

‘WE ALL WERE THAT ONE MAN’: AUGUSTINE ON THE ORIGIN OF SOULS AND OUR BOND WITH ADAM

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Abstract

Augustine’s view on the doctrine of original sin is closely informed by his view on the origin of souls. He held that all people were present in Adam when he sinned and, since in Augustine’s view sin is in the first place a matter of the human soul, the question is the following: how/in what way were all human souls in Adam when he sinned? And how does Augustine’s answer to that question relate to Plotinus’s doctrine of the pretemporal fall of the pre-existent soul? This article argues that the terminology Augustine uses to describe what happens to the soul reflects Plotinus’s doctrine of a pretemporal fall of the pre-existent soul. While Augustine does not teach a pretemporal fall of the soul, he does teach an ontological fall of the entire human race in Adam. Just like in Plotinus’s Neoplatonic anthropology all souls share a common existence in the one Soul, so Augustine holds all human beings to have a common existence in Adam preceding their individual existence. When Adam sinned, all human beings sinned in this common existence with Adam. This renders them all guilty, even before their concrete appearance in history. Since that guilt is common, it is not an alien guilt, but their own.

Keywords

Augustine, original sin, origin of the souls, Plotinus, Robert J. O’Connell, Ronnie J. Rombs

1. Introduction

Augustine¹ posits that all people are born with an inner disharmony he qualifies as *concupiscentia* (‘desire’). This *concupiscentia* is the senses’ disobedience to the mind, a state of moral ignorance and

¹ For Augustine’s works I use the abbreviations in Cornelius Mayer (Hg.), *Augustinus-Lexikon Vol. 3* (Basel 2010), XI-XXXII.

weakness.² After the first sin of Adam, this *concupiscentia* became a part of human nature, explaining why every person necessarily sins.³

In later writings like the *Contra secundam Iuliani responsionem opus imperfectum*, Augustine emphasizes that the state in which we are born is not only a punishment for Adam's sin, but is itself also sin, rendering all people guilty before God even before they are born.⁴ This is because every person shares in Adam's sin and thus becomes him- or herself guilty of that sin, since according to Augustine the entire human race was already present in Adam when he sinned.⁵

This raises the question of how that applies also to the human soul, since Augustine held sin to be above all a matter of the soul.⁶ In what way were all human souls in Adam when he sinned? With this, Augustine finds himself facing the difficult question of the origin of souls.

This article proposes to examine Augustine's answer to this question, offering a view of the philosophical background to his doctrine of original sin. For how is it that 'we all were that one man [Adam]' (*omnes fuimus ille unus*)?⁷ First, I will focus on the Plotinian hue of what Augustine writes about the vicissitudes of the soul in the first period of his writings, up to and including the *Confessiones* (§ 2). After that, I will describe Augustine's reaction to Origen's doctrine of the soul's pre-existent fall (§ 3). Finally, I will examine his later writings from the period of the Pelagian controversies with regard to the origin of souls (§ 4).

2. Plotinian hue

In book three of *De libero arbitrio*, Augustine lists four theories on the origin of souls, without making a choice between them: (a) God created one soul (Adam's), from which all human souls descend (traducianism);⁸ (b) souls are created individually for each newly born

² For the meaning of the concept *concupiscentia* in Augustine, see: Gerald Bonner, 'Concupiscentia', in: Cornelius Mayer (Hg.), *Augustinus-Lexikon Vol. 1* (Basel 1994), 1113-1122.

³ *ciu.* 14.1; *nat. et gr.* 3.3; *perf. iust.* 2.3; *c. Iul. imp.* 1.72, 4.103, 5.59 and 6.41.

⁴ *c. Iul. imp.* 1.47, 2.233, 5.59.

⁵ *c. Iul. imp.* 2.163, 2.177, 2.179, 4.76, 5.12, 6.9, 6.22.

⁶ *ciu.* 14.3; *orig. an.* (= *ep.* 166) 1.5.

⁷ *ciu.* 13.14 (CCL 48, 395): 'Omnes enim fuimus in illo uno, quando omnes fuimus ille unus, qui per feminam lapsus est in peccatum (...)'.
⁸ *lib. arb.* 3.20.56.

person (creatianism);⁹ (c) souls already exist somewhere in the hidden regions of God, and are sent to animate and govern the bodies of each person born;¹⁰ (d) souls created elsewhere are not sent by God, but come to inhabit bodies by their own choice.¹¹

Theories (c) and (d) proceed from the assumption that God creates the souls and keeps them in a place hidden from us, until they are joined to a body. This union can take place either (c) because God *sends* the soul into a body, or (d) because the soul animates a body *by its own choice*. As such, these theories assume the soul's pre-existence. Furthermore, theory (d) assumes a *fall* of this pre-existent soul.

The background to the theories (c) and (d) is Plotinus's doctrine of the soul.¹² In this doctrine,¹³ the Soul—which is the third hypostasis, after the One and the Intellect—occupies an intermediate position between the intelligible and the sensible realm. It belongs to the Soul to generate the sensible world and to give shape to it. As soon as the Soul is excessively focused on the sensible, the lower parts of the Soul descend and come to be connected with the sensible. This is the moment—understood logically rather than chronologically—when

⁹ *lib. arb.* 3.20.56.

¹⁰ *lib. arb.* 3.20.57.

¹¹ *lib. arb.* 3.20.58.

