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A Friend's Death: C. S. Lewis' Disagreement with St. Augustine

Jason Lepojärvi

> It is dangerous to press upon man the duty of getting beyond earthly love when his real difficulty lies in getting so far.[1]

The Irish-born author, Christian apologist and literary scholar, C. S. Lewis (1898–1963), spent most of his life in Oxford and (later) Cambridge, and left the British Isles only twice during his entire life. Except for the five years he spent in Italy, Augustine Aurelius (354–430), the Numidian-born Bishop of Hippo and Church Father, never ventured out of North Africa. The relative immobility and deep-rootedness of these two men helped both to form meaningful friendships and embrace a life of study. Lewis paid Augustine the compliment of including in his literary diet a hefty amount of Augustine's work. In his theological and ethical thought, especially in his understanding of love, Lewis is greatly indebted to the Augustinian tradition. In all of Lewis' work, ranging from his scholarly monographs to books for children, "Augustinian themes, in particular, abound."[2]

Lewis did nothing to conceal his admiration of—and theological pedigree to—Augustine: as he wrote, Augustine "is a great saint and a great thinker

[1] C. S. *Lewis, The Four Loves* (London, 1960), 135.

[2] Gilbert Meilaender, *The Taste for the Other: The Social and Ethical Thought of C. S. Lewis*, 2nd ed. (Vancouver, 2003), 6.

to whom my old glad debts are incalculable."[3] This is why the *only* time he explicitly disagrees with Augustine on an important point concerning love, he does so "with trembling."[4] Lewis' sentiments in having to disagree with Augustine may be comparable to Stanley Hauerwas disagreeing with Lewis. It is difficult, Hauerwas wrote, "to criticize a writer who has done so much good as C. S. Lewis."[5] The purpose of the present article is to evaluate the gentlemanly engagement between Lewis and Augustine.

Lewis married late in life and had no children of his own; Augustine did not marry, but fathered a son while still a young man. In one way or another, both men thought much about marriage and fatherhood, love between the sexes, and love between the generations. They also thought much about love between friends, the love of friendship, the virtue of *philia* or *amicita*. Lewis' poem "Scazons" (1933), for example, opens with a contemplative stanza on the painful memory of lost friends:

> Walking to-day by a cottage I shed tears
> When I remembered how once I had walked there
> With my friends who are mortal and dead. Years
> Little had healed the wound that was laid bare.[6]

The remaining four stanzas will later be examined as a part of this work, for (as will become apparent) the poem allows for an implicit—and dramatic—dialogue with Augustine. In effect, the stanzas will serve as a literary backdrop for the more systematic analysis of the engagement. Michael Ward has offered an insightful, albeit succinct, commentary on this poem in

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[3] Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 137.

[4] Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 137.

[5] Stanley Hauerwas, "On Violence," in Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis* (Cambridge, 2010), 189. Hauerwas, as a pacifist, appreciatively critiques Lewis' view on violence. Peter van Inwagen begins his critical evaluation of Lewis' argument against naturalism in a similar vein by quoting Aristotle: "[W]e philosophers are lovers of wisdom, and while both truth and our friends are dear to us, piety demands that we honour truth above our friends." See Peter van Inwagen, "C. S. Lewis' Argument Against Naturalism," in *The Chronicle of the Oxford University C. S. Lewis Society*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2010, 2.

[6] C. S. Lewis, "Scazons," in *Poems*, ed. by Walter Hooper (New York, 1998), 118. "Scazons" was first published on the penultimate page of C. S. Lewis, The Pilgrim's Regress (London, 1998), 251. In the Preface to *Poems*, Hooper writes that Lewis was "continually revising" (vii) his poems. In the Appendix, he confirms that "Scazons" was one of the poems that had "been revised by the author" (142), since it was first published in *The Pilgrim's Regress*. Whether or not Lewis successfully and consistently improved his poems with revisions, the editor's job is to publish the version Lewis intended to be published "in a volume to be called *Young King Cole and Other Pieces*" (vii). The last-revised edition of "Scazons" is included herein. As for the name "Scazons," it is the title given by the editor, as the poem originally appeared in *The Pilgrim's Regress* untitled. The poem is a metrical experiment in so-called choliambic verse (sometimes called *scazon*) with irregular lines and varying spondaic and trochaic feet.

