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2018

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Maurice Borrmans MAfr. (1925-2017)

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# *Nobilissimus philosophus paganorum / falsus philosophus: Porphyry in Augustine's Metaphilosophy*

Giovanni Catapano\*

## *Abstract*

The aim of this article is to highlight Augustine's judgment on Porphyry as a philosopher and to show whether and how it is related to Augustine's general idea of philosophy. In Augustine's evaluation Porphyry is a great philosopher and a false philosopher at the same time: a great philosopher as being an eminent exponent of the best among the schools of philosophy, Platonism; a false philosopher as being an archenemy of Christianity, which is the *uerissima philosophia*. The question that this article tries to answer is: To what extent does Augustine think that Porphyry's anti-Christian errors depend on the fact that Porphyry was a philosopher, which means a Platonic philosopher? In other words: How much is philosophy, especially Platonism, responsible for Porphyry's anti-Christianism in Augustine's opinion? By analysing Books VIII and X of the *City of God*, this article claims that Augustine wants to present Porphyry's rejection of the Christian religion as not due to authentically philosophical reasons, and not necessarily consequent to Porphyry's Platonism. Augustine argues that had been Porphyry a consistent Platonist and a consistent philosopher, he would have found in philosophy, if anything, reasons for embracing Christianity rather than dismissing it. The simultaneous presence of greatness and falsehood in the portrait of Porphyry painted by Augustine is not, therefore, due to contradiction in Augustine's thought. On the contrary, such ambivalence is due to Augustine's apologetic plan for depriving Porphyry's anti-Christianism of any philosophical foundation and putting it at odds with the Platonic tradition itself, regarded as the school that has rightly gained primacy among the ancient philosophical schools.

## *1. Preliminary remarks*

The relationship between Porphyry and Augustine can be studied from many points of view. Porphyry scholars examine Augustine's texts carefully looking for fragments of works attributed to Porphyry.<sup>1</sup> Smith's edition of Porphyry's fragments includes sixty-one fragments taken from Augustine, mostly from the *City of God*.<sup>2</sup> From this point of view, Augustine is seen as a source for obtaining information on Porphyry. Augustine scholars, by contrast, generally regard Porphyry as a source used by Augustine and deal with questions such as the following ones: Which texts and ideas of Porphyry did Augustine actually know? When and how did he become acquainted with them?

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\* A first version of this paper was discussed at the Philosophische Fakultät of the Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena on July 4, 2014, during the workshop "Porphyry and Augustine". I thank the organizer, Prof. Dr. Matthias Perkams, and the other speakers (Miira Tuominen and Christian Tornau) for their comments on that occasion.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. e.g. A. Magny, *Porphyry in Fragments. Reception of an Anti-Christian Text in Late Antiquity*, Ashgate, Farnham-Burlington 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Porphyrii philosophi *Fragmenta*, ed. A. Smith *Fragmenta Arabica* D. Wasserstein interpretante, Teubner, Stuttgart-Leipzig 1993, pp. 616-7.

To what extent did they affect his thinking? In which places of his works and for what reasons and purposes did he make use of them?<sup>3</sup> Porphyry experts therefore usually study Augustine in order to learn more about Porphyry, whereas Augustine experts usually study Porphyry in order to learn more about Augustine. From both points of view, the relationship that these authors have with each other is deemed to be relevant: Augustine is a fundamental witness for reconstructing Porphyry's lost works *On the Return of the Soul* and *Philosophy from Oracles*,<sup>4</sup> and Porphyry in turn is considered an important source for understanding the content of Augustinian texts such as the treatise *On the Immortality of the Soul*.<sup>5</sup> Although these points of view are different, they are not separate from each other. The assessment of Augustine's reliability as a witness to Porphyry cannot be separated from the study of Augustine's attitude towards his Neoplatonic sources, and vice versa Porphyry's actual influence on Augustine has also to be measured in relation to those texts and ideas whose attribution to Porphyry is based precisely on the testimony of Augustine.

In this paper, I will look at the relationship between Porphyry and Augustine just from the point of view of an Augustine scholar. I will not try to study Augustine for increasing or improving our knowledge of Porphyry, nor will I discuss or suggest hypotheses concerning Porphyry's works and doctrines. While taking my place on the Augustinian side of the relationship between the two

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. the bibliography quoted by G. Madec, "Augustin et Porphyre. Ébauche d'un bilan des recherches et des conjectures", in M.-O. Goulet-Cazé - G. Madec - D. O'Brien (sous la dir. de), *ΣΟΦΙΗΣ ΜΑΙΗΤΟΡΕΣ*, "Chercheurs de sagesse": *Hommage à Jean Pépin*, Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, Paris 1992, pp. 367-82. To this should be added at least the following studies: M. Cutino, "I Dialogi di Agostino dinanzi al *De Regressu animae* di Porfirio", *Recherches Augustiniennes* 27 (1994), pp. 41-74; N. Cipriani, "Il rifiuto del pessimismo porfiriano nei primi scritti di S. Agostino", *Augustinianum* 38 (1998), pp. 413-28; J. Pépin, "La hiérarchie par le degré de mutabilité (Nouveaux schèmes porphyriens chez saint Augustin I)", *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 10 (1999), pp. 89-107; Id., "Pourquoi l'âme automotrice aurait-elle besoin d'un véhicule? (Nouveaux schèmes porphyriens chez saint Augustin II)", in J.J. Cleary (ed.), *Traditions of Platonism: Essays in Honour of J. Dillon*, Ashgate, Aldershot 1999, pp. 293-305; Id., "À propos de la doctrine de la conversion: Augustin et Porphyre sur le degré d'être", in T. Kobusch - M. Erler - I. Männlein-Robert (eds.), *Metaphysik und Religion: Zur Signatur des spätantiken Denkens. Akten des Internationalen Kongresses vom 13.-17. März 2001 in Würzburg*, Saur, München-Leipzig 2002, pp. 153-66; A. Lévy, "Porphyrius christianus: l'intégration différenciée du platonisme à la fin du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle (S. Grégoire de Nysse/S. Augustin d'Hippone)", *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 88 (2004), pp. 673-704; I. Bochet, "The Role of Scripture in Augustine's Controversy with Porphyry", *Augustinian Studies* 41 (2010), pp. 7-52; Ead., "Les *quaestiones* attribuées à Porphyre dans la *Lettre* 102 d'Augustin", in S. Morlet (ed.), *Le traité de Porphyre Contre les chrétiens: Un siècle de recherches, nouvelles questions*. Actes du colloque international organisé les 8 et 9 septembre 2009 à l'Université de Paris IV-Sorbonne, Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, Paris 2011, pp. 371-94; G. Clark, "Acerrimus inimicus? Porphyry and the *City of God*", in Morlet (ed.), *Le traité de Porphyre Contre les chrétiens*, pp. 395-406; A. Magny, "How Important were Porphyry's Anti-Christian Ideas to Augustine?", in M. Vinzent (ed.), *Studia Patristica* 70, Peeters, Leuven-Paris-Walpole 2013, pp. 55-61. For a synthesis, cf. F. Van Fleteren, "Porphyry", in A.D. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids - Cambridge 1999, cols. 661-3; A. Smith, "Porphyrius", in R. Dodaro - C. Mayer - C. Müller (eds.), *Augustinus-Lexikon*, IV, Schwabe, Basel 2016, cols. 790-5.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. J.J. O'Meara, *Porphyry's Philosophy from Oracles in Augustine*, Études Augustiniennes, Paris 1959; Id., "Porphyry's Philosophy from Oracles in Eusebius's *Praeparatio euangelica* and Augustine's *Dialogues of Cassiciacum*", *Recherches Augustiniennes* 6 (1969), pp. 103-39; P.F. Beatrice, "Quosdam Platoniorum libros. The Platonic Readings of Augustine in Milan", *Vigiliae Christianae* 63 (1989), pp. 248-81; R. Goulet, "Augustin et le *De regressu animae* de Porphyre", in I. Bochet (ed.), *Augustin philosophe et prédicateur: Hommage à Goulven Madec*. Actes du colloque international organisé à Paris les 8 et 9 septembre 2011, Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, Paris 2012, pp. 67-110.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the *status quaestionis* made by G. Catapano, "Introduzione generale", in *Aurelio Agostino, Tutti i dialoghi*, Bompiani, Milano 2006, pp. VII-CXCVII, in part. pp. CXXXIV-CXLIV, and by Ch. Tornau in his German edition of Augustine's *De Immortalitate animae*, Schönningh, Paderborn (forthcoming).

