

1. Augustine has trouble with substance, except as physical. He gets that God the Father will not be in the form of a man, but is uncertain as to how to come up with a positive idea.

Materialistic notions of God...

Augustine understands that God must be “imperishable, inviolable and immutable” (121) and has trouble thinking of God as something other than “spatial” (121).

2. Augustine hold a false view about the vastness of God because he can't think any other way. He sees his error—it can't be that a larger part of earth holds a larger amount of God, for example, but he can't talk his way out. Augustine says that God has “not yet illumined my darkness” (122).

2,3. Is God vulnerable to evil? Augustine discusses this idea, which muddles him, as well as the nature of the soul—he thinks it comes from a mix of God with hostile powers. More muddle, contradiction, dead ends.

The problem of evil

3,4. Augustine decides that God must be not be corruptible or changeable.

5. “[T]he cause of evil is the free decision of our will” (123). But if God has made Augustine, then how is it that he can want bad things? He doesn't know, but blaming God for evil isn't right, for sure.

4, 6. Augustine is convinced that God is indestructible and that indestructibility is superior.

5, 7. Augustine says he has been searching “in an evil way” for where evil comes from (125). He sees it is wrong to think of God as material. He is concerned about the nature and origin of evil but has no good answers. He tentatively accepts the Catholic faith at this point.

He finally rejects astrology

6, 8. Augustine's friends Vindicianus and Nebridius are against astrology. His friend Firminus is interested in astrology. This causes Augustine to have to address the issue, and he comes to see it is nonsense.

9. Augustine decides that social class determines fate more than the stars do.

10. Further, he decides that God is at work. We should not ask about fate.

Still searching

7, 11. Augustine begins to feel distress at not knowing how to resolve his questions. “The happy mean, the central region where I would find salvation, was to preserve your image in me, serving you and subduing my body” (131). The problem, to a great degree, is that Augustine is still proud and using his own strength.

8, 12. His suffering helps him improve.

He reads “the books of the Platonists”

9, 13. The struggle for Augustine to come to Christianity allows him to learn humility. In the books of the Platonists, Augustine understands many ideas that are foundational truths of Christianity. He does not find other foundational truths in the Platonists, and will discover these truths later.

In the long passage from John, we understand that the Platonists take Augustine as far as rationality can go—but the Platonists do not give Augustine the Incarnation. (Much of this vision in Book 7 prepares us for what Augustine’s conversion in Book 9.) His focus is on the immutability of Truth and the existence of objective Truth that exists without reference to him.

The Platonists give Augustine the idea of the Forms, but not the Way, as it were.

15. Here we have the metaphor about Egyptian food and Egyptian gold (133). This answers somewhat the question of “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”

He attempts Platonic ecstasy, but is “beaten back”

10, 16. Augustine turns inward to seek spiritual Truth. He understands that he is not mature enough yet to be transformed.

New light on the problem of evil

11, 17. Creation is real in that it is from God, but it is not God. He understands he must “hold fast to God” (135).

12, 18 and 13, 19. Because injury is the loss of good, “[e]verything that exists is good” (136). Further, each element makes sense in light of “the totality” of creation (137).

14, 20. Augustine understands that God is “infinite” but “in no way derived from the flesh” (137).

15, 21. Things are good and are themselves. God’s time is to be thought of differently from linear time.

16, 22. Evil is “the perversity of a will twisted away from you” (138).

Fresh attempt at mounting to God; he attains That Which Is

17, 23. Augustine sees that he has worked through error and has a real relationship with real God. He understands that God is objectively real, not a projection of his mind.

Augustine has now climbed the Ladder of Love/Hierarchy of Knowledge to the point where he is able to “attain” God, but he is returned to everyday life via his weakness (139).

He realizes the need for Christ the Mediator

18, 24. To dwell in God, he needs Christ the Mediator. The problem is, again, humility. The text reminds us that God “raises up to himself those creatures who bow before him” (140). That is, salvation is the work of God on those ready to receive it.

19, 25. Augustine regards Christ as “a perfect man” (141). Alypius has an erroneous concept of Christ as God only.

Christ the Way

20, 26. Augustine recaps what the Platonists have taught him: “the truth is beyond corporeal forms” (141). He has understood that God exists, is infinite, and is unchanged. Further, creation comes from God. He begins to lose his pride and to see scripture as a way to learn to dwell in his “beatific homeland” (142).

Augustine discovers St. Paul

In St. Paul’s writings, Augustine discovers the truths he recognizes combined with the Incarnation. Augustine is now open to conversion.