THE WORKS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE
A Translation for the 21st Century

On Genesis:
On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees
Unfinished Literal Commentary on Genesis
The Literal Meaning of Genesis

I/13

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Book I

Genesis 1:1-5: Creation of heaven and earth; the work of the first day

The multiple meanings of scripture

1. All divine scripture is twofold, as the Lord points out when he says, A scribe learned in the kingdom of heaven is like a householder bringing forth from his treasury new things and old (Mt 13:52), which are also said to be the two testaments. In all the holy books, however, one ought to note what eternal realities are there suggested, what deeds are recounted, what future events foretold, what actions commanded or advised. So then, in accounts of things done, what one asks is whether they are all to be taken as only having a figurative meaning, or whether they are also to be asserted and defended as a faithful account of what actually happened. No Christian, I mean, will have the nerve to say that they should not be taken in a figurative sense, if he pays attention to what the apostle says: All these things, however, happened among them in figure (1 Cor 10:11), and to his commending what is written in Genesis, And they shall be two in one flesh (Gn 2:24), as a great sacrament in Christ and in the Church (Eph 5:32).

Genesis 1:1-2: the state of the question

2. So if that text has to be treated in both ways, what is meant, apart from its allegorical significance, by In the beginning God made heaven and earth (Gn 1:1)? Does it mean in the beginning of time, or because it was the first of all things, or in the beginning, which is the Word of God, the only begotten Son? And how could it be shown that God produced changeable and time-bound works without any change in himself? And what may be meant by the name heaven and earth? Was it the total spiritual and bodily creation that was termed heaven and earth, or only the bodily sort? In that case one would have to understand that in this book he kept quiet about the spiritual kind, and said heaven and earth in such a way as intending to signify the whole bodily creation, both the higher and the lower. Or was it the uniformed basic material of both kinds that was called heaven and earth; namely, spiritual life as it can be in itself without having turned to the creator—it is by so turning, you see, that it is formed and perfected, while if it does not so turn it is formless, deformed; and bodily being, if it can be understood as lacking every kind of bodily quality, which is manifested in material that has been formed, when there are already various kinds of bodies, perceptible either by sight or by any of the body's senses?

3. Or is "heaven" to be understood as meaning the spiritual creation, from the moment in which it was made, in all its perfection and everlasting blessedness, while "earth" means bodily material, still unfinished? Because the earth, he goes on, was invisible and shapeless, and there was darkness over the abyss (Gn 1:2), words in which he seems to indicate the uniformed state of bodily being. Or is the uniformed state of each kind of being indicated by these subsequent words—of the bodily sort where it says the earth was invisible and shapeless, of the spiritual where it says and there was darkness over the abyss? In this case we would interpret the dark abyss to mean the nature of life as being uniformed unless it turns to the creator, which is the only way it can be formed so as not to be the abyss, and enlightened so as not to be dark. And in what sense does it say, there was darkness over the abyss? Is it just because there was no light? If there had been, it would of course have been over it and would as it were have poured over it; this is what happens with the spiritual creation when it turns to the unchangeable and incorporeal light, which God is.

In what way did God "say" things?

2.4. And in what way did God say, Let light be made (Gn 1:3)? Was it in time, or in the eternity of the Word? And if it was in time, then of course it involved change. So how could God be understood to have said this except through some created being? He himself, clearly, is not subject to change. And if it was through a created being that God said Let light be made, how can light be the first thing created, if there already was a created being through which God said Let light be made? Or is light not the first thing created, because it has already said In the beginning God made heaven and earth? And could some voice have been produced in a temporal process involving change through some heavenly created being, to say, Let light be made? If that is the case, then it was this bodily

1. The real twofold quality of scripture, he is saying, is not its obvious division into two testaments, but its all having both a figurative and a literal meaning. His giving priority to the figurative or spiritual meaning is in line with the practice of most of the Fathers, from Origen onward, but is the exact opposite, of course, of contemporary exegetical orthodoxy today—and indeed of the line Augustine is taking in this work.

2. The Aristotelian concept of "prime matter."
light that we perceive with our bodily eyes which was made, when God said through a spiritual creature (which God had already made when he made heaven and earth in the beginning), Let light be made; said in a way in which through the interior and hidden motion of such a creature the words "Let light be made" could be said by divine inspiration.

5. Or did the voice of God, saying Let light be made, also make an audible sound, as did the voice of God when he said, You are my Son, the beloved (Mk 1:11); and this too through some bodily creature, which God had made when he made heaven and earth in the beginning, before light had been made, which was then made at the audible utterance of this voice? And if that is the case, what language was this voice speaking when God said Let light be made, since there was no diversity of languages yet, something that came about later on at the building of the tower after the flood? What was the one and only language in which God spoke the words, "Let light be made"? And who was there, who needed to hear and understand, to whom this sort of utterance would be addressed? Or is this an altogether absurd and literal-minded, fleshly, train of thought and conjecture?

6. So what are we to say, then? Is the voice of God best understood as being the intelligible meaning of the audible utterance, Let light be made, and not the audible utterance itself? And the question then arises whether this does not belong to the very nature of his Word, about which it is said, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and it is God that the Word was (Jn 1:1)? Seeing that it is said about him, All things were made through him (Jn 1:3), it is evident enough that light also was made through him, when God said, "Let light be made." If that is the case, then God’s saying Let light be made is something eternal, because the Word of God, God with God, the only Son of God, is co-eternal with the Father, although when God said this in the eternal Word, a time-bound creature was made. While "when" and "some time" are time words, all the same the time when something should be made is eternal for the Word of God, and it is then made when it is in that Word that it should have been made, in the Word in which there is no "when" nor "some time," because that whole Word is eternal.

