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Katherine Chambers

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AUGUSTINE AND THE NATURAL LAW

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Abstract: Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE) is widely recognised as providing the foundational theological discussion of the natural law for Western Christianity. Yet his thinking on the natural law has not been examined in depth, despite the growing interest among contemporary theologians and philosophers in the natural law. For Christian thinkers, the idea of a natural moral law directly raises the question of the relationship between reason and revelation. In particular, the idea of the natural law needs to be reconciled with the idea of the divine law: that is, with the traditional Christian claim that knowing right from wrong is dependent in some way, or to some extent, on receiving God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. This study revisits and revises our understanding of how Augustine reconciled reason and revelation in his discussion of the natural law.

Keywords: Augustine of Hippo, Natural Law, Moral Philosophy, Moral Theology, Ancient Ethics

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1 Introduction

This study explores Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE)'s understanding of the natural law. In recent decades, there has been a revival of interest among philosophers in the natural law approach to ethics, also known as ethical naturalism.¹ Natural law ethics involves the claim that morality is objective and universal because it is based on facts about human nature, discoverable by reason. It is thus seen as an alternative to moral noncognitivism, the ethical stance that gained wide acceptance among moral philosophers in the twentieth century and which denies that moral facts exist.² Natural law ethics holds appeal because, by insisting that moral facts exist, it allows us to affirm the possibility of reaching agreement about ethical questions, despite differences of culture, upbringing, education and so on.

Ethical naturalism was the main approach to ethics in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. Nonetheless, modern philosophy's turn to ethical naturalism has mostly focussed on the writings of Aristotle, to the neglect of other ancient thinkers in this tradition.³ Yet these thinkers, who include the Stoics and Cicero as well as the Platonists and early Christians, have the potential to offer us valuable insights into the natural law approach to ethics. Hence, I suggest that an exclusive focus on Aristotle is to the detriment of our understanding of ethical naturalism. In this study, I propose to contribute to the project of broadening our knowledge of the ancient natural law tradition by outlining Augustine's understanding of the natural law. Augustine was one of the most influential Christian thinkers of late antiquity; his thought had a lasting impact on the development of Christian ethics throughout the Middle Ages and beyond; and he remains a figure of central importance for contemporary Christianity. Augustine accepted the existence of the natural law, raising the question of how he understood the natural law's relationship to Christianity. For his understanding of the natural

¹ G. E. M. Anscombe, 'Modern Moral Philosophy', *Philosophy* 33 (1958): 1–19; P. Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); M. Thompson, 'Apprehending Human Form', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 54 (2004): 47–74; R. Hursthouse, 'Human Nature and Aristotelian Virtue Ethics', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 70 (2012): 169–188; T. Angier, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Natural Law Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); T. Angier, *Natural Law Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

² A. J. Ayer, 'Chapter 6. Critique of Ethics and Theology', in *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Penguin, 1936); S. Blackburn, *Ruling Passions: A Theory of Practical Reasoning* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998).

³ For a recent appraisal of Aristotle in the light of modern ethical naturalism, see M. Hähnel, ed., *Aristotelian Naturalism, Historical-Analytical Studies on Nature, Mind and Action*, vol. 8, (Cham: Springer, 2020).

law, he drew, not on Aristotle, but on writings by Cicero, the Stoics and Neoplatonists.⁴ This means that a study of Augustine's understanding of the natural law gives us insights, not only into the early Christian reception of natural law ethics, but also into non-Christian post-Aristotelian developments in natural law thinking. In this study, I focus on the question of whether or not Augustine considered that the understanding of the natural law which he encountered in Stoic and Platonic sources was an approach to ethics which was compatible with Christianity. Did he share a notion of the natural law with these classical ('pagan') authors, or did he modify their idea of the natural law in the light of his Christian faith? What follows is a journey through Augustine's moral thought with a focus on the question of his reliance on reason, rather than revelation, for his ethical conclusions.

1.1 Natural Law and Theology

Recently Christian thinkers have rejected the possibility of reviving the ancient classical natural law approach to ethics; they argue that the Christian doctrine of the Fall rules out Christians accepting this approach's claim that moral knowledge is accessible to everyone – including those unacquainted with Jewish and Christian writings – simply through the study of human nature.⁵ Two arguments against the natural law have been proposed in the light of the doctrine of the Fall. First, it is claimed that while the bible shares the view of classical thinkers about the ontological basis of morality in human nature, the bible maintains that the nature in question is nature at creation, not fallen nature. This means that Christianity can only accept the normativity of nature if that nature is understood as the 'first' human nature, the nature of Adam and Eve before they fell: since human nature is now fallen, we cannot reliably access the knowledge of the good through the study of our nature; instead, this argument goes, we

⁴ Augustine describes his debt to Cicero and the Neoplatonists in *Confessions* 3.4.7 and 7.20.26. His writings are replete with references to Stoicism: see S. C. Byers, *Perception, Sensibility and Moral Motivation in Augustine: A Stoic-Platonic Synthesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁵ J. Daryl Charles, *Retrieving the Natural Law: A Return to Moral First Things* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008); M. Levering, *Biblical Natural Law: A Theocentric and Teleological Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); D. VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014); D. Haines and A. A. Fulford, *Natural Law: A Brief Introduction and Biblical Defense* (Lincoln: Davenant, 2017); T. Rowland, 'Chapter 7. Natural Law in Catholic Christianity' and J. Herdt, 'Chapter 8. Natural Law in Protestant Christianity', in Angier, *Cambridge Companion to Natural Law Ethics*.

must rely on the bible as the authoritative guide to morality.⁶ According to this account, reason can discover, at most, some basic moral principles or a few moral precepts, but, contrary to the view of classical natural law thinkers, reason cannot provide complete knowledge of morality.⁷

Second, as further support for the view that the doctrine of the Fall involves the rejection of the classical natural law tradition, Christian thinkers cite the effects of the Fall on human reason. This involves appeals to the Christian teachings that humans are the image of God, and that at the Fall, the image of God was partially lost: these teachings lead to the conclusion that human reason is impaired as a consequence of the Fall because the image of God is human reason and the Fall left this image damaged. It follows that Christianity teaches that human reason is itself fallen, with the result that, after the Fall, there are some truths which humans must learn, not through the use of reason, but by relying on God. This idea of the fallenness of human reason is viewed as offering further support for the conclusion that, after the Fall, humans must rely on revelation,⁸ rather than reason, as the guide to morality.

Thus, the idea that comprehensive moral knowledge is genuinely accessible to all people, everywhere, has not been widely accepted among modern Christian thinkers. Instead, Christian writings on the natural law in recent decades have concentrated on defending the idea that moral knowledge

⁶ Keith Ward comments that it is not 'imperfect' nature but 'ideal' nature which is the proper guide for Christian ethics: see 'Chapter 4. Moral Facts', in *Ethics and Christianity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1970), p. 73. For the Catholic position, see John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), para. 1, 'As a result of that mysterious original sin ... Man's capacity to know the truth is also darkened' and para. 36 'the need, given the present state of fallen nature, for Divine Revelation as an effective means for knowing moral truths'. Retrieved from www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html.

⁷ Levering (*Biblical Natural Law*) p. 4: 'While all human beings know the natural law at least to some degree, explanations of the character and content of the natural law are greatly assisted by faith, and thus also by biblical revelation'. VanDrunen (*Divine Covenants*, p. 14) states that in the covenant of creation, which God formed with Adam, the natural law made known 'humanity's basic moral obligations'. Daryl Charles, 'Chapter 1. Burying the Wrong Corpse: Protestants and the Natural Law', in J. Covington, B. McGraw and M. Watson, eds., *Natural Law and Evangelical Political Thought* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2013), writes of the natural law as giving 'basic moral reasoning', 'basic moral principles' and 'basic virtues' (pp. 21–22).

⁸ John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, para. 36: 'the dependence of human reason on Divine Wisdom and the need, given the present state of fallen nature, for Divine Revelation as an effective means for knowing moral truths, even those of the natural order'; also para. 44 and para. 112. VanDrunen (*Divine Covenants*), pp. 15–16 and 40 ('sinful human beings have damaged reason'). Haines and Fulford, *Natural Law*, p. 39, n. 28: 'The very fact that our knowledge of human nature is limited is one of the reasons why divine revelation in both inspired and inerrant scriptures, and in Christ himself, is important. The Word of God tells us what is wrong with humans and what humans are supposed to be like.'

is, at best, incomplete and imperfect in the absence of Christian faith. An exception to this approach is found in the New Natural Law (NNL) theory, whose proponents are Catholics and which is Thomist in origin, and which has gone some way towards accommodating the idea that universal moral knowledge is possible.⁹ However, the thesis of the NNL is that there has not been, until this point, a coherent understanding of the natural law in the Christian tradition, neither among medieval philosophers, including Aquinas himself, nor among the Christian thinkers of late antiquity, including Augustine.¹⁰ Instead, the NNL's notion of the natural law is proposed as 'new': in particular, it is proposed, not as a simple restatement, but rather as a development, of ideas contained in Aquinas and, consequently, as an attempt to provide what it is claimed the Christian tradition has always needed but lacked, namely, an account of the law that is 'written on human hearts' (Romans 2:15). In what follows, I seek to show, on the contrary, that Augustine had a coherent account of the natural law, making his account at least as worthy of our consideration as that of the NNL. Moreover, whereas the NNL theory does not seek to understand the ancient classical natural law tradition at all, instead seeking to build upon Aquinas's account, Augustine drew on this tradition for his understanding of the natural law. Hence, in studying Augustine's discussion of the natural law, we have the opportunity to discover how Christian thinkers perceived the main approach to ethics in the ancient world, an approach which also inspires modern moral philosophers. This is a further reason to pay particular attention to Augustine's account.

1.2 Natural Law in the Bible

As noted already, the view most often found in modern Christian scholarship on the natural law is that a biblical ethics, based upon the notion of the Fall, necessarily dismisses the possibility of independent, comprehensive moral knowledge. The problem with this claim, however, is that there are many passages in the bible which do support the idea that moral truths can be known by all humans without recourse to the bible's own teachings.

⁹ J. Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) and G. Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus. Vol. 1: Christian Moral Principles* (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald, 1983). For a critical response to the NNL, see Lisa Sowle Cahill, 'Chapter 11. Grisez on Sex and Gender: A Feminist Theological Perspective', in N. Biggar and R. Black, eds., *The Revival of Natural Law: Philosophical, Theological and Ethical Responses* (London: Routledge, 2000).

¹⁰ G. Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), 'Chapter 5. The Goods which fulfil human persons: Question F. What is St. Augustine's theory of the human good as a whole?'

These passages do not suggest that this knowledge is necessarily limited and imperfect. This in turn raises the question of whether what the bible says about the Fall can be reconciled with classical antiquity's view that everyone can know the moral law through studying human nature. This is the possibility of the ancient classical notion of the natural law as a biblical idea – not an idea critiqued, modified or transformed by the bible, but an idea embraced by the bible itself.

The evidence that the bible recognises that non-Christians can have moral knowledge is substantial. For example, there are the well-known passages in the *Letter to the Romans* where Paul alludes to moral standards which are known by Gentile non-believers, meaning, by those unacquainted with the Jewish scriptures or with Christ's teachings (Romans 1:26–32 and Romans 2:14–15). Paul uses terminology (what is proper and improper) which is Stoic in origin when referring to these moral standards.¹¹ In listing the things that are improper (Romans 1:29–31), Paul lists behaviour which was widely condemned in the ancient world, not just by Christians and Jews, but by Stoics and other Greco-Roman moralists as well.¹² He both uses a Stoic term and lists things which the Stoics also regarded as immoral; and the passage finishes with an explicit declaration that these things are known by Gentile non-Christians as sins (Romans 1:32, 'they have known the just decree of God'). Arguably, this passage is not intended as an exhaustive list of the sins that non-believers can know¹³; instead, it is intended to suggest that every sin could be found among them ('all unrighteousness') and likewise every sin could be known by them.¹⁴

There are a number of other New Testament texts which likewise raise the possibility of wide-ranging moral knowledge apart from Christian faith. For example, in 2 Corinthians 8:21, Paul stated, 'For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man', an allusion to Proverbs 3:4, 'in the sight of the Lord and

¹¹ See Romans 1:28. F. J. Leenhardt, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1957, 2nd ed., 2022), p. 70; J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, World Biblical Commentary vol. 38A (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), p. 66; J. Maartens, 'Romans 2.14–16: A Stoic Reading', *New Testament Studies* 40 (1994): 55–67, pp. 56–57.

¹² Dunn, *Romans*, p. 67 and Leenhardt, *Epistle*, pp. 70–71.

¹³ Dunn, *Romans*, p. 75 and Leenhardt, *Epistle*, p. 70. Maartens, 'Romans', p. 55: 'Paul is not going to charge the Gentiles with breaking the rules when they did not know they were playing the game. So what game were they playing? Paul convicts them on the same basis as he does the Jews: they broke the rules they were given, in their case reason.'

¹⁴ A. F. Johnson, 'Is There a Biblical Warrant for Natural-Law Theories?', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25 (1982), 185–199. Johnson sums up Romans 1:26–32 (p. 195): 'There is a universal knowledge of God and his will available to all persons apart from Biblical revelation.'

of men'. In this passage, he had earlier written of what is 'honourable', another Stoic term. Paul echoed this sentiment in 1 Thessalonians 4:12, 'so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders'.¹⁵

In a number of places, Paul also referred to nature as the source for norms of behaviour.¹⁶ Some commentators suggest that Paul could only accept nature as normative within the context of the biblical doctrine of creation,¹⁷ but in the context of 1 Corinthians 11:14, Paul appealed to nature as a teacher separately from his earlier reference to the Genesis creation story, and in Romans 1:26 and 2:14–15, the reference to nature occurred as part of his discussion of moral norms known by Gentile non-Christians. As a concept which does not occur in the Hebrew Bible (it is not present in Genesis at all), 'nature' would be an odd concept for Paul to introduce if his intention in 1 Corinthians 11:14 was to point to the doctrine of creation as the source of moral guidance, especially as he must have known of the importance of 'nature' in Greek moral philosophy.¹⁸

Paul makes frequent reference to the commandments of God in his letters, which might suggest that he accepts the concept of divine positive law (the Torah, the written laws of the Old Testament, morals as revealed through a direct communication from God), but scholars point out that some at least of his references to God's commandments cannot be read in this way. For example, as noted earlier, in Romans 1:32, he refers to people outside the Jewish and Christian communities (those whose knowledge of God comes through the study of nature, and who are idol-worshippers), but he still writes 'they have known the just decree of God' (Romans 1:32). This suggests that God's decree refers to the natural law: that is, to the idea that God's will (and therefore God's commandment) is one and the same thing as the moral norms discernible in human nature. Hence, this is not 'law' in the sense of positive law, but law in the sense of an order inherent in the world, which corresponds to the divine will. Likewise, in

¹⁵ Johnson, 'Biblical Warrant', pp. 196–198, lists these passages and others (1 Cor 10:32; Phil 4:8; 1 Pet 2:12).

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 11:14. Also Romans 1:26–27 and 2:14–15. See Dunn's comment (*Romans*, p. 64) that *phusis*, 'nature', 'is not a Hebrew concept; the term only comes into the [Septuagint] in the later works which originated in Greek ... The concept is primarily Greek, and typically Stoic – to live in harmony with the natural order and its divine rationality being a Stoic ideal'.

¹⁷ C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), p. 35: 'the decisive factor in Paul's use of [nature] is the doctrine of creation'.

¹⁸ See Maartens, 'Romans', p. 57: 'What is significant is not only Paul's casting of the language in Stoic technical terms, but the fact that Paul continues to condemn the Gentiles on the basis of nature. Paul is, after all, under no compulsion to name these practices as "unnatural"; it would be more to the point for Paul to call them evil and sinful.'

1 Corinthians 7:19, he referred to the ‘commandments of God’, but this is also not a reference to Torah, since he had just said that ‘circumcision is nothing’: given that circumcision is commanded by Torah, he could not be referring to Torah here. Nikko Huttunen suggests that by the commandments of God in this passage Paul meant the natural law: in 1 Corinthians 7:19, Paul, using the natural law as the basis for his moral judgement, claimed that a person’s social status was nothing and circumcision was nothing. Huttunen shows that in both the earlier cases (Romans 1:32 and 1 Corinthians 7:19), the writings of the Stoics (in this case, Epictetus) carried exactly the same moral views as Paul expressed here.¹⁹

Thus, there is evidence that Paul accepted that the moral teachings that he set forth in his writings were teachings which were shared with non-Jewish and non-Christian moralists in his society. Indeed, Thorsteinsson has shown that all the moral advice which Paul offered in Romans 1:26–32 and Romans 12–15 (Paul’s fullest discussion of ethics) had a close parallel in contemporary or near-contemporary Stoic texts; there was nothing distinctive about the morals which Paul taught here when compared to those taught by the Stoics, including his comments on sexual sins in Romans 1:26–32 and on neighbour-love, resisting the urge for revenge, and treating one’s enemies well in Romans 12–15.²⁰ In this way, we can conclude that Paul did not understand himself as disclosing moral principles which he considered unknowable by his readers except through the medium of his letter or through an acquaintance with the ethical teachings of Judaism. Instead, he was aware that everyone could know the things that he identified as involved in living well: that is, he thought of the moral law as universally applicable and universally knowable. This matched his message in Romans 1:26–32 and 2:14–15 about the possibility of moral knowledge in the absence of Christian faith. It also supports the view that for Paul, the divine law was not always the divine positive law, or Torah, but could also be the natural law: the law that was known through the application of reason to the study of human nature.

Modern scholarship has also identified the existence of a notion similar to the natural law in many writings of the Old Testament. As noted

¹⁹ N. Huttunen, ‘Chapter 3. Stoic Law in Paul?’ in Tuomas Rasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen and Ismo Dunderberg, eds., *Stoicism in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), pp. 44–46 and 55.

²⁰ R. Thorsteinsson, ‘Chapter 2. Stoicism as a Key to Pauline Ethics in Romans’, in Rasimus et al., *Stoicism*, pp. 23–34. See also C. Hayes, ‘Chapter 4. Paul: Minding the Gap’, in *What’s Divine about Divine Law? Early Perspectives* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); and S. K. Stowers, ‘Chapter 4. Jesus the Teacher and Stoic Ethics in the Gospel of Matthew’, in Rasimus, et al., *Stoicism*.

already, nature or *phusis* is not a concept which is present in the Hebrew Scriptures; nonetheless, many of the books of the Old Testament contain the idea of an order in the world which is relevant to human conduct and comprehensible by humans (all humans).²¹ While it might be concluded that it is too ambitious to expect humans to understand the order inherent in the world, this is not the assumption of those Old Testament writers who assume that humans do derive their moral knowledge from this order.