authors, I will not follow, however, the prevailing approach among Augustine scholars regarding Porphyry as a source. I have not the intention to help to determine the contents, limits, and effects of Augustine's knowledge of Porphyry. My aim is, rather, to highlight Augustine's judgment on Porphyry as a philosopher and to show whether and how such a judgment is related to Augustine's general idea of philosophy, which I call his 'metaphilosophy'.<sup>6</sup> I will consider only explicit opinions of Augustine about Porphyry. Therefore, my investigation will be limited to texts in which Augustine cites Porphyry by name or clearly refers to him in other ways. Among these texts, I will leave aside those in which Augustine neither mentions Porphyry's status of philosopher, nor does he make any judgments about Porphyry's ideas.

## 2. Some lexical data

Let us start with some lexical data. The lemma 'Porphyrius' occurs 65 times in Augustine's corpus.<sup>7</sup> In four of these occurrences, which are found in Book I of the work *Against Julian* (sections 19 and 32), the name *Porphyrius* refers to two of the fourteen Eastern bishops who judged Pelagius at Diospolis in 415 and acquitted him from heresy. In all other cases, this name indicates our philosopher Porphyry.

As mentioned 61 times, Porphyry is in second place in the ranking of the philosophers most cited by Augustine. In first place is Plato, with 199 occurrences; in third is Epicurus, with 28; in fourth Socrates, with 26; in fifth Apuleius, with 25. I have excluded from this ranking Cicero and Varro, who are cited respectively 237 and 97 times. Although Augustine drew from the works of both these authors a great deal of information about philosophers and philosophical doctrines, and although he was converted for the first time to philosophy by reading Cicero's *Hortensius*,<sup>8</sup> he seems not to have regarded Cicero and Varro as philosophers in the strict sense, as is evidenced for example by the epithet *philosophaster* that he gives to Cicero in the *City of God* (2,27).<sup>9</sup>

Despite the relatively high number of its occurrences, the name of Porphyry is found in only four works of Augustine, in two of his letters and in one of his sermons. All these writings belong to the episcopal period of Augustine's literary production. The oldest text is considered to be the *De consensu euangelistarum*, which according to Pierre-Marie Hombert dates back to 403-4.<sup>10</sup> The *Quaestiones Contra paganos* and *Sermo 241* may have been composed in the same years. The following table shows the distribution of the occurrences in each text.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. G. Catapano, "The Development of Augustine's Metaphilosophy: *Col 2:8* and the 'Philosophers of this World'", *Augustinian Studies* 38 (2007), pp. 233-54; Id., "Philosophia", in Dodaro - Mayer - Müller (eds.), *Augustinus-Lexikon*, Vol IV (above, n. 3), cols. 719-42.

<sup>7</sup> I was able to find these data thanks to the CD-ROM *Corpus Augustinianum Gissense*, ed. by C. Mayer, Version 2, Schwabe, Basel.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Aug., *De beata uita* I, 4; *Conf.* III, IV, 7-8.

<sup>9</sup> On the meaning of '*philosophaster*' in that context, cf. G. Catapano, "L'uso del termine '*philosophus*' nel *De ciuitate dei*", in C. Müller - R. Dodaro - A.D. Fitzgerald (eds.), *Kampf oder Dialog? Conflict/Dialogue? Begegnung von Kulturen im Horizont von Augustins De ciuitate dei / Augustine's Engagement with Cultures in De ciuitate dei*. Internationales Symposium / International Symposium, Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, Roma, 25.-29. September 2012, Augustinus bei echter, Würzburg 2015, pp. 187-99, in part. pp. 190-1.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. P.-M. Hombert, *Nouvelles recherches de chronologie augustiniennne*, Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, Paris 2000, pp. 81-7.

Title	Date of composition <sup>11</sup>	Number of occurrences	Places (chapters or sections)
<i>De Consensu euangelistarum</i>	403-4	1	1
<i>De Ciuitate dei</i>	412-26	49	25
<i>Retractationes</i>	426-7	3	2
<i>De Praedestinatione sanctorum</i>	428	1	1
<i>Epistula</i> 82	not before summer 405	1	1
<i>Epistula</i> 102 (= <i>Quaestiones expositae contra paganos numero sex</i> )	403 or 404?	3	3
<i>Sermo</i> 241	403 or 404?	3	2

Table 1: Occurrences of the name of Porphyry in Augustine's writings

What immediately leaps out in this table is the great disproportion in the distribution of the occurrences. As much as 80% of them are found in the *City of God*; the other writings contain only one or three occurrences each. In the *City of God* itself the occurrences are unevenly distributed, as this other table shows:

Book	Date of composition <sup>12</sup>	Number of occurrences	Chapters
VII	415	1	1
VIII	416	1	1
X	416	24	11
XII	418	3	2
XIII	418	1	1
XIX	after 420	4	2
XX	after 422	2	1
XXII	425	13	6

Table 2: Occurrences of the name of Porphyry in Augustine's *De Ciuitate dei*

Half of the occurrences contained in the *City of God* are concentrated in Book X; another quarter gathers in Book XXII; the rest is scattered in six other books, with a maximum of four occurrences in Book XIX.

From these data it appears that Augustine cites Porphyry frequently only in two books of the same work, that is, in Books X and XXII of the *City of God*. The general context of these Books is given by anti-pagan apologetics, which also characterizes the *De Consensu euangelistarum*, the *Quaestiones contra paganos*, and *Sermo* 241. More specifically, it may be interesting to note that Books X and XXII of the *City of God* close the two main parts into which the work is divided. As Augustine himself says in *Epistula* 1A\* (Divjak), 1 and *Retractationes* II, XLIII, 1-2, the first ten books of the work refute opinions contrary to the Christian religion, while the remaining twelve explain and defend the contents of the Christian faith, although the constructive aspect is also present in the first part of the work and the polemic aspect is also present in the second. Perhaps it is no coincidence that Augustine reserves the culminating moments both of his refutation of paganism and his defence of Christianity to a critical *Auseinandersetzung* with Porphyry. More precisely,

<sup>11</sup> According to J. Anoz, "Cronología de la producción agustiniana", *Augustinus* 47 (2002), pp. 229-312.

<sup>12</sup> According to Anoz, "Cronología", pp. 236-7.

Book X of the *City of God* concludes the second half of the first part of the work (Books VI-X), in which Augustine criticizes the position of those who believe that worshipping many gods with sacrifices is useful for life after death, while Book XXII concludes the last third of the second part (Books XIX-XXII), in which Augustine tackles the issue of the final destinies of the two mystical cities. In particular, Book X details the concepts of sacrifice and purification, while Book XXII deals with the topic of the saints' eternal happiness in their resurrected bodies. In summary, we can say that Augustine's *Auseinandersetzung* with Porphyry concerns two main questions: (1) Under what conditions and by what factors can the soul attain union with God and hence happiness after death, that is, after the soul's separation from the body? (2) What relationship will the happy soul have with the body it was joined to in this life? With regard to these issues, both related to eschatology, Augustine's judgment on Porphyry is highly critical. Porphyry, according to Augustine, deliberately took a position diametrically opposed to the Christian faith, refusing Christ's Incarnation as universal purification factor and posing complete separation from any body as a necessary condition for a soul to be happy. From Augustine's point of view, this means that Porphyry's theses are culpably erroneous. The question that I will try to answer is: To what extent does Augustine think that Porphyry's guilty errors depend on the fact that Porphyry was a philosopher, namely, a Platonic philosopher? In other words: How much is philosophy, especially Platonism, responsible for Porphyry's anti-Christianism in Augustine's opinion?

