels compelled to offer an account of the manner in which God constituted the actual nature of things (*quemadmodum Deus instituerit naturas rerum*). It is well within the divine power to ensure oil remains submerged beneath water, explains Augustine; yet, the innate propensity of oil (*olei natura*) is to float above the water. Just as oil seeks its own proper place (*appetendo suum locum*), which is not under water, but above water, so too, the natural place of water would not seem to be above the firmament.[4] It is of the actual created, existing order, which has a predictable, intelligible structure, that Augustine seeks to give an account in his literal commentary. The contention that it is impossible for water to float suspended above the firmament cannot, then, be resolved with an appeal to divine omnipotence.

Augustine introduces Wisdom 11:20, an axial text in his theology of creation: "You have arranged all things in measure and number and weight." This text features frequently when Augustine considers the harmony and rationality of created existence as issuing from and reflecting the divine nature. What is the proper place to which the weight of water is drawn (*locum proprium ponderi aquarum*)?[5] Based on the "weights of the elements" (*ponderibus elementorum*) it would not seem possible for water to rest above the sky.[6] The particular place (*locus*) and quality (*qualitas*) of water is not above the earth:

> Such solidity can only belong to things of earth, and anything of that sort is not sky or heaven, but earth, the elements being distinguished not only by their places (*locis*) but also by their qualities (*qualitatibus*), so that it is in virtue of

2 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,1,2 (32,21-33,5 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 190): *Neque quisquam istos debet ita refellere, ut dicat secundum omnipotentiam Dei, cui cuncta possibilia sunt, oportere nos credere, aquas etiam tam graues, quam nouimus atque sentimus, coelesti corpori, in quo sunt sidera, superfusas. Nunc enim quemadmodum Deus instituerit naturas rerum, secundum Scripturas eius nos conuenit quaerere; non quid in eis uel ex eis ad miraculum potentiae suae uelit operari.*

3 Cf. Augustine, *ciu.* 10,12 (CCSL 47, 286-287 Dombart/ Kalb).

4 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,1,2 (33,2-9 Z.).

5 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,1,2 (33,10-12 Z.). Variations of the word *pondus* occur sixteen times in Book 2.

6 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,1,3 (33,14-17 Z.).

> their specific qualities (*qualitatibus propriis*) that they are allotted their specific places (*loca propria*). Thus water's place is above earth, and even if it settles or sinks under the earth, as in caves and hidden potholes, it is still being held up by that part of the earth which it has underneath itself.[7]

The elements exhibited in the created order always seek to rest as if in their own "place," and so the natural *locus* and *qualitas* of the created order is the baseline for Augustine's understanding of the text.[8] His sustained advertence is to the "laws" of the existing natural order. He systematically goes through the four elements, paying particular attention to the specific natural "place" and "qualities" of each element, which exhibits an innate integrity and intelligible structure. First, it is the nature of air to be above water. A simple experiment demonstrates this fact. If one holds an empty bottle under water with its mouth directed downwards, no water enters. This is because "air by its nature seeks the higher or upper place."[9] Conversely, if one puts an empty bottle upright under water, the water immediately fills the bottle as the air escapes up and the water flows down. The conclusion is that air always seeks to be above water.

Even more than air, fire has a propensity to leap up to the heights (*ignem ad superna emicantem*).[10] Again, Augustine points to a basic demonstration of natural science.[11] If one holds a burning torch upside down, the flames imme-

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7 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,1,3 (33,17-24 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 191): *Quod talis soliditas nisi terris esse non possit, et quidquid tale est, non coelum sed terra sit. Non enim tantum locis, sed etiam qualitatibus elementa distingui, ut pro qualitatibus propriis etiam loca propria sortirentur: aqua scilicet super terram, quae etiam si sub terra stat aut labitur, sicut in antris cauernisque abditis, non tamen ea terrae parte quam supra, sed ea quam infra se habet, continetur*.

8 It will not do, claims Augustine, to appeal to Scriptural texts such as Ps 136:6 ("He founded the earth on the water"). In this respect, Augustine refers his reader back to an exegetical principle he established in Book 1, namely, that apparent inconsistencies between the actual existing order and a literal interpretation of Genesis are not be resolved with a facile appeal to the authority of Scripture (Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,1,3 [34,5-9 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 191]): "Accordingly, nobody may understand the literal sense of the words, 'who founded the earth on the water' in such a way as to conclude that the weight of the waters was placed under the weight of the earth to support it as if that were the natural order of things."

9 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,2,5 (35,8 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 192): *aeris naturam locum petere superiorem*.

10 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,3,6 (36,6 Z.).

11 In using the term "natural science," we must remember that Augustine, of course, operates with a pre-modern conception of science. Post-Baconian science is reductive, limiting its scope of investigation to efficient causality. Augustine, by contrast, retains a richly textured metaphysical and teleological substructure in his account of nature, attending to both formal and final causality. Further, Augustine's participatory ontology remains

diately turn upwards, desiring to ascend. Fire always seeks a place above air, for which reason the heavens above the air are said to be "pure fire" (the empyrean). In short, the "quality" of each element informs its "place." Water always seeks to be above earth, air above water, and fire above air: "Now just as both air and water give way to the weight of particles of earth, so that they drop to the earth, in the same manner air gives way to the weight of water, so that it drops down either to earth or to water."[12] Each of the four primordial elements demonstrates natural properties (*qualitates*) according to which they are innately drawn by their own *pondus*.[13]

The natural weight of the elements presents a problem for a literal exposition of Genesis 1:6. How can water be above the firmament? How can water be found above the heavens (and the fiery empyrean), when both air and fire seek their place above water?[14] Augustine presents two solutions he has discovered from Christian exegetes who resolve this exegetical conundrum while still adhering to the literal interpretation. The first is advanced by one exegete who understood the water above the heavens to be vapor moisture.[15] After all, cloud condensation is often discovered high up in mountainous regions. Augustine considers this an intelligent interpretation and one that is not contrary to the faith (*contra fidem*).[16] If the water above the firmament is vapor, we have a credible explanation for how this may occur despite the water's natural "weight" (*non impedire propria pondera elementorum*).[17]

Another resolution, one that Augustine has learned from Christian exegetes and that he himself seems to lean towards, is that the water suspended above

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cognizant of the fact that creaturely causality is dependent on (and answerable to) God's creative causality.

