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What Licentius Learned: A Narrative Reading of the Cassiciacum Dialogues[1]

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The Cassiciacum dialogues are Augustine's earliest extant writings, and thus a touchstone for any account of the development of his thought. One of their distinctive features is that, unlike his later philosophical dialogues, they tell a story. Taken together, the first three of them, *Contra Academicos, De Beata Vita,* and *De Ordine,* unfold a single narrative plotline, with characters coming and going, entering and leaving the conversation, and pursuing a definite order of discussion.[2] The point of the discussions emerges when we examine the shape of this plotline, which can in turn be seen most clearly from the point of view of one particular character, Licentius. At least that is the hypothesis I would like to test here, by reading the dialogues in narrative order, focussing on the character of Licentius.

Taking Licentius' point of view means paying special attention to the surface of the Cassiciacum dialogues. We will be passing by many of Augustine's deeper and more speculative thoughts, including his recent Platonist reading, in order to focus primarily on what he has to teach a beginning student who we may presume has never read Plotinus or Porphyry. The Licentius portrayed in the dialogues is an enthusiastic and promising young man, a budding poet who spends much of his free time writing verses, but whose philosophical

1. This article is the complete version of a short paper read at the 22nd International Patristic, Medieval and Renaissance Studies Conference at Villanova University, September 12, 1997.

2. On the reconstruction of this narrative order, cf. Appendix.

education does not seem to go beyond some reading in Cicero. He and his friend Tygretius, another of Augustine's students, have joined Augustine, his family and friends in retiring to the villa at Cassiciacum outside Milan, where they pursue various studies and engage in philosophical discussions.

The Cassiciacum dialogues are presented as written versions of these discussions, but I accept O'Meara's argument that they are substantially fictional.[3] Of course this does not mean that there were no actual conversations of this sort at Cassiciacum—quite the contrary—but only that what we are reading is Augustine's composition, not the work of a stenographer. This is a important premise of my interpretation: the plotline of Augustine's dialogues is not determined by how the actual conversations happened to go at Cassiciacum, but must be understood as a product of Augustine's literary art, aimed at making Augustine's philosophical point. Which is simply to say we should read Augustine's philosophical dialogues the way we read anyone else's.

Another important premise of interpretation is that the Cassiciacum dialogues are pedagogical in focus. Like Plato's Socratic dialogues (and interestingly, unlike Cicero's philosophical dialogues), the nature of teaching and learning is near the center of attention here, not only as a topic of conversation but as a matter for drama. The Cassiciacum dialogues do not just talk about the search for wisdom and truth; they dramatize it. And Licentius is at the center of the drama. He is the son of Romanianus, the wealthy patron to whom Augustine dedicates the *Contra Academicos* (1:1).[4] Augustine at several junctures in the dialogue assesses Licentius' progress for the benefit of his father, and even presents him as an example for Romanianus to follow.[5] Hence what Licentius learns in the course of these discussions is a model for what one reader, at least, stands to gain by entering into the life of philosophy with Augustine.

3. J. J. O'Meara, *St. Augustine: Against the Academics* (Westminster: Newman, 1950), pp. 24-32.

4. Romanianus is also the dedicatee of *De Vera Religione* (cf. 12, and the accompanying letter, *Ep.* 15). On his interest in joining Augustine in the philosophic life, cf. *Conf.* 6:2. Outside of the Cassiciacum dialogues, we know of Licentius from a letter Augustine wrote to him exhorting him to a more serious pursuit of wisdom (Ep. 26:2) and Christ (26:5f) and commenting on a poem Licentius had written about the experience of studying at Cassiciacum with him (26:3f).

5. In *C. Acad.* 1:4, Augustine ventures to propose that Romanianus should imitate his own son, in 1:25 he hopes that reading about the philosophic life Licentius is living at Cassiciacum will kindle Romanianus' interest in these studies, and in 2:18 the whole company nearly dissolves into tears at the thought of Romanianus' estrangement from philosophy and Licentius prays that he may one day be joining in their discussions. The metaphor of kindling in 1:25 is particularly interesting, as it suggests that Augustine hopes his writing will do the same thing for Romanianus that Cicero's *Hortensius* and the books of Plotinus did for Augustine, both of which had the effect of kindling a desire for philosophy in him (*De B.V.* 4; cf. *C. Acad.* 2:5).

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The character of Licentius is thus a mirror held up by the author, in which a reader is invited to see himself. But by the same token, I would add, this is a mirror in which we may see the author, as Licentius' experiences at Cassiciacum lead him to enter the same road that Augustine himself entered a few months earlier in Milan, the road of the philosophic pursuit of wisdom.

I. Happiness and Wisdom

The plotline begins with the three days of discussions in the first book of *Contra Academicos*. Interestingly enough, in this first book the sceptical philosophy of the Academy, which is the topic and target of the treatise as a whole, is left unnamed until near the end, when Augustine in his summary of the discussion mentions that the position Licentius has been defending is that of the Academics (1:24). The discussion does not begin with reference to the Academics but with Augustine setting his two students, Licentius and Tygretius, to debate the question of whether one can be happy without knowing the truth (1:5).

Tygretius makes the first point in the discussion, that "we certainly do want [*volumus*] to be happy."[6] It is a point no one disagrees with, not only because it is so obvious, but because they have all read it in Cicero's *Hortensius*.[7] In beginning the discussion this way, our author[8] is in fact imitating the *Hortensius*, in which the discussion began precisely with this dictum: that we all certainly want to be happy.[9] Hence the opening theme of the Cassiciacum discussions is not the topic announced by the title of the first treatise ("Against the Academics") but that announced by the second ("On the Happy Life"). For "happy life" (*beata vita*) is simply Cicero's usual translation of the Greek word for

6. *C. Acad.* 1:5. (All translations are mine; citations are by book and paragraph, omitting chapter numbers whenever they are redundant).

7. Augustine mentions in the preface that the *Hortensius* had already largely won Licentius and Tygretius over to philosophy (*C. Acad.* 1:4). Thus the Cassiciacum discussions, and with them Licentius' involvement in philosophy, are set in motion by the same text which initially turned Augustine's heart to seek wisdom (*De B.V.* 4, *Conf.* 3:7f).

8. So long as the narrative of the Cassiciacum dialogues is under discussion in the text, I will use this phrase to designate Augustine as their author, reserving the name "Augustine" to designate the character within the dialogues.

9. Augustine tells us in *De Trin.* 13:7 that this dictum, *beati certe omnes esse volumus,* served as the exordium of the discussion in *Hortensius.* The dictum recurs again and again in Augustine's works, especially at the head of important discussions (e.g., *C. Acad.* 1:5, *De B. V.* 10, *De Lib. Arb.* 2:26ff, *Conf.* 10:29ff, *Civ. Dei* 10:1). Cf. H. Hagendahl, *Augustine and the Latin Classics* (Göteborg: Elanders Boktryckeri Aktiebolag, 1967), p. 81ff, for further references.

happiness, *eudaimonia,*[10] which all the philosophers agree is the ultimate goal of human life.[11] The question about which the various schools of philosophy disagree—and it is the key question of ancient philosophical ethics—is what happiness actually consists in. Thus for example the modern tendency to think of happiness as a *feeling* would be acceptable only to the hedonists, who define happiness in terms of pleasure. The Academics, Stoics, and Peripatetics, on the contrary, all agree that happiness consists in wisdom—and this is a consensus in which our author, like Cicero, shares.