¹² The scholarly consensus is that Augustine's concept of *anima* is 'predominantly of Neoplatonic origin', 'mainly derived from his perusal of the *Platonicorum libri*': Gerald J.P. O'Daly, 'Anima, animus', in: Cornelius Mayer (Hg.), *Augustinus-Lexikon Vol. 1* (Basel 1986), 315-340, there 317. The *Platonicorum libri* which Augustine obtained (*conf.* 7, 13) are generally thought to be Neoplatonic texts, in Latin translation, of Plotinus and Porphyry: Michael Erler, 'Platonicorum libri', in: Robert Dodaro, Cornelius Mayer, Christof Müller (Hg.), *Augustinus-Lexikon Vol. 4* (Basel 2016), 762-764. See also the concluding remark of Andrew Smith, 'Plotinus', in: Dodaro, Mayer, Müller (Hg.), *Augustinus-Lexikon Vol. 4* (Basel 2016), 772-774, there 774: 'We will probably never be able to say with certainty that A[ugustine]'s Neoplatonic ideas came directly from P[lotinus], but there are some indications that he did have the text of some of P. (probably in Latin translation) before him and that, even if many of the ideas of P. were mediated through Porphyry, they are nevertheless P.'s ideas whose originaive genius A. clearly recognised'.

¹³ For a recent study of Plotinus's doctrine of the soul, see David Caluori, *Plotinus on the Soul* (Cambridge 2015). See also Stephen R.L. Clark, 'Plotinus: Body and Soul', in: Lloyd P. Gerson (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge 1996), 275-291; Jens Halfwassen, *Plotin und der Neuplatonismus* (München 2004), 102-128. Caluori's study provides an explanation of the so-called hypostasis Soul and its relationship to individual souls, including the World Soul. In my dissertation *Erfzonde? Onvermijdelijkheid en verantwoordelijkheid* [Eng. *Original Sin? Inevitability and Responsibility*] (Utrecht 2018), my description of Plotinus's doctrine in the context of a comparison between him and Augustine (37, 48-51) fails to distinguish sufficiently between the hypostasis Soul and the World Soul.

the one Soul falls apart into a multitude of individual souls; it is the fall of the soul.¹⁴ The cause of the soul's fall is audacity (*τόλμα*) in a pejorative sense; a hubris through which the lower parts of the Soul prefer a body of their own to have and control, instead of being satisfied with being part of the one Soul.¹⁵ This individualization is therefore a question of sin and culpability. Oneness is always preferable to plurality. Meanwhile, the individualization of the souls does not eliminate the unity as Soul. The Soul is at once unity and plurality; as individual souls, the souls remain in some way one.

Insofar as the individualization of souls and their union with bodies is the consequence of hubris, the souls bear guilt. On the other hand, the individualization is a necessary and natural process; in that process, the souls have been sent into bodies. Therefore, the present state of souls (i.e., those involved in the material) is at the same time a matter of guilt ('fall') and of necessity ('sent').¹⁶ Plotinus's doctrine

¹⁴ Plotinus treats the descent of the soul into bodies in *Enneades* IV.8: ΠΕΡΙ ΤΗΣ ΕΙΣ ΤΑ ΣΩΜΑΤΑ ΚΑΘΟΔΟΥ ΤΗΣ ΨΥΧΗΣ (Arthur H. Armstrong, *Plotinus*. With an English translation, 7 vols. (Cambridge 1966-1984), Vol. 4: *Enneades* IV.1-9, 396-423). In *Enneades* IV.8.4, Plotinus states: 'But they [the individual souls] change from the whole to being a part and belonging to themselves, and, as if they were tired of being together, they each go to their own. (...) It is by now applying itself to and caring for things outside and is present and sinks deep into the individual part (*καὶ ὅσα αὐτοῦ πολλὰ εἰς τὸ εἶσω*)' (translation Armstrong). Armstrong comments: 'This is a particularly clear expression of Plotinus's constant conviction that the sin of the soul is self-isolation, individualism, a turning away (never quite complete) from the free universality of its higher state to bind itself to the particular' (Armstrong, *Plotinus*, Vol. 4, 408-409). Plotinus continues: 'It was altogether better for it [the soul] before when it was running upwards; it is fallen (*πεσοῦσα*), therefore, and is caught, and is engaged with its fetter (...) ' (Armstrong, *Plotinus*, Vol. 4, 410-411). The soul does not aim at the whole, but 'plunges into the interior (*εἰς τὸ εἶσω δότο*) and does not stay whole with whole'; this is a descent (*κατάβασις*) to what is lower (*Enneades* IV.8.7; Armstrong, *Plotinus*, Vol. 4, 418-419).

¹⁵ Naguib Baladi, 'Origine et signification de l'audace chez Plotin', in *Le Néoplatonisme*. Colloques internationaux du Centre national de la recherche scientifique (Paris 1971), 89-97; Natale Joseph Torchia, *Plotinus, Tolma, and the Descent of Being. An Exposition and Analysis* (New York 1993). 'The locus classicus of tolma-language in the *Enneades*' (Torchia, *Plotinus*, 79) is *Enneades* V.1.1: 'What is it, then, which has made the souls forget their father, God, and be ignorant of themselves and him, even though they are parts which come from his higher world and altogether belong to it? The beginning of evil for them was audacity (*ἀρχὴ μὲν οὖν αὐταῖς τοῦ κακοῦ ἡ τόλμα*) and coming to birth and the first otherness and the wishing to belong to themselves' (*Enneades* V.1.1; Armstrong, *Plotinus*, Vol. 5, 10-11).

¹⁶ 'For everything which goes to the worse does so unwillingly, but, since it goes by its own motion, when it experiences the worse it is said to be punished for what it did (*λέγεται τὴν ἐφ' οἷς ἐπραξε δίκην*)'; a few lines down, the course of the descent is called sin (*ἀμαρτία*). 'But when it is eternally necessary by the law of nature that it should do and experience these things (...) if anyone said that a god sent it down

of the fall of the soul therefore has three aspects to it:¹⁷ (1) *ontological*: the moment of the fall of the soul is the moment of the individualization of the souls and the soul-body compound; (2) *cosmogonic*: the fall of the soul, which ushers in its involvement with the material, is how the material takes shape; as such, the fall of the soul explains the emergence of the (visible) universe; (3) *moral*: the fall of the soul is a matter of hubris.