### 3. Did Augustine change his mind about Porphyry?

Before answering this question, let us give a look at another lexical datum. Augustine calls Porphyry *philosophus*, or assigns him to the class of the 'philosophers', or in any case associates him to this class, in 17 of the 35 places in which he cites Porphyry. To these must be added at least two other places that are found in Book X of the *City of God* (chapters 27 and 28), in which Augustine apostrophizes Porphyry without calling him by name. As a philosopher, Porphyry is described by Augustine three times as *nobilis* (i.e., as 'well-known') or even *nobilissimus*, three times as 'great' (*tantus, magnus*) and once as '*doctissimus*', while he is qualified only once as *falsus*. The first attribute, *nobilis*, is used in a substantially non-judgmental sense: Augustine merely states that Porphyry is one of the best known philosophers. It is noteworthy that, in all the three places in which the adjective *nobilis* is attributed to Porphyry as a philosopher, Augustine refrains from any value judgments on Porphyry. The second and third attributes ('great' and 'learned') have a positive connotation: by using them, Augustine recognizes that Porphyry was a great philosopher and a very educated person. This recognition, however, is granted for critical purposes, in order to oppose the hesitations of so great a philosopher concerning demons to the certainties of any little old Christian woman, or to put Porphyry's authoritative appreciation of the God of the Jews in contradiction with his aversion to Christianity. As for the last attribute, '*falsus*' has an utterly critical meaning, which poses a problem of compatibility with the previous attributes: How can a philosopher be described as 'great' and 'false' at the same time?

It could be tempting to solve this problem by noting that the only place in which Augustine calls Porphyry a 'false' philosopher is *Retractiones* I, IV, 3, which is also the latest place in which he qualifies Porphyry's title of philosopher with an adjective. Since Augustine's evaluation of Porphyry as a false philosopher is not coeval with, but following to his evaluation of Porphyry as a great philosopher, the assumption could be made that Augustine eventually changed his mind. Such an assumption, however, is quite implausible. The last place in which Augustine calls Porphyry a 'great' philosopher (*Ciu.* XX, 24) does not precede the *Revisions* by more than four years: the idea

that Augustine radically changed his opinion on Porphyry in a short span of time, at the end of his life, is completely far-fetched. There are valid reasons to believe, on the contrary, that Augustine's overall judgment on Porphyry as a philosopher remained essentially the same. The thesis of the 'false philosopher' Porphyry from which Augustine dissociates himself in the *Revisions*, the one that every body ought to be fled from, is clearly criticized by Augustine in several places of the *City of God* (Books X, XII, XIII, and XXII) and in *Sermon* 241.<sup>13</sup> Other Porphyrian statements concerning mythology, theurgy, and demonology are the target of heavy, sometimes even sarcastic, criticism in Books VII and X of the *City of God*. Recognizing Porphyry's fame, greatness, and culture never prevents Augustine from exposing the falsity of some of this philosopher's doctrines. Augustine's evaluation of Porphyry always includes both appreciation and criticism. We can find clear traces of this double-faced evaluation since the opening chapters of the *De uera religione*, a treatise that Augustine composed in 390, in which all the essential elements of his judgment on Porphyry are already in a nutshell, as I will try to show.

Simply put, the positive qualities of Porphyry that Augustine recognizes are related to the fact that Porphyry was a Platonic philosopher and so belonged to the philosophical school that came closer to some fundamental theological truths professed by Christians. On the other side, the negative qualities of Porphyry that Augustine criticizes are related to Porphyry's rejection of the Christian religion, a rejection that Augustine means to present as not due to authentically philosophical reasons and not necessarily consequent to Porphyry's Platonism. Augustine argues that in fact, if Porphyry had been a consistent Platonist and above all a consistent philosopher, he would have found in philosophy, if anything, reasons for embracing Christianity rather than dismissing it. The simultaneous presence of greatness and falsehood in the portrait of Porphyry painted by Augustine is not, therefore, due to Augustine's contradiction. On the contrary, such ambivalence is due to Augustine's apologetic plan for depriving Porphyry's anti-Christianism of any philosophical foundation and putting it at odds with the Platonic tradition itself, regarded as the school that has rightly gained primacy among the ancient philosophical schools.

#### 4. Porphyry as a philosopher in the City of God

I will now examine some places in the *City of God* in which Augustine's judgment on Porphyry is connected with Augustine's idea of philosophy. In analysing these places I will also refer to some passages, taken either from this same work or from other works of Augustine, that are relevant from a metaphilosophical point of view, even if they do not concern Porphyry explicitly.

##### 4.1 Book VIII

Let me start from Book VIII of the *City of God*. This Book is undoubtedly one of the most important texts for the study of Augustine's metaphilosophy. In chapters 1-11 Augustine first justifies his choice of the Platonists as interlocutors on the subject of natural theology; then he traces Plato's philosophical genealogy and expounds Plato's doctrines according to the division

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. L.B. Richey, "Porphyry, Reincarnation and Resurrection in *De Ciuitate Dei*", *Augustinian Studies* 26 (1995), pp. 129-42; M. Chase, "Omne corpus fugiendum? Augustine and Porphyry on the body and the post-mortem destiny of the soul", *Chora* 2 (2004), pp. 37-58; I. Bochet, "Résurrection et réincarnation. La polémique d'Augustin contre les platoniciens et contre Porphyre dans les *Sermons* 240-242", in G. Partoens - A. Dupont - M. Lamberigts (eds.), *Ministerium Sermonis: Philological, historical, and theological studies on Augustine's Sermones ad populum*, Brepols, Turnhout 2009, pp. 267-98.

of philosophy into natural, moral, and rational; finally, he emphasizes the closeness between Platonism and Christianity as regards the idea of God and he considers the hypothesis of a biblical influence on Plato. It is in chapter 1 of this remarkable Book that we find the famous statement that the true philosopher is a lover of God (*uerus philosophus est amator dei*).<sup>14</sup> Augustine presents this statement as a corollary of the etymological definition of the philosopher as a lover of wisdom; a definition that he attributes to Pythagoras in chapter 2 of the same Book. As the Scriptures reveal that God's wisdom is that by which all things were made, it follows that those who love true wisdom love God. To be more explicit than Augustine himself, by this reasoning we should conclude that those who love true wisdom love Christ, because, according to the prologue of the *Gospel of John*, the divine Word through which all things were created became flesh. This divine Word made flesh, which is Christ and the crucified Christ, is then defined by saint Paul in the First *Epistle to the Corinthians* (1:24) as the power of God and the wisdom of God. Since the very beginning of his confrontation with the Platonic philosophers in the *City of God*, Augustine therefore implicitly, but unequivocally, suggests that from a Christian point of view the true philosopher loves Christ, not only as the eternal Word through which all things were made, but also as the incarnate, crucified God. Augustine chooses the Platonic philosophers among the others because they understood that the whole visible world and every soul are created by a transcendent, triune God. From this point of view, the Platonists were 'truer' philosophers than the others, because in some way they recognized the existence of the eternal Word. At the same time, however, Augustine criticizes the Platonists in that they did not recognize and accept Christ as the incarnate, crucified God. From this different point of view, the Platonists are 'false', or not completely true, philosophers. According to Augustine's metaphilosophical criterion, the Platonists appear as half true and half false philosophers. On the one hand, Augustine appreciates them for their celebrated greatness; on the other hand, he blames them for refusing God's incarnation in Jesus. On the basis of the faith in Christ as both divine and human, Augustine is able to argue that the refusal of the human side of Christ, so to speak, is not consistent with, or a necessary consequence of, the recognition of his divine side. Given that the specific difference that distinguishes the Platonists from the other Greek philosophers lies in their concept of God as the supreme, transcendent cause of existence, knowledge, and happiness, according to Augustine it is not as a Platonist that a philosopher such as Porphyry rejects the Christian faith. Porphyry's anti-Christianism is not attributable to his Platonism, by virtue of which he partakes of true philosophy, but to other reasons, namely his curiosity for magic and his pride.