Thus, there are places in the Old Testament where ethics is understood not as a matter of divine positive law and covenant, but as a matter of principles which all humans can know. For example, in Genesis 12 and 20, Pharaoh and Abimelek recognised that it is morally wrong to take another man's wife (in this case, Sarai/Sarah, whom they had believed to be Abram/Abraham's sister).²² Similarly, Barton finds that the prophet Amos did not base his moral condemnations on appeals to Israelite laws, but rather on general appeals to 'justice and righteousness': Amos is concerned with sins which he thinks 'would seem abominable to anyone'.²³ The Wisdom literature, including the Book of Proverbs, does not contain appeals to the Mosaic laws at all; instead, Barr notes that the Wisdom literature 'has an air of expressing norms of "natural" morality, rather than of revealing anything previously unknown'.²⁴ The content of these 'wise sayings' was shared with the cultures surrounding ancient Israel, including the wisdom literature of ancient Egypt.²⁵ There are moral principles, like that of hospitality, which are frequently mentioned in the Old Testament, but never enter into a legal code (Genesis 18:3; 19:1; 24:14; Judges 19:3); while the way some Israelite laws are worded itself testifies to pre-existing moral standards which are modified, but neither directly endorsed nor rejected, by these laws (for example, Numbers 35:19 and Deuteronomy 24:16 which assume that the principle of vengeance – an avenger will put a murderer to death – already exists as a moral principle).²⁶

Moreover, there are places in the Old Testament where 'justice' is not understood as 'whatever God commands' (a divine positive law approach). Thus, Rodd notes that in Genesis 18:25, Abraham's appeal to God, 'Shall

²¹ J. Barton, 'Chapter 4. The Moral Order', in *Ethics in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

²² Barton, 'Moral Order', p. 101. ²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ J. Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 421.

²⁵ Barr, *Biblical Faith*, p. 448, who refers to the well-known parallels between the laws of ancient Israel and those of Mesopotamia, including the Hammurabi laws. See Exodus 21–23, including 21:1–6 and 21:28–32.

²⁶ H. D. Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), p. 188, cites these passages and others.

not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?' indicates that there is a standard of justice by which even God's actions are to be judged and that Abraham knows this standard and asks God to respect it in his dealings with Sodom.²⁷

Thus, we can see that there are places in the bible which do not assume that only a minimal or basic knowledge of morality is possible in the absence of faith in YHWH; instead, these passages take for granted the fact of wide-ranging moral knowledge, perhaps even a comprehensive understanding of morality, which is independent of divine positive law and independent of Christian or Jewish faith. This has potentially radical implications for the Christian approach to ethics. Contemporary theological discussions sometimes have recourse to the idea of the natural law to support the claim that non-Christian people can know for themselves some of the moral positions found in the bible, or to explain why Christians can hope to persuade non-Christians of the truth of the bible's moral views.²⁸ These claims, however, do not really make use of the idea of the natural law. This is because the idea of the natural law, understood as the moral law knowable by all humans everywhere, is not compatible with a commitment to the idea that the bible is always correct in its pronouncements about moral matters: with the idea of the natural law, the bible recognises that people can know right from wrong for themselves; the bible thereby gives authority to reason in the investigation of morality, meaning that the bible itself does not require us to affirm as true any statements found within it which do not agree with the conclusions that independent reason reaches about the contents of the moral law. This is the most important implication of the finding that the natural law is a biblical idea: namely, that with the idea of the natural law, the bible points us to a standard outside itself for judging the moral claims that it makes (just as, arguably, it points us to standards outside its pages for judging the scientific and historical claims found within it).

At the same time, the fact that thinkers in the ancient eudaimonist natural law tradition shared many of the moral views found in the bible is not evidence that these views are sound since these thinkers themselves might have failed to apply their reason well to the study of human nature. We will see that 'human nature' in the natural law tradition is meant to capture everyone's experience of being human; hence, each of us must

²⁷ C. S. Rodd, 'Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth do What Is Just? (Gen. xviii.25)', *The Expository Times* 83 (1972): 137–139.

²⁸ D. VanDrunen, 'Chapter 6. Learning the Natural Law and Engaging the Public Square', *Natural Law: A Short Companion* (Brentwood: B&H Academic, 2023).

be able to recognise ourselves in the natural law's description of what it is to be human. Historically, thinkers in the natural law tradition often reached moral judgements based upon a failure to appreciate the diversity of human experiences, including the experiences of women, transgender people, sexual minorities, the neurodiverse, disabled, and racial and ethnic groups. As Sowl Cahill notes, more careful attention to the lives of those who have not historically enjoyed cultural and religious authority 'will reward us with a more, not less, objective understanding of moral goods'.²⁹

1.3 Augustine in Modern Scholarship

Given the biblical evidence in support of the claim that humans can know right from wrong independently of divine positive law and independently of the moral statements found in the bible itself, the idea of the natural law can be said to be a Christian idea in the sense of an idea compatible with, and even required by, Christian faith. Nonetheless, as we have seen, the idea that comprehensive moral knowledge is genuinely accessible to all people, everywhere, has not been widely accepted among modern Christian thinkers. Instead, recent Christian writings on the natural law generally defend the idea that there can be only a minimal understanding of moral truths among non-Christians, and they do so by pointing to the biblical account of the Fall. Thus, there is a tension between what the bible says about the possibility of universal moral knowledge and what the traditional interpretation of the doctrine of the Fall says about this possibility. This is a further reason to return to Augustine of Hippo who both embraced the idea of the natural law and who also wrote extensively about the idea of the Fall and original sin. Can we find in his writings a way to accommodate the idea of the Fall to the bible's recognition that people outside the Christian and Jewish traditions can grasp many, perhaps all, moral truths?

To date, scholarship on Augustine has attributed to him the same view of the natural law as found in modern treatments of this topic: namely, the view that the doctrine of the Fall means that Christianity cannot accept the classical idea of the natural law. Scholars report that, for Augustine, fallen humans know next to nothing of the natural law because the Fall has almost completely erased the knowledge of this law from our minds, meaning that we must rely upon divine revelation for most of our knowledge of morality. Thus, in his classic study, *The Political and Social Ideas*

²⁹ Sowl Cahill, 'Grisez on Sex and Gender', p. 259.

of *St. Augustine*, Herbert Deane claimed that, in Augustine's eyes, 'sin and unrighteousness have almost effaced from men's hearts the natural law that God has implanted, although some faint traces of that law still remain'.³⁰

More recently, Porter states that Augustine held that 'given the pervasive effects of sin, our moral knowledge is at best limited and corrupt'.³¹ Covington likewise concludes: 'the radical effects of sin give Augustine rather low expectations of what natural law can accomplish and how completely it can be known'.³² It has also been argued that Augustine considered that the natural law was itself only a partial guide to sin. This view holds that, in Augustine's eyes, while pagans and other non-Christians had access to the moral teachings of the natural law, these teachings did not enlighten them as to all the possible ways in which they might sin. The natural law's teachings about sin needed to be supplemented, not just by the teachings of the bible, but also by the guidance of divine grace itself. Until this happened, there would be many occasions on which merely knowing the principles of the natural law would not be enough to ensure that people knew how to avoid sinning.³³

Thus, modern interpreters consider that Augustine looked on the bible as rejecting the notion that the complete knowledge of morality could be found outside its pages: for them, he modified the classical idea of the natural law in the light of the biblical doctrine of the Fall, arguing that fallen humans had only a very incomplete grasp of the natural law and that this law provided nothing more than the bare outlines of morality anyway. Yet Augustine was a careful scholar of the bible and widely read in classical philosophy, making it unlikely that he overlooked those biblical passages

³⁰ H. A. Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 93. See also p. 95. Similarly, R. W. Dyson, *St Augustine of Hippo. The Christian Transformation of Politics* (London: Continuum, 2006), pp. 12, 18–19, and pp. 54–55.

³¹ J. Porter, *Natural and Divine Law: Reclaiming the Tradition for Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 12. A. Fogelman, 'Augustine and Natural Law: Negotiating the Saeculum with Markus, Milbank and Mathewes', *Political Theology* 20 (2019): 595–612: while Augustine does not completely reject the notion of natural law, he is somewhat sceptical towards it (p. 596), maintaining that human nature must be considered 'from a theological standpoint' (p. 604).

³² J. Covington, 'Chapter 8. The Grammar of Virtue: Augustine and the Natural Law', in Covington, et al., *Natural Law*, p. 170. See also p. 173: for Augustine, 'What is "natural" before the Fall is clearly different from what is called "natural" after the Fall'.

³³ R. Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 118: '[Augustine] recognises that, owing to the effects of original sin, many moral obligations cannot easily be determined'. See also pp. 73–74 and 212–213; and Dodaro's entry on 'Justice' in A. Fitzgerald, ed., *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 483.

which confirmed the possibility of extensive, perhaps comprehensive, moral knowledge among non-believers. For this reason, it is timely to reconsider his comments on the natural law, with a focus on the question of what changes, if any, he thought Christianity demanded of the classical natural law tradition.

1.4 The Classical Natural Law Tradition

It is not possible to evaluate how Augustine viewed the classical natural law tradition without first understanding the claims made by that tradition itself. As stated already, my focus here is on the understanding of the natural law among Stoics and Platonists.³⁴ The Stoics and Platonists considered that moral truths were known through studying human nature because they understood ‘goodness’ as equivalent to ‘well-being’ or ‘correct functioning’. This remains one meaning for goodness today: for example, we say that it is good for plants to have water, and this means ‘good plants have water’; here ‘goodness’ refers to what it means for a plant to thrive or flourish.³⁵ Contemporary ethical naturalists argue that this was the original meaning for goodness; other meanings gradually accrued to the idea of goodness, but in the ancient world, a good human was simply a flourishing human: ethics, as an inquiry into goodness, was an inquiry into the flourishing human life, the *eudaimon* life in Greek and *beata vita* in Latin (sometimes translated as the happy life).³⁶ Hence, for ancient thinkers, the natural law described what it meant for a human to flourish.

The idea that goodness referred to flourishing meant that ancient thinkers looked upon the meaning of goodness as objective and universally knowable. ‘Flourishing’ was not a state which could differ from one human to another; we discovered what was involved in human flourishing by studying ourselves and other humans, discerning the traits that we shared in common and identifying how we differed as a species from other species. In other words, flourishing was the same as living in complete accordance with our nature as humans, meaning that we were good when we conformed in every way to our human nature.³⁷ Moreover, the

³⁴ For Aristotelianism as a kind of Platonism, see L. P. Gerson, ‘Chapter 1.1 The Perennial Value of Platonism’, in A. J. B. Hampton and J. P. Kenney, eds., *Christian Platonism: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p. 22.

³⁵ Anscombe, ‘Modern Moral Philosophy’, pp. 5–7.

³⁶ Anscombe, ‘Modern Moral Philosophy’, p. 6.

³⁷ For an overview of Stoic ethics, see B. Inwood, ‘Ch. 5. Ethics’, in *Stoicism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); and C. Gill, *Learning to Live Naturally: Stoics Ethics and Its Modern Significance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022). I have used Inwood’s *Later Stoicism 155 BC to AD 200: An Introduction*

natural law tradition noted that everyone always wanted to flourish and no-one could stop wanting this, or want anything which was judged to be opposed to flourishing, meaning that this desire was itself natural to us: it was inborn and ineradicable, so that flourishing was something which we could not help but want, and want in everything which we desired, with the result that we would always consider the issue of whether or not something contributed to our flourishing. Hence, it follows that, for natural law ethics, we would always have a motive to follow the precepts of the natural law once we learned what they were.

Given this, it might seem that ancient thinkers must have considered that everyone already lived the flourishing life: as members of the human species, we could hardly do otherwise than live in accordance with our human nature. The natural law tradition, however, found that living in complete accordance with human nature required more of us than simply following our desires. This was because it found that human nature was distinguished from other animal natures by its rationality. Natural law thinkers held that all humans were rational: we had features in common with other animals, and these set us apart from other rational beings (spirits and deities), while our rationality set us apart from other animals. Hence, in the natural law tradition, to be human was to be a reasoning animal.³⁸

Moreover, natural law thinkers concluded that the function of human reason was to rule humans' animal part. Consequently, we only lived in accordance with our nature as humans when our reason did what it was fitted by nature to do, namely, to govern our irrational desires.³⁹ All humans possessed reason and began using it from their earliest years. But we also learned from reason that, whatever things formed the objects of our desires, we would only desire these things in a way which was truly in accordance with our nature if our desire for them was governed by reason.

In other words, the function of reason was to study the things that we were born desiring, or which we desired in common with other humans, and to bring these desires into accordance with the capacities and limitations that all humans were born with, or which emerged in the course of our common development. The natural law tradition concluded that this was

and *Collection of Sources in Translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022) [abbrev. *LSCST*] to identify relevant Stoic texts. Strobaeus, *Eclagues* 2.76.6–15 (I-75, *LSCST*); Clement, *Stromata* 2.21.129 (I-76, *LSCST*); Seneca, *Letters on Ethics*, 121.5.8–9 (IV-31, *LSCST*).

³⁸ Seneca, *Letters on Ethics* 76.9–11 (IV-31, *LSCST*); Cicero, *On Duties*, 1.11 (I-71, *LSCST*).

³⁹ Seneca, Letter 124.23, in Inwood, *Seneca*, p. 103; Cicero, *On Duties*, 1.101 (I-94 *LSCST*): 'reason is in charge and appetite obeys'; Seneca, *On Benefits*, 2.18.1 (I-110 *LSCST*): 'we should go through life under the guidance of reason'.

a requirement for humans to flourish, understood as the life in accordance with our human nature: to have our reason bring all our desires for food, shelter, self-preservation, companionship, pleasure, play, reproduction and so on into accordance with the limits and capacities that were common to us all. Since we were good, or virtuous, when our whole lives conformed to our human nature, it followed that virtue referred to the thought that governed all these desires within these limits; while vice referred to the way of thinking that failed to govern them within these limits. Equally, virtue referred to the correct ordering of all our desires, so that we made our ultimate goal only what was involved in human flourishing, and vice referred to disorder in our desires, through misunderstanding what we needed to flourish.

All the principles of the natural law were derived through reflecting upon what it meant to live in complete accordance with our human nature. For example, ancient natural law theorists agreed that reason established that humankind was sociable: reason taught reciprocity and interdependence, which meant that we must exert ourselves on behalf of others and even risk being harmed in their service.⁴⁰ There was a strong emphasis in the ancient sources on the vulnerability of the individual human: we needed others to survive, meaning that living as humans would involve living with others. This could not permit us to treat others as the means to our survival, rather than as ends, since living in accordance with human nature could not prevent another from living in accordance with human nature; otherwise, human nature would be in conflict with itself. Hence, the flourishing of the many could not come at the price of the misery of the one or the few: by definition, living in accordance with human nature must be something which all humans could achieve. This meant that we did not live this life if we lived in a way which prevented others from living as we did. These were the rational considerations underpinning the natural law view that human nature was not only social but also sociable, that is, social in a way which involved actively promoting everyone's well-being, insofar as this lay within our powers. Our flourishing could not prevent another from flourishing; we would thrive only when we acted in ways compatible with everyone else thriving since thriving meant living the fully human life and this must be a life which every human could live.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Gill, *Learning to Live Naturally*, pp. 226–246. Marcus Aurelius, *To Himself*, 5.1 and 11.1 ('Love of one's neighbours ... [this is] characteristic of a rational soul') (IV-48 LSCST); Epictetus, *Discourse* 1.19.13–14 (V-44 LSCST); Seneca, *On Benefits*, 4.18.2–4 (IV-25 LSCST); Hierocles, *The Elements of Ethics* XI.14–20 (VI-37 LSCST).

⁴¹ See Gill, *Learning to Live Naturally*, pp. 264–265. Also, G. Reydams-Schils, 'Human Bonding and *Oikeiōsis* in Roman Stoicism', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*

At the same time, natural law thinkers did not conclude that the social life was sufficient for virtue; as noted earlier, the fully human life was as much a matter of our interior lives (our thoughts and desires) as a matter of our exterior lives (our interactions with others). Often our interior lives would shape how we treated others, but our attitudes and ideas were of moral concern to natural law thinkers even when they did not have an effect upon our treatment of other people. Reason is needed to bring not only our actions but also our thoughts and desires into accordance with the capacities and limitations that are present among all humans. For example, natural law thinkers observed that no human could be secure in the possession of any mutable thing; everything in the physical world, including our own body's health, as well as any material possession, was something which a human could lack, or lose, despite wanting to hold onto it.⁴² If humans could lack something, despite wanting to have it, then that thing was not something which it was suitable for a human to want to have as though it could never be lost. That is, in studying our nature, we learned that living in complete accordance with our nature involved moderating our attitude to all external things: it would never be appropriate for us to want some of these things (since having them, or seeking to have them, would not accord with sociability); in the case of other things, we must want them in a way which was appropriate to our nature as beings with limited power over everything external to us. Since humans could lack or lose external and bodily things, it followed that we must not want these things as though having them was a feature of the fully human life.⁴³

This insight led the Stoics to conclude that virtue, or goodness, referred to thinking that nothing perishable or changeable was needed for the enjoyment of the fully human life: living in accordance with our nature involved ridding ourselves of the mistaken idea that we needed any temporal thing to flourish. To think of temporal things as needed for flourishing was a thought which was itself out of accord with our nature, meaning

22 (2002): 221–251. I address N. Wolterstorff's criticism that Stoicism fails to view the welfare of others as a good in its own right (*Justice: Rights and Wrongs* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008]), in Chambers, *Augustine on the Nature of Virtue and Sin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), pp. 16–44.

⁴² Diogenes Laertius, 7.101–104 (I-78 LSCST) and Cicero, *On Goals* 3.49–50 (I-79 LSCST). Epictetus (on externals): *Discourse*, 1.51.1 (V-4 LSCST), 3.3.5 (V-47 LSCST), 2.8.1 (V-49 LSCST).

⁴³ Gill gives a strong account of how indifference to temporal goods did not equate to indifference to other humans, but instead involved loving others and promoting their well-being: *Learning to Live Naturally*, pp. 237–246.

that this thought was itself a vice. Moreover, when we rid ourselves of this thought, we would live the sociable life, since the Stoics concluded that it was through desiring mutable things as though they formed part of the flourishing human life that we were driven into unsociable conduct. For the Stoics, it was part of the flourishing life to desire these things, for ourselves and for others, but only in a way which recognised that the possession of them escaped our complete control. Hence, for the Stoics, we would flourish as soon as we embraced the idea that nothing temporal was needed for flourishing; this meant that 'goodness' in Stoicism referred to recognising this idea as all that was needed for happiness.

