

Reading 9

Saint Augustine*

From *The Way of Life of the Catholic Church*

[*What is the Supreme Good for Human Beings?*]¹

Book I: Chapter 3

(4) Let us inquire, then, how according to reason human beings ought to live. Certainly, we all wish to live happily. There is no human being who would not assent to this statement almost before it is uttered. However, in my opinion, neither one who lacks what he loves can be called happy, whatever it be, nor one who has what he loves if it be harmful, nor one who does not love what he has although it be the best. For he who desires what he cannot obtain is tormented, and he who has attained what he should not have desired is deceived, while he who does not desire what he should seek to attain is diseased. To souls such as these, there remains nothing but misery, and since misery and happiness are not accustomed to dwell in the same person simultaneously, none of these persons can be happy.

As I see it, however, a fourth alternative remains in which the happy life may be found - when that which is best for a human being is both loved and possessed. For what else is meant by enjoyment but the possession of what one loves? But no one is happy who does not enjoy what is supremely good for human beings, and whoever

* *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 56, trans. D. A. Gallagher & I. J. Gallagher, Catholic University, Washington, 1966, pp. 5-11 [Way of Life]. *Basic Writings of St Augustine*, trans. G. Wilson, Random House, New York, 1948, vol 2, pp. 123-139 [City]. Augustine, *Earlier Writings*, *The Library Of Christian Classics*, vol 6, trans. J. H. S. Burleigh, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1953, pp. 115-118 [Free Will].

¹ The idea of a "supreme good" or "end" that human beings should pursue was present in all the ancient Greek ethical theories. But in their case that good was usually a way of life or an excellence of character that people could strive for. Augustine pushes the notion in a religious direction by arguing that this supreme good can only be the Divinity Himself.

does enjoy it is not unhappy. We must possess our supreme good, therefore, if we intend to live happily.

(5) It follows that we must seek to discover what is the supreme good for human beings, and it cannot, of course, be anything inferior to humans themselves; for whoever strives after something inferior to himself becomes himself inferior. But all human beings are obliged to seek what is best. Therefore, the supreme good for human beings is not inferior to human beings.

Will it then perhaps, be something similar to human beings themselves? It might well be so, provided there is nothing superior to human beings that they can enjoy. If, however, we find something that is both more perfect than human beings and which can be attained by the one loving it, who would doubt that they should, in order to be happy, strive to possess this thing, which is more excellent than they themselves who seek it? For if happiness is the possession of a good than which there is no greater, and this is what we call the supreme good, how can a person be said to be happy who has not yet attained their supreme good? Or how can it be called the supreme good if there is something better that they can attain? Such being the case, it follows that one cannot lose it against their will, for no one can be confident of a good they know can be snatched from them even though they wish to keep and cherish it. And if they lack this confidence in the good which they enjoy, how can they, in such fear of loss, be happy?

Chapter 4

(6) Let us, then, attempt to discover what is better than human beings. And this will be very difficult unless we first discuss what human beings themselves are. But I do not think I should be expected to give a definition of human being here. Rather, it seems to me that since nearly everyone agrees (or at least, and it is sufficient, those with whom I am now dealing agree) that we are composed of body and soul, what should be determined at this point is what human beings themselves are. Of the two which I have mentioned, are they body alone or soul alone? For although these are two things, soul and body, and neither could be called a human being were the other not present (for the body would not be a human being if there were no soul, nor would the soul be a human being were there no body animated by it), it might happen, nevertheless, that

one of these would be looked upon and be spoken of as a human being.

What do we call "human being," then? Is the human a soul and body like a centaur or two horses harnessed together? Or shall we call him the body alone in the service of a governing soul, as is the case when we give the name lamp, not to the vessel and flame together, but to the vessel alone on account of the flame within it? Or shall we say that a human is nothing but the soul, inasmuch as it rules the body, just as we say that the horseman is not the horse and human together, but the human alone from the fact that he guides the horse? This is a difficult problem to solve, or, at any rate, even if its solution were simple, it would require a lengthy explanation involving an expense of time and labour which would not profit us here. For whether it be both body and soul or soul alone that goes by the name of 'human being,' that is not the supreme good for human beings which constitutes the supreme good of the body. But whatever is the highest good either of body and soul together or of the soul alone, that is the supreme good for human beings.

Chapter 5

(7) If we ask what is the supreme good of the body, reason compels us to admit it is whatever causes the body to be at its best. But of all the things that give vigour to the body, none is better nor more important than the soul. Hence, the supreme good of the body is not sensual pleasure, nor absence of pain, nor strength, nor beauty, nor swiftness, nor whatever else is ordinarily numbered among the goods of the body, but the soul alone. For by its very presence, the soul provides the body with all the things we have enumerated and with that which excels them all besides, namely, life. Therefore, it does not seem to me that the soul is the supreme good for human beings, whether we call a human being soul and body together, or soul alone. For, as reason declares, the greatest good of the body is that which is better than the body and by which the body is given life and vigour, so, too, whether the body and soul together be the human being or the soul alone, we must still find out whether there is anything beyond the soul itself which, when sought after, makes the soul more perfect in its own order. If we can discover some such thing, all of our doubts will be removed, for it will unquestionably merit the name of the supreme good for human beings.

(8) if the body be a human being, it cannot be denied that the supreme good for human beings is the soul. But, surely, when it is a question of morals - when we ask what kind of life we must lead in order to attain happiness - the commandments are not for the body, and we are not concerned with bodily discipline. In a word, good morals pertain to that part of us which inquires and learns, and these are acts of the soul. Therefore, when we are dealing with the attainment of virtue, the question is not one which concerns the body. But if it follows, as it does, that the body when ruled by a virtuous soul is ruled both better and more worthily and is at its best because of the perfection of the soul ruling it rightly, then that which perfects the soul will be the supreme good for human beings even though we call the body a human being. For if at my command the charioteer feeds and properly manages the horses in his care, and enjoys my generosity in proportion as he is obedient to me, who can deny that not only the charioteer but the horses, too, owe their well being to me? And so, whether body alone, or soul alone, or both together be the human being, the important thing, it seems to me, is to discover what makes the soul perfect, for when this is attained, a man cannot but be perfect, or at least much better than if it were lacking to him.

Chapter 6

(9) No one disputes the fact that virtue perfects the soul, but the question might well be asked as to whether virtue can exist by itself or only in the soul. This is another of those profound questions demanding lengthy discussion, but perhaps a summary will be adequate for our purpose. And I hope that God will grant His assistance, so that, to the extent our weakness of mind permits, we may treat this subject not only clearly but briefly as well.