This Plotinian anthropology is readily recognized in theories (c) and (d) on the origin of souls as described by Augustine: either souls are sent into a body by God (cf. c; then it is a matter of necessity), or else they inhabit bodies by their own choice (d; then it is a matter of guilt). These two possibilities do not constitute an absolute contrast, but are two sides of the same reality.

What is Augustine's stand on these Plotinian views? In *De libero arbitrio*, he does not reject any of the four above-listed theories out of hand. He therefore does not dismiss the theories that assume the soul's existence prior to its joining a body (c and d). The same even holds true for the view positing that the soul's union with a body is the result of a 'fall' of that pre-existent soul (d).

In writings from his earliest period up to and including the *Confessiones*, Augustine describes the vicissitudes of the soul using a terminology that on many points parallels that of Plotinus.¹⁸ In doing so he seems to assume a fall of the pre-existent soul. That soul had an intermediate position between the (higher) spiritual and the (lower) material. 'Sin' was the soul's turn (*auersio*) from the higher reality (God) to lower things. The cause of sin is hubris, that is, the soul's desire to have something to itself, to have dominion over something. Due to this sin, the soul fell into a body—that is the fall of the soul, and the moment of its individuation. Nevertheless, the soul remains a unity: simultaneously it is unity and multitude.

On the one hand, the union with the body is the soul's fall. On the other hand, God created the soul with the desire for the lower (for this is how God shapes the lower, through the souls). Therefore, the fall of the soul is at once a matter of guilt and necessity.

(καταπέμψαι) he would not be out of accord with the truth or with himself" (*Enneades* IV.8.5; Armstrong, *Plotinus*, Vol. 4, 412-413). See also Robert J. O'Connell, *St. Augustine's Early Theory of Man, A.D. 386-391* (Cambridge 1969), 152-155.

¹⁷ For this classification, see Ronnie J. Rombs, *Saint Augustine and the Fall of the Soul. Beyond O'Connell and His Critics* (Washington 2006), xx-xxi.

¹⁸ O'Connell, *St. Augustine's Early Theory of Man*, 155-183; Rombs, *Saint Augustine and the Fall of the Soul*, 42-66.

In *De Genesi aduersus Manichaeos* (388-389),¹⁹ Augustine discusses Genesis 2:5. The Latin translation which he uses reads as follows: 'There was made the day on which God made heaven and earth, and all the green of the field before it was upon the earth and every food of the field' (2.3.4).²⁰ Augustine understands 'the green of the field' as 'the invisible creature', that is, the soul (*inuisibilem creaturam [...] sicut est anima*) (2.3.4). 'Before it [the green of the field] was upon the earth' means 'before the soul sinned. For soiled by earthly desires, it is correctly said to have come to be upon the earth or to be upon the earth' (2.3.5).²¹

That the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil are planted in the *middle* of paradise signifies for Augustine the mid-rank of the soul (*medietas animae*)²² between God and the pleasures of the body. When the soul abandons God and turns to itself (*ad seipsam conuersa*) and wills to enjoy its own power as if without God, it swells up with pride (*superbia*) (2.9.12).

In his explanation of Genesis 3:22-23 (2.22.34), Augustine draws a subtle distinction between 'dismissing' and 'excluding'. The Latin translation he uses says that God dismissed (*dimisit*) Adam from paradise, not that he excluded (*excluserit*) him. That is to make clear, says Augustine, that Adam was pulled down by the weight of his own sins to a place that suits him. That the soul found its place in the body (which, in Augustine's view, is the very point of the passage) both comes about by the fault of the soul and results from the fact that the soul is sent into the body by God.²³

In *De libero arbitrio* 2.19.53 (written between 391 and 395), Augustine writes: 'By adhering to the changeless good, which is common to all, the will (*uoluntas*) acquires the principal and important goods, though the will is itself an intermediate good. But when it turns

¹⁹ In this part of the excursus, I use parentheses to refer to passages from Augustine's *De Genesi aduersus Manichaeos* (CSEL 91, 67-172). English translation: Roland J. Teske, *Saint Augustine On Genesis: Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichees and On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book*. The Fathers of the Church 84 (Washington 1991), 47-141.

²⁰ 'Factus est ergo dies, quo die fecit Deus coelum et terram et omnia uiridia agri, antequam essent super terram, et omne pabulum agri' (CSEL 91, 121).

²¹ 'Deinde quod addidit: *antequam esset super terram*, intellegitur: antequam anima peccaret. Terrenis enim cupiditatibus sordidata tamquam super terram nata uel super terram esse recte dicitur' (CSEL 91, 123).

²² Compare also 2.15.22 (CSEL 91, 144): '(...) illa medietate, per quam deo subiecti erant et corpora subiecta habebant (...)'.
²³ Rombs, *Saint Augustine and the Fall of the Soul*, 55-59; O'Connell, *St. Augustine's Early Theory of Man*, 171s.

away (*auersa*) from the changeless good, common to all, and turns towards (*conuersa*) a good of its own, or to an external or lower good, then the will sins. It turns towards a good of its own whenever it wants to be its own master (...).²⁴ Evil consists in 'its turning to goods that are changeable'; it is that 'turning away' and 'turning to' (*auersio atque conuersio*) which are punished.²⁵

The *Confessiones*²⁶ (written between 397 and 401)²⁷ also reflect the terminology of Plotinus. Here too Augustine seems to assume a fall of the pre-existent soul which has to be overcome by a return to God: '[But] if your physical perception were capable of comprehending the whole and had not, for your punishment, been justly restrained to a part of the universe, you would wish everything at present in being to pass away, so that the totality of things could provide you with greater pleasure' (4.11.17). Later on he writes: 'By the Platonic books I was admonished to return into myself. With you as my guide I entered into my innermost citadel (...). And I found myself far from you "in the region of dissimilarity" (*regio dissimilitudinis*) (...)' (7.10.16). The Neoplatonic way of thinking shows itself in Augustine's description of 'sin': it is 'a perversity of will twisted away from the highest substance, you O God, towards inferior things, rejecting its own inner life and swelling with external matter' (7.17.22). He continues: 'I was caught up to you by your beauty and quickly torn away from you by my weight.'²⁸ With a groan I crashed into inferior things. (...) But with me there remained a memory of you' (7.17.23). And: 'By continence we are collected together and brought to the unity from which we disintegrated into multiplicity (*a quo in multa defluximus*)' (10.29.40). So, Augustine writes: 'I slipped

