

The Intellectual World of Late Antique Christianity

Reshaping Classical Traditions

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Contents

List of Plates [page ix]

Notes on Contributors [x]

Preface [xv]

List of Abbreviations [xvii]

- 1 Modes of Knowing and Ordering Knowledge
in Early Christianity [1]
LEWIS AYRES, MICHAEL W. CHAMPION, AND MATTHEW R. CRAWFORD
- 2 The Beginnings of a Christian Doctrine of the Spiritual
Senses before Origen [21]
JANE HEATH
- 3 Health, Medicine, and Philosophy in the School of Justin
Martyr [47]
JARED SECORD
- 4 Learning Through Experience: The Structure of Asceticism in
Irenaeus of Lyons [66]
PAUL SAIEG
- 5 The Order of Education and Knowledge in Clement
of Alexandria [89]
MATYÁŠ HAVRDA
- 6 Origen's Institutions and the Shape of Biblical
Scholarship [100]
PETER W. MARTENS
- 7 Dialogue and Catalogue: Fate, Free Will, and Belief
in the *Book of the Laws of the Countries* [118]
SCOTT FITZGERALD JOHNSON
- 8 Iamblichus on Divination and Prophecy [134]
PETER T. STRUCK

observational powers. These arguments are enhanced by Augustine's use of Ambrose's and Basil's criticisms of the immorality and impracticality of making detailed astrological observations at a live birth. The limits of the human condition provide Augustine with an ordering principle that structures and unites these different modes of knowing the future as practices directly opposed to a Christian life.

24 The Duplex Via: Authority and Reason at Cassiciacum

GERALD P. BOERSMA

Introduction

Augustine's three earliest writings, *Contra academicos*, *De beata vita*, and *De ordine* form a literary unit. The three Cassiciacum dialogues share a literary genre, characters, and setting. Further, each of the dialogues makes internal reference to the other two.¹ The setting of the dialogues is the fall of 386 at the bucolic villa of Augustine's friend, Verecundus, in an airy, mountainous region just outside of Milan.² The dialogues feature Augustine in the role of a teacher engaged in philosophical discourse with close friends and family. The only further attestation we have to this time at Cassiciacum is from the *Confessions* and the *Retractationes*. Augustine tells us that after his conversion he retreated to Cassiciacum for a time of contemplative leisure. Upon his return to Milan, before his baptism during Easter of 387, Augustine composed the dialogues.

Since one of the common variables to the dialogues is the continuity of the Christian faith with classical philosophy, I want to pursue the following question: How does Augustine understand the relation between faith and reason or, more precisely, the relation between the *auctoritas* (of Christ and of the Catholic Church) and reason?³ Many commenters, including John O'Meara, Robert O'Connell, Olivier du Roy, and, more recently, Brian Dobell contend that in the dialogues Augustine presents authority

¹ In the preface to the recently published critical edition of the Cassiciacum dialogues, Therese Fuhrer and Simone Adam describe these three texts as an 'independent trilogy' (Fuhrer and Adam 2017: vii). I have followed the translations of the three dialogues in FC 1 (1948).

² The *Soliloquia* are often included in the Cassiciacum dialogues because Augustine penned this work at the same time in Milan. However, the *Soliloquia* are an *interior* dialogue between Augustine and his reason. Further, the common subject matter, *mise-en-scène*, and characters of the Cassiciacum dialogues are not shared with the *Soliloquia*. Brian Stock (2010) offers an excellent analysis of the significance of the distinction between the external and internal dialogue for Augustine.

³ For the significance of the terms 'authority' and 'reason' in Augustine's theology, and especially for the role they play in his early thought, see Lütcke 1986–1994: 498–510; Catapano 1986–: 1069–84.

and reason as two distinct paths of ascent to God. The path of authority is the safe and secure road now made available to all through Christian revelation. This path teaches moral excellence and promises happiness and wisdom in the life to come. The path of reason is a more treacherous (but rewarding) road accessible only to the few. This path promises happiness and wisdom already in this life through the study of the liberal arts and philosophy. I disagree with this reading. My contention is that in the dialogues, Augustine does not conceive of authority and reason as two diverse paths of ascent, but as distinct elements that constitute one integrated path of ascent. Authority and reason are coordinate means of ascent to wisdom and happiness (*Ord.* 2.5.16; 2.9.26).⁴ I will first analyse how Augustine defines these two terms at Cassiciacum. I will then consider the two main reasons why many commentators hold that authority and reason represent two distinct paths of ascent. Third, I will argue that authority and reason operate dialectically, that is, while they can be characterised as opposing forces, authority and reason ultimately operate in tandem to purify and enlighten the soul for the ascent to God. Finally, I will argue that the integrated, dialectical relation of authority and reason comes to the fore most clearly when we consider the responsibility of reason to offer an *intellectus fidei*, an intellectual account of the mysteries delivered by authority.

The focus of this volume – Christian epistemology – is a mainstay of Augustine's long literary career. Faith's 'ways of knowing' occupy much of Augustine's intellectual landscape. 'Ordering knowledge' from distinct sources – philosophy and revelation, reason and authority – constantly exercise Augustine's thought. In part, this fascination is born out of Augustine's own intellectual experience: his long dalliance with the Manicheans and the decisive intellectual breakthrough occasioned by his encounter with Platonic literature. Here I engage Augustine's earliest writings, which already evince his conviction that faith is a type of knowing, that reason necessarily avails itself of faith, and that believing involves thinking. Augustine is a significant *theological* voice in the conversation devoted to Christian epistemology in late antiquity. His decisive contributions reverberate through the Christian tradition, reaching a certain apogee in the diverse scholastic articulations of the Augustinian principle, *crede ut intellegas*. The tension between the Christian theological imperative that truth is (at least in theory) accessible to all and the consensus that dominated the

⁴ My reading of the dialogues is more proximate to those who recognise a convergence between authority and reason already at Cassiciacum: Holte 1962: 303–28; Mandouze 1968: 266–71; van Fleteren 1973; Harrison 2006: 67–73.

refined 'epistemic schemes' of the late antique intellectual world, namely, that eternal truth and philosophical wisdom are the preserve of an intellectual elite, is a central focus of this volume. Augustine's transposition of the Platonic distinction between the few and the many into a Christian key (a central theme in this chapter) is one striking example of Christian epistemology grappling with its diverse intellectual inheritances.

