OVERCOMING OUR EVIL

Human Nature

and

Spiritual Exercises

in Xunzi

and Augustine

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CHAPTER EIGHT

Reformations: Spiritual Exercises in Comparative Perspective

Augustine and Xunzi both aim ultimately at perfection, although how they conceive of such a state differs dramatically. They also focus on rather different issues as they chart the path toward this perfection, which reflect their distinctive worries about the gravest spiritual dangers. Examining their differing interests in mapping these "stages of development" helps to prepare the way for comparing their complex regimes of personal formation. As outlined in chapter 7, early on in his authorship, Augustine develops his sequential account of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, but under the pressure of his debate with Pelagianism he later submerges this account in favor of the simpler scheme of law and grace that he discerns in Paul's epistles. Xunzi, for his part, appears not to change his conception of a ladder of ethical development that stretches from the vast category of "pettiness" up through becoming "educated" and then "noble," to the final goal of sagehood.

As I implied in the last chapter, over the course of his embattled episcopate, Augustine becomes more and more convinced that the dangers of spiritual elitism and religious arrogance generally outweigh the goods to be attained through in-depth analysis of the real differences between beginning and advanced believers. He thus gravitates toward a scheme that draws a sharp line between those true believers who are "under grace" and those "pagans" and "heretics" who are outside the fold, still "under the law," whether they realize it or not. This scheme also draws a second sharp distinction between the living and the dead: It places all good Christians into the same fundamental status, dependent "under grace" on God's mercy, continuing to yearn for a time when their inner struggles will cease and they will be fully healed for eternal life "in peace." Xunzi, by contrast, gives all his attention to this period of religious discipleship, which Augustine seeks to level out.[1] Why this difference?

Augustine's growing resistance to distinguishing a hierarchy of spiritual achievement stems from his alarm over the extreme danger posed by *superbia* or "pride" to all who attempt to make progress in righteousness.[2] Such arrogance afflicts not only proud Roman traditionalists but even some outwardly exemplary Christians, such as Pelagius. Augustine's scheme of law and grace underlines the absolutely fundamental distinction he sees between a life rooted in love of self and one rooted in love of God.[3] Even the distinction between being "under grace" and "in peace" serves to cultivate humility in believers by reminding them that perfection is impossible in this life, no matter how great their efforts to avoid sin and cleave to God. All aspects of the schema are designed to prod Christians to cast their hopes on God, instead of relying on their own strength. For us in this life, according to Augustine, no one can know his or her own spiritual state with perfect clarity, although presumably one can discern evidence of the presence of grace whenever one is genuinely moved to take some holy, loving action. But beyond such wondrous signs of new life growing in the wake of baptism, even those who have been given the grace of a superior calling such as virginity have no way of knowing if their hearts have become pure enough to willingly accept martyrdom, the ultimate test of faith for Augustine, which is most certainly open to those who are married, if God grants it (*virg.* 44.45, 47).

Xunzi shares this concern about arrogance only in the derivative sense that it conflicts with his central virtues of benevolence, ritual propriety, and justice. Pride is not a special or uniquely potent danger, in Xunzi's reckoning. The most obvious human difficulties stem from ignorant impulse-following and the chaos and misrule that stem from and exacerbate this sort of life. The more subtle danger of obsession shares some similarities with *superbia*, at least in the aftereffects of self-satisfaction and preference for illusion over uncomfortable truth. But instead of being centered on the "mimetic desire" for Godlike sovereignty provoked by Satan's promise to Adam and Eve that "you shall be as gods," Xunzian obsession must be a partial apprehension of the truth, wrong only in its limited scope and failure to comprehend the larger patterns of existence.[4] Xunzi, in fact, thinks that every person desires to have the authority and lavish pleasures of an emperor, but he seems to see this as fundamentally a point about the strength and range of human desire, not its secret deviousness in deflecting moral self-cultivation into self-aggrandizement.

Indeed, Xunzi appears to use the prospect of becoming a glorious emperor as rhetorical enticement in recommending Confucianism to the aspiring rulers of his day. This at least implies that the pursuit of such a vision will not automatically plunge a ruler into evil; it also implies that

Xunzi is quite confident in his abilities as a wise counselor, and in the power of virtuous ministers to steer an ambitious king rightly (11/53/12–25; note also 4/16/18ff.). Despite this seeming nonchalance about the dangers of the quest for supreme power and position, Xunzi's own program of ritual reformation centers on the need for aspiring Confucians to incessantly practice their deference as a corrective for human self-assertion, which suggests that he takes the ethical problem of arrogance more seriously than it might at first appear.

These differences in their estimation of human desires for power and mastery point toward deeper differences concerning proper subjection. By subjection, as discussed in chapter 2, I mean the sense of human agency as ordered toward and in important respects constituted by some authoritative standard or entity. Both Augustine and Xunzi are too frequently saddled with rather stupidly authoritarian interpretations, wherein the "best" human life is the one marked by the most thorough groveling before extant religious and even political powers.[5] Both do reject untutored self-guidance as profoundly misguided, but much of their respective bodies of work can be read as efforts to explain the sort of "tutoring" necessary for a truly humane and just life to be possible. Augustine and Xunzi are concerned to make true human moral agency possible, despite difficulties, not to derail or jail it.

For Augustine, the ultimate authority is of course God, and more specifically the triune Christian God as properly understood by the Catholic Church. As outlined in chapters 4 and 7, human beings cannot properly understand themselves, nor live well, unless they understand themselves in relation to God, Christ (including his body here on Earth, the church), and the Holy Spirit (e.g., *en. Ps.* 121.8). Such a relation must be subordinate, in the sense that Christ's word to believers, "even if obscure, is better and truer than any insights that we can gain by our own efforts" (*doct. Chr.* 2.7.9). Such subordination and dependence is distasteful to fallen humanity, precisely because we have been rendered rebellious, riven internally by lusts for dominance, covetous possession, and selfish enjoyment. In our zest to "be like gods," we create prisons for ourselves out of habit, making ourselves ever more wretched. "Conversion" is the process of breaking these chains, of a gain in freedom, power, and even self-control; and the ongoing process of "making progress in righteousness" continues this increase in true agency. For Augustine, then, agency that is derived from and appropriately dependent on the divine is true, good, and potent; all other "agency" is in the end only a simulacrum, still subject to God's authority but struggling fruitlessly against this fact rather than accepting and indeed loving it.[6]

Turning to Xunzi, the situation is not quite as clear, at least at first. *Tian* 天, or "Heaven," does occupy the supreme ritual position in the cosmos. But it is not the sort of entity that issues moral commands or ensures the ultimate justice of events, nor is it the source of the authority of the *Dao*, for Xunzi. On his account, we must be careful not to confuse the human Way with the very different Way of Heaven, each of which involves quite distinctive tasks. It might appear that Confucian tradition, especially as accumulated in the classics, would be the ultimate authority for Xunzi, but he makes it clear that the real authority rests with the human beings who carry on the Confucian tradition. Only they know how to interpret the classic texts, which are confusing and opaque to the uninitiated, Xunzi thinks (1/3/20–1/4/4). Moreover, only the best and wisest human beings have fully mastered Confucian ritual in such a way that they may teach it to others. This practical, fully articulated ritual mastery is the ultimate ground of their authority, and the ultimate source for aspiring Confucians. As Xunzi says:

> Ritual is the means by which to rectify yourself. A teacher is the means by which to rectify [your practice of] ritual. . . . When your dispositions are at peace in ritual and your understanding is like that of your teacher, then you have become a sage. Hence to oppose ritual is to be without a model; to oppose your teacher is to be without a teacher. To refuse to accept your teacher and the model and instead prefer to govern yourself: this is like relying on a blind person to distinguish colors, or relying on a deaf person to distinguish sounds; you have no way to abandon chaos and foolishness. (2/8/1–4)

Without reliance on a teacher and the external models he provides, people have no way to gain a sense of what is truly good. At first, we are all morally "blind" and "deaf," Xunzi thinks. Only with carefully guided practice can we develop an understanding of and taste for the Way, which is what the rituals themselves "mark out" (17/82/22–17/83/1).[7] And eventually, as discussed in chapter 6, after many years of practice, our tastes or desires will become "transformed," Xunzi thinks, so that we can continue the tradition ourselves without painful strain and without error. Thus for Xunzi true human agency is found in service as the "ministers" or indeed "agents" of the *Dao*, that is, in actively governing themselves and the world so that justice and beauty might prevail everywhere.

Clearly both Augustine and Xunzi require individually chosen subordination to just authorities as the necessary precondition for true human agency, although they conceive the particulars rather differently. Before moving on to more specific comparisons, however, we can sharpen some of the differences

between them by noting the distinctive "spiritual geographies" imagined by Xunzi and Augustine as the spaces defining human agency.

As noted in chapter 5, Augustine conceives of desire, and indeed all love, as having a vertical dimension that relates it to God, presumed in this image to be "above" us and other worldly things. The *voluntas*-aspect of each of our mind's "inner words" is striving either "up" toward God or "down" toward various changeable physical realities. This radical disjunction explains many very basic features of Augustine's understanding of the religious life. First, it means that at the basis of any human life is a fundamental orientation, either correctly ordered toward God, or incorrectly away from him, which in this spatial scheme must be an opposite orientation. Second, this explains Augustine's strong interest in conversion—literally, "turning around" to face God as one should. Sin is not missing the target occasionally, as implied by Xunzi's formulation of fine character as "hitting the target" one hundred times out of one hundred (1/4/12); for Augustine, sin does not even aim at the target but away from it. Augustine does have a variety of goal or target metaphor operating, in the sense that beatitude in the presence of God is the end of all of our striving; what is unique is his insistence on how radically misguided sin must be, as well as the difficulty implied by the image of rising up to the heavens against the pull of our carnal "gravity" dragging us back to Earth.

In contrast to this picture, the space implied by Xunzi's conception of moral agency is, first of all, fundamentally horizontal: We are lost, and we seek a way through the world, with travel through space serving as an image for travel through time. There is no different realm to ascend to in Xunzi's Confucianism. Xunzi does use the metaphor of a fork in the road to underline the gravity of choosing the right path to follow, and he insists that a seemingly small error at the start can lead to terrible results later on (11/53/25–26). And as noted in chapter 6, he yearns for a clear distinction between what is "within" the Way and what is "outside" it. But his conception of obsession as focused on partial truths that obscure our awareness of broader issues suggests that it is at least logically conceivable for Xunzi that even non-Confucians might make "errors" without being radically misguided. Of course, Augustine distinguishes between more and less serious sins, as does Xunzi, and Xunzi does not hesitate to denounce the grievous errors of numerous opponents, including fellow Confucian Mencius, so it would be easy to overstate their differences here. The key issue is simply to note that Augustine's imagination of moral space drives him frequently to quite radical diagnoses of sin and evil, as in his disputes with, for example, the Donatists and Pelagians.

This difference in imagining the nature of the moral life also plays out in Xunzi's lack of interest in conversion, discussed above in chapters 5 and 6. According to Xunzi, we start out lost and ignorant, lacking reliable orientation. Our "bad" innate impulses do misguide us, but mostly because they overreach and thereby conflict with important values (to which we start out insensible), not because they direct us absolutely contrary to the good. Xunzi's followers, at least, seem to have thought that lifelong Confucian education, beginning in childhood, was the ideal (27/134/16). There would in any case seem to be no religious use, on Xunzi's account, in going wrong by following one's own devices, in order to see the bankruptcy of one's own resources for self-direction and to turn dramatically back to God, as with Augustine.

In the rest of this chapter, I explore some of the details beneath these broad differences, examining several issues raised by comparison of their views of the "will," as well as their differing emphases in the practice of personal formation, as these are illuminated by and speak to some aspects of modern virtue theory. I then pursue a constructive point that grows out of these comparisons, developing enduring similarities between Augustine and Xunzi as a general moral psychological outlook that I call "chastened intellectualism."

VIRTUE AND "THE WILL"

In chapter 2, I argued for a comparative conception of "the will" (a "bridge concept," in this study's lexicon) that was in effect an umbrella covering several related topics treated by both Xunzi and Augustine: their accounts of human action; their assessments of human capacities for choice and decisive commitment; and any characteristic limitations, flaws, or dangers they think afflict human decision and action. After elaborating and beginning to compare their theories of human nature and personal formation, it is now possible to give a much more precise account of "will" as a psychological term covering a more tightly integrated set of ethical issues, while still remaining attentive to broader concerns about human agency and its characteristic afflictions. Specifically, we can now say that "will" as a bridge concept between Xunzi and Augustine should include four related areas of ethical concern that both men share: first, more or less enduring dispositions to think, feel, and act in particular ways; second, more momentary feelings, desires, and aversions that move us to act in specific situations; third, intentions and goals, both proximate and ultimate; and fourth, whatever capacities humans may have to consent, assent, or dissent from particular actions,

that is, the capacity to choose to do or refrain from doing something. This more precise set of distinctions and topics invites deeper specific comparisons, which I pursue in the rest of this chapter. We should note that seeing these areas as closely related, deserving joint analysis, shows how deeply Augustine has influenced the West, because Xunzi does not group these concerns into one named system like "the will." Nevertheless, he does treat each of them in varying degrees of detail, and we can reconstruct their logical relations to each other within his psychology and ethics.

This set of topics also allows me to relate comparative study of "the will" to what has come to be called virtue ethics. My goal in doing this is not to add even more complication to the current project, but to articulate some of my main arguments in a vocabulary familiar to contemporary ethicists. Indeed, "virtue" is the most common contemporary way of talking about growth in moral discernment and excellence, even if that development, the main subject of the current study, is not made central to most inquiries into virtue ethics.

"Virtue" is famously ambiguous between a general sense of fine character, and more specific excellences that together make up such a character, such as courage and wisdom. A virtue in the latter sense may be understood as a good disposition, that is, "a disposition to act, desire, and feel that involves the exercise of judgment and leads to a recognizable human excellence or instance of human flourishing."[8] Both Xunzi and Augustine have well-developed understandings of what might count as general human excellence, although I hope to have shown in this study how moral formation may rest on rather different sorts of virtues, reflecting different stages in this ongoing process, so that looking only at perfected virtue would miss much of importance. This point is clearest with Xunzi, who as just argued above makes sharper distinctions among aspiring Confucians than Augustine often wishes to draw among aspiring Christians.[9] (I discuss this issue further below when comparing their accounts of continence.) And although only Augustine, who draws on the massive tradition of Greco-Roman ethical philosophy, has the terminology to speak of particular excellences as distinct "virtues," Xunzi also discusses several specific excellences that fit together in systematic ways, including the most important: *ren* 仁, "benevolence" or "humaneness"; *yi* 義, "justice"; *li* 禮, "ritual propriety"; *xu* 虛, "emptiness" or "intellectual openness"; *yi* 一, "unity"; and *jing* 靜, "tranquillity."[10] Although to consider their differing lists of particular virtues in detail would require another book-length study, over the course of this chapter I do address Xunzian analogues to Augustinian continence, and I comment further on what is implied by Xunzi's consideration of ritual propriety as a crucial ethical virtue.

Virtue, then, is a matter of having well-formed dispositions to think, feel, desire, and act—presuming, of course, that life is complicated and that wise practical judgment will be essential to good human action, so that such dispositions are not mere reflex actions or thoughtless habitual responses. Stated so generally, it seems clear from the interpretations offered here that, broadly speaking, both Augustine and Xunzi are concerned that human beings come to possess true virtue. In Augustinian terms, *virtus* is primarily a matter of love or *voluntas*, but it always involves all aspects of the triune mind (memory, understanding, and will) and reflects the degree to which the mind conforms to and relies on God. In Xunzian terms, Confucian virtues involve both our relatively settled dispositions or *qing*, which account for the desires and emotions we feel, and also our patterns of assenting (*ke* 可) to an articulate understanding of the *Dao* as one's ethical standard and way of life. As always, however, the most intriguing points develop when we consider the details.

