OVERCOMING OUR EVIL

Human Nature

and

Spiritual Exercises

in Xunzi

and Augustine

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CHAPTER FIVE

Comparing Human "Natures"

REVISITING BRIDGE CONCEPTS

Bridge concepts aim to provoke accounts of widely separated figures in terms of a common set of topics that highlight particular points of similarity and difference. By creating more precise points of contact, the comparativist can provide the basis for an imaginary dialogue between the two positions thus articulated and thereby pursue more substantive investigations of the general topic the bridge concept specifies. Thus a bridge concept like "human nature" can serve to generate what might be called a *problématique* for inquiry. The process works as follows: Comparison provokes conceptual analysis of what at first seemed to be a straightforward idea such as "human nature," which in turn provokes deeper interpretive investigations on each side, which lead to articulated positions that can be seen, at least partially, to speak to each other in various ways. Sorting out the issues thus raised spurs further ethical analysis of the subtopics in question.

Most crucially in the present case, Augustine's and Xunzi's accounts of human nature are not theoretically isolated but are themselves enmeshed in larger projects of person formation. At the most general level, at least, both thinkers charge "human nature" with grave flaws and deficits, as well as important potentials. Both the deficits and the potentials, however, describe possible arcs of development, whether ascending toward the angels or sage kings, or descending into corruption and pettiness. This chapter begins to chart this motive aspect of accounts of human nature as justifications and guides for self-cultivation more explicitly, in preparation for the subsequent chapters on their proposed spiritual exercises.

To make headway with this comparison, then, we must first attend closely to the various aspects of "human nature" as a bridge concept and

thereby delve beyond the surface similarities in the views of Augustine and Xunzi to begin to grapple with the distinctive strengths and weaknesses of each figure's ethical vocabulary. Despite the facile identification of Augustine's and Xunzi's positions by Dubs in the middle of the twentieth century, the evidence adduced in chapters 3 and 4 suggests that the differences between their two accounts are quite significant.

For Augustine, the bridge concept of "human nature" correlates fairly well with his own term *natura*. According to him, human *natura* is our essential being, placing us high in the divinely ordained hierarchy of being, superior to inanimate things, plants, and animals but inferior to angels and God. This *natura* is shared by all human beings, and it is distinctive to us as a species in comparison with other types of things, each of which has its own *natura*. *Natura* includes every salient aspect of human beings, including what is distinctive to us, our rational minds, as well as what is shared with other animals: memory, habits, sensation, desires and fears, and the bodily existence that makes these things possible. In the wake of the primordial Fall, we have been justly punished with a vitiated version of our original nature, and our existence as persons, as mixtures of body, *corpus*, and soul, *anima* and *animus* (including mind, *mens*), is marked by profound deficits: a tendency toward covetous desire for earthly goods, including food, sex, companionship, praise, wealth, and power; and susceptibility to destructive habits that cement these desires into our memories in such a way that we become enslaved to a bestial and corrupt existence.

Although for Augustine our embodied existence has become a locus for the punishment of original sin, and for the repetition of sin, our mind still carries the indelible imprint of its creator. Our minds are made in the image of God, and no amount of sinning can destroy this. Our deepest desire remains fixed on God, and so we can never truly rest without full divine presence. Given this deep yearning for the divine, to the extent that we become entangled in carnal delight (i.e., the love of created things in themselves rather than as creations of God), we are inwardly at war with ourselves. For Augustine, however, this internal struggle does not map cleanly onto different psychological faculties, such as reason and emotion, or warring substances, such as light and darkness, or even aspects of human personhood like body and soul. On his account, we are composites of different substances joined in a "mixture" or "marriage" that should be loving and marked by obedience of lower to higher but is instead marked by disobedience and chaotic impulses of rebellion against just order. Perhaps surprisingly, Augustine characterizes this tendency to rebellion in terms of a structurally unified mind that speaks internal "words" involving the integrated activity of memory, understanding, and will or love. However, in

spite of its formal unity, the mind has been infected at the highest levels with a pride that divides it from God and, in a cascade of deviations, divides the mind against itself and the body from the soul.

For Xunzi, by contrast, the standard identification of *xing* 性 with "human nature" is incorrect, given my analysis of the idea as a multifaceted bridge concept. To get at Xunzi's views of human nature in a contemporary sense, one must attend not only to *xing*, "innate endowment" or "instincts," but also to *qing* 情, "disposition" and "emotion," as well as to Xunzi's separate discussions of what is unique about human beings and what is common to humans and other animals, as well as his larger accounts of psychology and moral development. Indeed, when considered in this larger context, it is clear that *xing* does not even exhaust what is common to human beings but instead focuses on what we do spontaneously and effortlessly, without thought, in contrast to all that is *wei* 偽, "artificial" or constructed in human life.

According to Xunzi, human beings have an innate endowment, the "raw material" of personhood, which is made up of sensory capacities and a responsive disposition. He construes this disposition as made up of certain positive and negative emotional tendencies, or rather he appears to conceive of emotions primarily as dispositions to feel and act in certain ways. These *qing* generate more specific desires as the sense organs discern objects and the heart/mind becomes aware of various possibilities. Our innate emotions and desires, however, are "bad" for two reasons. First, they produce awful consequences if followed without external or internal restraint. And second, they tend generally toward destructive, shortsighted selfishness (although they do include some sociable instincts as well). If dependably satisfied, they are liable to proliferate well beyond our basic needs. Except for our ability to form and follow distinctions, which seems also to underlie our metastasizing desires, human beings are no different from other animals, such as apes, who share similar appearance, sensory constitution, and responsive, desiring modes of action. According to Xunzi, our spontaneous impulses include our shared desires for food, sex, shelter, rest when tired, companionship with similar creatures, and social dominance.

The human heart/mind, however, can affect these spontaneous, instinctual processes in ways unavailable to other animals. It can examine and plan, consider possible actions and consequences, relate disparate perceptions and ideas into complex wholes, and above all learn new skills and information. All these activities can interpenetrate with our spontaneous desires in any given situation, especially through the heart/mind's ability to overrule spontaneous desires by assenting to particular aims or goals. Over time, the heart/mind can learn to remain empty, unified, and tranquil in the midst of

this active deliberation, even if at first these nascent abilities are limited and weak, and easily swayed by desires and aversions. Learning, whether correct or misguided, tends to accumulate and affect the judgments one makes and the actions one is moved to take. For Xunzi, the Confucian Way is the comprehensive object of learning, the pursuit of which will nurture these capacities into full flower.

Thus Xunzi takes *qing* and *xing*, terms that had been used before him in relatively strong ways to mark the "fundamental nature" or "essence" of a thing and its genetic trajectory of birth, growth, decline, and death, and redefines them in minimalist ways. Our *xing*, for Xunzi, is what is innate, thoughtless, and instinctive, what requires no work or delay to become so; in contrast, *wei* 偽, or "artifice," is necessary to develop the heart/mind and become truly human, to become persons in any strong sense. Our *qing* consists of evaluatively loaded dispositions to feel and act in certain ways, which in turn generate specific desires in response to particular situations. As a matter of logic, Xunzi seems to be assuming that certain potential capacities must exist in the heart/mind for it to be capable of learning complex theories about human life and the cosmos, restraining and reshaping emotion and desire, and commanding socially prescribed actions. Yet he does not ascribe these to our *xing* but to the heart/mind and to "artifice," his marker for that which takes conscious effort over time to achieve.

Xunzi and Augustine, then, differ both in the architecture and the substance of their moral anthropologies. Augustine unifies all human beings in the concept of *natura*, which he then specifies in terms of body, soul, "inner" and "outer man," and mind, each of which he analyzes in itself and in its relations to the other elements of human personhood. For Xunzi, what "makes us human" is our capacity to make distinctions, by means of the heart/mind; our innate endowment, dispositions, and desires are no different from other primates' and deserve no special respect. To become genuinely humane persons, Xunzi thinks, we must develop and rely on the educated heart/mind, and this process of development will eventually transform us from our animalistic beginnings.

The various aspects of "human nature" can have rather different theoretical valences. For both Augustine and Xunzi, accounts of our instinctive desires and aversions provide grounds for pointed criticism of some of our drives, and thereby partly define the problems and objectives for their regimes of personal formation. The powers that should be brought to bear on these drives, however, are for Xunzi at least emphatically not instinctive or spontaneous. For both thinkers, attention to human desires pushes us beyond a consideration of "human nature" alone, toward a broader account of moral

psychology and even moral anthropology. Much of the rest of this chapter comparatively develops various themes in this area, examining topics such as desire, emotion, habit, and will, in preparation for the subsequent analysis of their proposed spiritual exercises.