Whichever it be - whether virtue can exist by itself without the soul, or whether it cannot exist except in the soul - doubtless, the soul seeks after something in order to attain virtue, and this must be either itself, or virtue, or some third thing. If the soul pursues itself in seeking virtue, it pursues something foolish, since the soul itself is foolish before it has acquired virtue. And since the supreme desire of all who seek is to attain what they are seeking, in this case either the soul must not wish to attain what it seeks, and there is nothing more absurd nor perverse than this, or, in pursuing its

foolish self, it attains the very foolishness from which it flees. But if, in its desire to attain virtue, it seeks after it, how can it seek what does not exist? Or how can it desire to attain what it already has? Therefore, either virtue is outside the soul, or, if we must reserve the name of virtue only for that disposition or quality of the wise soul which cannot exist except in the soul, it remains that the soul must pursue something else in order that virtue may arise within itself. For neither by pursuing nothing nor by pursuing foolishness can the soul, in my opinion, reach wisdom.

(10) Consequently, this something else, through the seeking of which the soul becomes possessed of virtue and wisdom, is either a wise person or God. But as has been said above, it must be of such a nature that we cannot lose it against our will. Now who would hesitate to admit that a wise person, should we be satisfied to follow after him, can be taken from us, not only against our will, but even in spite of our resistance? Only God remains, therefore. If we follow after Him, we live well; if we reach Him, we live not only well but happily. As for those who may deny that God exists, I cannot concern myself with arguments by which to persuade them, for I am not even sure that we ought to enter into discussion with them at all. To do so, in any event, would necessitate starting out all over again with a different approach, a different method, and different arguments from those we have taken up at present. I am now concerned only with those who do not deny God's existence and who, besides, acknowledge that He is not indifferent to human affairs. For I cannot believe there is anyone who considers himself religious who does not hold at least that Divine Providence looks after our souls.



From *The City of God*, Book XIX, ch.4

[The Ultimate Good is not to be found in this Life]²

² This passage is one of Augustine's harshest criticisms of the view of human happiness that he had found in the ancient schools of philosophy, particularly among the Stoics.

[What view the Christians hold about the supreme good and the supreme evil, as against the philosophers who have maintained that for them the supreme good is in themselves.]

If, then, we are asked what the City of God replies when asked about these several matters, and first what its opinion is about the ultimate good and the ultimate evil, it will reply that the ultimate good is eternal life, and that the ultimate evil is eternal death, and that in order to obtain the one and escape the other we must live rightly. Wherefore it is written: "The just person lives by faith."³ For neither do we see as yet our good, and therefore must seek it by believing, nor is it in our power of ourselves to live rightly unless he who has given us faith to believe that we must seek help from him shall help us, as we believe in and pray to him. But those who have supposed that the ultimate good and evil are to be found in the present life, placing the ultimate good either in the body or in the soul or in both, or, to speak more explicitly, either in pleasure or in virtue or in both, in repose or in virtue or in both, in pleasure combined with repose or in virtue or in both, in the primary wants of nature or in virtue or in both, all these persons have sought, with a surprising vanity, to be happy in this life and to get happiness by their own efforts. Truth laughed at these people through the words of the prophet: "The Lord knows the thoughts of men,"⁴ or, as the apostle Paul has set forth this passage: "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain."⁵

For who, no matter how great his torrent of eloquence, can avail to enumerate the miseries of this life? Cicero lamented them, as best he could, in the Consolation on the death of his daughter; but how inadequate was his best! For when, where, how can the so-called primary wants of nature be on such a good footing in this life that they are not tossed about at the mercy of blind accidents? Why, what pain is there, the opposite of pleasure, what turbulence is there, the opposite of repose, that may not assail the wise person's frame? Surely the amputation or weakening of a person's limbs forces his freedom from physical defects to capitulate, ugliness his beauty, illness his health, weariness his strength, sleepiness or sluggishness his agility; now, which of these

³ 1 Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38.

⁴ Psalms 94:11.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 3:20.

may not invade the flesh of the wise, person? Fitting and harmonious attitudes and movements of the body are also reckoned among the primary wants of nature; but what if some disease makes the limbs quake and tremble? What if a person's spine be so bent that he puts his hands on the ground, which makes of him a quadruped, so to speak? Will not this ruin all beauty and grace whether of bodily pose or of movement?

What of the so-called primary goods of the mind itself, of which the two that are rated first, as means to the grasping and observing of truth, are sensation and intelligence? But how much sensation remains, and of what value, if a person becomes deaf and blind, to say nothing of other defects? And whither will reason and intelligence withdraw, where will they slumber, if a person is crazed by some disease? When the insane say or do many absurd things that are for the most part alien to their own aims and characters, - nay, even opposed to their good aims and characters, - whether we use our imaginations or have them before our eyes, if we reflect on their case as it deserves, we can scarce hold back our tears, or it may be even that we cannot. What shall I say of those who, are afflicted by attacks of demons? In what hidden or submerged places do their intellects lurk, when the evil spirit is using their souls and bodies according to its own will? And who is quite sure that this evil cannot befall the wise person in this life? Then what sort of observation of truth is there in this flesh, or how great is it, when, as we read in the truthful book of Wisdom: "The corruptible body weighs down the soul, and the earthly frame lies heavy on a mind that ponders many things?"⁶ Furthermore, drive or impulse to act, - if either is the correct Latin word for what the Greeks call *horme*, for that, too, is included among the primary goods of nature, - is not impulse also responsible for those pitiable movements and acts of the insane that shock us, when sensation is distraught and reason is asleep?

Finally, as to virtue itself, which is not among the primary wants of nature, since it is a later addition ushered in by instruction, although it claims the highest place among human goods, what is its activity here but perpetual war with vices, not external vices but internal, not alien but clearly our very own, a war waged especially by that virtue called in Greek *sophrosyne* and in Latin temperance, which bridles the lusts of the flesh

⁶ Wisdom 9:15.

lest they win the consent of the mind and drag it into crimes of every sort? For it is not the case that there is no vice when, as the Apostle says: "The flesh, lusts against the spirit." For to this vice there is an opposing virtue, when, as the same Apostle says: "The spirit lusts against the flesh. These two," he says, "are opposed one to the other, so that you do not what you would."⁷ But what is it that we would do, when we wish to be made perfect by the ultimate good, unless it be that the flesh should not lust against the spirit, and that there should be in us no such vice for the spirit to lust against it? But since we cannot bring that to pass in the present life, however much we may desire it, we can at least with God's help so act that we do not yield to the lust of the flesh against the spirit by failure of the spirit, and we are not dragged with our own consent to the perpetration of sin. Far be it from us, then, so long as we are engaged in this internal war, to hold it true that we have already attained to that happiness which is the goal that we would gain by victory. And who is so wise that he has no battle at all to wage against his lusts?