Is the light spiritual, corporeal, or both?

3. 7. And what is this light that was made? Something spiritual or something bodily? If something spiritual, you see, it could be the first thing created, which had first been called heaven, when it said, In the beginning God made heaven and earth (Gn 1:1), and was now perfected by this utterance; so that the text here,

God said, Let light be made; and light was made (Gn 1:3), should be understood as its being converted and enlightened, by its creator calling it back to himself.

8. And why is it put like this: In the beginning God made heaven and earth, and not like this: In the beginning God said, Let heaven and earth be made; and heaven and earth were made, in the same way as the account of light is given: God said, Let light be made; and light was made? Is it that first of all what God made had to be universally embraced and presented under the name of "heaven and earth," and then this had to be followed up piecemeal by how he made it, when it says of things one by one, God said; meaning that it was through his Word that he made whatever he did make?

Why God did not say "Let it be made" about the unformed basic material

4. 9. Or is it that when the unformed basic material, whether of spiritual or bodily being, was first being made, it was not appropriate to say God said, Let it be made, because it is by the Word, always adhering to the Father, that God eternally says everything, not with the sound of a voice nor with thoughts running through the time which sounds take, but with the light, co-eternal with himself, of the Word he has begotten; and imperfection or incompleteness does not imitate the form of this Word, being unlike that which supremely and originally is, and tending by its very want of form toward nothing? Rather, it is when it turns, everything in the way suited to its kind, to that which truly and always is, to the creator that is to say of its own being, that it really imitates the form of the Word which always and unchangeably adheres to the Father, and receives its own form, and becomes a perfect, complete creature. Accordingly, where scripture states, God said, Let it be made, we should understand an incorporeal utterance of God in the substance of his co-eternal Word, calling back to himself the imperfection of the creation, so that it should not be formless, but should be formed, each element on the particular lines which follow in due order.

By so turning back and being formed creation imitates, every element in its own way, God the Word, that is the Son of God who always adheres to the Father in complete likeness and equality of being, by which he and the Father are one, but it does not imitate this form of the Word if it turns away from the creator and remains formless and imperfect, incomplete. That is why allusion is made to the Son, not because he is the Word but only because he is the beginning, when it says, In the beginning God made heaven and earth (Gn 1:1); here he is being suggested as the source of creation still in its formless imperfection. But the Son is being alluded to as being also the Word where the text runs God said, Let it be made. Thus his being the beginning implies his being the source of creation as it


4. See Jn 10:30.
comes into being from him while still imperfect, while his being the Word implies his conferring perfection on creation by calling it back to himself, so that it may be given form by adhering to the creator, and by imitating in its own measure the form which adheres eternally and unchangingly to the Father, and which instantly gets from him to be the same thing as he is.  

What spiritual formlessness might be, and how it is formed

5, 10. The Son, after all, the Word, does not have an unformed life, seeing that for him not only is it the same thing to be as to live, but to live is for him the same as to live wisely and blessedly. A creature, on the other hand, even a spiritual and intelligent or rational one, which seems to be closer to that Word than others, can have an unformed life, because while for it also to be is the same as to live, to live is not the same as to live wisely and blessedly; if it turns away from the unchangeable Wisdom, after all, it lives foolishly and miserably. It is formed, however, by turning to the unchangeable light of Wisdom, the Word of God; it is to the one, you see, from whom it received existence, just to be and to live anyhow, that it turns in order to live wisely and blessedly. Eternal Wisdom, of course, is the origin or beginning of the intelligent creation; this beginning, while abiding unchangeably in itself, would certainly never cease to speak to the creature for which it is the beginning and summon it by some hidden inspiration it turn to that from which it derived its being, because in no other way could it possibly be formed and perfected. That is why, when he was asked who he was, he replied, The beginning, because I am also speaking to you (Jn 8:25).

11. Now what the Son speaks the Father speaks, because when the Father speaks, a Word is uttered which is the Son, with God uttering in an eternal manner, if “manner” it can be called, a co-eternal Word. For in God there is a supreme and holy and just courtesy and a kind of love in his activity which comes not from any need on his part but from generosity. That is why, before scripture came to the text, God said, Let light be made (Gn 1:3), it preceded it by saying, And the Spirit of God was being borne over the water (Gn 1:2). Now it may have wanted to call by the name of “water” the whole basic material of the bodily creation, to suggest in this way what all things which we can distinguish according to their kind were made and formed from, calling it water because we observe all things on earth to be formed and to grow in their various species from humid matter; or it may have wished to indicate a kind of spiritual life in a fluid, shifting state, as it were, before the form given it by its conversion. In either case, to be sure, the Spirit of God was being borne over it, because whichever it was that he had initiated, ready to be formed and perfected, it was subject to the good

5. The Word being eternally uttered by the Father is the same as the Son being eternally born of the Father, and so being God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God.

will of the creator. This means that when God said in his Word, Let light be made, and so on, what was made would abide in his good will, that is, would meet with his approval according to the measure of its kind. And thus it is right, because it met with God’s approval, with scripture saying, And light was made; and God saw the light that it was good (Gn 1:3-4).

How the mystery of the Trinity is hinted at in these verses

6, 12. Just as at the very start of his beginning creation, which was mentioned under the name of “heaven and earth” on account of what was to be completed from it, the “threeness” of the creator is suggested, so too in creation’s. Thus when scripture says: In the beginning God made heaven and earth (Gn 1:1), we understand the Father in the word “God” and the Son in the word “beginning”; the beginning, not for the Father but for the creation created at the start through himself, and chiefly for the spiritual, and consequently for the totality of creation; while with scripture saying: And the Spirit of God was being borne over the water (Gn 1:2), we recognize the complete indication of the Trinity being converted and perfected in order to be distributed into its various species, the same “threeness” should be suggested, of the Word of God, that is to say, and the Word’s begetter, when it says God said; and of the holy goodness, by which God is pleased with whatever pleases him on its being perfected in its own small, natural way, when it says, God saw that it was good.

