

I believe, and because I believe, Master, I speak;^{*} you know it, Master. Didn't I openly divulge to you my offenses, my God, confronting myself, and didn't you acquit my heart's guilt?[†] I won't contest the matter in court with you,[‡] who are the truth, and I don't want to mislead my own mind and let my wrongdoing commit perjury against itself.[§] So I won't contest the matter with you in court, because if you, Master, are witness to my wrongdoings—who can make that stand up?[¶]

7. But nevertheless allow me to speak in the face of your mercy. I am dust and ashes,^{**} but nevertheless let me speak; because here is your mercy—and not a human being who will only make fun of me—to which I am speaking. Maybe you too make fun of me, but you will turn around and pity me.

What is it, after all, that I want to say, Master, except that I don't know where I came from to this place, into this—do I call it a deathly life or a living death? I don't know. But taking me in their arms to rear up as their own were the solaces of your mercies—as I heard from the parents of my body, the man from whom and the woman in whom you shaped me in the realm of time; I myself don't remember, naturally.

Yes, the comforts of human milk took me under their care, but it wasn't my mother or my nurses who filled their own breasts; you yourself gave me, through them, the nourishment of in-

* Psalms 116:10. The New Revised Standard Version reads, "I have kept my faith, even when I said, 'I am greatly afflicted.'" The verse is quoted in 2 Corinthians 4:13.

† Psalms 32:5.

‡ Job 9:2–4.

§ Psalms 27:12.

¶ Psalms 130:3.

** Genesis 18:27, Job 42:6.

fancy, according to your dispensation; you gave me your riches, which you've allocated clear down to the lowest place in the universe. You gave me the gift of not wanting more than you gave me, and to those who nursed me, you gave the desire to give to me what you gave to them. They wanted, through the feelings you ordained, to give to me what overflowed in them, coming from you. Their good was my good coming from them, because it wasn't actually from them, but only through them.

All good things, in fact, are from you, God, and from my God is my full deliverance. I became aware of this later, when you shouted at me through these very things you bestow inside me and outside me. But at first, back then, I knew enough to suckle, and to find satisfaction with pleasures, and to cry at physical annoyances—and I knew nothing else.

Start here.

8. Later I started to smile as well, first while I was sleeping, and then wakefully. People have told me this about myself, and I believe it, since this is what we see babies in general doing; I myself certainly don't remember doing it.

And there I was, gradually perceiving where I was, and desiring to make my desires known to people who could grant them—but I couldn't show my desires, because they were inside me, whereas other people were outside, and no perception that they possessed had the power of entering into my consciousness; so I threw around my arms and legs, and I threw off sounds, making signs resembling my wishes—the few signs I could make, that is, and as good as I could make them; there wasn't really any resemblance. And when compliance was not forthcoming, either because people didn't understand me or wouldn't do some-

thing to my disadvantage, I was wrathful that my elders wouldn't submit themselves to me, and that free people wouldn't be my slaves, and I wreaked vengeance on them—by crying.

10/1 What I've been instructed, by those babies in a position to instruct me, that this is how they are; and they, though hardly knowing the facts, have informed me that I was like them, and informed me better than those knowledgeable people who nurtured me.

What existed before infancy?

9. So here we are: my babyhood died long ago, but I myself am still alive. But you, Master, who live forever, and in whom nothing dies; since before the origins of all ages, and before anything that could even be called "before," you exist, and you exist as the God and the Master of all things, which you created, and in your presence every impetus of unstable things stands fast, and the immutable sources of all mutable things remain unmovable, and the reasons for all unreasoning and time-bound things have their eternal life: God, tell me, your suppliant, in your pity tell me, a pitiful human being belonging to you, whether my babyhood followed on some other, expired stage of my life?

Was that the stage I spent inside my mother's womb? About that age a certain amount has been told me, and I personally have seen pregnant ladies. My delight, my God, tell me what took place even before that? Was I anywhere or anyone? I have no one who can tell me this. My father and mother couldn't, nor could other people's experience or my own memory. But are you laughing at me as I ask these questions, and commanding praise and testimony from me for yourself that draws on what I do know?

So much attention given to a time Avg doesn't remember
Book 1 · 11
re-interferes / awliness?

10. I testify to you, Master of the sky and the earth, reciting praise to you out of the earliest days of my babyhood, which I don't remember. You have granted to a human being the power to conjecture about himself based on the evidence of others, and to trust as authoritative many utterances even of trivial womenfolk about him.

