The Mysteries of Order and Agonism in Late Modern Conjugal-Sexual Ethics, an Augustinian Proposal in Conversation with William E. Connolly

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DECLARATION

This thesis in its entirety has been composed by me, Andrew Keuer. It has not been submitted for any previous degree.

All work is original, unless explicitly stated otherwise; in such instances, quotations (direct and indirect) and sources have been acknowledged explicitly.

Signed: Andrew Keuer
Date: 18 September 2015
This thesis provides a constructive theology of Christian marriage rooted in an Augustinian Trinitarian grammar of order. In conversation with a contemporary agonistic ethicist, William Connolly, I identify sensibilities in the Augustinian tradition that I argue need reemphasis in late modern times. Section One consists of three chapters, each of which analyzes William Connolly’s interpretation of the biblical texts that he engages to contest an “Augustinian” reading which projects a natural order that promises to attune self and society. In chapter one I look at Connolly’s ethic of self-formation that emerges from his sower parable, detailing the relation between the cultivation of the self, marriage, and sexuality in late modernity. Chapter two turns to Connolly’s reading of the Edenic narrative, attending to his normative ethic of responsibility to the agon that offers strategies for inverting gender hierarchy that he claims Augustine reifies. Chapter three focuses on the biblical book of Job through which Connolly argues that Augustinian apophatic order produces an inferior ethics of compassion in comparison to an ontology of fugitive abundance. Section Two of the thesis shifts focus to two groups of Augustine’s writings: the Cassiciacum dialogues and Confessions (with contemporaneously published treatises on marriage and celibacy). Chapter four finds an early Augustinian ecclesiology at Cassiciacum in which a community inclusive of contemplative and domestic forms of life together become a mode of indirect contemplation of the Triune God who orders all things. In chapter five, I interpret Augustine’s famous conversion narrative in Book 8 of Confessions, claiming his learning to “read” the sacred sign of marriage in the Milanese catholic church was essential to his exercising faith in the Incarnate Son.
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This thesis sets forth a constructive theology of Christian marriage rooted in an Augustinian Trinitarian grammar of order. My constructive account does not amount to a full theology of conjugal ethics, sexual difference, ecclesiology, or order. Rather, the focus falls on articulating sensibilities in the Augustinian tradition related to these four areas that, I argue must be reemphasized if contemporary Christians are to adequately respond to recent cultural developments.

“What are Christians to say about marriage and sexuality in times like these?” This question often quickly narrows to, “So what do you think about (insert hot-button issue)?” The incessant stream of publications over the last twenty years written to answer such questions gives evidence of their prevalence. Such publications address popular, academic, and official denominational audiences, showing the many different communities to which such questions frame the discussion. I undertook this thesis project several years ago with hopes of uncovering what such ways of framing our questions obscures about the manner in which the Christian tradition has articulated how divine wisdom provides guidance in this and other realms of life. A close study of the works of Saint Augustine’s theology and ethics of Christian marriage, which positions theology as a contemplative discipline practiced by both celibate and married Christians in the local church, does not silence the questions I noted above, but does decisively reframe them. In this brief introduction, I set the terms through which I propose to reframe our contemporary questioning on these matters along Augustinian lines. I articulate this shift, as the thesis title indicates, in terms of the church’s engagement with mystery.

In his first letter to the church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul responds to a series of questions posed by the nascent community. Debates about the original unity of the letter aside, biblical scholars agree that Paul’s response shows evidence of a church riddled with
division and uncertain of their future. Though the original letter penned by the church does not survive, the Apostle Paul’s response reflects a community who wanted to know what to do. At least six areas of daily ethics come under treatment in Paul’s response, ranging from communal meals to a proper relationship to civic juridical authorities. Among such discussions, in the seventh chapter of the epistle, is the New Testament’s longest statement on the theology and ethics of Christian marriage. Paul in no way hesitates to announce clear commands in this context, even writing his most comprehensive statement about them: “obeying the commandments of God is everything” (7.19). But I will suggest that an Augustinian account of the broader theology of the epistle introduces a more patient and communally rich orientation to such commands, one that requires a more extensive process of ethical formation and that instils a deeper dependence upon the ongoing work of the Spirit in the church community’s members.

In this thesis, I argue that a productive way to begin filling out the orientation that the epistle aims to instil can be found by developing latent connections between three largely under-thematized features of Paul’s epistle: divine mystery, ecclesial order and the ecclesial agon. I will turn to the latter two themes below, but begin with a focus on mystery. Among all the Pauline epistles, this correspondence contains the highest frequency of mystery language. For example, in 4.1, Paul writes, “Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries.” The significance of Paul’s self-identification is not its claiming of apostolic identity. As is often noted by commentators, throughout the epistle, Paul offers himself as an exemplum for the Christian community.

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1 There are twenty-three imperatives in chapter 7 alone.
2 μυστήριον occurs in 2.1, 7; 4.1; 13.2; 14.2; 15.51. κρύπτω occurs in 4.5 and 4.25. In his rich study on the theme of mystery in Paul’s epistles, Jean Paillard notes that 1 Corinthians 2.1 is, chronologically, the first occurrence of the word in Paul’s letters: Jean Paillard, In Praise of the Inexpressible: Paul’s Experience of the Divine Mystery (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2003), p92.
Thus, what the Corinthians are able to see about God’s work in Paul’s life and ministry implies what they are able to see about the same among themselves. So Paul’s identification as a “steward of the mysteries” is an invitation to a new understanding of the ecclesial identity. The term “steward” implies richness and abundance, and thus his call to re-envision themselves strikes a note of joy. Paul makes this clear just a few verses later in 4.6: “I have applied all these things…to myself…that you may learn by us…” In fact, his wording suggests that it is, first, the ecclesia who “has” these mysteries, and by implication, the Apostle Paul, on account of his relationship to their community, can be seen as a steward of them in their midst. Indeed, one way to understand Paul’s self-references throughout the epistle is as part of an extended effort to orient their ethical lives to these mysteries.  What is the relationship, then, to the mysteries that are at work among them and the apostolic commands? I suggest that this question bears considerable contemporary significance, particularly with respect to Christian conjugal and sexual ethics.

While modernity disliked mystery, as it was seen to pose a threat to the urge to philosophy, post-modernity has re-engaged it. According to Hegel, mystery is that which confronts us with a factum that we cannot explain rationally, whether through an account of causation, teleology, or other means. Such experiences disrupt our settled patterns of feeling, thinking, and acting. The type of mysteries that concern me in this thesis, however, are not those which disturb us momentarily and then allow a return to normal; rather, they are inescapable and demand an interpretation that reconfigures one’s way of life and perception of self and others. Interpretations of such mysteries are, by definition, open-ended and contestable. As the title of my thesis indicates, I focus in the pages that follow on the mysteries that confront late moderns in the conjugal-sexual realm (a term I

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4 I Corinthians 2.1-7 also exhibits a shift from the Pauline “I” to the apostolic “we”, claiming that Paul and the other apostles were God’s agents for mediating God’s mysterious wisdom to the church. When read in light of 1 Corinthians 4.1-6, it becomes evident that Paul, then, presents the church also as the mediator of such mystery. See Paillard, In Praise of the Inexpressible, chapter 7.
define below), which is where many late moderns find that mystery is experienced most immediately.

Drawing on Hegel’s assessment, three types of mysteries enter our experiences, and I apply his assessment to the conjugal-sexual realm. First, things confront us from the inside. Moments of perplexing self-realization occur when, for example, we realize something about our own body and its urges. We find such experiences either disconsoling or surprising, but we cannot ignore them. That we do not understand unsettles us. Second, things confront us from the outside. For example, as I will discuss in chapter 3, intersexed individuals disrupt a culture who count on an absolute male-female dualism. Third, mystery is often experienced in relationships. Why does she love me? Why do I love him? Why has our attraction gone cold? “It’s the weather,” sounded Glaucon. Endlessly generative of books, movies, and other artistic expressions are the mysterious comings and goings of attraction at different moments—and the intersections of such vectors, unpredictable and unstable, and yet infinitely fascinating and unsettling.

Though I return in the conclusion of the thesis to the ethical significance of the relation of mystery, order, and agonism in Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians about marriage, I do so only after a lengthy exploration of Augustinian theological ethic of marriage. Why Augustine? First, because his theology of Christian marriage has lain at the heart of the Western concept and practice of marriage. Given his influence, carefully reading Augustine promises to expose the roots of our own discourse and enables us to rethink them. In tension with this familiarity (however conscious), is Augustine’s historical and cultural distance from contemporary concerns. Rather than being a hindrance to a

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productive rethinking of the roots, this distance serves contemporary discussions on these themes insofar as engagement with the strangeness of the past can allow the strangeness of the contemporary questions themselves to become evident. Thus, listening to Augustine’s voice provides a way to unsettle familiar patterns of thinking and feeling from within established concepts and practices within this sphere. However, prevalent caricatures of Augustine in popular and academic consciousness present a significant hurdle to reading him constructively on marriage and sexuality. Many perceive Augustine as stringent and forceful, ascetical, and shame-inducing. For example, Uta Ranke-Heinemann has stated succinctly what has become the *communis opinio* when she writes that Augustine “fused Christianity together with hatred of sex and pleasure into a systematic unity.” Augustine can thus tutor contemporary ethicists how to avoid the two extremes of exclusionary vigilance and easy revisionism.

I will not respond to such charges directly but instead will examine them in the form they are presented by William Connolly. Connolly is a contemporary Nietzschean political theorist who published a series of studies on Augustine in the mid-1980s to mid-1990s. I describe Connolly’s project and his interaction with Augustine below in an introduction that sets the stage for my engagement with his work in chapters 1-3. Connolly foregrounds Augustine’s philosophy of order as creating many ethical problems in democratic culture, and he traces such failures back to an insufficient acknowledgement of the mystery at the heart of things. I make a contribution to scholarship on Connolly by showing that his own vision of agonistic democracy provides ethical guidance in the conjugal-sexual realm that promotes the creative cultivation of the self, the easing of unevenly distributed moral responsibility, and the pluralisation of communities (including religious ones).

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Neither Connolly nor Augustine think mystery can be solved through rational discourse and both agree that interpretations of mystery must be tested ethically. But with respect to the mysteries of marriage and sexuality, there exists an insurmountable difference between them. While Augustine, along with the whole of the Christian tradition, discusses the ethics of human sexuality with reference to marriage, Connolly sees marriage as a social fabrication that may be good in some ways but that can cut off further becoming and development of being. Connolly theorizes sexuality in terms of infinite difference. Because this project is primarily a theological work within the Augustinian tradition, I use the phrase “the conjugal-sexual” to bring these two ideas together. This fusion enables me to place these ways of framing this field of mystery together because it allows Connolly's view of sexuality, which grounds his ethical critiques of sexually differentiated marriage, to challenge Augustine’s conjugal morality. Conversely, it allows Augustine’s view of sexed bodies in his theology of marriage to press Connolly on implicit assumptions and ethical consequences of his view of human sexuality.

I. Augustinian Order and Nietzschean Agonism: A Conversation Between Living Traditions

The thinking of modernity about ethics is largely determined by Plato’s assumptions, for whom, “Virtue is no longer to be found in public life or in excelling in the warrior agon. The higher life is that ruled by reason, and reason itself is defined in terms of a vision of order, in the cosmos and in the soul. The higher life is one in which reason-purity, order, limit, the unchanging governs the desires, with their bent to excess, insatiability, fickleness, conflict.”7 Pushing back against this consensus, Nietzsche attempted an imaginary jump back into the concepts of an agonistic culture. He declared that Plato’s rationally-guided soul had run its course, ending in scepticism. In such a condition, Nietzsche thought that stirring the ancient embers of agonistic forms of life

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would enable cultural newness and human excellence to again arise after the rationality that had legitimated modern ethico-political ways of being turned back and defeated itself in thorough-going scepticism.

By calling what follows a “conversation,” I do not intend to signal that I am concerned with the agonistic tradition in the same way that I am with the Augustinian one. Just as the agonistic tradition remains the centre for Connolly during his discussions of Augustine, this thesis is consciously committed to thinking within the Augustinian tradition. My interaction with Connolly focuses on what the agonistic tradition enables him to see in terms of ethical problem and possibilities in the conjugal-sexual realm in late modernity.

Of central importance in recent theological discussions on the moral and doctrinal meanings of the conjugal-sexual sphere, has been the question of tradition – its significance, consistency, and function in a time of rapid cultural change. These questions relating to tradition are important for this thesis, as I consciously work within the Augustinian tradition throughout. When ‘tradition’ is invoked in the way I just have, one may begin to worry that a project is traditionalist, meaning a dry and insistent repetition of ‘what Augustine said’ with little awareness of the historical distance between contemporary life and the ways of the world in which Augustine thought and wrote. But I mean something quite different by it, and before demonstrating my sense of ‘the Augustinian tradition’ in the chapters that comprise this thesis, I will now signal some methodological details that ground my approach. My purpose in all that will follow will be to articulate some signal features of Augustinian reflection on conjugal-sexual ethics as a “living tradition”. In what follows next here, I will put in conversation recent accounts of the role of tradition in theological discourse on this sphere of life, from the writings of John Rist and Ephraim Radner.
A. The Concept of a Living Tradition

“What really is exciting is not disagreement but agreement.”

For me, a “living tradition” implies three important methodological points. First, the notion of “living tradition” emphasizes not a block of static propositional truths that must be continually reasserted but, as Brian Brock notes, enacted agreement in a dynamic conversation that is “constantly influencing and being influenced by neighbouring discourses.” This view of tradition allows for mutually-transformative encounters with such discourses, even with those that might ‘threaten’ or ‘attack’ convictions at the centre of a particular community of agreement. A “living tradition”, when encountering what might be deemed a ‘demonic’ cultural movement from the perspective of one’s tradition, listens to the critical voice. Such listening is undertaken, in part, out of an expectation or a hope of gaining a deeper perception of one’s own tradition as this new conversation partner stirs-up latent elements and demands a fuller demonstration of its strength by calling it to meet new challenges. Thus, to say that this thesis engages the Nietzschean agonistic tradition from the perspective of the Augustinian tradition is not to say that I will offer an apologia of the Augustinian ‘position’. In other words, I will not use the Nietzschean tradition as a foil to validate Augustinian rationality. Rather, I show that contemporary challenges from theorists of agonism enable the church to find creative new ways to agree with past tradition.

Second, the Augustinian tradition will not be instrumentalized in what follows. As I noted above, I do not employ Augustinian theology as a hermeneutic to yield insights

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8 Bernd Wannenwetsch, “Conversing with the Saints as they converse with Scripture: In Conversation with Brian Brock’s Singing the Ethos of God” European Journal of Theology 18, no. 2 (October 2009): 125-135.


into contemporary ‘pressing questions’. Rather, it actively sets the terms of discussion and sheds new light on those pressing questions. Third, a “living tradition” presents “a live option” in spheres of life that matter to contemporary communities. I emphasize that theological ethical engagement through a tradition bears a therapeutic burden. One of the most contentious aspects of participating in a tradition relates to the need to make judgments about the forms of guidance that no longer disclose the most important aspects of that tradition, given the changes in the concrete context in which human agency is situated. Brock notes that calling tradition “an enacted form of agreement” does not preclude disagreement within itself, and I will make clear throughout what aspects of Augustine’s thinking about marriage and sexuality I consider to no longer depict the coherence of its core convictions, given both the insights of later theologizing and of the nature of today’s questions.

Fourth, a living tradition is tied to actual communities. While Augustinian theology offers “theoretical” insight on a number of ethico-political topics, I argue throughout the thesis that theology is a second-order discipline for Augustine. Throughout the thesis I refer to his mother Monica’s church, to which he converted from Manichaeism, as the “catholic church”. I insist on the lower case, first, on historical grounds: Augustine’s North African church did not submit to the Roman bishop in the manner that later churches would. The lower case also allows me to emphasize the locality of the church, an irreducible feature of Augustine’s ecclesiology. While I do not find in Augustine a fulsome

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12 Michael Banner has recently called for greater attention the pastoral/evangelical/therapeutic responsibility of Christian ethics. See Michael C Banner, The Ethics of Everyday Life: Moral Theology, Social Anthropology, and the Imagination of the Human (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p17: “But moral theology will only find its therapeutic and evangelical voice and vocation insofar as it understands and locates the bad in its own compelling form, and as it narrates the good as a form of life with its own logic and sense.” Though I do not pursue the engagement with sociological research that Banner commends, my engagement with Connolly strives towards this same attentiveness to contemporary culture albeit in a more philosophical register.

13 This is precisely how I understand the debate surrounding the Roman Catholic Synod for the Family that met, amidst much conflict, in November 2014.
“free church ecclesiology” along the lines of, say, Miroslav Volf or James McClendon, there is a consistency with such ecclesiologies in that the physical assembling of God’s people never leaves his purview when discussing the nature of the church. One aspect that distinguishes Augustinian ecclesiology from this tradition is his understanding of the relation of celibate vocations to marriage vocations, which creates space for a monastic element in the local ecclesia. Other differences could be noted, but I mention this difference, as it bears considerable importance for the argument in Section Two below.

To further highlight the methodological significance of my understanding of “living tradition” as this guides my exploration with Augustine into ‘the mysteries of order in the conjugal-sexual realm’, I turn at this point to summarize John Rist's recent account of tradition with respect to conjugal-sexual ethics.

B. John Rist: Tradition’s Dialectical Propositional Development

Rist's overall project in his recent book *What is Truth?* is multifarious and could be depicted in many ways, but one of his overarching aims is to forward a concept of tradition that expresses both faithfulness to Scripture and openness to additional truth arising outwith specifically Christian sources of knowledge.

I find in Rist’s discussion of truth three concentric circles that can be seen to have porous borders: the inner circle is “saving truth”, with “truth” and “Christian thought” as two encompassing outer layers, in that order. By “saving truth”, Rist means the central beliefs that primitive Christianity held about Jesus, which was later commonly referred to as the *regula fidei*. “Saving truth” in this sense is only accessed by faith and cannot be observed directly with the intellect. Though he does not provide a definition of “truth”, it is clear that this is a more general category that includes knowledge of any aspect of reality. By "Christian thought," Rist refers to "all ideas that have a certain consistent

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circulation within a Christian culture.”¹⁵ In other words, this latter category is knowledge that grounds a common way of life. Rist claims that since the earliest Christians held beliefs about Jesus that founded the church, “Christian truth” has been expanding precisely by virtue of the guidance of those founding beliefs (which are “saving truth”), though they themselves, from the beginning, have been whole and intact. The orientating role of the *regula fidei* has both restrictive (stripping away falsehoods in broader truth claims that become associated with it) and expansive (testing new truth claims as to their compatibility with itself) functions. Thus, tradition is a dialectical expansion of “Christian truth” through history as the church learns new truths that unfold from its own sources of knowledge, as well as from non-Christian sources that prove to disclose truths compatible with the *regula fidei*.

But Rist worries that two ‘fundamentalisms’ threaten to hold the church back from engaging in tradition’s ongoing development. First, some think that “saving truth” can be accessed via a simple and straightforward reading of Scripture, while others, like John Henry Newman, conceive of doctrinal development as the increasingly clear and formal articulation of truth fully present in the early church’s writings. The former (scriptural fundamentalism) ignore the complexities of interpretation, while the latter (traditionalist fundamentalism) confuse the mind of the early church with the mind of God. Both downplay the fact that “saving truth” will only be clearly displayed in its role of guiding the ongoing development of “truth” and “Christian thought” when the latter two forms of truth continue in open interaction with non-Christian sources of knowledge. According to Rist, only when the *regula fidei* actively restricts and expands these other forms of truth can “saving truth” shine forth as that which orders all human knowledge to the fullness of life in God. The impasses one reaches through these fundamentalisms are treacherous, for both versions have played a felicitous role for some Christians. For example, they have

¹⁵ Ibid., p.3.
focussed Christians deeply on particular theological truths revealed in their preferred sources. However, this has come at the price of rendering the “possessors [of “saving truth”] incapable of recognizing other truths compatible with saving truth and possibly illuminating it.”

Rist aims to carefully guide these fundamentalists to a form of affirming the “saving truth” that is better for the world.

In his first and longest chapter of the book, Rist turns to the church’s developing understanding of the role of sexual difference within the doctrine of man (as homo, not vir) as the image of God. He narrates in great detail the philosophical understandings that influenced theologians in their readings of difficult texts such as 1 Corinthians 11.7 (“[man] he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man”), Ephesians 4.13 (“until all of us come…to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ”), and Galatians 3.28 (“there is no longer male and female”). He weaves a narrative that sees early Platonic readings of these texts, in which the effort to isolate sexual difference to bodies requires one to downgrade their passions and Stoicize agape, giving way to more promising Aristotelean ones, in which gender differences relate to the full person.

This complex tale demonstrates that there never has been an “immediate sense of Scripture” that has provided a unified understanding of how sexual difference relates to the doctrine of the image of God. Rather, many readings have been offered with strengths and drawbacks, diverging because of supposed anthropological “truths” that informed them. Such variation was made possible, Rist notes, because Scripture nowhere unambiguously denies female inferiority. Rist’s narrative unfolds the slow process by which Christian thought has come to identify male-female equality and complementarity as “true” on account of its comportment with “saving truth”. Noting contributions and shortfalls along the way, he arrives at the Thomistic synthesis of the Platonic and

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16 Ibid., p3.
17 Ibid., p18-103.
18 To be clear, Rist offers far more than just the Platonic and Aristotelean readings that I have all too quickly recounted here.
19 Ibid., p84.
Aristotelean traditions, claiming that it must be superseded by abandoning the Platonic notion that sexuality is properly limited to the body. He sees the elimination of male-female “as absolute and distinct categories” as more promising, as Clement and Augustine already signalled was possible when they claimed, respectively, that receiving grace requires a feminine quality in the soul and that feminine love of Christ was often superior to masculine love in the gospel accounts (and therefore exemplary to both male and female).

Rist’s account of tradition is similar to my description of “living tradition” in several respects. Most importantly, he shows how any interpretation of Scripture or tradition is culturally embedded. He refuses to accept the prevalent assumption about Scripture’s or tradition’s transparency, as if one can come to either with a free and open mind that directly accesses “the mind of Christ”. Rather, his historical narrative suggests that a proper relation to the regula fidei requires the church to consciously engage the truths that arise from outside Christian sources, which are already conditioning her readings to some extent. He counsels that such engagement can be done in the confident expectation that her regula fidei will sift and illuminate as one searches for truth. As his historical study of woman as made in the image of God reveals, such conversations with non-Christian sources of truth will prove to be occasions in which “saving truth” is seen more clearly.

However, I find Rist’s aim to offer an apologia of a Roman Catholic tradition via an observable historical dialectical development to leave little room for the role that faith plays in bringing one into a relationship with “saving truth”. At times, his account seems to suggest that tradition’s development will expose the veracity of the regula fidei in such an obvious manner that it will be easier to believe than not. By contrast, I emphasize how faith arises and is sustained for Augustine through the mysteries of the Incarnation on display in the more mundane arena of daily local church life. I focus on the vocations or
forms of life that Augustine considers constitutive of the very nature of the church insofar as they are presented as ways of persevering in the Christian faith. This leads me to read the early and middle career Augustine as reasoning with a much sharper focus on what might be called the ‘local’ aspect of his ecclesiology. While not necessarily in conflict with Rist’s more historical account, my focus on the life of the local church as the context in which faith and theological reflection arise and are sustained leads me to emphasize the mediation of tradition not via rational observation of its historical expansion but in the affirmation of the significance of stable forms of life performed by common Christians.

C. Ephraim Radner: Tradition’s Evangelical Theological Integrity

In contrast to John Rist, Ephraim Radner refers to “dreaded theories of doctrinal development.” Rather than looking for valid forms of “newness” entering the tradition, Radner diagnoses recent debates in marriage theology as having lost an understanding of the authoritative centre of tradition. Radner ascribes a status to tradition that makes it no less than “the revelation of God in the Church’s past,” which is to say that it is authoritative. By “tradition,” Radner means “the evolved and evolving consensus of the faithful, as articulated in the councils of the Church and in the writings and examples of the saints.” Radner’s most significant claim about the consistency of the church’s teaching on marriage and sexual ethics is the lost understanding of these elements as comprising as “an essential aspect, not simply of moral behaviour, but of the very enunciation of the gospel itself.”

According to Radner, recent disagreements in Christian marriage ethics discourse have “call[ed] into question both the existence of a consistent Christian tradition about

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21 Ibid., p125.
22 Ibid., p123.
23 Ibid.
marriage and the reality of that tradition’s theological breadth.”24 This issue of consistency, however, has led to a cul-de-sac. So-called “conservatives” aim “to [historically] prove that there has been a consistent Christian tradition about the meaning, purpose, and general form of marriage.”25 Nevertheless, such efforts are far less to the point than they imagine in light of the fact that “revisionists” are equally insistent on the tradition’s continuity, though of its (for example) misogynistic impulse from the early church to present. In the minds of “revisionists,” the real debate surrounds whether something new with respect to theological understandings of marriage is needed. Radner calls both sides of this debate regarding the continuity of the tradition – whether celebrating it or seeking to surpass it – to focus instead on whether “the tradition is bound up with what is essential to the gospel.”26 Only then can the continuity be deemed either authoritave or revisable.

Thus, it is imperative “to seek after the accepted core of past teaching in the case of a disputed question, like sexuality and marriage today.”27 As the title of his book indicates (Hope Among the Fragments), Radner sees an earnest search into the past for “the accepted core” as an exercise in hope; he notes that such a search should be undertaken in the confidence that “a common examination of that tradition, moored in the Scriptures, will give up from its store, however encrusted or smothered, the divine truth of a divine gift.”28 This hopeful conviction has been constant “from the time of the early Church through the Middle Ages and the Reformation.”29 While Protestants and Catholics “sought to uncover the constant power of the Eucharistic gift,” the time has come now for them to seek in relation to the sacramentality of marriage. Radner’s argument for the evangelical integrity of the church’s sacramental tradition on marriage and the consequent authority of that tradition leads him to bemoan appeals to the contested status of the church’s tradition

24 Ibid., p121.
25 Ibid., p122 (emphasis in original).
26 Ibid., p123 (emphasis in original).
27 Ibid., p124 (emphasis in original).
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., p125
as evidence that newness is needed. For Radner, such logic is another instance of seeing the church’s “phenomenal history as coincident with its meaning.”

That is, for Radner, the meaning is instead always hidden among the tradition-like assemblage of the fragments that comprise ‘Christian history’.

My own Augustinian account of conjugal sacramentality complements Radner’s call to seek the tradition’s authority in its evangelical integrity, but I suggest that the ethical and theological significance of actual Christian marriages to a local congregation needs greater development than Radner offers. An emphasis on locality is implicit in Radner’s claim that sacramental realities represent the historical existence of God’s life in time, pointing to the person of God in Christ, rather than concepts or principles. But I show that, for Augustine’s own conversion, the ‘performance’ of Christian marriage was the heart of the experiential recovery for which Radner calls.

II. The Agonistic Tradition in Contemporary Ethics

In what follows now, I will describe the ancient conceptualities underlying agonistic culture, before turning to two recent works in Nietzschean agonism, noting questions that they pose to William Connolly’s participation in this tradition.

Historically, agon is the friendly competition of ancient Greek society. Homer’s work contrasts the harmonious family of the Trojans and the distinct individuals of Greece, who always compete against each other. While some cultures sought the good life, a pursuit of excellence characterized ancient Greek culture. The idea of competition or games is central to such pursuit. Games were held in order to discern the excellent. They were carefully arranged to enable competition in a framework that sustains and allows recognition of who and what the community valued. So contestations in different spheres (athletics, poetry, rhetoric, etc.) developed rules that isolated and rewarded particular qualities. The result was an identification and celebration of talent that was distributed

according to fate. The games reframed relations rooted in domination to those organized around competition that displayed values that could pull them together as a people.

In this culture, politics itself becomes an agon. Political engagement enables the culture to go beyond the good and into the excellent life. ‘The political’ is the realm, in this frame, not for rational disputation, but for persuasion. Pericles’s *Funeral Oration* is often cited as a classic articulation of such a view of politics. He sets forth a non-Spartan political theory: while the Spartans trained their youth from a young age and had all kinds of laws, Pericles celebrates that Athenians freely chose what they wanted to do.

In Section One of this thesis, I outline William Connolly’s contemporary expression of an agonistic ethic, one that he claims is suitable to late-modern Western democratic cultures. Here, I turn to two recent projects that explore Nietzschean agonistic ethics that allow me to situate Connolly’s project of democratic agonism in a broader context of significant work in this field of research. I look at the recent studies of Christa Davis Acampora and Yunus Tuncel. I show that their work asks Connolly’s project a key question that enables me to make a contribution to discussions about the status of Connolly’s agonism. Their studies, thus, provide a specific research question that I pose to Connolly's conjugal-sexual ethic in my conclusion to Section One, after an extensive exploration of his writings.

**A. Christa Davis Acampora: Is Connolly an Agonistist or Modernist?**

Christa Davis Acampora’s recent study, *Contesting Nietzsche*, traverses Nietzsche’s writings to show his persistent interest in how ancient Greek agonism animates ethics, education, art, and philosophy better than the cultural proposals of his contemporaries. She argues that Nietzsche “thinks agonistic economies of power are particularly effective

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for coordinating and organizing various elements because they potentially produce values
and provide imminent occasions for the development and exercise of judgment and such
activities potentially orient organizations toward productive ends.” From a Nietzschean
perspective, she raises a question for Connolly’s project, which I will return to in my
conclusion to Section One. She writes,

I appreciate the compatibility of democracy with a number of Nietzsche’s other
claims about freedom. [But] I think the very articulations of radical democratic
political theory that look to the agon specifically as Nietzsche discussed it or at
least in that same spirit are, ironically, not Nietzschean enough and, if they had
some interest in being true to the ultimate possibilities they find in radical
contestability, they would do well to follow Nietzsche all the way down to the heart
of the matter. In other words, despite protests otherwise, democratic political
theorists who view the agon as a means of legitimizing contingent values seem
unwilling to admit as contestable the larger democratic values of freedom and
equality. If agonism is a means of legitimizing, promulgating, and sharing values
and one turns to it as the alternative to a foundational scheme or specific
procedure, then no value can be sacrosanct, no value spared from possible
contention…if the values in question emerge, are created, and acquire their
legitimacy through contestation, then they all must potentially be subject to it at
some point.

To restate Acampora’s charge as a question: Does Connolly allow agonism to bring
the whole culture into contestation or only some parts of it? Or does his work rest on the
unstated assumption that the agon can be sustained by a deeper culture? Is Connolly
simply a modified Rawlsian liberal at the end of the day? Acampora states clearly her own
answer: Connolly prizes liberal notions such as freedom and equality in such a way that
keeps them safe from the agon.

I am interested in this line of questioning, because it can be asked also of his
conjugal-sexual ethic: does Connolly assume, as Acampora says he does with freedom and
equality, that the prevailing late modern liberal democratic marriage culture will sustain
the agonistic possibilities of human sexuality? Or, does Connolly want the agonising of
human sexuality to overtake the prevailing marriage culture? I will return to this question

34 Ibid., p161.
in the conclusion to Section One.

B. Yunus Tuncel: Does Connolly’s Democracy Include Agonistic Erotics?

Yunus Tuncel’s recent work, *Agon in Nietzsche*, also focuses on agonism in Nietzsche. Like Acampora’s study, it also engages in exegetical work on Nietzsche’s writings to show the pervasive role of the agon throughout his philosophical career. However, Tuncel’s study adds a dimension that is significant for my investigation: the consistency between ancient Greek, Nietzschean and democratic agonisms. His tests of the relation of both ancient and contemporary agonisms to the Nietzschean version allow me to further specify the question that I formulated above from Acampora’s work.

In discussing the confluence of Nietzschean and ancient Greek agonal education, Tuncel highlights the manner in which agonal *erotics* were considered an essential aspect of training for greatness. Only one detail concerns me in this regard, however, and this is Tuncel’s illumination of the connection and similarity between ancient Greek uses of sexual activity – as openness to one’s animality that could be diverted into competitions – and Nietzsche’s contrast of the desired agonistic “breeding” or “farming” with culturally degenerate “Christian taming”. In a separate chapter, Tuncel also notes that comparing Nietzsche and ancient Greek agonism makes clear that recent attempts in contemporary political theory to show that Nietzsche is compatible with democracy have not taken account of the *coherence* of the many aspects of agonal culture that inspired Nietzsche. Tuncel writes,

> Politics…does not take place in void, but is rather connected to a host of other forces that constitute the values of the individual and collective human being. The ability to deal with suffering…, collective feelings, myths and rituals, the experience of the sacred, formation-education, *breeding of higher types*, forms of power that are prevalent…are some of the issues. Without including these issues or

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36 Tuncel, *Agon in Nietzsche*.
37 Most of his study focuses on the relation between ancient Greek and Nietzschean agonism.
38 Ibid., chapter 10.
39 Ibid., chapter 12.
at least considering how their ancient Greek experiences or constructions may be simulated in our contemporary context, the discussion on agon will sit only on one crutch, limping slowly towards an Olympian victory…Agon lives not only in the words and deeds of the *agonal* individual but also in the social, political and cultural formations that he is part of, which sustain and cultivate the living reality of agon. When these formations collapse, the *agonal* culture collapses as well, since agon does not live only in the lives of *agonal* poets and thinkers or in the isolated acts of the contestant. On the contrary, it lives and is fed by the dynamics of culture.\(^40\)

Thus, Tuncel’s work allows me to refine the question that arises from Acampora’s project in terms of the conjugal-sexual realm: what parts of agonism need to be avoided or overcome to make it suitable to democracy? Is agonistic erotics one of those aspects? There are, of course, several possible answers to such a question. For example, might it be that Connolly rests his agonism on a broader democratic culture, but wants to reintroduce agonistic erotics? As Tuncel suggests, this would reveal a deep inconsistency within agonistic democratic theory. Or, could it be that Connolly is not only a democratic theorist with respect to freedom and equality, as Acampora suggested, but also with respect to marriage (i.e. with, say, liberalism’s contractual marriage or its privatization of the sexual)? But this also would involve deep inconsistencies in his project, as rejection of the public-private is a feature of the agonistic vision that he assimilates into his own theory, as I show below. A final possibility worth mentioning is that Connolly’s conjugal-sexual ethic calls for a radical contestation of both democratic values and values such as privatization, that mark liberal marriage culture. This latter possibility would mean that Connolly is indeed a Nietzschean agonist *all the way down* with respect to this aspect of his ethics.

I return to this question about the *extent* of Connolly’s commitment to agonism at the conclusion to Section One both in general and in relation to Connolly’s own normative project in conjugal-sexual ethics. Nevertheless, the primary aim that drives my interaction with his work is to assess the full scope of his arguments about the ethical advantages of agonism in late modernity in comparison to Augustinian conjugal-sexual morality. I will

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\(^{40}\) Ibid., p223-224 (my bold).
analyse his arguments that Augustinian order generates an unethical formation of the self (chapter 1), reifies a patriarchal hierarchy (chapter 2), and inflicts suffering on those who have an ambiguous relation to marriage and/or sexual difference (chapter 3). Here, I will turn next to a brief review of recent projects in ethics based on a philosophy of order.

III. The Order Tradition in Contemporary Ethics

In his classic work, *Indo-European Language and Society*, Emile Benveniste makes the following judgment about the concept of order:

> We have here one of the cardinal notions of the legal world of the Indo-European, to say nothing of their religious and moral ideas... Nothing which concerns man or the world falls outside the realm of ‘Order.’ It is thus the foundation, both religious and moral, of every society. Without this principle everything would revert to chaos.\(^{41}\)

I note two recent projects in what may be called broadly Augustinian ethics of order, so as to highlight two criticisms of philosophies of order and to articulate how my account of Augustinian order and its role in conjugal-sexual ethics fills a gap in recent research.

A. Eric Voegelin’s Aristocratic Individualism

In his ambitious multi-volume *Order and History*, Eric Voegelin develops a contemporary philosophy of order that is in substantive continuity with the Augustinian tradition, broadly conceived.\(^{42}\) After outlining Voegelin’s central philosophical notions in *Order and History*, I will argue that these display a tendency to aristocratic individualism, a critique often levelled at philosophies of order.\(^{43}\) I trace this tendency in Voegelin to the


\(^{43}\) I do not claim to capture the essence of Voegelin’s thought in this brief summary. It is notoriously difficult and expansive. Thomas J. J. Altizer, for example, notes after reading the first four volumes of *Order and History*: “Voegelin’s prose style is tantalizing, for it is clear and obscure at once, and its clarity is
rationalistic emphases in his description of philosophical pursuit.

Voegelin’s philosophy explains how ethico-political order has been and can again be recovered in times of disorder. As a young academic, German Socialists persecuted him, and such events gave rise to the vital impetus behind his work. In turning to the Platonic tradition he was captured by the notion that, at numerous moments in history, the soul of a philosopher had an experience of transcendent order that became the basis for an ordered polis. At the centre of Voegelin’s understanding of how this happened is his account of “consciousness,” through a study of which he thought it possible to trace the development of experiences of order and their symbolization. Rather than engaging in a history of ideas approach to ethico-political thought (as is common in political theory) or detailing and comparing past forms of cultural symbolization (as in anthropological studies), Voegelin’s notion of consciousness, he claimed, enabled a meditative re-enactment of the motivating experiences that underlie ordering cultural symbolizations. In emphasizing the experiences of order rather than their subsequent dogmatic content, he considered himself to be working in continuity with “Origen,…Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, Scotus Eriugena, Anselm of Canterbury, and the mystics of the fourteenth century,” who understood a tension between theologia mystica and theologia dogmatica.

Voegelin’s philosophy of order challenges contemporaries who were Christian theologians indistinguishable from its obscurity. So much is this the case that it gradually becomes apparent that the actual subject of Order and History is a mystery.” See Ellis Sandoz, ed., “A New History and a New but Ancient God? Voegelin’s The Ecumenic Age,” in Eric Voegelin’s Thought: A Critical Appraisal (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1982), p179–88.


to turn from dogmatic orthodoxy back to the experience of “the mystery.””

Ironically, however, Voegelin’s paths to recovering experiences of “the mystery” were decidedly rationalistic. His multi-volume exploration begins chronologically in volume 1 of *Order and History* with ancient Near Eastern societies and stretches in volume 4 to more contemporary thinkers, such as Hegel. Voegelin understood history as a series of “advances in differentiating consciousness,” which he then set as his task to identify through his expansive historical study. His work is at once a study of human consciousness, of the proper role of the philosopher, and of the deformations that lead to social and individual disorder. For Voegelin, a differentiation occurs when “some part of the experience of reality becomes more acutely pronounced in human awareness, leading to a more intricate understanding of the human condition.” The symbols that arose from such differentiations were how the philosophers who achieved the differentiations mediated them to the communal consciousness. The philosophical re-engagement of these symbolisms re-enlivens these experiences, perpetuating the central role of the philosopher in sustaining order. Only after philosophers begin to do such work can each individual in the community play a role in ensuring that society will prove recalcitrant to totalitarianism and anarchy, by imbibing the full historical development of consciousness up to that point.

Voegelin claims that his philosophy of order is Augustinian in that he sees two cities abiding in history, with the good one being formed and reformed by a true philosophy and the degenerate one living under ideologies that give free reign to the *libido dominandi*. On Voegelin’s account, this formation, like in Pauline Christianity, includes moments of disruptive conversion, and differs from the humanist tradition of education in which an unchanging ‘core’ is supplemented through a process of enculturation. But central to his account of conversion, is a Platonist understanding of “mind” which, he

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48 Ibid. p191.
notes, differs from Pauline theology in which “mind” is understood only in terms of its connection to the charisma of teaching and preaching the saving word. Thus, the Voegelinian conversion bears a family likeness with platonic periangoge, not with Christian metanoia. This fundamental difference relates to his presentation of the philosopher as the saviour of social order on account of philosophical intellectual achievement and virtue. In the end, Voegelin’s heroic and ultimately successful struggle undertaken by philosophers in the historical unfolding of human consciousness displaces accounts of divine salvific agency.

This displacement of graced agency is seen most clearly in Voegelin’s description of the faith commended by the Hebrew prophets and Paul as “metastatic” (one of many Voegelinian neologisms). The term is derived from Plato’s metaxy, and describes a situation in which one attempts to escape the existing world. Voegelin says there are metastatic dreams and nightmares, the former of which are visions of grace invading the historical order in a way that sidelines human responsibility for action. The paradigmatic example he offers is Isaiah’s counsel to King Ahaz to “Take heed, be quiet, do not fear” (Isaiah 7.4). Here, he claims, is a command to transform mundane existence through some type of imaginative leap to overcome mundane reality. Only a philosopher, Voegelin claims, can break such a metastatic vision. While the philosopher is indeed helped by divine grace, Voegelin says that the search for transcendent truth begins with a heroic human “push” then supplemented by God’s “pull”.

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53 Voegelin critiques Aristotle’s immanentized metaphysic for not recognizing that the soul is formed through grace. See Eric Voegelin, *Order and History, Vol. 3: Plato and Aristotle* ([Baton Rouge], La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), p419. However, in a later writing he claims that Aristotle’s spoudaios who is “formed by the existential virtues of phronesis and philia” is “equivalent” to Paul’s pneumatikos who is formed by the divine pneuma. See Voegelin, *Order and History, Volume 4*, p310.
intellectually gifted personality who is helped along in disclosing truths that common minds could never uncover without philosophical assistance. Voegelin’s reading of the Pauline *nous*, as with his interpretation of other aspects of Pauline theology, overlooks a significant insight that I find in Augustine’s philosophy of order, namely that the *nous* is descriptive of divine activity in the ethical life of the church community – it is not first descriptive of individuals (cf. “we have the mind of Christ,” 1 Corinthians 2.16). For Augustine, this communal centre allows an inclusion of non-philosophers into a life that Voegelin thought available only to philosophical heroes that leads Paul to ask, “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” (1 Corinthians 1.20).

Voegelin also charges that Pauline faith envisions a *transcendent order*, but needs Plato and Aristotle to assist contemporary philosophy to extend it to *cosmic order*. The validity of this claim comes under assessment in my treatment of Augustine in Section Two of the thesis. Stated as a question, can Augustine be seen to attempt an extension of Paul’s transcendent order to cosmic, or does he remain “Pauline” on this score?

**B. Oliver O’Donovan’s Pneumatological and Ecclesial Deficits**

In his book, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, Oliver O’Donovan presents Christian ethics as a reasoned approach to discern the “ordered structure of being and good,” which has existed within the world from the beginning.55 His project is properly subtitled “an outline for *evangelical* ethics” (emphasis mine) because he claims that this created order has been affirmed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For O’Donovan, the personal act of faith in the resurrected Jesus Christ brings about a moral transformation in which one is awakened to this enduring order, one’s place within it, and its moral implications for one’s individual and collective lives. While O’Donovan understands both history and creation as relating to the resurrected and ascended Christ, creation remains primary in his account.

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“because [creation] is the framework within which history takes place.” So O’Donovan finds in the resurrection a Christological warrant for describing the moral order of creation and unfolding the principles which communicate it. Doing so provides the criterion through which virtue and vice, good and evil can be discerned.

By looking to the created order, O’Donovan’s project pursues a path of epistemological realism that counters the subjectivist orientation of existentialism and voluntarism. Against such tendencies, he affirms that the order of things is objectively there. In this way, he uses order to avoid fideism. He presents evangelical ethics as having a point of contact through the notion of order with Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. Yet, O’Donovan understands the moral order in Trinitarian terms. As David McIlroy summarizes it: “the moral order in creation owes its origin to the Father, finds its coherence and redemption in the Son, and is directed and perfected by the Spirit.” This Trinitarian grammar points the moral order beyond itself, to the eschaton, though not in a way that negates its present existence.

Thus, O’Donovan uses a traditional conception, created and moral order, in the context of a Trinitarian theological ethic. However, as Stanley Hauerwas notes, the universal availability of the order that O’Donovan describes threatens to minimize the role of the church in her role of forming Christians and sustaining practices and moral concepts. McIlroy states a similar criticism in terms of a proclivity in O’Donovan’s ethics to emphasize that which is beyond the church: “there is a tendency at times…to expect not only the claims of Jesus to be made public by the Church in the here and now,...
but also for those claims to be vindicated in public here and now.\footnote{McIlroy, \textit{A Trinitarian Theology of Law}, p109.}

O’Donovan’s use of moral order in contemporary Christian ethics, his epistemological realism, and his evangelical founding of such an ethic bears substantive similarity to the account I develop in this thesis. Yet, as I have noted, my constructive account takes stock of the central role of the local church as the primary point of epistemic access in Augustine’s account. I draw on Augustine’s own Trinitarian theology to unfold an understanding of theology as a contemplative discipline that takes place \textit{within} the life of the church. This moral vision awaits further development in Section Two.

IV. \textbf{Overview and Organization of the Thesis Argument}

The thesis consists of two main sections followed by a conclusion: \textbf{Section One} explores Connolly’s criticisms of an Augustinian philosophy of order, and \textbf{Section Two} unfolds a constructive Augustinian theology of marriage.

I begin Section One in the next chapter with a brief essay, \textit{Introducing William Connolly’s Contest with Augustine}, which indicates Connolly’s decade-long interaction with Augustine that informs the approach I take to these writings. I make clear there that I wish to interact with Connolly’s readings of three different biblical texts, which he engages so as to contest Augustine’s reading of them. Connolly charges that Augustine projects onto the texts a natural order that promises to attune self and society, and Connolly details in his own readings the ethical problems that such expectations of order lead to in late modernity. Though not explicitly thematised in Connolly’s own readings of these biblical texts, I will show that the theme of conjugal-sexuality is consistently present. Each of the three chapters which comprise Section One will be a creative interpretation of Connolly’s exegesis, revealing the links between his agonism and conjugal-sexuality.

Section One is arranged in accordance with \textit{the logic of inversion and displacement} that Derrida describes in many of his works and which I find methodologically germane to
Connolly’s project. Thus, I arrange the sequence of themes as follows: Chapter One sets up Connolly’s theory of the self and his account of ethical formation of self in late modern times. This chapter lays the groundwork for how Connolly relates conjugality, sexuality, and the self upon which the subsequent two chapters build. Chapter Two deals with the problem of male-female hierarchy and the manner in which Connolly offers a normative account of agonistic responsibility to invert such hierarchy. Chapter Three then details Connolly’s displacement of male-female sexual difference as an essentialist dualism, via his discussion of intersexed individuals. Though Derrida’s program of deconstruction provides the logical arrangement for these chapters, I will detail in the following chapters how Connolly differs from deconstructionist genealogy in a significant way. Connolly posits that genealogists not only deconstruct, but also forward a normative ethico-political vision to which they are committed. Thus, though Connolly himself does not articulate this aspect of his normative vision, my primary interpretive contribution to Connolly’s work comes in a brief Conclusion to Section One wherein I offer a summary picture of Connolly’s conjugal-sexual ethic and emphasize its coherence. To this ethic, I then pose the questions I have drawn from Christa Davis Acampora about its source (i.e., whether it is grounded in democratic culture or an agonistic ontology) and secondly, from Yunus Tuncel, about whether agonistic erotics is included in Connolly’s application of agonism to contemporary life. Section One closes by summarizing the primary features from Augustine’s theology that interacting with Connolly critiques and normative proposal brought to the fore.

I begin Section Two by Introducing the Augustinian Travail from Disorder to Order, which notes the philosophical background of this traditionally dominant theme and

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62 Ashley Woodward provides a helpful description of Derridean deconstruction as inversion and displacement: “1. Inversion involves turning the traditional hierarchy of a binary opposition upside down and showing that there are actually reasons why the traditionally subordinate concept might in fact be the dominant one. 2. Displacement involves creating new terms, which Derrida calls ‘undecidables’, that cannot be reduced to the traditional hierarchical opposition in question.” See Ashley Woodward, Understanding Nietzscheanism (Durham [England]: Acumen, 2011), p 92.
highlights in how Augustine utilized the language of order and disorder in his conjugal-sexual ethic. I note that Augustine utilizes order to describe the body-soul relation, society, and creation. I argue that Augustine’s apophaticism suggests that the “attractive” species of order pervades Augustine’s work, though a Pythagorean “mathematical” type of order is also present at times.

