A97: De Peccato et Purificatione. Exercitatio practica in locum e S. Gregorio Nysseno excerptum. cf. Textus et Documenta, Ser. theol., 21, De Platonismo Patrum, R.P. Arnou, PUGreg 1935, par. 26, 29, pp. 35, 38.

[Lonergan Archives, Batch II, Folder 1, Item 1]

[Translation of preliminary page]

[The text begins with quotations from the Enneads of Plotinus]

IV, vii, 10 - It is not by running to external things that the soul contemplates *temperance* and *justice*, but by remaining within itself and in contemplating itself and knowing what it was like before; once purified, it will see how badly the images within it, as it were, had become covered with rust over time. It is as if a piece of gold having a conscious mind had rid itself of some earthy alloy: whereas previously ignorant of itself because it did not see the gold, now, seeing itself unalloyed, it would marvel at its excellence, and would realize that it has no need of any borrowed perfection, being itself supremely excellent as long as it is allowed to be by itself.

I, vi, 5 - We must, then, inquire into our experience of love for non-sensible realities. What do you feel regarding what are called noble pursuits, a fine character, a temperate way of life, and, in short, all virtuous actions and dispositions and beauty of soul? ... You are affected ... you revel ... you are transported ... you are inflamed with desire ... you yearn to slough off your body and be one with them ... These are the really real things. What is it in all these virtues that shines forth like the sun?

Baseness comes to the soul as an adventitious evil ... Hence the soul does not see what it ought to be contemplating, as a result of being continually dragged outside itself and beneath itself into darkness ... The soul pure and simple, therefore, is not itself this baseness; rather, [a base soul] is like gold that is alloyed with earth.

I, viii, 4 - [The principle of becoming] is a nature that is material, which is so evil that it fills with its own evil whatever is not yet in it but merely looks towards it.

I, vi, 9 - The soul that has come to itself and, as it were, just now risen from matter, cannot immediately gaze upon these luminous realities. It has to accustom itself to seeing noble pursuits ... noble deeds ... and finally to behold the soul of those who do these noble deeds ... How? Go into yourself and look; and if you do

not yet see yourself as beautiful, then, like a sculptor making a statue, lop off what is excessive, straighten what is crooked, get rid of the dark areas and make them shine, and do not stop polishing this statue of yours until the godlike splendor of virtue shines forth and you behold temperance seated on its sacred throne. If you are thus changed ... [and see] all of and only the true light ... Having become this vision ... look intently; for only this eye sees the highest beauty ... For the seer must be connatural and similar to that which is seen. First, therefore, be wholly divine, wholly beautiful, if you would behold god and beauty.

Our question: What sort of *morality* was implicit in Gregory of Nyssa's theory about the *natural* beauty of the soul? What *truth* was implicit in it?

Analysis of these passages:

1 An assertion of the usual perception of and admiration and love for moral goodness: the element of emotion and striving is emphasized.

2 An assertion of the law in our members that wars against the law of our mind.

3 In accordance with the principle ‘like is known by like,’ the argument proceeds from the objective beauty of moral goodness to the beauty of the soul which apprehends it.

4 The opposition between the flesh and the spirit is understood metaphysically as if matter were intrinsically evil.

5 The purgative way (the cultivation of virtues) is proposed as the means to mystical contemplation.

Compare the principle ‘Like is known by like’ with ‘As a person's character is, so does his end or purpose seem to him.’ Consider the following: ‘... they are not able to encourage the many [Gk., hoi polloi, ‘the masses’] to nobility and goodness. For these do not by nature obey the sense of shame, but only fear, and do not abstain from bad acts because of their baseness but through fear of punishment; living by passion they pursue their own pleasures and the means to them, and avoid the opposite pains, and have not even a conception of what is noble and truly pleasant, since they have never tasted it." - Aristotle, Nic. Eth. x, ix, 4; 1179 b 10-16 [McKeon translation]. According to Aristotle, moral judgments are relative: ‘in accordance with one's character.’ A right judgment is

that made by a *spudaios*, a good or virtuous person; cf. ibid. X, vi, 4-5; 1176 b 19-26.

ON SIN AND PURIFICATION

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[Translator' interpolations are in brackets]

(A 'practical exercise' on a passage from St. Gregory of Nyssa. Cf. R. Arnou, *Textus et Documenta*, Series Theologica 21, *De 'Platonismo' Patrum* {Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1935}, §§ 26 and 29, pages 35 and 38 respectively).

The text proposed for interpretation today is from an ascetical work written about 370 by St. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-after 394). ('De Virginitate,' chap. XII; MG 46, 372 A-C).

[26 is the passage from *De Virginitate*; 29 is from Gregory's *De Beatitudinibus*, orat. 6; MG 44, 1272 B-C. For a translation of these two passages, see Appendix.]

