THEOLOGY AS HERMENEUTICAL STANCE: GADAMER AND SELF-COMPOSURE IN ST. AUGUSTINE'S *CONFESSIONS*

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> I have read Vergil, Horace, Livy, Cicero, not once but a thousand times, not hastily but in repose, and I have pondered them with all the powers of my mind. I ate in the morning what I would digest in the evening; I swallowed as a boy what I would ruminate upon as a man. These writings I have so thoroughly absorbed and fixed, not only in my memory but in my very marrow, these have never become so much a part of myself, that even though I should never read them again they would cling in my spirit, deep-rooted in its inmost recesses. But meanwhile I may well forget the author, since by long usage and possession I may adopt them and regard them as my own, and bewildered by their mass, I may forget whose they are and even that they are others' work. This is what I was saying, that sometimes the most familiar things deceive us the most. They recur perhaps to memory, in their wonted way, when the mind is busied and concentrated on something else, and they seem to be not merely one's own thoughts but, remarkably indeed, actually new and original.[1]

One of the fundamental insights contained in *Truth and Method*, Hans Georg Gadamer's magnum opus on philosophical hermeneutics, is his characterization of understanding as the product of a dialectic between experience in the cumulative sense (*Erlebnis*), and experience in the active sense, as something ongoing (*Erfahrung*).[2] For Gadamer, experience in this double sense provides the structural model for hermeneutics, and so in this formulation we see the basic problematic of hermeneutics, or, if you wish, of understanding, as

[1] *Letters from Petrarch*, quoted in Gerald Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 199-200.

[2] Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer & Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1993).

one concerning the relation of foreknown to other. The true locus of hermeneutics lies, he explains, in between this "polarity of familiarity and strangeness."[3] Consequently, understanding is an inherently "historically effected" event.[4] And tradition, conceived of not as a monolithic narrative one may or may not seek to escape, but as an always operative heteroglossia of interpretation, is of course part and parcel with this central problematic. From this state of affairs it follows that the proper stance of the hermeneut requires a "historically effected consciousness," an acute though by no means paralyzing awareness of the impossibility of knowing the other in itself due to one's own historicality. Gerald Bruns, after Gadamer, accordingly takes hermeneutics to be a form of reflection, in which the other "compel[s] us to reflect critically on our own intellectual and cultural situation," as opposed to a naive and hegemonic appropriation of the other into one's own ideology.[5]

Insofar as theologies concern themselves with the nature of God, we can say that they necessarily theorize relationships between otherness and its counterpart, the foreknown. That is, since their aim is to theorize about the relation between a subject and divine other, theologies will offer, as Kenneth Burke might put it, "exceptionally thoroughgoing" delineations of particular hermeneutical stances.[6] These will privilege and make normative certain positions between the poles of "familiarity and strangeness" which Gadamer discusses. Theology becomes, therefore, a "perfectly thorough" dramatization of the dyadic opposition between foreknown and other.[7] The purpose of this paper is to elucidate the hermeneutical 'disposition' apparent in aspects of St. Augustine's theology, and, eventually, to suggest the complicity which this has in his social theory. Thinking Augustine through Gadamer casts a fundamental aspect of Augustinian Christian theology in a different language, and so is also an

[3] Gadamer, 295.
[4] Gadamer, 300.
[5] Bruns, 7.
[6] Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), v. I am indebted to Burke's thinking about theology in many ways, for example, as he believes that "men's thoughts on the nature of the Divine embody principles of verbalization" (1). I believe they embody the principles of hermeneutics. I also am indebted for my interest here in the tautological aspects of theology (cf. his "Tautological cycle of terms for 'Order,'" 183–96). A full study of Gadamer and Burke in light of each other, i.e., historicity and logology, could perhaps yield some provocative observations.
[7] Burke, 38.

exercise in defamiliarizing theology. My hope is that such a shift might bring new understanding to its legacy. I am also running Gadamer through Augustine, observing the utility of Gadamer for creating such an allegory of Augustinian theology, so that my subject is hermeneutics itself.[8] I make these remarks because, in my attempt to remain consistent with Gadamer as I understand him, my reading of Augustine must not be satisfied with merely appropriating him into a Gadamerian scheme; rather, my reading is only complete when I consider Augustinian theology's very ability to acquire this contemporary analogy, only complete when I reflect upon the very "applicability" of Gadamer to Augustine, which is to reflect upon tradition itself.[9]

