



THE EMERGENCE OF SOUL: RETRIEVING AUGUSTINE'S POTENTIALISM FOR CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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Introduction

That there is a certain resonance between Augustine's theology of creation and evolutionary theory has been pointed out by many scholars over the last century, and is reiterated in recent works on the relation between theology and biology.¹ Only very recently, however, has it been suggested that Augustine's theology of creation articulates something like a general theory of emergence *avant la lettre*. Such is the argument in Alister McGrath's 2009 Gifford lectures, published as *A Fine-Tuned Universe: The Quest for God in Science and Theology*.² McGrath notes the dynamic holism of Augustine's notion of seminal reasons (*rationes seminales* or *rationes causales*), which are 'infolded' by God in the world at its original creation, only to *unfold* over time when the right circumstances pertain. As McGrath reads it, not implausibly in my view, these seminal reasons can be used as a theological heuristic for understanding several intriguing features of the world recently disclosed by science, namely the so-called anthropic principles that make this a 'bio-friendly universe'. Says McGrath:

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¹ Conor Cunningham, *Darwin's Pious Idea: Why the Ultra-Darwinists and Creationists Both Get It Wrong* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010); Ernan McMullin, ed., *Evolution and Creation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985); Etienne Gilson, *From Aristotle to Darwin and Back Again: A Journey in Final Causation, Species, and Evolution* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1984); Christopher O'Toole, *The Philosophy of Creation in the Writings of Saint Augustine* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1944). See also the collection of essays in John Doody, Adam Goldstein, and Kim Paffenroth, eds., *Augustine and Science* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), as well as Yiftach Fehige and Adam Richter's review of the same in *Isis* 106, no. 3 (2015): 690-1, where they criticise a tendency among scholars in this field in terms of their often rather selective retrieval of Augustine to support their own view of nature.

² Alister McGrath, *A Fine-Tuned Universe: The Quest for God in Science and Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009). Part of the argument is reiterated in McGrath, *Darwinism and the Divine: Evolutionary Thought and Natural Theology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

The fundamental picture that emerges from the contemporary view of the origins and development of the universe is that of an entity which came into existence and was virtually instantaneously endowed with potentialities for anthropic development. ... The intellectually capacious notion of *rationes seminales* is consonant with a universe that evolves and, as time progresses and conditions change, unfolds potentialities that were present early, though not yet actualized.³

According to McGrath, then, these created potentialities can be understood as the cosmological constants, making possible the emergence of chemical complexity, which in turn makes possible the emergence of life, and constrains the possibilities of its development.⁴ The emergence of the complex world as we know it from the Big Bang onward can thus be seen as the actualization of a potentiality inherent in creation from the very start.

Somewhat disappointingly, however, McGrath shies away from interacting with the most exciting—but also the most troubling—aspect of emergence theory, the emergence of consciousness within a material world.⁵ For it is in fact human consciousness, or mind, that stands out as the great challenge for emergence theory. Moreover, in the seventh chapter of *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, the work from which McGrath principally draws, Augustine himself discusses the possibility that even the human soul may be one of the potentialities inherent in creation from the start, though in the end he seems to conclude that the soul is better thought of as exempt from the processes of development otherwise characteristic of the material world.

I shall argue, however, that it is possible to read Augustine differently, and to retrieve a more radical Augustinian potentialism—even with regard to the soul—that is of significance for the contemporary discussion of the emergence of human consciousness. Before embarking on this historical-systematic exploration, however, I would like to indicate two reasons for why such a retrieval is especially relevant in the context of contemporary theological anthropology.

A More Radical Emergentism

The theory of emergence with regard to human consciousness has captivated the imagination of noted theological thinkers, such as Arthur Peacocke, Philip Clayton, Nancey Murphy, and others.⁶ Emergence theory, in a nutshell, holds that complex dynamic systems, such as a living cell, an ecosystem, or the human brain may give rise to features that are not reducible to the parts of which the system is composed. In this way novel and qualitatively different layers of reality emerge in the world, which may in turn (at least in strong versions of emergence) causally influence their substrate

³ McGrath, *Fine-Tuned Universe*, 125.

⁴ McGrath, *Fine-Tuned Universe*, 142; and 111–201 for the development of the whole argument.

⁵ He points to the problem in a footnote. McGrath, *Fine-Tuned Universe*, 209, note 25. And again in *Darwinism and the Divine*, 244, note 79.

⁶ See especially, Philip Clayton, *Mind and Emergence: From Quantum to Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Philip Clayton and Paul Davies, eds., *The Re-Emergence of Emergence: The Emergentist Hypothesis from Science to Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Nancey Murphy and William Stoeger, S.J., eds., *Evolution and Emergence: Systems, Organisms, Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). For an earlier 'classic' study, see Arthur R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

levels—the whole influences the behaviour of the parts, life constrains the behaviour of inert molecules, mind ‘directs’ the body. In the philosophy of mind, emergence tries to steer a way between substance dualism and reductive materialism.⁷

Emergence theory appears to have several features appealing to the theologian: it suggests a theological anthropology in tune with cutting-edge philosophy and science on the nature of consciousness, and especially with the evolutionary understanding of life and mind as determined by a historical process; and it combines well with theology’s increasing emphasis on the holism of the biblical conception of humankind, in stark contrast both with much later anthropological dualism and with modernity’s typical reductionism, thus promising a way of affirming the unique value and dignity of humankind (as the *imago dei*), yet without having to make scientifically problematic claims often associated with dualistic perspectives.⁸

Should theological anthropology therefore incorporate emergentism in its efforts to make sense of what human beings are? Before answering that question two problems must be addressed. The first is of a *methodological* nature: it is unclear how the emergentist proposal relates to the historical tradition of Christian thought on the nature of humankind, in particular to the language of the soul that pervades Christian theology and spirituality.⁹ While rightly emphasizing the more holistic approach of the biblical traditions over and against the more dualistic thought of much later dogmatics, certain theological appropriations of emergence appear to be primarily wedded to what the sciences are currently saying, and less interested in exhibiting intellectual continuity with the theological tradition—the normative assumptions are thus set by contemporary science. Consequently these proposals come out as more of a novelty in relation to the broader Christian tradition.¹⁰ Karl Barth’s methodological insistence on letting theological anthropology define its own normative assumptions is apposite here (although Barth can perhaps be said to have erred in the other direction through his relative neglect of the sciences).¹¹ In any case, in so far as emergence theory as such is a viable alternative there is good reason to explore the possible continuity it might have with earlier Christian traditions, at least if it is to be of use to the wider project of theological anthropology. This is what our retrieval of Augustine’s theology of creation aims to do.

