

The Confessions – Book VII (Plain English)

He looks back on the beginning of his early adulthood — around his thirty-first year — when he was still making serious errors about the nature of God and the origin of evil, but was gradually coming to know God more clearly, even though he had not yet properly understood Jesus Christ.

Chapter 1: He thought of God not as a human body, but still as some kind of physical substance spread through space

1. That dark and shameful period of my youth was over now, and I was moving into early adulthood. But as I got older, I was getting worse in a different way — I was becoming more and more caught up in empty thinking, because I couldn't conceive of anything existing unless I could see it with my own eyes.

I had never thought of you, O God, as having a human body. From the moment I began to take wisdom seriously, I avoided that idea, and I was glad to find that the Catholic Church — our spiritual mother — taught the same thing. But beyond that, I had no idea how else to picture you.

And yet I, a mere man, was trying to form a conception of you — the one true and sovereign God. Deep in my heart I genuinely believed that you were incorruptible, untouchable, and unchanging. I didn't know where this conviction came from or how, but it was absolutely clear to me that whatever can be corrupted must be inferior to whatever cannot; that what cannot be damaged is better than what can be; and that what never changes is better than what does. I believed this firmly.

I fought hard against the confused mental images that kept crowding my mind, trying with one decisive effort to sweep them all away from my inner vision. But they barely retreated before swarming back in an instant, pressing in from every side and clouding everything over. So although I never pictured you as a human body, I was still forced to imagine you as something physical taking up space — either spread throughout the world, or stretching infinitely beyond it. This physical something I pictured as incorruptible, untouchable, and unchanging — all the things I correctly preferred over what was corruptible and changeable. But I couldn't conceive of anything that wasn't located somewhere in space. If I tried to think of something with no spatial dimension at all, it seemed like nothing to me — not even a void, just sheer emptiness. Like if you removed a body from a place and the place itself remained there with absolutely nothing in it — not earth, not water, not air, not sky — just a vast, empty nothingness.

2. That's how closed and unenlightened my thinking was at the time. Anything that wasn't spread out across space, wasn't extended or expanded or bulging with some kind of volume — I simply assumed it was nothing at all.

My mind was running over the same shapes and surfaces that my eyes normally look at. And I never noticed the obvious contradiction: that my very own mind — the thing doing all this imagining — was itself not physical in that way, and yet it clearly *was* something, and something capable of forming all these images.

In the same way, I pictured you, O God — the Life of my life — as an enormous presence stretching through infinite space in every direction, flowing through the entire mass of the world and then beyond it in all directions through measureless, boundless space. I imagined that the earth had you, the sky had you, everything had you, and everything was contained within you — while you yourself were nowhere in particular.

It was like sunlight passing through air — the air doesn't burst or break, the light simply fills it completely. I imagined that not just the sky, the air, and the sea, but the earth itself was completely transparent to you, open to your presence passing through every part of it, governing everything you created both from within and from without, through some hidden inward working.

That's what I guessed, because I couldn't think of anything else. But it was wrong. Because on this model, a larger piece of the earth would contain more of you, and a smaller piece less of you. A bigger body would hold more of God than a smaller one — an elephant would contain more of you than a sparrow simply because it takes up more room. That's absurd. But that's where my thinking had taken me. And you had not yet lit up my darkness.

Chapter 2: Nebridius's argument against the Manicheans — is God corruptible or not?

3. O Lord, when it came to dealing with those deceitful, boastful people — the Manicheans, who talked at length but through whom your word never actually spoke — I found one argument enough to shut them down. It was an argument that Nebridius used to put forward back when we were in Carthage, and everyone who heard it was shaken by it.

The argument went like this: the Manicheans claimed that there was a nation of Darkness — a great opposing mass set against you, O God. But what exactly could this nation of Darkness have done to you if you had simply refused to engage with it?

If the answer is "it would have harmed you," then you are subject to damage and corruption — which means you aren't truly God.