Section Two begins with a focus on Augustine’s early apophatic ecclesiology on display at Cassiciacum and then turns to look at the vocations that are constitutive of this church’s life. In Chapter Four, I investigate Augustine’s Cassiciacum dialogues, paying particular attention to De Ordine. I argue that the catholic church is presented as a community of “seeking and finding” whose communal life becomes a way to indirectly contemplate the ineffable Triune God who orders all things. I show that, while Augustine provides extensive discussion about divine order in the discursive material, the communal interactions on display in the dialogues also prove significant for his philosophy of order. Augustine depicts a community in which the uneducated make decisive contributions to the ethical and philosophical development of the discussants. In doing so, the dialogues present Augustine’s early vision of the mutuality of the contemplative and domestic modes of life in the church. In Chapter Five, I offer an interpretation of Augustine’s famous conversion narrative in Book 8 of Confessions. I argue that his learning to “read” the sacred sign of marriage in the Milanese catholic church was essential to his coming to faith in the Incarnate Son. By reading Book 8 against the backdrop of Books 1 and 13, I show that learning the language of the catholic church involved empowerment to live a vocation that participates in the love of the Incarnate Son and draws one closer to their proper place in the infinitely beneficent order of creation.
Introducing William Connolly’s Contest with Augustine

William Connolly’s direct engagement with Augustine spanned from the late-1980s to the mid-1990s, and has drawn the attention of numerous Christian political theologians and ethicists. In these writings, ‘Augustine’ (who is not only the historical figure but also “an interesting stranger who moved in next door”) and his notion of order come under extended scrutiny from a Nietzschean perspective. ‘Augustinian order’, Connolly claims, has come to mean more than simply thinkers and movements that consciously march under the Augustinian banner – rather, it refers to a set of beliefs and practices whose coalescence effectively subsumed pagan social arrangements in the fifth century and continues today in a variety of ethically significant contexts. It operates not only in sanctuaries and confessional booths but also grounds such common forms of thought as “a categorical imperative or a veil of ignorance or the counterfactual presupposition of a rational consensus or a fictive contract or a utilitarian economy.” In Charles Taylor’s terms, it has become a determinative but amorphous ‘source of the self’ that is both old and new, religious and irreligious.

Connolly’s Nietzschean contestation with Augustinian order constitutes a distinct era of his work, one that was preceded by several years of writings on the interpretive approach to political inquiry and that was followed by an explicit turn to Deleuzian themes. The sustained attention his Augustine era of writings have received since being published is due both to the significant foundational role they played for the movement

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2 Connolly, Political Theory and Modernity, p vii: this phrase describes the thinkers addressed in Political Theory and Modernity (Hobbes, Rousseau, de Sade, Hegel, Marx) but also accurately describes the way in which he interacts with Augustine in his next book, The Augustinian Imperative.

3 Connolly, The Augustinian Imperative, pg xviii

known as “agonistic democracy” (a phrase Connolly coined) and for the ire and appreciation his bold claims generated regarding the contemporary significance of ‘Augustine’ and ‘Nietzsche’, particularly among specialist interpreters of those thinkers.

Even though my investigation focuses on a narrow selection of texts – and within those texts on the interaction of only two philosophical fontes (Augustine and Nietzsche) – this treatment of Connolly’s thought cannot avoid a fundamental problem that besets all his readers. David Howarth notes that Connolly’s work brims with a vitality and scope, with forgotten and deferred perspectives, with various idioms and styles of reasoning, all of which defy claims to have identified a single thread of argument that organizes or energizes it all. Interpreters, therefore, cannot claim an exhaustive treatment of any set of his writings but must rather settle upon a line of flight that stretches through numerous texts and trace how he grapples with it. In what follows, I make no claim to having identified Ariadne’s thread in this era of Connolly’s writings, but do boldly seek to show the numerous ways in which conjugal-sexual matters occupy Connolly at almost every significant point of interaction between Augustine and Nietzsche. The thread of argument in these writings that I develop in Section One requires some preliminary comments and thus is best stated upfront: Connolly claims that Nietzschean agonism facilitates, even more effectively than the pre-modern tradition of Augustinian order, ethical ways of being that resist and overcome various problems that inevitably arise from modern conjugal-sexual morality. Though Chapters One to Three will look in detail at different aspects of Connolly’s ethic as it bears upon the conjugal-sexual realm, it is worth raising here in advance three features of this focal argument that I find in Connolly’s writings, an argument that is not commonly acknowledged to be central to his thought in the way I seek to display:

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First, I note Connolly’s assiduous attention to human sexuality and marriage in these writings, though I am unaware of any study of Connolly’s work that interacts with the coherent sexual ethic that emerges therein. KA Pearson, like many, tangentially observes that Connolly follows Foucault’s investigation of the various discourses of modernity: madness, sexuality, punishment, etc., without detailing Connolly’s contribution to or theoretical inflections of Foucault’s work on these discourses. Bonnie Honig, to cite another example, highlights that Connolly has pressed throughout his career for two practical legislative reforms, one of which is a more expansive definition of marriage that would include homosexuals (and the other being the freedom to practice doctor-assisted suicide); but Honig does not comment on the programmatic significance of the conjugal-sexual in Connolly’s thought. And, to mention just one more, Kristen Deede Johnson notes that gender issues occupy Connolly at various places, but in the same breath claims (without substantiation) that his discussions of sexuality exemplify how his ethic provides little positive content. My attempt to elucidate Connolly’s sexual ethic will, at times, require constructive interpretation – by which I mean, first, that I will draw inferences regarding his conjugal-sexual ethic by comparing him with his sources (most prominently Nietzsche and Foucault) and extant movements that discuss the same themes (for example, feminism); second, I mean that I will in a few places supplement a particular insight he offers on a given matter with that of another thinker whom I consider to develop it more fully in a way that remains consistent with Connolly’s agonistic ethical vision.

Why is this recurrent thread of discussion typically neglected? Perhaps, in part, because Connolly is most commonly read by those who consider themselves and him to be political theorists which, at times, entails the assumption that he deals with issues of

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8 Ibid., p132-133.
9 In 2008, ~2,500 American political theorists were given a survey, of which one question was as
public concern and leaves to the side so-called private matters such as sexuality. But, as I will show, reading Connolly’s work through a public-private division fumbles the fully politicized ethic that he seek to advance. Connolly’s emphasis on ethical transformation at the level of the individual is a feature of his work that is noted and engaged by his more perceptive readers. And this turn to the individual and the ethical has come under critique, particularly from political theorists who see the focus on the cultivation of the self as insufficiently revolutionary. But from theorists who emphasize Nietzschean aesthetic individuality, Connolly is charged with limiting the possibilities for self-formation by insisting that any construction of the self is political. That Connolly has critics who accuse him of being both overly public and overly private is further evidence that his ethical vision constantly crosses the public-private divide.

A second feature that my reading of Connolly seeks to take into account is the distinction in his 1990s writings between two versions of Augustinianism alive and well today, one that carries forward various strengths of pre-modern ethico-political existence (‘pre-modern Augustine’) and another that arises from modernity’s shaping influences (‘modern Augustine’). Connolly attempts to depreciate the latter version in his

follows, “Name five scholars whom you feel have had the greatest impact on political theory in the United States over the last twenty years.” The study showed that William Connolly was the highest ranked living American political theorist. See Matthew J. Moore, “Political Theory Today: Results of a National Survey,” PS: Political Science & Politics 43, no. 02 (2010): p265–72.

As the title of his book would suggest, Charles Mathewes’ perceptive treatment of Connolly’s political vision suffers from precisely this limitation: see Charles T Mathewes, A Theology of Public Life (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p261-274.


For example, Neo-Hegelian Adrian Johnston has recently labelled Connolly’s work as a bottom-up approach that is exhausted in “micro-political tinkering”. See Adrian Johnston, Adventures in Transcendental Materialism: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers, 2014, see especially chs 1, 3, 12.

genealogical narrative in *Political Theory and Modernity*; and the fact that

*Identity\Difference* (1991) and *The Augustinian Imperative* (1993) followed *Political Theory and Modernity* (1988) suggests that the final verdict in the conflict between an Augustinianism considered plausible to moderns and his own Nietzschean agonism turns on how well each tradition negotiates the deficits of modernity. In other words, as I will show below, *Political Theory and Modernity*’s genealogy is required to explain Connolly’s claim that Augustine and Nietzsche share a great deal more with respect to the possibilities they open for contemporary life than either do with modern theorists like Hobbes, Rousseau or Hegel (the key three thinkers Connolly treats in *Political Theory and Modernity*).

Many readers of Connolly underrate his admiration for the Augustinian tradition in his direct writings on the saint, because Connolly’s focus is on drawing out the differences with his own position. But ignoring the substance of his admiration does disservice to the richness of Connolly’s own ethic, as it erases the more collaborative side of the spectrum of responses that Connolly claims is available within his ethos of agonistic respect, a spectrum which ranges from violent opposition to groups that threaten democracy itself, to critical responsiveness to a new emerging identities, to selective collaboration with identities sharing some interests. Deede Johnson, by contrast, makes the opposite mistake – taking Connolly as addressing only the Augustine that has continued in modern modes of thought – thereby obscuring Connolly’s primary project in *The Augustinian Imperative*, namely describing the different political possibilities (or lack thereof) of the Augustinian and Nietzschean traditions. This distinction between the pre-modern and modern Augustine identifies a lacuna that I intend to pursue in these chapters on Connolly: while he is clear on what must be avoided in modernist sexual ethics, he does not develop

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15 Connolly, in these early writings, prefers the term “late modern” to the more common “post-modern” because it highlights continuity of concern with agencies of change and development (see *Political Theory and Modernity*, p2-3).

16 Johnson pays attention to moments such as *The Augustinian Imperative*, p xviii, where Connolly announces that he will seek in the book to modify the effects of the Augustinian legacy on the present.
substantial criticisms of the pre-modern Augustinian perspective. My reading of Connolly generally follows his denunciation of the way in which modernity carried forward only some aspects of the pre-modern Augustine, but I then go beyond Connolly in arguing that particular elements left behind bear great promise for a Christian conjugal-sexual ethic in late modernity.

Taking these first two features seriously, it becomes possible to expand upon Connolly’s own suggestion that an interaction between Augustine and Nietzsche could go in a very different direction. The direction he did choose was, negatively, to utilize a Nietzschean ontology to challenge the arbitrary cruelty that so-called ‘morali
ties of good and evil’ based on moral order hide, and, positively, to “cautiously [draw] sustenance from selective strands within the thought of Augustine” in order to reach beyond the temptations latent in the Augustinian tradition.17 But this chosen course leads him by the end of the book to drop Augustine entirely – the reader notes that the last chapter of The Augustinian Imperative contains no substantive traces of Augustine; the pre-modern Augustine’s voice has been displaced. This appears to be an overreach of Connolly’s own deconstructive work, and this overreach is perhaps what gives validity to readers of his work that see a more negative stance towards Augustine than our reading will suggest. That this obscuring of the pre-modern Augustine from the dialogue was not Connolly’s intention is obvious from the preface to The Augustinian Imperative in which Connolly announces that he could have framed the interaction between Augustine and Nietzsche in a different way:

This project might have been organized differently...my agenda could be pursued by treating Augustine as the key inspiration and Nietzsche as the principal adversary. One could stir Augustinian presentations of sensuality, the divided will, confession, mystery, memory, paradox, and awakening until sublime sparks and flashes in these coals glow more brightly. One might even suggest that were Augustine to re-appear in this time, he would stir them differently himself.18

Connolly is not entirely clear whether he means that an Augustine capable of

17 The Augustinian Imperative, p132.
18 Original preface to The Augustinian Imperative, pxxii.
producing such “sublime sparks and flashes” would, on account of engaging contemporary philosophical traditions, ultimately (on Augustinian grounds) release belief in ‘moral order’ – or whether this would be an Augustine who would resist modernity’s temptations while sustaining a notion of order. In support of the former reading, one may note that in *The Augustinian Imperative*, Connolly celebrates two contemporary re-workings of traditional religious texts along the Nietzschean lines that he finds most promising: Stephen Mitchell’s redacted and freely rendered *The Book of Job* and Harold Bloom’s conjuring of the Pentateuchal “J” source. One could claim that both of these contemporary offerings function as *exemplum* for Connolly in *The Augustinian Imperative*, and that his unpursued agenda consists of a similar re-working of Augustinian sources (like Lyotard’s *The Confessions of Augustine*). But this would be nothing more, in the end, than a theoretical dissolution of Augustine into Connolly’s own project, and thus Connolly’s text would no longer itself display the “agonistic respect” he advances. And so I suggest that it is plausible that, in the above quote, Connolly is making the more radical claim that one might find an Augustine whose account of ‘moral order’ bypasses the modernist temptations he identifies in *The Augustinian Imperative*. In *Section One* of this thesis, I take up the project (understood in this latter sense) that Connolly gestures towards but never pursues.

My interpretation of Connolly’s unpursued agenda appears more reasonable when Connolly’s work is situated in Daniel Barber’s taxonomy of the various ways theological discourse can be philosophically positioned. Barber catalogues the following approaches:

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19 Charles Mathewes (*A Theology of Public Life*, p108) highlights that Connolly’s preface to the 2000 edition of *The Augustinian Imperative* signals a shift of focus from “the Augustinian imperative” to “the Augustinian temptation”, but I suggest this is a rhetorical rather than substantive change from his earlier position and that the Connolly’s early 1990s work can be read, as a whole, as identifying various temptations that modernity stirs within the Augustinian tradition.

1) **philosophical delimitation** evaluates theological discourse from the vantage of a purely philosophical structure (cf. Kant, Heidegger);

2) **theological particularism** asserts the primacy of theological discourse in its particularity and thus calls into question the viability of foregrounding an ontological horizon (cf. Barth, Lindbeck, Hauerwas);

3) **theological ontology** claims that the desire to think 'being' is to be affirmed and can be thought through theological discourse (cf. patristics, Milbank);

4) **philosophical excess** sees all attempts to overcome theology as unsuccessful and thus seeks to continually renew philosophy and enable it to fulfil its creative task by dispelling the theological which is seen as the unthought remainder (cf. Agamben, Derrida, Žižek).

Connolly sits most closely to the “philosophical excess” camp, in the sense that he seeks to problematize modernity’s claim to have washed political theory and ethics of theological discourse – or at least to having encased it in the private realm in order to secure a neutral public space. He shares with other thinkers in this camp the practice of engagement with key theological writings, though the works by Connolly I analyse in this thesis display a uniquely rich and pervasive intertextuality with the Christian tradition. While never dropping the baseline of contestation, his writings nonetheless exhibit a kind of midrashic quality that acknowledges an openness to future intervention, even of a theological variety. My engagement with Connolly is undertaken in the hope that such further interpretive ventures, chastened by his delineation of unethical moments in commonly accepted readings, need not be merely “traditionalist” repetitions but can be enriched interpretations that nonetheless stand in substantive continuity with the theological tradition in question. That is, narrating Connolly’s critical insights in theological terms is not to say that theology would have made these points anyways but is

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21 This “generosity” and “respect” also marks Connolly’s later work in which he makes clear that he is “not a secularist” in the sense that rather than attempting to secure a space free from personal beliefs and opinions, he seeks to foster dispositions that allow difference rooted in contingency to remain alive and active. See William E Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

22 This should not come as a surprise, as Connolly’s rejection of the Habermasian discourse or hermeneutics approach means that he refuses to reduce his interaction with Augustine to a fight between an atheological versus theological horizon.
rather a way of displaying what I called above the “aliveness” of the Augustinian theological-ethical tradition.

In regards to conjugal-sexual ethics, Connolly can especially inform a contemporary Augustinian account in which issues of individual identity and gender have taken on new meaning. But, significantly, Connolly’s way of engaging theology allows such insights to be theologically framed. His “ethos of agonistic respect” requires such a genuine openness to fresh ethico-political contributions from opposing views and provides the rationale for his decision to repeatedly stage contestations on the turf of key theological texts rather than by a point-by-point logical unfolding of his own position. The adjective “agonistic” emphasizes his resistance to standard readings of such texts, while the noun “respect” signals that underlying such engagement is his estimation of the worth of theological discourse or, more modestly, a non-resentful stance towards the further development of theology that, in large part, sustains the irresolution of theology and philosophy.

In Chapters One, Two and Three I detail William Connolly’s charge that Augustine’s relation to an ordered nature is incapable of providing a conjugal-sexual ethic that comes to terms with the significant dynamics constituting the late modern condition. Connolly articulates this critique and forwards his own ethic arising from a Nietzschean agonistic relation to nature through extensive discussion of important biblical texts, three of which highlight dimensions that are especially important for my contemporary conjugal-sexual ethic (articulated in Section Two of this thesis) to consider. First, in his version of the parable of the sower, he claims that an agonistic ethic of self-formation empowers subjects to remove Augustinian moral constraints on sexuality that serve a political order and bind late modern subjects in mutually constitutive exclusionary relations. Second, Connolly argues that Augustine’s interpretation of the events in Eden detracts from an ethic of responsibility to the agon by reifying a gender order in which
female agency is depicted as insufficient for important contest. Third, through a discussion of the biblical characters of Job and his friends, Connolly argues that Augustine’s notion of nature’s mysterious order suspends rather than displaces certain forms of *ressentiment* and thereby hamstrings a proper Nietzschean **ethic of compassion** for ‘the disordered’. My constructive Augustinian theology of marriage in Section Two will need to show itself adequate to each of these ethical challenges. And so I conclude each of chapters 1, 2, and 3 a brief section that signals details what what connolly’s ethical challenges requires that I foreground from Augustine’s philosophy of order. I summarize Connolly’s agonistic conjugal-sexual ethic and sketch an outline of my Augustinian ethic in a short conclusion before moving to section two.
Chapter One: Cultivating The Self in Conolly's Agonistic Garden

Ian Hamilton Finlay began cultivating his four-acre estate, located several miles outside of Edinburgh, Scotland, in the mid-1960s. The grounds soon transformed into a garden, accessible to the public, named “Little Sparta”.¹ Finlay’s practices have been referred to by some² as “agonistic gardening,” as they uniquely aim to make plain that a garden is an attempt to take unencompassable and often violent forces and set them within an observable boundary. Many features communicate this mode of self-awareness at Little Sparta. For example, one sees immobilized boats and hears running water throughout the landscape, which suggests that the garden can never be more stable than a chaotic inland sea. Or, one may note the inscription placed on the edge of the garden’s border that reads, “The present order is the disorder of the future,” suggesting that wilderness remains in relation to civilization despite humanity’s best efforts to forge a permanent demarcation.³ Many explain the garden’s name by citing Finlay’s comment that it points to Edinburgh as the Athens of the north, since it sits twenty miles from Edinburgh as Sparta was from Athens. But it is hard to believe that Finlay did not also intend to allude to the Spartan awareness that order only arose from war. In this sense, a Spartan is one who knows that the garden is forged in violence and exists for only a moment, bracketed by past and future chaos. In this and a variety of other ways, one may see Finlay’s gardening as a form of stewarding life, understood in the Nietzschean sense as that which is mysterious and ultimately inhospitable to humanity.

Susan Stewart notes that gardening has long been considered analogous to other

¹Peter Martell, “Little Sparta Goes a Long Way in Poll on Scotland’s Greatest Art”, The Scotsman, December 5, 2004. In a 2004 poll of art historians, gallery directors, and artists, Little Sparta was deemed the most important work of Scottish art from any period.
modes of ordering life, precisely because both intervene and change the form of living things without determining all aspects of their development.⁴ And so, gardening styles have concomitant political, ethical, and ontological orientations. For example, Rudolf Arnheim notes that in the eighteenth century, the formalized French garden was defended by those who worried about political instability, while the looser English garden was an aspect of “the fight of liberalism against the rigid autocracies of the past.”⁵ Charles Taylor similarly noted that early modern French gardening “involved imposing an order of constructive reason on nature – drawing straight lines down long vistas, balanced and symmetrical,” while Romantic gardening aimed to expose one to the spontaneous overabundance of “nature,” which they anticipated would stir the inner impulses.⁶

While there is no standpoint within “Little Sparta” that surveys the whole garden, visitors find that the garden consistently foregrounds the flux of change. By contrast, a strong and exclusively Apollonian style, such as is embodied in traditional Victorian gardens, sets as its main task to obscure such flux precisely by orienting the garden to a point of oversight. Stewart expands on this theme, explaining that, in deliberate contrast to both the Enlightenment gardening that expected inert matter (bricks, rocks, etc.) to endure and the Romantic perception that the entirety of the world was susceptible to decay, Finlay inscribed stones with short poems and sayings throughout his garden. These monuments highlight how those “natural” things one might consider inert and fixed are always already culturally conditioned, and that one’s sense of landscape and “the natural” is framed by past human making.⁷

⁴Stewart, The Open Studio: Essays on Art and Aesthetics, chapter 10
⁷Along these lines, some visitors express discomfort with certain artefacts Finlay insinuates are inevitably part of the plot of land we cultivate in our contemporary context. For example, George McKay notes the proliferation of war-time monuments throughout the garden. He worries about the Nazi symbolism and various other references to human brutality in Little Sparta, and wonders whether Finlay is perhaps making a statement about the limits of symbolic communication that a garden can sustain [See George McKay, Radical Gardening: Politics, Idealism and Rebellion in the Garden, 1st ed. (London: Frances
The link between gardening and political-ethical ordering of life takes literary form in the sower parable, as found in Jesus’ preaching, but also in other biblical and extra-biblical writings. Consonant with this tradition, William Connolly playfully reworks the parable as a way of expressing central features of his ethical vision. I began this chapter with a brief walk through Finlay’s garden, taking special note of Little Sparta’s differences from modernist European modes of botanical cultivation and their concomitant political orientation. In doing so, I foreground a dimension of gardening metaphors emphasized in Connolly’s version of the parable that theologians who analyse biblical versions of it rarely notice, namely the significance of one’s conception of and relation to nature for a vision of ethical self-formation.⁸ This chapter unfolds the account of ethical self-formation in Connolly’s sower parable and, more constructively, seeks to discern how it arises from and sustains a distinctive conjugal-sexual ethic.⁹ Connolly develops his account of ethical self-formation in critical dialogue with modern sexual moralities that draw on an understanding of nature as ordered. And though Connolly charges Augustine with forging the understanding of nature and relation to it, which he thinks made possible the unethical modernist sexual moralities, I show through Augustine’s reading of the Pauline sower parable in 1 Corinthians an Augustine who shares Connolly’s concern for a politicized account of self-formation and an account of marriage that is capable of responding to the developing intersubjectivity of late modernity.

This investigation unfolds in five sections. In the first section, I describe and explain the significance of the parable and note its presence in Connolly’s writings on

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⁸Lincoln Publishers, 2011), 76 – 78.]. What McKay does not consider is that agonistic gardening entails an awareness of being already implicated in past “achievements” and an admission that any novum will arise from and among current cultural resources.

⁹Connolly distinguishes between an apolitical ethic of individuality and a politicized vision of the self that locates ethics in how the self is formed in a given political context: see Connolly, Identity/Difference, p85-86.

⁷It is worth mentioning what line of investigation I am not pursuing, namely, the tradition that reflections upon marriage itself as a garden (for example, see Solomon’s Song of Songs in the Old Testament). While Augustine has moments where he engages in this tradition of reflection, Connolly does not, and so contrasting their visions of conjugal-sexual ethics requires doing so through an ethic of self-formation.
Augustine. The **second section** focuses on the invitation to “plant seed,” by noting Connolly’s approach to ontology and the accompanying call to cultivate that constitutes his account of ethical self-formation. The **third section** looks at “the weeds” by detailing Connolly’s genealogical critique of liberalism’s depoliticized subject, whose nihilism is seen most clearly in the sexual moralities it sustains. The **fourth section** analyses Connolly’s call to plough and his assessment of “the soil of modernity” by way of his critical interaction with Hegel’s account of the role of marriage in the composition of the modern intersubjective subject as one who is capable of participating in the ethical life of the modern state. The **fifth section** distances my Augustine from Connolly’s by comparing Connolly’s ethic of self-formation with the Augustinian subjectivity that will arise from and sustain the constructive contemporary Augustinian conjugal-sexual ethic that I will most fully develop in Section Two of this thesis.

### I. The Sower Parable in Connolly’s Augustine Writings

By “sower parable” I refer to a group of botanical analogies that focus on the activity of cultivation and the resulting botanical growth or decay.\(^{10}\) This broad definition encompasses not only Jesus’ sower parable recorded in the synoptic gospels,\(^ {11}\) but also previous Hebraic versions that it draws upon\(^ {12}\) and subsequent versions, among which is the version that I will be comparing to Connolly near the end of this chapter, namely the Apostle Paul’s notion of the apostolic “planting” and “growth” of new ecclesial communities in 1 Corinthians.\(^ {13}\) I also mention Plato’s sowing and gardening analogy that

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\(^{10}\)Stanley Hauerwas cites several attempts to distinguish “parable” from other forms of literary comparison and expresses exasperation: “Dear Lord, please save me from ever being tempted to define anything.” Stanley Hauerwas, *A Cross-Shattered Church: Reclaiming the Theological Heart of Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, Div of Baker Publishing Group, 2009), 41.

\(^{11}\)The parable occurs in each of the synoptic gospels: Matthew 13.1-23; Mark 4.1-20; Luke 8.4-15.


\(^{13}\)See 1 Corinthians 3.5-9 and 9.7-11. The sower parable is echoed in numerous places in the NT, for example, in John 4.35-38, 12.24; 2 Corinthians 9.6, 10; Galatians 6.7-9; James 3.18. However, I focus only on Augustine’s reading of 1 Corinthians for reasons stated in the Thesis Introduction.
described a philosopher-in-training’s pedagogical advancement or sophistic corruption, as this version differs in several important respects from both Connolly’s and the biblical versions.

Several formal similarities between Connolly’s version and Augustine’s interpretation of the Pauline version set the stage for my reading of both parables and demarcate the themes that are important for this chapter. First, both emphasize the theme of *cultivation*. One might argue that Connolly’s version sounds more like ornamental gardening, while the Pauline (and other biblical versions) depicts subsistence farming. But both versions are “sower parables” in the sense that they are situated along a continuum of *cultivation*. Second, both see self and community as co-extensive with the garden, and thus both contrast with the Platonic sower parable, which describes an individual’s coming-to-awareness of the essential human nature without necessary dependence upon the broader intersubjective context. Third, while the Platonic version presents the soil as the passive female and the seed as the masculine ‘word of truth’ with agential power, neither Connolly nor Augustine use gender as a metaphor in this way in their parable. These similarities between the two versions allow a direct comparison between their accounts of cultivation of self and community as significant for the conjugal-sexual realm.

Before analysing Connolly’s parable in subsequent sections, it is important to establish its existence and importance in his writings on Augustine, especially because, to my knowledge, none of his interpreters have properly taken stock of its significance in his work. Readers less familiar with the theological texts Connolly interacts with when he

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14 See, for example, *Phaedrus* 260c-3, 276b-277a.
15 That Plato sees “gold” (philosophical capability) in each person in the polis might provide a way to argue that his notion of philosophical epistemological access entails aspects of intersubjective politicization, but it is clear that his account of the philosophical king does not access an intersubjective “gold” to uncover his own – rather, Plato claims the uncovering happens in an isolated way and then has the possibility of becoming intersubjective. See Plato, *Republic* 414b-415b and 487b-497b.
16 See Derrida’s discussion of Plato’s *Phaedrus* dialogue on this theme in: Jaques Derrida, *Disseminations*, translated by Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2007). Derrida discusses Plato’s sower parable along gendered lines and argues that this Platonic gendering maps onto the Pauline discussion of gender order in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14. By contrast, Connolly’s critique of Augustine on gender order takes place through his discussion of the Garden of Eden and not with respect to the sower parable, and so I engage his arguments on static gender order in chapter 2 below.
wrote on Augustine might miss it as a key interpretive tool through which Connolly articulates his vision of self-formation, especially in light of the fact that Connolly rarely articulates the features of the parable in one place, giving it an almost subterranean existence in his writings. But those familiar with the dominical version of the parable will notice dozens of references to it in the pages of Connolly’s writings in this era: the field or terrain of modernity, cultivating life, creating space for new growth, having ears to hear, and new life taking root. I claim that the frequent, but scattered character of the references to the parable invites readers to gather these pieces and construct a holistic account of Connolly’s reading of this ancient story.

I find it significant that images of sowing are absent in his writings occurring before his engagement with Augustine (before Connolly, *Politics and Ambiguity*), and in

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18 The mention of modern political discourse as a “field” or “terrain” is unique to the era of Connolly’s writings under analysis; it occurs in the following places: William E Connolly, *Politics and Ambiguity*, 1st ed. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), pp xi, 5, 73, 95; Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity*, pp 2, 82-85; Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, pp x, 2, 42-44, 47-48, 114, 156, 171, 221; Connolly, The Augustinian Imperative, p12, 136. William E Connolly and Morton Schoolman, *The Augustinian Imperative: A Reflection on the Politics of Morality, Vol. 1* (Newbury Park: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1993), p12 is particularly significant as Connolly states that the Jobian “voice from the whirlwind” is perhaps a more direct “metaphor for difference” than is the plowed field. This suggests that his choice of the sower parable was precisely to find a way to emphasize the elements of difference and their ethical impact on self-formation.

19 See for example, Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, p 195; Connolly, *The Augustinian Imperative*, p 65, 119, 140. Also, Connolly, Politics and Ambiguity, p 9 sees subjectivity as a tree trunk. Stephen K White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (United States: Princeton University Press, 2000), Chapter 5, centres his discussion of Connolly’s political theory on his “ethic of cultivation” but, as I note below, makes no connection to these other literary images that comprise his sower parable.


23 That said, Connolly’s influential and widely-cited 1969 essay “The Challenge to Pluralist Theory” presents two images of healthy pluralist politics that he concludes have failed: both Robert Dahl’s “arena” and Adolf Berle’s “umpire”, Connolly claims, allow one to remain attentive to the biased context which gives rise to the cluster of issues that constitute political discourse. His goal in this early essay is to make more room within pluralist theory for “the critical temper” which would subject to fresh evaluation the particular ideological and institutional frames that do the gatekeeping, deciding which groups or causes can enter the arena or amble onto the pitch of political participation. One might argue that Connolly’s analogies of sowing, cultivating, weeding, and ploughing can be seen to offer a competing set of images that not only
his writings after this era, Deleuzian “resonance” and “rhizome” (also an image linked with vegetative growth) take pride of place. Also, such gardening and farming tropes do not appear with the same kind of regularity and importance in either Heidegger or Foucault, who strongly influence these writings. The most likely source is in Nietzsche, who depicted agonistic education as “breeding” or “farming”, and in chapter 3 below I develop the significance of this ancient tradition of cultivating animality, noting its dependence upon agonistic erotics. As for a specific literary instance that may have informed Connolly from Nietzsche’s work, the early Nietzsche, discussing the themes of culture and cultivation, offers an extended sower parable in at least two places, though detailing its similarities and differences from Connolly’s probable literary source goes beyond the scope of my investigation in this chapter.

A single occurrence of the sower parable in Connolly’s writings on Augustine will give active guidance to gatekeepers (as he found arena and umpire to do) but that also enable all subjects to challenge the biased evaluative frames that limit plurality. See William Connolly, “The Challenge of Pluralist Theory” p3-34 in The Bias of Pluralism ed William Connolly (New York: Atherton Press 1969).

It goes beyond the scope of our investigation to look in any depth at similarities between Connolly’s earlier sower parable and his later reliance on and development of the Deleuzian rhizome image. But Stephen K. White’s observation that the rhizome fits Connolly’s ethos because it describes a growth that happens within and around existing structures, changing without destroying them which is certainly apropos to our treatment of his sower parable: Stephen White, “Ethos and Late-Modern Democracy”, in Democracy and Pluralism: The Political Thought of William E. Connolly, ed. Alan Finlayson and Samuel A. Chambers (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2009), p58. The fact that Connolly returns to the sower parable in his later book, William E. Connolly, A World of Becoming (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p.79, p89, suggests that its importance exceeds the Augustine period to which I limit this chapter’s investigation.

One possible resource for Connolly might Charles Taylor’s topographical depiction of human flourishing as “moral space”. See Taylor’s Sources of the Self.

See The Birth of Tragedy, Section 20: “In vain we look around for a single root with powerful branches, for a spot of fertile and healthy soil: everywhere we see dust, sand, languishing paralysis…but how suddenly that wilderness of our tired culture which we described with such gloom a moment ago changes when touched with Dionysiac magic!...so full and green, so lavishly vital, so longingly immeasurable. Tragedy sits in the midst of this excess of pulsating life, pain, and pleasure…” (Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, ed. Douglas Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).) Also, Nietzsche consistently invites readers to see themselves as plants in Daybreak; for example, see Section 560: “What we are at liberty to do. - One can dispose of one's drives like a gardener and, though few know it, cultivate the shoots of anger, pity, curiosity, vanity as productively and profitably as a beautiful fruit tree on a trellis; one can do it with the good or bad taste of a gardener and, as it were, in the French or English or Dutch or Chinese fashion; one can also let nature rule and only attend to a little embellishment and tidying-up here and there; one can, finally, without paying any attention to them at all, let the plants grow up and fight their fight out among themselves - indeed, one can take delight in such a wilderness, and desire precisely this delight, though it gives one some trouble, too. All this we are at liberty to do: but how many know we are at liberty to do it? Do the majority not believe in themselves as in complete fully-developed facts? Have the great philosophers not put their seal on this prejudice with the doctrine of the unchangeability of character?” (Friedrich Nietzsche et al., Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1997). See also Daybreak, Section 174.
serve as a touchstone throughout this chapter. It is one of the longer examples of the sower parable in his writings and mentions various elements that relate to self-formation:

Scratch the cultural ground with a sharp stick here and there, and drop a few seeds. Take a look at promising sprouts later in the season, watering some and pulling weeds crowding others. (Ahh, the weeding…that is the delightful part!) Perhaps if others find anything worthy of cultivation a plant or two will grow, modifying the landscape of political discourse in this way or that. More likely, others will find new weeds to pull in their turn.27

Readers might be as perplexed as were Jesus’ disciples by the mysterious set of analogies Connolly mentions here. The next three sections analyse Connolly’s sower parable by offering an interpretation of its key dimensions, beginning with the seed, which needs to be cultivated into a healthy plant.

II. Planting and Cultivating Seed: The Ontology of Fugitive Abundance and an Ethic of Care for Difference

This section sets out how Connolly describes the unstable experience of identity in late modernity in terms of a Nietzschean ontological reality (the seed). Stephen White notes that Connolly is part of both the ‘ontological turn’28 and the ‘ethical turn’29 in critical theory. This section, after detailing the way he forwards an ontology and spells out its content, will look at his claim that a proper perception of the nature of ‘the seed’ leads to the cultivation of a sensibility that is ethically superior to the morality of pre-knowable rules and principles that arises from an ontology of order. Subsequent sections of this chapter further elaborate the significance of this ontology, noting how it not only grounds an ethic (‘cultivating’: detailed in this section) but also genealogical work (‘weeding’: described in the next section) and judgments about the political significance of certain empirical observations (‘ploughing’: the focus of the fourth section below).

A. A Nietzschean Ontology

27Connolly, Identity\Difference, p xi
29Peter Baker, Deconstruction and the Ethical Turn (Miami: University of Florida Press 1995)
Connolly’s willingness to declare his ontological commitments is a distinctive feature of his critical theory. But before describing its content, it is important to specify the sense in which he forwards an ontology. In contrast to thinkers who do not move beyond the deconstructive moments, Connolly insists, “it is impossible to proceed without implicitly invoking some set of fundaments”. That is, he notes that one must do more than perpetually detach from the socially recognized commitments in a given time and place. However, both Stephen White and Edward Wingenbach have noted that Connolly’s ontological declarations differ from classical metaphysical pronouncements. White terms the latter “strong ontology” and the former “weak ontology”, while Wingenbach uses the labels “foundationalist” and “post-foundationalist”. The hallmark of this new form of ontological commitment, White and Wingenbach explain, lies in its awareness of pressures in habits of thought and language to elide the intelligible with the necessary. In White’s words, a weak ontology turns “the unifying momentum of its concepts back upon itself” in some way. Said another way, Connolly wants to ensure that his inevitable commitment to a set of fundaments continues in some genuine sense to be inductively acquired and sustained, rather than merely asserted and closed off to further revision.

Connolly situates his post-foundational or weak ontological approach in relation to previous critical theorists. He notes that they have typically seen two options in relating to ontological fundaments: try to eliminate them altogether from interpretation (some have held up Judith Butler as a prime example of this route), or lapse into a “passive nihilism” that foregoes the opportunity to challenge religious fundamentalists on the field of

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30 Craig Hovey, *Nietzsche and Theology* (New York: T & T Clark, 2008), 130–133.
31 Connolly, *The Augustinian Imperative*, p148
32 White classes George Kateb, Charles Taylor, Judith Butler, and William Connolly as weak ontologists and devotes a chapter to each in *Sustaining Affirmation*.
34 Cf. Connolly, *The Augustinian Imperative*, p147
35 White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, p108
Connolly sees Nietzsche and Foucault as forging a third way, as both saw a need to make clear the account of being they perceive in order to sustain positive affirmations in the wake of their genealogical work. In the case of Nietzsche, Connolly claims that he provides many reasons in his writings to raise the experience of resistance to the ontological level: he notes that all orders heretofore have excluded some aspect of humanity. He argues that every supposedly providential account has failed, and he shows how an ontology of resistance serves the practical purpose of bringing to light an unacknowledged theological residue in contemporary thought. Such arguments for a Nietzschean ontology of resistance differ in kind from classical metaphysical arguments for the logical necessity of, for example, an unmoved mover. Connolly sees a similar form of ontological commitment at play in Foucault’s counsel to dig deeply in order to make the intelligible appear against the background of emptiness. Connolly argues that the emptiness of which Foucault speaks is not nihilism, but is only empty in relation to airtight logical systems of thought. In other words, Foucault’s “emptiness” still endorses a universal vision that exceeds any set of conventions. Building on these readings of Nietzsche and Foucault, Connolly boldly announces his ontological “faith” (his term).

Building on Nietzsche and Foucault, Connolly encourages two modes of awareness to accompany any universally projected reality. One must remember: i) the contingency of one’s perception of and commitment to it, and ii) the imperfection of the ethico-political results it is capable of inspiring. Such modes of awareness ensure that the basic fundamental commitment is corrigible to further ethico-political development and maturation. I take these two modes of awareness in turn:

First, by an awareness of contingency, Connolly tells us that he means more than what Richard Rorty means, namely “that things which were once thought necessary or
essential are now seen to be accidental or empirical.”41 The Rortian understanding of contingency ignores, in Connolly’s estimation, the Nietzschean insight that contingent events can form into “an obdurate complex of interactions which resist effective intervention.”42 In requiring an awareness of contingency in relation to one’s fundaments, Connolly seeks to instil an awareness that any ontological account is an arrangement that has collected itself in such a way that it contains powerful inward pressure to destroy any threats to its self-confidence. This conception of the contingency of one’s perception of ontology arises from his notion of agonistic reality, and it suggests the need for tactics of the self that enable resistance to this tendency towards violent self-defence in the face of threatening difference.

Second, by an awareness of the imperfect ethico-political results, Connolly means to suggest that one must not only articulate an ontology, but also the normative entailments attached to it. One must construct theories of self, justice, and the common good that are appropriate to one’s perception of the character of existence.43 But such norms always destroy in their very act of creating.44 Connolly coined the phrase, “ontopolitical” to capture the symbiotic relation of an ontological and a normative political vision. Recognising this symbiosis ensures that one’s view of reality remains corrigible to the working out of its concomitant ethical vision; for if the ethic turns out to be radically insufficient, this suggests a need to change fundamental conceptualities.45 The symbiosis also implies that opposing ontologies should be encountered not by vilifying and excluding, but by showing how one’s own normative entailments are more useful in current conditions than those offered by opposing ontologies.46 Rather than seeking a

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42 Ibid., p105.
43 Connolly, Political Theory and Modernity, p171
44 Ibid., p160. Connolly does not mention Nietzsche’s images here, but the Zarathustran sequence of camel-lion-child comes to mind.
45 Connolly, The Augustinian Imperative, p149.
46 Ibid., p143.
“pure” ethico-political programme, Connolly calls for the kind of strength that enables one to acknowledge the “dirt” that their vision produces.\textsuperscript{47}

As for the content of his ontology, in \textit{Political Theory and Modernity}, Connolly describes it as “an ontology of resistance” and in \textit{The Augustinian Imperative} as “an agonistic ontology”. The specific name is unimportant, he notes, as it has numerous names in the Nietzschean tradition: life, bodies, earth, will to power, the oblivion of difference, untamed exteriority, etc.\textsuperscript{48} Foucault’s labelling it an “ont-alogy” highlights the common thread between these descriptors. As the term specifies, this is a vision of being (“onto-”) that is thought according to organic or aesthetic metaphors rather than strictly logical ones (“a-logy”). Connolly draws on Heidegger’s notion of encountering the abundance of being with gratitude and even wonder.\textsuperscript{49}

The content of the ontology becomes clearer when contrasted with two competing late modern accounts of ultimate reality that he thinks Augustinian thought gives rise to and supports. First, there are modernity’s ontologies of a static, fixed, logical order knowable through rules or principles that are prior to all encounters with the concrete situations in which they apply. These visions of being assume that reality is “for us”, where “us” is understood in terms of rational, cognitive human agents. Connolly claims that no evidence exists for the assumption that rationality can look into nature to discern how to order life so as to be at home in it. To look into nature and see a potential home does not say something about nature, but says something about the “transcendental egoism” of the rational subject.\textsuperscript{50} Nietzsche disabused late moderns not only from this assumption, but also from the very wish to be at home in this world. Such a wish, or “homesickness”, must be placed to the side as a juvenile dream, and one’s nomadic

\textsuperscript{47}Connolly, \textit{Politics and Ambiguity}, p94-97
\textsuperscript{48}Connolly, \textit{The Augustinian Imperative}, p142
\textsuperscript{49}Connolly (Connolly, \textit{The Augustinian Imperative}, p143) says that he and Taylor acknowledge excess/abundance of the source to the self in a way that does not interpret it as lack or fault that needs remedy. I understand his mention of “lack” in this context to signal a conscious rejection of accounts of identity-formation influenced by Lacan (like Mouffe in the agonistic camp or Žižek among neo-Hegelians).
\textsuperscript{50}\textit{The Augustinian Imperative}, p66, 139
condition must be fully owned. Connolly asserts that this is best done by affirming a Nietzschean figure of being as resistant to human plans and organization. Affirming the alogical nature of being highlights the insufficiency of any principle to harmonize with the full scope of difference in being. As Thomas Dunn states, to cultivate this Nietzschean ontology in our late modern times involves loving the world “without necessarily knowing it”.

It is in holding on to the inhospitality of being that Connolly’s ontology differs from that other ontology on offer in late modernity, namely, the pragmatic affirmation of a changing or plastic self, human community, and world. Contra the pragmatists, Connolly notes that Nietzsche highlights how “the world” consistently resists and exhibits recalcitrance in the face of human plans. This suggests that pragmatists (like earlier modern philosophies of order) also fail to fully own their nomadic condition, because they assume that the world and the self are susceptible to human control and mastery. To project such plasticity onto an account of being, in Connolly’s assessment, is to sustain a kind of secularized version of religious hope. In contrast to an inert and pliable reality, Nietzsche’s emphasis on the resistance at the heart of things awakens one to a different set of experiences and possibilities in late modernity. Like accounts of inert order whose moral meaning is accessed through a set of pre-knowable rules, Connolly sees pragmatism’s taproot as also reaching down into Augustinian soil. Because, like accounts of inert order whose moral meaning is accessible through pre-knowable rules, pragmatism shares the “transcendental narcissism” that the world is for us. It only differs from ‘static order’ in the sense that it locates the hope for finding a home in human production, rather than in a pre-made and hospitable external reality. So, a Nietzschean ontology contrasts with both in asserting a fugitive abundance in being that will persistently resist and subsume any account of order (whether created or discovered).

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51The New Pluralism, p81
By “fugitive abundance”, I take Connolly to mean that late moderns experience differences at such a pace that they find themselves unable to incorporate them into a pre-known order. While Sheldon Wolin ascribes experiences of “fugitive” abundance in late modernity to empirical conditions unique to this period, Connolly shifts them to an ontological register. In other words, the sense that differences are now coming into late modern communities faster than our communities can incorporate them, is not merely a feature of late modernity, but a feature of reality to which late modernity has become increasingly sensitized. I turn now to Connolly’s account of how this ontology is experienced in late modernity.

**B. Late Modern Experiences of Fugitive Abundance**

Connolly describes the seed of life as “the ont-alogical,” “resistant,” and inhospitable to human life, and he locates the moment of clearest epistemological-experiential access to this reality in anxiety. Connolly writes, “Anxiety is a fluid mood of estrangement from an uncertain object. Such a feeling cries for interpretation.” The cogency of his ontological articulation relies, in large part, on his unique theorization of anxiety, from which his ethic of cultivation provides therapeutic relief.

One common line of interpretation, he notes in *The Augustinian Imperative*, is to see anxiety as a “lack” or “fault” in one’s identity. Though, in the context, Connolly is discussing Augustine, one cannot help but see here an only slightly veiled barb at Lacanian notions of identity and subjectivity; such notions are forwarded not only by neo-Hegelians like Slavoj Žižek, but also by agonists such as Chantal Mouffe. Connolly argues that the Freudian theorization (which Lacan furthers) is Augustinian in that it sees the self as

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53 Connolly, *The Augustinian Imperative*, p136 (his emphasis)
54 Ibid., p137.
55 Ibid., p143. (Connolly only mentions Taylor in this context.)
divided and “always yet to be remedied.”

This sense of fault can be situated in a variety of different ontological contexts, but the most problematic is one of moral order. In this situation, the “lack” becomes “guilt for failure to live up to what one already is intrinsically.”

Freud focused on extracting guilt from such anxious lack by diminishing the sense of moral obligation in the self. But fixating on lack and division in the self has left unexplored “the productive role of excess in ethico-political interpretation.”

Connolly seeks to open precisely such a path of exploration through an alternative interpretation of anxiety, which he begins by asking a series of questions that not only challenge the moralistic ontology that Freud denounces, but also the Augustinian divided self that Freud retained: could not anxiety be understood as an excess or surplus of possible subjective experiences, rather than only as a lack of what one could or should have been? Might not the late modern experience of anxiety reveal “the excess of life over identity”? Might I feel anxious less because of something inadequate in me and more because I experience something inside me unsustained by the harmonious order with which I am expected to harmonise? This line of questioning is intended to suggest that the moralizing effects that exercised Freud do not exhaust the possibilities associated with anxiety. A new account of self is needed to push such questions further, and so Connolly asks, why choose to emphasize the “depth” of the self rather than of the social rules and structures?

In Political Theory and Modernity Connolly further explicates the theory of the subject that will make possible the productive role of excess. He notes that Freud’s stratified subject correctly accentuates a feature of subjectivity that early modern accounts of the self did not theorize, namely reflexivity or self-consciousness. The need for the self

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56 Ibid., p143.
57 Ibid., p137.
58 Ibid., p143.
59 Ibid., p143.
60 Connolly, Politics and Ambiguity, pix.
to regulate itself arose from early modern theories in which political power developed disciplines to fit the self into the utopian political order. In seeking to free the self from such externally sourced discipline, Freud transferred the regulative agency of the self to the management of the complex dynamic interaction between superego, ego, and id(it) whose rearrangements make possible a solution to anxiety that requires no changes to the external order. The result is a vision of therapeutic self-formation which attempts to heal the interior self rather than explore what unconsidered or unembraced possibilities the seeds of life within it might bring to prevailing conceptualizations of self and society.

Connolly, however, claims that these internal dynamics of the Freudian self were spread across regimes in early modern political theory. The conflicts Freud locates within the self can thus be converted back into the political register.

In the section below on “pulling weeds” I further expand upon Connolly’s repoliticized self. The important point to note here is that his late modern self finds anxiety to be the essential experience of an ontology of abundance, meaning that it should be seen as a sign of life rather than division. Interpreting anxiety in this way creates a need for a process through which such disruptive excess can form into a healthy plant or subjectivity. Connolly’s account of cultivation describes precisely this process.

