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PETIT LARCENY, THE BEGINNING OF ALL SIN: AUGUSTINE'S THEFT OF THE PEARS

Scott MacDonald

In his reflections on his adolescent theft of a neighbor's pears, Augustine first claims that he did it just because it was wicked. But he then worries that there is something unacceptable in that claim. Some readers have found in this account Augustine's rejection of the principle that all voluntary action is done for the sake of some perceived good. I argue that Augustine intends his case to call the principle into question, but that he does not ultimately reject it. His careful and resourceful analysis of the motivations of his theft adds subtlety to his own understanding of voluntary action and allows him to introduce an important component of his general account of sin, namely, that it essentially involves prideful self-assertion in imitation of God.

Augustine might reasonably be accused of having been obsessed with sin both as a theoretical concept and as a personal affliction. As a theoretical concept, sin dominates his thinking. His discovery and articulation of what he took to be the Christian understanding of sin is crucial to his intellectual reconciliation with Catholic Christianity. It is his answer to the problem of the origin of evil: sin—understood as the corrupted free choices of certain of God's good creatures—is the first evil in creation. Evil is therefore not created by God but introduced into creation *de novo* by rational beings acting irrationally. The concept of sin grounds his elaborate two-evils theodicy: all evil is either sin or its consequences. God cannot prevent sin consistent with respecting the rational nature of angels and human beings, and God is morally justified in causing or permitting the evils that are consequent on sin insofar as they are instruments of just punishment and benevolent moral correction and transformation. Augustine's reflections on the nature of sin lead him to his distinctive metaphysical positions on free will and moral responsibility, shape his ethical theory, and give rise to his famously pessimistic view of fallen human nature's ability to do what is good without divine aid. All the major intellectual opponents he faced—Manichaean cosmological dualists, schismatic North African donatists, and the Pelagians that dogged the last two decades of his life—in Augustine's view fundamentally misunderstood the nature and extent of human sin and its affects on the human psyche.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the theoretical importance the notion of sin has for Augustine's thought is matched, in his reflections on his own life,

by the significance he attaches to his own personal sin. In the *Confessions* in particular, it can seem that he focuses on, indeed agonizes over, his own past sins and sinfulness to the point of excess. His confession of his own present sin, in book 10, for example, is relentless not only in length but in detail. His attention throughout the narrative of his life to his struggles with sexual incontinence in particular can seem to border on deviance and, in book 8, to assume a magnitude out of all proportion with reasonable self-assessment. Viewed against this backdrop of searing self-scrutiny the famous story of the theft of the pears, in *Confessions* book 2, can seem—and has in fact seemed to some readers—Augustine's most extreme piece of self-flagellation. He appears to scourge himself mercilessly for what might best be described as a bit of late-night adolescent mischief.¹

Most commentators agree that there is more to the story of the theft of the pears than this caricature allows. But they have had a hard time agreeing on precisely why Augustine thinks the story is worth relating, what he wants us to take from it, and why he chooses to relate it where he does, in book 2 of the *Confessions*.² In this paper I try to understand what Augustine is up to in the telling of this story.

1. Why is Augustine interested in the theft of the pears? (book 2, section 9)³

Augustine devotes roughly the second half of book 2—the last ten of the book's 18 sections (2.9-18)—to the theft of the pears. All of book 2 is given over to the retailing of Augustine's adolescent sins, sins committed, he tells us, in his sixteenth year while living at home during a break in his schooling. Augustine is now entering young adulthood, and his life is, by his own account, a mess. He is a prodigal son, wandering farther and farther away from God, becoming more and more destitute as he wanders.⁴ Augustine wants us to see the sinful state from which his long journey back to God must begin. But he also intends the autobiographical elements to provide a backdrop for important philosophical and theological themes. In particular, he intends reflection on his own sins to yield theoretical understanding of the nature of sin in general.

The first half of the book focuses on his youthful sexual adventures. The difficulty with sexual continence that occupies Augustine's attention throughout the first eight books of the *Confessions* takes root here. Sexual activity has a good purpose and end in God's creation. But unchecked and without regard to their place in the divine order of things, Augustine's desires for sex become wild and uncontrollable. "I boldly thrust out rank, luxuriant growth in various furtive love affairs" (2.1); "A frenzy of lust imposed its rule on me, and I wholeheartedly yielded to it" (2.4); "The thorn-bushes of my lust shot up higher than my head, and no hand was there to root them out" (2.6).⁵ As we learn later, in book 8, nothing short of divine grace will be sufficient to bring Augustine's sexual desires under control.

The theoretical point of discussing these youthful indiscretions is clear. Sexual promiscuity is not only a particular kind of sin but also a compelling metaphor for sin generally and illustrative of sin's general characteristics. In Augustine's view, morally significant features of human lives essentially involve human loves, and sin consists in the loving of lesser,

created goods in preference to God, the highest and immutable good.⁶ Sin, then, is a kind of fornication: giving one's best love inappropriately and unrestrainedly, thereby joining oneself to goods whose value to us is out of all proportion with their real value.⁷ We can see Augustine using the metaphor later in book 2 where no actual sexual liaison is in question: "In this way the soul fornicates when it is turned from you and seeks apart from you things which it finds pure and clear only when it returns to you" (2.14).⁸ It is easy to see, then, why the sexual adventures come in for extended attention.

It is not as clear why the theft of the pears deserves similar attention. In section 9 of book 2 Augustine turns to the theft of the pears, in this passage:

Your law, Lord, which clearly punishes theft, has been inscribed on human hearts. Not even wickedness itself can erase it. For what thief is an equanimous victim of theft, even if he is rich and the one who robs him is driven to it by poverty? I wanted to commit theft and I did it, compelled by no need other than a poverty of and scorn for justice and an abundance of wickedness. For I already had plenty of what it was I was stealing, and what I had was far better. Nor did I want to enjoy the thing I was seeking by theft; rather I wanted to enjoy the theft itself and the sin.

There was a pear tree near our vineyard laden with fruit that was appealing in neither appearance nor taste. Late one night, after we had prolonged our revelry in the streets in our pestilential way, our band of no-good youth set off to shake the fruit from the tree and carry it away. We hauled off huge loads, not for our feasts but in order to throw them to the pigs. Even if we ate some of what we took, nevertheless what pleased us was the fact that what we were doing was forbidden.

Of course the theft gives Augustine another example of sin to add to his list: it is another morally bad action, another instance of his violation of the divine ordering of creation, and further evidence of his moral corruption. But these opening lines suggest two other dimensions of the theft that Augustine seems interested in emphasizing. First, he introduces and briefly defends the claim that the divine prohibition of theft has been indelibly inscribed on human hearts. The adolescent Augustine therefore knows that what he is doing is sinful, and he does it anyway. That point is reinforced by his insistence that what pleased him in the act was doing what was forbidden—in order to be pleased by doing what was forbidden he must have *known* at the time that the act was forbidden. The emphasis on antecedent knowledge here distinguishes the theft of the pears from the other sins Augustine has been discussing.