7, 13. But why did it first mention creation as incomplete and imperfect, and only mention the Spirit of God after that, with scripture saying: Now the earth was invisible and shapeless, and there was darkness over the abyss, and then continuing: and the Spirit of God was being borne over the water (Gn 1:2)? Was it because a love that is needy and in want loves in such a way that it is subjected to the things it loves; and so for that reason, when the Spirit of God was to be mentioned, in which his holy benevolence and love is understood, it is said to be borne over what he loves, in case it should be thought that it was out of the compulsion of his needs that God loved the things which were to be made, rather than out of the abundance of his generosity? With this very thing in mind, the apostle is going to say about charity that he will point out an overwhelming way (1 Cor 12:31), and in another place he says, the charity of Christ that overwhelms knowledge (Eph 3:19).

8, 14. Thus it was that when things also had been perfected and formed from that primal origin, God saw that it was good; it was out of the same genial courtesy, after all, that he took pleasure in what had been made, as that it had pleased him that it should be made. There are two things, in fact, on account of which God loves his creation: in order that it should be, and in order that it should abide. So in order that there should be something to abide, the Spirit of God was being
borne over the water; while in order that it should abide, God saw that it was good. And what was said about light was said about everything else. Some things, you see, abide by soaring over all the whole rolling wheel of time in the widest range of holiness under God; while other things do so according to the limits of their time, and thus it is through things giving way to and taking the place of one another that the beautiful tapestry of the ages is woven.

The question of time; when did God say, Let light be made?

9, 15. So then, as for what God said: Let light be made; and light was made (Gn 1:3); did he say it on some day, or before any day? If, you see, he said it in the Word co-eternal with himself, he said it, clearly, in a timeless manner; but if he said it in a time-bound manner, he did not say it in the Word co-eternal with himself, but through some time-bound creation. And in this case light will not be the first thing created, because there was already another thing through which could be said, in time, Let light be made. Besides, what is understood to have been made before any day is that about which it says, In the beginning God made heaven and earth (Gn 1:1), where by the name of “heaven” is to be understood the spiritual creation already made and formed, as being the heaven of this heaven, which is the highest thing among bodies. Now it was on the second day that the solid structure was made, which again he called “heaven”; while by the name of earth, invisible and shapeless, and by the dark abyss the incompleteness and lack of perfection of bodily reality was signified, out of which those time-bound things would be made, the first of them being light.

16. How, though, it was possible, through a creature which he made before time, for God to say in time Let light be made, it is rather difficult to work out. We do not, after all, accept that it was said with the utterance of a voice, because whatever such a thing as that is, it is certainly corporeal. Or did he make from that primal bodily substance in its incomplete state some corporeal voice with which to utter Let light be made? So then, some voice-producing body was created and formed before light. But if that is the case, there was already time for the voice to run through, and for the spaces occupied by the successive syllables to pass along. Now if time was already there before light was made, in what time would the voice have been made with which to utter Let light be made; to what day did that time belong? The count, after all, begins with the one day, and that the first, on which light was made. Or does the whole space of time, on which both the voice-producing body was made through which to utter Let light be

made, and on which the light itself was made, belong to that day? But every such voice is produced by the speaker on account of some listener’s sense of hearing; this, I mean, has been so made as to perceive vibrations in the air. And so did that, whatever it was, invisible and shapeless matter have a sense of hearing, to which God could thus bellow and say, Let light be made? Well then, perish this absurdity from any thoughtful mind!

17. So was there some spiritual but still time-measured movement by which we are to understand that Let light be made was said, a movement produced by the eternal God through the co-eternal Word in the spiritual creation, which he had already made when, as it says, In the beginning God made heaven and earth; produced, that is, in that heaven of heaven? Or is this utterance too to be understood as not only made without any sound but also without any time-measured movement of the spiritual creation, while being somehow or other fixed and impressed on its mind and reason, by the Word, co-eternal with the Father, so that then, following this utterance, that lower, dark and unformed corporeal nature would be set in motion and turned toward the appropriate species, and light would be made?

But this really is problematic; here we have the spiritual creation which in its contemplation of Truth is beyond all time, and God giving an order outside time, and the spiritual creation hearing it outside time, but having these formulae mentally impressed upon it from God’s unchanging Wisdom like so many intelligible utterances, and then transmitting them to lower levels so that time-measured movements should be set up in time-measured things, whether for giving them specific form or for controlling them; how this could happen it is practically impossible to grasp. If, however, light, which was the first thing of which it was said that it should be made, and then it was made, is also to be taken as holding the first place in creation, then it is itself that intellectual, intelligent life, which would be in a formlessly fluid state unless it turned to the creator to be enlightened. But when it did turn to him and was enlightened, then that happened which was said in the Word of God: Let light be made (Gn 1:3).