Both thinkers' assessments of what is common to all human beings, as well as what is distinctive to us as a species, help develop the substance of their moral anthropologies. These accounts of commonality and distinction also serve to place human beings in a broader religious cosmos. Contrary to readings of Augustine and Xunzi as pessimistic, both these thinkers give humans rather lofty stations in the broader ecology of existence. Strikingly, both place us in what could be called penultimate positions: inferior and subject to the greatest beings (angels and God, for Augustine) or powers (Heaven and Earth, for Xunzi), but superior to everything else in the universe. Their distinctive cosmologies help provide the tenor or color of their pictures of personal formation. (These themes are developed in greater detail in chapters 6 and 7.) For Augustine, we must take care to do all we can to ascend toward divinity, reversing the fall "downward," using lower beings only insofar as they contribute to this process, and cultivating grateful obedience, humble dependence on Christ, and active, joyful service. By such means we may eventually return to our true home and true rest, in effect leaving our current station and ascending to a more stable and blessed angelic position (*corrept.* 10.27). For Xunzi, we are to actively administrate the existence of all living things, especially ourselves, like good and capable ministers serving their lord. Xunzi explicitly warns us not to try to ascend in the cosmic hierarchy but to come to dwell happily and well in our current, inevitable station, which can be made splendid and beautiful, or wretched and chaotic, depending on the character of shared human activity. Eternal beatitude beckons Augustine; Xunzi dreams of the beautiful order of the Way prevailing completely under Heaven. Both figures are concerned to inspire their audiences toward dramatically better possibilities that can and will be achieved, if their proposals are followed.[1]

Last, both thinkers chart courses of "natural" development in order to warn us away from predictable doom; both decry the social chaos, war, and human degradation that uncorrected human action is prone to foment, and Augustine points as well to damnation as the final, just result of these evils for the individual souls that pursue them. This fourth aspect of the bridge concept serves to articulate more fully the dangerous consequences of human sinfulness, to use Augustinian language. At the micro level of individual formation, however, this developmental dimension serves to condition each figure's account of spiritual exercises by articulating various dangers

and weaknesses that must be avoided or corrected over time if a person is to become virtuous.

Let us turn now to develop some of the deeper issues implied by both thinkers' moral anthropologies, through more precise comparisons of particular issues.

COMPARATIVE MORAL PSYCHOLOGY: THEMES FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The mind (i.e., *mens* for Augustine, *xin* 心 for Xunzi) is for both our subjects the unified center of thought and feeling. Both use imagery of rulership to describe the mind's role within the person, although for Augustine this metaphor is double-edged: The human mind is in the midst of a chain of command, subject to God, its rightful lord. Trying to command oneself apart from God is one of Augustine's paradigms for sin. Thus for Augustine obedience to God is essential to the mind's proper functioning, whereas for Xunzi there is no such requirement, although we can only learn to feel and think wisely through inculcation into the practices of the Confucian Way. (Their differing senses of appropriate "subjection" or dependence are examined more carefully in chapter 8.) For Xunzi, the mind is always capable of ruling the body, although its abilities to analyze, reflect, and judge need significant development to have any positive effect on our existence. We might say that for Augustine the fallen mind is fundamentally weakened, out of joint with reality, its view of the truth congenitally but not totally obscured, and it needs surgery and a convalescent period to come to understand and love the truth. For Xunzi, by contrast, the mind's capacities are at risk because of the general direction and tenor of our innate impulses, but it carries undamaged potential and suffers no fundamental epistemological deficits other than complete ignorance. For Xunzi, truly dangerous obscuration of the heart/mind is the result of miseducation, misplaced conviction, and the often natural development of vicious customs or habits.

The unity of the different aspects of the mind is a striking feature of both their accounts, although how exactly they analyze the various powers and activities of the mind varies. (I pursue this theme most fully in chapter 8 by developing an account of the two figures' distinctive versions of "chastened intellectualism" in moral anthropology; I lay some of the groundwork for that account here.) For Xunzi, the mind can be—and must develop its capacities to be—empty, unified, and tranquil, and it can make and observe numerous distinctions with increasing precision. By this he means that we are and remain open to new experience, and yet can store memories of past

ideas and observations without disrupting our ongoing openness; we can learn to relate our ideas, impressions, and memories together into a whole without losing sight of particular ones, and "unify" or focus our attention on particular objects, thoughts, and goals; we can learn to remain unperturbed and alert in the process of living, acting, and thinking; and we can make subtle distinctions and judgments between phenomena, especially concerning human social life, and act on those judgments. For his part, Augustine analyzes the mind as a single immaterial substance that remembers, understands, and loves, and he explicates this by means of the metaphor of the mind as a person within oneself, with an "inner ear," "inner eye," and "inner mouth" that hear, see, and speak inner words that precede normal language and action. Our interior perception can gradually become strong enough to contemplate and love eternal truths; but in the unregenerate state, such "divine light" appears so strong that it is painful to us, and we would turn away from it without help to withstand the shock.

To fill out these general pictures, and to articulate specific points of agreement and disagreement between Augustine and Xunzi, I turn now to a sequence of anthropological and psychological themes that have been broached in chapters 3 and 4 but that need to be developed further in tandem. These themes are (1) desire, (2) the complex relations of emotions and dispositions as a first assay of the topic of "the will," (3) the powers and debilities of memory and habit, and (4) the idea of assent or consent as a second approach to willing.

Desire

Both Xunzi and Augustine conceive of desire as a fundamental aspect of human motivation, and thus they see desire as in large part defining the field of what is problematic in human life—why do we desire wrongly, and how might we come fully to desire what is good? Thus for both thinkers, the human tendency to desire merely apparent rather than real goods is a deep-seated ethical difficulty.[2]

Despite their relatively similar lists of what our typical desires include, however, profound differences appear in the two thinkers' general analyses of desire. Augustine links his psychology of desire at its deepest levels to the metaphysical hierarchy ordained by God, and to humanity's defection from this just and beautiful order. For Augustine, desire always has a "vertical" dimension—up toward God or down away from Him—which corresponds to a fundamental formal difference between expansive desires (*caritas*) to share in universally present, unchanging goods like God, and constrictive, covetous desires (*cupiditas, libido*) to hold and possess earthly goods in a private manner for one's own enjoyment. Almost all our damaged "natural"

desires fall into this category for Augustine, although our deepest natural desire is still for rest in God.

For Xunzi, in contrast, there is no categorical contrast between types or forms of desire. Human desires aim at real goods, in the sense that the objects desired are not intrinsically evil; but these goods may or may not be properly ordered within the highest good, which for Xunzi consists of following the human Way. For Xunzi, then, impulses to action can be consonant with the Way or disruptive of it, but the fundamental structure of desire (judgment of lack, felt yearning, and frustration or satisfaction) remains the same regardless of the object of desire. Though Xunzi does distinguish between good and bad desires, he does not conceive of this distinction in terms of an absolute contrast between opposing orientations to good and evil. Tempting alternatives to the Way are skewed and incomplete, according to Xunzi, and will therefore lead us astray, but they are not thereby fundamentally opposed to the goodness of the Way.

The first thing to note here is the centrality of metaphysics to each figure's account. For Augustine, not only is God the ultimate object of desire; God's perfection essentially includes eternal constancy. In contrast, created things, although intrinsically good and testifying through their measure, form, and order to the goodness of their maker, are subject to change, including decay and destruction. This seems to be a necessary condition of Augustine's judgment that created things can never make us happy and thus cannot serve as fit objects for our strongest desire. When we misdirect our longing this way, we will be stalked by anxiety, born from the threat of loss; this anxiety will inevitably give way to despair as the people and things we love covetously (i.e., with *cupiditas*) fail or desert us (e.g., *en. Ps.* 83.3, *conf.* 4.4.9ff.).

