

# INTELLECT AND GRACE IN AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO<sup>1</sup>

Josef Lössl, Cardiff University

(LosslJ@cardiff.ac.uk)

Abstract: In 1964 Rudolph Lorenz published an article in the *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* entitled “Gnade und Erkenntnis bei Augustinus”, in which he discussed links between Augustine’s concepts of intellect and grace and possible implications with regard to Augustine’s teachings on Predestination and Original Sin. This paper takes up some of Lorenz’s points and tries to develop them further. It concludes that one of the reasons why Augustine was so adamant in defending these controversial doctrines and why he was unable to share the concerns of contemporaries regarding their controversial nature was the fact that he understood them in the context of his intellectualist framework. For him this made them “comprehensible”. At the same time, not framing the human intellectual endeavour in the context of a teaching on grace would have meant for Augustine a depressing reduction of the most essential and fulfilling form of human activity to a mere natural process, while in his view it originated gratuitously in God and linked each human being to eternal salvation in Christ and communion with God.

At the risk of appearing “un-original” I intend to follow a fairly well-trodden path today and present a re-appraisal of Rudolf Lorenz’ train of thought, laid out in his seminal article *Gnade und Erkenntnis bei Augustinus* published in 1964.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps I should have given my paper a sub-title like, “a re-appraisal of Rudolf Lorenz”. But this would have given the game away; and at any rate, in some respects I do hope to be able to point beyond Lorenz. Still, Lorenz’ paper was a guiding study for my own doctoral research during the mid-90s, published in 1997.<sup>3</sup> However, as I recognize now, many of its valuable points I was quite unable to appreciate then, be it from lack of intellectual maturity or because I felt under pressure to produce something “original” myself.

---

<sup>1</sup> Paper presented on 14 January 2011 at the *Philosophical Psychology, Morality and Politics Research Unit*, Department of Systematic Theology, Faculty of Theology, University of Helsinki. The paper has been slightly adapted for publication. The author would like to thank the leaders of the unit, especially Profs. Risto Saarinen and Simo Knuuttila, for their invitation, and the editors of JLARC for accepting this only slightly edited version of the paper for publication.

<sup>2</sup> R. Lorenz, “Gnade und Erkenntnis bei Augustinus,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 75 (1964), pp. 21-78.

<sup>3</sup> J. Lössl, *Intellectus Gratiae. Die erkenntnistheoretische und hermeneutische Dimension der Gnadenlehre Augustins von Hippo* (Leiden, 1997).

Josef Lössl, “Intellect and Grace in Augustine of Hippo,” in: *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 7 (2013) 15-25; ISSN: 1754-517X; Website: <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/clarc/jlarc>

My focus then was quite different from Lorenz'. I began my research under the impression of the acrimonious debate provoked by Kurt Flasch's polemic against Augustine's "logic of terror", *Logik des Schreckens*, his teachings of original sin (in the sense of a genetically inherited guilt) and predestination (in the sense of a non-predestination and gratuitous damnation of the non-elect), which in Flasch's view had overshadowed, for centuries, earlier, classical and early Christian views of a good, rationally ordered creation, a humanity guided by reason and freedom of the will. Flasch held Augustine responsible for the dominance in the west of a negative view of humanity which gave rise to inhumanity and totalitarianism. I list a few of the most important titles for that debate: John Rist's article of 1969, Kurt Flasch's book of 1990, Aimé Solignac's article of 1988, which would also be worth a thorough re-appraisal one day, a paper by Gerard O'Daly of 1989, James Wetzel's work of 1992, the work of Pierre-Marie Hombert of 1996, and my own responses to these contributions.<sup>4</sup>

Much of that acrimonious debate has meanwhile subsided and in today's paper it will be put to one side. Rather than calling Augustine's position fundamentally in question I will try first to build it up from its own principles following Lorenz's account very closely. Only in a second step I will ask some questions of the kind raised by some of the above listed items. As you can see, I also reversed the order of the title of Lorenz' article ("grace and intellect...") thereby emphasizing the intellectualist perspective of my paper, which is very similar to that of my recent paper "Intellektualistischer Voluntarismus" published in 2010.<sup>5</sup>

