



Looking in the Mirror of Augustine's Rule

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Abstract

Augustine's Rule is one of the most influential texts in the history of religious life in the West. Those who follow the Rule, whose longest chapter deals with visual asceticism, are to examine themselves in it "as in a mirror." This paper uses visual theory to explore the meaning of the Rule as a mirror in order to have a new look at the meaning of chastity, self-knowledge, and the gaze.

Keywords

Augustine's Rule, mirror, chastity, self-knowledge, gaze

In *The Mirror of the Self: Sexuality, Self-Knowledge, and the Gaze in the Early Roman Empire*, Shadi Bartsch argues that precisely the interrelation of the three discourses of vision, sexuality, and self-knowledge provides a space for conceptualizing selfhood in the early Roman Empire.¹ Her approach modifies Michel Foucault's theories and avoids the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan as well as contemporary film theory.² Also, she steers away from discussing the Church fathers, but she lays significant groundwork that can be used to analyze early Christianity even in the late Roman Empire.³ Her intersection of these three topics may, in fact, assist us as a guide to the world of early Christian asceticism, with its various continuations, transformations, and renunciations of sexuality, self-knowledge, and the gaze that we find studied in Bartsch's book.

Like Seneca's works and other texts that Bartsch marshals for her evidence, Augustine's brief *Praeceptum, Regula 3*, or simply Rule,

¹ Shadi Bartsch, *The Mirror of the Self: Sexuality, Self-Knowledge, and the Gaze in the Early Roman Empire* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 1.

² For Bartsch's modification of Foucault, see esp. *Mirror of the Self*, chap. 5 "Models of Personhood," pp. 230–81. For her disavowal of engaging Lacan and film theory, see *Mirror of the Self*, p. 13.

³ Cf. *Mirror of the Self*, p. 13.

invites analysis in these same areas of study.⁴ Augustine's Rule has special significance not only for its antiquity, but also for its continued authority for many religious communities, including the Order of Preachers. The Rule's asceticism, once brought to sharper relief through an application of visual theories, can be more readily appreciated for its original setting in the late Roman Empire and applied to Christian life today. Influenced by Bartsch, I propose to take "mirror" as a master metaphor that allows us to see the intersection of chastity, self-knowledge, and the gaze in Augustine's Rule. Such a metaphor, as we will see, understands Augustine in his own terms—but in a new light. Moreover, while recent studies have shown how asceticism petitions the gaze,⁵ this study explores one example of a wide philosophical and religious asceticism that disciplines the gaze in sexual renunciation.⁶

I begin each section with a vantage point of Bartsch's work and then proceed to analyze Augustine's Rule with assistance from additional views, both ancient and modern. By this method of visual theory, I argue that the Rule serves as a mirror so that Augustine's brethren, striving to become true "lovers of spiritual beauty," may grow in self-knowledge under the watch of God and the community, especially in the paradigmatic case of the sexual gaze.⁷ Such self-knowledge, in seeing themselves in the Rule as to how they have been and not been faithful, spurs the brothers on to Christian love in their identity as those made free under grace.

⁴ Augustine's authorship of the Rule and related monastic documents has been a vexed question, but one carefully studied to much profit in Luc Verheijen, O.S.A., *La Règle de saint Augustin*, vol. 1 *Tradition manuscrite*, vol. 2 *Recherches historiques* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1967). George Lawless, O.S.A., follows Verheijen's results with a distinctive analysis in *Augustine of Hippo and His Monastic Rule* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). I am using the critical edition established by Verheijen in vol. 1, pp. 417–37. This is repeated, with only two changes and without the critical apparatus, in Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo*, pp. 80–103, where a translation is found on the opposite pages. Having consulted published translations, I have made my own translations of ancient texts unless otherwise indicated.

⁵ Patricia Cox Miller writes, "[P]etitioning the gaze may have been one of the premises of ascetic activity itself." See her "Desert Asceticism and 'The Body from Nowhere,'" *JECS* 2 (1994): 137–153, at p. 138. She supports her claim by citing Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 327; Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 24 and 27; Edith Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 13.

