

NOTES AND COMMENTS

ST. AUGUSTINE ON TEXT AND REALITY
(AND A LITTLE GADAMERIAN SPICE)¹

One way of viewing the organizing structure of the *Confessions* is to see it as an engagement with various texts at different phases of St. Augustine's life. In the early books of the *Confessions*, Augustine describes the disordered state that made him unable to read any text (sacred or profane) properly. Yet following his conversion his entire orientation – not only to texts but also to reality as a whole – changes. This essay attempts to trace the winding paths that lead up to Augustine's conversion through his various encounters with texts (and individuals) and to examine his struggles both intellectual and spiritual along the way. In the final section, I bring Augustine into conversation with Hans-Georg Gadamer in order to highlight a number of hermeneutical continuities shared by premoderns and postmoderns. After comparing premodern and modern hermeneutical orientations, I conclude that Augustine's approach to Scripture contrasts sharply with a (strict) modern grammatico-historical biblical methodology, whereas premodern hermeneutics share a number of continuities with Gadamerian and postmodern emphases.² Lastly, in light of Gadamer's famous statement, 'all of life is hermeneutics', I suggest that perhaps we could read Augustine's life as affirming this claim. By taking a close look at Augustine's story, I will attempt to show how pre-judgments, interpretative traditions and a dynamic/analogical rather than a static/univocal understanding of text (and reality) decisively affected his spiritual and intellectual vision – observations Gadamer would no doubt heartily affirm.

AN ENCOUNTER WITH CICERO

Prior to joining the Manichees – a religious sect with which he associated for nearly a decade – Augustine had come across one of Cicero's works, the *Hortensius*. Having been educated in the liberal arts and himself a rhetorician, Augustine was trained to appreciate eloquent writing and speech, often emphasizing its style to the neglect of its content; he desired eloquence, not to advance toward some higher end, but to promote his own selfish ambition and to advance his career. In fact, Augustine seems to indicate that his pride and love of form hindered his ability to appreciate and apprehend the rich depths of Scripture given its simple style.³

Nevertheless, when Augustine the narrator reflects on these events, he sees God's providential hand cultivating in him a hunger and thirst for that which lasts and ultimately for God Himself. He tells us that when not yet converted he read the *Hortensius'* exhortation to pursue wisdom; years later, he describes the experience as a turning point in his pilgrimage.

The book changed my way of feeling and the character of my prayers to you, O Lord, for under its influence my petitions and desires altered. All my hollow hopes suddenly seemed worthless, and with unbelievable intensity my heart burned with longing for the immortality that wisdom seemed to promise. I began to rise up, in order to return to you. My interest in the book was not aroused by its usefulness in the honing of my verbal skills [. . .]; no, it was not merely as an instrument for sharpening my tongue that I used that book, for it had won me over not by its style but by what it had to say.⁴

Here Augustine indicates that his encounter with Cicero's work was unique in that the content 'won him over'.⁵ He perceived that reading Cicero, rather than simply providing him with more polished skills as a *rhetor*, had instead affected his innermost being: his desires were changed, and he now longed for eternal things, viewing his former hopes and pursuits as worthless (*vana spes*). Liking himself to the prodigal son ('I began to rise up'), Augustine clearly marks this event as the beginning of his return to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.⁶ Though Augustine the narrator represents his encounter with Cicero as the start of his ascent to God, even a casual reader of the *Confessions* will easily recognize that the return journey was anything but a straight and effortless path. In fact, whatever change the *Hortensius* produced

in him (and there is no reason to doubt that a genuine change occurred), it was not sufficient to prevent him from joining the Manichean sect, and remaining with them for nine years.

AUGUSTINE'S DISAPPOINTMENT WITH FAUSTUS

During his time with the Manicheans, Augustine grew increasingly dissatisfied with their teachings and had accumulated a number of questions that none of his fellow Manichees could answer adequately. His friends, however, assured him that Faustus, when he arrived, would do so. Yet when the two finally met and Augustine had the opportunity to question him on various issues, he found him wanting. Faustus indeed lived up to his reputation as a gifted orator, but the content of his oratory had no substance; he was 'adept at serving finer wines' but his drink offerings were incapable of satisfying Augustine's thirst.⁷ Here we see the experience with Cicero's text bearing fruit, hence marking another significant turning point in Augustine's journey.⁸ We should resist, however, interpreting his longing for content over form as a wholesale dismissal or repudiation of the importance of articulate rhetorical style.⁹

AN ENCOUNTER WITH AMBROSE

In light of Faustus' inability to provide adequate responses to his inquiries, Augustine entered a brief period of academic skepticism; yet, he continued to wrestle with theological questions and longed for an individual with whom he could dialogue intelligently about the Scriptures. Providentially, as Augustine the narrator would say, he eventually moved to Rome where he met Bishop Ambrose. In a striking contrast with Faustus, Ambrose exceeded Augustine's expectations. As our narrator himself admits, less than virtuous motives led him to Ambrose: he wanted to benefit from observing the Bishop's rhetorical skill. Yet, as he sat under Ambrose's teaching, the weightiness of the content began to grip him. Of this experience, he writes,

Nonetheless as his words, which I enjoyed, penetrated my mind, the substance, which I overlooked, seeped in with them, for I could not separate the two. As I opened my heart to appreciate how skillfully he spoke, the recognition that he was speaking the truth crept in at the same time, though only by slow degrees. At first the case he was making began to seem defensible to me, and I realized that the Catholic faith [...] was in fact intellectually respectable.¹⁰

Interestingly, Augustine states that he became open to the teaching as a result of hearing Ambrose's skilled oratory; while enjoying the sound of the words, he simultaneously began to recognize that the content was both substantive and true, 'for I could not separate the two.' The passage shows that he has not dismissed the salutary use of polished rhetoric, and it also introduces us to a theme that we shall later discuss in connection with Gadamer, namely, the hermeneutical significance of approaching a text with openness.

Eventually, Ambrose's account of the spiritual sense of Scripture proved a particularly important breakthrough for Augustine.¹¹ The Manichees had interpreted a number of Old Testament texts in an overly literal fashion; the results posed serious difficulties for him as he sought to understand God's nature and character. Yet once he embraced this new hermeneutical approach to Scripture, the spiritual approach of Ambrose, a great many – though not all – of his former objections and misconceptions became irrelevant. Although by this point he had more or less repudiated his Manichean beliefs and therefore (intellectually speaking) had less of an excuse to reject the Catholic faith,¹² he was still troubled by a number of theological problems. One of his chief remaining stumbling blocks – itself a holdover from his now abandoned Manicheanism – was his inability to conceive that God is immaterial.¹³ This barrier will be removed in his encounter with the writings of the Platonists, to which we now turn.