Cicero and the Platonists agreed with the Stoics that flourishing involved ceasing to think of temporal things as though they were needed for living the fully human life; but they added that this was not enough for flourishing. This was because they concluded that the function of human reason was not only to govern our animal desires in the light of an understanding of our nature, but also to seek after (Cicero) and to apprehend (the Platonists) the highest truth.⁴⁴ This led the Platonists to conclude that it was in knowing the true God, understood as Truth itself, that we would flourish. This meant that virtue, for the Platonists, did not consist simply in the government of our animal desires by reason, it also consisted in our reasoning discovering the highest truth. For the Platonists, we grasped that nothing temporal was needed for happiness, but also saw that merely knowing this was not enough for happiness, since the human mind was fitted to know the divine. In this way, the Platonists held that we lived the fully human life in discovering our mind's innate idea of the true God in the contemplation of which our reason attained its end: we were happy in the vision of the divine. Hence, goodness referred to purifying oneself of temporal things so that one could love and know the highest truth.⁴⁵

The natural law tradition thus used reason to discover the characteristics of the fully natural life. The Stoics and Platonists were theists and so their account of the happy life included belief in God. It has been

⁴⁴ Cicero, *On Duties* 1.13, 'It is above all characteristic of human beings to enquire into and probe for the truth' (I-71 *LSCST*). Here, I draw on C. S. Byers' account of Platonism in *Perception*, pp. 46–51; and L. Zwollo, 'Aflame in Love: St. Augustine's Doctrine of *amor* and Plotinus' Notion of *Eros*', *Studia Patristica* 75 (2017): 69–80. Also, George Boys-Stones, 'Chapter 17. The Goal: Virtue and the Ideal Life', in *Platonist Philosophy 80 BC to AD 250: An Introduction and Collection of Sources in Translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). F. Sheffield, *Plato's Symposium: The Ethics of Desire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 42: 'Happiness, Socrates will argue, consists in a godlike life of contemplation of the divine form'.

⁴⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads* I.2–6, in E. O'Brien, trans., *The Essential Plotinus*, pp. 110–117.

suggested, however, that the natural law, with its notion that humans have a *telos* or goal, requires belief in a Creator God.⁴⁶ However, the natural law's notion of human nature does not require us to posit such a being. In ethical naturalism, the notion of 'purpose' or 'goal' is captured by the very idea of a 'nature'. All living things, by virtue of being living things, have a purpose or *telos* in this sense: all living things aim at being completely what they are; everything with a nature aims to live in complete accordance with that nature.

The idea of a natural 'law' does not presuppose, moreover, the idea of a divine legislator. The natural law is a 'law' in the same way that any other law governing the natural world is a law. We talk about the laws of science, but what we really mean is a pattern or regularity discoverable in nature; the natural law makes use of the same notion of law. The idea of the natural law expresses the thought that humans embody a particular order or structure: they are a particular kind of being. Living in accordance with the natural law makes a person 'good', in the sense of 'flourishing'. This is the only sense of goodness with which the natural law is concerned: hence there is no need for a decree that 'it is good to flourish'; there is no need for God to require obedience to the natural law. This would be to frame the natural law within another conception of ethics: 'good' in this sentence would not be synonymous with the notion of human flourishing.⁴⁷

2 Augustine and the Natural Law

I have argued elsewhere that Augustine developed his ethics from within the ancient tradition of eudaimonism: upon becoming a Christian, he did not break with this tradition, or modify it in any way; rather, his very conversion to Christianity, as well as the explanation of Christian doctrine which he defended throughout his career as a priest and bishop, remained continuous with ancient eudaimonism.⁴⁸ In the present study, I relate this insight to Augustine's discussion of the natural law.

Throughout his career, Augustine accepted the existence of the natural law. He identified this law with the 'law written on the heart' of Romans 2:14–15, which also associated this law with the testimony of the conscience. Thus, in *On the Lord's Sermon on the Mount*, he read the law written in the heart as 'the law of nature': God spoke in the conscience of every rational soul in the natural law.

⁴⁶ Levering insists on the need for a 'Creator's teleological ordering' (*Biblical Natural Law*, p. 137; also p. 15).

⁴⁷ Anscombe, 'Modern Moral Philosophy', p. 8.

⁴⁸ This is my argument throughout Chambers, *Augustine on the Nature of Virtue*.

For when will they be able to understand that there is no soul, however wicked, which can yet reason in any way, in whose conscience God does not speak? For who but God has written the law of nature in the hearts of men? [Augustine then quotes Romans 2:14–16].⁴⁹

Question 53 of *On Eighty-Three Different Questions* also referred to the natural law, describing it as the law ‘written upon the rational soul’, which was arguably an allusion to the law ‘written upon’ the heart of Romans 2:14–15.⁵⁰ In *Against Faustus*, Faustus also identified the ‘law of nature’ with the law described in Romans 2:14–15, an identification which Augustine did not challenge.⁵¹

Augustine held that the natural law had two key characteristics. The first of these, as indicated by his references to ‘conscience’, was that the natural law was a law about morality: that is, this law was composed of moral precepts, so that to transgress this law was to sin. Moreover, the moral principles set out in the natural law were morally sound: it was not mistaken in what it condemned or commended. Hence, Augustine explained that the ‘godless’, who formed their moral judgements according to this law, offered blame and praise ‘rightly’.⁵²

The second key characteristic of the natural law was that it was knowable by the exercise of human reason. Thus in *On the Punishment and Forgiveness of Sins*, he indicated that the *lex naturalis* was the law known by anyone ‘using reason’.⁵³ He similarly indicated in the passage from *On the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount*, which was quoted earlier, that God spoke in the reason: the law of nature was written in everyone’s heart and it was knowable through reason.⁵⁴

In the classical natural law tradition, what was contrary to the law of nature was sinful, or, in other words, sin was whatever was against nature; goodness referred to living in accordance with human nature. Augustine likewise maintained that goodness and sin corresponded to what did, and did not, accord with our nature. For example, he indicated that something was sinful if it was ‘contrary to nature’.⁵⁵ He said much the same thing when he stated: ‘For there is nothing so discordant by vice, so social by nature,

⁴⁹ *The Lord’s Sermon on the Mount* 2.9.32.

⁵⁰ *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, Question 53.2. See also Question 31.1, where he quotes Cicero’s *De inventione*, ‘there is a law rooted in nature’.

⁵¹ *Against Faustus* 19.1–2.

⁵² *The Trinity* 14.15.21: ‘For hence it is that even the godless think of eternity, and rightly condemn and rightly praise many things in the moral conduct of men.’

⁵³ *On the Punishment and Forgiveness of Sins and Baptism of Little Ones* 1.10.12.

⁵⁴ See also *Expositions of the Psalms*, Ex. of Psalm 57.1.

⁵⁵ *On the Spirit and the Letter* 27.47.

as humankind.⁵⁶ Sociability was natural, meaning that unsociability was contrary to nature. Since unsociability, understood as discord among humans, was also vicious, this statement supported the conclusion that what was contrary to nature was vicious. There are many other passages throughout his writings where he described vice in these terms.⁵⁷

Nature in this context meant human nature. Thus, Augustine stated in *Against Faustus* that humans were not ‘evil through nature’, their own ‘or another’s’, but through their own ‘will’; hence, they were rightly loved ‘for [their] nature’.⁵⁸ Later in *Against Faustus* he stated: ‘sin, then, is any deed, word or desire contrary to the eternal law. And the eternal law is the divine reason or will of God, commanding the preservation of the natural order and forbidding the disturbance of it.’⁵⁹ Sin referred to any voluntary thing (deed, word or desire) which disturbed the natural order in humans; whatever was in accordance with this natural order, however, was not wicked, so that this natural order itself was rightly loved. This passage presented the principle that sin referred to whatever disturbed the natural order in humans as a principle of the eternal law, or the divine reason or will. Yet this did not mean that this principle was not part of the natural law; on the contrary, as noted already, the idea of a natural law itself implied that sin was anything, willed by a human, which was against nature.

Like the classical natural law tradition, Augustine equated happiness or flourishing (*beatitudo*) with the life in accordance with human nature and hence with goodness. Thus, he connected the correct understanding of the happy life with the correct understanding of the moral law, directly or indirectly, in a number of places. For example, in common with the natural law tradition, he maintained that the desire for happiness was universal and ineradicable: no one was capable of setting aside considerations of their own happiness.⁶⁰ Moreover, we were led to know right from wrong through correctly understanding happiness. Thus, he explained that moral philosophy (“ethics” in Greek) was concerned with identifying the supreme good (*Summum Bonum*), defined as that ‘which leaves us nothing more to seek for our happiness’.⁶¹ In other words, knowing morality was a matter of knowing wherein lay human happiness.

The passage from *Against Faustus* presented sin as rebellion against the divine reason. Elsewhere, Augustine explained that we were free from sin,

⁵⁶ *The City of God* 12.28. ⁵⁷ See further, Section 2.8 ‘Two human natures?’

⁵⁸ *Against Faustus* 19.24. ⁵⁹ *Against Faustus* 22.27.

⁶⁰ *Trinity* 13.5.8; *The Happy Life* 2.10; *The Morals of the Catholic Church* 3.4; *Nature and Grace* 49 (57); *Enchiridion* 28 (105).

⁶¹ *City of God* 8.8. See also *Of True Religion* 23.44.

or well-ordered, when reason governed our animal desires,⁶² but he added in other places that reason itself needed to find its end in the knowledge of God. This was an allusion to the Platonic notion that it was not enough for reason to exercise its proper government of our animal nature; virtue also required that reason attained its proper end in the knowledge of divine truth. Thus, in *On True Religion*, he stated, agreeing with the Platonists, ‘to the rational and intellectual soul is given to enjoy the contemplation of [God’s] eternity....’⁶³ When he addressed himself to Platonist philosophers in *City of God*, he praised Plato for his emphasis on contemplation. He understood Plato as affirming that humans were ‘so created’ as to have knowing the truth as their end, which meant knowing ‘the one true God of supreme goodness’.⁶⁴ Similarly, the passage from *Against Faustus* which was quoted earlier continued, ‘in the soul itself the reason is superior by the law of nature to the other parts which are found also in beasts; and in reason itself, which is partly contemplation and partly action, contemplation is unquestionably the superior part. The object of contemplation is the image of God, by which we are renewed through faith to sight. Rational action ought therefore to be subject to the control of contemplation ...’.⁶⁵

Augustine explained sin as a matter of our wills, or loves, in the passage from *Against Faustus*. In locating the ultimate goal of reason in the contemplation of the true God, he followed the Platonists in explaining sin, more precisely, as a matter of loving what was temporal in the place of what was eternal.⁶⁶ He held that, in essence, sin consisted in ‘lust’, also known as ‘cupidity’,⁶⁷ a definition of sin with which the Stoics would have agreed as well: ‘We have agreed that all evil deeds are evil for no other reason than that they are committed from lust, that is, wrongful cupidity’.⁶⁸ He indicated that *libido* or *cupiditas* referred to the ‘love of things which one may lose against one’s will’.⁶⁹ In another place, he explained that cupidity meant ‘the love of getting and holding onto temporal things’.⁷⁰ A little later in *On Free Will*, he described ‘doing evil’, or sinning, as ‘to neglect eternal things which the mind itself perceives and enjoys and loves

⁶² *On Free Will* 1.7.16–1.8.18. ⁶³ *True Religion* 3.3. ⁶⁴ *City of God* 8.4.

⁶⁵ *Against Faustus* 22.27. See also *Sermon the Mount* 9 (9).

⁶⁶ *Free Will*, 1.3.8.20–1.4.9.22. See also 1.4.10, where Evodius states: ‘Now I am glad to have learned what culpable cupidity is, which we also call lust. Evidently it is love of things which one may lose against one’s will.’ Later, Augustine writes of ‘those who are happy on account of their love of eternal things’ (1.15.31). Book 1 of *Free Will* concludes with the following definition of sin: ‘all sins are included in this one class, viz. turning away from things which are divine and truly abiding, and turning to things which are changeable and uncertain’ (1.16.34–35).

⁶⁷ *Free Will* 1.3.8. ⁶⁸ *Free Will* 1.4.10. ⁶⁹ *Free Will* 1.4.10.

⁷⁰ *Eighty-Three Different Questions* 36.1.

and cannot lose, and to pursue, as if they were great and wonderful, temporal things ... [which] can never be possessed with complete certainty'.⁷¹ This is consistent with his view that the ultimate goal of reason was to know the true God; here, he claimed that love, understood as the desire that we felt for whatever we named as our ultimate goal (that is, as our supreme good, the thing in which we located our happiness), must have the true God, the one eternal thing, as its object.⁷² His message was that when we failed to have the true God as the object of this love, we inevitably had something temporal as its object.

In explaining sin as giving to temporal things the love that was owed to God, Augustine echoed the natural law principle that things which were indifferent to our happiness must be valued as such: everything which could be lost to us against our wills was not to be valued as though it mattered for living the life in complete accordance with our nature; everything which lay outside our nature's complete control was something which we were not fitted by our nature to value as though we could completely control it. Sin referred to incorrectly estimating these things as though they mattered for happiness. Hence, our wills sinned when we consented to the thought that these things were necessary for us to flourish.

In *On Free Will*, Augustine implied that the principle that it was wrong to love temporal things as though we needed them in order to flourish allowed everyone to understand why certain actions like adultery were also wrong.⁷³ Presumably, he reasoned that everyone who committed adultery did so because they mistakenly thought that the experience of sexual pleasure (a temporal thing) formed part of the happy life, but this insight did not in itself explain why the act of adultery (and not just the love that inspired it) was something sinful. We can gain a better understanding of the steps that Augustine thought led to the conclusion that, not only loves but also the actions that were inspired by those loves were sinful by looking at the following passage from *Confessions*.

So then, when people look for the reason why some criminal act has been committed, their account is usually reckoned credible only when it is evident that there may have been greed on the malefactor's part to gain possession of goods belonging to someone else – those goods we have called 'lowest' – or fear of losing his own; for these goods truly are beautiful and lovely in their own way, even though base and mean in

⁷¹ *Free Will* 1.16.34.

⁷² *True Religion* 10.20 and 14.45; *Usefulness of Believing* 16.34; *Spirit and Letter* 4 (6); *Perfection of Righteousness* 13.31.

⁷³ *Free Will* 1.3.6.

comparison with the higher goods that bring us true happiness. Suppose someone has committed homicide. Why did he do it? Perhaps he was in love with the victim's wife, or coveted his estate, or wanted to steal from him in order to support himself⁷⁴

Here, Augustine explained that sinful actions like murder or theft belonged to a class of actions which were always motivated by the desire to have, as part of our conception of happiness, some temporal thing (which he here called 'lowest' goods and explained as things which were worth seeking, for their own sake, but not worth seeking as necessary for happiness): a spouse, an estate, food to sustain us, even revenge. This passage implied that we would know that an action belonged to this class of sinful things if we established that it was something which could only ever be inspired by the sin of loving something temporal as though it was necessary for happiness: temporal things had no place in the happy life, understood as the life in complete accordance with human nature, since these were things which we could lose against our wills, meaning that living the fully human life did not require us to have these things. As suggested earlier, Augustine's discussion in *On Free Will* implied that adultery did belong to this class of actions, since his discussion indicated that all adulterers were inspired by the desire to have, as part of their conception of happiness, something which in fact lay beyond our will's control (so that it could be lost to us against our will). That is, he implied that adultery was of the same character as murder or theft, in being something which no one would ever do except in the expectation of becoming happy in the possession of some temporal thing (such as sexual pleasure). It followed from this that adultery itself was something sinful: in knowing that it was always inspired by sin at the level of our love, and in knowing that all actions which could only ever be inspired by this sin were themselves sins, we were able to identify adultery as itself a sin.

He explained in this passage from *Confessions* that temporal things were worthy of a degree of esteem: the thought underlying this claim was the natural law principle that temporal things were preferred indifferent, indifferent to our happiness, but worthy objects of our desires nonetheless. That is, they included things which we ought to seek, but in the correct way, namely, in the full knowledge that we did not need them to flourish. In other words, like the Stoics and Platonists, he held that actions like murder, theft or adultery were committed by people who erred, not in esteeming temporal things, but in bestowing on them too much esteem; we

⁷⁴ *The Confessions* 2.5.11.

committed these actions through misunderstanding the proper value to be assigned to external, changeable things.⁷⁵

Augustine likewise explained virtue as a matter of our wills or loves and, in particular, as a matter of loving the true God, a view which, as noted already, he shared with the Platonists: 'I would not define virtue in any other way than as the highest love of God.'⁷⁶ Later, Augustine defined virtue as the order of love ('it seems to me that a brief and true definition of virtue is the order of love'), a definition which (as we will see later) allowed him to look on one's own self, and other people, as worthy objects of love, but only when ordered to the love of the true God.⁷⁷ We ordered our love to the true God by recognising that having ourselves, and others, as the people we would be in the happy life depended on knowing the true God, since it was only in knowing God that we, and they, would be happy.⁷⁸ Thus, while he accepted that love for others could exist in the absence of love for the true God, he held that this love would not form part of virtue unless it was ordered to God.⁷⁹

Thus, for Augustine, living fully in accordance with human nature did not involve simply withholding a certain kind of love from temporal things. Rather, living the fully human life also involved having the correct object of our love, and this was the true God. He held that reason revealed that it was in removing from our minds the idea that anything temporal was needed for happiness, and directing our thoughts about happiness to what was eternal, that people were assured of reaching the knowledge of God. Thus, he addressed himself to Plato in *True Religion*:

You have persuaded me that truth is seen not with the bodily eyes but by the pure mind ... Nothing hinders the perception of truth more than a life devoted to lusts, and the false images of sensible things, derived from the sensible world and impressed on us by the agency of the body, which beget various opinions and errors. Therefore the mind has to be healed so that it may behold the immutable form of things which remains ever the same⁸⁰

⁷⁵ See Chambers, *Augustine on the Nature of Virtue*, pp. 209–222, for an explanation of how Augustine was able to agree that no temporal thing mattered for happiness, whilst also explaining that, in this life, not only the vicious but also the virtuous as well would experience grief.

⁷⁶ *Morals of the Catholic Church* 15.25. See also *Usefulness of Believing* 16.34.

⁷⁷ *City of God* 15.22. See also Letter 155 at 4.13, and Letter 167 at 15.

⁷⁸ See Chambers, *Augustine on the Nature of Virtue*, pp. 144–154, for the different meanings of love in Augustine (and ancient eudaimonism): *eros* and *philia*; pp. 189–196 for the sin of pride as disordered *philia*; and pp. 229–231 and pp. 240–268 for *eros* as ordered love.

⁷⁹ *Trinity* 14.14.8: 'but when the mind loves God, and by consequence, as has been said, remembers and understands Him, then it is rightly enjoined also to love its neighbour as itself; for it has now come to love itself rightly and not perversely, when it loves God'.

⁸⁰ *True Religion* 3.3. See also *The Soliloquies* 13.22–14.24.