⁶ Study of ascetical practices can profit from even greater attention to the senses. For the sense of smell, too often neglected, see esp. Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). While the sense of taste is frequently the subject of comments in ascetical dietary regimens, Augustine's Rule speaks more about vision than food (cf. *reg.* 3.1–3.5).

⁷ *Reg.* 8.1. *spiritalis pulchritudinis amatores.*

The Mirror

Shadi Bartsch contrasts ancient notions of the mirror with those of our time. We take mirrors for granted; they are cheap and plentiful. In antiquity, mirrors were rather rare and expensive. Bartsch continues:

[The mirror] was the subject of optical theorizing, magic beliefs, and most of all, of moralizing discourses. . . . [T]he ancient reception of the mirror provides a way to understand the interrelation of such seemingly disparate discourses in antiquity as the nature of self-knowledge, the visual emphasis of ancient culture, and the interaction of eros and philosophy; the mirror allows us entry into all three topics of this study at once.⁸

Augustine fits well within the parameters of Bartsch's method as he loved the image of a mirror.⁹ He certainly inherited within his worldview various philosophical attitudes toward mirrors as well as those distinctively Christian, such as the two places in the New Testament that mention a mirror, James 1:23 and 1 Cor 13:12. The Rule's conclusion alludes to the former passage, while the latter passage stands out as "the scriptural text to which [Augustine] referred more frequently than any other throughout his authorship."¹⁰ Paul says to the Corinthians, "We see now through a mirror in enigma; but then face to face."¹¹ But how does Augustine speak of mirrors, and specifically readings as mirrors?¹² Augustine frequently applies the word "*Speculum*" to the Scriptures.¹³ In fact, Augustine near his death compiled various verses from the Old and New Testaments and called this work "*Speculum*;" Augustine planned it "for a rule of life" (*ad vitae regulam*) both for those who could read much and those who could not.¹⁴ In his *Enarrationes in psalmos* Augustine repeatedly refers to the Scriptures as a mirror for his church.¹⁵ For example,

⁸ Bartsch, *Mirror of the Self*, p. 17.

⁹ Cf. Ritamary Bradley, C.H.M., "Backgrounds of the Title *Speculum* in Medieval Literature," *Speculum* 29 (1954): 100–115, esp. 102–05.

¹⁰ Margaret R. Miles, "'Facies ad Faciem': Visuality, Desire, and the Discourse of the Other," *The Journal of Religion* 87 (2007): 43–58 at p. 54.

¹¹ 1 Cor 13:12. Videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate; tunc autem facie ad faciem.

¹² Augustine, as it should be noted, also continued the philosophical tradition of considering the soul as a mirror. E.g. *Soliloquia*. 2.35 for the expression "speculum cogitationis."

¹³ *The Rule of Saint Augustine: Masculine and Feminine Versions*, with introduction and commentary by Tarcisius J. van Bavel, O.S.A. and translation by Raymond Canning, O.S.A. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984), 119.

¹⁴ Possidius, *Vita Sancti Aurelii Augustini* 28.3 (PL 32, 57). Quique prodesse omnibus volens, et valentibus multa librorum legere, et non valentibus, ex utroque divino Testamento, Vetere et Novo, praemissa praefatione praecepta divina seu vetita ad vitae regulam pertinentia excerpsit, atque ex his unum codicem fecit; ut qui vellet legeret, atque in eo vel quam obediens Deo inobediens esset, agnosceret: et hoc opus voluit *Speculum* appellari.

¹⁵ Michael Fiedrowicz, chap. 2, "Speculum et Medicamentum nostrum," in *Psalmus Vox Totius: Studien zu Augustins 'Enarrationes in Psalmos'* (Freiburg: Herder, 1997),

while preaching on Psalm 103, Augustine comments on the verse, "You have clothed yourself in confession and beauty." He preaches:

[God] has placed his Scripture, a mirror, for you. It is read to you, "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God." A mirror has been given in this reading. See if you are what it said. If you're not yet, lament so that you may be. The mirror will make your face known to you. Just as you will not perceive the mirror as a flatterer, so too you will not caress yourself. Its clarity shows you what you are. See what you are. If it displeases you, strive not to be that way.¹⁶