AUGUSTINE AND THE PLATONISTS

Confessions VII recalls Augustine's indebtedness to the 'Platonists' ¹⁴ for enabling him to conceive God as non-corporeal. As he himself explains, previously he had held that what is not extended does not exist, and that whatever exists therefore must in some way be material. After reading the Platonists, however, he realized that an entire realm of immaterial entities exists to which he had previously been blind.¹⁵ The Platonists helped him see that the power to conceptualize is not extended; reflecting on reflection itself

reveals that the mind is immaterial. This insight enabled him to move beyond applying corporeal categories to God, which in turn enabled him to rethink God's omnipresence. If God is immaterial, then he is not extended in space. If God is also all-powerful, then by virtue of his power, God is omnipresent. With these discoveries, one of Augustine's major intellectual roadblocks was removed.

Interestingly, however, Augustine indicates that only by God's grace was he able to see these truths of the Platonists, as previously his eyes had been so swollen with pride that he could not see.¹⁶ God showed him not only the benefits of their teaching, but also its shortcomings.¹⁷ Thus Augustine read in their writings: 'the Son, being in the form of God the Father, deemed it no robbery to be equal to God'; he did not, however, read that Christ 'emptied himself and took on the form of a slave', 'being made in the likeness of men', or 'that he humbled himself and was made obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross'.¹⁸

Augustine goes on to enumerate other teachings of the Christian faith not found in the Platonists. For example, he speaks of Christ's resurrection and exaltation by God the Father, the call to worship and to confess Christ as Lord, Christ's sacrificial and substitutionary death for his enemies, the hiddenness of these truths from the 'wise', and Christ's ability to forgive sins. Then with St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (1.18–23) in the background, he highlights the ethical and epistemological implications of 'those who are raised on the stilts of their loftier doctrine,' namely the philosophers.¹⁹ Of them Augustine says, 'even if they know God, they do not honor him as God or give him thanks; their thinking has been frittered away into futility and their foolish hearts are benighted, for in claiming to be wise they have become stupid'.²⁰ Continuing the same motif, he describes the idolatry of the so-called wise men, who vainly offer up 'the food of the Egyptians.'

These things I found there [in the writings of the Platonists], but I did not eat that food. [. . .] I disregarded the idols of the Egyptians, to which they paid homage with gold that belonged to you, for they perverted the truth of God into a lie, worshipping a creature and serving it rather than the creator.²¹

Here we note Augustine's ability to discern 'Egyptian gold' from 'Egyptian idols'. Yet in spite of attaining significant spiritual progress, Augustine, by his own admission, remained burdened by certain moral struggles that left him in despair. To see how he overcame them, we must turn to book 8.

AUGUSTINE AND ST. PAUL

Early in book 8 Augustine tells us that at this stage in his journey he no longer desired 'greater certainty' about God, 'but a more steadfast abiding' in Him'.²² He goes on to say, 'I was attracted to the Way, which is our Savior himself, but the narrowness of the path daunted me and I still *could not* walk in it'.²³ Although worldly ambition no longer ruled him, he still found himself 'in tight bondage to a woman'.²⁴ In the opening paragraphs we learn that his ongoing struggle with sexual lust continued to undermine his relationship with Christ. When finally we reach the famous garden scene, we find Augustine in a state of spiritual turmoil – longing to embrace Christ more intimately, yet lacking the power to do so.²⁵ When his struggle becomes so great that he can no longer conceal his inner chaos, Augustine bursts into tears and pleads with God to forgive his sins. Then while sitting in the garden weeping, he hears the voice of a child singing, 'tolle lege, tolle lege.' He interprets this as a command from God himself, so he opens St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, reads the first passage on which his eyes fall, and decides he has neither desire nor need to read further.²⁶ Whatever happened in this encounter with St. Paul, Augustine comes to experience a new freedom in Christ – a freedom the philosophers were unable to provide. In this final example, we have an encounter with a text – that is, with a Person, but mediated through a text – and this time Augustine's destiny is radically changed. From this point on, he displays an extremely humble attitude toward Scripture, as he realizes the impossibility of circumscribing the infinite God with finite means (in particular, that of signs).

THE WORD IN-EXCESS

Having traced Augustine's journey to his conversion, in the space that remains I will discuss how his hermeneutical practices (which include his increased humility toward Scripture) share much in common with certain Gadamerian and postmodern practices. I will also examine how Augustine's approach to Scripture contrasts with modern biblical hermeneutics. Previously, in examining the various texts and persons to which he had been providentially directed, we saw how each experience enabled Augustine

either to move (however circuitously) toward his destiny in Christ or to deepen his abiding in Christ. Not only sexual lust but also various forms of pride hindered him in his search for truth. Now, however, as a mature Christian – in fact a leader of the Church – Augustine the Bishop is struck with the profundity and the inexhaustible riches of Scripture, which seems to call for polysemous possibilities that in no way diminish its veracity.²⁷ For example, after reviewing a number of potentially faithful interpretations for Gen 1:1 and emphasizing that charity must govern our hermeneutical endeavors, in book 12 Augustine writes,

What does it matter to me that various interpretations of those words are proffered, as long as they are true? I repeat, what does it matter to me if what I think the author thought is different from what someone else thinks he thought? All of us, his readers, are doing our utmost to search out and understand the writer's intention, and since we believe him to be truthful, we do not presume to interpret him as making any statement that we either know or suppose to be false. Provided, therefore, that each person tries to ascertain in the holy scriptures the meaning the author intended, *what harm is there if a reader holds an opinion which you, the light of all truthful minds, show to be true, even though it is not what was intended by the author, who himself meant something true, but not exactly that?*²⁸

Interestingly, though Augustine states that he and others strive after the author's intention, he also claims that it is not only possible but quite acceptable for God to reveal true meanings that go beyond the *mens auctoris*.²⁹ Moreover, for Augustine truth and love have a reciprocal relationship: if a person approaches the Scriptures without love, she should not expect to obtain truth. The introduction of love into the conversation allows Augustine to formulate a criterion of sorts that aids the exegete as she attempts to discern which meanings are legitimate: when several interpretations of the same passage are possible, the principle of charity (which states that all valid meanings of Scripture must promote love of God and love of others in God) must be our guide.³⁰ As Augustine explains,

