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Edited by Gareth B. Matthews

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On the Trinity

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Book 8

Outline

1. In the Divine Trinity, paradoxically, three persons are not greater than one. (1.1)
 2. All bodily analogies to the relationships among the persons of the Trinity mislead. (2.3)
 3. There would be no changeable goods, unless there were an unchangeable good. (3.4–5)
 4. To think of a bodily thing our mind must represent to itself something with bodily features. (4.6–7)
 5. We can represent the Virgin Mary and the Apostle Paul to our mind through a bodily image. (5.7–8)
 6. We know what a mind is because we have one. (6.9)
 7. We know there are other minds by analogical reasoning. (6.9)
 8. We can know what a *just* mind or soul is through knowledge of the form of justice. (6.9)
 9. We love God and our neighbors from the same love. (7.10–10.14)
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Preface

In this Trinity, as we have said elsewhere, those names, which are predicated relatively, the one of the other, are properly spoken of¹ as belonging to each person in particular, as Father and Son, and the Gift of both, the Holy Spirit; for the Father is not the Trinity, nor the Son the Trinity, nor

¹ Augustine here draws on his distinction between substantial predication and relative predication, which is introduced in Book 5 and discussed briefly in the Introduction above.

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the Gift the Trinity. But when they are spoken of singly with respect to themselves, then they are not spoken of as three in the plural number but as one, the Trinity itself. Thus the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God; the Father is good, the Son is good, the Holy Spirit is good; and the Father is omnipotent, the Son is omnipotent, and the Holy Spirit is omnipotent; but yet there are not three gods, nor three goods, nor three omnipotents, but one God, one good, and one omnipotent, the Trinity itself. And the same applies to everything else that may be said of them, not in relation of one to the other, but individually in respect to themselves.

These things are said essentially,² for in them to be is the same as to be great, to be good, to be wise, and whatever else is predicated of each person therein with respect to themselves or of the Trinity itself.³ And, therefore, they are called three persons or three substances, not that any diversity of essence is to be understood, but so that we may be able to answer by some one word when anyone asks three what or what three things. So great is the equality in this Trinity, that not only is the Father not greater than the Son in that which pertains to the divinity, but neither are the Father and the Son anything greater than the Holy Spirit, nor is each person singly, whichever of the three it may be, anything less than the Trinity itself.

These are the things that we have affirmed; and the more often we repeat and discuss them, then, of course, the more familiar the knowledge of them will become to us; but at the same time we also have to set some limit to our treatise. And we must supplicate God with the most devout piety, that He may open our understanding and take away the spirit of contention, in order that our mind may gaze upon the essence of the truth that is without any bulk and without any mutability. Therefore, insofar as the Creator Himself in His marvelous mercy comes to our help, let us turn our attention to these subjects, which we shall analyze in a more inward way⁴ than the preceding things, although they are the very same things. Meanwhile let us hold fast to this rule, that what has not yet become clear to our intellect may still be preserved by the firmness of our faith.⁵

² *secundum essentiam*. Given Augustine's distinction between two kinds of "proper" or non-accidental predication, namely, substantial and relative predication, what is said *secundum essentiam* is predicated substantially, rather than relationally.

³ The idea expressed here is called "the doctrine of divine simplicity." (See the Introduction under "Divine simplicity.")

⁴ *modo interiore*.

⁵ Augustine here suggests the guiding principle of his philosophical theology, *fides quaerens intellectum* ("faith in search of understanding"). Seven centuries later St. Anselm used this phrase

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Book 8

Chapter 1

(2) For we say that in this Trinity two or three persons are not greater than one alone. Our carnal perception cannot grasp this, because it only perceives, as it can, the true [or: real]⁶ things that are created, but is unable to discern the truth itself by which they have been created. If it could do so, then that very corporeal light itself would be in no way more clear than this that we have just said. For, in relation to the substance of truth, since truth alone truly is, nothing is greater unless it is more true [or: more real]. But with regard to whatever is intelligible and unchangeable, no one thing is more true than another, because all are equally and unchangeably eternal. What is called great, is great from no other source than from that by which it truly is.