The *Hortensius* is modelled after one of the founding documents of this consensus, Aristotle's *Protrepticus,* whose basic argument is that if you want to be happy you should philosophize, i.e. seek wisdom as an end in itself, indeed as the ultimate end which will make you happy.[12] This Aristotelian argument is imitated by Cicero in the *Hortensius,*[13] which is in turn imitated by our author in the first two books of the Cassiciacum dialogues. Together, these two books (i.e. book 1 of *Contra Academicos* followed by *De Beata Vita*) form a Christian protreptic discourse,[14] an exhortation to philosophize. Philosophy, as our author loves to point out, is not the special property of the pagan traditions that go by that name, for it simply means the love or pursuit of wisdom.[15] What our author brings to philosophy as a Christian is the conviction that the Wisdom philosophers seek is none other than Christ, who is the Wisdom of God—a point which is made at the climax of his protreptic discourse.[16] Thus the Cassiciacum writings intend a synthesis of Christianity and philosophy

10. E.g., when Cicero translates the title of Theophrastus' treatise *Peri Eudaimonia,* it comes out *De Beata Vita* (in *De Fin.* 5:12 and *Tusc.* 5:24)—the same as the title of Augustine's treatise.

11. Cf. Augustine's survey of this philosophical territory in *Civ. Dei* 19:1-4, and for the historical background cf. R. Holte, *Béatitude et Sagesse: Saint Augustin et le problème de la fin de l'homme dans la philosophie ancienne* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1962), esp. Part 1.

12. The *Protrepticus* is not extant, though we have extensive fragments, collected in W. D. Ross, *The Works of Aristotle,* vol. 12, *Select Fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952). Note also the attempts to reconstruct the *Protrepticus* as a nearly complete whole by I. Düring, *Der Protreptikos des Aristoteles* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1969), and by A.-H. Chroust, *Protrepticus: a Reconstruction* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1954).

13. The *Hortensius* also is not extant, and the fragments that have survived are much less extensive than those of *Protrepticus.* Most of what we know about it comes from Augustine's quotations and from inferences based on the fact that it was modelled on the *Protrepticus,* as we are told by ancient writers (Ross, p. 27). Cf. M. Ruch, *L'Hortensius de Cicéron: histoire et reconstitution* (Paris: Les belles lettres, 1958).

14. Cf. Appendix.

15. E.g., *De Ord.* 1:32, *C. Acad.* 3:20 (where the phrase *studium sapientiae* is derived from Cicero, *Tusc.* 1:1 or perhaps from the *Hortensius*—cf. Boethius' reference to the latter in *De Diff Top.* 2, PL 64:1187d-1188a); *Conf.* 3:8, *Civ. Dei* 8:1, *De Trin.* 14:2.

working backward from the goal (Christ as Wisdom) to the initial motivation (the desire for happiness).

Thus at the outset of the Cassiciacum dialogues the trivial-sounding dictum, "We want to be happy," is already aimed implicitly at Christ, as the eternal Wisdom of God. The desire for happiness is not only the opening theme of the Cassiciacum discussions, but the motivation driving them. When Licentius enters these discussions, therefore, he is stepping into the tension between the most fundamental of all human desires and its ultimate fulfillment. He initiates a controversy, however, by proposing to leave that tension unresolved. He takes up his position in the debate by answering Augustine's opening question in the negative: we do not need to possess a knowledge of the truth in order to be happy, he argues, for it is sufficient simply to be diligently seeking the truth. Licentius too appeals to Cicero's authority, quoting from the *Hortensius* that "whoever searches for the truth is happy, even if he is unable to arrive at the finding of it."[17] This view is part and parcel of Cicero's espousal of the Academic philosophy,[18] and can claim a lineage that goes back through the Hellenistic Academy to Socrates.[19] In effect Licentius is confirming

16. Cf. *De B.V.* 34, where Christ is identified not only with Wisdom but also with Truth. For both identifications there is of course Biblical authority (1 Cor. 1:24 and John 14:6, respectively). The identification of Christ with Wisdom also governs Augustine's comments on his initial reading of the *Hortensius* in *Conf.* 3:8. For what Cicero's text exhorted him to seek was "not this or that philosophical school, but Wisdom itself, whatever it may be," and the only thing holding him back then was that "the name of Christ was not there." What he did not seem to realize at the time is that "Christ" may be the name of that Wisdom which the philosophers seek. But now at Cassiciacum that realization guides his use of the *Hortensius,* and of the rest of his philosophical reading as well.

17. *C. Acad.* 1:7, quoting *Hortensius,* fragment 101 (cf. Hagendahl, p. 491).

18. Licentius refers to Cicero's Academic views (without mentioning the Academics by name) in *C. Acad.* 1:7: "who does not know that he [Cicero] forcefully affirmed that nothing can be grasped by man and that nothing remains for the wise man but the most diligent inquiry into Truth [*diligentissimam inquisitionem veritatis*]. . . ."

19. Cicero traced the sceptical dialectic of the Academics back to Socrates in *De Fin.* 2:2, *De Nat. Deor.* 1:11 and *Acad.* 1:44f, a view endorsed by A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy* (London: Duckworth, 1986), p. 89f, D. Sedley, "The Motivation of Greek Skepticism" in Burnyeat, M., *The Skeptical Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California, 1983), p. 10, and Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers,* 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1987) 1:5 and 1:445. For the scepticism of the Academy as based on unending inquiry (*skepsis*) rather than systematic doubt, cf. the highly suggestive work by H. Tarrant, *Scepticism or Platonism? The Philosophy of the Fourth Academy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1985), esp. ch. 1. For recent efforts to fill in the details of the Academic sceptics' debts to Socrates, cf. J. Annas "Plato the Skeptic" in P. Vander Waerdt, *The Socratic Movement* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1994), as well as C. Shields "Socrates among the Skeptics" in *ibid.*, pp. 341-366.

the account of the good life which Socrates offered in Plato's *Apology*: "the greatest good *for a human being* is to spend every day in discussion about virtue and the other things about which you hear me discussing and examining myself and others, for the life without examination is not a life for a human being. . . . "[20]

The qualification "for a human being" must not be overlooked, however. For while a continual Socratic seeking for truth may make the best life for a human being—that is evidently how it seemed to the sceptical Academics, at any rate—there is another wing of the Platonist tradition, beginning with Plato's greatest student and culminating in neo-Platonism, which ascribes the possession and contemplation of truth to a part of ourselves that is more than human, the immortal and divine mind within us. The contrast between the merely human good of virtue and the divine good of contemplation, first worked out by Aristotle, had by Augustine's time become a commonplace, especially in the genre of protreptic literature to which the *Hortensius* and the first book of *Contra Academicos* belong.[21]

Licentius uses this distinction to defend his position, arguing that possession of the truth is a divine, not human attribute, and that for a properly human happiness the mere search for truth is sufficient. Whoever gives all the effort he can or should give to the finding of truth is doing all he was born to do as a human being, and therefore is happy even if he does not find the truth he is seeking (1:9). Criticizing Augustine's stock definition of wisdom as "a knowledge of things divine and human,"[22] Licentius proposes rather to define wisdom so as to include both knowledge and the quest for knowledge, the one divine, the other human (1:23).