In Book VIII, chapter 12 of the *City of God* Augustine gives some examples of Platonists. He introduces them by remarking that the very fact that those philosophers wanted to be called 'Platonists' indicates their proximity to the thought of Plato and to the truths Plato had achieved:<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> On this statement and its meaning in Augustine's thought, cf. G. Madec, "*Verus philosophus est amator dei*. S. Ambroise, S. Augustin et la philosophie", *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 61 (1977), pp. 549-66.

<sup>15</sup> Aug., *Ciu.* VIII, 12, ed. B. Dombart - A. Kalb, Brepols, Turnhout 1955 (*CCSL* XLVII), p. 229; trans. W. Babcock, New City Press, Hyde Park (NY) 2012 (*The Works of Saint Augustine* [hereafter: WSA] I/6), pp. 256-7.

<p>Ideo quippe hos potissimum elegi, quoniam de uno deo qui fecit caelum et terram, quanto melius senserunt, tanto ceteris gloriosiores et inlustriores habentur, in tantum aliis praelati iudicio posterorum, ut [...] recentiores tamen philosophi nobilissimi, quibus Plato sectandus placuit, noluerint se dici Peripateticos aut Academicos, sed Platonicos. Ex quibus sunt ualde nobilitati Graeci Plotinus, Iamblichus, Porphyrius; in utraque autem lingua, id est et Graeca et Latina, Apuleius Afer extitit Platonicus nobilis. Sed hi omnes et ceteri eius modi et ipse Plato diis plurimis esse sacra facienda putauerunt.</p>	<p>I chose them, in particular, because, just as their view of the one God who made heaven and earth is superior to the others, so too they are held in higher esteem and more preeminent regard than the others. And they have been ranked far above others philosophers by the judgment of posterity. [...] In spite of all this, however, the most distinguished philosophers of more recent times, who chose to follow Plato, did not want to be called either Peripatetics or Academics but simply Platonists. Of these, the most notable are the Greeks Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Porphyry, but the African Apuleius also stands out as a noteworthy Platonist in both languages, that is, in both Greek and Latin. All these, however, and others of their like, as well as Plato himself, thought that worship should be given to many gods.</p>
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The fame of the Platonists is described in this passage as directly proportional to the correctness of their views about the Creator, which are closer to truth than those of the other philosophers. Porphyry is mentioned in last place among the Greeks after Plotinus and Iamblichus. This is the only occurrence of the name of Iamblichus in all Augustine's writings. The fact that in this list his name precedes that of Porphyry suggests that Augustine was not aware of the fact that Iamblichus was a pupil of Porphyry. Scholars usually do not include Iamblichus among Augustine's sources;<sup>16</sup> it would be interesting, however, to investigate this matter, as Iamblichus was the most ardent supporter of theurgy and the need for ritual sacrifices and expounded his view in a work, the *De Mysteriis*, which is a reply to the *Letter* of Porphyry to Anebo, the same *Letter* that Augustine, albeit from a completely different point of view, also criticizes in Book X of the *City of God*.

#### 4.2 Book X

The relationship between theurgy and philosophy is at the heart of the other passages from the *City of God* that I am now going to examine. These passages are all contained in Book X. The section concerning theurgy begins in chapter 9. Augustine has just finished to mention some miracles narrated in the Old Testament, claiming that they occurred to confirm the teaching of the holy Scripture, which recommends worshipping the one true God and prohibits worship of the many false gods. Those miracles, Augustine says, took place through the work of faith and devotion, not of the art that pagans call either 'magic', or derogatorily 'sorcery', or favourably 'theurgy', which is an expression of impious curiosity. Augustine does not accept the distinction that someone draws between the devotees to sorcery, who would be reprehensible, and the devotees to theurgy, who would be laudable, and believes that both are entangled in deceptive rites of demons masquerading as angels.

<sup>16</sup> There are few exceptions, such as J.-C. Fredouille, "Sur la colère divine: Jamblique et Augustin", *Recherches Augustiniennes* 5 (1968), pp. 7-13; D. O'Brien, "Pondus meum amor meus. Saint Augustin et Jamblique", *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 198 (1981), pp. 423-8.

After introducing his discussion on theurgy with this denial of its essential difference from sorcery and this affirmation of the equally demonic origin of both, Augustine mentions and, in chapter 10, comments on Porphyry's admission of the effectiveness of theurgic rites. Then, in chapter 11, Augustine reports the more critical stand against theurgy taken by Porphyry in his *Letter to Anebo*. Many fragments of *De regressu animae* in Smith's edition are taken from this section of the *City of God*. This is not the place to analyse all of them, much less to discuss their attribution to *De Regressu animae* or the complex issue of the identity of this writing of Porphyry. I will only focus on four of these fragments, i.e., 288F, 289F, 290F, and 292F Smith, corresponding to lines 13-37 of chap. 9 in Dombart&Kalb's edition of the *City of God* published in the *Corpus Christianorum* series (Smith's italics):<sup>17</sup>

[288F] Nam et Porphyrius quandam quasi *purgationem animae per theurgian*, cunctanter tamen et pudibunda quodam modo disputatione *promittit*; *reursionem uero ad deum hanc artem praestare cuiquam negat*; [289F] ut uideas eum inter uitium sacrilegae curiositatis et philosophiae professionem sententiis alternantibus fluctuare. Nunc enim *hanc artem tamquam fallacem et in ipsa actione periculosam et legibus prohibitam cauendam monet*; [290F] nunc autem uelut eius laudatoribus cedens utilem dicit esse *mundandae parti animae, non quidem intellectuali, qua rerum intellegibilem percipitur ueritas, nullas habentium similitudines corporum; sed spiritali, qua corporalium rerum capiuntur imagines. Hanc enim dicit per quasdam consecrationes theurgicas, quas teletas uocant, idoneam fieri atque aptam susceptioni spirituum et angelorum et ad uidendos deos. Ex quibus tamen theurgicis teletis fatetur intellectuali animae nihil purgationis accedere, quod eam faciat idoneam ad uidendum deum suum et perspicienda ea, quae uere sunt. Ex quo intellegi potest, qualium deorum uel qualem uisionem fieri dicat theurgicis consecrationibus, in qua non ea uidentur, quae uere sunt. Denique animam rationalem siue, quod magis amat dicere, intellectualem, in sua posse dicit euadere, etiamsi quod eius spiritale est nulla theurgica fuerit arte purgatum*; [292F] *porro autem a theurgo spiritalem purgari hactenus, ut non ex hoc ad immortalitatem aeternitatemque perueniat.*

Even Porphyry promises a kind of purification of the soul through theurgy, although he does so hesitantly and with some embarrassment about his argument. At the same time, however, he denies that this art provides anyone with a way of return to God. You can see, then, that he fluctuates back and forth between the vice of sacrilegious curiosity and the profession of philosophy, his views alternating from the one side to the other. At one moment, he warns us to be on guard against this art as a delusory, dangerous in actual practice, and prohibited by law; but at the next, as if giving in to those who praise the art, he states that it is useful for purifying part of the soul – not, of course, the intellectual part, by which we perceive the truth of intelligible things that have no bodily likenesses, but rather the spiritual part, by which we apprehend the images of bodily things. He asserts that by means of certain theurgic consecrations, which they call mysteries, this part of the soul is made fit and apt for the reception of spirits and angels and for seeing the gods. But he admits that the intellectual soul gains nothing from these theurgic mysteries with regard to the purification that would make it fit to see its God or to perceive the things that truly exist. From this we can understand what kind of seeing, and of what kind of gods, he says is brought about by theurgic consecrations – a seeing in which the things that truly exist are not seen at all. In fact he claims that the rational soul – or, as he prefers to call it, the intellectual soul – can escape into its own realm even without any purification of its spiritual part by the theurgic art. And, what is more, he says that even the theurgist's purification of the spiritual part does not actually go so far as to allow it, on this basis, to attain to immortality and eternity.