At any rate, I existed and I lived even then, and already near the end of babyhood, in its borderland, I was seeking the signals by which I could make my perceptions known to others. Where would such an organism come from, if not from you, Master? Will anyone emerge as the craftsman who makes himself? Or is any channel drawn from anywhere else, by which existence and life can run into us? Is this channel anything except your making of us, Master, for whom being and living are not two different things, because to be, in the highest sense, and to live, in the highest sense, are one and the same?

You are the highest, and you do not change, and the day that is today does not pass by in you—and yet it does pass by in you, because in you are also all these lower things: they would not have their paths on which to pass by, unless you contained these paths. And since your years do not fall short,† your years are the day that is today. How many days, our own and our ancestors', have passed through your today, and from it have taken their limits, and in whatever way have existed! And other days will pass through and take their limits and in whatever way will exist.

* Malachi 3:6.
† Psalms 102:27, quoted in Hebrews 1:12.

immutably
 You, however, are yourself, the same one, and all things that are tomorrow and beyond, and all that are yesterday and before, you will make to be today, you have made to be today. What is it to me, if someone doesn't understand? Let even the one who says "What is this?" have joy. Let him have joy even in saying it, and let him love finding you through not finding you out, rather than not find you by trying to find you out.

knowledge
 II. Listen to me, God! Tragic, the sins of humankind! A human being says this, and you have pity on him, since you made him yet didn't make the sin in him. Who will bring to my mind the sin of my infancy, since no one is clean of sin in your eyes, not even a baby whose life on earth is only a day long? Can any tiny little one at all recall this for me, a child in whom I see what I don't remember about myself?

So how was I sinning at that time? Was it because I strained, greedily drooling and wailing, toward my nurses' breasts? If I did that now, fixating in this way not on breast milk but on some food suitable to my age, I would be laughed at and very rightly taken to task. Back then, therefore, I was doing things that merited a scolding, but since I couldn't have understood anyone scolding me, custom and common sense didn't allow me to be scolded. As we grow up, we pull up behavior of that sort by the roots and toss it out. I haven't seen anyone, when cleaning something out, consciously throw away good things.

But could even that temporary behavior have been good: weeping for something that would have been harmful if handed over; getting bitterly angry at free people and grown-ups, the baby's own progenitors, who refuse to subject themselves to him; strik-

ing at and struggling to hurt, to the limits of his powers, many people besides who know better than him and don't submit to the slightest gesture that indicates his sovereign will—because they won't obey commands that it would be disastrous to obey?

infinite capacity
Being weak, babies' bodies are harmless, but babies' minds aren't harmless. I myself have observed (carefully enough that I know what I'm writing about) a tiny child who was jealous: he couldn't speak yet, but his face was pale and had a hateful expression as he glared at the child who shared his nurse. Who doesn't know that this happens? Mothers and nurses say that they avert this curse with one kind of cure or another. The alternative would be to believe that *this* is really "harmlessness" or "innocence": where a wellspring of milk is flowing and overflowing from the very bosom of abundance, he doesn't tolerate an adjunct who absolutely needs this resource and is still drawing his life from this single food. But these things are gently put up with, not because they're nothing, or because they're small matters, but because at a more advanced age they'll disappear. You can confirm this by the fact that you can't calmly endure the very same faults when you detect them in someone older.

12. You, therefore, Master, who gave life to that baby, and gave him a body, which, as we perceive, you fitted out with the physical senses, you composed from its various parts, you beautified with its shape, and for its wholeness and wholesome security you placed in its bosom all the impulses of a living being: you command me to praise you even for these small things, and to make my testimony to you and chant psalms to your name, to you the most high, because you are God, all-powerful and good—and this would be the case even if you'd made nothing

but these small things, as no one but you, the One, can make them. From you comes every form, from you who are most sublimely becoming—the most beautiful, that is—you who form all things and arrange all beings in order through your law.

This was an age, then, Master, through which I don't remember living, and for an account of which I trust others, and through which only on the evidence of other babies I can conclude that I passed (though the conclusion seems highly reliable): so I shrink from placing this age in the same category as this conscious life of mine that I live in the world. To the degree that babyhood belongs to the darkness of my forgetting, it is like the time during which I lived in my mother's womb. But if I was conceived in wrongdoing and in her sins my mother nourished me in her womb,* then where—I beg you to tell me, my God and my Master—where and when was I your slave innocent? Well then, let me leave aside that time: What, after all, does it have to do with me now, since I can't recollect any trace of it?