12 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,3,6 (36,17-19 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 193): *sicut terrarum ponderibus et aer et aqua cedit, ut ad terram perueniant; sic aquarum ponderi, et ipse aer cedit, ut uel ad terram uel ad aquam perueniat*.

13 Cf. Béatrice Bakhouche (ed.), *Science et Exégése: Les Interprétations antiques et médiévales du Récit Biblique de la Création des Éléments* (*Genèse 1,1-8*) (École pratique des hautes études: Section des sciences religieuses 167; Turnhout, 2016); John Doody, Adam Goldstein, and Kim Paffenroth (ed.), *Augustine and Science* (Lanham, 2013); Siver Dagemark, "Natural science it's limitations and relation to the liberal arts in Augustine," *Augustinianum* 49 (2009): 439-502.

14 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,3,6 (35,5-36,5 Z.).

15 The CSEL editors suggest Augustine is thinking of Basil of Caesarea (*Homiliae in Hexaemeron* 3,8 [GCS NF 2, 51,18-53,20 Mendieta/Rudberg]), who adopts this exegesis.

16 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,4,7 (37,23-25 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 194): "I judge this carefully thought out theory to be deserving all praise. What he said, you see, is not against the faith, and can also be readily accepted when the grounds for it are set out."

17 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,4,8 (38,1-2 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 194).

the heavens could exist in a solid form of ice (*glaciali soliditate pendere*).[18] This solution has the added benefit of accounting for an otherwise perplexing astronomical observation. The planet Saturn is known to be fiercely cold. However, it is hard to understand why. According to the Ptolemaic astronomical system, Saturn takes thirty years to circle around the earth on account of its higher and, therefore, more extensive orbit; as such, its outer parts must rotate with incredible speed, such that Saturn should be very hot. Why, then, is this planet so cold? "Indubitably, what makes it cold is the nearness of those waters set in place above the heavens."[19] Perhaps, despite the heat generated by its swift rotation, ice above the heavens serves to keep Saturn cool. The payoff of this exegetical option, then, is that it also resolves an astronomical enigma!

Availing himself of his predecessors' literal interpretations of Genesis, Augustine proposes that both vapor or ice are suitable explanations for how water might be suspended above air and even above the fiery heavens. The laborious manner of resolving the challenge of water above the firmament demonstrates Augustine's commitment to a literal interpretation of Genesis and to an articulation of the harmony between Scripture and natural phenomena. Whatever interpretation one chooses to follow, there can be no evading the authority of the scriptural text, which clearly states that water exists above the firmament.[20]

2. Creation and the Divine Ideas

The creation formula is punctuated by the repetition of a tripartite phrasing, notes Augustine. After the divine command, "Let a solid structure be made in the midst of the waters, and let it be a division between water and water," the text repeats much of the phrasing when it says: "And thus it was made, God made a solid structure; and God divided the water which was above the solid structure, and between the water which was below the solid structure" (Gen 1:7). The text then concludes with the oft-repeated phrase, "And God saw that it was good."[21] Some interpreters, remarks Augustine, understand in

18 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,5,9 (39,15 Z.).

19 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,5,9 (39,8-9 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 196): *Nimirum ergo eam frigidam facit aquarum super coelum constitutarum illa uicinitas*.

20 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,5,9 (39,15-18 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 196): "In whatever form, however, waters may be there, and of whatever kind, let us have no doubts at all that that is where they are; the authority of this text of scripture, surely, overrides anything that human ingenuity is capable of thinking up."

21 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,6,10 (39,20 Z.).

this repeated tripartite phrasing a distinction of the divine persons and their operations. They propose the Father is indicated in the first utterance, "Let a solid structure be made …" The second utterance, "And God made a solid structure …," suggests in their understanding the Son, who carries out the command of the Father. And, finally, the Spirit is allegedly indicated in the recurring phrase, "And God saw it was good." Augustine is not convinced: "This is not fitting with the unity of the Trinity."[22] The Father does not order the Son to do something, which the Son subsequently carries out, and in which the Spirit delights. After all, with what words would the Father speak to the Son, given that the Son *is* the Word through whom all things come into being?[23]

In Augustine's handling of this triadic formula we see two consistent theological concerns that animate his exposition of the creation account. First, Augustine is concerned to counter Homoian interpretations that might undermine divine unity. The unity and simplicity of the Holy Trinity should be recognized in the unity of operations at work in the creation narrative. Second, Augustine regularly reminds his reader that creation – God making something that is not God – does not undermine the eternity of God. The act of creation does not undermine the otherness of God vis-à-vis his creation. As such, we should not understand God's speech ("Let a solid structure be made …") to initiate a construction project, imagining God as an agent immanent in the world, acting in creaturely fashion, making the world in a temporal process. Rather, when we read, "Let a solid structure be made …," we are to understand the immaterial and eternal utterance of the Word of the Father. In the eternal Word all things primordially exist in perfect, immutable fullness as life. Augustine writes, "Anything that there is in him is life, because *whatever was made through him is in him life* (Jn 1:3-4), and of course creative life, while under him life is a creature."[24] This rendering of the Johaninne prologue aligns with Augustine's Platonic understanding of the preexistence of all things in their ontologically fullness as divine ideas in the Eternal Word.[25]

Creatures do not have primordial life in themselves, in their own nature, but "what is made *in him* is life." Augustine explains,

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22 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,6,12 (40,26 Z.; trans mine): *Sed non conuenit unitati Trinitatis.*

23 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,6,12 (40,28-41,1 Z.): *Quibus enim uerbis iuberet Filio Pater ut faceret, cum ipse sit principale Verbum Patris, per quod facta sunt omnia?*

24 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,6,12 (41,4-6 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 197): *et quidquid in illo est, uita est; quia quidquid per eum factum est, in ipso uita est, et uita utique creatrix, sub illo autem creatura.*

25 For discussion of the role of the divine ideas in *Gn. litt.* see my essay, Gerald P. Boersma, "The *Rationes Seminales* in Augustine's Theology of Creation," *Nova et Vetera* 18 (2020), 413-441, from which this section explicitly draws.