But if the answer is "it couldn't have harmed you at all," then there was no reason for you to go to war with it in the first place. And yet the Manicheans said you did go to war — and in doing so, some part or portion or offspring of your own substance got tangled up with these hostile alien powers, became corrupted and degraded by them, fell from

happiness into misery, and needed rescuing and cleansing. They said this piece of your substance was the human soul — enslaved, contaminated, corrupted — and that your Word came to rescue it, pure and free and whole.

But wait — if the Word came from the same substance as the corrupted soul, then the Word itself must also be corruptible.

So: if they say God's substance is incorruptible, their whole story falls apart and is exposed as false. But if they say it is corruptible, then that claim collapses the moment it's spoken and should be rejected with disgust.

This argument alone was enough to make me reject those people completely. They had no escape that didn't involve saying something truly blasphemous about you — either in their thoughts or out loud.

Chapter 3: The cause of evil is the free choice of the will

4. But even I, at this point, hadn't worked it all out. I firmly believed and was fully persuaded that you, our Lord and true God — who made not just our souls but our bodies, and not just us but all creatures and everything that exists — were completely untainted, absolutely unchangeable, incapable of being corrupted or transformed in any way. That much was settled.

But I still couldn't clearly understand what the cause of evil was. Whatever that cause was, I knew I had to find it in a way that didn't force me to conclude that the unchangeable God was somehow changeable — because if I went down that road, I would become the very kind of error I was trying to investigate. So I searched with a calm, steady mind, certain that the Manichean answer was false — and I kept well away from them, because I could see that their whole approach to the problem of evil was driven by a bad motive: they would rather believe that your substance was capable of doing evil than admit that their own wills were.

5. I then turned my attention to what I kept hearing — that free will is the cause of our doing evil, and your just judgement is the cause of our suffering its consequences. I tried hard to see this clearly, but I couldn't quite grasp it.

I kept trying to pull my mind up out of that confusion, but I kept sinking back in. Over and over I tried, and over and over I fell back.

But one thing began to lift me towards your light: I knew, with certainty, that I had a will — just as I knew I was alive. When I chose to do something or chose not to, I was absolutely sure that it was me — and no one else — who was doing the choosing. And right there I could see the source of my sin.

But when something happened to me against my will — when I suffered rather than acted — I could see that wasn't really my doing, and I judged it not to be my fault but my punishment. And since I believed you to be perfectly just, I quickly acknowledged that I was being justly punished.

But then I asked: who made me? Was it not my God — who is not merely good, but is goodness itself? So where did this tendency in me come from — the tendency to want to do evil and resist doing good, which gives rise to the just punishment I receive? Who put this in me? Who planted this bitter root in me, when I was made entirely by my most kind and good God?

If the devil was responsible — then who made the devil? And if the devil himself, by his own twisted choice, fell from being a good angel into becoming a devil — then where did the evil will in *him* come from, if he was originally made completely good by the most Good Creator?

These thoughts pulled me back down and crushed me. And yet they didn't send me plunging all the way into that pit of error — the place where no one confesses to you — where people end up thinking that you permit evil rather than that human beings do it.

Chapter 4: God is not corruptible — and if he were, he would not be God at all

6. I was still working through all of this, but I had already established one firm point: that what is incorruptible must be better than what is corruptible. And so, whatever you were, I acknowledged you to be incorruptible. Because no soul has ever been able to conceive of anything better than you — you are the highest and best good. And since what is incorruptible is, without question, better than what is corruptible — which I myself now clearly saw — then if you were not incorruptible, I could in my thinking reach something better than God. Which is impossible. So the conclusion was clear: I had to look for you in the incorruptible, and from there work out where evil came from — that is, where corruption comes from, since corruption is precisely the thing that can never touch your substance.

For corruption cannot harm God in any way — not by anyone's will, not by any necessity, not by any unforeseen accident — because God *is* God, and what God wills is good, and God himself is that good. And being corrupted is not good. You are not forced into anything against your will, either — because your will is not somehow less than your power. If it were, you would be greater than yourself, which makes no sense, since God's will and God's power simply *are* God. And nothing can catch you off guard, since you know all things — there is no kind of thing that exists beyond your knowledge.

