

What Augustine Suggested: the *dramatis personae* of the Cassiciacum Dialogues

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INTRODUCTION

Augustine's forty-year literary activities are distinguished both by the varieties of the literary genres he chose and practised and by the diversities of the characters with whom he engaged in discussions, controversies, converses, comments, and answers to the questions posed to him from different circumstances and social conditions. Although he could not always be in close and intimate relationship with other people appeared in his works, probably because he was sometimes obliged to contact with his opponents and even strangers, he seems to attempt to maintain the communication. The picture of Augustine focusing on philosophical, exegetical, and theological issues emerges as the one who willingly enters into dialogues with people in his time (Th. Fuhrer 2012). It is noteworthy that his literary activities begin with a series of works in the dialogue form. After his decisive conversion at a Milanese garden in 386, the earliest dialogues were composed. Augustine follows the tradition of Ciceronian dialogues: the scenery of their conversations—villa, bathroom, and field— and the activities of his group are described. Because of his statement that these treatises show what was actually done, it has been argued whether they are fictional in their recorded report. However, regardless of the fictional or real record, it is indispensable to examine how the effects of employing the literary techniques reflect his philosophical and theological preoccupations. Why did Augustine do this in these dialogues? What did it allow him to follow the literary tradition? In this paper I shall first summarise the characteristics of his early dialogues from the viewpoint of whether Augustine adopted the classical tradition to each of them. Then I shall focus on the limits and scope of involving the literary use of characters or "*dramatis personae*." Finally I shall consider the significance of the literary devices in the development of his early thought.

AUGUSTINE'S LITERARY DIALOGUES BETWEEN 386 AND 391

Augustine's earliest literary composition includes a sequence of writings in the dialogue form. First, the four dialogues were written in 386 at the villa near Milan called Cassiciacum: *Contra Academicos*, *De beata vita*, *De ordine*, and *Soliloquia*, which are named "Cassicaicum dialogues." Second, during his sojourn in Rome and Thagaste, four works were written in the dialogue form between 387 and 391: *De quantitate animae*, *De*

musica, *De magistro*, and *De libero arbitrio*. Although he had started exploring such various styles and genres of writing as the controversial works on Manichaeism, a report of the public debate, a scriptural commentary, and theological monographs, Augustine's literary activities in this period were predominantly directed by the dialogues just enumerated.

Augustine's first extant writing is, after the lost treatise *De pulchro et apto*, entitled *Contra Academicos* (or *De Academicis* by Augustine himself in *Retr.* 1.1.1), in which first he raises the question of the possibility of achieving the happy life (book 1), then proceeds to refute the skeptic position on both the withholding of judgement and the suspended attitude of knowledge (book 2 and 3). Because the first book is intended as a preparatory discussion with his young students, Licentius and Trygetius, two "prefatory letters" to Romanianus, the father of Licentius, are attached at the opening of both book 1 and book 2. Romanianus has been Augustine's patron from his youth and a follower of the skeptic at that time. It seems likely that these letters serve as an invitation for him to devote the same attention as Licentius and his mentor to what they do there. Another point to note is that his friend Alypius, after an extended absence in Book 1, returns to the debate with Augustine, by whom the discussion is developed and closed with a continual talk about his viewpoint on understanding and belief. Alypius and Augustine are, thus, considered as the so-called "senior members", being expected to guide the discussion.

The second dialogue entitled *De beata uita* seems to be situated between the first book of *Contra Academicos* and its second and third books (also the first book of the third dialogue, *De ordine*, to be placed), provided that the historicity of these dialogues entirely hinges on descriptions given in *Confessions* (9.4.7) and *Retractationes* (1.1.1). This dialogue records the conversations between Augustine and his intimates at his birthday celebration. Participants include those engaged in the previous discussion, Trygetius and Licentius, while Alypius' absence and the presence of young people and the mother of Augustine is announced. Although some remain silent during the conversations, his mother, Monica, sometimes plays a significant part in casting doubts on their rational approach to philosophical issues. As in the first dialogue, there are both the "prefatory letter" addressed to Manlius Theodorus, who is known to be an admirer of both a pious way of life and christian platonism, and the final talk by Augustine himself.