Authority and Reason Defined

The dialogues present authority as a person in whom one can invest trust for life's moral and intellectual direction.⁵ Authority opens the door to hidden truth (*Ord.* 2.9.27) and lays the ground for reason. In a certain respect, then, ascent to wisdom and happiness is a movement from the cradle of authority (*auctoritatis cunabula*) to a grasp of reason itself (*ipsa ratio*) (*Ord.* 2.9.26). Nevertheless, as we will see, from stem to stern, authority and reason are complementary features of the ascent to God. A fundamental demarcation obtains between divine and human authority (*Ord.* 2.9.27). While the 'authority of upright men' is generally a good guide for the uneducated (*Ord.* 2.9.26), it remains fallible and not always or altogether trustworthy (*Ord.* 2.9.27). The only human *auctoritates* mentioned in the dialogues are philosophers; they epitomise 'the authority of our ancestors' (*Acad.* 1.3.7). Augustine references 'Plato, Socrates and all the other ancients' (*Acad.* 2.6.14; 3.18.41). Cicero also appears frequently as a 'yoke' and 'weight' of authority (*Acad.* 1.3.9; 1.9.24; 2.10.24; 3.7.14). Alypius piously bows his head to the authority of the eminent Sceptic philosophers (*Acad.* 2.13.29). But transcending all human authority is the divine *intellectus*, sent to assume a human body and now made present in the sacraments (*Acad.* 3.19.42; *Ord.* 2.9.27). No authority is more powerful than that of Christ (*Acad.* 3.20.43). In *De beata vita*, Augustine contrasts 'the authority of those who have given us the tradition of the divine mysteries' with the human authority that shines in the books of the Platonists (*Beat.* 1.4). Divine authority unambiguously attests that the Son of God is eternal wisdom, who is also truly God (*profecto deus*) (*Beat.* 4.34).

Three distinct uses of 'reason' are in play at Cassiciacum. First, the cosmic order displays reason – it is 'reasonable' (*rationabile*) (*Acad.* 1.1.1; *Ord.*

⁵ Augustine is heir to a Latin philosophical tradition that considers the relation between reason and authority. Karl-Heinrich Lütcke has pointed to this theme in both Cicero and Seneca (Lütcke 1968: 45–46).

1.1.2; 2.11.31). Second, reason distinguishes the human person from the beasts; man is 'rational' (*rationalis*) (*Acad.* 1.7.20; *Ord.* 2.19.49). Finally, eternal reason (*ratio*) orders and guides all things. Augustine proposes a distinction between *rationalis* (referring to creatures possessing the faculty of reasoning) and *rationabile*, that which is done 'according to reason':⁶

We could call these baths or our discourse *reasonable* (*rationabiles*); but him who constructs the baths, or ourselves who are now discoursing, we could term *rational* (*rationales*). Reason, then, proceeds from a rational soul (*anima rationali*) into reasonable things (*rationabilia*) which are done or spoken. (*Ord.* 2.11.31)

The three senses of the term 'reason' are construed hierarchically. It is by attending to the order and reason in the cosmos (*rationabile*) that the rational creature (*rationalis*) can ascend to eternal *ratio*. Rational creatures (*rationales*) are able to perceive cosmic reason and can delight in this order. Beyond what the senses perceive, they can apprehend 'beauteous reason (*pulchritudo rationis*) signalling something' (*Ord.* 1.8.25). Rational creatures (*rationales*) are capable of apprehending 'another Reason (*alia ratione*) that rules over all things from on high' (*Ord.* 1.8.25). Few, however, perceive this divine and deeply hidden reason (*occultissima ratio*) (*Ord.* 2.7.24).

Augustine's definition of reason is revealing: 'Reason is a movement of mind (*mentis motio*) capable of distinguishing and connecting the things that are learned' (*Ord.* 2.11.30). Reason is a dynamic, teleologically ordered movement (*motio*) that proceeds upwards, by way of distinctions and connections – rung by rung – to discern the intelligibility of the cosmos.⁷ It proceeds from discerning order in the material cosmos to an understanding of the immaterial reason that orders all things. Reason's proper activity is to offer intellectual demonstrations about truth (*ratio demonstravit*) (*Beat.* 2.14; 3.17; 3.21; 4.23; 4.29; 4.33; *Ord.* 7.22). The itinerary of the mind's motion (the cognitive content of which is filled in by the liberal arts) promises to disclose, at its culmination, the immaterial reason that animates the material cosmos while itself wholly transcending all things. But this is a rare achievement: 'To this knowledge, few are able to arrive in this life; even after this life, no one can exceed it' (*Ord.* 2.9.26). Reason's

⁶ *Ord.* 2.11.31: *nam rationale esse dixerunt, quod ratione uteretur uel uti posset, rationabile autem, quod ratione factum esset aut dictum.*

⁷ John O'Meara captures the dynamic character of *ratio* operative in the dialogues: 'Ratio in Augustine's early *Dialogues* stands for the discursive function of the *mens* (i.e., *ratio* in the strictest sense), or for the completed act of that function (i.e., *intellectus*) or, by a natural transference for the truths attained or attainable by such function. That is to say, *ratio* is the process of the fullest human intellectual perception as Augustine conceived it, and is sometimes used also for the truths perceived' (O'Meara 1951: 344). See also du Roy 1966: 130–42.

full mental motion is seldom realised. Among the few who have leisure and talent, reason is often squandered and used to obtain only more of what is fleeting and effervescent, that is to say, reason is used for a life *least* according to reason. Few people desire to penetrate the nature and quality of reason itself (*Ord.* 2.11.30).

Rationality and mortality are the two elements punctuating the classical definition of the human person.⁸ These two elements are construed hierarchically. That which is rational aspires 'up' to the transcendent and the eternal, to the stability of being itself, while that which is mortal inclines 'down' to the effervescent and transient, to the world of becoming. Further, moral hues colour the predicates 'rational' and 'mortal' – they become epithets for the character of one's life. By living 'according to reason', man follows that in him which is immortal and furnishes a way of escape from the mortal nature into which he has fallen.⁹ As such, reason, the highest part of the soul, should direct and govern the body (*Acad.* 1.2.5). Augustine writes,

Just as the soul's upward movement (*progressus animae*) has fallen down (*lapsus*) to the things that are mortal, so ought its return be to reason. By the one term, *rational*, man is distinguished from the brute animals; by the other term, *mortal*, he is distinguished from God. Therefore, unless it holds fast to the rational element, it will be a beast; unless it turns aside from the mortal element, it will not be divine. (*Ord.* 2.11.31; trans. altered)

At Cassiciacum, Augustine and his entourage aspire to live a life *secundum rationem* – a phrase used four times (*Acad.* 1.3.9; 1.4.1; 1.4.12; 1.9.24). Reason is what is highest in the human person, and to live according to reason is to set oneself on a path towards union with eternal Reason. Augustine exclaims with enthusiasm, 'This is the life we are living!' (*vitam nos vivamus*) (*Ord.* 1.2.4). Licentius offers an enticing description of this philosophical life:

He is happy, because, to the utmost of his power, he is extricating himself from the entanglements of the body and devoting himself to sheer introspection; because he is not allowing himself to be torn asunder by inordinate desires, but always tranquilly directing his mind towards itself and towards God; and because he is doing all this in order to make a thoroughly good use of reason (*ratione perfruatur*) at the present time ... so that on the last day of his life he may be found prepared for what he has been longing to obtain. (*Acad.* 1.8.23)

⁸ *Homo est animal rationale mortale* (*Ord.* 2.11.31). See Aristotle, *Top.* 132b2; Sextus Empiricus, *Pyr.* 2, 25; Cicero, *Luc.* 7, 21.

⁹ I am agnostic about the fraught question of whether the 'fall of the soul' into a mortal nature should be understood in Plotinian terms or within the African theological tradition of original sin.

Living the philosophical life – a life directed by reason (*Ord.* 5.16) – is a happy mortal life that prepares one for immortal happiness. Reason promises a rich harvest (*Ord.* 1.24) to those who follow the course she charts (*ratione institutus cursus*) (*Beat.* 1.1.1).

