

Augustine's Analysis of his Theft of Pears – the Medium Represents the Message

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Abstract:

This essay argues that Augustine structures his famous analysis, *in Confessions 2*, of his theft of pears by his understanding of the mode of insight rather than by his understanding of the mode of discovery. Therefore, while Augustine's study explicitly includes what he thinks are the stages by which his audience can discover his principal insight that human nature is *imago Dei*, i.e. spiritually united with a Self-Sufficient and Creator God for the sake of attaining perfect union with Him, it is entirely from this *imago Dei* perspective that Augustine presents his account of the pear theft. Recognizing the center of Augustine's approach, moreover, offers his reader two closely related benefits. These are opportunities, first, to overcome various limited criticisms and interpretations of Augustine's analysis of the pear theft and, second, to see how Augustine's rhetorical manner of *confessio* represents his perspective of insight.

Keywords: arrogating divinity, divine omnipotence, God, good/goods/goodness, *imago Dei*, moral evil, nothing, participation, pride, privation, sin, spiritual, will, and wickedness.

(i) Introduction

In a famous passage in book 2 of his *Confessions (conf.)*, Augustine of Hippo (354 - 431 A.D.) recounts how at the age of sixteen he and his companions stole pears from a neighbor's vineyard and, while delighting in their actions, simply threw away the pears to pigs.¹ Augustine describes the event like this:

There was a pear tree near our vineyard laden with fruit, though attractive neither in color nor taste. To shake the fruit off the tree and carry off the pears, I and a gang of naughty adolescents (*nequissimi adolescentuli*) set off late at night after (in our usual pestilential way) we had continued our game in the streets. We carried off a huge load of pears ... merely to throw to the pigs. Even if we ate a few, nevertheless our pleasure lay in doing what was not allowed. ... I had no motive for my wickedness except wickedness itself (*et malitiae meae causa nulla esset nisi militia*). It was foul (*foeda erat*) and I loved it (*et amavi eam*). I loved the self-destruction (*amavi perire*), I loved my fall (*amavi defectum meum*), not the object for which I had fallen (*non illud ad quod deficiebam*) but my fall itself (*sed defectum meum ipsum amavi*). My depraved soul leaped ... to ruin. I was seeking not to gain anything by shameful means (*non dedecore aliquid*), but shame for its own sake (*sed dedecus appetens*).²

Many commentators maintain that Augustine is being scrupulous. While some imply that his theft of pears is no more than the typical action of a rebellious teenager³, each holds that his thievery is not the epitome of wickedness.⁴ The *sense* of the criticism is this: ‘Yes, he stole some pears – but this pales beside the murderous actions of a Hitler. How, then, can a theft of pears represent the depths of depravity?’ Along the same lines, some recent ethicists would criticize Augustine for measuring evil too much by motivation – i.e. by the psychological state of the evildoer⁵ – rather than by the effects of the evildoer’s actions upon others.⁶ Despite their differences, these commentators agree that Augustine’s analysis is overdone, the product of a tortured soul, and therefore largely irrelevant to contemporary human self-understanding.

It is evident, however, that Augustine sees the matter somewhat differently. To start with, he does not think that his theft of pears typifies early adolescence.⁷ He certainly holds that each person is especially tempted to sin at that juncture in life. But he also understands that adolescents do not have to succumb to temptation⁸ since means are available enabling them (and anyone else) to embrace authentic law and authority.⁹ Second, Augustine nowhere claims in *conf.* 2 that stealing pears (for the sake of enjoying pears) is a *terrible* sin. In fact, his analysis of sin in 2.5.11 shows fundamental agreement with those who rate murder as a star instance of moral evil.¹⁰ Moreover, *what Augustine means* by ‘wickedness’ is less the theft of pears than his attempted larceny of some aspect of the divine nature. In other words, his stealing of pears with his companions was an instrument of and signifies the much greater sin of pride (*superbia*).¹¹ As Augustine sees it, every sin (in terms of its metaphysical or objective dimensions¹²) represents a futile attempt to reject divine law and establish as law one’s own judgments and preferences, i.e. to arrogate divine status.¹³ Whether recognized or not, each sinner intends to ‘play’ God. While sinning does this implicitly, the sixteen-year-old Augustine acted explicitly – which is much worse. Indeed, what he recounts by speaking of the theft of pears is that he knew and loved the self-destructive character of his claim to divinity. *Hence, Augustine condemns as wickedness his self-conscious rejection of both God and his own personal integrity for the sake of basking in human glory.*

Most important, while a good number of recent commentators (*e.g.* MacDonald, Starnes, Cavadini, Vaught, and Crosby) share Augustine’s view in the matter, their analysis is incomplete since it underestimates, in some way, Augustine’s profound metaphysical doctrine ordering every sentence and paragraph in his entire *Confessions*, viz. that *the human being (as imago Dei) is established together (i.e. in spiritual unity) with God for the sake of right union with Him.* This outlook obviously informs Augustine’s confessional mode of discourse throughout *conf.*; he speaks at once to God, neighbor, and himself; and it is explicitly asserted in *conf.* (*e.g.* in 10.26-37-27.38¹⁴ & 13.11.12) and employed throughout book two. In the latter regard, Augustine shows that the essence of sin cannot be the claim to divinity (2.6.13-14) unless man is already (at least to some degree) aware of, united with, and ordered to God. According to Augustine, this reality is known intuitively by the mind (*e.g.* the thief’s awareness that theft is morally wrong [2.4.9]) and is arrived at philosophically by a rigorous application of the doctrine of participation¹⁵ according to which

lower order realities (*e.g.* substances, core attributes of all substances [*e.g.* beauty], and cognitive acts) are understood to participate in some supreme, uncreated personal being known by, and therefore spiritually united with, the human mind. Man, in other words, is essentially theological.

Although I will elaborate on this matter in my conclusion, Augustine's moral theory or psychology entails that: (i) man (who exists by participation in God) has always some relationship with and is ordering divine goods (*viz.* God's law and truth) and created goods (which exist by participation in God); (ii) man should order created goods to divine goods; (iii) sin consists in ordering divine goods to created goods; and (iv) while lesser sins are committed for the sake of enjoying wrongly some created good, the greatest sins are committed to embrace wrongly some divine good. In other words, while lesser sins go against God indirectly the greatest sins go against Him directly. Hence, Augustine maintains in *conf.* 2 that what he did as a teenager, *viz.* stealing pears for the goal of claiming divine status, is far worse than stealing pears for the sake of food or revenge upon one's neighbor. While each sin contradicts personal integrity, the former contradicts personal integrity absolutely since, generically speaking, it is the paradigmatic sin in which every sin participates. For our purpose, this brings two crucial implications. First, Augustine's claim that his theft of pears signifies his attempt to arrogate God's power as the source and goal of the moral law is grounded in the metaphysical principle that man is established in relationship and for the sake of right union with God. And second, a comprehensive account of Augustine's analysis of his grievous sin depends on understanding the aforementioned principle.

With this in mind, we can infer that the commentators on Augustine's theft of pears fall into three groups. Some accuse him of scrupulosity; others argue that he fails to explain adequately the problems of sin he considers (*e.g.* Mann [1979]); and a third group maintains that he sets out a cogent overall analysis both of his sin and of the structure of human sin generally (*e.g.* Starnes, MacDonald, Wills, Cavadini, Vaught, and Crosby). While those holding that Augustine is scrupulous do not distinguish (i) the sin of theft from the sin of pride and (ii) its philosophical ground, those maintaining that Augustine does not ultimately provide an intelligible account of wrong-doing (Mann [1979]) distinguish his sin of pride but fail to recognize its philosophical ground. And finally, those asserting that Augustine provides a cogent account of wrong-doing (Starnes, Wills, MacDonald, Cavadini, Vaught and Crosby)¹⁶ distinguish the sin of pride but neglect to elucidate crucial aspects of both that sin (pertaining to Augustine's motivations and pleasure in his act) and Augustine's doctrine of wrong-doing because they underestimate, in diverse ways, Augustine's profound philosophical ground.

This essay will argue, therefore, that each party falls short of explicating some crucial aspect of Augustine's teaching for two closely related reasons pertaining, on the one hand, to content and, on the other, to method. Concerning content, each party neglects – albeit in varying manners – to recognize Augustine's fundamental framework of analysis that man participates in God by the mode of spiritual relationship. This common oversight, however, can be traced to a shared deficiency in their method. On this score, each party focuses too much on Augustine's account of the order of

discovery and too little, therefore, on his teaching concerning the order of being. Augustine's analysis includes both approaches but his *confessio* mode of exposition emphasizes the order of being since that is, he thinks, what the order of discovery ultimately teaches. In this respect, Augustine's medium represents his message.