This theme occurs at the final chapter of Augustine's Rule. Here also Augustine suggests vision, self-knowledge, and *erōs* while holding up a mirror. The Rule concludes:

May the Lord grant that you observe all these things with love, as lovers of spiritual beauty, burning with the good fragrance of Christ from your manner of living, not as slaves under the law, but as the free who are established under grace. And so that you may be able to examine yourselves in this little book as in a mirror (*tamquam in speculo*), it should be read to you once a week—lest you neglect anything through forgetfulness. And where you find yourselves doing these things that are written, give thanks to the Lord, the giver of all good things. But whoever among you sees that something is lacking in himself, let him grieve about the past and be on guard about the future, while praying that his debt be forgiven and that he not be led into temptation.¹⁷

The metaphor of the mirror, reminiscent of James 1:23, allows us to see the comparability in Augustine's thought between the Bible and his own writing for Christian living. With its numerous biblical references and especially its modeling on the community described in the Acts of the Apostles, the brief Rule encapsulates an abbreviated

pp. 145–233 and general introduction to *Expositions of the Psalms 1–32*, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century III/15, trans. and notes by Maria Boulding, O.S.B., ed. John E. Rotelle, O.S.A. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 13–66, esp. sec. 10, "The Psalms as a Mirror and Remedy of Salvation for the Soul," pp. 37–43.

¹⁶ *En. Ps.* 103(1).4. *posuit tibi speculum scripturam suam; legitur tibi: "beati mundi corde, quoniam ipsi deum uidebunt."* *speculum in hac lectione propositum est; uide si hoc es quod dixit; si nondum es, gema ut sis. renuntiabit tibi speculum faciem tuam; sicut speculum non senties adulatorem, sic nec te palpes. hoc tibi ostendit nitor ille quod es; uide quod es; et si tibi displicet, quaere ut non sis.*

¹⁷ *Reg* 8.1-2. *Donet dominus, ut obseruetis haec omnia cum dilectione, tamquam spiritualis pulchritudinis amatores et bono Christi odore de bona conuersatione flagrantes, non sicut serui sub lege, sed sicut liberi sub gratia constituti. Ut autem uos in hoc libello tamquam in speculo possitis inspicere, ne per obliuionem aliquid neglegatis, semel in septimana uobis legatur. Et ubi uos inueneritis ea quae scripta sunt facientes, agite gratias domino bonorum omnium largitori. Ubi autem sibi quicumque uestrum uidet aliquid deesse, doleat de praeterito, caueat de futuro, orans ut ei debitum dimittatur et in temptationem non inducatur.*

scriptural way of life.¹⁸ Expanding upon Elizabeth Clark's recognition of the Bible as the text lying behind the ascetic texts of *Vitae* and *Regulae*, I suggest that Augustine's Rule serves—as do also the Rules of Basil and of Benedict—as a basic rendition of putting the Bible into practice.¹⁹ Just as the Creed is a Rule of faith by which the Scriptures are believed, so too the *Praeceptum* is a Rule of love by which the Scriptures are lived for the ascetic community.²⁰ This suggestion of the Rule's comparability to Scripture in mirroring Christian practice is not without parallels elsewhere in Augustine's works. In writing to Boniface, a layman, husband, and prominent imperial official in North Africa, Augustine employs the word “mirror” for his text and compares his writing to the Bible. Augustine writes, “May this letter be for you a mirror where you see how you are rather than where you may learn how you ought to be. Nevertheless, whatever truth you still lack for the good life you will find it in this letter or in the sacred scriptures.”²¹ Moreover, one can recall from Augustinian theology that not only Augustine's writings but even the Scriptures are *just* a mirror for this life, not heaven's light itself.²²

Holding on to this image of the Rule as mirror, we can now consider the three aspects of chastity, self-knowledge, and the gaze in the Rule. This triangulation in method may result in a deeper appreciation for the community's ascetic practices which are weekly checked by the Rule's hearing so that the brethren may see themselves—both their ideal selves in the constancy of the Rule's ideal and in their imperfect selves in weekly reality.