The second feature of the case Augustine calls our attention to here at the start is the motive of the theft. He clearly thinks it strange and especially noteworthy that what attracted him to the act and what pleased him in it was the theft itself, the sin, the doing of what was forbidden. He did not steal because he wanted the pears; he stole because he wanted to steal, to sin, to do what was forbidden. That is not a feature of the other sins

Augustine has been discussing in book 2.

So on the basis of what he says in introducing the case, it would be natural to suppose that Augustine adds the theft of the pears to his litany of youthful offenses because these distinguishing marks make it significant to him and his project. Unlike the other sins in book 2, the theft of the pears purports to be a sin committed in full *knowledge* of its being a sin and precisely *because* it is a sin. Never mind that, viewed from an external perspective, the act itself is relatively harmless and perhaps less worrisome than Augustine's sexual improprieties. The peculiar mental state he attributes to himself—his knowledge and motivation—distinguish this case.

Augustine goes on to focus attention on just these features of the case. Here is his initial retrospective assessment of himself:

Behold my heart, God. Behold my heart which you had mercy on when it was in the depths of the abyss. Behold my heart. It now declares to you what it was seeking there, so that I might be wicked for its own sake (*gratis*) and there would be no cause of my wickedness other than wickedness. It was foul, and I loved it. I loved perishing, I loved my fall—not that for which I was falling, rather I loved my fall itself. My soul was filthy and, not seeking something shamefully but seeking shame, I was casting myself down from your firmament to utter destruction. (2.9, continuation)

What Augustine is clearly struck by here, and wants us to be struck by, is the depth of the moral perversity in the case. If the external act is no big deal, the heart from which the act springs is foul, and foul precisely in virtue of what it loves and is motivated by—sheer wickedness, the perishing, the shamefulness. To be motivated to act by the prospects of illicit sexual satisfaction is for one's loves to be disordered and misdirected, to seek something shamefully. But the good one seeks is nevertheless recognizable and genuine. By contrast, to be moved to act by the wickedness of an act is for one's loves to be disordered in the extreme, to be directed toward what is in itself not good at all. A heart with loves of that sort is in the very depths of the moral abyss.⁹

What Augustine says later in book 2 confirms this assessment. He tells us that not even the notorious Cataline was so corrupt as to love his crimes simply because they were crimes (2.11). And he says of himself, "What rottenness! What a monstrous life and abyss of death! Could what is not permitted have been pleasing for no other reason than that it was not permitted?" (2.14). And he concludes book 2, "It is foul. I do not want to consider it. I do not want to look at it. . . . I became for myself a region of destitution" (2.18). In the theft of the pears Augustine's prodigality has become dramatic and complete.¹⁰

The theft of the pears, then, is important to Augustine because it enables him to introduce a particular notion of extreme moral depravity: loving something wicked solely for the sake of the wickedness. That, I think, is the *first* reason for introducing the story. But as the rest of Augustine's extended discussion reveals, there is more attracting his attention than just the depravity of his motive in the case. After having confidently identified the

motive and roundly excoriated his adolescent heart for it (in the passages we have just looked at from section 9), he seems, just a bit farther along in the text, to waver: "Wretch that I was, what did I love in you, my theft? . . . I want to know what in the theft gave me delight." (2.12). The question arises not because he thinks his initial account ("what pleased us was the fact that what we were doing was forbidden") involves a mis-remembering of his state of mind at the time, or that he might be wrong about the extent of the wickedness it manifests. His worry seems to be rather that the motive he has attributed to his younger self is impossible, that no one could be moved in that way, that despite his memory of the event, the initial explanation he has given of his theft is in fact unintelligible. This is clearly the main or most explicit problem that Augustine wants the story of the theft to bring out. Nearly all the material in sections 10-18 of book 2 is devoted to articulating and trying to resolve the particular difficulty he has his finger on when he asks this tentative question: "What did I love in you, my theft?" That is the *second* reason Augustine has for introducing the theft of the pears in book 2 of the *Confessions*.

Augustine's handling of that problem is my main concern and I consider it in detail below. But before wandering into that particular thicket I want briefly to suggest a *third* reason Augustine has for including the theft of the pears here in book 2. The theft of the pears gives Augustine the occasion to explain in the context of his own personal pilgrimage the significance of the fall of the first free creatures, angelic and human. There is plenty in the opening paragraphs of the discussion of the theft that invites us to think of the story as analogous to the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden (Genesis 3). Like the adolescent Augustine, Adam and Eve took fruit from a tree. Adam and Eve, too, disobeyed a clear divine prohibition. And they, too, acted crucially in consort—they were a gang of two. There is clear allusion here to the angelic fall, too, in Augustine's casting himself down from the firmament.¹² And there is the unmistakable parallel between the two trees framing salvation history—the tree associated with the fall in the garden and the tree on Golgatha where redemption is wrought—and the two trees framing Augustine's own pilgrimage—the pear tree in this story and the tree in the Milanese garden under which a weeping Augustine finally surrenders to divine grace (in book 8).¹³ So we cannot help but be thinking of creation's first sins as we contemplate Augustine and the pears.

So why should the first falls be relevant to Augustine's own story in the *Confessions*? Why should he want to recall them here in book 2? There are no doubt several reasons, but two of them seem to me particularly compelling. First, Augustine intends the story of his own life to represent in microcosm the principles and events that Christianity takes to be fundamental in the larger story of God's creation and redemption of the universe. Insofar as the theft of the pears mirrors the first falls, Augustine is anxious to use it to teach us about those foundational events in Christian history. Second, Augustine believes that the primal sins of Lucifer and Adam and Eve are important not merely because of their temporal priority and causal significance but also because they are in a certain way paradigms. All sins—primal, creation-rending sin, everyday peccadilloes, and everything in between—share a common deep structure, and Augustine

thinks that one won't properly understand sin's nature until one sees it. In one obvious sense, Augustine's sins, including the theft of the pears, are not primal: they are preceded by and prepared for by other evils already in creation and in Augustine himself. But in another sense they are: their motives spring ultimately from the same deep wells as the motives of Lucifer and Adam and Eve.¹⁴ Augustine introduces the theft of the pears in book 2 because it allows him to make that important point, as I now proceed to argue.

2. Explaining motivation (book 2, sections 10–11)

Augustine has identified a motive for his theft of the pears. He puts it in five different ways in the small bit of text we have seen so far, all of which, I think, are meant to convey the same idea:

A. Nor did I want to enjoy the thing I was seeking by theft; rather I wanted to enjoy the theft itself and the sin (*nec ea re volebam frui quam furto appetebam, sed ipso furto et peccato*)

B. Nevertheless what pleased us was the fact that what we were doing was forbidden (*tamen fieret a nobis quod eo liberet quo non liceret*)

C. [My heart now declares to you] what it was seeking there, so that I might be wicked for its own sake and there would be no cause of my wickedness other than wickedness (*quid ibi quaerebat, ut essem gratis malus et malitiae meae causa nulla esset nisi malitia*)

D. It was foul, and I loved it. I loved perishing, I loved my fall—not that for which I was falling, rather I loved my fall itself (*foeda erat, et amavi eam. Amavi perire, amavi defectum meum, non illud ad quod deficiebam, sed defectum meum ipsum amavi*)

E. [My soul was filthy and,] not seeking something shamefully but seeking shame, [I was casting myself down] (*non dedecore aliquid, sed dedecus appetens*)

He repeats some of these variations and adds others as the discussion proceeds. As he understands the case, he performs a certain action, an act of theft, and is motivated to perform that action under that description, that is, just insofar as he takes it to be theft, a crime, something forbidden, something the doing of which will make him wicked and shameful.

