

BOOK I

Early Years

i (1) 'You are great, Lord, and highly to be praised (Ps. 47: 2): great is your power and your wisdom is immeasurable' (Ps. 146:5). Man, a little piece of your creation, desires to praise you, a human being 'bearing his mortality with him' (2 Cor. 4: 10), carrying with him the witness of his sin and the witness that you 'resist the proud' (1 Pet. 5:5). Nevertheless, to praise you is the desire of man, a little piece of your creation. You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.¹

'Grant me Lord to know and understand' (Ps. 118: 34, 73, 144) which comes first—to call upon you or to praise you, and whether knowing you precedes calling upon you. But who calls upon you when he does not know you? For an ignorant person might call upon someone else instead of the right one. But surely you may be called upon in prayer that you may be known. Yet 'how shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe without a preacher?' (Rom. 10: 14). 'They will praise the Lord who seek for him' (Ps. 21: 27).

In seeking him they find him, and in finding they will praise him. Lord, I would seek you, calling upon you—and calling upon you is an act of believing in you. You have been preached to us. My faith, Lord, calls upon you. It is your gift to me. You breathed it into me by the humanity of your Son, by the ministry of your preacher.²

ii (2) How shall I call upon my God, my God and Lord? Surely when I call on him, I am calling on him to come into me. But what place is there in me where my God can enter into me? 'God made heaven and earth' (Gen. 1: 1). Where may he come to me? Lord my God, is there any room in me which can contain you? Can heaven

¹ For Plotinus (6. 7. 23. 4) the soul finds rest only in the One. Augustine's sentence announces a major theme of his work.

² Probably Ambrose (as in Augustine's letter 147. 52) rather than Christ; i.e. the two phrases are contrasting, not parallel and equivalent. That the humanity of Christ is an example of faith is common in Augustine. See below, x. xliii (68).

(6) The house of my soul is too small for you to come to it. May it be enlarged by you. It is in ruins: restore it. In your eyes it has offensive features. I admit it, I know it; but who will clean it up? Or to whom shall I cry other than you? 'Cleanse me from my secret faults, Lord, and spare your servant from sins to which I am tempted by others' (Ps. 31: 5). 'I believe and therefore I speak' (Ps. 115: 10). 'Lord, you know' (Ps. 68: 6). Have I not openly accused myself of 'my faults', my God, and 'you forgave me the iniquity of my heart' (Ps. 31: 5). I do not 'contend with you in a court of law' (Job 9: 3), for you are the truth. I do not deceive myself 'lest my iniquity lie to itself' (Ps. 26: 12). Therefore I do not contend with you like a litigant because, 'if you take note of iniquities, Lord, who shall stand?' (Ps. 129: 3).

vi (7) Nevertheless allow me to speak before your mercy, though I am but dust and ashes (Gen. 18: 27). Allow me to speak: for I am addressing your mercy, not a man who would laugh at me. Perhaps even you deride me (cf. Ps. 2: 4), but you will turn and have mercy on me (Jer. 12: 15). What, Lord, do I wish to say except that I do not know whence I came to be in this mortal life or, as I may call it, this living death?⁶ I do not know where I came from.⁷ But the consolations of your mercies (cf. Ps. 50: 3; 93: 19) upheld me, as I have heard from the parents of my flesh, him from whom and her in whom you formed me in time. For I do not remember. So I was welcomed by the consolations of human milk; but it was not my mother or my nurses who made any decision to fill their breasts, but you who through them gave me infant food, in accordance with your ordinance and the riches which are distributed deep in the natural order. You also granted me not to wish for more than you were giving, and to my nurses the desire to give me what you gave them. For by an impulse which you control their instinctive wish was to give me the milk which they had in abundance from you. For the good which came to me from them was a good for them; yet it

⁶ Echo of Lucretius 3. 869; Euripides quoted by Plato, *Gorgias* 492c: 'who knows if being alive is really being dead, and being dead is being alive?'

⁷ On the origin of the soul's union with the body and on the possibility of pre-existence, Augustine is always unwilling to make any decision: see IX. xi (37). The Platonic doctrine of the soul's pre-existence and fall into the prison of the body is never affirmed. Nevertheless, the possibility of pre-existence is also not denied, and especially in *Confessions* XI–XII the language used of the soul's lapse from a divine eternity to the disruptive successiveness of temporal things is very close to Plotinus.

was not from them but through them. Indeed all good things come from you, O God, and 'from my God is all my salvation' (2 Sam. 23: 5). I became aware of this only later when you cried aloud to me through the gifts which you bestowed both inwardly in mind and outwardly in body. For at that time I knew nothing more than how to suck and to be quietened by bodily delights, and to weep when I was physically uncomfortable.

(8) Afterwards I began to smile, first in my sleep, then when awake. That at least is what I was told, and I believed it since that is what we see other infants doing. I do not actually remember what I then did.

Little by little I began to be aware where I was and wanted to manifest my wishes to those who could fulfil them as I could not. For my desires were internal; adults were external to me and had no means of entering into my soul. So I threw my limbs about and uttered sounds, signs resembling my wishes, the small number of signs of which I was capable but such signs as lay in my power to use: for there was no real resemblance. When I did not get my way, either because I was not understood or lest it be harmful to me, I used to be indignant with my seniors for their disobedience, and with free people who were not slaves to my interests; and I would revenge myself upon them by weeping. That this is the way of infants I have learnt from those I have been able to watch. That is what I was like myself and, although they have not been aware of it, they have taught me more than my nurses with all their knowledge of how I behaved.

(9) My infancy is long dead and I am alive. But you, Lord, live and in you nothing dies. You are before the beginning of the ages, and prior to everything that can be said to be 'before'. You are God and Lord of all you have created. In you are the constant causes of inconstant things. All mutable things have in you their immutable origins. In you all irrational and temporal things have the everlasting causes of their life. Tell me, God, tell your suppliant, in mercy to your poor wretch, tell me whether there was some period of my life, now dead and gone, which preceded my infancy? Or is this period that which I spent in my mother's womb? On that matter also I have learnt something, and I myself have seen pregnant women. What was going on before that, my sweetness, my God? Was I anywhere,

or any sort of person? I have no one able to tell me that—neither my father nor my mother nor the experience of others nor my own memory. But you may smile at me for putting these questions. Your command that I praise you and confess you may be limited to that which I know.

(10) So 'I acknowledge you, Lord of heaven and earth' (Matt. 11: 25), articulating my praise to you for my beginnings and my infancy which I do not recall. You have also given mankind the capacity to understand oneself by analogy with others, and to believe much about oneself on the authority of weak women. Even at that time I had existence and life, and already at the last stage of my infant speechlessness I was searching out signs by which I made my thoughts known to others. Where can a living being such as an infant come from if not from you, God? Or can anyone become the cause of his own making? Or is there any channel through which being and life can be drawn into us other than what you make us, Lord? In you it is not one thing to be and another to live: the supreme degree of being and the supreme degree of life are one and the same thing.⁸ You are being in a supreme degree and are immutable. In you the present day has no ending, and yet in you it has its end: 'all these things have their being in you' (Rom. 11: 36). They would have no way of passing away unless you set a limit to them. Because 'your years do not fail' (Ps. 101: 28), your years are one Today. How many of our days and days of our fathers have passed during your Today, and have derived from it the measure and condition of their existence? And others too will pass away and from the same source derive the condition of their existence. 'But you are the same'; and all tomorrow and hereafter, and indeed all yesterday and further back, you will make a Today, you have made a Today.⁹

If anyone finds your simultaneity beyond his understanding, it is not for me to explain it. Let him be content to say 'What is this?' (Exod. 16: 15). So too let him rejoice and delight in finding you who are beyond discovery rather than fail to find you by supposing you to be discoverable.

vii (11) Hear me, God. (Ps. 54: 2). Alas for the sins of humanity! (Isa. 1: 4) Man it is who says this, and you have pity on him,

⁸ Plotinus (3. 6. 6. 15) says this also.

⁹ This sketch on time and eternity anticipates book XI (esp. xiii (16)).

because you made him and did not make sin in him. Who reminds me of the sin of my infancy? for 'none is pure from sin before you, not even an infant of one day upon the earth' (Job 14: 4-5 LXX). Who reminds me? Any tiny child now, for I see in that child what I do not remember in myself.¹⁰ What sin did I then have? Was it wrong that in tears I greedily opened my mouth wide to suck the breasts? If I were to do that now, gasping to eat food appropriate to my present age, I would be laughed at and very properly rebuked. At the time of my infancy I must have acted reprehensibly; but since I could not understand the person who admonished me, neither custom nor reason allowed me to be reprehended. As we grow up, we eliminate and set aside such ways. But I have never seen anyone knowingly setting aside what is good when purging something of faults.

Yet, for an infant of that age, could it be reckoned good to use tears in trying to obtain what it would have been harmful to get, to be vehemently indignant at the refusals of free and older people and of parents or many other people of good sense who would not yield to my whims, and to attempt to strike them and to do as much injury as possible?¹¹ There is never an obligation to be obedient to orders which it would be pernicious to obey. So the feebleness of infant limbs is innocent, not the infant's mind. I have personally watched and studied a jealous baby. He could not yet speak and, pale with jealousy and bitterness, glared at his brother sharing his mother's milk. Who is unaware of this fact of experience? Mothers and nurses claim to charm it away by their own private remedies. But it can hardly be innocence, when the source of milk is flowing richly and abundantly, not to endure a share going to one's blood-brother, who is in profound need, dependent for life exclusively on that one food.

But people smilingly tolerate this behaviour, not because it is nothing or only a trivial matter, but because with coming of age it will pass away. You can prove this to be the case from the fact that the same behaviour cannot be borne without irritation when encountered in someone of more mature years.

¹⁰ Cicero (*De finibus* 5. 55) remarks on the value placed by philosophers on infant behaviour as a guide to the understanding of human nature.

¹¹ Seneca (*De Constantia Sapientis* 11. 2) observes how babies hit their mothers in anger.

I. vii (12)—I. ix (14)

(12) You, Lord my God, are the giver of life and a body to a baby. As we see, you have endowed it with senses. You have co-ordinated the limbs. You have adorned it with a beautiful form, and for the coherence and preservation of the whole you have implanted all the instincts of a living being. You therefore command me to praise you for that and to 'confess to you and to sing to your name, Most High' (Ps. 91: 2)—God, you are omnipotent and good—even if that were all that you had made. No one else could do that except you, the one from whom every kind of being is derived. The supreme beauty, you give distinct form to all things and by your law impose order on everything.¹² This period of my life, Lord, I do not remember having lived, but I have believed what others have told me and have assumed how I behaved from observing other infants. Despite the high probability of this assumption, I do not wish to reckon this as part of the life that I live in this world; for it is lost in the darkness of my forgetfulness, and is on the same level as the life I lived in my mother's womb. If 'I was conceived in iniquity and in sins my mother nourished me in her womb' (Ps. 50: 7), I ask you, my God, I ask, Lord, where and when your servant was innocent? But of that time I say nothing more. I feel no sense of responsibility now for a time of which I recall not a single trace.

viii (13) On my path to the present I emerged from infancy to boyhood,¹³ or rather boyhood came upon me and succeeded infancy. Infancy did not 'depart', for it has nowhere to go. Yet I was no longer a baby incapable of speech but already a boy with power to talk. This I remember. But how I learnt to talk I discovered only later. It was not that grown-up people instructed me by presenting me with words in a certain order by formal teaching, as later I was to learn the letters of the alphabet. I myself acquired this power of speech with the intelligence which you gave me, my God. By groans and various sounds and various movements of parts of my body I would endeavour to express the intentions of my heart to persuade people to bow to my will. But I had not the power to express all that I wanted nor could I make my wishes understood by everybody. My grasp made use of memory: when people gave a name to an object and when, following the sound, they moved their body towards that

¹² Plotinus I. 6. 6 says God is source of beauty.