¹⁸ Cf. T. J. van Bavel, O.S.A., “The Evangelical Inspiration of the Rule of St Augustine,” *The Downside Review* 93 (1975): 83–99.

¹⁹ Cf. Elizabeth A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), esp. 60. Clark begins her introduction, “*Reading Renunciation* explores the exegetical problem confronting early Christian ascetic writers who wished to ground their renunciatory program in the Bible. Their ‘problem’ arose because the Bible only sporadically supported their agenda” (p. 3). Someone could likewise allege that the Bible only sporadically supported the credenda of the Rule of faith. For the Rule of Benedict, see esp. *RB* 73.1–3. Basil's Longer Rules convey numerous scriptural references; their opening emphasis on love of God and love of neighbor resonates with Augustine's own predilection in regulating life.

²⁰ Cf. *sermo* 58.11.13 where Augustine counsels his people to take the Creed as a mirror each day to see if they believe what they say they believe.

²¹ *Ep.* 189.8 (to Boniface). Ita ut haec epistula magis tibi sit speculum, ubi, qualis sis, uideas, quam ubi discas, qualis esse debeas. uerum tamen quicquid siue in ista siue in scripturis sanctis inuenieris,

²² E.g. *Jo. ev. tr.* 35.8–9 and *conf.* 12.13.16. Also, I do not mean to suggest that Augustine considered his writing as on par with the Scriptures. For his belief that the Scriptures are unequalled, see esp. his *ep.* 82 (to Jerome).

The Mirror and Chastity

Bartsch recalls that the mirror in antiquity was not esteemed as a morally neutral instrument. "When used by men . . .," Bartsch writes, "the mirror could point to—or result in—more than an increase in vanity or an exhibition of the erotic. A broad range of texts from as early as fifth-century Athens testify to the idea that only the 'effeminate' man—the passive homosexual, the eunuch, the hermaphrodite—would consult a mirror."²³

In calling his Rule a mirror, Augustine does not suggest any effeminacy of the brethren. Rather, he wants his words to reflect to the brothers the ideal of their ascetic life in various respects—not simply the sexual. The first reason, he says, that the brothers are gathered together is to be "one soul and one heart in God."²⁴ The details of the first chapter concerning possessions, with special attention to brothers coming from both rich and poor backgrounds, end in reprising this theme: "Therefore, all of you are to live in a unanimous and harmonious way. In one another among you honor God, whose temples you have become."²⁵

Yet, the chapter with the longest treatment in the Rule is chapter 4, which deals especially with problems concerning sins of the eye against chastity. The Rule mirrors the sexual asceticism and lack thereof in the fraternal community. Chapter 4 states:

Do not let your eyes, even if they are cast toward some woman, be fixed on anyone. For when you go out, you are not forbidden to see women, but to desire them or to want to be desired by them is reproachful. In respect to concupiscence for women, one desires and is desired not only by touch and affection, but also by sight. Do not say that you have chaste souls if you have unchaste eyes, because an unchaste eye is the messenger of an unchaste heart. Even when the tongue is silent, unchaste hearts announce with a look toward one another, and by the concupiscence of the flesh they take pleasure in the burning for each other. Chastity itself flees from customs even if bodies remain intact from an impure violation.²⁶

²³ Bartsch, *Mirror of the Self*, p. 30.

²⁴ *Reg.* 1.2; cf. Acts 4:32a. *anima una et cor unum in deum*. Van Bavel writes, "All of the other chapters [of Augustine's Rule] can be seen as elaborations and applications of the inspiring principles offered in the first chapter." See his "'And honour God in one another' (*Rule of Augustine* 1, 8)," in Cornelius Mayer, ed., *Homo Spiritualis: Festgabe für Luc Verheijen OSA zu seinem 70. Geburtstag* (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1987), pp. 195–206, at p. 195.

²⁵ *Reg.* 1.8; cf. Acts 4:32; Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 6:16. *Omnes ergo unianimiter et concorditer uiuite, et honorate in uobis inuicem deum cuius templa facti estis*.