Before turning to the *Confessions,* it is useful to look briefly at one of Augustine's more direct treatments of the dynamics of understanding. At the beginning of the *First Catechetical Instruction,* Augustine explains what takes place when understanding occurs: First, "intuition floods the mind...with a sudden flash of light,"[10] which he sees as a kind of primary intellectual apprehension (in *On Christian Doctrine,* we find that "the mind should be cleansed so that it is able to see that light and cling to it once it is seen"[11]). Then, this original "flash" hides itself in the "secret recesses" of the mind, before speech can be formed, but leaves behind an imprint, "stamped in a wonderful way...upon the memory."[12] From this imprint speech can be constructed. We can readily observe here how intellectual apprehension is mysterious, that it has its source in God. We also see how he regards its manifestations first as thought and then as speech as progressively more derivative and depreciated. In Books IX and X of

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[8] Gadamer writes, "to think historically means, in fact, to perform the transposition that the concepts of the past undergo when we try to think in them" (397). I am trying to think Augustine through Gadamer while recognizing, of course, that Gadamer becomes my heuristic, a kind of conceptual probe.

[9] "Application" is a fundamental hermeneutical issue for Gadamer. This is his term for the context sensitive aspect of understanding: "understanding always involves something like applying the text to be understood to the interpreter's present situation" (308). He regards "not only understanding and interpretation, but also application as one unified process" (308).

[10] Augustine, *First Catechetical Instruction*, ed. Johannes Quasten & Joseph C. Plumpe, trans. Joseph P. Christopher, Ancient Christian Writers 2 (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Bookshop, 1946), 15.

[11] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D.W. Robertson Jr. (New York/London: Macmillan, 1958), 13.

[12] Augustine, *First Catechetical*, 15.

The Trinity, he dwells upon the triadic structure of this psychology: understanding is a consubstantial triad of mind, knowledge, and love (or "will"). Love functions to bind knowledge—what Augustine calls the "inner word," or *verbum mentis*—to mind: "love, like something in the middle, joins together our word and the mind it is begotten from, and binds itself in them as a third element."[13] The triad is of course an image of the divine trinity, "the unequal image, but the image nonetheless."[14] The word of God incarnate in Christian scripture, and in Jesus, of course, becomes, paradoxically, the quintessential 'inner word' of which the *verbum mentis* is but the imperfect image.[15] Scripture embodies perfect knowledge, which, "wonderfully," is bound to God via the Holy Spirit.

Whether one regards this analogy between Holy Trinity and a triadic model of understanding as exquisite tautology or source of profound mystery (the two phenomena seem often to go hand in hand), it is interesting to consider for a moment the mysterious status of love, as that which binds knowledge to mind, and the mysterious status of the Holy Spirit, as that which unites God and Jesus. For the mysteriousness of these third elements finds a parallel in Gadamer's notion of historicality: the condition that presides over the relationship between foreknown and other is likewise mysterious, insofar as the role that our historicity plays in that relationship can never be completely, consciously known, and moreover, is something we have more or less repressed. The mysterious status of the Augustinian third element also finds a parallel in the (Peircean) semiotic interpretant, the essential subjectivity of semiosis that presides over the relation of object and sign, also traditionally repressed. These other mysteries, or repressions, may be contemplated as analogous to

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[13] Augustine, *The Trinity,* ed. and trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991), 278.

[14] Augustine, *The Trinity,* 299.

[15] For Gadamer's discussion of Augustine's doctrine of the inner word, see "The Development of the Concept of Language," in *Truth and Method,* 418–29. He explains how Christianity afforded a novel examination of the intimate relation between thought and speech in developing the doctrine of the inner word to "undergird theological interpretation of the Trinity by analogy" (421). From this doctrine, we learn, Gadamer says, that the inner word "is that in which knowledge is consummated" (426). The inner word is for him the universal aspect of hermeneutics (see the foreword to Jean Grondin's *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics,* trans. J. Weinsheimer [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994]). Elsewhere in *Truth and Method,* Gadamer states, "the linguisticality of understanding is *the concretion of historically effected consciousness*" (389; emphasis in original).