But is emergence theory in fact viable? This brings us to the second problem, which is *conceptual* in nature and the subject of much recent philosophical debate. It seems

⁷ Terrence W. Deacon, *Incomplete Nature: How Mind Emerged from Matter* (New York: Norton, 2013); and Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007) are two very substantial defenses of emergentism in the philosophy of mind.

⁸ For discussion of the latter point, see Joel B. Green, ‘“Bodies—That is Human Lives”: A Re-Examination of Human Nature in the Bible’, in Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy, and H. Newton Maloney, eds. *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998).

⁹ I stay here with the question of *what* a human being is, but it remains to be investigated how emergence theory inflects such theological *loci* as christology, soteriology, and eschatology. This is not to suggest that theological anthropology could be substantially discussed without reference to these topics, but only to clarify that the present investigation is necessarily circumscribed.

¹⁰ It is perhaps worth observing that emergentism in the philosophy of mind has been elaborated by and received among process philosophers in particular, and therefore among theologians influenced by this school of thought, for which continuity with tradition is not necessarily seen as a desideratum.

¹¹ Cf. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics Study Edition III. 2* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 416–7.

clear that the fundamental philosophical critique of the idea of an emergence of mind from matter has retained its force, namely that moving from matter to mind in this way involves something of a category mistake: regardless of how complexly organized the material substrate is, it is nonetheless nothing but complexly organized matter—it is not mind. In other words, starting out from *mere* matter will only get you mere matter differently organized, and to think otherwise amounts to a conceptual confusion.¹²

Unless, of course, there is a difference between the real nature of matter and the *mere* matter of modern materialism; that is to say if matter already from the start is somehow endowed with the capacity to produce consciousness when the right kinds of systemic organization takes place. This would arguably take emergentism out of the conceptual deadlock such that it would be possible to envisage the emergence of mind from matter, albeit at the rather high cost of a radical reconceptualization of matter. Precisely this move, however, is suggested in several recent significant publications in the philosophy of mind. In this literature emergentism has grown stranger, but also perhaps more interesting from a theological point of view.

A couple of examples will suffice to illustrate the point. Most recently, the celebrated philosopher of mind, Thomas Nagel, has argued that since psychophysical reduction has proved a failure, particularly in view of the widely agreed upon impossibility of a physicalist reduction of qualia, we should abandon materialism in favour of a stranger kind of monism that can perhaps only be approached through what it has been able to produce—conscious human beings. 'A genuine alternative to the reductionist program would require an account of how mind and everything that goes with it is *inherent in the universe*.'¹³ Nagel therefore advocates 'neutral monism', according to which the basic constituents of the natural world 'have properties that explain not only its physical but its mental character'.¹⁴

David Chalmers argues similarly in his landmark book *The Conscious Mind*, where he argues that in order to make sense of consciousness we need to abandon materialism in favour of something like property dualism or, indeed, panpsychic monism: 'Perhaps the physical and the phenomenal will turn out to be two different aspects of a single encompassing kind. ... But it remains the case that if a variety of monism is true, it cannot be a *materialist* monism.'¹⁵ Unlike ordinary materialism, this new monism takes 'phenomenal or protophenomenal properties as fundamental'.¹⁶ In later works, Chalmers is more explicitly emergentist, arguing that the emergence of consciousness

¹² I have in mind such critique as advanced by David Chalmers and Thomas Nagel, on which see below. For an influential critique of emergence in general, see Jaegwon Kim, 'Making Sense of Emergence', *Philosophical Studies* no. 93 (1999): 3-36. Certain Christian thinkers have seized upon this conceptual problem to argue for anthropological dualism and against naturalism. See e.g. J.P. Moreland, *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei: Human Persons and the Failure of Naturalism* (London: SCM Press, 2009).

¹³ Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 15 (emphasis mine); see also 20, 32.

¹⁴ Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 56; see also 4-5. Nagel's book had a mixed reception, to be sure. Critical voices include, among others, Elliott Sober, 'Remarkable Facts: Ending Science as We Know it', *Boston Review*, Nov 7, 2012; and Michael Chorost, 'Where Thomas Nagel Went Wrong', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 13, 2013.

¹⁵ David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 129; cf. 122-3, 128, 171, 299, 378-9 note 41.

¹⁶ Chalmers, *Conscious Mind*, 155.

is the only plausible candidate for strong emergence that we have.¹⁷ After the fact of emergence there are two types of reality—the material and the mental. The origin of these types, however—their primal substrate—must be conceived of either in panpsychic, neutral-monistic, or protomental-monistic terms—but not in materialistic terms alone.¹⁸

If *mere* matter, as the unquestioned starting-point of theories of emergence, is rejected in favour of the more mysterious—but also more conceptually coherent—notion of matter suggested by Nagel and Chalmers, then a conversation with the early Christian intellectual tradition lies close at hand. Against the background of the methodological and conceptual problems identified, as well as sea changes in contemporary philosophy of mind, here illustrated by Nagel and Chalmers, Augustine's theology of creation stands out as highly relevant. For as I shall now try to show, going beyond the hints provided by McGrath, there is an Augustinian trajectory of thought that is indeed 'emergentist' with respect to the soul, and it is an emergentism of the more radical kind.

Augustine and the Twofold Potentiality of Creation

In his mature reflection on the creation narratives in Genesis 1-3, Augustine's basic hermeneutical move is to distinguish between (a) the once-and-for-all original and simultaneous founding of the world *ex nihilo* in God's creative act, as recounted in Genesis 1:1-2:4a (an act which the story divides into six days for largely pedagogical reasons, as well as to indicate the ensuing harmony of the created world), and (b) a temporal unfolding of the so created world, giving rise to vegetation, animals, and human life, as recounted in Genesis 2:4b-3:24. So there is a sense in which God's creative work is finished with the original founding of the world ('God rested from all his work', Genesis 2:2), yet what is so created is front-loaded with the potentialities for on-going development under the providential *gubernatio* of the Creator, who in this sense continues his creative work ('My Father is working until now', John 5:17).¹⁹

What Augustine offers is a 'potentialist' reading of creation that is very complex—not least since his hermeneutic scheme splits potentiality in two, as it were. There is both (a) the primordial potentiality of the *materia informis* created at the original founding of the world, and (b) the historical potentiality of the *rationes seminales* or *rationes causales*, inhering in the world from its beginning and later unfolding when the time and circumstances are right. I shall explain both of these notions.