²⁶ *Reg.* 4.4. *Oculi uestri, et si iaciuntur in aliquam feminarum, figantur in nemine. Neque enim, quando proceditis, feminas uidere prohibemini, sed adpetere, aut ab ipsis adpeti uelle, criminis est. Nec solo tactu et affectu, sed aspectu quoque, adpetitur et adpetit concupiscentia feminarum. Nec dicatis uos animos habere pudicos, si habetis oculos*

Legislation on the sexual gaze is of course not a uniquely Christian phenomenon. Michel Foucault recalls Xenophon's record of Spartan formation that showed "the strictest modesty in demeanor (walking in the streets in silence, with downcast eyes and with hands hidden beneath their cloaks)."²⁷ In his volume 3 of the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault comments, "The gaze was thought to be the surest vehicle of passion; it was the path by which passion entered the heart and the means by which passion was maintained."²⁸ However, Christianity did not simply continue previous ascetical practices of vision. It transformed them and injected into them distinctively Christian senses of sin and goodness. In explicit revision on past thinking, Matt 5:28 makes even looking with lust already adultery in the heart.²⁹ In Christian visual asceticism, Augustine's Rule is not as harsh as some eremitical practices that discourage even looking at a woman.³⁰ Augustine's brethren may, after all, see women. However, such vision is regulated. The Rule considers the eyes to be windows into the soul, which may be the source of sin. In the Rule's own expression "an unchaste eye is the messenger of an unchaste heart." This interiority leads us into our next section.

The Mirror and Self-knowledge

Bartsch contrasts modern notions of self-knowledge with ancient forms of knowing oneself. Bartsch writes, "The ancient mirror is not a metaphor for the turning of the mind, pure *nous*, upon itself;

inpudicos, quia inpudicus oculus inpudici cordis est nuntius. Et cum se inuicem sibi, etiam tacente lingua, conspectu mutuo corda nuntiant inpudica, et secundum concupiscentiam carnis alterutro delectantur ardore, etiam intactis ab immunda uiolatione corporibus, fugit castitas ipsa de moribus.

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, vol. 2 of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), pp. 74–75; cf. Xenophon, *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians*, 2 and 3.

²⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, vol. 3 of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 138. For a comparative study on Foucault and Augustine, see J. Joyce Schuld, *Foucault and Augustine: Reconsidering Power and Love* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003). For this aspect of sexuality, see esp. the treatment on "The Power of Desiring and Social Configuration," pp. 85–102.

²⁹ Some other key texts of the Gospel include Matt 6:22 concerning the eye as the lamp of the body and Matt 18:9 concerning an eye that causes one to sin. Neither passage explicitly pertains to sexual sin.

³⁰ Gerald Bonner discusses the example of the monk in Egypt who notices that nuns are along the road. The leader of the women turns to him and says, "If you had been a perfect monk you would not have looked so closely as to see that we were women." *Augustine of Hippo: The Monastic Rules*, p. 78; cf. *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* 4.62, trans. by Owen Chadwick, *Western Asceticism* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1958), p. 58. This story is also used in Aline Rousselle, *Porneia: On Desire and the Body in Antiquity*, trans. Felicia Pheasant (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 141.

what is mirrored is either the community or God.”³¹ For example, Seneca writes about examining his days in a letter on drunkenness. He says, “Thus we must certainly live, as we live in plain sight; thus we must think, as if someone is able to look deep inside the heart, and someone can. For what use is it that something is secret from a human? Nothing is closed from God.”³² This Stoic teaching prepares us to consider Augustine, whom Marcia Colish has called “the single most important figure in the history of the Stoic tradition in the Latin west between the third and the sixth centuries.”³³

The note of introspection at the end of the Rule, as we have already seen is inextricably bound to both community and God. This is no solipsistic mirroring. Returning to chapter 4, we find that community and God give the brother an opportunity for self-knowledge. The Rule says, “He who fixes his eye upon a woman and loves her fixed eye upon himself should not doubt that he is seen by others, when he does this. He is certainly seen, even by those whom he does not think see him. But if this lies hidden and no human being sees him, what will he do about that Observer on high from whom nothing can hide?”³⁴ Augustine safeguarded himself and his community against transgressions of the eye by this communal watch. In fact, according to Possidius, Augustine as bishop never spoke with women alone, but always had clergy present as witnesses.³⁵