his work, *Planet Narnia*. In this essay the analysis is taken further, but the sixteen lines Ward devotes to the poem are golden.[7] In *The Problem of Pain* (1940), one of Lewis' earliest works of Christian apologetics, there is also an attempt to make sense of suffering, including the death of loved ones in a world supposedly created by a good and all-powerful God.[8] Much later, in his autobiographical work, *A Grief Observed* (1961), Lewis traces the cataract of emotions he felt when he lost his wife to cancer. As he writes:

> Nothing less will shake a man—or at any rate a man like me—out of his merely verbal thinking and his merely notional beliefs. He has to be knocked silly before he comes to his senses. Only torture will bring out the truth. Only under torture does he discover himself.[9]

Written as a therapeutic form of diary in the aftermath of his wife's death, the book records how a stalwart believer, overcome by grief, almost loses all sense of meaning in the universe, and how he gradually regains his bearings. Nicholas Wolterstorff has insightfully described the difference between *The Problem of Pain* and *A Grief Observed* respectively as the difference between "an *account* of suffering" and "an *expression* of suffering."[10] In Lewis' work, *The Four Loves* (1960), which popularizes the theology of love, an entire chapter (or one fifth of the entire book), is devoted to *philia*, the love of friendship. Lewis exalts this love: friendship "has no survival value; rather it is one of those things which give value to survival."[11] The Jesuit philosopher Martin D'Arcy described *The Four Loves* as "a minor classic" that "combines a novelist's insight into motives with a profound religious understanding" of our human nature.[12] It is in this work that Lewis, "with trembling," expressed concern about Augustine's reaction to the death of his friend.

Augustine, we see, also experienced tragic loss. In the *Confessions*, he

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[7] Michael Ward, *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis* (Oxford, 2008), 106.

[8] C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London, 1998), see especially 1–12.

[9] C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York, 1996), 38.

[10] The *Problem of Pain* is "a sustained Christian *account* of suffering. For those who want to know how Lewis thought suffering fits into a Christian understanding of reality, this is the basic text . . . *A Grief Observed* is of a different genre; it is not an account of suffering but an *expression* of suffering—a cry of grief over the death of his wife, Joy, from cancer." See Nicholas Wolterstorff, "C. S. Lewis on the Problem of Suffering," in *The Chronicle of the Oxford University C. S. Lewis Society*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2010, 5.

[11] Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 84.

[12] Martin D'Arcy, *New York Times Book Review,* 31 July 1960. Cited in Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Complete Guide to His Life and Works* (San Francisco, 1996), 377, originally published under the title *C. S. Lewis: Companion and Guide*. See also George Sayer, *Jack: A Life of C. S. Lewis* (Wheaton, 1994), 388.

related several stories that involve tears. Even the death of a fictional character moved him to tears: as a young man, he had wept over the death of Dido who, in Vergil's *Aeneid*, killed herself when Aeneas did not return her love. In Book One of the *Confessions* Augustine expressed shame for having shed tears on such an occasion:

> What is more pitiable than a wretch without pity for himself who weeps over the death of Dido dying for love of Aeneas, but not weeping over himself dying for his lack of love for you, my God . . . I had no love for you and 'committed fornication against you' (Psalm 72:27).[13]

Later, in Book Four, Augustine is devastated by the death of an unidentified friend. As Lewis comments, "In words which can still bring tears to the eyes, Augustine describes the desolation in which the death of his friend Nebridius plunged him. . . . Then he draws a moral. This is what comes, he says, of giving one's heart to anything but God."[14] By the time of the death of Augustine's mother, Monica, in Book Nine of the *Confessions*, Augustine is laboring to fight back his tears.

A common reading of these stories often depicts them as signs of Augustine's excessive Platonic spirituality and supposed attraction to Stoic invulnerability. The work of Hannah Arendt exemplifies this critique.[15] Lewis, too, though touched by Augustine's grief, found that Augustine's interpretation of it made him uneasy. The passage describing the desolation he felt over his friend's death is, Lewis suspected, "less a part of St. Augustine's Christendom than a hangover from the high-minded Pagan philosophies in which he grew up. It is closer to Stoic 'apathy' or neo-Platonic mysticism than to charity [*agape*]."[16] Lewis rejected the moral that Augustine drew: as if "this is what comes of giving your heart to anything but God."