Since we are not writing a novel in which, as a rule, all the strands of the plot are kept hidden until the very end, we shall immediately and briefly open up the entire question and state our method of handling it. First of all, then, Gregory, at least in this passage, had a concept of sin that is quite different from ours. He does not speak of sin as something voluntary or blameworthy; he does not say that a sinner ought to have sorrow and repent; he does not say that sin offends God, or is an insult to the divine majesty. He does not deny all this, of course, but neither does he affirm it. But what he does affirm seems to us quite extraordinary, not to say heretical. His whole treatise, it seems, can be reduced to these three propositions: (1) original justice, although gratuituous, was proper and natural to man – indeed, an essential element of human nature; (2) this godlike [Gk., *theoeides*] beauty of soul, that is, the grace of this primordial state of mankind, was not wholly lost through original sin, but diminished, obscured, impaired; (3) after the fall, the return to this former state is apparently not beyond man's natural powers, inasmuch as that original grace was not lost but only covered over. The following comparison may help to clarify this point: just as Luther taught that sin was not taken away but only covered over, so Gregory seems to say that grace is not taken away by sin but only covered over. This, then, is the problem before us. Our discussion can be divided in roughly the following way. First, since the nub of the whole question is a certain godlike beauty, we must make some historical

observations concerning the thought of St. Irenaeus and St. Athanasius. Next, we shall show from this text of St Gregory, its context and other passages in his works, that he considered this godlike beauty to be at once supernatural and natural. Third, since the source of this confusion is to be found in the moral and ascetical theories of the Platonists, we shall attempt a foray into this area as well. Fourth, we shall venture to make a few observations about sin, prayer, apatheia or absence of passion, and intellectualism.

The first words [of the passage from 'De Virginitate'], 'Every work of God ...' recall to mind the ancient controversy with gnosticism. Let us briefly outline it here. (Cf. DTC XII (23), 322 ff.). The gnostics held that evil arose out of a certain natural necessity. Their chief opponent was St Irenaeus who vindicated God's justice and omnipotence through a synthesis of biblical doctrines. The central and fundamental point of this synthesis was the statement in Genesis 1.18: 'Let us make man in our image and likeness.' With the affirmation of this similitude, the whole gnostic position collapses: what is made in the likeness of God is surely not evil by necessity, and if not by necessity, then by free will. Irenaeus's originality lay in the fact that he not only considered this primordial image and likeness to be a proof of God's goodness but that he extended this conception to Adam's fall and Christ's redemption. The sin of our first parents destroyed this likeness to God; the eternal Word, the invisible image of God, was made visible in order to restore this image on this earth and give back to man who was defiled by sin his original excellence and perfection. So you see the whole of sacred scripture contained in this single concept of man's godlike image: in the beginning it was conferred upon man, then destroyed by sin, and finally restored and given back to him in the Incarnate Word.

So much for Irenaeus. What is most noteworthy is that his synthesis regarding the image of God was taken holus-bolus and ready-made from the bible itself. It was inevitable that such a synthesis, so very similar to the theories of the Platonists, would be further and more explicitly elaborated through philosophical reflection. You have already learned that this was finally done in the fourth century by the young Athanasius. But you yourselves are well aware that in applying philosophy to an understanding of revelation there is the danger that supernatural grace may not be clearly distinguished from the preternatural gifts and from man's purely natural powers. In the mind of Irenaeus and of the Fathers generally, that initial image and likeness of God which Christ restored was supernatural grace. (Cf. Palmieri, *De Deo Creante*. Romae, 1878, pp. 410-12, 414.) But for philosophers the soul itself has a certain purely natural beauty, which can be called 'godlike' in a broad sense.

St Athanasius seems not to have entirely escaped this danger of confusion. In his third Oratio against the Arians (MG 26, 393 A) he states that before the time of Christ there were many who were holy and sinless. We can easily detect the source of this error in another passage. In his Oratio contra Gentes, 34, he makes the following statement to those who worship idols: 'Why do they not hasten back to God *in the same way as* (1) they went away from him? For just as it was through their *mind* (2) that they abandoned him and fashioned objects that were no gods at all, so they can ascend *through this same part of their soul, their mind* (2), and turn once again to him. They can, I say, if they *put off* (3) all the filth of their evil desires *that they have put on* (3) and cleanse themselves until they have *washed away* (4) all those foreign accretions upon the soul and reveal it *alone* (5), as it is in itself, just as it was created, so that in this way they can see in it the Word of the Father, in whose likeness they were made in the beginning. For indeed the soul was made and created in the image and likeness of God, as sacred scripture indicates, speaking in the person of God: 'Let us make man in our image and likeness.' When, therefore, it has *washed away* (6) all the stains of sin with which it was *bespattered* (6), and preserves *pure* (7) and *intact* (7) that likeness *alone* (7), it will deserve to contemplate in that totally cleansed and resplendent likeness, as in a mirror, the Word who is the image of the Father; and through thought it will apprehend in the Word the Father, whose image the Savior also is' (MG 25, 67 CD).

It is not at all our intention here to enter into a discussion of this text. We simply want to make the following point: if the image of God which was conferred upon our nature at the beginning, was supernatural, it would be totally destroyed by original and by personal sin. If, therefore, this image has been destroyed by the sin of idolatry, then surely man cannot restore himself to that image through any moral purgation. Not only is purgation required; a new infusion of grace is also required. For without grace there is no such image of God; and what is not present is not an object of contemplation.

What we have hinted at in St. Athanasius we shall immediately discover in St Gregory of Nyssa, a follower of the Alexandrian Fathers. He seems to consider this likeness to be supernatural in the sense that it was conferred gratis upon the first man but was darkened and marred by sin rather than taken away and totally lost. Grace is not conceived as being a removable accident but rather as a part of the essence which remains in sinners and the just alike, though clearly visible in the just, while obscured and disfigured in sinners.