How can contemporary visual theory aid in understanding Augustine's practice? In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault contrasts the ancient spectacular culture (where many can see one, such as in a theater) with the modern surveillance culture (where one can gaze upon many, as represented by Bentham's penitentiary Panopticon.)³⁶ Foucault argues that only in modernity can we speak of this kind of surveillance. Foucault's periodization has not been without

³¹ Bartsch, *Mirror of the Self*, p. 26.

³² *Ep.* 83.1 (*Seneca: Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, 2, p. 258; Loeb edition). Sic certe vivendum est, tamquam in conspectus vivamus; sic cogitandum, tamquam aliquis in pectus intimum introspicere possit; et potest. Quid enim prodest ab homine aliquid esse secretum? Nihil deo clusum est.

³³ Marcia L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, vol. 2, *Stoicism in Christian Latin Thought through the Sixth Century*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985), p. 142. For a detailed study of one Stoic influence on the Rule, see Luc Verheijen, “The Straw, the Beam, the ‘Tusculan Disputations’ and the ‘Rule’ of Saint Augustine: On a Surprising Augustinian Exegesis,” *Augustinian Studies* 2 (1971): 17–36.

³⁴ *Reg.* 4.5. Nec putare debet qui in femina figit oculum et illius in se ipse diligit fixum, ab aliis se non uideri, cum hoc facit; uidetur omnino, et a quibus se uideri non arbitrator. Sed ecce lateat et a nemine hominum uideatur, quid faciet de illo desuper inspectore quem latere nihil potest?

³⁵ Possidius, *Vita Sancti Aurelii Augustini* 26.3.

³⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), pp. 216–217.

criticism.³⁷ In Augustine's Rule, we may be taking a step from spectacle to surveillance in a communal watch on all the brethren and a divine omnipresent vision upon all. This similarity to Foucault's focus of study, instructive of the regulatory aspect, need not have the rather sinister implications of early modern penal institutions. Indeed, Augustine means the Rule precisely to safeguard freedom under grace.³⁸

With Mary Douglas we can use anthropological theory to see self-knowledge as stemming from the constant exchange of meanings between the group and the individual. Douglas writes, "The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society."³⁹ Applying these perceptions of the two bodies, we find that Augustine realizes that the brother can be misled in his own thoughts. But when the Rule mirrors for the brother what the community and God perceive, then the brother can grow in this self-knowledge within the communal body formed in God. The Rule pairs the community and God again not only in their watching, but also in their preserving of the brother's chastity. The Rule states: "When therefore as soon as you are in church and wherever there are also women, guard the purity of one another. For God who dwells in you also will guard you in this way from among yourselves."⁴⁰ At this point, Augustine applies the communal correction of Matt 18:15–17 to the sin of an unchaste eye. He writes, "And what I have said about not fixing the eye should also be diligently and faithfully observed in other sins discovered, prohibited, revealed, proved, and punished—with love for the people and hatred for the sins."⁴¹ Moreover, the opposite reactions to person and sin, love and hatred by the community, carries an astonishing power for one's self-knowledge. A penitent brother can know that he is always loved by his community and God—despite his hated failings. Therefore, one's actions do not completely determine

³⁷ For a variety of applications of the gaze to Roman culture, see David Fredrick, ed., *The Roman Gaze: Vision, Power, and the Body* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), esp. some critiques of Foucault in Fredrick's introduction, pp. 1–30.

³⁸ Cf. *reg.* 8.1.

³⁹ Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2003), p. 72.

⁴⁰ *Reg.* 4.6. Quando ergo simul estis in ecclesia et ubicumque ubi et feminae sunt, inuicem uestram pudicitiam custodite; deus enim qui habitat in uobis, etiam isto modo uos custodiet ex uobis.