Authority and Reason: Two Paths?

Many scholars, including John O'Meara, Robert O'Connell, and Olivier du Roy, maintain that the distinction between authority and reason marks a foundational structural demarcation in Augustine's early thought, a hermeneutical fault line for thinking through all major theological and philosophical questions. These commentators argue that, in the dialogues, Augustine proposes two distinct and independent paths of salvation: the path of authority safely travelled by the many and the path of reason arduously traversed by the few. Only after Augustine's return to Africa would he come to have less confidence in the ability of reason to ascend to God. His increasing exposure to the theological tradition, his deliberate reading of scripture, and the universality of his pastoral mandate would have led Augustine to abandon the *duplex via* and, instead, to prioritise the starting point of faith, later expressed in the dictum *crede ut intelligas*.¹⁰

Two arguments seem to give credence to the position that reason and authority represent two distinct paths of ascent in the dialogues. First, Augustine seems to adopt the Platonic distinction between the 'few' and the 'many' without emendation. For Plato, only the few are capable of living the philosophical life, of coming to know truth, and thereby achieving a degree of happiness and wisdom. The many are consigned to run after shadows, living only for what is effervescent.¹¹ Augustine's Platonic inheritance is quite content to consign the many to a life that is less than fully human. The two most well-known images of the *Republic* – the analogy of the cave and of the divided line – suggest that the distinction between the few and the many is a distinction predicated on the ability to distinguish between the intelligible and the sensible and to live according to that

¹⁰ Cf. O'Meara 1951: 344–46; O'Connell 1968: 236–57; du Roy 1966: 126–30. More recently, Brian Dobell also followed this scholarly consensus. In fact, he structures his entire book into two parts corresponding to what he understands to be the two distinct paths of salvation outlined in Augustine's early writings, namely, the way of authority for the many and the way of reason for the few. He claims, 'Neither way is necessary, and both ways are individually sufficient, for salvation' (Dobell 2009: 27).

¹¹ Cf. *Resp.* 493e–494a; *Apol.* 25b.

knowledge.¹² The many do not live according to what is highest in them but contend about shadows projected on a cave wall.

What Augustine terms the *duplex via* can seem to map neatly onto the Platonic distinction between the 'few' and the 'many'. A number of texts in the dialogues might lead one to the conclusion that Augustine adopts this Platonic distinction *tout court*:

When the obscurity of things perplexes us, we follow a twofold path (*duplex via*): reason (*rationem*), or at least, authority (*auctoritatem*). Philosophy sends forth reason, and it frees scarcely a few. (*Ord.* 2.5.16)

The authority of upright men seems to be the safer guide for the uninstructed multitude, reason is better adapted for the educated. (*Ord.* 2.9.26)

Moreover, in the hortatory protreptic at the outset of each dialogue, Augustine makes clear that only the few are able to follow the path of philosophy that leads to wisdom, happiness, and eternity. After all, such a life requires leisure (*otium*) and intellectual talent (*ingenium*), both of which are not only in short supply, but wholly serendipitous – they are *fortuna's* favour.¹³ Many do not have the opportunity or talent for formal instruction in the liberal arts. They will have to be 'content to follow authority alone' (*sola auctoritate contenti*) (*Ord.* 2.9.26). Their vocation is to live a morally upright life that will have its reward after death when they 'will be liberated with greater facility ... as they have lived the more virtuously' (*Ord.* 2.9.26). Augustine does (perhaps grudgingly) acknowledge that those, like his mother, who do not aspire to master the liberal arts but faithfully trust divine authority have what is sufficient to achieve happiness. Nevertheless, speaking for himself, he remarks, 'I know not how I could call them happy as long they live among men' (*Ord.* 2.9.26).¹⁴

¹² *Resp.* 509d–520e.

¹³ Augustine makes a lot of Lady Fortune (*fortuna*) in the Cassiciacum dialogues. Her ministrations lead some to the tranquil life of philosophy, while most others thrash about in a turbid life of ignorance, vice, and indulgence. For classical thought, *fortuna* can denote either prosperity or misfortune, but the decisive point is that her designs lie beyond human agency. Augustine makes mention of *fortuna* forty times in the dialogues. Outside of the dialogues, however, *fortuna* receives little attention in Augustine's corpus.

¹⁴ Cf. *Retract.* 1.3.2. Carol Harrison considers this line 'to be more a statement of personal opinion than anything else' (2006: 45). Augustine's *own* mind, so eager to comprehend and grasp the contents of the faith, could not stomach the idea of resting content with faith, but he recognised that the faith itself sanctioned the legitimacy of this posture. Harrison writes, 'How can anyone be content simply to believe, to accept authority, and not desire to know and grasp the truth which they have been taught and which they worship? Augustine the intellectual, and Augustine the former Manichee, would find this incomprehensible. But Augustine the Christian is also bound to acknowledge the pre-eminent authority of the Christian faith' (2006: 46).

Robert O'Connell's treatment of the distinction between the few and the many is representative:

Augustine's whole discussion of faith and reason pivots on a distinction between the 'many' and the 'few'. Not all are capable of pursuing the arduous upward way through the study of the liberal disciplines. Not all, in other words, are candidates for the way of 'reason' ... The way of 'authority', then, is the indispensable way for the 'many', the 'unlearned', for those both 'uninstructed' and, indeed, incapable of the instruction demanded by the way of reason.¹⁵

O'Connell chafes at the 'intellectualism of [the] Plotinian way of salvation' exhibited in these early works, which seems to consign the many to plodding obediently after authority, reserving the intellectual life and the pursuit of truth to the few.¹⁶ What is missing in this analysis, however, is the recognition that Augustine radically reconfigures this Platonic division. There are no longer two classes of people: the few who achieve wisdom and happiness and the many who flit about, getting and spending, carousing and copulating. Instead, all are called to transcend the cave; all are able to possess wisdom and happiness.¹⁷ The division between the few and the many is no longer a distinction of natures, demarcating two types of people.

Admittedly, Augustine shares with the broader ethos of Platonic thought a steely realism, convinced that most are simply intellectually unfit for the curriculum of the liberal arts that lead to the philosophical life. Indulgence (*piger*), a life of business (*negotium*) that affords no time for leisure, or simply a lack of intellectual aptitude for the rigours of study (*durum ad discendum*) entail that most are not cut out for reason's rigorous regime as Augustine outlines it in *De ordine* (Ord. 2.5.15). But Augustine does not gainsay the path of faith. Faith is not, as it is in the Platonic lexicon, second-rate knowledge or opinion (*doxa*) but is divine and authoritative. To trust divine authority (ecclesially mediated) for what one cannot himself demonstrate is not a cause of ignominy:

Let them provide for themselves a stronghold of faith (*fidei praesidia*), so that He, who suffers no one that rightly believes in Him through the mysteries (*per mysteria*

¹⁵ O'Connell 1968: 248–49. ¹⁶ O'Connell 1968: 227.