How many number one was spent

10, 18. Nonetheless, if this was said timelessly, because time has no place in the Word, co-eternal with the Father, someone may perhaps wonder whether it also happened timelessly. But how can this be supposed, when after the light was made and divided from the darkness and they were labeled “day” and “night,” scripture goes on to say: And there was made evening, and there was made morning, one day (Gn 1:5)? From this it appears that this work of God took up

6. See Gn 1:5-8. This is the “bodily heaven,” not the spiritual heaven which is above it as its own heaven. For this idea of a “heaven of heaven” see note 19 below.
7. See Gn 1:2.
8. See Gn 1:3.
9. Ratioines in the Latin; a word that will almost dominate this whole treatise, and for which no single satisfactory translation can be provided.
the space of a day, and when this had been spent like that, evening came on, which is the beginning of the night. And then again when the space of a night had passed, the whole day was completed, so that morning could be made.

19. Indeed now, this really is astonishing: when God said, Let light be made, without any spacing of syllables, as an idea of his eternal Word, why it should take such a long time to make light, until the space of a whole day had passed, and evening could be made. Or was the light, perhaps, indeed made instantly, but the whole space of daytime could still be taken up in distinguishing it from the darkness, and giving each of them, once distinguished, their respective labels? It would be astonishing if this too could take God even as long to do as it takes us to say it. The distinction of light and darkness, surely, was ipso facto a consequence of the light being made: it could not, after all be light, unless it were distinguished from darkness.

20. As for God calling the light day and the darkness night, how long could this have taken, even if he had done it with the sound of a voice, syllable by syllable? No longer, surely, than it takes us to say “Let light be called day and darkness be called night.” Unless of course anyone should be so crazy as to assume that because God is greater than everything else, even the fewest syllables uttered by the divine mouth could be spread over a whole day. What it comes to is this, that in fact it was by a word co-eternal with himself, that is with the inner and eternal ideas of unchanging Wisdom, that God called the light day and the darkness night. Again, you see, it could be asked, if he did the calling with the words we use, what language he did it in, and what need there was for transient sounds where there was nobody’s bodily sense of hearing, and no answer to the question could be found.

21. Or must it be said that as soon as this work of God had been performed, the light remained without night following it until a full day-time period had passed, and that the night which followed the day remained until a full night-time period had passed, and morning could be made of the next day with one day, and that the first, completed? But if I say that, I am afraid I will be laughed at by those who know for certain, and by those who can easily work out, that during the time when it is night with us the presence of light is illuminating those parts of the world past which the sun is returning from its setting to its rising, and that thus during the entire twenty-four hours, while it circles through its whole round, there is always day-time somewhere, night-time somewhere else.

So then, are we really going to station God in some part where evening can be made for him, while the light withdraws from that part to another? For it is also written in the book called Sirach as follows: And the sun rises, and the sun sets, and leads on to its place, that is to the place from which it rose. It continues, you see, and says, Rising it proceeds thither to the south and circles round to the north (Sir 1:5-6). So when the southern part of the sky has the sun it is day-time for us, but when in its circuit it reaches the northern part, it is night-time for us; yet that does not mean it is not day-time in the other part where the sun is present—unless maybe our hearts are inclined to accept the poetic fiction, so that we really believe the sun sinks into the sea and rises, well washed, on the other side.14 Though if this were the case, the abyss itself would be lit up by the presence of the sun, and it would be day-time there. I mean, it would be able to illuminate even the waters, seeing that it could not be extinguished by them. But this is a monstrous supposition. Why? Because there was not yet even any sun.

22. Accordingly, if the light that was made on the first day was spiritual, surely it never set, did it, to be succeeded by night? While if it was corporeal, what then is that light which we can no longer see when the sun has set—because there was as yet no moon nor any stars? Or if it is always in the same part of the sky as the sun, not as the light of the sun, but as a kind of companion to it, always joined to it in such a way that it cannot be distinguished and identified apart from it, we come back to the same difficulty in solving this problem, because this light too as the sun’s companion circles round in the same way as the sun from its setting to its rising, and is in the other part of the world during the time that this part in which we find ourselves darkens into night. This obliges us to believe—perish the thought!—that God was in one part, a part this light would desert so that evening might be made for him. Or had he, perhaps, made the light in that part of the world in which he was going to make man, and that is why, when the light had departed from that part, evening is said to have been made, even when that light which had left there was in the other part, ready to rise in the morning after completing its round?

The function of the sun on the fourth day

11, 23. So why was the sun made with authority over the day (Ps 136:8), to give light upon the earth (Gn 1:17), if that light which had also been called “day” had been sufficient for the making of the day? Or was that earlier light illuminating higher regions far from the earth, so that it could not be perceived on earth, and thus it was necessary for the sun to be made, and through its agency for day-time to be manifested to the lower parts of the cosmos? This can also be said, that the brilliance of the day was increased by the addition of the sun, so that a

10. Rationes in the Latin.

11. Augustine probably had Ovid’s Metamorphoses, Book 2 in mind, the beginning of which is devoted to myths about the sun. But in the classical myths of the sun that deity (or Titan) traveled in a chariot, drawn by the horses of the sun; and it is these horses that really needed washing in the ocean after their day’s work, and received it, after being given an evening feed on some kind of ambrosian hay in the Hesperides, the western islands of the blessed.
day less brilliant than it is now may be supposed to have come into being through that light.

Then I know that this also has been said by someone: that first of all the essence of light was introduced in the work of the creator, by the words, *Let light be made; and light was made;* while later on when it talks of the luminous bodies, it relates what was made out of that light in the due order of days, in which it seemed good to the creator that all things should be made. But where this essence of light passed along to when evening was made, so that night in turn might run its course, this person did not say and neither do I think it can easily be ascertained. It can scarcely be supposed, after all, that it was put out so that nocturnal darkness might follow, and then lit again so that morning might be made, before the sun took on this task, which as the same text testifies was made to begin on the fourth day.