It is *that* account of the motivation for his thievery that Augustine finds worrisome, and he spends the next two sections—book 2, sections 10 and 11—building a theoretical framework that will allow him to state the worry clearly. The framework has two main components: what we might think of, respectively, as a subjective and an objective constraint on motivation.

Subjective constraint on motivation: Augustine points out that if we are to make sense of a person's voluntary actions, we must understand what in or about those actions moves her to view them favorably, what it is in them that she loves or takes to be worth seeking. His various ways of putting this include saying that we are moved or motivated by what delights us (*delectat*), what pleases us or gives us pleasure (*libet, placet*), what we love (*amare*), or what we want to enjoy (*frui*). It is an assumption of this sort that

leads Augustine to ask: "Wretch that I was, what did I *love* in you, my theft? . . . I want to know what in the theft gave me *delight*." (2.12) He supposes that if he is to understand his motivation, he must know the answer to this particular question.

A well known passage in Augustine's commentary on the Sermon on the Mount makes the point a bit more systematically:

There are three steps by which sin is brought to completion: suggestion, delight (*delectatio*), and consent. A suggestion comes about through memory or a bodily sense (when we see, hear, smell, taste, or touch something). If the enjoyment (*frui*) of this thing delights (*delectaverit*), then if the delight is illicit, one ought to refrain from it. For example, when we are fasting and a desire (*appetitus*) for something to eat arises in us at the sight of food, this occurs only by virtue of delight. Nevertheless we do not consent to it, and we restrain it by a command of reason which has control. But if consent were given, the sin would be complete in our heart and known to God—even if the deed fails to occur and [the sin] remains unknown to others. (*De sermone Domini in monte* 1.34)¹⁵

Augustine's concern in this passage is to explicate Jesus' claim that a person can violate God's commands—can sin—"in his heart." But the basic account he sketches here applies to voluntary action generally. Whether or not we are fasting, when the sight or smell of food gives rise in us to a desire to eat, the desire is explained or accounted for, on Augustine's view, by our delight at the prospect of eating or enjoying the food. And in general, the thoughts and perceptions that occur to us—what Augustine here calls "suggestions"—lead to desire and ultimately to consent and action only by virtue of their presenting us with something that delights us.¹⁶ It is unclear whether Augustine thinks of the delight and the correlative desire it explains as distinct things, the former causing or giving rise to the latter, or whether he means only to be calling attention to a sort of conceptual truth about desire, namely, that desires, by their very nature, take as their objects things or states of affairs conceived of as in some way delightful. Either way, we can see the point of his identifying delight as crucial for understanding voluntary action: until we know what it is in or about an action that delights the agent, we will not know what motivates her. Being told merely that she *desires* to act in a certain way is uninformative; we need to know why she has that desire, why that action should seem to her desirable.

Augustine's position, then, identifies a subjective constraint on motivation which we might express as follows:

If an agent *S* voluntarily performs some action (*Øs*), then there must be something, *D*, in or about *Ø*ing that delights *S* and (for that reason) moves *S* to *Ø*.

What delights an agent—*D* in this schema—is what motivates her. Sometimes the relevant feature of an action will be something attaching directly to the action itself: acts of virtue are intrinsically valuable, and their

intrinsic value can attract us to them. Sometimes the feature that delights will be an object or state of affairs that the action can be expected to bring about or promote, as when one digs in one's garden in order to cultivate a beautiful space.

Objective constraint on motivation: Augustine supposes that human beings are designed or constituted to take delight in only a certain range of things. In section 10 of book 2, he offers a brief summary of his views on this matter.¹⁷ Certain bodies have a kind of beauty (*species*) or an appropriate sort of fit (*congruentia, modificatio*) with our bodily senses that causes us to respond with delight to them. Our minds rather than our senses discern and respond to certain other goods such as temporal honor and power, which have a kind of dignity or worth (*decus*), and human friendship, the sweetness of which owes to the unity it secures among different minds. Augustine tells us that all these things have their delights (*habent haec delectationes*) and that this temporal life "has its attractiveness on account of a kind of measure and fittingness of the adornment (*decus*) it possesses where all these earthly beautiful things are concerned" (2.10). His idea seems to be that delight is the result of an appropriate sort of fit or accommodation between an object and the bodily senses or the mind and that, as a consequence, the sorts of objects in which human beings can take delight are the sorts that are fitted or accommodated in the right way to our bodies and minds.

Given that human beings' physical and mental constitution is relevantly determined by their nature, and given that only certain sorts of objects are naturally fitted to the human constitution in the right way, it follows that it is an objective matter—a matter determined by the natures of things—what objects human beings can take delight in. It cannot be that any object whatsoever can be an object of human delight.¹⁸ Hence, Augustine's account of the nature of delight places an objective constraint on the range of objects that can fill that role. For a given case of voluntary action, if we cannot identify an objectively recognizable delight—something with beauty, worth, the sweetness of unity, or in some other way appropriately accommodated to the human body or mind—then we will not have understood the agent's motivation in acting.

Augustine points out that this account of the nature of human delight and the role delight plays in the account of motivation helps us understand not only ordinary, unobjectionable human behavior but also deviant behavior and, in particular, sin. We sin, Augustine believes, not because we are motivated by bad things but because we pursue perfectly natural and appropriate delights inordinately, preferring them and the things in which they reside to higher goods. "Sin is committed for the sake of all these things and other things of this sort when, by virtue of an inclination towards them that is inordinate (since they are the lowest sort of goods), we forsake better and higher goods" (2.10). Augustine's sexual escapades from the first half of book 2 illustrate this account nicely. In his acts of sexual promiscuity Augustine aims at objectively recognizable goods—physical pleasure and intimate communion with another person—but he does so inordinately, preferring those goods to other, higher goods. The genuine goods that motivate sinners—the delights that attract them—make their sinful actions *intelligible*; the disproportionate and disruptive role those

motivations play in sinners' lives is what makes their sinful actions *sins*.

Augustine goes on in the next section—section 11—to direct the account he has been developing toward the kind of case he is interested in here, the commission of a crime. It turns out, perhaps unsurprisingly, that criminal acts are just a special case of sin and are subject to the same pattern of explanation:

And so when there is an inquiry into why (*qua causa*) a certain crime was committed, the charge would not typically be believed unless it is made clear that a desire to obtain one of those goods that we have claimed to be the lowest (or a fear of losing one of them) was possible.

This is just the application of the subjective constraint on motivation. Insofar as it is voluntary, criminal behavior must be motivated by something the criminal himself takes delight in or recognizes as good. Augustine imagines some of the possibilities:

He committed murder. Why did he do it? He loved the man's wife or his estate, or he wanted to rob him to get money to live on, or he was afraid that he would suffer the loss of something of this sort at the other man's hands

...