¹³ Books I–VII follow the six ages of man; cf. II. i (1); VII. i (1).

object, I would see and retain the fact that that object received from them this sound which they pronounced when they intended to draw attention to it. Moreover, their intention was evident from the gestures which are, as it were, the natural vocabulary of all races, and are made with the face and the inclination of the eyes and the movements of other parts of the body, and by the tone of voice which indicates whether the mind's inward sentiments are to seek and possess or to reject and avoid. Accordingly, I gradually gathered the meaning of words, occurring in their places in different sentences and frequently heard; and already I learnt to articulate my wishes by training my mouth to use these signs. In this way I communicated the signs of my wishes to those around me, and entered more deeply into the stormy society of human life. I was dependent on the authority of my parents and the direction of adult people.

ix (14) O God, my God, 'what miseries I experienced'¹⁴ at this stage of my life, and what delusions when in my boyhood it was set before me as my moral duty in life to obey those who admonished me with the purpose that I should succeed in this world, and should excel in the arts of using my tongue to gain access to human honours and to acquire deceitful riches. I was next sent to school to learn to read and write. Poor wretch, I did not understand for what such knowledge is useful. Yet if ever I was indolent in learning, I was beaten. This method was approved by adults, and many people living long before me had constructed the laborious courses which we were compelled to follow by an increase of the toil and sorrow (Gen. 3: 16) of Adam's children. We found however, Lord, people who prayed to you and from them we learnt to think of you, in our limited way, as some large being with the power, even when not present to our senses, of hearing us and helping us. As a boy I began to pray to you, 'my help and my refuge' (Ps. 93: 22), and for my prayer to you I broke the bonds of my tongue. Though I was only a small child, there was great feeling when I pleaded with you that I might not be caned at school. And when you did not hear me, which was so as 'not to give me to foolishness', (Ps. 21: 3), adult people, including even my parents, who wished no evil to come upon me, used to laugh at my stripes, which were at that time a great and painful evil to me.¹⁵

¹⁴ Terence, *Adelphoe* 867.

¹⁵ In spite of the criticism of Quintilian (1. 3. 13-17), corporal punishment was

(15) Lord, is there anyone, any mind so great, united to you by a strong love—is there, I say, anyone (as with the character produced by a certain stolidity)—is there a man who is so devotedly united to you with mighty affection that he holds of small account racks and hooks and various torments of this brutal nature, which in all countries people with great terror pray you they may escape, and yet loves¹⁶ those who are utterly terrified of them? Is this comparable to the way our parents laughed at the torments which our teachers inflicted on us as boys? We at least were no less scared and prayed no less passionately to escape them. Yet we were at fault in paying less attention than was required of us to writing or reading or using our minds about our books. Not, Lord, that there was a deficiency in memory or intelligence. It was your will to endow us sufficiently with the level appropriate to our age. But we loved to play, and punishments were imposed on us by those who were engaged in adult games. For 'the amusement of adults is called business'.¹⁷ But when boys play such games they are punished by adults, and no one feels sorry either for the children or for the adults or indeed for both of them. Perhaps some refined arbiter of things might approve of my being beaten. As a boy I played ball-games, and that play slowed down the speed at which I learnt letters with which, as an adult, I might play a less creditable game. The schoolmaster who caned me was behaving no better than I when, after being refuted by a fellow-teacher in some pedantic question, he was more tormented by jealousy and envy than I when my opponent overcame me in a ball-game.

x (16) Yet I was at fault, Lord God, orderer and creator of all things in nature, but of sinners only the orderer. Lord my God, I sinned by not doing as I was told by my parents and teachers. For later I was able to make good use of letters, whatever might be the intention of my adult guardians in wanting me to learn them. I was disobedient not because I had chosen higher things, but from love of sport. In competitive games I loved the pride of winning. I liked to tickle my ears with false stories which further titillated my desires

universal in schools of Augustine's time. Once (*City of God* 21. 14) he reflects on the paradox that sometimes a boy would prefer to be flogged than to learn his lesson.

¹⁶ For 'loves' the emendation 'derides' is found in one manuscript (tenth century).

¹⁷ Seneca cited by Lactantius (*Institutiones Divinae* 2. 4. 14). Plotinus 3. 2. 15. 36: 'All human concerns are children's games'.

(2 Tim. 4: 3-4). The same curiosity mountingly increased my appetite for public shows.¹⁸ Public shows are the games of adults. Those who give them are persons held in such high dignity that almost everyone wishes this honour to come to their children. But they happily allow them to be flogged if such shows hinder the study which will bring them, they hope, to the position of giving such shows.

Look with mercy (Ps. 24: 16-18) on these follies, Lord, and deliver us (Ps. 78: 9) who now call upon you. Deliver also those who do not as yet pray, that they may call upon you and you may set them free.

xi (17) When I was still a boy, I had heard about eternal life promised to us through the humility of our Lord God, coming down to our pride, and I was already signed with the sign of the cross and seasoned with salt from the time I came from my mother's womb.¹⁹ She greatly put her trust in you. You saw, Lord, how one day, when I was still a small boy, pressure on the chest suddenly made me hot with fever and almost at death's door. You saw, my God, because you were already my guardian, with what fervour of mind and with what faith I then begged for the baptism of your Christ, my God and Lord, urging it on the devotion of my mother and of the mother of us all, your Church. My physical mother was distraught. With a pure heart and faith in you she even more lovingly travailed in labour for my eternal salvation. She hastily made arrangements for me to be initiated and washed in the sacraments of salvation, confessing you, Lord Jesus, for the remission of sins. But suddenly I recovered. My cleansing was deferred on the assumption that, if I lived, I would be sure to soil myself; and

¹⁸ i.e. circus (horse-racing), amphitheatre (gladiators and beast fights), theatre, and music hall. To pay the cost of such public entertainments brought high credit, and was expected of the rich. Villas and estates might be sold to pay the bill (thereby bringing land back into circulation in the economy).

¹⁹ Catechumens were sanctified by the sign of the cross, prayer invoking the protection of God and the child's guardian angel, laying on of hands, and salt placed on the tongue as an act of exorcism. The Latin prayers accompanying these actions may be read in the eighth-century Gelasian Sacramentary. The salt survived in the Roman baptismal rite until 1969.

Before about 400, the intense significance attached to baptism as sacrament of the remission of sins, led many Christian parents to postpone baptism, often until the death-bed. Catechumens were entitled to bear the name 'Christian' but not that of the 'faithful' (*fidelis*).

after that solemn washing the guilt would be greater and more dangerous if I then defiled myself with sins.

So I was already a believer, as were my mother and the entire household except for my father alone. Though he had not yet come to faith, he did not obstruct my right to follow my mother's devotion, so as to prevent me believing in Christ. She anxiously laboured to convince me that you, my God, were my father rather than he, and in this endeavour you helped her to gain victory over her husband. His moral superior, she rendered obedient service to him, for in this matter she was being obedient to your authority.

(18) I beg of you, my God, I long to know if it is your will, what was your purpose when at that time it was decided to defer my baptism? Was it for my good that the restraints on sinning were as it were relaxed? Or were they not in fact relaxed? Even now gossips speaking about one or another person can be heard on all sides saying in our ears: 'Let him be, let him do it; he is not yet baptized.' Yet in regard to bodily health we do not say: 'Let him inflict more wounds on himself, for he is not yet cured.' How much better for me if I had been quickly healed and if, thanks to the diligent care of my family and my own decisions, action had been taken by which I received the health of my soul and was kept safe under the protection which you would have given me (Ps. 34: 3). Certainly much better. But beyond boyhood many great waves of temptations were seen to be threatening. My mother was already well aware of that, and her plan was to commit to the waves the clay out of which I would later be shaped rather than the actual image itself.²⁰

xii (19) Nevertheless, even during boyhood when there was less reason to fear than during adolescence, I had no love for reading books and hated being forced to study them. Yet pressure was put on me and was good for me. It was not of my own inclination that I did well, for I learnt nothing unless compelled. No one is doing right if he is acting against his will, even when what he is doing is good. Those who put compulsion on me were not doing right either; the good was done to me by you, my God. They gave no consideration to the use that I might make of the things they forced me to learn. The objective they had in view was merely to satisfy the appetite for

²⁰ The unstable, undrinkable sea is Augustine's standing image for humanity alienated from God. The 'clay' (Gen. 2: 6) is natural humanity, the 'image' humanity remade by grace. Cf. below, xiii. xii (13).

wealth and for glory, though the appetite is insatiable, the wealth is in reality destitution of spirit, and the glory something to be ashamed of. But you, by whom 'the hairs of our head are numbered' (Matt. 10: 30), used the error of all who pressed me to learn to turn out to my advantage. And my reluctance to learn you used for a punishment which I well deserved: so tiny a child, so great a sinner. So by making use of those who were failing to do anything morally right you did good to me, and from me in my sin you exacted a just retribution. For you have imposed order, and so it is that the punishment of every disordered mind is its own disorder.²¹

xiii (20) Even now I have not yet discovered the reasons why I hated Greek literature when I was being taught it as a small boy.²² Latin I deeply loved, not at the stage of my primary teachers but at the secondary level taught by the teachers of literature called 'grammarians' (*grammatici*). The initial elements, where one learns the three Rs of reading, writing, and arithmetic, I felt to be no less a burden and an infliction than the entire series of Greek classes. The root of this aversion must simply have been sin and the vanity of life, by which I was 'mere flesh and wind going on its way and not returning' (Ps. 77: 39). Of course, those first elements of the language were better, because more fundamental. On that foundation I came to acquire the faculty which I had and still possess of being able to read whatever I find written, and to write myself whatever I wish. This was better than the poetry I was later forced to learn about the wanderings of some legendary fellow named Aeneas (forgetful of my own wanderings) and to weep over the death of a Dido who took her own life from love. In reading this, O God my life, I myself was meanwhile dying by my alienation from you, and my miserable condition in that respect brought no tear to my eyes.²³

(21) What is more pitiable than a wretch without pity for himself who weeps over the death of Dido dying for love of Aeneas, but not weeping over himself dying for his lack of love for you, my God, light of my heart, bread of the inner mouth of my soul, the power

²¹ The principle goes back to the *Gorgias* of Plato.

²² Augustine was never fluent in Greek, but could make his own translations when needed. He knew more Greek than he sometimes admits.

²³ There is a reminiscence here of a story told by Plutarch and Aelian about Alexander tyrant of Pherae, who left a tragedy in a theatre because he did not wish to weep at fiction when unmoved by his own cruelty.

which begets life in my mind and in the innermost recesses of my thinking. I had no love for you and 'committed fornication against you' (Ps. 72: 27); and in my fornications I heard all round me the cries 'Well done, well done' (Ps. 34: 21; 39: 16). 'For the friendship of this world is fornication against you' (Jas. 4: 4), and 'Well done' is what they say to shame a man who does not go along with them. Over this I wept not a tear. I wept over Dido who 'died in pursuing her ultimate end with a sword'.²⁴ I abandoned you to pursue the lowest things of your creation. I was dust going to dust. Had I been forbidden to read this story, I would have been sad that I could not read what made me sad. Such madness is considered a higher and more fruitful literary education than being taught to read and write.

(22) But now may my God cry out in my soul and may your truth tell me: 'It is not so, it is not so. The best education you received was the primary.' Obviously I much prefer to forget the wanderings of Aeneas and all that stuff than to write and read. It is true, veils hang at the entrances to the schools of literature;²⁵ but they do not signify the prestige of élite teaching so much as the covering up of error.

Let no critics shout against me (I am not afraid of them now) while I confess to you the longing of my soul, my God, and when I accept rebuke for my evil ways and wish to love your good ways (Ps. 118: 101). Let there be no abuse of me from people who sell or buy a literary education. If I put the question to them whether the poet's story is true that Aeneas once came to Carthage, the uneducated will reply that they do not know, while the educated will say it is false. But if I ask with what letters Aeneas' name is spelled, all who have learnt to read will reply correctly in accordance with the agreement and convention by which human beings have determined the value of these signs. Similarly, if I ask which would cause the greater inconvenience to someone's life, to forget how to read and write or to forget these fabulous poems, who does not see what answer he would give, unless he has totally lost his senses? So it was

²⁴ Virgil, *Aeneid* 6. 457.

²⁵ In the Roman Empire veils before an entrance were a sign of the dignity of the person beyond it; the higher the rank of a civil servant, the more veils were passed to gain access, each being guarded. For his school at Milan Augustine employed a junior usher to control the entrance veil.