*How did evening and morning follow each other during the first three days?*

12, 24. It is hard to work out and explain on what kind of circuit, before this happened, they could follow each other, those three days and nights of the light which was first made, while it retained its nature, if it is a bodily light that we must understand as being made then. Unless perhaps one were to say that some earthly and watery mass, before these elements were sorted out from each other, which the text tells us happened on the third day, was called darkness by God on account of its grosser thickness which light could not penetrate, or on account of the dense shadow which such a mass would necessarily cast if it was lighted up on the other side. The place, after all, which the mass of any body stops light reaching, is in shadow place lacking the light which would illuminate it unless an intervening body obstructed it; that is all that is meant by “shadow.” If the mass of a body casts a shadow big enough to occupy as much space on the earth as daylight occupies on the other side, it is called night. Not any and every darkness, after all, is night; I mean in vast caves too, where light is prevented from breaking through by some obstructive mass of rock, it is certainly pitch dark, because there is no light there, and the whole of that space lacks light. Darkness of that sort, though, has never been called night, but only the sort which covers the part of the earth from which the day has been withdrawn. In the same way not every light is called day—after all, light comes from the moon and the stars and lamps and phosphorescence, and anything that glows—but only that light is called day which comes before night and is followed by it as it bows out itself.

25. But if that primordial light had been poured round the mass of the earth on all sides to cover it all, whether it was stationary or circling round, there would have been no part in which it could let night in to follow it, because it would not itself have withdrawn from anywhere to make room for it. Or was it just made on one side of the earth, so that as it circled round it would allow night from the other side to circle round too in its wake? Since water, you see, was still covering the whole earth, there was nothing to stop the mass of this watery globe from causing day on one side from the presence of light, and night on the other from the absence of light, which would follow round to the first side at the time of evening, while the light sank down to the other side.

*As the water under heaven had first covered the whole earth, where did it recede to, for the dry land to appear?*

26. So then, where were the waters collected together, if they had previously occupied the whole surface of the earth—those waters, that is to say, which were drawn aside so that the earth could be laid bare, what part were they collected into? If there was already, you see, a piece of bare earth where they could be collected, the dry land had already appeared, and the abyss did not occupy the whole surface of the earth; but if it had occupied the whole surface, what was the place for the waters to be collected in for the earth to appear as dry? They were not, surely, collected into a pile, as happens on the threshing floor when the harvest that has been threshed is winnowed and then swept into a heap, and so lays bare the place it had been spread over and covered?

Who would ever say such a thing, when they can see the fields of the sea spread out level on all sides, because even when waves raise up what seem like mountains of water, they are smoothed out again the moment the storm abates? And even if some shores are more extensively laid bare by the ebbing tide, it cannot be said that there are no other spaces of land where what has been drawn away from somewhere else can go to, and then return again to the place it had departed from. But since it was quite simply the whole earth that was covered by the surges of the watery element, where would this retreat to in order to lay bare some parts? Or perhaps it was a more rarified water-like mist that was covering all the lands, and this was collected together by being condensed, so that out of many parts it could lay bare those in which the dry land might appear? Though again, the earth too, by subsiding and sinking far and wide, could have provided hollow places to receive the waters flowing together into them in

12. Not only does Augustine not tell us who this person was, but neither do any of his learned editors, neither the Maurists nor their predecessors, nor the editors of the CSEL.

13. See Gen 1:5.

14. A poetic expression, not exactly quoted, but in all probability derived from Virgil's *Aeneid,* 10.214, which has *campus saltus.* But it was a common kind of expression in classical poetic literature.

15. The only sea Augustine had experience of was the Mediterranean, which is almost tideless. But he will have known of course about Atlantic tides beyond the Pillars of Hercules—the straits of Gibraltar.
torrents, and in this way dry land could have appeared in those parts from which the wet had departed.

27. Basic material, however, in which even something as minimally specific as mist has appeared, is not absolutely shapeless and without form.

When had earth and water been created?

13. And therefore the question can still be asked: when did God create these visible species and qualities of the waters and the lands of the earth; I mean, there is no record of them in any of the six days. And so suppose that he did it before any day, according to what is written before these first days are mentioned: In the beginning God made heaven and earth (Gn 1:1). So we could understand by the word “earth” the earth species already formed and in essence visible, but with the waters manifestly covering all of it. Then we would not think of any formlessness of basic material in the words of scripture which follow: Now the earth was invisible and shapeless, and there was darkness over the abyss; and the Spirit of God was being borne over the water (Gn 1:2), but of earth and water without light (which had not yet been made), but established with those qualities we are now so familiar with. So we could take it that the reason the earth was said to be invisible was that being covered with water it could not be seen, even if there had been anyone there to see it, while the reason it was called shapeless was that it had not yet been distinguished from the sea and girded with its shores and embellished with its fruits and animals.

So if that is the case, why were these particular species, which are unquestionably bodily, made before any day? Why does the text not run: “God said, Let the earth be made; and the earth was made,” and again, “God said, Let the water be made; and the water was made”? Or both of them together, if they are both contained under what you could call the law of the lowest place: “God said, Let the earth and water be made; and thus it was made”?

14. Why does it not say, when this had been done, “God saw that it was good”?

Why did God not “see that it was good” after creating formless matter, in verse 2?

28. It is, after all, obvious (that everything changeable is given form or shape out of something lacking form or shape) and at the same time Catholic faith prescribes and reason inductively teaches that there could have been no basic material for any specific natures, unless it came from God the initiator and

creator of all things, both formed and formable, about which one passage of scripture says to him: You that made the world out of formless matter (Wis 11:18). It is considerations of this sort, you see, that have convinced me that it was this basic material that was indicated by those words which spiritual fore-sight adapted even to less quick-witted readers or listeners, and which say before coming to any counting of days, In the beginning God made heaven and earth, and so on until it comes to And God said, so that from there on the order of things given form and shape might follow.