²⁴ 'Voluntas ergo adhaerens communi atque incommutabili bono impetrat prima et magna hominis bona, cum ipsa sit medium quoddam bonum. Voluntas autem auersa ab incommutabili et communi bono et conuersa ad proprium bonum aut ad exterius aut ad inferius, peccat. Ad proprium conuertitur, cum suae potestatis uult esse (...)' (CSEL 74, 86). English translation: Robert P. Russell, *St. Augustine: The Teacher, The Free Choice of the Will, Grace and Free Will*. The Fathers of the Church 59 (Washington 1968), 161-162.

²⁵ '(...) malum sit auersio eius ab incommutabili bono et conuersio ad mutabilia bona; quae tamen auersio atque conuersio quoniam non cogitur, sed est uoluntaria, digna et iusta eam miseriae poena subsequitur' (CSEL 74, 87).

²⁶ In the following part of the excursus, I use parentheses to refer to passages from the *Confessiones* (CCL 27, 1-273). English translation: *Saint Augustine, Confessions*. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Henry Chadwick (Oxford 1998).

²⁷ Erich Feldmann, 'Confessiones', in: Cornelius Mayer (Hg.), *Augustinus-Lexikon Vol. 1* (Basel 1994), 1134-1193; there 1184.

²⁸ In a note to this passage, Chadwick (see note 26), 127, points to very similar language in Plotinus.

down into the dark and was plunged into obscurity. Yet from there, even from there I loved you. "I erred and I remembered you" (Ps. 118:176). "I heard your voice behind me" (Ezek. 3:12) calling me to return' (12.10.10). In his writings from this first period (up to and including the *Confessiones*), Augustine therefore *seems* implicitly to be assuming a 'fall' of the pre-existent soul. But is that actually his assumption? Opinions are much divided. Goulven Madec and Gerald J.P. O'Daly are insistent in their denial that Augustine ever believed in a pre-existence of the soul, even in the first period following his conversion.²⁹ But Robert J. O'Connell is just as strongly convinced that he did.³⁰ Ronnie J. Rombs, on the other hand, takes an intermediary position. As far as Augustine's early, pre-*Confessiones* writings are concerned, he agrees with O'Connell.³¹ Yet he insists that the Plotinian concept of the fall of the soul is prominently present in the *Confessiones*, nevertheless adding that Augustine is primarily interested in the *moral* aspect of this fall, rather than in any ontological and cosmogonic aspects. Plotinus's terminology is thus used to describe *the psychology of sin*, the sin of everyone.³²

For this first period, I leave the question of Augustine's adherence to Plotinianism undecided. In the context of this article, the answer to this question is more important for the period of the Pelagian controversies, and I will return to it in § 4 below. For now, it is sufficient just to note that at least Augustine's *terminology* shows definite influences from Plotinus.

²⁹ Goulven Madec, 'Bulletin augustinien pour 1963', *Revue des études augustiniennes* 11 (1965), 372-375; Gerald J.P. O'Daly, 'Did St. Augustine ever believe in the Soul's pre-existence?', *Augustinian Studies* 5 (1974), 227-235; Gerald J.P. O'Daly, 'Augustine on the Origin of Souls', in: Horst-Dieter Blume and Friedhelm Mann (Hg.), *Platonismus und Christentum. Festschrift für Heinrich Dörrie* (Münster 1983), 184-191.

³⁰ 'My interpretation of Augustine's theory of the human condition compelled me to conclude [in his earlier *St. Augustine's Early Theory of Man, A.D. 386-391*; in conclusion: 145; 182s; 278] that his early works enshrined a view of man as "fallen soul"; that this view of our journey through "this" life persisted in his *Confessions* (...)' (O'Connell, *The Origin of the Soul in St. Augustine's Later Works*, 2).

³¹ 'The Plotinian cast of Augustine's early writings suggests an implicit acceptance of the fall of the soul without the same explicit scrutiny that will characterize the later Augustine', Rombs, *Saint Augustine and the Fall of the Soul*, 67-68.

³² Rombs, *Saint Augustine and the Fall of the Soul*, 135-152. Peter Brown offers a similar description of the *Confessiones*: '[But] all this [the language of Plotinus's *Enneads*] has been transformed. (...) With Augustine this "fall" is intensely personal (...)' (Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo. A Biography. A New Edition with an Epilogue* [Berkeley and Los Angeles 2000], 162).

3. Origen

When Pelagius and his followers came on the scene claiming that children are born without sin, the question of the origin of souls assumed even greater importance. Moreover, during this new period Augustine came to be confronted with the doctrine of Origen, first encountering it in 414. This confrontation also forced him to think about the origin of souls.

According to Origen, the fact that souls are involved with bodies results from a fall in their pre-existence. The body is a sort of prison from which the soul must be released. That one soul sank deeper in corporeal existence than the other, relates to the fact that it sinned more gravely than the other did.³³

Once Augustine understands the implications of Origen's theory, he strongly rejects it:³⁴ the world, including bodies, was made by God, and was made good.³⁵ In Origen's view, after many life cycles the soul must return again to the burden of corruptible flesh and to the endurance of punishment. To Augustine's mind this is a horrifying idea. Moreover, he writes, how can one be so sure about someone who has left the present existence? If the soul can sin before descending into the body, why should it not also sin after leaving it? Finally, he argues that sinning pre-existently, which is what Origen is talking about, has nothing to do with sinning *in Adam*, which is what the Bible is talking about.³⁶

Already before he became acquainted with the teaching of Origen, Augustine had rejected the view that man has certain merits or demerits prior to birth. In this context he invokes Romans 9:11. There Paul writes about Esau and Jacob that before they were born, they had done nothing good or bad.³⁷ Later on Augustine will use the same text for rejecting the teaching of Origen.³⁸

Does the fact that Augustine rejects Origen's teaching, and therefore the idea that man already has certain merits prior to birth, also mean that he distances himself from the notion of the pre-existence of souls? Not necessarily. Augustine opposes certain *aspects* of

³³ Rowan Williams, 'Origenes, Origenismus' in: Gerhard Müller (Hg.), *Theologische Realenzyklopädie XXV* (Berlin/New York 1995), 397-420, there 407s.