The first notion, that of a primal unformed matter—*materia informis*—capable of realizing various forms, was already present in Augustine's philosophical context, but it is given a particular shape when combined with the Christian idea of a divine creation of the world *ex nihilo*. When God created the world, Augustine reasons, he must have created

¹⁷ David Chalmers, 'Strong and Weak Emergence', in Philip Clayton and Paul Davies, eds., *The Re-Emergence of Emergence: The Emergentist Hypothesis from Science to Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹⁸ Chalmers, *Conscious Mind*, 129-30, 298-9. Cf. William Hasker, *The Emergent Self* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1999), 194-5. Chalmers responds to critics and develops his position further in *The Character of Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). For another powerful philosophical critique of materialism, see Robert C. Koons and George Bealer, eds., *The Waning of Materialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹⁹ For a general account, see Scott Dunham, *Trinity and Creation in Augustine: An Ecological Analysis* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008).

unformed matter and 'then' imbued it with form.²⁰ Because 'everything changeable is given form or shape out of something lacking form or shape' [*omne mutabile ex aliqua informitate formari simulque illiud*].²¹ However, everything God creates must have its measure of goodness—a postulate that follows necessarily from the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. Consequently, while unformed matter is not yet formed, neither is it nothing, since it has been created. Hence, it must be 'something midway between form and nothingness' [*quiddam inter formam et nihil*].²² It must be that in virtue of which things can change from one form to another. As such it has 'some kind of being'—the being of potentiality.

The mutability of mutable things itself gives them their potential to receive all those forms into which mutable things can be changed. And what is this mutability? ... I would call it 'a nothing-something' [*nihil aliquid*] or 'an-is-that-is-not' [*est non est*] if such expressions were allowed.²³

In other words, unformed matter names a primordial kind of potentiality created by God, which is never concretely instantiated as such—there is never some unformed matter lying around waiting to be formed. Rather, Augustine holds that it is instantaneously given form by God in the original act of creation. It is a logical notion that serves two functions for Augustine: it lets him interpret the first verses of Genesis, where God is said to have created the 'formless and void', and it explains mutability. Yet there is an internal tension. Augustine writes as if unformed matter were only a logical concept and never in fact instantiated; yet, unformed matter is constantly present as the mutability intrinsic to human creatures and into which they might at any time fall back. 'Every changeable thing suggests to us the notion of a certain formlessness.'²⁴ A gradual loss of form—and in the end, perhaps, a state of formlessness—continue to be existential possibilities for Augustine; formlessness is not merely a quasi-logical concept that is forever left behind at the founding of creation. There is a sense, we might say, in which the potentiality of matter is thought of as both a non-temporal absolute potentiality at the initial founding of the world, and a temporal potentiality of things formed.²⁵ The important thing to note here is that the potentiality of unformed matter is not limited to

²⁰ For a brief history of the philosophical concept of unformed matter, see Frederick Van Fleteren, 'Matter', in John C. Cavadini, ed. *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999); for an account of Augustine's notion of 'form' and 'formation' in the context of creation, see Marie-Anne Vannier, '*Creatio*, '*conversio*, '*formatio*' chez S. Augustin (Fribourg, Suisse: Éditions Universitaires, 1991).

²¹ *Gn. litt.* 1.14.28 (CSEL 28.1: 20). *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* is quoted from *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees, Unfinished Literal Commentary on Genesis, The Literal Meaning of Genesis*. Edmund Hill, O.P., trans., John E. Rotelle, O.S.A., ed., *The Works of Saint Augustine. A Translation for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: New City Press, 1997). All Latin references are taken from *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim. De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber. Locutionum in Heptateuchum libri septem* (CSEL 28.1.) Crit. ed. J. Zycha. Leipzig 1894.

²² *conf.* 12.6.6. All English quotations are from *The Confessions*, Maria Boulding, O.S.B., trans., John E. Rotelle, O.S.A., ed., in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: New City Press, 1997). Latin references are from *Confessions, vol 1. Introduction and text*, ed. with intro. and comm. by J. J. O'Donnell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

²³ *conf.* 12.6.6.

²⁴ *conf.* 12.19.28.

²⁵ That time itself is a result of formation indicates that *materia informis* is really a limit concept for Augustine—at the limit of what can be thought. Cf. *conf.* 12.11.14. See also *conf.* 12.5.5: 'If human speculation runs on these lines, it would be well advised to aim at knowledge by way of unknowing, or be content with an ignorance that is yet a kind of knowledge.'

its role at the original foundation of creation, for it is that which subtends the mutability of temporal things, and as such it also plays an existential role in Augustine's thought.²⁶

In addition to *materia informis*, there is a second notion of potentiality connected to the seminal reasons—*rationes seminales*—inherent in the world after its original founding. This notion was also present in Augustine's intellectual context, notably in Stoic philosophy and in Gregory of Nyssa, but it is nonetheless absent from the *Confessions*.²⁷ In the later *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, on the other hand, it takes centre stage. As Augustine now interprets creation, the original founding of the world was only the beginning of its unfolding, and in Book Five of *The Literal Meaning*, he begins to describe a new sort of potentiality, which he thinks of as seeds buried in the earth, which will begin to develop when the time and circumstances are right.²⁸ The master image is that of a magnificent tree growing from a tiny seed:

This admirable sight did not of course spring into being in its full stature and glory ... it rose up from its roots, which the first sprig had fixed in the earth, and from there grew all these forms with their distinct forms and shapes. That sprig, furthermore, came from a seed; so it was in the seed that all the rest was originally to be found, not in the mass of full material growth, but in the potentiality of its causative virtue [*potentiaque causali*]. ... But both [seed and tree] come from the earth, not the earth from them. So their first parent is the earth. ... Now just as these elements, which in the course of time and in due order would constitute a tree, were all invisibly and simultaneously present in the grain, so too that is how, when God created all things simultaneously, the actual cosmos is to be thought of as having had simultaneously all the things that were made in it and with it [*Sicut autem in ipso grano inuisibiliter erat omnia simul, quae per tempora in arborem surgerent, ita ipse mundus cogitandus est, cum deus simul omnia creauit, habuisse simul omnia, quae in illo cum illo facta sunt*].²⁹

This is a remarkable interpretation of the creation narrative of Genesis. Augustine is able to affirm both a creation *ex nihilo* of the cosmos and an on-going evolution or development internal to it.³⁰ An absolute creation of space and time, as Augustine sees it, does not in the least lead to a denial of the temporal evolution of the world so created. In the context of unformed matter, Augustine understands seminal reasons as particular formations of unformed matter—the formation of a potentiality from a potentiality, as it were.