Augustine's own mystification by the relationship of knowledge to mind. And we might suspect that their ability to be analogues of one another may simply betray their mutual subjection to tradition.

Augustine's *Confessions* is of particular interest because it documents a movement toward redemptive self-composure; his conversion to Christianity entails a submission to, as Geoffrey Galt Harpham puts it, "domination by the scriptural word."[16] And Augustine views this process of self-composure as an inherently hermeneutical event in the sense that he recognizes that such self-composure depends upon a particular model of human understanding—that outlined in *First Catechetical Instruction*. The *Confessions* in fact begins with the riddle of the foreknown and other, framed in more or less the same way as it had been in Plato's *Meno*. The relevant passage I offer here:

> SOCRATES: ...Do you realize that what you are bringing up is the trick argument that a man cannot try to discover either what he knows or what he does not know? He would not seek what he knows, for since he knows it there is no need of the inquiry, nor what he does not know, for in that case he does not even know what he is to look for.
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> MENO: Well, do you think it a good argument?
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> SOCRATES: No.
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> MENO: Can you explain how it fails?
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> SOCRATES: I can. I have heard from men and women who understand the truths of religion...[17]

Plato, as we know, calls the problem mere sophistry and reverts to his theory of the immortality of the soul to explain how some knowledge is already present in the mind. This is the response that Augustine will adapt.[18] Here, now, is the passage from the beginning of the *Confessions* that recalls the *Meno:*

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[16] Geoffrey Galt Harpham, "The Language of Conversion," in *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press), 101.

[17] Plato, *Protagoras and Meno*, ed. Betty Radice, trans. W.K.C. Guthrie (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1956), 128–9.

[18] Gadamer comments on the significance of the fact that Plato appeals to myth rather than to "superior argument" as follows: "This is a very ironic appeal, since the myth of pre-existence and anamnesis, which is supposed to solve the mystery of questioning and

> Grant me, Lord, to know and understand whether a man is first to pray to you for help or to praise you, and whether he must know you before he can call you to his aid. If he does not know you how can he pray to you? For he may call for some other help, mistaking it for yours.[19]

In the first six chapters of Book I, Augustine lays out a series of other paradoxes, similar in that they also concern various riddles of priority having to do with the radical otherness of God. For example, the physical location of God becomes a paradox of spatial priority: "but if I exist in you, how can I call upon you to come to me?"[20] So the *Confessions* is inaugurated with the fundamental problematic of understanding, the dialectic of foreknown and other, wherein the two are depicted as radically alienated from one another, and as an enigma subsumed into the overall inscrutable mystery of God.

This inaugural depiction of self and divine other as radically alienated gives way at the beginning of Book X to a new relation wherein they approach identity: "Let me recognize you as you have recognized me."[21] This new recognition follows from Augustine's composing the story of his conversion. Augustine's autobiography culminates in God's recognition of him rather than his recognition of God because this self-composure is derived from, literally derivative of, his intellectual apprehension, which, as we have seen, in turn belongs, not to himself, but to the divine source. To further their commensurability, then, to make their recognition more mutual, Augustine quite logically moves from a narrative of the self to a dialogue with the self, a dialectical inquiry into the nature of God's "Truth" which yielded his confession, truth that is the "unfailing light from which [he seeks] council upon all...things."[22] And he must now begin to reflect on the mysterious nature of understanding itself, beginning with the role of memory, where, he concludes, God's Truth lies "scattered and unheeded," waiting to be discovered and if necessary rediscovered.[23]

In fact, Truth turns out to be both the measure of what is true, in other words, the "arbiter" of understanding—as though truth were

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seeking, does not present a religious certainty but depends upon the certainty of the knowledge-seeking soul..." (345).

[19] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin, 1961), 21.

[20] Augustine, *Confessions*, 22.

[21] Augustine, *Confessions*, 204, citing 1 Cor. 13.12.

[22] Augustine, *Confessions*, 249.