³⁴ *orig. an* (= *ep. 166*) 9.27 (CSEL 44, 583): 'non credo, non adquiesco, non consentio'.

³⁵ *c. Prisc. 9*; *ciu. 11.23*.

³⁶ *orig. an* (= *ep. 166*) 9.27.

³⁷ *Gn. litt. 10.11.19*; *pecc. mer. 1.22.31*.

³⁸ *gr. et pecc. or. 2.31.36*; *ep. 202A.8*.

that idea, namely the possibility of souls already having merits prior to their birth in a body, as well as the notion of souls undergoing multiple cycles of fall and return. His rejection of these aspects does not, however, necessarily imply the rejection of the soul's pre-existence.³⁹ In reaction to a work of Vincentius Victor, Augustine similarly denies the possibility of souls sinning prior to their involvement in bodies—once more by invoking Romans 9:11⁴⁰—but here too he does not reject a pre-existence of souls as such.

This is important to note, since we do encounter several passages reminiscent of Plotinus's worldview in works written after 414, following the outbreak of the Pelagian controversy.

4. Against Pelagianism: sin in Adam

When Augustine was confronted with the views of Pelagius and his followers, the question of the origin of souls became of great importance to him. The Pelagians denied that newborn children are guilty of Adam's sin. Augustine quotes the Pelagian bishop Julian of Eclanum as saying that 'any who are guilty are blamed for their morals, not for their origins'.⁴¹ The Pelagians connect this view with a creationist understanding of the origin of souls: God creates each individual soul newly and joins it to a body; therefore, the soul has nothing to do with Adam's sin.⁴² Against this background, Augustine was once again forced to consider the question of the origin of souls.

Traducianism (a)⁴³ seems to be most in line with Augustine's reasoning on the hereditary nature of sin. This concept offers an explanation (as Augustine himself indeed recognized)⁴⁴ for the propagation of sin through the generations, and at the same time confirms the identity of all descendants with Adam: all humans were that one man. According to Julian, Augustine's talk about 'all (in) one' proves that he adheres to traducianism, which Julian himself considers a form

³⁹ Michael Mendelson, "'The Business of Those Absent'". The Origin of the Soul in Augustine's *De Genesi Ad Litteram* 10.6-26', *Augustinian Studies* 29 (1998), 25-81, there 63.

⁴⁰ *an. et or.* 1.12.15.

⁴¹ *c. Iul. imp.* 1.122: 'moribus, nec exordiis accusatur'.

⁴² *pecc. mer.* 3.3.5; 3.10.18; *c. Iul. imp.* 2.25.

⁴³ The letters (a) through (d) refer back to Augustine's inventory in *De libero arbitrio* of the four hypotheses concerning the origin of souls; see §2 above.

⁴⁴ *Gn. litt.* 10.11.19; 10.14.23.

of Manicheism, as if the evil is within the very nature.⁴⁵ But Augustine rejects traducianism, charging that it cannot do justice to the difference between body and soul; it threatens to make the soul a kind of matter, as Tertullian had stated. The logical consequence is that also God is corporeal.⁴⁶ Once one maintains that the soul has an immaterial nature, the soul cannot conceivably be propagated at conception.⁴⁷

Creatianism (b) keeps the soul free from such corporeal, material propagation. But how can we still be said to have been (in) that one man when he sinned? Is this not a matter of the sin of *another*, and therefore of a *foreign* guilt? Pelagius⁴⁸ and Julian⁴⁹ do not fail to confront Augustine with this objection. If creatianism is true, how is it possible for young children who die before they have committed personal sins to be condemned for Adam's sin? Augustine admits that he has no answer to this question.⁵⁰ If the soul is innocent at the moment it joins the body, it is impossible to explain how it becomes guilty as a result of this joining. Actually, it is not the body that is sinful first, but the soul! The result is that God (or nature, created by God) comes to be held responsible for sin or for the fact that innocent people are punished.⁵¹

But if the choice is between traducianism and creatianism, Augustine in the end still prefers creatianism. He would like to follow the view of Jerome at Bethlehem, an adherent of creatianism, if the latter can help him with an answer to the vexed question of how this concept can still leave room for children to be born in guilt.⁵²

One might also consider whether the final two views on the origin of souls listed above (§2) can help Augustine with an answer to the problem. It is the view that God creates souls and keeps them in a place hidden from us until they are joined to a body, either (c) because God *sends* the soul into a body, or (d) because the soul inhabits a body *by its own choice*. Does the pre-existent fall of pre-existent souls offer Augustine an answer to the pressing question placed before him by the Pelagians demanding that he account for the sinful condition in which human beings are born?

⁴⁵ *c. ep. Pel.* 2.1.1; *c. Iul.* 1; *c. Iul. imp.* 1.6; 2.178; 4.104.

⁴⁶ *Gn. litt.* 10.24.40-26.45; *ep.* 190.4.14-15.

⁴⁷ *ep.* 190.4.15.

⁴⁸ *pecc. mer.* 3.3.5; 3.10.18.

⁴⁹ *c. Iul. imp.* 1.48; 3.5.

⁵⁰ *Gn. litt.* 10.15.27; *orig. an* (= *ep.* 166) 4.9; *c. Iul. imp.* 2.178.