(ii) *Conf.* 2.4-10: Augustine considers his theft of pears

Augustine introduces consideration of his theft of pears by proclaiming that stealing is contrary to the moral law that is (i) promulgated by God and (ii) writ on the heart of every person.¹⁷ He writes:

Theft (*Furtum*) receives certain punishment by your law (*Exod.* 20: 15) Lord, and by the law written in the hearts of men (*Rom.* 2:14) which not even iniquity itself destroys (*quam ne ipsa quidem delet iniquitas*). For what thief can with equanimity endure being robbed by another thief (*quis enim fur aequo animo furem patitur*)? He cannot tolerate it even if he is rich and the other is destitute.¹⁸

Augustine begins with this example because he thinks it shows that every thief (including the sixteen-year-old Augustine) has some notion/awareness of divine law. According to Augustine, each human being is subject to an objective moral standard (i) deriving from God, (ii) structuring his relationship with God and neighbor, and (iii) implying that he is made for the sake of *right union* with God and neighbor. Hence, Augustine claims that it is by adhering to such law that we fashion *right order* in the way we procure the goods, for which we have natural inclinations, like food, shelter, clothing, friendship, and knowledge.¹⁹

As Augustine sees it, the contradiction of the thief who refuses to suffer theft is this: on the one hand, he appropriates what he knows belongs to another; on the other hand, he refuses to allow others to appropriate what he knows belongs to him. The thief both asserts and denies the same law in one and the same respect – and this is only possible because he recognizes (i) an objective law against theft and (ii) it is in his power to obey or disobey the law. So, as the thief is ordered through law to God, and consequently to human flourishing, it follows that when he breaks the law he contradicts and diminishes himself.²⁰

As we remember, Augustine claims that he stole the pears because he wanted to do evil for its own sake – thus far defined as the intention to break the moral law precisely because of what it is (*et malitiae meae causa nulla esset nisi militia*).²¹ To show the gravity of his sin, Augustine spends the remainder of book 2 analyzing philosophically the theft of pears. This is accomplished by bringing before his reader an analysis of sin – in terms of its objects, motives, and metaphysical dimensions. Augustine begins by asserting that sin does not consist in enjoying the temporal goods that attract us. On the contrary, these goods, whether physical or social, attract us insofar as they fulfill our innate inclinations to good, especially to beauty, and are rightly enjoyed if properly ordered by the soul. Augustine writes:

There is beauty (*species est pulchris*) in lovely physical objects, as in gold and silver and all other such things. When the body touches such things, much significance attaches to the rapport of the object with the touch. Each of the other senses has its own appropriate mode of response to physical things. Temporal honor and the power of giving orders and of being in command have their own kind of dignity. ... The life which we live in this world has its attractiveness because of a certain measure in its beauty and its harmony with all these inferior objects that are beautiful. Human friendship is also a nest of love and gentleness because of the unity it brings about between many souls.²²

According to Augustine, then, sin is *disorder*; it occurs when the soul²³ subordinates its proper object, the highest and supreme (because non-participated or uncreated) Good, viz. God, to lower goods, i.e. to goods that are such by participation in God.²⁴ As the soul is a participated good made (i) in relationship with God and (ii) to achieve happiness or fulfillment by embracing Him above all created goods *and* therefore by ordering to God (as He sees fit) its pursuit and enjoyment of created goods, sin happens when the soul wants to enjoy a created good in such a manner that (objectively speaking) it *attempts* to elevate that good's intrinsic value while reducing the intrinsic value of God. Augustine writes:

Yet sin is committed (*peccatum admittitur*) for the sake of all these things and others of this kind when, in consequence of an immoderate urge towards those things which are at the bottom end of the scale of good, we abandon the higher and supreme goods (*meliora et summa deseruntur*), that is you, Lord God, and your truth and your law (*tu, domine deus noster, et veritas tua, et lex tua*). These inferior goods have their delights, but not comparable to my God who has made them all (*qui fecit omnia*). It is in him that the just person takes delight (*in ipso delectatur iustus*); he is the joy of those who are true of heart (*ipse est deliciae rectorum corde*) (Ps. 63:11).²⁵

To support his definition of sin, Augustine cites as evidence our common analysis of crimes. We maintain that there is a motive behind every crime and usually identify it with the desire to enjoy an inferior/participated good like property of some kind, sexual relations, money, or human justice.²⁶ Within this framework of analysis, Augustine searches for his motive in the theft of pears: "Wretch that I was, what did I love in you (*Quid ... in te amavi*), my act of theft (*furtum meum*), that crime which I did at night in the sixteenth year of my life?"²⁷ He wonders if his theft was precipitated by an undue desire for the participated good that is the pears. He discloses, however, that he stole neither to enjoy the pears' appearance or taste nor, for that matter, to satisfy a hunger for food. It had nothing to do with the beauty or utility of the pears; rather, his motive was directly related to the act of theft. In his case, the stolen object could just as well have been a car, computer, or towels from a hotel. Augustine writes:

The fruit which we stole was beautiful but was not that which my miserable soul coveted. I had a quantity of better pears. But those I picked solely with the motive of stealing. I threw away what I had picked. My feasting was only on the wickedness which I took pleasure in enjoying (*epulatus inde*

solam iniquitatem qua lactabar fruens). If any of those pears entered my mouth, my criminality was the piquant sauce (*condimentum ibi facinus erat*).²⁸

What pleasure, then, was he trying to procure? In other words, what does it mean to ‘feast on wickedness’? Augustine begins to unravel this mystery by asking if his theft was carried out for the sake of some real or apparent participated good aside from the pears. Taking a panoramic view of participated goods, he compares his theft to (i) acts of virtue; (ii) qualities in the mind and body; (iii) the orderly movements of the stars and the cycle of death and birth which preserves living creatures; and (iv) specious vices (i.e. to some apparent good). He discovers, however, that his pleasure cannot be identified with any of the above. His action was not for the sake of (i) cultivating the virtue of justice; (ii) developing his intelligence or muscles; (iii) benefiting the pigs (e.g. to satisfy their appetite for food) or the vineyards (e.g. planting more trees or fertilizing the ground); or (iv) robbing the rich to feed the poor.²⁹

The *primary object* of Augustine’s theft, then, was neither the pears nor some other participated good that employs the theft of pears as its means. Rather, he acted for the sake of what is worse than a specious vice, viz. vice itself. Where, then, is his pleasure found? Based on his analysis thus far, we can only surmise that Augustine’s satisfaction consists in using the lower goods for the express purpose of *subordinating* the highest good. This is because to steal for its own sake means that one’s pleasure is found in breaking the law and defying the One who makes and enforces it. If Augustine does not want to enjoy any real or apparent participated good, he must want to enjoy what belongs to the God who forbids theft.

For this reason, Augustine now offers his *second, more profound and decisive, account of sin* that is centered on a study of pride (*superbia*). He identifies *superbia* as the essential motive behind every sin, and his principal teaching is that every sinner – whether the latter recognizes it or not – aims to appropriate what belongs to God. This is because if each good the sinner desires exists by participation in or is God, it follows that every sin represents the sinner’s desire to arrogate *some aspect of the divine nature*. In short, sin consists in setting oneself in the place of God.³⁰

Moreover, the sinner who arrogates what belongs to God (i.e. perversely imitates God) can take nothing from Him for He *is* Goodness. Rather he can only take something (viz. goodness) from himself, i.e. diminish his own capacity for right order. *In reality*, then, the sinner gets the opposite of what he wants; instead of procuring goodness he loses it. The ambitious person who wants the honor and glory due to others – and, above all else, to God – loses the honor and glory that is his due. The cruel leader, seeking only to be feared, loses the fear owed him as leader; and the curious person, striving to know what he doesn’t need to know, fails to gain the knowledge he ought to have. Likewise, the idle, by rejecting work, lose the rest that is their due (as the result of hard work); and the vengeful person who takes justice into his own hands loses the justice owed to him by others. On this basis, Augustine maintains that every sinner *fornicates away from God*:

So the soul fornicates (*Ps. 72:27*) when it is turned away from you (*fornicator anima, cum avertitur abs te*) and seeks outside you (*et quaerit extra te*) the pure and clear intentions which are not to be found except by returning to you (*ea quae pura et liquida non invenit, nisi cum redit ad te*). In their perverted way, all humanity imitates you. Yet they put themselves at a distance from you and exalt themselves against you. But even by thus imitating you they acknowledge that you are the creator of all nature and so concede that there is no place where one can entirely escape from you.³¹

According to Augustine, every sin is futile and self-contradictory because the sinner exists by participation in and, therefore, by ordination to God. There can be no rebellion – no attempt to set up a contrary order – unless there is an objective order to rebel against in the first place. How does the sinner imitate God? By trying to order, according to his standard, what is already and can only be ordered by God the Creator. The sinner, in other words, claims divine status as the ultimate source of being, value, and reward and punishment. Why does Augustine maintain that this hostile attitude towards God is nonetheless an acknowledgement of God? Because when the sinner denies God in one respect he necessarily embraces Him in another respect. As everything (including the sinner) exists by participation in God, and as the sinner is established (by God) in relationship with God for the sake of achieving right union with Him, his rejection of God means that he embraces as God some good that participates in God. At bottom, this is himself and/or some good that is God but is wanted apart from Him.