However, he adds that after this mortal life a wise man is morally prepared to enjoy the properly divine happiness of possessing knowledge, not merely seeking it (*ibid.*). But this implies, as Licentius mentions earlier, that "there is without doubt a divine power [*virtus*] even in a human being."[23] For in devoting

20. Plato, *Apol.* 38a (emphasis added).

21. Cf. Plato, *Rep.* 9:589c-590a, Aristotle, *Protrepticus,* Fragment 10c (Ross), *N. Ethics* 10:7, 1170b26-1178a2, Plotinus *Enneads* 1:2.7 (end), and Cicero's *Hortensius,* as quoted at length in Augustine *De Trin.* 14:12.

22. *C. Acad.* 1:16. The definition is a commonplace, familiar to Augustine probably from Cicero, e.g., *Tusc.* 4:57, *De Fin Off.* 2:5, *De Fin.* 2:37.

23. This is the translation demanded by the context of discussion, although the Latin also admits of the translation, "for without doubt virtue is divine even in a human being" (*nam virtus etiam in homine sine dubitatione divina est*), *C. Acad.* 1:22. Talk of a divine *virtus* in us may echo

himself to rational inquiry a human being is, even in this mortal life, "living according to the divine part of the mind."[24] Our author seems to agree with Licentius on this score, as he opens the *Contra Academicos* by portraying the odyssey of "the divine mind inhering in mortals"[25] trying to find its way home to the port of wisdom.[26]

The question of whether the mere search for truth is sufficient for happiness is taken up again in *De Beata Vita,* which is the immediate sequel to the first book of *Contra Academicos.* When the treatise opens, it is Augustine's birthday, and he proposes to serve his guests a birthday meal consisting of food for the soul. After leading an introductory discussion elucidating the metaphor of food for the soul, he proceeds to the meal itself, which begins—once again—with Cicero's dictum, "We want to be happy."[27] Thereupon Augustine gets everyone to agree to the premise that one cannot be happy without having what one wants (§10). Indeed, Augustine proposes, what one needs to get in order to be happy is precisely that which one can have whenever one wants it.[28] He draws thence the conclusion—welcomed by everyone in the discussion–that in order to be happy one must want to have something which cannot be destroyed or taken away, something eternal, namely God (§11).

But when Augustine proceeds to apply this premise to the issues of the previous discussion, Licentius refuses to swallow it. For the application is that the Academics, who seek truth but do not find it, do not have what they want, and therefore are not happy (§13f). Licentius sees that in order to defend the

Ciceronian usage (cf. the divine *vis* in our souls, *Tusc.* 1:64f and 1:70) but probably what Augustine ultimately has in mind is something Christological, for (as Augustine's translation of 1 Cor. 1:24 consistently has it) Christ is "the Wisdom of God and the *Virtus* of God"; cf. conclusion below.

24. *secundam divinam illam partem animi viventes, C.Acad.* 1:11.

25. *divinum animum mortalibus inhaerentem, C. Acad.* 1:1.

26. The metaphor is Ciceronian (*Tusc.* 5:5) but the thought is probably neoPlatonist (cf. *Enneads* 5:1.1 and 1:6.8 on the soul's return home). On Augustine's early flirtation with the notion of the soul's divinity (a theme which Cicero and the Manichaeans have in common with the neo-Platonists) cf. R. J. O'Connell, *St. Augustine's Early Theory of Man* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1968), pp. 31-32 and 112-131.

27. *De B.V.* 1:10. This time our author makes it explicit that Cicero's exordium is also his own: *ego rursus exordiens: Beatos nos esse volumus, inquam.*

28. *ei conparandum est, quod cum vult habet* (*De Beata Vita* 2:11). This later becomes a key notion in the first book of *De Libero Arbitrio* (cf. esp. 1:25f), Augustine's first systematic treatment of the notion of will or *voluntas.* Much of Augustine's concern with the will seems to grow out of the relation between happiness and will, as designated by the adjective and the verb in the Ciceronian dictum, ***Beati** certe omnes esse **volumus.***

Academics he must deny the premise that in order to be happy one must have what one wants—and this is a denial which he himself finds so unpersuasive that he tries to retract it immediately after making it (§15). He is thus driven to the very brink of admitting that happiness requires finding and not merely seeking truth—but he does not yet capitulate.[29] Something more than argument must push him over the brink.

II. Inspiration and Discipline

Licentius goes over the brink in a veritable conversion narrated in *De Ordine,* book 1. Questioned by Augustine in the middle of the night about the order by which God governs the universe, Licentius seems to find himself inspired and bursts into rhapsodic defense of the position that there is nothing outside or apart from order, not even evil or our own ignorance. Into his mouth our author puts his first statement of the Plotinian theodicy, according to which evil has its place in the whole providential order of the cosmos.[30] In a series of broad hints our author portrays this discovery as the result of a truly divine inspiration, which causes Licentius to see the truth in the midst of the darkness of our oblivion and ignorance. At one point, for example, Licentius abruptly rises and stands over Tygretius's bed, speaking in a voice of dread authority that leaves Tygretius "suddenly impressed and shaken by the discourse of his friend and fellow student, imparted by a new inspiration."[31]

29. Later, the company discusses an ethical version of Licentius' view. They find they must reject the notion that someone who lives a morally good life already has a happy life (*De B.V.* 17-20). For to live a morally good life is to do God's will and seek him (18), and if that was sufficient for happiness then one could have happiness merely by seeking God, without possessing him (20)—and that would mean one could be happy without having what one wants (21). They all realize that unless they want to hand victory in the debate to Licentius, they cannot accept this line of reasoning, and therefore must reject the premise. *Bene vivere* is not the same as *beate vivere.*

30. *De Ord.* 1:18f. The basic inspiration for this theodicy is surely Plotinus' treatise "On Providence," *Enneads* 3:2f. On Augustine's acquaintance with this treatise at this time, cf. A. Solignac "Réminiscences plotiniennes et porphyriennes dans le début du *De Ordine* de saint Augustin" in *Archives de Philosophie* 20 (1957) 446-465, as well as O'Meara, p. 170, n. 17. That this Plotinian insight should be put in the mouth of Licentius, who we must assume has not read Plotinus, is highly significant; cf. conclusion below.

31. *admirans et horrens subito condiscipuli et familiaris sui afflatum nova inspiratione sermonem, De Ord.* 1:19.

32. *De Ord.* 1:10. The line is *Aeneid* 10:875: *Sic pater ille deus faciat, sic altus Apollo.* Virgil's text has *pater ille deum,* referring to Zeus as father of the gods (*deum* is a contraction of *deorum*), but Augustine's text is *pater ille deus,* "God the Father." Augustine only quotes the first half of the line (up to the comma) but refers to "high Apollo" two sentences later. His students can be expected to catch the allusion, because they have been studying Virgil with Augustine at Cassiciacum, *C. Acad.* 2:10 and *De Ord.* 1:26.