[23] Augustine, *Confessions*, 218.

a kind of faculty of discernment—and that which is true, that which comprises the objects of knowledge themselves that one seeks to understand. The possibility of mutual recognition, of commensurability between self and divine-other, then, arises from a conjoining of memory and truth. So, the mutual recognition that Augustine strives for, but which, as we shall see, is ultimately elusive, would in Gadamer's terms be a conflation of the prejudices of understanding with the objects of understanding.[24] Augustine theorizes the self as always already knowing, but this is not due to one's experiential-historical accretion of, for lack of a better term, 'ideology,' in the grand archive of memory (*Erlebnis*) and subject to the intricacies of forgetting and remembering, but is due, obviously, to the belief that genuine knowledge emanates from a timeless and absolute source, from an ontologically prior intention.

The emphasis in the *Confessions*, however, is finally not on the younger Augustine's maturation toward this identity, not on his progress toward glimpsing the "eternal Wisdom which abides over all things," nor is it the contents of this wisdom per se.[25] The progress of the maturing Augustine is finally overshadowed by the discursive practice of relating this discovery, this "glimpse." For it is Augustine the hermeneut, not Augustine the newly converted, who ends the *Confessions*. Only after discovering, through the strenuous inner dialogue of Books X and XI, how the locus and nature of truth are entangled with understanding itself, only then is Augustine fully prepared for an exegesis of Genesis.

That the more significant narrative sequence seems to be the progression of discursive acts, the autobiography proper being one of them, has been frequently remarked upon.[26] But what I want to view as significant is that in this way Augustine strives to create a circle of understanding: the autobiography, as an interpretation of his past, constitutes engaging the word of God, and having done so, having

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[24] Another way of putting this is to say that for Augustine, truth is immobile because it conflates the two poles of *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*: *Erlebnis* amounts to criteria for discernment, while *Erfahrung* contains the object of knowledge whose understanding is sought according to these criteria. We can compare this Augustinian notion of truth with a formulation that Gadamer offers: "In understanding we are drawn into an event of truth" (490). Simply a way of characterizing understanding, "Truth" is an event because it characterizes the dynamism of the dialectic between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*.

[25] Augustine, *Confessions*, 198.

[26] See Bruns; Harpham. See also Eugene Vance, *Mervelous Signals: Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).

composed himself, he dwells on the nature of this heuristic and then returns to and begins again the text containing it. In order to renew further its efficacy, he returns to Genesis. However, as Bruns says of Philo, the hermeneut is endlessly returning to reread from the beginning not in order to produce interpretations, but in order to "[abide] in wisdom."[27] The *Confessions* demonstrates Augustine's high estimation of ongoing hermeneutical activity as a mode of being. And this moves us closer to what I see as the crucial difference between Augustine and Gadamer.

It needs to be clear that, in terms of the hermeneutical problematic, when the other-in-itself is reified as both the end and beginning of all understanding (as having "priority" in both senses of the term), then the complicity which the foreknown inevitably has in what is construed as the other will be unwittingly reified as well. In this state of affairs, any hermeneutical activity is going to invite a discourse fraught with tautology, foreclosing through its denial of historicity the kind of understanding that Gadamer advocates.[28] When Augustine invokes his Lord to "circumcise the lips of my mind and my mouth. Purify them of all rash speech and falsehood. Let your scriptures be my chaste delight," he expresses more than fervent humility.[29] He indicates a deliberate, systematic embrace of the foreknown via never-ending reconciliation with Scripture. So while Augustine valorizes the activity of interpreting as a progressive one, an ongoing one, indeed, a never-ending one, he nevertheless takes a hermeneutical stance that, in its breach with ongoing experience where otherness is continually encountered (*Erfahrung*), seeks to close off the Gadamerian form of the growth of consciousness. One is redeemed only to the extent that one is successful in seeking to do so.

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[27] Bruns, 103. The high esteem Augustine placed upon this activity, upon endless (re)interpretation sheds an interesting light upon his returning to reread and emend his own corpus, the record of which is *The Retractations*. He perhaps thought of it as a final attempt at self-composure, this time not a narrative depicting his conversion to Christianity, but rather, a narrative of his discourses on it, a confession of another order.

[28] The hermeneutical point here perhaps is that we will always be mystified by our own historicity, but we ought not to mistake its source; a self-conscious awareness of the specter of tautology (of the potential for understanding only according to what we already know) ought to replace a reverent submission to it.

[29] Augustine, *Confessions,* 254.