Unless we believe that Moses meant whatever he did mean in his books with an eye to those twin commandments of charity, we shall make the Lord out to be a liar, by attributing to our fellow-servant a purpose which is at odds with the Lord's teaching. Since, then, so rich a variety of highly plausible interpretations can be culled from those words, consider how foolish it is rashly to assert that Moses intended one particular meaning rather than any of the others.³¹

Thus, the Scriptural exegete is not simply one who pursues truth, but one who pursues love; God after all is both Truth and Love. A few paragraphs later the discussion continues: 'I would hope to have written in such a way that if anyone else had in the light of truth seen some other valid meaning, that too should not be excluded, but present itself as a possible way of understanding in what I had said'.³² With this statement, Augustine affirms what we shall see is a crucial Gadamerian hermeneutical insight, namely, that the possible meanings of a text are based in but in no way confined to authorial intention.

GADAMER

At this point, I bring Augustine into conversation with Hans-Georg Gadamer. As David Linge explains, for Gadamer the meaning of a text is not simply restricted to the intention of the author, nor is the act of interpretation construed *solely* as an attempt to replicate the author's intention. Rather, the text itself is living and dynamic. In contrast to a mathematical problem, where one and only one answer is possible, most texts (and works of art) cannot be approached as if they were static, a-historical entities.³³ Gadamer likewise deems misguided every attempt to produce a precise method or formula for interpretation that when applied yields the same result each time. Such a model has more in common with scientific experiments than with what occurs when we read a text dialogically, bringing new sets of questions to it, questions that reflect the different historical moments of author and reader(s). In addition, according to Gadamer a hermeneutical theory that restricts textual meaning exclusively to the author's intention is riddled with insoluble difficulties. Highlighting the tensions that such a theory creates, Linge writes:

The basic difficulty with this theory is that it subjectifies both meaning and understanding, thus rendering unintelligible the development of tradition that transmits the text or art work to us and influences our reception of it in the present. When meaning is located exclusively in the *mens auctoris*, understanding becomes a transaction between the creative consciousness of the author and the purely reproductive consciousness of the interpreter. The inadequacy of this theory to deal

positively with history is perhaps best seen in its inability to explain the host of competing interpretations of texts with which history is replete, and that in fact constitute the substance of tradition.³⁴

Some attempt to explain away the multiplicity of interpretations by claiming that each text possesses a supposed 'meaning-in-itself', which is univocal, but that the subjective application of this meaning (Hirsch's 'significance') varies. This proposal, however, does not take seriously disparate interpretative insights obtained by different traditions and schools of thought over the course of time.³⁵ Gadamer, in contrast, understands the text as having an excess of meaning upon which tradition builds:

Every age has to understand a transmitted text in its own way, for the text belongs to the whole tradition whose content interests the age and in which it seeks to understand itself. The real meaning of a text, as it speaks to the interpreter, does not depend on the contingencies of the author and his original audience. It certainly is not identical with them, for it is always co-determined also by the historical situation of the interpreter and hence by the totality of the objective course of history. [. . .]. Not just occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well.³⁶

At this point, some might object that such a view is open to charges of relativism or that it promotes hermeneutical anarchy.³⁷ Yet these conclusions do not *necessarily* follow – in fact, in no way did they follow for Augustine, who (as we have seen) argued for a surplus of meaning that goes beyond the intention of the author. For Augustine and the entire premodern interpretative tradition, I would suggest, that we do have a multitude of true interpretations and levels of meaning in Scripture indicates the infinity and incomprehensibility of the Referent to which these signs point; it does not indicate that truth is relative or that there is no truth.³⁸ Gadamer, of course, makes no specific appeal to an infinite Referent when he claims that every act of interpretation harbors a latent polysemy; he does however insist that meanings are not to be taken in an arbitrary way.³⁹ 'Just as we cannot continually misunderstand the use of a word without its affecting the meaning of the whole, so we cannot stick blindly to our own fore-meaning about the thing if we want to understand the meaning of another'.⁴⁰ Elaborating his claim that meaning is dynamic and flexible but not arbitrary, he adds,

meanings represent a fluid multiplicity of possibilities [. . .], but within this multiplicity of what can be thought – i.e., of what a reader can find meaningful and hence expect to find – not everything is possible; and if a person fails to hear what the other person is really saying, he will not be able to fit what he has misunderstood into the range of his own various expectations of meaning. Thus there is a criterion here also. The *hermeneutical task becomes of itself a questioning of things* and is always in part so defined. This places hermeneutical work on a firm basis. [. . .] [A] person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something. That is why a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's alterity.⁴¹

Clearly, Gadamer is not saying that the interpreter has license simply to ignore the text and to assign it any meaning that she sees fit. Nor does Gadamer believe that the interpreter ought to approach the text neutrally. Rather, the interpreter comes with full awareness (insofar as that is possible) of her own 'fore-meanings' and 'prejudices' and allows the text 'to present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings'.⁴² From what we have seen thus far, I suggest that neither Augustine nor Gadamer seek to promote a hermeneutical free-for-all;⁴³ however, both reject hermeneutical practices that assume a univocal or flat understanding of meaning and reality.

PREMODERN AND POSTMODERN HERMENEUTICAL CONTINUITIES

In contrast, for example, with those who would espouse a strict grammatico-historical hermeneutic,⁴⁴ the Church Fathers and medieval exegetes understood that neither Scripture nor reality present themselves as flat; rather, since both Scripture and reality correspond to and reveal an Infinite Creator, such premodern theologians understood that the two present themselves as multi-layered, polysemous and sacramental.⁴⁵ As Henri de Lubac explains, the doctrine of the fourfold sense of Scripture (historical, allegorical, moral/tropological, and anagogical) 'provided a framework of thought for numerous generations of Christians'.⁴⁶ Interestingly, those who adopt a strict grammatico-historical 'method' of interpretation tend to embrace only the literal or historical sense of Scripture. Likewise, those following this tradition often claim to interpret Scripture in an 'unbiased' manner, free from all prejudice and from the uncritical claims

of authority. Postmoderns, of course, are very suspicious of this alleged neutrality; but I would suggest that premoderns too, at least from a certain perspective, share this suspicion. Thus in good Augustinian fashion, de Lubac indicates that the Church Fathers and the medievals openly acknowledged their dependence on tradition and on the interpretations handed down to the Church by the apostles and their successors.