De ordine, the third of the *Cassiciacum* dialogues, offers the reader discussions on the origin of evil. Augustine's conversations with his young students, Licentius and Trygetius, move to the middle of book 2 and reveal the aporia of the divine order and evil, thus turing to the detailed explanation of the process of intellectual education by Augustine himself. It is noteworthy that at each end of three days' discussions Augustine addresses his remarks to the audience. First, at the end of the second day, his monologue about the philosophy as love of wisdom is directed towards his mother, whose presence was indicated from its beginning. Second, at the middle of the third

day's discourse, he outlines the problematic of the order of the liberal arts, when Licentius is absent there. The third and final monologue is followed by the talk between Augustine and Alypius, the latter of whom was announced to reappear at the beginning of the third day's discussion. There is also the "prefatory letter" addressed to Zenobius, who is a friend of Augustine and known to us only through this letter and two other letters (*ep.* 2 and 117). Zenobius seems to be an official in the imperial government.

While the first three dialogues include a lot of the scenery of the estate, by which the reader could easily imagine the situation of their conversations held at the villa, the fourth dialogue, *Soliloquia*, only indicates his private meditations before portraying Augustine himself in dialogue with his reason (*ratio*). Consequently, no other participants were involved in the dialogue. Augustine as the student and the *ratio* as the teacher fully and without any hindrance concentrate on the problem of knowledge. Another distinctive difference from the first three dialogues is that the prefatory letter is not prefixed to this dialogue. Instead, it is preceded by the long, exalted prayer towards the triune God, in which Augustine expresses his own ardent desire to find the truth.

After writing the *Cassiciacum* dialogues at the villa, Augustine returned to Milan where, at the Easter vigil in 387, he was baptised by bishop Ambrose, and resolved to live in the service and pursuit of God. He travelled back to his hometown Thagaste in 388 and started the life with his friends. During these years the so-called second group of the dialogues was composed, which was primarily characterised by the exclusion of both the description of a scenic setting and the varieties of participants. Besides, these dialogues did not prefix the prefatory letters to the main discussions. First, during his stay in Milan, *De musica* is planned to compose as a part of his systematic handbook on the seven disciplines (however, its final revision on the book 6 is done after 400). In a talk between a teacher (unnamed) and his student, they search for the path towards the highest cognition. From book 5 an initial feature of the question and answer talk is replaced by the monologue of the teacher. The second dialogue, *De quantitate animae*, was written during his sojourn in Rome. It was around a year after his baptism. This dialogue seems to be the record of the actual conversations held with Evodius who is the intimate of Augustine and later appointed to the bishop of Uzalis. Evodius as the student poses six different questions concerning the body and soul to Augustine playing the role of teacher. At the final part of the dialogue, Augustine delivers a continual discourse on seven ascents of the soul towards its contemplation. *De magistro*, the third of these dialogues, is characterised by a maieutic conversation with his son, Adeodatus, about the possibilities of language and the education. At the end of the dialogue Augustine gives a continuous speech about the limited possibility of human cognition. The last of the second group dialogues, *De libero arbitrio*, was first begun in Rome in 388 and completed after his ordination probably around 391. Book 1 of this work includes the discussions between Evodius as the student and Augustine as the teacher about the question of the origin of evil. From the latter part of book 2, their conversa-

tion is changed into Augustine's continual speech about the divine grace, human responsibility and the concept of free will.

THE LIMITS AND THE SCOPE OF THE DIALOGUES

It becomes clear that several types of the rhetorical technique are employed, even unequally, in his eight dialogues composed during the short period (386–391). According to his own references to these works, Augustine recorded actual discussions conducted, first with a group of his friends and students, and then respectively with a friend who played the role of his student. Especially, with regard to the first three scenic dialogues, he asserted that these dialogues precisely described the circumstances and their activities at the villa near Milan. Some clues about what happened at the villa — a secretary's presence at the debates, his references to the actual days and order of the various discussions, and the repetition of its sudden interruptions — also make it probable to evaluate the verisimilitude of these dialogues. Here the question of the historicity occurred. Before considering in detail some of the literary devices with regard to its correlation with his early thought, brief mention should be made of this question. Some scholars find it hard to determine how the influence of christian teachings reminded in *Confessions* affects his philosophical preoccupations in these dialogues, thereby claiming that the records of his engagement are more actual and reliable than the later testimony in *Confessions*. In fact, although these dialogues would include some of the historical events at the estate, it seems very likely that not only did Augustine compile the records but revised, arranged, and prepared them for publication. Thus, concerning the question of the historicity, the crucial question lies in presuming the degree of his editorial control. On the other hand, his control is explicitly realised through the use of the literary devices in these dialogues. Activities of his group assembled there were transformed into these dialogues, thereby enabling us to read his message from the villa. Or rather these documents would give an indication of Augustine's interpretation on these discussions, in which not each participants' but "his" concern about a communal pursuit would be more to the fore.