As noted in chapter 5, Xunzi has an ethical vocabulary that allows him to clearly mark the distinction between longer-lasting if still changeable dispositions (*qing* 情) and more momentary desires (*yu* 欲). He also, less fortunately, uses *qing* to refer to our more transient emotions or feelings. For his part, Augustine uses the same words interchangeably for both dispositions and desires or emotions—that is, he refers to all of these as forms of love, whether properly ordered to God as the divine love *caritas*, or not, as covetous *cupiditas*. This ambiguity suits his religious purposes, however, by calling into question some aspects of the very idea of a virtue as a long-lasting, dependable disposition toward the good. For Augustine, this idea of a steady, powerful inclination to goodness presents a temptation to human beings to defect once again from God and to prefer our own seemingly good self-command to obedience to the Lord. Nevertheless, Augustine's psychology of delight does rest on the idea of underlying dispositions, of both *caritas* and *cupiditas* considered as deep inclinations, which inflame us with desires both holy and profane. And his account of "progress in righteousness," especially in practices like fasting, seeks directly to change the ratio of these underlying dispositions to each other.

Where Augustine and Xunzi differ is in their estimation of habituation as a means of effecting this transformation. Xunzi understands ritual in particular as being primarily a method of re-habituating human "customs" or practices; he talks of this in terms of the gradual "accumulation" of goodness, via repetitive Confucian disciplines, into the deeper "artifice" of a reconstructed character. As argued in chapter 5, Xunzi recognizes the possibility of "deviant" and "chaotic" customs, but he thinks such things can generally be restrained and even reformed by good government, and so are

above all a political problem. In his account of personal formation, Xunzi attends almost exclusively to the power of habit formation for good. Augustine, however, reserves *consuetudo* or "habit" almost exclusively for evil, misguided dispositions, those "chains" of perverse love that drag us away from God. Most important, according to Augustine, even the best Christians are always capable of willing evil, of defecting from God's providential order. In the wake of the Fall, even the elect are incapable, without grace, of fully and completely willing the good. Concupiscence continually besets us, tugging our souls away from spiritual matters to the concerns of "the flesh."

Why this difference? As noted above, Augustine conceives of most spontaneous human desires as results of our concupiscence, that is, of covetousness as a deep disposition within the mind. Thus habits formed on the basis of these loves cannot be for good. Conversely, our genuinely good dispositions are fundamentally gifts from God, always a matter of inspiration. The most helpful spiritual exercises provide occasions for this inspiration to occur. Augustine's view of concupiscence leads him to suspect "delight" in any earthly thing, even those things used in holy worship, which makes it nearly impossible for him to conceive of habituation as good, because it seems to trade on our fondness for pleasure. Indeed, the only sort of habituation Augustine seems to countenance is that of restraint, which quells carnal pleasure to make room for God-given delight in the good to burst forth. This suggests that the thoughtlessness of habituation as a sort of conditioning strikes Augustine as dangerous, especially if used to reinforce pleasures. But habituation seems dangerous to him even if used for what might seem like good ends, because whatever independent effectiveness it might possess as a technique of self-shaping makes it usable for human projects of defiance. For Xunzi, though, this "directionless" quality of habituation is no problem at all—at least it does not automatically lead us away from the *Dao*, and more to the point wise teachers can enlist it to lead earnest students to the *Dao*. As noted, in contrast to Augustine, Xunzi thinks desire has only one form, and that it cannot be destroyed but only redirected, and to a certain extent heightened or suppressed.

This disagreement about the manipulation of desire through repeated practices reflects another aspect of what I called above their differing spiritual geographies. One could reasonably say that Augustine thinks habituation is both stronger and weaker than Xunzi contends, depending on whether it goes along with or thwarts our spontaneous carnal impulses. On Augustine's account, sinful habit can take hold of us instantly, as when Augustine's friend Alypius "drank in savagery" during one forced trip to the gladiatorial shows (*conf.* 6.8.13). Or it can never really take hold at all, if it aims to thwart our concupiscent desires all by itself, because it will merely end up refin-

ing them by cloaking them in the subterfuges of pride. By contrast, Xunzi's craft metaphors of reshaping stiff, difficult materials into a beautiful form suggest that although our dispositions will tend to remain as they are, they are adaptable to changes in circumstances, and to growth or contraction in response to consciously contrived experiences, at least when repeated sufficiently.

Although Augustine is doubtless correct to say that pleasure can move us strongly, this is not really what is at issue between the two figures; at the most obvious level, the question concerns whether everyday pleasures of food, sex, and personal contact are as potently habit forming, and potentially soul destroying, as drugs like methamphetamine, and therefore need to be very carefully regulated. Put this way, it seems obvious that Xunzi is right to say that, except in unusual cases, pleasures move us strongly but not overwhelmingly, and even our real delights need practice to become refined and strong. But Augustine's account is more insightful when considered below the surface implications of his extreme remarks on habit: His point is that even after honestly dedicating ourselves to goodness, with real desire for that prospect, we remain prone to self-deception precisely because at a very deep level our minds remain inclined to seek our own pleasure regardless of any other considerations, and this tendency (*concupiscentia*, *cupiditas*) always threatens to undermine and corrupt our ongoing efforts at personal formation.

To engage these issues further, we need to examine how Augustine and Xunzi conceive of what is often called the "divided self." To get at least the lineaments of their positions before us, we should briefly review their understandings of intention and consent, as analyzed in chapters 5 through 7. Augustine makes a distinction between "proper" or immediate ends and "final" ends that motivate more specific *voluntates* or "wills" in the plural. The final end of the *voluntas* as a whole is its settled, long-range intention, and this corresponds strikingly well to Xunzi's predominant sense of *zhi* 志 as a settled intention, our ultimate aspiration or goal. (Although Xunzi sometimes speaks of it in the sense of proximate intention as well, *zhi* for him generally reflects the fundamental orientation of the heart/mind.) For both of them, intention overlaps with our dispositions in complex ways: Ultimate intentions seem to reflect our second-order judgments and desires about what is of the very highest worth, and for both seem to reflect a genuine yearning for that goal. But at the same time, those intentions may be self-deceptive and reflect more than we care to admit our less-than-perfect dispositions and desires. Although Augustine is much more alert to and concerned about this possibility than Xunzi, Xunzi does recognize it at various points, as I discuss more fully below. Both of them also think that a central aspect of spiritual exercises is the project of unifying our proximate intentions around the

ultimate intention of following God or the Way—and, indeed, uniting and purifying that ultimate intention itself. "Purity of heart is to will one thing" is a slogan both could happily embrace, although they would explicate it quite differently.

Significant differences emerge, however, in their accounts of choice and its relation to intention and desire, as discussed especially in chapter 5. According to Augustine, consent and dissent from possible actions "belong to the will (*voluntas*)"; by this, he means that *arbitrium*, that is, choice or decision, is a subsidiary power of *voluntas* (*spir. et litt.* 34.60). In other words, on Augustine's account, we follow what we love, because it delights us, and our *consensio* "agreement" or "consent" to those delights is our freely given decision to pursue them in particular circumstances. We are not constrained by any outside forces in our deliberations about how to satisfy our wishes, but the basic orientation of our loves remains relatively impervious to reflective choice, in Augustine's picture. As I put it in chapter 5, for Augustine our second-order choices to assent or dissent from particular courses of action are only logically superior to our desires, and before God's saving grace allows us to convert to Christianity we will not infrequently find ourselves "consenting" to habitual activities that we find loathsome, and that we ineffectively wish to stop doing. Only God can pour Christian love into our hearts in sufficient amounts to outweigh our carnal predispositions and fire our imaginations with a truer understanding of the beatitude we have mistakenly sought in worldly goods. We can contribute to the consolidation of God's gifts through eager Christian service, but this is always a response to prior divine initiative.

For Xunzi, however, even the uncultivated have full possession of the innate power to assent or dissent from particular desires, although such "petty" people analyze and evaluate the world only in terms of what will benefit them by satisfying as many of their desires as possible. Thus they will not in fact dissent from their desires very often—presumably only in cases of immediate physical danger. When such people experience the anxiety and fear that stem from the social chaos of unrestricted interhuman conflict over goods, they may search out some better way of life. They are capable of assenting to the idea of learning a new way of life, and putting themselves before a teacher—if they are lucky enough to come across one who seems to promise a better Way. They are incapable of acting like a noble man, let alone a sage, but if offered the chance they can at least begin the long journey necessary to reach such goals.

As noted in chapter 5, however, these sketches leave to the side some of the most interesting issues regarding conflict within the self, to which we now turn. A striking similarity in Xunzi's and Augustine's views is their

distinction between positive and negative kinds of personal disintegration. Both see the unredeemed or uncultivated person (perhaps after a brief "happily vicious" initial period) as torn between conflicting first-order desires, which tend when followed to produce profoundly harmful consequences for both individuals and the community. And yet to escape such dissipation both suggest that an even more profound internal chasm needs to open, as people begin to recognize qualitatively higher values that overrule immediate desires, to use Charles Taylor's language, although what they think these are certainly varies. For Augustine, we need to turn away from our "carnal" orientation of private delight in lower, earthly goods, and turn toward God, the supreme good. For Xunzi, we need to be exposed to the excellences of the Confucian Way, which will attract many people sufficiently for them to commit to the more onerous program of cultivation he advocates, which in turn can slowly strengthen their commitment to that Way until it is indestructible. For both of them, then, the second disintegration is salutary because it leads eventually to a unified focus on the good that transcends all confusion, vacillation, and personal disintegration. Put in modern terms, both seek a state of perfect virtue wherein all internal conflict disappears and we freely, effectively, and capably will to live righteously. Of course, Xunzi thinks that such a state can be attained by at least a tiny number in this life, who can share the benefits of sagehood with others through teaching and good government, whereas Augustine argues consistently that no one will be free from uncertainty and internal conflict until the resurrection, and that earthly peace is always flawed and fragile, whereas eternal peace will be untroubled and absolutely secure.

Augustine and Xunzi seem to agree in large measure in their low estimate of the wretchedness of unregenerate humanity, caught between desires for pleasure, dominance, and safety that seem to preclude mutual satisfaction. They both portray the self-restraint of such impulses as crucial to at least some spiritual exercises that will help us make progress in virtue, and they conceive of this restraint as part of a two-sided training process that restrains some desires but heightens or magnifies others. But here their differences over consent loom large, even if we restrict ourselves to comparing the situation of Christians "under grace" and of aspiring Confucians, whether "petty" or more accomplished.

We can focus the issues by considering one of the few virtues to which Augustine devotes a freestanding treatise, *continentia* or "continence."[11] According to Augustine, continence is a "spiritual virtue" that is "a gift" from the Holy Spirit, "whereby we control and rule and conquer carnal desire" (*cont.* 1.1, 5.12). Though it certainly refers to the ability to preserve sexual chastity, its deeper meaning concerns the ability to stop the inward consent

of the heart to any sinful desire, precisely by putting a "gate" on the "inner mouth" of the heart to stop it from uttering sinful "words" internally (1.1–2.3). The ambiguities of Augustine's discursive model of the psyche have already been addressed in chapter 5, where I developed a slightly revised Augustinian account of inner discourse that includes "words" we do not consciously consent to, precisely in the form of the fleshly temptations of concupiscence. Continence, then, refuses to agree to follow such words, which bubble up within us from the fault in our human nature, as exacerbated by past sinful habits but also diminished by the grace of baptism and Christian worship (7.18–8.19). Thus continence is a virtue found only in Christians under grace, who have been inspired by God to fight inwardly in a ferocious struggle against concupiscence, as they "crucify" fleshly desires in Christian "combat" (3.6–9, 8.20, 7.18). In other words, for Augustine continent dissent from sin is the engine that makes practices such as fasting and sexual restraint possible as true spiritual exercises, which over time cause not only our sins to decrease but even our carnal desires themselves (8.20). However, given the conflict of the different sorts of delight that make up our *voluntas*, this refusal of consent to sin is only made possible when "the Lord gives a sweetness that is beneficial, making continence more pleasurable," to counter the sweetness of satisfying sinful desire (3.7).[12]

So continence is a virtue that presupposes both a delight in sinning that must be restrained, but also a stronger delight in goodness that is given to us by God, and that makes possible our refusal to consent to sin.[13] Thus Augustine's account of the Christian life of inward struggle presupposes not the grim refusal of all delight but the earnest preference for a superior delight to an inferior, for the "gentle joy of sanctity" over lingering carnal temptations (14.31). Augustinian continence both reflects and heightens the increasingly strong love for God that motivates Christian believers who are progressively purifying their imaging of God.[14] But in this life, even under grace, this inward combat is tinged by fear and uncertainty (11.25) and the alarming possibility of relapse, because despite all our new and holy inclinations, we might reenact the Fall yet again, more horribly. Augustine writes that in Christians "base carnal impulses" are "being continually suppressed by continence to prevent them from rising up again. If anyone ceases to put them aside in this way, as though safe from them, they will launch themselves at the stronghold of that person's soul, and overthrow it and make it their slave again, a foully mutilated captive" (14.31).[15] Thus continence is an ongoing necessity; it can never be forgotten or neglected for an instant. Augustine's insistent language of struggle, combined with his urgent pleas to trust in God, not in oneself and one's own powers of self-restraint, which are bound to fail (5.12), all suggest that Augustinian virtue

is best understood as continuous striving for something higher, not repose in dependable excellences of character. Augustinian virtue risks the self by trusting entirely in God's power and mercy, carefully retaining a humble, expectant, obedient inward posture.

In comparison with this full Augustinian treatment, which places continence at the center of the Christian life of spiritual exercises, Xunzi's treatment is strikingly thin. He seems to have a similar concept, but the idea appears to be relatively uninteresting to him theoretically because he thinks the power of assent is common to all humans, and so he is much more concerned with how we might learn to what we should assent. This is fundamentally an intellectual and even epistemological problem, which motivates his thorough treatment of learning and the virtues of the heart/mind.[16]

Xunzi speaks of something analogous to continence in two places: his discussions of unity as a virtue and goal of the heart/mind that should guide ongoing Confucian practice; and his discussion of the lower levels of Confucian ethical achievement, especially surrounding the transition from pettiness to becoming an "educated man."[17] In the first area, unity implies "dark obscurity of intent" as one struggles as an uncelebrated, unskilled beginner to follow the Way. If my intention is unified, then I will be steadfast in my pursuit of the Way, like the single-minded earthworm rather than the *zao* 躁, "impetuous" or "scattered" crab (1/2/13). In the second area, we hear that educated men are those "whose enactment of the model has reached a steadfastness such that they do not let selfish desires disorder what they have heard" from their teacher (8/30/12–13). This implies that aspirants who have not yet reached this stage still allow "selfish desires" to disorder their moral deliberation, and it implies further that their intellectual grasp of the *Dao* is still relatively tenuous—it is something they have heard about but have not yet truly made their own through deep understanding and practice.

So far, this might seem hard to distinguish from Augustine's picture, but Xunzi's psychological model implies a very different treatment of such "disunity" and disordering conflict within the self. Most crucially, Xunzi's deep distinction between, on the one hand, our initially innate system of spontaneous responsiveness to our environment that includes our dispositions and desires and, on the other hand, the reflective and deliberative desires that consist in our judgments of assent, implies a localization and domestication of conflict within the self. Such conflict is always between our considered, reflective judgments and our spontaneous impulses. This is so because, according to Xunzi, the actual power to assent to particular courses of action is never lacking, even in beginners; when I stray from the *Dao*, I have made some sort of error, whether of evaluation or perception,

about what the *Dao* is or how it relates to the situation before me. If we just learned more, or thought through the implications of what we had learned, or more creatively drew analogies from it, we would not err so badly again. Crucially, Xunzi seems to think that "selfish desires" can "disorder what [aspirants] have heard" by "pulling" and "tilting" our perceptions so that we are blind to anything but our own immediate benefit or pleasure (21/105/7–8). Indeed, his stress on how desire can constrict and skew our perceptions, and thus undercut our capacities to deliberate from the very start, is essential to the plausibility of his psychology of assent and desire. Unless we actively address such difficulties, our vulgar innate desires will not only "tilt" our perceptions but also incline us toward corrupt interpretations of the Way, in which personal benefit or pleasure play too large a role, rather than an appropriately limited one. This means that internal conflict tends in the end for Xunzi to be a relatively simple and clear phenomenon: our impulses are bad; but if we understand things properly, we will be reflectively moved to restrain and eventually reshape them. At least for aspiring Confucians in a good environment, Xunzi in effect localizes, delimits, and demystifies our impulses to evil by making them strictly a matter of our spontaneously reactive disposition.[18] A Xunzian Confucian can then think of himself as fundamentally what he assents to, with a holdover of first-order desires that are no longer truly his own, because he decisively rejects them, and that he can patiently work on like a steadfast artisan working on a grand work of art. The larger and growing portion of first-order desires he does approve of will slowly and steadily eclipse the rest, until there are no more misshapen desires left within him and his self-crafting will at last be completed.