⁵¹ *ep.* 190.4.13.

⁵² *orig. an* (= *ep.* 166) 4.8.

In writings following the outbreak of the Pelagian controversy too, we find several passages that are reminiscent of Plotinus's world-view, including the fall of pre-existent souls. One example is *De trinitate* (399-419):⁵³

'By wickedness and ungodliness with a crashing discord we had bounced away, and flowed and faded away from the one supreme true God into the many, divided by the many, clinging to the many' (4.7.11). 'What happens is that the soul, loving its own power, slides away (*prolabitur*) from the whole which is common to all into the part which is its own private property. By following God's directions and being perfectly governed by his laws it could enjoy the whole universe of creation; but by the apostasy of pride (*superbia*) which is called the beginning of sin (Sir 10:13) it strives to grab something more than the whole and to govern it by its own laws; and because there is nothing more than the whole it is thrust back into anxiety over a part, and so by being greedy for more it gets less' (12.9.14). 'Out of greed to experience his own power he [man] tumbled down at a nod from himself into himself as though down to the middle level. And then, while he wants to be like God under nobody, he is thrust down as a punishment from his own half-way level to the bottom. (...) In this way the consciousness is outweighed with a sort of self-heaviness, and is therefore heaved out of happiness, and by that experience of its half-wayness it learns to its punishment what a difference there is between the good it had forsaken and the evil it has committed. (...) For who will ever free the hapless soul from the body of this death except by the grave of God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 7:24)?' (12.11.16). 'So it [the mind] turns away (*auertitur*) from him [God] and slithers and slides down (*labitur*) into less and less which is imagined to be more and more' (10.5.7). Accordingly, we lead this life like a 'return journey' (12.10.15). The mind 'does not remember its happiness. That was once, and is no more, and the mind has totally forgotten it and therefore cannot even be reminded of it'. This is true, regardless of the particular hypothesis on the soul's origin:⁵⁴ 'Not that it [the mind] remembers him [God] because it knew him in Adam [a, traducianism], or anywhere else before the life of this body [d, the theory of the fallen soul], or when it was first made in order to be inserted into this body [b, creatianism, or c, the theory of the soul,

⁵³ In the excursus parenthetical numbering refer to *De Trinitate* (CCL 50, [3-]25-380; 50A, 381-535). *English translation*: Saint Augustine, *The Trinity*. Introduction, translation, and notes, Edmund Hill; editor, John E. Rotelle; The Works of Saint Augustine. A translation for the 21st Century, Part I, Volume 5 (New York 1991).

⁵⁴ Rombs, *Saint Augustine and the Fall of the Soul*, 85 has demonstrated how Augustine in this passage in fact surveys the four current hypotheses (as described in *De libero arbitrio*; see § 2 above) concerning the origin of souls.

sent to animate the body—the difference between these two is not relevant in this connection]. It does not remember any of these things at all; whichever of these may be the case, it has been erased by oblivion’ (14.15.21). Thus the theory of the pre-existent fallen soul (d) is once again presented as a legitimate option, despite Augustine’s rejection of Origen’s teaching.

In *De ciuitate Dei* (413–427), Augustine once more addresses the first sin of man and the consequences of that sin for all humanity (books 13 and 14). It is striking that in this context he does not comment on the different hypotheses concerning the origin of the souls to clarify the nature of the bond between Adam and his posterity. We were in him; we all were that one man⁵⁵—but Augustine does not address the ‘how’ of this being-in-Adam. Or does he?

O’Connell has drawn attention to Augustine’s use of the expression ‘*propria uita*’ in *De ciuitate Dei* and other writings from the period following the start of the Pelagian debates.⁵⁶ Prior to birth, human beings do not yet have their ‘own life’ (*propria uita*), and therefore have not done anything good or bad yet. This is indeed reflected in what Paul writes in Romans 9:11 about Jacob and Esau, saying that before they were born, they had done nothing good or bad.⁵⁷ The sin which they share with Adam is not their own sin, but that of another (*non propria, sed aliena peccata*).⁵⁸ Infants have broken God’s covenant in Adam, but not by reason of their own life (*non secundum suae uitae proprietatem*).⁵⁹ They contract this sin without any will of their own (*sine propria uoluntate*).⁶⁰ The fact that Adam’s sin is for newborn children a ‘foreign’ sin does not mean that this sin is of no concern for them. For all then sinned in Adam, when they still were that one. Nevertheless, this sin is called ‘foreign’ because the children were not yet living their own lives (*agebant uitas proprias*), but the life of the one man rather contained whatever was in his future posterity.⁶¹

In this way, so Augustine concludes, justice can be done to the word of God spoken through Ezekiel: ‘The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father (...)’ (Ezek. 18:20, *NIV*). This applies when the son has a personal, separate life.

⁵⁵ *ciu.* 14.13.

⁵⁶ O’Connell, *The Origin of the Soul in St. Augustine’s Later Works*, 187–200.

⁵⁷ *ep.* 190.2.5; *pecc. mer.* 2.36.59.

⁵⁸ *pecc. mer.* 3.5.10–11 (quotation from Cyprian).

⁵⁹ *ciu.* 16.27.

⁶⁰ *c. Iul. imp.* 5.40.

⁶¹ *pecc. mer.* 3.7.14.

But at the time of Adam's sin, we were not yet souls with a separate life, that is, souls apart from Adam's soul. We were one with Adam's person, we were in him.⁶² Each child *is* Adam, not only as regards the body, but also as regards the soul.⁶³

This means that people are themselves going to sin only when they live a life of their own (*propria uita*), but not before their birth. Apart from their own, separate lives, however, there is also a common life that all men share with Adam: '(Unless it is true that) even infants, not in their own personal lives but in the common origin of the human race, have all broken God's covenant in that one man in whom all have sinned'.⁶⁴ Adam's sin, in one man, became an act common to all (*commune factum est omnibus*).⁶⁵ that sin resulted in a common ruin (*in communem perniciem perpetratum est*), when all humankind existed in one man.⁶⁶

As such, Augustine manages to retain the bond with Adam, and at the same time does justice to Romans 9:11. As separate persons, with 'a life of their own', Jacob and Esau did not sin before they were born. But that does not exclude them from sinning with and in Adam as part of him.