The following stanzas of "Scazons" provide dramatic background for understanding Lewis' objection. They record two disillusionments, which is another way of saying that the poet was under the spell of two illusions. The first illusion (and subsequent disillusion) is biographical in nature, the second theological. The first disillusionment is recorded in the second stanza where the poet speaks of the "little spear that stabs":

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[13] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by Henry Chadwick (Oxford, 1991), 15–16 (1.21).

[14] Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 137. Lewis mistakenly—and interestingly—referred to Augustine's unnamed friend as "Nebridius," a point taken up later in this article.

[15] See, for instance, Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine* (Chicago, 1996). For a defence of Augustine against Arendt's critique, see Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love* (Chicago, 2008), especially 202–42.

[16] Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 138.

> Out little spear that stabs! I, fool, believed
> I had outgrown the local, unique sting,
> I had transmuted wholly (I was deceived)
> Into Love universal the lov'd thing.[17]

The pain accompanied by the memory of the lost friend—the lost individual, local friend—betrays the fact that the poet's love had been imperfect. The love he felt for particular people had not yet developed into universal love, as he thought it should have. The pain shatters the illusion that the transmutation of local love into universal love had been accomplished.

This disillusionment is immediately followed by a second, more profound disillusionment, recorded in the third stanza:

> But Thou, Lord, surely knewest thine own plan
> When the angelic indifferencies [*sic.*] with no bar
> Universally loved, but Thou gav'st man
> The tether and pang of the particular . . .[18]

If the first illusion consisted of thinking that the transmutation from local to universal love was already complete, the second illusion consists of thinking that this transmutation was the ideal in the first place. That transmutation is what we should strive for; that perfected love must leave behind ("transmute") our local loves and be replaced by a supposedly more authentic love ("Love universal").

The tears—the stab—have given the poet a new understanding of love. Humans are not angels, who (according to the poet) have no favorites ("angelic indifferences"), so to speak. Angels love universally with "no bar." "But Thou gav'st man the tether and pang of the particular." What is this "pang of the particular"? It can either be understood as a single instance of particular loss, tears, a stab, or as the general human ability and disposition to sense particular loss, tears, stabs, and the deeper understanding and perhaps embracing of this ability. ("Embracing" because, after all, the poet calls it a gift—"Thou gav'st".) In *The Problem of Pain* Lewis has written of the "intolerable compliment" paid by God, which means God loves us too much, not too little.[19] In a well-known passage, he explains his meaning:

> We want, in fact, not so much a Father in Heaven as a

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[17] Lewis, *Poems*, 118.

[18] Lewis, *Poems*, 118. As originally written by Lewis, the fourth word in the second line of the stanza should be "indifferences." The misspelling of the word is found in the work cited herein. *In The Pilgrim's Regress*, the line reads "indifferences." See Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 251.

[19] Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 27–8, 38.

> grandfather in heaven—a senile benevolence who, as they say, 'liked to see young people enjoying themselves' and whose plan for the universe was simply that it might be truly said at the end of the day, 'a good time was had by all.'[20]

In anticipation of the final line of the poem, readers may find the gift intolerable because "we pay for it dearly." But, as the poet explains, "Thou, Lord, surely knewest thine own plan." Particularistic love is part of God's plan, his good plan, for humanity. It is not a sign of imperfect love.[21] Is not, however, true Christian love universal? Is not universal love still the ultimate goal? Surely it is. But universal and particular loves are not contradictory, not mutually exclusive. Here it is important to understand the distinction between *transmutation* and *transposition* in Lewis' thought. Transmutation indicates the changing of one substance into another; or, to emphasize the point, the annihilation of one substance into another. Transposition, on the other hand, indicates perfecting without annihilation: the raising of a lower medium to a new significance by incorporation into a higher medium.[22] This is how the German philosopher Josef Pieper (who described Lewis as "the great lay theologian of the present day")[23] expressed it in his aretological study of love. Perfecting, he writes, means abandonment "precisely for the sake of preserving identity in change."[24]

Human loves also follow this logic. As Lewis explained: "Divine Love does not *substitute* itself for the natural—as if we had to throw away our silver to make room for the gold. The natural loves are summoned to become modes of Charity while also remaining the natural loves they were."[25] God transposes our various human loves into Divine love without annihilating them in the process. (Lewis is talking about "good" local loves; of course there are such things as unlawful loves that may require total abandonment.) "We do not disparage silver by distinguishing it from gold," as one of Lewis'

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[20] Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 26.