Xunzi's treatment of unity as both goal and virtue implies two main existential worries: first, the possibility of "obsession" derailing continued learning about and appropriation of the Way; and second, the very alarming (to Xunzi) possibility that someone might begin Confucian study and then give up because it was too frustrating or slow, or simply because they got distracted from it somehow and stopped paying attention to the task of self-improvement. This helps to explain his stress on communal support, which leads him to coin a seemingly unique idea of proto-continence: Educated men can command themselves well enough to follow the Way, as long as they are part of a dependable Confucian grouping that can keep pressing and guiding them onward and correcting their errors on specific points. Only when such people are truly dependable when alone or in antagonistic circumstances have they become noble men, who seem more than continent in their delight in "the [Confucian] model" of conduct, but not yet perfectly, effortlessly virtuous.

This is still considerably less radical, however, than Augustine's conception of the inner conflict within good, aspiring Christians "under grace." As William Babcock writes, Augustine's anti-Manichean account provides no localization of differing centers of desire but instead develops a way "to portray a true internal struggle of the self against itself."[19] Both our carnal and spiritual desires are our own desires, our own "inner words" within our own minds that battle for supremacy. This implies that for Augustine the mind's resistance to itself will always retain an element of mystery in the negative sense, of incomprehensibility, just like the Fall. Inner conflict cannot be quarantined by placing sinful impulses only within the body, or a lower part of the soul, when our own inner discourse is divided against itself.

Not only that, but according to Augustine even when grace has provided that superior delight in the good that makes continence possible, our minds may still "defect" from this stronger yearning by consenting to sin (*cont.* 5.12–13, 8.20, 14.31). If such consent is given to a sufficiently serious offense, a lifetime of continence can be destroyed in an instant, if God has predestined such a catastrophic warning to others (*persev.* 22.61).

For Xunzi, by contrast, the vigilant attention to pursuing unity that is appropriate to aspirants and even educated men slowly fades out as our dispositions are more and more thoroughly reshaped through steady Confucian practice. Though unity remains as a virtue, "dark obscurity of intent" eventually gives way to the "shining brightness of illumination" (1/2/13–14), when what we would call continence is no longer necessary. Even for the noble man, who still must practice self-overcoming of a sort, the fundamental battle has been won. Although noble men still make occasional mistakes of speech, conduct, and understanding, they have nevertheless fundamentally settled their new orientation to the Way, so that there is no reason for them to *fear* their remaining imperfect impulses or misjudgments, even if they might be cause for shame (8/30/13–15). For Xunzi, if the Way prevails in society at large, such men can only be considered happy, as they continue their pursuit of sagehood. The real danger concerns aspirants who might overestimate their grasp of the Way, or give up on it foolishly, or simply become distracted by enticing possibilities that they do not even recognize as temptations.

To sum up the discussion so far, Xunzi and Augustine are proposing two intriguingly different accounts of the long quest for the ethical perfection that each enjoins. Each of their distinctive ideas of such perfection (effortlessly splendid sagehood for Xunzi, and eternal beatitude in perfected relation to God for Augustine) stands in sharp contrast to the petty or sinful state of normal human beings, and serves to goad and entice aspirants further along their respective paths. These ideals, in other words, are meant to

induce passionate striving within the religious life, and a sense of dissatisfaction with one's current state of existence, perhaps even a sort of positive anxiety to be transformed.

Xunzi's account of this striving is relatively more straightforward. Throughout the process of moving from pettiness to nobility, we have a humbling awareness of how far we remain from the ideal of the sage, who spontaneously desires to follow the Way alone, and who is so skillful in his ritualized interpersonal mastery that he has no trouble responding well to any unusual person or situation. But if we remain steadfast in our practice of Confucian spiritual exercises, according to Xunzi, we will gradually notice the change in our desires, in concert with the increasing depth of our understanding. It would seem, then, that practice is initially quite difficult but becomes noticeably easier as we progress for Xunzi, although I suspect that Xunzi and other Confucians proffer the sage ideal at least in part to keep those who perceive themselves to be noble from overestimating their mastery of self and the arts of the Way. But even so, it would seem that a noble man would be right to feel growing self-assurance and ease, even as he continues to strive for greater creativity, flexibility, and insight in his ritual practice, and his teaching of beginning Confucians.

For Augustine, however, his teachings about the inevitable imperfections of personal cultivation in this life, as compared with the beatitude that is our true goal as human beings, combine to lead to what might be called a double ideal: one suited to our present existence under grace, and another more ultimate one. Though in the next life we will enjoy perfect, untroubled rest and the barely imaginable joy of having our greatest desire eternally satisfied, in the current life our situation is fundamentally one of expectation. This means that in a certain sense, even as our loves become more integrated through Christian discipleship, our yearning and striving only increase in intensity—as long as we are still pilgrims on the way home to the heavenly Jerusalem. Augustine writes: "Our task lies in desiring. Holy desire is the whole life of good Christians. . . . Thus God, by deferring [what we yearn for], stretches our desire; by the desiring, stretches the soul; by stretching, makes it more capacious. Let us therefore desire, brothers, because we shall be filled" (*ep. Jo.* 4.6).[20]

Augustine suggests that we should work to increase our spiritual hunger and even dissatisfaction, that we might strive all the more and become inwardly capable, through greatness of love, for true beatitude. Though increasingly intense *caritas* may be satisfied in part through regular prayer and worship and the practice of other spiritual exercises, it demands as well vigorous striving to love other human beings through active, extensive benevolence. In this sense Paul, rather than Christ, becomes the model for

Christians in this life, according to Augustine: Paul forgets what lies behind, stretches out to what lies ahead, and presses on intently toward the ultimate union with Christ in beatitude (Phil 3:13, *Trin.* 9.1; see also *s.* 400.1).[21]

In other words, Augustine counsels an ideal that continues to fascinate many in the West, although often in a radically altered, Nietzschean form: a life of ever-increasing passion, which is marked by increasingly intense yet disciplined striving for spiritual perfection. This heroic striving seems to require continuing antagonistic contests, with significant challenges and resistance to be overcome, where great acts and great passion incite each other in turn. Of course Augustine undoubtedly also questions this heroic tendency, most notably via his skeptical interrogation of *superbia*, and he suggests that genuine perseverance against the ongoing threats of concupiscence is the finest achievement believers may reasonably hope for in this life. But the basic structure of continuing struggle, effort, and impassioned striving is present nonetheless.

In contrast, Xunzi imagines that the ideal human state is one of "effortless action," in Edward Slingerland's apt phrase.[22] In such a sagely state, one's desires, thoughts, skills, and actions are all perfectly integrated in "the middle course where ritual flows." As Slingerland argues, this vision reflects a shared early Chinese ideal of effortlessly skillful mastery as the ultimate human state.[23] Though Xunzi undoubtedly pictures the Confucian path as an extremely demanding endeavor in its earlier stages, the sense of struggle and striving that are essential to any movement from pettiness to higher stages of life gradually dissipates as one's dispositions are reformed into the proper shape. The Way gets easier as one walks it over a lifetime, until one may skip along it with unselfconscious delight. But unlike Augustinian beatitude, which is essentially contemplative, Xunzian sagehood is fundamentally a matter of active engagement with the world as a preternaturally capable moral leader. (The Augustinian life of inspired corporate charity within and beyond the church, however, is equally active and engaged, although it eschews hope for perfect peace or flawless moral leadership here on Earth.)

The extreme difficulty of actually living this sort of sage-leader ideal, however, suggests that Xunzi is trying to ward off the self-satisfaction that would ordinarily come with high rank, an ample salary, and social influence, if our dispositions are not fully transformed (23/116/25–23/117/1). Even the internal rewards of a fully ritualized life are obviously insufficient by themselves, in this sort of vision, without political effectiveness in ushering the Way more widely into society. In other words, for Xunzi, the extremity of the ideal makes the pursuit of perfection asymptotic, with significant further progress possible for even the highly virtuous and very capable. As

Confucius's celebrated disciple Yan Hui is reported to say of the Way in *Analects* 9.11, "The more I look up at it the higher it seems; the more I delve into it, the harder it becomes. Catching a glimpse of it before me, I then find it suddenly at my back. The Master is skilled at gradually leading people on, step by step. He broadens me with culture and restrains me with the rites, so that even if I wanted to give up I could not."[24] For Xunzi, as with other early Confucians of his outlook, following the *Dao* with sagely perfection is a vast challenge, and it requires a lifetime of commitment to master.

Augustine goes even further, however, undercutting the pretensions of human virtue decisively. In this life, everyone still has far to go, according to Augustine. Though believers should have confidence in the Lord, pride is always a dangerous, devious enemy.

For both figures, long-term or even unceasing striving is necessary in part because aspiring Christians and Confucians, on their accounts, are seeking to live an ideal that they only dimly and partially understand. As with many of the most important endeavors in life, both Augustine and Xunzi think that personal formation is a long-term project to which we must commit ourselves before we fully understand it, in part because its difficulties would terrify us if we knew them in advance.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES AND THE MANIPULATION OF INNER AND OUTER

One of the striking similarities between Augustine and Xunzi is their shared conviction that learning is a foundational spiritual exercise. People cannot flourish without learning. Put another way, we do not innately possess the resources necessary to live a good life, and so we must learn from others the most important, indeed salvific, facts about human existence. Moreover, learning must continue throughout our lives. It is not as if there are a few earthshaking truths we must grasp, after which all is resolved. It might seem, then, that both Xunzi and Augustine would insist on the necessity of external assistance because of the paucity of internal resources available to uncultivated people. Though this is true in a general sense, it obscures important differences in their treatments of what is "inner" or hidden and what is "outer" or visible, differences that help explain many of the dissimilarities between their overarching accounts of spiritual exercises. (I return to their shared emphasis on learning in the third section of this chapter.)

So far, much of this chapter has focused on moral psychology, but to grasp the deeper organizing principles in Augustine and Xunzi's regimes of personal formation, we need to note as well their partially divergent

conceptions of a related topic: what is morally required of human beings. In other words, what counts as a good or right action, for each of them? On this issue, Augustine sits squarely within a central stream of western ethical reflection, which he helped shape. For Augustine, the crucial issue in evaluating human actions is whether they stem from a rightly directed will. This means they must be properly motivated by *caritas*, and properly "referred" to the right ultimate end, beatitude with God (*Trin.* 11.10). The notion of reference at play here concerns the reason or end for which an action is taken, and Augustine envisions logical links between immediate proximate intentions, intermediate goals, and the ultimate ends of beatitude, glory, or pleasure, which determine the moral quality of every particular *voluntas*, no matter how minor. This means, crucially, that for Augustine actions that seem to perfectly fulfill the requirements of some duty, at least outwardly in terms of performance, can still be fundamentally evil if they are ultimately motivated by and "referred" to some wrong end, such as personal glory.[25] An example would be doing some visibly good deed, such as helping the proverbial old lady across the street, for an ultimately selfish reason, such as gaining a good reputation so that one might be entrusted with responsibility and thus power.

A corollary of this conception is that the actual outcome of one's efforts is secondary at best, for Augustine. Indeed, because God uses all things for good, even the evil wills of sinning humans, according to Augustine *every* action will in some objective, external sense become part of God's providential design, and thus be just and right. If one's own aims in action are thwarted, one may still rest assured that God has justly and wisely overruled one's efforts. For Augustine, in sum, moral evaluation hinges fundamentally on individual intention and motivation. As Augustine famously counsels, "Love, and do what you will. . . . Let the root of love be within. From such a root nothing but good can come forth" (*ep. Jo.* 7.8).

For Xunzi, the situation is more complicated. On his account, right action must be manifest in correct outward form, although to be perfect such action must be matched by appropriate emotions and desires; such is the "middle course where ritual flows." In his criticism of Mencius, Xunzi defines *shan* 善, "good," and *e* 惡, "bad," as follows: "From antiquity to the present, what all under Heaven have called good is what is correct, properly patterned, peaceful, and orderly. What is called bad is what is slanted, vicious, perverse, and chaotic" (23/115/1–2). The root meanings of goodness for Xunzi seem to concern publicly observable states of affairs, mostly involving proper social order. But the context in which this remark is made is the debate over the character of human *xing* or instincts, which suggests

that the quality of human impulses is also at issue. Moreover, badness for Xunzi seems to include certain qualities of volition, such as viciousness and perversity.

To grasp what Xunzi has in mind, recall that for him the Way is "marked out" by the rituals (18/82/22–18/83/1). As discussed in chapter 6, to follow the Way one must behave in a ritually appropriate manner, which requires a certain sort of personal demeanor as well as a wide range of specific behaviors, across all spheres of human activity, including but going well beyond particular important ceremonies. Moreover, the minute details of ritual incarnate general norms of justice (*yi* 義), and so they are crucial to the right ordering of society. Indeed, Xunzi says at one point that the Way is essentially a matter of creating community, by properly ordering, harmonizing, and nourishing people, so that they may flourish together (12/59/11–16). All of this suggests that right actions, on Xunzi's understanding, both *aim at* and *successfully achieve* the outward manifestation of a properly patterned society.[26]

This insistence on excellent observable form might suggest that Xunzi does not care particularly much about proper motivation and intention, but this would be mistaken. (It would also make rather mysterious his insistence on spiritual exercises designed to reform our dispositions and desires.) It is clear that Xunzi thinks we must possess the proper emotions and dispositions to fully exemplify the Way. One of his more general ways of making this point is his insistence that right action (i.e., action in accord with ritual and justice, and thus the *Dao* as well) must manifest the virtue of *ren* 仁, which for him means something like "benevolence," "caring," or "humaneness" (8/28/15). Indeed, he explicitly rejects actions that are not based on ritual and justice but that accidentally hit on what is outwardly fitting, because he thinks such actions are not truly benevolent and will thus necessarily "fail," perhaps because they will fail to move their recipients appropriately (8/33/14). For him, it appears that fully good actions must both be motivated by and manifest the benevolence, justice, and beautiful propriety characteristic of the Confucian Way.

This generates an interesting complication, given Xunzi's account of assent overruling our inadequate emotions and desires. To put the point briefly, his psychology and personal formation program suggest that most people, not being sages, will need to frequently push themselves toward proper outward observances of ritual and just action in ways that pull back from or go beyond their felt emotions and desires. Such actions, for him, must in some significant sense be good, because their ultimate goal is enacting the Way, even though they are imperfect in their flawed motivation. He

thus prioritizes correct outward form and performance, but he relates this in complex ways to our considered intentions manifest in what we assent to, and to our initially misdirected dispositions and impulses.

These differences in their conceptions of what counts as genuinely good or right action play out in the regimes of spiritual exercises that Augustine and Xunzi each recommend, especially those that go beyond textual study and serve to help internalize or genuinely realize the lessons learned in such study. Xunzi's overarching concern with proper social order and beautiful outward form (*wenli* 文禮, "proper form and good order") leads him to devote much of his attention to what may be called performative practices like ritual and music. Such practices order persons in terms of not only their appearance and positioning but also their interrelations within groups, aiming throughout to create forms and patterns that are *mei* 美, "fine" and "beautiful," as well as just. In this sort of practice, individuals are pulled outward—their attention is focused on timely and appropriate interactions with others. They thus cultivate alert awareness of others and their actions, and sensitivity to the numerous moral and aesthetic distinctions that ritual forms create and enforce.