Right from the beginning, in the first century of the Church's existence, at the time of the very first generation of Christians, it was a matter of Scripture being read or the word of God being heard in the Church and interpreted by Tradition.⁴⁷

Moreover, neither the Church Fathers nor medieval exegetes approached Scripture as just another human book or even as a textual corpus to be studied and examined scientifically, much less as something to be dissected and treated atomistically. Instead of approaching Scripture as a collection of divergent and contradictory accounts, the premodern Christian came to Scripture assuming its unity, with both testaments unfolding one drama whose main actor is Christ.⁴⁸ Does this mean that the apostles as well as the Church Fathers and medieval exegetes were biased, and came to Scripture with their interpretative goal (Christ) already in mind? Here again, perhaps Gadamer has something to contribute. In stark contrast to the modernist, Enlightenment aversion to prejudice and tradition, which rejects them as a hindrance to hermeneutical 'objectivity', Gadamer endorses both.⁴⁹ According to Gadamer, all of us necessarily come to the text with our own prejudices or 'horizons', and these biases are therefore not to be understood as an obstacle that closes off understanding, but as the avenue that facilitates it. Though it is the case that our prejudices can and do set limits on our interpretative endeavors, it is not the case that they are unalterable; nor do they always perform a disservice. Rather, they can and often do perform the indispensable function of providing an entry point into the act of understanding itself:

Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified and erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth. In fact, the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word [pre-judgment], constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices *are biases of our openness to the world*. They are simply the conditions whereby we experience something – whereby what we encounter says something to us. This formulation *certainly does not mean* that we are enclosed within a wall of prejudices and only let through the narrow portals those things that can produce a pass saying, 'Nothing new will be said here'. Instead we welcome just that guest who promises something new to our curiosity (emphases added).⁵⁰

This passage calls for several remarks. First, we note that for Gadamer, biases and pre-judgments can actually be true and reasonable. Second, he maintains that, paradoxically, our prejudices make possible our openness to reality and change, even as they simultaneously rule out other options once a decision has been made. Third, he notes that through our dialogic encounter with a text or an individual, the possibility arises for us to become more acutely aware of our prejudices and to have them altered or even replaced. Perhaps here it is helpful to recall Augustine's description of his encounter with Ambrose's teaching and how his increasing openness to that teaching was due in part to Ambrose's oratorical skills. That Augustine possessed a favorable predisposition toward those skilled in rhetoric helped to make him willing to listen to Ambrose in the first place. Such openness of course does not guarantee that one will embrace what is presented (whether in verbal or textual dialogue) – here Faustus is a case in point, in which additional factors influenced Augustine's decision to reject what he was teaching. For example, Augustine states that in studying certain philosophers, he had come to see that their views on natural science were more convincing than those of the Manicheans. Given that he had already formulated an unfavorable judgment about the Manichean claims, and had so to speak brought his pre-judgments with him, the content of Faustus' speech understandably left him dissatisfied. Yet, with regard to Ambrose, it is instructive to highlight the way in which Augustine describes his experience. '[A]s his words, which I enjoyed, penetrated my mind, the substance, which I overlooked, seeped in with them, for I could not separate the two. As I opened my heart to appreciate how skillfully he spoke, the recognition that he was speaking the truth crept in at the same time, though only by slow degrees'.⁵¹

My essay only scratches the surface of what may be gained by bringing Augustine (and the premodern tradition to which he belongs) into dialogue with Gadamer (and the postmodern tradition to which he, Gadamer, belongs). Nevertheless, I hope to have shown that the hermeneutical practices of the former share a number of important continuities with the latter, and that each has something to contribute to the other. In closing, I want to anticipate some possible objections to the connections I have highlighted. First of all, some may find that I have exaggerated these connections. After all, Augustine was a Christian and wrote as a Christian, whereas Gadamer, whatever his religious convictions, does not make them explicit in his writings, nor do they inform his work in any obvious way.⁵² With this significant difference in view,

an objector might point out that Augustine's appeal to the reciprocity of truth and love and to the principle of charity as a criterion for adjudicating multiple interpretations is glaringly absent in Gadamer's account. Secondly, one might protest that Scripture itself asserts that it is a book written not only by human authors but also by a divine Author, the Triune God. Doesn't this difference significantly undermine the hermeneutical harmonies I have suggested? Wouldn't the Christian have to admit that no meaning of Scripture exceeds the intention of its divine Author? If so, then how closely should we align Augustine and Gadamer on the question of authorial intent? These objections are no doubt well-founded and point to genuine discontinuities that I readily acknowledge and to a large degree affirm and embrace. Still, I am not convinced that these otherwise legitimate discontinuities invalidate the equally legitimate continuities I have brought to the fore. While it is true that orthodox Christianity would certainly reject the suggestion that true meanings somehow transcend the mind of God as the divine author of Scripture, perhaps the Christian could appeal to a kind of incarnational analogy that would bridge the gap in meanings while simultaneously affirming it. That is, just as orthodox Christianity confesses that Jesus is fully human and fully God, so too Scripture manifests both divine and human characteristics; hence, we shouldn't be surprised at the commonalities that exist between the Bible and other literary works – commonalities such as polysemy and meanings that transcend (human) authorial intent. Such an understanding of the nature of Scripture upholds the divinity of Scripture, and likewise emphasizes the humanity of Scripture, which was, of course, given in human language and reflects particular human cultural perspectives. In sum, the incarnational model of Scripture yields the non-tautological claim that the incarnation of the word is analogous to the Incarnation of the Word, thus acknowledging the continuity-and-discontinuity between Scripture and all other great works of literature. Second, if (as Christianity claims) all good gifts find their source in God, then it seems to me that a Christian could maintain without contradiction that the various true meanings manifested throughout history in the interpretative traditions of secular texts (Plato, Aristotle, Dostoevsky, etc.) also in some way relate to the mind of God. That is, if God is Truth, and all truth ultimately relates to God, then the multiple, true meanings of secular texts also reflect and participate in God. Accordingly one might say (to complete the analogy) that the various true meanings of secular texts are likewise within the intention of the ultimate Author. Therefore, in neither case, sacred or secular, do we have true meanings that go beyond the *mens divini auctoris*.