33. *Nec enim altus Apollo est . . . alius ille altus veridicus atque ipsa—quid enim verbis ambiam?—veritas, cujus vates sunt, quicumque possunt esse sapientes* (*De Ord.* 1:10).

34. *Conf.* 3:8. See n. 16, above.

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There is an important shift of literary strategy here, as our author moves from discussing the relation of truth and happiness to dramatizing it. For Licentius the importance of these night thoughts is that he is no longer just talking about finding truth but doing it. Unlike Tygretius and even Augustine, Licentius insists from the beginning that he is certain (*certus*) about the fact that nothing exists apart from order—so that his fellow-student Tygretius can remark with joy that Licentius is no longer an Academic, despite his earlier defense of their views (1:10). In fact at this point Licentius has nothing but impatience for the very mention of the Academics, for he does not want to be distracted from "that divine thing, I don't know what, which is beginning to show itself to me" (*ibid.*). Augustine is overjoyed to hear this and alludes to a line of Virgil about the doings of God the Father and high Apollo.[32]

It is striking that our author chooses just this moment of divine inspiration to insert pagan religious language into his narrative. Perhaps this is an indirect way of acknowledging that the opinions he puts into Licentius' mouth have non-Christian sources, like the Platonist insights which have recently played such an important role in his own return to the Catholic Church. But more likely his point is that pagan religion and philosophy is not an independent "source" at all, for the source of any truth it contains is the same Truth which Christians know by the name of Christ. At any rate, he makes it quite clear that his reference to pagan religion is not to be taken literally, as he promptly allegorizes Virgil's "high Apollo," interpreting him as none other than "that high and truthful—why should I mince words?—Truth itself, whose prophets are whoever can become wise."[33] It seems the divine Truth is available to all, be they pagan or Christian. Yet by the same token there can be no doubt that the Truth to which Augustine refers here is the same to which he refers at the end of *De Beata Vita*—namely Christ. Thus Virgil's *Aeneid* seems to be in the same situation as Cicero's *Hortensius*, which points toward Wisdom ("whatever that might be") but does not contain the name of Christ, who is divine Wisdom in person.[34] It is as if to say: the wise among the pagans have caught a glimpse of the highest Truth but did not know that its name is Christ (they knew something of the *res* but not its *nomen*).

Finding the right names for the things one sees turns out in fact to be a matter of great difficulty. Throughout the discussion it is as if the Truth arises from the depths of the night to shine upon them for one brief resplendent moment in the midst of the darkness. There is no need now for Augustine to be Licentius' teacher (1:12), and indeed the insight Licentius struggles to articulate seems quite beyond the feeble powers of human language to teach. The would-be poet is at a loss for words, and "as if rapt in mind he exclaims, 'O if I could only say what I want to! . . . Both good and evil are in order. Believe it if you want to, for I don't know how to explain it" (1:16). He finally delivers his key speech "groaning over the difficulty of words" (1:18).

Yet in the light of day we hear the name we have been expecting. The next morning Licentius gives thanks to Christ, announcing that he has suddenly become attracted to philosophy rather than poetry, because "a different light, far different, has been shed upon me by I know not what."[35] Augustine hears him heartily singing a Psalm about conversion: "O God of virtues, convert us and show us Thy face, and we shall be saved."[36] He had been chanting it over and over again, all day yesterday, even in the privy (1:22). Monica objected to this, but Augustine backs him up. It is as fitting to sing of conversion in a place of filth as it is in a time of darkness, for in conversion we turn away from bodily uncleanness as well as the darkness of error in which we find ourselves, and we seek the face of the God of virtues, which is Truth (1:23). In Augustine's judgment, in fact, Licentius' chanted prayer has been answered: the God of virtues has indeed shown himself to Licentius in his conversion.[37]

So Licentius' insight in the middle of the night must count as a conversion. If we want to know our author's view of conversion at this time in his life, then here is the place to look. His dramatization of Licentius' conversion gives us a picture of what he thinks conversion consists in, only a few months after his own conversion in the summer of 386—much closer to the event than the famous conversion scene in book 8 of the *Confessions*. Licentius' conversion in fact looks more like the philosophical insight described in book 7 of the *Confessions*: the key moment in both cases is not the reading of Scripture (with the eyes of the body!) but the mind's glimpse of divine Truth in the midst of a life of darkness and sin.[38]

The problem which results, here as in the *Confessions*, is that the brief glimpse is followed by a falling back into darkness, because of intellectual weakness and the inability to gaze steadfastly at the Truth. At the end of their night talk Augustine promises to test Licentius' ability to hang on to his newfound insight with hard questions in the next day's discussion (1:20). At issue is whether the sudden inspiration of the night can survive in the light of day. Is the moment of divine insight something one can hold onto through the days of mortal time? In practice, this depends on whether the thing that is glimpsed by the mind can be expressed adequately in words.[39] For, as Augustine notes at the beginning of the day's discussion, he wants their words to be recorded in writing "so as not to lose the words concerning these things, and to fasten the things themselves by writing, as if leading them back in chains when they have fled from memory" (1:27). The task, then, is to get the thing, the *res* which was glimpsed in a flash of insight last night, into words, so it can be recalled even in moments when one is no longer inspired. And getting the thing into words turns out to be agonizingly impossible.

To begin with, Augustine asks Licentius for a definition of order. Licentius reacts "as if he had been doused with cold water," shuddering and looking at his teacher with visible perturbation and an embarrassed smile.[40] He responds with a series of confused but resonant questions: "What sort of thing [*res*] is this? And what do you take me for? I don't know what strange spirit you think me inspired with [*inflatum*]." But then, suddenly recovering himself, he says "Or maybe—is there something with me?" and lapses into a brief silence "to

35. *alia, longe alia nescio quid mihi nunc luce resplenduit, De Ord.* 1:21. Cf. Augustine's description of his glimpse of God in *Conf.* 7:16—"It was not this [visible] light, but different, far different [*aliud, aliud valde*] from all such things."

36. Ps. 80:7 (=Vg, 79:8) The Greek *theōs ton dynameōn* (literally "God of [armed] forces"—in English, usually "God of hosts") has become *Deus virtutum,* in a translation parallel to that of 1 Cor. 1:24, where Greek *dynamis* comes out in Latin as *virtus.*

37. *Neque enim arbitror te frusta heri tam diu cecinisse, ut virtutum deus converso tibi se ostendat* (*De Ord.* 1:23).

38. Cf. esp. *Conf.* 7:16. The author of the *Confessions* does not use the language of conversion here, but only of the scene in the garden, *Conf.* 8:30.

39. To use terminology from a slightly later period in Augustine's career, the problem—or rather the impossibility—is to bring forth what is seen inwardly in the mind, and express it adequately in words that are merely external (cf. esp. *De Cat. Rud.* 3 for the phenomenon, *De Mag.* 33-38 for the explanation).

40. *De Ord.* 1:28. Licentius consistently resents being asked for definitions, saying "I am incapable of defining anything" (*C. Acad.* 1:10) and "I hate to define" (*De Ord.* 2:4).

gather together whatever his notion of order was into a definition."[41] But what ensues is a disaster: Licentius wins a quick victory over Tygretius in the debate,[42] then insists on keeping his opponent's mistake written in the record, "as if," Augustine remarks, "we were doing all this for the sake of vainglory" (1:29). Then, when Augustine rebukes Licentius on this score, Tygretius in turn giggles at Licentius' embarrassment (*ibid.*).