Augustine advances here an important insight that is missed by those holding that he ultimately distinguishes no adequate motive (in the sense of ‘his pursuit of some [apparent] good’) in his theft of pears.³² Unlike Augustine, these thinkers focus their analysis on only one aspect of the subjective dimension of Augustine’s motivation. In particular, they neglect to consider sufficiently the adolescent Augustine’s simultaneous desire for divine omnipotence and human glory; in general, they fail to recognize Augustine’s primary teaching that as *man is spiritually united with God* each of his thoughts and actions have an accompanying theological aspect.

Even if someone claims ‘to do evil for its own sake’ (including the person who wants to commit suicide and believes that death brings personal annihilation) the corresponding objective dimensions of his action would be essentially the same as the sixteen-year-old Augustine’s since the standard of analysis is no less than an objective (i.e. metaphysical) understanding of the human person *in relationship with and fulfilled in God*. In other words, that motivation means the agent wants to arrogate divine omnipotence – claiming that he/she, rather than God, creates human being and thereby determines right and wrong, and reward and punishment. As Augustine’s objective account of human personhood entails relationship with God, it follows that – whether the human agent is aware of it or not – his motives and actions have an inherent theological dimension. Again, if the suicide (i) no longer wants to be (period) or (ii) wants to be cast into hell by God (*e.g.* Ivan Karamazov in Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*) then, all things considered, *he really wants* to be God. Put differently, the good he embraces as God is in one respect himself and in another respect God. This person knowingly wills what does not perfect him but his own existing as a

participated good in relationship with God means, objectively speaking, that his will for self-destruction (insofar as it contravenes divine law) is also a will for some good either by participation in God or because it is God! At the same time, then, as the sinner rejects God in one respect he embraces Him in another respect. For this reason, Augustine calls someone with this mind-set ‘a runaway slave’.

Therefore, since man is spiritually established with God he always embraces the non-participated Good in some respect. If man is rightly ordered, he orders himself to God; if he is wrongly ordered, he orders God to himself (i.e. wants to be God). Hence, they are mistaken who maintain Augustine teaches that his theft of pears is not motivated by the pursuit of some (ontological) good. The young Augustine wants what is ontologically good – the problem is that he does not want this in a manner that is morally good. Consequently, they are also mistaken who hold that persons can act for no apparent good at all. Someone might *say he is acting for no apparent good* but *in the ultimate scheme of things* he is really making a claim to divinity, and he himself is the apparent good he is acting for. Those who ignore these distinctions analyze insufficiently Augustine’s reflections on his theft of pears, overlooking especially the profound dignity he ascribes to the human person.

In any event, it is Augustine’s point that the sinner acknowledges God at the same time as he rejects Him. Therefore, since man is established in relationship and for the sake of right union with God, rebellion against the divine order is both (i) rebellion against personal integrity and (ii) an implicit recognition of divine sovereignty. Even though sin is spiritual suicide, the sinner gives glory to God.

Returning to Augustine’s analysis of his theft of pears, he asks: what does it *really* mean to steal for the sake of stealing? It signifies that the thief desires to usurp the role of divine lawgiver. The adolescent Augustine arrogates divine omnipotence; by breaking God’s law, he claims to be his own law – or, put differently, that he belongs to and is ordered to himself rather than to God. Like the biblical accounts of Satan and the first human couple in the Garden of Eden, the young Augustine wants to possess God’s power to determine and enforce the distinction between good and evil. However, as his integrity depends on obeying divine law, what he ‘gains’ by disobedience is powerlessness to do what he ought, viz. to obey God’s law. Since his desire to usurp the divine power depends, in the first place, on his participation in divine power – his very ability to act derives from God – Augustine’s sin causes him to diminish his own power. By embracing what is unreal, a shadow, he becomes, in that respect, unreal himself. Augustine writes:

Therefore in that act of theft what was the object of my love (*quid ergo in illo furto ego dilexi*), and in what way did I viciously and perversely imitate my Lord (*et in quo dominum meum vel vitiose atque perverse imitatus sum*)? Was my pleasure to break your law, but by deceit, since I had not the power to do that by force? Was I acting like a prisoner with restricted liberty who does without punishment what is not permitted, thereby making an assertion of possessing a dim resemblance to omnipotence (*tenebrosa omnipotentiae similitudine*)? Here is a runaway slave fleeing his master and

pursuing a shadow (*Job* 7:2). What rottenness! What a monstrous life and an abyss of death! Was it possible to take pleasure in what was illicit for no reason other than that it was not allowed (*potuitne libere quod non licebat, non ob aliud nisi quia non licebat*)?³³

Hence, what fruit (i.e. gain or pleasure) did the young Augustine procure from the sin? From the perspective of Confessor Augustine's objective account of the human person's relationship with God, the answer is nothing positive (*nihil*). On that basis, the 'pleasure' or 'thrill'³⁴ the young Augustine experiences is not a gain but a loss or negation. As a person (and therefore as ordered to perfect spiritual union with God), he is beset by deficiency, disorder, disintegration or privation; he is 'less human'³⁵ than before since his open hostility towards God means that he possesses a weaker disposition towards God.

Augustine's sin, therefore, is a *nothing* because it moves him away from his proper end of unity with God. In this sense too (i) the praise of the gang and (ii) Augustine's pleasure in his actions are *nothings* for these draw him away from virtue, true friendship, and right pleasure.³⁶ What Augustine and his gang identified as 'gain' is really a 'loss' of personal integrity. In his words:

What fruit (*fructum*) had I, wretched boy, in these things (*Rom.* 6.21) ... above all in that theft in which I loved nothing but the theft itself? The theft itself was a nothing (*nihil*) and for that reason I was the more miserable. Yet had I been alone I would not have done it (*et tamen solus id non fecissem*) ... alone I would not have done it. Therefore my love in that act was to be associated with the gang in whose company I did it (*ergo amavi ibi etiam consortium eorum cum quibus id feci*). Does it follow that I loved something other than the theft? No nothing else (*nihil aliud*) in reality (*quid est re vera*) because association with the gang is also a nothing (*quia et illud nihil est*) ... my pleasure was not in the pears (*in illis pomis voluptas mihi non erat*); it was in the crime itself (*ea erat in ipso facinore*), done in association with a sinful group (*quam faciebat consortium simul peccantium*).³⁷

Moreover, Augustine understands that the pleasure taken in defying God (and therefore, objectively speaking, in harming himself) was inseparable from the pleasure gained from recognizing the gang's approval of his actions.³⁸ In other words, *these two things together* constituted his satisfaction in the theft. This is important for *three reasons*.

In the first place, it confirms Augustine's assertion that his motivation in the crime was not simply for the lower goods of human friendship and glory but these were sought in conjunction with his primary interest to defy God. That 'he would not have done it if he had been alone' doesn't mean he acted simply for the sake of friendship and glory but that the type of friendship and glory he sought by his act of defiance would not have been available if he had acted alone. Augustine did not have two distinct motives but his primary motive had two intimately related components – *in this instance, to openly defy God is at the same time to seek glory from depraved men*.

MacDonald, therefore, is right that Augustine uses his doctrine of pride "to unlock a resolution to the central puzzle of the theft of pears."³⁹ In the long run, however, MacDonald⁴⁰ does

not adequately integrate the motivation of pride with the motivation for friendship because he neglects to acknowledge the metaphysical principle upon which Augustine's entire analysis rests, viz. that man is established in relationship and for the sake of right union with God and, therefore, with neighbor. What I mean is this. MacDonald's interpretation surpasses Wills' interpretation because while the latter ultimately identifies Augustine's principal motive as the pursuit of "a false ideal of companionship"⁴¹ MacDonald holds that Augustine's "motivational state" is a "composite" of (i) the desire to claim for himself divine status, i.e. "a kind of limitless freedom and power," and (ii) the desire "to be included in the fellowship of rogues."⁴² Unlike Wills, therefore, MacDonald identifies as Augustine's motivation both the explicit urge for divinity and the urge for false friendship. MacDonald, however, fails to relate together these two components of Augustine's motivation in anything more than an accidental manner. Although he acknowledges that these motives "work crucially together" in Augustine's analysis⁴³, his subsequent comments suggest the opinion that each of the aforementioned motives is sufficient unto itself and happen to converge in Augustine's mind in his theft of pears.⁴⁴ All things considered, this leaves MacDonald with the odd claim that Augustine both has and has not one motivation in his theft of pears.