Formless matter prior as a source, but not prior in time, to the things formed out of it

15, 29. It is not because formless matter is prior in time to things formed from it, since they are both created simultaneously together, both the thing made and what it was made out of; but because that which something is made out of is still prior as its source, even if not in time, to what is made from it, that scripture could divide in the time it takes to state them what God did not divide in the time it took to make them. Just as a voice, after all, is the basic material for words, whilst words are what a voice is formed into, but the speaker does not first give vent to an unformed voice which he can later on gather up and form into words, so too God the creator did not first make formless material and later on form it, on second thoughts as it were, into every kind of nature; no, he created formed and fashioned material. If the question were asked, I mean, whether we make a voice from words or words from a voice, it would not be easy to find anyone so slow of wit as not to answer that it is rather words which are made from a voice. So too, although the speaker makes them both simultaneously, it is clear enough, on a moment’s reflection, what he makes out of which.

For this reason, since God made them simultaneously, both the material which he formed and the things into which he formed it, and since both had to be mentioned by scripture and both could not be mentioned simultaneously, can anybody doubt that what something was made out of had rightly to be mentioned before what was made out of it? Because even when we just say “matter” and “form,” we understand them as being together simultaneously, and we are unable to state them simultaneously. Now just as it happens in a very short space of time, when we utter these two words, that we utter them one before the other, so too in the longer form of a narrative, one thing had to be mentioned before the other, although God made each of them, as we have said, simultaneously. Thus what came first in the making solely as source comes first also in the telling. If two things of which neither is in any way prior to the other cannot be named simultaneously, how much less can their stories be told simultaneously! So then, there can be no doubt at all that this formless basic material, almost the
same as nothingness though it be, was still made by none but God, and was simultaneously created with the things that were formed from it.

30. Let us take it as granted, then, that this formless basic material may be said to be signified by the words, Now the earth was invisible and shapeless, and there was darkness over the abyss; and the Spirit of God was being borne over the water (Gn 1:2), and that apart from what is put there about the Spirit of God, we are to understand the other words, while indeed being the names of visible things, as intended to suggest that formlessness as best it could be done to the less quick-witted, because these two elements, earth that is and water, are more manageable than the others in the hands of workmen for making things, and that is why this formlessness was the more suitably suggested by these names.

16 But if this is the most probable interpretation, there was no formed mass there which the light could illuminate on one side and on the other produce darkness, so that night could follow the departing day.

A suggestion that during the first three days night and day mean contraction and emission of light

31. We might, however, wish to understand the emission and contraction of that light as constituting day and night; but if so, we cannot see any reason why it should be done like that—there were no animals yet, after all, for whom this beneficial alternation could be arranged, and for whom, now that they have evolved, we see that it is arranged by the circling of the sun; nor does any example spring to mind which would enable us to accept as in the least likely such an emission and contraction of light for bringing about the alternation of night and day. Yes, the darting out of rays from our eyes is indeed the darting out of a kind of light, and it can be contracted when we fix our gaze on the air that is nearest to our eyes, and emitted when we turn our attention along the same line to things that are further away. Nor does it cease, to be sure, to see things further away when it is contracted, but it certainly sees them more hazily than when the glance is emitted directly at them. But still, the light which is in the sense of the seeing subject is so slight, we are informed, that unless it was assisted by the light outside, we would be able to see nothing; and since it cannot be distinguished from that external light, it is hard, as I said, to find an example by which the emission of light into day and its contraction into night could be demonstrated.

17. The common theory of vision at the time—at least, the one Augustine took for granted—was that it is achieved by the eyes emitting rays which touch the objects seen and then transmit the impression back to the sense of sight, something like the antennae of certain insects—or the headlights of a motor car.

18. See Jn 1:3-9.

19. He is here echoing the biblical expression “the heaven of heaven” as in Ps 115:16, in the Latin Vulgate: Caelum caeli Dominus; see also Dt 10:14. He has made the same allusion earlier on, in IX.15.17.

What can evening and morning, night and day, be for spiritual light?

17, 32. But if it was a spiritual light that was made when God said Let light be made (Gn 1:3), it is not that true light, co-eternal with the Father, that is to be understood, through which all things were made, and which enlightens every human being, but that about which it could be said: Before all things there was created wisdom (Sir 1:4). When that eternal and unchangeable Wisdom, you see, which was begotten, not made, transfers itself into spiritual and rational creatures, as it does into holy souls, so that being thus enlightened they can themselves become sources of light, there is produced in them a kind of infection of shining, glowing intelligence; and this can be taken as made light, made when God said, Let light be made, provided there was already a spiritual creation, which was signified by the word “heaven,” where it is written, In the beginning God made heaven and earth. This was not a corporeal heaven but the incorporeal heaven of the corporeal heaven, that is above every kind of body, not by degrees of space, but by the sublimity of its nature. How they could be made simultaneously, however, both what was being enlightened and its actual enlightenment, while being given different times in the narrative, we were explaining a short while ago when dealing with the basic material of things.

33. But on what terms are we to understand the night succeeding this kind of light, so that evening might be made? From what sort of darkness, for that matter, could this sort of light be divided, where scripture says: And God divided between the light and the darkness (Gn 1:4)? There were not any sinners and fools already, were there, falling away from the light of truth, between whom and those abiding in the same light God could divide, as between the light and the dark, and by calling the light day and the darkness night could show that he is not the operative cause of sins, but is still in control of them by the appropriate distribution of rewards and punishments? Or is “day” here the name for the whole of time, and is the roll of all the ages included in this word, and is that why it is not called the first day, but one day? And there was made evening, you see, it says, and there was made morning, one day (Gn 1:5). So if we take it like this, the making of evening would seem to signify the sin of rational creatures, while the making of morning would mean their restoration.