But he is not willing to countenance certain attributions of motive:

Would anyone commit murder without a reason (*sine causa*), having taken delight in murder itself (*ipso homicidio delectatus*)? Who would believe that? (2.11)

No one would believe it, Augustine supposes, and the objective constraint on motivation explains why. Murder itself is not the sort of thing that human beings can take delight in. Hence, when someone commits murder, there must be something else, an objectively recognizable delight, that motivates him. Even in the case of the notorious Cataline, who was reputed to have committed his crimes "without reason," Augustine insists that there is in fact a straightforward explanation in terms of motives that fits the general account he has been developing: "Therefore not even Cataline himself loved his crimes; rather he loved something else"—and we might add: "something else which is a recognizable delight"—"which was the reason he committed them."

We are now in position to combine the two components of Augustine's account of motivation, the subjective and objective constraints on motivation:

If an agent *S* voluntarily performs some action ($\emptyset$ s), then there must be something, *D*, in or about $\emptyset$ ing that delights *S* and (for that reason) moves *S* to $\emptyset$, where *D* is an objectively recognizable object of delight that is either a feature of $\emptyset$ ing itself or something *S* intends to bring about or promote by $\emptyset$ ing.

This schema, I think, articulates the theoretical framework Augustine intends to use in his analysis of the theft of the pears.

3. *The central puzzle (book 2, section 12)*

With this framework for understanding human motivation in place, Augustine begins the analysis of his special case: "Wretch that I was, what did I love in you, my theft, that nocturnal crime in the sixteenth year of my life? You were not beautiful, since you are theft" (2.12). Augustine focuses here precisely where we would expect him to focus, given the constraints he has just articulated. If his general account holds, then there must be some objectively recognizable delight motivating him to steal the pears. He suggests here at the beginning of section 12 that the theft itself is ineligible to fill this role. Theft, like the case of murder discussed in the previous section, insofar as it is recognized for what it is, neither is nor contains in itself anything delightful, anything naturally suited to attract us. The pears themselves would be appropriate objects of delight, but Augustine adamantly denies that they were what motivated him in this case: "The pears were beautiful, but my miserable soul did not desire them." The theft itself, however, is not an intelligible motivator; there is no beauty or dignity in it, as Augustine asserts for the second time in the space of a dozen lines of text: "And now, Lord my God, I ask what it was that delighted me in the theft. There is no beauty (*species*) in it." So if Augustine's account of human motivation holds generally, neither the theft itself nor the wickedness and shame it promises can have motivated him to steal the pears. His initial account of his motivation—confidently asserted in section 9 of the text (see A–E in section 2 above)—must be wrong. There must be some other delight that moves him to act in this case; the account of motivation he has sketched in sections 10 and 11 requires it.

This, I think, is the central puzzle Augustine sets for himself in the story of the theft of the pears. Are there genuine counterexamples to the general account of human motivation Augustine has just given us good reason to accept? Are there voluntary sinful human actions that are not merely heinous and perverse but also strictly unintelligible on the best account Augustine thinks we have?¹⁹ The stakes here are extremely high for Augustine. His own hard-won and carefully wrought account of the nature of sin fits integrally with and relies essentially on the general account of human motivation sketched in sections 10 and 11. That account of sin provides Augustine the conceptual leverage he needs to overturn his Manichaean convictions: he comes to see that all of God's creatures are good and that sin, the first and fundamental evil in creation, arises from creaturely free choices that aim essentially (and inordinately) at genuine goods, things in which it is wholly appropriate to take some measure of delight. To allow that there are sins in which sinners aim at no good, sins in which sinners find no recognizable delight, would undermine the foundations of Augustine's theodicy and thereby the entire edifice of his Christian intellectual enterprise.²⁰ Reflection on the superficially banal story of the theft of the pears has led him to philosophical issues of profound importance. In my view, the most compelling reason Augustine has for including the story in

book 2 of the *Confessions* is that it enables him, as the stories of his adolescent sexual exploits cannot, to raise this deep worry about human motivation.

The story of the theft of the pears allows Augustine to articulate the difficulty, but does reflection on it also enable him to resolve it? I want to suggest that Augustine seriously entertains two answers to the question "What did I take delight in in the theft?" The first appears in section 14. Since I think that commentators have for the most part failed to appreciate the importance of that part of Augustine's analysis, I devote most of my attention in what follows to it (see sections 5 and 6 below). The second, which Augustine develops in sections 16 and 17 of book 2, is the more explicit and, for that reason, better known of the two attempts. I begin briefly with it.

4. *The allure of camaraderie (book 2, sections 16–17)*

In section 16 Augustine appears to emerge from the discussion of the theft of the pears and to begin pulling together the various threads of book 2: "What fruit did I ever get, wretch that I was, from these things that I now blush to recall, especially from that theft in which I loved the theft itself and nothing else?" The expression "these things that I now blush to recall" is intended to be general and to shift our attention from the single case he has been focused on since section 9 to the broader variety of sins he has identified and lamented in book 2. The theft of the pears remains in the foreground ("especially from that theft"), but Augustine here reminds us that it is one case among others. He is moving toward a general conclusion to his reflections on his adolescent sins.

This opening question in section 16 ("What fruit did I ever get . . . from these things . . . especially from that theft?") also reminds us of the puzzle that was raised but not resolved in section 12 ("What did I love in you, my theft?"). The two questions differ in perspective. The earlier question, in section 12, focuses attention on Augustine's motivation. It asks what he wanted (prospectively) to enjoy or what good he expected to obtain by means of the theft. By contrast, the question here in section 16 seems to ask about the benefit or enjoyment he actually derived from the theft (and his other sins).²¹ Augustine's answer to this later question is that he received no benefit at all. What he loved was the theft itself, and since the theft itself is nothing, he gained nothing by having got what he loved—in fact he was made more miserable still.²² But this reference to what he loved in the theft, leads Augustine back to the question of motivation, which he goes on to address:

Nevertheless, I would not have done it by myself—I remember that this was my state of mind at the time—I would in no way have done it by myself. Therefore I also loved there the camaraderie of those with whom I did it. . . . If at that time I loved the pears that I stole and wanted to enjoy them, I could have committed the wickedness by which I achieved my satisfaction even by myself, if the love was strong enough. I would not have needed to inflame the itch of my desire by the stimulation of my peers. But because my satisfaction did not lie in the pears, it lay in the crime itself committed in league with a gang of sinners.

The observation that he would not have stolen the pears by himself leads to a kind of break-through. On the basis of that observation Augustine immediately draws a conclusion that offers a direct answer to the question from section 12: "Therefore I also loved there the camaraderie of those with whom I did it." It had seemed to Augustine as if he had loved the theft itself and nothing else, but it is now clear to him that he also loved the camaraderie. Since apart from the gang he would not have done it, it follows, he suggests, that it was his love of camaraderie that provided the critical impetus: "[My satisfaction] lay in the crime itself committed in league with a gang of sinners." This is Augustine's final word on his motivation for stealing the pears.