What of that virtue which is called prudence? Does she not devote all her vigilance to the discrimination of good and evil, so that in pursuing the one and shunning the other no error may creep in? Thus she bears witness herself that we are among evils, that is, that evils are in us; for she teaches us herself that it is an evil to yield to a lust for sin, and a good not to yield to a lust for sin. But that evil to which prudence teaches and temperance causes us not to yield, is neither by prudence nor by temperance banished from this life. What of justice, whose function it is to assign to each person their due, whereby there is located in man himself a certain right order of nature, so that soul is subordinated to God, and flesh to soul, and therefore both soul and flesh to God? Does not justice thereby demonstrate that she is still labouring in her task rather than resting already at the goal of her labours? For the less the soul keeps God clearly in mind in all its activity, the less it is subordinate to God; and the more the flesh lusts against the spirit, the less it is subordinate to the soul. So long, then, as we have in us this weakness, this sickness, this torpor, how shall we dare say that we are already saved, and if not saved, how already blest with that ultimate bliss? Then truly that virtue called fortitude, though combined with however great wisdom, bears witness most convincingly to human ills, for they are what she is required to endure with patience.

⁷ Galatians 5:17.

Now I am amazed that the Stoic philosophers have the face to argue that these ills are no ills, though they admit that, if they should be so great that the wise person cannot or ought not to endure them, he is compelled to inflict death on himself and depart from this life. But such is the stupid pride of these men who suppose that the supreme good is to be found in this life, and that they can be the agents of their own happiness, that their wise person, - I mean the person whom they describe as such with astounding inanity, - whom, even if he be blinded and grow deaf and dumb, lose the use of his limbs, be tortured with pain, and visited by every other evil of the sort that tongue can utter or fancy conceive, whereby he is driven to inflict death on himself, they do not scruple to call happy. What a happy life, that seeks the help of death to end it! If it be happy, let a person stay in it. How can those things not be evil that vanquish the good that is fortitude, and compel it not only to give way to them but so to rave that it calls the same life happy from which it advises us to escape? Who is so blind as not to perceive that, if it were happy, it would not be a life to escape from? Why, the word 'escape' is an unconcealed admission of weakness in their argument! What ground have they now to keep them, with stiff-necked pride broken, from admitting that it is even a wretched life? 'Was it not through lack of fortitude, rather than through fortitude, that the famous Cato took his life? For he would not have done it, had he not lacked the fortitude to bear the victory of Caesar. Where, then, is his fortitude? It yielded, it succumbed, it was so far vanquished that he gave up, forsook, escaped from this happy life. Or was it no longer happy? Then it was wretched. How, then, were those not evils that made life wretched and a thing to be escaped from?

And therefore those who admitted that these are evils, as did the Peripatetics and the Old Academics, the sect that Varro defends, speak in a more tolerable manner; but they, too, are sponsors of a surprising error, in that they maintain that amid these evils, even if they be so grave that he who suffers them is obliged to escape by seeking his own death, life is nevertheless happy. "Among evils," says Varro, "are pains and anguish of body, and their evil is the greater in proportion to their severity; and to avoid them one should escape from this life." What life, pray? "This life," he says, "that is beset by so great evils." So it is definitely happy, then, amid those very evils because of which you say that one must escape from it? Or do you call it happy because you have freedom to

escape from these evils by death? What, then, if by some divine judgement you were held among them and were not permitted either to die or ever to be free of them? Then, no doubt, at any rate, you would say that such a life is wretched. So it is not unwretched merely because it is soon abandoned, inasmuch as, if it were everlasting, even you yourself would pronounce it to be wretched. And so it ought not to be judged free from all wretchedness because the wretchedness is brief; or, still more absurdly, because the wretchedness is brief, on that account be even called a state of bliss.

Mighty is the power in these evils that compel a person, and according to these philosophers compel even a wise person, to deprive himself of his own existence as a human being; although they say, and say truly, that the first and greatest commandment of nature is that a person should be brought into harmony with himself and therefore instinctively avoid death, and that he be his own friend in such wise as to be vigorously determined and eager to keep the breath of life and to live on in this union of body and soul. Mighty is the power in these evils that overcome the natural feeling we hear of, by whose working we use every means and bend all our strength and all our endeavours to avoid death, and so completely defeat nature that what was avoided is now longed for, pursued, and, if it may not arrive from some other quarter, inflicted on a person by himself. Mighty is the power in these evils that make fortitude a homicide, if indeed she should still be called fortitude who is overcome by these evils so completely that she not only cannot by her endurance safeguard the human being whom, as virtue, she has undertaken to govern and protect but is herself compelled to go to the length of killing him. The wise person ought, to be sure, to endure even death with firmness, but death that befalls him from an external source. If, then, he is compelled, according to these philosophers, to inflict it on himself, surely they must admit not only that those are evils but that they are in fact intolerable evils that compel him to perpetrate this crime.

The life, then, that is oppressed by the weight of such great and grievous evils or exposed to the chance of them would by no means be termed happy if the people who use that term, - people who, -when they are defeated by the increasing pressure of their ills, in the act of inflicting death upon themselves, surrender to misfortune, - would with equal condescension, when they are defeated by sound logic in the attempt to discover a happy life, surrender to the truth, instead of supposing that the enjoyment of

the supreme good is a goal to be attained in the mortal state of which they speak. For our very virtues, which are surely the best and most useful attributes of a human being, bear trustworthy witness to life's miseries so much the more, the more strongly they support us against life's dangers, toils and sorrows. For if our virtues are genuine, - and genuine virtues can exist only in those who are endowed with true piety, - they do not lay claim to such powers as to say that persons in whom they reside will suffer no miseries (for true virtues are not so fraudulent in their claims); but they do say that our human life, though it is compelled by all the great evils of this age to be wretched, is happy in the expectation of a future life in so far as it enjoys the expectation of salvation too. For how can a life be happy, if it has no salvation yet? So the apostle Paul, speaking not of persons who lacked prudence, patience, temperance and justice, but of persons who lived in accordance with true piety, and whose virtues were therefore genuine, says: "Now we are saved by hope. But hope that is seen is not hope. For how should a person hope for what he sees? But if we hope for that which we do not see, then we look forward with endurance."⁸ As, therefore, we are saved by hope, so it is by hope that we have been made happy; and as we have no hold on a present salvation, but look for salvation in the future, so we look forward to happiness, and a happiness to be won by endurance. For we are among evils, which we ought patiently to endure until we arrive among those goods where nothing will be lacking to provide us ineffable delight, nor will there now be anything that we are obliged to endure. Such is the salvation which in the life to come will itself be also the ultimate bliss. But those philosophers, not believing in this blessedness because they do not see it, strive to manufacture for themselves in this life an utterly counterfeit happiness by drawing on a virtue whose fraudulence matches its arrogance.



From *On Free Choice of the Will*, Book I, iii,6 - iv,10

[*Why Adultery is evil*]⁹

⁸ Romans 8:24,25.