These difficulties are cleared up, however, if we recognize and apply Augustine's organizing principle. For if man is established in relationship and for the sake of right union (or friendship) with God and neighbor, then the desire to arrogate the divine omnipotence necessarily entails that the neighbor (viz. Augustine and his gang) is elevated to the status of God and God is relegated to the status of creature. Or, put differently, the decision to embrace the gang's commands as absolute and binding necessarily requires allocating divine omnipotence to the gang. Most important, this insight allows us to see (i) that Augustine has essentially one motive with (as MacDonald rightly asserts) two inseparable components, and (ii) why these components "in his analysis, work crucially together."⁴⁵

Starnes provides a more complete solution to the matter than MacDonald⁴⁶ but he seems to link together Augustine's twin motivations from the perspective of psychology rather than from the perspective of metaphysics. It is one thing to maintain that Augustine's desire for omnipotence depends on "some objective recognition that this was the case" and "in order to be established objectively it must in some way be recognized by someone other than Augustine."⁴⁷ But it is quite another to show the essential cause in which the aforementioned distinction participates. It is true that (i) (*pace* MacDonald) in Augustine's circumstances these motives were inseparable and (ii) (*pace* Starnes) these motives are inseparable psychologically. However, it is more precise to say that these motives are united since, *based on Augustine's account of the order of reality*, the divine and the human are spiritually united. In other words, Augustine's philosophical psychology unites the aforementioned motives for divinity and for friendship because his psychology is grounded in the metaphysical claim that man is spiritually established with and ordained for perfect spiritual union with God. If man is essentially theological, his thoughts and actions have theological meaning.

On this basis, the limitation of Starnes' psychological analysis is visible in two other areas. First, he thinks that Augustine could only have acted alone if he was insane (i.e. "to retreat into

idiocy”) for in this instance there would have been no object to confer on him the ‘divinity’ he sought.⁴⁸ Starnes is certainly right that Augustine’s particular sin requires the gang’s presence since Augustine intends to gain glory from his like-minded companions through sharing with them the common medium of arrogating divine omnipotence. However, Augustine doesn’t need the gang to *commit the sin of pride* and pat himself on the back for doing it. This is because if each individual is spiritually established with God then there is a way wherein every act of pride is carried out apart from human community. Starnes’ analysis of *Augustine’s particular sin of pride* is generally accurate but Augustine’s sin is a species rather than the essence of pride. Starnes justifiably asserts that God will not bestow glory on the prideful (if that is what they seek) and that such glory can therefore only be received from like-minded others. Nevertheless, as Augustine claims elsewhere⁴⁹, the sin of pride is carried out ‘before’ God in advance of being manifested to men. Since pride occurs in the recesses of the human heart it is intrinsically social in one way, i.e. in terms of the sinner’s relationship with God, before it is social in another, i.e. concerning the sinner’s relationship with other men. In this respect, the proud person acts, i.e. exalts himself, before God in advance of acting before men and, to the extent that he sees the probability of attaining what he wants, he likely congratulates himself both before and after he receives glory from like-minded others. Hence, Augustine acted ‘alone’ in order to act before men because he glorifies himself, in the first place, to spurn God and, in the second place, to seek glory for spurning God from like-minded men.

Second, while Starnes identifies the fruit of Augustine’s sin as “the love of those with whom he stole”⁵⁰ he neglects (perhaps because of his psychological perspective) to *consider sufficiently* why Augustine says that his fruit, i.e. his satisfaction and his gang, were essentially ‘nothings’. Starnes justifiably identifies these as depraved realities⁵¹ but, unrecognized by him, this distinction is ultimately made on the basis of the metaphysical principle that man is established in relationship and for the sake of right union with God. For according to the strictest application of this principle what moves the sinner away from God brings negation (disintegration) and what brings the sinner towards God brings something positive (integration). On this basis, we can see that Augustine’s affirmation by his friends is a ‘nothing’ because the pleasure he takes in this is a false pleasure having the effect of diminishing his integrity. The point is not that nothing occurred –Augustine was congratulated by his friends and gratified by this; however, in terms of the *telos* of his personhood, what happened was a negative reality. Likewise, the gang Augustine loved is a ‘nothing’ for the same reasons as above. His companions are real persons joined together for a common goal but their orientation is for falsity and sin rather than for divine truth and law. As such, Augustine’s love for the gang is a negative reality since it diminishes his integrity.

Therefore what one perspective classifies as ‘deficient realities’ the other perspective classifies as ‘nothings’. These insights are obviously compatible but, from an ontological perspective, the former participates in the latter since to classify the aforementioned realities as ‘deficient’ depends on viewing them in light of the principle that man is established in relationship for the sake of right union with God. In other words, Augustine’s pleasure and his gang are ‘deficient’ realities because,

viewed in light of an objective understanding of the nature and destiny of the human person, they are essentially ‘nothings’. What Starnes says about these realities is illuminating and essentially correct on its own level but in this instance (as before) his analysis presupposes Augustine’s first principle without making clear everything it implies.

That said, the second reason why Augustine emphasizes that his pleasure was composed of defying God together with gaining the gang’s approval is because it shows plainly that he could not take from God the good he wants. *In reality*, Augustine cannot possess divine omnipotence⁵²; he only has the appearance of omnipotence (in truth, the reality of impotence) because like-minded persons share with him the same goal – and therefore illusion. Since Augustine cannot possess the higher good he seeks, he procures some semblance of that good under the condition that others share with him the same vice. ‘Alone he could not have done it’ because, under such circumstances, the ‘pleasure’ Augustine sought after could not have been gained.⁵³

And thirdly, the composite nature of Augustine’s pleasure discloses that the gang has become his ‘God.’ This is because it has tried to usurp the divine prerogative to (i) determine the distinction between good and evil, and (ii) confer honor and glory upon those it deems deserving. The gang establishes itself as God so that its members can have the appearance of getting what they want.

As a result, Augustine and his companions have diminished their power to obey God. By trying to take from God—nay more, by claiming that they own themselves (i.e. are non-participated goods) and are therefore the ultimate goal of their actions – they end up taking from themselves. Hence, Augustine remarks that nothing can be more demeaning and unstable than subjecting oneself to the whims of a wicked gang according to which “As soon as the words are spoken ‘Let us go and do it’, one is ashamed not to be shameless?”⁵⁴

Finally, these considerations allow us to weigh Crosby’s provocative claim that Augustine’s analysis of human willing contradicts the perennial doctrine that “the will has for its object the good so that it desires whatever it desires under the aspect of good and cannot desire anything under the aspect of bad.”⁵⁵ In short, Crosby wonders: how can it be asserted that man is (i) ordered to God as his ultimate end and (ii) capable of rejecting Him? If we hold that ‘to be ordered’ is ‘to be determined’ (in the sense of what excludes choice of will) these claims appear contradictory.⁵⁶ Augustine’s study of his theft of pears, however, asserts otherwise. To show this requires making three cardinal distinctions. In the first place, we consider various meanings of the term ‘ordered’ – as (i) determined or fixed, (ii) oriented towards (i.e. willingly ordered), and (iii) subject to (i.e. unwillingly ordered). Second, we distinguish ontological goodness from moral goodness. And third, we demarcate the character of will when it is joined with divine aid from when it is not therewith united.

To begin with, Augustine maintains that will (i.e. mind’s power by which it seeks out and joins itself to goods for the sake of what pleases it) is ordered to good. Insofar as every good either is or participates in God (2.5.10) and to be human is to be established in relationship with created and uncreated goods for the sake of right union with God (2.6.13-14), it follows that will always tends

towards ontological goods. However, as considered immediately below, Augustine also understands that will does not always, i.e. in terms of its existential character, tend towards its *proper good* of morality. In other words, will always pursues good but it does not always pursue God, the Supreme Good, since it does not always want to enjoy participated goods in the right way, i.e. as ordered to God. The adolescent Augustine, for example, steals the pears because he wants the goods of divine power, human friendship and glory. The problem, however, is that he wants to possess them in the wrong way. As a result, he loses integrity. *Therefore*, insofar as Augustine holds that will always tends towards ontological good and every such good either is or participates in God it follows, in this respect, that will is ordered, in the sense of *being determined*, towards good but it is only implicitly determined towards the Supreme Good, God Himself.

Augustine asserts, therefore, that will is *subject to* the moral law (i.e. to moral goodness/God/relating properly to ontological goods) but does not always embrace – i.e. is not *determined to* – this law. Why is that? In one way will is structured, *qua* created, in relationship with God to explicitly love Him but, according to the nature of love, this requires will to explicitly subordinate itself to and co-operate with God. In another way, will can be weighed down by Original and personal sin since these can exacerbate a will's delight in ontological goods over moral goods. On this basis, will's negative inheritance and past actions can 'add' to it certain accidental or non-essential characteristics (including bad habits) that motivate it to behave contrary to its objective, i.e. divinely created, ordination. Will *as such*, then, is determined to choose (i) between ontological goods and (ii) between moral good and evil but, other things being equal, it is not determined to choose *this over that* ontological good, virtue instead of vice or God over man. Any of these would negate will's nature to co-operate freely with God.

