## **PREFACE**

The reader should be warned at the outset of what he would soon find out for himself: this book makes no claim to being a comprehensive interpretation of the Confessions. It does not pretend to say all that could, or even should, be said about that rich and often baffling work. Rather, it aims to extend an exploration of Augustine's thought on man that I have already presented in a series of articles and then, more fully, in my study of St. Augustine's Early Theory of Man, A.D. 386-391. That book represented the slightly reoriented and much-expanded version of my previous efforts to demonstrate that the fundamental matrix of Augustine's early view, especially of man as "fallen soul," is far more faithfully Neo-Platonic and, more specifically, Plotinian than heretofore commonly acknowledged.

The present work is very much a sequel to its predecessor,

<sup>1.</sup> Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968. The articles in the order of their conception are: "Ennead VI, 4-5 in the Works of St. Augustine," Revue des Études Augustiniennes, 9:1-39 (1963); "The Plotinian Fall of the Soul in St. Augustine," Traditio, 19:1-35 (1963); "The Enneads and St. Augustine's Image of Happiness," Vigiliae Christianae, 17:129-164 (1963); and "The Riddle of Augustine's Confessions: A Plotinian Key," International Philosophical Quarterly, 4:327-372 (1964).

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and as such, a "thesis book," with, I hope, some of the virtues, but more likely all of the defects inherent in that genre. It can be viewed from two angles: as confirming the hypothesis embodied in my studies of Augustine's early anthropology, by illustrating its substantial applicability to the Confessions; but also, more justly, as explicating that same theory of man as Augustine presents it, slightly modified at points, at a later period in his development. What that theory of man implies I have attempted to suggest in the Introduction and then systematically to summarize in the first chapter of this book. For additional detail and for the proof that this summary does represent Augustine's earlier view, I must refer the reader to St. Augustine's Early Theory of Man.

Much of what I say here deals with matters scholars have disputed about for decades and more. The admittedly provisional answer I present to some of those issues emerges from the view to which my own research has led me, a view of how the early Augustine used Plotinus in his effort to elaborate an "understanding of the faith." The special character of this optic, then, may explain at least in part why I have not chosen to turn this exposition of the Confessions into a continued altercation with rival views. What is all too often at stake in my differences with other writers is the fundamental set of interpretative suppositions I have tried to validate in St. Augustine's Early Theory of Man and to summarize in the Introduction and opening chapter of this book. In the notes to those two chapters the reader will find references to the many studies with differing interpretations from my own. These notes may also stand as some small excuse for the relative sparsity of notes to the subsequent chapters.

There is an obvious danger in the business of examining a labyrinthine world such as that of the Confessions from the kind of perspective I have assumed. Any optic one chooses risks setting certain features into a prominence that may turn out to have been exaggerated; it may at the same time minimize the importance of features which, examined through a wider lens, turn out to be far more prominent than the narrower vision could allow. Every scholar fears the moment when he may have become prisoner to a point of view he has cultivated far too long than was good for his objectivity. And yet, his only therapy is to present the findings that his point of view enabled him to uncover, even at the risk of being premature. Others, then, may succeed in widening his vision be-

fore it is too late. In presenting his findings, he must (for sweet clarity's sake if for nothing else) suppress the ever-nagging temptation to resort to the subjunctive: "If my view of the matter be correct, then it would follow that Augustine means this." But the indicative mood, habitual in English exposition, tends to convey an air of greater confidence than the writer himself often enjoys: give me a scholar and he will know what I mean. My hopes are that whatever features of the Confessions' landscape I may have left in the shade were not deliberately ignored, or half-consciously excluded, because their message positively militated against the thesis propounded here, and that the Augustinian scholar will be sensitive to the number of hesitant subjunctives that still tremble behind my regular use of the indicative mood.

I am grateful to Doubleday and Company, New York, publishers of John K. Ryan's translation of *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, for the kind permission to quote from that translation. I must thank the editors of *The International Philosophical Quarterly* both for the real assistance they gave at the time of publishing "The Riddle of Augustine's *Confessions:* A Plotinian Key" in their review, and for their kind permission to reproduce substantial portions of that article here.

The students, both graduate and undergraduate, who have aided me in sharpening the views presented here, will see how much I owe to their resilient minds; so will the patient members of Harvard University Press's editorial staff. Finally, I must thank the authorities of Fordham University for having accorded me the Faculty Fellowship year during which the substance of this work came to be.

Fordham University June 1968 R.J.O'C.