

Affectus and Affectio in Augustine of Hippo

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'Longing for the other world puts people to sleep in this world'.¹ Echoing Nietzsche, Martha Nussbaum presents what is the most common criticism of Augustine's theology of the affections: an otherworld-directed appetite that disregards commitments to this world.² Nussbaum is not alone in this criticism. Thomas Dixon offers a more pointed criticism. Because Augustine, according to Dixon, theorized the affections as a single movement to God, 'not a drop of affection was to be spilled on barren earthly terrain'.³ One must admit that these *ethical* criticisms of Augustine's theology of the affections can sting, if not wound, an Augustinian account of the affections. Recent scholarship on the affections in Augustine's thought has attempted to rescue Augustine from Nussbaum, Dixon, and Arendt.⁴ While there is value in this program of rehabilitation,⁵ most scholars ignore the deep ambivalence toward the affections in Augustine's thought. Nussbaum and Dixon (as well as Hannah Arendt) are picking up on a perplexing *aporia* in Augustine's account: affections are both necessary and necessarily a failure. In light of this, I don't think Augustine really needs saving, but rather clarification of how and why he thinks the affections fail and to what extent he sees their *failure* as intrinsic to the human's ways of

¹ Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), 553.

² For her full response to Augustine on the affections or 'emotions', see Nussbaum (2001), 527-56.

³ Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 55.

⁴ **THE LIST...**

⁵ See, e.g., Augustine's rehabilitation of grief (*tristitia*) in *ciu.* 14.7.

knowing, loving, and living. In other words, how is it that Augustine is both a champion of the affections and a pessimist for their ultimate utility?

Notwithstanding the responses to Nussbaum et al., the theme of the affections has been a growth area for the Augustine industry. One of the most philologically and philosophically developed contributions has been Sarah Byers' *Perception, Sensibility, and Moral Motivation in Augustine*.⁶ Byers weaves together reflection on Augustine's psychology with what she takes to be the practices Augustine offers as 'affective therapies', or the ways in which the human is supposed to respond to and with human affections.⁷ Byers is surely right to centralize the problem of affections' instability, for Augustine, like his non-Christian counterparts in late antiquity, is worried about the unpredictability and unreliability of the affections. Furthermore, Byers finds in Augustine an attempt to provide therapies for our affections. Byers is, again, right to see Augustine searching for a therapy or method of self-help in his early works. But, as James Wetzel has argued, this view ignores the profound break that Augustine experienced from all programs of self-improvement that are not initiated and sustained by divine gift in the mid-390s.⁸ For Wetzel, Augustine's evolution included a steady rejection of the Stoical psychology, largely taken from Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*, that entails the human's ability to consent to wise desires. The conditions, motives, and sources of consent are far too complex to credit the human with anything like straightforward consent. Wetzel, it seems, matches Byers' optimism for rehabilitation with

⁶ Sarah Byers, *Perception, Sensibility, and Moral Motivation in Augustine* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012).

⁷ **Passage from CD 9... it is not a good to have involuntary impressions**

⁸ James Wetzel, 'Prodigal Heart: Augustine's Theology of the Emotions' in Wetzel, *Parting Knowledge: Essays after Augustine* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 81-96, 89.

pessimism born from world-weariness: the first and most profound affection in the life of the human is the grief over the soul's loss of God.

Byers' optimism and Wetzel's pessimism represent two poles around which most reflection on the affections in Augustine's thought revolve. In this essay, I want to propose a kind of middle way between the two. I do not think that Augustine ever fully abandoned programs or therapies to rehabilitate the affections, but that the form these programs take post-390s, and most poignantly post-410 when so much in Augustine's world could be seen as all too unstable, too influx, is almost unrecognizable as a 'program' or 'therapy'. The form of this program of rehabilitation is illustrated, I believe, by the practice of prayer, theologically understood. Despite the preponderance of affective language in Augustine's reflections, prayer has not yet become a focus in the scholarship on the affections. A case in point is that Byers asserts that 'Prayer itself is not one of Augustine's recommended affective therapies'.⁹ I shall argue instead that prayer, for Augustine, is a privileged site of the work of the Holy Spirit, who molds humans' *affectiones* into *constantiae*, that is, into affections corresponding to the perfected state of reason.