What more needs to be said? The very substance that is God cannot be corruptible — because if it were, it simply would not be God.

Chapter 5: Questions about the origin of evil — God, who is the highest good, cannot be the cause of evil

7. I kept asking: where does evil come from? And I was searching in an evil way — without realising that the very manner of my searching was itself part of the problem.

I set out in my mind the whole of creation — everything I could perceive: earth, sea, air, stars, trees, living creatures; and everything I couldn't see: the vault of heaven, all the angels, all the spiritual beings that inhabit it. But because I couldn't think in non-physical terms, my imagination arranged all these beings in locations — as if they were bodies — and I lumped together all your creatures into one enormous mass, sorted by types. Some were real physical things, others were what I myself had invented for spirits. And this mass I imagined as vast — not as it actually is, which I had no way of knowing, but as large as I chose to picture it — yet finite in every direction.

And you, O Lord, I imagined surrounding and pervading this mass from every side, yet yourself infinite in every direction. As if there were an ocean everywhere — an infinite sea stretching in all directions — with inside it a huge sponge, enormous but finite, so that the sponge would be soaked through in every part by the boundless sea around it. That is how I pictured your creation: finite, and filled by you, the Infinite.

And I said to myself: here is God, and here is what God has created. God is good — yes, supremely and incomparably better than all of it. And he, being good, created it all good. And look how he surrounds it and fills it.

So then — where is evil? Where did it come from? How did it creep in?

What is its root? What is its seed? Does it even exist at all?

If it doesn't exist, why do we fear and avoid it? But if our fear is groundless, then surely that fear itself is the evil — the heart being needlessly pricked and tormented. And that would actually be a *greater* evil, since we have nothing to fear and yet fear it anyway.

So either the thing we fear is evil, or the act of fearing is itself evil.

Either way — where does evil come from? God is good, and he made all things good. He, the greatest and highest Good, created these lesser goods, and both Creator and creation are good.

So where is evil?

Or was there some evil matter out of which God made and formed and ordered things — but left a remainder in it that he never converted into good? But why? Was he unable to transform the whole of it, so that no evil remained — he who is all-powerful?

And why would he use this evil matter at all, rather than, with that same unlimited power, simply make it cease to exist? Could it have existed against his will? Or if it existed from eternity, why did he allow it to persist through infinite ages of the past, and only much later decide to make something out of it?

And if he suddenly chose to act at some point — shouldn't the Almighty rather have made sure this evil matter simply did not exist, so that he alone should be the whole, the true, the highest, the infinite Good?

Or if it wasn't right for God — who is good — to refrain from creating good things, then couldn't he have got rid of the evil matter entirely, reduced it to nothing, and then made good matter out of which to create everything? Because he would not truly be all-powerful if he could only make something good when helped along by material he hadn't created himself.

These were the thoughts churning around in my wretched heart, crushing me with anxiety — I was terrified of dying before I found the truth. But throughout all this, the faith of your Christ, our Lord and Saviour, as held by the Catholic Church, remained fixed firmly in my heart — even if there were still many points I hadn't worked out, and some ways in which my thinking still strayed from proper teaching. Yet my mind never abandoned it entirely; every day I was drinking in more and more of it.

Chapter 6: He exposes the pretensions of the astrologers

8. By this time I had also rejected the lying predictions and godless nonsense of the astrologers. Let your mercies, rising from the depths of my soul, give thanks to you for this too, O my God.

For it was you — who else could it be who calls us back from the death of all error, but the Life that cannot die, and the Wisdom that needs no external light but itself illuminates minds that need it, governing the whole universe down to the fluttering leaves on the trees? — it was you who broke down my stubbornness in this area, even though I had argued against it with two people: Vindicianus, a sharp old man, and Nebridius, a brilliantly gifted young man. Vindicianus said flatly, and Nebridius said repeatedly — though with a degree of hesitation — that there was no such thing as a genuine art of predicting the future. People's guesses sometimes happened to be right, they said, simply through luck; and because astrologers made so many predictions, some of them were bound to come true by pure accident, without the astrologers having any real idea they would.