¹⁷ Little has been written on Augustine's adoption and transposition of the Platonic distinction between the few and the many. Pierre Manent is an important exception: 'Christianity's point of impact is the separation between the few and the many. What Christianity attacks is not social or political inequality but the pertinence of the distinction between the few and the many, the philosopher and the nonphilosopher, with regard to the capacity to attain or receive the truth' (2013: 272). See also Harmon 2019.

bene credentem) to perish, may by this bond (*vinculo*) draw them to Himself and free them from those dreadful, entangling evils. (Ord. 2.5.15)

It remains the case that few intentionally and wholly devote their lives to contemplative speculation about divine realities, and most are content to follow authority. Nevertheless, Augustine's treatment of authority and reason does not map seamlessly onto the distinction between the few and the many. As I will argue shortly, this schema fails to do justice to the inter-related character of authority and reason in the dialogues. For Augustine, authority is reasonable and subject to rational interrogation. And, on the other side of the coin, the object of reason's investigation is dependent on authority, an authority that never becomes supererogatory. One never graduates beyond authority into a type of autonomous reason.

The second argument often advanced in defence of the claim that reason and authority represent two distinct paths of ascent at Cassiciacum is that Augustine seems to maintain the intrinsic superiority of reason over authority. Only reason can achieve, *already in this life*, wisdom and happiness, whereas authority promises its inductees wisdom and happiness in the life to come.¹⁸ Again, Robert O'Connell is representative:

Augustine's dialogues at Cassiciacum show him seriously entertaining the possibility that this end is attainable even during 'this life', even while the soul 'bore the body': attainable, not only for a moment here and there, but in a semipermanent way. Even while 'in' the body, the soul could become so purified of bodily desires, so liberated from bodily preoccupations, that it could enter this circle of lasting joy, the 'happy life'.¹⁹

The man whose mind has been sharpened, his inner eye strengthened, 'comprehends' at length the triadic divinity of Reason, Intellect, and even 'what, beyond all things, is the Source of all things' ... Heaven can be dwelt in even now; even in the body, the soul can achieve effective disincarnation, unabating contemplation, unbroken happiness.²⁰

That, at Cassiciacum, Augustine believed the life of reason can yield happiness and wisdom seems incontestable. Those who outgrow the 'cradle of authority' (*auctoritatis cunabula*) and lay hold of 'reason itself' (*ipsa*

¹⁸ The majority of Augustine scholars take it as axiomatic that, at Cassiciacum, Augustine held the possibility of beatitude to be a distinct possibility *in via*. Van Fleteren writes, 'In the Cassiciacum dialogues, the texts are numerous and the evidence indisputable that Augustine thought that man could reach such a vision in this life' (van Fleteren 1977: 9). See also Teske 1994: 289–90; Dobell 2009: 65, 121, 198, 223. An important exception in this respect is Harrison 2006: 63–66.

¹⁹ O'Connell 1968: 236. ²⁰ O'Connell 1968: 253.

ratio) achieve something intrinsically more noble than what authority can deliver in this life. Reason discloses a personal intellectual apprehension of the highest reality; the few can see for themselves that which the many are consigned to believe in faith. The concluding paragraph of *De beata vita* holds out the transcendent goal at which reason aims: 'This, then, is the full satisfaction of souls (*satietas animorum*), this is the happy life (*beata vita*): to recognise piously and completely the One through whom you are led into the truth, that nature of the truth you enjoy, and the bond that connects you with the supreme measure' (*Beat.* 35).²¹ Nevertheless, the dialogue concludes with the aspirants 'not yet wise and happy' (*Beat.* 35). Reason's grasp of divine truth should not be equated with beatitude. Despite the soaring rhetoric about the philosophical life, the role of reason remains *preparatory* for beatitude. Augustine's early optimism regarding the ability of the liberal arts and philosophy to lay hold of an intellectual vision of the truth should not be confused with the stability and eternity of the *visio dei*.²²

In *De ordine*, Augustine encourages Licentius to study the *disciplinae* precisely because they equip the soul to embrace truth and live the happy life (*beata vita*) (*Ord.* 1.8.24). But this happy, philosophical life is distinct from eternal life, which the dialogues make clear is realised only when the soul has escaped the body. The goal of the philosophical life – to 'see God' (*Deum videre*) (*Ord.* 2.19.51) – can be realised only after death. Drawing on the cadence of the *Symposium* and *Enn.* 1.6, Augustine exclaims

What kind of eyes those shall be! How pure! How beautiful! How powerful! How constant! How serene! How blessed! And what is that which they can see! What is it? I ask. What should we surmise? ... I shall say no more, except that to us is promised a vision of beauty – the beauty through whose imitation all other things are beautiful, and by comparison with which all other things are unsightly. (*Ord.* 2.19.51)

The vision of beauty is an eschatological hope for which the exercise of reason is preparatory. Although some passages in Augustine's early corpus could be read to argue that the vision of God can be possessed even

²¹ There is almost certainly a trinitarian referent entailed in the description of the truth, the bond, and the supreme measure. See du Roy 1966: 154–65.

²² If Augustine held that the stability and eternity of the *visio dei* obtains for some in this life, one would expect more vigorous censure of this position in *Retract.* In fact, Augustine only remarks that he is displeased to have said that happiness is found in the mind alone and that the happy life consists, rather, in an immortal body subject to the spirit (*Retract.* 1.2.1). The principle reprimand of *De ordine* in *Retract.* is of the undue value afforded the liberal arts (*Retract.* 1.3.2–3).

in via (*Beat.* 35; *Ord.* 1.8.24; *Solil.* 1.6.12), this does not comport with the overall sense of his early theology that beatitude – eternal life – is possible only after death. Admittedly, reason has an objective pre-eminence over authority because of its capacity to discern *already in this life* the order and providence of God that faith can only believe. But this does not entail that reason affords a direct, unmediated, and unchanging simple vision of God *in via*. If at Cassiciacum (and perhaps for a period thereafter) Augustine seems to hold that happiness – the intellectual vision of God – lies within the reach of the few, it is an intellectual perception in the order of an *intellectus fidei*, an intellectual grasp of divine realities that most are required to accept on authority.

The neat partition between the few who follow reason and the many consigned to trust authority is, in fact, more complicated. It does not neatly map onto the Platonic distinction between the few and the many. Nor does Augustine imagine that unaided reason can ascend to the beatific vision in this life.

Purification and Paedagogy

Authority and reason are, in fact, already thoroughly integrated at Cassiciacum, and the principle *crede ut intelligas* is already operative to a much greater extent than many commentators admit. In the dialogues, authority and reason intersect and overlap. If reason has an objective priority to authority in that it enables its inductee, already in this life, to obtain happiness and wisdom in knowing divine truth, authority has a relative priority in the temporal process of coming to learn. Diligent students who aspire to the philosophical life, Augustine explains, are 'of necessity led in a twofold manner: by authority and by reason. In point of time, authority is first; in order of reality, reason is prior (*tempore auctoritas, re autem ratio prior est*). What takes precedence in operation is one thing; what is more highly prized as an object of desire is something else' (*Ord.* 2.9.26). The path of reason begins with education, which inescapably requires an initial disposition of trust in authority. Augustine's long foray against the Sceptics in *Contra academicos* makes clear that methodological scepticism is an impossible starting point on the path of reason. Without the quickening of faith extended by trust in authority, the soul finds itself in a rut, the tyres are spinning, reason is unable to gain any traction to ascend. The life of reason requires the student first to be docile (*docilis*) to instruction: 'For those who seek to learn great

and hidden truths authority alone opens the door' (*Ord.* 2.9.26). Thus, while reason has an objective priority (*re ... prior est*), authority takes temporal precedent.