Where, then, greatness itself is truth, whatever has more of greatness must necessarily have more of the truth. Therefore, whatever does not have more of the truth does not also have more of greatness. Again whatever has more of the truth is certainly more true [or: real], just as that which is greater has more of greatness; therefore, in regard to the substance of truth, that which is more true [or: real] is greater. But the Father and the Son together are not more true [or: real] than the Father singly or the Son singly. Therefore, both together are not something greater than each one by Himself alone. And because the Holy Spirit also truly is, so the Father and the Son together are not something greater than He, because they are not more true [or: more real] than He. The Father also and the Holy Spirit together do not surpass the Son in greatness, because they do not surpass Him in truth; they are not more true [or: more real]. And similarly the Son and the Holy Spirit together are something just as great as the Father alone, because they are just as truly as He is. Similarly, the Trinity itself is just as great as each one of the persons therein. For there, that is not greater which is not more true, where truth itself is greatness. Because in the essence of the truth, to be true is one and the same as to be, and to be is one and the same as to be great; therefore, to be great is one and the same as to be true. Consequently, what is there equally true, must there be also equally great.

as the subtitle for his famous *Proslogion*, in which he presents what has come to be called “the ontological argument.”

⁶ In this section Augustine’s word for “true” also means “real.”

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Chapter 2

(3) In material things this and that gold can be equally true [or: real], and yet one can be greater than the other, because here greatness is not the same as truth, and because it is one thing for it to be gold and another thing for it to be great. The same is also true with regard to the nature of the soul, for it is not called a true soul in the same respect in which it is called a great soul. For he also has a true soul who has not a great soul, since the essence of the body and the soul is not the essence of the truth itself, as the Trinity is the one, the only, the great, the true, the truthful God, Truth itself.

And if we try to think of the Trinity, insofar as He allows and grants, let no one think of any kind of contact or embrace in space or in place, as though there were three bodies, nor of any knitting together of a joint, as the fables relate of the three-bodied Geryon, but let us reject whatsoever may occur to the mind that is of such a sort as to be greater in three than in each one singly, and less in one than in two, for in this way everything corporeal is rejected. But even in spiritual things let nothing changeable that may have occurred to the mind be thought of God. For when we aspire to that height from this depth, it is a step toward no small bit of knowledge if, before we can know what God is, we can already know what He is not.⁷ For assuredly He is neither earth nor heaven, nor like earth and heaven, nor any such thing as we see in the heaven, nor any such thing as we do not see, and is perhaps in the heaven. Even if by the power of your imagination you magnify the light of the sun in your mind as much as you are able, either that it may be greater or that it may be brighter, a thousand times as much or innumerable times, yet even this is not God. Neither as the pure angels are thought of as animating heavenly bodies, changing and making use of them in accordance with the will by which they serve God, neither if all were brought together and became one – and there are thousands of thousands of them [*Daniel* 7:10; *Revelation* 5:11] – is any such thing God. Nor would it be so, even if you were to think of these same spirits without bodies, which is indeed extremely difficult for our carnal thought.

Behold and see if you can, O soul bowed down by the corruptible body [*Wisdom* 9:15] and laden by many and various kinds of earthly thoughts,

⁷ The attempt to describe God by saying what God is *not* is called in later medieval philosophy “the negative way” (*via negativa*). Moses Maimonides (1135–1204) says that even claims about God made in the affirmative mode should be understood as implicit denials. See his *Guide for the Perplexed* 1.58.

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behold, and see if you can that God is Truth. For it is written that “God is light” [*1 John* 1:5] not as these eyes see it, but as the heart sees it when it hears: “He is Truth” [*John* 14:6]. Do not ask: “What is Truth?” [*John* 18:38]. For at once the mists of bodily images and the clouds of phantasms will obstruct your view, and obscure the brightness which shone upon you at the first flash when I said “Truth.” See, remain in that first flash in which you were dazzled as it were by its brightness, when it was said to you “Truth.” Remain in it, if you can, but if you cannot, you will fall back into those wonted earthly thoughts. And what weight, pray, will finally cause you to fall back, if not the tenacity of the sinful desires that you have contracted and the errors of your earthly pilgrimage?