Then you provided a friend of mine — someone who regularly consulted astrologers, though he wasn't an expert in the art himself, just an interested amateur. He knew

something — something he said he'd heard from his father — which he wasn't quite sure how much it undermined astrology's credibility, but it turned out to be decisive.

This man was called Firminius. He was well-educated and trained in rhetoric, and as a close friend he came to consult me about some personal matters in which he had high hopes — asking what I thought, based on his so-called astrological chart. By this point I had already begun to lean towards Nebridius's view. Still, I didn't completely refuse to discuss it — I shared what came to my uncertain mind — but I made clear that I was almost entirely convinced that astrology was empty and ridiculous nonsense.

He then told me that his father had been deeply obsessed with astrological books, and that this father had a friend equally obsessed, who together, through shared study and constant discussion, fed each other's passion for this hobby. They went so far as to record the exact moment when the animals in their own houses gave birth, and then checked the position of the stars at that moment, as supposed proof of astrology's validity.

Firminius then told me this story, which he said his father had told him: around the time his mother was about to give birth to him, a slave woman belonging to his father's friend was also pregnant — and her pregnancy was impossible to hide from her master, who prided himself on tracking the births even of his dogs with painstaking care.

As it turned out — one man carefully recording the days and hours and even the minutes for his wife, the other doing the same for his slave — the two women went into labour at exactly the same moment. Each man had people ready to rush a message to the other the instant the birth happened, so that neither would have the slightest delay in learning of it. The messengers from each house met each other at the exact halfway point between the two homes, so that neither house's birth could be shown to have occurred even a fraction earlier than the other. The time, the position of the stars, every minute detail — was identical for both births.

Yet Firminius — born to a wealthy and prominent family — went on to live a prosperous life, gained wealth, and rose to high positions. That slave, on the other hand — his chains never loosened — went on serving his masters all his life. Firminius knew him personally and confirmed this.

9. Hearing this from such a trustworthy source, all my remaining resistance crumbled. I immediately tried to bring Firminius himself to his senses on the matter, by pointing out: if I were to look at his astrological chart and predict honestly, I would have to see in it parents who were respected in the community, a distinguished family name, a good upbringing, and a solid education. But if that slave had come to me with the exact same chart — because it was the exact same chart — I would equally have to tell him the truth about his low birth, his degraded status, and everything completely the opposite of what I told Firminius.

So if I were looking at the same chart, I would have to say completely different things in order to tell the truth in both cases. And if I said the same thing to both, I would be lying to at least one of them. Therefore, it was obvious: whenever an astrologer predicts correctly, it is not because of skill — it is sheer luck. And when he gets it wrong, it is not a failure of skill either — it is just that luck went against him.

10. Having broken through to this conclusion, I turned it over further in my mind, making sure I had an answer for any of those fools who practised astrology — whom I longed to challenge and tear apart — in case they tried to dismiss the argument by saying Firminius had lied to me, or that his father had lied to him. So I thought about twins.

Twins generally come out of the womb so close together in time that whatever small gap there might be between them — however much astrologers might insist it matters enormously — cannot actually be measured by any human observer, or captured in the charts that an astrologer examines. And yet twins can't be predicted the same way by astrology, since they so often live completely different lives. Think of Esau and Jacob — if an astrologer had looked at the same chart for both, he would have had to predict the same thing for each. But their lives were not the same at all. So either he predicts falsely — or if he predicts correctly for one, he must say different things while looking at the same chart. And that means it's not skill but chance when he gets it right.

For it is you, O Lord — most righteous ruler of the universe — who work secretly, without either the person consulting the astrologer or the astrologer himself knowing it, so that the person consulting hears what — according to the hidden account of their soul — they ought to hear, out of the depths of your utterly just judgement. And let no one say to you: why is this? Or why that? Let them not say so — for they are only human.