Nevertheless, the chronological priority of authority is not absolute. Augustine admits that authority entails an initial judgement both in the determination that such belief is reasonable and in the determination of *which* authority to trust.²³ (There are good teachers, authorities worthy of trust; as well as bad teachers, sophists, and blowhards. The conundrum is that reason – even before it is fully formed – must judge who is a trustworthy authority (*Ord.* 2.9.26).)²⁴ In this respect, reason and authority are always coextensive: If I extend trust in an authority, I believe that to be reasonable, and when I reason, an appeal to authority is necessarily present. Some hold that reason and authority mark successive stages in the soul's ascent, such that a person graduates from the 'cradle of authority' to 'reason itself' (*Ord.* 2.9.26).²⁵ More accurate, I believe, is the contention that authority and reason dialectically constitute each other in a type of circular logic, each intersecting and overlapping with the other. We are dealing with a chicken and egg problem. Van Fleteren is closer to the mark when he describes the *duplex via* as 'one bipartite way'.²⁶ Authority and reason are not two distinct, parallel paths of ascent, but two lanes of the same road. While they can be distinguished, they function inseparably.

The ascent of the soul – the grand motif that fuels Augustine's early writings – palpably demonstrates the dialectical character of authority and reason, that is to say, these two seemingly antinomous realities function synchronically. They operate jointly in effecting moral purification and pedagogical instruction, thereby equipping the soul with the requisite volitional and intellectual aptitude for the ascent.

²³ Much later Augustine will articulate the omnipresence of reason in faith's assent: 'Who does not see that thinking comes before believing? No one, of course, believes anything unless he first thought that it should be believed ... In fact, the very act of believing is nothing other than to think with assent. Not everyone, after all, who thinks believes, for many think in order not to believe. But everyone who believes thinks, and a believer thinks when believing and, in thinking, believes' (Augustine, *Praed.* 2.5, trans. Teske, WSA 1/26: 151).

²⁴ This is a species of 'Meno's Paradox' (*Meno* 80d–e), in which Plato questions whether it is possible to learn anything new: '[A] man cannot search either for what he knows or for what he does not know[.] He cannot search for what he knows – since he knows it, there is no need to search – nor for what he does not know, for he does not know what to look for' (Plato, *Meno* 80e, trans. Grube).

²⁵ Dobell and Lütcke maintain that authority and reason represent distinct stages in the soul's ascent. See Dobell 2009: 49; Lütcke 1968: 64–65.

²⁶ Van Fleteren 1973: 48.

Moral Purification

The philosophical life at which the community at Cassiciacum is aiming is one of both intellectual and moral formation. This is a repeated emphasis: 'This science (*disciplina*) imposes a twofold order (*geminum ordinem*) of procedure on those who desire to know it, of which one part pertains to the regulating of life, and the other pertains to the directing of studies (*una pars vitae, altera eruditionis*)' (*Ord.* 2.8.25). Throughout the dialogues, but especially in the protreptic – the direct address at their outset – Augustine urges his reader to a moral conversion towards the philosophical life.²⁷ Such hortatory enjoinders (*exhortatio*) stand firmly in the rhetorical tradition of Cicero's *Hortensius* and Aristotle's *Protrepticus*.²⁸ Moral purification is an essential feature of the exercise of reason; the sublime heights of reason are accessible only to him who 'lives well, prays well, studies well' (*Ord.* 2.19.51). As Carol Harrison remarks, for Augustine and the broader classical philosophical tradition, the practice of reason is never simply an intellectual exercise:

We must not forget that this ascent is not just a rational purification, but also, as in Neoplatonism, a moral one. The two are inextricable: the soul can be in a position to contemplate the truth only if it is pure and virtuous. Progress in the truth is at the same time a purgation of the soul, a training in virtue, away from involvement in temporal, mutable things and towards eternal, immutable truth ... Like the classical sage, the Christian must observe the truth in a particular mode of life in order to seek it by reason.²⁹

The submission of the intellect to the order of the cosmos through study concomitantly effects moral order in the soul. The law of God, recognised in the created order, is 'transcribed' onto the souls of the wise:

It is not by faith alone, but by trustworthy reason, that the soul leads itself little by little to most virtuous habits and the perfect life. For to the soul that diligently considers the nature and the power of numbers, it will appear manifestly unfitting and most deplorable that it should write a rhythmic line and play the harp by virtue of this knowledge and that its life and very self – which is the soul – should nevertheless follow a crooked path and, under the domination of lust, be out of tune by the clangor of shameful vices. (*Ord.* 2.19.51)

The increased recognition of external order in the cosmos should inculcate attention to the order of one's soul. The *disciplina* of contemplating the divine order serves not only to advance understanding but also to ennoble one's manner of life (*ut tanto se sciant vivere melius tantoque sublimius*, *Ord.* 2.8.25).

²⁷ Doignon 1986: 21–37. ²⁸ See Schlapbach 2003: 7. ²⁹ Harrison 2006: 44.

From his earliest writings, however, Augustine is attentive to both the inability of reason to fully purify its devotees (much less the many) and the attendant pride that lurks behind this aspiration. Divine authority complements and extends the moral purification effected by reason. The incarnation and its extension in the sacramental economy extends moral purification to all. The breadth of its purifying power to 'liberate' (*liberant*) the many completes and broadens what reason does for the few (*Ord.* 2.5.16). The contrast between the *ascent* of reason and the *descent* of divine authority is equally a contrast between pride and humility. This antinomy, first presented in the dialogues, subsequently becomes a mainstay of Augustine's writings (e.g., *Conf.* 7; *Civ.* 10). The universal moral purification made possible by the declension of the divine *intellectus* into a human body is the supreme example of divine humility (*clementia*).³⁰ Already in the dialogues, Augustine criticises the pride of autonomous reason that would seek to ascend independent from the descent of divine authority. Augustine writes,

Great, indeed, though it be that so great a God has for our sake (*propter nos*) deigned to assume and activate (*assumere atque agere*) a body of our own kind (*nostri generis corpus*), yet the more lowly it appears, so much the more is it replete with clemency (*clementia*) and the farther and wider remote from a certain characteristic pride of ingenious men. (*Ord.* 2.5.16, trans. altered)

By deeds (*factis*) [divine authority] shows its power; by humility, its clemency (*clementia*); by commandment (*praeceptione*), its nature. And all this is being delivered (*traduntur*) to us so distinctly and steadily by the sacred rites (*sacris*) into which we are being initiated: therein the life of good men is most easily purified, not indeed by the circumlocution of disputation, but by the authority of the mysteries (*mysteriorum auctoritate purgatur*). (*Ord.* 2.9.27, trans. altered)

Few are able to live the contemplative life, and it is not at all clear that such a life can be lived stably nor that it is equivalent to eternal life. As such, the mysteries communicate divine authority to *all*, purifying through effective words (*factis*) and deeds (*praeceptione*). Divine authority purifies its followers through sacramental rites with a power and efficacy absent from the purification philosophy promises.³¹ Already in the dialogues there is a subtle censure of the pride that lurks in the corridors of philosophy that would reject the descent of divine *clementia* to the many and the possibility

³⁰ Divine *clementia* is the *ratio* for the incarnation in each of three passages that explicitly treat the incarnation at Cassiciacum (*Ord.* 2.5.16; 2.9.27; *Acad.* 3.19.42).