While Gadamer says that understanding and interpretation are identical processes (see note 9), Augustine sees their identity as only ever virtual, as an ideal. Their becoming identical is a goal that can only be approached, arduously and momentarily, and the *Confessions* exemplifies this labor. The condition whereby god-other is an ever-receding horizon of knowledge is due, of course, to the fallen nature of human understanding; the *Confessions* portrays an ideal—an identity with God as the perfect configurement of the mind by Holy Scripture. Aside from viewing such an aim as misguided, Gadamer accounts for the impossibility of achieving it through reasoning that experience-as-event (*Erfahrung*) cannot but affect the process of understanding; one is continually acquiring "a new horizon within which something can become an experience for him," textual or otherwise.[30] For Gadamer, Augustine's hermeneutic circle can never close; it must spiral due to the centrifugal force of temporality, of *Erfahrung*, of ongoing experience, where each reading's difference from the last is precisely what makes the practice of continual biblical interpretation magnificently mysterious. In his exploration of "the history of how an individual acts upon himself," Foucault also isolates the dynamic aspect of consciousness as a central obstacle to the kind of self-deciphering which he says distinguishes the Christian technique of the self. He says that

> the scrutiny of consciousness consists of trying to immobilize consciousness, to eliminate movements of the spirit that divert one from God. That means we have to examine any thought which presents itself to consciousness to see the relation between act and thought, truth and reality, to see if there is anything in this thought which will move our spirit, provoke our desire, turn our spirit away from God.[31]

Foucault is indicating the extent to which the effort to read the self in this way is a battle to repress historicality. Hermeneutically speaking, this battle against time is an effort to shut out the historical aspect of understanding.

To summarize, the self-other dichotomy has the status of paradox in Augustine. We may no longer regard this as paradoxical because we may understand it in relation to the historical nature of

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[30] Gadamer, 354.

[31] Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 46.

experience. Gadamer uses the two-fold structure of experience as his model for hermeneutics. But the Augustinian correlatives to Gadamer's two-fold structure are reversed: while Gadamer in general views experience-as-possession negatively, for it is something to be overcome in the understanding of the other, and experience-as-event positively, for it contains the possibility for reflection and thus growth, Augustine's hermeneutics attempts to preserve experience-as-possession and appropriate into it experience-as-event (his treatise *On Christian Doctrine* provides the methodology—that is, allegory—for practicing this kind of hermeneutics). The truly inescapable paradox for Augustine lies in the belief that only active, continuous interpretation can achieve this self-preservation, this self-composure, and that an authentic dialectic with the otherness of God is thought to be afforded in this way. In this sense, we might call Augustine's hermeneutical stance radically ascetic.

I would now like to suggest briefly how the hermeneutical stance which underlies Augustine's theory of ongoing hermeneutical activity is mirrored in his theory of sacred history. Quite consistent with the theory of understanding outlined above, Augustine recognizes the primacy of interpretive activity in apprehending sacred history. In Book Twelve of Augustine's *The Literal Meaning of Genesis,* he explains how the insight of the individual hermeneut differs from that of the prophets of the gospels only in degree, "in proportion to the clarity of [their] intellectual vision" (this means that the *Confessions* differs from biblical prophecy only in degree).[32] He elaborates,

> the man who interpreted what another had seen was more a prophet than the man who had seen. Thus it is obvious that prophecy belongs more to the mind than to the spirit... [33]

Such statements theorize prophecy to be not so much something that is revealed, as the revealing of something, an intellectual event. We might say that prophecy denotes a quality of access to divine intentionality. In Robert Markus's work on *The City of God,* Augustine's treatise on sacred history, he concludes that for Augustine, sacred history and prophecy were "near-synonymous":

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[32] Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis,* ed. Jonannes Quasten & Walter Burghardt, trans. John Hammond Taylor, Ancient Christian Writers (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 186.

[33] Augustine, *Genesis,* 189.