13. Didn't I move onward from there, from babyhood, and come to boyhood? Or rather did boyhood come into me and take over from babyhood? Babyhood didn't leave me—what "away" did it have to go to? Yet now it wasn't there. I wasn't an "in-fant," or "non-speaker," any longer but a boy, talking.

And I do remember this, and afterward I realized how it came about that I learned to talk. Older people didn't teach me, purveying the words in a fixed order in lessons, as they taught me to read and write later on. Instead, I used the mind you gave me,

* Psalms 51:5.

my God. With various murmurs and other sounds, and with parts of my body moving in different ways, I tried to deliver the impressions of my heart, in order to enforce obedience to my will. When I couldn't prevail in everything, or with everyone, I would grab with my memory. That is, when people around me named some object and, in accordance with that word, moved their bodies toward something, I saw, and I grasped that they were naming the object in this way, by the sound that they made when they wanted to indicate it. The evidence of this was their physical movements, a sort of natural worldwide language arising from facial expressions and movements of the eyes, and actions of other parts of the body, and the voice's pitch that shows the mind's disposition in seeking out, retaining, discarding, and avoiding things.

In due course, when I had heard words often in their proper places in a variety of sentences, I gradually deduced what they were symbols for; and once I had tamed my mouth and made it use these symbols, I could announce my wishes through them. Thus I began to share with those around me the symbols for making wishes known, and I ventured farther from shore on the stormy sea of our common human life—depending on my parents' authority and the power of people older than myself.

14. God, my God, what wretchedness I experienced there, what a mockery was made of me; but this was in fact set before me, as a boy, as the proper way to live. I was to submit to those guiding my views, that I might flourish in this world and excel in the science of garrulity, which would pander slavishly to the penchant for prestige you find among humankind and to wealth that was in reality no such thing.

square; there I was supposed to excel more, and be more praiseworthy, the more skillful a scam artist I was. That's how terrible human blindness is, with the human beings actually boasting of their blindness.

To make it worse, I surpassed the others in my school of rhetoric, and I exultantly preened myself on my superiority and was full of diseased pride. I was, however, far more sedate than the rest, as you know, Master, and had nothing whatsoever to do with the work of the demonic "demolition men" (a rascally title reminiscent of the devil's name in Greek,^{*} and one they wore like a badge of smart-aleck-rank). But I lived *among* them in a sort of brazen propriety, given that I wasn't one *of* them. But I was *with* them, and from time to time I enjoyed their friendship, though I was always repulsed by what they did—meaning the violent pranks by which they preyed impudently on students new to the scene, playing on their shyness to drive them into utter panic for the sheer fun of it, just to nurture their own vicious glee.

No activity resembles theirs more than the demons' own. What adds veracity to their being called "demolition men" is that they themselves, transparently, were first turned upside down and distorted out of all decency. The demons who pull their pranks unseen laugh at them while leading them by the nose—which is the exact way they love to treat their own victims.

* The most literal meaning (the common, figurative meaning is "slandorous") of the Greek word (*diabolos*) from which we have "diabolic" and "devil" is "throwing every which way" or "destroying." Accordingly in Latin, these young men are "those who turn [things] upside down," or *eversores*.

7. Among these persons I was, at my impressionable age, studying books about oratory, an art in which I longed to be prominent, with the execrable goal of producing a lot of hot air for the delectation of human fatuity. At one point in the traditional curriculum, I encountered a book by—in case you haven't heard of him—Cicero, whose tongue almost everyone admires; but what was in his bosom, not so much.[†]

In any case, in this book of his, entitled *Hortensius*, he urgently commends the study of philosophy. That work did renovate my attitude; it changed my pleas, directing them to you, Master, and altered my aspirations and desires. Suddenly all my empty ambition was deeply discounted, and with an unbelievable seething of my heart I longed for everlasting wisdom. I began to pick myself up so that I could return to you.[‡] It wasn't to sharpening my tongue—though this was my purported purpose, for which the tuition financed by my mother went at this time, when I was eighteen,[§] my father having died three years before—it wasn't, I repeat, to sharpening my tongue that I applied that book; and it wasn't the style in which it spoke, but what it said that persuaded me.

Start here.