Locating Augustine's Discourse on the Affections

The theological contention at the center of this essay is twofold. First, Augustine's discussion of affections is illuminated by the context of his teaching on prayer. The basis for

⁹ Byers (2012), 153.

this is that Augustine locates the discourse on prayer in both the body and the soul,¹⁰ a dual-focus that Augustine stipulates for the affections as well.¹¹ And second, Augustine's theory of the affections cannot be reconstructed without recourse to his doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The upshot of this is that Augustine's account of the affections must be considered as a *theological* account, a consequence of which is that when we try to parse what he means by this or that term we should not lose track of the fact that Augustine was ultimately driven by his vocation as bishop, pastor, and monk.

This theological location of Augustine's discourse does not, however, dissolve any of the complex terminological issues. For convenience sake, I use the decidedly modern term 'emotion' as a close enough proxy for *motus* or *motus animae*, but also, following Byers, as a general term encompassing 'passions' (*passiones*, *perturbationes*, and *libido*) and 'affections' (*affectus*, *affectiones*). 'Emotions are caused by judgments, passions by assent to false propositions, and affections by assent to true propositions. Passions are "morally bad emotions" and affections are "morally good emotions".¹² As with so many other areas of Augustine's thought, there is very little stability in the precise terminology he uses. However, by looking at the nexus of the affections, prayer, and pneumatology we might be able to

¹⁰ In *De magistro*, prayer is a movement of the rational soul. 'I dare say you don't know that we are instructed to pray "in closed chambers" (*in clausis cubiculis*) – a phrase that signifies the inner recesses of the mind (*mens penetralis*)' (*mag.* 1.2). He goes to refer to the psychological location of prayer as the 'chamber of the heart' (*cubiculum cordis*), echoing Ambrose's language in *De sacramentis*. In Ambrose, *cubiculum* is located in that part of the person which *mens*, *animus*, and *cor* all equally pick out. A few years later in his *De sermone Domini in monte*, Augustine refines the psychological location of prayer. In contrast to *cubiculum* as a kind of catch-all term for *animus*, *cor*, and *mens*, prayer is now seemingly restricted to *cor*: 'What are these chambers (*cubicula*) unless the very heart (*cor*)' (*s. dom. m.* 2.3.11; CCSL 35:101).

¹¹ *Ciu.* 14.2-5

¹² Sarah Byers, *Perception, Sensibility, and Moral Motivation in Augustine: A Stoic-Platonic Synthesis* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), p. 57.

observe how *affectus* and *affectio* interrelate with other 'affective' terms such as *amor* and *concupiscentia*, as well as help us understand Augustine's seemingly erratic borrowing of peripatetic and stoical language from Cicero's *Tusculanae Disputationes* in *ciu.* 14.

A Stoical-Biblical Synthesis

Augustine's early reflections on the affections is, as I have already intimated, indebted to Cicero's efforts to Latinize some Hellenistic psychological theories in his *Tusculan Disputations*. In these reflections one senses that Augustine is attempting to tame the affections, make them sensible. In the first book of *On Free Choice* (388), Augustine offers an account that reveals just such an effort to control the affections: an involuntary impression that something has or is about to happen is followed by a judgment about that impression. The judgment is distinguished from the impression by the act of consent (*consentio*), and Augustine uses this caesura between impression and judgment to locate human agency: while we cannot control the impressions that happen to us, we can choose to consent or dissent from them. Augustine will later find fault with this view as it is based on a fiction or, at least, a naive rendition of human consent (can we really just so simply accept or reject these impressions without being deeply impacted by our history of encounters over which we have had very little if any control?). Augustine's sustained attempt to discredit this view comes in *City of God* 9.4 and is based on, as Wetzels points out,

a deliberate misreading of an anecdote from *Attic Nights*, a journal of the second-century amateur philosopher Aulus Gellius.¹³

It is important not to over emphasize the extent to which Augustine unhooked himself from a ‘Stoical construct’, as Augustine was never all that deeply committed to one philosophical camp over another.¹⁴ This promiscuity allowed Augustine to pick up many aspects of Stoicism through his (seemingly) casual encounters with Cicero. But whatever latent Stoicism lingered in his system after 410 was refined into the Biblical categories that played a dominant role in his thinking.