C. Cultivating an Ethical Sensibility

As I have noted in the previous paragraphs, Connolly points to anxiety, understood as moments in which life exceeds extant identities, to describe how late moderns experience the Nietzschean account of reality. I now turn to Connolly’s account of the ethical promise of his ontology, which is captured in his notion of “cultivation”.

‘Cultivation’ derives from the Latin cultura, which almost always refers to tending land or plants, with rare exceptions in which the objects are non-botanical inanimate things that are polished or improved in some way. Even more rarely are humans the object of cultura. The predilection for a nonhuman object carries over into the English, which suggests its
home among gardening images and analogies. The term has a distinguished pedigree in Greek ethics, appearing in Aristotelean visions of virtue-formation which is also modelled on seed and organic growth. Connolly sets his account of cultivation against historically significant modernist thinkers and by doing so seems to imply that every moral or ethical thinker cultivates something. For example, he claims that Hobbes cultivates the fear of death and that Rousseau cultivates a pure heart that is concerned only for the good of others. And he assesses such systems in comparison with the cultivation of aspects of his ontology or sensibilities that he claims it best supports; two exemplary quotes suffice:

Maybe it is ethically productive to cultivate a certain dissonance or scepticism amidst all the pressures to confirm a fixed faith or conform to a settled identity. [Connolly recommends the cultivation of] those elements in your faith that allow it to forge relations of presumptive generosity with others.

Connolly’s fullest description of “cultivation” comes by way of a contrast with Charles Taylor’s account of the same, which I detail below. It is helpful to first sketch the distinctively Nietzschean features that his comparison with Taylor assumes before noting what, from an Augustinian view, is a problematic consistency between Connolly and the Aristotelean tradition of cultivation.

Robert Solomon helpfully articulates two extremes of cultivation that the Nietzschean approach avoids. First, Solomon notes that the gardening metaphor was a favourite in nineteenth-century naturalist literature, though it tended to depict human development deterministically as an inevitable unfolding of immanent principles unresponsive to human agency. Thus, human cultivation was merely part of an impersonal

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62Ibid., p29.
63Ibid., p102.
64Connolly, *The Augustinian Imperative*, p65
65Ibid., pxxiii
natural process.\textsuperscript{67} Second, the Sartrean vision of humans as “captains of our fate,” assumes a Kantian noumenal “up by your bootstraps” self capable of \textit{de nihilo} self-fashioning. In contrast to these extremes, Nietzsche’s counsel to “Become who you are,” Solomon argues, is a genuine imperative that requires coming to terms with a thickly contextualized, but non-fatalistic conception of human agency. Solomon highlights that, for Nietzsche, “agency” includes one’s character, which suggests that Nietzsche’s naturalism and purportedly associated determinism is not in any sense impersonal. Rather, Nietzsche’s notion of character as agency calls for a cultivation of oneself “\textit{in accordance with} our inborn abilities and limitations.”\textsuperscript{68}

Connolly’s cultivation, which shares this basic Nietzschean shape, receives further specification as he contrasts it with the cultivation seen in other modern and late modern ethical projects, which he finds to unnecessarily limit potentialities of being. This point comes from a comparison with Charles Taylor’s Aristotelean account of cultivation. Connolly claims that Taylor shares a sense of the fugitive character of the self’s deepest sources as seen in his account of the change that happens to the source and the self when the source is articulated. That is, Taylor holds that drawing a source of the self into discursive practice changes it, while at the same time potentially empowering human agency by such articulation. Connolly agrees with Taylor that articulating an ontology potentially brings to light new ethical implications that were unknown prior to such communication. But Connolly bristles at Taylor’s claim to have “recognized” the source prior to its “articulation”. Connolly instead remains aware that he has “affirmed” a source of the self and retains the crucial practice of genealogy, rather than a straightforward and innocent “articulation”. Connolly thus sees himself as attending to mere possibilities of being that are imperfectly installed in established institutions, while Taylor expects

\textsuperscript{67}Brian Leiter has argued that Nietzsche improperly ascribes such determinism based on an anthropological essentialism that excludes cultivation to Schopenhauer. See Brian Leiter, \textit{Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Nietzsche on Morality} (Routledge Philosophy Guidebooks) (London: Routledge, 2002), p61 – 63.

\textsuperscript{68}Solomon, p427 (his emphasis).
increasing attunement of self and the social order with a supratemporal source. The upshot is that Connolly sees his ontology opening the late modern individual to a genuine newness and open-endedness that Taylor’s expectation of cultivating pre-known virtues forecloses. This comparison with Taylor clarifies that, as for Nietzsche, Connolly’s cultivation involves the creation of new modes of relating and being.

With this background in place, I turn now to three textual instances of cultivation in Connolly, which bring to the fore his contribution to the Nietzschean cultivation tradition:

[Nietzsche counsels] you [to] cultivate **fugitive excesses or surpluses** in the experience of life to fold greater generosity into the ethical sensibility governing you.  

[Nietzsche and Foucault] devise strategies for cultivating **care** for identity and difference…

‘Agonistic respect’…is a civic virtue that allows people…to cultivate **reciprocal respect** across difference…

In the above examples, Connolly counsels cultivation of, respectively: (i) the ontology of life or a particular quality of that life (like its surpluses, strangeness or unpredictability, for example); (ii) like Aristotle, a particular human sensibility or disposition; (iii) relational modalities. The ambiguity regarding what is to be cultivated, I suggest, is best explained by the fact that he is thinking in terms of the parable of the sower, in which cultivation can have the seed, a plant, or a desired interaction among plants as its object.

These quotations clarify that Connolly’s unique contribution to both the Nietzschean cultivation tradition and the sower parable itself is the political dimension whereby cultivating excesses in others is also to cultivate care for abundance in oneself. I described this same politicized aspect of the formation of the self, arguing that, for

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69 Connolly, *The Augustinian Imperative*, p141.
70 Ibid., p138.
Connolly, the garden is both the self and the social order. The same point arises here with respect to cultivation, as these three passages in Connolly listed above clarify that cultivating excess involves allowing it in others and, at the same time, installing in oneself an openness to difference, rather than a foreshortened unity demanded by the particular social order in which one is situated. Said another way, to care for difference in oneself is to respect it in others. It is precisely this link between the order of the self and the social order that underlies Connolly’s insistence, contra Taylor, that it is impossible to know beforehand the required specific virtues – or perhaps more pointedly, it exhibits the impossibility of timeless virtues.\(^{73}\) Taylor is simply apolitical at this point; that is, he thinks that the good of the self is grounded in some kind of immediate self-and-world apprehension that bypasses the political realm altogether. Connolly’s sower parable imagines a far more politically situated and contextualized understanding of ethical cultivation. Undergirding this link between the self’s order and the social order is a political theory of the self, which is outlined in detail below in the next section of this chapter. What is important to note at this junction is that Connolly does hold to a self that is stable across time, though not in the sense of a timeless and statically enduring unity.\(^{74}\)

There is work to be done on the self, therefore, though one must be aware of life as an

\(^{73}\)Stephen White is one of Connolly’s most adept interpreters, but he has disagreed in print with Connolly regarding how the latter moves from ontology to ethics. Though White rightly notes that “cultivation” is how Connolly describes the movement from ontology to a normative ethic (White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, p115), he does not link Connolly’s “cultivation” to the broader set of metaphors that comprise his parable and instead utilizes the language of a “prefigurative path” (White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, p131) or of “stages of prefiguration” (White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, p121) to analyse such a movement in Connolly’s work. This disagreement becomes significant when White charges that Connolly charts an unlikely path from abundance of being to ethical modes of identity relation. Connolly responds that a strong sense of gift giving will move one from ontology to an ethic of generous identity relations (Cited in White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, p131). My observation above concerning the three objects of cultivation has a bearing on this disagreement in that they show that White’s opting for “prefiguration” instead of “cultivation” language causes him to miss the second object of cultivation noted above, namely the need to cultivate a sensibility in oneself. White’s point will be further critiqued in the next two sections of this chapter which show that the conjugal-sexual sphere is the context in which Connolly most fully develops (or “prefigures,” in White’s terms) the content of his ethic, though this will require pulling together scattered fragments in order to arrive at the coherent picture of marriage and sexuality latent in his Augustine era writings.

\(^{74}\)Nietzsche’s *Daybreak*, Section 560, “Have the great philosophers not put their seal on this prejudice with the doctrine of the unchangeability of character?” The reference here is to Schopenhauer, whom Nietzsche (perhaps mistakenly) portrayed as holding to a subject whose essence is the will and which cannot change through cultivation.
excessive source and of the intertwined nature of social and personal change.

The next two sections bring the conjugal-sexual into direct conversation with Connolly’s Nietzschean ontology, therapy, and ethical cultivation that have been outlined above. They also begin to hint at the way in which I learn from Connolly how to read Augustine in this contemporary setting, namely with an attention to the necessary intersubjective dimension of ethical cultivation of the self. However, it will become clear that Connolly’s account of cultivation remains Aristotelean in a way that, I argue, Augustine helpfully avoids insofar as Augustine offers an account of the disruptive transformative role a particular community can have on the self’s formation. This point will come into focus in the closing section of the chapter. In the next two sections, I detail how Connolly’s interaction with the conjugal-sexual takes the form of a critique of modernist sexual moralities. Connolly’s politicized self comes into clearer view in these interactions, as does the implications that his account of ethical self-formation has for a contemporary conjugal-sexual ethic.

III. Pulling Weeds: Connolly’s Critique of the Liberal Subject

“Take a look at promising sprouts later in the season, watering some and pulling weeds crowding others. (Ahh, the weeding…that is the delightful part!)”

Connolly playfully describes the manner in which agonists undertake genealogical work, namely in a spirit of joyful combat or humorous anger. Like most common mortals (perhaps even deontologists!), agonists avoid the backbreaking work of weeding, that is, until a patch of unwanted field flowers blocks the view of the petunias or steals sun from the cabbage. Only then, when a weed proves itself to be not merely hearty, but profligate, when one strand does violence to less developed forms of life in its aim to turn a patch of soil into a prosaic monochrome expanse of itself, is one’s ire stirred. Only then does the

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75 Connolly, *Identity\Difference*, pxi. The ellipsis is Connolly’s and not mine.
76 The latter phrase is Geoffrey Rees’, which is not developed in explicit reference to Connolly but fits his description and practice of genealogy, despite the Freudian origins of Rees’ phrase (Geoffrey Rees, *The Romance of Innocent Sexuality* (Eugene, Or: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011), p81.
joy of weeding move one to do combat with the ubiquitous weed, even as the back aches. The joy or the humour of weeding arises from the agonist’s faith that a richer expression of life is possible after its removal. Thus, I suggest that “weeding” in Connolly’s parable is the kind of genealogical work that follows from his ontological and normative-ethical affirmations. And I further suggest that the weeds in Connolly’s parable are nihilistic subjectivities in their various forms. The delight in deconstructing the universalizing ambitions of the modern self marks agonistic weeding precisely because Connolly affirms a vision of subject-formation (detailed in the previous section) that is ethically superior to the intended mimetic repetition and divinization of the weed. In other words, weeding frees up possibilities for cultivating self and society.

We have already encountered one weed in Connolly’s field of modernity, the “passive nihilism” of genealogists who counsel perpetual detachment without advocating for a new set of attachments, thereby leaving a plot of rich soil open for fundamentalism to come to seed and flourish. Connolly, in contrast to this form of genealogical work, outlines an ethic of cultivation that ensures that the soil is too populated with different identities to allow any more than just a little space for religious fundamentalist subjectivities to grow. But the subjectivities of passive nihilism are not the primary weeds that raise Connolly’s ire. The true depth of delight he mentions is felt in removing what he calls the “aggressive nihilism”77 of modernity’s individualistic subject. As I show in this section, Connolly’s genealogy levels an ethical critique on this score, exposing the “evil” in the process of self-formation that arises from modernity’s claim to have direct access to the moral meaning of nature. The core commitment that sustains this subject, Connolly claims, is that the garden of self and the social order can be viewed from a standpoint that surveys the whole. Connolly insists that something much nearer the ground is needed, namely a cultivation of nature’s abundance, and that a bird’s eye view of the garden only distances

77Connolly, Identity\Difference, p10; Connolly, The Augustinian Imperative, p148
one from the actual dynamics of growth or decay. I argue in the last section of this chapter that Augustine has neither a passive nor aggressive nihilistic subjectivity. As I show, Connolly finds the joy of weeding mostly with respect to modern sexual moralities that arise from and sustain the modern individualistic self, though he ultimately (and unnecessarily) claims that this self springs forth from Augustinian soil.

A. Hobbes, Rousseau and Sade on Natural Sexual Morality

In *Political Theory and Modernity*, Connolly argues that, despite their vast differences on important ethico-political issues, the Hobbesian and Rousseauan ethics of self-formation share the same formal structure: First, the rational mind finds guidance in nature for attaining a utopian social order. Second, the self’s susceptibility to this desired order requires containing its disruptive passions and impulses via disciplines and regulations. Third, the resulting ordered self is described in moral terms in distinction from disordered selves who are labelled “irrational” or “evil”.

Whatever debates a contemporary Hobbesian or Rousseauan might have with each other, both will assume this sketch of the self. Their conversation will never bring it under conscious scrutiny. Connolly sees in this basic structural model a continuation of the pre-modern vision of self that Augustine bequeathed to the West, the only difference being with Augustine’s account of the first point, namely that Augustine’s account of mystery yields a more sophisticated and less immediate understanding than his modern successors of the way in which nature provides guidance. I will bracket this Augustinian difference for now, as I take up Connolly’s discussion of Augustinian mystery in the third chapter.

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78 Connolly mentions that they differ on the following topics (Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity*, p68): the state of nature, the human subject, the form of sovereignty, how to pursue freedom, the religion-state relation, the moral quality of commerce, equality, and the expectation about the reception of their ethico-political vision.

79 In Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity* (p69) Connolly lists twelve similarities between Hobbes and Rousseau in order to facilitate a discussion about numerous structural similarities between their projects, of which self-formation is just one. My list of three similarities above is a distillation of the points that relate to this one theme of self-formation.

80 One might find it a stretch to call Hobbes’ ethico-political vision “utopian”, but I am stating Connolly’s view in this section, which, in relation to this point, is that both Hobbes and Rousseau claim to show the way to the best social order.
For the purposes of this chapter relating to an ethic of self-formation, Connolly can be said to see Augustine as the originator of these three formal features of the modern self. And so I will call the self shared by Hobbes and Rousseau ‘the Augustinian self’ (in single quotes) for the remainder of this chapter. I use single quotes to demarcate it as Connolly’s Augustine and to distinguish it from the Augustine I will forward in this thesis.

Connolly does not reject ‘the Augustinian self’ tout court. Quite to the contrary, I noted in the previous section of this chapter that he finds the second point (thinking the self’s order in terms of its susceptibility to the desired social order) a productive site of reflection, as it provides resources for a politicized theory of the late modern self by detailing the various disciplines that Hobbes and Rousseau see as useful for constraining and regulating it so as to achieve an intelligibility and coherence with respect to the social order. As I stated above, this politicized self is Connolly’s constructive alternative to the depoliticized vocabularies of formation, particularly in the Freudian tradition. Connolly notes that linking the self’s order to the social order – or as I have stated metaphorically above, seeing the garden as both self and society – is a point of continuity between the pre-modern (i.e., Augustinian) and early modern selves, and this similarity is significant for the purposes of this chapter, as it allows for a smooth comparison between Connolly’s and Augustine’s sower parables. So while Connolly saves the second point by using it against the intentions of Hobbes and Rousseau to produce a theory of a politicized late modern self, Connolly’s ethic of cultivation requires a direct resistance to the first and third points. His way to problematize these features is to draw Marquis de Sade into conversation with Rousseau.

Sade, who assiduously read and pondered Rousseau’s work throughout his life, constructs and documents a variety of sexual practices. These enactments give expression to the ocean of impulses and passions that ‘the Augustinian self’’s’ intensive organization

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seeks to contain, and the purpose of the subsequent discursive reflections on these performances is to depict the “diversity of propensities, passions, desires and inclinations,” described therein as expressions of the natural self. And so, while Rousseau depicted nature as “a state of simple bliss,” the figure of nature emerging from Sade’s articulations is of “a fund of forces, materials, drives and limits which shape and condition life.” While Rousseau and Hobbes believed that the singular voice of God spoke to them through nature, Sade uses the same arguments that Rousseau and Hobbes used against an universally authoritative interpretation of scripture to pluralize nature’s own voice. And so after Sade, Connolly notes, it becomes obvious that any claims from nature about the order of self or society are shown to be arbitrary and not rationally verifiable, for Sade shows that the standard of nature can be used to authorize not only acts of sentimental good will to another (as in Rousseau) but also heinously cruel acts. In Connolly’s words, in Sade,

Nature now allows anything and everything. If one now wishes to ascertain whether some act is natural, one needs only to ascertain whether it can become an object of desire…nothing in nature itself overthrows any desire which becomes intense at a particular moment.

The Sadean text does not always make clear what aspects of his philosophical exercises are meant to impact behaviour in the private or public spheres, but Connolly sees in his work as a whole a clear political vision with a simple imperative: “it is far better to allow this [natural] diversity to find expression than to try to model each self after some specious paradigm of selfhood…” But Connolly finds this expectation of “expressing nature” in the passions to be just as suspicious as ‘the Augustinian self’s’ presumption to find nature expressed in rationality (and rationality expressed in nature). For, Connolly asks, does Sade not realize that in his own philosophical exercises he can only give

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82 Ibid., p77.  
83 Ibid., p68.  
84 Ibid., p77.  
86 Ibid., p77.
expression to the ocean of feeling that Rousseau’s social order contained by means of a competing pre-arranged organization of self that requires its own accompanying disciplines?

And does Sade not see that, in appealing to a different individuality on the basis of a new conception of nature revealed in the passions, he accomplishes a greater “individuality” for woman only by pluralizing her subjection to more partners, rather than making her a desiring and independent subject in her own right? Both of these features of Sadean texts, of which Sade himself was unaware, suggest that human passions are a no more reliable medium of a nature that will free the human subject from the bounds of convention than was rationality. And this shows that Sade and ‘the Augustinian self’, while offering competing conceptions of nature and nature’s medium, retain the same formal relation to it, because both assume a boundary between nature and culture. That is, both Sade and Augustine see a pre-cultural natural self, whose state of existence is not a result of cultivation, but is like a rock in the garden that remains the same on account of constitutive features (rationality or passions) that are impervious to human cultivation since they exist previous to it. Connolly’s ethic of cultivation, by contrast, affirms continuity between nature and culture and does away with this nihilism, this affirmation of a no-thing.

Martin Leet’s perceptive account of the difference between the nature-culture continuity implied in Connolly’s ethic of cultivation with the genealogical work of “passive nihilists” helps me further describe the joy that Connolly finds in weeding.

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87 Ibid., p73.
88 Ibid., p74.
89 Leet does not utilize Connolly’s own term “passive nihilism” but simply contrasts Connolly with Judith Butler. See Leet, Aftereffects of Knowledge in Modernity (SUNY), esp. p62-67. Leet’s treatment of Connolly has one significant error that is worth mentioning in this context: Leet sees Connolly as attacking the idea that the subject is an enduring entity. But my interpretation of Connolly’s ‘Augustinian self’ given in the three points above seeks to make clear that Connolly nowhere opposes modernity for seeing the subject as natural but rather for claiming that rationality provides a direct window into nature that provides sufficient content to ethically form the self. This mistake in Leet does not compromise his Connollian diagnosis of Butler’s insufficiently politicized self, but it does miss the way in which Connolly seeks to repoliticize the self – precisely through the early modern subject seen in Hobbes and Rousseau. In the last section of this chapter, noting this route will prove to be important for my investigation because it provides a basis for contrasting my Augustinian self (developed in Section Two of this thesis) with Connolly’s ‘Augustinian
Passive nihilists, Leet explains, operate with what he calls an “emancipatory apriorism,” by which he means that their genealogical work which they engage to enable perpetual detachment from extant identities operates with the unstated assumption that such detachment frees something beneath those identities. I recounted above Connolly’s observation of this same assumption at work in Sade’s text. That something, he claims, must be some version of a modern natural subject. Using this insight into Connolly’s difference from someone like Judith Butler, I can expand creatively on Connolly’s description of weeding as delightful by saying that a passive nihilist’s weeding is comparatively joyless, as its aim is simply to keep “the natural” in plain view, while an agonist finds delight in the prospect of inflecting the pulsations of life around her in such a way as to enable a much fuller expression of life in the garden. The goal of weeding, for Connolly, is not to “free up” the natural subject but to “free up” possibilities for human cultivation. Only by fighting for what might come to be does one exercise a proper gratitude for the abundance of life that is experienced in late modern identities.

I noted above that Finlay’s Little Sparta challenges the nature-culture divide, in part, by inscribing poems on stones. And the above paragraphs have shown how Connolly, as a fellow agonistic gardener, deconstructs claims that the self has direct access to nature by narrating the impasse modernity reached through Sade’s challenge to Rousseau. I now detail how this narrative culminates in an ethical critique that Connolly draws from Hegel, the great historicizer of human subjectivity.

**B. The Ethical Critique of the Subject of Modern Sexual Morality**

Hegel provides Connolly with his most potent and influential ethical diagnosis of the modern subject: his charge that it fails to overcome “the second problem of evil”.

Connolly recounts Hegel’s criticism of two implausible forms of individuality:
hedonism and the virtuous pure heart. Hegel does not make the link, but Connolly clearly has Sade and Rousseau in mind.\(^91\) The hedonist has no concern with bestowing dignity on their object of pleasure nor with leaving a legacy among successors, while “pure hearts” seek recognition as those whose sentiments naturally flow forth in a manner that dignifies the other. Hegel diagnoses both as “manifestations of insistent individualism”\(^92\) that are inadequately integrated into the intersubjectivity that will sustain modern ethical life. Sade represents what I call an isolationist immediacy of the self and Rousseau an overly-optimistic immediacy. Connolly agrees with Hegel’s denunciation of both.\(^93\) Connolly labels the former a “narcissistic individualist” and the latter a “transcendental narcissist”.\(^94\)

On Hegel’s account, hedonism cannot sustain itself, because hedonists become suspicious of other hedonists who they know will use them to satisfy their pleasure without warning of the risks involved. Connolly writes, “Perhaps the other has AIDS. Suspicion devolves into paranoia in a universe of hedonists.”\(^95\) And so hedonistic subjectivity reacts by transforming into the pure heart that cares only about the good of others. The pure heart assumes that the universal laws of justice and goodness reside within the self. But, Hegel claims, because the pure heart needs no mediating arrangements, “only bare coincidence could produce unity between two unmediated hearts.”\(^96\) As conflict between pure hearts grows, this subjectivity ends by repudiating the very law of individuality that defined its being.

Connolly agrees that these two forms of insistent individuality define and sustain one another. The very existence of each is formed only in opposition to the other, though they themselves obscure this fact by claiming that they are seeing a self in nature. The

\(^91\)This section draws on the Second Interlude and Chapter Four of Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity* (p86-136).
\(^92\)This is Connolly’s and not Hegel’s phrase (Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity*, p101).
\(^93\)Hegel’s and Connolly’s critique of the “pure heart” or “overly optimistic immediate self” extends to Schleiermacher’s “sheer immediacy” in which self is seen to be always already absorbed in the infinite. Cf. James M. Brant, *All Things New: Reform of Church and Society in Schleiermacher’s Christian Ethics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 2001), p61
\(^94\)Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity*, p78.
\(^95\)Ibid., p102.
\(^96\)Ibid.
implication Connolly draws is that a nature-culture division will always generate a nihilistic subject (i.e., one that does not exist), while a nature-culture continuity will place upon humanity a proper responsibility for cultivating the self. Further, the latter is a condition of possibility for remaining aware of what Connolly calls, “the second problem of evil,” which is that in late modernity the self is actually constituted through the defining of that which is essentially different from oneself as immoral or other.

He labels it the “second” problem because it has, in his assessment, replaced the Augustinian (first) problem of evil, which established for him a criterion by which he judged Manichaeism inadequate and catholic theology adequate for the problems of life. On Connolly’s account, Augustine saved an omnipotent and good God by “relocating responsibility for evil in the world he created.”97 And his solution not only constituted a denunciation of Manichaean Gnosticism but also “took the most significant step toward the conception of the self as an interiorized subject free and responsible for its own actions.”98 But this free and responsible self, according to Nietzschean ontological assumptions, is a mirage. It enabled later thinkers to create the conditions in which human life is experienced in terms of a unified and enduring identity. But holding fast to an identity, Connolly claims, is only done by means of defining oneself as not something or someone else.

Connolly shows how this problematic ‘Augustinian’ self-constitution works through a discussion of how Sade and Rousseau together created the category of “pornography” in early modernity.99 The narrative starts with Rousseau demanding the formation of a docile self who enters into a contractual marriage in order to ensure that passion is subdued within the confines of an atomistic self who has a degree of freedom in the private realm of the home. Anyone who expresses passion in public discourse threatens to disturb social order and therefore should be labelled immoral and unruly. Sade

97Ibid., p18.
98Ibid.
99Connolly, Political Theory and Modernity, p79-85.
arises to challenge precisely Rousseau’s framework, but his critique is merely a reversal of Rousseau’s categories rather than a more radical revaluation of them that would allow the cultivation of a unique self, heretofore unknown. Thus, Rousseau and Sade are equally responsible for the creation of “pornography” as a category. Connolly sees Sade’s pornographic explorations as inadequate cultivations of anything new in self and other, because they are constricted by a revenge that can do nothing more than mirror Rousseauan categories, such as purity or docility. Sade’s exercises thus reveal their source in a root of bitterness rather than a connection to a seed of life.

So in terms of the three formal features of ‘the Augustinian self’ outlined above, Connolly’s argument is that the first point (an appeal to nature as source of guidance) is the condition of possibility for the third (the constitution of identity through the definition of another as essentially immoral). In this way, appeals to nature hide the actual dynamics of identity-formation, which creates the second problem of evil to which he finds Augustine inadequate. The way in which contractual marriage and rebellious hedonism produce, sustain, and require one another is emblematic of the options that ‘the Augustinian self’ sees in its own formation. So when Connolly talks about marriage ethics, his concern is with how new sexual and marital identities can emerge into the sphere of social recognition and play a role in preparing the individual to appreciate moments of attunement with others. Connolly’s Hegelian diagnosis of ‘the Augustinian self’ depends upon a positive assertion about the self which Connolly draws on, namely that the modern self needs to be historicized in order to be rendered sufficiently intersubjective. The next section will fill out this constructive picture further by clarifying how Connolly links intersubjectivity and the conjugal-sexual sphere.

IV. Ploughing the Soil of Modernity with and Beyond Hegel

“Scratch the cultural ground with a sharp stick here and there…”

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100Connolly, *Identity\Difference*, p xi
If “transgressive energies are refined and tempered, they might help to generate more effective space for singularity, diversity, and spirited contestation in life.”

As I showed in the previous section, Connolly draws on Hegel’s critique of hedonist and purist sexual moralities, formulating his own criteria for contemporary accounts of self-formation in his “second problem of evil” that ‘the Augustinian self’ made possible. In this section, the precise nature of Connolly’s reliance on Hegelian intersubjectivity is made plain. The differences Connolly announces from Hegel in this regard are most fully articulated in terms of his rejection of Hegel’s requirement that the conjugal-sexual sphere serve to build-up a recognition that makes possible the intersubjective quality of the ethical life of the state.

Connolly appreciatively recounts Hegel’s narration of how the seed of subjectivity was sown: Ancient Greek society defined her citizens by their connection to a common life that was understood to be a unified whole. When contradictions arose between absolute injunctions that sustained the order of the polis, ancient Greeks treated them as manifestations of fate. But an internal enemy arose in the physical female body of Antigone, even as she cared for her family, highlighting the need for the mediation of competing laws through subjectivity. On Hegel’s narrative, dialectical dynamics arose between masters/slaves and hedonists/purists. What emerged was the modern intersubjectivity that is built up through various forms of recognition. Requisite for such building up is Hegelian traditionalist marriage.

Hegel, Connolly comments, is “a philosopher of empiricist-essentialism.” And Connolly articulates how this type of philosophizing is at work in Hegel’s account of marriage. Hegel claims that sexually differentiated human bodies (male-female) carry an

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101 Connolly, *The Augustinian Imperative*, p47
102 Unless otherwise noted, this section interacts with Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity*, Chapter Four and Second Interlude. As before with Hobbes, Rousseau and Sade, I am only concerned in this section with Connolly’s Hegel.
104 Ibid., p122-123.
immanent purpose, one that is derived from the telos of the ethical life of the state. For Hegel, these meanings are immanent to male-female bodies. And these meanings that arise from the ontology of Spirit are not incidental to it but are “fundamentally expressive of it”. Not only does this imply that those living in singleness are incomplete persons, but also that longstanding roles of subordination can be explained under the guise of simple role differentiation. For Connolly, such ethical claims are not merely historical curiosities. Rather, he worries about “the residue of Hegelian teleology clinging,” among other places, to extant accounts of marriage flowing from modernity.

Connolly offers an immanent critique of Hegel’s historical narrative by updating his empirical claims about how things have turned out:

This finding of Hegel’s about Greek life could only be articulated after the modern world had clarified the principle of subjectivity and the role it can play in ethical life. Similarly, the modern world of nineteenth-century Europe and America, viewed now from a perspective accepting Hegel’s systematic account minus its ontology of Spirit, inverts and exacerbates that classical contradiction…such a massive contradiction was not supposed to occur in the realized state of modernity.

In other words, by extending individuality to women, feminine subjectivity did not stay within the private sphere as Hegel’s ontology said it would but unexpectedly became an agent for change. The successes of this agency’s demand for change can be seen, Connolly claims, in how the state is now more involved in settling disputes within families (in the wake of the displacement of male-only leadership), in more egalitarian child-rearing patterns, etc. Far from being perfected in the modern state, such developments suggest that subjectivity is still developing. Such comments constitute an immanent critique of Hegelian ontology by suggesting that Hegel’s coherence theory of truth is “jeopardized by the implication that more than one theory in a ‘given’ domain [in this case the family.] can meet the relevant test of coherence.”

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105 Ibid., p140.
106 Connolly, Political Theory and Modernity, p123.
107 Ibid., p168.
108 Connolly, Politics and Ambiguity, p65.
Connolly offers new empirical evidence relating to the family, to which he finds Hegel’s traditionalist assumptions inadequate. In order to relax the drive to mastery and attunement and thereby relieve the self from the need to domesticate discordances (such as differing opinions about how “woman” should operate in private and public),[109] Connolly offers a fuller assessment of the unique pressures being placed on the late modern self in relation to family and sexuality in *Politics and Ambiguity*. He claims that the Hegelian ideal of family and gender roles was embodied in early twentieth-century America as a mode of sacrifice that attempted to secure a beneficent future for progeny.[110] In other words, marriage functioned as a cog in the civilization of productivity.[111] But as endless economic expansion proved to be a myth, divorce rates rose and struggles over gender roles ensued. And because the growth imperative replaced the sense of common purpose that liberal ideals were founded upon, the social rules that had previously governed family roles lost their determinacy.[112] And the result of these disjunctions registers on the level of identity: “To become severely disaffected from that which one is called upon to do in…family…is also to become disaffected from the self one has become.”[113]

One could multiply such quotes several times over from *Politics and Ambiguity*. But even this small selection clarifies that Connolly brings empirical evidence from contemporary life to show that family will never reach the kind of complete resolution with contemporary subjectivity that Hegel announced and predicted. The traditional guides to family life, the ones that Hegel endorses as enduring from the time of the ancient Greek society up to the present, were unconscious, Connolly claims.[114] To the degree that such unreflective traditions lose their power to define (for example) family roles, public

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[111] Ibid., p69.
[112] Ibid., p61
[114] Ibid., p84.
recognition will become increasingly important.\textsuperscript{115} The need in such situations is, thus, for a political means by which one can remedy their role disaffection through intersubjective buffering and recognition. Political, Connolly makes clear, refers to the social relations that emerge when issues require resolution that reason and evidence are insufficient to settle.\textsuperscript{116}

The picture that emerges of marriage from the above is not of a natural institution that needs preservation or promotion in its own right. It is rather a more sceptical stance towards a socially recognized arrangement capable of carrying a variety of communal purposes into one’s subjectivity, including imperatives rooted in a civilization of productivity, or, as will be espoused from Augustine’s work in Chapter Five, the kind recognition by a local church of a performed sacrament. Whatever the specific frame of reference, Connolly’s worry is with accounts of marriage that, given the empirical situation at the time, will produce individualistic subjectivities, either due to the disaffection that results from too severe disciplinary measures on self or other in a marriage.

So what are the implications of Connolly’s agonistic ethic for the conjugal-sexual realm? I suggest that the category in Connolly’s writings that best fits his treatment of marriage is of an “obdurate or entrenched contingency”.\textsuperscript{117} This category resists Hegel’s projection of particular gender roles into an ontology and renders the institution of marriage corrigible to further subjective experiences. This category of social configuration also highlights what distinguishes his work from both Richard Rorty and Judith Butler. In regards to the former, Connolly thinks marriage is not a private matter that one can ironize as one wishes (a point I develop more fully in chapter 2). In regards to Butler, Connolly does not see culture (including the conjugal traditions within it) as instantly malleable, plastic, and negotiable. Rather, as Hegel’s narrative of marriage and subjectivity showed,

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\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., p87.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., p76.
\textsuperscript{117} Connolly, \textit{Identity/Difference}, p171-181.
changes happen slowly over centuries; late modern expectations of changing the “entrenched contingency” of marriage must be kept modest.\textsuperscript{118} Thus, with respect to marriage, Connolly assumes that one must cultivate the soil in which one finds oneself and give up revolutionary ambitions. So while Connolly agrees with Hegel that identity-formation is a relational-social phenomenon and that marriage plays a crucial role in the formation of the subject, he insists that marriage be seen as the malleable institution that history shows it to be and thus requires contemporary conceptions of it to be open to possibilities that arise from the cultivation of new individualities.

How does one engage in producing such modest inflections in the intersubjective experiences of late modernity? Connolly worries that the individuality of Foucaultian micropolitical tactics of the self will prove inadequate to unleash marriage from the imperatives arising from the political economy as a whole.\textsuperscript{119} Something more socially visible is required. Stephen White notes that Connolly’s notion of cultivation, in comparison with Foucault, is less delicately aesthetic and more “socially engaged, assertive, and risky”.\textsuperscript{120} Connolly portrays inflections as forms of creative resistance that are never anything more than “uncertain steps”\textsuperscript{121} and that yet must be militant.\textsuperscript{122} While Foucault emphasizes that micropolitical steps must take place first on the self, Connolly’s linking of the self’s order with the political order via an open-ended Hegelian intersubjective assessment of marriage requires the embodiment of ethical relational modalities. While these relational postures can be seen to be rooted in attitudes towards the self (such as awareness of one’s own finitude\textsuperscript{123}), the general drift of Connolly’s micropolitical strategies assume that such attitudes to the self can only be sustained, and are only cultivated, for the purposes of cultivating the seeds of life that one sees in the

\textsuperscript{118}Connolly, \textit{Political Theory and Modernity}, p163
\textsuperscript{119}Connolly, \textit{Politics and Ambiguity}, p44-51
\textsuperscript{120}White, \textit{Sustaining Affirmation}, p121
\textsuperscript{121}Connolly, \textit{Identity/Difference}, p167
\textsuperscript{122}Ibid., p81
\textsuperscript{123}Ibid., p164-166
differences of others.

V. Gesturing Towards an Ethical Augustinian Account of Marriage’s Role in Christian Self-Formation

In the previous sections I have detailed Connolly’s account of ethical self-formation which promises health and newness in the contemporary intersubjective garden. He counsels that such newness requires: i) rendering the self as a historically developing (i.e., contingent) and intersubjective thing, and ii) expanding the constricted definition of marriage through expression of new sexualities that free it from the state’s aims. Connolly sees ‘Augustine’ to underlie early modernity’s resistance to these sources of newness. The basic charge is that ‘Augustine’ depoliticizes both self-formation and marriage, which plays such an important role in shaping the self. To combat these purportedly ‘Augustinian’ strictures, Connolly’s parable presents an account of cultivation that cherishes differences in modern subjects while weeding these no longer useful elements of subjectivity out of the garden, thereby opening marriage to become a space in which genuinely creative individualities arise.

I turn in this section to Augustine’s interpretation of the Pauline sower parable found in 1 Corinthians 3.5-9 and 1 Corinthians 9.7-11 to begin developing a contemporary account of marriage that draws from some of Connolly’s ethical diagnoses of Augustinianism in modernity. The Augustinian account I give is not Nietzschean all the way down but, more minimally, emphasizes aspects of the Augustinian vision that are capable of sustaining a greater sensitivity to the unethical tendencies that Connolly highlighted. With respect to the ethical formation of the self in late modernity, I show that Augustine’s account of marriage as sacrament assumes an intersubjective self and supports a created, rather than natural, ordered individuality. I then articulate how a Connollian lens on the sower parable highlights that Augustine’s conjugal sacramentality implies an

\[124\] To be clear, Augustine nowhere calls these Pauline passages a “sower parable” – thus, just as I creatively constructed Connolly’s sower parable from scattered fragments in his writings, I undertake a similar constructive-interpretive task here in relation to Augustine.
account of cultivation that extends beyond the mere cultivation of pre-known rules or virtues – it indeed entails a genuine open-ended creativity. It does so because the sacrament of marriage is understood by Augustine to be an ecclesial vocation, meaning that it orients the self outward in loving attention to the other.

A. Sacramental Marriage in Augustine’s Pauline Sower Parable

Around the time he finished writing Confessions, Augustine penned a treatise, On the Work of Monks (De opera monachorum, hereafter Dom), in response to a fellow bishop who was troubled by unusual practices carried out by monks under his charge.¹²⁵ The treatise includes one of Augustine’s most lengthy expositions of Paul’s sower parable (focusing almost exclusively on 1 Corinthians 9.7-11), in the midst of which Augustine presents programmatically significant elements of a catholic theology of Christian marriage. Understanding the parable’s meaning in relation to marriage requires some brief comments about the overall argument of the treatise. In Dom 1-38, Augustine addresses the scriptural arguments offered by monks to justify their eschewal of any form of work and their opting to beg for a living. Then, in Dom 39-40, Augustine seems to shift subjects entirely, denouncing these monks’ practice of wearing their hair long. Many readers of this treatise have properly noted that these seemingly disparate practices (refusal to work and practices of bodily ascesis) are, in Augustine’s assessment, commonly rooted in what today might be labelled an over-realized eschatology.¹²⁶ Specifically, these monks claimed to have attained an asexual angelic status, which they signified in a rejection of (male) manual labour and a donning of Samson-like (female) long hair.

One important argument that arises from the Pauline sower parable that Augustine brings to bear on this situation can be seen when Augustine defines the seed as “the word and mystery of the sacrament of the kingdom of heaven,” specifying further near the end

of this treatise (Dom 40) that a marriage between Christians has sacramental status in a
catholic ecclesial community. Augustine’s affirmation of marriage’s sacramentality
implies that it is not accidental but essential to the ecclesial self because of its capacity to
teach Christians to properly value the sexually differentiated bodies that constitute
humanity’s created nature. The implication is that Christian marriage requires communal
recognition in order to function as a sacrament, which points to an intersubjective
dimension to the ecclesial self. In other words, the seed is not planted until the community
recognizes a Christological truth at work in a given Christian marriage, a truth that is
relevant to all catholic Christians. This intersubjective dimension, in Connolly’s account,
dismisses various forms of individual immediacy that inadequately resist merely reactive
desires and that make possible the depoliticization of the self’s formation. That the
recognition of marriage is essential for formation of the ecclesial self means that it is, at
least in relation to marriage, political all the way down in precisely the way Connolly
discerned.

This vision of marital sacramentality as an intersubjective experience in the church
suggests that the monks’ significations of asexual individuality are irrelevant to ecclesial
identity precisely because they signify the arrival of a reality that denounces created bodily
reality. So while much of this treatise focuses on clarifying the biblical passages twisted by
the monks to promote an asexual identity, Augustine’s closing word of counsel that finally
makes good on the promise he made in the work’s preface to not only refute these monks
from Scripture but also to show the good bishop of Carthage a means of correcting his
community (see Dom 1), is that the community must learn to see Christological meaning
in the performance of Christian marriage. Such a perception sustains a self that affirms the
bodily reality denied in these monks’ practices. I further develop an Augustinian account

127 As I show in Section Two of this thesis, Augustine’s treatises on marriage and celibacy in this era
of writing are uniquely insistent on the sacramental nature of marriage, spilling over into his discussions of
marriage in Confessions which he was also writing at this time.
turn to *Confessions* to detail the Augustinian claim that the Christological seed gives rise to the self who finds itself a part of the created order.

### B. The Difference between Augustine’s Created Self and Modernity’s Natural Self

Augustine’s *Confessions* culminates in Book 13 (13.12.13-13.38.53) with an exposition of the Genesis 1 creation story. In an effort to take seriously the Pauline description of the church as the “new creation”, Augustine sees in the nine creative acts of Genesis 1 a series of ecclesial realities. The implication for the self is that, in the life of the church, one discovers the created self. This created self is not the natural self of modernity, for there is no nature-grace distinction in Augustine. On the one hand, this description of the self as created means for Augustine that it is the self that exists in mutuality and complementarity with other created beings. In other words, it is the self that is part of the created order. But, in another sense, the “created” descriptor points to the awareness that one’s present existence is upheld by the Creator and is therefore not one’s own possession, which means that there is not direct epistemological access to this self. These two senses of creatureliness are inseparable, and thus perceiving the created order of which one is a part entails a proper relation with the Creator.\(^\text{128}\) This issue of direct or indirect epistemic access highlights a significant difference between an Augustinian self who is part of the “created order,” and the modern natural self whose bird’s eye rational view of that order enables a perception of the true stability and fixity that will always remain rationality’s inexpugnable possession.

Notably, the ecclesial world that Augustine sees in Genesis 1 is constantly threatened by watery formlessness. Like the ancient cosmologies that shaped the Genesis creation text that envisioned the habitable land to be held above the deep waters of chaos

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\(^{128}\) Jason BeDuhn notes that Augustine’s making a perception of the former sense of createdness (as existing within the created order) dependent on the latter (as existing only by God’s upholding power) is evident from Augustine’s earliest writings and is what most decisively distinguishes Augustine’s account of order from the Platonic one. This agrees with my exposition of Augustine’s writings in Chapters Four and Five. See Jason David BeDuhn, *Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma, Volume 1: Conversion and Apostasy, 373-388 C.E.* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), p39.
by pillars, Augustine says the ecclesial self is surrounded by water everywhere: there are “dark and storm-tossed waters within us” (13.14.15), rain clouds above that hide divine counsel (13.15.18), and raging waters at the edges of the ecclesia (13.17.20). Though Augustine decisively departs from agonistic gardeners in his insistence that God actively sustains a created order that one can begin to perceive in the ecclesia, remaining aware of chaos within and around oneself is a part of the perception of that created order. The ecclesial garden is no less threatened than Finlay’s Little Sparta. And yet the ecclesial peace that arises from knowledge of God’s ordering is revelatory of the nature of all created reality, since this community’s God is indeed the Creator and Sustainer of all. Because the ecclesial self is not part of an order that arises from resources immanent to creation itself, ongoing chaos within and around oneself is not traced by Augustine back to a lack of rational perception of order but rather to the will of the Creator.

The above suggests that Augustine distinguishes between two kinds of chaos: one that is traced to broken relation with Creator (unnecessary chaos), and another back to the will of the Creator (ineliminable chaos). Connolly does not acknowledge these different types of chaos. He sees any denial of any type of flux on account of a notion of order to be generative of pre-knowable and thus depoliticized rules that buoy identities by submerging difference. While Connolly properly denounces any claims to possess a programme for a stable social order for the self, he is wrong to claim that any appeal to order implies a depoliticizing break between nature and culture. For, in Augustine, claiming that order is ‘out there’ does not entail removing humanity from the flux that is nature precisely because he sees that only God is separated from his creation and the knower and securer of order. The ethical implications of the apophatic quality of the created order that is implicit in Augustine’s Creator-creature distinction is detailed in later chapters of this thesis.

C. Augustinian Ethical Cultivation of Self

In Confessions 13.20.26-28, Augustine compares the divine creation and dispersal
of reptiles into the waters to the dispersal of sacraments that are sent out into the midst of human passions. Augustine seems to be drawing on the ability of reptiles to traverse water and land. As he had indicated in 13.17.21, the purpose of “the mysteries” (i.e., the sacraments) going into the waters is to see them return to solid land where fruit is being brought forth. The bearing of fruit is love and mercy to others. Given that marriage is a sacrament, it becomes clear that marriage turns one outside in love to others. Love to others is the growth that is desired in the ecclesia, and living in attunement with the created order (i.e., being on land) is nothing less than to exhibit in some small way the creative power of love. Augustinian sacramental marriage is thus not focused on pre- knowable principles but requires genuine creative strength. For to participate in this love is, at the same time, to live in attunement with the power that orders all created reality.

I will return to these themes of sacramentality, order, and loving, creative strength in Chapter Five of this thesis. But I close the chapter with the image of human waters becoming ecclesial land by virtue of the divine mysteries in order to emphasize a final decisive difference Augustine and Connolly on cultivation. While both opposed the unity of virtues that are found, for instance, in Aristotelean virtue theory, Connolly nowhere distances himself from an Aristotelean notion of habit. By contrast, Augustine in Confessions depicts habit as the enemy of virtue. Bonnie Kent notes that for Augustine “moral development [does not] follow the horticultural model, where good ‘root stock,’ appropriate soil and climate, and other fortunate circumstances prove indispensable for the production of an outstanding, flourishing specimen.” She notes that conversion is disruptive in Augustine, a breaking of habit; it is “the ‘turning around’ that marks the decisive moment in the Christian’s life.” And my aim in Section Two will be to show from Confessions that Augustine’s conversion from Manichaeism to catholic Christianity required the recognition of the role of marriage in the Milanese Christian community that

Manichaeism said it could not play. One could say that, to Augustine, the ecclesial self is more surprising than ancient virtue traditions (and Connolly) could account for, because the seed of life is the very power of God in sinful embodied human lives.

This chapter has laid the groundwork for noting confluences and differences between how Connolly and Augustine understand the role of the conjugal-sexual in the formation of the self. I have shown that Connolly opposes any conjugal-sexual ethic based on either an immediate natural subject or on an account the naturalness of marriage. Connolly rejects these options through an insistence on the nature-culture continuity, while Augustine resists them by means of the nature-grace continuity. What is needed to bring our exploration into Connolly’s agonistic conjugal-sexual ethic a step further is to look into his normative account of ethical relations between the sexes developed in terms of a diagnosis of Augustine’s supposed reification of patriarchal hierarchy that Connolly claims is implicit in his ethic of responsibility.
Chapter Two: In Praise Of Slack: Connolly’s Ethic Of Responsibility And The Reversal Of Edenic Gender Order

In the first chapter, I began investigating Connolly’s work by showing the relation between marriage, sexuality, and self-formation. I turn now to his reading of Eden to detail how Connolly proposes to reverse the unjust gender hierarchy that he claims Augustinian order reifies. In concluding the chapter, I argue that Augustine has resources to do the same, though in a way that has some advantages to Connolly’s strategies.

Introduction: Responsibility to the Agon

The Edenic myth “is fundamental to Euro-American culture,”¹ and part of its ongoing influence resides in the assumption of many late moderns that it provides unimpeded access to humanity’s “natural” or “original” state. The early Nietzsche of The Birth of Tragedy thought myth promised direct access to reality. But Connolly follows the mature Nietzsche’s insistence that any rehearsal of a myth is a mixture of mythic events and one’s own interpretation of it.² One might say that the myth for Connolly is a glass window that not only reveals a suspended, timeless past that sits undisturbed on the other side of the pane; it also reflects back something of the viewer’s own countenance. The Edenic myth – in whatever form it circulates in contemporary society – is always mediated through an Apollonian interpretive grid that expresses a politically significant set of hopes, fears, and beliefs. To continue the window analogy: in looking onto the landscape of Eden, viewers ultimately cannot separate the dim reflection of features from the interior of the room and that which is outside the window. One’s own reflection overlays the scene outside, producing a single image. Interpretation is essential to myth. A deep or rich myth, such as the Eden episode, has points of ambiguity and mystery that invite continuous

¹Connolly, The Augustine Imperative, p94.
²Ibid., p91-93.
interpretation. Though it appears to be a simple story, Connolly finds in it a deep Dionysian force that gives rise to constitutive conflicts and requires interpretive open-endedness. The Eden myth and our readings of it reveal something of the plenitude of being itself.\(^5\)

The Eden tale begins with a man and woman naked and unashamed, free to explore and enjoy a verdant creation that they share a responsibility to cultivate. One prohibition governs their relation to the garden: an inexplicable divine command to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God warns that eating of it will bring death. The snake comes to the woman and questions the veracity of the threat. The woman eats of the forbidden fruit and then shares it with the man who complies. God arrives on the scene to find the man and woman ashamed of their nakedness. He punishes the snake and casts man and woman out of the garden. In sum, Eden is a story about a command, a question about its legitimacy, a deliberate violation, and a punishment that holds some more responsible than others.