⁹ This passage illustrates Augustine's emphasis on the "inner" side of actions when it comes to their being right or wrong, good or evil. The example of a slave who unwillingly kills his master is also treated by

Augustine: You ask for the cause of our doing evil. First we must discuss what doing evil is. Tell me what you think about this. If you cannot put the whole thing briefly in a few words, at least indicate your opinion by naming some evil deeds one by one.

Evodius: Adultery, homicide, sacrilege. I need mention no more. To enumerate all the others neither time nor my memory would be sufficient. But no one doubts that those I have mentioned are examples of evil deeds.

Aug. Tell me now why you think adultery is evil. Is it because it is forbidden by law?

Ev. It is not evil because it is forbidden by law. It is forbidden by law because it is evil.

Aug. Suppose someone were to press us, stressing the delights of adultery and asking why it is evil and why we think it worthy of condemnation. Do you think that people who wanted not only to believe that adultery is evil but also to know the reason why it is so, would be driven to appeal to the authority of the law? You and I believe without the slightest hesitation that adultery is evil, and I declare that all peoples and nations must believe that too. But our present endeavour is to obtain intelligent knowledge and assurance of what we have accepted in faith. Give this matter your best consideration and tell me the reason why you know that adultery is evil.

Ev. I know it is evil because I should not wish it to be committed with my own wife. Whoever does to an other what he would not have done to himself does evil. ,

Aug. Suppose someone offered his wife to another, being willing that she should be corrupted by him in return for a similar licence allowed him with the other's wife. Would he have done no evil?

Ev. Far from that. He would have done great evil.

Aug. And yet his sin does not come under your general rule, for he does not do what he would not have done to him. You must find another reason to prove that

Abaelard in Reading 11. The dialogue is between Evodius (Ev.), a young student, and Augustine (Aug.) himself.

adultery is evil. .

Ev. I think it evil because I have often seen men condemned on this charge.

Aug. But are not men frequently condemned for righteous deeds? Without going to other books, think of scripture history which excels all other books because it has divine authority. If we decide that condemnation is a certain indication of evildoing, what an evil opinion we must adopt of the apostles and martyrs, for they were all thought worthy of condemnation for their faith. If whatever is condemned is evil, it was evil in those days to believe in Christ and to confess the Christian faith. But if everything is not evil which is condemned you must find another reason for teaching that adultery is evil.

Ev. I have no reply to make.

Aug. Possibly the evil thing in adultery is lust. So long as you look for the evil in the outward act you discover difficulties. But when you understand that the evil lies in lust it becomes clear that even if a man finds no opportunity to lie with the wife of another but shows that he desires to do so and would do it if he got the chance, he is no less guilty than if he were caught in the act.

Ev. Nothing is more manifest; and I now see that there is no need of lengthy argument to persuade me that the same is true of homicide, sacrilege and all other sins. For it is clear that lust alone dominates the whole realm of evil-doing.

Aug. You know that lust is also called cupidity?

Ev. I do.

Aug. Do you think there is or is not a difference between cupidity and fear?

Ev. Indeed there is a great difference between them.

Aug. I suppose you think so because cupidity longs for its object while fear avoids its object.

Ev. That is so.

Aug. What if someone kills a person from no desire to get possession of anything but from fear of suffering some evil at their hands. In that case he will not be a homicide?

Ev. He will indeed. Even such a deed is not without a trace of cupidity. He who kills a person from fear desires to live without fear.

Aug. And it is no small good to live without fear?

Ev. It is a great good, but the homicide cannot attain it by his crime.

Aug. I am not seeking what he can attain, but what he desires. Certainly he desires a good thing who desires a life free from fear, and so far his desire is not to be blamed. Otherwise we shall be blaming all lovers of good things. So we are compelled to admit that there can be homicide in which the dominance of evil cupidity is not to be found;

and it will consequently be false to say that it is the dominance of lust which makes all sins evil. In other words there can be homicide which is not a sin.

Ev. If to kill a person is homicide it can sometimes be done without sin. When a soldier kills an enemy, or when a judge or an officer of the law puts a criminal to death, or when a weapon slips out of someone's hand without his will or knowledge-, the killing of a person does not seem to me to be a sin.

Aug. I agree, but these are not usually called homicides. But tell me this. A slave kills his master because he feared he would be terribly tortured by him. Do you think he would have to be regarded as one of those who are not to be classed as homicides because they have killed a person?

Ev. His is a very different case from theirs. They act in accordance with the laws, or not contrary to the laws, but no law approves his deed.

Aug. You are reverting again to authority. You must remember that we have undertaken to try to understand what we believe. We believe the laws and must

accordingly try if we can to understand whether the law which punishes this deed does not wrongly punish.

Ev. It does not punish wrongly when it punishes a person who willingly and knowingly slays his master. None of these other cases we have mentioned is similar.

Aug. You remember you recently said that in every evil deed lust prevailed, and that for that very reason it was evil?

Ev. Certainly I remember.

Aug. Did you not also admit that he who desires to live without fear has no evil cupidity?

Ev. That too I remember.

Aug. When our slave kills his master from that motive he does so without any culpable cupidity. So we have not discovered why the deed was evil. We have agreed that all evil deeds are evil for no other reason than that they are committed from lust, that is, wrongful cupidity.

Ev. Now it seems I must admit that he is unjustly condemned. But I should not dare to say so if I had any other answer to give. *Aug.* You are persuaded that so great a crime ought to go unpunished before you consider whether the slave desired to be free of fear of his master in order to satisfy his own lusts? To desire to live without fear is characteristic of all people, not only of the good but also of the bad. But there is this difference. The good seek it by diverting their love from things which cannot be had without the risk of losing them. The bad are anxious to enjoy these things with security and try to remove hindrances so as to live a wicked and criminal life which is better called death.

Ev. I am recovering my wits. Now I am glad to have learned what culpable cupidity is, which we also call lust. Evidently it is love of things which one may lose against one's will.



From *The City of God*, Book XIV, 15-24

[*Lust, a Penalty for the Original Sin*]¹⁰

Chapter 15

[On the justice of the retribution that was meted out to the first human beings for their disobedience.]

Man, as we know, scorned the bidding of God who had created him, who had made him in his own image, who had placed him above the other animals, who had established him in paradise, who had provided him with an abundance of all things and of security, and who had not laden him with commands that were numerous or onerous or difficult but had propped him up for wholesome obedience with one very brief and easy command, whereby he sought to impress upon this creature, for whom free service was expedient, that he was the Lord. Therefore, as a consequence, just condemnation followed, and this condemnation was such that man, who would have been spiritual even in flesh if he had observed the order, became carnal in mind as well. Moreover, this man who had pleased himself in his pride was then granted to himself by God's justice; yet this was not done in such a way that he was completely in his own power, but that he disagreed with himself and so led, under the rule of the one with whom he agreed when he sinned, a life of cruel and wretched slavery in place of the freedom for which he had conceived a desire. He was willingly dead in spirit and unwillingly destined to die in body; a deserter of the eternal life, he was doomed also to eternal death, unless he were freed by grace. Whoever thinks that condemnation of this sort is either excessive or unjust surely does not know how to gauge the magnitude of wickedness in sinning when the opportunity for not sinning was so ample.