⁴¹ *Reg.* 4.10. Et hoc quod dixi de oculo non figendo etiam in ceteris inueniendis, prohibendis, indicandis, conuincendis, uindicandisque peccatis, diligenter et fideliter obseruetur, cum dilectione hominum et odio uitiorum.

how one is perceived in the gaze of another— our last topic before concluding.

The Mirror and the Gaze

Bartsch counsels her reader to distance the ancient world from our own concerning vision. Following Hans Jonas, she says:

Sight . . . seems to us the most neutral and the most detached of all the senses: innocent of causality, boundless in its scope, synchronous rather than diachronous in its workings. And yet this perspective has little to do with the understanding of the visual process in antiquity. Almost all the ancient schools of thought about optics, from the atomists to Plato, Euclid, and Ptolemy, put an emphasis on the tactile nature of sight, and several of them talk specifically in terms of penetration and touching in language that is literal, not metaphorical.⁴²

We find a similar emphasis in a recent study on Augustine by Margaret Miles. Miles says, "Augustine adopted Plato's theory of the visual ray that touches its object as a perfect model for his description of both the potential danger of desire and for his account of positive desire resulting in the vision of God."⁴³ Miles sketches these two epistemologies of dangerous desire and positive desire in her consideration of the *Confessions* and the *De trinitate*. She thinks that scholars have lost sight of the role of physical vision in the Platonic tradition and she accentuates the positive role of physical beauty for Augustine. However, we find more in the Rule the epistemology of danger when it comes to discourse of vision. Here Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger* can assist our analysis. But first, we can review Augustine's Rule on the gaze and how it has a tactile quality.

The Rule as an adjustable mirror prohibits the gaze of desire through a series of visual changes of focus.⁴⁴ The Rule zooms in on gazes exchanged between a brother and a woman, it pans to include the community's vision of a brother's transgression, and it offers the unremitting vision of the Lord. From this perspective of the Lord's sight upon unchaste vision, the Rule quotes Prov 27:20 (LXX), "An abomination to the Lord is a fixed eye."⁴⁵ Moreover,

⁴² Bartsch, *Mirror of the Self*, pp. 58–59. Cf. Hans Jonas, "The Nobility of Sight: A Study in the Phenomenology of the Senses," in *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 135–152.

⁴³ Miles, "'Facies ad Faciem': Visuality, Desire, and the Discourse of the Other," p. 52. Cf. Schuld, *Foucault and Augustine*, p. 90 in the pithy expression: "Beauty, for Augustine, is always a blessing and a temptation."

⁴⁴ Cf. *reg.* 4.4.

⁴⁵ *Reg.* 4.5. Abominatio est domino defigens oculum.

the brother looks at himself metaphorically when the Rule is read to him. These aspects of ascetic vision come into view because the transgression against chastity is “not only by touch and affection, but also by sight.”⁴⁶ The most vivid representation of the sense of vision comparable to touch comes in the communal correction of an offending brother.

The Rule compares the impure eye to a bodily wound. It says, “For if your brother has a wound in the body, which he wants to hide since he fears to be cut surgically, would it not be cruel for you to be silent and merciful for you to reveal it? Therefore how much more rather ought you to manifest it so that it may not putrefy more perniciously in the heart?”⁴⁷ Indeed, sin corrupts the inmost being with putrefaction, a state in marked contrast to the intended goal of the Rule: to form brethren as lovers of spiritual beauty, giving off the good fragrance of Christ.⁴⁸ The brother with an unchaste eye, if he refuses to submit to punishment should be expelled from the society. The Rule states, “For this occurs not cruelly, but mercifully, lest by his pestiferous contagion he should kill many.”⁴⁹ Those familiar with Mary Douglas’s work on purity can now readily apply her understanding of pollutions as “analogies for expressing a general view of the social order.”⁵⁰ Precisely because the transgressor’s danger continues to harm the innocent, according to Douglas’s theory, the community brands the delinquent.⁵¹ Applying this theory to our case of a strong group, the unrepentant brother with an unchaste eye is expelled to protect the social order with its innocent and vulnerable members. In a community guided by Augustinian thought, such an action must proceed from the demands of love.