Beyond merely its prevalence and interpretive malleability, what interests Connolly in the Edenic myth? To answer this question, I compare Connolly with two thinkers to whom myth plays a significant role. First, Sigmund Freud develops his psychoanalytic therapies for the modern stratified self by reference to the myth of king Oedipus. I detailed in chapter one (see II, B) that Connolly offers a theory of the modern self that repoliticizes the stratified self. The Edenic myth serves this goal of repoliticizing aspects of late modern life that function in an unconscious register, because it contains no narrative ground for the psychologists’ fixation on childhood development (such as the Freudian Oedipal myth does). Here, in Eden, we find adults with no history, standing in relation to one another as male and female before a sovereign. Connolly is interested in the political themes on the surface of the text of Genesis’s opening chapters: subjects,

\(^{5}\text{Ibid., p94.}\)
commands, legitimacy, the will, punishment, etc. Working with this myth stirs political themes that inform contemporary practices that form self and community. Second, Simone de Beauvoir dedicates roughly a fifth of her monumental work, *The Second Sex*, to decrying the various myths of “woman” that emerge from a male gaze and perpetuate the ideal of woman as inessential, secondary, and incapable of sustained reciprocity. Unlike Beauvoir, Connolly accepts the prevalence of the Edenic myth and its perdurance rather than seeking new ones. He enters Augustine’s mythical home to stir latent elements that might energize competing practices and doctrines.

According to Connolly, Augustine’s reading of the Edenic narrative constitutes a way of explaining the pain and suffering of humanity. Augustine’s reading of Eden and the doctrines that arise from it introduce and sustain *practices of responsibility* that promise to make sense of why bad things happen to some and why others are rewarded. Connolly worries especially about the effect of this effort to ascribe wrongdoing and hold accountable:

> When historical crisis, personal uncertainty, or social instability erupt, and [people are] unable to detect a responsible agent accountable for the evil experienced, they are set up by their own doctrines to be accused of weakness, softness, equivocation, or misplaced compassion…Finding it difficult to reply convincingly, they may lapse into silence or respond in defensive tones…

Connolly traces the Augustinian practices of responsibility back to Augustine’s conception of nature as ordered. He offers a counter-reading of the Edenic events designed to curtail the influence of these doctrines. But he also offers his own normative account of responsibility that opens the drive to responsibly but in ways that Augustine’s doctrines of will and original sin foreclose. Connolly excises not every moral diagnosis from social life (i.e., “that person did wrong”) but rather only the expectation that moral explanation will adequately explain one’s encounter with evil (a point that will be more fully developed in

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In his reinterpretation of the Eden scene, Connolly seeks a reading that empowers participation in his community of agonistic inclusion (the nature of the inclusion will be further detailed in the next chapter).

Morton Schoolman and Kathleen Roberts Skerrett, two of the most perceptive and attentive readers of the themes and development of Connolly’s corpus – working in political theory and Christian ethics, respectively – note that responsibility is at the heart of Connolly’s project in his Augustine writings. Connolly seems thoroughly Nietzschean in this respect, as Craig Dove has recently argued that a revised account of responsibility and freedom is at the heart of Nietzsche’s ethical theory. Connolly affirms that every known culture has practices of responsibility. What marks his treatment as unique is the insistence that it is an ambiguous good that is necessary for the coordination of social relations, and that, “the history of western thought is full of attempts to relocate the locus of responsibility: from humanity to the gods, from god to humanity, from a collectivity to the individual, from the past to the present, and, again, from the individual to a new vision of the collectivity.”

Attempting to completely and immediately uproot contemporary responsibility practices and the conceptual structures that sustain them are a fool’s errand. The practices can only be inflected, and until they are, conceptual arguments will not ultimately effect change. One may think in this context of Nietzsche’s comment that “free will” has been rationally defeated hundreds of times to no effect (cf. BGE 18). Like Nietzsche who focused on the use to which “free will” was being put, Connolly engages an ethical examination that, in the end, takes issue with the Augustinian guilty self and the theodicy that creates it.

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8Connolly, Identity/Difference, p97.
Connolly describes the late modern situation in which people feel burdened by various responsibilities:

You might picture western practices of responsibility as two poles crossing each other. The horizontal pole consists at one end of a deep identity to be discovered and at the other of a self formed through radical choice. The vertical pole consists of original sin at one end and mental illness at the other. A variety of individuals and groups have been nailed to this cross whenever the problem of evil has become too intense to bear.⁹

Responsibility as bearing the cross, a phrase, obviously of biblical origin, provides a way into discussing Connolly’s complex relation to contemporary notions of responsibility. On the one hand, the allusion to crucifixion illustrates that any ethic of responsibility will generate otherness and seek to inflict pain on it. But, on the other hand, his allusion expresses his assessment that some level of accountability and ascription of wrongdoing is essential. Without at least partially responsible agents, pure chaos and violence ensue. Thus, any social order requires practices of responsibility, despite the violence they inevitably inflict. Rather than merely criticizing extant practices, Connolly offers his own constructive and normative account that he presents as suitable to late modern times.

The conceptual core of his proposal is drawn from Foucault, who emphasized the impossibility of closure. Connolly uses two terms to refer to the lack of closure that Foucault sees: first, he denies equivalence between evil and responsible agency; and second, he sees incommensurability between the power of evil in the world and humanity’s collective agential power. It is not that humanity has no responsibility, but that each moment of accountability has limits. Connolly’s concern is that, when the limit has been reached, when equivalence cannot be achieved between evil and fault or when incommensurability needs to be acknowledged, a society must have resources to affirm the lack of closure. This requires living with a profound existential dissonance in which evil is experienced and yet no one in particular can justly be held responsible. Connolly’s

ambition is to reduce the obsession of ascribing guilt for troubling events. Stated positively, he wants to sustain an order, with slack. Doing so requires a sharper awareness of the impossibility of erasing *incommensurability* from human experience. I call this Connolly’s normative account of responsibility, because it rests on an understanding of reality in which intricate and complex webs of factors interrelate and condition human being, acting, and relating. While Connolly charges Augustine with creating a notion of responsibility that obsesses over finding *the* culpable subject that inevitably reduces the intricate picture that exists before blame is assigned, in a later section of this chapter, I highlight strategies that Connolly offers to assist late modern individuals to do this.

My focus in this chapter is on a connection that Connolly makes between responsibility and gender order, a connection present in his essays on responsibility but in a shadowy way. The underdeveloped or insufficiently articulated link is that the Augustinian notion of responsibility that prevails in Western culture today, based on a particular reading of the Eden myth, both assumes and reinstates an unequal gender order. It does so by unevenly distributing moral responsibility and thus political and moral agency to male and female. At a few moments in his interpretation of the Edenic narrative, Connolly resists how Augustine sees Eve’s limited agency in the story. But this connection between responsibility and gender order is present in Connolly’s work only in the form of a critique of Augustine, and so the following sections of this chapter make an interpretive contribution by demonstrating how Connolly’s own normative account of responsibility is developed to ensure more ethical gender relations. I unearth Connolly’s normative proposal for gender relations by investigating the primary source that inspires Connolly’s own reading of Eden, Harold Bloom’s *Book of J*, which “introduces an element of creative estrangement”¹⁰ to the familiar Augustinian interpretation of the myth. Though Connolly only spends four or five pages interacting with Bloom’s text, I show that investigating

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¹⁰Connolly, *The Augustine Imperative*, p94.
further into Bloom’s reading of Eden clarifies Connolly’s positive claims about responsibility to the agon and ethical gender relations.

This chapter’s argument will unfold as follows: In the first section I unfold the importance of Harold Bloom’s interpretation of Eden to show how Connolly employs his own ethic of responsibility to oppose gender hierarchies. The second section details Connolly’s argument about how the prevalence of Augustinian responsibility in various contemporary philosophies has perpetuated gender inequalities. In the third section, I look at Connolly’s means of moving beyond what he identifies as the Augustinian-Pelagian bind (the classic debate over freedom of will), by engaging an interrogative tone, humour, and irony, all of which he learned from the wise snake in the Garden of Eden. I close the chapter in the fourth section by critiquing Connolly’s understanding of sexual difference before detailing how Augustinian humour puts on display Christological and ecclesiological commitments that are capable of funding practices of responsibility which bypass the ethical problems that Connolly diagnoses.

I. Harold Bloom’s Book of J: Feminine Irony

In this section, I engage the text, the Book of J that informs Connolly’s reading of the Eden events. I show that a framework can be found in Bloom’s book that Connolly nowhere explicitly endorses but, within which Connolly develops his ethic of responsibility in response to unequal gender order.

What is the Book of J?¹¹ And why did Connolly choose it as a textual ally to help him develop an account of responsibility from the Edenic narrative that resists the Augustinian reading? To the first question, Book of J is a dually authored volume comprised of Harold Bloom’s¹² introductory and expository essays on David Rosenberg’s creative reconstruction and translation of the “J” strand of the Torah. The volume

¹²For convenience, I will from here on refer to Bloom as the sole author of the text, though Rosenberg’s translation is indispensable to the book.
embodies a largely abandoned neo-Wellhausian expectation that source-criticism makes possible a mechanical compilation of earlier sources. But Bloom does not follow the tradition wholesale, distancing himself from the JEDP theorists who were anti-Semitic “Hegelian savants” (such as WML De Wette, KH Graf, W. Vatke, J. Wellhausen) who “saw Israelite faith as a primitive preparation for the sublimities of the true religion, high-minded Christianity.” After securing a “J” document through what many reviewers criticized as a dubious and largely eclipsed methodology, the majority of Bloom’s commentary is an imaginative exercise that sketches an original author, providing historical coloration that depicts the history of Torah authorship in a way that differs from the Christian inclination of the previous JEDP theorists.

Bloom’s philosophical and ethical commitments and his resulting view of authorship have deep affinities with Connolly’s. In several books and essays written in the 1970s and 1980s, Bloom advanced a theory of canonical literary tradition in which “strong” poets compete with a received collection that exhibits a distinct harmony of style and/or meaning. The strength of the poet is seen in his or her ability, in the face of the overwhelming sense that everything that could be said has been said, to inflect the coherence of the collection in a new way. Readers aware of Bloom’s previous work were nonetheless surprised by the imaginative reconstruction of the J author that he offered: J was an upper class woman who lived at or near the court of Solomon in the time of King

13 Alan Cooper and Bernard R. Goldstein refer to “Rosenberg’s and Bloom’s unreflective Wellhausenism.” They also rightly note that the more common extension of the source-critical tradition expects to show the organic growth of various traditions, and that this more conservative approach arises from the observation that whatever sources can be discerned in Torah are “embedded” and thus “determined by the discourses to which they now belong.” These methodological critiques of Bloom suggest that his “J” is a complete fiction. See Alan Cooper and Bernard R. Goldstein, “Biblical Literature in the Iron(ic) Age: Reflections on Literary-Historical Method”, Hebrew Studies 32, no. 1 (1991): 45–60, doi:10.1353/hbr.1991.0021.
15 Dozens of reviews from historians, Hebraists, and biblical scholars noted the antiquated methodology. Cooper and Goldstein note many of the agreements among critics of Bloom’s book.
16 For example, see Harold Bloom, Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 1984).
17 Bloom often contrasts his view of authorship and literary influence with Erich Auerbach’s Mimesis in which any text is seen as capable of completing any other text. For a fuller exposition of Bloom’s views which are treated all too quickly here, see Virginia Mihaela Dumitrescu, “Revisiting Harold Bloom: Reading as Textual Violence”, Synergy 5, no. 2 (2005): 218–24.
Rehoboam of Judah, who wrote in “friendly competition” with “the male author of the court history narrative in 2 Samuel”.¹⁸ Thus, Bloom thinks some clues to “J” can be found in 2 Samuel who was her greatest opponent,¹⁹ whose vision of a Davidic god was closer to J than to P.²⁰ Not only does this vision of authorship depict the Hebrew Scriptures as centred on the Davidic united kingdom, but it also presents them as a literary deposit of an agonistic battle among geniuses – which, of course, was Bloom’s a priori understanding of the development of any textual tradition.²¹

The excitement of the agonism which is the heart of literary tradition is found, for Bloom, in the dynamic between the strong authors who generate the fundamental conflicting sensibilities and forms of inspiration that propel the tradition forward. And J, Bloom claims, emerges as the strongest author. Later redactors, however, are by definition weak authors who smooth out differences with a normative brush. Strong or weak readers also exist who can be identified by the authors who inspire them. In the end, Bloom admits that he cannot argue decisively for J’s unsurpassable strength, but only show that “half a century as a reader teaches me the authorial reality of J as against a frequently numbing context of communal or normative voices.”²² Bloom’s judgment, he announces, is an “intuitive aesthetic” one that will be “of no interest to scholars” (by which he means biblical scholars with a historical bent).²³ And asserting J’s strength entails the view that “J stands at the start of what the late E. A. Speiser liked to call ‘the Biblical Process’ [i.e., the flow of writings that come after J and contribute to later strands (EDP) and revisions of the final text].”²⁴

Though he nowhere spells it out in one place, Bloom’s essays and expositions in

¹⁹Ibid., p15.
²⁰Ibid., p31.
²¹Despite the obvious confluences with Connolly’s view of agonistic reality, Connolly does note that a kind of fundamentalism of the genius undergirds Bloom’s theory of authorial strength that he does not follow: Connolly, The Augustine Imperative, p128.
²³Ibid., p22.
²⁴Ibid.
Book of J provide a reception history of J that dovetails with Connolly’s choice to oppose Nietzschean and Augustinian ontologies: To the original audience, who were upper-class Jews living in the tumultuous transition from Solomon to Rehoboam (tenth century BCE25), the text would have been understood as "a sophisticated parable of the decline of David’s kingdom from imperial grandeur to division and turbulence.”26 However, Jubilees, which Bloom considers a “prolix” text written by a Pharisee in the second century BC,27 marked a new development of a normative redaction of Genesis-Exodus, and Chronicles, which had the same intentions in relation to 2 Samuel.28 At some point, E, D, and P entered as interpreters, enriching this same normative-moralizing trajectory – a line of interpretation that flourishes in Christian and Gnostic readings of J.29 At several points, a strong high/low and before/after dualism arose to support this interpretation, as seen in the late Judaic text of 2 Esdras, which, Bloom notes, deeply informed the Apostle Paul’s encounter with J. The fully normative and dualist reading is seen, however, in Augustine, who promulgated such dualistic thinking in his highly influential reading of Eden that centres attention on a supposed Fall.30 Thus, Bloom writes, “[J] is an author not so much lost as barricaded from us by normative moralists and theologians, who had and have designs upon us that are altogether incompatible with J’s vision.”31 Bloom’s comments on P align with Connolly’s Nietzschean challenges to Augustinianism: J’s “earth-bound irony” and P’s “cosmological fantasy” conflict.32 P’s is “a hymn to divine order.”33 In P’s creation story, the dry land symbolizes the land of Israel, while J “sets her landscape in the dry wilderness and gives us a first spring in which Yahweh’s will-to-life rises as a mist.”34

26 Ibid., p187.
27 Ibid., p35, 282.
28 Ibid., p283
29 Ibid., p3: “…the Christian Bible…amounts to a very severe revision of the Bible of the Jews.”
30 Ibid., p185.
31 Ibid., p16.
32 Ibid., p28.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., p293.
Bloom claims that “J has been weakly misread by normative conventions” – by which he means that form of theologizing invested in a dualism that finds so-called anthropomorphisms, monistic vitalism, irony, and heroism to be embarrassments. Thus, Connolly notes that Hellenization, EDP, and all other subsequent normativizing readings are all Augustinian for Bloom. In fact, as Connolly notes, “Bloom has Augustine in mind…almost as much as he does J.”

Before turning to the account of Augustine that Connolly draws from Bloom, it is important to clarify what Bloom understands to be the essential features of J’s vision. I will focus only on aspects of this vision that arise from his reading of J’s Edenic narrative. Bloom informs the reader that, the genre of J’s creation tale is neither moral, theological, historical nor political – rather, the narratives were experienced as something like “children's literature”. Bloom states: “J is not writing a moral tale but a children’s story that ends unhappily,” resulting in the message: “when we were children, we were terribly punished for being children.” While J’s god is more interventionist than the author with whom she competes (i.e., the author of 2 Samuel), the upshot of the scene in Eden is that her god is not omniscient and does not deserve human worship, submission, or trust. Rather, this god is but one character among others who operates amidst a tragic set of events. Further, he learns as events unfold; for example, he responds with punishment that does not fit the crime and thereby comes under a kind of critique from J, which doubles as a warning to keep a safe distance from this divine figure who still has much to discover about his world and the creatures he has made. At the very centre of J’s vision is a monistic (Nietzschean) vitalism that is “at the opposite extreme from either the Gnostic

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36Connolly, The Augustine Imperative, p97.
37Bloom, The Book of J, p13, “J was no theologian, and rather deliberately not a historian.”
38Ibid., p46.
39Ibid., p185.
40Ibid., p186.
41Ibid., p185.
42Nietzsche appears with some regularity in Bloom’s remarks, always in a way that depicts Nietzsche as J redivivus – see, for example: p33, 45, 179, 196, 233.
or the Pauline Christian dualism.” Bloom states that “Yahweh is for J just the name for reality.” For J, “vitality can be defined as the prime characteristic of J’s Yahweh, since all life whatsoever has been brought into being by him.” This god “is the fact of power and action, which are life.” And thus, “Yahweh is not to be conceived as holiness or righteousness but as vitality.”

Connolly’s reaction against an Augustinian reading of Eden follows the general outlines of Bloom’s J as rehearsed above. And thus, Bloom’s J provides a point of reference for Connolly to begin envisioning a way of being held responsible that is other than the stifling, guilt-ridden practices of responsibility Augustine promoted in Western culture. In particular, Connolly draws upon J’s “ironic stylistics,” her representation of women, and (a layer that Connolly himself adds to Bloom’s own interpretation of J) the role and significance of questions in Eden. I will detail these three features further.

Bloom presents J as a dramatic ironist, interested in story and personages, rather than history and theology. “[J] is the most ironic writer in the Hebrew Bible; she is essentially a comic author…” There are more ironies in J than any single exegete could uncover. Bloom notes that he agreed to arrange the book around Rosenberg’s translation precisely because it preserves J’s “ironic tone and stance”. She tells her stories “with her own seriocomic irony.” Bloom only briefly discusses what he means by “irony,” which is unfortunate given its centrality to Bloom’s own conception of J herself. ‘Irony’ seems to most often refer to modes of dissembling or subverting, either through narration,

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43Ibid., p277.
44Ibid., p286.
46Ibid., p277.
47Ibid.
48Ibid., p10.
49Bloom claims that Kafka was the legitimate heir of J’s dissembling irony (Bloom, The Book of J, p13, 25, 177-178, 187, 191-192, 320).
51Ibid., p26 (emphasis in original).
52Ibid., p307.
53Ibid., p50.
54Ibid., p318.
personification or other means. For example, J ironizes god, who is, in fact, “J’s awakened imagination,”\textsuperscript{56} “the uncanniest of all Western metaphors.” Her god is “an imp who behaves sometimes as though he is rebelling against his Jewish mother, J.”\textsuperscript{57} Another sense of irony for Bloom arises when J “juxtaposes incommensurates.”\textsuperscript{58} Her ironies are often “founded upon the play of incommensurates.”\textsuperscript{59} J’s god is “human-all-too-human” and even childish, “which is to say, wholly incommensurate with himself.”\textsuperscript{60} This god moulds humanity out of mud not as a potter (as in competing extant Ancient Near Eastern tales), but as a child making mud pies.\textsuperscript{61} There are “no standards of measurement for this most incommensurate of all personalities,”\textsuperscript{62} who, for example: protects Cain from the consequences of his forced nomadism; pulls down Sodom but emboldens Abram to protest it beforehand; appears to comfort Hagar whom he had cast out. Connolly attaches to this second form of irony in which J’s god appears to possess no commitment to a neat and clean balancing of the books of the universe. Connolly draws on Bloom’s preservation of the more disjointed moments between command, disobedience, and response that Bloom sees EDP and other normalizing readers later suppress. Here is inspiration for a comic vision of life in which, from the very beginning, there is no moral equivalence.

I claim that Bloom’s J also assists Connolly in diagnosing and curtailing the tendency in the Augustinian practice of responsibility to assign greater responsibility to men. Seen from another angle, Connolly thinks Augustinianism, from the perspective of J, presents an interpretation of the Edenic myth that depicts the woman as less culpable in order to assert that she is less morally capable than man. Bloom notes that J’s tale of woman’s creation is the only one in Ancient Near Eastern literature, given “six times the

\textsuperscript{56}Ibid., p19. 
\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., p15. 
\textsuperscript{58}Ibid. 
\textsuperscript{59}Ibid., p293. 
\textsuperscript{60}Ibid., p26. 
\textsuperscript{61}Ibid., p28. 
\textsuperscript{62}Ibid., p304-305.
space to the woman’s creation as to the man’s.” 63 Further, J has no heroes, only heroines. 64 But Bloom’s crowning “insight” along these lines is that J is a woman who admired the “hard women” who appear with regularity in her narratives – characters such as Sarai, Rebecca, Rachel, Tamar, etc. – “a hardness that perhaps J found in herself.” 65 If Genesis contains narratives in which women are hard, strong moral agents, Connolly can resist Augustine’s suggestion that the woman proved herself in Eden more susceptible to temptation than the male. If woman is not morally weaker than man in the Genesis text, might the text mock the Augustinian depiction of woman as possessing a weaker moral agency than the man? Instead of seeing the original order as gendered in such a way that men protect weaker women, might J be depicting her stories in ways that bring to mind situations in which an opposing gender order comes to the fore? Bloom mentions counter-cultural matriarchal Jewish households. And might the danger of reifying a different gender order to replace the old be sidestepped through humorous invocations of alternative orders, emphasizing that all orders are faulty and imperfect? Connolly finds that Bloom’s alternative reading energizes such questions.

Finally, Bloom gives Connolly a way to portray how Augustine handles questions in Eden. In reading Bloom’s text, Connolly observes that the snake is the first creature to speak after god, and he makes much of the “fact” that the first non-divine speech comes in the form of a question. 66 Bloom’s J discourages the Augustinian suggestion that all questions in Eden are sinful, and highlights instead the notion that questions reveal something about the very order of things, namely that there is a “rift” in being (Connolly’s term). For Connolly, J’s snake, who is smooth (which Bloom notes is equivalent to the humans’ shameless nakedness 67), asks a question that discloses a rift, while Augustine sees the serpent as already fallen and thus emphatically associates signs of doubt with wilful

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64Ibid., p32.
65Ibid., p312.
66Connolly, The Augustine Imperative, p95.
fault. The path that J suggests for Connolly is to “affirm the rift with its chancy combination of chance and fate, deeds and events, without demanding the guiding hand of a providential god or an intrinsic purpose or a sufficient reason or a free will.”

Connolly’s own interpretive voice comes more to the fore when he expands on the role that J assigns the snake in Eden by turning to Nietzsche’s serpent metaphors in Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Specifically, Connolly discusses the scene in the Third Part, Section Two, entitled, “On the Vision and Riddle”. Here, Zarathustra comes upon a shepherd (whom Nietzsche later reveals to be himself) writhing on the ground and gagging on a snake that hangs out of his mouth. Zarathustra desperately shouts at him to bite off the snake’s head. Unlike the snake that Nietzsche later mentions which embodies the same earthy wisdom as J’s smooth creature, the blackness of this snake symbolizes the oppressiveness of the thematic of sin. While the promised clearing of the airway that will follow obedience to Zarathustra’s command to bite off the head is an analogy for the clarity and enablement that comes from moving beyond good and evil, Connolly provocatively suggests that Nietzsche’s mention of “the head” of the snake entails the severing of a masculinism that insists that there is an essential moral order (given by a god or reason), that men are superior in it, that sovereign rulers are in touch with the intrinsic order, that singular authority is intrinsic to it, and that strict order is imperative to it… Probably… Zarathustra’s ‘overman,’ it seems to me, is neither ‘masculine’ nor ‘feminine,’ but an aspiration that strives to rise over ‘man.’

I read Connolly’s comment on “the head” here as a jab at Augustine’s well known doctrine of “headship” that sees Adam as responsible for the eviction from the Garden of

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68 Connolly, The Augustine Imperative, p116ff.
69 Ibid., p124.
71 Connolly, The Augustine Imperative, p121.
72 Ibid., p122. Connolly’s reading of Nietzsche on male-female relations is not the common one. See, for example, Beavoir’s depiction of Nietzsche on male-female in The Second Sex, p214: Nietzsche claims that the feminine is always exalted in weak cultures, while heroes revolt against the Magna Mater. However, Frances Nesbitt Oppel has recently argued convincingly that Nietzsche consistently employs irony in discussing the feminine: see Frances Nesbitt Oppel, Nietzsche on Gender: Beyond Man and Woman, 1st ed. (United States: University of Virginia press, 2005).
Eden that followed the eating of the fruit. His means of striving to rise to an over-human will come into greater focus in the next chapter; my concern here is to highlight Connolly’s point that doing away with male guilt frees female agency from any notion of a static natural ordered relation between the sexes. Connolly’s reading of Nietzsche leads him to assert that living in a world of fundamental discordances requires, first, a rejection of the view that the Edenic snake is the black snake that is currently in the mouth of later moderns. The snake that spoke to Eve was, rather, communicating that earthy wisdom that would enable her to confront reality and find her own way to live in it. Second, this discordant world means that doubts must be seen as inevitable, having no relation to evil, arising from the order of things.

J’s Edenic woman faces the same “Augustinian temptation” that hounds late moderns: in standing before the rift in being, should she accept existential fault for the rift, assume guilt, and plead for god to repair it? Of course, in using the phrase “temptation,” Connolly is not retaining the same formal account of “evil” that Augustine employed with different content – rather, for Connolly, Augustine’s inability or unwillingness to associate the Edenic questioner with the wise earthy serpent reveals a foolishness best chastened through irony, teasing, and humour. In Connolly’s terms, Bloom thinks the normative redactors of J’s narrative made sure that Eve submitted to the Augustinian temptation, thereby dooming all subsequent women to the feeling that they may cause tremendous evil whenever they operate outside the protective sphere of male agency.

By contrast, J models the kind of hardness and toughness needed to bite off the head of the black snake. For Connolly, this requires seeing the fear that lies at the heart of the Augustinian reading. Standing before the rift, Augustine is fearful; J, however, bravely refuses to feel the same terror that draws women into the subjection that the normative interpreters of Torah first designed for her.73 J’s Edenic narrative, Connolly suggests, helps

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73 Connolly, The Augustine Imperative, p97-98.
readers stand before the rift in being with irony and questions, in full and confident conversation with earth’s wisdom, which proclaims that being is endlessly and irreducibly discordant. The resulting message is that sometimes women are strong, sometimes men. There is, in the end, no way to harmonize all the gaps, ambiguity, and imperfection into an account of the gender order that existed before doubt entered the world. Because we live in a world run by a god who is a clumsy child trying to figure things out just like we are. Contra those who attempt to stabilise the achievements of the strong through norms, god does not respect moral rules. The wise, earthy serpent of the Garden of Eden calls forth strength, whether from male or female.

The above exploration of Bloom’s *Book of J* clarifies the differences between a supposedly more original Edenic narrative found in the J strand and a later normativizing reading that reaches its apex in Augustine’s Eden. While Augustine and later Jewish and Christian interpreters would believe that there is a “final form of the text” that is inspired and authoritative (however conceived), Bloom and Connolly reject this premise. They claim that there are only fabrications of texts, all of which are contestable. Bloom’s strategy is to fabricate a historical situation which gave rise to J and show what such a fabrication exposes about Augustine’s reading. They claim that it reveals moralizing, removal of irony, and patriarchalism. They also claim Augustine has simplified the narrative.

But I note only one example of how Connolly’s own desire to find arbitrariness and battle at the heart of things causes him to gloss over complexities that persist even in their fabricated version. For example, Connolly misses that the first act of speech in Eden was not from the snake, but rather from the first human who named the animals (the “animal naming” narrative is included by Bloom in the J strata\(^74\)). Thus, while Connolly aims to reveal layers of complexity that Augustine supposedly obscures, Connolly himself

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offers a wilful reading that simplifies his text. That Connolly does not meditate on the mystery of a moment of agential harmony between divinity and humanity that resides in his own text suggests that he does not operate in consistency with his own aim to expose simplification and fear of mystery. I take this argument further in the closing section to this chapter by showing that Connolly’s reading of Augustine’s interpretation of Eden also reveals a lack of awareness of Augustinian irony and humour, which is present in most of Augustine’s treatises and expositions. Rather than revealing the need for a better Eden narrative than the one Augustine provides, Connolly’s oversights reveal that what is needed is a better reading of Augustine’s myth than the one he provides.

II. Diagnosing the Augustinian-Pelagian Bind: The Limits of Taylor, Sartre, and Ricoeur on Responsibility

Connolly, like Nietzsche, sees humanity as ‘the herd animal’ who has a ‘drive to order’. While J gave Connolly resources to imagine and affirm an Eden in which mystery, ambiguity, and evil always already existed, I now look at the details of the Augustinian reading of Eden that Connolly developed this vision in order to counter. After further unfolding Connolly’s understanding of the Augustinian Eden, I explore one of Connolly’s suggestive remarks regarding the role of original sin by interacting with Geoffrey Rees’s recent work that explores the democraticizing potential of this much maligned doctrine. Then, I detail Connolly’s interaction with three contemporary accounts of responsibility that he finds to be bound by the Augustinian frame: Charles Taylor, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Paul Ricoeur. Connolly claims that, following in Augustine’s tracks, these authors forward conceptions of human agency and responsibility that lead them to an impasse, namely the “Augustinian-Pelagian bind”, which refers to the reduction of options for theorizing agency to an account of a fallen will (Augustinian) or of a will with absolute freedom (Pelagian). Connolly shows how the debate between Pelagian free will and Augustinian fallenness – a debate which continues within the divergent theories of responsibility, freedom, and agency on offer today – traps late modern participants in hypocrisy,
unintentional inflation of guilt, and passivity before evil. Though Connolly does not interact with her texts or mention her in his Augustine writings, I draw Simone de Beauvoir into Connolly’s analysis of this bind to clarify how his own proposal to bypass this historic impasse addresses unjust gender relations.

A. Augustine’s Eden: Practices of Responsibility as Theodicy

I showed from Bloom’s text that Connolly derived a picture of Augustine as a dualist unable to laugh or handle paradox and who uses morality to secure the social benefits that only strength can achieve. Augustine does this, Bloom claims, by specifying and extending norms latent in J’s story. Connolly drew from Bloom the notion that explaining all evils in terms of humanity’s responsibility requires the suppression of various incommensurabilities and the tragic dimensions of life that the wise serpent heroically exposed. The reason I expounded on Bloom’s reading in greater detail than Connolly himself does was to highlight the connection between male-female hierarchy present in Augustine’s narrative of Adam and Eve’s first sin and of the commensurate punishment that followed. Connolly saw that, as an explanatory mechanism of evil, human moral responsibility is implemented in Augustine’s myth in terms of a gendered distinction, in which man is seen to have a stronger agency and therefore a higher potential for freedom than woman. Bloom gave Connolly several strategies for resisting this ascription of fault and rush to accountability. Connolly expounds the Augustinian reading beyond Bloom’s explicit remarks by discussing Augustine’s doctrines of the will and original sin, both of which undergird his account of responsibility that justifies depleting female agency and constricting woman’s freedom.

First, according to Connolly, Augustine creates the human will, which Connolly claims, changed the nature of responsibility in decisive ways. For example, he suggests that while ancient Greek culture located responsibility in the family or clan, Augustine’s doctrine of the will introduced a new individualized conception of it. The self now had the
ability to respond as a single, unitary agent, rather than as a complex interactive unity with multiple competing centres. Augustine also shifted attention away from the ancient focus on the results of action for the community to the action itself, and from the virtues of strength to an understanding of moral goodness rooted in self-control. With respect to gender order, I do not understand Connolly to be suggesting that plural conceptions of the person necessarily result in more equitable gender relations; rather, he is identifying the prevalent account of agency that must be overcome to achieve such relations in the contemporary context. This issue of unitary agency becomes the basis from which Connolly interacts with contemporary Augustinians, such as Charles Taylor. Thus, highlighting Augustine’s account of the responsible subject becomes how Connolly will use Bloom’s strategies of irony, humour, and affirmation of incommensurability into the present context.

Connolly sees the untenable nature of Augustine’s doctrine of a unitary agency or will most clearly in the two acts of pure will in the history of God’s creation: the serpent’s act that was either the question posed to Eve or an unnarrated rebellious movement that occurred before it, and Adam’s decision to take and eat. The will enables Augustine to assign responsibility for evil: Adam had free will, and thus God’s actions of punishment were proportionate. Connolly raises a predictable and classic line of questions at this point: “How could Adam and Lucifer perform acts of will separating them from the will of the creator if they themselves are at different ‘times,’ pristine products of its creation?” He rightly notes that Augustine avoids this question by depicting Adam as a childish adult in Eden. But Connolly sees this as an unsuccessful avoidance of the real question:

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75 These points are all mentioned in Connolly, *Identity\Difference*, p95.
76 George Kateb claims that Connolly misreads Augustine on this score, though adjudicating between their readings would distract from my aim to unfold the more general ethical failure Connolly sees in the Augustinian notions of responsibility, agency and freedom: see George Kateb, “Prohibition and Transgression” p167-196 in *The New Pluralism: William Connolly and the Contemporary Global Condition* ed. by David Campbell and Morton Schoolman (Duke University Press 2008).
77 Connolly, *The Augustine Imperative*, p104.
78 Ibid., p113.
How can that act by which a created being first falls away from God be an act of will for which it is responsible? If it possessed sufficient density of character before the act to act wilfully (such as language, intelligence, experience, maturity of judgment, knowledge of good and bad, the capacity to coordinate its intentions with its actions, etc.), the elements installed in its character during creation would recoil back on the god who created it. But if it lacked such density of character, it would seem that its action could not be an act of will, but either an arbitrary deed or a determined event: if arbitrary, only the omnipotent god could be responsible for it. With respect to either alternative, then – density or its absence prior to the act – the assertion of wilful responsibility becomes highly problematic. But Augustine needs the wedge of pure will to drive the crucial gap between this god and responsibility for evil. 79

Connolly highlights how Augustine reasons towards the doctrine of wilful responsibility through a logical process of elimination, noting just such a process in a passage from Augustine’s *City of God* (12.7). Quite famously, Augustine envisions two men sitting beside each other, identical in all substantive respects. A woman walks by them. One man keeps his mind on worthy things, while the other man lusts after her. Augustine reasons: the problem is not the flesh (they are the same), nor can it be blamed on the mind (which are equal in abilities). The only possible answer, he suggests, is the will. What about women? Connolly asserts that Augustine does not think Eve also acted with full and deliberate will, because she is subordinate to men, who are responsible for her in the intrinsic order of things. Eve does little more, on Augustine’s reading, than pass the snake’s request on to Adam, Connolly claims. Connolly’s remarks on Eve bear a family likeness to Hannah Arendt’s discussion of a “delegate” who might say, “don’t blame me; I’m just the messenger.” Woman, here, appears as a manifestation of a prior will, with no mediating agency of her own. 80 In Connolly’s words, woman is “more like a transmission belt than an active agent.” 81 And when she acts, the claim “she acted freely,” is often nothing more than a preface to a superior agent’s claim that, “she deserves what we are about to do to her.” 82 In other words, Connolly notes that, whether the woman is

seen to be passive or active, the move to responsibility serves an order that sees her as subordinate to man and thereby an occasion to expand male agency. As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, none of these comments from Connolly lead him to reject responsibility and the will; rather, they are both necessary fictions: “[they are] best acknowledged as complex, muddy construction[s] imposed on a problematical experience that has never been proven to correspond to [them] intrinsically.”\textsuperscript{83} His concern is rather to keep in view how these notions fuel unethical treatment of others, which happens when they are expected to correspond to an ordered natural arrangement.

The second notion that occupies Connolly regards Augustine’s doctrine of original sin, which, for Connolly, functions positively in Augustine’s thought, despite failing to keep Augustine aware of the uneven assignment of responsibility to men and women. He writes, “The doctrine of original sin is often presented as the one element in Augustinianism most in need of revision because of the sense of injustice that attaches to it. But…\textit{within} the hard compound into which it is mixed, it is a softening agent.”\textsuperscript{84} In a similar vein, he writes of Augustine’s “not quite defunct category of original sin.”\textsuperscript{85} In these two literary moments, I understand Connolly to differentiate his own approach to responsibility from that of Michel Foucault. While Foucault decisively rejected the notion of original sin, there is a tension in Connolly’s own estimation of the doctrine – because he accepts that the Augustinian account of responsibility that informs contemporary practices will not be displaced (i.e., it is what he might call an “entrenched contingency”), he sees that it might be useful to retain the doctrine and develop it in a fresh way. On its positive role, Connolly rightly notes that original sin serves as a weak excuse for obdurate habit. Further, it generalizes human guilt, ensuring that no single action is assigned too great a responsibility for evil. It democratizes implicating everyone. I show below in the third section of this chapter that Connolly develops his own doctrines and strategies for

\textsuperscript{83}Ibid., p125.
\textsuperscript{84}Ibid. p106 (emphasis in original).
\textsuperscript{85}Connolly, \textit{Identity\slash}Difference, p113.
advancing his normative account of responsibility to the agon. But he provides this brief
textual opening without exploring or developing its potential as a means of lightening the
Augustinian burden of responsibility and providing contexts for more equal relations
between the sexes.

However, Geoffrey Rees’s recent study, *The Romance of Innocent Sexuality*,
explores the productive role that Augustine’s doctrine of original sin can play in
contemporary theological ethical discourse on human sexuality.\(^{86}\) I turn to Rees’s work in
the following excursus to explore further Connolly’s suggestion of an ethically beneficial
role for the doctrine of original sin. This brief excursus will not capture the depth of Rees’s
beautifully orchestrated and argued book (which I consider to be one of the richest recent
instalments in Christian sexual ethics) – instead, I focus on how Rees extends Connolly’s
insight regarding Augustine on original sin.\(^{87}\) In subsequent sections, I will show how
Connolly’s strategies for initiating his normative account of responsibility in late
modernity identify a shortcoming in Rees’s use of original sin.

**Excursus: Geoffrey Rees’s View of Original Sin as Softening Agent**

Geoffrey Rees draws upon the Augustinian doctrine of original sin to critique
theological arguments that state or imply that marriage (whether homosexual or
heterosexual) is a privileged site of access to God and/or created innocence. By “original
sin,” Rees intends to refer to the notion that Adam and Eve’s act of rebellion in Eden
initiated a state of confusion with respect to the meaning of one’s sexed body that has been
biologically transmitted to progeny. In our postlapsarian context, Augustine makes clear
that all forms of sexuality are equally sinful. Rees uses this doctrine to show problems
with the claims of so-called traditionalists (such as Gilbert Meilaender) and revisionists
(such as Eugene Rogers). Both argue for marriage as a means of redemption, that is, the

\(^{87}\) To be clear, Rees does cite Connolly numerous times throughout his study, but he does not
anywhere indicate Connolly as the source behind his core argument regarding the felicitous ethical effects of
Augustine’s doctrine of original sin.
attainment of a unity of body and soul in which the body's sexuality bears discernible meaning and the soul acts joyfully according to that meaning. The recent debates over the definition and scope of marriage have produced heat rather than light, according to Rees's diagnosis, because both sides assume that marriage secures such redemption, a claim he rejects as mere "sentimentalism." He goes so far as to claim that the expectation that marriage could be a means of recovering the lost unity of self is not sourced in Christian thought but was a "doctrine" preached by and proliferated through nineteenth century British novels.

Rees's book connects deeply, one could say pastorally, with the late modern existential condition, in which sexuality is experienced as a source of tremendous confusion and without consistent meaning upon which life or identity can be reliably based. And yet, without consciously deciding to do so, late moderns expect their own "sex" (however defined) to tell them something about who they are – that is, for Rees, "sex…is something that people become, a possibility of intelligible personal identity with a history."88 Rather than leading to passivity before such confusion, Rees's creativity is seen in his claim that original sin requires that each person individually "accept responsibility…for the universal ruin of humankind in a single inheritable original sin that is meaningfully and appropriately associated with sexuality."89 Not only does this account of Augustine’s much despised doctrine free one from the expectation and need to find meaning and a stable identity in relation to sexuality, but also it emboldens those excluded from a given community on account of their supposed aberrant sexuality to deconstruct false claims to innocence associated with regnant sexual identities. In practical terms, homosexuals are empowered to insist that heterosexuals recognize their own responsibility for sin.

Rees counsels “charitable anger” in sufferers, a point to which I will return in the

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89 Ibid., p x.
next section of this chapter. In fuelling humorous resistance and advocacy, original sin goes beyond providing a conceptual account of the genuine unity of humanity and funds a social ethic that enables a performance of such unity. Rees keeps the focus throughout his book on the homo/hetero identities, though it is not difficult to see how his use of original sin to flatten any puritanical hierarchy between these two could also apply to the male-female inequalities that I have been highlighting in Connolly’s work on responsibility.

I noted above that Connolly does not pursue this route that Rees takes. The core conceptual difference between Connolly’s ultimate rejection of original sin and Rees’s productive exploration of it regards the way original sin is linked with the human will: Connolly rejects original sin because it creates the willing subject, while Rees sees it as a means of disseminating responsibility or pressure on that same subject. This, in the end, is a very wide divide. While Connolly has no principled reason to refuse a productive use of the doctrine (as his brief remarks above showed), his exploration of it would require a more complicated development than even Rees undertakes. For Connolly’s Nietzschean aim to lighten the gravity or weight of responsibility on late modern subjects is undertaken within the confines of the Augustinian willing subject. In some sense he assumes its perdurance, which allows him to follow Foucault (though not all the way) in criticising confessional practices that are used out of a nervousness that the subject will not remain subservient. Is it possible to loosen the reins on the willing subject through a democratizing account of original sin and reject the confessional practices? This would be the path Connolly would have to follow. But would this rejection of confession not displace the Augustinian self altogether, something which I think Connolly would perceive as unhelpful and disruptive? Rees does not face this problem, since he accepts the Freudian stratified self and the practices of confession that sustain it (for Connolly’s critique of the stratified self see chapter 1, II, B). In the closing section of this chapter I highlight other ways, in addition to the doctrine of original sin, that Augustine loosens the
disciplinary impulses on the willing subject that Connolly finds in Augustinian practices of responsibility.

The unexplored potential of original sin in Connolly’s project that Rees develops informs in several ways my aim to articulate a contemporary conjugal-sexual ethic. In chapter 5 of this thesis, I argue that, for Augustine, the sexually-differentiated conjugal “site” is privileged not because of its innocence. In fact, it is quite the opposite – it is a site where forgiveness is practiced – and thus a sign that God continues ordering history in grace. Marriage signifies to the ecclesia the forgiveness that grounds its identity. Thus, marriage is a “privileged site,” not one that promises “purity,” but rather one that enacts divine forgiveness precisely in the context where the chief signifiers for original and ongoing sin are most visible (conjugal sexuality). To put it in Rees’s terms, Christian marriage is participation in Christ’s “taking responsibility” for original sin by participating in his forgiveness of another’s disorder. Augustine’s claim that marriage accesses Edenic harmony when its participants enact a forgiveness that can sustain even sinful self-giving arises from his understanding of marriage as a vocation that serves as a participation in and an ethical witness within the ecclesia to Christ’s humility that faith sees in the Incarnation. Said another way, created order is accessed in marriage only when a marriage becomes an ethical participation in the Christological life. Taking responsibility for another in the form of forgiveness is required of both man and woman, thereby challenging any asymmetrical assignment of sin and responsibility that Rees or Connolly might find present in a doctrine of marriage or of the will. I strive to show that Rees’s general point regarding exclusions on the basis of supposed innocence is secured by Augustine via ecclesiology and not by surrendering sexually differentiated marriage as a form of life that is a potentially privileged point of access to Edenic harmony.

For the purposes of this chapter, I briefly note two Augustinian challenges to Rees’s argument. First, Rees does not take into account Augustine’s notion that marriage
itself experientially deconstructs what Rees calls “fictions of sex”. Rees is unclear why original sin necessitates dismissing sexually differentiated marriage, nor does he interact with the arguments that Augustine himself gave to uphold both (i.e., sexually differentiated marriage and original sin) as instruments that accomplish this deconstructive role. Said more simply, marriage itself, for Augustine, reveals that all sexuality is broken. Second, Rees’s uncoupling of what Augustine holds together, namely sexually differentiated marriage and original sin, risks allowing the doctrine of original sin to become a means of avoiding the specification of the particular ways in which Christians engage in sexual sin. While Rees creatively shows how the doctrine of original sin can relax the drive to impugn particular sexual identities as sinful and others as not, he does not show what replaces sexually differentiated marriage as a loadstar of moral reflection on the proper way to take responsibility for one’s fallen sexuality. To highlight this deficiency is not simply to wish that Rees had written a different book, but is rather to insist that, in an Augustinian theology, perhaps the doctrine of original sin needs the requirement of sexual differentiation for marriage. Otherwise, Augustine provides no normative guidance for the conjugal-sexual sphere.

B. The Pelagian Hypocrisy of Sartrean Responsibility

In an essay entitled “Responsibility and Freedom” from his book Identity\Difference, Connolly interacts with several contemporary theorists of responsibility. He shows how these several theorists are caught in what he calls an “Augustinian-Pelagian bind,” which refers to the constriction of theorizations of agency to the fallen will (Augustinian) or the will with absolute freedom (Pelagian). I begin with Connolly’s discussion of Jean-Paul Sartre.

Sartre’s widely cited Anti-Semite and Jew interests Connolly because it “serves as a conscious or unconscious model for a whole series of accounts of racism, sexism,
national chauvinism, and antiwelfarism succeeding it during the last several decades.” At the centre of Sartre’s analysis of the anti-Semite, which can be seen as a model for a sexist ethical disposition, is a penetrating diagnosis of the anti-Semite’s use of responsibility to provide a rationale for subverting and excluding the Jew. I expand upon Connolly’s interaction with Sartre into this sphere of sexism (a link he only briefly mentions in his reading) by showing its relevance to Simone de Beauvoir’s own existentialist account of myth and responsibility. After all, Beauvoir herself compares Nazi mythology of the Jew and myths of the feminine. Though Connolly and Beauvoir interpret Nietzsche differently with regard to gender order, both distance themselves from what Connolly calls Sartre’s Pelagianism.

Connolly summarizes four aspects of Sartre’s description of the anti-Semite’s use of responsibility: first, responsibility enables a dissociation from those unpleasant features of experience that are disruptive; second, consigning fault to another enables the restoration of harmony; third, shifting evil to another keeps his notion of “good” free from interrogation and questioning; and finally, his notion of a good order justifies temporary erasure of law. In sum, the anti-Semite, or sexist, blames another when he or she encounters an instance of evil in the world that could lead to the fear that the world is ill-contrived. It is the same terror, in fact, that Augustine’s first woman felt before the rift in being, which, if deeply felt, empowers a desperate scapegoating that is more primal than rationales supporting legal constraint.