³¹ The criticism of philosophy's inability to purify its inductees perhaps gives weight to the contention that Augustine's early works already exhibit an anti-Porphyrion polemic. See Theiler 1933; Hadot 1960; O'Meara 1969.

of universal purification. The descent of divine authority completes and extends the moral purification that constitutes an inextricable part of classical philosophical life.

Intellectual Pedagogy

The retreat at Cassiciacum is described as *schola nostra*, and Augustine serves as the *magister* of the gathered philosophical colloquy.³² *De ordine* offers Augustine's most detailed précis of the ideal liberal arts curriculum. The goal of this sequence of study is to familiarise the soul with immaterial and eternal realities; it is to train the mind in the power of abstraction.³³ The curriculum should aid the inductee in his ascent from corporeal realities to incorporeal. Carol Harrison explains that, in *De ordine*, the liberal arts effect an 'inward turn and ascent, as they facilitate the movement from multiplicity to unity, from temporal fragmentation to eternal simplicity and truth'.³⁴ The structure of learning corresponds to the structure of the universe. Attending to the order of study is vital if one is to apprehend the order of the universe.³⁵ Beginning with the temporal, particular, and material, one ascends to the eternal, universal, and immaterial. As Augustine explains, 'Now in music, in geometry, in the movements of the stars, in the fixed ratios of numbers, order reigns (*ordo dominatur*) in such a manner that if one desires to see its source (*fontem*) and its very shrine (*penetrabile*), so to speak, he either finds in these, or he is unerringly led to it through them' (*Ord.* 2.5.14).³⁶ The liberal disciplines disclose *rationes* that

³² As Philip Cary writes, 'The Cassiciacum Dialogues are paedagogical in focus. Like Plato's Socratic dialogues (and interestingly, unlike Cicero's philosophical dialogues), the nature of teaching and learning is near the center of attention here, not only as a topic of conversation but as a matter for drama. The Cassiciacum Dialogues do not just talk about the search for wisdom and truth; they dramatize it' (1998: 142).

³³ There is much written on the classical tradition of the liberal arts and Augustine's place in that tradition. The best entry remains Marrou 1938: 187–327.

³⁴ *Retract.* 1.3. Cf. Harrison 2006: 43.

³⁵ Harrison underscores that the disciplines are not arbitrary, 'but a means of expressing and attaining the truth from which they derive: God is unity, order, harmony, simplicity, the archetype and source of the truth which informs the disciplines, and to which they lead. Since God is eternal truth, the exercise of reason, the highest part of the soul, is less a matter of rational exercise and argument as a religious and mystical quest for self-knowledge and knowledge of God' (2006: 43).

³⁶ Lewis Ayres notes the Platonising orchestration of the liberal arts: 'In clearly Platonist fashion, the Augustine of the *De ordine* insists that the *artes* find their unity in reason's uncovering of the harmonic and numerical form of all that enables an ascent towards contemplation, and that dialectic is a skill which attends to the order and structure of reality itself' (2010: 126). On

govern all things and lead the student up to the eternal *ratio* itself in which all finite *rationes* participate.³⁷

The formal character of the liberal disciplines is the perception of the order and reason inscribed in the material universe. Augustine identifies this intelligible order with number (*numerus*) that pervades all things. The purpose of these studies is to ascend from that order to the eternal reason that governs all things:

In all these branches of study (*disciplinis*), therefore, all things (*omnia*) were being presented to reason as numerically proportioned (*numerosa*). And they were all the more clearly visible in those dimensions which reason, by reflection and contemplation, beheld as most true; but it used to recall rather the shadows and vestiges of those dimensions in the things that are perceived by the senses. (*Ord.* 2.15.43)

The ascent through the liberal arts trains reason to apprehend the immaterial order (*numerus*) that animates perceptible reality. Through the *liberales disciplinae*, reason learns to judge the sensible and material according to an immaterial standard (*numeri*), which it recognises as governing the 'shadows and vestiges' of the physical order. The liberal arts are propaedeutic to a (Platonic) philosophical conception of the 'simple, true and certain unity of all things' (*Ord.* 2.16.44). The inductee transcends simple faith, now apprehending divine realities 'not merely as truths to be believed, but also as matters to be contemplated, understood and retained' (*Ord.* 2.16.44).

Study of the *disciplinae* remains the preserve of the few, those of 'good talent and leisure', who have given themselves fully to study.³⁸ Augustine soberly reminds that reason's path 'is very difficult except for some very gifted person who even from boyhood has earnestly and constantly applied himself' (*Ord.* 2.16.44). Moreover, even the few who ascend to a contemplative vision of simple unity frequently lapse from the heights of philosophical contemplation back to this sullied flesh. Here, where reason proves weak or faltering, divine authority intercedes and shores up reason's wings. The divine *intellectus* comes in a fleshly mode to the fleshly minded; he willingly debases (*depresserit*) himself to become an object of sense precisely so that all can learn to

the development of the liberal arts in the later Latin tradition, see Chapter 35 by John Magee (this volume) on Boethius and Cassiodorus; for an earlier Christian attempt to order the various disciplines, see Chapter 5 by Matyáš Havrda (this volume) on Clement of Alexandria.

³⁷ Ryan Topping remarks, 'Through these arts we are able to grasp the rationality immanent within the world ... In Augustine's hand the liberal curriculum has become a microcosm of the order and rationality present within creation' (2012: 132–33).

³⁸ *Ord.* 2.7.24; 2.9.26; 2.16.44; *Mus.* 6.1.1.

detach themselves from things of sense and ascend to immaterial and eternal truth. Augustine writes,

We must therefore, accept as divine that authority which not only exceeds human power in its outward manifestations (*sensibilibus signis*), but also, in the very act of leading a man onward (*ipsum hominem agens*), shows him to what extent it has debased (*depresserit*) itself for his sake and bids him not to be confined to the senses, to which indeed those things seem wondrous, but to soar upward to the intellect (*ad intellectum evolare*). At the same time it shows him what great things it is able to do, and why it does them, and how little importance it attaches to them. (*Ord.* 2.9.27, trans. altered)

In this text and in the passages quoted above (*Ord.* 2.5.16; 2.9.27), we have a clear expression of the pedagogical christology that marks Augustine's early theology of the incarnation. The material and sensible signs of the Incarnate Christ become for the many a *via* of ascent to immaterial truth.³⁹ In its most epigrammatic form, the purpose of the incarnation is to 'rise through what is human to what is divine'.⁴⁰ Divine pedagogy finds its fullest expression in the incarnation, in which divine authority expresses itself in sensible signs (*sensibilibus signis*) consisting of words (*praeceptione*) and deeds (*factis*). These signs are a divine accommodation (*clementia*) to meet the many in their intellectual weakness and spiritual immaturity. However, one ought not to rest in amazement at the 'outward manifestation' of the incarnation. This divine sign (like all signs) is penultimate; the sensible is to be used only to ascend to the intelligible.⁴¹ The sacramental mysteries attest to this same principle, or, more accurately, the sensible order of the incarnation is extended (*traduntur*) into the sacramental economy. Like the incarnation, the sacraments consist of sensible signs – deeds (*factis*) and words (*praeceptione*) – that lead beyond themselves to the eternal and intelligible.