Before leaving this section on the gaze, we briefly contrast Augustine with his older contemporary John Chrysostom. In her article, “John Chrysostom on the Gaze,” Blake Leyerle applies feminist film criticism to her early Christian study.⁵² That criticism of the gendered gaze exposes how woman is the spectacle for desire and man

⁴⁶ *Reg.* 4.4. Nec solo tactu et affectu, sed aspectu quoque.

⁴⁷ *Reg.* 4.8. Si enim frater tuus uulnus haberet in corpore, quod uellet occultare, cum timet secari, none crudeliter abs te sileretur et misericorditer indicaretur? Quanto ergo potius eum debes manifestare, ne perniciosius putrescat in corde?

⁴⁸ Cf. *reg.* 8.1.

⁴⁹ *Reg.* 4.9. Non enim et hoc fit crudeliter, sed misericorditer, ne contagione pestifera plurimos perdat.

⁵⁰ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London and New York: Ark Paperbacks, [originally printed 1966] 1988), p. 3.

⁵¹ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp. 133–134.

⁵² Blake Leyerle, “Chrysostom on the Gaze,” *J ECS* 1 (1993): 159–174. To introduce her project’s use of feminist film criticism, Leyerle credits: Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn’t* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16 (1975): 6–18, E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (New York: Methuen, 1983), and Beth Newman, “The Situation of

the bearer of the look. In Leyerle's analysis, even those men seen and vividly described by Chrysostom, such as monks living with virgins in "spiritual marriages," are themselves feminized in his theatrical rhetoric.⁵³ But Augustine's Rule differs markedly from Chrysostom's preaching. Augustine, as we have seen, focuses on mutuality in sins of vision not comparable to Chrysostom's own look. Moreover, the Rule was easily disseminated in a feminine version with the appropriate changes of gender and references to the opposite sex.⁵⁴ The Rule as a mirror equally reflects communities of men and communities of women. Its accessibility to both male and female ascetics distances it from those who exclusively depict women as dangerous or pleasurable objects for male viewing.⁵⁵ Augustine's Rule stands up rather well to that feminist concern today.

Conclusion

Through the master metaphor of the mirror, we see reflected in Augustine's Rule an intersection of chastity, self-knowledge, and the gaze comparable to what Shadi Bartsch studied in the texts of the Roman Empire. However, Augustine has not only adopted these discourses, he has adapted them to meet the needs of his Christian asceticism. As I have shown with the help of ancient and modern views, this kind of community life features a professedly scriptural asceticism of vision for a close-knit social body that renounces the sexual gaze and does so without falling into a decidedly sexist account of the gaze. In this visual asceticism, the brothers are to hear the Rule again and again, seeing themselves (both in ideal and present forms) in the Rule, giving thanks to God for what they have kept. Where they have failed, they pray in sorrow for the past and to be on guard for the future lest they be led into temptation. This visual asceticism makes explicit a way how the brothers are to be of one soul

the Looker-On': Gender, Narration, and Gaze in *Wuthering Heights*," *PLMA* 105 (1990): 1037–1038.

⁵³ See also Blake Leyerle, *Theatrical Shows and Ascetic Lives: John Chrysostom's Attack on Spiritual Marriage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), esp. Chrysostom's use of comedy to describe these monks in chap. 5, "Ridiculous Men," pp. 100–142.

⁵⁴ Later interpolations made some changes beyond simply the gender, but recent textual criticism does not allow for these changes. See Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo and His Monastic Rule*, p. 110. According to Lawless on p. 136, one of the (now discredited) arguments for the Rule originally addressed to women was the reference to the mirror in the Rule's conclusion.

⁵⁵ This aspect of the Rule may help us to understand more about Augustine's position regarding women. For an insightful study on some of the complexities, see Gerald Bonner, "Augustine's Attitude to Women and 'Amicitia'," in Cornelius Mayer, ed., *Homo Spiritualis: Festgabe für Luc Verheijen OSA zu seinem 70. Geburtstag* (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1987), pp. 259–275.

and one heart in God. By seeing their identity in this light, those who today profess obedience according to the Rule of St. Augustine can apply its ancient wisdom to matters of growth in authentic Christian love.

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