Chapter 3

(4) Behold, and again see if you can. Certainly you love only the good, because the earth is good by the height of its mountains, the moderate elevation of its hills, and the evenness of its fields; and good is the farm that is pleasant and fertile; and good is the house that is arranged throughout in symmetrical proportions and is spacious and bright; and good are the animals, animate bodies; and good is the mild and salubrious air; and good is the food that is pleasant and conducive to health; and good is health without pains and weariness; and good is the countenance of man with regular features, a cheerful expression, and a glowing color; and good is the soul⁸ of a friend with the sweetness of concord and the fidelity of love; and good is the just man; and good are riches because they readily assist us; and good is the heaven with its own sun, moon, and stars; and good are the angels by their holy obedience; and good is the lecture that graciously instructs and suitably admonishes the listener; and good is the poem with its measured rhythm and the seriousness of its thoughts.

Why should I add still more? This good and that good; take away this and that, and see good itself if you can; so you will see God who is good not by another good, but is the good of every good. For in all these good

⁸ Augustine’s word here is *animus*, not *anima*. Quite consistently in this work Augustine uses *anima* for the principle of life to be found in all living beings, including human beings. He uses *animus* for the rational soul, which is to be found in human beings but, Augustine thinks, not in other animals. Later on, especially in Book 10, he focuses on *mens*, the conscious human self. McKenna has chosen to translate *animus* as “soul” here in Book 8, but the reader should be aware that, as we approach Augustine’s discussion of the Problem of Other Minds in DT 8.6.9, it will become increasingly clear that it is the rational soul, or mind, that Augustine is especially interested in.

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things, either those which I have enumerated, or any others which are seen or thought, we would be unable to call one better than the other, if we judge in accordance with the truth, if the idea of good itself had not been impressed upon us, according to which we approve of something as good, and also prefer one good to another. Thus God is to be loved, not as this or that good, but as good itself. For the good of the soul that is to be sought is not that over which one flies by judging, but that to which one adheres by loving, and what is this but God?⁹ Not the good soul, nor the good angel, nor the good heaven, but the good. But perhaps what I wish to say may be grasped more readily in this manner. For example, when I hear that a soul is called good, as there are two words [i.e., “good” and “soul”], so from these words I understand two things: one by which it is a soul, the other by which it is good. And certainly the soul itself had nothing to do with making itself a soul, for at that time it was not, so that it could not bring about its own being. But I realize that an act of the will is necessary in order that it may be a good soul, not as though the soul itself were not something good by the very fact that it is a soul, for how then could it be called, and most truly called, better than the body? But it is not yet called a good soul for this reason, because an act of the will still remains to be made, by which it may become more excellent; should it neglect this, then it is justly blamed, and it is rightly said not to be a good soul.

Such a soul is different from one that has made itself good; and if the latter is deserving of praise, then the former is naturally deserving of blame for not having done so. But when it acts with this end in view and becomes a good soul, it can only reach this goal by turning towards something which itself is not. But to what else can it turn in order to become a good soul, than to the good which it loves, desires, and obtains? And if it should again turn away from it, and by the very fact of its turning away from the good does not become good, then unless that good remain in it from which it has turned away, there would be nothing to which it could again turn if it should wish to amend.

(5) There would, therefore, be no changeable goods, unless there were an unchangeable good. When you hear then of this good and that good which may not even be good in other respects, if it were possible to put aside those goods which are good by a participation in the good and see the good itself of which they are good by participation – for when you

⁹ Augustine’s reasoning here is very close to the reasoning St. Thomas uses in his “Fourth Way” to prove the existence of God (*Summa Theologiae* 1a, q2, a3).