At this point the disputation is over, and Augustine reads the boys a lecture about the evil of substituting love of victory for love of truth. This is the sort of thing Augustine had left the schools of rhetoric in order to escape (1:30). There is an utter reversal of the imagery of the previous night: here in the daylight of external, public reasoning and debate, the precious glimpse of divine Light is swallowed up in human darkness, or rather in the false light of vainglory. The boys' lack of seriousness in pursuing philosophical inquiry shows that they do not see how deep is the darkness in which they dwell who are not yet wise. They are not ready, not morally pure enough, for philosophy.

How can we ever get from our present state of darkness and ignorance to the wisdom that philosophers seek? The second book *On Order* points to the path we must take. Resuming the discussion of the order by which God governs all things, it gradually comes to focus on the question of the place of the ignorant and unwise within that order. The question is first raised at a general level: are movable things *with God* or not? (2:3) Licentius is torn between wanting to say that whatever is with God remains unshakable, *inconcussum,* and wanting to acknowledge that even movable things are not without God. He feels on firmer ground when he speaks of the wise man, whose mind is immovable and therefore clearly with God.[43] But the case of ignorance—i.e.,

41. *De Ord.* 1:28. Note how different this is from the casual way definitions are proffered in Plato's dialogues, where one's first stab at a definition is destined to be a thing of the moment, soon to be replaced by more refined versions as the process of dialectical criticism unfolds. For the characters in Augustine's dialogues, on the contrary, definitions appear to be the outcome of a deep and perilous process of taking a direct look at the object of one's inner vision (however blurred and out of focus) and then trying to fix it in mere words. Tygretius expresses the perils and depths of this process after having one of his definitions roundly scouted by Licentius: "Somehow or other, when that notion has left behind the harbor of our minds and has stretched itself out in words like a sail, it immediately runs up against a thousand shipwrecks' worth of fallacies." (*C. Acad.* 1:15). The vocabulary anticipates the famous discussion of time as a stretching-out or *distentio* of the soul in *Conf.* 11:30-39; here a timeless insight has stretched itself out [*tetenderit*] in the temporal structure of words.

42. The debate turns on a fine point in trinitarian theology, indicating that all present are aware of and committed to the Nicene teaching that the Son of God is just as fully and properly God as the Father (1:29).

the situation in which all of us who are not wise find ourselves—is a more difficult problem. Ignorance, of course, is a form of mutability, of loss and change. While we may hesitate to affirm that there is ignorance with God (2:8), we will not do any better if we say that the ignorant person is without God or outside the divine order of things (2:11). For how can anything exist apart from God the Creator and the order by which he governs all things? Therefore the proper answer is as in book 1: even our ignorance is not apart from or outside the providential order by which God governs all things.[44]

Interestingly, Licentius is absent when this answer is given.[45] It is not clear whether he has physically left the circle of conversation or simply has his mind elsewhere.[46] In either case, Licentius' absence from the discussion

43. *De Ord.* 2:4-6. Licentius must concede that the lower functions of the wise man's soul, such as memory, deal with changeable things and therefore are movable. But his mind, with which he understands God, is immovable (2:6). Augustine remarks that Licentius heard this teaching from him (2:7). Does Plotinus' view of the higher and lower parts of the soul lie behind this? At any rate, the notion of something immutable that is inseparably present in the soul plays a central role in Augustine's attempt to prove the immortality of the soul in *Sol.* 2:22-24 and *De Immort. Anim.* 1-11; cf. Cary.

44. This verbal paradox runs throughout the *Confessions*: the sinner flees God, but can never find any place where God is not. The paradox is summed up, "You were with me, but I was not with you" (10:38—cf. also 5:2 on the impossibility of flight from God). The thought is not alien to the Bible (e.g., Psalm 139), but the conceptuality is specifically Plotinian (cf. esp. *Ennead* 6:9.7). The paradox arises because of God's integral omnipresence, which implies that there is nothing that can put a distance between us and God—except, somehow, sin and ignorance. Notice here the tight conceptual connection between issues of theodicy and of omnipresence, the two key problems which Augustine identifies early in *Conf.* 7 as keeping him from a proper understanding of the nature of God. Here in *De Ord.* he shifts from the one set of issues to the other smoothly and almost effortlessly, simply by changing a prepositional phrase and altering the form of the question from "Is X without God [*sine Deo*]?" (omnipresence) to "Is X outside order [*praeter ordinem*]?" (theodicy). For the omnipresence issue is not merely spatial, but ontological: without God no creature can even exist. And this ontological issue immediately implies the issue of theodicy: how then is the existence of evil, sin, and ignorance—which seem to be a sort of separation from God—even possible? In *De Ord.* we are supposed to learn that these things do not exist apart from God's providential order. But how they could have arisen in the first place—*unde malum*?—is a question that must be reserved for later.

45. The answer is first given by Tygretius (2:11), then developed by Augustine (2:12-17).

46. When Licentius' absence is first mentioned in passing (*Licentio prorsus absente*), it sounds as if he is simply not physically present (2:10). But when he returns, after "having been occupied for quite a while with some concern or other" (*tam diu nescio qua cura occupatus,* 2:17), the language suggests that perhaps he had simply been distracted, walking about nearby and turning things over in his mind, as he has been known to do before (*C. Acad.* 1:10). He is described as having been absent from their conversation *in mind* in *De Ord.* 2:21 (*absentiam a sermone nostro animi tui*).

appears to illustrate the only sense in which one can be absent from God, i.e., by turning one's attention away. It seems no accident that his absence is first remarked upon as they are about to discuss why ignorance is impossible to understand—just as darkness is, strictly speaking, impossible to see (2:10). Licentius' curious separation from the discussion seems to be a symbol of what separation from God is like: a separation of mind from Truth which is as difficult to explain as darkness is to visualize.

Licentius had acquitted himself rather well at the beginning of the discussion, but now he seems to have lost the insight he glimpsed in the first book of *De Ordine*. For upon his return to the discussion (2:17ff) he cannot find the answer which Tygretius has already given,[47] nor even remember that his own previous insights implied that answer. The great thing which had once been in his mind is now something he must remind himself of by reading the written record of the discussion that he has missed.[48] When pressed for definitions, he repeatedly asks that Augustine, with his quick mind, "anticipate the things themselves [*res ipsas*]" (2:20) for which Licentius has difficulty finding words.[49] Yet it seems in fact that the things themselves have fled from his mind. All he has left is the lifeless record of written words, or the verbal reminders of others.

As Augustine had predicted, the momentary flash of Truth in Licentius' mind has been obscured again by the darkness of oblivion. And things get worse before they get better, for as Augustine presses Licentius, the discussion is gradually attracted, as if magnetically, to the most difficult question of all—not simply whether evil and ignorance are encompassed by divine order, but where they came from in the first place—that great and terrible question: whence evil?[50] Soon Augustine has everyone, not just Licentius, agonizing over the dilemma: if evil arose apart from order then there is something apart from order (despite Licentius' earlier denials) but if it arose in order then it seems to have its origin by the order of God, which is a sacrilegious thing to say (2:23).