Augustine accomplishes at least two important things with this last observation. First, he (finally) brings the story of the theft of the pears under the main theme of book 2. At the beginning of book 2 Augustine told us that at this time in his adolescence he was burning to be satiated with the lowest sort of goods. "And what was it that I was taking delight in," he goes on to ask (2.2), "except loving and being loved?" It is immediately clear how his sexual adventures and his bragging to his peers about them satisfy this general description. Here at the very end of the book Augustine shows us how the theft of the pears, too, can be understood as a misguided and disordered attempt at loving and being loved. Hence, his final verdict on the case: "O utterly hostile friendship, unfathomable seducer of the mind! . . . When someone says 'Come on, let's do it!' one is ashamed not to be shameless" (2.17).

Second, Augustine salvages the theoretical account of motivation that the story of the theft of the pears threatened to undermine. Contrary to initial appearances, the objectively undelightful theft was not what moved him to act as he did (at least it was not sufficient by itself). There was something else moving him: delight in the camaraderie of those with whom he did it.²³ Moreover, in contrast with the theft itself, camaraderie—loving and being loved—is a recognizable and intelligible good, the sort of thing human beings naturally take delight in. Hence, in the theft of the pears Augustine is, after all, moved by an objective delight. The good of friendship (in this case what is really false and hostile friendship) affects him inordinately and perversely, but the desire for friendship nonetheless satisfies the constraints imposed by Augustine's own account of motivation. He appears to have found a suitable answer to his question in section 12, "What did I love in you, my theft?"²⁴

This resolution of what I have called the central puzzle occurs at the very end of both the account of the theft of the pears and book 2 (at sections 16–17). But Augustine seems to offer a different resolution earlier in the account, at section 14.

5. Imitation of God (book 2, sections 12–14)

After raising the central question in the opening line of section 12 ("What did I love in you, my theft?") Augustine devotes the remainder of section 12 to searching for a plausible answer. The search is structured by the systematic account of human delights suggested in sections 10 and 11.²⁵

Augustine first rules out the relevant corporeal goods (the beautiful appearance [*pulchra*] of the pears, their taste). He then denies that the theft delighted him because of any kind of spiritual or intelligible goodness it possessed: it did not have the sort of beauty (*species*) possessed by the virtues (equity or prudence) or the faculties of the human soul (mind, memory, the senses, or the vegetative life); nor did it have the sort of beauty or attractive ordering (*speciosa et decora*) found in the motions of the stars and the regular laws and cycles of nature. He finally appears to deny even that the theft possessed the sort of "defective and shadowy beauty found in the deceptive vices."²⁶

The introduction of this notion of deceptive vices causes Augustine to leave off his search for the elusive delight in his theft in order to elaborate. He lists fifteen different deceptive vices, explaining in each case how the particular vice involves an attraction but one that is based on deception insofar as each seeks an object that is only a defective and shadowy imitation of something that is to be found genuinely only in God. He tells us that *pride* imitates exaltation (whereas only God is exalted above all things); *ambition* seeks honor and glory (whereas only God is worthy of honor before all things and eternally glorious); sloth seeks a kind of rest (whereas certain rest is found only in God); avarice seeks possessions (whereas only God possesses all things) and so forth.²⁷ The list is something of a mixed bag and the uniform analysis Augustine subjects it to seems strained in places.²⁸ But the general point Augustine wants to derive from the brief account does not depend on the details: "In this way the soul fornicates when it is turned from you and seeks apart from you things which it finds pure and clear only when it returns to you" (2.14).

Augustine has taken the time to introduce and explain the deceptive vices because they give him, in the notion of misguided or illusory imitation, an important new tool for understanding the structure of sin. The model Augustine had been working with up to this point in book 2 identifies sin as the *inordinate* desire for something that is genuinely good. What the fornicator or the glutton seeks is a good, but each person sins in preferring the genuine but lower good at which his fornication or gluttony aims to things of greater value: "Sin is committed for the sake of all these [lower goods] . . . when by virtue of a desire that is inordinate (since these are the lowest sort of good) better and higher things are abandoned. For these [lowest goods], too, have their own delights" (2.10). The goods identified here are genuine goods, despite their being of the lowest kind, and they have their own delights—that is why they can straightforwardly and directly motivate sinners to sin. But the deceptive vices give us a slightly different perspective on sin. The avaricious person, for example, seeks possessions and, presumably, does so inordinately—to that extent avarice has the structure of fornication and gluttony. But in the case of avarice there is an additional twist: the avaricious person's pursuit of possessions constitutes (in a defective and shadowy way) an attempt to possess all things, that is, to be like God in respect of possessions. The person who is subject to a deceptive vice, then, inordinately desires some object and *in so doing* seeks to have what can be had only by being or being in God. Deceptive vices call our attention, as it were, to two objects in the relevant sins: the

sinner's direct object (possessions or power or honors and glory) and what we might think of as his indirect object (being like God in the relevant respect).

Having provided a new tool for thinking about the nature of these sins, Augustine brings it to bear on his own theft of the pears. Here is the relevant text :

- 1 All who set themselves apart from you and extol themselves
- 2 over against you imitate you perversely. But even when they
- 3 imitate you in this way they indicate that you are the creator of
- 4 all natures and that there is no way they can escape from you.
- 5 What was it, then, that I took delight in (*dilexi*) in that theft, and
- 6 in what way did I imitate my Lord viciously and perversely?
- 7 Was it pleasing (*libuit*) to do something against the law at least
- 8 deceptively (since I could not do it by sheer force), so that by
- 9 doing with impunity what was not permitted I might imitate, in
- 10 a dim likeness of omnipotence, the shackled freedom of a pris-
- 11 oner? Behold, this person is a slave who flees his master and
- 12 hides in the shadows. What rottenness! What a monstrous life
- 13 and abyss of death! Could what is not permitted have been
- 14 pleasing for no other reason than that it was not permitted? (2.14)²⁹

There is no mistaking the fact that Augustine intends here to identify his own theft of the pears as a case of perverse imitation of God, on the model provided by the deceptive vices. He begins with a general principle (at lines 1-2) that is clearly meant to encompass his own case. He has been describing himself since the opening lines of the *Confessions* as the prodigal who travels far from home, who sets himself apart from God.³⁰ Moreover, here in the story of the theft of the pears he has portrayed himself as the thief who brazenly flaunts the law God has indelibly inscribed on human hearts. So Augustine has set himself apart from God and extolled himself over against God. In the theft of the pears, then, it must be that he is imitating God perversely.³¹

But how exactly is his petty thievery a perverse imitation of God? Augustine raises the question (at line 5) and links it with the question he had left aside at the end of section 12 when he digressed to explain the deceptive vices. The suggestion is that the two questions must be treated together, that their answers will also be linked. Augustine goes on straightaway to offer an account (at lines 6-10) designed, apparently, to answer both questions. In breaking God's law with impunity he has grasped at freedom and power (his direct object) in a way attempts to be like God (his indirect object)—it is as if he were asserting "I can do whatever I want!" "Not even divine law can restrict what I do." But the freedom is sham—it is the shackled freedom of a prisoner who can move only as far as and only in the manner in which his shackles permit him to move. And the power he claims for himself is at best a dim likeness of omnipotence. The whole affair, Augustine suggests, is predicated on the illusion that in flaunting God's law he is asserting or claiming for himself a kind of freedom and power that he does not and cannot possess. He acts

as if he alone determines the limits of his actions. He thereby imitates omnipotent God perversely.