This whole dynamic serves the anti-Semite, though perhaps not as well as he hopes – according to Sartre, it only makes possible an “inverted liberty,” by which he is free to accuse the other of all evils and exempt himself from responsibility for the same. In Sartre’s estimation, European anti-Semitic culture left the accused (a Jew, in this case –

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90 Connolly, *Identity\Difference*, p100 (bolding is mine).
92 Connolly, *Identity\Difference*, p100.
but it could also be woman, as Connolly indicates) with two insufficient responses. First, one could submit to the accusations that tie his identity to specific evils and undertake a project of self-subjection defined by constant self-examination and avoidance of any and all stereotypical behaviour. Sartre worries that kowtowing in this way simply creates a new and equally despicable stereotype: “the cautious, self-demeaning, ingratiating Jew who is inauthentic with respect to himself and all the more vulnerable to new assaults by the anti-Semite.” 94 The same could be said about an oppressed woman: submitting to the Edenic narrative role requires the “bad faith,” or inauthenticity, that surrenders her unique form of feminine strength. 95 Second, contemporary political liberal thought counselled the Jew to assimilate and base his identity on universal human traits to bridge differences between Jew and anti-Semite. But stripping oneself of particularity leaves one with no passion in shared social forums, which is the danger of the liberal’s rationalist universalism: it promotes a passive disposition that will prove no match for the impassioned activity of the anti-Semite or sexist. 96 Both forms of counsel, of submission or assimilation, deprive the victim of any way to challenge the prevailing notion of a good order that is, at least in part, the source of his suffering.

Connolly admires the power of Sartre’s diagnosis of anti-Semitism, but takes issue with his response. Sartre bases his counsel on an existentialist anthropology that sees humans as capable of “radical choice”. Freedom and choice are ontological realities for Sartre, which endure in any and every human life situation. One need only tap into one’s own freedom to choose, and an authentic life becomes possible again. Applied to the anti-Semite, Sartre claims that he must choose to not hate or discriminate. He must realize that the root cause of his hatred is his own will, rather than any situation. Change is within his power. He must awaken to his own power to choose a more humane and ethical form of

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94Ibid., p101: the quote is of Connolly, not Sartre.
95My mention of “strength” is an attempt to tie Connolly’s essay on Sartre with his reading of the Genesis narrative over Bloom’s shoulder. Sartre himself does not use the term in this context.
96Ibid., p102.
interaction. Connolly charges that this form of counsel reverses the distribution of responsibility that he observes to be at work in the anti-Semite who blames the Jew for evil. That is, Sartre claims that the anti-Semite should recognize his responsibility for the mistreatment of the Jew and choose to accept some of the blame for the evil that he yearns to assign to the Jew. According to Connolly, “Sartre thus stands to the anti-Semite as the mild anti-Semite…stands to the Jew.” Existentialist counsel is structurally hypocritical.

Why can Sartre not envision a response to the anti-Semite other than to redistribute fault? What precisely in Sartre’s thought binds him to repeat the anti-Semite’s structure of accusation? Connolly traces Sartre’s hypocrisy to an inability to think outside a basic dualism. For Sartre, the self has absolute freedom, but that self in a particular situation can influence how to express that freedom. When Sartre discusses the anti-Semite, Connolly notes, the emphasis falls on freedom to choose; however, when he focuses on the Jew, situatedness comes to the fore. It is this dialectic of freedom and situation that Connolly finds behind Sartre’s failure to avoid his own earlier diagnosis of the faults of the anti-Semite; he blames the Jew because he fears that the world might be ill-contrived. Sartre appears in the grip of the same delusion and insists, just as the anti-Semite, that “where there is evil there is equivalent responsibility.” In the end, Sartre holds to an ideal community in which every person realizes his or her freedom and thus produces a harmonious social life. Connolly claims, “The ideal world [Sartre] projects at the end of Anti-Semite and Jew looks suspiciously like the resentful ideal of harmony he insightfully identified as the existential demand at the root of anti-Semitism.”

Only recently have scholars observed that Simone de Beauvoir took issue with the Sartrean notion of responsibility, based as it is on an abstract and depoliticized account of ontological freedom. Beauvoir insisted that Sartre offered ineffective counsel to the

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97 Connolly, Identity\Difference, p103.
98 Ibid., p104.
99 Ibid., p106.
100 See, for example, Elaine Stavro, “Re-Reading the Second Sex: Theorizing the Situation”,
woman who needs a more historically situated understanding of freedom to help her identify how freedom arises within and is delimited by her specific situation. Her search for a historically mediated account of freedom enables her to avoid the voluntarism that Connolly notes in Sartre. In other words, Beauvoir does not oppose freedom and situation in the way Sartre did. Later works by Sartre move in this direction that Beauvoir pioneered. 101

Beauvoir converges with Connolly in several important ways that Sartre does not. Not only are they similar in their relational vision of subjectivity, 102 but also in their perception of the importance of revising prevalent cultural myths. For Beauvoir and Connolly, myths are an important aspect of woman’s situation because they enable or limit opportunities for reciprocal relations. But Beauvoir focuses on the creation of new myths rather than inflecting extant ones; this is a key difference between their projects. Despite these similarities, I claim that Connolly’s diagnosis of Sartre suggests that Beauvoir nevertheless fails to escape the Augustinian-Pelagian bind. She retains an ideal community of utopian reciprocity in which subjectivities harmonize in their full realization of freedom; and she seeks symmetry between evil and responsible agency, for such a demand always assumes a vision of utopian community. Rather than positing an ideal harmonious community, Connolly notes that it is best to follow Sartre’s initial suggestions (that he himself betrays) to boldly face up to the ill-contrived world. Connolly’s utopia is a “Nietzschean…ideal of rivalry between competitors who reciprocally recognize their difference and indebtedness.” 103 This vision drops the expectation of symmetry and energizes resistance to any account of a natural order or perfect harmony assumed in the

101 Connolly notes that Simone de Beauvoir’s book, The Ethics of Ambiguity, was the inspiration behind his book Politics and Ambiguity, but he has no sustained interaction with her texts in any of his Augustine era writings.
102 Stavro helpfully distinguishes de Beauvoir’s account of agency and freedom not only from Sartrean voluntarism but also from later feminists who see subjectivity as mere psychic effects, as discursive practices, or as modes of production. She notes that de Beauvoir’s subjectivity is more relational and more richly acknowledges the subject’s historical situation than do these other options.
103 Connolly, The Augustine Imperative, p119.
Edenic myth or elsewhere. Thus, the Jew is empowered to argue with the substantive vision of social harmony that animates the anti-Semite, and woman is able to combat the pre-known optimal social arrangements that are deemed to accord best with “natural law”. To see a tragic set of events as humanity’s most primal experiences in Eden challenges how responsibility is used as theodicy.

In the next two sections of this chapter, I show how Connolly diagnoses two further ways in which an Augustinian account of responsibility perpetuates and even enables an unjust gender order. He articulates these problems through interaction with two contemporary Augustinians: Charles Taylor and Paul Ricoeur. As will become clear, Connolly claims that Taylor’s project lacks any means of moderating the continued expansion of responsibility for some within a given society, and that the Augustinian hope for redemption from responsibility for evil makes one passive with respect to fighting evil in the present in Ricoeur. After detailing these critiques, I turn to Connolly’s own means of avoiding these two problems without releasing the felicity and (contingent) necessity of upholding some account of responsibility for ethical relations in late modern times.

C. The Inflationary Tendency of Charles Taylor’s Responsibility

Existential voluntarists such as Sartre were shown to be susceptible to hypocrisy by Connolly by virtue of standing on the same ground as Augustinians with respect to their use of responsibility to serve a theodicy. Nevertheless, Connolly discloses a different ethical worry in the Augustinianism of Charles Taylor: no means exist to moderate the inflationary tendencies of duty and fault.

Connolly notes that Taylor also discloses insights into “the logic of responsibility” via an interaction with Sartrean radical choice. Taylor recounts a scene in Sartre’s Existentialism Is a Humanism in which a young man feels torn between caring for his ailing mother and throwing in his lot with the resistance movement. Taylor agrees with Sartre that such a situation requires a radical decision, but he questions whether it is true
that Sartre’s existentialism can make sense of why this is experienced as a dilemma. Are there not, Taylor asks, values that this young man holds that cause him to feel an attraction to both options? And where did these values come from? Radical choice? Taylor’s point is to highlight that radical choice can only happen in a strong evaluative context that is itself not a product of radical choice. Thus, Sartre sees the self as capable of determining itself through choice irrespective of context or situation. Taylor, by contrast, forwards a self whose choices are all structured by previous evaluations that were not chosen. But Connolly observes that Taylor fails to address the fact that Sartre’s anthropology and ethic of freedom arises from the ontology he explicitly advances. Instead, he asserts an alternative ontology of the self in which an agent’s persistent questioning of one’s coherency of judgment, across many situations, strengthens and matures one’s own moral life by refining the prejudgments that comprise the self. Connolly observes that Taylor provides no argument for this ontology, and further, notes that neither of Taylor’s important observations about Sartrean responsibility (i.e., that prior assumptions condition any choice and that any choice has an evaluative background that we only partly choose and that we only partly know) require it.

Connolly labels Taylor’s ontology of self “a doctrine of quasi-radical self-questioning.” Taylor finds this ontology superior to Sartre in that it demands a fuller articulation of one’s evaluative background; however, Connolly argues, he does not realize that it rests upon a contestable Augustinian ontology in which the self is seen as deep, beyond grasping, but at the same time somehow a privileged point of access to truth. Instead of making this ontology explicit and arguing for it, Taylor instead “evoke[s] the

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105 It is helpful at this point to remember the notion of “weak ontology” that I explored in chapter one, a form of ontology that Stephen White found on display in both Taylor and Connolly: see White, Sustaining Affirmation, chapter 3 (Taylor) and chapter 5 (Connolly).

106 Connolly, Identity/Difference, p108.


108 Ibid., p110.
experience of discovery and elevation rather than, say, the experience of a socially formed self established upon a raw being partly resistant to its own form.” Further, Taylor often employs a nebulous “we” and inveighs the reader with a variety of “musts”. Connolly charges that this “we” does more than install a harmless sentimental sense of unity; rather, it, like the Augustinian faith in general, discourages efforts to question the “truth”. Here, Connolly clearly puts Taylor in the role of Augustine, who wants to silence the snake which will silence the woman. While Taylor does not reify a gender hierarchy, Connolly can be taken to suggest here that Taylor removes late modernity’s most potent options for reversing it. But persistent questions arise about what it means to be related to the Augustinian god, how the will can be maintained as a coherent aspect of the self, and how relations to others can avoid practices of demonization. As this and the previous two chapters have shown, Connolly engages in sustained argument with the Augustinian tradition in numerous ways, but he invests most of his efforts not in logical argument but in reinterpretation of prevalent images and narratives that draw attention to these difficulties. Below, I show that, with respect to Augustinian practices of responsibility and their related conceptual doctrines, Connolly counsels and displays rhetorical strategies that loosen the grip of the Augustinian vision. But Taylor’s “must” accomplishes the opposite, claims Connolly.

I briefly argued in the first chapter that Connolly does not see that the local church for Augustine is the primary point of epistemic access to divine order. Taylor sits at variance with Augustinian theology on this score, as his “church” does not emphasize the ‘local’ dimension but rather function more as an abstract entity of immense social and political significance. The church, for Taylor, is not the relational matrix that Augustine refers to as “the body of Christ”. The significance of this point will be further developed in the closing section to this chapter.

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109 Ibid.
110 Connolly, Identity\Difference, p111.
D. The Passive Hope for Redemption in Ricoeur’s Responsibility

Like Connolly, Paul Ricoeur is appalled by the Augustinian Eden. Connolly engages him in a very short section of his Eden essay to demonstrate how extensively the Augustinian notion of responsibility pervades the Western consciousness. In Ricoeur, Connolly sees a final feature of the Augustinian vision that impacts late modern ethical thought and removes the options he wants to cultivate for reversing prevalent conceptions of gender order. In addition to rejecting the doctrine of original sin, deeming it psychologically harmful, Ricoeur folds into contemporary readings of Eden several key elements from a tragic vision of life and reality: that there is a fault in being that a hero both exposes and, through hubris, exacerbates as he or she encounters morally contradictory situations.111 With this picture of Eden in place, Ricoeur then forwards what Connolly calls a “Christology of optimism,” in which ascriptions of responsibility for sin are only advanced from the perspective of a salvation already accomplished in Christ.112 Connolly notes that, unlike in Taylor, what I would call a ‘Christologically situated harmatology’ does indeed loosen the drive to responsibility that Augustinian doctrines secure. But another harmful element of Augustinian responsibility can be seen to cling to Ricoeur’s account: the hope for redemption from the tragic elements of life. Connolly finds such hope ethically problematic because it “build[s] too much human resignation into its recognition of the tragic character of life, and, as a corollary, too much hope for outside redemption from the existential condition it delineates.”113 In terms of gender order, Ricoeur’s counsel leaves women passive before unfair dispensations of responsibility.

III. Bridges Toward More Ethical Practices of Responsibility in Connolly

I noted in the first section above that Connolly proposes a normative ethic of

111 Connolly, The Augustine Imperative, p117-118.
112 Ibid., p118-119.
113 Connolly, The Augustine Imperative, p118.
responsibility to agonistic relation. But in the preceding section, I also noted that he sees
the late modern moment conditioned, irremediably, by the Augustinian wilful subject. In
this section, I describe several bridges that Connolly constructs from Augustinian Edenic
soil to a situation in which a greater sensitivity to the incommensurabilities of being limit
the drive to blame-ascription and accountability. In the preceding section I detailed
Connolly's diagnosis of the Augustinian-Pelagian bind and how he draws on Harold
Bloom’s J in calling those unduly burdened with responsibility to stand boldly before the
rift in being and refuse guilt. In this section, I articulate Connolly’s pursuit of an order
with “slack” that guides his revised reading of Eden, and then clarify the generalizable
strategies he employed – the engagement of an interrogative tone, humour, and irony.
While Sartre, Beauvoir, and Taylor remain in the wilful/will-less agent dialectic,
Connolly’s practices instil a responsibility to agonistic relation. In the context of gender
order that has occupied me in this chapter, I argue that Connolly’s practices aim to loosen
not only the gender dualism, but also the idea of sexual differentiation itself.

A. In Praise of Slack: Ironic Reversals

In Politics and Ambiguity, Connolly highlights how prevailing ethical theories
subvert and justify the disciplining of sources of ambiguity. He argues that democratic
virtues are best secured and cultivated within a social ontology that refuses theoretical
erasure of ambiguity; thus, he unfolds the merits of “dissonant holism” to play this role.
The adjective (“dissonant”) ensures that democratic theory does not reduce the ideal-actual
gap in democratic communities through discipline. I have shown above that this is
precisely what Connolly sees Augustinianism enabling in contemporary Western cultures,
because it holds forth the promise that individuality and social existence can harmonize
without ambiguity.114

In contrast to this tightening of the screws of an ideal order through either

114See Connolly, Politics and Ambiguity, chapter 1.
punishing vice and rewarding virtue (Rousseau’s emphasis) or reassertion of the “legitimacy” of authoritarian directives (Hobbes’ emphasis), Connolly praises what he calls “slack”. By “slack” he means:

an order which does not have to coordinate so many aspects of our lives and relations to maintain itself; an order which can afford to let some forms of conduct be; an order which is not compelled by its own imperatives of coordination to convert eccentric, odd, strange behavior into the categories of vice, delinquency, or abnormality.\textsuperscript{115}

To stir some imaginative possibilities for late modern communities, Connolly draws on the work of Mary Douglas to envision what it might mean for an order to ritualize or institutionalize an acknowledgement of the “dirt” that it generates. Douglas classifies cultures as either dirt-denying or dirt-affirming.\textsuperscript{116} The latter find ways to communally embody the ambiguity that irreducibly remains in the ideal of order they collectively and individually pursue. Connolly notes, for example, that some cultures engage in “tribal rites of reversal” in which a servile wife might act as a domineering husband in a particular performance.\textsuperscript{117} Such rites, express reflexively what reflexive impulses honed by the Enlightenment suppress: The norms and standards appropriate to the good life we prize together are also destructive in their impact on the other in oneself and other selves; the rites of reversal affirm this ambiguity and offer some degree of redress for the human losses incurred.\textsuperscript{118}

Connolly notes that these rituals differ in kind from “private” religious or personal practices. What is exemplary about societies strong enough to affirm dirt is that they do so publicly. Unlike the much discussed ironizing of Richard Rorty,\textsuperscript{119} Connolly thinks that both public and private discourse need be ironized, and that the “slack” which results is

\textsuperscript{115}Ibid., p96.
\textsuperscript{116}Ibid., 94.
\textsuperscript{117}Ibid., p110: Connolly draws this example from Victor Turner’s book The Ritual Process.
\textsuperscript{118}Ibid., p111.
not the liberal allowance of more private space (which is what Rorty seeks). Instead, Connollian “slack” traverses the public and private dichotomy that imitates Bloom’s J, who challenged the late Davidic monarch, particularly under Rehoboam, with jokes about matriarchal households. Unfortunately, Connolly does not suggest nor point to any particular contemporary performances that embody the dirt-affirmation that might serve as a panegyric of “slack” amidst contemporary dualisms. But he clarifies their purpose: to instil a deeper awareness of the politically constructed nature of social roles that tighten the screws of late modern responsibility. Connolly wants to loosen the grip of such roles.

Connolly’s notion of “slack” contrasts with several contemporary uses of the term. For example, the term “organizational slack,” often used in business management theory, has the negative connotation of a wasteful reserve or excessive expenditure. For example, “slack” happens when an employee is paid more than needed to secure their loyalty. Managers are taught to rid the organization of “slack”. More colloquially, “slack” can mean something similar to “grace”. Someone may say, “Give me some slack, I only slept a few hours.” Connolly, of course, would be concerned with both uses of the term, because both imply what he sees as an affirmation of an Augustinian notion of responsibility in which rewards are commensurate.

But I argue in the last section of this chapter that Augustine also uses humour and irony to reverse gender roles, though such practices do not necessarily loosen roles, which is Connolly’s goal. Rather, Augustinian humour frees one to more fully live their ecclesial vocation, which is a humble form of service to others. “Slack” in this ecclesial context translates as flexibility to live a particular form of love that fits a specific situation. Because Connolly rejects an ethic of love, I argue, he can only envision a need to distance oneself from particular social roles; he at no point imagines how one could need and desire

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121 Alexander Styhre notes that it is often a “dirty word”; see *A Social Theory of Innovation* (Copenhagen Business School Press), p176.
slack for a given social role. In other words, an agonistic ethic imagines only the need to be freed from; an Augustinian vision acknowledges such a need at times, but also imagines moments of needing to be free for a particular social role. Connolly’s “slack” does not address such situations. Charles Mathewes argues that Connolly’s moral psychology is unrealistic with respect to human commitments. Connolly, Mathewes claims, assumes that people can learn to sit upon their social roles more lightly. But does this “slack” serve a caretaker for an elderly parent, a nursing mother, or participants in a protest for racial equality?

I now briefly discuss two of Connolly’s strategies for achieving the role distancing or “slack” that enables responsibility to agonistic relations.

B. A Rhetoric of “Perhaps”

Connolly closes his fourth chapter in *Identity\Difference* (entitled “Responsibility for Evil”) by preaching. Part of the purpose of this closing section, “A Pagan Sermon,” is to advance the chapter’s argument regarding the need to mitigate the drive to responsibility – through a kind of homiletical exegesis of a specific Nietzschean text that he cites at the opening of the section – another feature of the sermon demonstrates a counter-rhetoric of responsibility to the one he found in Charles Taylor. Connolly calls Taylor and others, “theorists of the must”. (Sartre gets lumped into this group as well.) But Connolly noticeably backs away from Taylor’s confident declarations and instead instils a questioning posture, a scepticism about the pursuit of unequivocal responsibility. Note the following passages (bolding is mine; italics are Connolly’s):

**Perhaps** standards of responsibility are both indispensable to social practice and productive of injustices within it. **Perhaps, because** every society demands some such standards, a problem of evil resides within any social practice that fulfils this demand relentlessly.127

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127 Ibid., p96.
Perhaps the quest by normals for a sense of moral superiority contributed pressures to define the first set of abnormalities in terms of self-responsibility. Perhaps the demand to hold the other responsible for defects flows to some degree from the demand to treat oneself as responsible for every virtue attained. Maybe such patterns of insistence…

Perhaps the late-modern secular culture...could use an infusion of imaginary paganism, itself secularized and modernized...[that] might take the following form: we are not pre-designed to be responsible agents, but we cannot dispense with practices of responsibility.

Examples such as this in his discussion of responsibility could be multiplied many times over. He deliberately displaces the “musts” of the Augustinians and Pelagians, and this highlights his mild resistance to their wilful subject. But the “must” is not completely displaced. As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, Connolly advances a normative vision of responsibility. He articulates it in the following way:

This is the gap [i.e., the one between the social indispensability of responsibility and the desert of those to whom it is applied] that must be maintained and honoured in a political theory of responsibility.

He then announces his own “evangelism” that advances this imperative and that makes possible an agonistic humour:

My friends and I…will try to convert you to a more modest, contingent view of your own identity…Our affirmation of the irony in these stances will contain an invitation to you to affirm corollary ironies in your own. Let us laugh together, in principle.

C. Laughing Together

John Morreall schematizes theories of laughter as arising from superiority, incongruity, or relief. I noted above that Bloom’s J most often depicts incommensurates as humorous, which corresponds with the second theory of humour Morreall mentioned. Though Connolly does not mention Morreall’s study, he notes that Hobbesian humour

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128 Ibid., p98.
129 Ibid., p116.
130 Connolly, Identity/Difference, p116.
131 Ibid., p120.
arises from moments in which “I show myself to be ahead and you to be behind.” Racist or sexist jokes spring to mind as examples of a superiority occasion of humour. Connolly, by contrast, states that he pursues a form of laughter that arises from mutual recognition of individual dissonances. However, in practice, I argue that Connolly operates with the same type of humour that he accuses Hobbes of advancing.

The dissonances at the centre of Connollian humour reside in the identity of both partners in the conversation, making Connolly’s laughter always at oneself and the other. There is a danger in this form of humour that Connolly demonstrates in his interaction with Augustine. One of Connolly’s recent commentators, John Lombardini, asks whether Connolly embodies his own ideal of humour in his “Letter to Augustine” that constitutes chapter 5 of I:D? The “letter” is filled with a “deep tone of mockery” that, at best, lies in tension with Connolly’s own counsel to “laugh together, on principle.” I cite just one example from Connolly’s letter: “I beg you, O Bishop of Hippo, enlighten me where I go wrong here. Fill my mind with a deeper understanding and rid it of those distractions that cloud its vision, I who bear within me my own morality, and who can only follow the thin shaft of light that leads into your deep soul.” While Kathleen Roberts Skerrett claims that Connolly “self-consciously indulged in the temptation of enmity” in order to “dramatize the difficulties of agonistic respect”, Lombardini more convincingly notes that “the letter [to Augustine] invites its readers to laugh at Augustine, and Augustine to laugh at himself” – but Connolly never laughs at himself.

A similar charge might be levelled at Geoffrey Rees’s appeal for “mature

\[133\] Connolly, Identity\slash Difference, p180-181.
humor” in the context of the discourse on theology and sexuality. I engaged above in a brief excursion of Rees’s argument regarding the democratizing potential of the doctrine of original sin; I extend that treatment here. Rees sees “mature humor” as that response which spontaneously arises when conjugal-sexual moralities rooted in fantasies of innocent sexuality are seen in the light of original sin. While fictions of innocent sexuality are created and sustained by fear of one’s own finitude and the threat of others to that limitedness, mature humor entails a hospitable and non-defensive posture to oneself and others on account of mutual implication in sin. Rees claims that mature humor defends “vulnerable life against the depredations of sex.”

Both Connolly and Rees promise an ironizing humour that critiques any identity that takes too seriously its own morality or universal validity. This form of humour is rooted in an expectation of irreducibly agonistic relations and how it cultivates “slack” in the context of such relations. I drew Rees into this discussion of Connolly’s agonistic humour because his “mature humor” is structurally parallel to it. Mapped onto theological ethical discourse on conjugal-sexuality, this form of humour fails to generate a “laughter with” – it only operates as a “laughter at” those who take themselves too seriously. While such agonistic laughter produces slack in the social order, it assumes an antagonistic social world that betrays a depth of fascination with conflict that renders such laughter incapable of imagining intimate contexts in which genuinely mutual laughter can form. I note briefly in the following closing section how Augustine’s humour in the ecclesia is the ironic role reversal that loosens role expectations flowing from an Edenic gender order. Augustine’s Trinitarian ecclesiology proves capable of the ethically productive humour that Connolly extols without the derisive fascination with conflict and relational distancing that his humour entails.

139 Ibid., p24.
140 I draw these terms from Lombardini, though Lombardini mentions only Connolly and not Rees: “Civic Laughter,” p216.
IV. Why and How Christian Marriage Needs the Church: Augustine’s Christological Irony and Humour

George Kateb, in an essay that interacts with Connolly’s reading of the Edenic myth notes, “There is more than morality in Augustine’s world-picture.” I note several features of Augustine’s thought that, when held together with features that Connolly highlights as connected with Augustinian practices of responsibility, mitigate the moralizing tendencies in his theology.

Augustine’s doctrine of universal original sin is matched by his doctrine of Christ as “second Adam”. The context of assigning responsibility in the ecclesia, as Paul Ricoeur noted above, is always in the context of the community’s narrative of being conformed to the image of Christ. For Augustine, such perception of responsibility or fault is never fully known. Augustine does not forward a neat and clean theodicy that would drive an account of human responsibility. Such an account of order only arises in Augustine’s thought only when his Christology and ecclesiology are abandoned. In this way, Connolly’s worries regarding Augustinian responsibility can be renarrated as a worry over the abandonment of Augustine’s Christological ecclesiology in late modernity. When these central theological elements of Augustine’s vision are abandoned, the Edenic narratives become a timeless “myth” about human agency (i.e., what it means to be under a superior power that can command and enforce conformity by claiming that particular actions deserve particular responses). I turn to two significant moments of humour and irony in Augustine’s *Confessions* that show how Augustine’s Christological ecclesiology moderates “the drive to responsibility” that worries Connolly. These examples show that Augustine ironizes and employs a humour that is more ethically appealing than that which forms the centre of Connolly’s (and Rees’) agonistic engagement.

In *Confessions* 1.6.8-1.7.11, Augustine recounts his first laugh as an infant, the moment that marked the presence of a level of rational ability that would be capable of

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speaking and understanding language.\textsuperscript{142} The “infant” is literally one who is incapable of speaking (Latin: \textit{in-fans}), and in the context of \textit{Confessions} Book 1, Augustine means that this is one who cannot speak according to the Creator’s intentions for the creation.\textsuperscript{143} Thus, Brian Stock is correct to argue that the “infant” is a metaphor for Augustine of an unbaptized catechumen or interested pagan.

In a justly famous passage, soon after laughing the infant begins to express an inordinate craving for milk (1.7.11). Augustine calls it gluttony (\textit{inhio}), which is desire for food beyond the measure of what is good for oneself and another. Using the Pauline depiction of deplorable behaviour as infantile,\textsuperscript{144} Augustine details how gluttonous behaviour should be overcome: infants (i.e., unbaptized pagans) need gentle correction that assigns no blame, but rather maintains a focus on securing the proper mutually beneficial order. However, adults (i.e., Christians) who act in infantile ways are to be ridiculed (\textit{derideo}) and rebuked (\textit{reprehendo}). Augustine discusses “ridicule” (\textit{derideo}) at several important places in \textit{Confessions}: while ridicule is demonic when one uses it to enjoy the tearing-down of another (cf. \textit{Confessions} 3.3.6), God’s use of derision seeks to make a person justly disappointed with himself as a prod to participate in a reality that is more fulfilling (cf. \textit{Confessions} 6.14.24 and 11.15.18\textsuperscript{145}).

Further, in 9.8.18 Augustine narrates the effectiveness of a slave girl’s ridicule\textsuperscript{146} in response to Monica’s gluttonous (\textit{inhio}) habit of drinking alcohol in her young years. I choose this example because Augustine praises an instance of laughter that momentarily reverses social roles to good effect. Augustine allows a note of mockery that imitates or...

\textsuperscript{142}Colin Starnes notes that Augustine was in line with the ancient philosophical assessment that saw humour as rooted in rational observation of incommensurates: see Colin Starnes, and Saint Augustine, Augustine’s Conversion: A Guide to the Argument of Confessions I-IX (Waterloo, Ont., Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1991). p.3.
\textsuperscript{143}Brian Stock (among others) has convincingly shown that Augustine’s infantile narrative relates to pre-baptized pagans: see Brian Stock, Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996). chapters 1 and 6.
\textsuperscript{144}See 1 Corinthians 14:20: “do not be children in your thinking; rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults.”
\textsuperscript{145}In 6.14.24 Augustine cites Psalm 144:15-16 and in 11.15.18 he cites Psalm 59:8.
\textsuperscript{146}Though Augustine uses insultatio and not derideo in 9.8.18, the similarity in the narrative patterns suggests that reading the passages in light of one another is legitimate.
participates in divine derision when a Christian is at risk of developing habits that bar them and others from forms of life that exhibit the same kind of humble service seen in the Creator who reveals himself in the Incarnation. Thus, humour in the ecclesia is not a reminder of original sin for those who pridefully claim innocence (as in Rees’s “mature humor”), but rather a call not to abandon one’s particular form of humility (or vocation) that expresses faith in the Incarnate One, which is the very grain of the created order itself. This first programatically significant example of humour from *Confessions* shows that Augustine’s Christological ecclesiology avoids what Connolly calls the “the Augustinian temptation,” the estrangement of others who are considered more responsible for the evil in the world. A second example displays Augustinian ironizing.

The strategies or “bridges” that I delineated above that pervade Connolly’s work have been presented in terms of the Augustinian notion of responsibility. I have shown that Augustine is capable of accomplishing a similar reversal. But as I noted at the beginning of this chapter, Connolly forwards his own normative account of responsibility – I labelled it “responsibility to the agon”. The next chapter displays what is discovered on the “other side” of the bridge, once a community passes over it. What appears on the horizon is a community that not only shows itself capable of reversing hierarchies that define its life, but also allows for the introduction of mysterious differences that resist clear identification with either end of the hierarchical order. Thus, chapter 3 explores the displacement of sexual difference as a meaningful identity of social organization.
Chapter Three: Agonistic Resources For Misfits

Introduction: Connolly’s Revision of Nietzschean Compassion

A Nietzschean anthropology folds the vertical Creator-creature distinction along a horizontal axis so that creator and creature are both seen as aspects of human nature. On Nietzsche’s account, these two streams of energy in humanity give rise to divergent groups or types, namely the overman and the herd animal. In Book VII (“Our Virtues”) of *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche argues that this vision of determinative energies at work in humanity funds an account of pity\(^1\) that focuses not on coming to the aid of the weak, passive creature (as does Christian compassion) but instead is oriented to assist solely the innovative, active creator. He writes,

In the human being, creature and creator are united…Do [you, Christians,] understand that your pity is for the ‘creature in the human being’, that which must be formed, broken, forged, torn, burned, annealed, purified – that which necessarily has to suffer and should suffer? And our pity – do [you, Christians,] not understand whom our reversed pity is intended for, when it resists your pity as the worst of all possible self-indulgences and weaknesses?\(^2\)

Even more directly, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the protagonist declares that “not wanting to help can be more noble than the virtue that jumps in.”\(^3\) One can see hints in these two quotes of how Nietzsche draws on the Stoic tradition in which the wise man has no πάθος, though Nietzsche links healthy compassionate emotions εὐπάθος not to rationality as the Stoics did but to life itself understood as the source of human creativity

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\(^1\)I use “pity”, “compassion” and “consolation” interchangeably in this chapter, though I acknowledge that the around the turn of the 20th century “pity” began to take on negative connotations (i.e., of condescension, of a kind of emotional expenditure that cripples advocacy, etc.) that it did not have in Nietzsche’s day. Several contemporary translators (Kaufmann, Hollingdale, Faber, etc.) of Nietzsche’s texts have translated his German Mitleid as “pity”, thereby connecting his critique to something now deemed morally insufficient – which was not true in Nietzsche’s own day.


\(^3\)Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Graham Parkes (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), (Part 4, Section 7, “The Ugliest Man”), p231. Zarathustra persistently states that the overly-compassionate god is the one who must die and indeed has.
and strength. Nietzsche’s focus on pity is at the centre of his rejection of Christianity, and a well-chosen target at that, as both the Old and New Testament describe compassion as an attribute of God and a mark of the community of God’s people. Similarly, since (at least) the time of the restoration of the Roman republic in 27 BC, the Romans understood compassion (clementia) to be one of the four primary virtues (alongside virtus, iustitia, pietas), whereas the pre-Christian Greek ethical culture, which Nietzsche draws on to disclose the degeneracy of the later Roman-Christian developments, considered compassion meritorious but not one of the virtues. Roman Christians, such as Lactantius, would later look back on the upgrading of compassion as a distinctive mark of Roman moralism and a key part of its felicitous providential confluence with Christianity. Augustine complicates the Lactantian picture of Roman and Christian clementia, due largely to his openness to aspects of Stoic notions of ἄπαθος.

While the first chapter focused on ethical self-formation and the second focused on an ethic of responsibility to the agon, in this chapter I turn to Connolly’s reading of the biblical book of Job to analyse his worry that Augustinian apophatic order produces an inferior ethics of compassion in comparison to that which an ontology of fugitive abundance can sustain. Just as his concern with prevalent readings of the parable of the sower centred on their reification of the nature-culture distinction, so in reading the book of Job Connolly traces the unethical elements of Augustinian compassion to its underlying ambition to achieve attunement with a natural order. He worries especially about how Augustine’s use of mystery makes a community impervious to the contributions of suffering creators, and he takes up the case of the nineteenth century hermaphrodite

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5 See, for example, Exodus 34.6, Isaiah 49.5, Matthew 9.36, 2 Corinthians 1:3, and James 5.11 (the latter speaks of the revelation of the compassionate divine nature in Job’s story).
8 Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, 6.10.1 (noted by Blowers, p4).
Herculine Barbin as a Job-figure in order to contemporize the criticism. Though Connolly does not explicitly cite Nietzsche’s views on compassion in his interpretation of the book of Job, his exposition does focus on how this biblical text might inform a contemporary ethic of compassion or consolation (the latter appears to be Connolly’s preferred term). The way he inflects the Nietzschean anthropology to make his ethic of consolation relevant to the late modern context yields, at first glance, a more compelling account of agonistic compassion than can be found in Nietzsche, largely because he puts the Nietzschean celebration of strength in service to a more egalitarian vision. But I demonstrate that Connolly’s revisions on this score exhibit the same fundamental ethical problem found in Nietzschean compassion.

Though not in the context of his discussion of the book of Job, Connolly articulates the way in which he changes or updates the Nietzschean anthropology. He writes,

The Nietzschean conception of a few who overcome resentment above politics while the rest remain stuck in the muck of resentment in politics is not today viable on its own terms. Today circumstances require that many give the sign of the overman a presence in themselves and in the ethicopolitical orientations they project onto the life of the whole…If the overman was ever projected as a distinct type – and this is not certain – it now becomes refigured into a struggle within the self between the inclination to existential resentment and an affirmation of life that rises above this tendency.

The shifting of creator-creature from distinct types of humans into dynamics within and between each and every late modern self is reinforced in Connolly’s work through a redefinition of the Nietzschean pathos of distance. Connolly notes that distance from the “herd” was achievable in Nietzsche’s day, as an apolitical space existed on the margins of society where the “tentacles of the state” did not reach. While Nietzsche used terms such as “hermit” and “eagle” to allude to spaces of aristocratic isolation, Connolly observes that today these terms are associated, respectively, with “a regulated multitude who are

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9 It is unclear why Connolly prefers the term. Compassion (literally, “to feel with”) seems a better fit for his purpose than consolation (literally, “to be alone with”).

10 Connolly, Identity/Difference, p187.

11 Ibid., p184-197.
homeless” and “a protected species”. In a Foucaultian vein, Connolly comments that late modernity is the time in which social organization is literally everywhere; relationality and social control now pervades spaces that once offered isolated sanctuary. Thus, “the distinction between types [i.e., creator and creature] now gives way to struggle within and between selves.” Connolly’s transfer of Nietzsche’s aristocratic pathos of distance from a social relation into a disposition within and towards oneself assumes what I made explicit in the previous chapter, namely that the self and community are co-extensive. Connolly’s treatment of Job foregrounds the ethical significance of this vision in relation to an ‘other’ who suffers.

Stephen Williams has recently argued that Nietzsche’s aim to affirm the entirety of existence, even one’s own suffering, is what leads him to denounce the human kindness that is a welcome part of any human life, but which is nearly impossible to legitimate in a philosophical register. Williams presses those enamoured by the Nietzschean celebration of strength to consider: Have not hospitals demonstrated to us that compassion is often humanizing and ennobling rather than shame-inducing as Nietzsche seems to imply? Does not divine pity presuppose, rather than detract from human dignity? Would not a wounded soldier prefer the “humdrum morality of the pathetic herd” over one of Nietzsche’s heroes? I draw on Williams’s general line of argument from everyday life in what follows. But in order to show its relevance to Connolly’s concern that Christian compassion tends to neglect those who suffer from being different, I argue that it needs to be situated in an Augustinian ecclesiology. Augustine’s ecclesiology funds an ethic of compassion that attends to physical suffering in a way that Connolly’s account of consolation, which focuses on alleviating existential suffering, does not. But Connolly’s

12Ibid., p189.
13Ibid. (Connolly’s italics).
15Ibid., p257-261.
16Williams’ book-length mature theological meditation on Nietzsche’s quarrel with Christianity does not bring ecclesiology into focus at any significant point.
diagnosis of what can go wrong with Augustinian order reveals the fragility of the Augustinian elements that I hold up as capable of energising a superior communal response to the hermaphrodite.

In section one I detail Connolly’s criticism of Augustine’s reading of the book of Job, particularly how Augustine’s order causes a community to seal off their common life from misfits and to justify their apathy toward their plight; in section two I unfold Connolly’s own reading of the book and explain his argument for the ethical superiority of his late modern version of agonistic compassion; I then in section three level two criticisms of Connolly’s ethic of consolation, namely that it exhibits an inattentiveness to the human body and insufficiently counters what Augustine finds to be the core problem with any Manichaean ethical programme; and finally, in section four I foreground Augustine’s ethical apophaticism to show that mystery can serve a different function in Augustine’s philosophy of order than the one Connolly identified at play in his reading of the Jobian narrative.

I. Augustinian Order at the Margins with Job and Alex/ina

Why does Connolly engage the biblical book of Job? For one, it was a crucially important text to modern political thought – for example, Hobbes titled his two most important treatises, Leviathan and Behemoth, after two characters in it.17 Thus, “Job…[and] its themes continue to flow through the cultural unconscious of the West…”18 It does so in large part because it continues to inspire divergent readings, and so it has proven to be a text with a unique capacity to both inform and disturb. Job’s wrestling with his friends is not contained in the past; rather, the interpreters of this text find that it, like Job himself, “resists easy or full assimilation by any single response.”19 But what and how does this text disturb? The mention of “Job” flowing through the unconscious of the West signals, in light of the discussion in chapter one of how Connolly proposes to politicize the Freudian stratified self (see above chapter 1, section II, B), that Connolly is interested in Job as a sufferer whose painful experiences do not fit within the terms of order established by the community. In this section I detail Connolly charge

17Connolly, Political Theory and Modernity, p24-25.
18Connolly, The Augustinian Imperative, p3 (my italics).
19Ibid., p3.
that Augustine’s community responds unethically to certain aspects of Job’s suffering. The community’s ambition to attune with a “natural order” requires it to prioritize the resolution of its own identity over compassionate engagement with a Jobian sufferer. To show the potency of such a criticism, Connolly describes Alex/ina’s experiences within a community that prized order. I begin with Connolly’s critical description of an Augustinian exegesis of the story and its relevance to interpretations of Alex/ina’s hermaphroditism based on order.

A. The Community of Moral Order Encounters Job

As the story goes, after a brief celestial wager between the Accuser and God, Job is inflicted with physical pain and loss of loved ones. His world is turned upside down as a kind of wildness is unleashed on his life that he never expected nor had the resources to explain. I propose to read Connolly’s writing on Job in terms of four layers of suffering. Though Connolly does not explicitly delineate them, I find that this layered account of suffering forms the core of his exposition of the book and enables him to highlight a deficiency in Augustine’s account of compassion. In the first layer, Job experiences physical disablement and loss of resources needed to survive. Second, he suffers from a deep existential confusion: his understanding of reward and just deserts leave him with a sense of shock because he has not done anything to deserve these evils.20 Third, several friends come to sit with Job. They ask what he did to deserve such suffering, but Job proclaims his innocence. Because Job’s community identifies itself as “naturally ordered,” it only can achieve communal coherence when each member embodies harmony with the divine order. Thus, the community must resolve Job’s confusion. The friends are dispatched, and they leave Job, in the end, with two options: falsely claim that he did not suffer or expose the secret sin that justifies the divine decision to visit him with personal calamity. Job refuses both of these sanctioned options. Because the community understands itself to embody the natural way of being, they reinforce their identity by

20Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, p121: “People tend to demand, to put it all too briefly, a world in which suffering is ultimately grounded in proportional responsibility.” See chapter 2 above for an interaction with Connolly’s ethic of responsibility.
expelling Job from the community. Fourth, the communal exclusion deepens the confusion which soon transforms into an unresolvable anger at the god of the community. Job’s disjunction with his friends becomes bitterness towards their god. These layers can be summarized as follows:

- physical pain and loss
- confusion over why it is happening
- grief over being excluded
- anger at the god who justifies the community’s excluding order

Connolly presents the nineteenth century French hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin, whose journals were discovered and published by Michel Foucault in the 1970s, as a sufferer who is surrounded by Jobian friends. Connolly calls her “Alex/ina” to foreground the confusion she represented for the prevailing gender order of his day.21 Alex/ina’s memoirs record ambiguous experiences of life in a convent, including a secret romantic relation with a woman and the unsettling times with the sisters in the public baths. Foucault’s introduction to her published writings narrates Alex/ina’s eventual suicide as his story became public and ‘she’ was relabelled by the medical establishment as a ‘he’. Alex/ina pens prayers of deep confusion and worry to her God whose nature assigns a clear male or female body to each beloved human creature. Priests, doctors, and family members assess, anatomize, and ponder this anomalous body that fails to fit neat categorization, concluding in terms of their own master discourses (casuistic, medical, fashion) that further confessions, research, or personal stylization would bring alignment with the community’s current structures of thought. Connolly employs a late modern “we” to raise the readers’ awareness of their perhaps unknowing likeness to the community of Job’s friends:

We insist that bodies fit into the duality we impose upon them and act as if we report actuality inscribed in nature. We then treat bodies that differ from these impositions as deviations, imperfections, flaws in the body (rather than, say, in the social form that endorses this particular idealization of the body). Since our identities are bound up with clearly defined boundaries of gender,

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21When referring to Alex/ina, I alternate between female and male pronouns throughout the chapter.
we must hide, alter, repair, help, or correct that which transgresses the boundary.\textsuperscript{22}

Connolly’s analysis describes the two forms of unresolvable suffering that the Jobian Alex/ina must bear alone: social exclusion and an unproductive anger at this community’s god who does not exist but who demands that she be male or female through and through. This community only offers moral advice to such a one; it is incapable of providing \textit{consolation}.

In both narratives (Job and Alex/ina), the community exhibits an incapacity to show compassion. Why? Because they lack awareness of the energies that secure their communal harmony. To bring these to light, Connolly’s reflections on the biblical book of Job can be seen as an attempt to join Job and Alex/ina at the margins in order to give voice to \textit{their} understanding of the community. Connolly’s report runs as follows. Those touting a natural order already fit into it – or at least, they know what it means to do so – and thus, they are fooling themselves. The community is preoccupied with the signs of attunement within its own life. But the dark underside to such a preoccupation is that those who embody anomalies must label their oddity “unnatural” and learn to foreground those sanctioned qualities within themselves that reaffirm the order that provides communal coherence. Because the community identifies itself as “naturally ordered,” its desire to resist any power that would dissolve its common life is equivalent to the desire to exclude anything that suggests its order is not “natural”. Thus, the claim to be “naturally ordered,” is borne of a need for one’s community to \textit{reaffirm} those qualities about oneself that one most treasures. The friends’ account of order is rooted in nothing more than a “transcendental narcissism”.\textsuperscript{23}

Below I will explain that Connolly’s ethic of consolation takes Nietzsche’s soteriology of affirming life and applies it to communities. Connolly wants to replace the demand that every member of a community affirm a particular “natural self,” with a

\textsuperscript{22}Connolly, \textit{Politics and Ambiguity}, p156.  
\textsuperscript{23}Connolly, \textit{The Augustinian Imperative}, p11.
community that affirms all aspects of oneself and others. If a community’s members could affirm themselves in this way, they could also overcome the drive to have the community affirm them. Following this Nietzschean ethic requires a refusal to make recourse to “nature” (understood as separate from culture) and a refusal to hope for attunement with some natural order. What I make clear below is that this Nietzschean soteriology fails to adequately address layer one suffering. At this point, I merely register that Connolly’s critique of Augustinian order deals only with what I have labelled as the third and fourth layers of suffering.

It is only through an agonistic conception of nature that one will drop the efforts to provide counsel, because only then does one fully own up to the fact that nature provides none. Then, one can take up the work of consolation: “[Job and Alex/ina] soon learn – as many have after – that these two functions of friendship [counsel and consolation] do not coincide.” Consolation can only be recovered by ridding the notions of ordered nature that underwrites a drive to offer counsel. Nevertheless, Connolly sees Augustine as more patient with Jobian sufferers than his modern progeny, because of his deeper sense of mystery at the heart of things. In this sense, Augustine’s apophaticism with respect to natural order requires him to be involved in a more thorough struggle than modernity could sustain.

B. Augustine’s Mysterious Order

Connolly details how Augustine’s apophaticism avoids the quick exclusions seen in modern order, by upholding complementary moral sources and by relating to ‘the other’ as a mysterious sign. I take these in turn to unfold Connolly’s account of an Augustinian reading of the book of Job.

Connolly provides a nuanced account of Augustine’s philosophy of order. He distinguishes between two aspects of ‘moral order’ in Augustine’s writings: a noun form

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24 Ibid., p3.
(“order” as in intrinsic design) and a verbal form (“to order or command”). The Aristotelean and Hegelian traditions accentuate the noun form, while the verbal form funds the moral projects of Hobbes and Kant, to mention just two examples. Connolly thinks that all moral projects that rely on a straightforward account of intrinsic design will fail if and when adherents realize that human experience is more complex and diverse than the sanctioned account allows. And those subject to the verbal form become disenchanted when they, inevitably, find themselves addressed by a specific divine injunction that has no rational backing and yet requires tremendous sacrifice to fulfil. Connolly thinks this is how these more reductive systems crumble ‘from the inside’.

However, on Connolly’s adept reading, Augustinianism finds ways to weave design and command together so they function as complementary moral sources. Disenchantment is, thus, much less likely under Augustinian morality. One of the key ways Augustine maintained congruence between the two forms of order was by folding his own doubts into the moral program – that is, by characterizing design (the noun form) as inaccessible to finite and sinful human minds. Augustine claimed that humanity knows that they are conditioned by the divine order from experiences of harmony and beauty in their lives, and they also know by honest reflection that they do not have immediate access to it. While Connolly finds this call to epistemic humility commendable, he worries about whether this mystery goes far enough. He claims that mystery does not erase the expectation of the fog clearing one day but rather intensifies one’s sense of need for it, thereby making possible the delivery of a blunt divine command that satisfies the sense of need for guidance. This is the “Augustinian Imperative” referenced in his book title.

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25Ibid., p35.


27Connolly does not always reference this account of the complementary nature of ‘noun’ and ‘verb’ order when he defines “the Augustinian imperative” direct; for example, he writes in the preface to The Augustinian Imperative (p xvii): “the Augustinian imperative [is] the insistence that there is an intrinsic
Outside a harmonious world, a command must be accompanied by promises to fame, honour, or wealth; but, in Augustinianism, because the command is always conditioned by that larger scheme of things that is never fully known to humanity, adherents experience the imperatival word as imbued with power and legitimacy. The command becomes the point of access to this unknown divine order. Thus, in recognizing doubts, while also providing clear moral guidance, Augustinianism provides a fulsome and existentially satisfying moral world.