A case in point is how he handles the concept of the will (*voluntas*) in *City of God* 14. Much has been made of Augustine’s theory of the will in general and its application to Augustine’s discussion of the affections in particular. While it is far from clear whether Augustine did in fact provide a critical clarification of the will (it could equally be argued that he helpfully obscures a notion of the will), the will (*voluntas*) would indeed be central to any psychological reconstruction of Augustine’s account of the affections in *City of God* 14. ‘Universally, as a man's will (*voluntas*) is attracted or repelled by the variety of things which are pursued or avoided’, Augustine argues, ‘so it changes and turns into affections (*affectiones*) of one kind or the other’.¹⁵ ‘For if the will is perverse, the emotions (*motus*) will be perverse; but if it is righteous, they will not only be blameless, but praiseworthy’.¹⁶ Augustine goes on to stipulate that desire (*cupiditas*) and joy (*laetitia*) are simply *voluntas* in

¹³ Wetzel (2013), 85.

¹⁴ Clark (2016), 225.

¹⁵ *Et omnino pro varietate rerum, quae appetuntur atque fugiuntur, sicut allicitur vel offenditur voluntas hominis, ita in hos vel illos affectus mutatur et vertitur. (Ciu. 14.6)*

¹⁶ *Quia si perversa est, perversos hos motus; si autem recta est, non solum inculpabiles, verum etiam laudabiles erunt. (Ciu. 14.6)*

consent with what we want, and fear (*metus*) and grief (*tristitia*) *voluntas* in dissent with what we do not want.¹⁷ At the bottom of it all is the quality of a person's will.

Unfortunately, pushing the issue toward the quality of *voluntas* does not solve much, for it falls short of anything that might secure a position from which a person can properly classify an impression as worthy of consent. Augustine himself seems discontent to allow *voluntas* to have the final word, as he pivots to love (*amor*):

A righteous will (*voluntas*), then, is a good love (*bonus amor*); and a perverted will is an evil love (*malus amor*). Therefore, love striving to possess what it loves is desire (*cupiditas*); love possessing and enjoying what it loves is joy (*laetitia*); love fleeing what is adverse to it is fear (*metus*); and love undergoing such adversity when it occurs is grief (*tristitia*). Accordingly, these feelings are bad if the love is bad, and good if it is good.¹⁸

Yet this does not seem to advance any kind of analytic clarity, at least not the kind that might provide somebody with the position from which she could evaluate an impression and successfully categorize it as *bonus* or *malus*. What Augustine does achieve here is a Scripturally-sourced defense of desire, joy, fear, and grief from the Stoical rejection of them as *perturbationes* or *passiones*.¹⁹ But, this still seems a meager offering considering the centrality of the affections.

¹⁷ *Voluntas est quippe in omnibus; immo omnes nihil aliud quam voluntates sunt. Nam quid est cupiditas et laetitia nisi voluntas in eorum consensione quae volumus? Et quid est metus atque tristitia nisi voluntas in dissensione ab his quae nolumus? (Ciu. 14.6)*

¹⁸ *Recta itaque voluntas est bonus amor et voluntas perversa malus amor. Amor ergo inhians habere quod amatur, cupiditas est, id autem habens eoque fruens laetitia; fugiens quod ei adversatur, timor est, idque si acciderit sentiens tristitia est. Proinde mala sunt ista, si malus amor est; bona, si bonus. (Ciu. 14.7)*

¹⁹ *Sic ergo illi loquuntur, ut velle gaudere cavere negent nisi sapientem; stultum autem non nisi cupere laetari, metuere contristari; et illas tres esse constantias, has autem quattuor perturbationes secundum Ciceronem, secundum autem plurimos passiones. (Ciu. 14.8)*

While shifting the theoretical center to *voluntas* and, by extension, *amor* did not seem to offer much of an analytical payoff, it did expose Augustine’s commitment to thinking through this problem with Cicero in the head and Scripture in the hand. Augustine begins to diverge from a Stoical construct in two respects. First, Augustine’s identity as a citizen of the City of God is the beginning point for any classificatory regime of ‘impressions’:

We Christians, on the other hand, are citizens of the Holy City of God, living according to God during the pilgrimage of this present life. Such citizens feel fear and desire, pain and gladness, but in a manner consistent with the Holy Scriptures and wholesome doctrine; and because their love is righteous, all these affections are righteous in them.²⁰