> The things that have been made through him, because he governs them and holds them together (*regit et continet*), are in him in one way, while the things which he himself is are in him in another. He, after all, is life, which is in him in such a way that it is he himself, since he, the life, is the light of men. So then, nothing could be created, whether before time (which does not mean co-eternal with the creator), or from the start of time, or in any particular time, of which the creation formula – if it can rightly be called a formula – was not alive with co-eternal life in the Word of God co-eternal with the Father; and that is why scripture, before introducing each element of creation in the order in which it says it was established, looks back to the Word of God (*respicit ad Dei Verbum*), and first puts, 'God said, Let that thing be made.' It could not, you see, find any reason for creating a thing, about which it had not found in the Word of God that it ought to be created.[26]

Augustine here introduces an essential feature of his theology of creation. Creation is the iteration in time and space of the things that exist as divine ideas in the Eternal Word.[27] While finite existence is upheld and sustained by God, it also exists in a "better" (*meliora*) and "truer" (*ueriora*) fashion in the eternal Word, where the divine ideas are "with" God (*apud illum*) eternally and immutably.[28] The repeated description of each creature being made "according to its kind" suggests to Augustine that "they were already in existence

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26 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,6,12 (41,6-18 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 197-198): *Aliter ergo in illo sunt ea quae per illum facta sunt, quia regit et continet ea; aliter autem in illo sunt ea quae ipse est. Ipse enim uita est, quae ita in illo est ut ipse sit, quoniam ipse uita est lux hominum. Quia ergo nihil creari posset siue ante tempora, quod quidem non est Creatori coaeternum, siue ab exordio temporum, siue in aliquo tempore, cuius creandi ratio, si tamen ratio recte dicitur, non in Dei Verbo Patri coaeterno coaeterna uita uiueret; propterea Scriptura priusquam insinuet unamquamque creaturam, ex ordine quo conditam dicit, respicit ad Dei Verbum, prius ponens: Et dixit Deus: Fiat illud. Non enim inuenit ullam causam rei creandae, quam in Verbo Dei non inuenit creari debuisse.*

27 All things are established eternally in the Word of God, explains Augustine (*Gn. litt.* 4,24,41 [123,24-124,2 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 265]), "in whom are the eternal ideas (*aeternae rationes*) even of things which were made in time, as in the one *through whom all things were made* (John 1:3)" (*in qua ipsi sunt principaliter conditi, in ipso Verbo Dei prius nouerunt, in quo sunt omnium, etiam quae temporaliter facta sunt, aeternae rationes, tamquam in eo per quod facta sunt omnia*).

28 Cf. Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 5,15,33 (158,25-159,6 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 292): "All these were in the knowledge of the maker before they were made, and of course were better (*meliora*) there, where they were truer (*ueriora*), where they are eternal and unchangeable. All this should be enough for anyone to know, or at least to believe unshakably, that God made all these things; and I do not imagine anyone could be so witless as to suppose that God made anything he did not know. Accordingly if he knew them before he made them, it follows that before they were made they were known 'with him' (*apud illum erant eo modo nota*) in such a way as to be eternally and unchangeably alive and to be life, while once made they existed in the way all creatures do, each according to its kind."

beforehand, though the account of their creation is only now being given."[29] The reference to "their kind" expresses the higher, spiritual ideas (*superiores rationes*) according to which God fashioned them.[30]

God alone is eternal and unchanging; he has "to be" within himself (*habens in se ut sit*), insists Augustine with an appeal to Exodus 3:14.[31] God does not have new thoughts; the stability of his eternal and unchangeable nature entails that all things exist first and most fully in his simplicity and stability:

> Only that, you see, really and truly and primordially is, which always is the same way, and not only never changes but is absolutely incapable of changing. So without bringing into existence yet any of the things which he has made, he has all things primordially in himself in the same manner as he is (*sicut ipse est*). After all, he would not make them unless he knew them before he made them; nor would he know them unless he saw them; nor would he see them unless he had them with him; and he would not have with him things that had not yet been made except in the manner in which he himself is not made.[32]

The divine ideas, then, exist in the divine mind as God himself exists (*sicut ipse est*) – begotten, not made, simply, stably, and immutably.[33] Augustine's conception of divine simplicity precludes an account of God as antecedent to the divine ideas, as we are distinct from and prior to our thoughts. Rather, the divine ideas exist in the manner that God himself exists: in the unity and simplicity of the divine nature. They are not called into being (*non factus*), but have their being as eternally begotten "in the manner in which [God] himself is not made."[34]

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29 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 3,12,18 (77,1-2 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 227).

30 Augustine *Gn. litt.* 3,12,18 (76,28-77,4 Z.): *Non frustra etiam lectorem mouet utrumne passim et quasi fortuito an aliqua ratione dicatur, secundum genus, tamquam fuerint et antea, cum primo creata narrentur: an genus eorum in superioribus rationibus intellegendum est, utique spiritalibus, secundum quas creantur inferius.*

31 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 5,16,34 (159,7-9 Z.).