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hear of this or that good, you also understand the good itself at the same time – if, therefore, I repeat, you could put these goods aside and perceive the good in itself, you would see God. And if you cling to Him by love, you will be at once blest. But since other things are not loved unless because they are good, let him be ashamed who is attached to them and does not love the good itself by which they are good. But if that which is also a soul, insofar as it is only a soul – insofar, therefore, as it is not yet good by its turning to the unchangeable good, but as I said, is only a soul – when the soul so pleases us that we also prefer it, when we rightly understand, to every corporeal light, it does not please us in itself, but in that art with which it was made. For there it is approved when already made, where it is seen to have been [in God’s eternal plan], when it was still to be made. This is the truth and the simple good, for it is nothing else than good itself, and on this account also the supreme good. For a good cannot be lessened or increased, unless it is a good which is good from another good.

In order to be good, therefore, the soul turns to this good to which it is also indebted for being a soul. Hence, the will then works in harmony with nature when, in order that the soul may be perfected in good, that good is loved by the will turning to it, from which that other good also comes that is not lost even by the turning away of the will. For by turning away from the supreme good, the soul ceases to be a good soul, but it does not cease to be a soul, and even as such it is already a better good than the body. The will, therefore, loses that which the will acquires. For there already was a soul that could wish to be turned to that from which it was, but there wasn’t yet a soul that could wish to be before it was. And this is our good, wherein we see whether the thing ought to have been or ought to be, insofar as we comprehend whatever ought to have been or ought to be; and wherein we see that the thing could not have been, unless it ought to have been, although at the same time we do not even comprehend in what manner it ought to have been. This good is not far from any one of us, for “In him we live and move and have our being” [*Acts 17:27*].

Chapter 4

(6) We must remain in this [good] and cling to it by love, that we may enjoy the presence of that from which we are, in the absence of which we would not be at all. For, since “we walk by faith, not by sight” [*2 Corinthians 5:7*], we certainly do not yet see God, as the same one has said, “face to face”

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[*1 Corinthians* 13:12]. Unless we love Him now, we shall never see Him. But who loves that which he does not know? For something can be known and not loved; but what I am asking is whether something can be loved that is not known? If that is impossible, then no one loves God before he knows Him. And what does it mean to love God, except to see Him and to perceive Him steadfastly with our mind? For He is not a body to be sought for with bodily eyes.

But even before we are capable of seeing and perceiving God, as He can be perceived, which is granted to the clean of heart, for “blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God” [*Matthew* 5:8], He must be loved by faith; otherwise, the heart cannot be cleansed so as to be fit and ready to see Him. For where are those three, faith, hope, and charity [*1 Corinthians* 13:13], for the building up of which in the soul all the divine books have been composed and work together, except in the soul that believes what it does not yet see, and hopes for and loves what it believes? Therefore, even He who is not known, but in whom one believes, is already loved. Care must, of course, be taken lest the mind, in believing what it does not see, picture it to itself as something which it is not, and so hope for and love that which is false. For if this is done, it will no longer be charity from a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned which, as the same Apostle says, is the end of the commandment [*1 Timothy* 1:5].

(7) When we believe in any corporeal things, of which we have heard or read but have not seen, our mind must represent them to itself as something with bodily features and forms, just as it occurs to our thoughts; now this image is either false or true; even if it is true, and this can happen very rarely, still we derive no profit from clinging to it by faith, but it is useful for some other purpose which is intimated by means of it. For who, upon reading or listening to the writings of Paul the Apostle, or of those which have been written about him, does not draw a picture in his mind of the countenance of the Apostle himself, and of all those whose names are there mentioned? And since in the large number of people to whom those writings are known, one represents the features and figures of those bodies in one way, and another in a different way, it is assuredly uncertain whose thoughts are closer to and more like the reality. But our faith is not busied there with the bodily countenance of those men, but only with the life that they led through the grace of God, and with the deeds to which that Scripture bears witness; this it is which is useful to believe, which must not be despaired of, and which must be sought.