²⁶ Cf. 'Created things have their beginning and their end in time, their rising and setting, their growth and decline, their beauty of form and their formlessness. ... Inevitably so because they were made by you out of nothing: not made from you, nor from any matter not of your making, nor from anything pre-existent, but from concreated matter [*de concreata*].' *conf.* 13.33.48. Temporal form and formlessness are here explicitly connected to the primordial matter of creation, and explained by it.

²⁷ See Ernan McMullin, 'Introduction,' in *Evolution and Creation*, ed. Ernan McMullin (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985) for a historically informed introduction to the idea of seminal reasons; see also Yoon Kyung Kim, *Augustine's Changing Interpretations of Genesis 1-3: From De Genesi contra Manichaeos to De Genesi ad litteram* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 145-8.

²⁸ Cf. *trin.* 3.2.16. I use the English translation of Edmund Hill, OP, *The Trinity*, John E. Rotelle, O.S.A., ed., *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: New City Press, 1991). The Latin text is given in *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina*, 50, W.J. Mountain and F. Glorie, eds. (Turnhout: Brepols, 1968).

²⁹ *Gn. litt.* 5.23.44-45 (CSEL 28.1: 167-68). Cf. *trin.* 3.2.13.

³⁰ 'Evolution'—from the Latin *evolvere*, to unroll, unfold—is an apposite term in this context, on which see Etienne Gilson, *From Aristotle to Darwin and Back Again: A Journey in Final Causality, Species, and Evolution* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1984), 59.

Now, the seminal reasons refer to the potentiality of life forms to evolve over time, and they are the key to Augustine's reading of the second creation narrative: 'So the earth is said to have produced grass and trees in their causes [*causaliter*], that is, to have received the power to produce them [*producendi accepisse uirtutem*]. It was in the earth, that is to say, that things which were going to be realized in the course of time had already been made ... in the roots of time [*in radicibus*].'³¹ The earth, as Augustine understands it, had itself been given the power to produce not only vegetation but 'all species, whether of animals or grasses or trees.'³² In short, all of life is included in the created potentiality of the world.

This means, of course, that humankind—man and woman—is also included among the seminal reasons. '*Male and female he made them ...* that is to say, in terms of a potentiality inserted as it were seminally into the universe [*secundum potentiam per verbum dei tamquam seminaliter mundo inditam*].'³³ For Augustine, this is apparently an important point, and one that he realizes is likely to be misunderstood by his fellow Christians.³⁴ Thus he struggles through all of Book VI to drive home the point that humankind must have had this twofold creation, like other living beings: once 'invisibly, potentially, in their causes [*inuisibiliter, potentialiter, causaliter*]', and then temporally, 'in actual fact [*facta*].'³⁵ It is important to note once again that Augustine speaks of seeds here only analogically. He does not imagine humankind as a material seed buried in the earth, but as a more sublime causal power—a theoretical concept, no doubt. 'Seeds do indeed provide some sort of comparison with this, on account of the growths to come that are bound in with them; before all seeds, nonetheless, are those causes.'³⁶ What he is saying here is essentially that God created the world such that the world coming into being had within itself the power to 'create' life—human life included—in due time and when the circumstances were right, though Augustine himself would have rather used the word 'unfold' than 'create', stressing God's unique role as creator.

Does this mean that Augustine is indeed an emergentist *avant la lettre*? Does Augustine really envisage human beings as emerging in this way through nature's 'power to produce'? Does he imagine a world so to speak front-loaded with the possibility of human existence in all its richness? A world created with anthropic principles? Not quite. For Augustine cannot bring himself to believe that even the human soul, the *animus*, was created only as a seminal reason among other forms of life, and his dualistic anthropology suggests to him that only the human *body* could have been included among the seminal reasons, while the *soul* must have been otherwise created and later infused into the body when God breathed upon it the breath of life, as Genesis 2:7 would seem to indicate.³⁷ In other words, Augustine withdraws what he takes to be the

³¹ *Gn. litt.* 5.4.11 (CSEL 28.1: 144), my emphasis.

³² *Gn. litt.* 5.7.20.

³³ *Gn. litt.* 6.5.8 (CSEL 28.1: 176).

³⁴ *Gn. litt.* 6.6.9.

³⁵ *Gn. litt.* 6.6.10 (CSEL 28.1: 177).

³⁶ *Gn. litt.* 6.6.11.

³⁷ See Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* (London: Duckworth, 1987), 7-79, for an authoritative presentation of Augustine's general theory of the soul. For critical discussion of Augustine's struggle with finding a 'metaphysical explanation of man', including the 'blending' of soul and body, see John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), chapter 4; and for a particular focus on sexual differentiation in relation to Augustinian anthropology, see John M. Rist, *What is Truth? From the Academy to the Vatican* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 68-87.

most essential aspect of human beings—their soul—from the processes of natural production that otherwise characterize the created world.³⁸

This returns us to the notion of *materia informis* as the underlying primordial potentiality for mutability. It is important to note that Augustine continually struggles over whether to think that God formed *two* basic kinds of ‘stuff’ into the angelic and spiritual world on the one hand, and the world of physical bodies on the other, or whether these two realms of created reality were formed from *one* and the same basic ‘stuff’. He had held the latter opinion in his earlier works on Genesis, as we shall see, but in *The Literal Meaning* he comes down on the side of two basic materials—one spiritual and one material—from which God formed all creatures. This means that the *materia informis* that contains within itself the potentiality for vegetative and animal life, and even the animal body of humans, is in the final analysis read precisely as matter—and that is the crux. For though such *materia* is full of potential for development, it is not an absolute potentiality; what it may grow into is significantly constrained by conceiving of it as *mere* matter, as primordially opposed to the mind or the spiritual.