32 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 5,16,34 (159,10-16 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 292-293): *quoniam illud uere ac primitus est, quod eodem modo semper est, nec solum non commutatur, sed commutari omnino non potest; nihil horum quae fecit existens, et omnia primitus habens, sicut ipse est: neque enim ea faceret, nisi ea nosset antequam faceret; nec nosset, nisi uideret; nec uideret, nisi haberet; nec haberet ea quae nondum facta erant, nisi quemadmodum est ipse non factus.*

33 Augustine also calls the divine ideas *rationes incommutabiles* (*Gn. litt.* 5,12,28 [155,26 Z.]) and *diuinae incommutabiles aeternaeque rationes* (*Gn. litt.* 5,13,29 [156,9-10 Z.]).

34 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 5,16,34 (159,15-16 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 293): *nec haberet ea quae nondum facta erant, nisi quemadmodum est ipse non factus*. Cf. *Gn. litt.* 2,8,16 (43,22-23 Z.): *illic non facta, sed genita.*

How to understand the tripartite formula, "And God said, 'Let a solid structure be made …'"; "And thus it was made, God made a solid structure …"; "And God saw it was good"?

> When we hear, *And God said, Let it be made*, we understand that it was in the Word of God that it should be made. When on the other hand we hear, *And thus it was made*, we understand that the creature on being made did not overstep the limits of its kind prescribed for it in the Word of God. When finally we hear, *And God saw that it was good*, we understand, not that in the kindness and courtesy of his Spirit it pleased him as something known after it had been made, but rather that in that goodness where it had pleased him that it should be made, it pleased him that it should remain made.[35]

Here the pre-existence of creation in the Word of God safeguards divine unity, simplicity, and eternity. For Augustine it is important that God does not at some moment in time decide to make something. Rather, the immaterial forms of all creatures perfectly exist from eternity in the Word. As creatures are summoned into time and space ("And thus it was made") they are set in an ordered and intelligible motion to attain their end according to their eternal *rationes* in the Word. This ordered development takes place under the providential care of the Spirit's nurturing, sustaining, and life-giving presence.

In Book 2 Augustine makes clear that the order of being, whereby creation exists eternally begotten as divine ideas in the eternal Word and "subsequently" comes to expression in the finite order, corresponds to the order of angelic knowledge. Angels do not know creation as we do, that is, by adverting to its effervescent existence in time and space. Angelic knowledge is not discursive; angels do not gradually acquire a body of knowledge by close observation of creaturely being. Rather, they know directly, immediately, and intuitively because they know the creature not as it exists in time and space, but as it exists eternally in the Word.[36]

It is angelic knowledge that is intimated in Genesis 1:3: "And light was made." This is not a physical light but refers to the "spiritual and intelligent creation" (*spiritalis et intellectualis creatura*), which is to say, the angels, who know God's created effects according to their eternal *rationes*: "Just as the formula or idea (*ratio*) on which a creature is fashioned is there in the Word of God before it is realized in the fashioning of the creature, so also is knowledge of the same formula or idea (*eiusdem rationis cognitio*) first produced in the intelligent creation which has not been darkened by sin, and only then is it realized in the

35 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,6,14 (42,5-12 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 198).
36 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,8,17 (44,5-10 Z.).

fashioning of the creature."[37] We, pallid creatures of the night, cannot bear the pure light of the divine ideas. Like bats in sunshine, we blink haplessly, unable to perceive directly the eternal *rationes*. Our knowledge of the eternal ideas is discerned discursively through creaturely beings, through the things that have been made, maintains Augustine, appealing to Romans 1:20. The holy angels, by contrast, know creaturely beings according to the divine ideas; they do not progress in gaining wisdom (*percipiendam sapientiam*): "No, from the moment they were created they have been enjoying the eternity of the Word in holy and devout contemplation."[38] From the vantage point of the divine ideas in the Word, they "look back" (*respicientes*) at finite creatures and judge that which they see as good or evil according to the eternal forms.[39]

Augustine establishes two important theological principles as he interprets the repeated tripartite formula of Genesis 1. First, creation is one indivisible operation. It is not the Father who commands, the Son who executes the command, and the Spirit who delights in creation's goodness. Such a reading would be ill-suited to the unity and the inseparable actions of the three persons of the Trinity. Second, creation does not involve God in a temporal process, whereby we might understand God to fashion the world like a construction project. Augustine's excursus on creation primordially existing as eternal *rationes* in the divine Word serves to safeguard these two theological principles. He concludes this discussion by offering an account of how best to understand the tripartite formula with which he initiated the discussion ("And God said, 'Let it be made'"; "And thus it was made"; "And God saw that it was good"). If these repeated phrases in the first chapter of Genesis do not refer to the distinct divine persons, how are they to be understood? In the first ("And God said, 'Let it be made'") we should understand Scripture as referring to the eternity of God's Word in whom all things are made. In the second ("And thus it was made"), we are to understand the knowledge the angels possess of the *rationes* in the eternal Word. Finally, we should take the last ("And God saw that it was good") as speaking of the pleasure the Triune God takes in his creation.[40] God's seeing with delight is a scriptural locution describing his sustaining presence, whereby each creature is held in existence according to its kind.

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37 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,8,17 (44,10-14 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 200): *Quemadmodum ergo ratio qua creatura conditur, prior est in Verbo Dei quam ipsa creatura quae conditur: sic et eiusdem rationis cognitio prius fit in creatura intellectuali, quae peccato tenebrata non est; ac deinde ipsa conditio creaturae.*

38 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,8,17 (44,16-17 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 200): *qui ex quo creati sunt, ipsa Verbi aeternitate sancta et pia contemplatione perfruuntur.*

39 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,8,17 (44,18-19 Z.).

40 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,8,19 (45,5-19 Z.).