[21] What is more, in *The Last Battle* we are told that it is *right* for Lucy to weep for the death of Narnia. The author would like to thank Louis Markos for pointing this out.

[22] See C. S. Lewis, "Transposition," in *C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces*, ed. by Lesley Walmsley (London, 2000), 267–78. See also Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 105. For a more systematic analysis, see P. H. Brazier, "C. S. Lewis: A Doctrine of Transposition," in *The Heythrop Journal*, vol. 50, July 2009, 669–88. Line seven of "Scazons" underwent an interesting change from the original to the collected edition. The revised version has: "I had transmuted wholly (I was deceived)." The 1933 version had: "I had transmuted away (I was deceived)." The choice of *away* (instead of *wholly*) accentuates the "illusion" of presuming that grace abolishes nature instead of perfecting it.

[23] Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love* (San Francisco, 1997), 218.

[24] Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, 280.

[25] Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 151–2.

favorite metallurgic similes has it.[26] Another of his favorite maxims was, "The highest does not stand without the lowest."[27] Local loves need not be destroyed as universal love takes hold. In fact, universal love "does not stand" without particular love. It might be called particularity in universality. Lewis targets Augustine when he writes, "We follow One who wept over Jerusalem and at the grave of Lazarus, and, loving all, yet had one disciple whom, in a special sense, he 'loved'."[28]

In the fourth stanza, the poet calls the wounding gift of particular love "a chemic drop." The pang of the particular:

> Which, like a chemic drop, infinitesimal,
> Plashed into pure water, changing the whole,
> Embodies and embitters and turns all
> Spirit's sweet water into astringent soul . . . [29]

A mere drop, but enough to constitute a dramatic difference between angelic and human nature, spirit and soul. What could potentially be discarnate spirituality is transformed into another kind of being, an embodied human soul. "Spirit's sweet water" is turned into "*astringent* soul."

Again, there are different ways to interpret this stanza. One is to take it as a poetic dramatization of God's original creative act. Alternatively, it can be understood as describing the process of our realization of what it means to be a human person, our deepened understanding of love. In this case, the process is set in motion by the stab, the pang of the particular, and a closer meditation on the message it conveys. The general definition of *astringent* is "harsh" or, with liquids, "bitter." Soul, one might say, is the bitter (or bittersweet) intensification of spirit. Insofar as it is bitter, it is intolerable; and insofar as it is sweet, it is a compliment. Emotions, even passions, are a rightful expression of our nature.

This brings the argument back to the earlier dispute with Augustine. As previously noted, Lewis' reference to Augustine's high-minded "hangover" and "neo-Platonic mysticism" is especially relevant here. In *The Allegory of Love*, Lewis referred to the "diffused Platonism, or Neoplatonism—if there is

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[26] Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 77.

[27] Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 12. This is a line from Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ* (2.10) and Lewis quotes it throughout *The Four Loves*.

[28] Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 138. See, however, Augustine in *Confessions* (3.19): "You [God] are all-powerful, caring for each one of us as though the only one in your care, and yet for all as for each individual." This exemplifies Augustine's ambivalence. The matter is not clear-cut, as will become apparent when considering revisionist readings of Augustine later in this article.