The pedagogical christology of the dialogues serves what Tarcisius van Bavel and others have recognised as an 'Antiochian' bent in Augustine's

³⁹ This pedagogical christology is especially evident in *De magistro* and *De vera religione* in which Christ is, above all, an exemplar of the moral life.

⁴⁰ *Mor.* 1.17.30 (trans. Teske, WSA I/19, 45): *per humana in diuina consurgant*.

⁴¹ Van Fleteren highlights the signatory valence of Augustine's early theology of the incarnation: 'Signs which transcend human power are not alone sufficient to testify to divine authority. Rather, the incarnation, described against the background of a Neo-platonist metaphysics, is a sign of this authority. The teaching of this incarnate authority, that man must not be held by the sensibles, but must flee to the intellect is characteristically Neoplatonic, perhaps Porphyrian. The miraculous events are done for this purpose and are of low estimation in themselves' (1973: 53).

early christology, in which Augustine readily avails himself of *homo susceptus* language. The divine *intellectus* proceeds from the ingenerate First Principle (*principium sine principio*) for our salvation (*nostram salutem*), without thereby being in anyway diminished (*sine degeneratione*) (*Ord.* 2.5.16). The divine *intellectus* bends down (*declinaret*), submitting (*submitteret*) himself to a human body (*Acad.* 3.19.42). The operative verb in this paradigm is *assumere*: 'So great a God has for our sake (*propter nos*) deigned to assume and activate (*assumere atque agere*) a body of our own kind (*nostri generis corpus*)' (*Ord.* 2.5.16, trans. mine).⁴² The pedagogy of the divine *intellectus* secures and extends reason's intellectual ascent through the liberal arts and philosophy.

Reason and divine authority operate in tandem to effect moral purification and intellectual enlightenment. These two functions come together in Augustine's most extensive and explicit discussion of the incarnation, at the conclusion to *Contra academicos*. Augustine offers an abbreviated history of philosophy, recapitulating how, among the amalgam of ancient philosophical schools, the Platonists and the Aristotelians stood out from the Hellenic medley in offering a serious account of erudition, doctrine, and morals. A sublime synthesis of these two schools resulted, by which we can safely assume Augustine means Neoplatonism.⁴³ Augustine writes,

For, it is not the philosophy of this world – the philosophy which our sacred mysteries rightly detest. It is of the other world, the intelligible world – a world to which even the most acute reasoning would never lead souls blinded by the multiform darkness of error and smeared with so much grime from the bodies. That most subtle Reason (*ista ratio subtilissima*) would never call back souls to that intelligible world if the most high God had not vouchsafed – through clemency (*clementia*) towards the whole human race (*popolari*) – to send the authority of the divine intellect (*divini intellectus auctoritatem*) down even to a human body, and caused it to dwell therein, so that souls would be aroused not only by divine precepts (*praeceptis*) but also by divine acts (*factis*), and return to their very selves and gaze up upon their fatherland without any disputatious wranglings. (*Acad.* 3.19.42, trans. altered)

The path of reason shines brightest among the Neoplatonists; this philosophy is true in an unqualified sense (*una verissimae philosophiae*

⁴² In this regard, the phrase *ipsum hominem agens* (*Ord.* 2.9.27) (translated above by Russell as 'leading a man onward') could be translated as 'activating a man' to better capture Augustine's 'Antiochian' proclivities. See O'Connell 1968: 265.

⁴³ These (Neoplatonic) philosophers taught that 'Aristotle and Plato blend and chord in such a manner that to the inattentive and unskilled they seem to be out of harmony' (*Acad.* 3.19.42). While many assume Plato and Aristotle offer rival accounts of the world, these men of extreme acumen and brilliance (*acutissimi et solertissimi viri*) recognise the common truth they taught.

disciplina).⁴⁴ Here reason at its most profound (*ratio subtilissima*) gives clear direction to the intelligible world. But, apart from divine authority, reason cannot extend sufficient moral purification or intellectual illumination to lead its devotees to a successful consummation of the ascent to the intelligible world. *Contra academicos*, more forcefully than *De ordine*, underscores the limitations of autonomous reason. Embodied creatures, mired in things of sense, have no hope of independently achieving the end to which reason points. God's mercy (*clementia*) intervenes. In contrast to philosophy, the humility of Christ is manifest in the universal scope of his saving intent. Divine authority revealed in the incarnation is capable of purifying all people (*populi*) through the mysteries, teaches through signs of word and deed, and thereby aids reason in achieving its anagogical end. In contrast to the 'disputatious wranglings' of the philosophers, the divine *intellectus* teaches with authority through sensible but effective signs – in words (*praeceptis*) and deeds (*factis*). The effect is dramatic: All are enabled to ascend, to turn within, and gaze *ad patriam*.

The Integration of Authority and Reason

The integrated, dialectical relation of authority and reason is perhaps most evident when we consider the principal task the dialogues assign to reason. Reason is charged with offering an *intellectus fidei*, an intellectual account of the mysteries delivered by authority. Augustine's description of a 'twofold path' of reason and authority (*Ord.* 2.5.16) might tempt us to imagine two opposing paths, one designated for the 'elite' and the other for the 'common man', but this would be a mistake. The context of Augustine's reference to a 'twofold path' makes clear that while the roles of authority and reason are distinguished, they operate in tandem:

When the obscurity of things perplexes us, we follow a twofold path (*duplex via*): reason (*rationem*), or at least, authority (*auctoritatem*). Philosophy sends forth reason, and it frees scarcely a few. By itself it compels these not only not to spurn those mysteries, but to understand them insofar as they can be understood (*non contemnere illa mysteria, sed sola intellegere, ut intellegenda sunt, cogit*). (*Ord.* 2.5.16)

⁴⁴ There is some ambiguity as to whether *una verissimae philosophiae disciplina* refers to Neoplatonism or to the Christian faith. I follow the majority who hold this to be a reference to Plotinus. In this regard, see du Roy 1966: 114–18. Ragner Holte contends that *verissimae philosophiae* is a sobriquet for Christianity (Holte 1962: 107–9).