The paragraph reflects the resentment against Augustine felt by secular professors of literature because of his renunciation and conversion.

a sin in me as a boy when I gave pride of place in my affection to those empty fables rather than to more useful studies, or rather when I hated the one and loved the other. But to me it was a hateful chant to recite 'one and one is two', and 'two and two are four'; delightful was the vain spectacle of the wooden horse full of armed soldiers and the burning of Troy and the very ghost of Creusa.²⁶

xiv (23) Why then did I hate Greek which has similar songs to sing? Homer was skilled at weaving such stories, and with sheer delight mixed vanity. Yet to me as a boy he was repellent. I can well believe that Greek boys feel the same about Virgil when they are forced to learn him in the way that I learnt Homer. The difficulty lies there: the difficulty of learning a foreign language at all. It sprinkles gall, as it were, over all the charm of the stories the Greeks tell. I did not know any of the words, and violent pressure on me to learn them was imposed by means of fearful and cruel punishments. At one time in my infancy I also knew no Latin, and yet by listening I learnt it with no fear or pain at all, from my nurses caressing me, from people laughing over jokes, and from those who played games and were enjoying them. I learnt Latin without the threat of punishment from anyone forcing me to learn it. My own heart constrained me to bring its concepts to birth, which I could not have done unless I had learnt some words, not from formal teaching but by listening to people talking; and they in turn were the audience for my thoughts. This experience sufficiently illuminates the truth that free curiosity has greater power to stimulate learning than rigorous coercion. Nevertheless, the free-ranging flux of curiosity is channelled by discipline under your laws, God. By your laws we are disciplined, from the canes of schoolmasters to the ordeals of martyrs. Your laws have the power to temper bitter experiences in a constructive way, recalling us to yourself from the pestilential life of easy comforts which have taken us away from you.

xv (24) 'Lord hear my prayer' (Ps. 60: 2) that my soul may not collapse (Ps. 83: 3) under your discipline (Ps. 54: 2), and may not suffer exhaustion in confessing to you your mercies, by which you have delivered me from all my evil ways. Bring to me a sweetness surpassing all the seductive delights which I pursued. Enable me to love you with all my strength that I may clasp your hand with all my

²⁶ Virgil, *Aeneid* 2. 772.

heart. 'Deliver me from all temptation to the end' (Ps. 17: 30). You, Lord, are 'my king and my God' (Ps. 5: 3; 43: 5). Turn to your service whatever may be of use in what I learnt in boyhood. May I dedicate to your service my power to speak and write and read and count; for when I learnt vanities, you imposed discipline on me and have forgiven me the sin of desiring pleasure from those vanities. For in them I learnt many useful words, but these words can also be learnt through things that are not vain, and that is the safe way along which children should walk.

xvi (25) Woe to you, torrent of human custom! 'Who can stand against you?' (Ps. 75: 8) When will you run dry? How long will your flowing current carry the sons of Eve into the great and fearful ocean which can be crossed, with difficulty, only by those who have embarked on the Wood of the cross (Wisd. 14: 7)? Have I not read in you of Jupiter, at once both thunderer and adulterer?²⁷ Of course the two activities cannot be combined, but he was so described as to give an example of real adultery defended by the authority of a fictitious thunderclap acting as a go-between. What master of oratory can hear with equanimity a person of his own profession saying out loud, 'Homer invented these fictions and attributed human powers to the gods; I wish he had attributed divine powers to us?'²⁸ It would be truer to say that Homer indeed invented these fictions, but he attributed divine sanction to vicious acts, which had the result that immorality was no longer counted immorality and anyone who so acted would seem to follow the example not of abandoned men but of the gods in heaven.

(26) Yet, you infernal river, the sons of men are thrown into you, and fees are paid for them to learn these things. It is a matter of great public concern when a speech is made in the forum in full view of the laws decreeing that teachers' salaries be paid from public funds in addition to the fees paid by pupils.²⁹ The river of custom strikes the rocks and roars: 'This is why words are learnt; this is why one has to acquire the eloquence wholly necessary for

²⁷ Terence, *Eunuch* (cited in the next section which explains the allusions here).

²⁸ Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 1. 26. 65.

²⁹ Imperial legislation (e.g. a law of the emperor Gratian of 376) provided that municipal professors be paid a basic state salary; this would be supplemented by fees from pupils. The rates paid were publicly set up on inscriptions. A famous inscription in the North African town of Timgad of the year 362 lays down the salaries and fees chargeable by lawyers, paper and travel costs being extra.

carrying conviction in one's cause and for developing one's thoughts.' It is as if we would not know words such as 'golden shower' and 'bosom' and 'deceit' and 'temples of heaven' and other phrases occurring in the passage in question, had not Terence³⁰ brought on to the stage a worthless young man citing Jupiter as a model for his own fornication. He is looking up at a mural painting: 'there was this picture representing how Jupiter, they say, sent a shower of gold into Danae's lap and deceived a woman.' Notice how he encourages himself to lust as if enjoying celestial authority:

But what a god (he says)! He strikes the temples of heaven with his immense sound. And am I, poor little fellow, not to do the same as he? Yes indeed, I have done it with pleasure.

There is no force, no force at all, in the argument that these words are more easily learnt through this obscene text. The words actually encourage the more confident committing of a disgraceful action. I bring no charge against the words which are like exquisite and precious vessels, but the wine of error is poured into them for us by drunken teachers. If we failed to drink, we were caned and could not appeal to any sober judge. Yet, my God, before whose sight I now recall this without the memory disturbing me, I learnt this text with pleasure and took delight in it, wretch that I was. For this reason I was said to be a boy of high promise.

xvii (27) Let me, my God, say something also about the intelligence which was your gift to me, and the ways in which I wasted it on follies. A task was set me which caused me deep psychological anxiety. The reward was praise but I feared shame and blows if I did badly. I was to recite the speech of Juno in her anger and grief that she 'could not keep the Trojan king out of Italy'.³¹ I had understood that Juno never said this. But we were compelled to follow in our wanderings the paths set by poetic fictions, and to express in plain prose the sense which the poet had put in verse.³² The speaker who received highest praise was the one who had regard to the dignity of the imaginary characters, who most effectively expressed feelings of anger and sorrow, and who clothed these thoughts in appropriate language.

³⁰ *Eunuch* 585, 589 f.

³¹ Virgil, *Aeneid* 1. 38.

³² This educational method is recommended by Quintilian (10. 5. 2).

What could all this matter to me, true life, my God? What importance could it have for me that my recitation was acclaimed beyond many other readers of my age group? Was not the whole exercise mere smoke and wind? Was there no other subject on which my talent and tongue might be exercised? Your praises, Lord, your praises expressed through your scriptures would have upheld the tender vine of my heart, and it would not have been snatched away by empty trifles to become 'a shameful prey for the birds'. There is more than one way of offering sacrifice to the fallen angels.³³

xviii (28) When one considers the men proposed to me as models for my imitation, it is no wonder that in this way I was swept along by vanities and travelled right away from you, my God. They would be covered in embarrassment if, in describing their own actions in which they had not behaved badly, they were caught using a barbarism or a solecism in speech. But if they described their lusts in a rich vocabulary of well constructed prose with a copious and ornate style, they received praise and congratulated themselves. Lord you are 'long-suffering and very patient and true' (Ps. 102: 8; 85: 15; Isa. 42: 14 LXX); you see this and you keep silence. But will you always keep silence? Even at this moment you are delivering from this terrifying abyss the soul who seeks for you and thirsts for your delights (Ps. 41: 3), whose heart tells you 'I have sought your face; your face, Lord, I will seek' (Ps. 26: 8). To be far from your face is to be in the darkness of passion. One does not go far away from you or return to you by walking or by any movement through space. The younger son in your Gospel did not look for horses or carriages or ships;³⁴ he did not fly on any visible wing, nor did he travel along the way by moving his legs when he went to live in a far country and prodigally dissipated what you, his gentle father, had given him on setting out (Luke 15: 11–32), showing yourself even gentler on his return as a bankrupt. To live there in lustful passion is to live in darkness and to be far from your face.

³³ Though aware of Christian interpreters who dissented from this opinion, Augustine understood the fallen angels to be demonic powers and the gods of polytheism. The paganism pervading classical literature made many Christians reserved towards the study of the subject: cf. VIII. v (10) below. 'Prey': Virgil, *Georgic* II. 60.

³⁴ Verbal allusion to Plotinus 1. 6. 8. 29 (also a favourite passage for Ambrose); see also below VIII. xix (31). Augustine fuses images from Homer's *Odyssey* and the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

(29) Look, Lord God, look with patience as you always do. See the exact care with which the sons of men observe the conventions of letters and syllables received from those who so talked before them. Yet they neglect the eternal contracts of lasting salvation received from you. This has gone to such lengths that if someone, who is educated in or is a teacher of the old conventional sounds, pronounces the word 'human' contrary to the school teaching, without pronouncing the initial aspirate, he is socially censured more than if, contrary to your precepts, he were to hate a human being, his fellow-man. It is as if he felt an enemy to be more destructive than his own hatred which has soured the relationship; or as if a man were thought to cause greater damage to someone else by persecuting him than he causes to himself by cherishing hostile attitudes.³⁵ Certainly the knowledge of letters is not as deepseated in the consciousness as the imprint of the moral conscience, that he is doing to another what he would not wish done to himself (Matt. 7: 12). How mysterious you are, God, dwelling on high in silence! (Isa. 33: 5). You alone are great. By your inexhaustible law you assign penal blindnesses to illicit desires. A man enjoying a reputation for eloquence takes his position before a human judge with a crowd of men standing round and attacks his opponent with ferocious animosity. He is extremely vigilant in precautions against some error in language, but is indifferent to the possibility that the emotional force of his mind may bring about a man's execution.³⁶

xix (30) These were the moral conventions of the world where I, as a wretched boy, lay on the threshold. This was the arena in which I was to wrestle. I was more afraid of committing a barbarism than, if I did commit one, on my guard against feeling envy towards those who did not. I declare and confess this to you, my God. These were the qualities for which I was praised by people whose approval was at that time my criterion of a good life. I did not see the whirlpool of shame into which 'I was cast out of your sight' (Ps. 30: 23). For in those endeavours I was the lowest of the low, shocking even the worldly set by the innumerable lies with which I deceived the slave who took me to school and my teachers and

³⁵ Augustine indirectly echoes Plato (*Gorgias* 469) that it is better to suffer than to do wrong.

³⁶ Like most of the Church Fathers, Augustine was against capital punishment.

parents because of my love of games, my passion for frivolous spectacles, and my restless urge to imitate comic scenes.³⁷ I also used to steal from my parents' cellar and to pocket food from their table either to satisfy the demands of gluttony or to have something to give to boys who, of course, loved playing a game as much as I, and who would sell me their playthings in return. Even in this game I was overcome by a vain desire to win and was often guilty of cheating. Any breach of the rules I would not tolerate and, if I detected it, would fiercely denounce it, though it was exactly what I was doing to others. And if I was caught and denounced, I used to prefer to let my rage have free rein rather than to give ground.

Is that childish innocence? It is not, Lord, is it? I pray you, my God. Behaviour does not change when one leaves behind domestic guardians and schoolmasters, nuts and balls and sparrows, to be succeeded by prefects and kings, gold, estates, and slaves, as one advances to later stages in life.³⁸ Likewise canes are replaced by harsher punishments. So you, our king, have taken the small physical size of a child as a symbol of humility; that was what you approved when you said 'Of such is the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 19: 14).

xx (31) Yet, Lord, I must give thanks to you, the most excellent and supremely good Creator and Governor of the universe, my God, even though by your will I was merely a child. For at that time I existed, I lived and thought and took care for my self-preservation (a mark of your profound latent unity whence I derived my being).³⁹ An inward instinct told me to take care of the integrity of my senses, and even in my little thoughts about little matters I took delight in the truth. I hated to be deceived, I developed a good memory, I acquired the armoury of being skilled with words, friendship softened me, I avoided pain, despondency, ignorance. In such a person what was not worthy of admiration and praise? But every one of these qualities are gifts of my God: I did not give them to myself. They are good qualities, and their totality is my self. Therefore he who made me is good, and he is my good, and I exult to him, (Ps. 2: 11) for all the good things that I was even as a boy. My sin consisted in this, that I sought pleasure, sublimity, and truth not in God but in

³⁷ The Latin is ambiguous and may mean 'restless urge for mimicry of comic scenes'.

³⁸ The theme here is found in Seneca, *De Constantia Sapientis* 12. 1.

³⁹ Augustine often states the Platonic axiom that existence is good and every being's instinct for self-preservation reflects the mystery of divine Being and Unity.

his creatures, in myself and other created beings.⁴⁰ So it was that I plunged into miseries, confusions, and errors. My God, I give thanks to you, my source of sweet delight, and my glory and my confidence. I thank you for your gifts. Keep them for me, for in this way you will keep me. The talents you have given will increase and be perfected, and I will be with you since it was your gift to me that I exist.

⁴⁰ Augustine fuses St Paul (Romans 1) with Plotinus (1. 6. 8).