[29] Lewis, *Poems*, 118.

a difference—of Augustine . . ."[30] Augustine has often been called the father of the "order of loves" (*ordo caritatis*) tradition, in which the objects of reality are to be loved in hierarchical sequence, based on their goodness.[31] Without tracing its pedigree in detail, it can be noted that this tradition heavily "Christianizes" the conception of love found in the *Symposium*. Lewis explained that, in the *Symposium*, we find the idea of "a ladder whereby the soul may ascend from human love to divine," human love being material and particular and divine love being spiritual and universal.[32] "But," as he adds, "this is a ladder in the strictest sense; you reach the higher rings by leaving the lower ones behind."[33] Lewis distanced himself from such a worldview, however. "I am inclined," he wrote, "to distrust that species of respect for the spiritual order which bases itself on contempt for the natural."[34] It thus seems reasonable to assume that Lewis believed that (at least in this respect and at this stage of Augustine's life) Augustine's Platonic Christianity had not shaken off some of its non-Christian dust. While Lewis would concur with Augustine that the real problem of love is inordinate love, he rejected Augustine's *solution* to inordinate love (as expressed in the *Confessions*).

On one level, the moral Lewis believed that Augustine drew—"All human beings pass away [so] do not let your happiness depend on something you may lose"—made excellent sense. Do not put your goods in a leaky vessel. Conservative by nature, this advice appealed to Lewis' temperament, but not his conscience. "When I respond to that appeal," he wrote, "I seem to myself to be a thousand miles away from Christ. If I am sure of anything I am sure that His teaching was never meant to confirm my congenital preference for safe investments and limited liabilities."[35] Lewis was not impressed by what might be called "Pascalian calculation": "[W]ho could conceivably begin to love God on such a prudential ground—because the security (so to speak) is better? . . . Would you choose a wife or a Friend—it if comes to that, would you choose a dog—in this spirit?" Lewis made his point clear: "One must be outside the world of love, of all loves, before one thus calculates.

[30] C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford, 1986), 46.

[31] According to Risto Saarinen, Lewis is not an advocate of what Anders Nygren called "the Augustinian caritas-synthesis," because Lewis "seems to lack an *ordo caritatis*" and "the natural affinities between the loves are weaker than in Thomas." See Risto Saarinen, "Eros, Playfulness and Norms: Towards a Fundamental Theology of Love," in *The Finnish Theological Journal*, vol. 2, 2006, 6. For a short overview of main themes in Augustine's theology of love, see Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York, 1991), 234–6.

[32] Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, 5.

[33] Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, 5. See also the references to "the Platonic ascent" in C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford, 1954), 159, 386, 532.

[34] Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, 267.

[35] Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, 137.

Eros, lawless Eros, preferring the Beloved to happiness, is more like Love Himself than this."[36]

Our loves, it is true, are inordinate—out of order. The need for a correct order of loves stands out in Lewis' thought. By it he does not mean simply a need to "control your loves," but, supposedly, quite literally, *keep them in order*. However, the quality that constitutes the inordinacy is not excessive love, but rather *defective* love. "We may love [our friend] too much *in proportion to* our love for God; but it is the smallness of our love for God, not the greatness of our love for man, that constitutes the inordinacy."[37] Our flaw is not excess love for our children over our spouse, but defective love for our spouse; not excess love for our friend over God, but defective love for God. We do not love our spouse more by loving our children less, nor do we love God more by loving our friend less.[38] According to Lewis, *inordinate* "does not mean 'insufficiently cautious'. Nor does it mean 'too big'."[39] It is not a quantitative term at all. In fact, Lewis doubts whether it is even possible to love a human being "too much." In this sense, the dynamics of virtue know no positive limit. The question whether we are loving our earthly beloved or God more is not, "so far as concerns our Christian duty, a question about the comparative intensity of two feelings. The real question is, which (when the alternative comes) do you serve, or choose, or put first? To which claim does your will, in the last resort, yield?"[40]

Accompanying this new understanding of human love is a new reality, or the acceptance of the reality that has always been present. As for "Scazons," it comes to a close with this fifth stanza:

> That we, though small, might quiver with Fire's same
> Substantial form as Thou—not reflect merely
> Like lunar angels back to Thee cold flame.
> Gods are we, Thou hast said; and we pay dearly.[41]

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[36] Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 137–8. On Lewis' disagreement with Anders Nygren on the question of love's relation to happiness, see Jason Lepojärvi, "Does Eros Seek Happiness? A Critical Analysis of C. S. Lewis's Reply to Anders Nygren," in *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, vol. 53, 2011, 208– 24.

[37] Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 139–40.

[38] In *The Great Divorce*, Lewis has his mentor, George MacDonald, explain that the real tragedy of the tearful ghost of the mother raging over the loss of her son, Michael, is that "[s]he loved her son too little, not too much." See C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (London, 2002), 87–8.