¹⁰ Christian doctrine as developed by Augustine holds that the present condition of mankind is in part the result of an original disobedience to God by the first man and woman and God's consequent punishment of all subsequent generations of human beings. It follows that what holds universally of human beings as we now find them might not be something natural to human nature but rather a result of this divine retribution. Augustine, here very much influenced by the negative views of the Platonists with regard to sexual passion, holds that sexual lust and the dependence of human reproduction on it is one of these features of human existence which have resulted from the original sin of disobedience.

Just as Abraham's obedience is not undeservedly celebrated as great because he was ordered to do a very difficult thing, namely, to slay his son, so in paradise disobedience was all the greater because the command that was given would have involved no difficulty. And just as the obedience of the Second Man¹¹ is the more laudable because "he became obedient unto death," so the disobedience of the first man is the more abominable because he became disobedient unto death. For where the proposed punishment for disobedience is great and the command of the Creator is easy to obey, who can adequately expound how grave an evil it is not to obey when an easy matter has been ordered by so mighty a power and is attended by the terror of such awful punishment?

To put it briefly then, in the punishment of that sin the requital for disobedience was no other than disobedience. For man's wretchedness consists only in his own disobedience to himself, wherefore, since he would not do what he then could, he now has a will to do what he cannot. In paradise, to be sure, man could not do everything whatsoever even before he sinned, yet, whatever he could not do, he did not have a will to do, and in that way he could do everything that he would. Now, however, as we recognize in his offspring and as holy Scripture attests, "Man has become like vanity."¹² For who can count up all the things that man has a will to do but cannot as long as he is disobedient to himself, that is, as long as his very mind and even his flesh, which is lower, are disobedient to his will? For even against his will his mind is very often agitated and his flesh feels pain, grows old, dies and suffers whatever else we suffer; but we should not suffer all this against our will if our being in every way and in every part gave obedience to our will.

Someone may perhaps protest that the flesh is unable to serve us because of what it suffers. But what difference does it make how this, happens? It only matters that through the justice of God, who is our master and to whom we his subjects refused service, our flesh, which had been subject to us, is troublesome by its insubordination, though we by our insubordination to God have succeeded only in being troublesome to

¹¹ I. e. Christ.

¹² Psalms 144:4.

ourselves and not to him. For he does not need our service as we need that of the body; so that what we get is punishment for us, but what we did was none for him. Further, the so-called pains of the flesh are pains of the soul that exist in and proceed from the flesh. For what pain or desire does the flesh experience by itself apart from a soul?

When we say that the flesh feels desire or pain, we mean that it is either the person themselves, as I have argued, or some part of the soul affected by what the flesh experiences, whether it be harsh and painful or gentle and pleasant. Pain of the flesh is only a vexation of the soul arising from the flesh and a sort of disagreement with what is done to the flesh, just as the pain of the mind that we call grief is a disagreement with the things that have happened to us against our will. But grief is generally preceded by fear, which is also something in the soul and not in the flesh. Pain of the flesh, on the other hand, is not preceded by anything like fear on the part of the flesh that is felt in the flesh before the pain. Pleasure, however, is preceded by a certain craving that is felt in the flesh as its own desire, such as hunger, thirst and the desire that is mostly called lust when it affects the sex organs, though this is a general term applicable to any kind of desire.

Even anger itself, so the ancients defined it, is nothing but a lust for revenge, although at times persons vent their anger even upon inanimate objects, where no effect of vengeance can be felt, and in their rage smash-their style or break their reed pen when it writes badly. But even this lust, though rather irrational, is a sort of lust for revenge and something like a shadowy reflection, as it were, of the principle of retribution whereby they who do evil, must suffer evil. There is then a lust for revenge, which is called anger; there is a lust for possessing money, which is termed greed; there is a lust for winning at any price, which is termed obstinacy; and there is a lust for bragging, which is termed vainglory. There are many different kinds of lust, of which some have special designations also while others have none. No one, for example, would find it easy to say what the lust to be overlord is called, though, as even civil wars attest, it exercises a very powerful influence in the minds of tyrants.

Chapter 16

[On the evil of lust, a term which, though it is applicable to many vices, is especially ascribed to the stirrings of obscene heat.]

Therefore, although there are lusts for many things, yet when the term lust is employed without the mention of any object, nothing comes to mind usually but the lust that excites the shameful parts of the body. Moreover, this lust asserts its power not only over the entire body, nor only externally, but also from within. It convulses all of a man when the emotion in his mind combines and mingles with the carnal drive to produce a pleasure unsurpassed among those of the body. The effect of this is that at the very moment of its climax there is an almost total eclipse of acumen and, as it were, sentinel alertness. But surely any friend of wisdom and holy joys, who lives in wedlock but knows, as the Apostle admonished, “how to possess his bodily vessel in holiness and honour, not in the disease of lust like the gentiles who do not know God,”¹³ would prefer, if he could, to beget children without this kind of lust. For he would want his mind to be served, even in this function of engendering off spring, by the parts created for this kind of work, just as it is served by the other members, each assigned to its own kind of work. They would be set in motion when the will urged, not stirred to action when hot lust surged.

But not even those who are enamoured of this pleasure are aroused whether to marital intercourse or to the uncleanness of outrageous vice just when it is their will. At times the urge intrudes uninvited; at other times it deserts the panting lover, and although desire is ablaze in the mind, the body is frigid. In this strange fashion lust refuses service not only to the will to procreate but also to the lust for wantonness; and though for the most part it solidly opposes the mind’s restraint, there are times when it is divided even against itself and, having aroused the mind, inconsistently fails to arouse the body.

Chapter 17

[On the nakedness of the first human beings, which seemed to them base and shameful after they sinned.]

¹³ 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5.

It is reasonable then that we should feel very much shamed of such lust, and reasonable too that those members which it moves or does not move by its own right, so to speak, and not in full subjection to our will, should be called pudenda or shameful parts as they were not before man sinned; for we read in Scripture: "They were naked, and not embarrassed."¹⁴ And the reason for this is not that they were unaware of their nakedness, but that their nakedness was not yet base because lust did not yet arouse those members apart from their will, and the flesh did not yet bear witness, so to speak, through its own disobedience against the disobedience of man.