In other words, while Augustine does present us with a highly suggestive ‘potentialist’ interpretation of creation, where all of life is seen to inhere in nature as created—originally created as *ratione naturae*³⁹—the life of the mind or the soul is nonetheless not originally included within this dynamic ontology.⁴⁰ To understand why Augustine makes these hermeneutical moves, and to probe Augustinian potentialism as a contemporary resource, it is this aboriginal dualism between material body and immaterial soul that we must question. Would it be possible to remain true to the basic thrust of Augustine’s potentialist reading of creation, while nonetheless moving beyond his anthropological dualism? Is it even internally motivated from an Augustinian point of view?

The Origin of Soul—Hermeneutical Tensions

It is in the seventh book of *The Literal Meaning* that we witness Augustine struggle most intensely with the question of the soul, a discussion that he prefaces with an

³⁸ Again, this is only indicated in a footnote in McGrath, *Fine-Tuned Universe*, 104, note 49.

³⁹ *Gn. litt.* 2.15.30 (CSEL 28.1: 56).

⁴⁰ Perhaps a word is in order about why I do not address the debate over ‘traducianism’ and ‘creationism’ with respect to the propagation of souls. Traducianism is the view that the soul is transmitted to the offspring via the parents in sexual intercourse. Creationism, on the other hand, is the view that God creates each individual soul, inserting it, as it were, into the body at the appropriate time. Augustine, especially in his later years, was drawn to traducianism, since it makes the doctrine of original sin easier to conceive. On the other hand, it is difficult to see how an incorporeal substance, such as the soul, could be transmitted in the decisively corporeal act of sexual intercourse. Creationism solves the latter problem, but in turn makes it hard to conceive how souls created by God could be infected, so to speak, with original sin. [See Teske, ‘Augustine’s Theory of Soul’, in Eleanor Stump and Norman Kretzmann, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 120–2, for a clear exposition of these alternatives.] Incidentally, traducianism (in its corporeal form)—which was never popular and is now rejected by the Roman Catholic Church—has some obvious affinities with certain forms of emergentism, in that the soul is somehow contained in bodily stuff, but is only later to come into full bloom. Now, while Augustine was drawn to traducianism, he always claimed that he did not know which position was correct, claiming only to be absolutely certain that the soul was not in any way ‘a body or any bodily quality or interlock’ (*Gn. litt.* 10.21.37). And what I am concerned with here is the dualism of soul and body as such, not the *propagation* of souls subsequent to the original creation of a first human soul. Hence, it suffices to look at Augustine’s treatment of the *creation* of the original soul, which is also what the texts we are considering are primarily about.

extraordinary statement of humility in face of the difficulty of the question: 'There follows, you see, a question about the soul of extreme difficulty ... I must confess that nobody has yet managed to persuade me I can ever have such a grasp of the soul, that I may assume there is no further question to be asked.'⁴¹ Augustine then proceeds to discuss the manner of the soul's creation—what kind of being is the human soul?

Augustine first enquires into what the soul is made from, rejecting the notion that it is to be seen as a part of God, as well as the materialistic theory that it is made up of matter—that is, of any of the four elements, some other element, or indeed a mix of material elements of any kind. 'It is quite credible that every kind of body can be changed into every other kind of body; but to suppose that any kind of body can be changed into soul is ridiculous' [*quodlibet autem corpus mutari posse in animam credere absurdum est*].⁴² This seems to leave two options: either the soul is made from some 'spiritual matter' [*spiritalis materies*] or it is made from nothing—*ex nihilo*. The significantly excluded option is that it is made from the one primordially created *materia informis*.

Not a part of God, then, as Augustine sees it, and yet not a material structure of any sort: what kind of being is the human soul? Clearly, since it is not God, it is created by God, and as such must either (1) be created *ex nihilo* at the original founding of creation, or (2) unfold from a seminal reason by the temporal, providential governance of God. In the latter case, there must have been some suitable 'spiritual material' created in which the soul would inhere as a potentiality. 'Soul too, possibly, before being made in the actual nature which is called soul ... could have had some appropriate spiritual material' [*sic fortasse potuit et anima, antequam ea ipsa natura fieret, quae anima dicitur ... habere aliquam materiem pro suo genere spiritalem*].⁴³ Both of these possible options give rise to new questions in Augustine's hermeneutic scheme.

As to the latter alternative—that there was some soul-material that could serve as the vehicle of the seminal *ratio* of a later developed soul—Augustine takes this to be almost too odd. For such material would after all be a creature created merely as a container for the *ratio* of the human soul, which was later to be joined with a human body. But the decisive problem with this interpretation is that Augustine sees no such 'material' indicated in the biblical text. In the end, he therefore rejects this hypothesis.⁴⁴

Augustine also considers the extravagant possibility that the causal formula [*ratio causalis*] of the human soul created at the founding of the world was inserted, as it were, in the angelic nature, but dismisses the possibility since it would entail that 'angelic spirit is the quasi-parent of the human soul'.⁴⁵ In sum, Augustine thinks there is little hope of locating some suitable spiritual material in which the causal formula of the human soul could have been inserted at the original founding of creation, and then later unfolded with the temporal development of the world under God's governing providence.

This leaves the second possibility—that God created the soul *ex nihilo*—but this alternative reading comes with its own hermeneutical problems. Recall that Augustine understands the second creation narrative, in which God forms the man out of mud and

⁴¹ *Gn. litt.* 6.29.40. Augustine kept this attitude to the end of his life. See Teske, 'Augustine's Theory of Soul', 121, referencing Augustine's *Retractiones* 1.1.3.

⁴² *Gn. litt.* 7.20.26 (CSEL 28.1: 217). Here, then, is Augustine's reply to much contemporary emergence theory.

⁴³ *Gn. litt.* 7.6.9 (CSEL 28.1: 206).

⁴⁴ *Gn. litt.* 7.22.33.