God, by contrast, will never fail us. God gives us *caritas*, the passion for what is divine, which we yearn to participate in and serve. Although *caritas* can issue in fear of and sorrow over evils, it will never take the form of anxiety. Sorrow is still compatible with appropriate religious hope, but anxiety is incompatible with human happiness, which must in its final fullness be peacefully and surely at rest in God.[3] To sum up, according to Augustine, human desire tends to deify its objects in the hopes that they might fulfill our longings for beatitude; but this passionate projection makes idols out of things and people, and it tempts us to sin to defend the unstable illusions of happiness to which we cling.

It is illuminating to compare this account with Xunzi's view of the relation of the Confucian Way to the various goods we desire. For Xunzi, in contrast to Augustine,[4] the human Way is a way *only* within and through the world, which orders and maximizes its beauty and productivity. This can be

achieved by giving beautiful form and proper order (*wenli* 文理) to human social life, especially by means of Confucian ritual in Xunzi's broad sense of the term. This makes sense as a model for human life because Xunzi thinks there is no hope of eternal beatitude in Augustine's sense; he does not even entertain the possibility of such a state. Instead of sharing Augustine's Neoplatonic metaphysics, Xunzi sees the cosmos as governed by temporal patterns of cyclical change, such as day and night, the cycles of the moon, the seasons, and the motions of the stars and planets.

Such changes are not absolutely invariant and stable (e.g., eclipses and droughts occur), but they are generally regular and recurring. The Way utilizes and relies on these patterns to achieve its glorious effects. (These themes are all developed in greater detail in chapter 6.) So though people and things pass away, we know that others will take their place, and that others will take our place eventually as family lineages and religious traditions continue across human generations. Eternal rest is not a possibility in such a view, and so the satisfaction and subsequent renewal of desire can never be stripped of their rhythmic, cyclical character. There can be no higher happiness than enacting the Way fully over time, for Xunzi; for him, the highest good is an ongoing performance, not a final end.

Xunzi thinks we all possess impatient instinctive desires for food, beautiful things, and sex, among other things, and one of the chief tasks of Confucian self-cultivation is to reshape these desires over time. This requires restraint, on the one hand, but also a development of a stronger taste for the beauties of the Way, on the other. When these new desires are awakened and strengthened by Confucian training and experience, the beauty and justice of the proper means for securing satisfaction will heighten our pleasures.

For Xunzi, then, sensory pleasure is an unalloyed good, and he thinks one of the prime features of his Confucian Way is that it provides so much satisfaction for so many, not only the wealthy and powerful but also the poor and defenseless (although he thinks these groups' pleasures will be, and should be, decidedly unequal). For Augustine, in contrast, the pleasure that comes with the satisfaction of desire is almost always a trap, an entanglement in carnality that binds us to earthly goods and pulls us "down," away from God. The only safe delights are the joys to be found in the service and worship of God; but while these are at times profound and intense, in this life they apparently cannot completely overwhelm the competing pull of carnal delights, even in fully committed and practicing Christians. Thus Augustine is extremely interested in the regulation of "natural" desires like hunger and sexual libido, and he wants as much as possible to minimize them; whereas for Xunzi, such desires need to be shaped and ordered so that they may be

satisfied in beautiful, religiously meaningful, and socially constructive ways. Xunzi thinks trying to eliminate or even minimize such desires is foolish, because he judges such a project to be impossible (22/111/4–6); we need to redirect such desires, not try to extinguish them.

Augustine might query Xunzi about anxiety and fear—how could any sage be free of such things? No matter how thoroughly the Way prevailed at a given moment, as for example in the heyday of the revered Zhou Dynasty, the social instantiation of the Way could eventually decay and lapse, as Xunzi agrees it had lapsed during his own time. Of course, such things can happen, Xunzi could reply, but the only solution is to reinvigorate the Way itself; if you have wandered off the path and become lost, you must simply return to the correct path. Such vicissitudes are horrible, and we should strive to avoid them, but one's faith must be in the Way itself and its proven potency. More specifically, Xunzi could distinguish between, on the one hand, the debilitating anxiety and fear felt by "petty" people who are ignorant of the Way and know all too well the dangers they face from others who might hurt or steal from them; and on the other, the wise but not complacent vigilance of the sage who knows the limits of his own life and powers, and the endlessly recurring difficulties engendered by the unfortunate character of untutored human instincts. Of course, a wise follower of the Way may suffer greatly as he struggles to establish the Way in a corrupt age; but such suffering is more akin to Augustinian sorrow over evil than to the anxiety and despair provoked by covetous love for people and things. A Xunzian "noble man" will remain assured that he is on the right path, even if it becomes clear that he must die an early or painful death.[5]

So we can say that Augustine and Xunzi disagree about something quite important: Does the fact that we, like all people and things, are subject to change lead to dissatisfactions and anxieties so fundamental that nothing deserving the name of happiness can be found in human life as we know it, which at best is only a foretaste of an ultimate, indestructible happiness?[6] Xunzi and Augustine agree that what might be called normal anxiety and fear drive us to religious solutions to our problematic ways of living; they disagree about the extent to which such fears and anxieties can be ameliorated here on Earth. For Xunzi, we are inevitably vulnerable to misrule and social chaos, but we can protect ourselves and each other from many varieties of bad luck through careful planning and foresight. However, this vulnerability, precisely because it is inevitable, can and must be accommodated within a flourishing human life by means of such things as both wise government and the Confucian death rituals (to be analyzed in the next chapter). Augustine agrees that we remain vulnerable in this life; but ironically, because of his

religious hope for a revolutionary end to this vulnerability, his account of our predicament becomes all the more radical in its assessment of our misdirected and idolatrous desires.

Emotions, Dispositions, and the Will

Xunzi and Augustine both stress the critical importance to the religious and moral life of having correct emotions. Normatively, both reject as inadequate merely correct beliefs without the right feelings and desires. Descriptively, the question is more complex. Xunzi seems to think most aspiring Confucians will have beliefs that come closer to the truth than do their desires, although both will approach greater adequacy together over time. On my reading, Augustine ties beliefs and desires quite closely together, in complex ways, given his views of the unity of the *mens*; like Xunzi, however, he thinks beliefs and desires grow together toward the truth, if they do so at all.[7]

Strikingly, Augustine and Xunzi share numerous important ideas about emotions. Both provide accounts of the emotions that stress their cognitive character, and specifically the importance of interpretation to the generation of feelings. Furthermore, both Xunzi and Augustine link emotion and desire together as analytically separable aspects of a single system of human motivation and action, although exactly how they parse the parts of this system varies.

For Augustine, the four classical emotions (desire, joy, fear, and grief) are forms of love, and thus will. These emotions are "movements of the soul" and even *voluntates* or "wills," which are each intrinsically integrated with the other aspects of the internal "word" that constitutes them, that is, with memory and thought. Thus the emotions themselves, for Augustine, could be considered desires, because they are the intentional "movements" of the soul toward or away from various objects. The entire account centers on the quality and direction of our loves. These movements must be called cognitive, in contemporary terms, because they exist in the form of "internal words" that are by nature discursive, describing and responding to situations and objects in linguistic terms.

For his part, Xunzi understands emotions primarily as dispositions to feel, desire, and act in certain ways, depending on circumstances. Desires gain their force spontaneously, but human action is always a complex process involving interpretations of circumstances based on whatever theories an actor holds true, and sometimes even on conscious assent to particular goals. Xunzi makes it clear that there is an element of interpretation even in cases of apparently spontaneous desires and feelings, because the heart/mind must first identify an object as something in particular (e.g.,

a bear rather than a bush), and apparently also make a judgment about the relation of the object to oneself (e.g., we are in the woods, not a zoo, and that bear is 10 yards away from me), in order to feel fear and desire to run (22/111/14–15). Such cognitive content is also obviously present in cases of conscious assent to discursively articulated goals.

As discussed in chapter 3, it is odd that Xunzi uses only one word, *qing* 情, for both emotion and disposition; indeed, the idea of emotion is relatively submerged even here, because the accent most often seems to fall on steady patterns of responsiveness. This terminology leads Xunzi to interpret human emotional life largely in terms of how it affects the long-term process of personal reformation: as I argue in chapter 6, Xunzi focuses not on desire per se as the object that spiritual exercises are supposed to change, but on *qing*, our relatively stable but still plastic dispositions to feel and act. He seems, then—despite his clear separation of habitual, relatively stable disposition from particular response at a given moment—to have left what we think of as emotions (particular feelings in response to particular situations) in a theoretical netherworld, doubling the position of specific, object-directed desires that are "the responses of the *qing*" (22/111/14–15). Perhaps we should think of Xunzian emotions as more generalized responses to situations (I fear that the bear will hurt me), and of desires as more specific (I want to run away from the bear and seek cover over there).