At this point, Augustine suggests to his friends, they have gotten out of order, because they are discussing matters they are not yet prepared for. Hence with their consent he shifts the topic of discussion from the *ordo rerum* to the

47. As Augustine notes, 2:21.

48. Augustine makes this point twice, 2:18 and 2:21.

49. Licentius makes this request in *De Ord.* 2:3 and renews it in 2:18 and 2:20.

50. For the importance and difficulty of this question, cf. *Conf.* 7:7 and 7:11.

ordo disciplinarum,[51] i.e. from the providential order of the universe to the proper order of studies, which will lead eventually to

> a certain high and exalted discipline far removed from the surmise of the many, [which] promises to show studious minds that love only God and the soul that all those things which we acknowledge to be perverse are nonetheless not outside the divine order—so that we are more certain of this than if we were adding numbers" (2:24).

This *ordo,* which Augustine proceeds to spell out at length in the rest of *De Ordine*, is a course of studies in the 7 liberal arts or disciplines, the last and highest of which is philosophy, whose subject matter is God and the soul.[52] The expectation that our certainty about these things will eventually exceed that of mathematics is a recurrent claim of the Cassiciacum dialogues.[53] The aim is to get beyond mere transitory glimpses of truth and attain a stable possession of it such as characterizes the wise man. In other words, the point of a proper liberal arts education is to see God (2:51). How this is possible—how Augustine can defend the extraordinary ambitiousness of his program of education—depends on the relation he sketches between God and the soul and Reason near the end of *On Order*, in his discussion of the discipline of philosophy.[54] Thus only at the end of Augustine's proposed course of studies is one in a position to understand its justification. Philosophy, the crowning discipline of the curriculum, shows how the relation of God and the rational soul makes possible what is in effect a program of education for beatific vision. But now Augustine must cut the discussion short, lest it exceed the bounds of moderation and order.[55] His interlocutors are not ready to understand the subject matter of philosophy (i.e., the relation of God and the soul) which is why Augustine must discuss it alone with himself—or rather with his Reason—in the *Soliloquies*.[56]

51. The relation between these two kinds of order is not adventitious. Wisdom's order of studies "is that by which anyone can be made capable of understanding the order of things" (*De Ord.* 2:47). Hence both are included in what Augustine says at the beginning of the discussion of order: "Order is that which leads to God, if we hold to it in life, and without which we will never reach God" (1:27).

52. *De Ord.* 2:47. This, of course, is precisely the subject matter of the *Soliloquies* (cf. 1:7).

53. Cf. in addition to *De Ord.* 2:24, *C. Acad.* 2:9 and *Sol.* 1:10. Cf. also *Conf.* 6:6. In a very Cartesian moment in *C. Acad.* 3:25, operations of elementary arithmetic are held up as something which remains certain even if we are dreaming.

54. *De Ord.* 2:43-51; cf. esp. 2:48-50 on the relation of reason, the soul and God (note in this discussion that Unity, like Truth, is a name for God).

55. *De Ord.* 2:50.

56. Cf. the poignant intellectual loneliness of *Sol.* 2:26.

At this point, then, the reach of Augustine's philosophical project at Cassiciacum extends beyond Licentius' grasp. But the fact that this order of disciplines includes the study of literature does explain some surprising advice which Augustine gave Licentius earlier, immediately after hearing of his turning from poetry to philosophy. For he tells him to turn back to the study of poetry!

> If you care for order, then you must return to those verses! For instruction in the liberal disciplines, so long as it is moderate and concise, makes for more alacrity, perseverance, and preparation in lovers who embrace Truth, that they might the more ardently desire and steadfastly pursue and adhere in the end the more sweetly to what is called, Licentius, the happy life.[57]

The study of poetry should be "moderate and concise," we may suppose, in contrast to the kind of immoderate weeping over Dido that figured in our author's own education.[58] Hence Augustine has some advice for Licentius about how to put the finishing touches on the poem he is writing about Pyramus and Thisbe. When he comes to the climax of the poem, where the two lovers commit suicide (like Dido killing herself over Aeneas!) then he has the perfect opportunity to satirize the folly of unclean lusts and praise instead "the pure, sincere love by which souls, endowed with the disciplines and made beautiful by the virtues, are coupled with understanding by philosophy, and not only flee death but enjoy the most happy life" (*De Ord.* 1:24). It is a telling comment on the fiercely teleological focus of our author's theory of education: every discipline we study must lead us solely to philosophy, for we ought to learn not for the sake of carnal enjoyment but for the love of wisdom, by which we attain the only real happiness.

III. Refuting Scepticism

By the end of *On Order,* Licentius has before him a whole curriculum of education in the liberal disciplines, which is aimed at acquiring the philosophical wisdom—the possession of truth—in which happiness consists. But now there is one last piece of unfinished business for the discussions at Cassiciacum—the argument about the Academics.

Although his heart is no longer in it, Licentius is appointed to defend the Academics' point of view as before (*C. Acad.* 2:16). He avoids the trap of

57. *De Ord.* 1:24. Cf. Augustine's remark to Romanianus that "Your son has begun to philosophize. I am holding him back, so that trained up first in the necessary disciplines he may rise up all the more vigorously and firmly," *C. Acad.* 2:8 (reading, with Migne, *disciplinis* rather than *discipulis*).

58. *Conf.* 1:20f.

affirming that the sceptics' position is true (for that would imply they knew something true, thus contradicting their scepticism) and settles for saying, as the Academics themselves did, that it is probable or "truth-like" (*verisimilis*) (2:17). But Augustine rapidly persuades Licentius that it is impossible to judge what is truth-like unless you know what truth itself is like—for how can you see that a young man looks like his father if you've never seen his father? (*ibid.*). Hence even reasoning about the probable requires some grasp of the truth. The suggestion, ultimately, is Platonist: the truth-like is like the truth, precisely as the sensible world is a similitude of the true, intelligible world.[59] All our thinking, like all our learning, is ultimately oriented toward this truth or it is nothing but error and foolishness.

By the end of the second book of *Contra Academicos,* Licentius has deserted the Academics' cause, leaving their defense in the hands of Alypius (2:27), who is painted as an upright advocate and judge, free from all motivations of vainglory, and thus willing to defend what everyone knows by now will be a losing cause.[60] Hence Alypius and Augustine are the debaters in the third book. The prelude with the boys is over (2:22);[61] it is time to put the playthings back in the bag (2:29) and tackle the issue of whether knowledge of truth is really possible for human beings, using "acute and subtle arguments" that are beyond the boys' depth (3:6). Therefore in the third book of *Contra Academicos,* Licentius is merely part of the audience for Augustine's refutation of scepticism.

The refutation takes some time, but it turns on a single point: whether there is such a thing as a wise man. In a long and tenaciously-fought battle, Augustine gets Alypius to concede that there are wise men[62] and then that the wise man knows wisdom—and hence that there is a truth that the wise man knows.