Augustine was by nature – or should we rather say, by grace? – an intellectual. Intellect was what he was seeking all his life. Now my understanding of intellect (*intellectus*) in this context, or rather, my understanding of Augustine's understanding of it, is that it is broadly Platonist. By this I mean that it is not merely practical or pragmatic skill, or even intelligence, or pure reason, or knowledge, but essential (substantial) insight ("epoptics", inner vision), understanding of the essence (or nature) of things, and ultimately of reality itself, as a whole; which also points to the theological dimension of the concept, and also to the dimension

---

<sup>4</sup> K. Flasch, *Logik des Schreckens* (Mainz, 1990; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1995); J. Rist, "Augustine on Free Will and Predestination," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 20 (1969), pp. 420-47; A. Solignac, "Les excès de l'intellectus fidei dans la doctrine d'Augustin sur la grâce," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 110 (1988), pp. 825-49; G. O'Daly, "Predestination and Freedom in Augustine's Ethics," in G. Vesey (ed.), *The Philosophy in Christianity* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 85-97; J. Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (Cambridge, 1992); P.-M. Hombert, *Gloria Gratiae : se glorifier en Dieu, principe et fin de la théologie augustiniennne de la grâce* (Paris, 1996); J. Lössl, "Augustine, 'Pelagianism', Julian of Aeclanum, and Modern Scholarship," *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 11 (2007), pp. 129-50; Id., "Intellektualistischer Voluntarismus. Der Willensbegriff Augustins von Hippo," in J. Müller & R. Hofmeister Pich (eds), *Wille und Handlung in der Philosophie der Kaiserzeit und Spätantike* (Berlin & New York, 2010), pp. 301-330.

<sup>5</sup> Lössl, "Intellektualistischer Voluntarismus" (n. 4).

Josef Lössl, "Intellect and Grace in Augustine of Hippo," in: *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 7 (2013) 15-25; ISSN: 1754-517X; Website: <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/clarc/jlarc>

of self-knowledge, which is implicit to my paper throughout, and on occasion also made explicit.

The reason why I call Augustine's understanding of intellect "broadly" (rather than "strictly") "Platonist" is that it seems embedded in a certain terminological fluidity. This is largely due, I believe, to the rhetorical character of Augustine's thought. Augustine is no scholastic. But in the relevant texts we find a range of expressions similar or related to "intellect" (*intellectus*) used in pragmatic ways, such as, for example, *cognitio*, *scientia*, *sapientia*, *ratio*, *visio*, *contemplatio*, and even *fides* and *gratia*, and the respective verbs, *intellegere*, *cogitare* etc., all used with slightly different meanings, depending on the context, but all to support the underlying intellectualist agenda. I shall not subject these concepts to meticulous analyses with the aim to reconstruct a perfectly coherent and consistent system of Augustinian thought. Such a system does not exist. Rather, I shall try to use these concepts pragmatically and hermeneutically, taking into account Augustine's own reasons for using and developing them, and I hope that the examples which I will cite are a fair representation of Augustine's thought and demonstrate by and large its claim to a certain coherence and plausibility, based on its own presuppositions.

Nor will I focus on the aspect to what extent intellect is also to be understood as salvific in a religious sense (which led Augustine to join the Manichaeans). I merely observe that the promise of intellect, rather than authoritative belief, was what attracted Augustine to the Manichaeans.<sup>6</sup> In *De Trinitate*, a very late work, Augustine still remembers how Cicero's *Hortensius* unlocked for him the desire to understand reality intrinsically, at the level of its very nature,<sup>7</sup> though the nouns used here, borrowed from Cicero, are '*una cognitio*' and '*una scientia*'.

Already very early in his work Augustine also identified the ultimate reality with God,<sup>8</sup> though this created for him the problem how to relate the obligation of faith with his quest for intellect. He was not a Gnostic or a pagan Neoplatonist. He was an orthodox Christian. Still, I believe that the identity of grace and intellect is already expressed in much stronger terms in the *Soliloquies* than Lorenz allowed for in his article. When Augustine speaks of God as *potestas nostra ipse*, then this includes the intellect, or even *it* refers primarily to the intellect. I hope this will become clearer in a moment.