When Augustine moves beyond study, by contrast, he advocates turning primarily to symbolic activities such as the Eucharist and discursive practices such as petitionary prayer, contemplation, and confession. Even practices of self-restraint such as fasting and celibacy are repeatedly understood symbolically, and he clearly envisions them as being simultaneous with more positive, articulate practices of prayer, mutual exhortation, and self-examination, as in the annual Easter vigil. All these exercises encourage what Foucault has called a "hermeneutics of the self," wherein one carefully scrutinizes one's inner impulses and thoughts, even when these concern seemingly outward activities such as partaking in the bread and wine, or refraining from eating for a period of time.[27]

Because the mind for Augustine is a trinity of memory, understanding, and will/love, which exists as an ongoing stream of "inner words," the crucial issues in personal formation are to discern the quality and "direction" of one's inner discourse at any given moment, and to do all one can to reshape it and properly direct it toward its true end. These goals may be accomplished by refusing consent to sinful internal words before they issue in action, by as it were "reciting" inwardly the discourse one wishes to adopt, and by using the proper terms to analyze and articulate one's own conception of self and world. Instead of finding one's rightful place in beautiful and just harmonization with other ritual actors, for Augustine we are to find our true self by correctly discerning our own deep inner relation to God.

By locating and relying on this divine fountain within, we may confidently go forth to love neighbor and even enemy; but without it, we are lost, both inwardly and outwardly.

To put the contrast schematically, Augustine pursues an "inside-out" model of personal formation, while Xunzi pursues an "outside-in" model.[28] In other words, Augustine's exercises focus as much as possible on the mysterious source of our actions in our inward "heart of hearts." By working to restrain concupiscent impulses so that God's love and wisdom may enter in and inspire us to righteous action, spiritual exercises *directly* address what is most inward to change what generates our outward behavior. Xunzi instead suggests that the most potent strategy for effecting lasting inward change is to focus on what we can control reasonably well—our outward movements, gestures, and speech—and by working to perfect these observable actions, slowly and *indirectly* reforming the impulses that move us spontaneously, until at last they lead just as surely to outwardly perfect action.

This contrast helps to explain some of the striking differences between Augustine's and Xunzi's programs for personal formation. Xunzi gives remarkably little attention to the sorts of meditations that seem so integral to the various forms of Augustinian prayer, for instance. Xunzi makes exercises such as the memorization and recitation of classical poetry subsidiary and introductory parts of his account of Confucian study and learning, and he explicitly warns against making them more central than ritual practice under the personal guidance of a wise teacher (1/3/7–1/4/4). And though Xunzi does mention self-examination occasionally in his writings, it occupies nothing like the central place confession and self-scrutiny do for Augustine (1/1/5, 1/4/16–19, 2/5/3–6, 2/6/12, 11/54/13; cf. 1/1/12–15). As argued in chapter 6, Xunzian self-examination seems to be a self-interrogation concerning one's treatment of close and distant human beings, and whether one has conscientiously enacted what one teaches and purports to follow, rather than a careful sifting and interpretation of thoughts and desires to ferret out hidden sinfulness.

Furthermore, in contrast to the relatively direct pageantry of Xunzian ritual, Augustinian rituals such as the Eucharist are shot through with symbolism, and they are meant to be occasions for the contemplation of symbols. As Robert Dodaro has argued, "Behind [Augustine's] enthusiasm for liturgical symbolism lies a Platonic sensitivity to the movement from visible to invisible orders of reality."[29] According to Augustine, as we move mentally from the physical reality of the bread and wine to their Christian symbolic meaning, to their *spiritus* or inner meaning, our minds are excited and drawn "upward and inward" to God's eternal truths in a way that would be difficult to achieve without allegory and symbolism (*ep.* 55.21). For Xunzi,

the details of the rituals he discusses have meaning in that they are commonly understood to express certain feelings and thoughts; yet the mode of this meaning is not in any obvious sense symbolic but rather conventional and somewhat literal, as when the grave goods are all in some way incomplete or unusable, to mark the fact that, although mourners wish the dead person were simply moving to a new abode, he or she will not actually be using any of these implements (19/95/6–13).

Let us pursue one such issue in greater depth. The basic contrast between inside-out and outside-in strategies of personal cultivation helps explain an intriguing and deep disagreement between Augustine and Xunzi concerning the value of pretence in self-formation. Consider first Augustine's absolute proscription of lying, which he discusses in two separate treatises, and which was a departure from earlier, somewhat less strict Christian reflection on the topic (*mend.*, *c. mend.*).[30] For Augustine, lying appears to be essential to most forms of sin, which except in unusual cases (e.g., the unevangelized who are "before the law") require that we lie to ourselves about the relative goodness of the end we pursue, such as human companionship, by semiconsciously overvaluing it relative to God's unchanging hierarchical ordering of reality (e.g., *conf.* 2.3.7, 2.6.14, 2.8.16, *Gn. litt.* 11.42.59). Because God for Augustine *is* the Truth (*conf.* 3.6.10, *c. mend.* 40), lying is at root a defection from God and God's ordering of reality, and so it may never be excused under any circumstances, no matter what other evils might be avoided by doing so (*mend.* 42). Indeed, for Augustine, the worst sort of deception is a lie about matters of religion; he views any sort of lying in the midst of religious instruction or training, purportedly for someone's spiritual good, as particularly heinous (*mend.* 17).

This absolutist conception of truthfulness leads Augustine to exalt a vision of the religious life as a continuing confession of the truth, both inwardly and outwardly, so that the Christian life can be seen as a contest between truth telling and lying as general modes of existence. According to Augustine, "Every proud person is an impostor. . . . Any proud person pretends to be what he is not; he cannot do otherwise." In contrast to this, the "true Israelite" or genuine believer who "ascends to Jerusalem" is one "in whom no guile (*dolus*, lit. 'artifice') is to be found." Augustine concludes: "Why do they ascend? How do they ascend? To confess to your name, oh Lord. It cannot be more splendidly said. Just as pride presumes, humility confesses. The presumptuous wants to appear to be something they are not; just so someone who confesses does not want to appear other than they truly are, and loves what He [i.e., God] is" (*en. Ps.* 121.8). On Augustine's account, it appears that pretense or outward artifice is always a mark of human pride, which seeks to dissemble about its true state as subject to God. This world-oriented guile is

radically opposed to the truth-confessing love of God. The need for humble confession of dependence on God becomes only greater when one takes up exalted positions within the community, such as ecclesiastical office or consecrated virginity. Indeed, a great danger in such a state is pretending to be humble outwardly, while inwardly one begins to revel proudly in the graces one has already been given, which destroys from within like a spiritual cancer (*virg.* 43.44).

Needless to say, such a vision of the dangers of pretense is dramatically opposed to both the rhetoric and, to a lesser degree, the real position of Xunzi, who provocatively chooses *wei* 偽 or "artifice" as his summary term for both the process of personal formation and good character itself (22/107/24). On Xunzi's account, we must meet objective moral standards, which often take the form of observable public performances, despite the fact that our inadequately cultivated dispositions do not spontaneously make us feel like doing so. We thus, in a very real sense, pretend to be more virtuous than we yet are, by imitating the clothes, gestures, words, and general demeanor of a noble man, even though this does violence to our true feelings.

Is Xunzi guilty of advising all aspiring Confucians to lie about their true character? The charitable answer must be no, because a Xunzian aspirant is not deceiving himself, or even others, about what he is doing, which is learning to become good by trying to act the part. More precisely, when someone engages in "artifice" in Xunzi's technical sense, they are *ke* 可, "assenting," to some particular plan of action based on preceding *lü* 慮, "deliberation," about what is best, that is, what matches the Way in the current situation; or if they are true beginners, by assenting to directions given by their teacher, whom they respect and trust even though they do not yet understand him well. Though the aspirant will suffer the frustration of thwarting some of his desires, he will be achieving, however clumsily and imperfectly, what he aims for, which is a ritually correct performance. Even in the case of an educated man, Xunzi's partly cultivated Confucian, who assents to acting properly in public on the basis of his own assessment of some matter despite his countervailing desires, this cannot really be counted as deception, because of the essential role of his assent in making such an action possible. Such Confucians are neither deceived about their own internal states, because they overrule their inappropriate desires and emotions, nor do they deceive others, because they honestly cherish the values conveyed by their performances.

Xunzi's psychological separation of assent from the responsive system of dispositions governing spontaneous desire and emotion thus makes possible a fundamentally different form of pretence from anything envisaged

by Augustine. But even a very charitable Augustinian might wonder why exactly Xunzi thinks "acting the part" of goodness will eventually make one good.[31] Might it not simply cultivate acting skill, while leaving one's heart and mind as corrupt as ever?

Xunzi's reply to such a query would be multifaceted. First, there are very important dissimilarities between "acting" as a contemporary artistic practice and Xunzian ritual as a spiritual exercise. Acting does not intrinsically relate to some higher goal, and it can be pursued for any number of reasons, in pursuit of goods internal to the practice such as producing splendid dramatic performances, or further cultivating one's skill as an actor; or goods external to the practice, such as earning a paycheck, becoming famous, or running away from one's own troubled existence.[32] By contrast, Xunzian ritual is supposed to be performed in order to follow the Way by making just and beautiful both everyday existence and important occasions. Moreover, acting covers any and all sorts of behavior—perfect mimicry, or at least believable simulation, of the full range of human conduct included. But Xunzian ritual is focused on only one sort of character, that of the ancient sages, and it is meant to encode and vivify their mode of life in as much detail as possible, so that the aspiring Confucian is not learning to imitate in general but to imitate the mode of life of the wisest and best human beings.[33] Thus the skill at ritual an aspirant cultivates by following the advice of his teacher would be skill only at acting like a sage. Moreover, skill at acting in the contemporary sense is a specialized craft that one might exercise or not exercise whenever one felt like it. But for Xunzi, and for Confucians generally, "skill" at ritual is equivalent to increasing mastery of the overarching art of living as a human being, which covers all aspects of life and is not something one sets aside, or even could set aside if sufficiently cultivated, based on whim or circumstance.[34] In other words, for Confucians like Xunzi, genuine skill at ritual is identical to virtue itself, in their conception.

Moving to the vocabulary of "skill" recalls Aristotle's famous discussion of cultivating virtue through practicing it, where he distinguishes sharply between virtue and skill in order to defeat the objection that one could not learn to be virtuous by doing virtuous actions, because such actions must already have the proper intention to be truly virtuous.[35] Aristotle suggests that though excellent outward form is sufficient to judge the goodness of craft products, it is not enough to judge the skill of the artisan. Moreover, it is insufficient for virtuous actions to merely possess the right qualities; such actions must be done by a person in the right state, that is, one who knows what he is doing and why (something good, because it is good), and furthermore does it out of a "firm and unchanging" state of character. On

this basis, he distinguishes between just actions, which are the sort that a just person would do, and performing such actions in the right way, in the manner that a truly just person would. Aristotle at this point simply asserts that the only way one can move toward actually possessing steady states of virtuous character is to frequently perform actions that outwardly manifest the good ("just actions"), as a way of practicing the deliberation that decides on what is good for its own sake, and of training emotions, desires, and discernment in order to see and judge in a consistently just manner.

Xunzi, however, can go well beyond this sort of account, given his view of the centrality of ritual skill to moral virtue. For him, this special sort of skill is much closer to virtue, and indeed is essential to its full possession. Where Aristotle distinguishes sharply between virtue and skill, Xunzi conspicuously fails to make such a sharp distinction, although we should note the disanalogies mentioned above between acting and ritual mastery.

Although the two sorts of practice do differ, Xunzian personal formation seems to share significant commonalities with the process of becoming an excellent musician or dancer.[36] In such practices, one must learn many basic rules and also learn how to actually execute certain sorts of movements and, eventually, performances, so that they are beautiful and good, according to the standards of the practice in question.[37] Several related things happen as practice deepens. As one gains greater expertise, one begins to understand the rationale for aspects of the practice that initially seemed arbitrary, painful, or irritating. Skill of this sort, however, is just as much physical as mental—one learns how to play the violin beautifully with one's fingers and hands as much as one's mind; one learns with both body and mind how to move smoothly and easily through various sorts of ritually regulated interactions. One also comes to better appreciate the subtleties that differentiate poor, middling, and fine performances. In tandem with this growing sensitivity, one gradually develops what can only be called artful style in one's own practice, although here there would presumably be room for a range of achievement. Indeed, Xunzi's near-assimilation of virtue with a certain sort of skill at living extends to his treatment of the sage, who may be distinguished from the noble man not only by his greater understanding of the Way and his perfected dispositions but also by his extraordinary skill at politically effective moral leadership (8/30/15–17). Perhaps most crucially, as ritual mastery increases, one gradually delights more and more in the beauty of the art one is creating through performance, and in one's own and others' abilities to perform so well.

This last point is essential to the plausibility of Xunzi's Confucianism. At the end of chapter 5, I questioned whether Xunzi could adequately explain how petty people might come to be motivated by love for the Way itself

rather than the benefits they might perceive to "playing along" with it. Xunzi's ritual reformation model hinges on the characteristics of performative skill training just discussed, combined with the process of Confucian learning. As this regimen is pursued over time, one will become aware of new sources of satisfaction, new values, that will relativize all that went before and will show that one's previous concerns were indeed "petty" or "small," as Xunzi puts it. Profit or personal benefit is not evil, on Xunzi's reckoning, but it is dramatically less important and valuable than the Confucian form of life marked by social justice, benevolent communal harmony, and the ritual and aesthetic culture that makes these possible. Confucian learning, ritual, and musical practice thus promise to transform our understanding and scheme of evaluation, our sensibilities, our capabilities and habits, and our tastes and desires. Xunzi's Confucianism is a comprehensive art of living well, shorn of the contemporary associations of that phrase with self-indulgent pleasure seeking.

On Xunzi's account, almost everything that makes life good grows on the basis of learning, considered broadly. In the same way that we might justifiably say that someone who never learned to read at all has missed all that comes from loving literature, and lived a stunted and deprived existence, Xunzi thinks that the culture of Confucian learning and practice opens up the most important human goods, without which human beings are barely distinguishable from animals.[38]

A critic could certainly persist, however, and question whether this has just moved the problem of "faking it" to a new level. Why could one not view the whole Confucian system as merely an excellent method for personal advancement, as many throughout premodern Chinese history undoubtedly did? Xunzi, like the circle of Confucius's followers who produced the *Analects*, is fully aware of this problem, and in the end he thinks there can be no foolproof certainty that going through the "wood-straightening" process of submitting to a Confucian teacher will automatically lead to true inner goodness. Only if that process genuinely opens new horizons of life, which kindle awareness of and taste for previously unimagined goods, will Xunzian virtue become possible. A story in one of the late chapters of the *Xunzi* probably put together by his students presents Confucius talking to a duke about how to choose worthy ministers. Confucius first suggests choosing those who follow the ancient ritual codes, including dress and demeanor, to which the duke responds: "Is anyone who dons court robes and court shoes and tucks an official tablet into his sash a worthy person?" Confucius replies that this is not necessarily so, and then he clearly relates the excellence of Confucians to the way they focus their *zhi* 志, "intentions" (i.e., direct their heart/mind) on the ways of the ancients and care little about food, which

seems to stand in here for personal interests in pleasure and advancement. He concludes, "Even if there should be some who abide by these [ways of the ancients] and still do wrong, they would be few indeed, would they not?" To which the duke can only reply: "Well spoken!" (31/144/27–31/145/5).[39]

The idea seems to be that it would be extraordinarily difficult to pursue Confucian training long enough to become observably excellent at ritual without being changed inwardly. If one never came to delight in the Way, one's dedication would flag and one would simply give up, or one would betray continuing pettiness through "slips" of the tongue or body. (This suggests that corrupt, lazy, or irreducibly "petty" students would eventually by expelled from a Xunzian teaching group.) Xunzi thinks that the practices of learning, ritual, and music are themselves very potent, and when guided by a capable teacher and accompanied by other serious students, one will be "rubbed" daily by good influences that only heighten these exercises' effectiveness—but because the root issue is the transformation of the self-commanding human heart/mind, Xunzi must allow for all-too-explicable failures of cultivation, due to the intransigent pull of instinctive desires. Such failures may take the form of "apostates" from Confucianism who advocate some other Way, or the *su Ru* 俗儒, "vulgar Confucians," whom Xunzi describes with scorn as those who ape the manner of a true ritualist and spout pointless quotations from the *Odes*, all for the purpose of enriching themselves at the expense of others (8/32/17–21).