Lastly, although to my knowledge Gadamer does not appeal to love or to the principle of charity as a way to settle hermeneutical disputes, one might be able to construe, *mutatis mutandis*, his formulation of the transcendentals (gleaned from his study of the later Plato) as a functional equivalent.⁵³ All things considered, I doubt that even Augustine himself would allege that the principle of charity *alone* solves all hermeneutical disagreements. After all, the principle itself must be interpreted; and not all agree on what promotes love for God and neighbor (Spinoza's conclusions in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* come to mind here). A possible retort might be to acknowledge the difficulty and then to maintain that such an open hermeneutical landscape points to the need for something like a *magisterium*, which of course Augustine has and Gadamer lacks. Though the point is well-taken, I remain unconvinced that this closes the door to all fruitful hermeneutical dialogue between the two thinkers. There are certain statements Gadamer makes in *Truth and Method* that to my mind leave the door open and call for further discussion. For example, speaking against an Enlightenment caricature of authority as 'blind obedience to commands', he claims that one's belief in and reliance upon authority need not be characterized so pejoratively. Rather, for Gadamer the 'essence of authority' rests upon the recognition of our finitude and the acknowledgment 'that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence – i.e., it has priority over one's own'.⁵⁴ Such a statement suggests that for both Gadamer and Augustine, finitude, alterity and a certain kind of reasonable humility are crucial components of our hermeneutical and hence living endeavors. After all, as Gadamer says, 'all of life *is* hermeneutics.'

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Notes

1 An earlier version of this essay was presented at the 32nd Patristic, Medieval and Renaissance Studies Conference, October 19–21, 2007, at the Villanova Conference Center, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I offer my thanks to the conference director, Dr. Kevin L. Hughes, and to the participants for their helpful comments. I am also extremely grateful to Dr. Philipp Rosemann, Dr. Victor Salas, and to my colleagues Derek J. Morrow and Michael Vendsel for their careful readings, helpful suggestions, and invaluable interaction at different stages of this essay's completion.

2 Regarding these 'postmodern emphases', I in no way mean to endorse every aspect of that which is commonly associated with postmodernism. Rather, I have in mind specific features that frequently accompany what might be

called a postmodern mindset, and which directly relate to my present purpose in this essay, namely, to highlight certain hermeneutical continuities shared between the premodern and postmodern traditions. Such features include: a suspicion toward claims of 'neutrality', a ready acknowledgement that we all come to the text with our own presuppositions and biases, or to use Gadamer's terminology, with our own 'horizons,' a positive view of tradition, and an appreciation for a diversity of interpretations or perspectives.

3 Here Augustine contrasts his approach to Scripture as a Christian with his attitude toward Scripture prior to his conversion. 'What I see in them today is something not accessible to the scrutiny of the proud nor exposed to the gaze of the immature, something lowly as one enters but lofty as one advances further, something veiled in mystery. At that time, though, I was in no state to enter, nor prepared to bow my head and accommodate myself to its ways. My approach then was quite different from the one I am suggesting now: when I studied the Bible and compared it with Cicero's dignified prose, it seemed to me unworthy. My swollen pride recoiled from its style and my intelligence failed to penetrate to its inner meaning. Scripture is a reality that grows along with little children, but I disdained to be a little child and in my high and mighty arrogance regarded myself as grown up' Augustine, *Confessions*, 3.5.9; translated by Maria Boulding Hyde Park: New City Press, 1997, p. 80. All subsequent references are to this edition.

4 Augustine, *Conf.*, 3.4.7; p. 79.

5 On the other hand, perhaps Augustine at first was attracted only to its eloquent style, or to its prominence within academic circles.

6 Plato's image of the cave also comes to mind, that is, perhaps Augustine's experience resembles that of the prisoner who only now has been released from his bonds; though yet in the cave, he perceives the wall-shadows are not the full reality and that he must ascend to something higher.

7 Regarding his encounter with Faustus, Augustine writes, 'When he came, then, he did indeed impress me as a man of pleasant and smooth speech, who chattered on the usual themes much more beguilingly than the rest. A man adept at serving finer wines, then; but what was that to me in my thirst? My ears were sated with such offerings already. The content did not seem better to me for being better presented, nor true because skillfully expressed, nor the man wise of soul because he had a handsome face and a graceful turn of speech' (*Conf.*, 5.6.10; pp. 119–20).

8 As Augustine the narrator reflects on this event, he perceives God's providential care and guidance. In fact, Augustine says that God had been teaching him to listen with a spiritually attuned ear and to recognize that God alone is the (true, inner) teacher of truth (*Conf.*, p. 120). A related theme, namely, Christ as the (only true) Teacher is found in Augustine's earlier work, *De Magistro*, especially 11.38 and 14.46.

9 For example, Augustine says, 'I had already learned under your tuition that nothing should be regarded as true because it is eloquently stated, nor false because the words sound clumsy. On the other hand, it is not true for being expressed in uncouth language either, or false because couched in splendid words. I had come to understand that just as wholesome and rubbishy food may both be served equally well in sophisticated dishes or in others of rustic quality, so too can wisdom and foolishness be proffered in language elegant or plain' (*Conf.* 5.6.10; p. 120). In addition, as I show in the following section, when Augustine meets Ambrose, he appreciates both the eloquence and the substance of his sermons.

10 *Conf.*, 5.14.24; p. 132.

11 'I delighted to hear Ambrose often asserting in his sermons to the people, as a principle on which he must insist emphatically, *The letter is death-dealing, but the spirit gives life* [2 Cor 3:6]. This he would tell them as he drew aside the veil of mystery and opened to them the spiritual meaning of passages which, taken literally, would seem to mislead' (Augustine, *Conf.*, 6.4.6; p. 140). Louis Mackey in his fascinating chapter on Augustine, 'From Autobiography to Theology,' in Mackey, *Peregrinations of the Word: Essays in Medieval Philosophy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), offers a creative variation on the spirit versus the letter theme. 'Materialism, the violence of the letter that kills the soul, is countered by the violence with which God chastises Augustine's carnal affections in order to save his life in the spirit. The spirit gives life by doing violence to the letter in order to counteract the violence of the letter' (p. 23). Mackey goes on to say that once Augustine embraced Ambrose's spiritual orientation to Scripture, Augustine not only views the Catholic demand for faith as sane and salubrious, but he also 'sees that it is precisely the Manicheans' rationalism, materialism, and dualism which are diseased. The pride of reason must be cured, and faith is the remedy' [cf. *Conf.* 6.5.7] (p. 23).