⁴⁵ *Gn. litt.* 7.23.34; cf. 10.2.3; 10.5.8.

breathes upon him the breath of life, as referring to the temporal unfolding of that original, simultaneous founding of all things *ex nihilo* in 'the roots of time' that is the subject of the first creation narrative. And since human being is already in the first narrative called the image of God, which for Augustine properly refers to the soul, soul must have already been created, either as fully actual or in potentiality, before the temporal unfolding.⁴⁶ Moreover, since God no longer creates anything new *ex nihilo* after the first founding of the world, the soul breathed by God into man in the second narrative could certainly not at that time have been created *ex nihilo*, but must somehow have been made at the original founding, either as a seminal reason in some suitable material (that is, not bodily matter), or indeed, as an already actualized being. Since, as we have just seen, Augustine rejects the first option, he is forced into the latter position:

So let it be supposed then, if there is no scriptural authority or evident argument of reason against it, that the man was made on the sixth day in such wise that while the causal formula of the human body was created in the elements of the world, the soul was itself created just as the original day was established and once created was stored away among the works of God [*ut corporis quidem humani ratio causalis in elementis mundi, anima vero iam ipsa crearetur, sicut primitus conditus est dies, et creata lateret in operibus dei*] [i.e. fully actualized *ex nihilo*], until in due time he chose to insert it ... by breathing it into the body formed out of mud.⁴⁷

Here, then, is the problem: Augustine's whole hermeneutic hinges upon the idea of a potentiality inherent in creation in the form of seminal reasons. It is this move that makes sense of the two dimensions of creation that he detects in the biblical narratives—its original foundation, where all things were created simultaneously, and its providential unfolding, where living things temporally come to actualize the manifold potentialities inherent in that original founding. The human body causes Augustine no trouble, but the soul just does not fit this model, and so he bends over backwards to solve the problem, eventually ending up with a conjecture, the chief virtue of which seems to be that it is not *against* scriptural authority, nor evidently *against* reason. But what speaks for it? The conjecture itself is odd: Augustine proposes that God created the human soul *ex nihilo* at the original founding of creation—not as a potentiality like the human body, but as fully formed—and that it was then 'stored away among the works of God until in due time he chose to insert it'. But this raises further problems, since why would the soul stored away with God be willing to part and be 'inserted into the life of this flesh'?⁴⁸ This seems especially true as the soul is not created as a potentiality to be actualized by being joined with a body, but rather is created complete and perfect, just waiting for its body to evolve.⁴⁹ Augustine, to save the theory, suggests that perhaps the soul was created with 'a natural inclination of its own will to administer the body' [*ad corpus administrandum voluntate propria fuerit inclinata*].⁵⁰

⁴⁶ *Gn. litt.* 7.22.32; cf. 3.20.31. For a discussion of the patristic understanding of the *imago dei* as specifically referring to the human soul, see Rist, *What is Truth?*, 68–78.

⁴⁷ *Gn. litt.* 7.24.35 (CSEL 28.1: 223).

⁴⁸ *Gn. litt.* 7.25.36.

⁴⁹ On the immediate perfection of the soul, after the manner of the angelic intellectual creatures, see *Gn. litt.* 3.20.31–32.

⁵⁰ *Gn. litt.* 7.25.36 (CSEL 28.1: 223); cf. 12.35.68.

While this last solution appears to be the one Augustine favours, he is apparently not satisfied with it, and the convoluted seventh book of *The Literal Meaning* ends with Augustine opening up once more to the possibility of the soul being formed from some originally created spiritual material, in parallel to the body's formation from corporeal matter, even though he had earlier rejected that interpretation as too odd.⁵¹ It is this inability to come to a conclusion about the soul that I want to pick up here. Now, there is clearly something appealing in Augustine's willingness to keep a difficult question open, and to entertain different possibilities of interpretation, and I would certainly not want to exchange that most amiable strand of Augustinian hermeneutics for dogmatic assertion. But when it comes to the question of the origin of the soul, his proposed alternatives are simply too contrived with respect to his overall scheme for interpreting creation, and he seems to be aware of this himself; it is difficult not to feel a sense of frustration coming through in these pages.

Let me try to be as clear as possible about the internal tensions I am detecting in Augustine's argument. There is indeed something striking and congenial about Augustine's creational hermeneutic in its general outline. That is, the conception of divine creation as both the coming into being *ex nihilo*, once and for all, of the whole world and the dynamic and temporal becoming internal to the world, resulting in all its rich diversity. And it is clear from *The Literal Meaning* that Augustine has found this to be the key that unlocks for him an understanding of the creation of the world that is both faithful to the biblical texts and philosophically sophisticated. Yet there is this anomaly, the human soul, that refuses to be smoothly incorporated into his interpretive scheme, and for which no other truly satisfactory solution presents itself.

A More Radical Potentialism

There is, however, a submerged line of thought in Augustine's theology of creation that I would now like to unearth and bring into the discussion. The trouble, I suggest, begins already with the definition of the *materia informis*, the basic material of creation which, in *The Literal Meaning*, Augustine understands as being of two fundamental kinds—spiritual (angelic) and bodily, even as, tentatively, he also opens up the possibility of a third distinct spiritual kind, one unique to the human soul. Consequently, to repeat our previous alternatives, since the soul is not in any way bodily, it must either be made of spiritual matter and akin to angels, or of soulish matter, or finally created fully formed *ex nihilo* and stored away with God. We have seen that these are all problematic. But there is another way of understanding the *materia informis*, one that Augustine had already entertained around the year 393, when he began to write what is now known as the *Unfinished Literal Commentary on Genesis*. Though he came to reject it in *The Literal Meaning*, this earlier notion of the *materia informis* takes it as encompassing the spiritual and the bodily alike. Writing about the first verse of Genesis, Augustine says that 'it can also be reasonably supposed that "heaven and earth" are put here for the whole of creation, so that both this visible firmament of ether is called heaven, and so too is that invisible creation of the higher powers'.⁵² Now, this 'heaven and earth' that includes the invisible world (the angelic world and the soul) refers here, as in *The Literal Meaning*, to the basic material from which God formed the world. But in contrast to the

⁵¹ *Gn. litt.* 7.27.38.