For the first human beings had not been created blind, as the ignorant multitude think, since Adam saw the animals upon which he bestowed names, and of Eve we read: "The woman saw that -the tree was good for food and that it was a delight for the eyes to behold."¹⁵ Accordingly, their eyes were not closed, but they were not open, that is, attentive so as to recognize what a boon the cloak of grace afforded them, in that their bodily members did not know how to oppose their will. When this grace was lost and punishment in kind for their disobedience was inflicted, there came to be in the action of the body a certain shameless novelty, and thereafter nudity was indecent. It drew their attention and made them embarrassed.

This is why Scripture says of them, after they had violated God's command in open transgression: "And the eyes of both were opened, and they discovered that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons."¹⁶ "The eyes of both," we are told, "were opened," yet not that they might see, since they could see already, but that they might distinguish between the good that they had lost and the evil into which they had fallen. This also explains why the tree itself, which was to enable them to make such a distinction if they laid hands on it to eat its fruit in spite of the prohibition, was named for that fact and called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For experience of discomfort in sickness gives a clearer insight into the joys of health as well.

¹⁴ Genesis 2:25.

¹⁵ Genesis 3:6.

¹⁶ Genesis 3:7.

Accordingly, "they realized that they were naked," stripped naked, that is, of the grace that kept nakedness of body from embarrassing them before the law of sin came into opposition with their minds. Thus they learned what they would more fortunately not have known if through belief in God and obedience to his word they had refrained from an act that would compel them to find out by experience what harm unbelief and disobedience could do. Therefore, embarrassed by their flesh's disobedience, a punishment that bore witness to their own disobedience, "they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons (*campestria*)," that is loin-cloths, a term employed by certain translators. (Moreover, though ' *campestria*' is a Latin word, it derives its origin from the practice of young men who used to cover up their pudenda while they exercised in the nude on the so-called campus or field. Hence, those who are so girt are commonly designated as *campestrati*.) Thus modesty, prompted by a sense of shame, covered what was disobediently aroused by lust against a will condemned for disobedience.

Ever since that time, this habit of concealing the pudenda has been deeply ingrained in all peoples, descended, as they are, from the original stock. In fact, certain barbarians do not expose those parts of the body even in the bath but wash with their coverings on. In the dark retreats of India too certain men who practice philosophy in the nude (and hence are called gymnosophists) nevertheless use coverings for their genitals, though they have none for the other parts of the body.

Chapter 18

[On the sense of shame in sexual intercourse, whether promiscuous or marital.]

Let us consider the act itself that is accomplished by such lust, not only in every kind of licentious intercourse, for which hiding-places are prerequisite to avoid judgement before human tribunals, but also in the practice of harlotry, a base vice that has been legalized by the earthly city. Although in the latter case the practice is not under the ban of any law of this city, nevertheless even the lust that „is allowed and free of penalty shuns the public gaze. Because of an innate sense of shame even brothels have made provision for privacy, and unchastity found it easier to do without the fetters

of legal prohibition than shamelessness did to eliminate the secret nooks of that foul business.

But this harlotry is called a base matter even by those who are base themselves, and although they are enamoured of it, they dare not make public display of it. What of marital intercourse, which has for its purpose, according to the terms of the marriage contract, the procreation of children? Lawful and respectable though it is, does it not seek a chamber secluded from witnesses? Before the bridegroom begins even to caress his bride, does he not first send outside all servants and even his own groomsmen as well as any who had been permitted to enter for kinship's sake, whatever the tie? And since, as a certain "supreme master of Roman eloquence"¹⁷ also maintains, all right actions wish to be placed in the light of day,¹⁸ that is, are eager to become known, this right action also desires to become known, though it still blushes to be seen. For who does not know what goes on between husband and wife for the procreation of children) Indeed, it is for the achievement of this purpose that wives are married with such ceremony. And yet, when the act for the birth of children is being consummated, not even the children that may already have been born from the union are allowed to witness it. For this right action does indeed seek mental light for recognition of it, but it shrinks from visual light. What is the reason for this if not that something by nature fitting and proper is carried out in such a way as to be accompanied also by something of shame as punishment.

Chapter 19

[That anger and lust, parts that are stirred in man with such harmful effect that they must be checked and curbed by wisdom, did not exist in that sound state of his being before he sinned.]

Here we have the reason why those philosophers too who came closer to the truth admitted that anger and lust are faulty divisions of the soul. They reasoned that these emotions proceed in a confused and disorderly way to engage even in acts that wisdom forbids and that consequently they stand in need of a controlling and rational mind.

¹⁷ Cf Lucan 7.62-63.

¹⁸ Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes*, 2.26.64

This third part of the soul, according to them, resides in a sort of citadel to rule the other two parts in order that, as it commands and they serve, justice in a human being may be preserved among all the parts of the soul.

Now as for these two divisions of the soul, those philosophers confess that they are vicious even in a wise and temperate man. It is for this reason that the mind by repression and restraint curbs and recalls them from things that they are wrongly moved to do, but allows them to follow any course that the law of wisdom has sanctioned. Anger, for example, is permitted for the display of a just compulsion, and lust for the duty of propagating offspring. But these divisions, I maintain, were not vicious in paradise before man sinned, for they were not set going against a right will in pursuit of anything that made it necessary to check them with the guiding reins, as it were, of reason. For in so far as these emotions are now set going in this way and controlled with more or less ease or difficulty, yet still controlled, by restraint and opposition on the part of those who lead temperate, just and holy lives, this is by no means a healthy state due to nature; it is a morbid condition due to guilt. Moreover, if modesty does not conceal the actions prompted by anger and the other emotions in every word and deed as it does those of lust in which the sexual organs are used, the reason is simply that in other cases the members of the body are not put into operation by the emotions themselves but by the will, after it has consented to them, for it has complete control in the employment of such members. No one who utters a word in anger or even strikes a person could do so if his tongue or hand were not set in motion at the command, so to speak, of his will; and these members can also be set in motion by the same will even when there is no anger. But in the case of the sexual organs, lust has somehow brought them so completely under its rule that they are incapable of activity if this one emotion is lacking and has not sprung up spontaneously or in answer to a stimulus. Here is the cause of shame, here is what blushing avoids the eye of onlookers; and a man would sooner put up with a crowd of spectators when he is wrongly venting his anger upon another than with the gaze of a single individual even when he is rightly having intercourse with his wife.

Chapter 20

[On the utterly absurd indecency of the Cynics.]

Those canine philosophers, or Cynics¹⁹ were not aware of this fact when they expounded a view offensive to human modesty, a view that can only be termed canine, that is, base and shameless. They held that since the act is lawful when it is done with a wife, no one should feel ashamed to do it openly and engage in marital intercourse on any street or square. Nevertheless, our natural sense of shame has been victorious over this heretical notion. There is, to be sure, a tradition that Diogenes once ostentatiously performed such an act because he thought that his school would win more publicity in this way, that is, if its shamelessness was more sensationally impressed upon the memory of mankind. The later Cynics, however, have abandoned any such practice, and modesty has prevailed over error, that is, the instinct among people to feel ashamed before other people has prevailed over the doctrine that people should make it their aim to be like dogs.