Chapter 7: He is tormented by the question of where evil comes from

11. And now, O my Helper, you had set me free from those chains. But still I kept asking: where does evil come from? And I found no answer.

Yet you did not let these churning thoughts carry me away from faith. I still firmly believed that you exist, that your substance is unchangeable, that you care for human beings and will judge them, and that in Christ your Son our Lord, and in the Holy Scriptures pressed upon me by the authority of your Catholic Church, you have laid out the path of human salvation leading to the life beyond this death. These things were safe and unshakeable in my mind. And yet I was desperately searching: where does evil come from?

What agony my struggling heart went through! What groaning, O my God! And yet your ears were open to it, even though I didn't know it. And when I searched in quiet and stillness, those silent convulsions of my soul were loud cries reaching your mercy.

No one knows what I went through — no one but you. Even what I managed to pour out through my lips to my closest friends — did the full tumult of my soul even come close to reaching them? Words and time were nowhere near enough to express it. But all of it — everything — poured into your ears, every bit of what I cried out from the groaning of my heart. And my longing was open before you. The light of my eyes was not with me — because that light was inward, while I was reaching outward. It was not in physical space, yet my attention was constantly fixed on things that were in physical space — and there I found no rest. The things I encountered out there didn't receive me in a way that let me say, "This is enough, this is good." Nor did they let me turn back inward to where it could truly be well with me.

I was above these lower things — but below you. And you are my true joy when I am beneath you, and you had placed beneath me what you created lower than me. That was the right and healthy middle position: to remain in your image, and by serving you to have proper authority over my body.

But when I lifted myself up in pride against you — running at the Lord with my shield raised — even those lower things were placed over me, pressing down on me, with no relief or breathing space anywhere. They crowded around my sight from every direction, and when I tried to think my way back to you, physical images forced themselves in as if to say: where are you going, you worthless and base creature?

All of this had grown from my wound — for you bring down the proud as one strikes down the wounded. And my own swelling pride was what separated me from you; the inflammation in my face was so great it shut my eyes.

Chapter 8: Little by little, with God's help, he moves toward the truth

12. But you, O Lord, endure forever — and yet you are not forever angry with us, because you take pity on our dust and ashes. It pleased you to reshape my misshapen self. By inward proddings you unsettled me, making me restless until you became real and clear to my inner sight. And through the quiet working of your healing hand, my swelling began to go down. And the disordered and darkened vision of my mind was, day by day, healed by the sharp but healthy sting of grief.

Chapter 9: He compares the teaching of the Platonists about the Word with the far greater teaching of Christianity

13. You wanted first to show me how you oppose the proud but give grace to the humble — and what an extraordinary act of mercy it was that your Word became flesh and lived among human beings. And so — through the instrument of a man puffed up with

enormous pride — you put into my hands certain books of the Platonist philosophers, translated from Greek into Latin.

And in those books I read — not in the same words, but conveying exactly the same meaning, backed up by many different arguments — what John's Gospel says: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* I found that there.

And that the soul of man — though it bears witness to the light — is not itself that light; but the Word of God, being God, is that true light which enlightens every person coming into the world. I found that there too.

And that he was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world did not know him. I found that.

But that *he came to his own, and his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God* — that I did not find there.

14. Similarly, I read in those books that God the Word was born not of flesh, not of blood, not of human decision or a husband's will, but of God. But that *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us* — that I did not find there.

I did find in those books, in many different ways, the teaching that the Son is in the form of the Father, and did not consider equality with God something to cling to — because he is naturally of the same substance. But that *he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in human likeness; and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross. Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father* — that is not in those books.

That before all time and above all time your only-begotten Son remains unchangeably co-eternal with you — that is there. That souls receive from his fullness — that is there. That through participation in the wisdom that remains in them they are renewed and become wise — that is there.

But that *in due time Christ died for the ungodly* — that is not there. That *you did not spare your own Son but gave him up for us all* — that is not there.