---

<sup>6</sup> *De utilitate credendi* 1.2: "The only reason why we fell [for the Manichaeans] was that they claimed that without abhorrent authority but by reason alone, pure and simple, they would lead to God all those who wanted to be their hearers, and free them from all error."

<sup>7</sup> See *De Trinitate* 14.9.12 (and 19.26): "[In his dialogue *Hortensius* Cicero argues that in the ecstatic philosophical life we do not even need the four cardinal virtues any more ... e. g. prudence is no longer necessary; consequently] 'we would be rendered happy by the one cognition and the one knowledge regarding nature by which alone even the life of the gods is praiseworthy'" (frg. 110 Grilli).

<sup>8</sup> See *Soliloquia* 2.1.1: *Potestas nostra ipse (Deus) est*.

It seems to me that Lorenz confirms this by pointing out that there is a link in Augustine between intellect and happiness. Augustine develops this extensively in *De Trinitate* 13.4.7-11.15, which I cannot discuss here. For Augustine, the fact that everyone seeks happiness indicates that everyone knows what happiness is, and that there really is happiness, as a substance of its own; i. e. Augustine does not allow for happiness to consist merely in the act of seeking happiness. In his view there has to be something like ultimate happiness, from which all inferior happiness derives or to which it points. The gap between seeking happiness (or intellect) and having found it, indicates that something is missing in someone who has not yet found it. That “something” (i. e. that “something” which is missing in someone like this), according to Lorenz’ reading of Augustine, is grace (*gratia*). Lorenz points to Augustine’s identification of Christ with *scientia et sapientia*, or, in a citation of *I Corinthians* 1.24, which occurs often in the early works, *virtus et sapientia Dei*, “the strength and wisdom of God”; and Lorenz uses a very strong metaphor here to describe the link: “Grace is integrated, built into, *the arch* [my emphasis, JL] of knowledge.”<sup>9</sup>

I am sometimes frustrated by such metaphors. What does it mean? Is grace a form of intellect, or vice versa? And how do we have to understand this? Grace is supposed to bridge the gap between the desire for happiness and perfect intellect, and the fulfilment of that desire. As a concept it is here inferior to the intellect, an auxiliary concept therefore. The gap itself, according to Augustine, thus Lorenz informs us, quite correctly, is caused by sin. It is not simply a natural gap, which could be bridged by natural means. It is a violent rupture, an unbridgeable abyss. Thus it is sin that weakens human rationality, and the latter is consequently all the more in need of grace. And if grace is at hand, it first appears in the shape not of reason itself but of authority, *auctoritas*, which guides reason back to its original path. Reason is suffering from ignorance and weakness and cannot succeed on its own. *Ignorantia* and *difficultas*, as we all know, are punishments of Original Sin; thus a famous passage in *De libero arbitrio*.<sup>10</sup>

Consequently sin does not only hinder the intellect, it suppresses it totally and pulls the soul in a totally different direction. The sinful soul actually takes, in a perverse way, “delight” in sin. (Of course, this cannot be real delight, but only a perverted form of delight.) It cannot but sin. It sins from necessity. This is a train of thought which we find extensively developed, explained and defended in Augustine’s later thought, for example in the works against Julian of Aeclanum.

But let us return to Lorenz: The soul, he continues, is caught in a vicious circle in which reason functions as an instrument to aggravate sin. Now the question is what can break this vicious circle? What can dissolve this impenetrable illusion,

<sup>9</sup> Lorenz, “Gnade und Erkenntnis” (n. 2), p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> *De libero arbitrio* 3.18.52: “Indeed, every sinful soul has been inflicted with these two punishments, ignorance and difficulty. Because of ignorance, error shames us; because of difficulty torment afflicts us.”

or delusion, of the sinful mind, and access reality? What can help the soul to break through to the *Ding an sich*, the reality outside the sinful self, the reality which is illuminated by the divine light? Augustine's answer, according to Lorenz: *Fides*, faith, belief, in the sense of acceptance that progress to intellect is possible, but only from a starting point which consists in the knowledge of one's imperfection and ineptness accepted on grounds of authority.<sup>11</sup> It is an insight which one gains not from oneself, but only prompted by an outside message accepted on authority.