Hence I prefer to think that Diogenes and others who reputedly did such a thing rather acted out the motions of lying together before the eyes of people who really did not know what was done under the cloak. I do not believe that there could have been any achievement of such pleasure under the glare of human gaze. For those philosophers did not blush to seem willing to lie together in a place where lust itself would have blushed to rear its head. Even now we see that there are still Cynic philosophers among us. They are the ones who not only wrap themselves in a cloak but also carry a club. Yet none of them dares to behave so, for it would bring down upon any who had dared a shower, if not of stones, at any rate of spittle from the outraged public.

Human nature then doubtless feels shame at this lust, and rightly so. For its disobedience, which subjected the sexual organs to its impulses exclusively and wrested them from control by the will, is a sufficient demonstration of the punishment that was meted out to man for that first disobedience. And it was fitting that this punishment

¹⁹ Philosophers in 4th century B.C.E. Athens who believed they were following the true teachings of Socrates in their disregard for many ordinary opinions about what was right and wrong. The word 'cynic' comes from the Greek word for dog.

should show itself particularly in that part of the body which engenders the very creature that was changed for the worse through that first great sin. No one can be delivered from the meshes of that sin unless the offence that was committed to the common disaster of all and punished by the justice of God when all men existed in but one, is expiated in each man singly by the grace of God.

Chapter 21

[That the blessing of increase in human fertility given before sin was not forfeited through transgression but alloyed with the disease of lust.]

Far be it then from us to believe that the couple that were placed in paradise would have fulfilled through this lust, which shamed them into covering those organs, the words pronounced by God in his blessing: "Increase and multiply and fill the earth."²⁰ For it was only after man sinned that this lust arose; it was after man sinned that his natural being retaining the sense of shame but losing that dominance to which the body was subject in every part, felt and noticed, then blushed at and concealed that lust. The nuptial blessing, however, whereby the pair, joined in marriage, were to increase and multiply and fill the earth, remained in force even when they sinned, yet it was given before they sinned, for its purpose was to make it clear that the procreation of children is a part of the glory of marriage and not of the punishment of sin.

There are, nevertheless, in our own day persons who must surely lack knowledge of that former happiness in paradise, for they believe that children could only have been engendered by the means with which they are personally acquainted, that is, by lust, which, as we see, causes embarrassment even to the honourable state of marriage. Some of these people do not merely reject outright but unbelievably deride the holy Scriptures, in which we read that after sin nakedness caused shame and the organs of shame were covered. Others among them, on the other hand, accept and honour the Scriptures but hold that the words "Increase and multiply" are not to be taken as referring to carnal fertility because some similar statement is also found with reference to the soul: "Thou wilt multiply me with strength in my soul."²¹ Relying on this passage,

²⁰ Genesis 1:28.

²¹ Psalms 138:3.

they interpret allegorically the words that follow in Genesis: "Both fill the earth and be masters of it."²² By earth they understand the flesh which the soul fills with its presence and over which it has greatest mastery when it is multiplied in inner strength, or virtue. But carnal offspring, they maintain, could no more have been born then than now without lust, which arose after man sinned, and which was observed with embarrassment and concealed; and they would not have been born in paradise but only outside it, as in fact happened. For it was after the first couple had been sent away from there that they united to beget children and did beget them.

Chapter 22

[On the matrimonial bond as originally established and blessed by God.]

I myself, however, have no doubt at all that to increase, multiply and fill the earth in accordance with the blessing of God is a gift of marriage and that God established this institution from the beginning before man's fall by the creation of male and female; the difference in sex is in any case clear enough in the flesh. It was also with this work of God that the blessing itself was connected, for immediately after the Scriptural words: "Male and female he created them", there was added: "And God blessed them, and God said to them: 'Increase and multiply and fill the earth and be masters of it,'" and so on.

Granted that all this can without impropriety be taken in a spiritual sense, yet we cannot understand "male" and "female" as figurative terms referring to any analogy in a single human being on the ground that in that person, as we know, there is one element that rules and another that is ruled. As the bodies of different sex make abundantly clear, it is the height of absurdity to deny that male and female were created as they were to increase, multiply and fill the earth by begetting offspring. For when the Lord was asked whether it was permitted to divorce one's wife on any grounds whatever, since Moses allowed the Israelites to give a bill of divorcement on account of their hardness of heart, his reply did not concern the spirit which commands and the flesh which obeys, or the rational mind which rules and the irrational desire which is ruled, or the contemplative virtue which is superior and the active virtue which is subordinate,

²² Genesis 1:28.

or the understanding of the mind and the sensation of the body, but it plainly referred to the marriage tie which binds both sexes to one another. In this answer he said: "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder."²³

There is no doubt then that from the very beginning male and female were fashioned in quite the same way as we see and know two human beings of different sex to be now and that they are called "one" either because of their union or because of the origin of the female, who was created from the side of the male. For the Apostle too invoked this first example, which God instituted as a precedent, to admonish each and every one that husbands should love their wives.

Chapter 23

[Whether procreation would have been allowed even in paradise if no one had sinned, or whether the principle of chastity would have fought there against the ardour of lust.]

When anyone says that there would have been no copulation or generation if the first human beings had not sinned, does he not imply that man's sin was required to complete the number of saints? For if by not sinning they would have continued to be solitary because, so some think, they could not have produced offspring if they had not sinned, then surely sin was required before there could be not just two but many righteous persons. But if that is too absurd to believe, we must rather believe that even if no one had sinned, a sufficiently large number of saints would have come into existence to populate that supremely happy city - as large a number, that is, as are now being gathered through the grace of God from the multitude of sinners, and as will be, so long as "the children of this world" beget and are begotten.²⁴

This leads to the conclusion that if no sin had been committed, that marriage, being

²³ Matthew 19:4-6

²⁴ Luke 20:34.

worthy of the happiness of paradise, would have produced offspring to be loved, yet no lust to cause shame. But there is now no example with which to illustrate how this could have been effected. Nevertheless, that is no reason why it should seem incredible that the will, which is now obeyed by so many members, might also have been obeyed in the absence of this lust by that one part as well. Consider how, when we choose, we set our hands and feet in motion to do the things that are theirs to do, how we manage this without any conflict and with all the facility that we see both in our own case and in that of others, especially among workers in all kinds of physical tasks, where a natural capacity that is too weak and slow is fitted for its employment by the application of greater dexterity and effort. May we not similarly believe that those organs of procreation could, like the others, have served mankind by obedience to the decision of the will for the generation of children even if there had been no lust inflicted as punishment for the sin of disobedience?