First, therefore, we must show that according to Gregory that initial likensss was supernatural: this in fact is clearly contained in the final sentences of the passage quoted [from 'De Virginitate']. Being assimilated to God, he says, is not the work of man nor in his power; it is a gift of God's munificence, who bestowed this likeness upon our nature at the very beginning.

Now we must ask a second question, whether after sin a return to that original likeness is beyond our natural powers. In other words, is that likeness to God conferred upon us at the beginning such that it is totally lost through sin? It seems from a number of indications that this question must be answered in the negative.

(a) On line 4 Gregory speaks of evil spreading into the human race from a small beginning to a boundless measure; but [reading atqui] if that likeness had been totally lost, original sin would not be a small beginning but the greatest of evils; therefore it was not totally lost.

(b) He uses metaphors that suggest that this likeness was marred or covered over but not taken away or lost. Iron that has rusted continues to be iron. A man who falls into a mud-hole and is so covered with dirt that even his close friends cannot recognize him still remains a fully human being. Also, sin is compared to a dirty covering that can be put on and taken off like a piece of clothing.

(c) From the context it seems clear that he used these comparisons precisely for the purpose of suggesting that sin is an obscuring or distortion of the likeness but not its loss.

For he goes on to say, 'But the great endeavor of mankind is *but* (τοσοῦτον, Lat. *tantum*) to wash off entirely the stains of sin and let shine forth that beauty that is hidden in the soul' – καὶ τὸ κεκαλυμμένον ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ κάλλος διαφωτίσαι (MG 46, 372 D).

Then, in interpreting the parable of the lost coin he compares the image of the king stamped on the coin to the soul's image and likeness of God. '... (the Lord) wants each person to look for the lost coin in his own house, that is, in himself. This searching for the coin must surely be understood as referring to the image of the supreme King, which *has not been totally lost* but lies *hidden* under the dirt' (MG 46, 373 AB).

(d) He does not say that Christ regenerates us but that he has urged us through purification to get rid of our image befouled by sin.

(e) In technical language he states: to reject what is alien to us (i.e., sin) is the same as returning to what is ours by nature. But surely through moral purification man returns to his natural state, not to a supernatural state which requires a sacrament, either baptism or reconciliation.

(N.B. - Regarding the connection between 'returning to one's former state' and 'it is not ours [to accomplish]': what is not ours to accomplish is our likeness to God; what is ours is to return to this likeness. If both were our work, it would not be necessary to return to our primordial state, but it would be enough to progress and evolve in accordance with our own nature.)

(f) Again, what he seems to say in Oratio VI of 'De Beatitudinibus' is consistent with all the foregoing (i.e., with this mistaken notion).

Here is how he explains the words, 'The kingdom of God is within you' (Luke 17.21): '... to teach us that one who has purified his heart from every created thing and every sinful affection beholds the image of the divine nature *in his own beauty*. And it seems to me that the Word, in these few words, includes the following counsel: O you men, who have a desire to contemplate what is truly good, since you have heard that God's majesty is exalted above the heavens, that his glory is beyond all knowing, his beauty beyond all telling and his nature beyond comprehension, do not fall into despair because of being unable to behold the object of your desire. (The [Latin] translation that follows is not that in Migne.) For what you [sing.] can comprehend is the measure within you of contemplation of God who in fashioning you has placed such a great boon directly into your nature and essence. In forming you, God stamped upon you a likeness of the excellence of his own nature, like making an impression on a piece of wax. But wickedness that has spread over this godlike stamp has rendered this gift *useless* to you, covering it over with a filthy vesture. (The Migne translation follows.) If, therefore, *by diligent and careful living* you remove and wash off the stains upon your heart, that godlike beauty will *once again shine* in you. Just as in the case of *iron* ...' MG 44, 1269 D – 1272 B.

Clearly, in this passage that godlike beauty is conceived as a natural perfection. Granted that it was conferred gratuitously, nevertheless it was placed in man's nature and essence; it is not destroyed but only obscured by sin, and it is through diligent and careful living that it shines again for one's contemplation.

(g) Again, a little further on in the passage referred to in our text [Arnou] under § 29, p. 39, he says: Just as you [plur.] can contemplate the sun in a mirror, so also

'as long as you return to the grace of the image and likeness that was given to you in the beginning, you have within yourselves what you seek. For purity and the absence of passion and being a stranger to every evil – this is divinity. Therefore if these things are within you [sing.], God is certainly within you. If your *mind* [ratio; Gk., logismos] is clear of all vice, free of passion and far removed from every defilement, blessed are you because of your keeness of vision ... MG 44, 1272 C.

It is obvious that this grace of the image to which one returns through the purification of one's natural reason is not supernatural in our sense of the word, but only in the sense in which something given to man's essence without being owed to it can be said to be supernatural.

(h) Our final argument concerns Gregory's statement about infants who die prematurely: 'But an infant, who is simple and *free of all sin*, since he is still without any disease of the eyes of his soul to obstruct his participation in the light, is in a natural state and needs no healing that is obtained through purgation, since not even from the very beginning of his life has he allowed any disease whatsoever into his soul (MG 46, 177 D). τὸ δὲ απειφρόκακον νήπιον, μηδεμιᾶς νόσου τῶν τῆς ψυχῆς ὀμμάτων πρὸς τὴν τοῦ φωτὸς μετουσίαν επιπροσθούσης, ἐν τῷ κατὰ φύσιν γίνεται, μὴ δεόμενον τῆς ἐκ τοῦ καθαρθῆναι ὑγιείας, ὅτι μηδὲ τὴν ἀρχὴν τὴν νόσον τῇ ψυχῇ παραδέξατο.