It is noteworthy that, while some of the literary devices are consistently employed in these dialogues, others are replaced by the newly introduced technique in its second group. First, among all the dialogues except for *Soliloquia*, Augustine continually delivers the "*oratio perpetua*", that is, an uninterrupted speech by himself without any questions from his interlocutors. At the end of each work, he engages in it by casting himself in the role of a teacher. But from the viewpoint of how the conversations are connected with the speech, there might be a difference between these dialogues. In the later dialogues, in fact, he refers to neither the scenery description nor participants. Augustine as the teacher discusses with a friend as the student. Their talks are followed almost immediately by the continual speech, in which he teaches the student further about the issues in question. In the *Cassiciacum* dialogues, on the other hand, Augus-

tine includes not only the dramatic setting but the detailed portrayal of the participants. The conversations of members with different backgrounds are followed by the speech of a participant who was the professor in rhetoric. His speech does not direct the problem solving process. Instead, he approaches to the history of philosophy from an esoteric idea in *Academics (Contra Academicos)*, searches for the path from the philosophical truth towards the perfect wisdom in union with the triune God (*De beata uita*), and explains the relationship between the divine order and the twofold order of a way of life, in which the seven branches of the discipline are recognised (*De ordine*). Thus, the function of the continual speeches in these dialogues differs from each other. While the speech in its second group manages to conclude the discussions in a dialectical mode even if their talks incompletely follow the tradition of the Platonic dialogues, in its first group through the inspiring speech Augustine would prepare for another stage of their conversation. Or rather it would suggest the possibility of combining their philosophical discussions with the search for the divine wisdom.

Second, among the Cassiciacum dialogues except again for *Soliloquia*, Augustine makes the literary use of both the prefatory letter and the “*dramatis personae*”, that is, the vivid illustration of the participants in these talks. The idea of dedicating his works is not only realised by these dialogues. But, these prefatory letters derived from the Ciceronian tradition are the remarkable one, in which the typical *topos* of the preface is involved. Not only the difficulties and the importance of the subject are emphasised, but the paradigmatic image of the addressees (Romanianus, Manlius Theodorus, and Zenobius) is honoured. Augustine frequently and rhetorically refers to the obstacles to the philosophical enquiry and sends the exhortative message to the addressee, that is, the “*logos protreptikos*” is attuned to their personal situations. It should be noted that these letters are highly sophisticated rhetorical proses. He employs diverse rhetorical tools in these letters and thus making it difficult to understand what is meant or claimed by the figurative expression and what relation it has to their circumstances. The case would be the same with the staging of the characters. There are up to nine persons at the villa: Licentius, Trygetius, Lartidianus, Rusticus, Alypius, Augustine, Navigius, Adeodatus, and Monica. It is hard to discern the effects of their limited presence (and the protracted absence) as well as their behaviours in the conversations: some of them sometimes stop talking, suddenly argue, and fall silent. Because, although it seems likely that their presence, absence, and behaviours assume some significance in discussions, their mutually different situations is relevant at this point but difficult to answer. However, the presence of Monica would help us to consider the “*dramatis personae*” and to receive the message from the author. An outstanding study describing her role as recreating the christian practices in the philosophical reflection, and at the same time as guiding the conversations towards the “liminal” configuration (Conybeare 2006) enables us to consider their staging as a whole to be the door into the possibility of integrating philosophical and theological preoccupations with the faith in Christian

teachings. Their talks are transformed into the dialogical open-ended approach to the alternative option of a way of life.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Augustine's use of the literary techniques in these dialogues— a continual speech at the end of the work, the prefatory letter, and the historical characters — reveals the characteristics of the transitional period of his early thought. Activities of his friends, students, and family with different backgrounds (young students and poets, the uneducated, a lawyer, a former professor in rhetoric, his brother, son, and mother) and their actual conversations are changed into the dialogue which reflects Augustine's concern about the shared pursuit of philosophical and theological questions. He offers the future option of a way of life to both his fellows and the pagan and christian intellectuals. It is based on the programme of education, which is expounded in his "*oratio perpetua*." In this period, Augustine focuses his mind on the stimulating effects of education, thereby expecting to pursue the philosophical enquiry and the contemplation of divine wisdom. All the same, he is fully aware that his friends and students (including himself) stay at the villa en route for a community where simple believers, learners, and scholars share their interests. An open form of these dialogues is achieved by his use of these literary devices.