BOOK II

Adolescence

i (1) I intend to remind myself of my past foulnesses and carnal corruptions, not because I love them but so that I may love you, my God. It is from love of your love that I make the act of recollection. The recalling of my wicked ways is bitter in my memory, but I do it so that you may be sweet to me, a sweetness touched by no deception, a sweetness serene and content. You gathered me together from the state of disintegration in which I had been fruitlessly divided. I turned from unity in you to be lost in multiplicity.¹

At one time in adolescence I was burning to find satisfaction in hellish pleasures. I ran wild in the shadowy jungle of erotic adventures. 'My beauty wasted away and in your sight I became putrid' (Dan. 10: 8), by pleasing myself and by being ambitious to win human approval.

ii (2) The single desire that dominated my search for delight was simply to love and to be loved. But no restraint was imposed by the exchange of mind with mind, which marks the brightly lit pathway of friendship. Clouds of muddy carnal concupiscence filled the air. The bubbling impulses of puberty befogged and obscured my heart so that it could not see the difference between love's serenity and lust's darkness. Confusion of the two things boiled within me. It seized hold of my youthful weakness sweeping me through the precipitous rocks of desire to submerge me in a whirlpool of vice.² Your wrath was heavy upon me and I was unaware of it. I had become deafened by the clanking chain³ of my mortal condition, the penalty of my pride. I travelled very far from you, and you did not stop me. I was tossed about and spilt, scattered and boiled dry in my fornications. And you were silent. How slow I was to find my joy! At that time you said nothing, and I travelled much further away from

¹ The language here is characteristic of Porphyry (e.g. *ep. ad Marcellam* 10, p. 280, 25 Nauck) and Plotinus 6. 6. 1. 5. See below XI. xxix (39).

² Echo of Virgil, *Aeneid* 3. 422 (Scylla and Charybdis).

³ Virgil, *Aeneid* 6. 558.

you into more and more sterile things productive of unhappiness, proud in my self-pity, incapable of rest in my exhaustion.

(3) If only someone could have imposed restraint on my disorder. That would have transformed to good purpose the fleeting experiences of beauty in these lowest of things, and fixed limits to indulgence in their charms. Then the stormy waves of my youth would have finally broken on the shore of marriage. Even so, I could not have been wholly content to confine sexual union to acts intended to procreate children, as your law prescribes, Lord. For you shape the propagation of our mortal race, imposing your gentle hand to soften the brambles which were excluded from your paradise.⁴ Your omnipotence is never far from us, even when we are far from you.⁵ Alternatively, I ought to have paid more vigilant heed to the voice from your clouds: 'Nevertheless those who are married shall have trouble in the flesh, and I would spare you' (Cor. 7: 28), and 'It is good for a man not to touch a woman' (1 Cor. 7: 1), and 'He who has no wife thinks on the things of God, how he can please God. But he who is joined in marriage thinks on the affairs of the world, how he can please his wife' (1 Cor. 7: 32-3). Had I paid careful attention to these sayings and 'become a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 19: 12), I would have been happier finding fulfilment in your embraces.

(4) But I in my misery seethed and followed the driving force of my impulses, abandoning you. I exceeded all the bounds set by your law, and did not escape your chastisement—indeed no mortal can do so. For you were always with me, mercifully punishing me, touching with a bitter taste all my illicit pleasures. Your intention was that I should seek delights unspoiled by disgust and that, in my quest where I could achieve this, I should discover it to be in nothing except you Lord, nothing but you. You 'fashion pain to be a lesson' (Ps. 93: 20 LXX), you 'strike to heal', you bring death upon us so that we should not die apart from you (Deut. 32: 39).⁶

⁴ Augustine's vision of the sex-life of Adam and Eve before the Fall passed from belief that their union was wholly spiritual (below XIII. xx (28)) to a conviction that it was both spiritual and physical, but controlled by reason and will, never by unreasoning passion, and wholly free of the thorny problems that beset sexuality in common experience.

⁵ The Neoplatonist Porphyry wrote: 'He who knows God has God present to him, and he who does not know him is absent from him who is everywhere present.' (*Ad Gaurum* 12. 3). Cf. above, II. ii (3).

⁶ Cf. above I. v. (6). The beneficence of punishment is affirmed in 2 Macc. 6: 12-16.

Where was I in the sixteenth year of the age of my flesh? 'Far away in exile from the pleasures of your house' (Mic. 2: 9). Sensual folly assumed domination over me, and I gave myself totally to it in acts allowed by shameful humanity but under your laws illicit. My family did not try to extricate me from my headlong course by means of marriage. The only concern was that I should learn to speak as effectively as possible and carry conviction by my oratory.

iii (5) During my sixteenth year there was an interruption in my studies. I was recalled from Madauros, the nearby town where I had first lived away from home to learn literature and oratory. During that time funds were gathered in preparation for a more distant absence at Carthage, for which my father had more enthusiasm than cash, since he was a citizen of Thagaste with very modest resources.⁷ To whom do I tell these things? Not to you, my God. But before you I declare this to my race, to the human race, though only a tiny part can light on this composition of mine. And why do I include this episode? It is that I and any of my readers may reflect on the great depth from which we have to cry to you (Ps. 129: 1). Nothing is nearer to your ears than a confessing heart and a life grounded in faith (cf. Rom. 10: 9). At that time everybody was full of praise for my father because he spent money on his son beyond the means of his estate, when that was necessary to finance an education entailing a long journey. Many citizens of far greater wealth did nothing of the kind for their children. But this same father did not care what character before you I was developing, or how chaste I was so long as I possessed a cultured tongue—though my culture really meant a desert uncultivated by you, God. You are the one true and good lord of your land, which is my heart.

(6) In my sixteenth year idleness interposed because of my family's lack of funds. I was on holiday from all schooling and lived with my parents. The thorns of lust rose above my head, and there was no hand to root them out. Indeed, when at the bathhouse my father saw that I was showing signs of virility and the stirrings of adolescence,

⁷ Augustine's biographer, Possidius, records that his father Patrick sat on the town council or *curia* of Thagaste, a position bringing social credit and financial burdens. The estate was not large, and in relative terms the family was reckoned 'poor', i.e. it possessed only a few slaves for the housework and the land, which in one letter Augustine describes as 'a few acres'. Naturally Augustine's family was not poor in an absolute sense; they were far from being destitute. But 'pauper' is once defined by Ovid as 'a man who knows how many sheep he has'. Patrick is likely to have known how many he had.

he was overjoyed to suppose that he would now be having grandchildren, and told my mother so. His delight was that of the intoxication which makes the world oblivious of you, its Creator, and to love your creation instead of you. He was drunk with the invisible wine of his perverse will directed downwards to inferior things.⁸ But in my mother's heart you had already begun your temple and the beginning of your holy habitation (Ecclus. 24: 14). My father was still a catechumen and had become that only recently. So she shook with a pious trepidation and a holy fear (2 Cor. 7: 15). For, although I had not yet become a baptized believer, she feared the twisted paths along which walk those who turn their backs and not their face towards you (Jer. 2: 27).

(7) Wretch that I am, do I dare to say that you, my God, were silent when in reality I was travelling farther from you? Was it in this sense that you kept silence to me? Then whose words were they but yours which you were chanting in my ears through my mother, your faithful servant? But nothing of that went down into my heart to issue in action. Her concern (and in the secret of my conscience I recall the memory of her admonition delivered with vehement anxiety) was that I should not fall into fornication, and above all that I should not commit adultery with someone else's wife. These warnings seemed to me womanish advice which I would have blushed to take the least notice of. But they were your warnings and I did not realize it. I believed you were silent, and that it was only she who was speaking, when you were speaking to me through her. In her you were scorned by me, by me her son, the son of your handmaid, your servant (Ps. 115: 16). But I did not realize this and went on my way headlong with such blindness that among my peer group I was ashamed not to be equally guilty of shameful behaviour when I heard them boasting of their sexual exploits. Their pride was the more aggressive, the more debauched their acts were; they derived pleasure not merely from the lust of the act but also from the admiration it evoked. What is more worthy of censure than vice? Yet I went deeper into vice to avoid being despised, and when there was no act by admitting to which I could rival my depraved companions, I used to pretend I had done things I had not done at

⁸ Augustine's father celebrated the signs of his son's virility by becoming inebriated. The implications of this passage on Patrick's hopes for a grandchild appear the only evidence to suggest that Augustine was the eldest of the children.

all, so that my innocence should not lead my companions to scorn my lack of courage, and lest my chastity be taken as a mark of inferiority.⁹

(8) Such were the companions with whom I made my way through the streets of Babylon.¹⁰ With them I rolled in its dung as if rolling in spices and precious ointments (S. of S. 5. 4: 14). To tie me down the more tenaciously to Babylon's belly, the invisible enemy trampled on me (Ps. 55: 3) and seduced me because I was in the mood to be seduced. The mother of my flesh already had fled from the centre of Babylon (Jer. 51: 6), but still lingered in the outskirts of the city. Although she had warned me to guard my virginity, she did not seriously pay heed to what her husband had told her about me, and which she felt to hold danger for the future: for she did not seek to restrain my sexual drive within the limit of the marriage bond, if it could not be cut back to the quick. The reason why she showed no such concern was that she was afraid that the hope she placed in me could be impeded by a wife. This was not the hope which my mother placed in you for the life to come, but the hope which my parents entertained for my career that I might do well out of the study of literature. Both of them, as I realized, were very ambitious for me: my father because he hardly gave a thought to you at all, and his ambitions for me were concerned with mere vanities; my mother because she thought it would do no harm and would be a help to set me on the way towards you, if I studied the traditional pattern of a literary education. That at least is my conjecture as I try to recall the characters of my parents.

The reins were relaxed to allow me to amuse myself. There was no strict discipline to keep me in check, which led to an unbridled dissoluteness in many different directions. In all of this there was a thick mist shutting me off from the brightness of your face, my God, and my iniquity as it were 'burst out from my fatness' (Ps. 72: 7).

iv (9) Theft receives certain punishment by your law (Exod. 20: 15), Lord, and by the law written in the hearts of men (Rom. 2: 14) which not even iniquity itself destroys. For what thief can with

⁹ The theme of this paragraph is found in Ambrose, *Noah* 22, 81.

¹⁰ Augustine's portrait of his wild years may be compared with the savage contemporary portrait of the riff-raff of Rome about 380 by the pagan historian Ammianus Marcellinus, who speaks of people spending their entire lives on alcohol, gambling, brothels, and public shows (28. 4. 28).

equanimity endure being robbed by another thief? He cannot tolerate it even if he is rich and the other is destitute. I wanted to carry out an act of theft and did so, driven by no kind of need other than my inner lack of any sense of, or feeling for, justice. Wickedness filled me. I stole something which I had in plenty and of much better quality. My desire was to enjoy not what I sought by stealing but merely the excitement of thieving and the doing of what was wrong. There was a pear tree near our vineyard laden with fruit, though attractive in neither colour nor taste. To shake the fruit off the tree and carry off the pears, I and a gang of naughty adolescents set off late at night after (in our usual pestilential way) we had continued our game in the streets. We carried off a huge load of pears. But they were not for our feasts but merely to throw to the pigs. Even if we ate a few, nevertheless our pleasure lay in doing what was not allowed.

Such was my heart, O God, such was my heart. You had pity on it when it was at the bottom of the abyss. Now let my heart tell you what it was seeking there in that I became evil for no reason.¹¹ I had no motive for my wickedness except wickedness itself. It was foul, and I loved it. I loved the self-destruction, I loved my fall, not the object for which I had fallen but my fall itself. My depraved soul leaped down from your firmament to ruin.¹² I was seeking not to gain anything by shameful means, but shame for its own sake.

v (10) There is beauty in lovely physical objects, as in gold and silver and all other such things. When the body touches such things, much significance attaches to the rapport of the object with the touch. Each of the other senses has its own appropriate mode of response to physical things. Temporal honour and the power of giving orders and of being in command have their own kind of dignity, though this is also the origin of the urge to self-assertion. Yet in the acquisition of all these sources of social status, one must not depart from you, Lord, nor deviate from your law. The life which we live in this world has its attractiveness because of a certain measure in its beauty and its harmony with all these inferior objects that are beautiful. Human friendship is also a nest of love and gentleness because of the unity it brings about between

¹¹ Echo of Sallust's language about Catiline. Augustine presents himself as a new Catiline.

¹² Like Lucifer.

many souls. Yet sin is committed for the sake of all these things and others of this kind when, in consequence of an immoderate urge towards those things which are at the bottom end of the scale of good,¹³ we abandon the higher and supreme goods, that is you, Lord God, and your truth and your law (Ps. 118: 142). These inferior goods have their delights, but not comparable to my God who has made them all. It is in him that the just person takes delight; he is the joy of those who are true of heart (Ps. 63: 11).