So much for the question of sin. We must now inquire into the nature of that purification. Since this question seems to be too wide-ranging, we have narrowed it down in this exercise, deeming it sufficient for our purposes if we can throw some light on that element that is common to Platonists and the Fathers, and to pagans and Christians alike.

In Ennead IV, vii, 10, Plotinus says virtually the same thing about sin as we have just seen in Gregory. After proving the immortality of the soul from its divinity, he goes on: It is not by running to external things that the soul contemplates temperance and justice, but by remaining within itself and in contemplating itself and knowing what it was like before; once purified, it will see how badly the images within it, as it were, had become covered with rust over time. It is as if a piece of gold having a conscious mind had rid itself of some earthy alloy: whereas previously ignorant of itself because it did not see the gold, now, seeing itself unalloyed, it would marvel at its excellence, and would realize that it has no need

of any borrowed perfection, being itself supremely excellent as long as it is allowed to be by itself.

This doctrine appears to be quite the same as that which St. Gregory expressed in his explanation of the saying, 'The kingdom of God is within you.' We have a treasure within us and need but to wash off the dirt in order to be delighted by its form and beauty. However, Gregory's reason for detesting matter was certainly not the same as Plotinus's. For Plotinus, matter is evil itself, while for Gregory every work of God is good, including matter. Our problem, therefore, would seem to be this, to locate the element that is common to both Platonists and the Fathers.

In dealing with this question we must proceed in the manner of an inductive science, that is, by way of hypothesis and verification. The data for our investigation are the writings of both Platonists and the Fathers. The meaning of their words is certainly not obvious and clear; but without understanding what they said, no conclusion may legitimately be deduced from their statements. Hence we must proceed by way of hypotheses.

Let this, then, be our hypothesis or supposition. Human nature possesses a certain perception of and admiration for moral goodness, a perception that is very prominent in both Plato and Plotinus, and is not passed over in silence by Aristotle. This perception is intimately connected with the moral life, with the ascetical life, and with contemplation: with the moral life, for moral goodness tells one what must be done; with the ascetical life, because asceticism sharpens and increases this perception; and with contemplation, because this perception, though in a way sufficient unto itself, invites one to contemplation more than it stimulates rational activity. We shall see how much an elucidation of this hypothesis will contribute to an understanding of the Fathers.

First of all, then, there exists this perception. St Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae*, 2-2, q. 145, deals with moral goodness. In the first article he asks whether goodness is the same as virtue, to which he gives an affirmative answer. In the body of this article he states that goodness, even though not an ultimate end, is nevetheless in a way also desirable for its own sake. In his response to the first argument he quotes Cicero: '... it is anything that allures us by its own power and draws us by its worthiness – such as virtue, truth, knowledge ...' In the second article he quotes Augustine: 'I call [reading voco for votum; see the text] moral goodness intellectual beauty, which is properly called spiritual' (*83 Quaestiones*, Q. 30). Aquinas adopts this opinion of Augustine in the fourth article, where he states that moral goodness is a certain spiritual beauty.

Seeing St Thomas placing Cicero and Augustine side by side you will no doubt be reminded of this well-known passage in the Confessions: ‘And in the ordinary course of my studies, I came across a book of Cicero, whose eloquence is almost universally admired, though not his heart. That book, which is called Hortensius, contains an exhortation to philosophy. It changed my *affections* and redirected my *prayers* towards you, O Lord, and transformed my *wishes and desires*. Suddenly all vain hope *became worthless* to me, and I began to yearn with an *incredible burning desire* for the immortality of wisdom; and I began to arise and go back to you ... How I *burned* with desire, my God, to fly up from the things of earth to you; and *I was unaware* that you were urging me on! *For* wisdom is to be found with you. ‘Philosophy’ is the Greek word meaning ‘love of wisdom,’ and that book was setting me on fire for it ... And I at that time, as you know, O light of my heart,... yet the only thing in that exhortation that delighted me was this, that I was *aroused* and *enkindled* and *inflamed* to love and seek and obtain and hold fast and firmly embrace not this or that particular sect, but *Wisdom itself, whatever it might be*; and the only thing that *dampened my ardor* was that the name of Christ was not there’ (Conf. III, iv, 7; ML 32, 685).

Augustine has shown us quite persuasively how great and how profound was his perception of moral goodness. Nowadays his experience would be called religious in a broad sense rather than philosophical: for it is a question not of any specific truth but of the very idea of truth, not about this or that wisdom but about Wisdom itself, and not about wisdom considered by itself and known in the abstract, but about that wisdom that shines forth in any part of wisdom or consequence thereof and that stirs up the soul and moves the heart. Besides, his experience was not a speculative but a practical one, transforming his prayers and desires, changing his affections, banishing his vain hopes, and filling his heart with such a burning desire that, when written about twenty years after the event and read about fifteen hundred years later, it continues to burn with the bright flame of enthusiasm. Finally, an experience that turns the mind from the things of earth to God seems to be a religious, not a philosophical, experience. On the other hand, it must be said that this experience was not religious in the strict and proper sense. There was that burning, even though the name of Christ was not present, despite the fact that the absence of this name caused him some disquiet. Besides, Augustine was not aware that he was at that time moving towards God, nor did he know this until, after his conversion to his mother's religion, he learned that the incarnate Word was Wisdom itself. What are we to make of this? Surely that that experience is to be placed in that middle ground between philosophy and religion which we call platonic. What Augustine experienced was approximately the same as what Socrates and Plato and all great men and women in any age have