59. In his account of the history of the Academy, Augustine attributes to Plato himself the teaching that the intelligible world is the true one and the sensible world is "truth-like" because made in its image (*C. Acad.* 3:37), and he claims that the leaders of the sceptical Academy knew this was the true Platonic teaching and used their scepticism as a front, guarding it as an esoteric doctrine (*C. Acad.* 3:40; cf. Ep. 1:1f). The relation of the truthlike to the true and the false is a central topic of inquiry in *Sol.* 2:10-18.

60. Cf. *C. Acad.* 1:5, 2:21, 2:24, 3:14 and 3:44, *De B.V.* 5, and *De Ord.* 2:9—and *Conf.* 6:16.

61. This motif seems to go back to *Euthydemus* 278b, where it introduces a Socratic exhortation to philosophy (278e-282d) which must have influenced Aristotle's *Protrepticus* and thence Cicero's *Hortensius.* On *Euthydemus* as precursor to *Protrepticus,* cf. Düring, p. 19f.

62. This is a point that the Academics cannot dispute, for they like all other Hellenistic philosophers speak constantly of "the wise man," as for instance when Cicero in his *Hortensius* insists that the wise man gives his assent to nothing (*C. Acad.* 3:31—cf. 1:7).

Alypius' main line of defense—that it only *seems* to the wise man that he knows wisdom—is reduced to the claim that it only seems to us (who are not wise) that the wise man knows wisdom (3:5-12). Augustine accepts this claim, which leaves a place for the reality of human ignorance alongside the possibility of human wisdom. We who are not wise cannot be said to know, but the possibility of knowing is not *a priori* removed from us. To assure himself of this possibility is, Augustine explains, the reason he so urgently wants to refute the sceptics in the first place, so as to clear away a philosophical position that had hindered his pursuit of truth, making him "reluctant and sluggish, not daring to seek, because such very acute and learned men forbade to find" (2:23). After Alypius admits defeat, the debate is ended, and the rest of the treatise is taken up with Augustine's critical history and analysis of the Academic tradition (3:14-43). Thus at the end of the Cassiciacum dialogues the ground has been cleared: no obstacle remains to prevent Augustine, Licentius, or the reader from setting foot on the path of study that will lead to philosophy, and thence to wisdom and happiness.

Conclusion

What, then, has Licentius learned at Cassiciacum? In one sense, that is very difficult to say, as Licentius himself discovered when he tried to put his nighttime insight into words the next day. At the heart of his educational experience is a moment of divine inspiration which Augustine did not teach him, which he himself cannot define or defend, and which he now can scarcely remember. But the order of studies Augustine proposes is designed to remedy that defect: it is a way forward—or should we say a way back?—to the wisdom Licentius glimpsed in that splendid moment of insight. It is the same way Augustine himself is currently taking,[63] after having a rather similar moment of insight in Milan a few months earlier. Meanwhile, the experience of insight is by itself sufficient to convince him that the truth is knowable, that ultimate wisdom is possible for a human being, and that the road to it requires him to go beyond poetry to philosophy. It confirms the effect of Cicero's exhortation to philosophize while counteracting the effects of Cicero's Academic scepticism. It convinces him that the studies leading to philosophy constitute the way to wisdom, and that the wise man can not only seek truth but find it. This is a

63. The order of studies proposed in *De Ord.* 2 did not remain merely programmatic. Augustine soon began to write textbooks designed to lead students through studies in the liberal disciplines to philosophical contemplation (*Retract.* 1:6).

dramatic change in his life, deserving the name "conversion," for which he gives thanks to Christ.

Thus far what Licentius learns at Cassiciacum seems to parallel what Augustine himself must have learned in Milan a few months before. It is the same basic plotline: an enthusiastic young man captivated both by Cicero's exhortation to philosophy and by his scepticism,[64] is brought to commit himself to philosophy but repudiate scepticism, by a moment of Platonist insight which he cannot hang on to, but is determined to regain by way of a course of studies in the liberal disciplines. The fact that Licentius too can have a Platonist insight, despite having read no Platonism, should not be so surprising if Augustine's synthesis of philosophy and Christianity is correct. If the Wisdom the philosophers glimpsed is Christ by another name, then it is something one can see without reading the books of the Platonists.[65] The implication is that Augustine's Platonism, according to Augustine's own view of it, is not something acquired from this or that literary "source," but from the one Source of all Truth. He and Plotinus and Licentius all glimpsed one and the same Truth (how could it be otherwise, if what they glimpsed really was the Truth?)[66] Such a glimpse is always available to the mind, by the inspiration and grace of God, even when there are no philosophy books about.

Of course much changes in Augustine's thought after Cassiciacum—and what we make of these changes depends very much on how we tell the larger story of Augustine's development. Let me draw attention to the two changes I find most striking, and then conclude by looking at one I find ambiguous and troubling.

First of all, the figure of "the wise man" who knows wisdom (and therefore is happy even in this life)[67]—a figure which is the linchpin of Augustine's refutation of Academic scepticism in *C. Acad.* 3—quickly drops from sight.

64. On Augustine's own involvement with Academic scepticism, cf. *Conf.* 5:19, 5:25, and 6:18. For the role of both Cicero's *Hortensius* and Cicero's scepticism in the life of young Augustine, cf. esp. M. Testard, *Saint Augustin et Cicèron* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1958), part I.

65. This is a point our author makes through the character of Monica, the unlettered woman who repeatedly gets to the heart of the philosophical issues without any help from Cicero, much less Plotinus or Porphyry: cf., e.g., *De B.V.* 10, 11, 27, and 35; *De Ord.* 1:31f and 2:1.

66. Augustine's repeated claim that the pagan Platonists properly understood the incorporeal nature of God would be untenable unless they too had caught at least a glimpse of the beatific vision; cf. *De Trin.* 4:20 (cf. also 12:23) and *Civ. Dei* 9:16.

67. That the wise man is necessarily happy is a claim Augustine makes in *De B.V.* 14: *nemo sapiens nisi beatus.* That he believes such perfection is possible even in this life seems clear from *Sol.* 1:14 (cf. *Retract.* 1:4.3)

This ideal figure had been a central topic of discussion in Hellenistic philosophy, especially as represented in the dialogues of Cicero, where the recurrent questions are: what is the wise man like, what does he know, how does he act? The figure of "the wise man" appears also in the so-called "Plotinian" sermons of Ambrose, which Courcelle identifies as so influential on Augustine in Milan[68]—sermons which drew heavily not only from neo-Platonism but also from Ciceronian and Stoic portraits of the wise man,[69] and stood moreover in the tradition of Philo's portraits of the patriarchs of the Old Testament as philosophic wise men. Despite the authority of the bishop of Milan, this is a road not taken—left open by Ambrose but not pursued by Augustine or by Western theology after him. On the contrary, Augustine was to urge against the Pelagians the view that there is no one perfect here on earth, no one happy except in hope of what lies beyond this mortal life.[70] Not the Stoic or Philonic or Ambrosian ideal of the wise man, but Licentius' experience of continual search for truth, of insight and loss and the need of a road back, remains the decisive pattern of Augustine's theology.