Might the aesthetic delights of Confucian ritual become a sort of idol, so that the adept who sees and enjoys his growing mastery of ritual could fall prey to a final sort of immoral seduction, caring only about the beauty of ritual performance and forgetting the value of justice and benevolence? Though Xunzi does not explicitly entertain this possibility, it seems clear that he could understand this as a case of obsession by ritual. And though ritual is a fine thing, essential to personal formation and the conduct of a good life, for Xunzi, it is not the only or uniquely supreme human value. Apparent "mastery" of ritual without a deeper understanding and love for the Way, manifest in the equal possession of the virtues of benevolence and justice, would be rigid and misguided (2/7/18–19). In other words, it would be merely counterfeit propriety.

To sum up, Xunzi thinks "artifice" is both necessary and saving because it allows us to learn, as embodied actors, how to live like sages. Such artifice is more like learning an art of performance than it is like pretending to be something one is not, because beginners cannot effectively pretend to be ritual masters, any more than I can pretend to be a concert violinist. Early-stage Confucians aspire to ritual mastery, but they only gradually approach such a state. In so doing, they are genuinely transformed, as long as they

persevere with a heart/mind focused on the Way, because ritual for Xunzi is not something that one engages in occasionally but rather a style or mode of existence that permeates all our activities and social interactions. As one gradually grasps what is truly at stake, one will even *shen qi du* 慎其獨, "be watchful over oneself when alone," so that one never departs from ritual even for a moment (3/11/7).

One might say, then, that Xunzi allows for something like inspiration—and even demands it. Where Augustine solves the problem of sincerity and moral purpose decisively by insisting on the primacy of divine agency in enabling true human agency and virtue, Xunzi "solves" the problem with much less finality. For Xunzi, we come to experience a new sincerity, if we ever do, when we find ourselves to be changed by our ongoing practices of learning and performance, when the Way we sought in order to find safety and a more impressive and pleasant form of life turns out to be something altogether richer than we had initially imagined possible, and we find that the desires that once moved us have been joined by new desires, subtly changing the whole constellation of our emotional life, in gradually better accord with our increasingly sophisticated understanding of what life is about.

CHASTENED INTELLECTUALISM

As noted at the beginning of the previous section, perhaps the most arresting and significant commonality between Xunzi and Augustine is their shared stress on the need for study, learning, and reflection as the backbone of their respective programs of spiritual exercises. In this section, I argue that despite their very significant differences, this shared emphasis marks out their religious programs as variants of a common sort of ethical position, one that is quite powerful and attractive, which I call "chastened intellectualism." Such a position affirms the value of intellectual apprehension and reflection, but it questions the neutrality and absolute sovereignty of thinking.

Augustinian Christianity and Xunzian Confucianism are "intellectualist" because they think text-based learning and intellectual reflection on this learning are prerequisites for living well as human beings. (And although Augustine, as noted in chapter 6, recognizes and respects illiterate holy people as heroes of the faith, he thinks that even such people have had to learn a web of crucial truths, stories, and symbols from someone, via language, in order to be saved and live righteously.) The common elements here stretch across anthropology, personal formation, and ethics itself. Augustine and Xunzi both believe that human beings have much to learn, that we come into existence ignorant of the most important truths, so that we must learn

at least these facts about our condition to live decent human lives, and much more to be capable of wise and just leadership in a community.

These views lead both Augustine and Xunzi to strongly emphasize education and to generate integrated accounts of its intellectual, moral, somatic, and aesthetic aspects. For both of them, proper understanding is essential to right living; progressively deeper wisdom is a concomitant of growth in virtue. Both think that the mastery of certain received texts helps us immensely toward these goals of understanding and virtue. These goals are not easy to achieve, but are needed nonetheless, because life is complicated and the best course of action is frequently unclear. This implies that some form of thoughtful deliberation, guided by traditional categories and modes of analysis assimilated through reflective practice, will often be required in order to choose and live well in a confusing and often disordered world.

This sort of position therefore judges ethical theory to be indispensable to living rightly. Ethical theory plays several important roles in this sort of vision, most notably description, guidance, and inspiration. It describes the ethically ideal form of life, and it justifies its superiority on the basis of an overarching account of both human beings and the world we inhabit. Theory explains how and why this better mode differs from typical human existence, and it at least in part guides us to this new form of life. Though the task of mastering ethical theory is therefore essential to living well, without teachers, practice, and various forms of transhuman aid, theory will be insufficient by itself to lead us to goodness. Guidance, then, includes not only the more familiar problem of sorting out which sorts of actions are typically forbidden or required by various moral considerations but also a full response to the problem of personal appropriation of a new way of life. And to the extent that it can make compelling its analysis and contrast of typical human life and the perfected, flourishing life, ethical theory is thereby inspiring to its students, although this sort of contrast is most often made vivid through more traditional rhetorical arts such as storytelling and drama.

Augustine and Xunzi are each, however, "chastened" in their intellectualism. This makes their positions more sophisticated and promising than the kind of modern philosophical ethics that concentrates only on theories of the right or the good, leaving the question of how to actually appropriate and live such theories to the side as a nonissue—a maneuver that seems to presuppose a naive voluntarism, as well as an unreasonably benign account of human nature.

There are several aspects to this chastening. The most obvious aspect is the highly critical accounts of elements of human "nature" offered by Augustine and Xunzi, as discussed in chapters 3 to 5. Although they differ in

their analyses, the basic point is that good human agency is an achievement, something that does not come "naturally" (i.e., spontaneously and easily) to us in our current state, whether this is conceived as fallen from some earlier, better form of life or not. We need significant outside assistance in order to live well, often taking the form of sustained, benevolent action from other people who help us escape our initial, rather bestial, existence and move toward something better.

Neither Augustine nor Xunzi could ever be accused of propounding a philosophy of bootstrapping or rugged individualism in moral development. According to Augustine, we need not only to hear from others the "good news" about Jesus Christ and the way he provides for humans to return to God; we also need direct intervention from God to move us toward Him. Furthermore, the only means of gaining forgiveness from our sins and the potential for a new start in life is through baptism into the church, a human collective and institution that points beyond itself to its heavenly head, Christ, who has deputized his human members as parts of the *totus Christus* or "whole Christ." Reformation and eventual beatitude are only possible through participation in the common life of the church and the practices that its members share, including scriptural study and the Eucharist.

Even on Xunzi's account, however, individuals are not in a position to save themselves from their misguided desires purely on their own power. Only when frustrated and afraid will people look for guidance beyond their instinctive urges. They need a teacher and fellow students to make any ethical progress. But if they turn to the wrong teacher or are afflicted with bad friends, they are just as likely to exacerbate the problems generated by their bad impulses. According to Xunzi, the tradition of the Zhou sages, preserved and developed by Confucians, holds the unique keys to resolving the dilemmas of the human condition. Without exposure to this tradition, humans remain "vulgar," dangerous to each other and everything else.

Although both thinkers clearly believe human assistance is required for anyone to progress in righteousness, it might seem that only Augustine thinks we need transhuman aid as well, in the form of divine grace. Xunzi is commonly read as a "debunker" of traditional Chinese religious beliefs, and he is beloved by some moderns (including many in the People's Republic of China) as a protosecularist. Though a full consideration of the aptness of this judgment is beyond the scope of this chapter, I would argue that Xunzi does rely on the efficacy of at least one transhuman power, specifically the interactions of *qi* with and between human beings.[40] Particularly in his discussions of music, Xunzi attributes almost magical power to singing and listening to classical Zhou poetry (with musical accompaniment), which can evoke responses in us that draw out properly humane emotions and desires,

contributing very quickly to our transformation. By causing us to take joy in the Way, music quite literally energizes us to follow it, building up our strength and commitment. Nevertheless, it must be noted that these effects are still predictable, almost technological, and are produced within human practices devised by past sages; such a picture is a far cry from Augustine's account of a transcendent God with perfect knowledge and an eternally unwavering will, who nevertheless enters time and supports and oversees every aspect of temporal existence.

A second, more subtle aspect of the chastening I am discussing is Augustine and Xunzi's shared tendency to combine what are often called "cognitive" and "affective" dimensions of human action. In Xunzi, we can see this in his accounts of the interpenetration of perception and interpretation with desire and emotion, as well as the very idea of "assent" to the Confucian Way, which implies both deliberative reflection and a motivating recognition of action-compelling factors in some complex situation. For Augustine, we can see such a conception quite clearly in his account of the integration of memory, understanding, and forms of will or love in the mental "word" that is the beginning of any human action.

This shared tendency to integrated models of thought, emotion, and action helps show why spiritual exercises might be necessary, and how they might work: It is naive to think that we can just decide one day, having been convinced by an argument, to transform our lives and change who we are. The interplay of settled conviction and emotional responsiveness, and thus of habitual inclinations to action, can only be changed by reforming all these elements in tandem. Conscious exercises seem perfectly suited to this task, because they require reflective commitment, however minimal, to a set of forms or rules for behavior that guide us in the repetitive practice of alternative behaviors, and they prescribe alternative emotions as well. As practice continues, and reflection on it deepens, intellectual commitment and inclinational tendencies will, at least ideally, gradually increase together. It is thus unsurprising that one of the central aims of learning, and indeed of all spiritual exercises for Xunzi and Augustine, is the reformation of human emotions and desires.

This sort of picture provides a corrective to Hadot's stress in his accounts of Hellenistic spiritual exercises on universalizing reason restraining the passions; I would argue that both Augustine and Xunzi have more subtle models of the human person, and especially the psyche. They both reject the thought that we could or should ever be free of our emotions, and they also reject the view that emotions are essentially disruptive of good judgment and action; instead, they insist on the crucial importance of emotions and their reformation within the moral life. Indeed, on such a view,

"understanding" without the properly correlated dispositions and emotional responses to situations would be either immature or counterfeit. In any case, commitment to spiritual exercises clearly does not rest on a simplistic rationalism, even though reflection and intellectual assent do seem to be essential to them.

Their views are chastened in another sense. On Xunzi's and Augustine's accounts, true understanding can only be attained in the context of a shared practice aimed at assimilating the correct view of human life in community, and in the cosmos. This implies that commitment to an only partially understood path of personal formation is required for full understanding to ever become possible. Detachment is thus less a precondition to genuine knowledge than an obstacle to it. Both promise an eventual return to a comprehensive and tranquil perspective after sufficient personal development, although such a perspective is largely constituted by its passionate assent to the universal order, so it could hardly be considered detached or neutral. Put another way, Augustine and Xunzi insist on the need for faith in the efficacy of a chosen religious path, because deep and universal understanding arrives only late in life for a few, on Xunzi's account, or in the presence of God after the resurrection, for Augustine.

As a type of practice, chastened intellectualists therefore view personal formation as voluntary submission to an authoritative teaching. Submission to a position recognized as authoritative is critical, in order that the dictates a practitioner tries to assimilate will be seen as binding, standing in judgment over any and all impulses she or he might feel. Without this, the whole project of trying to attain a definite intellectual, emotional, and moral shape would be unjustified. Conscious assent to a regimen of formative practices differentiates spiritual exercises from the use of propaganda or coercive programs of "thought reform." However, spiritual exercises do make use of what could be called "conditioning," through the repetition of rituals, meditations, readings, and other practices designed to affect our habitual responses to situations, or our "inner discourse" of reflection and evaluation.

This need for voluntary, conscious assent underlines the extent to which this sort of position is still intellectualist, and it also helps qualify and flesh out the sort of subordination to authority each envisions. Without first-person experience of actual improvement—combined with an increasingly compelling understanding of the justification, nature, and goal of one's religious practices—spiritual exercises would cease to appeal to the considered, critical judgment of practitioners. Both Augustine and Xunzi clearly view questioning and debate as central to the process of the thoroughgoing education they propose, at least for those literate elites who pursue the ideal sort of personal formation.

Being a chastened intellectualist means that one views the task of learning not merely as gaining new information but primarily as the task of assimilating transformative knowledge into one's mode of existence. Looking specifically at Augustine's and Xunzi's accounts of learning, it is remarkable how similar they are. As noted, both insist on the authority of teachers over students, and of a unique and comprehensive set of classic texts, although exactly how they understand this varies. Both urge a rigorous program of assimilation of those texts, starting with as much memorization as possible, but accompanied by deepening practice in interpretation, which is essential to proper understanding. The final goal is correct understanding, which intrinsically includes "practical" understanding of how to implement traditional teachings in one's own life. For Augustine, true knowledge reaches the heart; for Xunzi, it permeates the whole body, including the heart/mind.

Subtle differences regarding the process of learning separate their views, however. For Augustine, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, the triune God is the ultimate authority. The Bible as the words of God directed to humans is thus also absolutely authoritative, with every word a significant source of meaning, and the whole serving as an inexhaustible storehouse of information about God's will; Augustine thus invests the Bible with an intrinsic authority that goes far beyond Xunzi's respect for the Confucian classics. Nevertheless, although some of the Bible is very simple and clear, expressed so that anyone can understand it and grasp the essentials of Christian teaching, significant portions are quite difficult to understand and challenge even the greatest exegetes. Here learned teachers play the role not only of conveying clear truths to a wider, often illiterate audience but also of explicating difficult passages and resolving apparent conflicts as they extend the range of shared understanding of the text.[41] Despite the importance of teachers, and the necessity of obeying their direction, particularly in matters of ethics and spiritual exercises, Augustine's anthropology places God at the root of each person's soul and mind. His doctrine of direct illumination adds an ambiguous element that at least potentially undercuts the authority of teachers and their interpretations.[42]

For Xunzi, though the classics are the authoritative teachings of the ancient sage-kings, as noted above, they are themselves so hard to understand that the authority of the teacher becomes paramount. Only the person-to-person transmission of wise insight and interpretive skill can lead to true learning. The inherent difficulty in understanding the classics also leads Xunzi to highlight the value of a good community of learners, without which it is impossible to reorient oneself fully to the Way. Though a shared community of learners is the normal state of affairs for Augustine, and is generally help-

ful, for example in monastic and congregational settings, unlike Xunzi he not only recognizes but also highly respects supposedly solitary ascetics who serve God by reforming themselves alone, often without access even to the Bible itself, but sufficiently illuminated and inflamed by God directly.

Xunzi, then, is confident in the power of human teachers to impart both basic knowledge and real wisdom, and he is also confident in the power of learners to absorb such teaching. For Augustine, however, though thinking that real learning can be and usually is occasioned by human teaching, the crucial agent is always Christ, the "interior teacher" illuminating our minds. For Augustine, human teaching can and often does fail, when the "seed" of divine *disciplina* is tossed on rocky ground or partially accepted and then choked by the weeds of concupiscence. Xunzi, by contrast, despite the infamous defection of two of his most famous students, remains convinced of the efficacy of Confucian communities of learning when they are led by a truly virtuous teacher.