Moreover, he agreed with the Platonists that God was the one who gave us happiness, which involved knowing God, and this was given to those who loved God. Thus, the Platonists ‘acknowledge a God ... who gives happiness to the rational and intelligent soul’; they were superior to other philosophers because they understood ‘no one can attain this life of happiness, the object of all humankind’s desire, unless he has adhered, with the purity of chaste love, to that unique and supreme Good, which is the changeless God’.⁸¹

Finally, Augustine shared with the classical natural law tradition the insight that our human essence was reason. What made us human, distinguishing us from other animals, was our possession of reason: ‘For reason is not something common to human beings and the animals, but to human beings and the angels’⁸²; ‘the soul of a human being could not exist without being rational’.⁸³ A human was a reasoning animal; this was our distinguishing characteristic.⁸⁴

Piecing together Augustine’s comments so far, we have found that, in his discussion of the moral law, he identified many of the same principles that the classical natural law tradition identified. He considered that obedience to the natural law referred to living in accordance with human nature and tied this to living the happy, or flourishing, life. This led him to define sin and goodness in the same terms as the classical natural law tradition. What was sin? Anything in our wills or loves which was inconsistent with our nature as humans, understood as rational animals. He was explicit that, while we shared many desires with other animals, living in accordance with our rational nature involved the reason governing these desires. We governed these desires when our reason recognised that it was beyond our nature to exercise full control over any changeable thing; hence, sin involved looking upon things outside our wills’ complete control as things which we needed to have in order to live in accordance with our nature. Sin also included the actions that were committed by those who willed or loved in this incorrect way. More than this, reason taught us that we were beings whose reason was fitted to contemplate the highest truth. Since when we failed to love what was eternal, we necessarily gave our love, instead, to what was temporal, sin could be summed up as carnal concupiscence, the love of temporal things, where love, in this context,

⁸¹ *City of God* 8.1 and 10.1. See also *City of God* 11.25, ‘in [Plato’s] view God alone was the author of all nature, the giver of all reason, and the inspirer of the love which is the condition of a good and happy life’.

⁸² *The Deeds of Pelagius* 6.18. ⁸³ *Spirit and Letter* 28 (47).

⁸⁴ *City of God* 9.14; *City of God* 5.10; *Confessions* 13.32.47; *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* 16.12.22; *Free Will* 1.7.16 and 2.6.13.

referred to the emotions that arose through thinking of these things as needed for happiness.

What was goodness or flourishing? Willing, or loving, or exercising reason, in such a way that our whole lives conformed to human nature. This meant, not only the correct attitude towards temporal goods but also loving the highest truth, that is, the true God: it meant a reason which attained its goal of knowing this God and a will which was directed to the knowledge of the true God as the meaning of happiness.

It has been proposed that Augustine looked upon the knowledge of the natural law as severely limited by the Fall so that only a few basic moral principles could now be known by those outside the Christian faith. The above strongly suggests that this was not so. In his discussion of morals, Augustine agreed with the classical natural law tradition, not only in generalities but also in particulars as well, and he was self-conscious about doing so. He praised the Platonists especially for their grasp of ethics. It remains possible that he thought that fallen reason stopped short, in some way, of offering the complete account of the natural law, but [Section 2](#) establishes that he looked upon fallen reason as offering extensive moral guidance: he knew that in his pagan contemporaries he had people who applied their reason to the study of human nature and derived the principles that he himself identified as composing the natural law.

2.1 The Natural Law and the Golden Rule

In a number of places, Augustine identified the natural law with the Golden Rule in both its positive and negative forms: ‘do as you would be done by’ and ‘do not do as you would not be done by’. For example, he stated: ‘but that law [the law of Moses] was kept hidden from the beginning, when nature itself convicted wicked men, who did to others what they would not have done to themselves.’⁸⁵ Here, prior to the revealed law of Moses, the wicked were convicted by the natural law and the teaching of this law was encapsulated by the Golden Rule.

In *Confessions*, he likewise equated the Golden Rule with the natural law, which he described as the law written in human hearts. Moreover, he implied that the Golden Rule was knowable by everyone. Thus, he declared that theft was prohibited ‘by the law written in human hearts, which not even sin itself can erase’ and then indicated the principle that

⁸⁵ *Against Two Letters of Pelagius*, 3.4.13.

allowed everyone to condemn theft, even thieves themselves: ‘for does any thief tolerate being robbed by another thief, even if he is rich and the other is driven by want?’⁸⁶ In other words, the rule ‘do not do as you would not be done by’ allowed us to conclude that, since we did not want to be robbed, we ought not to rob others. This rule was found in the bible (in Tobit 4:15, Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31); Augustine held that it was also found in the natural law, and that everyone was able to know it. Thus, he insisted in another place: ‘There are many such points on which, if people are questioned, they will unhesitatingly reply that they do not want to suffer such treatment ... You judge something to be bad from the fact that you do not want to have it done to you; and it is the secret inner law, written in your very heart, that has taught you to view it so.’⁸⁷

It is worth noting that in these instances, each application of the Golden Rule could be restated in a way which bypassed a discussion of our actions (you do not want to be murdered or robbed, so you should not murder or rob others) and instead concerned itself only with our desires: you do not want to be murdered or robbed, so you should not want to murder or rob others. Not wanting to murder or rob others would ensure that we did not murder or rob them; moreover, restating the Golden Rule in this way captures something about our moral lives which is missed when this Rule is restricted to our actions: namely, those cases in which we might want to murder or rob someone, but are prevented from doing so by something external to us. Hence, the question arises: Did Augustine understand the Golden Rule in this way – did he think of it as a rule which governed our desires as well as our actions?

Augustine indicated that the Golden Rule did indeed govern our desires. Thus, in one place, he paraphrased the Golden Rule as enjoining the soul ‘to desire for another nothing that it would not wish for itself’.⁸⁸ Similarly, in his commentary on Psalm 51, he related the Golden Rule to the statement ‘You have loved malice above kindness’: his message was that, since everyone, in their own case, loved kindness rather than malice, it followed that we must love kindness rather than malice in the case of other people.⁸⁹ In this passage he also paired the Golden Rule with the biblical injunction to ‘love your neighbour as yourself’. The biblical injunction told us that we

⁸⁶ *Confessions* 2.4.9.

⁸⁷ *Expositions of the Psalms*, Ex. of Psalm 57.1. Also Ex. of Psalm 118 (sermon 25) at 4; Ex. of Psalm 35.1 (on verse 2); *Against Faustus* 15.7.

⁸⁸ *The Magnitude of the Soul* 33.73.

⁸⁹ *Expositions of the Psalms*, Ex. of Psalm 51.10 (on verse 5).

must have the same love for others as we had for ourselves, which could be paraphrased as desiring for them what we desired for ourselves. Here, Augustine implied that this was the same as ‘doing as we would be done by’ because this rule also told us to desire for others what we desired for ourselves. Thus, he explained in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount that ‘nothing else’ was meant by the Golden Rule than ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’.⁹⁰

In these places, Augustine told us to examine the desires that we had for ourselves, in order to discover what desires we ought to have for others: he held that ‘Do as you would be done by’ could be paraphrased as ‘Desire for others what you desire for yourself’ and this could be paraphrased as ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’. Hence, in knowing the Golden Rule, everyone was also able to know the principle of neighbour-love, the principle which, as Augustine well knew, Paul declared summed up the moral law in its entirety (Romans 13:8–10). Again, this is evidence that, for Augustine, our knowledge of the moral law remained extensive even after the Fall: relying upon reason alone, everyone was able to know the Golden Rule, the rule at the heart of the natural law, and everyone was thereby able to know that they should love their neighbours as themselves. This principle ranked second only to the principle of love for God as the most important moral principle.⁹¹ In short, for Augustine, our obligations towards others were summed up by the Golden Rule, which everyone was able to know, meaning that, even after the Fall, humans did not need any divine assistance to know in full what was right and wrong in their conduct towards others. Thus, in *On Christian Teaching*, Augustine stated that where the Golden Rule was observed, understood as love of neighbour, ‘all wrongdoing dies’.⁹²

In these instances, Augustine accepted that the Golden Rule guided us accurately as to how we should act towards others: through focussing upon what we wanted others to do, or not do, we correctly understood what we must do, or must not do. The Golden Rule condemned inflicting on others any harm which we did not want inflicted upon ourselves; it also taught us to pursue for others the good things that we wanted others to

⁹⁰ *Sermon on the Mount* 2.22.75. He also paired the Golden Rule with neighbour-love in *Christian Teaching* 3.14.22 and *Trinity* 8.7.10. Keith Stanglin (‘The Historical Connection between the Golden Rule and the Second Greatest Love Command’, *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33 (2005): 357–371) at p. 362: ‘For Augustine, the connection is so strong that the two statements nearly seem synonymous, that is, that they are actually the same.’

⁹¹ *Trinity* 8.7.10. ⁹² *Christian Teaching* 3.14.22.

pursue for us; in brief, it taught us to have the same desires and the same love for others as we had for ourselves.

At the same time, Augustine was aware that the Golden Rule, in making our own wants and desires the measure of what we should and should not do, appeared to introduce a subjective element into morality. He alluded to this problem in *On Free Will* in discussing the case of adultery. Here, he raised the problem of an adulterous husband who had no objection to other men committing adultery with his wife: Augustine accepted that this man ‘did as he would be done by’, in doing only what he was willing for others to do to him.⁹³ In this case, the Golden Rule appeared to be unable to teach this man to view adultery as sinful: on the contrary, the Golden Rule seemingly taught him to view adultery as morally permitted.

Nonetheless, as we have seen, Augustine insisted that every act of adultery was in fact morally wrong. As discussed already, when he noted the problem that adultery posed for the Golden Rule in *On Free Will*, he indicated that the natural law prohibition on reckoning any temporal thing as necessary for human flourishing allowed everyone to reach the conclusion that adultery was wrong.⁹⁴ In other words, Augustine’s view was that the Golden Rule formed part of the natural law and hence needed to be understood in the context of other natural law principles, principles which everyone was able to know through applying their reason to the study of human nature. That is, for Augustine, the Golden Rule summed up the natural law, but only when it was interpreted in the context of the natural law teachings about the correct object of our loves; it was in this sense that it offered the complete guide to morals.

2.2 Breaking the Golden Rule

Augustine was clear that the Golden Rule stood at the heart of the natural law, but he was also clear that it was not the only principle found in the natural law. This would imply that, for him, a breach of the natural law did not always involve a breach of the Golden Rule; this is seemingly confirmed by his view that an adulterous husband who was willing for others to commit adultery with his wife did not breach the Golden Rule. The problem with this conclusion, however, is that Augustine stated, on the contrary, that whenever we breached the natural law, we did so in breaching the Golden Rule: his message was that, somehow, to break the natural law was always

⁹³ *Free Will* 1.3.6. ⁹⁴ *Free Will* 1.3.6 and 1.4.10.

to fail 'to do as we would be done by', even though there were some sinful things, like adultery, which did not necessarily break this rule.⁹⁵

In order to understand how Augustine was able to defend this puzzling claim, we need to think more carefully about the meaning that he gave to the Golden Rule. We have seen that he accepted that adultery itself was not, in every instance, prohibited by the Golden Rule, but we have also seen that he did think that adultery was always caused by incorrectly evaluating something temporal as necessary for happiness: he explained that adultery always involved *libido*, which he defined as desiring some temporal thing as though it was needed for happiness. This suggests a way of explaining his conviction that whenever we did something in violation of the natural law, we broke the Golden Rule: while the act of adultery itself was not in every case prohibited by the Golden Rule, perhaps his view was that having this love for anything temporal always violated the Golden Rule, meaning that, in committing adultery, we would always break the Golden Rule at the level of our loves: that is, for him, perhaps loving something temporal as though we needed it to flourish was itself to fail to do as we would be done by.

We can explore this possibility by thinking further about what Augustine thought the Golden Rule required of us at the level of our desires. We have seen that, for him, the Golden Rule instructed us to desire for others what we desired for ourselves and to love them as we loved ourselves. This implicitly meant that we must desire happiness for others, since, as Augustine affirmed, everyone desired happiness for themselves. Desiring one's own happiness was a universal human trait, and it was simply ineradicable from our nature: in everything which we did, our desire for happiness was present. We have also seen that, for Augustine, following in the footsteps of the Stoics and Platonists, by happiness everyone meant the fully natural life, so that, even if we did not articulate our goal in these terms to ourselves, this was what we were always seeking in seeking our happiness. Since the fully natural life was what we always desired for ourselves, the Golden Rule instructed us always to desire it for others as well.

⁹⁵ *Against Two Letters of Pelagius* 3.13: 'but that law [the law of Moses] was kept hidden from the beginning, when nature itself convicted wicked men, who did to others what they would not have done to themselves'. Letter 157.15:

Hence, since there is also a law in the reason of a human being who already uses free choice, a law naturally written in his heart, by which he is warned that he should not do anything else that he himself does not want to suffer, all are transgressors according to this law, even those who have not received the law given to Moses.

This insight arguably allows us to understand Augustine's claim that every breach of the natural law involved a breach of the Golden Rule, even in those cases where we seemingly 'did as we would be done by'. The adulterous husband who was willing for another man to commit adultery with his wife seemingly willed to do only what he was willing for others to do to him; but, on another level, in acting as he did, he was necessarily moved by the desire to bring his life into full conformity with human nature, since this was what everyone always desired. Yet, at the level of his conscious choice of action, he had made his end the experience of temporal pleasure – this was the object upon which he bestowed his love; it was the inspiration for his decision to commit adultery, and this was what he presumably set as the end for other people as well, in desiring them to commit adultery with his wife. He willed happiness for them, but he willed this false notion of happiness, which located being happy in the enjoyment of sexual pleasure.

Hence, there was a sense in which he necessarily failed to desire for them what he desired for himself: everything which he did, whether he was aware of it or not, was impelled by his fundamental yearning to live in complete accord with human nature, but he failed to will this for other people as well: instead, he actually desired that their lives would not accord with human nature, since he wanted them to do and love something which had no place in the fully human life. The fact that he also wanted this for himself did not prevent him from breaking the Golden Rule, since it remained the case that there was a sense in which his desire for himself did not match the desires that he had for others. The Golden Rule commanded us to desire for others the happiness that we desired for ourselves: on one level, the adulterous husband did this, but on another level, in failing to want to bring others' lives into complete conformity to human nature, which was the true meaning of happiness, and which was a desire which everyone always had for themselves, the adulterous husband failed to desire for others the happiness that he wanted for himself. I argue that this is the best way to make sense of Augustine's otherwise puzzling insistence that every violation of the natural law was a violation of the Golden Rule. We were always driven by the goal of flourishing, even though most people never discovered what this actually meant; this was our underlying goal, but we always translated it into concrete objectives for ourselves, and for others too. So long as these concrete objectives were ones which were incompatible with the goal at the heart of our human nature, we would never 'do as we would be done by', since we would fail to will for others all the things that we willed for ourselves. Hence, in loving anything temporal as though we needed to have it in order to be happy, we necessarily failed to 'do as we would be done by'.

Section 2.2 gives us further insights into why Augustine equated the natural law with the Golden Rule: there was a sense in which ‘doing as we would be done by’ was synonymous with rejecting all thought of temporal things as happy-making since so long as we viewed something temporal in this way, we would fail to desire happiness for others, as we desired it for ourselves. Again, this adds further support to the conclusion that, for Augustine, the whole natural law continued to be knowable to unaided human reason after the Fall. The Golden Rule, which was universally knowable and which stood at the heart of the natural law, told us not to want for others any harm which we did not want to suffer ourselves and to want for others the good things that we wanted for ourselves. Despite appearances, this was an objective standard, not a subjective one, since ‘happiness’, understood as human flourishing, was both an objective measure of what was harmful and what was good for us and the constant object of our desires.

2.3 The Natural Law and the Divine Law

So far, we have found good grounds for concluding that, for Augustine, the whole natural law was knowable by fallen humans, without any divine assistance. This conclusion, however, seems to conflict with the following passage from *On the Spirit and the Letter*, where Augustine declared that our knowledge of the moral law was partially erased as a result of the Fall.

Nonetheless, the image of God has not been removed from the human soul by the stain of earthly loves to such a point that not even the faintest outlines of it remain. Hence, the soul can be correctly said to observe or know some elements of the law even amid the godlessness of this life. Perhaps this is what the Apostle meant when he said that the Gentiles who do not have the law do by nature what pertains to the law and that such people are themselves a law for themselves and have the work of the law written in their hearts. That is, what was impressed upon the soul by the image of God, when it was created, has not been entirely removed. In this way too, the distinction is preserved by which the New Testament differs from the Old. That is, the law of God, which through the Old Testament was written on tablets, is written on the hearts of the faithful through the New. For by their renewal there is written in those hearts what was not entirely destroyed by their old condition.⁹⁶

In this passage, Augustine conceded only a partial survival of God’s image, and hence only a partial knowledge of the ‘law of God’, after the Fall. Significantly, however, this passage makes no mention of the natural law;

⁹⁶ *Spirit and Letter* 28 (48). See also *City of God* 22.24.

instead, it refers to the divine law. Hence, this passage cannot be taken as *prima facie* evidence that Augustine thought that it was the natural law that was partially erased from our hearts at the Fall. He stated here that Gentile non-Christians ‘do not have the law’. Yet he also said that Gentiles continued to know and do ‘some’ things which were contained in the law, since the law that was ‘impressed upon the soul’ at creation ‘has not been entirely removed’. He stated that the law in this context was the law of God: that is, his message was that the law of God was partially erased at the Fall and that this missing part was re-inscribed only in the hearts of believers; yet there remained a sense in which its teachings were found in a partial way in the hearts of unbelievers, so that they knew and did some things contained in the divine law. Hence, Augustine continued this passage by referring explicitly to ‘the law of God which unrighteousness had not entirely wiped out’.⁹⁷

This passage did not refer explicitly to the natural law, but what did Augustine think was the relationship between the natural law and the divine law? It has been proposed that he thought that they were really the same thing;⁹⁸ yet, against this view, this passage continues by implicitly distinguishing the divine law from natural law:

The very image of God, which godlessness had not completely wiped out, is renewed in the mind of those who believe through the New Testament – for it had remained true that the soul of a human being could not exist without being rational. In the same way the law of God, which unrighteousness had not entirely wiped out, is surely written in the soul, when it is renewed by grace. The law written on tablets could not bring about for the Jews this writing of the law upon hearts, which is justification, but could only bring about transgression. For they were human beings, and that power of nature was present in them by which a rational animal both knows and observes something lawful.⁹⁹

The Jews, and other non-Christians, remained rational after the Fall, and therefore capable of knowing ‘something lawful’: we have seen that Augustine described the natural law as the law known through reason; hence, with this reference to the lawful things that non-believers continued to know after the Fall through the use of reason, Augustine must have meant the natural law. Yet he also referred here to the law of God, adding that this had been partially blotted out by the Fall. This points to the conclusion that the natural law, the lawful things known to the rational soul,

⁹⁷ *Spirit and Letter* 28 (48). ⁹⁸ Dyson, *St. Augustine of Hippo*, p. 94.