Interestingly, for Augustine the *initium fidei* is apparently not a blind, fideistic, spot, or move, a Schopenhauerian kind of "pure will", or a Kierkegaardian "leap of faith". Rather, it contains – already in itself – an element of intellect. "Nobody believes something unless he has a prior notion, a *cogitatio*, or *cognitio*, that it is believable, or that it should be believed," Augustine writes this in one of his very last works, *De praedestinatione sanctorum*.<sup>12</sup>

Lorenz reports that there are certain inconsistencies in Augustine's concept of faith, which have led to controversies in scholarship. Some scholars understand it in an intellectual sense, i. e. as a first stage of the intellect, for example when we consider that Christ is both the subject and object of faith and intellect, *virtus et sapientia*. Or when we think of *John* 20.29, where Jesus says to Thomas: "You believe because you see me." But then, of course, adds: "Blessed are those who believe, even though they do not see." And that is another aspect of Augustine's concept of faith, namely quite a strict distinction between authority-based faith and reason-based intellect: *quod intelligimus debemus rationi, quod credimus, auctoritati*, Augustine clarifies in the *Retractationes* to *De utilitate credendi*: "Intellect we owe to reason, faith to authority." The intellect-element in faith, a minimalist interpretation would argue, is only supposed to extend to the insight that faith is necessary as a precondition of the intellectual pursuit, but, as it were, not sufficient. That insight is its only intellectual content. It is, to use a notorious analogy, the faculty that renders an "unknown unknown" to a "known unknown", i. e. something that is known to be unknown.

However, as I already indicated, Augustine is not consistent here, because he cannot simply distinguish two totally separate types of intellect: If faith already contains a grain of intellect, then it is in a way already a form of intellect. There has to be a continuity, or else the universality or completeness, the perfection, of intellect would be in doubt. In his attempt to explain faith and the way it functions against the background of these problems Augustine resorts to the two concepts of will and love, notions which a psychologist of today might refer to as "emotional intelligence". Lorenz sees these two notions as hermeneutical devices that explain for Augustine the transition from the vicious circle of an isolated and self-centred

---

<sup>11</sup> *De utilitate credendi* 15.33: "The life and habits of men first need to be cleansed through authority. Only then they can acquire intellect through reason."

<sup>12</sup> *De praedestinatione sanctorum* 2.5: "Noone believes something unless he has a prior notion (*nisi prius cogitaverit*) that it should be believed (*credendum*)."

world of appearances, or of mere phenomena, to a *real* world of “substances”, or in Lorenz’s terminology, *Ideen*, ideas (in the Platonist sense), i. e. where reality and intellect come together.<sup>13</sup>

Since there is no automatism in the application of authority in the sense that not everyone who is exposed to authority will find faith and move on to intellect, there has to be another explanation why certain people find faith and begin to see the world with different eyes, which puts them on a more certain epistemological footing, while other people do not. In a passage in *De praedestinatione sanctorum* Augustine answers this question in a for him rather typical manner: “For faith has its own kind of *eyes*, with which it somehow *sees* to be true that which it does not yet *see*, and with which it *sees* with utmost certainty that it does not yet *see* what it believes.”<sup>14</sup> The word “seeing” (*videre*), used in a metaphorical and equivocal sense, is employed here to describe the epistemological and hermeneutical activity in which “faith” is engaged when it is active.

Now obviously, in order to initiate faith in this way, and to keep it going, there has to be a kind of “intellectual grace”, i. e. a kind of grace that is not just a force of practical love and adherence to the law, which provides strength to resist and eventually overcome sin and do good, but a kind of grace which is essentially an intellectual force, a force that initiates faith and “drives” it as the epistemological and hermeneutic activity as which it has just been referred to, thereby generating intellect from intellect.