8. How I burned, my God, how I burned to fly back from these earthly places to you, even though I didn't know what you would do with me! But wisdom is with you.[§] The Greek name

[†] This preeminent Roman Republican orator would of course have been central in Augustine's education; I read this reference to him as dismissive, if not downright sarcastic.

[‡] Luke 15:8, 20: Augustine is probably playing on the repeated "arise and go" wording of the prodigal son's return home.

[§] See note on book 2, chapter 4.

[§] Job 12:13 and 16.

philosophia means “love of wisdom,” and this love set me on fire through Cicero’s treatise.

There are those who debauch others through “philosophy,” using that great and persuasive and respectable word to gloss over and whitewash whatever they do wrong; and in this book are singled out and censured nearly all those who, in Cicero’s time and before, were in this category. This book lays out that rescuing instruction from your Spirit through your dutiful and reverent slave, Paul: “Look out for anyone who wants to trick you through philosophy and lead you meaninglessly astray, according to received human wisdom, and according to this material universe, and not according to Christ, because in him there lives the entire fullness of what is holy, in physical form.”

At that time—as you know, light of my heart—I had no knowledge yet of this passage from the apostles’ writings; yet I was delighted by *one* thing in Cicero’s urgings: I was supposed to conceive an affection for and seek out and grasp and hold and embrace, for all I was worth, not this or that system but philosophy herself, whatever *she* was; that’s why his words instilled such a thrill in me, why such a flame flared up.

And there was only a single thing to repel this great conflagration: Christ’s name wasn’t in the work. This name, according to your mercy, Master, this name of my Savior, your son, had been in my mother’s milk itself; my infant heart had reverently drunk that name in and kept it deep within me, and without it, whatever I read—however studied and polished it was, and however much of the truth it told otherwise—couldn’t ravish me altogether.

* The “slave” is Paul of Tarsus; Colossians 2:8–9.

9. Therefore I undertook to consider the sacred texts and get a sense of them. And lo and behold, the subject matter wasn’t “factual” in pretentious people’s opinion, or laid straightforwardly bare for children’s eyes, either, but lowly when I stepped toward her, of lofty dignity when I came up close, and veiled in mysteries. But back then, I wasn’t the sort of person who could enter into her, or bend my neck submissively to follow her own strides.

The tone I take now, you see, doesn’t show the way I felt when first turning to these writings, which seemed not even worth comparing to the excellence of Cicero. My swollen-headed opinion of my own taste recoiled from their mediocre manner, and my critical eye couldn’t pierce into the qualities behind that. In actual fact, this writing is just the sort to grow up alongside small children, but I wasn’t going to stoop to being a small child. I was bloated with conceit and seemed—to myself, anyway—quite grown up.

10. Accordingly, I fell in among people who were ^{Manichaeans} insanely arrogant, living for their bodies and their blather, in whose speech lurked the devil’s bird-snares,[†] smeared with a glue concocted from a commingling of the mere syllables of your name and the name of Jesus Christ, and the name of our advocate and comforter, the Holy Spirit.[‡] These words never retreated from their mouths, but never advanced farther than the squawky racket of their tongues; their hearts were hollow. They used to intone “Truth, truth,” and many times they intoned this to me, but the

[†] Matthew 18:4.

[‡] Timothy 3:7, 2 Timothy 2:26.

§ The Manichaeans were a sect with a version of the Trinity sharply distinct from that of the mainstream Christian church.

truth wasn't in them. They discoursed in lies, and not only about you, who are truly the truth, but even about the poor material components of this world, your creation.

Concerning *this*, I should have skipped over even the philosophers, who *were* telling the truth. I should have skipped over them for the sake of your love, since you're the highest good, and the beauty of all beautiful things. You, the truth, the truth! How the very inmost core of my consciousness sighed for you, while those people noised at me often and endlessly, conveying nothing but the sound of their voices and their large collection of hulking books. Those were so many trays on which, as I sat starving for you, the sun and moon were conveyed to me instead. These are your beautiful works, yet they're only your works. They're not you—and they themselves don't come first in importance among your works; your works of the spirit come before those petty material things, the shininess and heavenliness of these aside.