It is clear, then, how Augustine's account answers the question "In what way did I imitate my Lord viciously and perversely?" It also seems clear that it answers the question "What was it, then, that I took delight in in that theft?" According to the account Augustine entertains here in section 14, he took delight in the idea of possessing the radical freedom and power his act of impunity was intended to express. That sort of freedom and power—found only in the divine omnipotence—is a genuine good, a divine attribute, and recognizably delightful. Of course Augustine's idea that he himself could possess or manifest it is an illusion. But it seems reasonable to suppose—and Augustine's account seems to suggest—that that idea nevertheless delighted him and motivated his theft of the pears. In this way, both Augustine's subjective and objective requirements on explaining motivation are satisfied by the analysis of the events he sets out here. The puzzle of the motivation of the theft seems resolved.

I claim, then, that in section 14 Augustine uses the notion of the illusory imitation of God suggested to him by his account of the deceptive vices to unlock a resolution to the central puzzle of the theft of the pears. That conclusion is confirmed, I think, by a striking parallel from another of Augustine's texts. In *De libero arbitrio* Augustine argues that the first evil in creation occurs when one of God's rational creatures—the devil—freely turns away from God, loving certain created goods in preference to God himself who is the highest good. Near the end of the book Augustine raises and tries to resolve the difficulty that account unavoidably suggests: Why would the devil, who knows that God is the highest good and that his own happiness consists in loving God as the highest good, freely choose lesser, created goods in preference to God? What could possibly motivate the devil to act in this patently irrational and self-defeating way? Here is Augustine's reply:

In its contemplation of the highest wisdom (which of course the [devil's] mind is not, since the highest wisdom is unchangeable), the [devil's] mind (which is changeable) also observes itself and, in a certain way, comes before its own mind. This would not happen unless there were a difference by virtue of which it is not what God is and nevertheless is something that can be pleasing (*placere*) next to God. Now, it is better when the mind forgets itself in the presence of the love of the immutable God or considers itself of little value in comparison with it. But if, insofar as it encounters itself, it pleases (*placet*) itself to the point of perversely imitating God so that it wills to enjoy (*frui*) its own power, then to the extent to which it desires to be greater, to that extent it becomes less. This is "pride, the beginning of all sin" (Ecclesiasticus 10:13). (*De libero arbitrio* 3.76)³²

Augustine's account of the way in which his own theft of the pears constitutes a perverse imitation of God precisely tracks this account of the motivation for creation's very first sin. As Augustine explains it, the devil, who is first distracted from contemplation of God by his own genuine good-

ness, then takes inordinate delight in it, willing to enjoy his own power in such a way that he perversely imitates God.³³

The parallels between these two accounts are significant for two reasons. First, they show clearly that Augustine intends us to take seriously his analysis of the theft of the pears as perverse imitation of God's power. The motivations Augustine details for the theft are not unique to this case nor are they idle conjectures he entertains briefly only to leave aside. Rather they conform to an important pattern, the prototype of which is found in the fall of the angels. Moreover, the pattern is intended, as the account of the devil's fall shows, to provide a genuine answer to the question of what motivates sinners to imitate God in this way. They are moved by the delight they take in the idea of the utter self-determination that betokens omnipotence. We should conclude, then, that understanding the theft of the pears as imitation of divine omnipotence constitutes Augustine's answer to the question "What was it, then, that I took delight in in that theft?"

Second, seeing that the account of the theft is modeled closely on the account of the devil's fall puts us in position to see an important reason Augustine has for including the story of the theft of the pears in book 2 of the *Confessions*. At the end of the account of the devil's fall (quoted above), Augustine identifies the devil's sin as pride, and quotes a biblical text identifying pride as the beginning of all sin. We can see the point in calling perverse imitation of God "pride." The devil's sort of self-assertion—his choosing, on his own accord, to prefer a created good to the highest good—constitutes the placing of one's own choices and their objects (in this case one's own power) above all other things. That, one might say, is the paradigm of pride. Moreover, Augustine supposes that the devil's first sin is appropriately called "the beginning of all sin" not only because the devil's prideful act is in fact the very first evil in all creation but also because pride is at the root or is the source of all other sins. The story of the theft of the pears is crucial to book 2 of the *Confessions*, therefore, because it allows Augustine to identify and explain an idea without which he thinks no account of sin can be complete: the idea that imitation of God in the form of prideful self-assertion is at the bottom of all sin.³⁴ The story of the theft of the pears is designed to push Augustine's explanation of the nature of sin to this its deepest level.

In what sense is pride the root or source of every sin? Augustine has argued that each sin consists in loving a lesser good in preference to God; that is what it is for a person to turn away from God and toward created things. At the first level of explanation, then, Augustine tells us that the sinner takes delight in some created thing (bodily pleasure, temporal honors, the sweetness of companionship) and loves it disproportionately. But we might reasonably go on to ask *why* or *for what reason* the sinner loves this thing too much? Augustine supposes that that question moves us to a deeper level of explanation. When sinners (irrationally) prefer lesser goods to higher ones, they are in essence determining for themselves how goods are to be ranked relative to one another, disregarding their objective values and rankings. But that is an act of self-assertion, claiming for oneself a power one does not and cannot possess, the power to determine by one's own will the relative values of things. All sinners, then, whatever the

species of their sin, insofar as they love something inordinately, exemplify the sort of over-reaching self-assertion that Augustine calls pride.³⁵

If I have understood Augustine's views about pride correctly, then it follows that his account of sin as the sort of perverse imitation of God in which pride consists and his account of sin as inordinate desire for created goods are in fact complementary. Each is correct and illuminating of sin's nature. They function, as it were, at different levels.

6. Augustine's reticence

There is an obvious difficulty for the position I have just defended. Having identified a satisfactory motive for the theft, as I have argued he does in section 14, why does Augustine not proclaim that fact clearly and close the investigation. Why does he conclude section 14 by asking, "Could what is not permitted have been pleasing for no other reason than that it was not permitted?" If he had indeed just shown that there was something in the theft in which he took delight—the assertion of his own freedom and power—this question would be out of place. If I am right, we can see the significance of his insisting on having stolen the pears *because* it was forbidden. The fact that it was forbidden is crucial to the action's constituting the sort of prideful grasp at power that Augustine wants us to focus on. But he ought no longer to suppose that he did what he did *for no other reason* than that it was forbidden. He ought to suppose instead that he did it because it was not permitted and also because of the illusion of omnipotence it presented him. Similarly, when he returns to these issues in section 16 (see section 4 above), why does he seem to assume that he still lacks an answer to the question I have claimed he has resolved here in section 14?