The verbs describing the activity of reason contain important connotations. Reason seeks to understand (*intellegere*), to peer into the mystery. Having attained a degree of perception and comprehension, reason aims to hold the mysteries together as a whole before the mind's eye (*cogere*), that is, to perceive the integral harmony and sapiential unity of the faith. Reason is warned not to spurn the mysteries (*contemnere mysteria*), but to understand them as they ought to be understood. Reason's task is to penetrate the intelligibility of the mysteries. As such, despite Augustine's claim that reason has objective priority (*re ... prior est*) to authority (*Ord.* 2.9.26), there is also a sense in which authority claims objective priority. Authority provides the content of revelation that reason subsequently engages. Ryan Topping perceptively notes, 'The twofold method is what those who *already* accept Christian revelation may walk upon: these are not alternates open to Platonists, but only to those who have submitted themselves to the efficacy of the mysteries.'⁴⁵ Taken as a whole, the dialogues suggest both that the chronological priority of authority is relativised and that the intrinsic priority of reason is relativised. They are coextensive. Reason supervenes upon the contents of the faith, 'working over', so to speak, that which faith holds on divine authority. The quotation continues,

The philosophy that is true (*vera*) – the genuine (*germana*) philosophy, so to speak – has no other function than to teach (*doceat*) what is the First Principle of all things – Itself without beginning (*principium sine principio*), – and how great an intellect (*intellectus*) dwells therein, and what has proceeded therefrom for our welfare (*nostram salutem*), but without deterioration of any kind. Now, the venerated mysteries (*mysteria*), which liberate persons of sincere and firm faith – not indiscriminately, as some say; and not harmfully, as many assert – these mysteries teach that this First Principle is one God omnipotent (*unum Deum omnipotentem*), and that He is tripotent (*tripotentem*), Father and Son and Holy Spirit. (*Ord.* 2.5.16)

Here we have an arresting example of how Augustine understands reason to penetrate the content of what authority delivers. The central mysteries of the faith – the doctrines of the incarnation and the Trinity – are considered within the metaphysical structures of the philosophy described as *vera* and *germana* (presumably that of Plotinus). By perceiving the intelligibility (*rationabile*) of creation, reason is led (*doceat*) to acknowledge a transcendent and eternal cause that is itself uncaused: *principium sine principio*. The mysteries deliver trinitarian specificity to Plotinian metaphysics. The Nicene confession of the Trinity and the incarnation received

⁴⁵ Topping 2012: 170.

through the mysteries of the Church completes and make spiritually effective the truths that Platonism points towards in an obscure manner.⁴⁶

Conclusion

The widely held contention that at Cassiciacum authority and reason represent two distinct paths of salvation might *prima facie* seem plausible. After all, the distinction between the few and the many is a salient feature of Augustine's Platonic inheritance. This distinction, then, maps neatly onto the dialogues: while the many must rest content trusting divine authority to deliver salvation in the life to come, the few are permitted already in this mortal coil to ascend on the path of reason to beatitude. The exalted role that the liberal arts and philosophy play at Cassiciacum (a status that is nonpareil in patristic literature) in the ascent of the soul gives further support to this thesis. Despite the air of plausibility and the seeming textual warrant for these arguments, they do not stand up under scrutiny. Rather, the dialogues present authority and reason as dialectically constituted. Although they operate according to distinct modalities, they are woven into one integrated path of ascent. Reason supervenes on authority; it aims at an intellectual reckoning of what faith believes. In this sense, authority has chronological priority because the practice of reason requires a prior trust in what authority delivers. But this priority is not absolute. I can only trust what I already hold to be reasonable. Reason and authority mutually impinge on one another.

It is especially in the omnipresent theme of ascent that we can see how Augustine envisions the dialectical relation between reason and authority. For the philosophical schools of antiquity, a disciple's induction into the practice of reason was far from an exclusively cerebral affair. Ascent through the liberal arts, culminating in philosophy, promises an intellectual

⁴⁶ It is striking that here Augustine appeals in an explicit fashion to Nicaea. There is the creedal affirmation of *unum Deum omnipotentem*, and the *tripotentem* Godhead is named. It is exceptionally rare to find the term *tripotentem* used in Latin theology (this is its only occurrence in Augustine); however, it is used twice by Victorinus (*Adv. Ar.* 1.50; 1.56). On these grounds, Nello Cipriani speculates that Augustine was familiar with the *Adversus Arium* (Cipriani 1994: 264–65). Building on Cipriani, Lewis Ayres argues that since Augustine adopts Victorinus's 'tripotentem' but not his 'tres potentiae' (because the latter seems to run afoul of the unity of operations taught at Nicaea), we can see Augustine's early familiarity with Nicene debates. At the time of the composition of the Cassiciacum Dialogues, it seems Augustine was quite familiar with the terrain of Latin Nicene theology. Ayres concludes, 'We have strong evidence for an initial literary engagement with Latin Nicenes towards the end of 386' (2010: 29).

apprehension of the order and unity of all things. But like can only be seen by like: cosmic order and unity can be perceived only by a soul that is itself ordered and unified. Reason's ascent (*mentis motio*) from the distraction of mutable and temporal realities to the attention to immutable and eternal truth requires moral purification. The challenge, of course, is that such equanimity of soul – the life of unruffled stability proper to *theoria* – cannot be sustained while living in the body, nor can it contend with mortality. In short, reason cannot deliver the moral purification or intellectual illumination it promises. And, worse, Augustine diagnoses a pervasive pride in reason's autonomous attempt at purification, illumination, and ascent. Divine authority is itself eternal reason (*intellectus*) but now extends itself in humility (*clementia*) to all. The declension of the divine *intellectus* into a human body purifies and teaches the many through sensible signs – words and deeds – with the purpose of leading all beyond such sensible signs. The ecclesial mysteries are the sacramental extension of this incarnational principle that allows all to achieve what philosophy claims as the exclusive preserve of the few, namely, to 'return' to themselves and to 'gaze upon the fatherland' (*Acad.* 3.19.42).

Augustine's commitment to the doctrine of the incarnation at Cassiciacum requires that he radically reconfigure the Platonic distinction between the few and the many. There are no longer two classes of people with *insuperably* divided natures. Instead, *all* are called to the happiness and wisdom that is the vision of God, *all* require the aid of divine authority to realise this gift, and *none* obtains the stability and simplicity of such a vision in this life. Admittedly, some more than others are dispositionally suited to reason from the cosmic order to divine realities. Augustine's own experience is representative in this regard. Although he readily admits that the descent of divine *intellectus* now extends the promise of the happy life even to those with no familiarity in the liberal arts or time and talent for philosophy, his *own* disposition is one that cannot rest content on authority:

We are impelled towards knowledge by a twofold force: the force of authority and the force of reason. And I am resolved never to deviate in the least from the authority of Christ, for I find none more powerful. But, as for what is attainable by acute and accurate reasoning (*subtilissima ratione*), such is my state of mind that I am impatient to grasp what truth is – to grasp it not only by belief, but also by comprehension (*non credendo solum, sed etiam intellegendo apprehendere*). (*Acad.* 3.20.43)

Augustine's own creative use of Plotinus to articulate the metaphysical ligaments of the doctrine of the Trinity, the incarnation, and the drama

of creation and redemption is perhaps the most compelling illustration of how he envisions the dialectical nature of authority and reason. Reason attempts an *intellectus fidei*, a rational account of what authority delivers. Reason seeks to penetrate the mysteries confessed on divine authority. As such, the dialogues overcome the antinomy Augustine identifies in classical philosophy between the few and the many, between reason and authority, and between philosophy and faith. And the dialogues, therefore, already anticipate Augustine's aphoristic remarks a few years later in *De vera religione*: 'We must repudiate all those who neither philosophise about sacred matters, nor attach sacred rites to philosophy.'⁴⁷

⁴⁷ *Ver. rel.* 7.12.