In his works, Augustine makes explicit the connection—or rather identity—between emotion, love, and *voluntas*, which shows that proper emotions and desires are essential to righteousness, from his point of view. This identification also shows that his account of love must be the central element of any contemporary account of his views of "the will." However, his use of two interchangeable groups of terms (*voluntas* and the various terms for love, e.g., *amor*, *caritas*, and *cupiditas*) for *both* dispositions *and* particular emotions/desires has far-reaching effects in his account of spiritual exercises and his caution regarding the very idea of virtue. (I develop these ideas further in chapters 7 and 8.)

Xunzi more clearly distinguishes disposition and desire, while remaining somewhat murky on emotions. This allows him to articulate clearly how over time spiritual exercises transform our dispositions, which in turn lead us to spontaneously desire different things. In other words, Xunzi's terminology makes it easier for him to develop a sort of virtue theory and to give a nuanced account of how religious practices both respond to what we already feel and desire but also slowly change us in what are ultimately very dramatic ways, so that we come to desire and pursue different, higher goods.

Augustine is not being sloppy, however. He has what he judges to be the most serious reasons for his worries about previous understandings of

virtue as an ethical concept, which lead him to articulate human progress in righteousness not in terms of correct knowledge alone, or increasingly secure dispositions to act well, but rather in terms of a physics of increasingly ordered and powerful love that depends on God, not self. (I discuss Augustine's attempt to respond to the ambiguities of the pursuit of virtue more fully in chapters 7 and 8.) To begin to see why he thinks such a theoretical maneuver is necessary, we must examine his account of memory and his strikingly negative assessment of habit.

Memory, Habit, Sin

Augustine makes considerably more of memory than does Xunzi. For Augustine, the vast inner expanses of our memories are in some sense ourselves, and they provide the field for reflection and much of our personal reformation. Memory holds not just old thoughts and sense impressions, according to Augustine, but also skills and (most important) habits, which continue to weigh us down even after baptism. Xunzi, in contrast, sees memory as a relatively unproblematic aspect of the mind, worthy of mention but no serious analysis; he appears to conceive of memory as a storehouse or library that can be consulted when we wish to recall particular bits of information (21/104/1), although he does not develop this image. According to Xunzi, while we can become *bi* 蔽, "obsessed" (literally "obscured"), by partially true doctrines or particular goals, hopes, or fears, this seems to be a problem of understanding and attentiveness as much as a failure of "emptiness" or the openness to new impressions in memory. Once obsession is resolved, for Xunzi, it is apparently gone; but for Augustine, the momentum of past sins continues to trouble us even after we have repudiated them and tried for years to eradicate their aftereffects.

This sketch is perhaps unfair to Xunzi. His account of obsession hinges on the idea that people become partly aware of the truth, become unduly attached to what they have learned and experienced, and thereby become blinded to the complexity of reality. We love what we have learned from our own experience, and we become resentful of anyone who might question whether we fully understand things (21/102/5–10). Xunzi is here underlining the difficulty of truly coming to understand and grasp the Way, which cannot be articulated in simple formulas or an invariable ranking of various criteria for judgment.[8] Life is complicated, and it is not easy to become wise. Not surprisingly, for Xunzi, we are prone to overestimate our own moral attainment and understanding, and we resist those who could be our teachers. There are at least hints here of an account of self-justification and defensiveness as a deep moral problem, making us prone to failure when we do not systematically engage in study of what is in fact the right Way; if

we pursue some merely partial and thus wrong way intensively, we will be all too certain that we are becoming wiser and better, even as we wander further away from the right path. Intellectual patterns are habit forming, and we should take the utmost care to pursue the right patterns, those that continue to open us up to correction from reality in all its complexity.

From an Augustinian point of view, however, this account of moral failure is still too shallow: It rests on a simplistic and truncated account of memory, and it underestimates the scope of the negative effects of habit in our present fallen condition. Most strikingly, Augustine would question whether we are the sovereign masters of a flawless but essentially passive memory. For him, we cannot always easily recall whatever we might wish to recall; but even more alarmingly, we cannot forget what we might wish to forget: illicit pleasures and the taste for sin they have groomed. Our memory "whispers" to us against our better judgment, tempting us with possibilities we would prefer to reject: Augustine as bishop famously confesses that in dreams he still gives in to such temptations (*conf.* 8.11.27, 10.30.41). Even the most righteous have much to regret, according to him, because of the stringent inwardness of his ethic of desire—even to lust is a sin, whether or not one succeeds in satisfying such a lust outwardly.[9] So for Augustine, past sins present an ongoing problem, one that can be attenuated but not completely resolved until death.

The primary engine of this ongoing difficulty is of course habit, as discussed in chapter 4. According to Augustine, when lusts are satisfied in action, they bring a deceptive pleasure that chains us to particular sins, so that even after the pleasure diminishes, as it will with repetition, we can no longer avoid the illicit act in question. As John G. Prendiville has shown in his exhaustive survey of Augustine's views of habit, Augustine relentlessly focuses on the power of habit formation for evil.[10] Sinful habits become chains so strong that only God can break them, but what virtuous habits we develop are fragile, liable at any moment to slippage and collapse without incessant divine support. Our virtues are gifts from God, and "perseverance to the end" is a further gift, which all believers need to secure the continuation of such virtues (*conf.* 10.32.48, *civ. Dei* 19.27, *correpт.* 9.24, *persev.* 17.42, 45–46).

This theorization of habit allows Augustine to delve deeply into various aspects of our resistance to moral goodness, in ways that Xunzi never even approaches. But it comes at a high price. Augustine has portrayed habit—the most obvious tool for conceiving of virtue as a disposition to think, feel, and act rightly—as a paradigmatic aspect of human sinfulness. Nor is this a theoretical tic that might be corrected without repercussions. Augustine conceives of habit this way because of his account of lust (in the broad sense

of all covetous desire) and what he sees as the unique power of pleasure to mold us toward vice.

Xunzi, for his part, seems to think it likely that if whole groups of people fail to follow the Way but instead seek directly to satisfy their instinctive desires, they will generate and follow "chaotic customs." This is "the petty redoubling the petty," with each person's heart/mind operating as thoughtlessly as his or her stomach, to disastrous social and moral effect (4/15/14–17). Xunzi, like Augustine, sees the possibility of habitual vice deepening our bad instincts into real depravity; but in contrast to Augustine, he does not appear to think that there is an asymmetry of habit formation in favor of vice, even though this might seem to follow from his account of our spontaneous desires. As I show in the next chapter, Xunzi focuses with remarkable consistency on the power of habit formation for good, as in his account of the "accumulation" of goodness through repetitive Confucian practice. He recognizes the possibility of "deviant" and "chaotic" customs, but he is not unduly troubled by them or the vices they generate. Such things can generally be restrained and even reformed by good government, he thinks, except when people's habits have been truly hardened over many years. Human motivation is more pliable, for Xunzi, for good and for ill.

So Augustine and Xunzi again differ about quite significant issues. Though both agree that many of our spontaneous, innate desires misdirect us, Augustine thinks such desires are uniquely habit forming and thus powerful and dangerous. Xunzi disagrees, thinking that our desires can follow numerous different channels, and that habituation can occur in many directions, to quite various moral results. For Augustine, in our fallen state we are innately prone to vice, and we find it particularly difficult to escape its clutches even with sustained effort and divine aid; whereas for Xunzi, we are merely susceptible to vice, given the general tenor of our instincts. It is certainly hard and painful to retrain ourselves and our tastes, according to Xunzi, but it can be done.

As we shall see in the following three chapters, Xunzi thinks that dependable self-mastery is difficult to achieve but eventually attainable, and he may even believe in the possibility of perfect, sagely virtue. Augustine, however, thinks self-mastery is a mirage, a subtle trap set by pride. Sin's continuing vigor, reaching out of our past via memory to seduce our present and destroy our future, is an ongoing source of dismay and anxiety for Augustine. The only solution, he thinks, is to trust in God's mercy (*conf.* 10.32.48).