Augustine’s partisanship is clearly summarized by his flippant attitude to the Stoical classification. ‘If these motions and affections, which come from the love of the good and from holy charity, are to be called vices, then let us allow that real vices should be called virtues’.²¹ The point is not some objective classificatory regime, but rather one’s citizenship in the City of God or the City of Man. And second, a Christian is not only moved for his or her own sake, but for others as well: ‘[Citizens of the City of God] also feel [these affections] on behalf of those whom they desire to see redeemed and fear to see perish. They feel pain if these do perish, and gladness if they are redeemed’.²² In both respects, the underlying phenomenon of the affections is, for Augustine, radically *communal*. There is, then, a surprising return to the passions of the colosseum, a taste of which Augustine describes in his friend Alypius’ relapse in *Confessions* 6. ‘[Alypius] was one of the throng he came into...

²⁰ *Apud nos autem iuxta scripturas sanctas sanamque doctrinam cives sanctae civitatis Dei in huius vitae peregrinatione secundum Deum viventes metuunt cupiuntque, dolent gaudentque, et quia rectus est amor eorum, istas omnes affectiones rectas habent. (Ciu. 14.9)*

²¹ *Hi motus, hi affectus de amore boni et de sancta caritate venientes si vitia vocanda sunt, sinamus, ut ea, quae vere vitia sunt, virtutes vocentur. (Ciu. 14.9)*

²² *Non solum autem propter se ipsos his moventur affectibus, uerum etiam propter eos, quos liberari cupiunt et ne pereant metuunt, et dolent si pereunt et gaudent si liberantur. (Ciu. 14.9)*

He beheld, shouted, kindled, carried then with him the madness'.²³ While Alypius' affections are, in the classification Augustine presents in *City of God* 14.7-8, 'bad' loves, they are undoubtedly born from the communal experience of the Amphitheatre.

Alypius' error at that time was not, then, that he *felt* passion or even that he was caught up in a communal mood that anyone attending a sporting event today could recognize. Rather, it had to do with both the object and fellow subjects of the affections. As with so much else, the example of Paul delineates, for Augustine, the difference between the communal passions of the colosseum and those of the City of God: 'The citizens of the City of God are delighted to behold [Paul] with the eyes of faith. They behold him rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep, troubled by fighting without and fears within, desiring to depart and be with Christ'.²⁴ Two features of this account are salient to reconstruct Augustine's understanding of the affections. First, citizens of the City of God watch and take part in the passions of their community with the 'eyes of faith'. And second, their ultimate desire is to be with Christ. Alypius failed on both accounts: he watched the gladiators spill their blood with the eyes of the flesh, desiring nothing beyond his own immediate titillation.

The 'holy affections' of a true citizen of the City of God are, then, sourced from within the examples of the Christian community. As radical as this may sound, it does not initiate a reimagining of the psychological process itself. The case in point is how Augustine

²³ *Et non erat iam ille qui venerat sed unus de turba ad quam venerat, et verus eorum socius a quibus adductus erat. quid plura! spectavit, clamavit, exarsit, abstulit inde secum insaniam qua stimuletur redire non tantum cum illis a quibus prius abstractus est, sed etiam prae illis et alios trahens. (Ciu. 14.9)*

²⁴ *oculis fidei libentissime spectant gaudere cum gaudentibus, flere cum flentibus, foris habentem pugnans, intus timores, cupientem dissolui et esse cum Christo (Ciu. 14.9)*

writes about how Christ displayed his human affections. '[Christ] accepted these emotions (*motus*) into his own soul (*animus*) for the sake of his own assured purpose'.²⁵ Christ, it seems, is not only displaying human affections, and thereby sanctioning them as holy, but is endorsing a Stoical construct for processing such affections. But the problem for Augustine is that Christ's experience of the affections differs from the experience the rest of us have. We imagined Augustine searching for some objective place to judge the correct affective response to impressions. Augustine can now see why this search necessarily failed. Whereas he along with the rest of humanity responds to impressions involuntarily, Christ does so through his own power. Christ, it might seem, is envisioned as a Stoical sage, the true philosopher. The rest of us are, well, not so perfectly 'Stoical'.