<sup>17</sup> Aug., *Ciu.* X, 9, ed. Dombart - Kalb (CCSL XLVII), pp. 281-2; transl. Babcock (WSA I/6), pp. 314-5.

The sentence on which I would like to focus is that which opens the fragment 289F Smith: Porphyry fluctuates between the vice of sacrilegious curiosity and the profession of philosophy. This is obviously Augustine's judgment, not Porphyry's thought. What is the significance of this judgment? It must be noted that, syntactically, it is inserted into a consecutive sentence (*ut uideas*) and hence expresses a consequence of the foregoing. Augustine is saying that Porphyry's oscillation between *curiositas* and *philosophia* can be seen just because, on the one hand, Porphyry admits that theurgy has some cathartic power, while, on the other hand, he denies the ability of that art to let any soul return to God. Porphyry's sacrilegious *curiositas* is therefore connected to his partial admission of theurgic purification, whereas the *philosophia* professed by Porphyry is connected to his denial that theurgic purification can produce the soul's return to God. From the metaphilosophical point of view that I have adopted in this paper, the question arises why Augustine considers as a profession of philosophy Porphyry's denial that the return of the soul to God may be accomplished by means of theurgy.

An answer to this question can be found in the following lines of the quoted passage. Augustine goes on to state that, according to Porphyry, theurgy is useful only for purifying the spiritual part of the soul, i.e. the one with which the soul catches the images of bodily things. Thanks to theurgic purification, which takes place by means of initiation ceremonies, the soul would be made fit for receiving spirits and angels and for seeing the gods. Theurgic initiations, however, are not able to purify the intellectual part of the soul, with which the soul grasps the true, eternal beings, that is, the intelligibles, and sees God. Theurgic initiations are not even a necessary condition for the intellectual part of the soul to see its own objects; as a matter of fact, the intellectual soul can see them even if the spiritual part of the soul has not been purified by the rites of theurgists. According to the testimony of Augustine, therefore, in Porphyry's opinion theurgy acts on a different part of the soul from the one that the soul must use in order to see God and true reality, and theurgy has no effect on this other part. In this way, theurgy has nothing to do with philosophy, given that the purpose of philosophy is precisely to know true reality and join God. By denying the power of theurgy to lead philosophers to their goal, and hence by distancing himself from theurgy, Porphyry declared himself to be a philosopher. We might add that, more precisely, Porphyry thus declared himself to be a Platonic philosopher, because both the ideas that true reality is the intelligible one and that union with God is the philosopher's ultimate goal belong to Platonism – as Augustine explains not only in the *City of God*, but also in earlier writings such as the early dialogue *Against the Academics*, the treatise *On True Religion*, and *Letter 118*.<sup>18</sup>

So far Augustine seems to judge Porphyry's *philosophiae professio* in favourable terms. But there is a further aspect in this *professio* that Augustine undoubtedly criticizes. This aspect emerges much later in Book X of the *City of God*, namely in chapter 27, and consists in the idea that philosophers are able to achieve their goal by their own virtue. After reporting in chap. 26 that according to Porphyry descending angels announce divine things to the theurgists, at the beginning of chap. 27 Augustine contends that in this way Porphyry brings passions into angels, falling more seriously into error than Apuleius, who expressly claimed that the aetherial gods are not disturbed by passions. Apostrophizing Porphyry, Augustine continues his speech as follows:<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Aug., *Acad.* III, xvii, 37; *Vera rel.* III, 3; *Ep.* 118, III, 16.18-20.

<sup>19</sup> Aug., *Ciu.* X, 27, ed. Dombart - Kalb (*CCSL XLVII*), pp. 301-2; transl. Babcock (*WSA I/6*), pp. 335-6.

<p>[287F] Tu autem hoc didicisti non a Platone, sed a Chaldaeis magistris, ut <i>in aetherias uel empyrias mundi sublimitates et firmamenta caelestia</i> extolleris uitia humana, ut possent dii uestri <i>theurgis pronuntiare diuina</i>; quibus diuinis te tamen per intellectualem uitam facis altiozem, ut tibi uidelicet tamquam philosopho theurgicae artis purgationes nequaquam necessariae uideantur; sed aliis eas tamen inportas, ut hanc ueluti mercedem reddas magistris tuis, quod eos, qui philosophari non possunt, ad ista seducis, quae <i>tibi</i> tamquam superiorum capaci esse <i>inutilia</i> confiteris; ut uidelicet quicumque a philosophiae uirtute remoti sunt, quae ardua nimis atque paucorum est, te auctore theurgos homines, a quibus non quidem in <i>anima intellectuali</i>, uerum saltem in <i>anima spiritali</i> purgentur, inquirant, et quoniam istorum, quos philosophari piget, incomparabiliter maior est multitudo, plures ad secretos et illicitos magistros tuos, quam ad scholas Platonicas uenire cogantur. [288aF] Hoc enim tibi inmundissimi daemones, <i>deos aetherios se esse fingentes</i>, quorum praedicator et angelus factus es, <i>promiserunt, quod in anima spiritali theurgica arte purgati ad patrem quidem non redeunt, sed super aerias plagas inter deos aetherios habitabunt.</i></p>	<p>It was not from Plato, then, but from your Chaldean teachers, that you learned to elevate human faults up into the aetherial and empyrean heights of the universe and into the celestial firmaments, so that your gods would be able to divulge divine things to theurgists. For your own part, you set yourself above these divine matters by virtue of your intellectual life, for you, as a philosopher, apparently have no need of the purification of the theurgic art. But, in order to repay your teachers, you bring these matters in for others, seducing those who are incapable of philosophy into making use of the very thing that you admit is useless to yourself, because you are capable of higher things. Thus, those who are remote from the power of philosophy, which is too hard for all but a few, may, on your authority, seek out theurgists, by whom they can at least be purified in their spiritual soul, although obviously not in their intellectual soul. And since the vast majority have no liking for philosophy, the result is that many more are driven to those clandestine and illegal teachers of yours than to the Platonic schools. For these foulest of demons, who pretend to be gods of the aether, and whose proclaimer and messenger you have become, have made you the promise that those who are purified by the theurgic art in their spiritual soul will not, of course, return to the Father but will at least dwell above the aerial regions among the aetherial gods.</p>
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In this passage, the antithesis between theurgy and philosophy is made explicit in terms of Porphyry's opposition between the *multitudo* of people incapable of philosophizing and the *pauci* to whom the extremely difficult *uirtus* of philosophy only belongs. Porphyry thinks that the many are precluded from returning to the Father, that is, to God; he therefore invites them to go not to the Platonic schools, but to theurgists, who can at least purify the spiritual souls of the many. On the contrary, the happy few, among whom Porphyry inserts himself, do not need theurgy; they are capable of something greater than what theurgy offers, since they can live an intellectual life, for which philosophy is the only both necessary and sufficient condition. Their *philosophiae uirtus* is not a virtue different from philosophy: it is philosophy itself as a virtue. This becomes clear by comparing two parallel passages, one in *Sermo Dolbeau 26*<sup>20</sup> and the other in *De Trinitate*:<sup>21</sup>

<p>Horum autem superbiorum qui detinent <i>ueritatem dei in mendacium</i> [Rom 1:25], duo sunt genera. Alii suae uirtuti se commiserunt, nullum adiutorem quaesierunt, arbitantes animas suas per philosophiam posse purgari, quasi nullo egentibus mediatore. Sed de his in praesentia non est disputandum. Contra paganorum sacrilega sacra nunc agimus. Illi autem nulla sacrificia sibi opitulari dixerunt. Talem fuisse Pythagoram ferunt.</p>	<p>But of these people who hold down the truth of God in a lie there are two kinds. Some have entrusted themselves to their own virtue, have sought no helper, thinking their souls can be purified through philosophy, as though they needed no mediator. But we don't have to discuss these at present. What we are now going into action against is the sacrilegious sacred rituals of the pagans. But these people said that no sacrifices were of any use to them. They say Pythagoras was such a man.</p>
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<sup>20</sup> Aug., *Sermo Dolbeau 26*, 36, ed. F. Dolbeau, in *Augustin d'Hippone, Vingt-six sermons au peuple d'Afrique*, Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, Paris 1996, pp. 393-4; transl. E. Hill, New City Press, Hyde Park (NY) 1997 (WSA III/11), p. 207.