The Will Once More: Assent, Consent, and Dissent

Both Augustine and Xunzi attend carefully to our conscious assent and dissent from particular courses of action. Such decisive responses to the world

seem to be essential to the idea of having a will, and to pursuing purposes or ideals, as distinct from mere satisfaction. Xunzi isolates *ke* 可, "assent," as a characteristic and important activity of the heart/mind, and in the course of his treatment it becomes clear that he views this as one of the crucial human powers making human reformation possible. Augustine does not build such an operation into his mature structural account of the mind in *On the Trinity*, but very early he develops an account of sinful willing in terms of suggestion, delight, and consent that he struggles to integrate with his later account of the unified *mens*. This section of the chapter explores the similarities and differences between Augustine's and Xunzi's views of consent and attempts to identify the relative strengths and weaknesses in their positions.

Xunzi's account is simpler, and so I treat it here first. As noted in chapter 3, Xunzi thinks all people, even the uncultivated, will do what they *ke*, "accept" or "assent to," even when their existing desires point in another direction. Assent seems to be a natural human power for Xunzi, not something that might fail on occasion because of the strength of our desires; when desire and assent conflict, assent just trumps desires, according to Xunzi, and we suffer deprivation willingly (22/111/6, 20). On the face of it, such a position seems blind to common human experiences of "weakness of will" and internal conflict and indecision. But Xunzi is aware of such problems. He clearly believes that many people simply assent to seeking what they desire, and that all people start out this way. Only experienced difficulties can prompt us to question ourselves and our desires, and only the conscious articulation of our difficulties can open the logical possibility of overriding our desires. Because our desires do not cease to clamor for attention, on Xunzi's view, we only dissent from following them if we are convinced that they will lead us into relatively greater trouble and suffering—or in other words, we dissent from them when we believe they are dangerous. This does make sense; even the vicious can usually control themselves when they think their life or some other important interest is at stake. Such a judgment of personal danger provides some foothold, Xunzi thinks, for people to judge actions to be wrong, at least in the most limited, prudential sense. How Xunzi thinks such a limited sense of morality may grow into full-fledged commitment to the Confucian Way is the subject of chapter 6.

But even this sketch raises important questions. In essence, Xunzi has moved some of the problems to a new location. When, on his view, are we really convinced by the rightness of various principles or ideals? Might we be uncertain or confused, and how should we remedy this? Could we forget our convictions by not attending to them, and default to acting on spontaneous desires? One might also ask, with Augustine, if desires could tempt

us to betray even our settled convictions. Xunzi is not very articulate here, but he at least implies that these are real problems simply by virtue of his insistence on personal reformation: We need to reform our *qing* in order to reshape our desires, because we cannot depend on assenting repeatedly to what we do not desire. More specifically, he seems to think that disordered desires "pull" and "tilt" our perceptions so that we become grossly insensitive to important countervailing considerations, and so we blithely assent to actions that a clear-eyed observer would quickly reject (21/105/5–8). The need to transform our dispositions, and thereby our whole experience as perceiving, desiring beings, at least saves Xunzi from the charge of blindness to the difficulty of our predicament. But it does reveal him to be a sort of intellectualist in his account of morality and personal formation, in the sense that right understanding is the key to successfully transforming our feelings and desires. Assent, for Xunzi, is a matter of correctly recognizing and interpreting the morally compelling features of a situation, so that we correctly grasp what is at stake and thereby know what we *must* do; in Xunzi's vocabulary, *suo ke* 所可 means both "what we assent to" and "what [we think] is possible." Xunzi's challenge, then, is to account for our motivation to begin to learn, and to continue learning, about the Way, and to explain how such learning relates to the transformation of our dispositions and to the development of our heart/mind's abilities. For Augustine, of course, this is no problem at all: God calls whom He will, initiating and sustaining redemption in every member of the elect.

Augustine's analysis of consent is more complicated and occurs on multiple fronts. He develops his analysis of sinful willing in terms of suggestion, delight, and consent (*suggestio*, *delectatio*, *consensio*) as part of his exegesis of the story of Adam and Eve, beginning as early as 389 in his first commentary on Genesis (*Gn. adv. Man.* 2.14.20–21).[11] On this account, all sin begins with a suggestion, whether through sensation or memory, of some illicit possibility; this is akin to the serpent's whispering to Eve in the garden. Augustine gives the example of seeing delicious food during a fast. Next, we spontaneously delight in the prospect of the suggestion, for example, relishing the thought of eating the food before us. This is akin to Eve in fact being seduced by the serpent, so that she delights in what he proposes, and in her allegorical role as stand-in for carnal appetite, she actually eats the forbidden fruit. Last and most crucially, for sin to be "complete," we must consciously consent to the illicit prospect before us. In the example, this would be a conscious decision to break our fast wrongly and eat the food before us; the Genesis parallel is Adam choosing, even though "not seduced" as was Eve, to join her in eating the forbidden fruit. Such consent is itself sinful, even if our bad intentions are never realized in action (*s. Dom. mon.* 1.12.34).

This picture is fundamentally an account of temptation, but it captures broader issues in Augustine's vision of human motivation and action. Most notably, it highlights the spontaneity and centrality of delight in the operations of the will: Our *voluntas* is the collection of our loves, and our loves are movements of yearning toward various objects that delight us. Delight and yearning are two alternate descriptions of the same experience. As Augustine says, "A love that strains after the possession of the loved object is desire; and the love that possesses and enjoys that object is joy" (*civ. Dei* 14.7). Various possibilities attract us according to the character and orientation of our loves, and we long to "possess and enjoy" what delights us.

Let us try to coordinate this schema of suggestion, delight, and consent with the account given in chapter 4 of Augustine's psychology, especially as articulated most fully in *On the Trinity*. "Suggestion" correlates fairly easily with the discussion of sensation and memory in the "outer man" in book 11, both of which provide objects for our awareness, although even here Augustine wants to insist on the centrality of our *voluntas* in both picking out and remaining attentive to various possible objects of attention (*Trin.* 11.1–16, 15). The trouble begins with the differentiation of delight and consent. It appears that to capture the motive force of love, and thus *voluntas*, we must assimilate *delectatio* or "delight" to Augustine's various words for love and desire (*amor*, *diligo*, *caritas*, *cupiditas*, *libido*, *desiderium*, etc.). Given the account of the psyche developed in *On the Trinity*, such strong feelings take the form of "internal words" that we speak to ourselves as if reporting on our environment: This ongoing flow of words is the discursive structure of consciousness, according to Augustine. But how then are we to differentiate words spoken to articulate recognition of some delightful object from words spoken in judgment of that delight?

The problem is sharpened by the crucial passage from *City of God* that identifies emotion with *voluntas*. Augustine writes:

> Certainly the will is involved in all [emotions]; in fact they are all nothing other than wills (*voluntates*). For what is desire or joy but a will in agreement (*in . . . consensionem*) with what we wish for? And what is fear or grief but a will in disagreement with what we reject? . . . And in general, as a man's will is attracted or repelled in accordance with the varied character of different things that are pursued or shunned, so it changes and turns into feelings (*affectus*) of various kinds. (*civ. Dei* 14.6)[12]

The Latin generally translated as "consent" is *consensio* (verb form: *consentio*, *consentire*), here rendered quite properly as "agreement," the word's principal meaning. Augustine is saying, in other words, that emotions just are *voluntates* or "wills" consenting to or dissenting from particular objects,

that is, "in agreement" or "disagreement" with them. So it appears that *delight itself* is a form of spontaneously given consent or agreement, for Augustine, which muddies the waters as fully as possible.

What are we to make of this? At the very least, it appears that Augustine wants and needs to be able to separate out the spontaneous and involuntary *consensio* that constitutes our emotions from the purposefully chosen *consensio* that constitutes a judgment about what delights or repulses us. But his various ways of talking about *voluntas* and the mind do not make this easy.

One reasonable place to look for a resolution would be Augustine's treatment of the allegory of Adam, Eve, and the serpent in *On the Trinity* 12.17, where he interprets it in terms of different *intentiones*, "intentions" or "applications," of the triune human mind. The superior application, symbolized by Adam, is *sapientia*, "wisdom," and concerns the contemplation of eternal, spiritual realities. The inferior application, symbolized by Eve, concerns material reality, and is called *scientia*, "knowledge," presumably in allusion to the knowledge of good and evil provided by the tree in Eden. The allegory plays out similarly to the earlier texts, with sensation offering a tempting suggestion, and Eve consenting, but this time as *scientia*, rather than as *appetitus carnalis*, "carnal appetite." This apparent reallocation of psychic territory would have one very important benefit: Our concupiscent delight in sinful possibilities would not be localized in an "appetite" that could be seen as outside ourselves, given that Augustine wants to insist that in the deepest sense we are our souls, and more specifically our minds, above all. So it would be our mind feeling delight and yearning, our own *voluntates* that were engaged by both licit and illicit possibilities. Augustine goes on to attribute to *sapientia* a superior role in judgment, as "that *intentio* of the mind that has the supreme power to move the limbs to action or restrain them from action."[13] When the mind consents at its highest levels, this is full, conscious consent.