This general way of looking at moral development can help resolve basic conundrums about character development generated by the abstract models of a person advocated by Harry Frankfurt and Charles Taylor, which were discussed in chapter 2. To review, Frankfurt proposes a picture in which persons are defined as beings who not only have desires in the normal sense ("first-order desires"), but also "second-order" desires about which first-order desires they want to have. Despite the real utility of this basic distinction to studies such as the present one, Frankfurt's larger position on agency is inherently flawed, as Gary Watson and more recently James Wetzel have argued.[43] Frankfurt, at least in the original formulation of his ideas, is caught between two unpalatable options: first, an infinite regress of competing desires about one's desires, which would vitiate the entire point of the move to have some desires trump others; or second, making "second-order volitions," that is, effective second-order desires, the result of a mysterious, ungrounded, and voluntaristic personal commitment to "identify" with some desires.

However, "identification" in this sense is hardly a simple matter, as both Xunzi and Augustine show us. To take an extreme example, it is radically insufficient for a repentant pedophile to simply "not identify" with his sexual desires for children; long-term work at personal reformation would be necessary to even have a chance to change such impulses, and even this appears frequently to be insufficient.[44] For almost everyone, a mental effort of "identification" with some of our desires rather than others will quite often be fruitless if those desires are even moderately strong; instead, some therapeutic strategy will be required for substantive change. Both Xunzi and

Augustine provide much fuller pictures of how, via spiritual exercises, the gradual development of reflective commitment, in tandem with the reform of emotions and desires, can make considered evaluations of the good one's central motivation—without seeming to make such judgments a matter of brute, sovereign choice.

Taylor's related view of "strong evaluations" as the constituents of "moral frameworks" which give structures and ends to human lives, has the virtue of reintroducing social life and history into Frankfurt's general picture. However, Taylor in the end underplays the power of reflection on inherited and/or unfamiliar moral frameworks, as well as the effectiveness of personal decision and intentional character formation, shrinking these to the "articulation" of the "moral sources" within the West that determine our moral horizons. Both Xunzi and Augustine make room for the recognition and pursuit of an integrated comprehensive good amid conflicts and disagreements. They also provide models that show how practice leads to the assimilation and deepening of such recognition, whether it be of the triune God or the human Way. And even though they disagree on precisely how assent or consent function, they provide subtle and believable accounts of both the difficulties and possibilities of personal decisions.

When considering the full range of both figures' programs of personal formation, we can see several basic differences separating their two versions of chastened intellectualism. As argued in the previous section, their subtly differing conceptions of the nature of moral requirements, when combined with their more obviously differing anthropologies, lead Xunzi to advocate an "outside-in" model of personal formation that supplements learning with pervasively developed practices of performance; and lead Augustine to advocate an "inside-out" model of moral change that centers on discursive and symbolic practices that aim to assimilate Christian truth by reshaping the "inner discourse" of our triune minds.

Leaving aside global theological judgments as either quixotic, if pursued from putatively neutral grounds, or unilluminating, if they simply reflect previous confessional commitments, what can a contemporary student of these ancient ethical vocabularies conclude about their strengths and weaknesses, with regard to the main themes of this study? Numerous arguments are possible here, but I concentrate on only a few, and even these can only be sketched rather than fully developed. Xunzi's account seems particularly capable of addressing the everyday struggle to domesticate and train our first-order desires, and thus better illuminates gradual progress in cultivating virtue; he also, for related reasons, articulates a fuller and more positive role for human embodiment in the moral and religious life. Augustine's ethical vocabulary, conversely, seems better suited to addressing our ongo-

ing, second-order tendencies to rebel against the very idea of this sort of work on ourselves. He also provides a much better account of what can be called radical evil as a continuing human potential.

As argued in chapters 3 and 6, Xunzi's psychological model makes a rather sharp distinction between two kinds of motivation. The first and most basic type is desire, *yu* 欲, which he conceives as a spontaneous reaction of our relatively stable disposition, *qing* 情. The second is assent, *ke* 可, which is fundamentally a form of judgment about what is possible, permissible, or best in some situation. This two-source model makes it rather easy to envisage how second-order evaluations of our first-order desires could be brought to bear on those desires, at least insofar as Xunzi thinks assent always trumps desire when the two come into direct conflict, although we noted in chapter 5 some complications to this seemingly simple position that make it more believable. The crucial point here is that Xunzi's moral psychological vocabulary makes it easy to theorize the common human phenomenon of impulse control, simply by separating a controlling power from our spontaneous impulses. Moreover, the terminology of "dispositions" gives him a straightforward way to fill out the psychology of long-term character formation, which he describes metaphorically as "artifice," and the "accumulation" of many actions consciously assented to over time, which slowly "cut" and "pull" our dispositions into new and better forms. Like crooked wood that has been steamed and forced to become straight, after the process has been completed, our dispositions have taken on a new form, which means that we no longer desire the "petty" things we once craved; instead, we genuinely delight in good actions and find them as satisfying as a fine meal.[45] "Virtue" in the fullest sense, for Xunzi, would then seem to imply both a wise grasp of the *Dao* considered as a comprehensive "scale" for evaluating possible actions, which allows the good Confucian to deliberate well, and also as a refashioned set of dispositions, both achieved through persistent Confucian practice of study, ritual, and music.

Part of what makes this seem achievable for Xunzi is the nature, and not just the form, of the moral demands he thinks are imperative. Xunzi thinks it is impossible for anyone to extirpate basic desires for food, sex, safety, rest, and respect, so the ethical challenge is to create a form of life that can satisfy everyone's desires in a beautiful, harmonious, and just way—this grand cultural achievement is the *Dao* itself, the artful creation of past sages who have properly discerned the best way to order human life. It is no small matter that Augustine thinks the best Christian life is celibate, with very restricted food intake, and this leads him to experience the continuing presence of sexual desire and hunger in the way he does. Xunzi never even entertains celibacy as a desirable option, let alone a possibility, and he

makes lavish feasting a central religious ritual (cf., of course, the Eucharistic "meal" of small amounts of bread and wine). As argued previously, Xunzi understands ritual as to some extent a restraint, but just as much it is a way of "nourishing" and "adorning" our desires so that they take on the proper forms—forms that lead to social harmony rather than destructive competition and mutual predation. The degree of change to our dispositions that Xunzi aims for is considerably less radical than Augustine's "crucifixion" of our carnal loves, and so his expectation of the possibility of success in this endeavor, at least for some, seems achievable.

Xunzi thus possesses a relatively benign characterization of the nature of spontaneous human desires as blind and ignorantly selfish, not to be trusted to guide the self alone, but still aiming at basic human goods in a way that needs to be reshaped and ordered but not razed and recreated. This conception relates rather directly to his anthropology, which conceives of us as our bodies in their entirety. He thinks the *xin* 心, "heart/mind," is the ruler of the self and needs to be well trained to fulfill this function properly, but he never imagines that there might be some locus of the self that is separable from the body. In other words, he does not identify with a soul, let alone an immortal soul, that vivifies the body and is categorically superior to it, in the way Augustine does, like almost everyone in the ancient Mediterranean world. Not surprisingly, then, the role of embodiment in full ethical personhood for Xunzi is rather different than it is for Augustine. Although Augustine's most considered image of the soul–body relation is of a marriage, understood of course in a late antique Roman way as a relationship of stark inequality that ought to be characterized by strict obedience of lower to higher, he can also imagine our bodies as an "unruly mount" that is being ridden against its will toward our true goal, beatitude. Augustine's sense of the body as at least partly "other" to ourselves, as something that needs to be ruled because it can never be trusted, is considerably more extreme, and even self-alienating, than Xunzi's views.[46] For Xunzi, the body should be beautifully adorned in appropriate clothing, and it should also be trained to become an expressive medium almost equal to our own voice, through the performative "language" of Confucian ritual, which allows us to express our concern for each other in every daily interaction, no matter how minor. Bodily skill is essential to ethical virtue, for Xunzi.

This may all have a surprising whiff of Apollonian confidence, at least from an Augustinian point of view. Xunzi's account of steady work to reform oneself seems to presume both the desirability and the possibility of achieving transparent self-understanding, so that we can work steadily on our weak points to slowly but surely whittle them away. In particular, Xunzi's vocabulary and ethical theory seem relatively limited in their resources

for articulating ongoing resistance to self-formation as anything other than frustrated first-order desire. At best, Xunzi can speak about using the wrong ethical categories to guide our deliberations, as for instance the way "petty people" "see things only in terms of personal benefit" (4/15/14). This would be one very common form of "obsession" with one consideration to the detriment of many others that form part of the Way. But these sources of vicious behavior are not cases of internal resistance to self-formation so much as misguided self-formation, which are so dangerous precisely because of our long-term capacities to reshape ourselves.

In comparison with this, Augustine's starkly antagonistic account of good and evil, as manifest in what I called above his "spiritual geography" of desire and intention, helps him to articulate resistance to personal formation as something more fundamental and deep within human beings. Even more important, as argued earlier in this chapter, his structurally unified account of the *mens* or mind makes the contest between divergent desires, both first- and second-order, a real case of self-division, of vacillation, and even personal incoherence as competing inner discourses swirl within us, debating or talking past each other. What is truly striking in Augustine's account, in comparison with Xunzi's, is how this incoherence can be mitigated with divine aid but not finally resolved until the "complete cure" that comes with resurrection. Self-knowledge, like the knowledge of God, remains elusive and imperfect for human beings in this life, according to Augustine; God always knows us better than we know ourselves.

Because he thinks self-preference, and the grasping, covetous desires it spawns, remain as active potentials within our minds, whispering tempting inner words that continence must vigilantly reject, Augustine is also much more capable than Xunzi of articulating a robust account of corruption and self-deception. Augustine's vocabulary makes it easy to speak about how rebellion against the good can start in seemingly innocuous ways. Loving a friend, seeking to govern justly as a public official, even striving for virtue can also serve as projects of human arrogance instead of divine service, and inward confusion about what I really intend can cover these beginnings of sin all too effectively.

Augustine thus views the challenge of personal formation as more daunting than even Xunzi; indeed, Augustine views it as completely unmanageable were it not for God's merciful love guiding us back to goodness. The success of the venture to live righteously remains unsettled throughout this life for Augustine; unless God grants us the grace to persevere to the end, we will not succeed. We simply do not know what tests we might be ready to pass, on Augustine's account, although we can trust that with God all things are possible. In contrast to this, Xunzi appears to believe that even

before sagehood, which forms the distant summit of personal formation in any case, noble men can be sure of their own commitment to the Way. Inward struggles of a sort continue for such men, but these are much less grievous than those that can afflict the Augustinian believer, who continues to harbor at least occasional sinful doubts about the entire project of submitting to God.

This suggests that, on an Augustinian account, genuine evil remains a "live option" for everyone, even the holiest, who retain the possibility of defecting from God throughout earthly existence. Though Xunzi's understanding of human propensities for thoughtless self-gratification, avaricious personal aggrandizement, and the obsessive pursuit of a merely partial good together provide an account of how some humans commit truly horrible crimes, Augustine's account goes further, in several insightful ways. It rules out thinking of one's own group or even self as purely good, untainted by sin, and instead instructs us to searchingly question our own motives and plans to test their good faith and loving intentions. Falsely localizing evil in some other social group seems to be a precondition for true atrocities, such as genocide; but Augustine's anthropology and theology stop this move decisively, while giving as well an explanation for why it tempts us (we love to see ourselves in the best possible light, even if this is blatant self-deception). Moreover, his understanding of the continuing frailty and weakness of the seemingly law-abiding and even the genuinely virtuous suggests that his understanding of sin can account very well for the shocking but "banal" evils of the twentieth century, perpetrated in significant part by bureaucrats and functionaries who loved their families and home communities. Last, Augustine argues powerfully that the human lust for power manifests itself in a perverse imitation of divine omnipotence, which drives us to assert ourselves precisely through the manipulation and destruction of other things and people. This incisive charge provides a much stronger account of the sometimes baffling cruelty we routinely visit upon each other than is possible to construct out of Xunzian worries about bad impulses, distracting desire, and misguided self-formation.[47]

Although in certain respects it might be possible to combine the insights of both these figures while avoiding any respective difficulties—for example, by importing some of Augustine's points about the nature and dangerousness of the human will to power into a Xunzian ethical position—in other respects it is not clear how such a synthesis could ever be achieved. Beyond their obvious and fundamental disagreements over metaphysics, sacred history, and sacred texts, one basic problem of ethical theory is that Xunzi's separation of desire from assent proves powerful when addressing issues of the gradual formation of character through sustained practice but weak

when trying to address deep self-division of the sort that Augustine charts. Conversely, Augustine's picture of a structurally unified but nevertheless disintegrated *mens*, which remains to some extent mysterious to itself, provides an excellent way of articulating the self's continuing resistance to its own highest aspirations. (This is only furthered by Augustine's contention that consent cannot overrule our strongest loves, unless we are defecting from God's providential order through sin.) But this same picture makes it relatively more difficult for Augustine than Xunzi to account for the gradual development of virtue over time. It appears that there is no easy way to harmonize these two types of moral psychological pictures.[48]

A more intriguing and less clear-cut challenge would be presented by an effort to integrate a Xunzian account of the positive role of embodiment, concerning both typical "desires of the flesh" and embodied ritual action as an expressive medium for human relations, into an Augustinian Christianity. Could performance practices as an "outside-in" approach to formation supplement Augustine's more familiar symbolic and discursive spiritual exercises? I pursue such speculations no further here, but instead turn in the final chapter to the broader issues they raise concerning interpretation, evaluation, and cross-traditional learning.

NOTES

1. On the ways in which Augustine does and does not engage in such "leveling" of believers, see Clark 2003.

2. Augustine does of course make such distinctions, e.g., between married and celibate, and clerical and lay Christians. He believes these differences are real and important but nonetheless tempt our tendencies to pride.

3. The classic studies of this theme in Augustine are Burnaby 1947 and O'Donovan 1980.

4. The term "mimetic desire" comes from Girard 1977, 145–49, and is applied fruitfully to Augustine in the sense I intend by Dodaro 2004, 68–69.

5. For an egregious example, see again Dubs 1956, 218. For a serious attempt to address concerns of some modern despisers of Augustine, and in the process to articulate an "Augustinian liberalism," see Gregory, n.d.

6. I address some complications to this picture in the final section of this chapter.

7. Note also the revealing discussion of the priority of wise people to good *fa* 法, "models" and "standards," which cannot implement themselves, and which are both created and "corrected" by those who possess an enlightened understanding of the *Dao* that lies behind all such models (12/57/1–7). See Hutton 2001, 82ff., for discussion.

8. Yearley 1990, 13. For brief but insightful discussion of this generalized conception, see Yearley 1990, 6–23, 95–111.

9. On this point with regard to Xunzi, see Schofer 2000 [1993].

10. For discussion of general issues, and of the interrelations of the last three virtues in particular, see Hutton 2001.

11. Augustine's *On Continence* appears to have been written during the Pelagian controversy, sometime around 418–20 CE. See Kearney 1999, 189, for discussion.

12. This suggests that although Augustine conceives of continence as a preservative virtue that restrains us from doing evil, in contrast to inclinational virtues like justice that positively move us to good acts (*cont.* 7.17), it functions on the basis of a powerful inclination toward goodness implanted within us. For brief discussion of the inclinational/preservative distinction, along with fuller bibliography, see Yearley 1990, 13–14, 16, 207 n. 13.

13. For insightful analysis, see Babcock 1994. The only flaw in Babcock's excellent discussion is his apparent reading of continence as in effect infallible, because our greater desire for righteousness overwhelms our lesser desire for sin, so that under grace "our spirits are fixed in the grace and love of God" and we "cease to sin" (1994, 188). But Augustine explicitly rejects the possibility of sinlessness throughout the Pelagian controversy; even the best Christians continue to sin daily (e.g., *cont.* 5.12–13, 8.20, 14.31).