<sup>21</sup> Aug., *Trin.* IV, IV, 20, ed. W. J. Mountain - F. Glorie, Brepols, Turnhout 1968 (CCSL L), p. 187; transl. E. Hill, New City Press, Hyde Park (NY) 1991 (WSA I/5), p. 167.

Sunt autem quidam qui se putant ad contemplandum deum et inhaerendum deo uirtute propria posse purgari, quos ipsa superbia maxime maculat. Nullum enim uitium est cui magis diuina lege resistitur et in quod maius accipiat dominandi ius ille superbissimus spiritus ad ima mediator, ad summa interclusor, nisi occulte insidians alia uia deuitetur, aut per populum deficientem quod interpretatur Amalech aperte saeuens et ad terram promissionis repugnando transitum negans per crucem domini quae Moysi manibus extentis est praefigurata superetur. Hinc enim sibi purgationem isti uirtute propria pollicentur quia nonnulli eorum potuerunt aciem mentis ultra omnem creaturam transmittere et lucem incommutabilis ueritatis quantulacumque ex parte contingere, quod christianos multos ex fide interim sola uiuentes nondum potuisse derident. Sed quid prodest superbienti et ob hoc erubescenti lignum conscendere de longinquo prospicere patriam transmarinam? Aut quid obest humili de tanto interuallo non eam uidere in illo ligno ad eam uenienti quo dedignatur ille portari?

However, there are some people who think that they can purify themselves for contemplating God and cleaving to him by their own power and strength of character, which means in fact that they are thoroughly defiled by pride. No vice is more vehemently opposed by divine law, no vice gives a greater right of control to that proudest of all spirits, the devil, who mediates our way to the depths and bars our way to the heights, unless we avoid his hidden ambushes and go another way; or unless his open assaults by means of a “falling people,” which is what Amalek means, disputing the passage to the promised land, are overcome by the Lord’s cross, which was prefigured by the outstretched arms of Moses. Their reason for assuring themselves of do-it-yourself purification is that some of them have been able to direct the keen gaze of their intellects beyond everything created and to attain, in however small a measure, the light of unchanging truth; and they ridicule those many Christians who have been unable to do this and who live meanwhile out of faith (Rom 1:17) alone. But what good does it do a man who is so proud that he is ashamed to climb aboard the wood, what good does it do him to gaze from afar on the home country across the sea? And what harm does it do a humble man if he cannot see it from such a distance, but is coming to it nonetheless on the wood the other disdains to be carried by?

In the first passage, Augustine paints a portrait of philosophers who did not seek external aid for their purification and have relied solely on their own *uirtus*, believing that nothing else than philosophy could purify their souls. Virtue therefore consists in doing philosophy. Not surprisingly, the philosopher referred to as an example of this kind of pagans is Pythagoras, who is also said to have been the first to call himself a philosopher, as Augustine tells in *De Trinitate* XIV, 1, 2 and on several occasions in the *City of God* (VIII, 2; XVIII, 25.37). Augustine’s criticism of this kind of philosophers is severe: they commit a sin of presumption, thus being imprisoned in diabolical pride and becoming even more in need of purification and liberation. Augustine repeats this same criticism in the second passage, taken from *De Trinitate*.

In chapter 27 of the *City of God*, Book X, Augustine’s judgment on Porphyry is, however, more complex. Augustine does, of course, rebuke Porphyry for committing himself to his own *uirtus*, which is human, all too human, frail, and weak, rather than to Christ. But Augustine also blames him for suggesting that the many make use of demoniac practices such as the theurgic ones, which by Porphyry’s own admission are unable to let the spiritual part of the soul become immortal and eternal. Porphyry’s flaw is not only his prideful presumption of self-sufficiency, but also his elitism, by which he excludes the vast majority of humans from the possibility of returning to God. Augustine highlights both these defects of Porphyry by contrasting them with the humility and universalism of the Christian religion, which professes Christ as a necessary mediator and the saviour of the whole human being (mind, spirit, and body) and of all kinds of human beings.

In opposing Porphyry's ideas on the soul's purification to Christianity, Augustine carefully avoids ascribing Porphyry's lack of faith in Christ to his status of Platonic philosopher. On the contrary, Augustine emphasizes those elements of Porphyry's Platonic philosophy that should have led Porphyry to a different, more favourable attitude towards the Christian faith. This argument strategy is particularly evident in the final chapters of Book X of the *City of God*. At the very beginning of chap. 28 Augustine goes on apostrophizing Porphyry and says:<sup>22</sup>

<p>Mittis ergo homines in errorem certissimum, neque hoc tantum malum te pudet, cum uirtutis et sapientiae profitearis amatorem; quam si uere ac fideliter amasses, <i>Christum dei uirtutem et dei sapientiam</i> [1 Cor 1:24] cognouisses nec ab eius saluberrima humilitate tumore inflatus uanae scientiae resiluisses.</p>	<p>Thus you send people into certain error, and you feel no shame about this great evil, despite the fact that you profess to be a lover of virtue and wisdom. But if you had truly and genuinely loved these things, you would have recognized <i>Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God</i> (1 Cor 1:24), and you would not been so puffed up with pride in empty knowledge that you recoiled from his saving humility.</p>
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In this place Augustine skilfully combines the etymology of philosophy as *amor sapientiae* with the Pauline proclamation of Christ as *dei sapientia*. In this way, he can argue that, if Porphyry had really loved wisdom, that is, if he had really been a philosopher as he professed to be, he would have recognized Christ. The recognition of Christ, not the denial of Christ, is a consistent outcome of the profession of philosophy. Other admissions made by Porphyry, such as that only the *patrikos nous*, that is, the Son of God, can purify ignorance (fr. 291F Smith), or the assertion itself that it has been granted (*scilicet* by God!) only to a few to attain to God by virtue of intelligence (fr. 297F Smith), are per se favourable to Christianity.

Moreover, Augustine claims that estimators of Porphyry cannot consistently appeal to the Platonic tradition in order to reject the basic tenets of Christianity. It is precisely a Platonic doctrine that the intellectual soul, which in humans is united to a body, can become consubstantial with the *paterna mens*, i.e., with the Son of God; it is not unbelievable, then, that one intellectual soul is united to God in Christ. Even the possibility of ascension to heaven of Christ's risen body should be admitted by a Platonist. In fact, in his books *On the Return of the Soul*, Porphyry prescribes fleeing from all bodies for the soul to be happy with God, but this is inconsistent with the Platonic doctrine of the world, the sun, and the stars as immortal, happy, animated bodies.

Referring to Plato or Porphyry, Augustine concludes, is only an excuse to reject the Christian faith. The real reason for this rejection is not Platonism or more generally philosophy, but an ethical attitude incompatible with the one that Christ has shown in his Incarnation and Passion.<sup>23</sup>

<p>Quid ergo est, quod, cum uobis fides christiana suadet, tunc obliuiscimini, aut ignorare uos fingitis, quid disputare aut docere soleatis? Quid causae est, cur propter opiniones uestras, quas uos ipsi oppugnatis, christiani esse nolitis, nisi quia Christus humiliter uenit et uos superbi estis?</p>	<p>Why, then, when the Christian faith is commended to you, do you completely forget, or at least pretend not to know, what you yourselves customarily discuss and teach? Why is that you are unwilling to become Christians simply because you hold opinions which, in fact, you yourselves oppose? What reason is there, except that Christ came in humility and you are proud?</p>
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<sup>22</sup> Aug., *Ciu. X*, 28, ed. Dombart - Kalb (CCSL XLVII), p. 303; trans. Babcock (WSA I/6), p. 337.