Unfortunately, this proposed reading will not work. First of all, the distinction between *scientia* and *sapientia* tracks the distinctions between what is material and temporal, on the one hand, from what is spiritual and eternal, on the other. So any sort of consent to good or bad possibilities must be occurring in our *scientia*. Moreover, in this same passage (*Trin.* 12.17), Augustine clearly differentiates *appetitus* "appetite" from "the reasoning of knowledge," because the business of our *scientia* or "knowledge" is to attend to and reason about sensible, material things. He speaks of the "carnal" or "sensual" "movements of the soul," common to humans and animals, which are *intenditur*, "stretched out," toward material realities in such a way that they quite easily become "cut off" from our *sapientia* or wisdom. So Augus-

tine in this passage is distinguishing between what we might call notional and real consent (both consciously chosen), not between spontaneous and considered consent. He also argues that our appetites or "movements of the soul" (recall that this is one of his characteristic ways of speaking about emotions) are "close to" but distinct from the *intentiones* of our mind, particular our *scientia* or knowledge.

On the one hand, this way of parsing things allows Augustine to argue, as he does repeatedly, that merely feeling tempted by some delight is not in itself sinful, as long as we do not consent to pursuing it (e.g., *cont.* 8.20); such a situation is lamentable, part of our fallen condition, but is in itself only dangerous, not damning. But on the other hand, it also creates serious tensions with his considered account of desires and emotions as discussed in *City of God*. How are we to make sense of "movements of the soul" that move us to action that are somehow outside our minds? How could emotions and desires be inarticulate and yet still move us toward rather specific sorts of illicit pleasures? Our *voluntas* seems simultaneously to be one essential aspect of our unified minds, and yet also to include spontaneous movements that are in some sense outside our minds.

In some places, Augustine writes as if our "internal mouth" speaks only the words or thoughts to which we consent, and that tempting "suggestions" are somehow not verbalized internally, despite being within our hearts (*cont.* 1.2–2.3). But even the metaphors he uses, for example of "suggestion," work against this unfortunate quarantine maneuver. And in one of his most famous and penetrating accounts of the divided will, book 8 of the *Confessions*, the old, sensual temptations are described as *voluntates*, or "wills," that are quite specifically articulate "whispers" from out of the depths of our memories (*conf.* 8.11.26). These can only be construed as "words" spoken by our minds, in his fully developed psychological terminology. The issue may be put sharply this way: Who is talking internally when we "hear," that is, feel, such tempting suggestions? For Augustine, it must be us, not some alien substance in the form of our own bodies. The locus of sin is in our fallen minds, not just our souls, and certainly not in our bodies.

To revise Augustine slightly in the service of what I take to be the strongest version of his account of human psychology, our minds operate by means of an ongoing internal discourse. In contrast to some recent accounts, I suggest that for Augustine when we feel tempted we ourselves are affected, at the "highest" level of our soul, that of our *mens* or mind.[14] This means that our inner discourse is not entirely under our own control. Our minds speak words we wish they did not, and so if we are to pursue righteousness and the service due to God, we inevitably end up talking to ourselves, at least internally; our own minds are thus the deepest battlegrounds of "Christian

combat." As Augustine insists, we cannot master our own inner discourse without divine aid. What grace provides is a stronger delight in divine things, strong enough to overpower our previous loves decisively, even if not completely. Without sufficient delight, we are unable to consent, even if we might in some ineffective sense wish to (mere wishes would be an alternative construal of weak delight).

Delight and consent, then, are two different sorts of "internal words." The distinction between them tracks the distinction Frankfurt and Taylor draw between first-order and second-order desires, as long as we understand second-order "desires" to be products of some more or less articulate evaluation, as Taylor's account suggests.[15] Furthermore, Augustine is at pains to emphasize that people cannot effectively consent to anything without sufficient delight in the prospect. Without sufficient delight, "consent" is ineffective yearning, a second-order desire that registers as a form of suffering because it cannot be fulfilled.

Indeed, what is striking about Augustine's account is that our choices to assent or dissent from particular things are only logically superior to our desires; in actual experience, choice freely serves our *voluntas*, in the sense of the sum of our actual loves. As sinners with divided loves, we may have second-order wishes not to follow certain desires that now seem wretched, but we cannot simply choose not to follow them. In fact, we may be powerless to do anything other than consent to them, even with some awareness of how horrible they are; this is precisely the force of Augustine's account of sinful habit.

Obviously, this could not be more divergent from Xunzi's account of consent, at least on the surface. We frequently fail, according to Augustine, to do what we would wish or choose, although this raises at least a logical need for something like partial consent to effective sinful desires (i.e., those we carry out in action).[16] A patient, charitable Augustinian would want to query Xunzi about the exact scope of his confidence about consent. What sort of grounds would one need to dissent effectively from strong desires, whether for food, fame, or whatever? Xunzi's account seems to trade on the linguistic ambiguity of *ke* 可, ranging from "possible" to "permissible" to "approved" or "assented to." Suppose for now that any sane person will avoid what they take to be suicidal or impossible, but does that mean that anyone can be convinced to go against their own strong desires?[17] Xunzi does seem to want to say yes, but with some very significant caveats: Most will not see any point in dissenting from their existing desires, and even when we do become dissatisfied with a primarily instinctive existence, we need very significant outside aid to have any hope of reorienting ourselves to higher

goods; without such a strong reorientation, the power of assent will not win us much, because we will not know what to assent to.

Xunzi's moral psychological point is that assent is a different sort of motivating factor than mere desire, although the two relate intimately. He is not concerned with heroic feats of moral strength so much as the actual experience of self-control. The sort of case Xunzi would want to point to is not the case of struggling against an addiction but of controlling oneself in day-to-day activities of the sort referenced in chapter 3 (e.g., fighting off sleep to help a child with homework, or restraining oneself from lashing out in anger). In his view, it is just a misunderstanding to say that people who can control themselves in this way have some deep desire to avoid lashing out in anger. Xunzi is not particularly interested in cases where people are overpowered by their passions. Because at that point nothing can be done against the flood, one should avoid reaching such a state in the first place. And indeed, the places where Xunzi thinks human beings will be most desperate are often either amenable to political correction (making sure famines and wars do not occur), or can be properly mediated and even "saved," if I can say such a thing, by means of ritual (e.g., responding to the death of intimates). All of this implies that he thinks most people are for the most part not as far gone in viciousness as an Augustinian account suggests. The two men differ, then, about the actual quality of our inclinations, as well as our capacity to resist them if we are genuinely convinced we must, whether by force of circumstance or personal conviction.

From Xunzi's point of view, Augustinian consent seems like a meaningless psychological epiphenomenon, merely the conscious recognition that our strongest desire is indeed moving us to action. Perhaps Xunzi could accept this sort of picture as an account of how the "petty person" deliberates and acts most of the time, because they merely consent to what they think will be beneficial, which is also their strongest desire. But he would insist that such a picture cannot do justice to the crucial case of the religious student who must struggle to overcome disordered inclinations on the basis of a conscious commitment to something higher than immediate satisfaction, that is, staying on the Way.

Xunzi would have to give ground, I think, regarding the possibility of something like addiction: habitual vice that cannot be overcome even when it is no longer wished for or even accepted. But I suspect that he would resist any move to universalize this phenomenon as indicative of the deep character of human existence. He lived in desperate, dangerous times, and he seems to have thought that the urge to survive, and if possible, thrive, would be sufficient to scare significant numbers of people into real openness to his

Confucian Way, even if some others would inevitably succumb to their own, or someone else's, avarice and lust for power. Whether anyone would ever hear of finer possibilities was the responsibility of Xunzi and others like him.