(11) When a crime is under investigation to discover the motive for which it was done, the accusation is not usually believed except in cases where the appetite to obtain (or the fear of losing) one of those goods which we have called inferior appears a plausible possibility. They are beautiful and attractive even if, in comparison with the higher goods which give true happiness, they are mean and base. A man committed murder. Why? Because he loved another's wife or his property; or he wanted to acquire money to live on by plundering his goods; or he was afraid of losing his own property by the action of his victim; or he had suffered injury and burned with desire for revenge. No one would commit murder without a motive, merely because he took pleasure in killing. Who would believe that? It was said of one brutal and cruel man [Catiline] that he was evil and savage without reason.¹⁴ Yet the preceding passage gave the motive: 'lest disuse might make his hand or mind slow to react'. Why did he wish for that? Why so? His objective was to capture the city by violent crimes to obtain honours, government, and wealth; to live without fear of the laws and without the difficulty of attaining his ambitions because of the poverty of his family estate and his known criminal record. No, not even Catiline himself loved his crimes; something else motivated him to commit them.

vi (12) Wretch that I was, what did I love in you, my act of theft, that crime which I did at night in the sixteenth year of my life? There was nothing beautiful about you, my thieving. Indeed do you exist at all for me to be addressing you?

The fruit which we stole was beautiful because it was your creation, most beautiful of all Beings, maker of all things, the good

¹³ Throughout his writings Augustine holds to a doctrine of gradations of goodness. The good of the body is inferior to that of the soul; the will, in itself midway, may turn to higher or to lower things, and may err by preferring inferior goods to superior.

¹⁴ Sallust, *Catiline* 16 (also cited by Augustine, *Sermon on Ps. 108*, 3).

God, God the highest good and my true good. The fruit was beautiful, but was not that which my miserable soul coveted. I had a quantity of better pears. But those I picked solely with the motive of stealing. I threw away what I had picked. My feasting was only on the wickedness which I took pleasure in enjoying. If any of those pears entered my mouth, my criminality was the piquant sauce. And now, Lord my God, I inquire what was the nature of my pleasure in the theft. The act has nothing lovely about it, none of the loveliness found in equity and prudence, or in the human mind whether in the memory or in the senses or in physical vitality. Nor was it beautiful in the way the stars are, noble in their courses, or earth and sea full of newborn creatures which, as they are born, take the place of those which die;¹⁵ not even in the way that specious vices have a flawed reflection of beauty.

(13) Pride imitates what is lofty; but you alone are God most high above all things. What does ambition seek but honour and glory? Yet you alone are worthy of honour and are glorious for eternity. The cruelty of powerful people aims to arouse fear. Who is to be feared but God alone? What can be seized or stolen from his power? When or where or how or by whom? Soft endearments are intended to arouse love. But there are no caresses tenderer than your charity, and no object of love is more healthy than your truth, beautiful and luminous beyond all things. Curiosity appears to be a zeal for knowledge; yet you supremely know all. Ignorance and stupidity are given the names of simplicity and innocence; but there is no greater simplicity than in you. And what greater innocence than yours, whereas to evil men their own works are damaging? Idleness appears as desire for a quiet life; yet can rest be assured apart from the Lord? Luxury wants to be called abundance and satiety; but you are fullness and the inexhaustible treasure of incorruptible pleasure. Prodigality presents itself under the shadow of generosity; but you are the rich bestower of all good things. Avarice wishes to have large possessions; you possess everything. Envy contends about excellence; but what is more excellent than you? Anger seeks revenge; who avenges with greater justice than you? Fear quails before sudden and unexpected events attacking things which are

¹⁵ Augustine regarded the cycle of birth and death as 'beautiful'; i.e. death is evil to the individual, not to the race.

loved, and takes precautions for their safety; to you is anything unexpected or sudden? Or who can take away from you what you love? There is no reliable security except with you. Regret wastes away for the loss of things which cupidity delighted in. Its wish would be that nothing be taken away, just as nothing can be taken from you.

(14) So the soul fornicates (Ps. 72: 27) when it is turned away from you and seeks outside you the pure and clear intentions which are not to be found except by returning to you. In their perverted way all humanity imitates you. Yet they put themselves at a distance from you and exalt themselves against you. But even by thus imitating you they acknowledge that you are the creator of all nature and so concede that there is no place where one can entirely escape from you. Therefore in that act of theft what was the object of my love, and in what way did I viciously and perversely imitate my Lord? Was my pleasure to break your law, but by deceit since I had not the power to do that by force? Was I acting like a prisoner with restricted liberty who does without punishment what is not permitted, thereby making an assertion of possessing a dim resemblance to omnipotence? Here is a runaway slave fleeing his master and pursuing a shadow (Job 7: 2). What rottenness! What a monstrous life and what an abyss of death! Was it possible to take pleasure in what was illicit for no reason other than that it was not allowed?

vii (15) 'What shall I render to the Lord?' (Ps. 115: 2) who recalls these things to my memory, but my soul feels no fear from the recollection. I will love you, Lord, and I will give thanks and confession to your name because you have forgiven me such great evils and my nefarious deeds. I attribute to your grace and mercy that you have melted my sins away like ice (Ecclus. 3: 17). I also attribute to your grace whatever evil acts I have not done. What could I not have done when I loved gratuitous crime? I confess that everything has been forgiven, both the evil things I did of my own accord, and those which I did not do because of your guidance.

No one who considers his frailty would dare to attribute to his own strength his chastity and innocence, so that he has less cause to love you—as if he had less need of your mercy by which you forgive the sins of those converted to you. If man is called by you, follows your voice, and has avoided doing those acts which I am recalling

and avowing in my own life, he should not mock the healing of a sick man by the Physician, whose help has kept him from falling sick, or at least enabled him to be less gravely ill. He should love you no less, indeed even more; for he sees that the one who delivered me from the great sicknesses of my sins is also he through whom he may see that he himself has not been a victim of the same great sicknesses.

viii (16) 'What fruit had I', wretched boy, in these things (Rom. 6: 21) which I now blush to recall, above all in that theft in which I loved nothing but the theft itself? The theft itself was a nothing, and for that reason I was the more miserable. Yet had I been alone I would not have done it—I remember my state of mind to be thus at the time—alone I would never have done it. Therefore my love in that act was to be associated with the gang in whose company I did it. Does it follow that I loved something other than the theft? No, nothing else in reality because association with the gang is also a nothing. What is it in reality? Who can teach me that, but he who 'illuminates my heart' (Ecclus. 2: 10) and disperses the shadows in it? What else has stirred my mind to ask and discuss and consider this question? If I had liked the pears which I stole and actually desired to enjoy them, I could by myself have committed that wicked act, had it been enough to attain the pleasure which I sought. I would not have needed to inflame the itch of my cupidity through the excitement generated by sharing the guilt with others. But my pleasure was not in the pears; it was in the crime itself, done in association with a sinful group.

ix (17) What was my state of mind? It is quite certain that it was utterly shameful and a disgrace to me that I had it. Yet what was it? 'Who understands his sins?' (Job 10: 15). It was all done for a giggle, as if our hearts were tickled to think we were deceiving those who would not think us capable of such behaviour and would have profoundly disapproved. Why then did I derive pleasure from an act I would not have done on my own? Is it that nobody can easily laugh when alone? Certainly no one readily laughs when alone; yet sometimes laughter overcomes individuals when no one else is present if their senses or their mind perceive something utterly absurd. But alone I would not have done it, could not conceivably have done it by myself. See, before you, my God, the living memory of

my soul. Alone I would not have committed that crime, in which my pleasure lay not in what I was stealing but in the act of theft. But had I been alone, it would have given me absolutely no pleasure, nor would I have committed it. Friendship can be a dangerous enemy, a seduction of the mind lying beyond the reach of investigation.¹⁶ Out of a game and a jest came an avid desire to do injury and an appetite to inflict loss on someone else without any motive on my part of personal gain, and no pleasure in settling a score. As soon as the words are spoken 'Let us go and do it', one is ashamed not to be shameless.

x (18) Who can untie this extremely twisted and tangled knot? It is a foul affair, I have no wish to give attention to it; I have no desire to contemplate it. My desire is for you, justice and innocence, you are lovely and splendid to honest eyes; the satiety of your love is insatiable. With you is utter peace and a life immune from disturbance. The person who enters into you 'enters into the joy of the Lord' (Matt. 25: 21), and will not be afraid; he will find himself in the supreme Good where it is supremely good to be. As an adolescent I went astray from you (Ps. 118: 76), my God, far from your unmoved stability. I became to myself a region of destitution.¹⁷

¹⁶ Similarly IX. ii. (2).

¹⁷ The Prodigal Son is fused with a Neoplatonic theme of the soul's destitution without God, which is taken up at the beginning of book III and again in VII. x (16). Destitution in the soul distant from God is a theme in Porphyry (*De abstinentia* 3. 27 and *Sententiae* 40), based on Plato's *Symposium*.

only a loving memory and a desire for that of which I had the aroma but which I had not yet the capacity to eat.

xviii (24) I sought a way to obtain strength enough to enjoy you; but I did not find it until I embraced 'the mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus' (1 Tim. 2: 5), 'who is above all things, God blessed for ever' (Rom. 9: 5). He called and said 'I am the way and the truth and the life' (John 14: 6). The food which I was too weak to accept he mingled with flesh, in that 'The Word was made flesh' (John 1: 14), so that our infant condition might come to suck milk from your wisdom by which you created all things. To possess my God, the humble Jesus, I was not yet humble enough. I did not know what his weakness was meant to teach.

Your Word, eternal truth, higher than the superior parts of your creation, raises those submissive to him to himself. In the inferior parts he built for himself a humble house of our clay. By this he detaches from themselves those who are willing to be made his subjects and carries them across to himself, healing their swelling and nourishing their love. They are no longer to place confidence in themselves, but rather to become weak. They see at their feet divinity become weak by his sharing in our 'coat of skin' (Gen. 3: 21).²⁶ In their weariness they fall prostrate before this divine weakness which rises and lifts them up.

xix (25) I had a different notion, since I thought of Christ my Lord only as a man of excellent wisdom which none could equal.²⁷ I thought his wonderful birth from a virgin was an example of despising temporal things to gain immortality for us, and such divine care for us gave him great authority as teacher. But the mystery of the Word made flesh I had not begun to guess. I had only realized from the writings handed down concerning him that he ate and drank, slept, walked, was filled with joy, was sad, conversed. I knew that his flesh was not united to your Word without a soul and

²⁶ Augustine often allegorizes the 'coats of skin' of Adam and Eve to mean the mortality of the human condition.

²⁷ This was Porphyry's opinion, coupled with the rejection of the Church as mistakenly believing him to be divine: see *City of God* 10. 27–9. Porphyry, however, is not known to have accepted the Virgin Birth and to regard that as the ground of Jesus' special distinction as a wise man. Augustine associates this last opinion with Photinus who denied Christ's pre-existence before the incarnation, affirmed the Virgin Birth, and believed Christ wise through God's inspiration rather than to be the personal presence of God's wisdom. Condemned for heresy in 351, Photinus retained admirers.

a human mind. Everyone knows this if he knows the immutability of your Word. I knew it to the best of my understanding, nor had I the least doubt on the subject. To move the body's limbs at will at one moment, not another, to be affected by an emotion at one time, not another, to utter wise judgement by signs at one moment, at another to keep silence: these are characteristic marks of the soul and mind with their capacity to change. If the writings about him were wrong in so describing him, everything else would be suspected of being a lie, and there would remain no salvation for the human race based on faith in these books. So because the scriptures are true, I acknowledged the whole man to be in Christ, not only the body of a man or soul and body without a mind, but a fully human person. I thought that he excelled others not as the personal embodiment of the Truth, but because of the great excellence of his human character and more perfect participation in wisdom.

Alypius, on the other hand, thought Catholics believed him to be God clothed in flesh in the sense that in Christ there was only God and flesh. He did not think they held him to possess a human soul and mind. Because he was quite convinced that the actions recorded in the memorials of Christ could not have been done except by a created being endowed with life and reason, his move towards the Christian faith was slower. But later when he knew that this was the error of the Apollinarian heretics,²⁸ he was glad to conform to the Catholic faith. For my part I admit it was some time later that I learnt, in relation to the words 'The Word was made flesh', how Catholic truth is to be distinguished from the false opinion of Photinus.