12 Augustine also states that in studying certain philosophers, he had come to see that their views on natural science were more convincing than those of the Manicheans. These findings, in addition to what he learned from Ambrose, played a significant role in his decision to leave the Manichean sect (see for example, Augustine, *Conf.*, 5.14.25; p. 132).

13 The following passage illustrates Augustine's struggles and fears as he wavers between belief and unbelief: 'In my heart I was hanging back from any assent, dreading a headlong fall, and nearly died by hanging instead. I longed to become as certain of those things I could not see as I was that seven and three make ten. I was not so demented as to think that even this simple truth was beyond comprehension; but I wanted to have the same grasp of other things, both material entities not immediately present to my senses and spiritual realities of which I did not know how to think in any but a materialistic way. The possibility of healing was, ironically, within my reach if only I had been willing to believe, because then I could with a more purified mind have focused my gaze on your truth, which abides forever and is deficient in nothing. But just as someone who has suffered under a bad physician may often be afraid to entrust himself to a good one, so it was in my soul's case. It could be healed only by believing, yet it shirked the cure for fear of believing what was false' (*Conf.*, 6.4.6; p. 140).

14 Maria Boulding explains (*Conf.* p. 169, n. 40) that although 'Augustine does not identify them more precisely', when he speaks of the Platonists (as for example at *Conf.* 7.9.13, p. 169), he probably has Neo-Platonists in mind, for 'He certainly knew some of Plotinus' treatises; probably he read some Porphyry at Milan, perhaps in the form of maxims. In *The City of God* 8.12 he mentions Plotinus, Iamblichus, Porphyry, and Apuleius Afer as 'very noble'. He would in any case have imbibed some Neo-Platonism from Ambrose's teaching, to which he continued to listen, and from educated friends'.

15 Describing this experience, Augustine the narrator writes, 'for as my eyes were accustomed to roam among material forms, so did my mind among the images of them, yet I could not see that this very act of perception, whereby I formed those images, was different from them in kind. Yet my mind would never have been able to form them unless it was itself a reality, and a great one' (*Conf.*, 7.1.2; p. 159).

16 Augustine's 'wounded condition' made him unable to move beyond material images, for his pride, 'got in the way and kept me from you, and my face was so puffy that my eyes were closed' (*Conf.*, 7.7.11; p. 169). Yet God had mercy on him and gave 'new form' to his 'deformity' (7.8.12; p. 169). In fact, God was healing him of his 'swollen pride' (7.7.11; p. 169) so that he might see with new eyes. 'At the unseen touch of your medicine my swelling subsided, while under the stinging eye-salve of curative pain the fretful, darkened vision of my spirit began to improve day by day' (7.8.12; p. 169).

17 Since Ambrose belongs to the premodern Christian interpretative tradition, Augustine's new orientation to Scripture would have involved his reading the Old Testament in light of the New, that is, via Ambrose he came to embrace a Christocentric reading of Scripture. If so, Augustine may have received the gift of faith much earlier than the timeframe proposed by the two-stage conversion theory (which posits an intellectual conversion in book 7 and a moral conversion in book 8). While still a catechumen Augustine may have already moved from unbelief to belief in Christ, and Ambrose may have been instrumental in this movement. Support for this suggestion comes from the end of book 5. Reflecting on his reasons for coming to Milan and on his encounter with Ambrose, Augustine writes, 'Unknowingly I was led by you to him [Ambrose], so that through him I might be led, knowingly, to you' (*Conf.* 5.13.23; p. 131). In other words, although at the time Augustine did not recognize that God's providence was directing him to Ambrose, he later came to realize that God had used this friendship to bring him into friendship with Himself. Thus perhaps books 7 and 8 present a deepening of his 'unformed' and 'wavering' faith that nonetheless is still and already a faith *in Christ* – 'Faith in your Christ, our Lord and Savior, as I found it in the Catholic Church, still persisted steadfastly in my heart, though it was a faith still in many ways unformed, wavering and at a variance with the norm of her teaching. Yet my mind did not abandon it, but drank it in ever more deeply as the days passed' (7.5.7; p. 164). Cf. 7.7.11 (pp. 167–69).

18 *Conf.*, 7.9.14; p. 170, citing Phil 2:6–11. According to Mackey, Augustine providentially encountered the Platonists in order to 'break his pride and to teach him humility by confronting him with the lowliness of the incarnate Word. This indirectly, by showing him the pride of the Platonists and calling to his attention the absence from the Platonic writings of the Word made flesh' (*Peregrinations*, p. 25). Mackey holds that in the *Confessions* Augustine by God's grace gradually comes to distinguish death-producing words from the Word that gives life. He further argues that Augustine uses St. John's prologue as a rhetorical device to illustrate the failure of the Platonists to write it. By contrast, according to Mackey St. John succeeds where the Platonists failed. Armed with a Christocentric interpretation of Scripture, the gospel writer proclaims, 'in the beginning was the Word' and 'the Word became flesh [*sarx*]', and thereby successfully re-writes the opening of Genesis. Of the Platonists' failure to write the Gospel of John, Mackey says, 'Their philosophy is a repetition of origin that does not come off, and their account of the first principle falls short of the beginning. They knew the everlasting Word, and they knew that the world originates in the Word. But they did not know – their pride would have blocked recognition of – the Word made flesh, the repetition of the beginning in which the beginning is attained. Their faulted repetition of creation is a reenactment of the fall, and they leave the world un(re)generated' (*Peregrinations*, pp. 27–28).

19 *Conf.*, 7.9.14; pp. 170–71.

20 *Conf.*, 7.9.14; p. 171.

21 *Conf.*, 7.9.15; pp. 171–72.