We should expect that Xunzi and Augustine differ, then, on the role of assent or consent in the process of personal reformation. Crucial points of contrast might be expected at the start, concerning how one begins a new religious way of life, for example, through a dramatic conversion experience; in the middle, as beginners and more advanced practitioners struggle along the path of advancement (specifically, how does consent relate to the character and perhaps overcoming of internal division?); and at the end, when consent and desire are finally reunited in something like perfect virtue, if such an end ever comes.

"HUMAN NATURE" IN THE CONTEXT OF FORMATIVE PRACTICES

Augustine is deeply impressed by human resistance to moral reformation. He views this resistance as overwhelming, in effect, because no human being can become good through any combination of personal effort and merely worldly assistance; our lusts for pleasure, acclaim, and power are simply too pervasive and deep to be overcome without shattering experiences and a humble, grateful reliance on the God who pulls us back mercifully from the brink. If we fail to make a decisive break with our penultimate yearnings (not for God but for this world), they will remain hidden and effectively subvert whatever projects for goodness we attempt to pursue. Only by openly facing our paradoxical situation, as beings so close and yet so far from God, can we hope to escape it, having at last clearly understood what we need and where to get help.

Xunzi, by contrast, is deeply impressed by both the human need and potential for reformation. Our instincts cannot lead us to goodness; following them blindly is a trap into which too many fall. Luckily, though, there is a trustworthy tradition of reformation available that marks out the path we need to follow to become good: Confucianism. Until we understand the danger we are in, we are unlikely to seek help; but after we do start to understand, we may come across a suitable teacher who can show us this proper Way. As we pursue the Way, we will gradually come to understand both it and ourselves better, and in the process be transformed, intellectually, emotionally, and morally. Reinventing the Way by oneself is not even logically possible. Nor is hearing the Way simply a matter of hearing some directions that we are then able to practice without difficulty; it is a long, demanding process. Xunzi clearly recognizes that many will not become convinced by the majesty of the Confucian Way from outside, and some

are so far gone in vice that they will need to be coerced into sociability or even executed. But the majority would welcome a Confucian society, he is convinced, even if their initial evaluations were based on petty and self-interested calculation.

These differing senses of the possibilities for human reformation deeply shape both Augustine's and Xunzi's conceptions of human nature. However the various elements of "human nature" are conceived, such ideas are theoretical projections based on experience conditioned by tradition, and so serve to explain and justify that experience and further shape the relevant tradition(s) of reflection and practice. Without Xunzi's and Augustine's distinctive experiences of the difficulty of becoming good, it is hard to see what motive they would have had for developing their fully realized accounts of human nature. Thus "human nature" is an exceptionally ironic idea: Versions of it must be articulated in culturally conditioned vocabularies of reflection, but it aims to articulate human existence in a raw or undeveloped form, precisely to provide an account of continuing resistance to enculturation. Nothing else is possible for us, however, as linguistically, culturally, and historically conditioned beings, so we should not worry that there is something illicit in such an attempt to get behind, underneath, or before culture.

Nevertheless, all such attempts are linguistically articulated, and as my analysis above has shown, respond to a variety of different but related questions about human beings. There seems to be no easy and obvious way to decide which possible combination and framing of these questions is best, so interpretive, humanistic studies of "human nature" as a culturally deployed concept cannot simply be superseded by empirical inquiries into genetics, brain function, and the like. It is unlikely that inquiries into human nature can be conducted in abstraction from concerns about what humans can and should become (or avoid). Explicitly examining the intellectual linkages between conceptions of "human nature" and normative ideals of human formation and flourishing can serve to clarify various possible ways of proceeding, along with their strengths and weaknesses.

One rather obvious point does need to be made. In contrast to Augustine, who believes he has certain, divinely revealed knowledge of such matters, Xunzi does not speculate about the origins of the world or the human species. Xunzi confines his account of normative history to human culture, as developed by a succession of ancient sage-kings and carried into his own day as the Confucian tradition. By implication, on his account, there has been no change for the worse or the better in human nature or the structure of persons, only an improvement in techniques for reforming them. Death, disease, hunger, and sexual desire are central and inevitable aspects of human existence, and they have always been so. For Augustine, as I have shown, this

is not the case. Death, illness, and spontaneously arising "fleshly" desire are all punishments for humanity's original disobedience. Not to belabor the point, but Xunzi's views are much closer to a tenable view informed by modern evolutionary biology, even if they propound an idealized conception of ancient Chinese kings; Augustine, in contrast, seems wedded at a deep level to an erroneous account of human origins, which colors his perception of our instinctive desires, as well as his sense of our relative alienation from the rest of our ecosystem.

The rather more interesting question, however, is which of them provides a more insightful account of the character of observable human impulses, and of moral anthropology more generally. But deciding such questions without resolving their underlying religious and philosophical disagreements about sacred history and the structure of the cosmos will be nearly impossible, at least without begging crucial questions.[18] In lieu of such a quixotic attempt at global theological judgment, we can focus instead on particular areas of human experience that each thinker's vocabulary highlights, as a way to at least generate hypotheses about greater depth and insight. At this point in the study, such hypotheses can serve to generate questions that look forward to the forthcoming accounts of each thinker's regimes of spiritual exercises.

Augustine's accounts of memory and habit provide a particularly powerful way to conceive of inner depth and complexity within human beings. This accent is only heightened by his striking account of the mind as structurally unified and yet internally divided when looked at over time: Our inner discourse produces a stream of sometimes diametrically opposed "inner words" of love and knowledge. Both of these theoretical moves help him to question and "problematize" the very idea of moral progress. And yet as I argue in chapter 7, Augustine is clearly committed to the possibility, indeed necessity, of "making progress in righteousness." So the strength of his anthropological and psychological vocabulary for talking about hidden, inward rebellion against justice generates questions as well. What is the theoretical point of his deep suspicion of human motives? More specifically, how does this suspicion relate to his critique of pagan virtue, and his conceptualization of Christian redemption and increasing righteousness? Comparatively, what sort of account of internal moral conflict during the process of personal reformation does Xunzi provide? Is it shallow and inappropriately truncated? Or if not, might it instead be seen as reasonable and humane rather than inappropriately fixated on certain recurrent instinctive desires?

As pointed out earlier in this chapter, Augustine conceives of our desires as always possessing what might be called a "vertical" dimension in relation

to God. This relation decisively shapes the character and orientation of all our loving, and it effectively sorts our loves into two types, which he conceives as diametrically opposed. This schema provides him with powerful ways of discussing and analyzing what might be called radical evil, to borrow Kant's terminology.[19] Radical evil would be evil that is deep, willful, and potentially devastating in effect, given sufficient opportunity. What is perhaps striking about Augustine's vision, in comparison with Xunzi's, is Augustine's conviction that truly radical evil lurks within every one of us in the form of rebellious lusts that have infected our minds like a disease. In relatively short order, absolutely anyone—even professing Christians—can go from being a seemingly good citizen to being truly maleficent, given the collapse of love for the divine in the wake of consent to sin. For Augustine, the radicality of the disease demands the most stringent cure and careful ongoing therapy, as we shall see.

Xunzi, by contrast, seems to accent the relative shallowness of the disease. In fact, he eschews all language of disease or impurity, and instead he focuses on craft metaphors, giving examples of patient artisans slowly making something beautiful and useful out of difficult-to-work-with materials. Steady commitment will lead to gradual improvement, on this view, with at least the hope of eventual perfection. One basic question this contrast raises is whether Xunzi is missing something. He certainly seems aware of radical evil, at least in the form of tyranny and predatory crime, but he seems to view this as a contingent matter of bad tendencies allowed to grow under the pressure of violent, chaotic circumstances, without any countervailing forces. Radical evil is extreme and unusual, for Xunzi, not pervasively present in the form of latent possibilities. He seems much more concerned about what might be called day-to-day evil, where people allow their appetites to guide them without consideration of any larger factors, or they evaluate plans merely in terms of a calculation of individual or familial benefit. But it is still an open question whether Xunzi is belittling difficulties that he ought to take much more seriously, as Augustine would surely argue. From another angle, however, this contrast should make us question whether Augustine can finally give a convincing account of something recognizable as human goodness, especially when compared with Xunzi. Or in other words, is Augustine's suspicion of human motives too thoroughgoing and categorical, in the end?