The rejection of heretics brings into relief what your Church holds and what sound doctrine maintains. 'It was necessary for heresies to occur so that the approved may be made manifest' (1 Cor. 11: 19) among the weak.

xx (26) At that time, after reading the books of the Platonists and learning from them to seek for immaterial truth, I turned my attention to your 'invisible nature understood through the things

²⁸ Alypius was held back by his beliefs (a) that the gospels describe a real human being, (b) that the Church holds the incarnate Lord to be God veiled in flesh only, without a human mind. He was liberated when he found that the latter opinion had been censured as heresy when taught by Apollinaris of Laodicea in Syria during the 360s and 370s. Ambrose of Milan emphatically rejected Apollinaris' opinion.

which are made' (Rom. 1: 20). But from the disappointment I suffered I perceived that the darkneses of my soul would not allow me to contemplate these sublimities. Yet I was certain that you are infinite without being infinitely diffused through finite space. I was sure that you truly are, and are always the same; that you never become other or different in any part or by any movement of position, whereas all other things derive from you, as is proved by the fact that they exist. Of these conceptions I was certain; but to enjoy you I was too weak. I prattled on as if I were expert, but unless I had sought your way in Christ our Saviour (Titus 1: 4), I would have been not expert but expunged. I began to want to give myself airs as a wise person. I was full of my punishment, but I shed no tears of penitence. Worse still, I was puffed up with knowledge (1 Cor. 8: 1). Where was the charity which builds on the foundation of humility which is Christ Jesus? When would the Platonist books have taught me that? I believe that you wanted me to encounter them before I came to study your scriptures. Your intention was that the manner in which I was affected by them should be imprinted in my memory, so that when later I had been made docile by your books and my wounds were healed by your gentle fingers, I would learn to discern and distinguish the difference between presumption and confession, between those who see what the goal is but not how to get there and those who see the way which leads to the home of bliss, not merely as an end to be perceived but as a realm to live in. For if I had first been formed in mind by your holy books, and if you had made me know your sweetness by familiarity with them, and then I had thereafter met those volumes, perhaps they would have snatched me away from the solid foundation of piety. Or if I had remained firm in the conviction which I had imbibed to my soul's health, I might have supposed that the same ideas could be gained from those books by someone who had read only them.

xxi (27) With avid intensity I seized the sacred writings of your Spirit and especially the apostle Paul. Where at one time I used to think he contradicted himself and the text of his words disagreed with the testimonies of the law and the prophets, the problems simply vanished. The holy oracles now presented to me a simple face, and I learnt to 'rejoice with trembling' (Ps. 11: 7). I began reading and found that all the truth I had read in the Platonists was

stated here together with the commendation of your grace, so that he who sees should 'not boast as if he had not received' both what he sees and also the power to see. 'For what has he which he has not received?' (1 Cor. 4: 7). Moreover, he is not only admonished to see you, who remain ever the same, but also healed to make it possible for him to hold on to you. So also the person who from a distance cannot yet see, nevertheless walks along the path by which he may come and see and hold you.

Even if a man 'delights in God's law in the inner man', what will he do with 'the other law in his members fighting against the law of his mind and bringing him into captivity under the law of sin, which is in his members?' (Rom. 7: 22-3). For you, Lord, are just. But 'we have sinned, we have done wickedly' (Dan. 3: 27, 29), we have behaved impiously (1 Kgs. 8: 47), and 'your hand has been heavy upon us' (Ps. 31: 4). We have been justly handed over to the ancient sinner, the president of death, who has persuaded us to conform our will to his will which 'did not remain in your truth' (John 8: 44).

What will wretched man do? 'Who will deliver him from this body of death' except your grace through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 7: 24), who is your coeternal Son, whom you 'created in the beginning of your ways' (Prov. 8: 22). In him 'the prince of this world' (John 14: 30) found nothing worthy of death and killed him, and 'the decree which was against us was cancelled' (Col. 2: 14).

None of this is in the Platonist books. Those pages do not contain the face of this devotion, tears of confession, your sacrifice, a troubled spirit, a contrite and humble spirit (Ps. 50: 19), the salvation of your people, the espoused city (Rev. 21: 5), the guarantee of your Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 5: 5), the cup of our redemption. In the Platonic books no one sings: 'Surely my soul will be submissive to God? From him is my salvation; he is also my God and my saviour who upholds me; I shall not be moved any more' (Ps. 61: 2-3).

No one there hears him who calls 'Come to me, you who labour' (Matt. 11: 28). They disdain to learn from him, for 'he is meek and humble of heart'. 'For you have concealed these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes' (Matt. 11: 25).

It is one thing from a wooded summit to catch a glimpse of the homeland of peace and not to find the way to it, but vainly to attempt the journey along an impracticable route surrounded by the

ambushes and assaults of fugitive deserters with their chief, 'the lion and the dragon' (Ps. 90: 13). It is another thing to hold on to the way that leads there, defended by the protection of the heavenly emperor. There no deserters from the heavenly army lie waiting to attack. For this way they hate like a torture.

In surprising ways these thoughts had a visceral effect on me as I read 'the least' of your apostles (1 Cor. 15: 9). I meditated upon your works and trembled (Hab. 3: 2).

be conveyed by teaching. Nebridius, however, had yielded to the pressure of his friendship with us and was assistant teacher to Verecundus, a close friend to all of us, a citizen of Milan and instructor in literature there. Verecundus was in urgent need of reliable assistance, and by right of friendship claimed from our group the supply he badly wanted. So Nebridius was not attracted to this work by desire for the profits; for had he so wished, he could have made more money on his own as teacher of literature. He was a most gentle and kind friend, and recognizing the duty of generosity would not scorn our request. He performed his task most prudently, and took care not to become known to important people, as this world reckons them, so avoiding anything likely to distract his mind. He wanted to keep his mind free and to devote as many hours as possible to the pursuit of wisdom by investigating some problem or listening to conversation.

(14) One day when Nebridius was absent for a reason I cannot recall, Alypius and I received a surprise visit at home from a man named Ponticianus, a compatriot in that he was an African, holding high office at the court. He wanted something or other from us. We sat down together to converse. By chance he noticed a book on top of a gaming table which lay before us. He picked it up, opened it, and discovered, much to his astonishment, that it was the apostle Paul. He had expected it to be one of the books used for the profession which was wearing me out. But then he smiled and looked at me in a spirit of congratulation. He was amazed that he had suddenly discovered this book and this book alone open before my eyes. He was a Christian and a baptized believer. He often prostrated himself before you, our God, at the Church with frequent and long times of prayer. When I had indicated to him that those scriptures were the subject of deep study for me, a conversation began in which he told the story of Antony the Egyptian monk, a name held in high honour among your servants, though up to that moment Alypius and I had never heard of him. When he discovered this, he dwelt on the story instilling in us who were ignorant an awareness of the man's greatness, and expressing astonishment that we did not know of him. We were amazed as we heard of your wonderful acts very well attested and occurring so recently, almost in our own time, done in orthodox faith and in the Catholic

Church. All of us were in a state of surprise, we because of the greatness of the story, he because we had not heard about it.

(15) From there his conversation moved on to speak of the flocks in the monasteries and their manner of life well pleasing to you and the fertile deserts of the wilderness. Of these we knew nothing. There was a monastery full of good brothers at Milan outside the city walls, fostered by Ambrose, and we had not known of it. He developed the theme and talked on while we listened with rapt silence. Then it occurred to him to mention how he and three of his colleagues (the date I do not know but it was at Trier), when the emperor was detained by a circus spectacle in the forenoon, went out for a walk in the gardens adjacent to the walls. There they strolled in couples, one as it turned out with Ponticianus, the other two separately wandering off on their own. In their wanderings they happened on a certain house where there lived some of your servants, poor in spirit: 'of such is the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 5: 3).¹¹ They found there a book in which was written the Life of Antony, and One of them began to read it. He was amazed and set on fire, and during his reading began to think of taking up this way of life and of leaving his secular post in the civil service to be your servant. For they were agents in the special branch.¹² Suddenly he was filled with holy love and sobering shame. Angry with himself, he turned his eyes on his friend and said to him: 'Tell me, I beg of you, what do we hope to achieve with all our labours? What is our aim in life? What is the motive of our service to the state? Can we hope for any higher office in the palace than to be Friends of the Emperor? And in that position what is not fragile and full of dangers? How many hazards must one risk to attain to a position of even greater danger? And when will we arrive there? Whereas, if I wish to become God's friend, in an instant I may become that now.' So he spoke, and in

¹¹ Antony's Life by Athanasius of Alexandria was translated into Latin by Evagrius of Antioch, a friend of Jerome, about 371; an earlier version was also in circulation.

¹² *Agentes in rebus* were an inspectorate of the imperial bureaucracy, sometimes used as intelligence gatherers and secret police, but mainly responsible to the Master of the Offices (who was among other things head of the intelligence service) for the operation of the *cursus publicus* or government communications system. Promotion in this department could lead as high as a provincial governorship, though this was rare. 'Friends of the Emperor' were not a branch of the civil service, but honoured individuals in high office; in the later Roman Empire all high office holders were vulnerable to palace revolutions and conspiracies.

pain at the coming to birth of new life, he returned his eyes to the book's pages. He read on and experienced a conversion inwardly where you alone could see and, as was soon evident, his mind rid itself of the world. Indeed, as he read and turned over and over in the turbulent hesitations of his heart, there were some moments when he was angry with himself. But then he perceived the choice to be made and took a decision to follow the better course. He was already yours, and said to his friend: 'As for myself, I have broken away from our ambition, and have decided to serve God, and I propose to start doing that from this hour in this place. If it costs you too much to follow my example, do not turn against me.' His friend replied that he would join him and be associated with him for such great reward and for so great a service. And both men, already yours, were building their tower at the right cost of forsaking all their property and following you (Luke 14: 28). Then Ponticianus and his companion who were walking through other parts of the garden in search of them, came to the same place and, on finding them, suggested returning home since the daylight had already begun to fade. But they told him of their decision and purpose, and how this intention had started and had become a firm resolve. They begged the others, if they did not wish to be associated with them, not to obstruct them. Ponticianus and his friend, however, did not change from their old career; nevertheless, as he told us, they wept for themselves. They offered their friends devout congratulations, and commended themselves to their prayers. Then, dragging their hearts along the ground, they went off into the palace. The others fixed their hearts on heaven and stayed at the house. Both had fiancées. When later their fiancées heard this, they also dedicated their virginity to you.

vii (16) This was the story Ponticianus told. But while he was speaking, Lord, you turned my attention back to myself. You took me up from behind my own back where I had placed myself because I did not wish to observe myself (Ps. 20: 13), and you set me before my face (Ps. 49: 21) so that I should see how vile I was, how twisted and filthy, covered in sores and ulcers.¹³ And I looked and was appalled, but there was no way of escaping from myself. If I

¹³ Echo of Seneca, *De Ira* 2. 36. 1.

and you once again placed me in front of myself; you thrust me before my own eyes so that I should discover my iniquity and hate it. I had known it, but deceived myself, refused to admit it, and pushed it out of my mind.

(17) But at that moment the more ardent my affection for those young men of whom I was hearing, who for the soul's health had given themselves wholly to you for healing, the more was the detestation and hatred I felt for myself in comparison with them. Many years of my life had passed by—about twelve—since in my nineteenth year I had read Cicero's *Hortensius*, and had been stirred to a zeal for wisdom. But although I came to despise earthly success, I put off giving time to the quest for wisdom. For 'it is not the discovery but the mere search for wisdom which should be preferred even to the physical delights available to me at a nod.'¹⁴ But I nations and to the physical delights available to me at a nod.¹⁴ But I was an unhappy young man, wretched as at the beginning of my adolescence when I prayed you for chastity and said: 'Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet.' I was afraid you might hear my prayer quickly, and that you might too rapidly heal me of the disease of lust which I preferred to satisfy rather than suppress. I had gone along 'evil ways' (Ecclus. 2: 10) with a sacrilegious superstition, not indeed because I felt sure of its truth but because I preferred it to the alternatives, which I did not investigate in a devout spirit but opposed in an attitude of hostility.

(18) I supposed that the reason for my postponing 'from day to day' (Ecclus. 5: 8) the moment when I would despise worldly ambition and follow you was that I had not seen any certainty by which to direct my course. But the day had now come when I stood naked to myself, and my conscience complained against me: 'Where is your tongue? You were saying that, because the truth is uncertain, you do not want to abandon the burden of futility. But look, it is certain now, and the burden still presses on you. Yet wings are won by the freer shoulders of men who have not been exhausted by their searching and have not taken ten years or more to meditate on these matters.' This is how I was gnawing at my inner self. I was violently overcome by a fearful sense of shame during the time that

¹⁴ A quotation or at least paraphrase of Cicero (*Hortensius*, fragment 106 Grilli). Cf. XII. i (1) below.