3. *Eloquia diuina*: The *ratio* of Scripture

Book 2 is in many ways a reader's manual for effectively handling the interpretation of Scripture. An important aim of the book is to acclimatize the reader to divine eloquence, which, Augustine reminds, operates on a different register than human wisdom or natural science. For a person to learn from Scripture he must first know what questions to ask of the sacred text; otherwise such a person might be scandalized by the answer he (wrongly) thinks the text is proposing. Augustine is aware of the tension between the seeming demands of a "literal" interpretation of Genesis 1 and the spiritual aim of Scripture. Thus, a "literal" commentary might seem to require an account of the shape of the sky, the movements of the heavens, how time was measured on the "days" before the heavenly bodies were formed "for signs and for times and for days and for years," and in what phase the moon was created. Augustine exhibits a two-step response to such queries. He engages such questions seriously at a natural or scientific level, advancing natural hypotheses as possible solutions to such questions (similar to what we saw regarding the natural accounts for water above the firmament). Augustine feels he cannot evade these questions in a literal commentary. However, he also makes clear he is uncomfortable with questions proposed to Scripture that are the proper domain of natural science. As such, Augustine readily adverts to the metaphysical underpinnings he recognizes latent in the literal text of Scripture.

Unlike many cosmologies, the creation narrative of Genesis invites questions about what Scripture teaches about the natural order of the world. For example, what does Scripture teach about "the shape and form of the sky" (*forma et figura coeli*)? Does the sky cover the whole sphere of the earth or does it just cover one side from above, like a lid?[41] Augustine admits he would prefer not to consider questions like this. Christian commenters (*nostri auctores*) have wisely passed over these questions because they contribute little of value to the Christian life, and their concern lies beyond the spiritual ambit of Scripture (*ad beatam uitam non profuturas discentibus*).[42] Nevertheless, Augustine feels compelled (in a literal commentary) to engage with such questions because the trustworthiness of Scripture is at stake (*de fide agitur Scripturarum*).

Thus, sacred authors certainly knew whether the sky is a dome or spherical, but this was not their concern: "The Spirit of God who was speaking through them did not wish to teach people about such things which would contribute

41 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,9,20 (45,20-21.25 Z.).

42 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,9,20 (45,21-25 Z.).

nothing to their salvation (*nulli saluti profutura*)."[43] Part of the challenge is that people approach Scripture with questions proper to the natural sciences, and, furthermore, they are already confident of their own answers to such questions. Then, when Scripture seems to propose something opposed to their understanding, they are scandalized and lose faith in the Bible. Such people, remarks Augustine, "do not understand the style of the divine utterance" (*eloquia diuina non intellegens*).[44]

Similar questions are often asked about the movements of the heavens. Do the heavens rotate or stand still? If they rotate, why does Scripture speak of the heavens as a "solid structure" (*firmamentum*)? But, if they stand still, why does it seem that the constellations move from east to west, and why do the northern constellations make a shorter circuit around the pole, so that the heavens seems to rotate like a globe? Such questions proper to natural science require careful analysis and intelligent scrutiny (*multum subtilibus et laboriosis rationibus ista perquiri*), but, again, they lie outside the *ratio* of Scripture. Augustine's response to those inquiring about the movement of the heavens is to remind them that his exegesis of Genesis is "for their own salvation and the benefit needed by the Church."[45]

Why are the dry land and the water (vs. 10) made outside of the count of days? After all, the heavenly lights were made on the second day, but there is no mention of the day on which water and dry land were separated. Also, the things made on the second day were created after God said, "Let it be made," while by contrast, the separation of water from earth is not initiated by a word from God (*Dei uerbum*).[46] Augustine explains that the separation of earth and water is an elaboration or extension of the first words of Genesis: "In the beginning God made heaven and earth." For this reason its separation is not included among the "days" counted. "Earth" signifies formless matter awaiting form, which gives intelligibility and structure to creation. As such, the earth and water mentioned in vs. 10 denote this "residual formlessness."[47]

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43 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,9,20 (46,8-10 Z.; see 46,1-10; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 202): *Spiritum Dei, qui per ipsos loquebatur, noluisse ista docere homines nulli saluti profutura.*

44 Cf. G*erald Bonner*, "Augustine as *Biblical* Scholar," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible 1: From the Beginnings to Jerome* (ed. Peter R. Ackroyd and Christopher F. Evans; Cambridge, 1970), 541-563; Bertrand De Margerie, *An Introduction to the History of Exegesis 3: St. Augustine* (trans. Pierre de Fontnouvelle; Petersham, 1999); Tarmo Toom, "Augustine on Scripture" in *T&T Clark Companion to Augustine and Modern Theology* (ed. idem; New York, 2013).

45 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,10,23 (48,10-11 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 203): *ad salutem suam et sanctae Ecclesiae necessariam utilitatem cupimus informari.*

46 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,11,24 (48,21-49,13 Z.).

47 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,11,24 (49,13-50,14 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 204).

Although Scripture does not include the separation of earth and water among the days of creation, the sacred author wanted it understood to belong to the third day. One can infer as much because on the third day vegetation is created.[48] By not enumerating the day on which water was separated from land, but by explicitly mentioning that God made vegetation on the third day, Holy Scripture proposes that vegetation is distinct, but continuous with the earth in which it has its roots.[49] Unlike the animals subsequently created, grasses and trees are "fixed to the earth by their roots."[50]

On the fourth day of creation God created the lights of heaven, which divide day from night and serve "for signs and for times and for days and for years" (vs. 14). One is immediately confronted with a problem, notes Augustine. Was there no time before these heavenly bodies were created? How did the first three days pass at all? Here we see the richly metaphysical texture that imbues Augustine's literal exegesis. Perhaps the "day" refers to creatures considered according to their eternal form and "night" refers to the formless matter out of which creatures were fashioned. "Night," then, bespeaks the "nothingness" out of which finite creatures are created and which continues to mark them with thoroughgoing contingency and liability to change.[51] Thus, both in his account of the separation of dry land from water and in his explanation of the separation of day from night, Augustine resorts to a metaphysical account that he recognizes as present in the literal meaning.