Given his analysis of human instincts as bad but not truly perverse, Xunzi's focus on assent and dissent makes sense. We need to wake up and examine ourselves, on Xunzi's account. For him, moral failure is a matter of inattention and lack of seriousness, and above all a lack of sustained effort, which takes the form of assenting to Confucian disciplines. (Moral failure

can also be due to misrule that makes real teachers scarce.) But it remains somewhat mysterious that Xunzi does not assimilate assent to his gradualist paradigm of latent potential and cultivated power, which governs his views of the excellences of the mind, for example (emptiness, unity, and tranquillity). It would seem that he could assimilate assent to this model without endangering at least the possibility of moral development, but he does not. Why? Furthermore, how is this related to the question of how someone begins on the Confucian Way, and the perhaps even more vexing question of how one moves from merely calculating what is beneficial to truly pursuing what is just and good for its own sake?

Let us turn now to examine Augustine's and Xunzi's constructive proposals for personal reformation in more detail.

NOTES

1. It is tempting to interpret Xunzi and Augustine as respectively representing highly intellectual versions of what J. Z. Smith has called "locative" and "utopian" religions, although this mapping sits easier with Augustine than Xunzi. However, because my comparative target is "spiritual exercises" rather than "religion" per se, I will leave these issues to the side. On these terms, see Smith 1978, xi–xv, 67–207; and 1990, 116–43. Note also Yearley 1990, 42ff.

2. For Xunzi, this focus on desire needs to be qualified by equal attention to his account of assent, which on his account apparently trumps desire when the two conflict. These issues are examined in more detail below in the section on "consent."

3. I thank Richard Miller and William Babcock for assistance on these points.

4. I have no wish to contribute to the long-standing error of reading Augustine as "otherworldly," when he is so clearly concerned with the character of human life in this world, as well as committed at the deepest level to the fundamental goodness of created, temporal reality. Nevertheless, for Augustine the proper understanding and "use" of created reality can only be achieved in relation to the eternal, which is humanity's ultimate ground and proper destiny. All of this is very different from Xunzi's conception of the human Way.

5. A modern-day Xunzian might press back on this exact point, charging that Augustine's reading of concupiscent desire as an ever-present, genuinely dangerous lure even among the most serious and committed Christians leads to deep anxiety, especially when combined with a clear-eyed awareness of the doctrine of predestination. Some who appear, even to themselves, to be loving Christians may fall away when God, in His inscrutable judgment, withdraws the grace that lifted them heavenward (*persev.* 9.21). Augustine does not seem to be as aware as he might be of the potentially destabilizing anxiety such ideas can produce, but he would likely attribute such difficulties to our justly deserved penal state after the Fall. The objection would only serve to underline his general point about human happiness in this life.

6. Nussbaum 1986 is an important study in this area. In the broader philosophical literature, such issues tend to be analyzed in terms of "moral luck."

7. The strongest counterevidence to my reading of Augustine's psychology is not the *Confessions* (as argued in chapter 4) but his occasional remarks in *On Christian Teaching* about the need for certain sorts of rhetoric (the "grand style," borrowing from Cicero) to move people when they know something to be true but will not follow it (*doc. Chr.* 4.4.6, 4.12.28, 4.13.29, but cf. 1.9.9; see also *pecc. mer.* 2.19.33). I find this to be in flat contradiction to the subtle picture developed in *On the Trinity*, and speculate that it is a holdover from classical traditions of rhetoric that rested on a view of the soul where reason is opposed by and seeks to rule the passions, which had gradually come to seem not weaker than reason but stronger. Strikingly, these passages were written in the late 420s, near the end of Augustine's life, so this reflects a real tension in his thinking, not a transition between different positions that can be arranged in a temporal sequence.

8. On these points, see Hutton 2001, 74–137, which argues in detail that for Xunzi the Way cannot be codified.

9. The complications Augustine's notion of consent introduces into this picture are addressed in the next section of this chapter.

10. Prendiville 1972.

11. For insightful discussion, see TeSelle 1994. (I owe this reference to Jesse Couenhoven.) In this essay, TeSelle provides further references to Augustine's exegeses of the Edenic drama in terms of willing in notes 1 and 2, p. 355, although several of these do not directly corroborate the threefold analysis that is at issue here. The clearly supportive texts that work out the idea in detail are both very early: *Gn. adv. Man.* 2.14.20–21 (written in 389), and *s. Dom. mon.* 1.12.33–36 (393). Augustine also alludes to the schema in *en. Ps.* 48.1.6, 83.1.7, and 103.4.6, which are surely later, although hard to date precisely. The most interesting testimony for present purposes is the problematic account in *Trin.* 12.17 (written perhaps between 415 and 420), discussed above in chapter 4, n. 59, and again below in the current section of this chapter. TeSelle's other citations are *Gn. adv. Man.* 2.18.28, *cat. rud.* 18.30, *civ. Dei* 14.11, and *c. Jul.* 6.22.68. Note also s. 352.8, preached between 396 and 400. Delight and consent are referenced together in *conf.* 10.30.41, and several other places, especially in *en. Ps.*

12. This translation has been changed in several ways from Bettenson 1984, 555–56.

13. Translation adapted from Hill 1991, 332.

14. The alternative possible line of interpretation here is that taken by Sorabji 2000, 372–84, 400–17; and Knuuttila 2004, 152–72, who attend closely to Augustine's understanding of "consent" and see at least some of the conflicts involved. They read Augustine as advocating a literal separation of "carnal" and "spiritual" wills (*conf.* 8), with the former being an aspect of a lower, "emotional" part of the soul, and only the latter being part of the *mens*, which is thereby rendered more purely rational, and more purely good. This recalls Platonic models of a tripartite soul, analogous to Augustine's very early conception in *quant.*, written in 388 before his ordination, and at least foreshadows Thomistic faculty psychology, which may be part of the hermeneutical attraction. Oddly, however, as Knuuttila recognizes (2004, 161), such a reading requires that

Augustine think good, divinely inspired emotions inhere in the mind, while all other emotions rest in the postulated lower, affective part, which seems capricious. This stratification of consciousness also softens the radicality of Augustine's understanding of both sin and inner conflict, by assimilating these to more familiar contests between reason and passion conceived as different layers of the soul. (On this issue, see my discussion in chapter 8 of different ways of modeling a "divided self.") They thus lose the distinctiveness of Augustine's account of the human mind as deformed but still *triune* image of God proffered in *On the Trinity*, in favor of a more *psychologically* Platonizing reading. There is certainly some evidence for the other interpretation, such as *Trin.* 12.17, discussed above; *Trin.* 12.1–2 on animals and the outer man (depending on how one reads the issue of "animal appetites" in human beings—on my account, because we have the sort of minds we do such "appetites" can only be experienced as desire, via the activity of the mind); one remark in *civ. Dei* 14.19, in the midst of an analysis of Platonic psychology, that implies a separation between *affectiones* and *voluntas*, contradicting 14.6; and Augustine's discussion (in debate with Julian of Eclanum at the end of his life) of sexual lust as bypassing our *voluntas*. Nevertheless, I think the costs of such a resolution are too high. After all, Augustine instructs us to crucify the "inner man," not the "outer" one, if we would follow Christ (*Trin.* 4.6).

15. On these issues, see Couenhoven 2004, chap. 3, sec. 6. I have profited greatly from thinking through Couenhoven's reading of Augustine in terms of modern debates about free will and determinism, especially with regard to his analysis of Augustine on consent.

16. Our *arbitrium*, or choice, would seem to serve this need in Augustine's account of human action, at least in cases where we succumb to desires we (partly) wish to resist.

17. We should note that on an Augustinian account sin is indeed strong enough to drive us all the way from spiritual to physical suicide.

18. The problems with such attempts are manifold: First, incompatible basic premises cannot be judged by appeal to neutral facts or standards. Second, even in cases where it seems we can appeal to relatively neutral grounds (e.g., modern confidence in evolutionary theory as an explanation for human origins), judgments about possible responses of either side are difficult and often question begging. For instance, a contemporary Augustinian might very well be able to assimilate evolutionary theory and to restrict his or her exegesis of the Genesis account of Adam and Eve to the realm of moral psychology. MacIntyre's contrast between "progress" and mere "epicycles" only shows the depth of the difficulty, since one person's progress is another's pathetic failure. Important recent works on such questions include MacIntyre 1988, Stout 1988, Fleishacker 1994, and Moody-Adams 1997.

19. Kant 1960, 15 and passim.