Ponticianus was telling his story. When he had ended his talk and settled the matter for which he came, he went home and I was left to myself. What accusations against myself did I not bring? With what verbal rods did I not scourge my soul so that it would follow me in my attempt to go after you! But my soul hung back. It refused, and had no excuse to offer. The arguments were exhausted, and all had been refuted. The only thing left to it was a mute trembling, and as if it were facing death it was terrified of being restrained from the treadmill of habit by which it suffered 'sickness unto death' (John 11: 4).

viii (19) Then in the middle of that grand struggle in my inner house, which I had vehemently stirred up with my soul in the intimate chamber of my heart, distressed not only in mind but in appearance, I turned on Alypius and cried out: 'What is wrong with us? What is this that you have heard? Uneducated people are rising up and capturing heaven (Matt. 11: 12), and we with our high culture without any heart—see where we roll in the mud of flesh and blood. Is it because they are ahead of us that we are ashamed to follow? Do we feel no shame at making not even an attempt to follow?' That is the gist of what I said, and the heat of my passion took my attention away from him as he contemplated my condition in astonished silence. For I sounded very strange. My uttered words said less about the state of my mind than my forehead, cheeks, eyes, colour, and tone of voice.

Our lodging had a garden. We had the use of it as well as of the entire house, for our host, the owner of the house, was not living there. The tumult of my heart took me out into the garden where no one could interfere with the burning struggle with myself in which I was engaged, until the matter could be settled. You knew, but I did not, what the outcome would be. But my madness with myself was part of the process of recovering health, and in the agony of death I was coming to life. I was aware how ill I was, unaware how well I was soon to be. So I went out into the garden. Alypius followed me step after step. Although he was present, I felt no intrusion on my solitude. How could he abandon me in such a state? We sat down as far as we could from the buildings. I was deeply disturbed in spirit, angry with indignation and distress that I was not entering into my pact and covenant with you, my God, when all my bones (Ps. 34: 10) were crying out that I should enter

into it and were exalting it to heaven with praises. But to reach that destination one does not use ships or chariots or feet.¹⁵ It was not even necessary to go the distance I had come from the house to where we were sitting. The one necessary condition, which meant not only going but at once arriving there, was to have the will to go—provided only that the will was strong and unqualified, not the turning and twisting first this way, then that, of a will half-wounded, struggling with one part rising up and the other part falling down.

(20) Finally in the agony of hesitation I made many physical gestures of the kind men make when they want to achieve something and lack the strength, either because they lack the actual limbs or because their limbs are fettered with chains or weak with sickness or in some way hindered. If I tore my hair, if I struck my forehead, if I intertwined my fingers and clasped my knee, I did that because to do so was my will. But I could have willed this and then not done it if my limbs had not possessed the power to obey. So I did many actions in which the will to act was not equalled by the power. Yet I was not doing what with an incomparably greater longing I yearned to do, and could have done the moment I so resolved. For as soon as I had the will, I would have had a wholehearted will. At this point the power to act is identical with the will. The willing itself was performative of the action. Nevertheless, it did not happen. The body obeyed the slightest inclination of the soul to move the limbs at its pleasure more easily than the soul obeyed itself, when its supreme desire could be achieved exclusively by the will alone.

ix (21) What is the cause of this monstrous situation? Why is it the case? May your mercy illuminate me as I ask if perhaps an answer can be found in the hidden punishments and secret tribulations that befall the sons of Adam? What causes this monstrous fact? and why is it so? The mind commands the body and is instantly obeyed. The mind commands itself and meets resistance. The mind commands the hand to move, and it is so easy that one hardly distinguishes the order from its execution. Yet mind is mind, and hand is body. The mind orders the mind to will. The recipient of the order is itself, yet it does not perform it. What causes this monstrosity and why does this happen? Mind commands, I say, that it should will, and would

¹⁵ Echo of Plotinus I. 6. 8. 21.

not give the command if it did not will, yet does not perform what it commands. The willing is not wholehearted, so the command is not wholehearted. The strength of the command lies in the strength of will, and the degree to which the command is not performed lies in the degree to which the will is not engaged. For it is the will that commands the will to exist, and it commands not another will but itself. So the will that commands is incomplete, and therefore what it commands does not happen. If it were complete, it would not need to command the will to exist, since it would exist already. Therefore there is no monstrous split between willing and not willing. We are dealing with a morbid condition of the mind which, when it is lifted up by the truth, does not unreservedly rise to it but is weighed down by habit. So there are two wills. Neither of them is complete, and what is present in the one is lacking to the other.

x (22) 'Let them perish from your presence' (Ps. 67: 3) O God, as do 'empty talkers and seducers' of the mind (Titus 1: 10)¹⁶ who from the dividing of the will into two in the process of deliberation, deduce that there are two minds with two distinct natures, one good, the other bad. They really are evil themselves when they entertain these evil doctrines. Yet the very same people would be good if they held to the true doctrines and assented to the truth. As your apostle says to them 'You were at one time darkness, but now are light in the Lord' (Eph. 5: 8). But they wish to be light not in the Lord but in themselves because they hold that the nature of the soul is what God is. They have in fact become a thicker darkness in that by their horrendous arrogance they have withdrawn further away from you—from you who are 'the true light illuminating every man coming into this world' (John 1: 9). They should give heed to what you say and blush: 'Come to him and be illuminated, and your faces will not blush' (Ps. 33: 6).

In my own case, as I deliberated about serving my Lord God (Jer. 30: 9) which I had long been disposed to do, the self which willed to serve was identical with the self which was unwilling. It was I. I was neither wholly willing nor wholly unwilling. So I was in conflict with myself and was dissociated from myself. The dissociation came about against my will. Yet this was not a manifestation of the nature of an alien mind but the punishment suffered in my own

¹⁶ Manichees.

mind. And so it was 'not I' that brought this about 'but sin which dwelt in me' (Rom. 7: 17, 20), sin resulting from the punishment of a more freely chosen sin, because I was a son of Adam.

(23) If there are as many contrary natures as there are wills in someone beset by indecision, there will be not two wills but many. If a person is deliberating whether to go to the Manichees' conventicle or to the theatre, they cry: 'Here are two natures, a good one leads one way, a bad one leads the other way. How otherwise explain the opposition of two wills to one another?' But I affirm that they are both evil, both the will to attend their meeting and the will to go to the theatre. They think that the intention to go along to them can only be good. What then? If one of us Catholic Christians were deliberating and, with two wills quarrelling with one another, fluctuated between going to the theatre or to our Church, surely the Manichees would be quite undecided what to say about that. Either they will have to concede that to go to our Church is an act of good will, as is the case with those worshippers who are initiated into its sacraments and feel the obligation thereby imposed, or they will have to think two evil natures and two evil minds are in conflict within a single person. This argument will prove untrue their usual assertion that one is good, the other bad. The alternative for them will be to be converted to the true view and not to deny that in the process of deliberation a single soul is wavering between different wills.

(24) Accordingly, when they note two wills in one person in conflict with each other, let them no more say that two conflicting minds are derived from two rival substances, and that two conflicting principles are in contention, one good, the other evil. God of truth, you condemn them and refute and confound them. For both wills are evil when someone is deliberating whether to kill a person by poison or by a dagger; whether to encroach on one estate belonging to someone else or a different one, when he cannot do both; whether to buy pleasure by lechery or avariciously to keep his money; whether to go to the circus or the theatre if both are putting on a performance on the same day, or (I add a third possibility) to steal from another person's house if occasion offers, or (I add a fourth option) to commit adultery if at the same time the chance is available. Suppose that all these choices are confronted at one moment of time, and all are equally desired, yet they cannot all be

done simultaneously. They tear the mind apart by the mutual incompatibility of the wills—four or more according to the number of objects desired. Yet they do not usually affirm that there is such a multiplicity of diverse substances.

The same argument holds for good wills. For I ask them whether it is good to delight in a reading from the apostle, or if it is good to take pleasure in a sober psalm, or if it is good to discourse upon the gospel. In each case they will reply 'good'. What then? If all these offer equal delight at one and the same time, surely the divergent wills pull apart the human heart while we are deliberating which is the most attractive option to take? All are good and yet are in contention with each other until the choice falls on one to which is then drawn the entire single will which was split into many. So also when the delight of eternity draws us upwards and the pleasure of temporal good holds us down, the identical soul is not wholehearted in its desire for one or the other. It is torn apart in a painful condition, as long as it prefers the eternal because of its truth but does not discard the temporal because of familiarity.

xi (25) Such was my sickness and my torture, as I accused myself even more bitterly than usual. I was twisting and turning in my chain until it would break completely: I was now only a little bit held by it, but I was still held. You, Lord, put pressure on me in my hidden depths with a severe mercy wielding the double whip¹⁷ of fear and shame, lest I should again succumb, and lest that tiny and tenuous bond which still remained should not be broken, but once more regain strength and bind me even more firmly. Inwardly I said to myself: Let it be now, let it be now. And by this phrase I was already moving towards a decision; I had almost taken it, and then I did not do so.¹⁸ Yet I did not relapse into my original condition, but stood my ground very close to the point of deciding and recovered my breath. Once more I made the attempt and came only a little short of my goal; only a little short of it—yet I did not touch it or hold on to it. I was hesitating whether to die to death and to live to life. Ingrained evil had more hold over me than unaccustomed

¹⁷ Virgil, *Aeneid* 5. 547.

¹⁸ Persius' fifth satire (quoted below VIII. xii (28)) portrays a lover who swears to give up his mistress but returns on her first appeal (5. 157). An epigram in the Greek Anthology (5. 24) concerns a lover whose conscience warns him to fly from his mistress but his will has not the strength.

good. The nearer approached the moment of time when I would become different, the greater the horror of it struck me. But it did not thrust me back nor turn me away, but left me in a state of suspense.

(26) Vain trifles and the triviality of the empty-headed, my old loves, held me back. They tugged at the garment of my flesh and whispered: 'Are you getting rid of us?' And 'from this moment we shall never be with you again, not for ever and ever'. And 'from this moment this and that are forbidden to you for ever and ever.' What they were suggesting in what I have called 'this and that'—what they were suggesting, my God, may your mercy avert from the soul of your servant! What filth, what disgraceful things they were suggesting! I was listening to them with much less than half my attention. They were not frankly confronting me face to face on the road, but as it were whispering behind my back, as if they were furtively tugging at me as I was going away, trying to persuade me to look back. Nevertheless they held me back. I hesitated to detach myself, to be rid of them, to make the leap to where I was being called. Meanwhile the overwhelming force of habit was saying to me: 'Do you think you can live without them?'

(27) Nevertheless it was now putting the question very half-heartedly. For from that direction where I had set my face and towards which I was afraid to move, there appeared the dignified and chaste Lady Continnence, serene and cheerful without coquetry, enticing me in an honourable manner to come and not to hesitate. To receive and embrace me she stretched out pious hands, filled with numerous good examples for me to follow. There were large numbers of boys and girls, a multitude of all ages, young adults and grave widows and elderly virgins. In every one of them was Continnence herself, in no sense barren but 'the fruitful mother of children' (Ps. 112: 9), the joys born of you, Lord, her husband. And she smiled on me with a smile of encouragement as if to say: 'Are you incapable of doing what these men and women have done? Do you think them capable of achieving this by their own resources and not by the Lord their God? Their Lord God gave me to them. Why are you relying on yourself, only to find yourself unreliable? Cast yourself upon him, do not be afraid. He will not withdraw himself so that you fall. Make the leap without anxiety; he will catch you and heal you.'

I blushed with embarrassment because I was still listening to the mutterings of those vanities, and racked by hesitations I remained undecided. But once more it was as if she said: “Stop your ears to your impure members on earth and mortify them” (Col. 3: 5). They declare delights to you, but “not in accord with the law of the Lord your God” (Ps. 118: 85). This debate in my heart was a struggle of myself against myself. Alypius stood quite still at my side, and waited in silence for the outcome of my unprecedented state of agitation.

xii (28) From a hidden depth a profound self-examination had dredged up a heap of all my misery and set it ‘in the sight of my heart’ (Ps. 118: 15). That precipitated a vast storm bearing a massive downpour of tears. To pour it all out with the accompanying groans, I got up from beside Alypius (solitude seemed to me more appropriate for the business of weeping), and I moved further away to ensure that even his presence put no inhibition upon me. He sensed that this was my condition at that moment. I think I may have said something which made it clear that the sound of my voice was already choking with tears. So I stood up while in profound astonishment he remained where we were sitting. I threw myself down somehow under a certain figtree,¹⁹ and let my tears flow freely. Rivers streamed from my eyes, a sacrifice acceptable to you (Ps. 50: 19), and (though not in these words, yet in this sense) I repeatedly said to you: ‘How long, O Lord? How long, Lord, will you be angry to the uttermost? Do not be mindful of our old iniquities.’ (Ps. 6: 4). For I felt my past to have a grip on me. It uttered wretched cries: ‘How long, how long is it to be?’ ‘Tomorrow, tomorrow.’²⁰ ‘Why not now? Why not an end to my impure life in this very hour?’