exerienced. Not, of course, that all who have such an experience understand and describe it after the manner of Plato, nor, obviously, that they have received it to the same degree of intensity as those extraordinary persons. Yet that everyone has the capacity for it is proven by, for example, St. Ignatius's meditation on the Kingdom of Christ. Why does he propose this meditation? Surely in order that the moral idealism and enthusiasm that flourished among the knights of old may be transferred and transfused into that other soldiery which, under the leadership of Christ, takes up arms against the devil: '... that I may not be deaf to his call, but *prompt and diligent* in carrying out his most holy will' (second prelude).

Writings such as these confirm the existence of this perception, and it is easy to gather from them what this perception is like. First of all, it is objective knowledge: one knows the attractiveness of temperance or the nobility of fortitude or the beauty of justice or the godlikeness of wisdom (I say 'godlikeness' because though to err or sin is human, a wise man as wise does not err and only as unwise does one sin). But there is not only this positive knowledge; along with it there is a similar knowledge of moral turpitude arising from an apprehension of the contrary vices, intemperance, cowardice, injustice, stupidity; and besides, this perception of turpitude seems to be stonger and more common that that of the beauty of those virtues. Third, it is not a matter of a merely objective knowledge, but above all of a knowledge that is also affective and in some way effective as well. As we saw in St. Thomas's quotation from Cicero, it is 'anything that by its own *power allures* us and *draws us by its worthiness*.' The strength of this power that allures and this worthiness that draws us we have already seen in Augustine; but we all experience it more or less in ourselves. Fourth, the strength and keenness of this perception will vary according to the fidelity with which we ordinarily follow and obey these movements of the soul; for it was specifically about this perception that Aristotle uttered his dictum, 'As a person's character is, so does his end or purpose seem to him.' One who devotes his life to the study and pursuit of virtue has as his purpose in life to see it clearly and consistently practise it. On the other hand, this perception of goodness in one who directs his life towards pleasures and devotes himself to them becomes so dulled that moral goodness seems pointless to him and the pursuit of virtue stupid.

Let us now examine the relevance of this perception to the ascetical life. Since a person's character determines his end or purpose in life, or, as Plato would say, like is known by like, this perception is corrupted by vice but is sharpened and strengthened by virtuous living. Augustine very perceptively indicates pleasure as the cause of this fact. In the sixth book of his 'De Musica' he goes from a

consideration of temporal numbers to that of eternal numbers – eternal numbers are those intellections or instances of knowledge that are known a priori and offer something like first principles of the musical art; cf. 'De Musica,' VI, xii, 35, 36; ML 32, 1182 – and proposes the following as the foundation of the ascetical life: 'Pleasure is, as it were, the weight of the soul. Pleasure, therefore, gives the soul its orientation. For "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mt 6.21):): where your pleasure is, there is your treasure; and where your heart is, there is your happiness or your misery' (ibid. xi, 29; ML 32, 1179). But our pleasure cannot be had in this world: 'Love for this world is very wearisome. For what the soul seeks in it, namely constancy and eternity, is not to be found; for the little beauty that there is is brought to an end by the transitoriness of things ...' (ibid. xiv, 44; ML 32, 1185). Therefore, 'Taste and see the sweetness of the Lord' (Ps 34.8). For, 'I think,' he says, 'that this is what is at stake in those virtues that purify the soul by this conversion. Love for temporal things would not be eliminated except by a certain sweetness in those that are eternal' (ibid. xvi, 52; ML 32, 1190). In concrete terms this means that Augustine would never have gotten rid of his earthly love if he had not been led to know and take delight in things that are eternal through his reading of Cicero's Hortensius. Pleasure orientates the soul; where your treasure is, there is your heart. Now if pleasure gives the soul its orientation, and the purpose of the ascetical life is above all to direct the soul and purify the heart of all evil affection, then without doubt this perception of and admiration for moral goodness is very closely bound up with the ascetical life.

So far we have taken Augustine, as pointed out to us by Aquinas, as an intermediary leading us to Plato. Now we must ask whether we can find in Plato what we have found in Augustine; and to this question the answer is affirmative. Because of the constraints of time and the nature of this exercise, however, we can provide only a few brief evidences for this.

First, then, a quotation from the dialogue called Theages [a dialogue of disputed authenticity, not included in the Bollingen Collection]:

Socrates: '... but, you know, I always say that I know nothing to speak of except that I do have some knowledge of matters of love. However, in this knowledge I am considered to surpass all men both past and present' (Theages 128b).

It is likely that this dialogue was among the first that Plato wrote, so that it represents the early period of Platonism. Moreover, it is almost certain that the love that Socrates speaks of has to do with the beauty of moral goodness; for the

one kind of knowledge that Socrates had and the one in which he excelled all others is said to be this knowledge of love. We may confirm this from the fact that the dialogues belonging to this period, which are called the Socratic dialogues, generally treat of virutes: Charmides, temperance; Laches, fortitude; Meno, virtue, Gorgias, justice. The first two seem to be intended to show the irreducibility of these ideas (temperance, fortitude); in Meno the theory of reminiscence is postulated to explain this irreducibility; finally, in The Symposium, The Republic, and Phaedrus this theory of reminiscence is developed and expanded into the contemplation of the Ideas or Forms.