Christian ethicists who interact with Connolly’s work have often neglected to adequately register Connolly’s profound respect for Augustinian morality, reflected in his account of the difference between pre-modern and modern philosophies of order. What Connolly respects is the struggle that Augustine engages. Things are more difficult in Augustine’s order than in modernity’s. It would not be a stretch to say that Connolly sees in Augustine’s morality both the Nietzschean and modern moral traditions. From this angle, Nietzsche could be said to have achieved a fuller and more honest struggle than Augustine, who ultimately contains the struggle generated by doubt. But Connolly’s immense respect for Augustine’s relative honesty and persistence that enabled him to attempt to hold together what later became divergent traditions is immense. Indeed, Connolly dedicates four books to interaction with Augustinian themes, which should not be seen as frustrated argumentativeness, but sustained engagement with one whom he considers a worthy opponent.

Despite Augustine’s sophisticated moral system, particularly in the role played by mystery, Connolly still sees Augustine as a friend of Job. The notion of mystery makes Augustine more reticent in comparison to his modern offspring to pronounce judgment on sufferers. But this, Connolly thinks, only delays the exclusionary violence that comes when the community receives the long-awaited command. Augustinian mystery, Connolly moral order susceptible to authoritative representation.”
claims, makes a community more patient and more likely to withhold counsel to the suffering. But it gives adherents no more motivation to engage the sufferer than do natural lawyers or divine command theorists.

Connolly notes one other way in which Augustinian mystery avoids the kind of quick exclusion found in modern accounts of order, namely signifying misfits as “mysterious signs.” According to Connolly, pre-moderns would label Job or Alex/ina a mysterious sign, but modernity held to either a designative or constitutive account of signification that considered him/her more straightforwardly a ‘monster’ or ‘madman’. Regarding the pre-modern signification of misfits, Connolly writes,

[They] at once [stand] outside divinely sanctioned standards of life and inside the community of God’s creations, it reveals darkly truths which transcend the human capacity for understanding. The knowledge it bears is too much for any human to take…it may be excluded or it may be tolerated until it interferes too much with life. There is no call, though, to try to reform it so that it can be drawn fully into the life of the community.

Modern models of signification ignore the mystery that exists in the word-thing relation, which distinguishes them from an Augustinian pre-modern one. Connolly understands Augustine’s rich account of mystery to arise from his commitment to the noun form of order; however he allows doubt regarding its specifities. Thus, Augustine comes closer than his modern progeny to recognizing the “paradox of articulation”: “for things to be, they must be brought into a web of articulations which gives them boundaries, specificity, complexity; but any web of discourse fixes things in particular ways and closes out other possible modes of being.”

In a brief set of comments in Political Theory and Modernity, Connolly describes how ancient and medieval cultures often saw in human bodies signs of something greater. He cites Paracelsus as a late representative of the

28Unless otherwise cited, the discussion of semiotics in this and the next few paragraph is largely drawn from Connolly’s Politics and Ambiguity, chapter 10, “Where the Word Breaks Off” (p143-161).
29Connolly, Political Theory and Modernity, p88.
30Connolly, Politics and Ambiguity, p145.
31Connolly, Political Theory and Modernity, p7-8.
practice (the context suggests that he includes Augustine in this group\textsuperscript{32}), who saw the mysteries of cosmic realities reflected dimly in the human body. Indeed, throughout Connolly’s discussions of Augustinian semiotics, he assumes that Augustine himself, when signifying the human body, refers to cosmic truths. Connolly thinks that Augustine’s “order” (noun form) is the overarching harmonious arrangement of such cosmic truths. I highlighted in the thesis introduction that Paul Kuntz distinguishes philosophies describing cosmic order from those holding to transcendent order.\textsuperscript{33} I suggest below and argue in section two of the thesis that Augustine’s Trinitarian theology allows him to includes elements of both traditions, though without the implications of staticism that plague the Platonic notion of cosmic order.

Connolly sees Charles Taylor’s expressivist view of language as a kind of contemporary Augustinian semiotic, one that is more aware of the ambiguities in the word-thing relation than are the designative or constitutive models. In a sense, an expressive semiotic retains both the designative as well as the constitutive nature of language – the former by holding onto the possibility that language can be transparent to a \textit{res} outside of the speaker, and the latter by remaining aware of the determinative nature of “the frame of common meanings available to a community.”\textsuperscript{34} Each theory aims to answer the demand for redemption; they promise a route to better articulations – by recourse to the referent or to the intersubjective background. So if they label Alex/ina a ‘monster’, the designative model confirms that label in the face of arguments that it is unfitting, by making recourse to medical experimentation or other canons of empirical science, while the constitutive does so by exposing the monster’s way of life as incompatible with the

\textsuperscript{32}Connolly’s assumption that Paracelsus and Augustine signify cosmic realities in the body in a similar way and with similar political ramifications is not far-fetched. Stephen Pumfrey’s more historically oriented study similarly observes a consistent semiotic from Augustine to Paracelsus: “The Spagyric Art; Or, The Impossible Work of Separating Pure from Impure Paracelsianism: a historiographical analysis” (p21-53) in \textit{Paracelsus: The Man, His Reputation, His Ideas, and Their Transformation} ed. Ole Peter Grell (Leiden: Brill 1998).


\textsuperscript{34}Connolly, \textit{Politics and Ambiguity}, p146.
common life of the community. But Charles Taylor attempts to resist the exclusions built into these ways of responding to the demand for redemption by ensuring that the intersubjective setting can be critiqued. He does this by charting a telos of expression that “transcends the object (as in designative theories), the self (as in theories which give primacy to the subject), and the intersubjective realm (as in theories which vest constitutive power in the community).”\textsuperscript{35} Connolly neatly summarizes how Taylor envisions this telos unfolding:

First there is a vague feeling that the self seeks to clarify, perhaps so it can be evaluated or eliminated or enhanced. Second there is a translation of the feeling into an established realm of discourse, a translation which defines it as a mood available for public appraisal and contrasts it to a variety of other moods also open to articulation in that setting. Next, there is a rearticulation which places the public realm itself under greater scrutiny, comparing the articulation readily available in this world to possibilities available in other ways of life. Finally, there is the claim that the new articulation is not just a different account, but one that deepens and corrects the first one.\textsuperscript{36}

Taylor’s Augustinian semiotic expects that one uses acts of articulation to achieve a continually more refined attunement to the self and the community – and both of these to the world. Despite the sophisticated attempts to avoid the exclusions inherent in modernity’s pre-knowable rational order, Taylor imbibes an Augustinian notion of order which perpetuates the expectation that humans are at home in the world. Thus, he “gives hegemony to integration…and obscure[s] the violence done to life when the ambiguous character of communal forms of identification is under-thematized.”\textsuperscript{37}

In an Augustinian reading of the book of Job, the sufferer refuses to lie to the friends who want him to convert to a false account of the divine order. But, finally, the divine voice addresses Job directly. Connolly imagines that Augustine hears in “the voice” a critique of his account of order, calling him to revise his understanding of “nature”. On Augustine’s reading, the voice sustains Job’s and Alex/ina’s hopes that they can find their proper place in the world. But this divine message, Connolly charges, proves diabolical;

\textsuperscript{35}Connolly, \textit{Politics and Ambiguity}, p148.
\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., p150.
\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., p152.
for it encourages the community’s efforts to protect the status of their identity as “ordered” that drive their exclusionary practices. Thus, the message Augustine hears from the voice does not address the core problem: the need for a community to reaffirm a particular self as “natural”. And, according to Connolly, this exposes the fact that Augustine, though imagining himself as one who has heard this divine voice himself, turns out to be one of Job’s friends. I turn now to Connolly’s own interpretation of Job’s encounter with “the voice”. What is its message? It has a Nietzschean voiceprint.

II. Connolly’s Mystery as Difference and the Politicization of Existential Suffering

I turn now to Connolly’s own ethically significant reading of this narrative. Connolly is correct to insist that a viable reading of the book of Job will enable the community to lay aside false counsel and practice comfort. For commentators often note that the biblical book is deliberately framed by: a) an opening statement in 2:11 that describes how the friends arrive on the scene with the aim to comfort Job (נחם); and b) a concluding narrative comment in 42:11 about Job’s family coming to bring the comfort (נחם) for which he had longed. Between these two events, the discussions with the friends centre on the status of the counsel (עצה) they offer, which God condemns in 42:8. The author(s) of the biblical book also playfully shift between the Piel and Niphal verb tenses of the word, with the former meaning “comfort” and the latter meaning “repentance”. So, for example, Job’s friends aimed to “comfort” him but in the end were commanded by God to “repent” of their foolish counsel (42:7-9). This wordplay sounds a clear warning: genuinely comforting another might involve changing how one sees oneself and one’s community. Thus, the original Hebrew text captures how quickly efforts to offer comfort can become occasions for repentance. Connolly claims that an agonistic ontology and an updated Nietzschean ethic of compassion pry apart false counsel and genuine comfort. Analysing his reading and the ethic of comfort that arises from it requires a focus on the themes of politicization, mystery, and genealogical signification. Connolly’s account of
each rests on what he hears from the whirlwind.

The voice, on Connolly’s reading, brings to the attention of Job and his friends the powers in the world that are beyond human knowledge and control.38 Its questions “crush the self-serving, anthropomorphic demand for an intrinsic moral order.”39 Strangeness, diversity, wildness, and unfathomable stretches of time assail the neat and tidy order of Job’s friends. The Behemoth is an example of the wildness in the world that exceeds humanity’s moral rationalizations. It and other untamable beings prepare one to accept the fugitive energies in oneself and one’s neighbours. The crocodile eye that hovers just above the swamp’s water level becomes “a Jobian metaphor for the world,”40 one that captures the surging and unpredictable difference that flows “below, through, and over the structures of cultural organization” than did the plowed field.41 Humanity is part of this world and shares in its wildness but is only one of many actors in it. Provocatively, Connolly writes that the human sexed body exhibits the same ‘natural’ wildness:42 “the stiffening of a man’s penis or hardening of a woman’s nipples does not follow…a code of propriety.”43

So how does the voice from the whirlwind enable Job’s friends to bring comfort to the sufferer? How can the community interact ethically with Alex/ina, whose body does not fit in the dualisms of male-female that the community’s god has established? I summarize what Connolly seems to depict in three steps. First, Job’s friends deepen their awareness of Behemoth, the crocodile eye, and a thousand other “natural” beings who

38Connolly’s reading, in this sense, has a corollary in contemporary religious interpretation in the celebrated book by Rabbi Kushner. See Harold S Kushner, When Bad Things Happen to Good People, 20th ed. (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1920). Kushner attempts to retain some notion of divinity. Kushner argues that the characters in Job’s book must forgive God for not managing the world well – they discover that God is great but not really in control of things. Connolly’s reading is more compelling in thinking through the political implications of this reduced theology.
40Ibid., p10.
41Ibid., p12.
42Connolly’s comparison between Behemoth and human nature does, in a formal sense, follow the grain of the text: “Look at Behemoth, which I made just as I made you…” (Job 40:15a).
43Connolly, The Augustinian Imperative, p9. As I displayed in chapter one, such comments do not reflect a “naturalism” at the root of Connolly’s ethic; rather, he maintains a “weak ontological” approach throughout his Augustine-era writings.
reflect reality’s inhospitality. The community slowly realizes the impossibility of an order in which everything somehow fits. Second, aware of the inevitability of misfits, Job’s friends next come to understand a new dimension of their collective agency. They grasp that the only possible cause of Job’s layer three suffering (communal exclusion) is their own decision. That is, the misfit would only feel themselves to be such if the community wanted them to stop being different. And the whirlwind proclaims that there is no natural reason to want that. Job’s friends now realize that their own collective “unnatural” desires are what cause layer three suffering. Third, the community can then make the next step, namely understanding that layer four suffering depends upon layer three. Thus, if the community stops excluding, no one will feel anger toward the community’s god. The implication is that being angry at god for “making me a misfit” is always the community’s fault. With respect to Alex/ina, if her community would have stopped excluding him, she would have no reason to vent angry prayers in his journal. Alex/ina’s layer four anger is not her fault. Nor, contra Augustine’s counsel, does Alex/ina need to be patient. Now, the friends realize that the call to be patient is really nothing more than a cover for the community’s own lack of repentance, its tone-deafness to the voice from the whirlwind. The realization that layer four suffering arises not from the sufferer but solely from the community’s agency is what makes possible the politicization of existential suffering. To politicize layer four suffering is Connolly’s ethic of consolation.

The voice also guides the community to exercise compassion amidst mysterious experiences. I noted in chapter one that a unique feature of Connolly’s ethical thought is his insistence that genealogists commit themselves to a specific normative orientation. He observes that every normative program will encounter experiences of the uncanny within it. And so the question becomes, what account of mystery will enable an ethical engagement with such moments? From Connolly’s standpoint, modern philosophers of

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44Connolly does think that some exclusions are necessary, but I do not go into these here.
order attempt to divest life completely of the experience of the uncanny. Augustine differs from modernity in that he links order to an authoritative point above moral judgment, thereby building in a kind of perpetual mystery into his philosophy of order. But Connolly sees in Augustine an “instrumental mystery” (my term), one that is useful to Augustine in at least two ways: first, it serves the priests by forming a people who deeply want to be commanded; and second, it serves the community by allowing them to diagnose the cause of existential suffering within the agency of the excluded victims rather than in their own communal agency. By contrast, Connolly’s mystery engages difference, not as an unexpected exception, but as part-and-parcel of a mysterious reality. I call Connolly’s account “mystery as paradox”. The “voice” made clear to the community that all the wildness in the world cannot be contained in the community’s life, and yet, it also imparted to them a desire to be a bit wilder. Just as Nietzsche desires vital, strong individuals, Connolly desires a vital communal wildness. Rather than merely deferring exclusion via mystery (as in Augustine), Connolly’s mystery motivates engagement with the sufferer, initiating an open-ended search for what vitalities the sufferer may contribute to the communal life. I argue in the concluding section of this chapter that, contra Connolly, an open-ended search is precisely what Augustine’s apophaticism involves, though it only does so when it is situated in an ecclesial and Trinitarian context. Connolly nowhere acknowledges the ethical strength of Augustine’s relation to the first two layers of suffering.

I have noted at several points in this section that Connolly reinforces communal practices of compassion by means of particular significations of the sexed human body that emphasize dissonance with prevalent communal forms. Indeed, his discussion of Alex/ina reveals that she functions in Connolly’s text as this kind of sign. Mentions of such signs are important moments in his reading of the book of Job, because they are deployed to curtail those significations that motivate Augustin’s counsel to Job. I noted
above that Connolly found that Augustine’s semiotic, even its best contemporary expression in Charles Taylor, underthematizes “the ambiguous character of communal forms of identification.”

45 By contrast, Connolly’s strategy is to turn to examples that “clearly do not fit into established unities [like male-female], compelling us either to find ways to draw these misfits into the fold or to acknowledge the element of dissonance or artificiality within the unities themselves.”

46 But I argue that, in utilizing the sexed human body to symbolize a greater wildness than Job’s friends currently grasp, Connolly shows himself locked in a reactive relation with what he improperly depicts to be an “Augustinian” semiotic. Above I noted that Connolly thinks Augustine uses the human body to signify cosmic realities, while, as I have shown, Connolly himself uses it to signify the paradoxical nature of reality. What Connolly and this “Augustine” share are a form of signification that references non-human realities. That they signify non-human realities in the human body reveals, in both, a politics that distances people from bodies. I suggest that, contra Connolly’s diagnosis, this is the root problem with the “Augustine” he describes. The problem is not his philosophy of order. I label this a “Manichaean” relation to the body, in order to highlight its ambition to achieve salvation via liberation from the givenness or reality of the body. I further detail this criticism of Connolly below.

Connolly’s significations of the human body reveal an unannounced gnostic politic, and I show in the next section that Nietzschean compassion exhibits this same distanced engagement with the human body.

III. Agonistic Comfort: Connolly’s Nietzschean Soteriology and Community of Compassion

I noted above that Connolly’s ethic of compassion relies upon Nietzsche’s soteriology of affirming life, and further, that his primary contribution as a participant in this tradition is to apply it to late modern communities. In this section, I show that such a

46Ibid., p155.
soteriology is formulated to overcome the first two layers of suffering (physical pain and angst about why), but that it bypasses rather than engages what Martha Nussbaum calls “basic” forms of suffering in the world. I then explore whether this critique is relevant to Connolly’s communal application of Nietzsche’s soteriology which attempts to overcome the latter two layers of suffering noted above (communal exclusion and anger toward the god who orders the exclusion). I conclude that rather than instilling a more ethical relation to bodies, Connolly’s updated ethic of compassion perpetuates the Nietzschean avoidance of the body and its suffering.

A. Salvation from Physical Pain and Immobilizing Confusion

Giles Fraser’s perceptive study, Redeeming Nietzsche, situates Nietzsche in a taxonomy of soteriologies. He shows that Nietzsche wants to be born again, though not from above in the form of a mystical union with truth. A soteriology, of course, implies a harmatology. And Nietzsche rejects the Christian one: whereas Christianity diagnosed the human sickness as wilful wrongdoing that corrupts the created order in which all beings flourish (therefore deserving severe punishment, even eternal punishment at God’s hand), Nietzsche argues that the fundamental cause of human pain is not a just divine vengeance from which Jesus’ suffering can deliver one. He found at the root of such a notion the implication that humanity actually deserves suffering, a belief that can never generate anything other than cyclical self-loathing that leaves one open to the whims of strong but resentful people known as priests. Priests do not employ their strength to

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49 The all too brief description of the priest that I offer here relies on Aaron Ridley’s insightful analysis of the priestly figure in Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morality. Ridley convincingly shows that priests, for Nietzsche, were aristocrats who offered a value schema of pure-impure that was derivative of the nobles’ good-bad. Unlike the nobles whose schema only described the results of their immediate action that were conducted in the martial realm, the pure-impure schema at its very inception exhibited some elements of internalization. But it was a harmless self-awareness. Ridley calls this “being priestly” and distinguishes it from “being a priest”. The latter came later is Nietzsche’s real concern, because it involves an attempt to overcome the stronger nobles by stirring a slave revolt against them. “Being a priest” means metaphorizing the pure-impure valuations so that slaves can give vent to their ressentiment by claiming not superior
create and subsequently affirm their own creative contributions but rather merely control
the weak through a message that secures their loyalty by providing meaning in the midst
of suffering via an account of divine compassion that is communicated on the cross and
emulated in the church community. This divine pity is predicated upon a self-hatred in
which one accepts that they deserve suffering. Nietzsche, in contrast to the priests, seeks to
attain salvation by affirming life in all its fullness and emptiness, pleasure and pain. As I
noted above, Connolly follows this salvific programme, interpreting the “voice from the
whirlwind” who speaks to the suffering Job as calling for “an affirmation of life that rises
above [the] tendency [to existential resentment].”

Fraser notes that Nietzsche’s great challenge was to find an affirmational
orientation to pain. What might it mean to affirm life, even insofar as it involves pain? It is
helpful at this point to articulate Fraser’s account of the Nietzschean soteriology of
affirmation in terms of the four layers of suffering I found in Connolly’s reading of Job.
According to Fraser, Nietzsche acknowledges that there is no way to magically transform
Job’s first layer sufferings into pleasurable experiences. But what one can do is remove the
second layer by changing one’s response to the first. For example, if a person accidentally
falls from their bike and injures their arm, no strength of will can reverse time and bring
back the healthy version of the limb. But one can adjust how much they value the now
injured appendage. If the assessment of what is lost or pained can be brought down, Job’s
second layer suffering will subside.

But Fraser questions the scope of this Nietzschean call for re-evaluation. Is it
applicable to all instances of layer one suffering as Nietzsche seems to claim? To show its

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50 Connolly, Identity\Difference, p187.
limited remit, Fraser draws on Martha Nussbaum, who distinguishes two species of pain, what she calls ‘basic’ and ‘bourgeois’. There is no single, clearly identifiable feature that distinguishes the former from the latter, but, in general, the latter involves profound physical degeneration such as ALS, dementia, or starvation. Fraser agrees with Nussbaum that Nietzsche’s soteriology proves adequate only in the face of bourgeois suffering.

To demonstrate, Fraser recounts an emblematic moment of suffering that occupied and exercised Nietzsche greatly. There is record of it in Nietzsche’s journals, but it is described more poignantly and accurately at a later time by a friend. Nietzsche wrote, “We had a very animated conversation about all things, artistic and literary, and when we were saying goodbye, I asked him in the politest way to duel with me.”51 His friend Paul Deussen continues the story,

They locked swords, and the glinting blades danced around their unprotected heads. It scarcely lasted three minutes, and Nietzsche’s opponent managed to cut a low carte at the bridge of his nose, hitting the exact spot where his spectacles, pressing down too heavily, had left a red mark. Blood trickled to the ground, and the experts agreed that past events had been satisfactorily expiated. I packed my well-bandaged friend into a carriage, took him home to bed, assiduously comforted him, forbade him visits and alcohol. Within two or three days our hero had fully recovered, except for a small slanting scar across the bridge of his nose, which remained there throughout his life and did not look at all bad on him.52

To be sure, Nietzsche underwent more painful experiences than this – the death of his father at a young age, notorious migraines and related neurological issues that kept him on the move to different climates for relief, etc. But one takes Fraser’s point: Nietzsche’s soteriology accommodates self-absorption over petty scrapes and bruises, while leaving unchecked the tendency to look with disdain on those who truly suffer. It is on account of this possibility that Fraser finds Nietzschean soteriology to be rooted in a philosophy of the vacation or holiday.53 Notably, Connolly’s choice to articulate his own ethic of consolation through an interpretation of the book of Job puts before him a case of what

51 Fraser, Redeeming Nietzsche, p99.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., p98.
Nussbaum would label ‘basic suffering’.

But, it must still be asked, is Connolly’s ethic of consolation, rooted as it is in this same Nietzschean ambition to inflect one’s attitude towards suffering into a more affirmational stance, not open to a similar tendency towards self-absorption? Or does Connolly update Nietzsche’s compassion with a new dynamic that curtails the tendency to self-absorption inherent in his account of agonistic compassion? In light of the fact that Connolly calls Nietzsche “modernity’s Job,” it is helpful to rephrase the question in terms of a suitable reading of the book of Job: does Connolly truly allow this text to hold his feet to the fire of the world’s suffering to an extent that Nietzsche did not?

Connolly’s choice of Alex/ina as a contemporary Jobian sufferer suggests not. For Alex/ina’s own narrative, recorded in her journals, does not detail any experiences of the first layer of suffering. Connolly does indeed rightly fear that, were she alive today, Alex/ina might have been driven into the first layer of suffering, for example, in the form of forced sex-reassignment surgery. But Alex/ina certainly does not suffer in the sense that Job does – with loss of sustenance and health. Again, this is not in any way to say that Alex/ina did not suffer, nor would it be fitting to label Alex/ina’s suffering “bourgeois”; it is merely to say that Connolly exhibits the same Nietzschean tendency to meditate upon forms of suffering that are not what Nussbaum calls “basic” – and then speak about them as if they were. While Connolly claims that Augustinian order creates the third and fourth layers of suffering (a charge which, below, I show Augustine has resources to withstand), what I am intending to highlight here is that, in developing his ethic of consolation in reliance upon the Nietzschean affirmational soteriology, Connolly loses sight of the first layer (i.e., physical pain). By choosing a contemporary example of suffering that does not obviously involve the first layer, Connolly diminishes the type of suffering that the biblical text itself requires readers to engage. Connolly does not rise to the challenge. Connolly’s

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\(^{54}\)Connolly, *The Augustinian Imperative*, p119.
Nietzschean soteriology of life-affirmation that lies at the root of his ethic of consolation might serve the teenager with artistic abilities who resides in a house of sports fans. But what about the children on the cancer ward? Avoiding this first layer of suffering that afflicts Job allows Connolly to overstate what his soteriology accomplishes in real life. An erasure of the first layer, highlights a preoccupation with non-basic forms of suffering.

As I noted at the beginning of this section, the Nietzschean ethical tradition famously displaces the distinction between “good and evil” as the central conceptual schema from which to derive guidance for individual and communal life. It replaces it with the identification and harnessing of creative vitalities resident within each person. Affirming such vitalities requires a rejection of the good-evil dualism, because ‘life’ itself is seen to operate at both poles (as the Nietzschean voice from the whirlwind made clear). Stephen Williams rightly notes that good and evil need not be understood in such a way that implies imposition or compliance. Rather, one might think of “evil” as naming that which is experienced in both mind and emotion when encountering, for example, a situation of rape or torture. The deeply horrifying sense that results is a registering of “evil”; and “good” is simply that which one finds deeply attractive and honourable in the same register.\(^5\) In this sense, Nietzsche has a harmatology that can be compared to the Christian doctrine of sin. Eric Voegelin charts a promising course for such a comparison by rightly noting that this tradition of thought bears strong resemblances to a Manichaean soteriology of immanence in which one can achieve salvation through interacting properly with life-giving energies in the world.\(^6\) Augustine worried about the account of good and evil that such an immanent soteriology produced. He wrote throughout his adult life about how its immanent soteriology empowered a subjectivist understanding of good and evil.

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which too easily elided “good” with what one desired.\textsuperscript{57} He posited that only a perception of the order of creation in which all created beings flourish could confront such a subjectivist ethic, enable inherently selfish fallen humanity to identify their own participation in evil, and call people to engage the real evils in the world.

“Whatever we say about sin will qualify whatever we say about grace,” writes Cornelius Plantinga.\textsuperscript{58} I have been arguing that Nietzsche’s deficient harmatology, in allowing one to associate minor personal hurts with “evil”, produces an inadequate soteriology for those involved in “basic” instances of layer one suffering. Not only is Nietzsche’s small scar on his nose emblematic of a danger in his harmatology, his friend’s response to his tragic but heroic fight is emblematic of a danger in his ethic of compassion: “I assiduously comforted him.”\textsuperscript{59} Taking a cue from Connolly, I call these infelicitous possibilities the “Nietzschean temptation”. And I argue in the closing section of this chapter that Connolly can avoid this temptation by drawing on Augustine’s ethic of love. I turn in this next section to investigate whether Connolly’s ethic of consolation closes the door on the “Nietzschean temptation”.

\textbf{B. Salvation from Communal Exclusion and Anger at the god of Order}

I read Connolly’s ethic of consolation as an attempt to contemporize Nietzsche’s response to suffering by showing how it responds to the political dimensions of Job’s situation (Job’s friends). That is, he attempts to formulate an ethical response to the third and fourth layers of suffering noted above (i.e., grief over being excluded and anger at the god who justifies the community’s excluding order).\textsuperscript{60} In focusing on communal suffering, Connolly’s “compassion” may constitute a divergence from Nietzschean philosophy and indeed the entire tradition of ancient scepticism within which Nietzsche worked in

\textsuperscript{57}Augustine’s uneasiness with Manichaeism in this regard can be observed throughout what are often referred to as the Manichaean books of his \textit{Confessions} (Books 3-7).
\textsuperscript{58}Plantinga, \textit{Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be}, p6.
\textsuperscript{59}Fraser, \textit{Redeeming Nietzsche}, p99.
\textsuperscript{60}In Connolly’s view, addressing these latter two layers also includes the remediation of the second as well, but I simply mention layers three and four here to focus the discussion on Connolly’s unique contribution to agonistic consolation.
conscious continuity. In this vein, Martin Leet criticizes Connolly for envisioning the self to be so thoroughly embedded in the social world – by contrast, Leet argues, the ancient sceptics believed that the self was best formed *prior to* social engagement. Without a gap in which to prepare for the agon, the self’s difference lacks adequate time and space to grow strong enough to resist the established norm. As true as Leet’s mapping of the vast difference between Nietzsche and Connolly on this matter is, Leet only compares Connolly and Nietzsche with respect to their view of the individual. Here, I compare their account of agonistic community.

What is the relation to community implicit in Nietzsche’s soteriology? Giles Fraser’s study culminates in a critique of Nietzsche’s rejection of Christian compassion. Drawing on Stanley Cavell’s critique of scepticism, Fraser highlights that by distancing himself from relationships in order to accomplish an affirmation of all of life, a fear of dependency upon others can be seen in Nietzsche. He fears his creatureliness, his most fundamental human experience of needing others and living around those who need him. In Nietzschean terms, he fails to *affirm* the mundane or domestic. I noted above, that it may appear that this is precisely the feature of Nietzsche’s thought that Connolly excises from his account of compassion to creators. That is, Connolly sees creator-creature not as distinct types but as dynamics within and between late modern selves. So, to return to my question, does Connolly’s ethic of consolation enable deeper and stronger communal bonds with difference than Nietzsche advanced? Connolly’s application of the Nietzschean ethic of consolation to late modern times is not an argument for a more robust community than that found in Nietzsche; rather, it is borne of resignation to inescapable proximity. To address this situation of forced community, Connolly’s compassion aims not at bonds of friendship or ethical forms of support and dependence, but at forging new contestations. Thus, Connolly’s ethic of consolation does not embed the sufferer in a community in a

61 Fraser, *Redeeming Nietzsche*, chapter 8.
meaningful way. He remains Nietzschean in seeking only a very loosely stitched communal network.

In the end, Connolly’s notion of evil, at least in his reading of the book of Job, relates only to social exclusions. Stephen White is correct to note that Connolly does not provide resources for suffering unrelated to the symbolics of identity. Connolly emphasizes suffering from *being different*, but does not show how agonistic compassion might mobilise care for those with quotidian, not to mention potentially terminal, *physical pains*. The kind of argumentativeness that Connolly wants to issue forth from his ethic of consolation is indeed better than the quick exclusion generated under modern “norms”. But does Augustine’s ethics of compassion that arises within a philosophy of order truly reduce so simply to modernity, leaving contemporary communities with only these two options with which to conceive of compassion?

While Connolly’s agonistic compassion is inadequate, it raises important questions for an Augustinian philosophy of order. The final section of this chapter shows how the possibility of mystery serves a different function in Augustine’s philosophy of order than the one Connolly had diagnosed. I note that the strength of the ethic that flows from his apophaticism is its ability to form a community that engages real physical suffering in the world. However, Connolly’s project points to the fact that, perhaps, an Augustinian ethic does less well when it encounters those who suffering from *being different*. Connolly, thus, provides a needed challenge to articulate how Augustine’s ethic engages such suffering compassionately. I argue that, because Augustine’s ethic is rooted in Triune love, it also has resources to show compassion to difference.

I close this section, however, by crystalizing my criticism of Connolly’s ethic of compassion in three points. First, Connolly’s notion of “suffering with” (compassion) yields a community that is too loosely stitched to be capable of meaningful engagement

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with and in support of a Jobian sufferer. Jobian sufferers need something more than a community that allows their voice to enter open contestation with other responses to suffering. Second, placing the root difference that must be agonized in identity relations leaves too much room for self-absorption and too little motivation to genuinely engage others. Connolly treats the buffeting of one’s identity as the most significant form of suffering. Thirdly, his ethic is predicated upon distancing oneself from bodily suffering in the world. I argue below that this inattention to the body, in the end, does not serve ambiguous misfits, such as the intersexed Alex/ina, in ways that Augustine’s ethic can. Connolly’s willingness to elide the first and second layers of suffering reveals that his ethic allows an inattentiveness to bodily reality. Stated bluntly, identity suffering is not the most pressing or real form of evil in late modernity. The final section of this chapter offers an alternative account of Augustine’s apophaticism.

IV. An Augustinian Ethic of Compassion

I have made three critiques of Connolly’s late modern ethic of consolation, and these can be helpfully diagnosed through an Augustinian lens. While Connolly worries about social exclusion, the Augustinian tradition focuses on a different species of exclusion, the more subtle exclusions that arise from reducing another to one’s own “use”. Augustine’s philosophy of order posits an arrangement of things and persons that God has established in creation and continues to uphold by grace, a divine order, in which all beings and indeed all of creation flourishes. One can only experience the order of creation that makes possible mutually-beneficial relations by having one’s love directed, by grace, to God. It is not through rational perception of divine order but through love of the Creator

63In saying that Connolly displays what might be called a “docetic” view of the body in his discussion of Jobian sufferers, I do not intend to neglect what I consider to be Connolly’s most significant difference from Nietzsche in terms of their ethics: while Nietzsche aimed to erase the category of disgust from contemporary ethical reasoning, Connolly’s ethical proposal is that late modernity must re-engage it. (For Nietzsche’s views on disgust, see the perceptive treatment by Winfried Menninghaus, Disgust: The Theory and History of a Strong Sensation, trans. Howard Eiland and Joel Golb (United States: State University of New York Press, 2003), chapter 5. I do not deal with Connolly’s proposal regarding the visceral register, as he only directly begins to develop such thoughts in his post-Augustine era writings, namely, William E Connolly, Why I Am Not a Secularist (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
and Orderer that one discovers their place and encounters other beings in a way that honours their full potential. To sin, in this view of things, is to generate one’s own order that uses others to please one’s own desires and wishes. Thus, Connolly’s worry over excluding others out of narcissistic desires is also Augustine’s worry. But Augustine counters it through love for God and neighbour.

In this section, I gesture towards two aspects of Augustine’s thought that describe how fallen humanity grows in such love. Both are significant in light of Connolly’s criticisms of Augustinian order and both will be developed more fully in section two of this thesis. They reveal an alternative Augustinian reading of the book of Job from the one Connolly recounts, one in which Augustine pressures the community to genuinely encounter the sufferer and engage in an open-ended search for a common life with them. I take these points in turn, but their interdependence will become evident.

First, Augustine calls for an ecclesial ethic of compassion rooted in a love that attends to human bodies, including their suffering. It is in this life of love that the church can begin to glimpse the love of God for sinful and broken humanity. Significantly, Connolly only mentions the church a few times in his Augustine writings. This is perhaps why he overlooks the ethical strength of an Augustinian response to the first two layers rooted in a faith in the Incarnate Christ. Without the church, a second aspect of Augustine’s discussion of mystery is lost. Second, Augustinian apophaticism does not merely prime the community for a divine command that also resolves its exclusionary identity, as Connolly charged. Seen in its proper Trinitarian theological context, moments of unknowing direct a seeker to indirectly contemplate the divine order that is on display in the ecclesia. The community awaits not a bald command from a priest, but rather to hear in moments of unknowing a renewed call to continue in the forms of life that serve as indirect modes of contemplating divine love. The command to continue in love of

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neighbour is of heightened importance in moments of unknowing. Following Travis Ables, I call this Augustine’s “ethical apophaticism”. For Augustine, to participate in the church is to participate in the grace of the Father’s sending of the Son for the salvation of humanity and indeed all of the created order. The adjective “ethical” acknowledges that this love is unending, for the Father eternally begets the Son. Because this love is the source of the church’s life, her form is imperceptible ahead of time but is only known from within the divine love which constitutes her life.

I have not offered an ethic or theology of intersex nor interacted with Augustine’s textual discussions of it. Rather, I have argued that another set of dynamics are at work in the Augustinian philosophy of order that describe a community that does not depreciate bodily reality but attends to suffering, both of physical pain and communal rejection. These themes are taken up at greater length in section two.

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Conclusion to Section One

In the preceding three chapters I have explored Connolly’s creative interpretations of three scriptural texts that he deems exercise ongoing influence in late modern western selves and communities. Each biblical text presents an image of nature: the ploughed field, the Edenic male-female couple, and the Jobian whirlwind. He engaged these texts to criticize unethical entailments in Augustine’s reading of them, which, he sought to show, were rooted in Augustine’s vision of nature as ordered. He argued that, particularly with respect to experiences of mystery in late modern sexuality, an expectation of attunement with nature – and therefore, with the self and social order – produces a problematic ethic of self-formation (chapter 1), ethic of responsibility (chapter 2), and ethic of consolation (chapter 3). In place of an ordered vision of nature, Connolly’s readings highlighted an agonistic relation to nature that he argued was a more fitting ethic for late modern times. I noted in the Introduction to Section One that several recent readers of Connolly have claimed that he offers little by way of normative ethical guidance for gender and sexuality. To the contrary, my forays into Connolly’s essays of biblical interpretation have uncovered how his readings of key texts are redolent with implications for this sphere of life.

Three tasks remain before turning to Section Two which will focus directly on Augustine’s theology. First, because chapters 1, 2, and 3 have not unfolded an argument in terms of logical steps, but have rather thought along with Connolly as he comments on important biblical moments that he understands Augustine to have filled arbitrarily with a notion of natural order, I will provide a brief summary of significant elements that I found in his work that relate to conjugal-sexual ethics. However, it must be clearly stated that any claim to “summarize” Connolly’s thought is a falsification. My brief concluding remarks will not attempt to encapsulate the core moves of his thought, but rather to hint towards the coherence of the vision that emerges from my interpretive essays on his work.
in the preceding chapters. To this normative picture I pose the questions that I raised in the literature review of agonistic ethics in the Thesis Introduction regarding Connolly’s work. Second, after sketching Connolly’s normative vision I will provide a concluding discussion of an Augustinian critique of this vision that finds an agonistic relation to the human body, on the whole, problematic. While Connolly’s challenges to Augustine have been on display for the past three chapters, it is important to note again this point at which I find my own constructive Augustinian account to diverge from Connolly’s agonism.

Third, as I indicated in the Thesis Introduction, engaging Connolly’s critiques has been undertaken in order to test and demonstrate the aliveness of the Augustinian tradition. My manner of engaging the Nietzschean tradition thus far, has followed the course that Connolly himself has suggested is a viable one (though he himself has not pursued it), namely, “to stir Augustinian [themes] until sublime sparks and flashes in these coals glow more brightly.”¹ To conclude Section One, I gather together the “coals” that Connolly has drawn to my attention to set the stage for the constructive interpretation of Augustine on the conjugal-sexual realm that will follow in the next section of this thesis. In Section Two, these features of Augustine’s theology will be developed more fully via an exegesis of Augustine’s writing: the Cassiciacum dialogues and Confessions (along with the moral treatises on marriage that were written roughly concurrent with it).

I. Connolly’s Normative Conjugal-Sexual Ethics

At this point, I sketch the conjugal-ethical vision I have observed in Connolly’s work in order to pose to it the two questions I noted in the Thesis Introduction from the work of Christa Davis Acampora and Yunus Tuncel: first, does Connolly allow agonism to bring the whole culture into contestation or only some parts of it? Or does his work ultimately exhibit an unstated assumption that the agon can be sustained by a deeper culture? And, second, what parts of agonism need to be avoided or overcome to make it

¹ Connolly, The Augustinian Imperative, p xxxii.
suitable to democracy? Is agonistic erotics one of those aspects? I mention five features of Connolly’s vision that will make it possible to answer such a question in light of my investigations in chapters 1, 2, and 3.

First, Connolly is consistent with the agonistic tradition in his assertion of the nature-culture continuity. As I noted in chapter 1, at the core of Connolly’s ethical vision is a theorization of the self that bears similarity to a pre-modern (i.e., Augustinian) one. Connolly is like pre-modern Augustine in that he ties the order of the individual soul to the order of society: the two belong together. Moderns innovate from Augustine by constructing a “rational self” independent of any given social order and posit that this rational self is able to access order in nature that can, in turn, inform a proper social order for these supposed rational selves. In rejecting a modern “Augustinian” elevation of human social and sexual relations as being concordant with a rational reading of nature, Connolly, by contrast, opts for a Nietzschean assimilation of the social, the individual and the “natural” to the same purely immanent and naturalistic plane. Theorizing the self to be continuous with “nature”, he doubts the mode of access through rational transcendence that moderns presuppose. Connolly’s position bears similarity with Nietzsche’s extolling of “breeding” over Christian “taming”, as the former implies that “human” and “animal” exist on a continuum rather than in a polarized relation. Connolly’s view ascribes no unique dignity to human sexuality.

Second, Connolly seeks to pluralise acceptable sexual expressions in society. Each of the chapters above showed that, contrary to philosophers of order, Connolly highlights that individual and communal efforts to shape the self never reach a place of stabilisation because neither are eternal entities that possess an unchanging nature which can anchor the order of the other. By asserting a “belief” (Connolly’s term) in a self and society that express unending difference, Connolly raises awareness of the human construction of both the self’s and society’s orders. This encourages late moderns to expect changes in prized
social forms and an unending pluralisation of sexualities, though this will require patient cultivation of strange new forms in oneself and in the social sphere.

Third, social roles associated with marriage need to be displaced from the central importance they presently have in late modern identity. Connolly sees defined social roles as rooted in an ambition to find natural, social, and personal attunement – in contrast to an agonistic ethic. To loosen these roles, Connolly counsels the use of irony and humour, especially in relation to gender expectations within the broader social order. Irony and humour create slack in the community so that one can free one’s identity from being associated with restrictive social roles. Irony and humour also enable one to boldly face and even celebrate situations where no one is to blame in the midst of a problematic social situation. Because the world exhibits an asymmetry between the evil that comes upon human communities and the responsible agents therein, incommensurate moments should be expected rather than blamed on those experienced to be “abnormal”. Connolly, however, makes clear that society should still hold persons accountable for wrongdoing in certain cases, but such instances should be greatly reduced.

Fourth, Connolly finds it problematic that contemporary societies, under Augustinian influence, celebrate significations that display harmony and fit rather than discordance and contest. Implicit here, as I noted, is an argument against conjugal sacramentality. In its place, Connolly urges a greater emphasis on enigmatic and mysterious bodies that signify the amoral powers that give rise to human life and perpetually threaten one’s attempts to find one’s place. Connolly critiques churches directly, in which sexually differentiated marriage is taken to exhibit a kind of peace that reflects the order of things more generally. By situating ambiguous bodies among the central symbolizations of a community, the members can maintain an awareness that the ordering of their common life must remain contestable.

Fifth, Connolly stands out among Nietzschean agonistic ethicists as regards his
vision of an ethical conjugal-sexuality, because of his category of “entrenched contingencies”. I noted in chapter 1 that this is the category in Connolly’s thought which describes late modern marriage. Connolly’s use of this category indicates that he does not necessarily regard contemporary marriage practices as ethically irrelevant or inimical simply because some of its defenders fail to recognise its natural and historical contingency. Instead, the very social “entrenchedness” of late-modern marriage makes it an inescapable point of reference, for the time being at least. But Connolly does not explore its meaning extensively. For example, are there any social functions of sexually differentiated marriage that are so central to late modern social organization that it would be overly disruptive to challenge them? Or, what role does domestic commitment play in the broader culture, can such roles be played by other social forms, and or do certain of its features need to be secured at the present moment? Connolly does not provide reflection on such matters, but instead sounds a message about the need for pluralisation of sexual expressions and conjugal forms as a way to express and symbolize the discordance in the world. The conjugal-sexuality, it is clear, bears particular importance for him as a carrier of such a message.

The previous sketch of Connolly’s conjugal-sexual ethic displays that, in principle, he forwards a thoroughly agonistic vision of the conjugal-sexual. He regards the conjugal-sexual realm as especially suited to the ethical cultivation of chaotic forces. In turn, the public symbolising of experiences of natural chaos forms a central part of his ethic for late modernity. Nowhere, contra Acampora’s claims about his views on equality and freedom, does Connolly show signs of containing the agonistic sexuality that he forwards. But, he differs from a more radical species of agonism, in that he holds that such a vision must be implemented patiently (but aggressively) over long stretches of slow social and political development. The mysteries experienced in the conjugal-sexual realm sustain a slow march to a full agonistic erotics. Connolly does not articulate how the telos of this vision,
of which ancient Greek society provides extensive prefiguring, fits with his democratic ethos.²

II. Augustine’s Departure from Connolly’s Agonistic Ethic

The chapters of Section One have included moments not only of exposition of Connolly’s work but also of argumentation with his depiction of Augustine, with his criticisms of the supposedly negative effects of an Augustinian ethic, and, more fundamentally, with his conclusions about the value of an agonistic conjugal-sexual ethic for contemporary life. With respect to Connolly’s discussions and criticisms of Augustine, I have pointed to Connolly’s tendency to remove Augustine’s philosophy of order from its Trinitarian and ecclesial context. These, of course, are not secondary features of Augustine’s thought. Connolly avoids them, which, at times, gives readers the impression that Augustine shares more in common with modern philosophy than with the Christian theological tradition. However, this skewed emphasis of Connolly’s serves the theologian well, because it highlights the ethical and political significance of observing the integrity of theological discourse.

But Connolly overlooks such features, which limits his own exploration insofar as it brackets some of the deepest challenges that I find Augustine’s theology to bring to his agonistic vision. In particular, I have claimed that Connolly’s attempt to replace significations that refer to a harmonious conception of reality both misunderstand fundamental ethical requirements within Augustinian semiotics and repeat those overlooked features in his own proposal, in which, human bodies are made to signify non-human realities, namely inexpungable dissonances in the universe. I found an associated problem in his ethic of consolation based on his consistency with the Nietzschean tradition, namely its tendency to overlook “basic” bodily realities in an effort to affirm

² Speculating as to whether Connolly’s agonistic erotics is appropriate for the future of democracy in the contemporary West is beyond the scope of my investigation. A robust Augustinian argument against a proposal such as Connolly’s can be found in Robert W. Jenson’s essays, “Politics and Sex” in Systematic Theology: Volume II: The Works of God (Oxford University Press 1999), p73-94.
disruptive dynamics with which will inevitably buffet any identity. Augustine’s ethic of participation in the Triune love that took on human flesh and affirmed the entire created order in the Incarnation motivates a more felicitous bodily relation that, in turn, is reflected in conjugal sacramentality (as I hope the rest of this thesis will tend to confirm).

As I have noted in the preceding chapters, while Connolly’s vision is based upon a “faith” (Connolly’s term) that agonism holds ethical resources most suitable to late modern life, my criticisms of his conjugal-sexual ethic show specific points at which such a claim falters.

III. A Sketch of My Constructive Account of Augustine’s Conjugal-Sexual Ethic

On the whole, Connolly’s ethical critiques of natural and moral order in Augustine have drawn to the fore for my purposes the need to emphasize in Augustine’s thought the politics of the local congregation, the irreducibility of the Trinitarian ethic of love, the sacramental nature of marriage, and a doctrine of Christian vocation as a form of living in creation according to the love witnessed in the Incarnation. These are elements that are missing from Connolly’s reading of Augustine, and they may form the basis of a certain kind of Augustinian reply to the force of Connolly’s criticisms. I have signalled in many ways that I will be sketching a contemporary free church Augustinian account of the sacramentality of marriage. I will argue that a ‘local’ Augustinian ecclesiology is constituted by forms of life (vocations) that participate in the divine love for the creation. I turn to this constructive project now.
Introduction to Section Two: The Augustinian Travail from Evening to Morning Knowledge

In Section Two of this thesis I turn more directly to the Augustinian tradition, by engaging with particular texts that show how Augustine utilized the notion of order to reason about conjugal-sexual morality. I do not attempt a global interpretation of order and its role in Augustine’s thought, and neither do I seek to unfold a full theology of marriage and human sexuality from an Augustinian perspective. Rather, I seek to further unfold the elements that emerged from my interaction with the agonistic ethical tradition in Section One. This constructive account of the order Augustine sees in the conjugal-sexual realm does not aim to solve the opposition between itself and the agonistic tradition. Rather, I take into account in my readings of key Augustinian texts the functional ability of the agonistic tradition.

Augustine took up the topic of order in his first treatises as a Christian catechumen, and he continued to work with the theme in both his so-called “philosophical” and “pastoral-exegetical” eras of writing and work. This emphasis on order distinguished him not only from his Manichaean heritage, but also from close associates and predecessors such as Lactantius, Ambrose, or Orosius, none of whom took up the topic in a substantial way. In this brief introduction, I provide an overview of the background of this philosophical notion in the traditions that Augustine encountered in his day. I then turn to City of God, Books 11-14 to detail the formal relations in Augustine’s philosophy of order between self-other and body-soul that condition his conjugal-sexual ethic. I close by foreshadowing the argument that will follow in chapters four and five.

I. Philosophical Background to Order in Augustine

Phillip Cary has noted that the concept of order is “one of the deepest and most
elusive concepts in philosophy." Likewise, centuries ago Cicero warned his readers that they would have to grapple to understand the concept on their own, since he found it to be among those philosophical and moral subjects that escaped articulation. Two reasons for its elusiveness can be identified. First, Cicero traced his difficulty in discussing it, in part, to the incongruence between his own Latin and the Greek grammar and etymologies through which the subtleties of the concept were previously communicated. Second, the concept of order spans categories of thought that prevalent philosophical systems attempt to keep separate, whether it be the Stoic trio of logic, ethics, and physics or late modernity’s bifurcation of facts and values. Recent explorations of the philosophy of order continue to wrestle with this inherent interdisciplinarity.