⁵² *Gn. litt. imp.* 3.9.

later work, Augustine does not distinguish between different kinds of basic material; rather, he says that ‘the basic material [*vero materies*] was named “heaven and earth,” as being the seed, so to say, of heaven and earth, as being heaven and earth all mixed up and thrown together [*quasi confusum atque permixtum*] by the craftsman, God, ready for receiving those forms.’⁵³ Apparently, at this time Augustine conceived of the primal *materia* as one shared basic ‘stuff’ out of which every formation whatsoever was to be made, spiritual or bodily. Again he states: ‘What was called heaven and earth was a kind of mixed-up material [*materies erat confuse quaedam*] out of which the world (which consists of two chief parts, namely heaven and earth) would be fashioned, by the sorting out of its elements and the bestowal on them of shape and form.’⁵⁴

In fact, Augustine makes a very similar point already in his *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees*, written in 388–389, when commenting on the passage in Genesis 1:6–8 wherein a division is made to separate water above from water below. Since Augustine has already let ‘the water over which the Spirit was being borne’ signify the formless basic material out of which the cosmos was made, it is natural for him to suggest that the division between water and water on the second ‘day’ signifies that ‘the basic bodily material of visible things was separated from the basic non-bodily material of things invisible’ [*materiam corporalem rerum visibilium ab illa incorporali rerum invisibilium fuisse discretam*].⁵⁵ But this is of course already something like a formation, a distinction within what was originally unified. It presupposes, that is to say, that the *materia informis* created by God *ex nihilo* and signified by the ‘heaven and earth’ of Genesis 1:1, was that from which both the bodily and the spiritual were to be made.

Between these early works and the late *Literal Meaning* lies the *Confessions*, written in 397 or thereabout, which repays a close reading with this question in mind. For as I have already said, in this work Augustine’s main line of interpretation is that God originally created two basic kinds of material *ex nihilo*—spiritual and bodily matter: ‘Two realities [*duo quaedam*], one near to yourself, the other bordering on nothingness.’⁵⁶ ‘You made two kinds of creature [*duo ... quae fecisti*].’⁵⁷ My present view, then, is that it was on account of these two realities ... that your scripture states ... *in the beginning God made heaven and earth*.⁵⁸ However, as Augustine also says with characteristic hermeneutic openness, the view that there was only one primordial unformed *materia* shared by visible and invisible beings alike is still an admissible and quite possibly true interpretation of the biblical narrative, and he goes on to discuss this and other alternatives.⁵⁹

⁵³ *Gn. litt. inp.* 3.10 (CSEL 28.1: 465). The *Unfinished Literal Commentary on Genesis* is included in Augustine, *On Genesis*, and the Latin text is found in the same volume of the CSEL as *Gn. litt.*

⁵⁴ *Gn. litt. inp.* 4.11 (CSEL 28.1: 465). A little later he explains that ‘the mishmash of material ... is also called *Chaos* in Greek.’ Cf. *Gn. adu. Man.* 1.5.9. This explicit recognition of the conceptual resemblance between unformed matter and the Greek notion of chaos would seem to justify Catherine Keller’s qualified reading of Augustine as an ally for a ‘tehomophilic theology’. Interestingly, Keller connects this to contemporary chaos theory; to pursue this line of investigation here, promising as it is, would take us too far afield. See Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁵⁵ *Gn. adu. Man.* 1.11.17 (PL 34: 181). The English translation of *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees* is included in Augustine, *On Genesis*, and the Latin text is from J.-P. Migne, ed. *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 34. Paris 1841.

⁵⁶ *conf.* 12.7.7.

⁵⁷ *conf.* 12.12.15.

⁵⁸ *conf.* 12.13.16.

⁵⁹ *conf.* 12.20.29–25.35.

Indeed, 'a great variety of interpretations, many of them legitimate, confront our exploring minds as we search among these words to discover your will'.⁶⁰ One such legitimate interpretation, then, is the one previously held by Augustine: 'As for those who take the names "heaven and earth" to signify the still unformed matter from which heaven and earth were to be formed ... one understands the formless matter to be that from which both intelligible and sensible creatures would come' [*unde consummaretur intelligibilis sensibilisque creatura*].⁶¹ The discussion of this issue in the *Confessions* takes up several pages, and it is clear that this was an issue Augustine truly struggled with. In the end, he keeps the question open as to the different ways in which *materia informis* may be understood, but he clearly favours the creation *ex nihilo* of two distinct materials, as it were, one spiritual and one bodily—to wit, 'heaven and earth'.

This overview makes it clear that there is in the Augustinian corpus a hermeneutical alternative that *The Literal Meaning* does not really address, namely, seeing the bodily and the spiritual dimensions of human beings as originating in one and the same primordial *confusus*.⁶² What I am driving at here is simply this: if the primordial unformed *materia* is taken to contain the potentiality of bodily and spiritual formation alike—a manifest exegetical and theological possibility for Augustine—rather than conceiving of a primordial distinction between the bodily and the spiritual, then this would tend to underwrite a conception of the unity of all created being, a common rootedness in this absolute potentiality, which is itself underwritten by the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, through which all created things are united precisely in being thus created.

There is, in short, a logic in Augustine's creational ontology which operates in tension with some of the anthropological conclusions he draws. More precisely, Augustine's radical potentialism can be read against his primordial dualism of spirit and matter.

There is arguably an inconsistency already in Augustine's distinction between 'bodily' and 'spiritual' *materia informis*; such a distinction is not quite consistent with the basic thrust of the idea. For if primordial matter is really *unformed*, what sense can be made of the distinction between these basic *types* of it? Such a distinction would already entail a serious measure of formation. If, as Augustine suggests in the *Confessions*, he had to learn to conceive of unformed matter not as poorly or minimally shaped matter, but rather as pure potentiality,⁶³ then to describe it as already distinguished into the material and the spiritual would seem to beg the question. Here we must keep in mind, as Rowan Williams reminds us, that Augustine's idea of unformed matter must be distinguished from our spontaneous notion of unformed matter as mere atoms, or quarks, or strings or whatever—for these are precisely already formed, just like the four elements of the physics of antiquity. Rather, the Augustinian idea is the theoretical limit idea of pure potentiality.⁶⁴ But if this is so, then again: what are the grounds for a distinction within it? Arguably, if the notion of *materia informis* is to be truly radical, it must be conceived as that from which God creates everything. Emilie Zum Brunn suggests something similar when she notes that Augustine really does not push the idea of unformed matter—as *capax formarum omnium*—very far, 'since he accepts two different

⁶⁰ *conf.* 12.24.33.