22 At the end of book 5 Augustine recounts, 'I resolved therefore to live as a catechumen in the Catholic Church [. . .] until some kind of certainty dawned by which I might direct my steps aright' (*Conf.*, 5.14.25; p. 133). With a view to my earlier proposal (above, n. 19), by way of comment on this text, we could say that subsequently, when Augustine's faith had matured and deepened, he no longer sought the 'certainty' he once pursued as a younger believer. Against this suggestion, some would no doubt maintain that the mature Augustine no longer desired certainty, precisely because he had already acquired it from the pillaged treasures of the Platonists. Yet we know that throughout his career Augustine continued to wrestle with a number of intellectual and theological problems, and that he never claimed for himself a comprehensive knowledge of God or of all things theological. Consequently, as Augustine grew in faith and knowledge of God, it seems plausible to think that over time he abandoned his quest for certainty, particularly the mathematical certainty he had sought as a young man. Finally, my proposal would seem to harmonize well with the pastoral concerns Augustine the Bishop no doubt had. That is, if we keep in mind the multiple audiences of the *Confessions* (which addresses believers and unbelievers alike), it is not difficult to imagine that especially believers would find themselves particularly encouraged: for them, Augustine's story illustrates that faith unfolds slowly, matures with time, and that Christ suffices to meet all of life's challenges.

23 *Conf.*, 8.1.1; p. 184 (emphasis added).

24 *Conf.*, 8.1.2; p. 185.

25 Describing his perplexing situation, Augustine writes, 'there were plenty of actions that I performed where willing was not the same thing as being able; yet I was not doing the one thing that was incomparably more desirable to me, the thing that I would be able to do as soon as I willed, because as soon as I willed – why, then, I would be willing it! For in this sole instance the faculty to act and the will to act precisely coincide, and the willing is already the doing. Yet this was not happening. My body was more ready to obey the slightest whim of my soul in the matter of moving my limbs, than the soul was to obey its own command in carrying out this major volition, which was to be accomplished within the will alone' (*Conf.*, 8.8.20; pp. 200–1). He then suggests that this strange situation arose as a result of the punishments that Adam's progeny receive owing to Adam's sin. 'May your mercy shed light on my inquiry, so that perhaps an answer may be found in the mysterious punishments meted out to humankind, those utterly baffling pains that afflict the children of Adam' (*Conf.*, 8.9.21; p. 201, see also 8.10.22; p. 202). What Augustine seems to describe is a kind of divided will, a disintegrated and disordered self that has come about from original sin and from one's own sinful

habits – a will now in need of God's intervening grace in order to be re-integrated and re-ordered. Postlapsarian humans experience a 'sickness of mind, which cannot rise with its whole self on the wings of truth because it is heavily burdened by habit. There are two wills, then, and neither is the whole: what one has the other lacks' (*Conf.*, 8.9.21; p. 201). For a fascinating discussion of Augustine as the 'first philosopher of the will,' see Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, one-volume edition (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1978), pp. 84–110.

26 The passage that Augustine read was, '[n]ot in dissipation and drunkenness, nor in debauchery and lewdness, nor in arguing and jealousy; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provisions for the flesh or the gratification of your desires' (Rom 13:13–14). Having read these words, he says, 'I had no wish to read further, nor was there need. No sooner had I reached the end of the verse than the light of certainty flooded my heart and all dark shades of doubt fled away' (*Conf.*, 8.12.29; p. 207).

27 'How amazing is the profundity of your words! We are confronted with a superficial meaning that offers easy access to the unlettered; yet how amazing their profundity, O my God, how amazingly deep they are! To look into that depth makes me shudder, but it is the shudder of awe, the trembling of love' (*Conf.*, 12.14.17; p. 321).

28 *Conf.*, 12.18.27; pp. 327–28. See also Michael Hanby's comments on the 'plenitude of true meanings for a single text', in Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 34–35.

29 Although he also seems to entertain the belief that Moses had in his mind all of the true interpretations that Augustine had discussed, he then adds that even if Moses had only one true meaning in mind, surely the Holy Spirit is not ignorant of all the possible true and intended meanings of this verse. 'Finally, Lord, what if human vision is incomplete? Does that mean that anything you intended to reveal by these words to later generations of readers – you who are God, not flesh and blood – was hidden from your good Spirit [. . .]. Is this not the case even if the man through whom you spoke to us had perhaps only one of the true meanings in mind?' (*Conf.*, 12.32.43; p. 341). See Augustine's discussion of this topic in *On Christian Teaching*, 3.84–85; translated by R.P.H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 86–87. All subsequent references are to this edition.

30 See also *On Christian Teaching*, 3.36–37; p. 76.

31 *Conf.*, 12.25.35; p. 334.

32 *Conf.*, 12.26.36; p. 335.

33 This is not to deny that there are certain truths in Christianity that have a 'privileged' status, such as that Jesus is God incarnate. To disavow this truth is to move outside of Christianity. Yet even in texts where these kinds of privileged truths are proclaimed, there are additional (possible) true meanings, as well as levels of meanings to be discerned.

34 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, translated and edited by David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. xxiv.

35 See E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), which proposes the 'meaning/significance' distinction. As Linge points out, 'The distinction between meaning and significance is at best difficult to apply to the history of interpretation, for it is indisputably the case that interpreters of Plato, Aristotle, or Scripture in different historical eras differed in what they thought they saw in the text [Linge's italics] and not just in their views of the significance of the 'same' textual meaning for themselves. Interpreters of Paul, for instance, have not been arguing all these centuries only over what Paul 'means' *pro nobis*, but also over the claim Paul makes regarding the subject matter' (*Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. xxiv).

36 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed., translated and revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 296. If, as was the case for Augustine and his tradition, the 'totality of the objective course of history' culminated in Jesus Christ, then there is good reason to understand Him as not only the apex of history (and more) but also as the interpretive lens through which Scripture is properly understood.

37 To develop an adequate response to the relativism charge would require a second essay. Nonetheless, I offer the following musical analogy to hint at least at a possible way forward. Just as in no way is it the case that when a jazz piece is performed and interpreted by various musicians from different time periods, a kind of free-for-all takes place in which the 'original' melody is somehow destroyed, neither would it be the case that our interpretations have no strictures whatsoever and no relation to the author's intentions. Though each jazz performance is distinctive, there is still a common yet dynamic range that unites each performance such that the melody is recognizable when played in a wide range of styles (from traditional to more avant-garde styles). Analogously, if one simply ignored the melody (Jesus Christ) and harmonic structure (creation, fall, redemption, and final consummation in Christ) or distorted either such that they become completely unrecognizable, then clearly one has gone astray. I am certainly *not* suggesting such extreme distortion or blatant disregard, but I am suggesting that the analogy might help us to conceive anew a more dynamic and historically friendly approach to interpreting Scripture. See Gadamer's comments in *Truth and Method* (pp. 268–69) regarding the impossibility of meanings understood in an arbitrary fashion. See also the introductory chapter in Brice R. Wachterhauser, *Beyond Being: Gadamer's Post-Platonic Hermeneutical Ontology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999). Wachterhauser argues that Gadamer's hermeneutical studies must be read in dialogue with his work on Plato in order to properly understand many of Gadamer's significant hermeneutical insights, as well as to avoid common misreadings of Gadamer. Two common misinterpretations claim that Gadamer's project falls prey either to relativism or to some form of ahistorical dogmatism.