To sin with and in Adam does not apply to the concrete act of Adam, insofar as at that moment he also had his *propria uita*, as a historical person, a soul incarnated in a body. But it does apply to the pride which preceded the concrete sin.⁶⁷ A bad will preceded the bad act. That pride, by which the soul wanted to have something for itself,

⁶² *ep.* 98.1 (CSEL 34, 521): '(...) sed ideo ex Adam traxit, quod sacramenti illius [baptism] gratia solueretur, quia nondum erat anima separatim uiuens, id est altera anima, de qua diceretur: Et anima patris mea est et anima filii mea est [Ezek. 18:4]. iam itaque cum homo in se ipso est ab eo, qui genuit, alter effectus, peccato alterius sine sua consensione non tenetur obnoxius. traxit ergo reatum, quia unus erat cum illo et in illo, a quo traxit, quando, quod traxit, admissum est; non autem trahit alter ab altero, quando sua unoquoque propria uita uiuente iam est, unde dicatur: Anima quae peccauerit, ipsa morietur [Ezek. 18:4]'. Augustine actually wrote this as early as 408, before the start of the Pelagian controversy.

⁶³ *Gn. litt.* 10.11.19 (CSEL 28, 308-309): the baptism of little children before they die cannot be understood 'nisi unumquemque paruulum non esse nisi Adam et corpore et anima'.

⁶⁴ '(...) nisi quia etiam paruuli, non secundum suae uitae proprietatem, sed secundum communem generis humani originem omnes in illo uno testamentum Dei dissipauerunt, in quo omnes peccauerunt': *ciu.* 16.27 (CCL 48, 531); English translation: *The City of God (De Civitate Dei) XI-XXII*, translation William Babcock; editor Boniface Ramsey; The Works of Saint Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century, Part I, Volume 7 (New York 2013).

⁶⁵ *ciu.* 13.23.

⁶⁶ *ciu.* 14.20.

⁶⁷ O'Connell, *The Origin of the Soul in St. Augustine's Later Works*, 316-319.

is 'the beginning of sin' (Sir. 10:13) and, like greed, 'the root of all evils' (1 Tim. 6:19).⁶⁸ That pride took place in Adam as a transindividual person (we all were in him), and therefore it was a transpersonal sin.⁶⁹

Does this manner of speaking about Adam and his relationship with his offspring mean that Augustine accepts the fourth (Plotinian) hypothesis (d) from the series of options that he listed several times? Is his final answer to the Pelagians that God created the souls, which exist in a hidden place and—rather than being sent by God—come to inhabit bodies by their own choice, constituting their fall?⁷⁰ Is Adam for Augustine what the hypostasis Soul is for Plotinus?

On some points, the way Augustine speaks about the 'fall', also in his later period (after the *Confessiones*), corresponds with what Plotinus writes: (1) the soul has a certain independence, apart from the body; often 'the soul' is tantamount to 'man'; (2) the soul occupies a 'middle position' between the spiritual and the material; (3) sin is often described as a 'fall' (a spatial metaphor); (4) furthermore, sin is described as a turning away from unity (the one God) to multitude, where unity is superior to multitude;⁷¹ (5) the cause of that fall is pride, by which the soul wanted to have something for itself, and therefore turned away from the higher (the whole) to attach itself to the lower (a part of reality); (6) Adam as a transtemporal and transindividual person corresponds to the similarly transtemporal and transindividual hypostasis Soul of Plotinus; (7) existence in the body is a punishment; (8) the 'memory' of the soul: even though the soul does not remember where it knew God (in Adam or anywhere else before the life of this body), it does remember its God.⁷²

Apart from these similarities, there are also significant differences between what Plotinus and Augustine write about the soul and its fall: (1) Augustine does write that the consequence of sin is that

⁶⁸ *trin.* 12.9.14; *ciu.* 14.13.

⁶⁹ Aimé Solignac, 'La condition de l'homme pécheur d'après saint Augustin', *Nouvelle revue théologique* 78 (1956), 359-387, there 384.

⁷⁰ This has been argued by O'Connell in *The Origin of the Soul in St. Augustine's Later Works*, 310.

⁷¹ *ciu.* 12.23 (CCL 48, 380-381): '(...) cui populo esset huius rei consideratio profutura, quod ex uno homine Deus ad commendandum hominibus, quam ei grata sit etiam in pluribus unitas, genus instituisset humanum'. (English translation William Babcock: 'And he knew that this people would benefit from reflecting on the fact that God started the human race from a single individual for the express purpose of showing men how much he prizes unity among many').

⁷² *trin.* 14.15.21.

we ‘faded away into the many’,⁷³ but he does not view this multitude, the individualization, as the consequence of the soul’s fall. (2) He does describe the body as a burden to the soul, but that concerns the mortal body. The fact that the soul is joined to a body is not a consequence of a preceding sin committed by the soul. In fact, the first sin is committed by the historical Adam; his soul was already joined to his body. Only the fact that the body is mortal is a consequence of sin. (3) The above two points imply that Augustine did not teach an ontological fall of the soul in the sense Plotinus did. (4) Augustine does not talk about a cosmogonic aspect in the fall of the soul, either. He rejects the idea that the existing universe (matter that is shaped by the souls) is the consequence of the fall, and that the individualization of the soul is also a consequence of the fall of the soul. (5) Relatedly, Plotinus’s worldview is to a large extent pessimistic: the fact that the souls joined themselves to bodies is, even if necessary, a necessary *evil*, just as all individualization is something negative. Conversely, Augustine describes the material world as created by God, which by that very fact is intrinsically good.