Living into Vulnerability

What, then, is the actual difference between Augustine's account and a Stoical construct, given that Christ's psychology is imagined to work according a *voluntary* acceptance or rejection of impressions? The difference between Augustine and his Stoical predecessors is, at the bottom, a different conception of the soul or 'self', one that imagines that humans are not only overwhelmed by their impressions but also informed by the responses of their community. Wetzel has described this uniquely Augustinian 'self' as being 'more porous' and as having 'less of a capacity to keep others and their otherness on the outside'.²⁶ This porous self is informed, as we have seen, by Scripture's own way of talking about the affections. How does this intersect with a Stoical construct? Let us recall

²⁵ *Verum ille hos motus certae dispensationis gratia ita cum voluit suscepit animo humano. (Ciu. 14.9)*

²⁶ James Wetzel, *Augustine: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2010), 12.

one of Gillian Clark’s sage warnings: Augustine ‘did not write as a philosopher who expected to debate with other philosophers and to be challenged on his inconsistent use of terms’.²⁷ His immediate focus was, as Clark explains, ‘on the exposition of Scripture which teaches us how to live in the city of God’.²⁸

The critical distinction for Augustine in the *ciu.* 14.9 is not that between a ‘Christian’ and ‘Stoical’ construct of the affections, but rather a distinction internal to Christian discourse between righteous (temporal) affections and blessed (eternal) affections. The temptation to think that humanity is left to wallow in un-ordered emotion here on earth is great, as demonstrated by some of Augustine’s critics.²⁹ But this misunderstands the value Augustine places on necessarily inadequate affections of this life and how those differ from the adequate affections of the life to come.³⁰ ‘We must, however, confess that the affections (*affectiones*) which we have, even when they are righteous and according to God, belong to this life, and not to the life for which we hope; and that we often yield to them even against our will’.³¹ In other words, as Augustine clarifies, ‘even though moved by praiseworthy charity and not by any culpable desire, we sometimes weep even when we do not wish to do so’.³² The warp and woof of righteous affections is not some paradox for Augustine, but rather part and parcel of what it means to live righteously in a fallen world. To experience

²⁷ Gillian Clark, 'Caritas: Augustine on Love and Fellow Feeling' in Ruth R. Caston and Robert A. Kaster, eds. *Hope, Joy, and Affection in the Classical World* (Oxford: OUP, 2016), 209-25, 225.

²⁸ Clark (2016), 225.

²⁹ **LIST FROM STEWART-KROEKER**

³⁰ **NOTE ON ROBERT C. ROBERT'S 'ATTUNEMENT'**

³¹ *Proinde, quod fatendum est, etiam cum rectas et secundum Deum habemus has affectiones, huius vitae sunt, non illius, quam futuram speramus, et saepe illis etiam inviti cedimus. (Ciu. 14.9)*

³² *Itaque aliquando, quamvis non culpabili cupiditate, sed laudabili caritate moveamur, etiam dum nolimus flemus. (Ciu. 14.9)*

affections otherwise would, in fact, be a betrayal of earthly righteousness. ‘If we felt no such affections at all while subject to the infirmity of this life, we should then certainly not be living righteously. For the apostle condemned and denounced certain persons who, he said, were without affection’.³³ Righteous affections of this life are not only communicated through tears and weeping, but can be brought on inadvertently and without control. Affections are, in this life, a kind of tragedy – events outside our control conspire to awake in us passions that frighten us for the very reason that we find that righteous living is not characterized by a secured possession of our interior life.

Augustine, however, is no tragic thinker. And thus the tragedy of earthly affections is not the end of the story for him.

We must, then, lead a righteous life if we are to attain a life of blessedness; and such a righteous life will exhibit all these affections righteously, whereas a perverse life exhibits them perversely. Moreover, a life which is blessed and, by the same token, eternal, will exhibit a love and a gladness which are not only righteous, but also assured, and will contain no fear or pain at all.³⁴

The affections of this life are righteous not in themselves, but inside an eschatological framework that puts the Christian pilgrim on the redemptive trajectory from temporal to eternal existence.³⁵ The righteousness of humanity’s ‘uncontrollable’ affections is not because we adequately respond to the world – if you are not weeping, Augustine thinks, you are simply not paying attention – but because they mold humanity into blessed creatures.