Insofar as will, therefore, is subject to divine law and the latter either is or participates in God, it follows that will is 'ordered to' God in the sense of 'being subject to' and fulfilled in Him. Since (i) will is determined to ontological goods and to choice making and subject to moral goods, and (ii) all goods either participate in or are God, it follows that will is ordered to God as its end – not as determined to Him but as oriented towards and/or subject to Him. While will embracing divine aid (e.g. the repentant Augustine who writes *conf. 2*) is both *subject to and oriented towards* moral goodness, will rejecting divine aid (e.g. the Augustine who commits the theft of pears) is only *subject to* moral goodness. In both instances, will is *ordered* to God; in neither instance is it *determined* to Him. Only in the first case, however, is will willingly ordered (i.e. *willingly oriented*) to God. Hence, Confessor Augustine freely acknowledges his dependence on God so that his potentiality for perfect relationship with Him can be actualized.

Three clarifications are in order here. First, a more direct route establishing will's ordination to God is found by applying to it Augustine's doctrine of participation. Since everything exists in likeness to God *in terms of its existence, mode of existence, and development towards its end*, it follows, on Augustine's terms, that will is ordered to God as its end. To hold otherwise means that will is non-existent and therefore uncreated. However, since will can rebel against its end and requires right

development to be explicitly united with God, it is also apparent that will exists in a state of incompleteness (i.e. it is in a state of potency towards its proper end) that is exaggerated by its privative state since, as Augustine's theft of pears shows, will can have non-essential dispositions contrary to its proper end that are rooted in negative inherited and/or personal experience. Thus, the young Augustine's will has a limited orientation towards God.

Second, Crosby's nuanced analysis of Augustine's theft of pears causes him to claim that Augustine upholds two principles of which, in reality, he only upholds one. While Augustine agrees that will always retains some "connection with *bonum*..."⁵⁷, he denies that will "is not by its very nature tethered to the good..."⁵⁸ As we have seen, Augustine maintains that will is a good that always pursues what is ontologically good. But he would concur with Crosby's second assertion if the latter means that will is not determined 'to God'. On this score, however, Augustine would distinguish his will's divinely created nature, and consequently its objective orientation, from the essentially external or adventitious dispositions that his will's dependence on fallen Adam (which weakens will's objective character) and his own personal experience have added to (or subtracted from) itself and helped to motivate the young Augustine to contradict his will's objective orientation. So, by recounting how he rejected The Supreme Good in favor of created goods, Augustine claims that will is 'tethered to the good' apart from being tethered to the Supreme Good. As he argues in *conf.* 8, Augustine understands that the latter phenomenon requires the aid of divine grace.

What, then, causes Crosby to misinterpret Augustine? This is likely for three related reasons. First, Crosby does not distinguish between what is ontologically good and what is morally good – in the former respect, will always engages what is good; in the latter respect, will engages the moral law but can receive or reject it on account of its capacity to pursue the good(s) it judges to satisfy. Second, Crosby neglects to adequately consider the distinction between will's character *qua created* (which means it can fail) and will's character *qua affected* by past human choice-making (which can incline it towards failure). While Augustine holds that bad choices can dull or vitiate will's objective orientation towards the Supreme Good, Crosby's implied view of will's "very nature" suggests that will's previous choices, i.e. what originates from Adam and from the will's personal activity, are also divinely created. Third, and most important, Crosby does not uphold Augustine's primary metaphysical doctrine that man is a participated good who always engages created and uncreated goods. Put differently, Crosby neglects to consider both 'will' (and more generally 'man') and *bonum* within the relationship centered metaphysical framework of participation that Augustine employs.

On this score, Augustine's relationship principle is a key to answering Crosby's claim since it can account for the apparently contradictory phenomenon that 'will is tethered to good but not to the Supreme Good.' How so? While in the abstract God's Love necessarily exceeds human love and it is therefore highly probable that, in the long run, man will become 'tethered' to the Supreme Good by the mode of his special relationship with God, the relationship principle entails, on the divine side, that God can share His Love with man in a developmental or incremental manner and, on the human side, that man can, therefore, respond to/love God in a developmental/incremental

manner. This cannot entail that man should ever reject God or that he can ultimately reject Him. Nor can it be the case that God positively wants human will to reject Him since that would make Him the cause of moral evil. But it is certainly admissible to hold that God can permit will to reject Him (for a period of time) for the sake of some good – so that will, for example, comes to understand that it is love and He is Love, and to love Him as such. Therefore, depending on the circumstances, God might share His Love, in one way, wherein It is less powerful than human love (whereby It can be rejected by man for a duration) and, in another way, that It can be more powerful than human love (so that, as Augustine's notion of heaven would entail, It cannot be rejected because It is loved by man in and through Its Love). What human love is, then, is in one way constant, viz. the capacity to love. However, its existential character depends on the degree to which the aforesaid capacity is actualized and, therefore, on the nature of love's concrete relationship with God's Love. So, yes, human love/will is tethered, in a manner, to the Supreme Good, but this is by the mode of relationship. Most important, if love and Love, man and God, are relational, it can be explained why man, in one phase of will's relationship with God (i.e. the phase to which Augustine's theft of pears belongs), is determined to good apart from being determined to the Supreme Good.

Therefore, like those commentators holding that Augustine (i) is scrupulous and/or (ii) fails to provide compelling analysis for his theft of pears and/or (iii) offers a compelling explanation in terms of identifying two motivations, Crosby misinterprets key aspects of Augustine's teaching on the theft of pears because he underestimates Augustine's profound doctrine on the dignity of the human person.

Finally, our now developed analysis of Augustine's account of man's relationship-centered ordination to God renders more intelligible than before *conf.* 2.8.16's assertion that each of the adolescent Augustine's (i) attempted theft of divinity, and (ii) the pleasure he attained through the praise and friendship of the gang, were 'nothings' (i.e. *nihilis*). For insofar as Augustine pursues ontological goods and experiences 'pleasure' in his actions 'nothing' (*nihil*) cannot mean 'non-good/non-being' absolutely speaking (as if to say that he neither pursued nor enjoyed goods). Rather, it must mean 'the absence of good within good.' 'Nothing', in other words, signifies that Augustine both pursues and receives deficient forms of divinity, praise, friendship, and pleasure. In terms of the right ordering of his will, what Augustine both seeks and receives (and becomes present, as a phenomenon, to his will as a non-essential reality) is not gain but loss. The latter does not augment his integrity but negates or diminishes it. It is certainly the case that Augustine's behavior is purposely self-destructive but that presupposes that his will has some kind of natural orientation towards God which is recognized yet contradicted. As disorder is known through order and vice presupposes virtue, Augustine teaches that self-destruction is understood through awareness of the nature of personal integrity.

Augustine's account of moral evil in *conf.* 7.16.22 is instructive on this matter. He claims that "wickedness (*iniquitas*) is ... not ... a substance (*non ... substantiam*) but a perversity of will (*voluntatis perversitatem*) twisted ... away (*detortae*) from the highest substance (*a summa*

substantia) ... towards inferior things (*in infima*), rejecting its own inner life (*proicientis intima sua*) ... and swelling with external matter (*et tumescentis foras*).”⁵⁹ Augustine’s point is not that will (which, for him, can be coterminous with mind, mindset, moral self, love, and wish or want⁶⁰) is obliterated but that its disordered love for creatures causes it to somewhat bury its proper orientation towards God beneath what is essentially external (in the sense of contradictory) to itself. Augustine does not claim that will is replaced by a ‘null’ (since that would entail an evil thing – and therefore an evil creator God). In other words, he asserts neither that a morally evil will *qua* will is a substance, i.e. a naturally occurring individual thing (e.g. as man and/or essential parts of man exist), nor that a will’s morally evil disposition is an essential characteristic belonging therein (as quantity, in the form of weight, belongs to each man). Rather, Augustine maintains that will’s disordered love for the created order causes it to weigh itself down with impediments. The latter – mental realities like (i) memories of bad deeds and/or influences or encouragements and/or (ii) bad dispositions or habits – are non-essential *essential-characteristic-like* characteristics or presences that obstruct will from acting as it should. Hence, will’s misfortune and/or contradictory activity has added realities, in the manner of weight, unto itself that are essentially external to its proper orientation and either place it into a state of privation or exaggerate a pre-existing privative state. Moreover, the realities that the term privation describes are ‘nothings’ insofar as their *mode of being* is parasitic on substantial and essential realities. Therefore, just as rust depends on metal, a morally evil will depends on will. Like rust, moral evil is neither a substance nor an essential characteristic found either in substance or in an essential characteristic – rather, it is a non-essential characteristic belonging to the will. In this instance, privation doesn’t mean *nothing at all* but *nothing positive*. By contrast, will’s (i) adhering to strictly human good dispositions and habits and (ii) related assent to remembering strictly human good deeds and/or influences and/or encouragements would add *something positive* to will since these can help conform it to its proper end.