34. But this is an interpretation on the lines of prophetic allegory, which is not what we have undertaken in this work. We undertook, you see, to talk here about the scriptures according to their proper meaning of what actually happened, not according to their riddling, enigmatic reference to future events. So then, with
and night that the text says, God saw that it was good. This night, you see, is not some formless substance from which other things might be formed, but a space full of air which lacks the light of day; and to this night, obviously, there was nothing of its own sort to be added to make it more specially beautiful or distinct. Evening, though, in the whole of those three days before the heavenly bodies were made, is not unreasonably, I think, to be understood as the end of a finished work; while morning on the other hand points to a work that is yet to come.

In what way God works

18. 36. But above all we have to remember, a point we have already made several times, that God does not work by time-measured movements, so to say, of soul or body, as do human beings and angels, but by the eternal and unchanging, stable formulae of His Word, co-eternal with himself, and by a kind of brooding, if I may so put it, of his equally co-eternal Holy Spirit. For what is said here in the Greek and Latin versions about the Spirit of God, that it was being borne over the water, according to the Syriac which is a language closely related to Hebrew (this is how a learned Christian Syrian22 is said to have explained the word) is reported to mean not was being borne over but was brooding over the water in the way birds brood over their eggs,23 where that warmth of the mother’s body in some way also supports the forming of the chicks through a kind of influence of her own kind of love.

And so let us never think in a literal-minded, fleshly way of utterances in time throughout these days of divine works. The reason, I mean to say, why the very Wisdom of God took our weakness upon herself and came to gather the children of Jerusalem under her wings as a hen gathers her chicks was not that we should always remain little children, but that while being babies in majesty we should cease to be childish in mind.24

37. And in discussing obscure matters that are far removed from our eyes and our experience, which are patient of various explanations that do not contradict the faith we are imbued with, let us never, if we read anything on them in the divine scriptures, throw ourselves head over heels into the headstrong assertion

20. We nowadays would regard such an expression as “spiritual light,” and even a more usual expression like “the light of reason,” as involving the figurative, or metaphorical (if not anagogic) use of the word “light.” But for Augustine it was within the word’s proper range of meaning. If he was here extending that proper range, he was only anticipating, “prefiguring,” what modern physicists do, so I was told in an argument I was having with a younger mathematician here. They extend the word “light,” in technical use, to cover such phenomena as X-rays, Gamma rays—any rays you like to mention.

21. These meanings suggested for the calling of the light and the darkness day and night hardly seem to apply to the spiritual light which he is here preoccupied with. It is all questions, to be sure, not answers—but a certain mildly regrettable incoherence here in the question! But perhaps he will go some way to meeting this criticism in the next section.

22. This was very probably Saint Ephrem, a deacon of the Church of Edessa, who founded a school of theology there, and died in 373.

23. The words I have translated as “brooding” are first the noun foetus, and then the verb foresat. These have a much wider range of meaning in Latin, to cover the whole notion of fostering or cherishing; and the primary meaning, indeed, of foetus is the application of a fomentum or poultice to sores and wounds. So Augustine here says a little more that I translate: “was fostering the water; not as swellings or wounds in the body are fostered by cold or suitably warmed compresses, but as eggs are fostered by birds . . .”

24. See Lk 13:34; 1 Cor 14:20.
of any one of them. Perhaps the truth, emerging from a more thorough discussion of the point, may definitively overturn that opinion, and then we will find ourselves overthrown, championing what is not the cause of the divine scriptures but our own, in such a way that we want it to be that of the scriptures, when we should rather be wanting the cause of the scriptures to be our own.

Augustine's method in this commentary

19. 38. Now with this text, And God said, Let light be made; and light was made (Gn 1:3): let us suppose that one person was of the opinion that it was bodily light that was made, and another that it was the spiritual sort. That there is a spiritual light in the spiritual creation is something our faith has no doubts about, but that there is a special celestial or cosmic light, or even one that is above the sky or was there before the sky, which could be followed by night—well, it is not against the faith for just as long as it is not proved with absolute certainty to be untrue. If this does happen, then this is not what divine scripture contained, but what human ignorance had opined.

Should reason, on the other hand, definitively demonstrate that this is true, it will still be uncertain whether it is what the writer wished to be understood by those words of the sacred books, or whether he had in mind something else that is no less true. While if the whole context of the passage proves that he did not have this in mind, that does not mean that what he did wish to be understood by them will be false; no, it will be both true and more worth knowing. If, however, the scriptural context does not tell against the writer having intended this meaning, it still remains to inquire whether he could not also have meant something else. And should we find that he could have done, then it will be uncertain which of them he actually did intend. And it can be held not unreasonably that he intended both meanings, if all the other details lend support to each of them.

39. There is knowledge to be had, after all, about the earth, about the sky, about the other elements of this world, about the movements and revolutions or even the magnitude and distances of the constellations, about the predictable eclipses of moon and sun, about the cycles of years and seasons, about the nature of animals, fruits, stones and everything else of this kind. And it frequently happens that even non-Christians will have knowledge of this sort in a way that they can substantiate with scientific arguments or experiments. Now it is quite disgraceful and disastrous, something to be on one's guard against at all costs, that they should ever hear Christians spouting what they claim our Christian literature has to say on these topics, and talking such nonsense that they can scarcely contain their laughter when they see them to be toto caelo, as the saying goes, wide of the mark. And what is so vexing is not that misguided people should be laughed at, as that our authors should be assumed by outsiders to have held such views and, to the great detriment of those about whose salvation we are so concerned, should be written off and consigned to the waste paper basket as so many ignoramuses.