⁹⁹ *Spirit and Letter* 28 (48).

was not synonymous with the divine law mentioned at the beginning of this passage. Yet, at the same time, Augustine must have viewed the two laws as related, since he was clear that the teachings of the natural law were sound moral teachings; it goes without saying that he viewed the divine law as consisting of sound moral teachings as well. It is unlikely that he viewed the law of God as anything short of comprehensive in its moral teachings, and so this points to the conclusion that, for him, the natural law formed part of the divine law. That is, this passage, with its talk of the lawful things known to fallen reason, and its talk of the divine law which was partially erased, points to the conclusion that Augustine thought of the divine law as the complete moral law and the natural law as that part of it which continued to be knowable to non-believers through applying their reason to the study of human nature. In other words, the divine law included additional teachings which could not be known by fallen humans whose knowledge of this law was limited to the study of their nature: it was these additional teachings which were lost at the Fall, and hence the divine law, but not the natural law, was partially blotted out. In short, this passage, rather than suggesting that Augustine thought that the natural law was mostly blotted out by the Fall, suggests, on the contrary, that his view was that the natural law remained fully inscribed on the human heart after the Fall, and this corresponded to the partial inscription of the divine law on the heart.

This reading is confirmed by Augustine's commentary on Psalm 118, which echoed the earlier passage, with its claim that the Jewish people were humans and therefore, through the reason, knew something lawful: 'Was this natural law not present in the people of Israel? Certainly it was, for they too were human. They could no more have been without the natural law than they could have been alien to the human condition itself.'¹⁰⁰ This passage continued by distinguishing the natural law from the divine law. It stated, in similar terms, but more explicitly than the passage from *On the Spirit and the Letter*, that, as humans, we all possessed the natural law, with no suggestion that any part of it was erased at the Fall. Thus, when Augustine declared that the divine law had been partly blotted from our minds by the Fall, he understood this as contrasting with the natural law, which remained our complete possession because, despite being fallen, we remained human and, as such, we continued to have the natural law inscribed in our hearts.

What teachings might the divine law contain over and above the natural law? That is, what knowledge did Augustine think humans had lost at

¹⁰⁰ *Expositions of the Psalms*, Ex. of Psalm 118 (sermon 25) at 4.

the Fall, when the image of God was partially erased? We have seen that Augustine held that virtue referred to loving the true God. This points to the conclusion that the moral knowledge that we lost at the Fall was the knowledge of the true God's identity: the passage from *On the Spirit and the Letter* stated that the Fall erased God's image from our minds. This points to the conclusion that we were left with only an incomplete understanding of the identity of the true God. Without knowing who the true God was, we lacked complete knowledge of virtue, since we were incapable of knowing that virtue referred to love for the Christian God.

Thus, I propose that, for Augustine, the key difference between the natural law and the divine law lay in the fact that the natural law did not identify who the true God was. He noted that, through their rational inquiries, the Platonists grasped the existence of God, and they also grasped the fact that virtue involved loving the true God, but they did not grasp God's identity as the Christian God.¹⁰¹ The Platonists knew true things about God, but they did not know enough to identify who the true God was. Yet, as we have seen, their evident ignorance that the Christian God was the true God did not mean that they were ignorant of their duties under the natural law. Instead, his view that the natural law remained fully knowable after the Fall, while the divine law (and the image of God) was partially erased, points to the conclusion that, for him, pagans were in the paradoxical position of being capable of knowing the duty of loving the true God, and yet being incapable of fulfilling it while they remained pagan since to be pagan was to be ignorant of the true God's identity.

2.4 The Contents of the Divine Law

The above has argued that, for Augustine, the natural law omitted the teaching that virtue referred to loving the Christian God. The complication here, however, is that he also insisted that the divine law itself, in its written form in the bible, was inadequate as a guide to virtue: he insisted that both the knowledge of righteousness and righteousness itself were bestowed by divine grace alone. Yet he was also clear that any reader of the bible would find there the message that virtue consisted in loving the God of the bible with all the heart, soul and mind.¹⁰² This commandment was found in both the Old and the New Testaments (Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:37–40, Luke 10:27 and Mark 12:30–31), where it was singled out by Jesus as the greatest commandment of all; Paul declared in 1

¹⁰¹ *City of God* 8.8; *Confessions* 7.20.26–7.21.27.

¹⁰² *Spirit and Letter* 36(64); *The Perfection of Human Righteousness* 5.11 and 8.19.

Timothy 1:5, ‘the end of the commandment is love’.¹⁰³ The commandment to love the biblical God stood at the heart of the divine law; to fulfil this commandment was to fulfil the divine law, but it was also to fulfil the natural law, since it was to love the true deity.

Augustine was clear that this was the central teaching of the bible: in what sense, then, did he think that the bible failed to convey to people everything involved in being righteous? The message that the written moral law (the ‘letter’) failed to teach the full meaning of virtue was a main theme in *On the Spirit and the Letter*. Here, he drew a distinction between having God’s law ‘written on tablets of stone’ and having it ‘written in the heart’ – corresponding to the distinction between the letter and the spirit – in order to explain how merely knowing God’s law through reading the bible was insufficient to inform a person of what it meant to live in full conformity with that law, that is, of what it meant to be virtuous. Rather, he held that knowing God’s law completely was a matter of its renewed and therefore complete inscription on the heart.¹⁰⁴ Possessing God’s law fully inscribed on the heart was the work of the Spirit, not the letter; it was the mark of the true believer – the true Christian – and it was one and the same thing as knowing the law in full and being virtuous.

Thus, he explained that when God’s law was written in the ‘renewed inner person’, which happened through the Holy Spirit and only in the case of believers, then people possessed the knowledge of ‘righteousness’, and they also possessed righteousness itself.¹⁰⁵ Earlier, he quoted Romans 3:21 (‘the righteousness of God has been revealed apart from the law’), explaining that this meant that, while we relied upon ourselves for righteousness, we ‘do not know’ righteousness.¹⁰⁶

The letter of the law was the law written on tablets, meaning, the law written in the bible. Augustine was clear that this ‘letter’, which did not give life, but merely killed in revealing sinfulness, included not just the rites described in the Mosaic law, but also the moral teachings found in the New Testament (‘those works which amount to a righteous life for whoever does them’).¹⁰⁷ While accomplishing these works amounted to righteousness, merely knowing them did not amount to the knowledge of righteousness: the law of works was known, but not the law of faith. Instead, the knowledge of righteousness was given by the Spirit who wrote the divine law in the heart.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ *Spirit and Letter* 21(36) and 28(49). ¹⁰⁴ *Spirit and Letter* 28(48).

¹⁰⁵ *Spirit and Letter* 26(46)–27(47); *Spirit and Letter* 21(36). ¹⁰⁶ *Spirit and Letter* 9(15).

¹⁰⁷ *Spirit and Letter* 13(21) and 14(23). ¹⁰⁸ *Spirit and Letter* 17(29).

Augustine identified God's law, when it was fully written in the heart – that is, when it was the law of faith – with 'love' ('The law of God, then, is love').¹⁰⁹ People who merely (and incompletely) knew God's law through reading the bible were led to fear God, despite knowing that the law commanded love for God; but those who knew God's law completely, through having it inscribed by the Spirit in their hearts, knew the law as love in a more complete sense and also loved God. That is, God's law was love and people did not know in full what it meant to love the true God until the Holy Spirit gave them the gift of love (Romans 5:5), thereby bestowing on them both the knowledge of righteousness and righteousness itself.¹¹⁰ The bible did not, and could not, teach people to love the true deity; likewise, reason was unable to do this. Only grace, in the form of the Spirit's gift of love, gave the knowledge of everything involved in loving God, in giving love for the true God.

I propose that Augustine held that this was so because he held that, among the distinguishing features of the true deity was the fact that the true God alone bestowed virtue: virtue consisted in love for the true God and Romans 5:5 stated that this love was given by the Holy Spirit; that is, loving the true God must involve an experience whereby we receive this love from God. Without this experience, the God whom we loved would not be the true God because our notion of God would lack any coherent idea of God as the giver of virtue.

We will see that he held that knowing God could not be a human achievement, but only a divine gift.¹¹¹ This is hinted at in this passage from *Retractions*, where he pointed to the limits of mind, or reason, and insisted that the mind should be subjected to God: 'insofar as the nature of man is concerned, there is nothing in him better than mind and reason – and yet the man who wishes to live happily should not live according to this, for then he lives as man lives although, in order to be able to attain happiness, "he should live as God lives" (1 Peter 4:6). To attain this, our mind should not be self-contented, but should be subjected to God.'¹¹² Augustine was not here proposing that humans could live in any otherwise than as humans; rather, he was insisting that we could not rely on our own human powers to attain this end: we will see that he held that our human powers had been maimed by the Fall so that it was simply not possible to live the complete human life while we relied upon ourselves. Happiness required that we were restored to God's image, which could be accomplished only

¹⁰⁹ *Spirit and Letter* 17(29). ¹¹⁰ *Spirit and Letter* 3(5); 17(29); and 25(42).

¹¹¹ See further, Section 3.1 'Evil as the privation of goodness'. ¹¹² *Retractions* 1.1.2.

by God: we must live as the restored image of God, that is, with a mind which fully knew the true God; and our mind would fully know God only when we knew that we received this knowledge from God, so that we did not rely on ourselves for virtue but relied on God.

Further evidence for this reading can be found in Augustine's view that the distinguishing feature of the Christian God was Christ's saving death: the God of the bible was distinguished from the gods of all other religions by this act.¹¹³ Christ's death was a saving death because through it God was able to make people virtuous: that is, Christ's death won the grace whereby God made sinners virtuous. Hence, the bible taught that the true God was the saviour of sinners – or, in other words, the bestower of virtue. Consequently, to have the Christian God as the object of our love, and not some other false notion of God, it was necessary that our conception of God included knowing God as the one to make Himself the object of our love, thereby pouring love for God into our hearts.

This, arguably, is the only way to make sense of Augustine's conviction that the divine written law, as it was recorded in the bible, gave the knowledge of sin, but not the knowledge of virtue: people who read the bible, without receiving the Holy Spirit's gift of love for God, learned that they were sinners, since they learned that they must love the God of the bible in order to be virtuous, and discovered in the bible a message about God as the giver of love for God which necessarily escaped their understanding (so that they failed to direct their love to the true God) until they were actually able to look upon virtue (love for the true God) as something which they had received from God.

Augustine stated that the natural law was 'established, increased or put on a firmer footing' by the divine law.¹¹⁴ The above has offered an explanation of this claim: while all the teachings of the natural law agreed with the divine law, the divine law nonetheless contained additional teachings which were not found in the natural law. These additional teachings all centred on the key divine commandment to love the Christian God. The natural law was established, increased or put on a firmer footing by the divine law because, without the divine law, people would always lack something of the knowledge of virtue. This was because virtue referred to loving the Christian God, and, while this was the teaching at the heart of the divine law, it did not form part of the natural law which taught only that we must love the true God while necessarily omitting the teaching as

¹¹³ *Confessions* 7.9.13–14 and 7.21.27; *City of God* 10.29.

¹¹⁴ *Expositions of the Psalms*, Ex. of Psalm 118, Sermon 25 at 4.

to the true God's identity. The natural law necessarily lacked this teaching because knowing the Christian God required an act of self-revelation whereby God gave a person love for God (which was one and the same thing as re-inscribing in full the divine law upon a person's heart).

2.5 The Divine Law and Acts of Worship

In being ignorant of the identity of the true God, it followed that non-Christians were also ignorant of the cultic obligations that the true God required from worshippers. Hence, Augustine identified other teachings which were unique to the divine law: he explained that the divine law set forth the acts of worship that God required from God's people. These had been codified in the Mosaic laws, but, Augustine insisted, following Matthew 23:15, the Mosaic law was now fulfilled by Christ, meaning that Christ had done away with the ceremonies and sacraments of the Old Testament because these things were intended as prefigurements of what Christ would accomplish in his death and resurrection: Christ instituted new rites and sacraments because the old ones prefigured or foretold what Christ would do, while the new ones declared or announced that Christ had done what it was said he would do.¹¹⁵ Hence, in the New Testament, Christians learned about the acts of worship which now formed part of the divine law: by implication, all this was unique to the divine law; the natural law taught nothing about these cultic acts – the sacraments and rites that God's people were required to offer to God – since such things were beyond the powers of reason to discover.

Thus, the divine law was not simply the law that commanded love for the Christian God and the special love for neighbours which involved seeking to bring them to love the Christian God too; it was also the law that described the acts of worship that were pleasing to God. Further evidence in support of this reading is found in *On the Spirit and the Letter*, where Augustine explained that the command to love God and neighbour was easy to find in the bible; yet people could know and even obey the love commandments, while remaining ignorant of many of the things that pleased God.¹¹⁶ Arguably, this passage had as its background the idea that Christians could be ignorant of many of the things that God desired people to do as acts of worship – people easily strayed into error in failing to offer to God all the prayers and observances that God required of them, precisely because such things were beyond the power of their reason to

¹¹⁵ *Against Faustus* 19.11 and 19.16; *Spirit and Letter* 14(23).

¹¹⁶ *Spirit and Letter* 36(64).

discover; knowing these things involved the difficult task of deciphering the bible as the guide to the correct worship of God, a task made more difficult in a culture pervaded by pagan traditions of worship. Thus, Augustine wrote in many places of the ‘impieties’ that arose from ignorance: examples of these impieties included wearing amulets, saying incorrect prayers, or swearing by Christ’s name.¹¹⁷

2.6 Pagan Sinfulness Outside the Natural Law?

The above has found that Augustine’s position was that non-Christians were able to know the natural law in full, although they could not know the divine law in full: fallen human reason was a complete guide to the natural law, but not to the divine law. Dodaro has suggested, however, that, for Augustine, knowing the natural law in full would often be insufficient to inform a person of when he or she sinned. For Dodaro, Augustine held that pagans and other non-recipients of grace would often, unavoidably, sin in ignorance, because the natural law did not describe all the possible ways in which these people could sin.¹¹⁸ For Dodaro, Augustine’s view was that grace was needed, in addition to the natural law, to enlighten people as to how to avoid sin in many situations: ‘In these and similar cases he discusses [concerning the just use of violence], Augustine clearly doubts that reason, impaired as it is by ignorance and weakness, can ever arrive at just judgements.’¹¹⁹

The previous finding that the divine law identified additional sins, which were not found in the natural law, might seem to support this conclusion about the inadequacy of the natural law to convey the complete picture of pagan sinfulness: pagans did not know the divine law’s teachings about the identity of the true God as the Christian God and so they also did not know about the acts of worship that the true God desired to be given. If Augustine thought that it was a sin for pagans, and other non-Christians, to fail to give these acts of worship to God – if he thought that it was a sin for them to fail to say the Lord’s Prayer, to be baptised, and to neglect to celebrate all the other rites whereby Christians worshipped God – then this would mean that Augustine did think that the natural law was inadequate as a guide to pagan sinfulness. Admittedly, these are not the kinds of sins that Dodaro has in mind. As his statement makes clear, he seeks to claim that, for Augustine, the natural law was inadequate as a guide to

¹¹⁷ Sermon 16A at 3; Sermon 4 at 36; Sermon 199 at 2; Letter 36 to Casulanus; Letter 55 to Januarius.

¹¹⁸ Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, p. 118.

¹¹⁹ Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, pp. 118–119.

pagan sins in their interactions with other humans; that is, he attributes to Augustine the view that pagans could commit a great many social sins, all unawares – for example, by failing to know in sufficient detail what constituted the just use of violence, knowledge which Dodaro argues Augustine thought was provided only to Christians, and only through divine grace.

The previous discussion has not found any evidence that Augustine thought that the divine law contained teachings about our social, political, economic or sexual lives which were not also contained in the natural law. Discerning the natural law's teachings on these issues might be a complex task, but the above has found that Augustine followed the classical natural law tradition in regarding all these teachings as knowable by unaided human reason.

Rather than social, political, sexual or economic sins, the above suggested that the additional sins that Augustine identified as absent from the natural law but set forth in the divine law were all sins pertaining to the religious life of God's people. The divine law set forth cultic acts as extra demands of God's people, demands which were absent from the natural law; that is, God had communicated the divine law in full only to some people, suggesting that it was precisely the gift of the divine law in full to these people which imposed upon them the additional requirements of offering to God the prayers, rites and sacraments which were pleasing to God. These were things which God's people must do; but they were not duties which God imposed upon pagans since pagans had not received these parts of the divine law from God; pagans possessed only those parts of the divine law which were contained in the natural law. This did not mean that Augustine viewed pagan life as free from sin; on the contrary, we will see in a moment that his view was that pagans were incapable of avoiding sin, but their sin took a different form (namely, mistakenly regarding temporal things as necessary for human flourishing).

In other words, what we have seen so far from Augustine's discussion of the unique features of the divine law suggests that, contrary to Dodaro, Augustine's view was that whenever pagans sinned, they sinned against the natural law and not against those aspects of the divine law of which they were inevitably ignorant. Further support for this line of reasoning can be found in Augustine's discussion of Psalm 118 and Romans 2:12. In one of his sermons on Psalm 118 (Sermon 25), Augustine explored the meaning of the statement, 'I have deemed all sinners on earth as violators of the law.' In particular, he worried over how to reconcile this statement, which implied that every sin, without exception, was sin by virtue of breaking the law, with Paul's claim in Romans 2:12, that 'those who

have sinned without the law will perish without the law', which suggested that sin could occur even in the absence of lawbreaking. He concluded that Paul's statement in Romans 2:12 applied only to the Mosaic law. This allowed him to find that all sin was the violation of a law, but people lived under different laws; sinners who were neither Jewish nor Christian were sinners, not by virtue of violating the Mosaic law, because they were 'without' this law, but by virtue of violating 'some other law', namely 'the natural law'.¹²⁰

Augustine had a similar message in Letter 157. This letter also discussed Psalm 118, finding that this psalm referred to the natural law, as distinct from the Mosaic law.

For not all the sinners of the earth transgressed the law given through Moses, but still, unless they had transgressed some law, they would not be called transgressors. For where there is no law, there is also no transgression. ... Because of the transgression of the other law, however, which is found in the use of the reason of the rational soul at the age at which a human being already has the use of reason, all the sinners of the earth become transgressors.¹²¹

All those who had not received the Mosaic law were transgressors according to the natural law, the law known through reason; in other words, this was the law governing pagan life. Christians could sin with respect to the divine law, in neglecting to offer to God all the acts of worship which were pleasing to God, but pagan sin was always sin under the natural law. In his commentary on Psalm 57, he likewise alluded to the natural law (quoting the Golden Rule), stating that this was the rule 'whereby might be judged even those to whom the law had not been given'.¹²² Pagans were not judged according to those parts of the divine law which set forth additional requirements relating to the cultic acts owed to God, all of which were absent from the natural law, since they had not been given these additional requirements, and in this sense, they had not been given the divine law; rather they were judged according to the natural law.