Based, however, on Augustine’s consideration of his will’s conversion to God in *conf.* 8, he doesn’t seem to think that the above realities, if originated strictly by man, add something essential to will. He implies that they would fortify will’s proper orientation since agreeing with and developing it. These realities, then, would be positive instead of negative non-essential characteristics; they would add positive, rather than negative, weight. On the other hand, Augustine’s teaching in *conf.* 8.12-29—9.1.1 concerning God’s direct action on his will claims that God’s grace *in conjunction with* human effort (i.e. when man explicitly acknowledges and conforms to the nature of his relationship with God) adds something genuinely positive, i.e. *positive essential characteristics*, to will so that will becomes decisively fortified in conforming to its proper end. In this instance (or, at minimum, in terms of will’s conversion), Augustine seems to designate some kind of permanent change for the better to will’s ontological structure – it is less that positive weight is added to will (though that is, in a way, true) than that will’s structure is positively altered. Indeed, it is from this perspective that Confessor Augustine analyzes the theft of pears he committed as an adolescent.

Hence, awareness of the dynamics of and difference between man's/will's implicit and explicit relationship with God enables us to better understand Augustine's meaning of 'nothing' in *conf.* 2.8.16. 'Nothing' does not mean the complete absence of good, in the sense of a complete absence of being, but the absence of the proper good within a good. Augustine's point is that although he was pursuing and enjoying goods, he was seeking deficiently deficient goods; and therefore, he received deficient goods and deficiency. In this respect – i.e. because of the ontological gap between what ought to have been and what was, his actions and their outcomes were 'nothings'. Augustine's pleasure was real but, other things being equal, it was qualitatively less real than what virtuous action would have elicited.

(iii) Conclusion

It is evident, therefore, that commentators on *conf.* 2 underestimate the profound dignity that Augustine ascribes to human nature as *imago Dei*. This is because adhering to Augustine's principal doctrine shows, on the one hand, that and why his analysis of the theft of pears is not scrupulous and, on the other hand, how he provides a persuasive account of wrong-doing in general and of the motivations behind the theft of pears in particular.

Why, then, does Augustine condemn so harshly the theft of pears? Against those commentators inclined to trivialize that theft, Augustine judges that his attempt to arrogate divinity reverses the order of reality. Whereas man and human society is properly *imago Dei*, Augustine and his friends claim that God is *imago hominis*. At bottom, Augustine and his friends did not steal to enjoy the pears or some other participated good to which end the pears were a means, but to reject the objective moral order established by divine law and substitute, in its place, a human order explicitly recognized as false. Their goal – though impossible to gain – was to scale the heavens and topple the regime. Augustine and his companions claimed divine status but received, fittingly, the status of slaves. The most they could achieve was a human regime or club that *claims* to defy heaven but *really* destroys the integrity of its own members.

According to Augustine's metaphysical perspective, every sin has the same essential structure; but the young Augustine's sin is especially blameworthy since, together with his companions, he *explicitly* rejects the divine order by arrogating divine omnipotence to himself and to his friends. The immediate effects upon the pears and the farmer who owned them are relatively minor. Nevertheless, the psychological effect upon Augustine's soul is devastating because even though he views his sinful action as a 'gain' it diminishes significantly his being. Augustine is 'less human' than before not only because he has sinned but also because this particular sin establishes him in self-conscious opposition to the order of the universe and, therefore, to his own fulfillment as a person. Augustine remains *imago Dei* but he has diminished his capacity to fulfill his nature, i.e. to be explicitly *imago Dei*.

Moreover, our study of Augustine's analysis of his theft of pears allows us to infer that he employs therein six governing principles (see below). Augustine's consecutive studies of sin in 2.5.10

and 2.6.13 suggest that, for him, principles (iii) and (iv) are first in the order of discovery and that these are followed, in some manner, by principles (v) and (vi). Nevertheless, Augustine's actual centerpiece is principle (i), viz. that man is *imago Dei*, since it distinguishes his notion of the concrete relationship with God that constitutes human being; and Augustine's second most important principle is (ii) since, following from principle (i), it details some of the key ontological dimensions structuring the dynamic relationship between man and God. Most important, this allows us to make clear the difference between Augustine's analysis of his theft of pears and that furnished by those commentators, whom we divided into two parties, sharing his view that the theft was a heinous sin. In general, both parties underestimate the depth of Augustine's metaphysical perspective. However, while one party views the entire matter within a structure of participation rooted in God but apart from recognizing that the apex of Augustine's structure consists in the spiritual unity of God and man, the other party shares the former's view of Augustine's participation structure but places man both inside and outside of that structure in its effort to explain his theft of pears. Therefore, whereas the one party fails to unify Augustine's motive for sinning because it lacks sufficient understanding of Augustine's primary doctrine that man is essentially theological the other party, for the same reason, claims that Augustine's analysis stands both inside and outside of a theocentric participation structure. Hence, in different ways, each party truncates Augustine's actual participation structure by failing to acknowledge that the latter is grounded in the claim that man is intrinsically *related* to God by the mode of spiritual union.

Looked at in another manner, the general distinction between Augustine's view and that of the commentators is this: whereas the latter analyzes Augustine's study, to greater and lesser degrees, by more or less agreeing with key aspects of his account of the order of discovery, his own analysis (which his experience shows is arrived at by the order of discovery⁶¹) is ultimately by what he understands as the order of being (and, for him, the order of importance). Therefore, while the commentators assimilate Augustine's hierarchically related analyses of sin apart from recognizing his governing perspective on the relationship between man and God, Augustine makes his overall analysis – which includes the aforementioned studies of sin – in light of his governing perspective. As Augustine's *confessio* mode of narrative underscores, he judges that apart from understanding that man has some underlying spiritual relationship with God and neighbor, i.e. that man is *imago Dei*, the fact, circumstances, and gravity of human sinning could not otherwise be ascertained.

I state below Augustine's principles according to what his *confessio* narrative shows is the order of importance.

(i) Man is a participated good of irreducible value because, as his awareness of the moral law and attraction to created and uncreated goods shows, he is (a) established by God together, i.e. in relationship, with God according to the mode of spiritual union and (b) ordered to right union with Him (and therefore with his neighbor) as his ultimate goal.

(ii) While the right ordering of goods *via* virtue brings man towards his proper end (or purpose) of unity with God, wrong ordering, i.e. sin, leads him away from this end. In particular,

whereas virtuous actions, with or without explicit divine aid, are a positive reality integrating the human person, sinful actions are a negative reality disintegrating or diminishing him. Other things being equal, however, while the person co-operating with explicit divine aid can be integrated essentially and/or non-essentially, the person co-operating with implicit divine aid can only be integrated non-essentially. By contrast, all those rejecting divine aid suffer and/or enjoy some measure of non-essential disintegration. In principle, however, disintegration can be worse for those rejecting explicit divine aid than for those rejecting implicit divine aid. Therefore, since man is intrinsically related, and therefore responding, to God, he is always either disintegrating or being integrated.

(iii) There are uncreated and created goods, of greater and lesser intrinsic value, to which man – a participated good of irreducible value – is innately inclined.

(iv) There is a Supreme (because Uncreated and Self-Sufficient) Good, i.e. God, in whom all created goods participate and who orders, through law, the relationship between these goods.

(v) Man should value God above all created goods for, as these participate in God, it follows that to embrace rightly God is, in principle, to embrace rightly all participated goods.

(vi) Man has choice of will, i.e. the power to embrace or reject the intrinsic value assigned to participated goods (including to himself) and to God. In other words, man can choose or deny his ordination to God.

Therefore while the commentators, following aspects of the order of discovery, omit principles (i) and (ii), Augustine places them at the outset. Furthermore, Augustine implies that principles (i) and (ii) can be discovered and, if so, be provisionally placed at the end of the list. However, once the order of being is understood, those principles are properly placed at the outset.

Additionally, as Augustine well recognizes, his overall analysis of sin requires a significant qualification concerning its claim that, objectively speaking (i.e. by understanding man as *imago Dei*), every sin participates in arrogating divinity and entails supplanting God with oneself and, consequently, a society ordained towards divinity with a society aiming otherwise. This is because, as *conf.* 2.5.10-11 shows, it is certainly not the case that every sin is motivated by arrogating divinity. Unlike the young Augustine and his companions, not everyone appropriates divinity. Many sin for the sake of what Augustine called ‘the lower goods,’ viz. for sensual pleasure and ostensible career goals, domestic peace, political peace, power, money, fame – and, by this claim, warrant a relatively milder penalty. Hence, just as Augustine’s analysis of sin by the order of being respects, rather than negates, the order of discovery it also respects the order of experience.

Finally, it is reasonably maintained that Augustine’s fundamental point in *conf.* 2 is not only that God is Truthful Love and Loving Truth and man is truthful love and loving truth but also that God, being what He Is, *permits* man to discover these matters by allowing him to reverse, for a time, the attributes belonging to the natures of God and of man. If this is so, Augustine is certainly not claiming that God positively wills sinning or that humans should sin. Rather, he would be asserting that God employs human waywardness to lead humans towards rectitude. Perhaps this helps to

explain why Augustine presents his teaching on the theft of pears by the mode of *confessio*. In any event, it is plainly apparent that Augustine's medium represents his message.