From the outset and until the end of his life Augustine saw the intellectual and ethical life as a unity: *recta ratio est ipsa virtus*, he writes in *De utilitate credendi* 12.26: “reason, rightly disposed, is the essence of virtue.” But his idea of grace as intellect goes even further than that, and it throws quite an unexpected light on the controversy with Julian of Aeclanum.

It is because he identifies intellect with grace that Augustine must insist against Julian on the absolute necessity of grace for salvation, especially in the light of his doctrine of original sin and predestination, which extends not only to the sphere of ethics, but also to that of epistemology and metaphysics. For Salvation would not only not occur without a continuous stream of additional divine input of grace into creation channelled through the sacramental activity of the church (baptism) and a constant stream of prayer for forgiveness in the context of the church, it would not even be comprehensible. It could not be the starting point for an understanding of this complex reality: “God, who is the light of the inner man, helps our mind to understand that any good we do, we do not by our own but by His justice.”<sup>15</sup>

However, its comprehensibility is not just any odd feature of Salvation. As far as Augustine is concerned it is its most fundamental, its central feature. Salvation

<sup>13</sup> See Lorenz, “Gnade und Erkenntnis” (n. 2), p.

<sup>14</sup> *De praedestinatione sanctorum* 8.13: *Habet namque fides oculos suos quibus quodammodo videt verum esse quod nondum videt et quibus certissime videt nondum se videre quod credit.*

<sup>15</sup> *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali* 2.5.5.

is not something that somehow happens to human beings. Rather, for Augustine, it is something which human beings live through, consciously, in a performative manner. It is something by which they realise themselves, by which they morph into a new, divine, reality, a reality which is pure and complete consciousness. *Deificari*, “becoming God”, Folliet once called it, akin to the Greek Platonist concept of *homoiosis theô*. Salvation for Augustine is self-realisation through acquisition of self-knowledge, self-intellect, which is something that is given to men by God’s grace and emerging from the being of the human soul itself, from its transcendent dimension. Here the teaching on grace and the Neoplatonist self-transcendent, self-reflective, knowledge converge.

For Augustine, there is no difference between a Biblical “hearer of the word” (*Romans* 10.17: “faith comes from hearing”), and a Platonist intellectual, who has self-knowledge. *Quid est enim a te audire de se nisi cognoscere se?* – “For what else is hearing from you about oneself but knowing oneself?”, he once writes in *Confessions* 10.3.3. Moreover, an essential of self-knowledge is knowledge of one’s infirmity. Grace, Augustine continues the passage in *Confessions* which I just mentioned, strengthens the weak. How? By conveying in the first instance an intrinsic knowledge of one’s weakness: *qua [gratia] potens est omnis infirmus, qui sibi per ipsam fit conscius infirmitatis suae*. But equally, it is from itself that the soul has this knowledge: *[Anima, mens] semetipsam per se ipsam novit*.<sup>16</sup> This is because the mind-soul is open to its own transcendence: If you return into your self, Augustine writes in *De vera religione* 72, and keep on transcending yourself, by questioning yourself and the conditions of your questioning; if you do that, you cannot but reach the truth, which is beyond you and reaches you from that beyond from which the light of reason itself shines.<sup>17</sup> This, as he once famously said in a passage of the *Confessions*, is closer to you than yourself: *interior intimo meo*.<sup>18</sup> God in me. The place where I encounter God.

Although unlike Descartes Augustine does not build his whole philosophy on this experience, he does recognize its power and ability to provide an instance of absolute epistemological certainty. To be sure, Augustine does not construct this experience as some kind of thematic knowledge. It is implicit in everything one does, transcendental in the Kantian sense, i. e. not referring to objects but to the way we relate to objects intellectually, by being mind-souls, intellects, i. e. we perceive objects, and in doing so we perceive ourselves as perceiving them and we reflect on our way of perceiving them.

But, of course, unlike modern philosophers (and ancient ones, as well as the Gnostics) Augustine once more sets up some qualifying postulates. For him the

---

<sup>16</sup> *Confessiones* 10.3.4; *De Trinitate* 9.3.3.