Because you have *hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children* — so that those who are worn out and weighed down might come to him and he might give them rest, because he is gentle and humble in heart. *The meek he will*

guide in justice; the meek he will teach his way — looking on our lowliness and distress, and forgiving all our sins.

But those who are puffed up with pride in what they think is elevated learning do not hear him saying: *Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*. Because although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or give thanks to him. *Their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools*.

15. And so I also found in those books what follows from that: that *they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles* — turning to that Egyptian food for which Esau sold his birthright. For your firstborn people — the Israelites — worshipped the head of a four-footed animal in your place, turning their hearts back towards Egypt, bowing down their souls — which were made in your image — before an image of an ox that eats grass.

I found all this in those books. But I did not feed on it.

For it pleased you, O Lord, to take the reproach away from Jacob — so that the older would serve the younger — and you called the Gentiles into your inheritance. And I had come to you from among the Gentiles. I was reaching out for that gold which you willed your people to take from Egypt — because wherever it was, it was yours.

And through your apostle you said to the Athenians that *in you we live and move and have our being* — as even one of their own poets had said. And truly, those books came from that tradition. But I did not set my mind on their idols — those things to which they turned your gold, those who *exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator*.

Chapter 10: Divine things become clearer to the person who withdraws into the depths of their own heart

16. And then, prompted from within, I turned back to myself. You led me inward. And I was able to go there, because you had become my helper.

I entered into myself, and with the eye of my soul — such as it was — I saw above that very eye of my soul, above my mind, the Unchangeable Light.

Not the ordinary light that all eyes can see. Not even a bigger version of the same kind of light — as if this familiar brightness were simply much more intense and filled everything with its greatness. No — it was not like that. It was something entirely different. Completely and utterly different from all of that.

Nor was it above my mind the way oil floats above water, or the way the sky is above the earth. It was above me because it made me, and I was below it because I was made by

it. The person who knows Truth knows that Light. And the person who knows that Light knows eternity. Love knows it.

O eternal Truth, and true Love, and beloved Eternity — you are my God. To you I sigh both night and day.

When I first came to know you, you lifted me up so that I could see that there was something to see — and yet that I myself was not yet the one doing the real seeing. You pushed back against the weakness of my sight, pouring your rays powerfully upon me, and I trembled — shaking with both love and fear. And I found myself to be far, far away from you, in a region of utter unlikeness — as though I heard your voice from high above saying: *I am the food of the strong; grow, and you shall feed on me. You will not change me into yourself, the way food for your body is changed into you. It is you who will be changed into me.*

And I understood that you correct a person for wrongdoing, and you make the soul waste away like a cobweb.

And I said: is Truth then nothing at all — just because it is not spread out through space, neither finite nor infinite? And you cried to me from far away: *No — I AM WHO I AM.*

And I heard this — heard it the way things are heard in the heart — and there was no room for doubt. I would sooner doubt that I was alive than doubt that Truth exists, which is *clearly seen, being understood from the things that have been made.*

Chapter 11: Creatures are changeable; God alone is unchangeable

17. And I looked at all the other things below you, and I saw that they neither fully exist nor fail to exist. They exist because they come from you — but they are not, because they are not what you are. For what truly *is* remains unchangingly. And so it is good for me to cling to God — for if I do not remain in him, I cannot remain in myself. But he, remaining in himself, renews all things.

And you are the Lord my God — you have no need of my goodness.

Chapter 12: Everything that the good God has created is very good

18. And it became clear to me that things which are subject to corruption are still good. They are not the highest good — but if they weren't good in the first place, they couldn't be corrupted. Here's why: if they were the highest good, they would be incorruptible. And if they had no goodness at all, there would be nothing in them for corruption to attack.

Because corruption is always a kind of harm — and it could only harm by diminishing goodness. So either corruption causes no harm at all — which is clearly impossible — or, as is completely certain, whatever is corrupted loses some goodness.

Now if something were stripped of all goodness, it would cease to exist altogether. If things still exist, and they cannot be corrupted further, they will actually become better — because they will remain permanently uncorrupted. But it would be absurd to say that things become better by losing all their goodness. So if all goodness is stripped away, they simply stop existing.