[39] Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 139.

[40] Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 140. In the last resort, as Lewis wrote, "we must turn down or disqualify our nearest and dearest when they come between us and our obedience to God. Heaven knows, it will seem to them sufficiently like hatred... This is why it is of such extreme importance so to *order our loves* that it [an occasion for such 'hatred'] is unlikely to arrive at all" (141, 142, emphasis added).

[41] Lewis, *Poems*, 118.

Since man is created in the image of God, embracing our full nature implies embracing our divine calling as well. "Gods we are, Thou hast said." The distinction between Creator and creature is not eclipsed. The tone of the poem has been humbling, referring to God as the creator and source of life. But we, "though small," nonetheless participate in God's love. Human love shares, essentially, God's love. Lewis situated himself (probably consciously), in direct opposition to his contemporary, Anders Nygren, the Swedish Lutheran theologian and bishop, who taught that human beings are mere "conduits" or "channels" of divine love.[42]

The poet compares angelic existence to the moon ("lunar angels"). The moon gives light, but that is borrowed light, reflected from the sun, and by the time it reaches our faces it has lost all warmth. Of course, human existence is also derivative. This applies to human love as well. The poet is not satisfied with this, however, or so it seems. Humans are called to "quiver" with fire itself, that is, vibrate inwardly, and not merely to reflect "cold flame." Human nature is blessed—if men and women can take it—with "native luminosity." This luminosity is a gift, and yet, somehow, it is truly "ours."[43]

If men and women can take it. For this gift includes a compliment that (as noted above) may prove intolerable for some. To love is to be vulnerable. There is, however, as Lewis insisted, "no escape along the lines St. Augustine suggests."[44] In fact, there is no escape along any lines whatsoever. Love is followed by hurt; and hurt, it may be said, is a subtle double invitation: either to love again, or not. Hurt may be likened to smoke from a dying fire. The smoke is intolerably suffocating. One must either clear the air and rekindle the flame, or extinguish it for good. As Lewis wrote:

> If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully

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[42] Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (New York, 1969). The Christian, according to Nygren, "can be likened to a tube . . . He is merely the tube, the channel, through which God's love flows" (735). Nygren's conception of love is almost predestinarian, as "all choice on man's part is excluded. Man loves good . . . because God's unmotivated love has overwhelmed him and taken control of him, so that he cannot do other than love God" (213–14). For an outline of Lewis' position in "the Nygren debate," see Jason Lepojärvi, "C. S. Lewis and 'the Nygren Debate'," in *The Chronicle of the Oxford University C. S. Lewis Society*, vol. 7, 2, 2010, 25–42. See also Meilaender, *The Taste for the Other*, 56–7, 122–3; and Caroline Simon, "On Love," in MacSwain and Ward, *The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis*, 154–5.

[43] In *The Four Loves*, Lewis wrote of man's "native luminosity," but rejected it. In that context, however, it carries a specific meaning: "the pretence that we have anything of our own or could for one hour retain by our own strength any goodness that God may pour into us . . ." And yet, "The consequences of parting with our last claim to intrinsic freedom, power, or worth, are real freedom, power and worth, really ours just because God gives them and because we know them to be (in another sense) not 'ours'." See Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 149.

[44] Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 138.

> round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.[45]

This is one of the most memorable lines in *The Four Loves*. But what about Lewis' own memory? After all, he mistakenly referred to Augustine's unnamed friend as "Nebridius."[46] What can explain this error? We know that in his popular writing, Lewis may sometimes have "taken little pains to trace ideas or quotations to their sources when they were not easily recoverable."[47] But that cannot be the case here, for Augustine's *Confessions* was certainly easily recoverable.[48] Lewis' mistake is undoubtedly a human error, due to Augustine's mention of his "dearest friend Nebridius" in Book Four just two pages before the account of the unnamed friend.[49] Nebridius, too, suffered a premature death, but it was recorded much later, in Book Nine.[50]

Eric Gregory, who is sympathetic towards Lewis, is at least as sympathetic towards Augustine. He defends the story of Dido against critics such as Arendt and, in the case of the unnamed friend, implicitly against Lewis. But could Lewis have misunderstood Augustine?