³³ *Sed dum vitae huius infirmitatem gerimus, si eas omnino nullas habeamus, tunc potius non recte vivimus. Vituperabat enim et detestabatur apostolus quosdam, quos etiam esse dixit sine affectione. (Ciu. 14.9)*

³⁴ *Quae cum ita sint, quoniam recta vita ducenda est, qua perveniendum sit ad beatam, omnes affectus istos vita recta rectos habet, perversa perversos. Beata vero eademque aeterna amorem habebit et gaudium non solum rectum, verum etiam certum; timorem autem ac dolorem nullum. (Ciu. 14.9)*

³⁵ Sarah Steward-Kroeker, ‘World-Weariness and Augustine’s Eschatological Ordering of Emotions in *en. Ps. 36*’, *Augustinian Studies* 47:2 (2016), 201-226.

Whereas the citizens of the earthly city either experience no affection or are convulsed by the movements of their soul without purpose beyond their momentary titillation, pilgrims to the heavenly city feel affections that re-shape and re-form their souls. Paradoxically, this is not achieved through sealing up the holes in our porous selves, but rather by exposing more and more of ourselves to the warp and woof of this life. The distinction between Christ's affections and fallen humanity's righteous affections is that Christ is perfect in weakness – his very weakness came from his power.³⁶ For Augustine, fallen humans are too guarded, too frightened to allow such righteous affections to truly overwhelm us.

Affections as a Spiritual Project

There is some distance between allowing oneself to be overwhelmed by affections and having some process for remolding and refashioning the soul through affections. It seems prudent to accept, à la Wetzell, that Augustine did not think there was a fully perfected practice of rehabilitation available to earthly humans. But it does not seem likely that Augustine would have left his flock wallowing in their affections. In *ep.* 130, we can see Augustine attempting to split these very horns in advice to Proba, the wealthy Roman widow who fled the Goths to North Africa. Augustine envisions prayer as a practice accessible to all Christians that does not over-emphasize the human's contribution without leaving the supplicant resource-less. Critically, it is through the failure of prayer that the Holy Spirit intercedes for Augustine to re-mold the potentially over-whelming affections as *constantiae*.

³⁶ *non autem ita Dominus Iesus, cuius et infirmatis fuit ex potestate. (Ciu. 14.9)*

More so than even in the *Confessions*, the affections, prayer, and the Holy Spirit are intensely interwoven in Augustine's *ep.* 130 to Proba (the widow). Around the year 410, Proba had written to Augustine inquiring about how she ought to pray, and *ep.* 130 is Augustine's response. This letter, which is Augustine's most developed theological account of prayer, encompasses a wide-range of issues within prayer, but I will focus on Augustine's discussion of the Pauline conundrum 'we do not know what to pray as we ought', drawing out what I take to be Augustine's theological framing of the affections. The Pauline conundrum is often taken either as the problem that we do not know *what* to pray or as the problem that we do not know *how* to pray. For Augustine, it is the *what* of prayer that will help him decipher the *how* of prayer. As we shall see, Augustine submerges the desire for the *beata vita* into that which the Holy Spirit teaches us to 'groan' while we wait in patience. The affections are indeed oriented toward their goal of beatitude, but not in the way that Nussbaum et al. fear.

The *beata vita* is, in Augustine, a curious concept and has been subject to a myriad of confusions. The *beata vita* is subtly domesticated by the suggestion that it is simply a species of eudaimonism appended by 'an afterlife with continuous personal identity'.³⁷ As highlighted in *De vera religione* and *De sermone Domini in monte*, Augustine emphasizes that the *beata vita* is only realized in the next life,³⁸ and he warns in his exposition of Psalm 87 against the temptation to infer from this life to the next life.³⁹ The *beata vita* is, therefore, not so much an issue of the continuity of personality, but rather of the existential discontinuity between the present life and the afterlife. A consequence of this eschatological location of

³⁷ See, e.g., Byers (2013), p. 72.

³⁸ *vera rel.* 27.50; *s. dom. m.* 2.11.38.