Augustine not only possessed a keen awareness of the philosophical discussion of order as it had developed up to his time but also a willingness to creatively utilize the concept in offering a philosophical articulation of the Christian church’s belief and morality. Though numerous articles and book chapters have attempted to summarize Augustine’s philosophy of order and its significance for his ethical thought, no study has

2 Cicero, De Officiis, 1.126.
3 Ibid., 1.142-1.143.
4 Two recently launched research projects are exploring the relevance of the issues of order and disorder for contemporary scientific, philosophical, and humanitarian concerns; both are highly interdisciplinary in nature: “The Order Project” was launched by the Templeton Foundation as a four-year (2009-2013) exploration spanning “the disciplines of philosophy of science, history of science, theology, history of philosophy, philosophy of physics, philosophy of biology and philosophy of social sciences” (see: http://www2.lse.ac.uk/CPNSS/projects/orderProject, accessed April 2012). “Bedrohte Ordnungen” is also an interdisciplinary four-year project (2011-2015) at the University of Tubingen involving sociological, political, medical, and religious research projects (see: http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/forschung/forschungsschwerpunkte/sonderforschungsbereiche/sfb-923/kontakt.html, accessed April 2012).
attended to the various traditions that he negotiated in this aspect of his philosophy or to the development of this concept in his thought. I do not fill this research gap but merely briefly outline here the influential philosophical accounts of order with which Augustine draws from and engages. This brief historical survey limits itself to the cast of characters or groups that consistently appear in Augustine’s writings either as resources or targets of polemic (usually both), namely the Platonic, Neoplatonic, and Stoic traditions. Such an exploration provides necessary background for discerning the particular inflection Augustine gave to this concept.

Plato gave expression to a philosophy of order which would prevail in ancient Western philosophy. The realm of the Ideals exhibits perfect order, for Plato, and three aspects of reality especially reflect this order, namely the soul, social life, and the cosmos. These aspects of order depend upon one another in certain predictable ways, according to Plato. For example, the soul, once ordered, can become the basis for an ordered society. And such unity of soul can be advanced by observing the cosmic order.

Neoplatonism, particularly in Plotinus, added to the Platonist conception of order the three hypostases of God, Nous, Soul. God, for Plotinus, is above being and so is not characterized by order. But Nous contains the intelligible realm and all active intellects; so it is not simple but united. Materiality emanates from Soul, and the soul can find ‘fugitives’ of order in the material world. But most reliably, the soul should turn to itself and away from materiality in pursuit of the immaterial order.

The Stoics, by contrast, posited a materialistic conception of the universe, and, their pantheistic deity was equated with cosmic order understood as rational cause of all. They eschewed skepticism, affirming that the human senses reliably provided knowledge of the world. They denounced the passions, seeing them as disruptions of the natural course of events. Rather than a cosmic vision of order giving rise to virtuous actions (as in trajectory set by Plato (Sources of the Self, p126).
Platonism), Stoics insisted that virtue involved both actively shaping action according to perceived order and willingly accepting any event which transpired as the good natural order.

Augustine drew rather freely on different aspects of these different traditions of order. As I noted, this distinguished him from theological predecessors and contemporaries. For example, Ambrose, in De Officiis, a book culled from sermons that were given during the year that Augustine was a catechumate, warned Christian intellectuals to avoid delving into the philosophy of order. As was typical of Ambrose’s style of thought in general, he was keen to claim that he followed not the ars of philosophia but a Christian simplicitas (De Officiis 1.26.122), which meant that he avoided technical philosophical discussions. Following Cicero, Ambrose therefore stated that an elaboration of ordo as a concept properly descriptive of a life of virtue was not necessary, as the term is best understood rather than elaborately explained (De Officiis 1.19.82). This statement shows not only the pervasiveness of the concept (seeing that one could claim it required no explanation) but also its somewhat technical nature as a locus capable of generating considerable philosophical discussion and debate. He claimed that such philosophical sophistication drew a Christian away from a proper Christian simplicity that marks biblical thought. By contrast, Augustine engaged this traditionally dominant concept as a means of understanding not only the biblical passages that directly employ or reference it but all of Scripture, life, and theology.

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6Dating Ambrose’s De Officiis with precision is impossible; however, best estimates are that the sermons were delivered and then shortly thereafter gathered into a book in the late 380’s (see Ambrose: De Officiis, Ed., Trans., and Intro. By Ivor J. Davidson [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001], p3-6). James O’Donnell shows that Augustine borrowed from De Officiis in Confessions 3.2.2 and 10.35.54 (cited in Davidson, p561).

7It is beyond my scope to compare the pervasiveness of this theme in Augustine to Lactantius (whose Institutes influenced Augustine’s City of God) and Orosius (one of Augustine’s followers who penned a companion text to City of God at Augustine’s request entitled, Seven Books of History against the Pagans). But its minimal role in the latter two thinkers again emphasizes its unique importance to Augustinian thought.
II. Order and Sexuality in City of God Book 14

I now turn to Augustine’s most developed mature statement on order and the conjugal-sexual, namely his account of the origin of the two cities in *City of God* Books 11-14. While *City of God* 19.13 is a standard text in which to find a succinct statement regarding Augustine’s philosophy of order, it is in Books 11-14 that Augustine develops the links between perception of the order of creation and the order of body-soul in the sexual act. I focus particularly on Book 14 in what follows.

Augustine asserts in 14.5 that the human body is good in its kind and order (*genere atque ordine*), and thus, sin should not be blamed on the human body (*carnis accusare naturam*). One implication of this statement is that any moral difficulty arising from the body should be blamed on the human will’s attempts to impose (*jubent*) a novel order which, in the end, leads to a disrespecting of the proper nature of the body as it was created by God.

In 14.14-26 Augustine turns to the Edenic narrative. In Genesis 3, after the tragic first sin, Adam and Eve cover their bodies with leaves. The urge to hide was, on Augustine’s reading, a desperate attempt to cope with the profound change that took place as a result of their sinful action, namely the loss of some modicum of control of their sexual organs (CD 14.15). From this point onward in human history, Augustine claims, the experience of involuntary affection and bodily movement mark human sexuality and cause an unavoidable shame.

In order to emphasize the depths of shame experienced in postlapsarian sexuality, Augustine compares two species of disorder within the human person. First, the soul can conflict with itself. This occurs when a person desires something that they either cannot have or that they know they should not have. Augustine’s primary example of this category is when anger arises within the soul but is checked by a desire to show mercy or kindness (CD 14.19). Such experiences of internal conflict are so common to human
experience that they are rarely recognized as unusual or unnatural. But because God did not design the soul to be in conflict with itself, this is properly understood as a form of disorder. A second type is experienced when the body opposes the soul. This conflict is a more shameful disordering than the first, in Augustine’s mind, because the soul is now being confronted and possibly even conquered by that which it was meant to rule (CD 14.26). Sexual desire is Augustine’s primary example in this category of disorder (CD 14.15). When such an attraction leads to physical intimacy with another, the soul is conquered by pleasures to the point where the body completely overtakes the soul (CD 14.16). The shame of this disordering experience is felt by all, Augustine argues, which is why even married couples seek to hide their embrace from public view.

God’s choice of punishing humanity with the worst disordering in the sexual realm is fitting, Augustine thinks, for symbolic reasons. The rebellion of lower bodily members (like the sexual organs) arising against that which should be ruling it (the soul) symbolizes the rebellion of humanity before God (CD 14.15). In chapter three above, I noted William Connolly’s worry about how Augustinian communities celebrate significations of harmony and unity. However, Augustine’s reading of Eden recounted here finds an irresolvable sign of dissonance on the human body, a point which I noted Geoffrey Rees develops in a creative manner. For Augustine, the uncontrollability of the procreative organs is a fitting punishment from God, because they symbolize that a corrupt and disordered human nature will be passed to all subsequent generations (CD 14.20). Thus, the sexual realm is a microcosm of humanity’s relation to God, where one can see a reflection of human rebellion before God and its effects on future generations. While Connolly sees a paean to the maintenance of order in Augustinian signification, with respect to the conjugal-sexual realm Augustine himself sees a kind of inextricable disorder at work in human life.

III.  The Argument to Follow

In the next two chapters, I turn to argue that Augustine’s development of a
philosophy of order was undertaken with an eye to how it can source a catholic vision and theology of marriage. I argue in chapter four that ‘order’ is experienced in a pre-rational register and in the communal context of the church which stewards the mysteries of Christ’s Incarnation. While many recent treatments of Augustine’s early thought that have argued for a strong continuity with his later theology have looked to Augustine’s theology proper, I aim to show in chapter four that not only Pro-Nicene Christian teaching but also the need to theologize about distinctive Christian practice gave shape to his earliest efforts as a Christian philosopher of order. In chapter five, I look at Augustine’s famous conversion narrative in *Confessions* to show that his philosophy of order enables him to articulate the role of the catholic affirmation of marriage as essential to his conversion.
Chapter Four: The Path to Perceiving Order at Cassiciacum: Discursive Aporia and Performative Display

Introduction

Order was a subject of focus from the very beginning of Augustine’s Christian literary career. An analysis of these earliest writings makes clear that Augustine’s philosophy of order does not fit neatly into any one traditional stream of thought without remainder. Rather, his was a creative new synthesis with an energy and direction unique to himself. His first three treatises written at Cassiciacum (Contra Academicos, De Ordine, De beata vita) contain overlapping themes, and, though only in the title of the second, order figures prominently in the collection as a whole. The analysis below focuses on De Ordine (with supplementation from Contra Academicos and De beata vita) in order to grasp Augustine’s early account of order. What will be of interest is not what Augustine “simply took over as part of a contemporary stock of ideas”¹ but with how he entered the ancient discourse and added a new dynamic to it, transforming it from the inside.

The recent proliferation of studies on Augustine’s Cassiciacum dialogues has provided a rich field for investigation. Recent studies have argued that Augustine had fundamental pro-Nicene theological commitments at this stage,² and that he had read and been deeply impacted by various Pauline epistles and works of Origen.³ I will draw upon other important studies in the course of this chapter. But I note, first, a gap that I observe in recent research on the dialogues, namely the lack of attention paid to how the distinctively catholic forms of life and community provided a spur to Augustine’s earliest theological reflections. However, if the Confessions narrative of the events leading to the

²Chad Tyler Gerber, The Spirit of Augustine’s Early Theology Contextualizing Augustine’s Pneumatology (Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), see chapters 1 and 2.
dialogues bears any semblance of historical veracity, Augustine and his companions at Cassiciacum were only beginning to come to terms with significant differences between Manichaean and catholic Christianity. Thus, I investigate these dialogues in search of key differences that Augustine portrays between these two communities and how he expresses these differences through his philosophy of order. Also of significance for the purposes of this thesis is that Augustine, just prior to leaving Milan for the philosophical retreat at Cassiciacum, had committed to be baptized in the catholic church and to take on the vocation of celibacy in that context. As I will argue in chapter five, a significant aspect of his conversion was an acceptance of the sacramental quality of Christian marriage. Thus, I seek to show that there is evidence at Cassiciacum of a high assessment of the human body and its dignity that would enable Augustine to later formulate a robust theology of marriage.

In what follows, I first attend to the key difference Augustine portrays between the Manichaean and catholic communities, namely the submission to the humble authority of the church; second, I turn to describe briefly the discursive content of the dialogues but then show that the performative action is a neglected but vital aspect of their message.

I. Catholic Seeking and Finding

A significant line of discussion in De Ordine relates to the manner in which Augustine will tutor his students. Much is at stake with such a discussion on a practical level, as Licentius’s father is a funding the group’s retreat and would, no doubt, be interested to hear how his son was progressing. Thus, at the end of De Ordine, Augustine turns to detail his program of education. I will not recount here the entire discussion but rather will focus on a surprising moment in Augustine’s ordo eruditionis, namely his account of the educational authority in his program.

In De Ordine 2.8.25 Augustine describes the process by which one prepares for a perception of divine order. He claims that a disciplina imposes a twofold procedure on the
seeker: the regulating of life (ordo vitae) and the directing of studies (ordo eruditionis).

The language of imposition (jubet) suggests that disciplina be respected as a higher-order being whose directive should be respected. Such a disciplina only guides those with zealous minds who love only God and souls, and to such individuals this process promises to show that even things acknowledged as evil are not outside of God’s order (De Ordine 2.7.24). Though concealed in De Ordine itself, Epistle 11 to Nebridius written in 389 explains that disciplina refers to Christus and is a fitting title for Him because “the mode of existence which is properly ascribed to the Son has to do with training [disciplinam]…and with the exercise of the intellect…” While the Father, according to Epistle 11, is associated with the cause of all things, and the Spirit with permanence, the Son is associated with the forming and fashioning of reality in a particular way. As the source of each thing’s true form (speciem), the Son is properly understood as the ultimate cognition of all things. And thus, the Disciplina not only imposes a process of education on the zealous seeker of truth but is also the very content of the curriculum. Commentators frequently note that Augustine might, at this stage, still be unknowingly forwarding a Photinian understanding of the Son, in which Christ is regarded as an exceedingly wise and virtuous man but not as the active dispenser of grace that he later understood the Son to be. In other words, the early Augustine considered the soul capable of submitting to the educational process of the Disciplina and through deliberate effort attaining a share in His cognition.

The imposition of an educational process was deemed, in Augustine’s day, to be the rightful possession of the great philosophers, and philosophical authority was synonymous with the right to acquire pupils and then set an agenda of education for them.

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4 The topic of the liberal disciplines is prominent at Cassiciacum. In Contra Academicos 1.7.20-21, humans are said to be able to learn them, but demons cannot. Thus, one’s facility in the liberal disciplines reveals one’s readiness for philosophical vision. But in De Ordine it becomes clear that Augustine is already beginning to present them as penultimate and preparatory rather than an end in themselves.

5 Heidl cites this connection Heidl, Origen’s Influence on the Young Augustine, p55.

6 See Confessions 7.19.25 for Augustine’s description of his errant Christology in the time before he left for Cassiciacum.
As noted at several points above, the language of authority often occurs in the context of a discussion of some aspect of order, and Augustine’s interaction with philosophical authority is no exception. Especially in *Contra Academicos*, Augustine discusses Cicero’s authority and the implication of his teachings on the education of youth (*Contra Academicos* 3.16.35). Augustine begins in *Contra Academicos* 1.3.7-8 by warning that Cicero’s authority should not to dwell uncritically in one’s heart; rather, when discussing an issue, one should “leap onto the peak of liberty” (*Contra Academicos* 1.9.24) and critically evaluate where Cicero was right and wrong. Cicero’s authority is undercut again in *Contra Academicos* 2.2.5 when Augustine makes reference to the Ciceronian phrase *libri pleni* but uses it to describe Christian Neoplatonist books that contained precisely what the other philosophers missed, namely the Incarnation.\(^7\) The careful but persistent undermining of Cicero’s teaching authority climaxes when Alypius claims in *Contra Academicos* 2.13.30 that one cannot go beyond the great philosophers. Though Augustine makes no direct response in the immediate context, he closes *Contra Academicos* in 3.20.43 by claiming explicitly that Christ is the highest authority.

The reason Augustine considered *Disciplina-Christus* to exercise an authority that directly competed with Cicero becomes clear when Augustine discusses authority and reason in *De Ordine* 2.9.26-27. He begins by noting that education most directly relates to reason but that authority must come first.\(^8\) By authority in this context, Augustine means “the authority of upright men” (*bonorum auctoritas*), and he is thus speaking of submission to the human authorities of the Christian church and not directly to Christ or the Christian Scriptures. It is only Christ’s authority in this human form which “opens the door…to great and hidden truths.” What is at stake in the discussion on authority is the identification of the people from whom true knowledge and virtue is dispensed. It is

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\(^7\)See Heidl for the convincing argument that *libri pleni* should be interpreted “complete books” and refer to the commentaries of Origen rather than Platonist literature (Heidl, p35). The “drops” refer to the doctrine of the Incarnation that light a flame on Augustine’s passion for philosophy (Heidl, p11-17).

\(^8\)Cf. Cicero, *Academica* 2.36.117: one first commits to a school/way of life and then studies the theoretical justifications for that life.
significant that *Contra Academicos* and *De Ordine*, both of which closely attend to this issue of authority, were addressed to Augustine’s friends who were not members of the Christian church but were greatly interested in philosophy. Through a careful depiction of Christ as the authority for philosophers, Augustine presents an invitation to his friends to join him in submitting to the catechesis and baptism of the catholic church. His claim is that through such a submission one enters the proper order of education whereby one prepares for a vision of cosmic order. I turn now to detail what precisely Augustine understands this vision of order to be.

**II. Discursive and Enacted Forms of Order at Cassiciacum**

**A. *De Ordine*’s Discursive Content: Christianized Stoic Theodicy**

The three dialogues penned at Cassiciacum are interwoven. The first, *Contra Academicos*, engages in an extensive argument with the sceptical tradition, of which Augustine found himself a member for a short time. On Augustine’s reading, the Academics, or sceptics, promoted what is commonly called the doctrine of nonperception. To instill doubt in one’s sense experience, they often cited the ‘dream problem’ which posed the question, ‘how do you know that your senses are not merely dream-like mental projections?’ (*Contra Academicos* 2.5.11; 3.11.25) Augustine’s response to this question includes the argument that the question and any possible answer cannot actually support or defeat what both he and the Academics agree is at stake in philosophical pursuit, namely one’s moral condition (*Contra Academicos* 3.11.26; 3.16.35). Augustine notes that what matters for philosophy is not ultimately the accuracy of sense experience itself but rather how it is valued in relation to other forms of perception (*Contra Academicos* 3.12.27). In this vein, Augustine states that he has little concern with whether Epicurean arguments about the veracity of sense perception are valid but finds their valuation of physical pleasure as humanity’s highest good indefensible (*Contra Academicos* 3.11.26).

Augustine formulates in his next dialogue, *De Ordine*, a realist philosophy of order
by which he can avoid the moral implications of the claims of the sceptics. In *De Ordine* 1.1.2 Augustine presents a generally Stoic theodicy in which the providential order is accessed by the contemplation of the rational logos as discernible by the finite human mind. Henri Blocher has called this “the unified vision” of theodicy that assumes reason’s power to classify objects and thereby erase or blur the most scandalous aspects of evil that one experiences in the world. This theodicy requires adherents to believe that any contingent state of affairs is divinely ordained and that by discerning the transcendent and eternal intention through the confusion of the randomness of becoming, one can displace their own will and undergo any life situation. Such an account was, as I noted in the Introduction to Section Two, philosophically status quo. On this account, sin was located in the unconformity of the will with the theoretical “bird’s eye view” of the whole.

Augustine describes such a “bird’s eye view” in the form of an illustration of a man who stands closely to a wall and attempts to observe an inlaid stone fresco. Upon close inspection, the man finds what appears to be an inexact arrangement between two stones, a disorder in the fresco that indicates a faulty design. In the illustration, the stones, which are the object of the man’s observation, represent an instance of evil (malus), a Latin word which refers to two concepts that the English language distinguishes between, namely ‘human sin’ and ‘natural evil/disaster.’ As a result, the man’s “close inspection” in the illustration refers to one of two scenarios: either an experience of human sin or a sight of disorder in a part of nature. Augustine’s claim is that these are the two categories of sense experience which keep one from a vision of order. This suggests that an orientation to order will serve as both an ethic (addressing human sin) and a theodicy (answering philosophical questions about the existence of evil in a world under God’s control).

While this generally Stoic theodicy frames the philosophical discussion, Augustine does attempt to move away from it in several places. I turn briefly to the character of

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Licentius to note how and why he does so. Licentius’ confident assertions, attempted defenses, and changes in perspective and disposition in the De Ordine dialogue provide vital clues for properly interpreting the work.\textsuperscript{11} Licentius begins the dialogue proper by proposing that nothing is done apart from order (De Ordine 1.3.8). He further claims that order brings all things about by means of material causation, and thus a proper perception of order entails seeing every event as necessary (De Ordine 1.5.14). He concludes that the opposite of order is nihil (De Ordine 1.6.15). While affirming that order pervades all things, Augustine finds problematic Licentius’ “quasi-Stoic”\textsuperscript{12} insistence that all causes are material and thus all events necessary: if all things are necessary and driven by material causation, Augustine reasons, does this not imply that God is also under order’s guiding force (De Ordine 1.10.29)? So Licentius’ inability to perceive the difference between order and the things that are ordered reveals an inadequate awareness of an Orderer. Licentius’ first attempt is roughly Stoic and fails to properly maintain the Creator-creature distinction.\textsuperscript{13} Augustine’s responses reveal his worry that Licentius’ insisting on order’s necessity removes the power and thus the responsibility of the human soul to care for material things.

It comes as no surprise then that Licentius begins afresh in Book 2 by distinguishing material things that are not ‘with God’ from immaterial things that are. He infers that because only the material part of humanity is ‘with God’, the human soul must withdrawal from sense experience if it desires to attain order (De Ordine 2.1.2-2.2.5). Augustine’s response to these Platonist claims reveals that Licentius, in separating the soul from the body and the soul from itself, has now deified the human soul. Ironically,

\textsuperscript{11}Mark Boone and Phillip Cary both see Licentius as the key “character” in the Cassiciacum dialogues; see Mark J Boone, Conversion and Therapy of Desire in Augustine’s Cassiciacum Dialogues. ([S.I.]: Proquest, Umi Dissertatio, 2011), p122–175; and, Phillip Cary, “What Licentius Learned,” Augustinian Studies 29, no. 1 (1998): 141–63; the fact that the dedicatory epistle to Contra Academicos is addressed to Licentius’ father and Augustine’s patron, Romanianus, suggests that Augustine sent Romanianus all three Cassiciacum dialogues to instill confidence that his son was indeed progressing in his studies under Augustine’s tutelage.

\textsuperscript{12}It is ‘quasi-Stoic’ because Licentius complexifies the Stoic notion of causation by breaking it into the four Aristotelian categories.

\textsuperscript{13}Boone, Conversion and Therapy of Desire in Augustine’s Cassiciacum Dialogues, p122–175.
Licentius has again sundered the Creator-creature distinction. Augustine claims that becoming ordered will entail not the abandonment of the body but rather its proper care and not the division of the sensing or remembering functions of the soul from the rest but their proper integration (De Ordine 2.2.6-7). Thus, Augustine presents similar concerns in the face of both the Stoic and Platonist accounts of order, namely that they fail to recognize the Creator-creature distinction and the soul’s responsibility to care for the body.

However, Augustine does not in any obvious way carry through on this line of investigation. In fact, commentators note that these dialogues are full of false starts, rabbit trails, and rapid shifting of topics. Until recently, treatments of these dialogues attributed the messiness to Augustine’s youth or to the inexperience of his dialogue partners. However, more recent treatments have explored the possibility that the dialogues are intentional in their lack of philosophical success. This line of investigation suggests that Augustine not only attempted to defeat the sceptics but that he genuinely learned from them. Catherine Conybeare notes, for example, that the dialogues challenge the picture of the “dogmatic Augustine”. Rather than seeing the conversations recorded in the dialogues as unknowingly failing to resolve an issue, many readers are finding it fruitful to consider that Augustine has knowingly introduced uncertainty and lack of closure, punctuating some of the most important questions not with an exclamation point but a question mark. I turn now to briefly explore the possibility that the discursive content at Cassiciacum leaves open uncertainties in order to point readers to the enacted content of the dialogues. I will argue that the Cassiciacum community becomes a faint reflection of the Milanese catholic church.

B. Divine Ordering in the Dramatic Action of the Dialogues

Significantly, Matthew 7:7 is by far the most frequently cited Scripture passage at Cassiciacum, and Augustine’s interpretation of it sets the program for he and his friends’s

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pursuit in their otium liberale. I suggest that Augustine understands the dominical text to describe both the proper form and object of philosophical pursuit: specifically, it is Christ’s promise to a community of believers (not merely individuals) who are together seeking the personal activity of God (not merely truthful propositions). The dialogue genre is particularly apt for representing such a pursuit to those not present, as it allows Augustine to depict not only the polemical debunking of various intellectual affirmations but also and more fundamentally the process of becoming more fully ordered by God in a mutually beneficial manner. The dialogue genre embodies the significance of the catholic community that will emerge below. By displaying in the dramatic action a particular communal ethos, the early Augustine could indirectly beckon his readers to a kind of ethical development or becoming in the characters and community.

Catherine Conybeare highlights, among other dramatic features, the role of Augustine’s mother, Monica, in the dialogues. Consistently, Monica enters the philosophical discussions with little awareness of technical terms or philosophical camps. And yet, she time and again makes the key observation or asks the decisive question that advances the conversation. Conybeare notes that her leading role is perhaps most obvious in De beata vita. For example, Monica provides the metaphor of eating (1.6) that becomes the primary frame of discussion, and she makes the key link between modus and sapientia in the Son of God that brings resolution to their bind (4.34). Once the significance of such moments becomes clear, one is enabled to ask of the discursive content new questions. In particular, instead of seeking to know Augustine’s “position” on key philosophical topoi such as anthropology or cosmology, it becomes vital to search for his vision of community, for example. I note three features of community that arise from the De Ordine.

Augustine’s rich reading of Matthew 7:7 at Cassiciacum is supported in Matthew’s original Greek version in several significant ways: in Greek the commands enjoin continuous, iterative action (Αἱτήσετε… κρούσθε… ζητήσετε… κρούσθε…); the three parallel promises are each metaphors of personal response; and the πᾶς in 7:8 carries extensive and intensive force (‘all and every’) since it stands in attributive relation to a noun with a definite article. The dialogue genre especially accommodates the latter point, since all (including subsequent readers) learn from the progress of any individual participant.
First, Augustine states that the classification of people inherited from classical philosophy can no longer be considered valid. In *Contra Academicos* 1.1.1 Augustine says that the truth about order will only be revealed to those who deeply love it but that such teachings will be hidden from the uninitiated (profani). In classical philosophy, humankind was divided into the few who were philosophical and the many who lived outside the temple of true knowledge (hence the cultic language of ‘profane’). However, on the heels of his discussion about submission to church authority which was discussed above, Augustine claims (contra Alypius) that there are many who are living good and devout lives in the present (*De Ordine* 2.10.29). The basis for this comment is that the profane have been given open access to true philosophy through the church thanks to the Incarnation, and thus, the commonly understood proportions of those capable of discovering the mysteries of the philosophical life to those who are not have been reversed. Augustine claims that this reversal is due to “the divine assistance which is more abundant than many have imagined.” The manner in which those formerly considered profani can now enter the mysteries of order is not through the intellect but through submitting to the initiation rites of the Christian church. However, now Augustine reveals that such an initiation is not simply magical in nature but substantive, that is, it leads one to embody the form of life of the Christian church. Only in living as a Christian can one begin to discover wisdom, Augustine claims (*De Ordine* 2.9.26). The label of ‘philosopher’ is now open to anyone who lives the Christian ethos, even if they do so without understanding why it is the wisest way to live. The surprising claim here is that rationality indeed marks all Christian behavior; it is present in the church community as a pre-cognitive communal presence that is individuated in every Christian’s actions but not in every intellect.

Second, in *De Ordine* 2.11.31-2.12.35 Augustine describes how words and bodily

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16Brian Stock notes that Monica in *De Ordine* 1.10-11 serves to offer an alternative to the proposed model of ascent through study (p136). In *Confessions*, Book 9 Monica as a paradigm in this regard receives fullest expression.
gestures allow companions to share the “firmest association.” He argues that the only manner in which one can avoid reducing others to their impact on the senses is by looking to their words and deeds. My claim is that Augustine directs attention to words/deeds because dialogue serves to interrupt perceptions of another’s hidden or internal order. Conversation is also necessary to lead one to a proper valuation of how this person’s visible and auditory beauty relates to their hidden or internal order.

Only a “pouring of words” into one another can bring about a deep revelation of what is in the other, though gesture is also given a positive role in gaining such insight. Words and deeds, however, are only “external signs,” and the goal of fully knowing and learning from another’s attainment of a vision of cosmic order can only ever be realized in part. That being said, Augustine does describe the ideal conditions under which a deep knowledge of another can be attained. One must begin by deliberately setting aside the current habits of thought about this person (De Ordine 2.13.38), which includes (according to De Ordine 2.10.29) setting aside their history of behavior, how they consider themselves, and their social identity that they have created and others have pressed upon them. Growing in knowledge of the other requires a willingness and even expectation of seeing not simply more of the same but some virtuous deed or great quality that has not risen to sensible perception until now. While the early Augustine is sometimes portrayed as doubting the capacity of words to convey truth, here he challenges his companions to dare to take one another at their word, since some are increasingly as good as their word.

**Conclusion**

The above summary shows that Augustine is concerned at Cassiciacum to depict and discourse on a communal ethic. Though the theme of order occupies him for a large

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17Cf. De Magistro 14.45-46; De Trinitate 14.7.9 both of which suggest that dialogue can yield something better than words (cited by Brian Stock, p137). Below, this theme will be shown to continue most prominently in Augustine’s middle-career work, De Doctrina Christiana.


19Augustine’s account of the influence of Nebridius’ baptism on his friend can be seen as a narrative example of why this openness is necessary (Confessions 4.4.8).
swath of the Cassiciacum discussions, his interest fixes on the order of the community who is seeking. I turn now to Augustine’s *Confessions* to show that the community who is “seeking and finding” has a vocationally differentiated life that embodies their faith in a unique way.
Chapter Five: The Role of the Conjugal Sacrament in Augustine's Conversion

Introduction: Augustine’s Predicament in *Confessions*, Book 8

The contents of Books 7 and 8 of *Confessions*, their relation to one another, and to Augustine’s conversion to Christianity have been topics of much controversy in Augustinian studies over the past 150 years, since Adolph von Harnack\(^1\) and, more pointedly, Prosper Alfaric,\(^2\) claimed that the books inadvertently reveal but try to falsify that Augustine first converted to a Neoplatonic spirituality and then slowly, over time, to a Christian system of belief. Implicit in Harnack and Alfaric’s readings is the charge that Augustine overplays the Christian elements of his conversion in these books of his,\(^3\) and that his true conversion is to be found in his Neoplatonic discoveries recorded in Books 7. Other scholars, such as Robert O’Connell and Pierre Courcelle,\(^4\) have inflected this picture from Harnack-Alfaric by lending more weight to the Neoplatonic elements in Augustine’s later thought. All these authors present a picture of Book 8 that sees in its sexual renunciation a kind of natural continuation of the conversion begun in Book 7. Courcelle, for example, finds many allusions from Roman and Greek classics in the events surrounding the famous garden conversion scene. Such evidence in Book 8, these authors claim, shows that, while Augustine’s vocabulary Christianized over time, the basic structure of his philosophy remained Neoplatonic. Carl Vaught summarizes such a view:

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“it is easy to argue that all [Augustine’s] conversion [in Book 8] requires is the repudiation of the body and the consequent return of the soul to its origins. If this is so, his Christian conversion is a disguised redescription of his earlier conversion to Neoplatonism [narrated in Book 7].”5

A contrasting interpretation can be seen in the work of Carl Vaught and Colin Starnes. Vaught interprets Book 8 as a narration of “the volitional transformation that reorients his life.”6 The sickness and healing of Augustine’s will is the hinge of the narrative transition from an initial hesitancy to a leader of a new emerging Christian community: “In Book VIII, Augustine intends to narrate the stages in which God breaks the bonds of sexual addiction and sets him free from the deeper bondage of the will…”7 Thus, while Vaught acknowledges that Augustine renounces his sexuality in Book 8, the primary transformation narrated in the book concerns the abandonment of “the willfulness at the center of his being.”8 Colin Starnes similarly claims that, while Augustine saw the patria from a distance in Book 7, in Book 8 he confronts the fact that he was unwilling to follow the path that would take him there: “In [Book 8] he turns from a consideration of the objective knowledge of God as revealed in creation, and of the knowledge of the way to God as revealed in the church [which were the subject of Book 7], to his own subjective relation to Christ through will and belief.”9 For Vaught and Starnes, the embrace of celibacy is simply the surface evidence of a deeper change that God accomplishes in his will.

In contrast to the first group of readers noted above that sees strong continuity between Book 8’s conversion and Neoplatonic philosophy, I follow commentators such as

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6Ibid., p67.
7Ibid., p68.
8Ibid.
Vaught and Starnes who suggest that the changes Augustine narrates in Book 8 evidence a
disruption with respect to his condition resulting from the Neoplatonic vision of Book 7.
However, I seek to show, in contrast to Vaught and Starnes, that they read Augustine’s
conversion in too individualistic a manner, underplaying the role of the catholic church,
particularly its unique teaching on the sacramental quality of Christian marriage. As I
noted in chapter one, William Connolly’s sower parable sensitized my reading of the
Augustinian garden to the irreducible political dynamics at play in changes that occur to
the order of the self. Thus, my reading insists that not only must one emphasize the will, as
Vaught says, in order to avoid the error of thinking that Augustine “assume[s] that one
cannot become a Christian without embracing an ascetic way of life,”¹⁰ but, as I suggest in
what follows, the sacramental quality of marriage must be emphasized as a central element
of Augustine’s conversion in Book 8. The role of marriage in Augustine’s conversion
comes to light further when two features of Book 8’s narrative are foregrounded, the
significance of which the above scholars overlook: first, Augustine’s notion of
sacramentality and the significance of learning to speak and read God’s signs in
*Confessions* as a whole; second, the Manichaean readership of *Confessions* to whom
Augustine often appeals. I take these points in turn.

In his comprehensive study of marriage in the Western church, Philip Lyndon
Reynolds notes that Augustine’s doctrine of the conjugal sacrament was an ambiguous
teaching, the most vague of the three goods that Augustine described as constituting the
essence of Christian marriage (*proles, fides, sacramentum*). Reynolds writes about the
latter:

The idea of sacrament was a guiding principle in much of Augustine’s
writing about marriage, but he had no clear and fixed conception of the
nature of this sacrament. There is no single definition of sacramentum with
which one may gloss every occurrence of this word in his writings about
marriage. What we find instead is a range of related ideas corresponding to a

range of connotations that the word had acquired from various contexts.\textsuperscript{11}

The lack of clarity surrounding Augustine’s notion of sacrament means that its presence and significance might be difficult to identify in a work such as \textit{Confessions} that trades in narrative rather than didactic explanation. However, it is significant that roughly concurrent with the writing of \textit{Confessions}, Augustine wrote numerous treatises\textsuperscript{12} on issues relating to marriage ethics for the Christian community. The topic of the catholic view of marriage was on his mind in this era of writing. Reynolds claims that the simplest definition Augustine gives of a “sacrament” is that it is a “sacred sign”.\textsuperscript{13} This definition links Augustine’s work on marriage with his extensive treatment of signs in his work, \textit{On Christian Doctrine}, written in 396.\textsuperscript{14} As O’Donnell notes, in \textit{On Christian Doctrine} 1.2.2, a sacrament is “a word that helps bridge the gap between things and signs: sacraments are signs that are also things.”\textsuperscript{15} Further, Phillip Cary adds that \textit{sacramentum}, rooted as it is in the NT \textit{μυστήριον}, also connotes something that is secret.\textsuperscript{16} I suggest in this chapter, that coming to know the “secret” about Christian marriage, that it both signifies and participates in the Triune God, constitutes, for Augustine, a story worth telling.

The role of marriage in Augustine’s conversion becomes more obvious when the Manichaean audience of \textit{Confessions} is emphasized. David G. Hunter notes that in this \textit{Confessions} era of writing, Augustine’s most positive statements about marriage come in

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\textsuperscript{11}Philip Lyndon Reynolds, \textit{Marriage in the Western Church: The Christianization of Marriage during the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods} (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1994), p280.

\textsuperscript{12}Augustine’s \textit{Confessions} was written between 397 and 401, and \textit{The Good of Marriage and Holy Virginity} were both completed in 401. For dates see, Elizabeth A Clark, ed., \textit{St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality} (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), p13 and p19.

\textsuperscript{13}Reynolds, \textit{Marriage in the Western Church}, 280.

\textsuperscript{14}The fourth and last book of \textit{On Christian Doctrine}, which has little relevance to his notion of “sacrament”, was not completed until the late 420s. For dating, see James O’Donnell, “\textit{De Doctrina Christiana},” ed. Allan Fitzgerald and John C. Cavadini, \textit{Augustine through the Ages : An Encyclopedia} (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999).


contexts where he is countering the Manichaean vision of marriage.\textsuperscript{17} It is now well established in \textit{Confessions} research that Augustine addressed a diverse readership, including fellow ‘spiritual men’,\textsuperscript{18} Manicheans,\textsuperscript{19} and Donatists.\textsuperscript{20} Numerous recent studies have assisted in raising an awareness of Augustine’s focus throughout \textit{Confessions} on appealing to a Manichaean readership. Annemare Kotze’s recent work argues convincingly that \textit{Confessions} bears many features associated with the protreptic genre,\textsuperscript{21} which she distinguishes from two neighbouring genres: \textit{paranaesis} which assumes a shared moral disposition with the audience\textsuperscript{22} and \textit{apologia} which looks simply to persuade opponents. In contrast to the former, protrepsis attempts to overcome a perceived fundamental difference with all or a portion of the audience, and in contrast to latter, it seeks to effect a change rather than merely convince. Dirk Schenkeveld further clarifies that protreptic aims at a general reorientation, while \textit{paranaesis} focuses on a series of concrete rules of conduct.\textsuperscript{23} While Kotze’s study argues for this genre classification from numerous passages, her work does not analyse protreptic moments in Books 8-9 when Augustine, I will show, appeals to his Manichaean readers to adopt the catholic understanding of marriage.

In light of Kotze’s convincing cumulative argument that Augustine directly appeals throughout \textit{Confessions} to a Manichaean audience, it becomes unimaginable that

\textsuperscript{20}Kotze cites Wundt (1923).
\textsuperscript{21}Kotze finds Mark D. Jordan’s definition of “protreptic” most accurate: “The unity of the protreptic genre could be provided, then, by the recurring situation of trying to produce a certain volitional or cognitive state in the hearer at the moment of decision about a way-of-life.” See Kotzé, \textit{Augustine’s Confessions: Communicative Purpose and Audience}, p57.
\textsuperscript{22}Cf. ibid., p171–118.

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Augustine would not be addressing in Book 8 the key formal difference between the two communities, namely the catholic affirmation of marriage. As J. Kevin Coyle notes, according to Augustine, the Manichaeans allowed their “catechumens” to marry and have sex, but required celibacy for their “elect”. In *Confessions* 5.7.13 Augustine had expressed his hope to make progress in the Manichaean sect, which most likely meant that he would attempt to become an “elect” member who practiced celibacy. This suggests that, if Book 8 did not make any statement about the good of marriage, Augustine could easily have been seen by his Manichaean readership to be undergoing an essential Manichaean conversion to the status of “elect”.

In this chapter, I argue that in Book 8 Augustine presents his conversion as possible only in the context of a community in which conjugal sacramentality was operative and only when he was no longer “ashamed of the sacraments of the lowliness of Your Word” (8.2.4). I unfold this argument in what follows by, first, attending closely to how Augustine’s frames his predicament in light of Paul’s most extended direct instruction regarding Christian marriage, 1 Corinthians 7. Second, I set Augustine’s learning to “hear” the sacred sign of marriage against the backdrop of Book 1, in which he made clear that faith in the Incarnate Son would come by means of learning the language of the church and would result in one understanding his or her place in the created order. Third, I turn to the last book of the *Confessions* to show the significance the conjugal sacrament in the *formatio* and *reformatio* of the church as the new creation community. I then conclude by indicating how Augustine’s account of the conjugal sacrament differs from Barth’s theology of marriage that also employs a philosophy of order.

I. Framing of His Dilemma: Augustine’s Protreptic Narrative
Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7

After the Psalms, 1 Corinthians is the most commonly cited biblical book in
Confessions.\(^2^6\) I show in this section here the significance of 1 Corinthians 7 to
Augustine’s conversion narrative in Book 8. While O’Donnell correctly notes the
importance of the Pauline epistle to the Romans at key points in Book 8’s development, I
show that Augustine frames the book as a whole with the Pauline instruction regarding
various states of life from 1 Corinthians 7.\(^2^7\) I highlight how Augustine’s brief but
substantive allusions to this Pauline chapter frame the relationship between Books 7 and 8
in a way that emphasizes the need for divine empowerment for both the married and
celibate vocations.

Augustine opens Book 8, after a brief introductory prayer, with a comment about
uncertainty in his temporal life (8.1.1). He references 1 Corinthians 5.7-8 in this context,\(^2^8\)
to make clear that his sexual sin is the source of the uncertainty. In the second sentence,
Augustine refers to “the way, our Saviour himself,” who delighted him but upon which he
found it difficult to journey.\(^2^9\) The mention of “the way” creates a link with Book 7’s
theme, for in 7.9.13 Augustine had stated that, though the Neoplatonists gave him the
ability to overcome the errors of the Manichaeans and the sceptics, they did not show him
“the way”. Similarly, in 7.9.16 Augustine presents himself like Moses who looked from a
great distance atop a mountain at the promised land, which he returns to in 7.20.26, noting
that there are those who see the goal but not “the way” that leads to blessedness. He closes
the book in 7.21.27: “It is one thing to see the land of peace from a wooded mountaintop,

\(^2^6\)George Lawless notes that it vies for second place with Genesis and Romans. See George
Lawless, “Reflections Apropos a Recent Commentary on Augustine’s Confessions,” Augustinian Studies 25


\(^2^8\)1 Corinthians 5.7-8 (NRSV): “Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you
really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the
festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and
truth.”

\(^2^9\)I will be quoting from Sheed’s translation unless otherwise stated. Confessions, p29.
yet not find the way to it and struggle hopelessly far from the way…”\textsuperscript{30} Thus, Augustine is indicating that his Neoplatonic vision in Book 7 did not empower him to overcome his sexual sin. The vision left him with uncertainty as to which direction to go in life, since he still was enslaved to his lust. He closes 8.1.1 by indicating his intention to see Simplicianus, whom he was confident could show him how to walk the right path (i.e., how to overcome his sexual sin and follow Christ’s way).

Augustine opens 8.1.2 with an imaginative journey into the church in Milan, which serves to detail further the specific uncertainty that troubled him. He notes that “one went this way, and one that,”\textsuperscript{31} a reference to 1 Corinthians 7.7 (“one having one kind [of gift] and another a different kind”). Here, Augustine references the catholic teaching, arising from Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 7 that both celibate and married callings were valid for Christians. But he goes beyond the apostolic words by calling these vocations “ways”. By doing so, Augustine, in short span, suggests that both Christian vocations are forms of life that involve exercising faith in the Incarnate Son. That is, the catholics have \textit{the way} (which is the proper doctrine of Christ), but this way is always vocationally differentiated in the lives of individual Christians. Below I situate this theology of vocation in the context of the whole of \textit{Confessions}. What is important to note at this point is that Augustine has clearly identified his sexual sin as the barrier to his conversion and has noted that, if he could overcome it, he would walk one of the two catholic ways with certainty, seeing that both are somehow associated with the Incarnate Christ (“the Way”). But he, as of yet, does not have the power to walk into either vocation.

Augustine sheds further light on his high assessment of marriage by noting in 8.1.2 that “cares” were troubling him, a reference to 1 Corinthians 7.21. The link to this Pauline

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., p137.  
\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., p141.
verse, often overlooked, brings to the reader’s mind the apostolic aside in his chapter on marriage wherein he provides instruction to slaves who became Christians. The broader vocabulary of 8.1.1-2 suggests further links to this passage: in 8.1.2 he noted that his current state in life felt like an “exacting servitude” (servitus) and mentioned in 8.1.1 that he desired to “walk” (ambulo) God’s path – an echo of 1 Corinthians 7.17 (“let each of you walk the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you”). The message of the Pauline passage Augustine cites is that, if some were slaves when they became a Christian, they need not have “care” about changing that circumstance. Paul notes that, if they were able to seek and obtain freedom, they should do so. But, as Gordon Fee notes, Paul’s overall argument in 7.17-24 is to emphasize that when a person is “called” by God, the situation they find themselves in “is taken up in the call and thus sanctified to him or her.” Augustine’s citation of “cares” and inability to “walk” in his own life situation suggest that he has not yet been called by God into faith in the Incarnate Son, for if he had, he would obey the Pauline instruction to have no “care” about his life situation. So while the church presents to him two valid options or ways of life, he finds himself inadequate to both. The Pauline text makes clear that the problem is with Augustine himself and not with his unmarried or engaged status. This same point is emphasized later in 8.7.18 when Augustine notices that God provided certainty regarding his proper course (celibacy) through the story Ponticianus tells, but he fails to run onto the path. The reference to “certainty” and “running” allude to 1 Corinthians 9.26, which suggests that Augustine is contrasting Paul’s description of one who is burdened with “care” (1 Corinthians 7.21), unable to “walk” in their station in life (1 Corinthians 7.17), with the Apostle Paul who “runs” with “certainty” in his calling (1 Corinthians 9.26).

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32 Starnes, Vaught, and O’Connell all overlook the linked reference to cura here.
34 My translation. The NRSV renders “walk” (περιπατέω) as “lead”.
35 Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, p310.
It is significant to note that Augustine felt “care” about his engagement to be married. What produced this concern? The readings of those who see a Neoplatonic Augustine straight through Book 8 (i.e., Alfaric, O’Connell, etc.) are obliged to answer this question by saying that Augustine held celibacy to be the higher vocational option and therefore the only one of interest to him. However, this contradicts the references to 1 Corinthians 7 that I have noted. Further, it contradicts what Augustine himself says in 8.1.2 regarding his situation. There, he notes, “many things” that he did not want to suffer in the married “way of life to which I was utterly bound.”

Augustine provides no details as to what these “many things” were, but some commentators have suggested that it most likely related to the need to wait for roughly eighteen months for his fiancé came of marriageable age. On this reading, Augustine was full of “care” because he could not marry in the near future for unmentioned practical reasons. His lust was uncontrollable, and he only saw marriage at this stage as a lawful context for expressing such lust. Thus, from his own perspective, Augustine’s practical situation made it so that Augustine only had one vocational option, namely the celibate calling. Augustine’s personal inadequacies to enter the celibate vocation are clear to readers from Books 2-7.

But comparing Augustine’s comments in 8.1.1-2 with a roughly contemporaneous treatise on marriage’s goodness, reveals that Augustine’s comments in these opening scenes do not show evidence of a fulsome affirmation of catholic marriage. In the text, On the Good of Marriage, Augustine presents marriage as a vocation that is, like celibacy, suitable for expressing a will fully devoted to God and the church (11.13-12.14). He cites 1 Corinthians 7:34 where the Apostle Paul writes, “And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and

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36 Confessions, p142.
37 See, for example, Starnes, Augustine’s Conversion, p216.
Augustine argues that just as this passage should not be taken as a description of all celibates, it should also not be taken to exclude all married Christians. Based on this exegetical insight Augustine makes the remarkable claim that a participation in the married state does not necessarily impede one from possessing the same undivided concern with pleasing the Lord that marks exemplary celibate Christians. Compared to this statement regarding of the married state from 1 Corinthians 7.34, Augustine’s presentation of himself through 1 Corinthians 7.17-24 as burdened with “care” over the prospects of marrying and knowing he was unable to “walk” such a path suggests a less than full understanding of the catholic vocation of marriage at the end of 8.1.2.

I suggest that, at the beginning of Book 8, Augustine rather appears closer to his assessment of marriage reflected in Book 6. There, in 6.11.20-6.15.25, Augustine describes desiring marriage merely for the purposes of satiating his lustful desires. But he comments that marriage had a dignity of which he was unaware (6.12.22). Though he had heard of “the example of those who had pursued wisdom in the married state and served God faithfully” (6.12.21), his pursuit of marriage constituted a movement away from wisdom and its pursuit. The actual honour of marriage, he states, “had very small influence on [me].” He later notes in 9.4.8 that the Manichaeans lacked an awareness of the catholic sacraments which are their “medicines”, and in 9.6.14 he notes that perceiving the significance of a sacrament requires humility. Taken together, these texts suggest that Augustine’s lust involved a prideful stance to the humble catholic vision of the married life.