> The meaning of the narrative derives from the activity of interpretation; without it its constituent facts would be a meaningless mass of information about the past, lacking even such coherence as is required to incorporate them in a narrative, lacking direction.[34]

In Augustine's treatise, he argues that in the seventh age, the age subsequent to Christ, God's city and the *Saeculum,* or the earthly city, are intertwined, just as are the good and evil that must be deciphered in the individual soul, via confession, for example. However, so intertwined are they in the present age that the two cities are indecipherable, resistant to a prophetic interpretation that might reveal their places in God's narrative, or, perhaps more significantly, might occasion a striving for identity with God. Markus sums up Augustine's anti-Eusebian view of history:

> the time since the Incarnation is identical with the last age. It is the old age of the world, *Senectus Mundi.* There is no other decisive phase to look forward to, no turning-point to fear or to hope for; only the end. On the map of sacred history the time between Incarnation and Parousia is a blank; a blank of unknown duration, capable of being filled with an infinite variety of happenings, of happenings all equally at home in the pattern of sacred history. None are privileged above others, God's hand and god's purposes are equally present and equally hidden in them all. On them all the old prophecies are silent, for their reference is to the Incarnation and to the final fulfilment. The interim is dark in its ambivalence. There is no sacred history *of* the last age: there is only a gap for it *in* the sacred history.[35]

As with individual experience-as-possession, experience which is the collective possession (history) originates elsewhere, a narrative bestowed upon one and all by Jesus in the form of God's word and sacred history. But as Markus points out above, in this view of history, there is a boundary between past and present, a boundary that occurs in the past, and which therefore confers an invisible quality upon actual present collective experience—political, social, and cultural—mystifying it as something largely beyond interpretation, since its meaning is fused to this blank portion of history. Ultimately, this is the social expression of a hermeneutical stance that is backward-looking in its embrace of *Erlebnis* and its denial of

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[34] Robert Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 195.

[35] Markus, 23.

Erfahrung. Indeed, the collective experience of the present can only be interpreted negatively. This view of present society as relentlessly negative is revealed in *The City of God*, where Augustine shows that contrary to the supposed happy life of the Greeks all human relations in the hierarchy of social associations—the home, the city, and the globe—are "fraught with misunderstandings."[36] The social realm is "a tale of 'slights and fights and spirits vexed,' and we must expect such unpleasantness as an assured thing...."[37] What we might secure of earthly peace must be maintained by obedience to authority, even though that authority may be itself flawed.

The peculiar status of the social present as impervious to an allegorical reading is a situation that follows precisely from valorizing interpretation in a certain way, and this constitutes a very real breach between such an ascetic theology and social reality. Christianity's existence as a social history, and a social reality, becomes, paradoxically, the very text not able to *occasion* understanding. Augustine is forced, in theorizing the indecipherability of the two cities, to view social responsibility with a certain indifference:

> So long, then, as the heavenly City is wayfaring on earth, she invites citizens from all nations and all tongues, and unites them into a single pilgrim band. She takes no issue with that diversity of customs, laws, and traditions whereby human peace is sought and maintained.[38]

At the outset of this paper, I indicated what I view as the proper stance of the hermeneut, one which recognizes the reflective potential inherent in the activity of understanding. This stance takes full account of the unavoidable doubleness in any concretion of meaning, affirming this state of affairs rather than repressing, deferring, or lamenting it. Yet the more significant point, it seems to me, and perhaps one difficult to sustain as an intellectual attitude, is the fact that this changes what hermeneutical activity is *for*. As an activity, understanding strangeness—say, interpreting an alien culture's belief system—is not simply an action productive of knowledge that properly acknowledges the difficulty or impossibility of transcending one's own culture—the apology of the colonialist—because the point becomes not what the activity *produces* so much as what it *does*, what

[36] Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Gerald G. Walsh & Daniel J. Honan (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1954), 195.
[37] Augustine, *City*, 202.
[38] Augustine, *City*, 229.

it amounts to *as* an activity. Augustine worked this out: interpreting constitutes participating in an act of communion with God. It was the engagement with God's word that mattered, not the exegesis per se. Similarly, Gadamer sees understanding as a participatory act—one's historicity is engaged. In the epigram to this paper, Petrarch describes a phenomenon that may explain analogies between Augustine and Gadamer; one ought not attribute their capability for being analogous to the possible *universality* of such hermeneutical concepts as those which theorize the divergent "stances" I identify here, but rather to their mutual belonging to tradition: we know that history, too, has been "thoroughly absorbed and fixed, not only in...memory, but in [one's] very marrow." Gadamer, or I, may already understand Augustinian theology in ways that may now be, to recall a phrase of Foucault's, beneath the threshold of description.

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