Endnotes:

1. Recent commentaries on this passage include: G. Wills, *Saint Augustine's Sin* (New York: Viking Penguin; 2003), 7-17, and *Saint Augustine* (London: Phoenix; 1999), 10-15; S. MacDonald, "Petit Larceny, The Beginning Of All Sin: Augustine's Theft Of The Pears," *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 20.4 (2003), 393-414; J. Cavadini, "Book 2: Augustine's Book of Shadows," in K. Paffenroth and R.P. Kennedy, *A Reader's Companion to Augustine's Confessions* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press; 2003), 25-34; C. Vaught, *The Journey Toward God in Augustine's Confessions* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press; 2003), 52-65; J. Crosby, "How Is It Possible Knowingly To Do Wrong?" *American Catholic Philosophical Association Proceedings*, Vol. 74 (2001), 325-333; J.J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions, Volume 2, Commentary, Books 1-7* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; 1992), 104-144; C. Starnes, *Augustine's Conversion: A Guide to the Argument of Confessions I-IX*, (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfred Laurier University Press; 1990), 37-51; L. Ferrari, "The Pear-Theft in Augustine's *Confessions*," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 16 (1970), 233-241, and "Symbols Of Sinfulness In Book II Of Augustine's "Confessions"," *Augustinian Studies* 2 (1971), 93-104; and W. Mann, "The Theft of Pears," *Apeiron* 12 (1978), 51-59, and "Inner-Life Ethics" in G. B. Matthews, ed., *The Augustinian Tradition* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; 1999), 140-165, 157-160.
2. All translations are from *Saint Augustine: Confessions*, translated with an introduction and notes by H. Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press; 1991). This passage is found in book 2, chapter 4, paragraph 9 and page 29 (2.4.9, p. 29). I have occasionally inserted Augustine's Latin into Chadwick's translation for emphasis and clarification. Augustine's Latin has been taken from J.J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions, Volume 1, Introduction and Text* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; 1992).
3. This response is typical: "Rum thing to see a man making a mountain out of robbing a pear tree in his teens." Oliver Wendell Holmes to Harold Laski, Jan. 5, 1921, *Holmes-Laski Letters (I)*, ed. M. de W. Howe, 1953, 300. This is cited by Peter Brown in *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber; 1967), 172, footnote #5.
4. For example, Friedrich Nietzsche writes: "... I was just reading the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine. ...What a high-flown wordsmith! Such tear-jerking phoniness! How hard I laughed, for example, over a "pear theft" of his youth, made the basis for his account of his student days." (This text is cited by O'Donnell [1992] vol. 2, 227, and translated by Wills [2003], 3.) Mann (1979), 51, characterizes well the notion that Augustine is scrupulous: "One is inclined to say that if this is the foulest sin that Augustine could muster from his repertoire, then he led an exemplary childhood."
5. E.g. P. Hallie, "The Evil That Men Think—And Do," *Hastings Center Report*, December 1985, reprinted in *Vice & Virtue in Everyday Life*, eds. Christina Sommers and Fred Sommers, (New York: Harcourt College Publishers; 2001), 36-46.
6. I have not encountered this objection to Augustine's analysis in the scholarly literature, viz. 'No one—whether joined with divine grace or not—can perfectly obey divine law; without grace the task of obedience is especially difficult; the young Augustine did not have grace at that time in his life; therefore it is to be expected—in fact, it is almost inevitable—that he break the law. On this account, his guilt is negligible. He ought to judge more harshly those who have divine grace yet break the law.' As we will see by the end of this paper, Augustine would reply that what he did was his own responsibility and very bad since he knew that he was rejecting God, but that someone does worse who rejects God while being joined with divine grace.

7. *Conf.* 2.1.1 and 2. 4.9, p. 29: “Such was my heart, O God, such was my heart. You had pity on it when it was at the bottom of the abyss. Now let my heart tell you what it was seeking there in that I became evil (*ut essem ... malum*) for no reason (*gratis*).” Augustine thinks that his analysis of the theft of pears is not a study of mid-adolescence but of the *state of mind* or *moral character* he exhibited at that time. Most importantly, Augustine intends to elucidate the character of evil-doing *as such* by focusing principally *on the motivation* behind his theft of pears. On this basis, Augustine endeavors to distinguish the universal dimension of his behavior.
8. *Ibid.*, 2.2.3 and 3.3.6-8.
9. *Ibid.*, 2.7.15 and 2.10.18.
10. Augustine cites and analyzes motives for murder in 2.5.11. One reason he focuses on murder is because in his day, as in ours, murder is considered a classic instance of moral evil. Augustine’s discussion of sin in 3.8.15-16 implies that murder is worse than theft because, other things being equal, it consists in the taking of innocent life rather than of someone’s material goods.
11. Many scholars have noticed profound parallels between Augustine’s analysis of his theft of pears and the primal sins of (i) Adam and Eve and/or (ii) the fallen angels. For commentary see: Ferrari (1970 and 1971); Starnes, 45; O’Donnell, *Commentary on book 2*, 126-28; Wills (1999), 13-15 and (2003), xv, 7-19, 73-92; MacDonald, 397-8, 407-9; Cavadini, 28-34; and Vaught, 57-60, 64-5. To my mind, the commentators are right to parallel Augustine’s analysis of his pear-theft with biblical accounts of ‘the Fall’ but I argue that they underestimate the depth of Augustine’s understanding of the relationship between God and man that permeates his analysis. In particular, I claim that Augustine decries his theft since it contradicted what he then recognized as his proper spiritual relationship with God and neighbor. This presupposes two important implications: first, that the primal sin of Adam and Eve vitiates but does not obliterate a spiritual relationship between God and man (a matter which I do not discuss), and second (a matter I discuss) that the adolescent Augustine’s theft of pears knowingly attempted to reverse that relationship’s proper order.
12. By ‘metaphysical’ or ‘objective’ I signify Augustine’s understanding of the ultimate structure and meaning of reality and therefore of the human person. In *conf.* 2, Augustine emphasizes especially that: (i) man is made by God, i.e. by the Self-Sufficient and Good Creator of the universe; (ii) man is in relationship with and for the purpose of perfect union with Him; and (iii) man achieves right union with God by ordering rightly (i.e. to God) his thoughts and actions.
13. In other words, Augustine holds that pride (*superbia*) is the root of all moral evil. The subjective dimension is the sinner’s motive, i.e. what kind of pride does he embrace? According to Augustine, every sin arrogates divinity but while lesser sins are carried out principally for the sake of some participated good, the greatest sins are done for the sake of arrogating divinity. Augustine claims that he committed a grievous sin since, generally speaking, he embraced pride for its own sake.
14. Although Augustine asserts it is by God’s gift that he has become self-consciously united with God and is aiming for perfect spiritual union with Him in the future, he also claims that he has *always* been united with God. In his words: “Where therefore did I find you, so that I could learn about you? ... Late have I loved you, beauty (*pulchritudo*) so old and so new: late have I loved you! But behold, you were within (*intus*) and I was in external things (*foris*) and sought you there, and in those beautiful things that you made I plunged into deformity (*deformis inruebam*). You were with me, and I was not with you ... You called and cried out loud and shattered by deafness ... You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you; I tasted you and I hunger and thirst; you touched me, and I was set on fire for your peace” (10.26.37–27.38, p. 201). In fact, as 13.11.12 shows, Augustine ultimately maintains that each human being is *imago Dei* as *imago Trinitatis*. He writes: “Who can understand the omnipotent Trinity (*Trinitatem omnipotentem*)? ... These three aspects (*ista tria*) of the self are very different from the Trinity, but ... on this triad they [i.e. humans] could well exercise their minds and examine the problem, thereby becoming aware how far distant they are

from it. The three aspects I mean are being, knowing, willing (*esse, nosse, velle*). ... In these three ... let him who is capable of so doing contemplate how inseparable in life they are (*quam sit inseparabilis vita*): one life, one mind, one essence (*una vita, una mens et una essentia*), yet ultimately there is distinction (*tamen distinctio*), for they are inseparable, yet distinct. ... So, the divine being is and knows itself and is immutably sufficient to itself, because of the overflowing greatness of the unity“ (13.11.12, pp. 279-80). Hence, Augustine teaches that human being *as such* is spiritually united with God; man, he claims, is essentially theological.