As for Dido, Vergil's heroine, Gregory points out that the backdrop for the story is a contrast that Augustine drew throughout Book One between reality and illusion, or between the need to attend to reality and his own "love of games [and] passion for frivolous spectacles, and ... restless urge to imitate comic scenes."[51] According to this reading, Augustine regretted weeping, not because he regretted loving, but because his love had been unreal, a form of escapism. Gregory provides a modern analogy (with his apologies to Vergil):

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[45] Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 138–9.

[46] As Lewis wrote: "In words that can still bring tears to the eyes, Augustine describes the desolation in which the death of his friend Nebridius plunged him." Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 137. This point was identified by Eric Gregory in *Politics and the Order of Love*, 280. Gregory is a former president of the Oxford University C. S. Lewis Society.

[47] Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, x.

[48] The collection of books owned by C. S. Lewis found in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill includes two works by Augustine, the *Confessions* in English and *De Civitate Dei* in Latin, both annotated.

[49] Augustine, *Confessions*, 56 (4.6) and 58 (4.10).

[50] Augustine, *Confessions*, 158–9 (9.6).

[51] Augustine, *Confessions*, 22 (1.30). Cited in Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 280.

"[C]rying over reality TV or the infotainment packaging of death for media consumption just before we go off to 'bowl alone' in Robert Putnam's America. They allow you to enjoy weeping without demanding compassion."[52] As Augustine asked in Book Three, "But what quality of mercy is it in fictitious and theatrical inventions? A member of the audience is not excited to offer help, but invited only to grieve."[53]

As to the unnamed friend, Gregory offers in essence the same alternative reading. Augustine's grief is not that he loved too much, but that he did not really love his friend at all.[54] Whereas Jesus wept for Lazarus, Augustine wept for weeping's sake. As he confesses: "I was so wretched that I felt a greater attachment to my life of misery than to my dead friend. Although I wanted it to be otherwise, I was more unwilling to lose my misery than him." This led Augustine to want to escape: "I found myself heavily weighed down by a sense of being tired of living and scared of dying."[55] Gerald Schlabach, another Augustinian scholar, thinks that at this stage of his life, Augustine valued the ideal of friendship more than the friend itself.[56]

Eric Gregory agrees, but takes his vindication of Augustine even further. He argues that Augustine used the story as an allegorical opportunity to confess and mourn his forgetfulness of God:

> So I boiled with anger, sighed, wept, and was at my wits' end. I found no calmness, no capacity for deliberation. I carried my lacerated and bloody soul when it was unwilling to be carried by me. I found no place where I could put it down. There was no rest in pleasant groves, nor in games or songs, nor in sweet-scented places, nor in exquisite feasts, nor in the pleasures of the bedroom and bed, nor, finally, in books and poetry. Everything was an object of horror, even light itself; all that was not *he* made me feel sick and was repulsive—except for groaning and tears. In them alone was there some relief.[57]

All that was not *he*: who is this "he"? If it was not written with a minuscule, lower case "h," readers might be misled to think Augustine is speaking of

[52] Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 282.

[53] Augustine, *Confessions*, 36 (3.2). For an account of fictitious emotions in Augustine, see Simo Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford, 2004), 164–6.

[54] Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 283–7.

[55] Augustine, *Confessions*, 58–9 (4.11).

[56] Gerald Schlabach, *For the Joy Set Before Us: Augustine and Self-Denying Love* (South Bend, 2001), 58.

[57] Augustine, *Confessions*, 59 (4.12), emphasis added.

God. This is perhaps not surprising, for immediately following is Augustine's confession of having had a false image of God:

> But when my weeping stopped, my soul felt burdened by a vast load of misery. I should have lifted myself to you, Lord, to find a cure. I knew that but did not wish it or have the strength for it. When I thought of you, my mental image was not of anything solid and firm; it was not you but a vain phantom. My error was my god.[58]

Not only had Augustine's love for his friend been illusory, he could find no solace in his illusory image of God. He concluded the chapter of his pilgrimage story with these words: "And [so] I fled from my home town, for my eyes sought for him less in a place where they were not accustomed to see him. And so from the town of Thagaste I came to Carthage."[59]