Another confirmation can be drawn from the well-known Socratic irony. For one who knows about a particular virtue only what is *proper* to, say, an upright or temperate or brave or just person, both knows and does not know what is virtue in general or what those particular virtues are. He does know, because he has a very keen perception of how beautiful and how good virtues are; but at the same time he does not know, because he is ignorant of the intrinsic meaning of virtue. For although the perception of moral goodness reveals what is morally good and what is morally evil, it does not at all explain either why or how what is good is good and what is evil, evil. Moreover, the Socratic method was precisely to find the definition of something that was known. Socrates himself knew well that he did not know its definition; but his interlocutor, who knew the thing in question, also thought that its definition would be easy to find. In this he was greatly mistaken, and Socrates was unsparing in exposing his errors.

A third argument is from what the Neoplatonist Plotinus says on this matter:

We must, then, also inquire into our experience of love for non-sensible realities. What do you feel regarding what are called noble pursuits, a fine character, a temperate way of life, and, in short, all virtuous actions and dispositions and beauty of soul? ... You are affected ... you revel ... you are transported ... you are inflamed with desire ... you yearn to slough off your body and be one with them ... These (excellent things) are the really real things. What is it in all these virtues that shines forth like the sun? (Enn. I, vi, 5).

There is no doubt that this passage is about the perception of moral goodness and one's admiration for it. But this light that shines in the virtues reveals the ‘love for non-sensible realities.’ This surely reminds us of Augustine’s experience of delight and ardor and love. ‘These are the really real things,’ for the love of this world is very wearisome, whereas the intelligible world possesses and contains

true reality. ‘You desire to slough off your body,’ for pleasure gives the soul its orientation, and where your treasure is, there is your heart also.

We must proceed quickly now, and so I think enough has been said about this almost endless question. Let us, then, take this perception of moral goodness to be the most fundamental element in the development of Platonism; and let us suppose it to be both actually existing (the divine law written in our hearts) and intimately connected to morality and asceticism. But of course Platonism is not true in all its aspects, and so something must be said about its aberrations. Let us take Socrates’s extraordinary and unparallelled knowledge of the intelligible and of love to be true: not every doctrine either deduced from it or developed by the Platonists can be accepted as true.

In our investigation of these aberrations we shall limit ourselves to Plotinus.

After mentioning intellectual love in the above quotation, Plotinus went on to explain this love by its contrary baseness:

Baseness comes to the soul as an adventitious evil ... Hence the soul does not see what it ought to be contemplating, as a result of being continually dragged outside itself and beneath itself into darkness ...

We must immediately distinguish between what is true and what is false. Certainly there is a law in our members that wars against the law in our mind and tends to darken the mind itself; the body, therefore, is in a way an evil that comes to the soul from outside of it. But distinguish between evil in its cause and evil admitted in the will: the former is outside the soul, the latter inside it. Plotinus continues:

This baseness belongs to a soul that is not pure and simple, like gold mixed with earth ... And so a soul that has been set free from the desires it has by reason of the body, to which it is too closely attached, and released from other passions and cleansed of the effects of its embodiment, remaining now by itself alone has entirely rid itself of the baseness that had come to it from an extraneous nature (Enn. I, vi, 5).

This would be true if all evil were extrinsic to the soul. But as Plotinus himself admits, the soul is too closely attached to the body; hence, if he had believed in free will he would have had to admit the presence of evil in the soul itself and the need for its internal purification. On this basis, then, it is possible to determine

where the truth and the falsity lie in his doctrine concerning matter. He speaks of matter as being ‘so evil that it fills with its own evil whatever is not yet in it but merely looks towards it’ (Enn. I, viii, 4). It is certainly very true that the truths of eternity are hidden and obscured by the sensible world; therefore the life of the senses in us can be a causal evil unless we counteract it through sound doctrine and meditation. But a hypothetical causal evil is not yet an evil within the soul, nor does that possibility of an abuse of matter prove its inherent evil.

We come now to our final observation. So far we have dealt with Plotinus’s doctrine on matter as evil; now let us consider what he says about contemplation. In the following passage, Plotinus intimates that the soul rises to contemplation:

The soul that has come back to itself and, as it were, just now emerged [from matter] cannot immediately look at these luminous realities. It has to accustom itself to seeing noble pursuits ... noble deeds ... and finally to behold the soul of those who do noble deeds ... How? Go into yourself and look; and if you do not yet see yourself as beautiful, then, like a sculptor making a statue, lop off what is excessive, straighten what is crooked, get rid of the dark areas and make them shine, and do not stop polishing this statue of yours until the godlike splendor of virtue shines forth and you behold temperance seated on its sacred throne. If you are thus changed ... [and see] all of and only the true light ... Having become this vision ... look intently; for only this eye sees the highest beauty ... For the seer must be connatural and similar to what which is seen. First, therefore, be wholly divine, wholly beautiful, if you would behold god and beauty (Enn. I, vi, 9).