³⁹ *En. Ps.* 86.9.

the *beata vita* is that one's temporal desire for the *beata vita* is disturbed. I take the *beata vita* to be a state of affairs, and while a temporal state of affairs can be reasonably desired, an eternal state of affairs, such as the *beata vita*, falls outside the domain of knowable states of affairs. Desires being indexed to the concrete conditions of one's life, one might initially conclude that one's temporal desires will not adequately 'aim' at the right object if it is somehow outside of one's life. Augustine, however, relies on the Holy Spirit to address this problem of temporal desire taking the *beata vita* as its intentional object.

The question about how to pray that Augustine finds in Paul's letter to the Romans reveals for him the underlying psychology of prayer. Augustine juxtaposes his views with what he takes to be the practice of prayer in the Egyptian ascetical tradition. Augustine writes to Proba, 'The brothers in Egypt are said to say frequent prayers, but very brief ones that are tossed off as if in a rush, so that a vigilant and keen intention, which is very necessary for one who prays, may not fade away and grow dull over longer periods'.⁴⁰ In responding to this, Augustine seems to endorse the practice but not the underlying psychology:

Much talking is one thing, a lasting affection (*diuturnus affectus*) is another... For to speak much in praying is to do something necessary with superfluous words, but to petition (*precari*) him to whom we pray (*precari*) is to knock with a long and pious stirring of the heart (*diuturna et pia cordis excitatione pulsare*). For this task (*negotium*) is very often carried out more with sighs than with words (*plus gemitibus quam sermonibus*), more with weeping than with speaking (*plus fletu quam affatu*).⁴¹

Augustine is very clear: To pray without ceasing is to *desire* without ceasing the happy life, and to use words is thus to remind oneself of this state of affairs. Moreover, the media of

⁴⁰ *ibid.* trans. Teske (2003), p. 193.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

prayer are sighs and weeping more so than words and speaking. The desire for the *beata vita* is thus expressed through these emotions, which one might negatively judge as *perturbationes*, but function, in fact, as *affectiones*. The sighs and weeping of prayer involve the will, as do all emotions for Augustine, and the *object* of the will is what distinguishes between discordant and concordant sighs and weeping.⁴² There are, after all, Augustine’s youthful tears for the doleful and tragic scenes of the theatre as well as his tears for the death of his mother. Likewise, Monnica’s tears for her son are a kind of prayer for a state of affairs that she will soon envision and one day experience.

This affective account of prayer makes it, then, somewhat awkward that Augustine now wants to address the Lord’s Prayer to fill in what exactly Proba ought to be saying when she is praying. Augustine does this for a deeply theological reason. In *Sermon 56*, preached to those seeking baptism around the same time as *ep. 130*, Augustine suggests that ‘the words our Lord Jesus Christ has taught us in his prayer give us the framework of true affections’.⁴³ The petitions of the Lord’s Prayer are those of the Son for the Father, and to pray rightly one must enter into the Son’s petitions, the very desire of the Son for the Father. It is not, then, simply using words to pray, but more specifically the fact that praying the Lord’s Prayer *stabilizes* affections. The importance of the Lord’s Prayer is not because it provides words, but rather because the petitions represent what our affections ought to be and must be if human affection is to be *for the beata vita*. The Lord’s Prayer is, in other words, the framework for *affectiones* to become *constantiae*.

⁴² *De civ. Dei* 14.6; CCSL 48: 421, 1-5.

⁴³ s. 56

But this is rarely how things work out in reality. Paul is a case in point for Augustine. Augustine highlights that even Paul did not know how to pray because the object of his prayer is such that ‘we cannot think of it as it is’.⁴⁴ Paul’s prayer for his ‘thorn of the flesh’ to be removed, just as any other human supplication would, improperly expressed prayer’s desire for the *beata vita*. It is, however, in this *failure* of prayer that the Holy Spirit emerges to ‘intercede for us with inexpressible groans’. Quoting Rom 8:26-27 in full, Augustine accounts for the Holy Spirit not as a divine version of intercessory prayer, for the Spirit is ‘immutable God in the Trinity’ and thus does not intercede as a human would. Rather, the Holy Spirit is that which *actualizes* human prayer. ‘He makes the saints intercede with inexpressible groans, therefore, when he inspires them with the desire for so great a still unknown reality, which await in patience. How, after all, do we express, how do we desire what we do not know?’⁴⁵ Only in the Holy Spirit can humans pray for the *beata vita*; only by virtue of the Holy Spirit’s groaning and weeping are humans’ sighs and weeping directed toward the *beata vita*. By the Holy Spirit’s transforming *affectiones* into *constantiae*, human emotions transcend their temporality, their instability, in short, their potential to be undone by their origin.