<sup>23</sup> Aug., *Ciu. X*, 29, ed. Dombart - Kalb (CCSL XLVII), p. 306; trans. Babcock (WSA I/6), p. 340.

It is to pagans of his time who are still referring to Porphyry that Augustine addresses this provocative accusation of pride, as Augustine himself makes it clear a few lines before in the same chapter, ending the apostrophe to Porphyry:<sup>24</sup>

<p>Scio me frustra loqui mortuo. Sed quantum ad te adinet; quantum autem ad eos, qui te magnipendunt et te uel qualicumque amore sapientiae uel curiositate artium, quas non debuisti discere, diligunt, quos potius in tua compellatione alloquor, fortasse non frustra.</p>	<p>I know that it is pointless to speak to a dead man, but that applies only to you. There are also people who hold you in high regard and feel real affection for you, either due to some sort of love of wisdom or due to their curiosity about those arts which you should never have studied; and, in rebuking you, I am speaking to them. And that, perhaps, is not so pointless after all!</p>
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The real purpose of Augustine's judgment on Porphyry as a philosopher and on his ambivalent attitude towards theurgy in Book X of the *City of God* is, then, the conversion of the last pagan educated *élites*. Augustine wants to show them that the Christian faith does not contradict, but rather brings to fulfilment, the deepest and most genuine expectations of philosophy and Platonism. Augustine already uses this strategy in *De Vera religione*. In this early treatise he argues that, if Plato could come back to life and see the effects of the spread of Christianity, that is, that entire nations are convinced of the fundamental truths that Plato himself had taught, he would recognize that Christ is the wisdom of God. Accordingly, Augustine concludes that now only pride, envy, or curiosity about demons prevent Platonists from becoming Christians:<sup>25</sup>

<p>Ita si hanc uitam illi uiri nobiscum rursus agere potuissent, uiderent profecto, cuius auctoritate facilius consuleretur hominibus, et paucis mutatis uerbis atque sententiis christiani fierent, sicut plerique recentiorum nostrorumque temporum Platonici fecerunt. Aut si hoc non faterentur nec facerent in superbia et inuidia remanentes, nescio utrum possent ad ea ipsa, quae appetenda et desideranda esse dixerant, cum istis sordibus uisquoque reuolare. Nam tertio uitio curiositatis in percontandis daemonibus, quo isti maxime, cum quibus nunc agitur, pagani a christiana salute reuocantur, quia nimis puerile est, nescio utrum tales illi praepedirentur uiri.</p>	<p>Thus, if those men had been able to live this life again with us, they would have seen immediately to whose authority people could more easily turn for such advice, and, with a few changes here and there in their words and assertions, they would have become Christians, as indeed several Platonists have done in recent times and our own days. Or, if they didn't agree to all this and act accordingly but remained in the grip of pride and envy, I don't know how they could ever fly up to those things which they had said were so much to be desired and sought after, with their feet trapped in the birdlime of such foul vices. As for the third instance of the vice of curiosity in consulting demons, by which these pagans above all, with whom we are now engaged, are held back from Christian salvation, it is so excessively childish that I cannot imagine men such as those ancients being chained by its fetters.</p>
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Augustine puts forward a similar argument in *Letter* 118, dated to 410, in which he mentions the school of Plotinus in Rome and his disciples:<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Aug., *Ciu.* X, 29, ed. Dombart - Kalb (*CCSL* XLVII), pp. 304-5; trans. Babcock (WSA I/6), p. 339.

<sup>25</sup> Aug., *Vera rel.* IV, 7, ed. K.D. Daur, Brepols, Turnhout 1962 (*CCSL* XXXII), pp. 192-93; trans. M. O'Connell, New City Press, Hyde Park (NY) 2005 (WSA I/8), p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> Aug., *Ep.* 118, v, 33, ed. K.D. Daur, Brepols, Turnhout 2009 (*CCSL* XXXI/B), p. 135; trans. R.J. Teske, New City Press, Hyde Park (NY) 2002 (WSA II/2), p. 123.

<p>Sed aliqui eorum magicarum artium curiositate deprauati sunt, aliqui dominum Iesum Christum ipsius ueritatis atque sapientiae incommutabilis, quam conabantur attingere, cognoscentes gestare personam in eius militiam transierunt.</p>	<p>But some of them were corrupted by curiosity concerning the arts of magic, while others, knowing that the Lord Jesus Christ bore the person of the immutable truth and wisdom, which they were trying to attain, entered into his army.</p>
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Exactly as in *De Uera religione*, curiosity for the demonic arts of magic is indicated in this letter as the major obstacle to converting to Christianity, which instead is represented as the most natural landing for Platonic philosophers:<sup>27</sup>

<p>Ex quo intellegitur ipsos quoque Platonicae gentis philosophos paucis mutatis, quae christiana improbat disciplina, inuictissimo uni regi Christo pias ceruices oportere submittere et intellegere uerbum dei homine indutum, qui iussit et creditum est, quod illi uel proferre metuebant.</p>	<p>From this it is understood that those philosophers of the Platonic school, having changed a few things of which Christian discipline disapproves, ought to bow their pious necks to the one king, Christ, and to understand that when he, the Word of God clothed with a man, commanded faith, the people believed what the Platonists were afraid even to state.</p>
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In the light of these parallel passages, it is little surprise that in Book X of the *City of God* Augustine insists so much on denouncing the ambiguity and the unphilosophical character of Porphyry's curiosity about theurgy.

A metaphilosophical analysis of this Book of the *City of God* cannot end without a brief examination of the final chapter, in which Augustine's *Auseinandersetzung* with Porphyry concerns the universal way of the soul's liberation.<sup>28</sup> Augustine reports Porphyry's position as follows (fr. 302F Smith):<sup>29</sup>

<p>Cum autem dicit Porphyrius in primo iuxta finem de regressu animae libro nondum receptum in unam quandam sectam, quod uniuersalem contineat uiam animae liberandae, uel a philosophia uerissima aliqua uel ab Indorum moribus ac disciplina, aut inductione Chaldaeorum aut alia qualibet uia, nondumque in suam notitiam eandem uiam historiali cognitione perlatam: procul dubio confitetur esse aliquam, sed nondum in suam uenisse notitiam.</p>	<p>When, near the end of the first book of <i>On the Return of the Soul</i>, Porphyry says that no view containing a universal way of the soul's liberation has as yet been received into any specific philosophical school – not from any supremely true philosophy, not from the morals and practice of the Indians, not from the initiations of the Chaldeans, not from any other way – and that no such way has as yet come to his knowledge from his historical inquiries, he acknowledges beyond any doubt that there is such a way, but it has not yet come to his knowledge.</p>
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<sup>27</sup> Aug., *Ep.* 118, III, 21, ed. Daur (CCSL XXXI/B), pp. 126-7; trans. Teske (WSA II/2), p. 116

<sup>28</sup> On this famous chapter, cf. P. Courcelle, "Verissima philosophia", in J. Fontaine - C. Kannengiesser (eds.), *Epektasis: Mélanges Patristiques offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou*, Beauchesne, Paris 1972, pp. 653-9; B. Studer, "La cognitio historialis di Porfirio nel *De Ciuitate dei* di Agostino (Ciu. X, 32)", in *La narrativa cristiana antica: Codici narrativi, strutture formali, schemi retorici*. XXIII Incontro di studiosi dell' antichità cristiana (Roma, 5-7 maggio 1994), Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, Roma 1995, pp. 529-53; G. Förster, "Ein universaler Heilsweg? Die Auseinandersetzung des hl. Augustinus mit Porphyrios in *De Ciuitate Dei X*", in M. Neubrand - S. Gathmann (eds.), *Lebendige Gemeinde: Beiträge aus biblischer, historischer, systematischer und praktischer Theologie*, Pustet, Regensburg 2005, pp. 284-313; G. Clark, "Augustine's Porphyry and the Universal Way of Salvation", in G. Karamanolis - A. Sheppard (eds.), *Studies on Porphyry*, Institute of Classical Studies, London 2007, pp. 127-40; M.B. Simmons, *Universal Salvation in Late Antiquity: Porphyry of Tyre and the Pagan-Christian debate*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Aug., *Ciu.* X, 32, ed. Dombart-Kalb (CCSL XLVII), pp. 309-10; transl. Babcock (WSA I/6), p. 344.