Augustine explains that a literal mode of interpretation entails that the heavenly "signs" are not those that foolish men observe, presumably with reference to astrology. Rather, such signs are useful and necessary (*utique utilia*), helping ships navigate or forecast the weather and changing seasons. Likewise, "times" refers to how the heavenly bodies measure periods of days and years. The circuit of the sun indicates one day, and a year is measured by 365 days and six hours of such circuits.[52]

Another question Augustine raises, if only summarily to dismiss it as beyond the spiritual aim of Scripture, is whether the heavenly lights – the sun, moon, and stars – are all equally brilliant and only *appear* to be of diverse radiance

48 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,12,25 (50,15-51,6 Z.).

49 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,12,25 (51,6-8 Z.): *tamen quia fixa radicibus continuantur terris et connectuntur, ista quoque ad eumdem diem pertinere uoluerit.*

50 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,13,27 (53,3-4 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 206): *Radicibus quippe ista fixae sunt terrae.*

51 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,14,28 (54,10-13 Z.): *An potius in ipsa re facta atque formata eadem mutabilitas, hoc est deficiendi, ut ita dixerim, possibilitas, nox appellata sit; quia inest rebus factis, etiamsi non mutentur, posse mutari*?

52 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,14,29 (54,18-56,2 Z.).

on account of differing spatial distances. Does the Apostle Paul's remark about the glory of stars differing have import for a literal exegesis of Genesis? ("One is the glory of the sun and another the glory of the moon and another the glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory" [1 Cor. 15:41]).[53] After entertaining diverse opinions about this question, Augustine remarks, "It is not our business to inquire more precisely into the size and spacing of the constellations, spending time on such things that is needed for more important and worthy matters."[54] The spiritual *ratio* of Scripture sets the agenda for the exegetical questions Augustine entertains and provides him warrant to engage metaphysical questions in the context of a literal commentary.

4. Creation and the *Rationes Seminales*

Augustine exhibits frustration with the endless questioning (*loquacissime inquirunt*) of those who ask in which phase the moon was created. Some contend it is not fitting for God to create a moon that is not full, while others respond that, if created full, the moon would already be halfway through its cycle, rather than at the beginning. Regardless of whether God made the moon full or halfway into its phase, remarks Augustine, he made it perfect.[55] The question regarding at which phase the moon was created allows Augustine to introduce a key feature of his literal commentary, namely the doctrine of the *rationes seminales*.[56] Augustine notes that God fashions the eternal natures of his creatures, which then unfold in time and space according to their own laws of development and succession:

> God, after all is the author and founder of things in their actual natures. Now whatever any single thing may in some way or other produce and unfold by its natural development through periods of time that are suited to it, it contained it beforehand as something hidden (*continebat occultum*), if not in specific form and bodily mass, at least by the force and reckoning of nature (*ratione naturae*).[57]

53 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,16,33 (58,5-59,10 Z.).

54 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,16,34 (59,12-15 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 212): *nobis autem de interuallis et magnitudine siderum subtilius aliquid quaerere, talique inquisitioni rebus grauioribus et melioribus necessarium tempus impendere, nec expedit, nec congruit.*

55 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,15,30 (56,3-25 Z.).

56 For broader consideration of the role of the *rationes seminales* in *Gn. litt.* see my essay, "*Rationes Seminales*," (see note 25), from which this section explicitly draws.

57 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,15,30 (56,11-15 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 209-210): *Ipsarum enim naturarum est Deus auctor et conditor. Omnis autem res quidquid progressu naturali*

The doctrine of the *rationes seminales* accounts for why created realities, whose potentialities are yet to be unfolded in time and space, should not, for all that, be considered imperfect creations.[58] A tree shorn of its leaves in winter or one that has not yet born fruit early in spring is not imperfect, rather it simply exists according to the specific phase of its development: "Everything that with the passage of time is somewhere or other going to appear is already latent in invisible ways (*modis inuisibilibus latent*)."[59]

Throughout the literal commentary on Genesis Augustine insists that creation is not a process or movement on God's part.[60] Creation occurs at once, simultaneously, in an instantaneous and complete moment, in what Augustine terms an *ictus* (a sudden blow).[61] This is essential to Augustine's conception of the divine act in creation, and the recurring proof text in this regard is

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per tempora congrua quodammodo prodit atque explicat, etiam ante continebat occultum, si non specie uel mole corporis, ui tamen et ratione naturae.

58 The *rationes seminales* are an important feature of Stoic and Neoplatonic cosmogony. Marcia Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages* 2 (Leiden, 1985), 204, suggests the Neoplatonic background to Augustine's treatment is overplayed and that in Augustine "this notion is fully Stoic." However, it is hard to miss the clear resonances with Plotinus. Cf. Plotinus, *Enneades* 2,3,16; 2,3,18; 2,7,3; 4,3,10; 4,3,13; 4,9,5; 5,1,5; 5,9,3; 5,9,6 (SCBO Plotini opera 1, 161-163; 164-165; 198-199 Schwyzer; SCBO Plotini opera 2, 24-26; 29-30; 182-183; 191-192; 290-291; 294-295 Schwyzer). *Paul Agaësse and* Aimé Solignac (*ed.*), *La Genèse au sens littéral* (*I-VII*) (*Bibliothèque Augustinienne: Exégèse 7: 48; Paris, 1972*), 664, seems correct in noting, "Augustin utilise les catégories plotiniennes comme des instruments techniques qui lui permettent de construire et de formuler sa propre métaphysique." For the philosophical background to Augustine's treatment of the *rationes seminales* see *Charles Boyer*, "La Théorie augustinienne des raisons séminales," *Miscellanea Agostiniana* 28 (1931): 795-819; François J. Thonnard, "Les Raisons séminales selon Saint Augustin," in: *Proceedings of the XIth International Congress of Philosophy* (*Brussels, August 20-26, 1953*) (Amsterdam, 1953), 146-152; idem, "Razones seminales y formas sustanciales: Augustismo y tomismo," *Sapientia* 6 (1951): 262-272; Jules M. Brady, "St. Augustine's Theory of Seminal Reasons," *New Scholasticism* 38 (1964): 141-158.