Thus, in his discussion of Psalm 118 and Romans 2:12, Augustine indicated that non-Jews and non-Christians sinned by violating, not the divine law, but the natural law. From this it follows that, for him, in whatever way pagans sinned, it was always possible for them to know that they sinned, since their sin always took the form of a violation of the natural law and, as discussed earlier, his view was that pagans were capable of knowing the

¹²⁰ *Expositions of the Psalms*, Ex. of Psalm 118, Sermon 25 at 4–5. ¹²¹ Letter 157 at 15.

¹²² *Expositions of the Psalms*, Ex. of Psalm 57.1.

natural law completely since the natural law had not been erased in any way by the Fall and so remained knowable by everyone through the use of reason. Hence, contrary to Dodaro's interpretation, Augustine did not consider that pagans were unable to identify the ways in which they sinned. On the contrary, his message was that when pagans sinned, they always either knew that they sinned or at least were capable of knowing that they sinned through rational reflection: pagan sin was always a transgression of the natural law and this law could be known by fallen reason.

This finding adds strength to the earlier conclusion that, for Augustine, the natural law contained in full all the moral teachings governing our social, political, economic and sexual lives. If Dodaro is correct in his claim that, for Augustine, some of these prohibitions, such as prohibitions which regulated the just use of violence, fell outside the contents of the natural law, then it would follow that, for Augustine, pagans and other non-Christians did not sin in doing any of these things. Pagan life was governed by the natural law; all pagan sins were transgressions of the natural law; hence any sins which were found only in the divine law, and not in the natural law, were not sins which pagans could commit. There can be little doubt that Augustine did think that pagans would be guilty of sin in using violence unjustly; this is evidence that he saw the just use of violence as fully explicated by the natural law, and hence as something which all people, everywhere, could learn about simply through the application of their reason.

This finding invites the question of why, in *City of God*, Book 2, Augustine criticised the pagan gods for failing to give their followers a written moral law, such as Jews and Christians possessed in the bible.¹²³ Augustine did not view the natural law as inadequate as a guide to pagan sin; yet if pagans were always capable of knowing when they sinned through a rational inquiry into the natural law, why did he imply that their gods had failed them in neglecting to give them a divine written law? The solution to this puzzle lies in the fact that Augustine's discussion in Book 2 focussed on the sexual licentiousness that he claimed the Roman gods had encouraged in their followers. In particular, in Book 2, he held that pagan Rome would have benefitted from a divinely given law which condemned sexual licentiousness and immodesty precisely because the Roman gods themselves, in their own conduct and in the rites that they demanded, positively encouraged this behaviour. This position arguably did not conflict with his claim that every Roman was able, through the

¹²³ *City of God* 2.4.

natural law, to discover that licentious behaviour was morally wrong. He was able to claim this, and also to lament the gods' negligence in failing to bestow a written moral law on their followers, because his message was that the example of the gods deterred some Romans from referring this matter to their consciences – that is, it deterred them from heeding the advice of pagan moralists that this behaviour was immoral, or from embarking upon the rational inquiry for themselves that would establish that this was so.¹²⁴

This reading of Augustine's message in Book 2 is supported by the fact that he was clear that not all Romans were ignorant about the immorality of this conduct: there had always been those, such as Scipio, who had used their reason to identify sexual licentiousness as a sin. In fact, the idea that the Romans either knew, or at least were capable of knowing, whenever they sinned was a message which Augustine emphasised throughout Book 2, *City of God*. He noted that, among pagan Romans, there had always been those who acted as the voice of conscience for their fellow Romans, either condemning the sinful behaviour that they found among their contemporaries, or leaving behind them moral writings which served to condemn behaviour which had since arisen in Roman society. For example, he claimed that Scipio would have shared his abhorrence of the 'obscene practices' of the 'depraved cult' associated with the festivals of pagan gods and goddesses.¹²⁵

Scipio was an example of a pagan who had no difficulty in condemning as sinful all sexual immodesty: he was so vigilant in this respect that he had wanted to prohibit theatres and acting in Rome, seeing in these things simply occasions for lewd behaviour.¹²⁶ Augustine also referred to famous Roman moralists like the Stoic Persius who discussed, 'the limit to be placed on wealth; ... how much to pray for; the good that can be done with the crude coin; how much to give to country, and to friends ...'.¹²⁷ Likewise, he found that Sallust had condemned 'discord, greed, ambition', the oppressive treatment of the people by the powerful, and greed for luxury; Sallust had condemned 'the depth of depravity' of the Rome in which such conduct was rife.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ He wrote of some Romans viewing the example of the gods as giving them a sanction to behave in the same way. See *City of God*, 2.7, 8, 10 and 12.

¹²⁵ *City of God* 2.5.

¹²⁶ *City of God* 2.13 (where Augustine praises the Romans' condemnation of actors, 'This is the true Roman spirit') and 2.14 (where he praises Plato for his condemnation of poets).

¹²⁷ *City of God* 2.6 (quoting from Persius). ¹²⁸ *City of God* 2.18 and 2.21.

In other instances, the Romans' moral judgements had been enacted in laws, so that the condemnation of sinful behaviour was voiced by the Roman people themselves: the laws that the Romans themselves enacted 'reprove and correct [the immorality of] the gods.'¹²⁹ Augustine concluded Book 2 with statements which implied that the representation of immodest behaviour on a public stage was something which was widely identified as immoral in Roman society. His rhetorical strategy throughout Book 2 rested in part on this idea: in particular, he pointed out that Rome had consistently condemned actors for depicting this conduct in the theatre; he insisted that this ought to lead Romans to conclude that the gods who demanded this conduct in their religious festivals should likewise be condemned.¹³⁰

In this way, Augustine recognised examples of correct moral judgement among pagan Romans. In each instance, they had not learned these values from their gods; hence, they had arrived at these moral judgements for themselves through the exercise of reason. In short, his discussion in Book 2 confirms that he saw the sins committed by pagans as rationally knowable: all pagan sin was a transgression of the natural law, which was the complete guide to sin for pagans and which anyone could know through the exercise of reason.

Nonetheless, he was also clear in Book 2 that a divinely given, written moral law which condemned this sexually immodest behaviour would have served certain Romans well. Since this could not be because he thought that these Romans were unable to discover that sexual licentiousness was wrong through reasoning, it must be because he thought that the bad example set by the gods had the effect of discouraging these Romans from referring this matter to reason in the first place. These Romans might hear from men like Scipio that all such conduct was sinful, and they might themselves condemn this conduct in other public settings, like the theatre. Yet, if Romans encountered the negative example set by the gods at a time when they had not yet applied their reason to discover for themselves the fact that these actions were sinful, then the gods' example would have the effect of discouraging them from ever bringing this question to the scrutiny of their conscience. Thus, he wrote that some Romans had interpreted the example of the gods as giving them a licence to do likewise. He wrote, for example, that a youth had cited the sexual exploits of Jupiter 'as authoritative precedent for his own shameful conduct',¹³¹ likewise, the lewd performances given

¹²⁹ *City of God* 2.14. ¹³⁰ *City of God* 2.13 and 2.29. ¹³¹ *City of God* 2.7.

in the temples gave a divine sanction to lewdness in ordinary life.¹³² Augustine speculated that the purpose of the demons (the real identity of the Romans' gods¹³³) in allowing the scandalous stories to be told about them was to 'entangle men's minds' so that they would be led on to commit similar sins.¹³⁴

God spoke in the conscience of everyone: ordinary Romans were able to know that it was sinful to be immodest or licentious – they were able to discover that they must exercise sexual self-restraint; but this was so only if it first occurred to them to question the morality of such behaviour. With the gods themselves providing sanction for such sexual exploits, some Romans arguably closed their minds to the possibility that this conduct was morally wrong. Therefore, in Book 2, Augustine challenged the Roman gods to contradict their bad example with an explicit condemnation of this behaviour in a divinely given law.

2.7 Breaking the Natural Law

We have seen that, for Augustine, pagans sinned in transgressing the law that they were given, namely, the natural law. Augustine also insisted that everyone whose life was governed by the natural law broke the natural law: we were all sinners under the natural law.¹³⁵ The above has suggested why this was so: all non-Christians lacked virtue, since virtue referred to loving the true God, and everyone who was not a Christian failed to know who this God was and therefore failed to direct their love to its proper object. The natural law commanded love for the true God; hence, everyone violated this commandment while ever they remained subject to the natural law. It was only in receiving the rest of the moral law (in having the divine law reinscribed in full upon our hearts by the Holy Spirit) that we met this requirement of love for the true (Christian) God.

Yet, one complication here is that Augustine, as mentioned already, described sin, not as the failure to love the true God, but as the love that we bestowed on temporal things when we mistakenly regarded

¹³² *City of God* 2.8. ¹³³ *City of God* 2.11. ¹³⁴ *City of God* 2.10.

¹³⁵ *Punishments and Forgiveness of Sins* 1.10.12: '... the natural law under which each person with the use of reason begins to add personal sins to original sin ...' *Expositions of the Psalms 99–120*, Ex. of Psalm 118, Sermon 25 at 5: '... the law turned all sinners on earth into law-breakers, whether we think of the law imposed in paradise, or the law instilled into human nature, or the law promulgated in writing'. Letter 157 at 15: 'since there is also a law in the reason of a human being who already uses free choice, a law naturally written in his heart... all are transgressors according to this law'.

them as necessary for happiness. We have seen how this love (carnal concupiscence) always involved the breach of the Golden Rule. But how did he convict all non-Christians of this love? The answer to this question cannot be that Augustine thought that every pagan necessarily regarded external or bodily temporal goods, like wealth or physical pleasure, as things needed for human flourishing; as we have seen, he knew that in the Stoics and Platonists he had examples of pagans who correctly evaluated these things as indifferent to our happiness. Nonetheless, Augustine did believe that all pagans improperly loved temporal things, since he insisted that all those who failed to love the true God were guilty of carnal concupiscence. Hence, he considered that there was a sense in which the Stoics and Platonists regarded something temporal as featuring in the happy life, despite the fact that they rejected the idea that any of those inferior temporal goods, which inspired the doing of anti-social, other-harming, or sexually sinful actions, was needed for happiness. What kind of temporal thing did Augustine believe these people included in their picture of the happy life? I argue that his view was that the Stoics and Platonists necessarily included their own souls as temporal (changeable, inconstant) things in their picture of happiness. Evidence for this conclusion can be found in his claim that the soul only became an eternal thing through loving the true God – it was through cleaving to the unchangeable God that the soul itself became unchangeable.¹³⁶ Loving the true God involved thinking of the happy life as the life in which the Christian God was known; when we did this, we loved our own souls, and the souls of other people, as eternal things, since in the happy life – the life in which we knew the true God – our souls would be eternal things. He asserted that everyone always loved himself.¹³⁷ Hence, arguably, his view was that, in failing to love the one eternal God, the Stoics and Platonists loved their own souls as temporal things when they ought to love them as eternal things. Love here referred to the feelings evoked by picturing something as part of the happy life: when our picture of the happy life was incorrect, because the true God was not present in it, the selves that we pictured in that life were temporal things, and this was to love ourselves improperly, since in the happy life our souls would cease altogether to be temporal things through sharing in God's eternity.

¹³⁶ *Eighty-Three Different Questions* 35.2: 'What else but God is that eternal object which affects the soul with eternity?'; *Christian Teaching* 1.22.21; Letter 118, 3.15.

¹³⁷ *Christian Teaching* 1.24.24 and 1.25.26.

2.8 Two Human Natures?

As we have seen, it would be a mistake to suppose that the doctrine of the Fall committed Augustine to the idea that, after the Fall, we no longer knew enough about human nature to derive the precepts of the natural law. Sin always involved thinking of temporal things as necessary for human flourishing; he knew that the classical natural law tradition, which had only fallen reason and fallen human nature as its guide, explained sin in similar terms. Hence, he accepted that even as fallen, sinful beings, we did not lack the knowledge of sin. It follows from this that, for Augustine, there must be a sense in which the Fall did not give us a new sinful nature: instead, there must be a sense in which human nature remained the same after the Fall, and remained the guide to morality, since Augustine held that, even after the Fall, studying our nature would lead us to the knowledge of sin.

Given this finding, it is puzzling that, in certain places, Augustine referred to two human natures when talking about the Fall. In these passages, Augustine wrote of an historic nature which was blameless and our present nature which was enslaved ‘to the flesh’. Ephesians 2:3, which referred to people who were ‘by nature children of wrath’, was the biblical text that Augustine liked to quote in this context. On the one hand, the above has found grounds for attributing to him the view that human nature did not change at the Fall; yet he sometimes wrote as though human nature had been changed by the Fall. How can we make sense of this?

The best known passage in which Augustine wrote of two human natures is the following from *On Free Will*:

Likewise, we say ‘nature’ in one way when we are speaking strictly about the nature of human beings in which they were first made, faultless in their kind. We say it in another way when we are speaking about that nature in which we are born as mortal, ignorant, and slaves to the flesh, due to the penalty from damnation. The latter is the sense in which the Apostle Paul says: ‘We were by nature the children of wrath, even as others’ [Ephesians 2:3].¹³⁸

In *Retractions*, he again quoted Ephesians 2:3, to explain his statement in *Two Books on Genesis*, that ‘There is no natural evil.’¹³⁹ He maintained that this claim was to be applied to ‘nature as it was created in the beginning

¹³⁸ *Free Will* 3.19.54. Translation by P. King (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹³⁹ *Two Books on Genesis, Against the Manicheans* 2.29.43.

without sin. For this is truly and properly called human nature'.¹⁴⁰ The implication was that our present human nature was evil. Here, Augustine was concerned to explain how his positive statements about human nature which he had addressed to the Manicheans (in his effort to overturn their view that an evil, alien nature within us was responsible for sin, rather than our own wills), nonetheless did not support the position of the Pelagians who maintained that we were born sinless and able to avoid sinning.¹⁴¹ To the Manicheans, his message was that our wills were evil,¹⁴² and to the Pelagians, his message was that we were born with an evil will and that this will remained evil, so that in all our willing we sinned until our will was healed by grace.¹⁴³

Augustine also quoted Ephesians 2:3 in *On Nature and Grace*, adding the idea of a 'new creation' in Christ, from 2 Corinthians 5:17:

Human nature was in the beginning created blameless and without any defect. But that human nature, in which each of us is born of Adam, now needs a physician, because it is not in good health. ... After all, if we are now a new creature in Christ, we were, nonetheless, by nature children of wrath...¹⁴⁴

Here, he contrasted our blameless nature with our sick nature. Similarly, he wrote of our nature as vitiated by the Fall in *On Marriage and Concupiscence*:

Was this nature created thus in Adam? God forbid! But since in him it was vitiated, it has run on naturally through all, and still is running; so that there is no deliverance from this ruin, except by the grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁵

After the Fall, human nature was mortal, ignorant, weak and sinful. Sinful here did not refer to personal sins, since Augustine accepted that infants were free of personal sins; rather, our sinfulness referred to original sin: our wills were vicious from birth and unable to be anything but vicious until they were restored by grace. Augustine considered that all these things were the punishments for Adam's sin, which all Adam's descendants inherited. He declared that this was so in *On the Trinity*, again quoting Ephesians 2:3: 'the sin of the first man passing over originally into all of both sexes, who were born through conjugal union ... I have said 'by their origin'; this has the same meaning as the words of the Apostle

¹⁴⁰ *Retractions* 1.9.3. ¹⁴¹ *Nature and Grace* 7.8. ¹⁴² *Against Faustus* 19.24.

¹⁴³ *Retractions* 1.8.4. See also *Retractions* 1.14.6 on *Two Souls* 12.17, quoting Eph. 2:3; and *Retractions* 1.14.8 on *Two Souls* 13.20.

¹⁴⁴ *Nature and Grace* 3.3.

¹⁴⁵ *Marriage and Concupiscence* 2.20.8. See also *Soliloquies* 1.6.12.

[in Eph. 2:3] ‘by nature’, when he says that he had been by nature as the rest, that is, by the nature as it was depraved by sin, not as it was created upright from the beginning’.¹⁴⁶ From our origin – meaning in this case, not created nature, but the fallen nature with which we were born – we were sinners. We were all somehow guilty of Adam’s primal sin; and the punishment for this sin was original sin (as well as mortality, ignorance and weakness).¹⁴⁷ Our shared guilt in Adam’s sin meant that we were born with, and unable to rectify, our vicious wills.

Thus, Augustine explained that there was human nature at creation and human nature after the Fall; at creation, humans had been blameless, but after the Fall, they were born sinners and unable, while they relied upon themselves, to be anything but sinful. He also alluded to a further meaning for human nature, the ‘new creation’ in Christ,¹⁴⁸ as well as the ‘whole and healthy human nature’ which we do not now possess but which Christians would have at the resurrection.¹⁴⁹

These passages seem to support the view that, for Augustine, there was no common human nature shared by unfallen humans and fallen ones. This would mean that after the Fall, our nature, as a different nature to created nature, would no longer be the guide to morality: it would mean that living in accordance with our sinful nature would not make us good; we would be good only in living in accordance with good (‘first’ or unfallen) human nature. Yet it is important to note that the idea of different natures nonetheless poses problems for other ideas espoused by Augustine. Without the idea of a common human nature, shared by pre-fallen and fallen people alike, it is hard to understand how he thought Christ shared the humanity of everyone. As noted earlier, Augustine considered that the resurrection introduced a third way of being human, dissimilar to Adam and Eve before they fell, and dissimilar to fallen humans as well; moreover, he held that the experience of the regenerate (the ‘new creation’) differed from that of pre-fallen Adam and Eve, from the unregenerate and from the resurrected, so that the regenerate were a fourth way of being human.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ *Trinity* 13.12.16. See also *City of God* 13.3 and 13.14.

¹⁴⁷ J. Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin, Cured by Christ: Agency, Necessity and Culpability in Augustinian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 23–30.

¹⁴⁸ *Nature and Grace* 3.3.

¹⁴⁹ *Nature and Grace* 48.56. Human nature at the resurrection will differ from created nature, in being ‘unable to sin’ (*Enchiridion* 28.104–105) and in having a spiritual body, without any need to eat, drink, or sleep, and with an exceptional beauty: A. M. Reisenauer, ‘The Resurrection of Human Flesh’, *Augustine’s Theology of the Resurrection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 173–246.