The exact meaning of Augustine's words from *nondum receptum* to *qualibet uia* is not easy to determine. An interpretation of these words would require a philological analysis, including a discussion of textual variants, that I cannot do here. For the purposes of my paper, I will just consider the way in which Augustine himself comments on the thought that he attributes to Porphyry concerning the relationship between *philosophia uerissima* and *uniuersalis uia*. A few lines below, Augustine writes (fr. 302aF Smith):<sup>30</sup>

<p>Cum autem dicit uel a philosophia uerissima aliqua nondum in suam notitiam peruenisse sectam, quae uniuersalem contineat uiam animae liberandae: satis, quantum arbitror, ostendit uel eam philosophiam, in qua ipse philosophatus est, non esse uerissimam, uel ea non contineri talem uiam. Et quo modo iam potest esse uerissima, qua non continetur haec uia? Nam quae alia uia est uniuersalis animae liberandae, nisi qua uniuersae animae liberantur ac per hoc sine illa nulla anima liberatur?</p>	<p>And when he says that no school containing a universal way of the soul's liberation had as yet come to his knowledge, not even from the truest philosophy, he makes it quite clear, in my view, that the philosophy he himself followed either is not the truest or does not contain such a way. How can a philosophy be the truest if it does not contain such a way? For what else is a universal way of the soul's liberation but a way by which all souls universally are liberated and, therefore, a way without which no soul is liberated?</p>
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In these lines, Augustine partly rewrites the initial portion of the fragment that he has reported above. In this new formulation, the *philosophia uerissima* appears as one of the sources providing Porphyry with information; the question on which this source is consulted is the existence of a *secta* containing the *uniuersalis uia*; the answer given by the source is negative. In other words, Porphyry would be saying that no *philosophia uerissima* has still informed him of a *secta* like the assumed one. This statement would show, according to Augustine, that the philosophy in which Porphyry himself philosophized either is not absolutely true or does not contain the universal way. But a philosophy that does not contain the universal way cannot be absolutely true, so in any case the philosophy to which Porphyry belongs, namely Platonism, proves not to be absolutely true. Logically, it remains a possibility that the philosophy in which Porphyry philosophized, although it is not absolutely true, contains the universal way, but this possibility is in fact excluded from the whole context of the passage. Moreover, had that philosophy contained the universal way, it would have revealed itself as the *secta* that Porphyry was looking for.

This reasoning of Augustine is of considerable interest from a metaphilosophical point of view, especially for the idea that containing a universal way of the soul's liberation is a necessary requirement for a philosophy to be absolutely true. The *philosophia uerissima* thus becomes much more than as a source of information about the *secta* containing the universal way: it becomes this *secta* itself. As a matter of fact, under these conditions either there is no philosophy absolutely true or, if there is one, it contains the universal way of the soul's liberation. It should be noted that the *uniuersalis uia* is so defined by Augustine that, if it exists, it is unique: it is the way that liberates all souls and without which no soul is liberated. If, as Augustine says further, apart from this way no one has been delivered, no one is being delivered, and no one will be delivered, it is clear that there is no other way of liberation apart from this. The uniqueness of the way of liberation, in turn, implies the uniqueness of the *secta* that contains it. If, therefore, there is an absolutely true philosophy, it will be precisely the *una secta* that Porphyry was searching for. And vice versa, if there is a universal way of the soul's liberation, there will also be an absolutely true philosophy containing

<sup>30</sup> Aug., *Ciu.* X, 32, ed. Dombart-Kalb (*CCSL* XLVII), p. 310; trans. Babcock (*WSA* I/6), p. 344.

it. For Augustine, of course, this universal way exists, and it is Christ. And since the only *secta* that contains this way is the Christian religion – which also includes all believers belonging to the Jewish people, and even to other nations, who believed in Christ's future coming –, it follows that the truest philosophy is nothing else than the truest religion in Augustine's opinion. The identity of *uera philosophia* and *uera religio*, already suggested in *De Uera religione*,<sup>31</sup> is confirmed in a passage of *Contra Iulianum*, Book IV (composed around 421), in which the sole true philosophy is said to be the Christian one:<sup>32</sup>

<p>Obsecro te, non sit honestior philosophia gentium, quam nostra christiana, quae una est uera philosophia, quandoquidem studium uel amor sapientiae significatur hoc nomine.</p>	<p>I beg you, do not hold the philosophy of the pagans superior to our Christian philosophy which is the one true philosophy, for this name signifies the pursuit or love of wisdom.</p>
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The quote of Porphyry's fragment on the *philosophia uerissima* in the final chapter of the *City of God*, Book X, is therefore instrumental in the overall account of the relationship between Platonism and Christianity that Augustine has put forward since the *De uera religione*. Goulven Madec has effectively summed up such an account with the phrase: "Christianity as the fulfilment of Platonism".<sup>33</sup> Within this framework, Augustine paints a portrait of Porphyry that is necessarily made of light and shadow. On one side, the head of the philosopher is illuminated by the truths on God that he knew as a Platonist; on the other side, his face is obscured by the fact that he voluntarily turned his backs on the incarnate Wisdom that shines in Christ. It is for this reason that in Augustine's judgment Porphyry is a great philosopher and a false philosopher at the same time: a great philosopher as being an eminent exponent of the best ancient school of philosophy; a false philosopher as being an archenemy of Christianity, which is the *uerissima philosophia*. The source of Porphyry's greatness is not, and cannot be, the cause of his falsity.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Aug., *Vera rel.* v, 8 and G. Catapano, *Il concetto di filosofia nei primi scritti di Agostino: Analisi dei passi metafisici dal Contra Academicos al De uera religione*, Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, Roma 2001, pp. 280-3.

<sup>32</sup> Aug., *C. Iul.* IV, xiv, 72, ed. J.-P. Migne, Paris 1865 (*PL XLIV*), col. 774; trans. R.J. Teske, New City Press, Hyde Park (NY) 1998 (*WSA I/24*), p. 421 On this passage and on the idea of a "Christian philosophy" according to Augustine, cf. S. Alvarez Turienzo, "San Agustín – Su concepto de filosofía eje de toda 'Philosophia Christiana'", *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 11/2 (1955), pp. 690-702; G. Madec, "'Philosophia christiana' (Augustin, *Contra Iulianum* IV, xiv, 72)", in *L'art des confins. Mélanges offerts à Maurice de Gandillac*, PUF, Paris 1985, pp. 585-97; L. Sweeney, "Christian Philosophy in Augustine and Bonaventure", in W.A. Frank - G.J. Etzkorn (eds.), *Essays Honoring Allan B. Wolter*, The Franciscan Institute, New York 1985, pp. 271-308; I. Falgueras Salinas, "Nota sobre la expresión 'filosofía cristiana' en S. Agustín", *Anuario Jurídico Escorialense* 19-20 (1987-88), pp. 463-9; O. Boulnois, "*Philosophia christiana*. Une étape dans l'histoire de la pensée augustinienne", in *Augustin philosophe et prédicateur* (above, n. 4), pp. 349-69; J. Rist, "On the Nature and Worth of Christian Philosophy: Evidence from the *City of God*", in J. Wetzel (ed.), *Augustine's City of God: A Critical Guide*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 2012, pp. 205-24.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. G. Madec, "Le christianisme comme accomplissement du platonisme selon saint Augustin", *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 10 (1999), pp. 109-29.