(29) As I was saying this and weeping in the bitter agony of my heart, suddenly I heard a voice from the nearby house²¹ chanting as if it might be a boy or a girl (I do not know which), saying and repeating over and over again ‘Pick up and read, pick up and read.’ At once my countenance changed, and I began to think intently whether there might be some sort of children’s game in which such

¹⁹ Perhaps a symbolic reference to the figtree of Adam (Gen. 3: 7; cf. John 1: 48).

²⁰ Persius, *Satires* 5. 66.

²¹ The oldest manuscript reads here ‘from the house of God’. The child’s voice is in any event a divine oracle to Augustine. The variant may echo Ps. 41: 5.

a chant is used. But I could not remember having heard of one. I checked the flood of tears and stood up. I interpreted it solely as a divine command to me to open the book and read the first chapter I might find. For I had heard how Antony happened to be present at the gospel reading, and took it as an admonition addressed to himself when the words were read: 'Go, sell all you have, give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me' (Matt. 19: 21).²² By such an inspired utterance he was immediately 'converted to you' (Ps. 50: 15). So I hurried back to the place where Alypius was sitting. There I had put down the book of the apostle when I got up. I seized it, opened it and in silence read the first passage on which my eyes lit: 'Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts' (Rom. 13: 13-14).

I neither wished nor needed to read further. At once, with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled.

(30) Then I inserted my finger or some other mark in the book and closed it. With a face now at peace I told everything to Alypius. What had been going on in his mind, which I did not know, he disclosed in this way. He asked to see the text I had been reading. I showed him, and he noticed a passage following that which I had read. I did not know how the text went on; but the continuation was 'Receive the person who is weak in faith' (Rom. 14: 1). Alypius applied this to himself, and he made that known to me. He was given confidence by this admonition. Without any agony of hesitation he joined me in making a good resolution and affirmation of intention, entirely congruent with his moral principles in which he had long been greatly superior to me. From there we went in to my mother, and told her. She was filled with joy. We told her how it had happened. She exulted, feeling it to be a triumph, and blessed you who 'are powerful to do more than we ask or think' (Eph. 3: 20). She saw that you had granted her far more than she had long been praying for in her unhappy and tearful groans.

The effect of your converting me to yourself was that I did not

²² Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 2.

now seek a wife and had no ambition for success in this world. I stood firm upon that rule of faith on which many years before you had revealed me to her.²³ You 'changed her grief into joy' (Ps. 29: 12) far more abundantly than she desired, far dearer and more chaste than she expected when she looked for grandchildren begotten of my body.

²³ See above, III. xi (19-20).

BOOK X

Memory

i (1) May I know you, who know me. May I 'know as I also am known' (1 Cor. 13: 12). Power of my soul, enter into it and fit it for yourself, so that you may have and hold it 'without spot or blemish' (Eph. 5: 27). This is my hope, and that is why I speak. In this hope I am placing my delight when my delight is in what it ought to be. As to the other pleasures of life, regret at their loss should be in inverse proportion to the extent to which one weeps for losing them. The less we weep for them, the more we ought to be weeping. 'Behold, you have loved the truth' (Ps. 51: 8), for he who 'does the truth comes to the light' (John 3: 21). This I desire to do, in my heart before you in confession, but before many witnesses with my pen.

ii (2) Indeed, Lord, to your eyes, the abyss of human consciousness is naked (Heb. 4: 13). What could be hidden within me, even if I were unwilling to confess it to you? I would be hiding you from myself, not myself from you. Now, however, my groaning is witness that I am displeased with myself. You are radiant and give delight and are so an object of love and longing that I am ashamed of myself and reject myself. You are my choice, and only by your gift can I please either you or myself. Before you, then, Lord, whatever I am is manifest, and I have already spoken of the benefit I derive from making confession to you. I am not doing this merely by physical words and sounds, but by words from my soul and a cry from my mind, which is known to your ear. When I am evil, making confession to you is simply to be displeased with myself. When I am good, making confession to you is simply to make no claim on my own behalf, for you, Lord, 'confer blessing on the righteous' (Ps. 5: 13) but only after you have first 'justified the ungodly' (Rom. 4: 5). Therefore, my God, my confession before you is made both in silence and not in silence. It is silent in that it is no audible sound; but in love it cries aloud. If anything I say to men is right, that is what you have first heard from me. Moreover, you hear nothing true from my lips which you have not first told me.

iii (3) Why then should I be concerned for human readers to hear my confessions? It is not they who are going to 'heal my sicknesses' (Ps. 102: 3). The human race is inquisitive about other people's lives, but negligent to correct their own. Why do they demand to hear from me what I am when they refuse to hear from you what they are? And when they hear me talking about myself, how can they know if I am telling the truth, when no one 'knows what is going on in a person except the human spirit which is within' (1 Cor. 2: 11)? But if they were to hear about themselves from you, they could not say 'The Lord is lying'. To hear you speaking about oneself is to know oneself.¹ Moreover, anyone who knows himself and says 'That is false' must be a liar. But 'love believes all things' (1 Cor. 13: 7), at least among those love has bonded to itself and made one. I also, Lord, so make my confession to you that I may be heard by people to whom I cannot prove that my confession is true. But those whose ears are opened by love believe me.

(4) Nevertheless, make it clear to me, physician of my most intimate self, that good results from my present undertaking. Stir up the heart when people read and hear the confessions of my past wickednesses, which you have forgiven and covered up to grant me happiness in yourself, transforming my soul by faith and your sacrament. Prevent their heart from sinking into the sleep of despair and saying 'It is beyond my power.' On the contrary, the heart is aroused in the love of your mercy and the sweetness of your grace, by which every weak person is given power, while dependence on grace produces awareness of one's own weakness. Good people are delighted to hear about the past sins of those who have now shed them. The pleasure is not in the evils as such, but that though they were so once, they are not like that now.²

My Lord, every day my conscience makes confession, relying on the hope of your mercy as more to be trusted than its own innocence. So what profit is there, I ask, when, to human readers, by this book I confess to you who I now am, not what I once was? The profit derived from confessing my past I have seen and spoken about. But

¹ Like Plotinus and Porphyry, Augustine understood the Delphic maxim 'Know yourself' as the path to knowing God; conversely, knowing God is the way to self-knowledge. Plotinus 5. 3. 7. 2 f.

² The paragraph shows Augustine sensitive to the possibility that some among his readers may have a prurient interest in the record of his sexual excesses in youth.

what I now am at this time when I am writing my confessions many wish to know, both those who know me and those who do not but have heard something from me or about me; their ear is not attuned to my heart at the point where I am whatever I am. So as I make my confession, they wish to learn about my inner self, where they cannot penetrate with eye or ear or mind. Yet although they wish to do that and are ready to believe me, they cannot really have certain knowledge. The love which makes them good people tells them that I am not lying in confessing about myself, and the love in them believes me.

iv (5) But what edification do they hope to gain by this? Do they desire to join me in thanksgiving when they hear how, by your gift, I have come close to you, and do they pray for me when they hear how I am held back by my own weight? To such sympathetic readers I will indeed reveal myself. For it is no small gift, my Lord God, if 'many give you thanks on our account' (2 Cor. 1: 11), and if many petition you on our behalf. A brotherly mind will love in me what you teach to be lovable, and will regret in me what you teach to be regrettable. This is a mark of a Christian brother's mind, not an outsider's—not that of 'the sons of aliens whose mouth speaks vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of iniquity' (Ps. 143: 7 f.). A brotherly person rejoices on my account when he approves me, but when he disapproves, he grieves on my behalf. Whether he approves or disapproves, he is loving me. To such people I will reveal myself. They will take heart from my good traits, and sigh with sadness at my bad ones. My good points are instilled by you and are your gifts. My bad points are my faults and your judgements on them. Let them take heart from the one and regret the other. Let both praise and tears ascend in your sight from brotherly hearts, your censers. But you Lord, who take delight in the odour of your holy temple, 'have pity on me according to your mercy for your name's sake' (Ps. 50: 3). You never abandon what you have begun. Make perfect my imperfections.

(6) When I am confessing not what I was but what I am now, the benefit lies in this: I am making this confession not only before you with a secret exaltation and fear and with a secret grief touched by hope, but also in the ears of believing sons of men, sharers in my joy, conjoined with me in mortality, my fellow citizens and pilgrims,

some who have gone before, some who follow after, and some who are my companions in this life. They are your servants, my brothers, who by your will are your sons and my masters. You have commanded me to serve them if I wish to live with you and in dependence on you. This your word would have meant little to me if it had been only a spoken precept and had not first been acted out.³ For my part, I carry out your command by actions and words; but I discharge it under the protection of your wings (Ps. 16: 8; 35: 8). It would be a far too perilous responsibility unless under your wings my soul were submissive to you. My weakness is known to you. I am a child. But my Father ever lives and my protector is sufficient to guard me. He is one and the same who begat me and watches over me. You yourself are all my good qualities. You are the omnipotent one, who are with me even before I am with you. So, to those whom you command me to serve, I will reveal not who I was, but what I have now come to be and what I continue to be. 'But I do not sit in judgement on myself' (1 Cor. 4: 3). It is, therefore, in this spirit that I ask to be listened to.

v (7) You, Lord, are my judge. For even if 'no man knows the being of man except the spirit of man which is in him' (1 Cor. 2: 11), yet there is something of the human person which is unknown even to the 'spirit of man which is in him.' But you, Lord, know everything about the human person; for you made humanity. Although in your sight I despise myself and estimate myself to be dust and ashes (Gen. 18: 27), I nevertheless know something of you which I do not know about myself. Without question 'we see now through a mirror in an enigma', not yet 'face to face' (1 Cor. 13: 12). For this cause, as long as I am a traveller absent from you (2 Cor. 5: 6), I am more present to myself than to you. Yet I know that you cannot be in any way subjected to violence,⁴ whereas I do not know which temptations I can resist and which I cannot. There is hope because 'you are faithful and do not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear, but with the temptation make also a way of escape so that we can bear it' (1 Cor. 10: 13). Accordingly, let me confess what I know of myself. Let me confess too what I do not know of myself. For what I know of myself I know because you grant me light, and

³ By Jesus Christ.

⁴ Manichees held the opposite opinion.

what I do not know of myself, I do not know until such time as my darkness becomes 'like noonday' before your face (Isa. 58: 10).

vi (8) My love for you, Lord, is not an uncertain feeling but a matter of conscious certainty. With your word you pierced my heart, and I loved you. But heaven and earth and everything in them on all sides tell me to love you. Nor do they cease to tell everyone that 'they are without excuse' (Rom. 1: 20). But at a profounder level you will have mercy on whom you will have mercy and will show pity on whom you will have pity (Rom. 9: 15). Otherwise heaven and earth would be uttering your praises to the deaf. But when I love you, what do I love? It is not physical beauty nor temporal glory nor the brightness of light dear to earthly eyes, nor the sweet melodies of all kinds of songs, nor the gentle odour of flowers and ointments and perfumes, nor manna or honey, nor limbs welcoming the embraces of the flesh; it is not these I love when I love my God. Yet there is a light I love, and a food, and a kind of embrace when I love my God—a light, voice, odour, food, embrace of my inner man, where my soul is floodlit by light which space cannot contain, where there is sound that time cannot seize, where there is a perfume which no breeze disperses, where there is a taste for food no amount of eating can lessen, and where there is a bond of union that no satiety can part. That is what I love when I love my God.⁵

(9) And what is the object of my love? I asked the earth and it said: 'It is not I.' I asked 'all that is in it; they made the same confession (Job 28: 12 f.). I asked the sea, the deeps, the living creatures that creep, and they responded: 'We are not your God, look beyond us.' I asked the breezes which blow and the entire air with its inhabitants said: 'Anaximenes was mistaken; I am not God.' I asked heaven, sun, moon and stars; they said: 'Nor are we the God whom you seek.' And I said to all these things in my external environment: 'Tell me of my God who you are not, tell me something about him.' And with a great voice they cried out: 'He made us' (Ps. 99: 3). My question was the attention I gave to them, and their response was their beauty.

⁵ Cf. above viii. iv (9). The mystical idea of five spiritual senses (repeated in x. xxvii (38)) was developed already by Origen in the third century. For the ecstasy of Christ's arrow, like Cupid, see above ix. ii (3).

⁶ Anaximenes of Miletus, in the sixth century BC, held air to be the origin of all else, and to be divine (cf. *City of God* 8. 5). The argument of Augustine here is strikingly like Plotinus 3. 2. 3. 20 ff.