I think Augustine has two reasons for insisting, even after the analysis in section 14, that he stole the pears for no other reason than that it was not permitted. First, the action's being forbidden is crucially constitutive of and not merely instrumentally or accidentally tied to its expressing the sort of pride Augustine has identified. In a certain sort of way the allure of doing what is forbidden *just is* the allure of asserting one's own freedom and power. So when Augustine continues to maintain that there was no reason for his action other than that it was forbidden, he need not be taken to be denying thereby that he did it for the sake of asserting his own imagined omnipotence. Granted, the two *descriptions* of his motives are different and, on one way of looking at it, that is sufficient for ascribing two different motives to him.³⁶ But on another way of looking at it—the way I think Augustine chooses to adopt here—the two descriptions do not ascribe different motives since the one description merely specifies the feature of the action (its being forbidden) that is crucially constitutive of the action's satisfying the other description (its being an expression of radical freedom and power). So Augustine has some justification for continuing to maintain that he was motivated by nothing other than the fact that the theft was forbidden even while acknowledging that he was motivated by a desire for a kind of limitless power.

Second, there is another sense in which Augustine is right to say that there is nothing else motivating him. Insofar as he was motivated by delu-

sions of his own omnipotence, there was nothing actually corresponding to his delusions. He was not in fact omnipotent nor was it possible that he become omnipotent. What moved him, then, was in reality nothing at all, a mere delusion, something utterly illusory. For that reason it is, in a way, correct to say that he was motivated by nothing other than the fact that the theft was forbidden. Of course illusions (as distinct from what the illusions are illusions of) can and do motivate us, and that is why it is also correct to say that the shadowy illusion of unlimited power moved him to commit his crime. He was moved by the prospect of an omnipotence that is impossible to attain.

Moreover, Augustine has good rhetorical reasons for availing himself of these less than entirely transparent philosophical maneuvers. In general he wants the story of the theft of the pears to emphasize the depravity of his soul at this stage of his life. He wants by the end of book 2 to be able to claim that the prodigal has reached his nadir. The insistence that he stole the pears only because the act was forbidden serves that purpose well.

He also has good reason to postpone the suggestion that the puzzle has been finally resolved. In fact he thinks that the explanation is not yet complete at the end of section 14. As we have seen, the allure of camaraderie plays a crucial role in moving him to act, and that component of the account is still to come. Augustine's insistence that he stole the pears only because the act was forbidden allows him space to return to the question of motivation for the final time in section 16. As I have claimed, that insistence is only part of the truth Augustine has revealed to us in section 14. But Augustine the skilled rhetorician is happy to emphasize just the parts of the truth that best advance his project.

7. *Salvaging intelligible motivation*

Commentators have sometimes suggested that Augustine believes that in its most radical cases sin is utterly unintelligible, that no intelligible motivation can be found that would explain—in the sort of way reasons-explanations explain—the actions of sinners in these cases.³⁷ The account of the theft of the pears can seem to support that view. It can seem that Augustine presents the theft of the pears precisely as a counterexample to the claim that all voluntary actions are motivated by an intelligible delight, and that his lengthy discussion of the case leaves the counterexample standing. It would follow that in radical cases of sin rational creatures choose what is evil for its own sake and for no other reason.

I have argued here that Augustine is interested in the theft of the pears for just the reason these commentators suppose—because it appears to present a counterexample to what Augustine himself holds to be the best account of the motivations of voluntary action—but that his search for intelligible motivations in this case is *not* fruitless. Augustine succeeds in uncovering two motivations for his thievery which, in his analysis, work crucially together. He stole the pears because doing so seemed to him a way of expressing or claiming for himself a kind of limitless freedom and power. But given that that motive was not sufficient by itself to move him to the deed, his action also required the motivation provided by his desire

to be included in the fellowship of rogues—to love and be loved.³⁸ These are the two components of the composite motivational state Augustine's analysis of the theft of the pears reveals. Each of these motivating factors constitutes an intelligible motivation of the sort required by Augustine's own account of motivation. Each identifies something that an agent might reasonably take to be a good and therefore take delight in, even if doing so involves significant error or illusion.

Augustine's analysis of the theft of the pears therefore shows us how his action on that occasion is in fact intelligible. The analysis also makes clear that his motivations were neither simple nor immediately transparent. Augustine thereby succeeds in showing that the complexity and depth of the human psyche requires that any search for the motivations of voluntary action be patient, subtle, and resourceful.

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NOTES

1. For example, Oliver Wendell Holmes: "Rum thing to see a man making a mountain out of robbing a pear tree in his teens" (as quoted in Colin Starnes, *Augustine's Conversion: A Guide to the Argument of Confessions I-IX* (Waterloo, Ont.: W. Laurier University Press, 1990), 37).

2. For useful general discussion, see Pierre Courcelle, *Recherches Sur Les "Confessions" De Saint Augustin* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1968); Robert J. O'Connell, *St. Augustine's Confessions: The Odyssey of the Soul*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), ch. 4; James J. O'Donnell, ed., *Augustine: Confessions*, 3 vols., vol. II: Commentary on Books 1-7 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Starnes, *Augustine's Conversion*, 37-51; and Garry Wills, *Saint Augustine, Penguin Lives Series* (New York: Lipper/Viking Book, 1999), 10-15. See also the notes to *Confessions* book 2 in John Gibb and William Montgomery, eds., *The Confessions*, 2d ed., *Cambridge Patristic Texts* (Cambridge: University Press, 1927) and those by August Solignac in *Les Confessions, Bibliothèque Augustinienne* vol. 13 (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1998).

3. In references to the *Confessions* I omit the (redundant) chapter numbers in favor of the more precise section numbers. Hence "2.9-18" refers to book 2, sections 9-18.

4. See Luke 15:11-32. The parable of the prodigal son is prominent throughout the *Confessions* but especially here in book 2. See Leo C. Ferrari, "Symbols of Sinfulness in Book II of Augustine's *Confessions*," *Augustinian Studies* 2 (1971), 93-104.

5. Maria Boulding's translations: *The Confessions* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997).

6. See Augustine's systematic analysis of the concept of sin in *De libero arbitrio*. In book 1 of that work Augustine begins his analysis by asking what constitutes the evil in adultery (1.6). His preliminary suggestion is that it is lust (*libido*) (1.8). He then goes on to generalize on that suggestion: the evil in sin in general is inordinate desire (1.18-20). See my discussion of Augustine's account of sin: "Primal Sin" in Gareth B. Matthews, ed., *The Augustinian Tradition* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 110-39.

7. Augustine follows biblical practice in referring to sin generally as forni-

cation: the Old Testament often describes Israel's breaking of the covenant with God as fornication.

8. Translations are my own except where noted. I have used O'Donnell, ed., *Augustine: Confessions* vol. I: "Introduction and Text."

9. It is significant that the object of assessment throughout the account is Augustine's heart and not the act of theft itself. Augustine holds that the morally significant element in sin—what makes it sin—is a feature of the agent's motivation (see *De libero arbitrio* 1). See also William E. Mann, "Inner-Life Ethics" in Matthews, ed., *The Augustinian Tradition*, 140–65.

10. The feeding of the pears to the pigs in Augustine's story is perhaps meant to remind us of the Gospel's prodigal son who finds himself utterly destitute and far from home slopping another man's pigs.