15. For further explanation see ahead n. # 29.
16. On the one hand, I will analyze portions of the arguments of the first three commentators instead of those by Cavadini and Vaught since the latter express views that are ultimately typical of the former. Each of these five commentators maintain that Augustine’s analysis upholds the primacy of ontological goodness but do not go far enough. While Starnes, MacDonald and Wills maintain that man participates in God, Cavadini (30-2) and Vaught (54-5, 57-8, 60-5) suggest, at decisive points, that relationship with God is integral to human nature. For his part, Cavadini (31) claims that *conf.* 2.6.14 (i.e. where Augustine speaks of his sinning as a ‘perverse imitation of God’) “is in a way the key to the whole of Book Two ... [since] ... the governing themes of fornication, of turning away from God in the quest for a self-subsistent existence without God, the consequent lapse into the insubstantiality of shadow and death, and allusion to the Genesis text all come together.” Likewise, Vaught (60-1) writes that “the pear-stealing episode represents ... [that] ... God and the soul that falls away from him are on opposite ends of an ontological continuum. ... From this perspective, the imitation of God is a negative reflection of omnipotence, which implies that there is no place we can depart from God completely.” Nevertheless neither of these authors—like Starnes, MacDonald, and Wills—explicitly maintain that Augustine’s analysis of his pear-theft is made in light of understanding that man *as such* is spiritually united with God for the sake of attaining perfect union with Him. On the other hand, I will analyze separately key aspects of Crosby’s article since it agrees with Augustine’s teaching but uniquely claims that Augustine’s analysis denies, in crucial respects, the primacy of ontological goodness. Hence my thesis, then, is that both parties, albeit in different ways, lack explicit recognition of the high degree to which Augustine upholds the primacy of ontological goodness in his doctrine that man, by the fact of his spiritual unity with God, is essentially theological.
17. By divine or eternal law Augustine includes (i) what is commonly named natural law, and (ii) human laws representing legitimate extensions and applications of divine law. For a summary of his views on law together with some bibliography see R.J. Dougherty, “Natural Law,” in *Saint Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. A. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans; 1999), 582-4.
18. *Conf.*, 2.4.9, pp. 28-9.
19. See Augustine’s discussions of law at 1.18.29 and 3.7.13-8.16. He thinks that everyone has some primordial awareness of the ‘Golden Rule’ and of the related precept ‘to love God and neighbor.’
20. For further commentary see Starnes, 38-40.
21. *Conf.* 2.4.9, p. 29. Augustine writes: “Wickedness [to steal] filled me (*ego furtum facere volui et feci*). I stole something which I had in plenty and of much better quality. My desire was to enjoy not what I sought by stealing but merely the excitement of thieving and the doing of what was wrong (*nec ea re volebam frui quam furto appetebam, sed ipso furto et peccato*)....I had no motive for my wickedness except wickedness itself (*et malitiae meae causa nulla esset nisi militia*). It was foul (*foeda erat*) and I loved it (*et amavi eam*). I loved the self-destruction (*amavi perire*), I loved my fall (*amavi defectum meum*), not the object for which I had fallen (*non illud ad quod deficiebam*) but my fall itself (*sed defectum meum ipsum amavi*). My depraved soul leaped down from your firmament to ruin. I was seeking not to gain anything by shameful means, but shame for its own sake.”
22. *Ibid.*, 2.5.10, pp. 29-30.

23. I use the term 'soul' to signify the human person; 'soul' is a fitting substitution since that is the person's innermost self, i.e. the locus of consciousness, life, thought, feeling, conscience, decision-making, and action.
24. What is meant by 'participation in God'? At minimum, it signifies that every thing (i.e. substance) God makes (i) is like God and (ii) ultimately depends on Him for its existence, mode of existence, and development/fulfillment. Some passages from *conf.* 1.6.10 and 1.7.12 make this doctrine clear. While describing his coming into existence as an infant, Augustine maintains that (i) since nothing mutable—i.e. what comes into existence and passes away (plants, animals, minerals, humans, galaxies and universes)—can bring itself into existence (it is plainly evident that no plant or species of plant brings itself into existence); and (ii) since mutable creatures are characterized by definitive attributes like existence, life, form, and beauty; it follows (iii) that the existence of mutable creatures (and therefore the attributes they possess) depends on the existence of an immutable God in Whom there is no distinction between what He is and what Existence, Life, Form and Beauty is. In other words, it is because of and for the sake of God that everything (that is not God) exists. Apart from Him nothing else would be; since God 'Is', everything/substance that is is (*n.b.* Augustine doesn't classify 'evil' as a substance [7.12.18]). Therefore, every non-divine substance and its essential characteristics exist by participation in God. By contrast, certain non-essential characteristics found in things, like evil dispositions, exist by the mode of privation.
25. *Ibid.*, 2.5.10, p. 30.
26. *Ibid.*, 2.5.11, p. 30. Augustine writes: "When a crime is under investigation to discover the motive for which it was done (*qua causa factum sit*), the accusation is not usually believed except in cases where the appetite to obtain (or the fear of losing) one of those goods we have called inferior appears a plausible possibility. They are beautiful and attractive even if, in comparison with the higher goods which give true happiness (*prae bonis superioribus et beatificis*), they are mean and base. A man committed murder. Why? Because he loved another's wife or his property; or he wanted to acquire money to live on by plundering his goods; or he was afraid of losing his own property by the action of his victim; or he had suffered injury and burned with desire for revenge. No one would commit murder without a motive, merely because he took pleasure in killing."
27. *Ibid.*, 2.6.12, p. 30.
28. *Ibid.*, 2.6.12, p. 31.
29. *Ibid.* Augustine writes: "And now...I inquire what was the nature of my pleasure in the theft (*quaero quid me in furto delectaverit*). The act has nothing lovely about it, none of the loveliness found in equity and prudence, or in the human mind whether in the memory or in the senses, or in physical vitality. Nor was it beautiful in the way the stars are, noble in their courses, or earth and sea full of newborn creatures which, as they are born, take the place of those which die; not even in the way that specious vices have a flawed reflection of beauty."
30. *Ibid.*, 2.6.13, p. 31. In Augustine's words: "Pride (*superbia*) imitates what is lofty (*celsitudinem imitator*); but you alone are God most high above all things (*cum tu sis unus super omnia deus excelsus*). What does [the sin of] ambition seek but honor and glory? Yet you alone are worthy of honor and are glorious for eternity. The [sin of] cruelty of powerful people aims to arouse fear. Who is to be feared but God alone? What can be seized or stolen from his power? When or where or how or by whom? ... [the sin of] Curiosity appears to be a zeal for knowledge; yet you supremely know all.... [The sin of] Idleness appears as desire for a quiet life; yet can rest be assured apart from the Lord? [The sin of] Luxury wants to be called abundance and satiety; but you are fullness and the inexhaustible treasure of incorruptible pleasure.... [The sin of] Avarice wishes to have large possessions; you possess everything. [The sin of] Envy contends about excellence; but what is more excellent than you? [The sin of] Anger seeks revenge; who avenges with greater justice than you?"
31. *Ibid.*, 2.6.14, p. 32.

32. This is especially Mann (1979), 56-7.
33. *Conf.*, 2.6.14, p. 32.
34. Apparently following Von Hildebrand, Crosby (331) names this “subjective satisfaction.”
35. By ‘less human’ I mean that the agent is less oriented than before to his proper end of perfect spiritual union with God. I do not mean that he loses his human nature as such, ceases to be in the image and likeness of God, or forsakes completely his capacity to be united with God.
36. Note again Augustine’s profound metaphysical standpoint—while a person’s orientation towards God is a positive reality the orientation away from Him is a negative reality (i.e. a nothing [*nihil*]). In the first instance, the subject undergoes a positive change; in the second instance, he undergoes a negative change (or privation). Augustine makes this distinction in light of his objective understanding of the human person.
37. *Conf.*, 2.8.16, p. 33.
38. *Cf.* Starnes, 44-5.
39. MacDonald, 407.
40. *Ibid.*, 404-11.
41. Wills (2003), 12.
42. MacDonald, 410-11.
43. *Ibid.*, 410.
44. *Ibid.*, 410-11.
45. *Ibid.*, 410.
46. Starnes, 44-5.
47. *Ibid.*, 44.
48. *Ibid.*
49. *City of God*, 14.13.
50. Starnes, 44.
51. *Ibid.*, 45.
52. As we have seen, Augustine maintains that every person participates in divinity insofar as he/she is established in relationship for the sake of right union with God. However, one participates rightly in divinity by ordering oneself to God rather than by ordering God to oneself, i.e. by acknowledging that God is First Cause and that one is therefore a secondary and properly co-operative cause. One of the central themes of *conf.* is that the path to authentic (and therefore to complete and perfect) divinization is by humility rather than by presumption (see 7.18.24). When Augustine steals the pears he is presumptuous; as he writes about his theft he is humble.
53. *Cf.* Starnes, 45; Cavadini, 32-3; and Vaught, 63-5.
54. *Conf.*, 2.9.17, p. 34.
55. Crosby, 326.
56. *Ibid.*, 325-33.
57. *Ibid.*, 330.
58. *Ibid.*, 332.
59. *Conf.* 7.16.22, p. 126.
60. For consideration of Augustine’s account of will (*voluntas/amor/consensus*) together with an extensive bibliography see M. Djuth, “Will,” in *Saint Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (*op. cit.*), 881-5.
61. E.g. *conf.* 7.10.16; 17.23 and 9.10.23-25.

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