14. On this, note especially Schlabach 1998.

15. Translations adapted from Kearney 1999, 215.

16. On Xunzi's epistemology see Hutton 2001.

17. Both of these issues are discussed in chapter 6.

18. This leaves to the side the dangers of *bi* 蔽, "obsession," which as discussed in chapter 5 can derail even passionate seekers of what is truly good by trapping them within a merely partial awareness of the Way—one that still misguides even though it is partly correct. Obsession does not really imply conflict within the self, but a lack of conflict where it should be present. One other important counterexample is the case of self-deceived counterfeit "Confucians," whom Xunzi labels *su Ru* 俗儒, "vulgar Confucians." Such people follow *miu* 繆, "mistaken" or more likely "fake," techniques and their learning is *za* 雜, "mixed up." Xunzi presents them as thoroughly corrupt and deeply deluded (8/32/17–21). This would seem to be, however, a rather extreme and even simple case of hypocrisy and corruption, rather than a more interesting case of a seemingly earnest misunderstanding of Confucianism leading to gross evil in the name of the good.

19. Babcock 1994, 194. For textual basis see, e.g., *conf.* 8.11.27.

20. See Babcock 1994, 190, for insightful discussion of this passage.

21. There are many rich issues regarding Augustine's use of Paul as an exemplar that I cannot pursue here. Two helpful recent discussions are Dodaro 2004, 183–95, and Martin 2001.

22. Slingerland 2003b, 3–19, 217–64.

23. A modern account of happiness as "flow" that bears intriguing similarities to this vision is Csikszentmihalyi 1990. Yearley 1996b gives a helpful general discussion of this sort of skill-mastery.

24. Translation adapted from Slingerland 2003a.

25. As Augustine writes: "You know, then, that the virtues are to be distinguished from the vices, not by the duties [performed], but by their ends. A duty is what one ought to do, but an end is that on account of which one ought to do it. Therefore, when persons do some action in which they seem not to sin, if they do not do it on account of that for which they ought to do it, they are found to be guilty of sinning" (*c. Jul.* 4.21). Translation adapted from Teske 1998, 393.

26. For Xunzi's "'success' conception of the virtues" see Hutton 2001, 180. (Note also his illuminating general discussion of the interrelation of benevolence, ritual propriety, and justice in Xunzi on pp. 168–79, from which I draw here). Hutton takes this term from Irwin 1988.

27. Foucault 1985, 6.

28. I draw these terms and the general sort of contrast from Kline 1998, 51–52, who uses them to contrast Mencius and Xunzi. Note also Slingerland's (2003b, 12ff. and passim) developed contrast between self-cultivation "internalism" and "externalism." As Slingerland rightly notes (2003b, 291 n. 32), this contrast is not to be confused with current philosophical debates over motivational and epistemological internalism and externalism. The danger of such general slogans is that they can run together certain topics that can and should be kept distinct, specifically: (1) having or lacking various internal moral resources; (2) whether, when, and why effort or striving may be required in the moral life; and (3) various approaches to spiritual exercises. Here I am using the terms "inside-out" and "outside-in" only to refer to two differing strategies of personal formation, exemplified by Augustine and Xunzi, that support different sorts of spiritual exercises, as detailed in the main text.

29. Dodaro 2004, 124, and 115–81 generally.

30. On the background to Augustine's treatment, see Ramsey 1999, 556.

31. For a thoughtful and perceptive essay that draws from Stoicism and attends to similar issues, framed in terms of the relation of good manners to good morals, see Sherman 2005. It is no accident that Sherman focuses on the military, one of the few strongly ritualized cultural realms in the United States. For fascinating depictions of U.S. Marine Corps boot camp as a carefully structured setting for the rapid, purposeful transformation of the hearts, minds, and bodies of raw recruits, see Ricks 1997 (for a more objective, analytical account) and Schaeffer and Schaeffer 2002 (for an evocative subjective account).

32. The distinction between goods internal and external to a practice comes from MacIntyre 1984, 187–91.

33. Hutton 2001, 221, makes this point nicely.

34. See Xunzi's contrast between the comprehensive skill of a noble man as political leader and *Dao* follower with that of various artisans with more specialized sorts of expertise (21/104/16–21/105/3). On this issue, see Kupperman 1968, 181.

35. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1105a16–1105b20. For insightful discussion, see Irwin 1999a, 22, 193, 195–96, who notes the logical parallel to the problem about how one could learn something one did not already know in Plato, *Meno* 80a–e. Pace Slingerland 2003b, 259–64, Aristotle thinks he has resolved the issues regarding the cultivation of virtue by distinguishing between outward form, intention, and stable

"state" or virtuous disposition. Xunzi too is much more successful in resolving these apparent difficulties than Slingerland allows.

36. These ideas are hardly original; on these issues, I have learned most from conversation with Jack Kline. For other accounts that make similar points, see, e.g., Lai 2003; Kline 1998; Ivanhoe 2000a, 6–7, 29–37; and Kupperman 1968, 2002.

37. On the relation of practices and virtue, see MacIntyre 1984, 181–203.

38. Counterarguments could certainly be provided to the literacy example, but note that it would be genuinely hard to imagine someone living without storytelling or significant shared human culture as living a good human life.

39. I owe this reference to Hutton 2001, 222, and adapt his translation.

40. Although other Confucians, such as Mencius, make relatively more of the doctrine of Heaven-given *ming* 命, "fate" or "destiny," it is less significant in Xunzi's thought.

41. This sketch skips over some very complicated issues in Augustine regarding the authority of Catholic Church officials over the explication of scripture and articulation of doctrine. Even these knotty topics are but a subset of the larger controversies over how best to read Augustine's attempts to flesh out the relation between the sovereignty of God with various sorts of human authorities. I hope to pursue all of these issues in future work, but cannot do justice to them here.

42. Later Christian history bears this out, particularly in the development of pietist and other sorts of "inner light" Protestant sects in the wake of the Reformation. For a classic survey that treats this theme extensively and well, see Troeltsch 1992.

43. Wetzel 1992, 222–35; Watson 1975. Note also Frankfurt 1999 for his more recent work on these issues.

44. Bergner 2005.

45. This is somewhat inexact. For Xunzi, the noble man no longer desires certain basic goods such as food or social acclaim in a petty way, but only as properly understood parts of the *Dao*.

46. Of course, Augustine is relatively positive regarding the body when judged in his own context, as many commentators have remarked, and he is notable in his insistence that the body will be fully redeemed at the resurrection, so that eternal life will be embodied, in some mysterious and flawless way. None of this, however, vitiates the comparison with Xunzi regarding our experience of the body in this life.

47. For a fine recent exploration of these and related themes, see Mathewes 2001. For a parallel argument comparing Augustine with the early Confucian Mencius, see Van Norden 2003a.

48. The challenging test case to this claim would be someone like Aquinas, who develops a faculty psychology much more complex than Xunzi's separation of assent from desire, yet still wishes to save central Augustinian insights.

CHAPTER NINE

Understanding and Neighborliness

It should be clear by now that I am practicing a form of intellectual self-restraint in these pages, one with roots in the phenomenological tradition of religious studies.[1] By deferring global judgments of truth or superiority in favor of one or the other figure (although not eschewing specific criticisms and evaluative choices), I have built up detailed accounts of Xunzi's and Augustine's views of personal formation, articulated in relation to each other and to some modern ethical theory. The interpretations offered suggest that despite both their broad apparent similarities regarding the ethical dangers of human nature and the need for spiritual exercises, and their deep religious differences concerning the best way to live (following Christ or the *Dao*), they each provide accounts of personal formation that are powerful and suggestive, although with notable weaknesses as well as strengths.

One rhetorical and philosophical challenge of comparative works of this sort is to balance competing needs for generality and specificity, in both audience and treatment. In this final chapter, I pull back from the careful analysis of our subjects' prescriptions to address three broader implications of the current study. First, I argue that if any sort of chastened intellectualist view of human beings is correct, then in conditions of religious diversity we will need for the foreseeable future to operate with two-level theories of ethics and politics. Second, regarding "method" in religious ethics, I explore how the need for a certain sort of holism in interpretation complicates but does not ultimately undermine efforts at "retrieval" in studies of ancient ethics. And third, I outline a conception of "global neighborliness" as a regulative ideal for comparative studies.

THE VARIETIES OF MORAL AGENCY

I argued in the last chapter that Augustine and Xunzi both exemplify a laudable general view of human moral psychology, which I called "chastened intellectualism." Such a view suggests that "human nature," in its various registers as a family of related concerns, is sufficiently flawed that we humans are not spontaneously ethical in any full-bodied sense. Furthermore, on this sort of view, personal change is not easy and therefore not trivial. Human beings need significant education and formation to become moral, and they need to willingly assent to such formation if it is to be effective. Such assent is necessary for the requisite level of striving, and it will only be possible in the pursuit of a compelling vision of human existence.

All this implies that most people need the sort of fully worked out programs of character development provided by religious or quasi-religious traditions in order to cultivate dependable virtue, because we cannot simply "identify" with some of our desires or choose some new form of life, without real strain and likely failure. Trusted practices, articulate theories and justifications, socially recognized authorities, aesthetic and literary traditions, and communal and institutional support, especially when integrated together, all increase the possibility of successfully practicing spiritual exercises.

In contrast, despite the undeniable value of the basic distinctions drawn by Frankfurt and Taylor, their general theories of personhood and agency are so abstract and thin that they are finally inert and unhelpful as actual guides to self-formation. Of course, this was hardly their intent in producing such accounts, but it is still worthwhile to reflect on the gap between what can be compellingly argued for on such strictly limited general premises and the richness and complexity in fully realized ways of life.

Chastened intellectualism as I have articulated it here is in the end no different, except that it points beyond itself as a sort of general summary to the necessity of more fully specified versions of the approach (as, to be fair, does Taylor). But Taylor still seeks to provide an overarching synthesis of the "moral horizons" or "sources" of the West, whereas my view does not require the preexistence of any such shared horizon.

It makes a great deal of difference whether one regards oneself as a sick patient being healed of sinfulness by Christ, so that one might love God and neighbor rightly and eventually complete one's journey to beatitude after death, or a person aspiring to nobility by following the sagacious tradition of the Confucian Way, in hopes of properly harmonizing and ordering the human community and taking our appropriate place in the larger ecology of the cosmos. Although I think it is not outlandish to speak of these as vari-

eties of a common sort of view, the differences in specific understandings, expectations, practices, and overall flavor or style are profound.

Several things follow from the distance between the relatively vague generalities of thin views aiming for universality and the precise but controversial accounts propounded by individual thinkers in particular traditions and contexts. First, agreement on general ideas shared in common can conceal disagreements just as it reveals similarities. Second, the spiritual exercises that are necessary on a chastened intellectualist view cannot be vague if they are to be effective; one will be praying to God for forgiveness or singing the hymns of Zhou, but not merely sitting around wishing for a stronger and better character. This would lead to a third point, that in order to be a chastened intellectualist, one would need to be more than that as well, whether a Christian, a Confucian, or something else. This something else could include a systematic synthesis of different religious and/or philosophical elements; I will return to this point below.

Both Xunzi and Augustine recognized a variety of competitors for people's allegiance, a variety of ways to be human, but they were each confident that they had found the one uniquely correct synthetic and comprehensive path. This chapter is not the place to rehearse current debates within the comparative philosophy of religions, nor to provide my views on the familiar trio of "exclusivism," "inclusivism," and "pluralism" in interreligious understanding. Probably in part because of its colonialist past and current global hegemony, the modern West has simultaneously developed traditions of attentive and empathetic attention to other religions and philosophical systems. Studies in these traditions, as well as recent immigration policies that have brought unprecedented religious heterogeneity to the United States, among other places, have made it much more difficult to conclude that any particular tradition is the unique path to virtue, leaving aside how such goodness relates to salvation, enlightenment, or other supranormal religious goals. On the contrary, pace both Augustine and Xunzi, it seems hard to deny that multiple traditions provide sufficient resources for cultivating recognizable moral virtue.[2]

It would thus seem inevitable that we are stuck for the foreseeable future with relatively messy two-level approaches to ethics and politics: On the one hand, we all need general but vague views upon which most can agree in order to facilitate political and diplomatic relationships. But on the other hand, we also need to nurture and follow more specific traditions of personal development in order to (1) follow with integrity our considered conclusions about ultimate value; and (2) have the rich philosophical, metaphorical, ritual, and artistic resources for personal formation that particular, historically extended traditions provide (even as this subjects us to the

weaknesses, failings, and internal struggles of such traditions as they try to survive and improve).

Even restricting ourselves to the two cases studied here, simply because of the obvious disagreements between Xunzi and Augustine over metaphysics, history, and the character of the ultimate authorities they recognize, it would be impossible to create a supervocabulary of moral agency that would somehow harmonize their disparate ways of life. A fortiori, no one could create a "moral Esperanto" that could successfully articulate everything of moral (and cultural?) significance in one all-purpose vocabulary, and thereby supercede various religious and quasi-religious vocabularies for human life.[3]

What can be created are generalized vocabularies that address problems of coexistence amid social diversity. For example, the vocabulary of "human rights" has considerable utility in the contemporary world, because it makes it possible to articulate basic claims for justice to people around the world, despite our divergent specific moral vocabularies. Such claims are certainly not the whole of ethics, but they are still valuable. To live well as a human being requires being a citizen of a particular commonwealth, a rationally committed adherent of particular complex and conflicted traditions. Today, however, it also requires a tolerance for coalitions built around practical goals of justice that cannot be justified in the same way to everyone who values such goals. Even the most abstract lists of general goods in life will be hard to nail down to everyone's satisfaction, but this can no longer be surprising or even upsetting.[4]

"SPOILING THE EGYPTIANS": HOLISM, INTERPRETATION, AND THEFT

According to Augustine, all truth belongs to the Lord, wherever it is found, even in "pagan" traditions such as Stoicism and Platonism. Thus Christians should not hesitate to "spoil the Egyptians" as they leave the pagan world behind, taking whatever is good for Christian use, but being sure to "ceaselessly ponder" Paul's dictum that "knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (*doc. Chr.* 2.18.28, 2.40.60–2.41.61).[5] Xunzi, too, did not hesitate to take good ideas from a variety of sources as he developed his understanding of Confucianism, as I have argued elsewhere.[6]

Contemporary debates about this sort of "borrowing" or "stealing" from sources outside one's primary tradition are usually cast in terms of "bricolage."[7] Though this word may unfortunately connote a haphazard, unsystematic, and merely pragmatic process of borrowing, the basic issues involved are both deep and old, as Augustine's statements above attest. Put

simply, how might we best understand some unfamiliar ethical vocabulary, and how might we best learn something genuinely helpful from such study? I obviously cannot here give a full account of hermeneutics, nor a general theory of theory creation with a set of criteria to distinguish better from worse attempts. Instead, I address a particularly relevant and interesting claim in one of the most successful recent works of comparative ethics, Lee Yearley's *Mencius and Aquinas*.

In this book, Yearley argues for distinctions among what he (building on the work of the anthropologist Robin Horton) calls primary, practical, and secondary theory. On Yearley's account, primary theory concerns everyday empirical and technical matters and is widely shared across cultures; secondary theory concerns peculiar and distressing events, makes recourse to unobservable entities, and diverges strongly across cultures; and practical theory concerns how to live and what to do, and is partially shared across cultures. He suggests that partially overlapping practical theories are especially promising objects for comparison, and he uses this tripartite division to explain why he finds "real and textured resemblances" between Mencius's and Aquinas's conceptions of virtue, especially courage, while noting only "thin resemblances" and stark differences in other areas of their thought.[8]

Although this contention about fruitful comparison is borne out to some degree in the current study, I hope I have shown that it is not a waste of time to compare elements of "secondary theory." More important, I think my accounts of Xunzi and Augustine show that the strategy of isolating different "levels" of theory in order to compare only one of them is fraught with difficulty, because in most sophisticated thinkers "primary," "practical," and "secondary" concerns and ideas mix together into a generally coherent whole.[9] One cannot talk about their views of spiritual exercises without talking about their views of human nature and cosmology. Indeed, all three of these areas bleed across the boundaries of Yearley's schema.