The Hopeful Failure of Affections

As we have seen, the central project for fallen humanity is not concerned with excluding discordant affections, but rather with place these affections in the life of a pilgrim.

⁴⁴ *ep.* 130.14.27; trans. Teske (2003), p. 197.

⁴⁵ *ibid.* 15.28; trans. Teske (2003), p. 198.

As Augustine memorably states in *en. Ps.* 121, ‘We travel not by foot by our affections’.⁴⁶ But the rehabilitation of affection occurs then through the continual give-and-take of life lived with others. These others have their own passions and affections, and enjoying *concordia* with others is not simply a matter of waiting for them to rid their discordant affections. Rather, *concordia* results from patiently living with their affections, trusting that just as yours are being transformed into *constantiae*, so too are theirs. If we can say that the rehabilitation of affection occurs through the give-and-take of community life, we should also be able to say that prayer as a practice of the Church does not primarily divinize the community but rather establishes the Church as a community whose common humanity is emphasized by the way its members patiently bear one another. Only when the church has purchase on eternity through the Holy Spirit does it escape from its desires being ‘overwhelmed in time’.⁴⁷ Yet, the Spirit does not offer the Church liberation from the constant struggle of time or the promise that our projects will not falter.

The Spirit, according to Augustine, makes it possible for humans to pray for that which they do not know. This is not simply some epistemic transfer – in fact, it is not properly epistemic at all – but rather it makes possible the necessary condition for patience, that is, the discovery of our limits. If you could do, you would; it is only in cases where we discover our limits that we are forced to wait, forced into the posture of patience. This is the sense in which we are meant to understand in *ep.* 130 Augustine’s distillation of the Lord’s Prayer into the single petition: ‘not as I will but as you will, Father’. The point is not to communicate to Proba that she ought to renounce her will *tout court*, but rather that the

⁴⁶ *en. Ps.* 121.11.

⁴⁷ James Wetzel, *Augustine and the limits of virtue* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), p. 74.

movement of her will – the affection for the *beata vita* – is achieved through her patience – with herself and with others.

There is, however, a danger – one that Augustine was acutely aware of – in the temptation to sanctify affections as the work of the Holy Spirit. How am I to know when my temporal affections are being transformed into *constantiae*? The actual experience of the affection does not seem to change according to Augustine’s reading of Romans 8. So how do I know that I am not delusional and possibly permitting terrible acts of evil, committed by myself or by others? The protection against this danger, Augustine instructs Proba, are works of charity. If your patience translates into works of charity, particularly almsgiving, you will know that it is the ‘life of hope’. Prayer is not simply social by its form but also by virtue of the other practices it draws into itself as the sum of the Christian life. ‘The fountain of life is found’, Augustine explains to Proba, in that ‘which we thirst for in our prayers, so long as we live in hope’.⁴⁸ The life of hope is, for Augustine, the form of life in which longing for the *beata vita* is found. This longing, however, does not sever our connections from society. To the contrary, prayer as the ‘school of hope’ is sustained and nourished by acts of charity, without which we would not be able to discern the direction of our affections. But hope is also a kind of desire for the *beata vita* that is characterized by patience, and as such is its own distinctive movement of the will, but, because it’s movement is the Holy Spirit’s, hope is experienced as non-movement.

Cultivating *constantiae* requires a risk. One has to accept the affections that she has, trusting that, through the work of grace, they will become ‘holy desires’. When Augustine

⁴⁸ *ep.* 130.14.27.

instructs Proba to ‘pray for the happy life’,⁴⁹ he is calling her into that which necessarily fails. Augustine implicitly acknowledges the failure of the temporal desire for beatitude, yet, like Paul does in Romans, he simultaneously indicates how emotions might succeed (if in fact they do).

⁴⁹ *Ora beatam uitam; hanc enim habere omnes homines uolunt* (ep. 130.4.9; CCSL 31B: 218).