59 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,15,30 (56,20-21 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 210): *ubi omnia quae progressu temporis quodammodo procedunt, modis inuisibilibus latent.*

60 Elsewhere, Augustine warns against crass, childish understandings of the creation narrative: "We are not to understand this [divine creation and rest] in a childish sense as though God labored at His task. For he 'spake and it was done', with a word which was not audible and transient, but intelligible and eternal." Augustine, *ciu.* 11,8 (CCSL 48, 327,1-328,5 Dombart/ Kalb; trans. Robert W. Dyson, *The City of God Against the Pagans* [Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought; Cambridge, 1998], 458).

61 Augustine describes the creative act taking place in an *ictus*: *in ictu condendi* (Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 4,33,51 [132,12 Z.]). *Ictus* has particular valence in Augustine's theology. His enraptured moments of spiritual contemplation described in *conf.* are similarly described as instantaneous and striking (*ictus*). Cf. *conf.* 7,1,1; 7,17,23; 9,8,18 (CCSL 27, 93,17; 107,27; 144,52 Verheijen).

Sirach 18:1: *creauit omnia simul*.[62] Scripture delineates the simultaneous and instantaneous moment of creation by calling it a "day." At the moment ("day") of creation God implants creatures with their particular *rationes seminales*. Six times in the first chapter of Genesis this locution describing the action of creation ("day") is repeated as an accommodation of Scripture to the simple-minded.[63] God does not create in periods of time. The "days" of creation refer to a mystical number and not to the circuit of the sun.[64]

In Book 2 Augustine is insistent on this principle. God does not create through intervals of time (*temporis interuallo*), but rather at once, simultaneously (*simul*).[65] Nevertheless, in creating simultaneously God creates a world subject to constant change, diminution, and growth.[66] At this point Augustine distinguishes between the *rationes aeternae* that I have discussed thus far as eternal ideas and the *rationes seminales*, which serve as the means of navigating the ontological aperture between the eternal *rationes* in the mind of God and creaturely existence that flows in and out of being. Creation is the finite expression of the divine ideas – *rationes aeternae* – which are themselves not made but are begotten in in the eternity of the Word of God.[67] These primordial causes are implanted like seeds that germinate later in time,

62 Sirach 18:1 is quoted 19 times in *Gn. litt.* The Septuagint reads, ἔκτισεν τὰ πάντα κοινῇ.

63 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 4,33,52 (133,14-19 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 273): "The one who made all things simultaneously together also made simultaneously these six or seven days, or together this one day six or seven times repeated. So then, what need was there for the six days to be recounted so distinctly and methodically? It was for the sake of those who cannot arrive at an understanding of the text, 'he created all things together simultaneously,' [Sir 18:1] unless scripture accompanies them more slowly, step by step, to the goal to which it is leading them."

64 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 4,26,43 (125,3-126,8 Z.).

65 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,15,31 (57,3 Z.): *simul Deus materiam rebus concreauerit*.

66 Also elsewhere, Augustine demonstrates acute awareness of this tension between God creating all at once a world that is nonetheless subject to change. In *conf.* 11,7,9 (199,11-14 V.; trans. Henry Chadwick, *Confessions* [Oxford, 1991], 226, adjusted) he states the problem succinctly: "And so in the Word that is coeternal with yourself, you say all that you say in simultaneity and eternity … Yet, not all that you cause to exit by speaking is made in simultaneity and eternity."

67 Cf. Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,8,16 (43,9-44,4 Z.). Nonetheless, the *rationes aeternae* and the *rationes seminales* are related. Simon Oliver, "Augustine on Creation, Providence and Motion," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 18 (2016): (379-398) 390, writes, "The eternal reasons that lie complete in the Word become the *rationes seminales* that are implanted in creation to unfold in due time according to the providential will of God." Later he notes, "The *rationes seminales* are created expressions of the eternal reasons that lie in the Word or God's Wisdom" (ibidem, 392).

moving the creature towards the particular end for which it was created.[68] Unlike the divine ideas, the *rationes seminales* are definitely *creatures*, distinct from the Creator. They allow for the unfolding of contingent being according to its nature and teleology. The *rationes seminales* give specificity to the mode of God's sustaining providence, his ordered governance of creation.

Creation is good, but unfinished.[69] The *rationes seminales*, then, are the principles by which God's animating presence (or *creatio continua*) directs each element of creation, "from within," towards its particular and proper end.[70] As such, the *rationes seminales* are not material realities. They are not physical seeds implanted in an organism. Rather, they are intelligible causes responsible for the structural laws evident in creation. The *rationes seminales* explain the diversity, integrity, and intelligibility of all creation, which moves in predictable, orderly patterns of spatial and temporal development.[71] The caviling question about the phase of the moon at the point of its creation presents Augustine the opportunity to introduce the doctrine of the *rationes seminales*, whereby creation is moved in an ordered and intelligible fashion.

68 Cf. Cornelius Mayer, "Creatio, creator, creatura," *Augustinus-Lexikon* 2 (1996-2002): (56-116) 88: "Unter den von A. herangezogenen Termini ist deshalb <ratio> mit dem Attribut <causalis> der treffendste, denn in ihm deutet sich bereits die begriffliche Nähe der Urweltsamen bzw. der Primordialkeime zu den transzendenten <rationes aeternae> an, die auf diese Weise in die Welt hinein wirken. Die <rationes causales> sind somit die objektiven Korrelate der in die Materie in der Weise der Abschattung (umbra) hineinversenkten unveränderlichen Ideen, die dort als erschaffene Kräfte und Energien die Entwicklung der Organismen nach den ihnen innewohnenden Programmen betreiben."