More specifically, I disagree that secondary theory "may hinder" the analysis of human flourishing offered by sophisticated religious thinkers such as Xunzi and Augustine (as well as Mencius and Aquinas); on the contrary, such theories are essential and constitutive of that analysis.[10] In chapter 2 of the present study, I argued for a "weak holism" that views ethical "vocabularies" as generally integrated human constructions that enable particular forms of social and individual life. As we have seen in the cases of Xunzi and Augustine, their religious vocabularies as presented here reveal interrelated conceptions of metaphysics, history, recognized authorities, anthropology, general moral theory, and both theory and practices of personal reformation. Attempting to isolate the last three apparently "practical" considerations from the first three would eviscerate both figures' accounts of human

life, robbing them in particular of those considerations that justify the character of the spiritual exercises they recommend.

More deeply, several of these interrelated realms seem to resist classification into primary, practical, and secondary. Xunzi and especially Augustine think that history, which would seem to be an example of primary theory, cannot be comprehended without reference to proper conceptions of metaphysics, anthropology, and what is truly authoritative. Holy texts, institutions, traditions, and people—about which our figures would disagree so absolutely—are certainly as present and obvious as the objects of primary theory, shape human life in a practical way, and yet are decisively shaped by secondary theory. Perhaps most important, both their anthropologies rely very strongly on secondary theory. This is particularly obvious with Augustine, who refers constantly in his analysis of human beings to grace, imaging God, and the difference between various positions in the divine metaphysical hierarchy, among other "secondary" topics. Even the metaphysically more austere Xunzi relies on notions of *qi* 氣, *li* 理, ("pattern"), and the distinction between the "heavenly" and the "human" to explicate his anthropology. All this suggests that merely talking about the "ethics" of ancient thinkers is descriptively misleading if done in abstraction from the rest of their views. It also suggests that it may be impossible to engage some important aspects of practical theory, such as spiritual exercises, without simultaneously addressing "secondary" theoretical conceptions of various sorts.

We cannot then hope to understand or adequately represent Xunzi's or Augustine's "practical" theories in isolation from their "secondary" theories. This stance complicates efforts to "retrieve" past practices, ideas, and theories, by showing how they interrelate with numerous elements of their lived context. Shorn of these mutual supports and dependencies, particular bits and pieces may be unpersuasive and apparently useless. However, a broadly based and subtle reading that does not slight the connections between different aspects of a thinker's views may also show which parts of a broader "system" of living do and do not depend on others, and in what ways. This charting of logical dependencies gives an opening, at least, to borrowing—and in any case, creative recasting is always possible in principle, even if one cannot imagine exactly how it might be done in advance.[11]

This holistic approach to ethico-religious vocabularies even helps explain why such transplantation works so frequently in practice: Intercultural borrowing is often successful because bringing practices and theories into "reflective equilibrium" is always a creative production, requiring serious work and rigorous discipline, whether one is following ancient practices from precursors of one's own group or taking "spoils" from someone

else.[12] Successful borrowing can happen, even in unlikely places, because the disciplined work required is at least partially motivated by the formative practices themselves, which precisely in their difficulty call out for explanation and justification, and in their experienced effectiveness both inspire and strengthen practitioners to pursue such accounts. Simply as a matter of religious history, practices in particular seem able at times to float free of old justifications and to inspire new justifications in whatever vocabulary presents itself, if they are perceived to be effective. Models of personhood and "subjection" often seem to guide the incorporation of details, but perhaps even these could be borrowed or at least amended, once their distinctiveness is articulated in relation to other possibilities.

Of course, both Xunzi and Augustine would be deeply suspicious of beginners attempting to fashion their own religious way out of whatever techniques or ideas they might come across, given their analyses of the debilities of human nature. They felt licensed to engage in such borrowing only to the extent that they were confident they had grasped the essential elements, and a good bit of the details, of preexisting paths they judged to be superior to all other possibilities. They understood themselves to be engaged in the systematic elaboration of the truth, the outlines of which were already well in hand, allowing modest corrections to resolve particular difficulties. They engaged, in other words, in careful, systematic synthesis. The extent to which one sanctions this sort of experimentation, and by whom, will hinge largely on one's sense of the requirements of sufficient personal formation.

More generally speaking, even if one cannot honestly embrace an alien tradition via conversion, one can amend one's own tradition in small or large ways in response to the other tradition's strengths. Even the attempt to be scrupulously faithful to a complex historical tradition involves numerous evaluative choices in matters that are frequently difficult to grasp with confidence. This sort of elaboration and adjustment of one's own commitments as they continue to deepen seems to be essential to the process of learning that chastened intellectualists like Xunzi and Augustine advocate. Whatever the "sources" one might come across, if they suggest valuable new possibilities or promise resolutions to old difficulties, how could one refrain from making use of them? The borrowing involved might concern particular details of various issues, or it might even concern broader issues of overall architecture and approach—exactly what will prove helpful seems not to be limited necessarily to the realm of the "practical," in Yearley's sense, although he is surely right to suggest that concerns with how to live well as human beings recur in numerous cultures, promising ample material, at least, for engagement.

The process of comparison itself, as Yearley suggests, can also be helpful in this regard, by showing the distinctiveness and complexity of previously assumed ideas such as "human nature" and "the will," and also expanding the scope of other subjects, such as "spiritual exercises," by examining previously ignored conceptions and adjusting general accounts accordingly. Sorting the different and indeed competing strands in various accounts of "human nature" provides a new metric for analyzing the seemingly familiar accounts of both Augustine and Xunzi, as well as contemporary accounts that advocate or denounce versions of such an idea. Working out which aspects of the complex family of concerns amalgamated in the idea of the "will" are unique to the post-Augustinian West, and which are treated, in varying degrees of depth, in an unrelated tradition like classical Confucianism, helps us to understand the distinctiveness of each tradition without succumbing to simplistic "East versus West" dichotomies.

Regarding spiritual exercises, rather than dismissing non-western exercises as insufficiently cognitive,[13] attending carefully to Xunzi has helped expand the range of the idea beyond previous discussions focused on the Hellenistic world. For example, Hadot's classification of spiritual exercises into four types (disciplines of attention, meditations, other intellectual exercises, and active exercises intended to create habits) seems to presume a split between intellectual contemplation, to be governed by the first three, clearly superior sorts of exercises, and practical action, where habits of activity would be valuable as a sort of supplement. Xunzi recognizes no such distinction, and his exercises are tuned directly to his anthropological analysis of human beings as bodies ruled internally by the *xin* 心, or "heart/mind." His emphasis on practices of communal performance such as ritual and music is far from the typical range of discussions in the ancient Mediterranean world.

Augustine's emphasis on inward self-scrutiny, combined with his strong interest in discursive and symbolic practices designed to reshape our "inner discourse" of ongoing interpretation and deliberation, seems to put him squarely within the predominantly cognitive therapeutic traditions of the West, which stretch from the ancient philosophical schools and early Christian monastic movements to the various forms of "talking cure" practiced in contemporary psychotherapy. And yet his distinctive psychology, proposing a structurally unified mind involving memory, understanding, and *voluntas*, which is nevertheless divided in its ongoing stream of inner "words," along with his overarching account of the Christian life, changes the context and import of many of the exercises he adopted from extant traditions.

Moreover, both Augustine and Xunzi make study and learning foundational and central. In itself, this is hardly unique. But what I have called their

"chastened intellectualism" leads them each to give distinctive interpretations of the subtle interplay between intellectual progress and emotional, moral, and even physical progress within the ongoing process of education, at least when compared with views that presuppose a strong distinction between intellectual virtue and character virtue, for instance.

Which of these points, or the many other specific ideas and practices discussed in this study, will be most striking or useful will of course depend on the commitments and views of particular readers. The sort of comparative religious ethics I have been practicing in this work is thus not antagonistic toward more confessional approaches, including varieties of self-consciously Christian ethics, but complementary to them. It is more exploratory and experimental, but this should not be read as a rejection of continuing attempts to articulate the kind of comprehensive visions of personal formation that Augustine and Xunzi created. Indeed, such a rejection would be self-contradictory, given my arguments about the character of chastened intellectualism.

GLOBAL NEIGHBORLINESS

To increase the possibility of learning from others, from both distant and resident aliens, I propose "global neighborliness" as a regulative ideal for comparative studies of religious thought and for relating to religious "others" generally.[14] This implies a conception of such neighbors as potential teachers, not merely potential converts. It also implies an openness that refuses to fear the neighbor as a potential or likely threat, unless proven otherwise—some apparent neighbors really are threatening, but mere difference and disagreement are not. Testifying, apologetics, debate, and even proselytizing all have their times and places, but if any of these comes first, before neighborliness, learning something new will be a surprise and an accident, rather than something sought.

This ideal has several facets. First, it implies attentiveness to and curiosity about the ideas, practices, and general mode of life of others. Obviously, the appropriate degree and extent of such an attitude will depend on a number of factors related to one's social position and responsibilities. This is not a blanket policy of affirmation or even toleration of all ways of life. Instead, it suggests alert openness and an eagerness to learn.

Second, global neighborliness implies a commitment to the widely lauded goal of charitable interpretation: the sustained presumption that one's interlocutors are neither fools nor villains, unless such a conclusion becomes inescapable. This implies real evaluative concern, not the lack or evasion of it. Charity requires postulating the strongest, most sensible

interpretation of seemingly strange ideas or behavior, as a way of reaching deeper insight; and an interpreter cannot arrive at such judgments without attempting to see how someone else's views make sense, or occasionally fail to. By refraining from rushing to negative judgments about one's neighbor, charity requires patience, along with both moral and epistemological humility. The first sort of humility is justified by an awareness of our own faults, and the second by an awareness of the relation of sustained practice to real understanding—and both suggest the inherent difficulties in coming to grasp an alien tradition or person.[15]

A closely related third point is that neighborliness requires taking others' commitments seriously. This sort of maneuver is sometimes confused with an apparently nonjudgmental respect or admiration for any system of values (an ideal that seems self-contradictory). To the contrary, I would argue that serious consideration of others' views implies real critical engagement with them, as a corollary to charitable interpretation itself. Even if final judgments are deferred for some time, especially if they are strongly negative, working hypotheses about insight and confusion are essential to the process of gaining understanding. This process is ongoing, however, and needs to be sustained over time so that nuances and interconnections can be fully absorbed, precisely through the testing and revision of interpretive hypotheses, which cannot avoid being at least implicitly evaluative.

This critical engagement requires awareness of and attention to both differences and similarities between familiar theories or ideas and new, apparently strange ones. A rush to assimilate the new to the familiar is one of the easiest ways to miss any chance at learning something—indeed, it risks deceptively confirming the apparently impressive magnitude of our current wisdom. Yearley's insistence on sifting through "similarities within differences" and "differences within similarities" by drawing complex analogies and disanalogies between positions is particularly helpful here.[16]

This degree of careful engagement leads to the fifth characteristic of global neighborliness, which is alertness to complexity. Such alertness refuses to overgeneralize about whole "religions" or "traditions," and it recognizes that the range of views and practices in most social groups is large—not to mention in vast, historically extended traditions such as Christianity and Confucianism, let alone the cultural complexes associated with whole regions like East Asia or Europe. Any broad generalizations that comparative ethics might justifiably produce should not be about "mentalities" or "deep assumptions" of whole civilizations and/or eras but about the shaping of debates within and between religious traditions. This guards historical particularity, complexity, and conflict, while leaving room for comparing and contrasting different narratives of change over time. So, for

instance, we can recognize the immense influence of Augustine's particular formulation of the idea of *voluntas*, which has guided so much inquiry and subsequent debate in the West. And although in the section above I stressed the carefully synthetic, even systematic character of Augustine's borrowing from his numerous sources, the influence of his ideas about the will stems at least as much from the inherent tensions in the idea—for example, between freedom and determinism, and between responsible choice and spontaneous, powerful desire. Noting that the *problématique* for inquiry created by such tensions is simply not present in the same way in Chinese intellectual history, we could investigate what *problématiques* have been present, and compare them with more familiar ones, if broad civilizational contrast is what is in question.

Last, the most obviously Confucian element of this conception would be the need for tact, precisely as an expression of, and guide to, the serious care essential to neighborliness. This sort of diplomatic discretion concerns when and how to ask questions and listen, to forthrightly report one's own differing convictions, to criticize, and to suggest possible alternatives or even improvements in someone else's conceptions. As Xunzi and the other Confucians teach us, such benevolent politesse is required at all times, even if it might seem to exceed what an interlocutor appears to deserve, in part because of the responsiveness of human beings to signs of respect and disrespect, and in part because neighborliness as an ideal simply demands it.

This sort of attentive, charitable yet critical, patient, subtle, and tactful neighborliness facilitates learning from others, as well as the self-scrutiny that accompanies such learning. Though the remarkable diversity of human cultures and traditions suggests that no particular mode of personal formation is either biologically or logically necessary, if a chastened intellectualist account is at least roughly on track, we each need some version of such formation to become ethical beings. If we truly aspire to goodness, and not merely to a distanced consideration of models of human goodness, than we could hardly do better than to investigate conceptions of personal formation, aiming thereby to develop and refine our own convictions—by practicing them.

NOTES

1. For a helpful overview, see Twiss and Conser 1992.

2. I think this aspect of John Hick's work (1985, 1989) is inescapable, regardless of his theory's failings.

3. Actually, in terms of this study's lingo, one could argue that modern moral theories such as utilitarianism and Kantian constructivism are attempts to create just this sort of "moral Esperanto" and are notably more influential than the actual language

of Esperanto. Many have learned to speak and even live these moral vocabularies, but I would wager that their numbers are still dwarfed by those who adhere to some form of religion, and those who have absorbed elements of such accounts into comprehensive religious visions.

4. My position on human rights has been influenced most by the works of Sumner Twiss, as developed, e.g., in Twiss 1998b.

5. On the Israelites stealing from the Egyptians as they left, see Ex. 3:21–22, 12:35–6. On knowledge and love according to Paul, see 1 Cor. 8:1.

6. Stalnaker 2003.

7. On "bricolage," see Stout 1988, 74–77; and Stalnaker 2005, 215–19. Contrast this with the common habit of treating the parallel issue addressed within one's tradition, considered sometimes very broadly, as the "retrieval" of one's own "moral sources."

8. Yearley 1990, 175–82, 169–75.

9. Yearley now seems to see the force of this sort of objection, and to be moving in a similar direction. See Yearley 1998, 124. And even in *Mencius and Aquinas* (1990), Yearley's methodological conclusions about comparison and types of theory do not seem to have precluded him from offering detailed descriptions of the views of his two subjects, which draw on ideas from their "secondary" theories such as grace and *qi*, for example, in the body of the work itself.

10. Yearley 1990, 180. But Yearley's contention does have real bite: One could certainly argue that Augustine's understanding of sin is radicalized by his theological commitments, e.g., regarding atonement and the proper reading of the Letter to the Romans, in a way that is ultimately unconvincing. But this position is so essential to his overall understanding of life that to reject it is tantamount to rejecting his broader religious vision, in favor of something more like that of his late antagonist Julian of Eclanum.

11. Indeed, one of the other purposes for which Yearley deploys the distinctions between levels of theory is to authorize and guide his constructive efforts in contemporary virtue ethics, which draw on both Aquinas and Mencius to develop general accounts of dispositions, virtues, and the virtue of courage.

12. The phrase "reflective equilibrium" comes from Rawls 1971, 20ff.

13. Compare Hadot 1995, 116 n. 79.

14. Although the rhetorical allusion to the Christian love command is intended, that is hardly this ideal's only source. Global neighborliness is not meant to be restricted to Christians or automatically governed by Christian norms, but is proposed for others as well. The particular elements of the conception owe much to reflecting on the comparative procedures of Frank Clooney and Lee Yearley, among others.

15. A critic might question whether such counsels of charity are compatible with skeptical accounts of human nature such as Augustine's or Xunzi's, which might instead suggest that we should be dubious about the professed intentions and aspirations of our interlocutors. But as long as one is equally skeptical of both the familiar and the strange, then this criticism has a hard time getting off the ground: If one refuses to presume one's own superiority, then there are no grounds for high-handed, insensitive interrogations to begin.

16. Yearley 1990, 4–6, 170–75.