<sup>17</sup> *De vera religione* 72: *Noli foras ire, in teipsum redi. In interiore homine habitat veritas. Et si tuam naturam mutabilem inveneris, transcede et te ipsum ... Illuc ergo tende unde ipsum lumen rationis accenditur. Quo enim pervenit omnis bonus ratiocinator nisi ad veritatem?*

<sup>18</sup> *Confessiones* 3.6.43.

fact that I experience transcendence in me must not be interpreted in the sense that I am God, or that there is no God in the naïve sense, because any transcendence which I experience in me is simply due to the structure of my mind. But rather, what I experience *supra me*, is *te*, God.<sup>19</sup> For Augustine, this experience of transcendence constitutes in each of us a memory, which we must interpret as *memoria Dei* and which must find its expression in prayer and *confessio*. Thus, in the light of the Biblical tradition, materially speaking, but substantially grounded in the transcendental experience which constitutes *memoria Dei*, the human being is revealed as *imago Dei*. It is by being *imago Dei* that man is capable of God, i. e. of participating in the reality of God.<sup>20</sup>

Once more, however, this latter interpretation and above all its explicitation, its confession, namely that it is really God, the Biblical God, who is referred to here, is secondary to the underlying intellectual experience. “What I have just said,” Augustine once comments after finishing a prayer, “is not something which I have grasped with the intellect but something which I gathered here and there and committed to my memory and which I then accepted, as far as I could, with my faith. Knowing is something different.”<sup>21</sup> With a statement like this Augustine does not commend himself as a supporter of the ontological argument.

However, we have also said that whatever a believer expresses in his prayers, the primary content of *fides* is intellectual, i. e. “I am not God. God is the source of my intellect.” In this respect, to use Lorenz’ words, “grace leads from intellect to intellect ... The noetic achievements of grace and intellect are identical.”<sup>22</sup>

At this point Lorenz asks, what we also alluded to already in view of the Pelagian controversy: What about the relationship between grace and nature? Does not Augustine have to have some kind of concept of supernatural intellect in order to uphold his postulate of the necessity of grace? Or, to return to an earlier question: If all human beings are created as mind-souls, why are not all achieving salvation, i. e. in this case, intellectual fulfilment?

Lorenz at this stage continues with a parallel investigation of the structure of intellect and grace as a process (*Gnade und Erkenntnis als Vorgang*).<sup>23</sup> Both are interior, i. e. situated in the *interior homo*. The direction of the movement is from the outside to the inside, from the scattered to the more concentrated, from the unidentified to the identified, from that which is rejected and discarded to that which is approved and substantiated; whereby the impetus for this movement is situated in the interior; i. e. we are not pushed towards the interior by something which is

<sup>19</sup> *Confessiones* 10.26.37: *Ubi ergo inveni te ut discerem te, nisi in te supra me?*

<sup>20</sup> *De Trinitate* 14.8.11: *Eo quippe ipso imago eius est quo eius capax est eiusque particeps esse potest.*

<sup>21</sup> *Soliloquia* 1.4.9: *Dixi enim non quae intellectu comprehendi sed quae undecumque collecta memoriae mandavi et quibus accomodavi quantam potui fidem. scire autem aliud est.*

<sup>22</sup> Lorenz, “Gnade und Erkenntnis” (n. 2), pp. 45-46.

<sup>23</sup> Lorenz, “Gnade und Erkenntnis” (n. 2), p. 46.



located outside, but pulled in, drawn in, by the interior light itself. The purpose of the interior light, also sometimes referred to as interior teacher, *magister interior*, also a reference to Christ, is not only to throw light on objects that are themselves dark, e. g. material objects, for us to be able to distinguish and categorise them. In good Platonic fashion the authentic purpose of the interior light is itself. The eye of the mind is itself the sun, or a particle of the sun. In the process of the human intellect in action God reveals himself, naturally, so to speak: *Lumen ergo et alia demonstrat et seipsum*. And, “there is yet another light by which the soul is lit up in order that it has insight (intellect) into everything both in itself and in this other light,” i. e. in God.<sup>24</sup> And from this perspective Augustine indeed does look like an “ontologist”, although I am not able to discuss here all the implications of the relevant metaphors; e. g. how does Augustine understand the relationship between God and creation here? Between temporal and eternal? How does he understand the concept of participation? Including that of the participation of the soul in the inner-trinitarian communication?