38 Thomas Martin, O.S.A., speaks of Augustine's insistence in book 12 on the incommensurability between the Divine Word and human words. 'The interpreter of the Scriptures must never lose sight of the incommensurability: there will never be a perfect fit. It is precisely this 'gap' that keeps the interpreter of Scripture humble yet driven, never claiming to have arrived at Scripture's final truth, yet never ceasing passionately to search for even a fleeting glimpse of it'. Martin, 'Book Twelve: Exegesis and *Confessio*', in *A Reader's Companion to Augustine's Confessions*, eds. Kim Paffenroth and Robert P. Kennedy (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), pp. 185–206 (here p. 199).

39 Interestingly, Wachterhauser's studies lead him to conclude that 'Gadamer's position implies a modern appropriation of the *analogia entis* and as such it emphasizes the analogical connections between all realities. Such

ontological analogies or connections imply a challenge to any unbridgeable gap or difference between Being and beings. If Heidegger's thought suffers from an increasing tendency to insist on this unbridgeable difference, Gadamer's thought relativizes the difference between Being and beings and draws them closer to each other without forgetting that there is also a difference to be preserved' (*Beyond Being*, pp. 193–94). Although a Christian might want to probe further, asking whether Gadamer's position (on Christian presuppositions) is not guilty of blurring the Creator/creature distinction, the contention that Gadamer's project attempts to reinsert a modern version of the *analogia entis* harmonizes well with Gadamer's hermeneutical claims regarding the multivalent character of meaning. On the similarities and differences between Gadamer and Heidegger, see also Walter Lammi, 'Hans-Georg Gadamer's "Correction" of Heidegger', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52: no. 3 (Jul.-Sept., 1991), pp. 487–507. For Gadamer's views on Plato and Aristotle, see Catherine H. Zuckert, 'Hermeneutics in Practice: Gadamer on Ancient Philosophy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed. Robert J. Dostal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 201–24.

40 *Truth and Method*, p. 268.

41 *Truth and Method*, pp. 268–69.

42 *Truth and Method*, p. 269.

43 Though in the citation below he does not elucidate his view, Robert Sokolowski also rejects the claim that Gadamer's position ends in relativism. 'It is regrettable that hermeneutics is often taken as a license for relativism, a use that Gadamer would certainly dispute. The fact that there can be multiple interpretations of a text does not destroy the identity of a text, nor does it exclude erroneous or totally inappropriate readings, those that destroy the text'. Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 224–25.

44 Here I have in view the hermeneutical method, traceable to Spinoza (*Theologico-Political Treatise*), that attempts to fix the meaning of a text solely in relation to the intention of the author, places strong emphasis on the original language, grammar and syntax, and seeks to ascertain how the original audience would have received the message. This method privileges the literal or historical; for (it is argued) there simply are no other senses unless the syntax of the text itself explicitly states otherwise.

45 In book 10, Augustine describes how both the 'text' of creation and the text of Scripture proclaim God. 'You pierced my heart with your word, and I fell in love with you. But the sky and the earth too, and everything in them – all these things around me are telling me that I should love you; and since they never cease to proclaim this to everyone, those who do not hear are left without excuse' (*Conf.* 10.6.8, pp. 241–42, citing Rom 1:20).

46 Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, vol. 1, *The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. Mark Sebanc (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 12.

47 *Medieval Exegesis*, p. 25.

48 De Lubac, in describing the two Testaments not as two books but as two dispensations or covenants, also alludes to the progressive unfolding of Scripture in redemptive history. 'The goal of the one that is prior in time is to prepare the way for the second. But this is not what merits them those respective terms of 'old' and 'new'. The New Testament does not take its name solely from the fact that it comes second in time. It is not merely 'modern'. It is the last word, in an absolute sense [...]. The New Covenant is not repeated. It is completed and fulfilled once and for all'. De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, p. 227.

49 As Gadamer explains, 'there is one prejudice of the Enlightenment that defines its essence: the fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself, which denies tradition its power. The history of ideas shows that not until the Enlightenment does the concept of prejudice acquire the negative connotation familiar today' (*Truth and Method*, p. 270, italics original). He adds that the term *prejudice* or *pre-judgment* can have either a positive or a negative value, a claim that stands in contradistinction to the view advanced by the Enlightenment critique of religion, for which the term conveys only the negative idea of a judgment without basis. Gadamer goes on to state that according to the assessment by Enlightenment advocates, 'The only thing that gives a judgment dignity is its having a basis, a methodological justification (and not the fact that it may actually be correct). For the Enlightenment the absence of such a basis does not mean that there might be other kinds of certainty, but rather that the judgment has no foundation in the things themselves – i.e., that it is 'unfounded'. This conclusion follows only in the spirit of rationalism. It is the reason for discrediting prejudices and the reason scientific knowledge claims to exclude them completely. In adopting this principle, modern science is following the rule of Cartesian doubt, accepting nothing as certain that can in any way be doubted, and adopting the idea of method that follows from this rule' (p. 271).

50 Gadamer, 'The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem,' in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 9.

51 *Conf.*, 5.14.24; p. 132.

52 Although exactly where Gadamer stands with regard to Christianity seems to be a debated point among scholars, I did come across a statement where Gadamer refers to himself as a 'Protestant' who shares Luther's conviction that the sacramental elements do not merely signify the body and blood of Christ (as in Zwingli's view) but 'are the flesh and blood of Christ'. Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 35 (italics original). Whether this statement accurately reflects the convictions Gadamer held over the course of his life is a question that goes beyond the knowledge I currently have of his thought; hence, my comments in this section concerning his religious views may need amending.

53 For an excellent discussion of this topic, see Wachterhauser, *Beyond Being*, especially pp. 122–30.

54 *Truth and Method*, p. 279.