There is no denying that Augustine avails himself of Plotinian terms and images. But Madec’s warning has to be taken to heart: if one finds a similarity in images and terms, one has to be aware of the extent to which such images and terms are transformed by their transfer into a new ‘mental universe’.⁷⁴ In the case of Augustine, it cannot be maintained that his adoption of Plotinian terminology and images at the same time implies the adoption of the entire ontological and cosmogonic concept of Plotinus’s anthropology. By assuming a common existence of all *in Adam*, Augustine does not necessarily need to consider earthly existence itself as a consequence of sin.⁷⁵ His thesis that Adam’s posterity does not participate in the concrete sin (the eating of the fruit), but in the prior sin of hubris, does not need to be seen as a remnant of the Plotinian doctrine of the hypostasis Soul (a whole prior to its individuated parts, prior to their focusing on individual bodies), but can rather be considered a speculative equivalent of that doctrine—not a hypostasis Soul, but a common existence of all in Adam and therefore a sin of all in Adam’s sinful hubris.⁷⁶

⁷³ ‘*euanueramus in multa*’, *trin.* 4.7.11 (CCL 50, 175).

⁷⁴ Madec, ‘Bulletin augustinien pour 1963’, 373.

⁷⁵ Eugene TeSelle, ‘Theses on O’Connell: The Origin and “Proper Life” of the Soul in Augustine’s Thought’, *Augustinian Studies* 27 (1996), 7–19, there 17.

⁷⁶ As argued by TeSelle, ‘Theses on O’Connell’, 18.

It therefore cannot be demonstrated from Augustine's later works (after the *Confessiones*) that he assumed an ontological and cosmogonic fall of the soul.⁷⁷

Does this mean that Augustine adopted from Plotinus only the moral aspect of his view on the fall of the soul? This has been suggested by Rombs,⁷⁸ who argued that Augustine justified the state of punishment in which people are born along two lines: the philosophical line of a pre-existent fall of the soul, and the biblical trajectory by which we obtained our state in one way or another from Adam. According to Rombs, after Augustine in his later works abandoned the philosophical justification based on Plotinus's ontological approach, he ended up with the biblical line of our unity with Adam.

This thesis does not, however, do justice to the state of affairs. In Augustine's discussions with the Pelagians, and in particular with Julian, it repeatedly becomes clear that a reference to our bond with Adam does not suffice for him. The reference to Romans 5 immediately calls for a philosophical justification, which the Bible itself does not provide. If Romans 5 is understood to mean that when Adam sinned, *we* sinned—how can anyone imagine that? Again and again Augustine has to face this question, and again and again he offers a response. It is an ongoing search for a philosophical/ontological foundation of his theological position. It is not, as Rombs argues, that Augustine clarifies the idea of unity in Adam by the notion of (biological or juridical) derivation.⁷⁹ The opposite is in fact true. The consequences of the biological and juridical bonds between Adam and his posterity are clarified by Augustine's notion of unity in Adam.

After all, the foundation of Augustine's position is not simply Plotinus's ontology—on this point Rombs is right. But his position at the same time does present numerous features of that Neoplatonic ontology—on that point O'Connell is right. A *uita propria* preceded by an existence that we have in common with Adam is an important building block for Augustine's philosophical justification of the state of punishment in which we are born. It is his final answer to the Pelagian objection, which asks whether Augustine's speaking about the *peccatum originale* means that we are punished for a guilt alien to us (*alienum*). Do we not live our own lives, and are we not responsible

⁷⁷ In this respect, Rombs's argument against O'Connell is persuasive: Rombs, *Saint Augustine and the Fall of the Soul*, 163-180; O'Connell, *The Origin of the Soul in St. Augustine's Later Works*, 310.

⁷⁸ Rombs, *Saint Augustine and the Fall of the Soul*, 181s.

⁷⁹ Rombs, *Saint Augustine and the Fall of the Soul*, 183.

only for our own life, and for the good and bad we do in it? Augustine recognizes that people have their own life (*propria uita*). But this *propria uita* is not opposed to an *aliena uita* ('life of another'), but to a *communis uita* ('common life'): there is not only a life of one's own with one's own guilt, but also a common life with a common guilt. Although that guilt is not caused by deeds in our *propria uita*, it is not an alien guilt, but still our *own* guilt (as a common guilt). The fact that this first sin is not a personal sin (*propria*), but common to all (*communis omnibus*), is no reason for excuse. The very opposite is true: all share in the blame for what is done by all. That sin can be called an alien sin (*alienum*), but it can be also called our own.⁸⁰

In this way of thinking, several Plotinian features become visible: (1) Just like in Plotinus's thought the one Soul is a transindividual entity (a whole) which precedes the individual souls, so in Augustine's thinking Adam is not only an individual historical person, but also a transindividual person (a whole) who precedes the individual human beings. Unity precedes multitude. (2) Just like in Plotinus's doctrine there are individual souls which at the same time constitute the one Soul, so in Augustine's thinking all human beings have not only their individual life (*propria uita*), but also a common existence in Adam ('we all were that one man'). (3) Just like in Plotinus's thought all human beings sinned in their common existence as Soul, so in Augustine's thinking all human beings sinned in their common existence in Adam. (4) Just like in Plotinus's view the fall of the Soul had ontological consequences (the emergence of the individual souls and the composition of souls and bodies), so in Augustine's thinking the fall has ontological consequences (by which all human beings became guilty before God even prior to their concrete appearance in history).

All sinned because all were in Adam—this is Augustine's equivalent to the anthropology of Plotinus.⁸¹

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⁸⁰ *corrupt.* 6.9.

⁸¹ Cf. the observation of Peter Brown: 'It was a reading [of Plotinus's treatises] which was so intense and thorough that the ideas of Plotinus were thoroughly absorbed, 'digested' and transformed by Augustine' (*Augustine of Hippo*, 86).