The one question we could pursue in the context of our topic, however, is that of the agent. Who is actually the agent here? Who is doing the willing, the loving, the enjoying (*perfrui*) of the truth, God or the soul? For Augustine, the answer is, of course, clear. It is God. The soul is only itself, and active, through grace, i. e. by being received into God’s inner realm. Therefore there is strictly no difference between intellect and will. Although for us human beings, who do not fully share in God, there is, of course, a *separatio* between the two, which is also reflected in our tendency to deviate and turn towards the inferior.<sup>25</sup>

But the point (in us) where we do not do that, according to Augustine, is the point where God (Christ) acts in us, primarily intellectually. This is where grace in us is originally located, not as, in Augustine’s view, Pelagius and Julian would have it, in our natural ability, informed by the law, to choose and do the good.<sup>26</sup>

Lorenz rightly points out that there is a problem here. What, we might ask, is actually Augustine’s problem with the Pelagians? Could we not rather think of a continuum between his concept of grace and theirs, in the sense that on a more external, ephemeral, level grace is recognizing the match between “the law” and “what we ought to do” (morality), and on a more interior, central, level, grace is the convergence of intellect and will regarding the true and the good? After all,

---

<sup>24</sup> *De Genesi ad litteram* 12.31.59: *Aliud est autem lumen quo illustratur anima ut omnia vel in se vel in illo veraciter intellecta conspiciat*. Compare also *In Evangelium Iohannis tractatus* 47.3: *Lumen ergo et alia demonstrat et seipsum*.

<sup>25</sup> *De libero arbitrio* 2.14.37: *...a veritate atque sapientia separatio, perversa voluntas est, qua inferiora diliguntur*.

<sup>26</sup> *Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum* 4.11: “[The Pelagians, thus Augustine, consider the law as a kind of grace, which] we have as a help from God for our thinking in order that we know what we ought to do. [They do not think of grace] as an inspiration of [divine] love in order that we do, through divine love, that which we think [is right – i. e. in the sense that – in grace – intellect and will are identical], which is what grace really means.”

creation, including humanity, is good. So what is Augustine's problem with the Pelagian concept of grace, apart from the fact that it may not reach as deep as his transcendental approach?

As we know, for Augustine, nature is essentially fallen nature. This somehow flies in the face of what we have so far found out about his bringing together the two dimensions of intellect and will in grace. While nature is common to all men, salvific grace is not, according to Augustine. Nature on its own cannot achieve salvation, and this includes the natural human intellect, even if it is, by its own ingenuity, moved towards faith.<sup>27</sup> For Augustine, that (natural) movement of faith on its own is never sufficient.

Thus Augustine, as already mentioned earlier, overrides his more universal, Platonic, considerations regarding intellect and grace and focuses on what appears to be a rather arbitrary concept, namely predestination. It seems as if we have here a faultline running through Augustine's thought, which Lorenz proposes to tackle by exploring its ontological (metaphysical) presuppositions, because at that level it can be shown how, for Augustine, they fit with his Platonism.

For Augustine, Lorenz observes, our inner experience of transcendence, which on the religious level has to be interpreted as an encounter with the Biblical God, corresponds on the metaphysical level with our existence thanks to the intellectual activity of the absolute transcendent being, in whom the timeless forms (or ideas) of all contingent beings subsist.<sup>28</sup> Outside this eternal reality subsisting in God those beings only exist because God, in a form of panentheistic *creatio continua*, provides them with existence.<sup>29</sup> If God ever decided to "stop" with this "quiet and stable operation", the world would cease to exist. The very order, the fabric, of the world is identical with this operation, i. e. creation.<sup>30</sup>

Now this also applies to the human mind-soul, which, as we saw, comes to its own by "converting" to God and finding perfect intellect, goodness and happiness in God.<sup>31</sup> This conversion is grace, its agent is God himself. The method is illumination. Through the light which is in the world through the Word the creature is "called" through an *occulta inspiratio vocationis*.<sup>32</sup> At this level there

---

<sup>27</sup> *De dono perseverantiae* 14.35: "Clearly, some have the divine gift of intellect in their minds, naturally, and are moved by it to faith ... and yet are not separated from the *massa perditionis* by the predestination of grace..."