¹⁵⁰ F.-J. Thonnard. ‘La notion de “nature” chez saint Augustin. Ses progrès dans la polémique antipélagienne’, *La Revue des études augustiniennes* 11 (1965): 239–265,

If he considered that there was no common human nature, because each of these different instances amounted to a different nature, then which nature did he see as the norm or ideal? Where was goodness: before the Fall, in the regenerate or among the resurrected? This suggests that, despite the passages discussed earlier, Augustine could not dispense with the idea of a common human nature, which was present before the Fall, survived the Fall, which was shared by Christ (before and after the resurrection), and by the saints, and also by the damned in hell.

Further evidence that Augustine thought in terms of a common human nature is found in his many statements to the effect that nature, including human nature, was necessarily 'good', meaning that there could be no nature which was sinful. For example, in *Two Books on Genesis*, he stated: 'We say that there is no natural evil, but that all natures are good ... all are good insofar as they exist, since God made all things "very good" [Gn 1:31].'¹⁵¹ He stood by this claim in *Retractions*, where he repeated that 'no nature or substance, insofar as it is a nature and substance, is an evil'.¹⁵²

Absolute evil, therefore, has no measure, for it lacks all good whatever.

It thus does not exist, for it is embraced by no form, and the whole meaning of evil is derived from the privation of form.¹⁵³

Whatever existed was good because evil was not a nature. Evil was the absence of goodness: it was nothingness in the place of existence ('for evil has no nature: the loss of good has been given the name of "evil"').¹⁵⁴ He likewise stated in *True Religion*: 'since the vice of the soul is not its nature but contrary to its nature, and is nothing else than sin and sin's penalty, we understand that no nature, or, if you prefer it, no substance or essence, is evil.'¹⁵⁵ He repeated this claim in *The Nature of the Good*: 'Every nature insofar as it is a nature is something good.'¹⁵⁶ Later, he quoted 1 Timothy 4:4, 'Every creature of God is good.'¹⁵⁷

In these passages, Augustine considered that nature and goodness were the same thing, and so vice was contrary to nature: vice was contrary to nature, because if vice was part of any existing thing, then it would be a

pp. 245–249, notes these four different senses of nature in Augustine (and also in Aquinas). F.-J. Thonnard, 'Ontologie Augustinienne', *L'année théologique augustinienne* 14 (1954): 39–51, p. 44.

¹⁵¹ *Two Books on Genesis, Against the Manicheans* 2.29.43.

¹⁵² *Retractions* 1.9.1 and 1.2.35 ('that all natures, insofar as they are natures, are good').

¹⁵³ *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, Qu. 6 ('On Evil'). ¹⁵⁴ *City of God* 11.9.

¹⁵⁵ *True Religion* 23.44.

¹⁵⁶ *The Nature of the Good* 1 and 2. Also *Free Will* 3.13.36 and *City of God* 12.1.

¹⁵⁷ *Nature of the Good* 34.

good and not a vice. In *On Free Will*, he likewise maintained that ‘every vice, in virtue of the fact that it is a vice, is contrary to nature ... even contrary to the nature of the thing of which it is the vice’.¹⁵⁸

Augustine also maintained that nature was an unchanging thing, equivalent to the idea of being, existence or substance.¹⁵⁹ Human nature was unchangeable because it corresponded to one of the ideas, or forms or reasons, which existed in the Divine Mind (‘whatever things are fixed in their own order by a certain particular nature so as to exist, are produced by God as their cause’¹⁶⁰). This sense of nature assigned each kind of living thing to a particular place on the hierarchy of being: a creature’s nature referred to its measure, form, and order, the three criteria whereby each type of living thing had a rank.¹⁶¹ Humanity’s place in this hierarchy did not change after the Fall. Instead, Augustine held that human nature was the same – it occupied the same place – but humans would be ‘restless’ until they lived according to their place on the ladder of being.¹⁶²

These passages denied that it was possible to talk of a sinful nature: the correct understanding of vice was that it could not form part of any nature. In another place, he explained that ‘no one is evil by nature, but anyone who is evil is evil by vice’, adding that we should love ‘the human’ but hate the ‘vice’.¹⁶³ Here, again, he opposed nature and vice: vice was contrary to nature because nature was good and so vice could have no place in it. Augustine did not claim here that vice was contrary to the first human nature, but not contrary to our present nature. Instead, what he said in these places was that nature and goodness were one and the same thing, with the result that there could be no talk of a vicious nature.

Even in *Nature and Grace*, he insisted that our nature was praiseworthy. This was the work in which he was careful to insist on the fallenness of our

¹⁵⁸ *Free Will* 3.13.38. Also *City of God* 11.17.

¹⁵⁹ Thonnard, ‘Ontologie Augustinienne’, pp. 42–45. J. F. Anderson, *St. Augustine and Being: A Metaphysical Essay* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), p. 66.

¹⁶⁰ *Eighty-Three Different Questions* 46.2.

¹⁶¹ *City of God* 12.2: ‘And he gave to some more [being (*esse*)], and to others less, and thus arranged the natures of essences in ranks.’ See also *City of God* 11.16 and 12.5; *Nature of the Good* 3; *Confessions* 8.3.8 and 13.9.10.

¹⁶² *Confessions* 13.9.10: ‘They are not at rest so long as they are disordered, but once brought to order they find their rest.’ See Paul G. Kuntz, ‘From the Angel to the Worm: Augustine’s hierarchical vision’, in M. L. Kuntz and P. G. Kuntz, *Jacob’s Ladder and the Tree of Life: Concepts of Hierarchy and the Great Chain of Being* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987). This reading is supported by B. W. Smith, ‘Augustine’s Natural Law Theory in *De libero arbitrio*’, *Irish Theological Quarterly* 80 (2015): 111–135, pp. 126–127: ‘Human nature, vitiated by the fall, is less than it was, but it is not something different.’

¹⁶³ *City of God* 14.6. *Retractions* 1.8.5, writing on *Free Will* 2.20.54: ‘All good is from God. Hence there is no natural existence which is not from God.’

nature in the face of the Pelagian view that, in giving us our nature, God had given us everything which we needed for salvation. He recognised that Pelagius aimed to refute those (including the Manicheans, Augustine's own target in many of these passages) who sought to exculpate the human will by blaming human nature.¹⁶⁴ In response, Augustine insisted that, understood in one sense, human nature was praiseworthy even after the Fall;¹⁶⁵ but in another sense, after the Fall, it was helplessly enslaved to sin. The implication was that the Pelagians' understanding of human nature was flawed because it could not accommodate both these ideas: they grasped the idea that human nature was good, without also being able to understand that there was a sense in which it was enslaved to sin. We will explore shortly how Augustine thought it was possible to make these two claims.

In all these passages, Augustine could have written that nature *was* praiseworthy, perfect or good. That is, he was free to explain that he was referring to something historical, namely, nature before the Fall. He did not do this, however, because he was committed to the idea that everything which existed – everything with a nature – was good and that all natures were changeless ideas existing in the mind of God. This is also suggested by this passage from *On Marriage and Concupiscence*: 'This concerns vice, by which a good nature is depraved, the author of which vice is the devil. This does not concern the goodness of a nature itself (*de naturae ipsius bonitate*), the author of which is God.'¹⁶⁶ Here, he contrasted depraved nature, not with a historically earlier state of nature (pre-fallen nature), but with nature 'itself'.

Augustine indicated in these passages that the Fall did not produce a new human nature: if we acquired a vicious nature at the Fall, then vice would not be vice, since as something natural it would be good. Hence, after the Fall, our nature remained good, despite the fact that everyone was born a sinner: we possessed a common human nature shared with the first parents before they fell; sin formed no part of this nature which was good and unchanging.

How do we make sense of Augustine's conflicting statements about the Fall and human nature? I think we can make sense of them by finding that Augustine assigned two different meanings to the idea of 'nature': used in one sense, what was natural to us referred to any of the traits with

¹⁶⁴ *Nature and Grace* 1.1 and 7.7.

¹⁶⁵ *Nature and Grace* 34.39: 'We should, then, honour human nature with the praises it deserves.'

¹⁶⁶ *Marriage and Concupiscence* 2.9.21.

which we were born, including those which other humans might lack; used in another, the idea of our nature referred to the common trait that was unique to humans and that we all invariably possessed. These two meanings for nature allowed Augustine to write of humans as differing from each other at the level of their natures, whilst also writing of a common human nature shared by us all.

Support for this reading can be found in passages where Augustine wrote of natural differences among humans even after the Fall. He recognised that in any grouping of humans there could be different natures because some people would be born with certain natural traits or endowments, and other people with others. Thus, he remarked upon different natural aptitudes;¹⁶⁷ he was also aware of people born with physical and intellectual disabilities;¹⁶⁸ he accepted the possibility of wonderful kinds of humans.¹⁶⁹ He believed that before the Flood, humans had been of much greater stature than in the present day.¹⁷⁰ In recognising these different traits, some of which completely departed from our own human form, he emphasised that humans' identifying feature was their rationality: whatever differences existed, our reason united us.¹⁷¹

Thus, he accepted that within humankind there were variables even after the Fall; when writing of these variables, he used nature to refer to any of our inborn traits, including those which other people might not share: his message was that we might possess different natures, through being born with these different characteristics, but nonetheless, this did not prevent any of us from belonging to the one human nature. In other words, in these places, he gave two meanings to human nature, one of which referred to what was common to everyone, despite the existence of many variables. He consistently identified this common nature with our rationality: to be human was to be a reasoning animal.

In these cases, he was talking about human nature after the Fall: all humans after the Fall were united by their possession of reason, even though they were born with many different characteristics. Yet Augustine also held that at the Fall, our reason was damaged; perhaps, by a common human nature, he meant, merely, a common fallen nature: perhaps his meaning was that, after the Fall everyone was born with different traits, but a common inheritance of sinfulness and mortality. In which case, when he used nature to mean something common to us all, as distinct from the

¹⁶⁷ *City of God* 11.25; *Eighty-Three Different Questions* 1.2.4 and 1.2.22; *On Music* 6.7.19.

¹⁶⁸ *Enchiridion* 87; *Punishments and Forgiveness of Sins* 66. ¹⁶⁹ *City of God* 16.8.

¹⁷⁰ *City of God* 15.9. ¹⁷¹ *City of God* 16.8.

inborn ways in which we might differ from one another, he would be limiting his notion of nature to humans after the Fall: 'nature' used in this sense would not mean something which united us with Adam and Eve before they fell; it would simply refer to what united us with other fallen humans.

The problem with this reading of Augustine's two notions of nature, however, is the many passages, which have been discussed already, in which he wrote of nature as good. If nature, understood as something common to us all, simply meant what was common to us as fallen beings, then he could not have written of this nature as good. It seems unlikely that, in identifying nature with goodness, he was using nature in the alternative sense, namely, to refer to those inborn traits which other humans might not share. The passages in which he identified nature with goodness implied that all humans were born with the same level of goodness, not a level which could vary depending on each person's unique collection of different traits.

In other words, Augustine held that there was a common human nature, and this nature was not only common but also good and unchanging. He found that after the Fall, we had different natural traits, but also a common human nature, and this nature united us, not only with other fallen humans but also with Adam and Eve before they fell.

After the Fall, we were born mortal and sinful: these traits could be described as natural, but only in the first sense of 'nature', namely, in the sense of characteristics which some, but not necessarily all, humans possessed, since the first humans had lacked these traits. Nature, understood as what was unchanging, common and also good, must refer to whatever in fallen humans remained unfallen. Remembering that Augustine identified our nature with our reason, it follows that, for him, there was a part of our reason which was unfallen and which we consequently shared with the first parents. It was this which Augustine had in mind when he wrote of our nature as unchanging and good. Our reason was God's image,¹⁷² and God's image had been damaged in some respects by the Fall, but not in every respect;¹⁷³ thus, it was the part of the image of God which remained in fallen humans which constituted their human nature, not the damaged part that they shared only with other fallen people.

¹⁷² *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 3.20.30: 'it was in the very factor in which he surpasses non-rational animate beings that man was made to God's image. That, of course, is reason itself, or mind or intelligence or whatever word it may more suitably be named by.' Also *Unfinished Literal Commentary on Genesis* 60.

¹⁷³ *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* 6.24.35; *True Religion* 46.88; *Eighty-Three Different Questions* 51.1 and 67.4; *Spirit and Letter* 28.49 and *City of God* 22.24.

Adam and Eve had fully possessed God's image – their reason was undamaged – but fallen humans possessed only part of God's image. Yet we have seen that Augustine, in identifying this remnant of God's image as the trait that was shared by all humans, identified this remnant as our human nature. Hence, there was a sense in which Adam and Eve's nature, at creation, differed from ours, and a sense in which it was the same: Adam and Eve had traits which we did not share (including the part of reason which was unfallen in them but fallen in us) but also something which was common to us all (the part of reason which was unfallen in us). There could not be two standards of goodness, and so the good or flourishing life referred to the life that was in accordance with the nature that was common to us and to the first parents. This meant that to lead the good life was to live in complete accordance with the remnant of God's image which survived in us after the Fall.

If Augustine thought that everyone was able to distinguish between the traits that were natural in the sense of inborn but not shared with unfallen Adam and Eve, and those which were natural in the sense of common to unfallen and fallen humanity, then it would follow that he saw no obstacle to everyone identifying the features of the natural law. One complication here, however, is that Augustine held that to live in complete accordance with human nature – to flourish – was to have God's image fully restored in us. Thus, in describing how sin had entered our lives at the Fall and how we were restored by grace, he wrote of this as the loss and then restoration of God's image, linking Ephesians 4:23–24 ('Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, that has been created according to God in justice and holiness of truth') with Genesis 1:27 ('So God created man in his own image').¹⁷⁴ I propose that he was able to make this claim without being inconsistent because he held, first, that the remnant of God's image which remained in fallen humans fitted them to know God, so that the flourishing life, the life in which we lived as our nature fitted us to live, was the life in which God was known; and second, that knowing God referred to having God's image fully restored, with the result that we would only live the complete human life when we were restored to God's image.

My argument is that this was how Augustine defended the idea that the natural law was completely knowable by everyone after the Fall. Our reason was damaged at the Fall, but the fallenness of reason referred simply to the absence from reason of the knowledge of the true God's identity: the restoration of our reason referred to the restoration of this knowledge

¹⁷⁴ *Trinity* 14.16.22.

to our reason. Fallen reason differed from unfallen reason only in this one respect; hence, the damage suffered by our reason at the Fall did not mean that fallen reason had an end, in the sense of *telos*, which was distinct from that of unfallen reason; and this damage did not mean that fallen reason was unable to identify what this end was, namely, to know and love the true God as all-in-all for happiness, which involved rejecting all love for temporal things as happy-making. The unfallen remnant of reason was able to know that its goal was to know God, but it was unable to reach the knowledge of God since knowing God was one and the same thing as having God's image restored, and this was the work of divine grace. Hence, every human born after the Fall was able to identify the contents of the natural law, even though, without grace, they were unable to obey the natural law's command to turn from temporal things to the love of the true God.

3 The Privation Theory of Evil

The following offers further support for these claims through an exploration of Augustine's understanding of the relationship between reason and knowledge. As noted earlier, Augustine had a metaphysical explanation of evil as the privation of goodness: all natures were good; hence, evil was not part of nature. Instead, evil was the absence of something from our nature. In one sense, human nature remained the same, before and after the Fall; and yet, used in another sense, human nature was changed by the Fall since fallen humans, born as sinners, were born missing something which the first humans had possessed. At creation, Adam and Eve's nature could be understood in two ways: their nature could be understood as referring to the part of God's image which unfallen Adam and Eve shared with all their descendants; and, used in another sense, their nature could be understood as referring to the totality of God's image, including the part lost at the Fall. This is because, as we have seen, nature could be used to mean what we shared in common with every other human, and it could be used to mean any inborn (unacquired) characteristics which a person possessed, regardless of whether any other humans would be born with the same characteristics. Understood in this way, Adam and Eve's nature was undamaged by the Fall, and it was also damaged by the Fall: the remnant of God's image remained in them, but they also lost something from their nature, understood in the second sense, since they lost part of God's image. Hence, for Augustine, evil could be defined as the privation of nature (the privation of goodness); Adam and Eve suffered a loss to their nature, understood as God's complete image, a loss which

was transmitted to all their descendants, and this loss meant that everyone after the Fall was born sinful and dependent on grace for virtue.

Augustine held that reason was God's image. God's image was damaged at the Fall; in other words, reason was damaged at the Fall. In what sense was reason damaged? While it might be tempting to suppose that, for Augustine, reason was damaged in the sense that it no longer necessarily reached true conclusions, we will see that Augustine's theory of knowledge ruled out such a view. Rather, I propose, for Augustine, reason was damaged at the Fall in the sense that, after the Fall, reason was limited in the things that it could know without divine grace: the conclusions that fallen reason reached were always true, yet, after the Fall, there were certain things which were inaccessible to our reason and hence certain things which we were unable to know until God acted to make them known to us. As noted already, Augustine held that at the Fall, we lost part of God's image: I propose that he understood this as meaning that we lost part of our reason's innate idea of God; as a result, until God restored our reason (by restoring God's image), we knew true things about God but not enough to identify who the true God was.

Support for this reading can be found by investigating Augustine's account of the connection between reason and knowledge. He accepted that reality was either corporeal or incorporeal ('sensible' or 'intelligible').¹⁷⁵ He agreed with the Platonists that reason formed judgements about sensible reality in the light of certain standards, or innate ideas, which resided in the mind; these standards were present in the human mind as part of its permanent architecture.¹⁷⁶ Augustine called these standards 'reasons' (*rationes*).¹⁷⁷ It was simply part of what it meant to have a rational mind to have these *rationes* against which reason judged material reality: the knowledge of corporeal things required the reason to apply its innate ideas to form correct judgements about sense experiences.¹⁷⁸ Everything which we knew about the material world, we knew through the reason exercising its judgement with reference to these *rationes* which were part of the furniture of the mind.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ *City of God* 8.6.

¹⁷⁶ R. H. Nash, 'Illumination, Divine', in A. D. Fitzgerald, ed., *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), p. 439. See also R. H. Nash, *The Light of the Mind: St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge* (Kentucky: Kentucky University Press, 1969), pp. 7–11.

¹⁷⁷ *Immortality of the Soul* 4.6.

¹⁷⁸ Nash, 'Illumination', p. 440. S. E. Thompson, 'What Goodness Is: Order as Imitation of Unity in Augustine', *The Review of Metaphysics* 65 (2012): 525–553, p. 537.

¹⁷⁹ Nash, 'Illumination', p. 439.

Importantly, Augustine viewed these innate ideas, or reasons, as truths: our innate ideas were the way that we participated in the mind of God: through them our changeable minds participated in the unchangeable Truth.¹⁸⁰ Hence, there was no such thing as a false idea, understood in the sense of the *rationes*. Reasoning referred to forming judgements about material reality in the light of the truths that furnished our minds, and hence reasoning always led us to form correct judgements.