When in his discussion of the different forms of rule in his work entitled *On the Commonwealth* Cicero drew an analogy for his purpose from human nature, did he not say that the members of the body are ruled like children because of their readiness to obey, whereas the depraved parts of the soul are constrained like slaves by a harsher rule?²⁵ No doubt, in the order of nature, the soul ranks above the body, yet the soul itself finds it easier to rule the body than to rule itself. Nevertheless, this lust that we are now discussing is something all the more shameful because under its effect the soul neither succeeds in ruling itself so as to have no lust at all nor controls the body completely in such a way that the organs of shame are set in motion by the will rather than by lust. Indeed, if such were the case, they would not be organs of shame.

As things now stand, the soul is ashamed of the body's opposition to it, for the body is subject to it because of its lower nature. When the soul opposes itself in the case of other emotions, it feels less ashamed because when it is vanquished by itself, the soul is its own vanquisher. Although this victory of soul over soul is disorderly and morbid because it is a victory of constituents that should be subject to reason, yet it is a victory of its own constituents and therefore, as was said, a self-conquest. For when the soul

²⁵ Cf. Cicero, *De Re Publica* 3.25.37.

vanquishes itself in an orderly fashion and thus subordinates its irrational emotions to the rule of a rational purpose, such a victory is laudable and virtuous, provided that its purpose in turn is subordinate to God. Still, the soul feels less ashamed when it is not obeyed by its own depraved constituents than when its will and bidding are not heeded by the body, which is different from it and inferior to it and has a substance that has no life without it.

But when a curb is imposed by the will's authority on the body's other members, without which those organs that are excited by lust in defiance of the will cannot fulfil their craving, chastity is safeguarded, not because the pleasure of sinning has disappeared, but because it is not allowed to appear. If culpable disobedience had not been punished with disobedience in retribution, then doubtless the marriage in paradise would not have experienced this resistance, this opposition, this conflict of will and lust or, at-any rate, the deficiency of lust as against the sufficiency of will; rather, the will would have been obeyed not only by other members of the body but by all alike.

Under those circumstances, the organ created for his work would have sown its seed upon the field of generation, as the hand does now upon the earth. And though I am now hampered by modesty when I wish to treat this subject in greater detail, and am compelled to apologize to chaste ears and to ask their pardon there would then have been no reason for this to happen. Discussion, free and unencumbered by any fear of obscenity, would range over every aspect that might occur to the thought of anyone who reflected on bodily parts of this sort. There would not even be words that could be called obscene, but all our talk on this subject would be as decent as what we say in speaking about the other members of the body. Accordingly, if anyone approaches in a wanton spirit what I have written here, let him shun any guilt on his own Part, not the natural facts. Let him censure the deeds of his own depravity, not the words of my necessity. Herein I shall very readily be pardoned by the chaste and devout reader or listener as long as I refute the scepticism which relies for argument not by the faith in things unexperienced,, but on the perception of things experienced. For these words of mine will give no offence to the reader who is not appalled by the Apostle's censure of the appalling immoralities of the women who "exchanged natural relations for

unnatural²⁶ especially since I am not, like the Apostle, now bringing up and censuring damnable lewdness. Still, in explaining, as best I can, the working of human generation I try, like him, to avoid the use of lewd terms.

Chapter 24

[That if human beings had remained innocent and had earned the right to stay in paradise by their obedience, they would have used their genital organs for the procreation of offspring in the same way as they used the rest, that is, at the discretion of the will.]

The Seed of offspring then would have been sown by the man and received by the woman at such time and in such amount as was needed, their genital organs being directed by the will and not excited by lust. For we move at our bidding not only those members which have joints and solid bones, like hands, feet and fingers, but we can at will shake and move, stretch and extend, twist and bend or contract and stiffen even the parts that are slackly composed of soft muscular tissue, like those which the will moves, as far as it can, in the mouth and face. Indeed, even the lungs, which, except for the marrows, are the most delicate of all the internal organs and for that reason are sheltered in the cavity of the chest, are made to function in this way for the purpose of drawing in and expelling the breath and uttering or modulating a sound; for just as bellows serve the will of blacksmiths or organists, so lungs serve the will of anyone who blows out or draws in his breath or speaks or shouts or sings.

I shall not dwell on the natural endowment of certain animals in connexion with the covering that clothes their entire body; suffice it to say that if in any part of it they feel anything that should be driven off, they are able to make it move just at the point where they feel the object and to dislodge with a quiver of their hide not only flies settled upon them but also spears -sticking in them. Granted that man does not have this faculty, yet surely it does not follow that the creator was unable to grant it to such animate beings as he chose. Hence man himself too may once have commanded even from his lower members an obedience that by his own disobedience he has lost. For it was not difficult for God to design him in such a way that even what now is moved in

²⁶ Romans 1:26.

his flesh only by lust was then moved only by his will.

Certain human beings too, as we know, have natural endowments that are quite different from those of others and remarkable for their very rarity. They can at will do with their bodies some things that others find utterly impossible to imitate and scarcely credible to hear. For some people can actually move their ears, either one at a time or both together. Other people, without moving their head, can bring all the scalp that is covered with hair to the forefront and then draw it back again at will. Others can swallow an astonishing number of different objects and then, with a very slight contraction of their diaphragm, bring forth, as though from a bag, whatever item they please in perfect condition. Certain people mimic and render so expertly the utterances of birds and beasts, as well as of any other human beings, that it is impossible to tell the difference unless they are seen. Some people produce at will without any stench such rhythmical sounds from their fundament that they appear to be making music even from that quarter. From my own experience I know of a man who used to perspire at will. Certain people are known to weep at will and to shed a flood of tears.

But here is something far more incredible, a spectacle that a large number of our own brethren very recently witnessed. There was a certain presbyter, Restitutus by name, in the parish of the church of Calama. Whenever he pleased (and he used to be asked to do it by those who desired to have a first-hand knowledge of the amazing phenomenon), he would withdraw from his senses to an accompaniment of cries as of some person in distress and lie still exactly like a dead man. In this state he not only was completely insensitive to pinching and pricking but at times was even burned by the application of fire and yet felt no pain except afterwards from the wound. Proof that his body remained motionless, not through deliberate effort, but through absence of feeling was provided by the fact that, like someone deceased, he showed no sign of breathing. Nevertheless, he later reported that he could hear people talking, as though from a distance, if they spoke distinctly enough.

The body then, as we have seen, even now remarkably serves certain people beyond the ordinary limits of nature in many kinds of movement and feeling although they are living our present wretched life in perishable flesh. That being so, what is there to keep

us from believing that human members may have served the human will without lust for the procreation of offspring before the sin of disobedience and the consequent punishment of deterioration?

Man therefore was handed over to himself because he forsook God in his self-satisfaction, and since he did not obey God, he could not obey even himself. From this springs the more obvious wretchedness whereby man does not live as he chooses. For if he lived as he chose, he would deem himself happy; but yet he would not be happy even so if he lived an indecent life.