Therefore: as long as things exist, they are good. And so whatever exists is good.

That evil I had been searching for — asking where it came from — is not itself a substance. Because if it were a substance, it would be good. It would either be an incorruptible substance — which would make it a supreme good — or a corruptible substance — and even that would have to be good to begin with, since it could only be corrupted if it had some goodness to lose.

So I saw it clearly, and it became certain to me: you made all things good, and there is no substance at all that you did not make. And because everything you made is not equal, all things still exist — because each individually is good, and together they are very good, because our God made all things very good.

Chapter 13: It is fitting to praise the Creator for all the good things made in heaven and earth

19. And for you there is nothing evil — not for you, and not for the whole of your creation, because nothing from outside it can break in and disturb the order you have set in place.

Within creation, certain things seem evil because they don't fit well with other things. But those very same things *do* fit well with other things, and in themselves are good. And even the things that don't seem to harmonize with higher parts of creation harmonize with the lower part — with the earth — which has its own weather and atmosphere suited to it.

Let me never say, then, that these things shouldn't exist. If I could only see the lower parts of creation, I might wish for something better — but even for these alone I should praise you. For even from the earth — dragons, and all the deep places; fire and hail; snow and mist; stormy winds doing your bidding; mountains and all hills; fruit trees and all cedars; wild animals and all cattle; creeping things and birds; kings and all peoples; princes and all judges of the earth; young men and girls; the old and the young — all of them praise your name.

And from the heavens too: all your angels, all your heavenly armies; sun and moon; all stars and light; the highest heavens; and the waters above the heavens — all praise your name.

I no longer wished for better things — because I was thinking of all things together. And I saw with clearer judgement that the things above are better than those below, but that everything taken together is better than the higher things alone.

Chapter 14: When he was displeased with some part of creation, he invented two original substances

20. There is no spiritual health in anyone who is displeased by any part of your creation — and there was no health in me, because many things you had made displeased me. And because my soul dared not be displeased with *you*, it refused to allow those displeasing things to be counted as yours.

From there it slid into the idea of two substances — and rather than resisting this error, I just went along with it and talked nonsense. Then, drawing back from that, I constructed for myself a god stretched through infinite spatial dimensions — and imagined that was you — and placed this invented god in my heart. And my heart had become the temple of its own idol, which was an abomination to you.

But then — without me realising it — you stroked and soothed my proud head, and closed my eyes so they wouldn't keep looking at empty things. And for a little while I came to rest from myself; my madness was quietened to sleep; and I woke up in you, and saw that you are infinite — but in an entirely different way than I had imagined. And that sight did not come through the body.

Chapter 15: Everything that exists owes its existence to God

21. And I looked at other things, and I saw that they owe their existence entirely to you — and that they are all held within you. But not in the way that space contains things. Rather, you hold all things in the truth of your hand. And everything is true insofar as it has being — there is no falsehood except when something that does not exist is thought to exist.

And I saw that all things fit together — not only with their proper places, but with their proper times as well. And that you — who alone are eternal — did not begin to work only after some long stretch of empty time had passed. Because all stretches of time — past and future — neither come nor go except through you, who work and remain.

Chapter 16: Evil does not come from a substance — it comes from a will that has turned away from God

22. And I came to understand something — and it no longer surprised me — that bread which tastes disgusting to a sick person tastes good to a healthy one; and light which is painful to sore eyes is pleasant to healthy ones.

Your righteousness is offensive to the wicked. Even more so are the snake and the tiny worm — both of which you created good, fitting perfectly into the lower parts of your creation. And the wicked themselves fit into those lower parts too — the more unlike you they become, the more they belong there. Whereas the more a person becomes like you, the more they fit with the higher parts of creation.

And I looked into what wrongdoing — iniquity — actually is. And I found that it is not a substance. It is a turning of the will — bent away from you, O God, who are the supreme Substance, and twisted down towards lower things — pouring itself outward and swelling up with empty pride.