The knowledge of incorporeal, or intelligible reality, including our own souls and God, involved the rational mind looking within itself to discover these truths themselves. We did not reason our way to these truths; rather the reason encountered them in the mind and simply knew them.¹⁸¹ It was in this way that the mind came to know about the immaterial world, including knowing about itself as an incorporeal thing and knowing about God. We knew about these things through looking within and discovering the innate ideas that were present in our minds. In particular, we discovered that there must be the unchangeable mind of God beyond the changeable human mind: this was to discover God as the Truth, that is, as the source of all the individual truths present in our minds.¹⁸²

So, for Augustine, certain truths resided in the mind or reason, and it was because of these that reason apprehended all the truths that it apprehended, whether about the mind or about the world external to the mind, including the existence of divine truth itself. Thus, even after the Fall, reason was not mistaken in any of the conclusions that it drew since it reached these conclusions by judging its experiences in the light of the truths present in the mind, or by looking within and discovering these truths themselves.

Thus, when Augustine explained the Fall as the loss of part of God's image, and associated this with damage to our reason, we can conclude that he meant that, at the Fall, we lost something of our innate idea of God: humans had possessed this at creation; their mind was furnished with the knowledge of God. At the Fall, we lost this in part, and so, after the Fall, although our reason was able to form a partial idea of God, we were unable to form a complete picture, so that we were unable to know the true God until God acted to restore this knowledge to us. Hence, he was able to conclude that evil understood as the privation of nature (the loss of something which humans had possessed before the Fall), meant that, after the Fall, we were born sinful: we were born with a vicious will

¹⁸⁰ Nash, *Light of the Mind*, p. 7.

¹⁸¹ Nash, *Light of the Mind*, pp. 91–93. Thompson, 'Goodness', p. 537.

¹⁸² Nash, 'Illumination', p. 440. Thompson, 'Goodness', pp. 534 and 538. Augustine, *Free Will* 3.24.72; *True Religion* 39.7.

since we did not know the true God and hence did not love the true God; without the true God as the object of our love, we necessarily mistakenly pictured the happy life as the life in which we possessed something temporal, meaning that we were sinful in directing an improper love towards what was temporal.

In this way, Augustine was able to explain the impact of the Fall on Adam and Eve's descendants, including the sense in which all their descendants were born sinful, whilst also maintaining that the natural law was knowable by everyone born after the Fall through the exercise of (fallen) reason. Reason was fallen in the sense that it was unable to know the true God: this made everyone a sinner, but it did not prevent anyone from knowing what it was to be sinful. All that separated fallen nature from unfallen nature was the innate idea of God; in the absence of this, we were all sinners, yet, even so, we were able to know what it was to be sinful. We were able to know that we would be sinners while we failed to live sociably with each other and while we directed an improper love to what was temporal; correspondingly, we were able to know that we would be virtuous only in knowing and loving the true God.

3.1 Fallen Reason Reaching Its Limit

Augustine considered that after the Fall, non-Christians were able to know what sin consisted in; it follows that, for him, non-Christians were always able to know when they sinned. But we have seen that the Platonists believed that they were virtuous in directing their love towards the true God, when in fact, for Augustine, they were sinners in giving their love to a false deity. This suggests that he thought that there was one sin which sinners were unable to discover for themselves: non-Christians could know that it was sinful to love a false deity, but they could not know that they sinned in loving a false deity. In what follows I propose, on the contrary, that Augustine considered that the Platonists were capable of knowing that their love was not directed to the true God, with the result that, for him, even the Platonists' sin of loving a false deity was discoverable by unaided reason.

When Augustine proposed his privation theory of evil, he presented it as having philosophical merit. He did not offer it as an idea which he had reached in reliance on the bible or faith; he presented it as one which he had reached prior to his conversion to Christianity. That is, he offered it as an idea to which his own rational inquiries had led. He indicated that his journey to this understanding of evil began with his acceptance of the

Platonic notion of God as Being itself, that is, as changeless and incorruptible, a view of God which he considered also contained the idea of God's omnipotence and omniscience.¹⁸³

In *Confessions*, he described how learning of this philosophical idea of God contributed to his disillusionment with Manicheanism. He had initially been attracted to the Manichean explanation of good and evil as two different natures, but he saw that he must reject this as incompatible with the idea of God as Being, 'the supreme and only true Good'.¹⁸⁴ Manichean dualism, in picturing good and evil as substances locked in a battle, admitted the possibility that God could be harmed by evil, which was incompatible with a view of God as inviolable and incorruptible Being.¹⁸⁵

Alternatively, he was aware that the Platonists, particularly, Plotinus, explained evil in terms of the privation of the good, and he noted that by privation they meant the absence of form, but they understood matter as formlessness, so that they arrived at the idea of evil as formless matter.¹⁸⁶ This involved a sense of evil as non-being because matter was understood as non-being.¹⁸⁷ Thus, Plotinus held that evil was not simply the opposite of goodness, but the privation of goodness: evil had no Form and in this sense it was the absence of goodness which was Form.¹⁸⁸ For Plotinus, the soul fell into matter, separating itself from Form and thereby becoming weak.¹⁸⁹ Augustine thus attributed to Plotinus the view that our very embodiment in 'earthly limbs and dying members' made of formless matter gave rise to our desire for material, or temporal, things, which he and the Platonists identified with sin or vice.¹⁹⁰

Augustine agreed with the Platonists that God was the creator of the world in the sense of the source of its Being and Form; God was the Supreme Good, and everything else had its being or goodness from God. Hence, everything which existed was good. But Augustine did not

¹⁸³ *Confessions* 7.1.1–7.4.6. W. Maker, 'Augustine on Evil: The Dilemma of the Philosophers', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 15 (1984): 149–160, p. 153 for the way that Augustine shared the Greek idea of God. G. R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 2, noting that both Plotinus and the Stoic Epictetus did not think of evil as having an existence.

¹⁸⁴ *Confessions* 7.1.1–2 and 7.3.4–5.

¹⁸⁵ *Confessions* 7.2.3. L. Zwollo, *St. Augustine and Plotinus: The Human Mind as the Image of God* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), p. 17.

¹⁸⁶ *Confessions* 7.5.7. Plotinus, *Ennead* 1.8.4–5 and 1.8.11. In *Plotinus Ennead, Volume I: Porphyry on the Life of Plotinus. Ennead I*. Translated by A. H. Armstrong. *Loeb Classical Library* 440 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).

¹⁸⁷ Plotinus, *Ennead* 1.8.5: 'the true way of speaking is to say it "is not"'.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Plotinus, *Ennead* 1.8.1: 'one is form, the other is privation'; 1.8.3: 'evil cannot be included in what really exists or in what is beyond existence; for these are good'.

¹⁸⁹ Plotinus, *Ennead* 1.8.14. ¹⁹⁰ *City of God* 14.5. Zwollo, *St. Augustine*, pp. 25–27.

agree with the Platonists' view that God was not the creator of matter: the Platonists understood matter as evil (the absence of goodness) and hence maintained that the good God did not create matter.¹⁹¹ Augustine explained in *Confessions* why he found this account of evil philosophically unsatisfactory: he held that the problem lay in reconciling the idea that matter was evil with the idea of God's omnipotence. He considered that the very notion of God which he and the Platonists espoused contained the idea of God's omnipotence, and this led him to question their claim that matter was evil. Thus, he asked why the omnipotent God had failed to convert evil matter into good: 'Did he lack the power so to convert and change it all that no evil would remain, he who is omnipotent?'¹⁹²

Augustine then explained how, wrestling with this problem, he arrived at the insight, which took him beyond Platonism, that something which was good, but not the Supreme Good, could also be corruptible.¹⁹³ He reached the view that the Platonists were mistaken in supposing that incorruptibility needed to be attributed to everything which had being and goodness. Instead, incorruptibility was the characteristic of the Supreme Good alone: it was what set it apart from every other good. Rather than supposing that goodness necessarily meant incorruptibility, he declared that only what was good could be corrupted, since corruption referred to harming something and only the good could be harmed; since the Supreme Good was necessarily incorruptible (because he affirmed as evidently true that the incorruptible was superior to the corruptible¹⁹⁴), it followed that every other good must be corruptible. Combining this with the view of evil as privation of the good, Augustine offered a new explanation of privation: he did not need to have recourse to Plotinus's idea of formless matter, but he remained able to affirm that everything which existed was good.¹⁹⁵ Rather than locating evil in formless matter, he held that evil was simply the absence of goodness, meaning the absence of the proper amount or level of being or nature in something. The good could be corrupted; that is, it could lose goodness and the loss of goodness was the meaning of evil. The omnipotent God had created everything good, but it was part of the nature of goodness to be corruptible, and hence part of the nature of goodness that evil could exist. This was the only way, Augustine maintained, to reconcile God's omnipotence and goodness with the existence of evil.

Thus, for Augustine, the privation theory of evil, where evil was understood, not as formless matter, but rather as the loss of goodness (the loss of

¹⁹¹ *Confessions* 7.5.7. ¹⁹² *Confessions* 7.5.7. ¹⁹³ *Confessions* 7.12.18.

¹⁹⁴ *Confessions* 7.4.6. ¹⁹⁵ *Confessions* 7.13.19–7.16.22.

substance or nature), was an idea which was philosophically sound and the best available explanation of evil for all those who accepted the notion of an absolutely good and all-powerful God. He knew that the Platonists had not grasped the privation theory of evil, but his discussion implied that it could be grasped by them, if they only gave more careful consideration to the inconsistencies between regarding matter as evil and regarding God as omnipotent. In grasping the privation theory of evil, they would see that sin, understood as the improper love for temporal things, must involve the absence of something from our nature, understood as our reason. Since only God could restore our nature, the Platonists, through grasping the privation theory of evil, would also grasp the notion of our dependence on God for virtue. The Platonists' way of thinking about God did not contain this notion of God as the giver of virtue, and so the Platonists would be led to see that they worshipped a false deity. In contrast, they would find the notion of God as the giver of virtue in Christianity. Arguably this train of reasoning lay behind Augustine's declaration in *True Religion* that 'with the change of a few words and sentiments, [Plato and his followers] would become Christians, as many Platonists of recent times have done'.¹⁹⁶

3.2 Daylight Knowledge and Twilight Knowledge

Augustine gave two meanings to human nature and viewed our reason as fallen, but he explained these ideas in ways which made them compatible with the ancient natural law's central claim about the universality of moral knowledge. It has been argued, however, that Augustine made use of another notion, the idea of two different modes of knowing, and that, with this notion, he consigned those outside the Christian faith to nothing more than a partial knowledge of the natural law. Thus, Covington, writing with reference to the 'daylight' and 'twilight' knowledge of *City of God* 11.31, concludes that, for Augustine:

“Daylight” knowledge is clear, accurate, rightly directed, and largely accessible through scripture by saving faith. “Twilight” knowledge remains incomplete, confused, wrongly directed, and reflects the absence of scripture and saving faith.¹⁹⁷

In interpreting this passage as hostile to the idea of universal moral knowledge, however, Covington has misunderstood Augustine's distinction

¹⁹⁶ *True Religion* 4.6.

¹⁹⁷ Covington, 'Grammar of Virtue', pp. 173–174. Covington also describes daylight knowledge as 'error-prone'. See also p. 178: 'Fallen knowledge will remain limited and distorted'.

between daylight and twilight knowledge: in particular, Covington has inaccurately interpreted this distinction as meaning that daylight knowledge corresponds to what believers know through the bible, while twilight knowledge is confused and distorted and the product of the Fall.¹⁹⁸ Covington has overlooked the fact that Augustine was writing here about angelic knowledge. This is plain from *City of God* 11.29, which ascribed twilight knowledge, as well as daylight knowledge, to the angels. The ‘word of God’ in *City of God* 11.29, also referred to as ‘the wisdom of God’, did not refer to the bible, but to Christ, the second person of the Trinity (‘the only begotten Word of God’).¹⁹⁹ Angelic knowledge was not affected by the Fall; hence, contrary to Covington’s claim, the twilight knowledge that Augustine described as ‘dimmer’ than daylight knowledge was not something which pertained to fallen nature or fallen reason. Moreover, angelic knowledge was not error-prone; indeed, since knowledge is never false (because only what is true can be known), even human knowledge cannot be described as error-prone or distorted.

Nonetheless, Augustine distinguished these two ways of knowing; in *City of God* 11.7, he referred to these in a way which suggested that all creatures, not only angels, but humans too, had a twilight knowledge (‘for the knowledge of the creature is a kind of twilight, compared with the knowledge of the Creator’). What did he mean by twilight and daylight knowledge? Augustine’s ideas here are once again indebted to Plato, whose Allegory of the Cave, from Book 7 of *Republic*, also described two kinds of knowledge: the knowledge possessed by those who saw only the dim shadows, and the knowledge possessed by those who saw the light itself.²⁰⁰ Augustine’s Platonic-inspired view was that, through the second person of the Trinity (the Word of God), humans and angels (rational creation) participated in God, understood as Truth itself. That is, we had access to Truth through Wisdom, the Word of God (Christ), through whom we knew whatever we knew: this corresponded to the Platonic idea of the innate ideas or *rationes* whereby the human mind participated in the Ideas or Reason (the mind of God). Thus, in *City of God* 11.29, and in 11.7 as well, Augustine distinguished between knowing something ‘by’

¹⁹⁸ Covington, ‘Grammar of Virtue’, p. 175. ¹⁹⁹ *City of God* 11.29.

²⁰⁰ For a guide to Augustine’s understanding of twilight and daylight knowledge, see G. D. Wiebe, ‘Angelic Knowledge’, *Fallen Angels in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); J. Wetzel, ‘Books 11 & 12. Angels and Demons: The Eternal Framing of the Two Cities’, in D. V. Meconi, *Cambridge Companion to Augustine’s City of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); G. Lerner, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), p. 179.

or ‘in’ ‘itself’, which was twilight knowledge, and knowing things ‘in the art by which they were created’, which was daylight knowledge. He called twilight knowledge ‘more colourless’. His view was that we could know things in themselves, as the changeable things encountered in the world, or we could know them as they were imprinted unchangeably in our minds by God without their individual instantiations: thus, he wrote that there was a just man, and there was the idea of justice; a straight line drawn on a page, and the idea of a straight line. We could know things’ form or art, ‘the causes and reasons for their creation, fixed and unchanging’; or we could know individual instances of things.²⁰¹ To abstract our mind from the world of change was to contemplate what was changeless (the innate ideas) and this was to gain a clearer (daylight) vision since it was to see them as eternally abiding, rather than in their state of flux. Taking our mind away from the world of change to contemplate the *rationes* was very difficult but not impossible. Augustine, however, did not insist that this required Christian faith: it was not Christ in his role as saviour which allowed us to do this, which would imply that this was only possible for the faithful; rather, it was Christ in his role as the divine *logos*, that is, as the Son begotten by the Father as the wisdom ‘through whom all things were made’.²⁰² Christ played this role for the whole of creation. Thus, rather than requiring Christian faith to rise to the level of contemplating the innate ideas, Augustine instead maintained that the faithful were able to move a stage further, to ‘arrive at the immutable being of God’.²⁰³ As we have explored throughout this study, Augustine considered that the true God was known, not by human powers, but by grace, although reason could attain to some insights about the divine nature: ‘the mind of man, the natural seat of his reason and understanding, is itself weakened by long-standing faults which darken it. It is too weak to cleave to that changeless light and to enjoy it; it is too weak even to endure that light.’²⁰⁴

The changeless light is God, the one eternal thing; this light illuminates the human mind, through the innate ideas, but, Augustine claimed here, the Fall made our reason incapable of looking upon the light itself, that is, incapable of perceiving God. His meaning here was that the human mind, through understanding all of creation, both corporeal and incorporeal, could reach an understanding that everything that is owes its being to Being itself. This was a Platonic idea, and so Augustine accepted that fallen reason could reach this knowledge of God; but this natural knowledge of

²⁰¹ *City of God* 11.29. ²⁰² *City of God* 11.9. ²⁰³ *City of God* 11.2.

²⁰⁴ *City of God* 11.2.

God was both hard to attain and also incomplete. Knowing God as the good creator of everything in existence was insufficient for knowledge of the true God, since the true God was the Christian God, the God who saved sinners in giving them love for God. To know the true God was the meaning of happiness: thus, this passage concluded with a reference to the ‘felicity’ of abiding in the unchangeable light.

Unlike angels who possessed both the twilight knowledge of particulars and the daylight knowledge of the innate ideas, humans mostly failed to contemplate the innate ideas imprinted in their minds; they stayed instead at the level of twilight knowledge. But this did not mean that their ideas about the world were incorrect: twilight knowledge was still knowledge. As we have seen, Augustine held that we knew about the world of change, which included our own minds, through judging things in the light of the innate ideas. That is, he held that there was a difference between passing judgements based upon the *rationes* and contemplating them: the former resulted in twilight knowledge and the latter in daylight knowledge. Hence, twilight knowledge was dimmer and more colourless than daylight knowledge, and it was incomplete in the sense that it lacked an understanding of things as changeless and ever-abiding; but twilight knowledge did not lack anything for the knowledge of the mutable world: this knowledge was, by definition, the content of twilight knowledge. Consequently, contrary to the claims of Covington, Augustine’s distinction between twilight knowledge and daylight knowledge did not correspond to a distinction between an accurate and a confused way of perceiving the world; nor did it separate believers from unbelievers. Twilight knowledge was the common possession of angels and humans; and everyone was able to ascend to some knowledge of the innate ideas so that some daylight knowledge was possible even in the absence of Christian faith. But no one could perceive the changeless light of God without divine grace, and this grace was the possession of Christians alone.

Augustine described the authority of the bible in *City of God* 11.3:

These are the writings of outstanding authority in which we put our trust concerning those things which we need to know for our good, and yet are incapable of discovering by ourselves. Now we ourselves are our own witnesses for the knowledge of things which are within reach of our senses, whether interior or exterior.

Our ‘interior’ sense referred to our reason. Hence, with this statement, he gave authority to both reason and revelation: we put our trust in scripture to learn about things which pertained to our salvation but which lay beyond the ability of our reason to grasp; in every other respect, reason

was capable of being our guide. What did this mean in practice? The present study has found that, for Augustine, the whole natural law continued to reside in our hearts after the Fall and to be fully accessible to unaided reason, with the result that his view was that we did not need to rely on the bible, or to have our reason restored by grace, in order to know everything contained in the natural law. This study has also found that Augustine looked on the natural law as the moral law that governed pagan life. Non-Christians were able to identify every sin which could be present in their lives. Yet they lacked knowledge which pertained to their salvation since they did not know who the true God was and they did not know the cultic obligations imposed by God upon His people: the bible alone spoke about God's identity and about the acts of worship that God desired to be given.

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