⁶¹ *conf.* 12.28.39; cf. 12.29.40.

⁶² Pace Van Fleteren, who says that in Augustine 'there is little apparent development in this notion.' And again, 'throughout his writings Augustine is consistent as to what *materia* means.' 'Matter', 548.

⁶³ *conf.* 12.6.6.

⁶⁴ Rowan Williams, 'Good for Nothing? Augustine on Creation', *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994): 17.

kinds of matter for the corporeal created being and for the spiritual created being'. She goes on to note that Augustine really 'only distinguishes between them through the different formation they receive from the Word'.⁶⁵ In other words, when the notion of *materia informis* is understood in its true radicality—that is, as going to the very roots of created being—distinctions of whatever kind within creation ought logically to be seen as derived rather than primordial.

This way of reading *materia informis* would arguably help Augustine to push the vexing question of the soul in a more promising direction. It would also take us right up to the contemporary discussion. If *materia informis* can be read as a unified source of all that is formed rather than the later Augustinian notion of a primordial distinction between spiritual and material stuff, then it might be possible to understand the unfolding of the whole human being, with its bodily and spiritual dimensions, along emergentist lines—that is, as the unfolding of a potentiality which is somehow present from the beginning, inhering in creation as such. A reconstructed Augustinian interpretation could thus read as follows: In the beginning God created the formless potential of all things *ex nihilo*, and gave it various layers of formation. This creation included any number of possibilities for a temporal progression or development, among which were the development of the whole human being, which would in a specific way come to actualize the image of God that was only potentially present at the original founding of creation. Now, this would be neither materialism nor panpsychism, since the basic 'stuff' of the world is neither matter nor spirit, but their common root or element. Nor does it require us to think of the potentiality of the human soul as somehow implanted into angelic substance, or stored away ready-made with God, just waiting to migrate into the human body. Finally, it does not lead to the absurd idea of a sort of container material, later to be discarded, wherein the soul could be present in *ratio*. Rather, we seem to be in the vicinity of something like the idea of a 'neutral monism', mentioned above as one way in which contemporary philosophy of mind is radicalizing its metaphysical starting points.

It is also true, however, that this notion of a unified *materia informis* would not immediately solve all of Augustine's hermeneutical troubles, for as he sees it the biblical texts suggest a formation of this primordial matter into various kinds of things *prior* to the actual unfolding of the various life forms and human beings. And while he has no apparent trouble conceiving of the formation of corporeal matter—matter in the ordinary sense of the term—and the intellectual angelic creation, there remains the question of the human soul. In other words, even granted the primordial unity of one and the same *materia informis*, there would still be a subsequent first formation into the spiritual and the corporeal, and it is only the latter that really allows for the inherence of seminal reasons. Hence, if the soul were to be seen as a seminal reason, it would still have to inhere in corporeal things. In the end, therefore, this position would be reduced to a standard materialism, which understands the potentiality of soul to be contained within what I have called 'mere matter', as it can be known in principle by physics—precisely the contemporary position that we started out criticising as involving a conceptual confusion. In light of this, it would seem Augustine could neither have resolved his difficulties with this broadening of the concept of unformed matter to include corporeal and spiritual alike, nor is it very promising from a contemporary point of view.

⁶⁵ Emilie Zum Brunn, *St. Augustine: Being and Nothingness* (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1988), 75-6; cf. 89 note 72.

Yet this conclusion is premature. This is because of the aforementioned twofold role of unformed matter in Augustine's account—unformed matter is not merely left behind at the original founding of creation, at its initial formation, but continues to subtend the variously formed creatures, such that the potentiality of seminal reasons can be seen as a continuation of the more radical primordial potentiality which inheres in the *materia informis* itself, thus in a sense bridging the founding and unfolding of creation. Even corporeal things must therefore still somehow or other be rooted in this primordial 'basic material'—they are after all actualized forms of this initial potentiality. This in turn suggests that the distinction between this already formed corporeal matter with its potential in the form of seminal reasons on the one hand, and *materia informis* with its absolute potential on the other, may not be so neatly drawn after all—the lines between them must be blurred. In short, taking the entire framework of Augustine's creational hermeneutic into account, it would seem that a certain potentiality for soul must inhere even in corporeal matter. This is a possibility not considered by Augustine himself, but one that suggests itself as a possible if somewhat unorthodox reading of his interpretive scheme if one takes the radicality of the notion of *materia informis* seriously. The potentiality of soul could be seen as lingering even in corporeal matter, not on account of its materiality as such, but because corporeal matter, as we know it in everyday life as well as in science, is a concrete formation of that prior potentiality that Augustine himself called *materia informis*.

Conclusions

I have drawn attention to certain tensions within Augustine's own account that might be resolved differently; hence, this is something of an immanent critique that nevertheless does not reject the broader Augustinian framework for thinking theologically about divine creation. I believe it can help us to appreciate the fruitfulness of some of Augustine's main ideas, and the possibility of a contemporary retrieval that stays with Augustine's overall hermeneutic of creation, though significantly going beyond his explicit understanding of anthropology. There is a striking resonance between the radicalized notion of the potentiality of *materia informis* developed here and certain approaches within contemporary philosophical reflection on the emergence of mind that takes us well beyond the starting point of ordinary materialism, a resonance that deserves further attention also on the part of theologians working constructively on anthropological issues.

At the very least the lines between dualism and materialism have been blurred, for it is not easy to say—whether in emergentist philosophy or in the Augustinian hermeneutic presented here—if these positions should best be characterized as dualist or materialist anthropologies, or even what these terms now mean. Between the old and worn paths of dualism and materialism an alternative opens up. When a more conceptually coherent emergentism revises its metaphysical starting points away from mere materialism and in the direction of a primordial potentiality for mind and matter alike, the possibility of a richer dialogue with theology opens up, one in which theology is able to participate, as it always should, with its own integrity and out of its own resources. To this end, the 'Augustinian emergentism' traced out here should be seen as a contribution.