After noting Paul’s teaching on the two valid vocations in Confessions 8.1.1-2, Augustine recounts his conversation with Simplicianus who told him the story of

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38NRSV
40Confessions, p111.
Victorinus’ conversion (8.2.3-5). Upon hearing his story, Augustine ponders in 8.3.6-8 why the church delights more in the delivery of one who veered closer to destruction than to one who never faced real danger? In Victorinus’s case, he was stuck in worldly ambition but then released it decisively by God’s grace – for example, Simplicianus describes how Victorinus abandoned his pedagogical work when the authorities passed a law requiring Christians to refrain from teaching (8.5.10). Thus, God converts Victorinus in a way that involves renouncing the very honours and possessions that had held him tight for so long, thereby bringing the church more joy in God’s gracious deliverance. It is commonly noted that in recounting the story of Victorinus, Augustine is setting up the fact that his conversion centres on renouncing his active sexual life, which is the most unlikely vocation for him. Thus, God’s grace will bring greater joy to the church if he “walks” into the celibate life than if he enters Christian marriage. But another similarity between Augustine and Victorinus deserves mention: Victorinus, Augustine says, hesitated in embarrassment at “the sacraments of the lowliness of Your Word.”\(^{41}\) I have been suggesting that Augustine similarly exhibits a reticence with respect to the sacrament of marriage at this stage. To explicate the significance of such embarrassment, I turn to the opening Book of Confessions to detail Augustine’s account of learning the church’s language of praise. It will become clear that the conjugal “word” spoke of a dignity of things that philosophers took to be distractions.

II. Learning the Language of God’s Created Order in Book 1

I take up in this section an exposition of select scenes of Book 1 in order to clarify the relation with creation that is implied Augustine’s opening confessions of faith in the Incarnate Christ. I further develop in a study of the Confessions’s infancy narratives how, for Augustine, a relation to creation’s order requires faith in the Incarnate Christ. I then

\(^{41}\)Ibid., p144.
turn to Augustine’s treatise, *On Christian Doctrine*, in order to set the backdrop for what is involved in Augustine learning to “read” God’s signs and so participate in the created order. I close this section by arguing that enacted signs play a significant role in Augustine’s conversion in Book 8.

A. Opening Prayer: Coming to Know Oneself as Ordered by the Triune God

Augustine’s *Confessions* begins at the end in an important sense. The words of the opening prayer come from one who has journeyed from restlessness to being at rest in God, from needing God’s filling to being filled, from scoffing at the simple language of the church to joining her chorus of praise to the One who is the source of all existence. The intended readers know that the pray-er who opens the book is the bishop of Hippo and not “the searching Augustine” found in the pages of Books 1-9. These opening lines do not present a plight whose solution is unknown but rather come from one who has in some sense already received the answers to his requests. These petitions, therefore, present “the converting Augustine,” 42 a figure who still embodies fallen humanity’s fragmented beginning as well as a foretaste of her stable end.

Some claim that Augustine opens with prayer because he deemed it ‘the most effective rhetorical strategy’ for disarming his potentially averse readership. I suggest, instead, that Augustine is embodying for his readers what he will argue for at length in the coming books, namely that properly confessing the truth leads not to independence and fulfilled longings but rather to a recognition of one’s own dependent existence upon God and the created order in which one has been placed. Books 1-9 are Augustine’s narration of how he came to such a place of dependence upon God and a proper dependence upon God’s creation. I show below how the concluding Books 10-13 undertake an allegorical

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42 Robert McMahon makes a similar distinction between the character and voice of Books 1-9; see Robert McMahon, *Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent: Augustine, Anselm, Boethius, & Dante* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 78.
interpretation of the opening chapters of Genesis in order to further trace out what is entailed in seeing oneself in light of God’s created order. I show from Augustine’s opening prayer that truly perceiving oneself entails proper recognition of and relation to creation and its order. Numerous recent interpreters have noted this aspect of *Confessions*. For example, Margaret Miles highlights that Augustine’s confessing transcends the contemporary psychological-therapeutic focus of correcting internal features and deals instead with a much broader terrain, namely with a proper orientation to a far more comprehensive universe, including one’s relation to creation.43

The first sentence of the opening prayer (1.1.1-1.5.6) ends with a quote from Psalm 146:544 that is foundational to his claims about the interconnectedness of one’s perception of creation45 and confession to God: “of your wisdom there is no number”46 (*sapientiae tuae non est numerus*, 1.1.1). Augustine understands creation to be “numbered,” while the uncreated (God) is not numbered but is one. So the statement suggests that the very source of creation, God’s wisdom, cannot be found in the created realm. Augustine cites Psalm 146:5 again in Book 5 in the midst of explaining why it is essential to confess that God’s wisdom is the source of creation’s order. He explains that such a confession is a precondition for perceiving creation as creation, because it prevents one from deifying any aspect of that creation (5.3.5-6). He then cites Romans 1:21-25 to similar effect, noting

43Margaret R. Miles, “Infancy, Parenting, and Nourishment in Augustine’s ‘Confessions,’” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50, no. 3 (September 1, 1982): 349–64; Also, Jared Ortiz’s recent work summarizes and extends a host of studies that note the centrality of creation to *Confessions* as key to perceiving the unity of Books 1-9 (which detail Augustine’s life) and Books 10-13 (which undertake the development of a biblical cosmology). Ortiz highlights that such studies signal a need for sensitivity to the perception of and interaction with creation in the so-called autobiographical books. Jared Ortiz, “Creation in Saint Augustine’s *Confessions*” (Ph.D. diss., Catholic University of America, 2012) Ortiz’s arguments are succinctly summarized in his appended essay to Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding (San Francisco: Ignatius Press 2012), p475-490.

44Citation of Psalms will follow the Vulgate’s numbering.

45 Here, I follow Augustine’s use of referring to all that God made as “creation”. However, Augustine’s use of “nature” is variously employed to describe either the whole creation or the fallen condition (see *De Naturae et Gratiae* 67.81, quoted in Daniel Patte and Eugene TeSelle, eds., “De Naturae et Gratiae,” in *Engaging Augustine on Romans: Self, Context, and Theology in Interpretation* [Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2002], p169 I do not follow Augustine on this score but rather employ it to refer only to an individual created being’s uniquely created existence. Most translations follow this convention.

46My translation.
that an ongoing perception of the world’s order as created keeps one from deifying any aspect of creaturely reality.

The concern with deifying an aspect of creation can also be seen a few lines later in 1.1.1 in Augustine’s mention of the possibility of calling on and praising the wrong deity, presumably one who is not outside creation but is numbered as part of it. So already in the opening paragraphs of Confessions, Augustine connects invocation of the true God, perception of creation’s order, and ordered desire.

1.1.1 closes with Augustine’s confession that the humanitas of the divine Son makes possible the avoidance of the idolatry that throws various aspects of the created order into confusion. Gillian Clark helpfully notes that humanitas carries a double meaning, both of which appear to be intended in this context: kindness to others and the intelligence of a civilized person.47 Through the preaching of Christ’s humanity, Augustine finds the kindness of God and his own true humanity. Again, 5.3.5-6 bears close parallels that help expose tightly packaged connections in the opening prayer. Here Augustine explicates God’s kindness as the union of human nature and perfect wisdom that obtained in the Incarnation. In the Incarnation, Augustine explains, God’s very wisdom was numbered, and in doing so made possible the truly human knowledge of the created order of which humanity is a part. Thus, one’s relation to creation is always a feature of relating to God in this life, and proper confession necessarily involves speaking truthfully about creation. Faith in the Incarnate Son leads one back to his or her proper place in the created order. In this ‘rehumanization’ effected by the Incarnation of the Son, Augustine’s expressing these views in the form of prayers emphasizes that the creation order is not, for him, a universalizable form of knowledge. Rather, one must exercise faith in order to access it.

The significance of a proper perception of creation expands further when one takes note of Augustine’s confession that humanity is a “part of all that [God] has created” (*alia portio creaturae tuae*, 1.1.1). Because humanity shares in creation’s basic relation to God, what one perceives about creation shapes one’s own self-knowledge. Augustine describes creation’s relation to God in 1.2.2 in terms of God’s sustaining it by means of filling it with Godself. The present tense *impleo*, which is part of a quote from Jeremiah 23:24, draws attention to God’s ongoing activity and presence within creation. The point is that creation only exists because of God’s active sustaining work.

Augustine then spends 1.2.2 and 1.3.3 detailing a Christian account of the divine filling of creation, since such a claim was not unique to Christianity.\(^{48}\) He understands the scriptures to undermine both a partitive and a containment logic in regards to divine filling: God has not been partially poured into creation with some of God remaining elsewhere, nor has God been contained by creation. Augustine thinks that Scripture rather teaches that all of God fills all.\(^{49}\) From this Pauline statement Augustine derives his famous *ubique totus* doctrine, that all of God is everywhere.\(^{50}\) If the *humanitas* of the Son makes possible the proper human knowledge of creation, God’s presence as *ubique totus* to creation is a fundamental feature of the content of that knowledge. Only through this doctrine can one begin to grasp the absolute contingency of created being. Created being is so fundamentally dependent that it could only survive if all of God were present throughout to maintain its existence. It is this insight which opens the way for Augustine’s

\(^{48}\) Augustine notes in *De Civitate Dei* 4.9-11 and 6.7.9 that Virgil was often interpreted by Roman Christians as claiming that God is actively filling creation; however, Augustine (contra Lactantius, who more positively assessed Virgil’s understanding: see *Divine Institutes* I.3.19) argues that Virgil solved the problem by postulating polytheism. In other words, Virgil did not have the same philosophical need to retain divine unity as Christian philosophers do; thus, he saw various gods filling various parts of creation, not one God filling it all. Cf. Sabine MacCormack, *The Shadows of Poetry: Vergil in the Mind of Augustine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p33–35.

\(^{49}\) 1.3.3, te toto impleas omnia: “you fill all things with all of yourself” (my translation).

\(^{50}\) John M. Quinn, *A Companion to the Confessions of St. Augustine* (New York: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2003) and O’Donnell (Vol. 2, p22-23) for a summary of recent scholarship on this Augustinian formula that was frequently employed in his writings from AD 388-417. Augustine states that no created thing is always everywhere in 12.2.2.
particular diagnosis of his fallen condition.

Applying this insight into the radical contingency of all things to himself, Augustine acknowledges that if all created existence is dependent on the immediacy of God’s full presence, God must already be fully within him. However, he notes that human creatures experience a unique disquietude: “our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee”\textsuperscript{51} (\textit{inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te}, 1.1.1). Below it will be shown how this disquietude relates to a diminished participation in the order of creation, but in 1.5.5 Augustine focuses on it as revelatory of his need for further filling by God. This means that humanity lacks in some measure or quality the filling that the Incarnation allows one to see in creation as a whole.

Describing the human predicament in terms of a lack of that which constitutes created existence already implies something about the redeemed condition, namely that it will entail a sharing more deeply in certain features of that existence. Jared Ortiz has elucidated that Augustine later expands this opening insight in his interpretation of the Genesis creation account in Books 11-13 where creation ex nihilo is described as a threefold simultaneous act: \textit{creatio} (12.8.8), \textit{conversio} (13.2.2), \textit{formatio} (13.2.3). As Ortiz notes, this means that the conversion which will calm Augustine's restlessness is “patterned after God’s original creative act.”\textsuperscript{52} Augustine makes clear that the human experience of conversion does differ from the broader creation’s filling in that it “inebriates,”\textsuperscript{53} “intoxicates”\textsuperscript{54} or fills one “compellingly”\textsuperscript{55} (\textit{inebriare}, 1.5.5). Augustine utilizes the drunkenness metaphor in the context of a loving embrace,\textsuperscript{56} noting that such love causes one to forget all other options. Read against the backdrop of his concern with

\textsuperscript{51}\textit{Confessions}, p3.
\textsuperscript{53}Ibid., p7.
\textsuperscript{55}\textit{Confessions}, p5.
\textsuperscript{56}Similar to biblical wisdom literature: cf. Proverbs 5:19; Song of Songs 5:1.
the Creator-creature distinction, he speaks of forgetting wrong perceptions of creation as entailed in one’s ultimate good.

It should be clear at this point that Augustine does not anticipate God’s answer to this prayer for filling to result in some independent inner capacity which makes him restful in and of himself. Rather, the rest consists in the confidence of ongoing provision of assistance in recognizing the “utterly hidden and utterly present” Creator (secretissime et praesentissime, 1.3.3) amidst one’s interactions with various aspects of creation and thus of recognizing creation for what it truly is. In this form of existence rooted in proper praise, one’s nature comes to full seed as humanity is enabled by God’s wisdom, which is manifested in the created order, to not reduce the full scope of the various natures that provide support and sustenance, a reduction which occurs when one deifies or expects too much from some aspect of creation. How does one keep an awareness of one’s dependence upon the “utterly hidden and utterly present” God?

### B. Infancy Narratives: Coming to Know another as Ordered by the Triune God

Following the opening prayer, the narrative of the anonymous infant begins Confessions proper (1.6.7-1.7.12). The section opens and closes with references to creation’s order. Ancient biography and literature discussed six stages of human life (infantia, pueritia, adulescentia, juventus, grauitas, senectus), the first of which was characterized by an inability to think (cogitare), though the ability to record sense

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57 *Confessions*, p.4.

58 James Wetzel notes that it is unclear whether Augustine denies the possibility of attaining a stable self in this life or, more fully, denies the wisdom of such an attainment, opting instead for a more porous self which does not keep other creatures “on the outside”; see James Wetzel, *Augustine: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London; New York: Continuum, 2010), p12. My exploration adds nothing to Wetzel’s reflections; I only add further evidence that Augustine is persistent in his openness to creation, far more than is at times reflected in secondary research on *Confessions*.

59 Both Colin Starnes and Brian Stock note the infant’s anonymity; Starnes claims that the lack of particular detail reveals that Augustine is consciously making an argument in addition to narrating his past Starnes, *Augustine’s Conversion*, p1–32.
impressions meant they were not wholly ignorant of themselves (non ignorare). While Augustine stood in general continuity with the classical tradition in this regard, he utilizes this familiar depiction to argue that a feature of human life is the gratuitous manner in which one’s being is nurtured by and contributes to the order of the created realm. The infancy narrative progresses in two distinct scenes which will be analysed in turn below: breastfeeding and laughing/jealous crying.

In 1.6.7 the infant and mother experience a mutually beneficial relation in breastfeeding: “[my mother and nurses] willed to give to me through ordered desire what they abounded in” (dare enim mihi per ordinatum affectum volebant quo abundabant). The mother’s breasts fill as the baby’s stomach empties, and this is enjoyable to both mother and child: “it was a good to them, the good which came to me from them” (bonum erat eis bonum meum ex eis, 1.6.7). The mother experiences her existence as naturally contributing to the well-being of the child, and the child’s existence contributes to the mother as she finds joy in the fact that the specific form of her existence sustains another. The beneficent relations exist according to God’s “ordinances and riches set by You at every level of creation” (secundum institutionem tuam divitias usque ad fundum rerum dispositas, 1.6.7). All that has been ordered (ordinatum) is “from you, [God]” (ex te), which emphasizes that, “this good was not really from them but through them” (quod ex eis non sed per eas erat, 1.6.7).

Augustine utilizes the infant because he is a pre-rational being. As such, he makes clear that divine agency lies behind his experience of and participation in order. By depicting the mother and nurses as part of creation’s order, Augustine exposes the fact that even adult humans continue as infants in the sense that their ongoing existence arises from

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61 Our analysis of the breastfeeding scene closely follows Starnes’ treatment.
62 Starnes, Augustine’s Conversion, p3.
63 Confessions, p6.
God’s ordering action. Unlike infants, however, adults also cooperate with the divine agency on the plane of “ordered desire” (ordinatum affectum). That being said, in the conclusion of 1.6.7 the accent falls not on human cooperation but on God as the source of all beneficent relations with other creatures and of being itself: “for from you, O God, are all goods and it is from my God that my entire well-being comes” (ex te quippe bona omnia, deus, et ex deo meo salus mihi universa, 1.6.7). Order is thus what one who praises the true Creator is able to know about creation, because order is outside the scope of any one being’s power to initiate and requires one who is present throughout it to sustain it.

To clarify the way in which order names the theological nature of created existence requires an investigation into a common triplet that first appears in this work at 1.7.12: mode, form, order (a quo est omnis modus, formosissime, qui formas omnia et lege tua ordinas omnia). Charles Mathewes notes that mode, form, and order “is famously the structuring field for reality as a whole,” and it is helpful at this point in our analysis to pull together the scattered traces of this triplet found throughout, Book 1.

Like Plato, Augustine claims that decay/instability is endemic to all materiality which causes it to be susceptible to dispersion (1.3.3). God, however, whose very being is simple and unchangeable (1.4.4), is seen as granting a degree of stability to the world in the act of creation (1.3.3). God, who is said to be the measure of all things, who forms them (formare), and sets them in order (ordinare), brings stability by the imputation of measure, form, and order (1.7.12). Measure (modus) refers to creation ex nihilo of unformed matter, and form (forma) is the principle of individuation, describing a thing’s specific nature (species). The final act which makes created things “creation” rather than “creations” is God’s ordering it so that it reflects not dispersal but unity (conligere not

As a symphonic whole, the totality of mutually enforcing, beneficent movements in creation elevate it (*erigere* – to raise, build, excite) to God (1.3.3), meaning that the various created natures experience a measure of stability in their active interdependence upon one another. All the ways in which natures benefit one another was designed ahead of time and implanted in the creative act by means of *rationes causales* (1.6.9). While God is stable in his very nature (1.10.16), creation shares in this stability by means of order. Augustine associates the work of the Father with *modus*, the Word with *forma*, and the Spirit with *ordo*. Creation thus bears a Trinitarian stamp.

This brief rehearsal of the chief elements of Augustine’s philosophy of order at this stage makes clear that humanity cannot properly consider themselves the centre of the created order. This was Connolly’s worry – order as expressive of a “transcendental egoism”. But, as I have shown, in Augustine’s theology, seeing creation as an instrument for human consolation would be to divinize it. Augustine’s rest is in God, and accompanying this rest is the experience of creation’s order. As we have tried to show, acknowledging creation’s order rests on knowing and worshiping the God who is everywhere present within it and who thus makes the order possible. Without this awareness, which is the root of the “rest” he seeks, Augustine’s portrayal would suggest that one will inevitably seek rest in creation and will end up requiring it to satisfy one’s

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65 These descriptions of measure, form and order are in general agreement with Christian Schäfer’s summary of this triad Christian Schäfer, “Augustine on Mode, Form, and Natural Order,” *Augustinian Studies* 31 (2000): 59–77, doi:10.5840/augstudies20003111 however, my analysis of *Confessions* Book 1 takes issue with his equation of “natural order” with “hierarchical order”. Schäfer’s equation limits Augustine’s order discourse, since hierarchy is not always present in an ordered relation of various natures. The use of “hierarchy” as an abstract noun indeed arose from the same Neoplatonic tradition that Augustine found congenial to his developing view of creation; but the actual word “hierarchy” appears to be a Pseudo-Dionysian neologism (see: John Dillon and Sarah Klitenic Wear, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition* [Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007], p56). While Augustine does show a concern with submission of lower to higher natures in other works from this period (see for example his discussion of the judging power of soul over body in *De Libero Arbitrio* Books 2 and 7), in such contexts submission is presented as necessary for securing the proper nourishment for lower natures.

66 O’Donnell notes that Augustine’s notion of order differs from the connotations it acquired in medieval philosophy which envisioned a static coordination; by contrast, Augustine’s *ordo* is dynamic in that the goodness of the forms are realized in how their movements and changes benefits another (1.7.12). See O’Donnell, Vol. 2, p46-51.

67 Cf. De vera religion 36.66 where the Son is the form of all things; see also Epistle 12 to Nebridius

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desires for oneself. Both Connolly and Augustine diagnose the tendency in philosophies of order to project an arrangement of things that comfit to one’s preferences and “natural” qualities. It is precisely this selfish re-ordering of creation that Augustine’s next infancy scene depicts.

The next infancy scene in 1.6.8-1.7.11 reveals that fallen humanity not only lives as part of the created order but also acts within it in a way that either deepens its order or establishes its own novel arrangement. While Augustine’s choice to utilize infant laughter as a paradigm case of this unique human capacity seems odd to modern ears, Colin Starnes notes that it was a common place of ancient popular wisdom to observe that humans are the only animals that laugh. Laughter was thought to arise when one noted a contradiction, and such a perception implied the possession of rational capacities. In this segment of the narrative, the infant is contrasted with the mother and nurses whose desires cooperated with the divinely established created order. But now, the infant embodies the possibility of a disjunction between the human and divine wills in the medium of creation.

In direct contrast with the nourishment that arose from order in the previous section, the infant in 1.6.8 desires the subservience of the parental figure. While humanity’s fallen desires seek to render other creatures as purely servile (subditus), God’s order establishes humans as free (liber). On this account, freedom understood as enablement to live fully in accordance with one’s God-given form is observable when its various relations to other natures are maximally beneficial to oneself and them. Only when in such a web of ordered relations will the full possibilities of a given form emerge in a way that could never be anticipated by perceiving an individual form in isolation. Thus, the desire for the immediate obedience (ad nutum, 1.7.11) of another creature subverts the supportive context in which the full form of each being in the relation can be perceived.

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68Starnes, Augustine’s Conversion, p3.
69The reader familiar with the account of libido dominandi in De Civitate Dei will recognize this as more than an insignificant ‘for instance’.
and creaturely freedom realized. In harming the form of both the fallen human agent and the other natures with which it is in relation, the exercise of such desires are an attempted nihilistic undoing of God’s creative act.  

Augustine’s depiction of the infant demanding parental service implies two important aspects of the mature Augustinian anthropology, namely an account of the soul’s rationality and will. In the narrative, the infant does not desire the parent’s obedience because it perceives them to be a servant in some ontological sense; rather, the desires of the infant shape their relations. The rational capacity for Augustine does not exist apart from the will but is also not always entirely under its sway. While the will is more determinative of a person’s moral condition, rationality can function critically in relation to the will. Augustine shows that desires can be evaluated according to whether they extend the order that is the very basis of all creaturely existence or whether they act against the gift of order that makes possible the freedom of each created form. The rational capacity conducts this evaluation because it alone is capable of holding within itself a perception of the created order. However, in contrast to Augustine’s early anthropology, from his mid-career onwards he notes that rationality does not typically maintain its critical distance for long; the will either changes or the rationality drops its critical charges. The modus operandi of the soul is to function as a rational will or a desiring intellect.

As noted above, the good, or that which exists, is that which has mode, form and order. The human will’s ability to act against these essential features of created existence gives rise to Augustine’s description of sin as privation of the good. Of particular interest for our investigation is to grasp what is entailed in the privation of order (privatio ordinis).

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70 Stanley Rosenberg labels the results of the divine will “natural providence” and the results of the human will “voluntary providence” (cf. De Genesi ad Litteram 8.9.17); see “Forming the Saeculum” in Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon, eds., God’s Bounty?: The Churches and the Natural World (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK : Rochester, NY: Ecclesiastical History Society, 2010), p1–14. Confessions, however, treats the issues of the order of creation and the order of time separately.
Turning to a work written near the same time as *Confessions*, *De Natura Boni* 23 (AD 398), provides greater detail to what is entailed in the privation of order. In general, Augustine defines privation in terms of species, mode, or order which “are not adapted/accommodated to those things to which they should be adapted/accommodated, so that they may be called evil which are alien and incongruous”\(^7\) (non his rebus accommodantur quibus accommodanda sunt; ut ideo dicantur mala quia sunt aliena et incongrua). It is important to note again that Augustine’s concern here is not with the privation of hierarchy. The accent rather falls on the contrast between *accommodare* and *alienus/incongruus* which speak to the suitability, sense of belonging or fit between two or more natures.

Augustine then provides a humorous illustration of order and its privation in two scenes: a man naked in a bath in contrast to a man walking naked in public. The two contexts (bath and public) capture the creative power of an ordered environment as well as the stifling effects of a disordered one. A bath accommodates the activity of bodily cleansing by arranging all the elements in its environment to suit cleansing activities, whereas the public square is arranged to make congruous other forms of relating. If an individual nature is misplaced, their experience of their own existence as graciously provided is greatly diminished and the overall environment is harmed. Augustine closes *DNB* 23 by noting that disordered (inordinatus) conditions occur in precisely these two ways: either by the placing of a particular nature within the wrong context or by the diminishment of the order that establishes a proper context.

It is not insignificant that all of Augustine’s descriptions of disordered experience in *DNB* 23 come in adjectival form: *alienus, incongruus, inconveniens* and *inordinatus*. Latin does not possess an antonym of *ordo* in noun form, unlike English which utilizes ‘disorder’. Therefore, Latin linguistic convention more easily accommodated discussion of

\(^7\)My translation.
evil as privation of order, whereas English interpreters must use greater caution. As an example, in the highly acclaimed and often republished FJ Sheed translation (1943), he translates the one occurrence of inordinatus in Confessions with the noun “disorder” (1.12.19).72 This produces a subtle but not insignificant shift in meaning from the Latin which Starnes more accurately renders as “each disordered soul is to itself its own punishment”73 (poena sua sibi sit omnis inordinatus animus, 1.12.19), in contrast to Sheed, “every disorder of soul is its own punishment.”74 The broader context of this quote is Augustine’s discussion of how he spurned the learning of his early adolescence that would have truly benefited him in his pursuit of God. He describes himself as unfit, unequal to the context in which he was placed. He describes how his condition did not adversely influence the environment but rather only harmed his own advancement in what truly matters. Sheed’s ‘nounifying’ of inordinatus gives the impression that certain aspects of the soul can be, in and of themselves, entirely corrupted, which is a conceptual impossibility in Augustine’s privation model. By doing so, he risks severing the connection to the surrounding environment that Augustine presents as vital for understanding privatio ordinis.

In the scene of the laughing and demanding infant such privations of order occur as a result of the manner in which the human will interacts with what the divine will has created and is creating. Accompanying this movement of the will is a rational perception of creation’s order. Because creation is by definition good in mode, form and order, evil cannot arise from the will’s choice of an evil object but only from choosing good objects in an evil way. As Philip Cary remarks, “moral evil is best described with an adverb...choosing evilly.”75

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72 In addition, he utilizes “disorder” in two other contexts, though they do not translate inordinatus (13.2.2; 13.34.39).
73 Starnes, Augustine’s Conversion, p15.
74 Confessions, p14.
75 Cary, Outward Signs the Powerlessness of External Things in Augustine’s Thought.
I turn next to Augustine’s discussion of signs in his book, *On Christian Doctrine*. The infancy narratives have shown that the human will can act in accordance with or in opposition to the created order. Augustine describes how learning the right signs can enable one to live in one’s created existence that is constituted by an ordered set of relations with other natures. Proper interaction with creation is only made possible by invocation and praise of the Creator who is the source of this ordered existence, and such praise can be “spoken” and “read” in many different ways.

### C. *De Doctrina Christiana* on Performed Signs

In *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine divides reality into *signa* and *res*, signs and reality. As I have noted above, a “sacrament” is a thing that both signifies something and participates in the very thing that it signifies; it is both *signa* and *res*. I do not intend in this brief section to give an exhaustive account of Augustinian semiotics and the light it can shed on the notion of marriage as a sign, nor to interact with the numerous recent offerings in Augustinian semiotics that have enriched our understanding in ways that can be shown to have relevance to the conjugal sign. Rather, I posit the category of “performed signs” as particularly relevant to Augustine’s theology of marriage in Book 8 by noting how the various exempla in Book 8 have an analogous function to the purpose married couples might serve in a local catholic church.

There are numerous charges commonly levelled against Augustine’s view of signs. First, some claim Augustine thought that language is used because human souls cannot communicate with each other directly. Phillip Cary brings home Augustine's seeming-limited perspective here with particular force home with particular force.\(^76\) Second, others note that world (*res*) and sign (*signum*) are caught in a Platonic dyadic relation such that signs are clarified in dialectical relation to some further intelligible and thereby sacrificed.

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\(^{76}\)O’Donnell, Vol. 3, p.3.
to their intelligibility. Third, a common postmodernist critique is that he assures the coherence of signification through centering all interpretations in God, the transcendent signifier that guarantees things will make sense. Many point the following comment from Augustine as emblematic of this problem: “the truth of valid inference was not instituted by men; rather it was observed by men and set down that they might learn or teach it. For it is perpetually instituted by God in the reasonable order of things” (De Doctrina Christiana 2.32).

However, in De Doctrina Christiana 3.6.10, Augustine responds to some who were claiming that the rituals carried out by the Old Testament saints required an ignorant obedience. Because these rituals were only symbols, they claimed, the worshippers were required to perform things that, by definition, could not be understood until the coming of Christ. In response, Augustine claims that such rituals were significant not merely in the mental operation associated with them but that there was significance in their very performance. In a mysterious way, their physical embodiment participated in an order that was relevant to their time and that enacted the monotheism that other extant religions had unknowingly abandoned.

This category of “performative sign”, that Augustine only vaguely gestures towards in this context, provides a way to think about the conjugal sacrament. It also provides a link between the various exempla of Book 8 and the role that married Christians play in local catholic churches. O’Donnell notes that Book 8 is unique in that it “consists almost entirely of a series of specific recalled episodes.” And at the centre of each episode is an individual or group of individuals who undertake an action that it requires spiritual insight to perceive. What Augustine is doing in Book 8, therefore, is reading people as signs. As Sebastian Langdell has recently suggested, “For Augustine,

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reading Scripture does not mean his abandoning his reading of persons. On the contrary…the reading of persons and the reading of Scripture inform one another. After all, the actions are born of the same effort to interpret God through the signs of His creation.”

I suggest that Augustine’s own conversion narrative in Book 8 focuses largely on celibate “signs”, since this was the “way” he was called to walk. However, one can imagine a book of married “signs”. Augustine already noted the existence of such a possibility in 6.12.21, and he recounts in 9.3.5 the example of Verecundus, though only insofar as he relates to the fulfilment of Augustine’s own calling. While Augustine does not himself present such married exempla, I argue that his theology of marriage exhibited throughout Confessions provides the foundation for such sacred signs.

III. Re-created in the Ecclesia: Formatio and Reformatio in Book 13

While the emphasis of the previous section was on how Book 1 depicts ‘learning to speak’ as an analogy for exercising faith in the Incarnate Son that brings one into a restful place in God’s created order, in this section I explore the light Book 13 can shed on the significance of marriage as sacrament to Augustine’s conversion in Book 8. Though Book 13 is perhaps the richest theological section of Confessions, my investigation focuses only on this single thread running through Augustine’s exegesis of Genesis 1.1-2.2: the connection between the sacred signs of the church and one’s transformational attunement with her order.

Book 13 is Augustine’s allegorical reading of the Genesis creation narrative interpreted as the creation of the catholic church. While in the previous seventy-two chapters (spanning Books 11-12) Augustine engaged in an interpretation of Genesis 1.1-1.2a that was marked by a ponderous and seeming endless assessment of contradictory readings, he appears to break free in Book 13. He attempts nothing less than “an

allegorical exposition of the creation of the church that finds all of Scripture, from creation to apocalypse, in its first chapter.”  

I follow Robert McMahon and others who see in Augustine’s Book 13 exposition nine acts of creation that serve as a paradigm for Books 1-9. McMahon claims that each act of creation corresponds to one of the books in Books 1-9. Readers familiar with the opening Genesis narrative will recall that Yahweh proclaims his creation “good” seven times, with an emphatic “very good” on the eighth act, followed finally by the Sabbath rest. While the links between the first seven acts of creation and Augustine’s Books 1-7 requires explanation, the relevance of the eighth and ninth acts to the subject matter of Books 8-9 is more immediately recognizable. My focus here will be with unfolding the significant correspondences between Augustine’s conversion story in Book 8 and the eighth act.

In what follows, I first set the scene for Augustine’s reading of the eighth act by noting his description of the church’s order depicted in the first seven acts in Book 13, drawing from it several implications about conversion that is the subject of the eighth act. I then turn to clarify the role of sacraments in Book 13, and, finally, bring these observations about order and sacrament to Augustine’s reading of the eighth act of creation, which, in turn, reveals the significance of the conjugal sacrament in Augustine’s conversion narrative.

A. The Church’s New Creation Order in Acts One to Seven

Augustine opens Book 13 by describing creation as God’s bringing form to the chaotic waters. In light of the discussion above about the relation of forma and ordo, Augustine’s emphasis on God’s creative formation of the waters signals that the book as a
whole will be about humanity finding her proper place within God’s order. Augustine explains that God separates lower from upper waters, creating a space in between the two for creatures to exist in their own proper form. He notes that humanity is formed by gazing upon the divine Light which is the source of the order of the world (13.1.1-13.2.3).

Humans must always adhere to God, or else they move downward into the shadowy and formless deep waters of the nilhil (13.2.3.). With this focus on a space for human life, in which the human form exists in a broader created order though in a way that is always in danger of deforming, Augustine begins his description of the nine acts of creation.

The first act of creation, he notes in 13.12.13, relates to this place just mentioned between the lower and upper waters, “the heaven and earth”, claiming they are, respectively, the spiritual and carnal members of the catholic church. He attributes the form of these members to the love that comes from the Spirit in spiritual gifts and to the forming power of doctrine. Though influenced by these forming gifts of God, Augustine grieves that he continues to slip back to the deep. But he does not doubt God’s love for such as himself – he calls for fellow catholic Christians to hope in the God who alone knows who are the “children of light” (13.14.15). After associating the second act’s creation of the firmament with the divine gift of the Scriptures (13.15.16-13.16.18), Augustine describes the separation of dry land from the bitter sea (the third and fourth acts) as, respectively, the church, who has a “secret and sweet spring” (occulto et dulci fonte) that enables the bearing of fruit, and “evil men” (13.17.20-21). Augustine then portrays those with the gift of wise teaching as sunshine, those with knowledge as moon light, and those with other spiritual gifts as dimly flickering stars, which are the fifth act of creation (13.18.22-13.19.25). The sixth act, the creation of reptiles and birds, represent

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I acknowledge that Augustine’s opening comments relate to the creation of beings with only “intellectual natures” (i.e., angels), but reading these paragraphs as descriptive of human conversion is possible because humanity, for Augustine, share in the angelic intellectual nature. Augustine makes clear that he has been speaking of both the angelic and human natures in 13.8.9.
catholic ministers who go into the sinful world or fly above it with the message of God’s salvation in Christ (13.20.26-28). Finally, the seventh act, the creation of dry land animals, describes the work of catholic ministers among the baptized, who are the dry land (13.21.29-31). At the end of Book 13, in looking back over this scene of the church that looks towards the ninth act of creation, the Sabbath rest in the eschaton, Augustine notes, “this gloriously beautiful order of things that [is] very good will pass away when it has achieved it end.”

Before turning to the eighth act of creation, I make three interrelated observations about Augustine’s notion of order as seen in this vision of the new creation community, taking particular note of its relation to conversion. First, being a member of the catholic church involves participating in the creation of a social order that is somehow mysteriously related to God’s sustaining of created cosmic structures. Recent Pauline studies suggest that this is a uniquely Pauline conceptuality of the significance of what Christ is doing in the church. Augustine cites both Romans 8.23 (13.13.14) and 2 Corinthians 5.17 (13.18.22) in Book 13, though he does not cite the other Pauline mention of new creation, Galatians 6.15. While the former passages (the ones Augustine does cite) emphasize continuity between creation and new creation, the Galatians text emphasizes discontinuity. I read Augustine in Book 13 to be working on precisely this tension between continuity and discontinuity in Paul’s understanding of order. Book 8 will show that he locates the discontinuity primarily in the experience of the converting subject

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83 Confessions, p320.
84 I do not have space to detail the point here, but many recent Pauline studies have argued that the Apostle Paul presents the “new creation” as both a restoration of original structures and an unexpected subversion of established ones. For example, T. Ryan Jackson’s recent study sees in Romans 8.23 (which Augustine cites in Confessions 13.13.14) a renewal of the human ability to perceive created realities and therefore a restoration of the loss of vision that was described in Romans 1.18-32. See T. Ryan Jackson, New creation in Paul’s letters: a study of the historical and social setting of a Pauline concept (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010) chapter 7.
85 Apocalyptic readings of Paul have tended to emphasize how Galatians 6.15, when read in conjunction with Galatians 3.28, speaks of the manner in which the gospel and the eschatological reality to which it points ultimately disrupts any human account of created order, including male-female. See, for example J. Louis Martyn, “Christ and the Elements of the Cosmos,” in Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 125–40.
and not externally in the creational structures of the divine order.

Second, Augustine presents creation order as exhibiting a dynamic development that is not entirely pre-knowable. I noted with respect to the third and fourth acts – creation of land and sea – Augustine’s statement that the bitter waters are called “good” on account of how God’s order limits their wickedness (i.e., the shoreline). Augustine seems to be suggesting that those outwith the catholic church experience created order as immovable, static boundaries. By contrast, the dry land (catholic Christians) is described according to an organic metaphor of order (“fruit bearing”) sourced in a “secret and sweet spring”. Augustine does not expand upon this point, but I highlight that the organic metaphor suggests that catholic Christians experience divine order more as an unfolding and developing arrangement of things rather than as a static and fixed structure. Augustine traces the mysterious unfolding of the created order to the fact that it is sourced in a “secret and sweet spring” that is at work in the midst of the watery formlessness of humanity. Just as those who “watch” the unfolding of creation in the Genesis 1 narrative are surprised by what God’s Spirit makes from formless waters, so the church is surprised by the ongoing creativity of divine love in their midst. This means that conversion, understood as taking on a form that “fits” within the church’s order, will entail being a part of the order’s dynamic development.

Third, Augustine makes clear that the church’s order is never in his or any human’s possession. Augustine confesses that he himself, as a catholic bishop, continues to slip back to the formless deep from which the Spirit continually rescues him (13.14.15). Sinful humanity, catholic or non-catholic, cannot sustain the order of which he speaks, despite what Plato claimed about philosopher-kings. One’s conversion does not equip them to

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86James O’Donnell notes that Augustine’s “order” differs from the later medieval ideas of “order” in that the latter are more static; see his O’Donnell, Vol. 2, p47.
87Annemare Kotzé observes that “Augustine’s exposition of the third to the fifth act (13.17.20-13.19.25) is constructed around the metaphor of fruit bearing from 1 Corinthians.” See Kotzé, Augustine’s Confessions: Communicative Purpose and Audience, p191.
assert their counter-order to the disorder of the world. Further, Augustine’s admission of continual susceptibility to formlessness means that the church’s order is also not her own communal possession; that is to say, Augustine does not simply shift the Platonic philosopher-king as founder of a political order to a more communal foundation. Rather, the catholic church is that community who finds God secretly harmonizing their life together amidst their own sin and weakness.

Before moving to the eighth act of creation, I note the significance of sacramentum in Augustine’s interpretation of the first seven acts of creation. Particularly noteworthy are two occurrences of the word in acts five (13.18.23) and six (13.20.26, 28) – I treat these three mentions in turn, noting their applicability to the conjugal sacrament. The first occurrence, in paragraph 23, comes in the context of Augustine’s description of how the spiritual gifts of wisdom and knowledge, which are the unique exercise of contemplatives, are needed in order to sustain the church’s acts of mercy (feeding the hungry, providing homes, helping slaves, etc.). Augustine describes wisdom as the sunshine and knowledge as the moon light. The latter, he claims, are capable of understanding the different “sacraments” and their relationship to particular moments in salvation history. Applying this observation to the conjugal sacrament yields the following picture: marriage is a gift for this era of the church’s history, though it will fade away as part of the “night” when the full brightness of the eschaton arrives; for now, to live in marriage as a Christian requires contemplatives who understand the Scriptures to teach the church to see in this form of life the dim glimmers of divine light. The second occurrence of sacramentum comes in a similar context: just as paragraph 23 presented the sign of the sacrament as something

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88 This notion of a counter-order characterizes Eric Voegelin’s conception of the order that philosophers bring. As the editor of Voegelin’s Order and History notes in his introduction to Voegelin’s fifth and last volume of the series, “Order and History, thus, was conceived as a diagnosis of and therapy for troubled times, intended to help establish an island ‘of order in the disorder of the age.’” In this way, his philosophy of order could not be more distant from an Augustinian conception. Ellis Sandoz, “Introduction,” in The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 14–18 (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 15–26.
which belongs to the night, in paragraph 26 such signs are presented as living amidst the “sea” of human sin. Paragraph 28 then associates “the bitter sea” with the sinful humanity that flows from Adam through procreation. But in the midst of this watery formlessness, Augustine notes, the sacraments enable one to begin to grasp spiritual realities. Strikingly, Augustine closes paragraph 28 by claiming that the sacraments bring salvation, while a more direct meditation on Scripture is needed in order to reach forward to perfection. To summarize these three occurrences, Augustine holds that catholic marriage is a dimly flickering display of the divine light; it is a sacred gift that arises in a context of sin; and it is a means of conversion but has limited value in terms of sanctification.

B. The Eighth Act of Creation and the Significance of the Conjugal Sacrament in Augustine’s Conversion

Annemare Kotze notes that in the transition to the eighth act, in which humanity is created, Augustine noticeably shifts from a paraenetic to a protreptic rhetoric: “I define it as moving towards the protreptic end of the scale exactly because of the fact that the focus moves away from those in the church, back towards a not yet converted (Manichaean) audience.” So vivid is the imagined presence of Manichaean readers that O’Donnell (unfairly in my assessment) calls this section “Manichee-bashing.”

Augustine begins his treatment of the eighth act by contrasting it with the seventh: while the spiritual gifts speak about the interdependence of the church on one another, the creation of humanity points to a kind of independence that comes from grasping the truth for oneself (13.22.32). Through a discussion of Romans 12.1-2, Augustine emphatically presents catholic Christians as each having their own access to God. He notes that the command to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind,” is not a call to imitate the form of life of one’s neighbour. Such mimesis will not result in actual saving knowledge.

In the words of the Genesis text, this would be to model one’s existence “after their kind,”

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89 Kotzé, Augustine’s Confessions: Communicative Purpose and Audience, p196.
rather than after the divine image and likeness (Genesis 1.26). Only by renewing the mind
does one discover “the good, the acceptable, the perfect will of God.” There is a
significant link here to Augustine’s struggle to understand which “way” to take in Book 8.
Though he encounters numerous exempla who took different courses in life, he needed
God to speak directly to him about which way to take. Coming to this dilemma and to this
point of deeper reliance upon God for guidance and for knowledge of his own specific
route of deliverance required affirming the validity of marriage as a Christian vocation.

Another implicit affirmation of marriage comes in 13.23.33-34, when Augustine
notes that the independence of judgment that God grants does not make each catholic
Christian a judge of all others – in fact, a condition of being catholic is the humility that
refuses to engage in distinguishing the spiritales from the carnales. Though Augustine does
not develop the point in this direction, I observe that the implication with respect to the
catholic view of marriage is that the Manichaean claim that married Christians must
remain “adherents”, while celibates could become “Elect” is rooted in a prideful judgment.
In the catholic churches, “married” and “celibate” do not correspond with “carnal” and
“spiritual”. Augustine is arguing that the catholics are correct to claim that marriage is not
an indicator of spiritual immaturity.

As Augustine begins to draw to a close his lengthy exposition of passages which
relate to the eighth act of creation, spanning 13.22.32-13.34.49, he notes that the divine
declaration of “very good” relates to the harmonious arrangement of the whole (13.28.43).

In terms of the reading I have been developing in relation to Book 8, I suggest that it is the
mutuality and complementarity of the catholic vocations of marriage and celibacy that are
of utmost significance to Augustine’s ability to see God’s church as “very good”.
However, seeing the whole as “very good” requires seeing all that God has made as
“good”, including, I add, the conjugal sacrament. In 13.31.46, Augustine states that when
humans take delight in the various good things God has made, it is not they themselves
that are seeing but the Spirit of God seeing through them: “Thus whatever a man sees in the Spirit of God as good, it is not he but God who sees that it is good.” The “seeing” trope (videre) in these closing sections of the eighth act of creation (particularly in 13.28.43-13.32.47) provides a contrast with Augustine’s opening paragraphs in Book 8: “Of Your eternal life I was now certain, though I saw it in a dark manner and as through a glass.”

To see the beauty of the whole, Augustine first needed to see the dignity of the married vocation. Like Victorinus, who was “ashamed of the sacraments of the lowliness of Your Word” (8.2.4), divine illumination would entail setting aside his proud judgment, putting aside mimesis of human exempla, and affirming the light that dimly but surely emanated from the conjugal vocation. Only then could he see himself as a “good” member of the harmonious whole that was “very good”.

**Conclusion: A Comparison with Barth**

Augustine’s notion of marriage as a sacred sign implies that it is “read” as such in a community. For Augustine, this is the community of the local catholic church. I have emphasized the locality of Augustine’s church precisely because when it comes to marriage, Augustine provides scarce literary presentations of such a vocation. This was largely due to his own vocational calling as a celibate and thereby his distance from domestic life. His most vivid example of domesticity throughout *Confessions* is Monica. When Monica is mentioned, she is often presented in terms of her relation to the church community. I suggest that this implies that marriage, for Augustine, was significant on a local level. The ‘local’ function of marriage is seen in Augustine’s notion of performative signs mentioned above from *De Doctrina Christiana* 2.6.10 and in the prominence of exempla throughout *Confessions*.

In chapter one, I referred to this ‘local’ dimension of Augustine’s ecclesiology in

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91 *Confessions*, p141.
terms of a post-Hegelian intersubjectivity. I propose now to contrast the irreducible importance of marriage to the local church with Karl Barth’s comments on marriage as expressive of a proper order of male-female. In *Church Dogmatics III.4*, Barth develops a notion of an ordered relation between male and female in the context of a personalist philosophy that understands sexual difference to be a fundamental way that God unsettles and interrupts human life, setting a limit on humanity that is not of his or her own making. Similar to my understanding of Augustinian order, Barth comments on the use of the τάξις/τάγμα word groups in the New Testament, properly noting that a hierarchical relation is not part of the apostolic conception of the male-female or husband-wife relation. But Barth posits that the male-female difference is a universal experience that, by God’s command, is undeniable and interruptive. I detail this point further below, but my treatment of Augustine’s philosophy of order with respect to sexual difference suggests that the church is an essential point of epistemic access to discovering God’s ordering of this feature of human life.

Setting the issue of epistemic access to the side, it is important to note that Barth’s most decisive departure from the Augustinian marriage tradition is found in his claim that, “the marriage itself certainly cannot be created or guaranteed by what takes place between the married couple and the community.” This denial is offered in the midst of contrasting his own conception of the marital bond to the sacramental tradition. Many have noted, however, that Barth’s constructive proposal remains vague with respect to the formation of the marital bond. He consistently posits a “shadow of uncertainty” with respect to whether a given male-female couple has been conjugally united by God. For example: “They cannot control or even know the divine basis of their marriage.”

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93 Ibid., p221 [229].
94 Ibid., p201 [208].
marriage which does not in some way have to be lived out under this shadow." One notes the contrast with Augustine’s prayers and earnest searching for “certainty” in which “way” he should go in Book 8.

In the Thesis Introduction I outlined several ways in which contemporary people experience mystery in regards to the conjugal-sexual realm. Drawing on Hegel, I noted that it can come from a puzzling experience of one’s own body, from an external source such as an intersexed body or eunuch, or from the uncertainties associated with the “ons” and “offs” of romantic relations. I suggest that Barth’s treatment of the conjugal bond, because he lacks a proper ecclesial orientation, displays a fixation on this third form of mystery in a way that displaces a proper consideration of these other two forms. Such a fixation could be traced to his openness to the Schleiermachian romanticism at several places in his treatment. But, whatever its philosophical source, it risks a privatization of marriage that I found Connolly’s work to properly warn against.

I suggest in closing that Augustine’s notion of epistemic access to order coming only through the church’s life supplements Barth’s account of the order of male-female. Further, by incorporating a stronger ecclesial dimension to his account of the marriage bond, Barth would allow the intersubjectivity of the church to displace privatized judgment, which Barth himself finds incapable of reaching a resolution. In the place of a settled individualistic uncertainty, Augustine counsels a hopeful communal search that intends to celebrate the faintest traces of divine light in even the least holy and irresolute of marriages.

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95Ibid., p203 [210].


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