11. See Starnes, *Augustine's Conversion*, 45 and Wills, *Saint Augustine*, 14–15. (Wills remarks that no one has seen this key point [p. 14], but Starnes's observations, for one, antedate Wills's by nearly a decade.)

12. The language reflects Isaiah 14:12ff. and Ezekiel 28:13ff. O'Connell emphasizes the similarities with Plotinian language and themes, see *St. Augustine's Confessions*.

13. See Leo C. Ferrari, "The Pear-Theft in Augustine's *Confessions*," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 16 (1970), 233–41.

14. See my "Primal Sin."

15. *De sermone Domini in monte* dates from 393, most likely four or five years prior to the *Confessions*. Compare: *De libero arbitrio* 3.29; 3.74–75; *De trinitate* 12.17–18.

16. In the passage from *De sermone Domini in monte*, Augustine focuses on suggestion, delight, and consent; presumably there is a phenomenon mirroring this one that consists in suggestion and something like aversion and rejection.

17. Augustine develops the idea more fully in *De musica* 6. I am grateful to Charles Brittain for this reference.

18. *Pace* Hume.

19. William E. Mann ("The Theft of the Pears," *Apeiron* 12 [1978], 51–9) agrees that Augustine is worried about the intelligibility of the motivation alleged to obtain in the case of the theft of the pears, but his analysis of the locus of the worry is different from mine. Although Augustine does worry (elsewhere) about how an agent can come to prefer a lesser good to a greater good, I do not think that is the issue in the front of Augustine's mind in the theft of the pears.

20. The account of sin that appears to be challenged here by the possibility of voluntary action that aims at no good is first developed in detail in *De libero arbitrio* 1, perhaps as much as a decade prior to the writing of the *Confessions*. He continues to endorse that view here in the *Confessions* (the free-will theodicy articulated in book 7 relies on it, for example) and throughout his career (see, for example, *De civitate Dei* books 10–14, written more than a decade after the *Confessions*).

21. Augustine's use of the term 'fruit' (*fructus*) here achieves several rhetorical ends. It echoes Paul's reflection on the fruits of a life of sin at Romans 6:21: "But then what return did you get from the things of which you are now ashamed?" (*quem ergo fructum habuistis tunc in quibus nunc erubescitis*; compare Augustine: *quem fructum habui . . . in his quae nunc recolens erubesco*). It reminds us of Adam and Eve's sin in the garden: "[Eve] took of [the tree's] fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate" (Genesis 3:6). Moreover, in virtue of the etymological connection of 'fructus' with the verb 'fruor' (to enjoy), it plays on the relation between what one aims at (what one aims to enjoy) and what one actually gets (the fruit of one's actions).

22. Augustine here draws on his metaphysics of evil. On his view, evils are not realities, not substances or natures, but corruptions or privations in substances or natures. Insofar as his theft is evil, then, it is not a reality in its own right but a corruption or privation and, hence, metaphysically a nothing. See my account of Augustine's metaphysics of evil in "Primal Sin."

23. Is it intelligible? Augustine goes on in the next section to reflect on the curious phenomenon he has just uncovered: "Why, then, did I take delight in that which I would not have done by myself?" Since that material is not directly relevant to my purposes here, I leave it aside. For especially illuminating commentary, see Starnes, *Augustine's Conversion*, 43–5.

24. O'Connell, however, has doubts. See *St. Augustine's Confessions* p. 49, n. 2.

25. See section 2 above.

26. *Defectiva species et umbratica vitiis fallentibus* (last line of 2.12). There is reason to doubt whether the denial in this case is entirely genuine. I return to this question below, see n. 31.

27. The deceptive vices mentioned in section 13 are: pride, ambition, the brutality of those in power, the flatteries of lascivious people, curiosity, ignorance (simplicity), foolishness (innocence), sloth, luxury, extravagance, avarice, envy, anger, insecurity, and sorrow. See Starnes, *Augustine's Conversion*, 41.

28. See O'Donnell ("Commentary on Books 1–7," 136–7) for some principles of organization.

29. This is all of section 14 excepting only the section's first sentence (already quoted just above). The editions begin the new section with the preceding sentence ("In this way the soul fornicates when it is turned from you and seeks apart from you things which it finds pure and clear only when it returns to you"), but the sense of the text would be clearer if the new section began with the sentence that begins this quotation ("All who set themselves apart from you . . ."). The former sentence should be read as concluding section 13's digression into the deceptive vices; the latter sentence begins a new thought, adapting the results of that discussion to the special case at hand.

30. *Omnes qui longe se a te faciunt*. The language reflects the Gospel account of the story: *adulescentior filius peregre profectus est in regionem longinquam*. It also has affinities with Plotinian texts; see O'Connell, *St. Augustine's Confessions*, 48–9.

31. Hence, it seems clear that Augustine does indeed suppose that the theft conforms to the model of the deceptive vices. What, then, to make of the last clause of section 12 where he seems to deny that his theft had even the defective attraction of the sort manifested in the deceptive vices? Perhaps that last clause should be taken as a question: "Does it lack even the defective and shadowy beauty found in the deceptive vices?" The question's answer ("no, it does not lack even that") would then be found here in section 14.

32. Book 3 of *De libero arbitrio* was composed sometime between 391 and 394, roughly five years prior to the writing of the *Confessions*. In the passage immediately preceding the text quoted here, Augustine puts the question as one about where the suggestion on which the devil ultimately acted comes from (3.74–5). He clearly has in mind the tri-partite analysis of sin (suggestion, delight, consent) articulated in the passage from *De sermone Domini in monte* quoted above (see section 2).

33. The notion of imitation of God is a feature of all three prominent Old Testament accounts of creaturely falls: Genesis 3, Isaiah 14:12ff., and Ezekiel 28:13ff.

34. See my "Primal Sin." See also William M. Green, "Initium omnis peccati superbia": *Augustine on Pride as the First Sin*, *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* vol 13, no. 13 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press,

1949), 407–31.

35. It is important that sinners who desire things inordinately do so in some sense voluntarily or by virtue of their wills. Otherwise their inordinate desire could not be construed as *self*-assertion of the appropriate sort, that is, the sort on which moral responsibility attends. See my discussion in “Primal Sin.”

36. Given the intensionality of ascriptions of motive.

37. O’Connell seems to take this line, for example; see *St. Augustine’s Confessions*, 49, n. 2.

38. See Starnes (*Augustine’s Conversion*, 43–5) for an illuminating argument that these two motivating factors are *essentially* interdependent. The idea is that imitating God can be appealing only when an audience is present (when there is someone to acknowledge one’s freedom and power). That would explain why the motivation identified in section 14 is not sufficient apart from the motivation identified in section 16.

39. I presented earlier versions of this paper at the Catholic University of America and at the Cornell Summer Colloquium in Medieval Philosophy. I am grateful to the audiences on those occasions for helpful comments. I am also grateful to the participants in a graduate seminar on Augustine I taught at Cornell in fall 2001 for their useful discussion of this material. I have learned a great deal about the *Confessions* over a number of years from my colleague Charles Brittain. I thank him for many hours of stimulating conversation.