Secondly, the nature of the road back changes decisively. In a word, liberal *disciplina* gives way to Christian *doctrina*. Both are forms of teaching, but the one is available only to the few, while the other is open to the many, a universal way of salvation such as the philosophers had never envisioned.[71] Augustine never quite renounces the notion that the liberal disciplines could foster insight into unchanging truths,[72] but this comes to seem far less important to him—and certainly comes to be far less prominent in his writings—than the road of personal transformation, purification and instruction that he finds (and teaches) in the Church, its doctrines, Scriptures and sacraments. This is the road (as he tells it in *Confessions*, book 8) which he must take if he is to return to the permanent enjoyment of that insight which he had only momentarily tasted a few months before Cassiciacum.[73] This is the road marked out, first and foremost, by the incarnation of Christ (*Conf.* 7:24).

68. P. Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de St. Augustin,* 2nd ed. (Paris: Broccard, 1968), ch. 3.

69. Cf., e.g., Ambrose's *De Jacob et vita beata,* 1:23f and 1:35, and the comments of G. Nauroy "La méthode de composition et la structure du *De Jacob et vita beata,*" in Duval, Y-M., *Ambroise de Milan* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1974), p.120f.

70. Cf. *De Sp. et Litt.* 1-3, *De Perf. Just. Hom.* 17; cf. *De Doct. Christ.* 1:43, *Civ. Dei* 19:20.

71. Cf. *Civ. Dei* 10:32, and the general discussion of this topic in J. J. O'Meara, Young *Augustine* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1954), ch. 10.

72. The notion continues to be mentioned, at least briefly, in major works such as *Conf.* (10:16-19) and *De Trin.* (12:23). But that such studies and whatever insight they foster are sufficient to bring us to the happy life is an idea he roundly repudiates (*De Doct. Christ.* 2:57f).

Thirdly, the ambiguous and troubling point. The road of the incarnate Christ, the sacraments and Christian teaching is an external and visible one, but is meant to point us toward something invisible, inward and eternal. What is this inner realm within the soul, and how is it related to the immutable truth of God? The author of the Cassiciacum dialogues has some serious reconsiderations ahead of him on this point. He cannot continue to flirt with the idea of the soul's inherent divinity, as if the divine Wisdom we long for is available to us because of what Licentius calls "the divine part of the mind." Yet unlike the notion of the perfect wise man, the concept of the divinity within us is not something the mature Augustine simply drops. It is a Christological notion, and it has a future. Augustine's Christology at Cassiciacum is governed by the Pauline description of Christ as the Wisdom and Virtue of God,[74] and I think we must bear this in mind when we hear Licentius speak of a divine virtue or power (*virtus*) even within mortals. He seems to be speaking of the same inner power which Augustine calls "Reason" in the *Soliloquies*, which is—I would suggest—the same Inner Teacher which a few years later Augustine explicitly identifies as Christ, the Wisdom and Virtue of God.[75] Still later Augustine speaks, in his writings against the Pelagians, of grace as the phenomenon of being inwardly taught by God.[76] This notion that God is within, teaching us in a way deeper than any outward words, will become one of the key legacies of the Augustinian tradition. How much should it trouble us that it first makes its appearance when Augustine is flirting with the idea of the inward divinity of the soul?[77]

Appendix

The Narrative Structure of the Cassiciacum Dialogues

The most important clue for constructing the overarching plotline of the Cassiciacum dialogues is the whereabouts of Augustine's friend Alypius. On the very first day of discussions Alypius mentions his plans to take a trip to

73. According to *Conf.* 7:16 and 7:23.

74. 1 Cor. 1:24. A more accurate translation would be Christ the Wisdom and *Potentia* (Grk. *dynamis*) of God, but Augustine consistently works with the translation *virtus*. Hence for Augustine this key Christological passage intersects very strikingly with central concerns of ancient philosophical ethics—wisdom and virtue.

75. *De Mag.* 1:38.

76. E.g., *De Pecc. Mer.* 1:37f, *De Grat. Christi* 14, *De Praedest. Sanct.* 13, *In Joh. Evang.* 26:7.

77. For my own worries on this score cf. P. Cary, "God in the Soul: Or, the Residue of Augustine's Manichaean Optimism," in *The University of Dayton Review* 22/3 (Summer 1994), 69-82.

town (*C.Acad.* 1:5). Evidently he leaves that day or early the next, for he takes no part in the discussions of the next two days (*C. Acad.* 1:11-15, 16-25). At this point the discussion about the Academics is dropped for "about seven days" (*septem fere diebus*, *C. Acad.* 2:10), during which time the three days of discussion narrated in *De Beata Vita* take place (6-16, 17-22, and 23-36; note Alypius' absence from the list of participants in 6) and then the nighttime discussion and two days of conversations that make up the first book of *De Ord.* (1:6-21, 22-26, 27-33; Alypius' absence is alluded to in 1:27). Alypius returns in time for the discussions which make up the second book of *De Ord.* (cf. the opening of 2:1 as well as the remark about his arrival in 2:2) and following these, the resumed discussion of the Academics in books 2 and 3 of *C. Acad.* This plotline parallels the order of composition reported by Augustine in *Retract.* 1:1-3.

The narrative order this reconstruction yields is thus rather different from the order of the Cassiciacum dialogues in any edition of Augustine's works. Given this order, the natural grouping of the dialogues is in three pairs of books:

1. *Contra Academicos*, book 1 and *De Beata Vita*
2. *De Ordine*, books 1 and 2
3. *Contra Academicos*, books 2 and 3.

This grouping is reflected in the tripartite division of the main body of this article. The narrative follows a definite order of inquiry, from an introductory exhortation to seek the happiness of wisdom (1), to a discussion of the place of ignorance in the divine order and of the order of disciplines which overcome ignorance, forming the road back to wisdom (2), to the refutation of sceptical obstacles which block the entrance to that road (3).

The most important novelty in this grouping is the recognition that *C. Acad.* 1 and *De B.V.* belong together, forming a single continuous discussion beginning with the dictum that we all desire happiness (*C. Acad.* 1:5) and ending with the vision of Christ as the divine Wisdom and Truth whose possession makes us happy (*De B.V.* 33-5). These two books are Augustine's earliest extant works (*Retract.* 1:2.1) and can be taken together, I suggest, as a single protreptic discourse, modelled on Cicero's *Hortensius* and therefore of the same genre as Aristotle's *Protrepticus.*

The reasons for pairing *C. Acad.* 1 and *De B.V.* in this way are, in sum: the fact that *C. Acad.* 2 begins with a new preface, thus making it look like a fresh start rather than a continuation of book 1; the fact that the discussions in *De Beata Vita* are represented as taking place immediately after those of *C. Acad.* 1 and before those of *C. Acad.* 2 and 3; the fact that the Academics are not named as the subject of *C. Acad.* until near the end of the first book (1:24); the fact that *De B.V.* and *C. Acad.* 1 discuss the same topics, viz. the relation of wisdom and happiness and the question of whether someone who seeks but has not yet found wisdom is happy; the fact that the discussion in *C. Acad.* 1 is explicitly resumed in *De Beata Vita* (13); the fact that in both books there are frequent references to Cicero's *Hortensius*; and the fact that the conceptuality used in both books is overwhelmingly Stoic and Ciceronian, with only hints of neo-Platonism. Cf. Hagendahl, pp. 489-492.

CARY: WHAT LICENTIUS LEARNED