Yet it wasn't your works of the spirit but you yourself—you the truth, in which there's no change and no shadowing over from movement—for which I was starved and parched. But on and on, those platters were set in front of me, heaped with flashy apparitions, and it would actually have been better for me to be in love with that sun of ours—it's at least the truth to these wretched eyes—than to be in love with those lies, and to have my mind hoodwinked by my eyes. And yet, since I thought that what I was getting was you, I ate it—not gluttonously, for sure, because I didn't taste you in my mouth the way you really are (and in fact you *weren't* those empty inventions)—but I didn't

* James 1:17.

draw any nourishment from it; instead, I was more thoroughly drained than before.

Food eaten in dreams is very much like food eaten when people are awake—except that those sleeping aren't being fed; that's because they're sleeping. But those things were in no way at all like you, you as the truth that has now spoken to me, because they were mere phantasms, phony versions of material things.

More reliable than these are material objects, which we (in company with farm animals and birds) see with the sight of the flesh, whether these objects are in the sky or on the earth, and the objects are more real than the pictures we have of them in our heads. However, we picture them more clearly than we can use them to postulate other things on a larger, in fact overwhelming scale, things that absolutely don't exist. It was such nullities that I was being fed on then, but I wasn't being fed.

But you, my love, into whom I collapse so that I can be strong; you're *not* the material things we see in the sky, and you're not those we don't see there, either, because you originated both; nor do you rank them highest among the things you originated.

That's how far you are from those apparitions of mine, apparitions of objects that never existed in the first place! Images of objects that do exist are more real than them, and the objects themselves are more real still—but they still aren't what you are. Nor are you a soul, which is the life of objects (meaning the higher life of objects, a life more real than the objects themselves are)—no, you're the life of souls, the life of lives, living

† 1 Corinthians 12:10.

through yourself alone, and you don't change—you, the life of my soul.* ← End here.

ii. Given that, where were you then, in relation to where I was, and how far away from me were you? But I took a long foreign journey away from you, and I was barred even from the chaff on which I fed the pigs.†

How much better the fairy tales of the scholars and poets than those contemptible booby traps in which I found myself! Verses and poetical works and Medea airborne‡ are at any rate more useful than five elements in various tinges because they're in five different dusky caves,§ elements that in no wise exist and are death for the person who believes in them.

Poetry and tragedy I can transform into true entrées; furthermore, although I recited Medea's flight, I didn't vouch for it. Though I heard it recited, I didn't credit its occurrence. But I believed what my new mentors told me—and too bad it was for me, led step by step down to the lowest depths of the pit, struggling and sweltering as I was for want of the truth. This was while I sought you, my God (I place this confession of it before you, who had pity on me even before I placed my faith in you), while I sought you not with the mind's understanding, by which you willed me to excel wild animals, but according to my flesh's

* Here I must credit my amanuensis Samuel Loncar: "[This chapter] clearly [alludes] to the Platonic critique of art based on the theory of *mimesis*. Augustine has in view the Platonic set of concentric circles of reality: God/being, the forms, then material objects, then representations of those objects, then representations of representations."

† As pictured in the parable of the prodigal son, Luke 15:16; ordinary pagan literature is a form of refuse compared to scripture.

‡ Medea, in her eponymous tragedy by Euripides, escapes on a magical chariot after committing a series of murders.

§ These elements are basic to Manichaean physics and biology.

perceptions. You, however, were deeper inside me than my deepest depths and higher than my greatest heights.

I encountered that allegorical shameless woman in Solomon's writings, who's short on any thought for the future and sits on a chair in her doorway, saying, "Eat bread on the sly—you'll enjoy it; and steal water to drink—it'll taste so good." She seduced me, because she found me living homeless, i.e., under the eyes of my body alone, and in my mind chewing the cud from the sort of things I'd been able to gobble down through that eyesight.

ii. I didn't know, you see, another reality, which exists in truth. Instead, under the pretense of being oh-so-precise, I got shifted into partisanship with those idiot confidence men when they asked me what the source of evil was, and whether God was limited by a physical form and had hair and fingernails, and whether we should consider righteous the men who had many wives at the same time, and killed people, and performed animal sacrifices.

This line of questioning bothered me, as I didn't know anything about its background; and while I was withdrawing from the truth, I imagined myself moving toward it. I didn't know that evil doesn't exist except as the absence of good up to the point of annihilation. (How was I going to have such an insight when the sight of my eyes didn't extend past the material world, and the sight of my mind went only as far as illusions?) I didn't know that God is a spirit,† with no body having any length or breadth,

† Genesis 9:13-17.

† John 4:24.

refer to literature