<sup>28</sup> *De libero arbitrio* 2.18.49: "...*omnem speciem formamque corporis a summa omnium rerum forma, id est a veritate subsistere...*"

<sup>29</sup> *De Genesi ad litteram* 4.12.23: *Credimus et dicimus deum in iis quae creavit indesinenter operari.*

<sup>30</sup> *De ordine* 2.7.21: *Nam ordinem esse dixisti quo deus agit omnia. nihil autem, ut video, non agit deus.*

<sup>31</sup> *Confessiones* 13.3.4: [*creatura*] *ut vivit ... et ... beate vivit non deberet nisi gratiae tuae, conversa per commutationem ad id quod neque in melius neque in deterius mutari potest.*

<sup>32</sup> *De Genesi ad litteram* 1.5.10: *Principium quippe creaturae intellectualis est aeterna sapientia, quod principium manens in se incommutabiliter, nullo modo cessat occulta inspiratione*

Josef Lössl, "Intellect and Grace in Augustine of Hippo," in: *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 7 (2013) 15-25; ISSN: 1754-517X; Website: <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/clarclarc>

is no difference between grace and nature. God's providence consists in his universal agency, his omnipotence in action.

Now what about the Fall? From a certain perspective, Lorenz observes,<sup>33</sup> what we have just outlined is even more obviously, *a fortiori*, so to speak, the case after the Fall than before. God's action, his retaining creation in existence, is even more obviously gratuitous now than ever: God turns everything into his direction, from the dead stone to the wayward human will.<sup>34</sup>

The particularity of his gratuitous action requires no further explanation. It is so by definition. Out of the nothingness of all innumerable possible worlds God creates this, existent, real, one; and out of the nothingness of the *massa damnata* God predestines this, existent, real, communion of saints. The fact that the non-predestined are damned rather than simply non-existent is due to God's upholding of his quiet action of keeping them in existence as the beings as which they were originally created.

The provocative question which could be asked at this point is whether this is not almost equivalent to saying that, ultimately, the damned were created thus. Or, as Lorenz puts it: "Although it is through sin that humanity is turned into a *massa perditionis*, the ultimate cause of damnation is not sin, but non-election."<sup>35</sup> Or, to use yet another provocative phrase: For Augustine, damnation is a form of grace. Insofar as the non-predestined have specific natures and are created beings, they share in the same creative grace as the elect, only to a lesser degree.

Whether anyone, including Augustine, could ever have found consolation in this kind of thought was not my intention to discuss in this paper. Clearly, Julian of Aeclanum, and many in his time and after him, found it deeply offensive and utterly disturbing, and not in tune with fundamental Christian belief. However, Augustine equally vehemently defended his position, and for Lorenz a possible reason for this is, quite intriguingly, in the light of what I would like to call the nihilistic, entropic, experience which pervades post-modern culture, the danger which he saw in not perceiving nature, metaphysically, as grace, namely that we then see grace, un-metaphysically, as mere nature.

---

*vocationis loqui ei creaturae, cui principium est, ut convertatur ad id ex quo est, quod aliter formata ac perfecta esse non potest. ideoque interrogatus quis esset, respondit 'principium quia et loquor vobis' (Io 8.15).*

<sup>33</sup> Lorenz, "Gnade und Erkenntnis" (n. 2), p. 71.

<sup>34</sup> *De praedestinatione sanctorum* 18.37: [*deus*] qui universa operatur, usque adeo ut ipse in nobis operetur et velle...

<sup>35</sup> Lorenz, "Gnade und Erkenntnis" (n. 2), p. 75.