It is indeed not easy to know what to think about this passage. Augustine’s description of the love of wisdom does not suffice to explain this contemplation, but we must know whether Plotinian mysticism is natural, and if so, whether it is healthy or pathological. I am certainly not promising to address this question; but whatever must be said about contemplation itself, we can at least express the following opinion. First, it is closely connected with the perception of moral goodness, as evidenced by the words of Plotinus: ‘noble pursuits,’ ‘virtuous actions.’ ‘the soul of those who do noble deeds,’ ‘temperance seated on its sacred throne.’ Second, this contemplation stretches to the limit the truth, ‘Like is known by like,’ or ‘As a person’s character is, so does his end or purpose appear to him,’ where the ‘like’ that is known and the ‘like’ that knows merge into one at the summit. Third, the ascent to this contemplation is closely connected with the ascetical life, for it involves living morally and purifying the heart of earthly attachments and illusions.

Let us now return to St Gregory to render judgment on his doctrine on sin and purification, as this doctrine is illustrated in the texts we have quoted.

There are two things to consider: the theological doctrine on sin, and the ascetical and mystical doctrine on sin. The theological doctrine on sin is suitably divided into what regards the first state of mankind and the situation in the subsequent state. The ascetical doctrine is suitably divided into a consideration of prayer, of what is called intellectualism, and of apatheia.

The first state of mankind consisted of three elements: natural, preternatural, and supernatural. Beginning with Irenaeus, the Fathers of the Church interpreted the verse in Genesis, 'Let us make man in our image and likeness' as supernatural grace; so also did St Gregory, as we have seen. But this image of God in the soul could refer not only to supernatural grace but also to a certain cognitive faculty; and this for two reasons, first, because the Platonists used to speak about some divine knowledge had through the soul, and second, because scripture itself mentioned Adam's familiarity with God in Paradise. In addition there was the practice of interpreting the bible allegorically, in which Clement [of Alexandria] imitated Philo. Using this sort of interpretation, Athanasius understood Paradise as referring to the abode of the Ideas; and in the spirit of such an interpretation, Gregory put forth the *hypothesis* that if God had not foreseen man's sin, he would not have created the human body. But no doubt the main reason was that the Scholastics had not yet enriched theology with their sharp distinctions; for once a distinction is made between the supernatural and the natural, no confusion can ever arise between Adam's familiarity with God in Paradise and the Platonic contemplation of the Ideas. Adam's familiarity was a preternatural gift; Platonic contemplation must be said to be either natural or something unknown. On the other hand, before that distinction was made, it was hardly surprising that some Fathers who did not refer to tradition but embellished their orations with Platonism were less careful in their utterances. As we have seen, we have solid grounds for suspecting that St Gregory conceived the supernatural image of God to be such that it was not destroyed by sin but only obscured or darkened. Also, the passage from Athanasius's Oratio ad Gentes quoted above casts the same suspicion on him.

Also, since Platonists held the divine image placed in the soul to be the fruit of a morally good life and the practice of virtue, Platonism affected not only the teaching on sin but also the conduct of the ascetical life. On this point we may take this as most certain: let us say that there may have been some who embraced Christianity but who nevertheless would have deserved to be called Platonists

more than Christians. It would be wrong, of course, to even suspect this of those whom the universal Church proclaims as saints. We must therefore invoke the very serviceable distinction between the *id quod* and the *modus quo* – the matter and the manner. We deny that Gregory's asceticism was Platonic; but he seems to have described and conceived the ascetical life after the manner of Platonic descriptions and explanations of the same.

First, he speaks about *apatheia*. The difference between [Ignatian] indifference and apatheia is that indifference is solely in the will whereas apatheia excludes evil movements both in the will and in the rest of the person. Apatheia can be taken in an absolute or a relative sense. It is understood in an absolute sense by Plotinus, for whom the soul and body were entirely separate from each other and the body was the origin and source of all evil movements. Taken in a relative sense, however, apatheia is that purity of heart which the saints ordinarily attain. Accordingy, absolute apatheia differs from the relative in that the absolute is a denial of the body while the relative is an affirmation of that perfection of virtue, that acquisition of good moral habits, whereby a holy man with the greatest of ease can do what to a novice seems not only very difficult but practically impossible. We may think, for example, of St Francis's remark to Brother Juniper: 'Ci sarà … perfetta letizia.' We may ask, then, in what sense Gregory used the word 'apatheia.' The texts we have quoted are not sufficient to answer this question. We simply make two observations: first, Gregory rejected the basis of Platonic apatheia, since for Plotinus matter is intrinsically evil while for Gregory every work of God is good; secondly, it is possible that Gregory merely used this Platonic term without understanding what it referred to; but this is not a considered judgment nor an opinion, but only a supposition.

Apatheia is a denial of the senses as appetitive. There are two aspects to intellectualism: first, as opposed to the senses as cognitive, and second, as minimizing the role of the will.

From the passages quoted above we can easily gather that in his oration Gregory had in mind not the man Christ as known and made present through the senses and imagination but the eternal and simply intelligible divine Word. The kingdom of God seems to be within us in such a way that we are to contemplate and love not the incarnate Word but some sort of divine beauty stamped upon the soul. It is obvious how far removed this is from Christian devotion. In addition to this aberration there is the following error: it is strongly suggested that to attain mystical experience one need use only human effort as being by itself efficacious for attaining it. Both Plotinus and a Christian can attain a knowledge of the image

in the soul through a process of moral purification. The Christian can surely do what the pagan can do; but the question is, what is this in relation to eternal life? All the great teachers in the church agree that Christian mysticism is beyond our natural powers. We can exonerate Gregory, since this truth was brought to light by others after his time; yet it seems that being influenced by Platonism he must be said to have expounded a false tendency in the spiritual life.