Overall, the revisionist defense of Augustine is attractive, but is it plausible? And if it is plausible, does it pull the rug out from under Lewis' critique? Does he miss his mark? To consider this from the perspective of Lewis' scholarly acumen, it would be most accurate to conclude that, if Lewis misunderstood Augustine, it was simply a misunderstanding and not a fundamental disagreement. The burden of having to disagree with this "great saint and great thinker" would thus be lifted from Lewis' shoulders. This does not mean, of course, that a celestial apology will not be offered—or perhaps even an exchange of apologies. For, despite the wisdom given to him, in Augustine (as in Paul) "there are some things that are hard to understand."[60]

There are, however, reasons to suppose that Lewis did not misunderstand Augustine. Theological reconstruction of the "Augustinian tradition" is one thing; historical patristic analysis, another. And historical scholarship generally sides with Lewis' interpretation of the *Confessions*. In his *Amor Dei*, John Burnaby has concluded that Augustine's earlier works do "betray something very like hostility" to instinctive affection, suggesting even that "the ties of kinship are no more than consequences of the Fall,"[61] albeit that in later life (in *Retractions*) Augustine "peremptorily condemns such a view."[62] Simo Knuuttila, too, notes that "negative characterizations are common in Augustine's remarks on the emotions," even if in the *City of God*, which includes a more extensive discussion of emotions than does the *Confessions*, Augustine admits

[58] Augustine, *Confessions*, 59–60 (4.12).
[59] Augustine, *Confessions*, 60 (4.12).
[60] 2 Peter 3:16.
[61] John Burnaby, *Amor Dei. A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine* (Eugene, 2007), 128, 129.
[62] Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 129.

to the valuable functions of emotions and rejects Stoic suspicion of them.[63]

We need not, however, definitely settle the matter here. What seems evident is that Augustine provides a wealth of material, some of it ambivalent, for *both* the revisionist reading *and* critics such as Arendt and Lewis. A telling case in point is the death of Augustine's mother. Recall that Augustine labored hard to fight back his tears; eventually, he succumbed to the grief welling up inside him. "Now I let flow the tears which I had held back so that they ran as freely as they wished," he wrote, and then offered his confession:

> My heart rested upon them [the tears], and it reclined upon them because it was your ears that were there, not those of some human critic who would put a proud interpretation on my weeping. And now, Lord, I make my confession to you in writing. Let anyone who wishes read and interpret as he pleases. If he finds fault that I wept for my mother for a fraction of an hour, the mother who had died before my eyes who had wept for me that I might live before your eyes, let him not mock me but rather, if a person of much charity, let him weep himself before you for my sins.[64]

One can almost feel the tension in Augustine between what, on the one hand, he had learned from Plotinus about the ignobility of weeping, and, on the other, the human frailties that, as a Christian, he came to understand "are a necessary part of the order we have to endure and are the lot of the human condition."[65] •

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[63] Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, 152–6. What is more, scholars have paid attention to the parenetic factors at play: it is difficult to extract Augustine's theology from the Confessions in particular, because this work seeks to influence, exhort, and even convert readers (Manicheans included), sometimes instead of—or at the expense of—theological consistency. See Annemaré Kotzé, Augustine's *Confessions. Communicative Purpose and Audience* (Leiden, 2004), and "Protreptic, Paraenetic and Augustine's Confessions," in J. A. van den Berg et al., eds., "In Search of Truth": *Augustine, Manichaeism and Other Gnosticism. Studies for Johannes van Oort at Sixty* (Leiden, 2011), 3–23. See also Josef Lössl's "Augustine's Confessions as a Consolation of Philosophy," in the same *festschrift* for Johannes van Oort, 47–73.

[64] Augustine, *Confessions*, 176 (9.33).

[65] Augustine, *Confessions*, 175 (9.31). The stem of this article was first presented as a lecture before the Oxford University C. S. Lewis Society on 1 March 2011. The author would like to thank Walter Hooper for sharing his personal experiences of Lewis in relation to his poem "Scazons," and Simon Howard, Timo Nisula, Pauli Annala, Simo Knuuttila, Grayson Carter, Louis Markos, and an anonymous reader for helpful comments to an earlier draft of this article.