69 Rowan Williams, "'Good for Nothing'? Augustine on Creation," *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994), (9-24) 18 writes, "Creation is the constant process of realizing potential goods."

70 The *rationes seminales* allow Augustine to affirm that God does not create the world as a "place" outside of himself. They are the means of the divine *creatio continua*, of God's ongoing creative work: "Some people think of God as if he were a human being or a power immanent in a vast mass which, by some new and sudden decision external to itself, as if located in remote places, made heaven and earth" (*conf.* 12,27,37 [237,7-11 V.; trans. Chadwick, *Confessions* [see note 66], 266]). But God does not create the world as "external" to himself. Unlike a human carpenter, explains Augustine, who fashions a chest external to himself, God creates the world from within: "God is present in the world he is fashioning, he does not stand aside from it and handle the matter he is working on, so that say, from the outside. He makes what he makes by the presence of his majesty; by his presence he governs what he has made" (Augustine, *Io. eu. tr.* 2,10 [CCSL 36, 16,9-12 Willems; trans. Edmund Hill, *Homilies on the Gospel of John 1-40* [The Works of Saint Augustine 1,12; New York, 2009], 63]).

71 Cf. Mayer, "Creatio" (see note 68), 86.

5. A Note on Astrology

Augustine concludes Book 2 and the discussion of the heavenly lights with an admonition against astrology. He describes astrology as "injurious to the health of the faith"[72] and inimical to reason. Astrology undermines the practice of prayer and allows people to shrug responsibility for evil actions. The practice of astrology also contravenes the basic philosophical premise that souls are not subject to bodies, including heavenly bodies. Augustine's critique of astrology is a paired down version of what we find in *Confessiones* and *De ciuitate Dei*.[73] He appeals to his often used example of twins (including the example of Jacob and Esau) who, although born under the same astrological sign, go on to live very different and unpredictable lives.[74] Any truth that astrology ascertains is to be attributed not to the exactitude of the science (which does not exist), but rather to malignant spirits. As such, it is particularly pernicious and dangerous to the soul to engage with such demons.[75]

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72 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,17,35 (60,2 Z.): *omnino a nostrae fidei sanitate respuamus*.

73 Augustine regularly describes astrology as pseudo-scientific and deleterious to spiritual health. *Cf. diu. qu.* 45,1-2 (CCSL 44A, 67-69 Mutzenbecher); *doctr. chr*. 2,21,32-23,36 (CCSL 32, 55-59 Martin); *conf*. 4,3,4-6; 7,6,8-10 (41-43; 97-99 V.); *ep*. 55,7,12-15 (239,125-240,149; 243,233-246,311 Daur); *ciu*. 5,1-8 (128-136 D./K.). Cf. Agaësse/ Solignac, *La Genèse au sens littéral* (see note 58), 609-612; Alphons A. Barb, "The Survival of Magical Arts," in *The Conflict between Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth Century* (ed. Arnaldo Momigliano; Oxford, 1963), 100-125; Leo Ferrari, "Augustine and Astrology," *Lavel Théologique et Philosophique* 33 (1977): 241-251; David Pingree, "Astrologia-astronomia," *Augustinus-Lexikon* 1 (1986-1994): 482-490.

74 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,17,36 (60,19-61,1 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 213): "Yet even here the case of twins proves them wrong, living different lives, differing in their good luck and their bad, dying different deaths, but still for the most part given the same constellations, because even if there was some interval between them as they emerged from the womb, still in some cases it is so small that it could not possibly affect these people's calculation."

75 Augustine, *Gn. litt.* 2,17,37 (61,26-62,3 Z.; trans. Hill, *On Genesis* [see note 1], 214): "For this reason, good Christian, you must be on your guard against astrologers and anyone impiously practicing divination, especially when they say things that are true, lest your soul should be ensnared by consorting with demons, and thus entangled in their nets by some deed of convent and association."

6. Conclusion

Book 2 of *De Genesi ad litteram* is a sustained effort by Augustine to present a "literal" interpretation of the text. This entails an attempt to demonstrate the coherence between the *ad litteram* text of Genesis and the natural order. A bald-faced appeal to faith in divine omnipotence to do that which is naturally impossible will not suffice to explain cosmological challenges that the text presents. Augustine's commitment to articulate the harmony between Scripture and the natural order is evident in the lengths to which he goes to demonstrate that the waters are above the heavens in a logically intelligible manner (as vapor or ice), precisely as the letter of Scripture teaches. Despite his eagerness to demonstrate the congruity between Scripture and the natural order, Augustine reminds his reader that Scripture is not a science textbook and that many scientific questions are simply beyond Scripture's spiritual aims. However, in redirecting questions about the text of Genesis from the natural to the spiritual and metaphysical order, Augustine also demonstrates the latitude that marks his understanding of literal exegesis, which includes spiritual and metaphysical realities beyond time and space.

An essential feature of Augustine's doctrine of creation in Book 2 is the preexistence of all creatures as divine ideas in the eternal Word. This entails that God does not create the world as a temporal process, such that each day he would advance on his earlier work. God creates time, space, and all creatures at once (in an *ictus*), according to their eternal *rationes*. Angels know finite creatures according to this immutable and eternal mode. Nevertheless, creation is not finished; it is still subject to unfolding in an ordered, intelligible manner. The vegetation "rooted" in the earth (the work of the third "day") and the question about which phase the moon was created (the work of the fourth "day") provides Augustine the opportunity to introduce his account of the *rationes seminales*. God's providential structuring of creaturely movement is such that all creatures are implanted with immaterial intelligible "seeds," according to which they develop and grow to their proper end. Augustine concludes his discussion of the heavenly bodies created on the fourth "day" with a warning against astrology.