The other sort of intellectualism is that which does not take sufficient account of the will. We have already noted that Gregory, at least in these passages, said nothing about the voluntariness of sin, the guilt of the sinner, his need for repentance, or sin as an offense against God. This other aspect of intellectualism is intimated in our text, 29, where we read: 'If your mind (ho en soi logismos) is clean of all vice, free of all passion, far removed from all defilement, blessed are you because of your keeness of vision ...' Clearly, these words make us think of Platonic dialectic. According to Proclus, Commentarium in Parmeniden, there are three such dialectics: the first, which arouses the minds of young men from slumber, as it were, by putting questions to them for discussion, as in Thaeatetus; the second, which is explanatory and arrives at truth through disjunctions and reasoning, as in Parmenides; and the third, which in contemplating the various degrees of beauty progresses from sensible beauty to absolute intelligible beauty (cf. The Symposium, The Republic, Phaedrus), as in the example above from Plotinus: noble pursuits, noble deeds, the soul of those who act honorably. This third dialectic is involved when we speak about the purification of the soul: like is known by like, or, as Aristotle says, as a person's character is, so will his end or purpose seem to him. Our question is, then, whether Gregory had this tendency towards intellectualism because he spoke of purification as a purification of the mind [Lat. ratio]. Our answer must be affirmative, but the matter has to be understood properly.

First of all, Gregory was not infected with intellectualism in the same way as Socrates was. Socrates seems to have denied the freedom of the will: oudeis ekon kakos, 'no-one is evil willingly'; but we cannot even suspect Gregory of this, both because he was a Christian and because along with Christians and against the Gnostics he affirmed that every work of God was good (moral evil, therefore, is from an evil free will). Also, Gregory was not intellectualistic in the sense that he simply ignored the role of the will. It may be that he seems to have spoken in this way; his terminology, however, is considerably different from ours. Just as wisdom mainly regards the intellect but nevertheless includes the will (for a wise man does not sin, and insofar as one is a sinner, to that extext he is unwise), so likewise that purification of the mind intrinsically presupposes and postulates a

good will. The purification of the mind is not just a matter of meditation but a transformation of the whole mind; nor are only one's speculative judgments transformed but above all one's practical judgments, judgments of value, and moral judgments. This transformation, moreover, is *moral in the proper sense*: as a person's character is, so does his end seem to him; the purification of the mind is a purification of that quality of the soul according to which a person knows his end and embraces it. In the light of this, Gregory's intellectualism is greatly reduced; it consists in the fact that he does not distinctly speak of the will, and therefore does not distinctly speak of guilt or repentance or sorrow for sin or a gratuitous offence against God. It would be a serious mistake to minimize the importance of this absence of a clear and distinct conception. For concepts prepare the way for and direct one's manner of life, and it is hard to understand a 'purgative way' in which personal relationships, feelings of shame, sorrow, remorse, confidence, asking pardon, and love are largely ignored or absent altogether. Still, do not immediately decree Gregory blameless. At least go first to Aristotle and ask him about the nature of the will; you will not find any simple answer. (Cf. Nicomachean Ethics III, i & ii; 1109 b 30 ff.; VI, ii, 5; 1139 b 4). Our word 'will' [Lat. voluntas] cannot be translated by just one word in Aristotle's terminology. His word proairēsis means 'deliberate choice'; boulēsis refers only to willing the end, not the means; hekousion does not mean 'voluntary' in our sense since children and the other animals act hekousiōs (ibid. III, ii, 2 & 7; 1111 b 8 & 19). As far as the words go you will find our definition of the will in Aristotle; for he speaks of proairēsis, 'pre-election,' as an intellectual appetite (orexis dianētikē), but this seems to be an incidental remark, especially when at the same time and in the same sentence he uses an alternative expression, 'appetitive intellect' (nous orektikos). But let us not be too hard on this pagan; the Fathers themselves are evidence of how much the Catholic religion contributed to clarify the notion of the will. There is a curious passage in St. Athanasius' Oratio III Contra Arianos, 65: Those who hold that the Son was made by will [boulēsei] must also declare him to have been made by practical wisdom [phronēsei]; for I consider will and practical wisdom to be the same thing.

To conclude, we must make a few final comments. First of all, our discussion was not about St Gregory's considered and firmly held opinions but only about certain passages where the holy Doctor expressed himself somewhat carelessly. To determine his mind on any subject one would obviously have to consider his entire work. Next, one should take seriously Aristotle'ss admonition about judging the opinions of others: 'For it is the mark an educated person to ask for just so much precision on any given subject as the nature of that subject warrants; it is as unreasonable to accept merely probable arguments from a mathematician

as to require strict proofs from an orator.' Accordingly, although one may with the utmost care study and examine all the writings of the Fathers, it would be foolish to expect that in their orations, controversies, ascetical works, and pious exhortations one should find the same precision which only the greatest minds of the medieval period were to achieve. It is not ours to ask why God did not give the church a St Thomas until the thirteenth century. What is helpful to note, however, is how much obscurity, not to say error, was able to creep in before clear scholastic distinctions were made – in theology, for example, between the natural and supernatural orders, and in philosophy between the intellect and will.