Whenever, you see, they catch out some members of the Christian community making mistakes on a subject which they know inside out, and defending their hollow opinions on the authority of our books, on what grounds are they going to trust those books on the resurrection of the dead and the hope of eternal life and the kingdom of heaven, when they suppose they include any number of mistakes and fallacies on matters which they themselves have been able to master either by experiment or by the surest of calculations? It is impossible to say what trouble and grief such rash, self-assured know-alls cause the more cautious and experienced brothers and sisters. Whenever they find themselves challenged and taken to task for some shaky and false theory of theirs by people who do not recognize the authority of our books, they try to defend what they have aired with the most frivolous temerity and patent falsehood by bringing forward these same sacred books to justify it. Or they even quote from memory many things said in them which they imagine will provide them with valid evidence, not understanding either what they are saying, or the matters on which they are asserting themselves (1 Tm 1:7).

Stating all possible meanings by way of questions

20. 40. It is in order to take account of this state of things that I have, to the best of my ability, wrinkled out and presented a great variety of possible meanings to the words of the book of Genesis which have been darkly expressed in order to put us through our paces. I have avoided affirming anything hastily in a way that would rule out any alternative explanation that may be a better one, so leaving everyone free to choose whichever they can grasp most readily in their turn, and when they cannot understand, let them give honor to God's scripture,25 keeping fear for themselves. But since the words of scripture that we have been dealing with can be explained along so many lines, let those people now restrain themselves, who are so puff'd up with their knowledge of secular literature, that they scornfully dismiss as something crude and unrefined these texts which are all expressed in a way designed to nourish devout hearts.26 You could say they are crawling along the ground without wings, and poking fun at the nests of birds that are going to fly.

Some of the weaker brothers and sisters, however, are in danger of going astray more seriously when they hear these godless people holding forth

25. So the Maurists, with the support of most manuscripts, reading ubi intelligere non potest, scripturae Dei det honorem. The CSEL text reads . . . non potest scripturam, Deo det honorem—where they cannot understand the scripture, let them give honor to God.

26. The sort of person he had been himself before his conversion.
expertly and fluently on the "music of the spheres," or on any questions you care to mention about the elements of this cosmos. They wilt and lose heart, putting these puny deeds before themselves, and while regarding them as great authorities, they turn back with a weary distaste to the books of salutary godliness, and can scarcely bring themselves to touch the volumes they should be devouring with delight—shrinking from the roughness of the husks of the wheat and eagerly eyeing the flowers of the thistles. After all, they have no time to be still (Ps 46:11), and to see how sweet is the Lord (Ps 34:8), nor are they hungry on the sabbath (Mt 12:1); and that is why they are too lazy to use the authority they have received from the Lord to pluck the ears of wheat and go on rubbing them in their hands until they come to what they can eat.

**What have we gotten from his "rubbing the grain in his hands" like this?**

21, 41. Someone is going to say, "What about you, with all this rubbing of corn in this essay, how much grain have you extracted? What have you winnowed? Why is practically everything hidden still in a heap of questions? Affirm some of the many meanings you have argued can be understood."

To which I reply that I have happily reached this very food; namely that I have learned that we should not hesitate to give the answers that have to be given, in line with the faith, to people who make every effort to discredit the books our salvation depends on. So we should show that whatever they have been able to demonstrate from reliable sources about the world of nature is not contrary to our literature, while whatever they may have produced from any of their volumes that is contrary to this literature of ours, that is, to the Catholic faith, we must either show with some ease, or else believe without any hesitation, to be entirely false. And we should so hold onto our mediator, in whom are stored up all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge (Col 2:3), that we are neither seduced by the chatter of false philosophy, nor frightened out of our wits by the superstitions of false religion.

And when we read in the divine books such a vast array of true meanings, which can be extracted from a few words, and which are backed by sound Catholic faith, we should pick above all the one which can certainly be shown to have been held by the author we are reading; while if this is hidden from us, then surely one which the scriptural context does not rule out and which is agreeable to sound faith; but if even the scriptural context cannot be worked out and assessed, then at least only one which sound faith prescribes. It is one thing, after all, not to be able to work out what the writer is most likely to have meant, quite another to stray from the road sign-posted by godliness. Should each defect be avoided, the reader's work has won its complete reward, while if each cannot be avoided, even though the writer's intention should remain in doubt, it will not be without value to have extracted a sense that accords with sound faith.

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27. Literally, "or the numbers of the heavenly bodies"; but I am sure he does not mean the count of heavenly bodies, how many there are—nothing so banal. He means the harmonies of their motions.

28. He actually writes, "when we read the divine books in such a vast array . . . "; I think I am justified in switching the proposition.
Book II

Genesis 1:6-19: The second, third, and fourth days of creation

How there can be water above the solid structure of the sky

1. And God said: Let a solid structure be made in the midst of the waters, and let it be dividing between water and water. And thus it was made. And God made a solid structure, and divided between the water which was below the solid structure and the water which was above the solid structure. And God called the solid structure heaven. And God saw that it was good. And there was made evening and there was made morning, a second day (Gn 1:6-8). About the word of God which God spoke, saying Let a solid structure be made, etc., and about the pleasure he took in it on seeing that it was good, and about evening and about morning, there is no need to go over the same discussion again; and so from now on, as often as these phrases are repeated, I give the reader notice that for the most part they are to be interpreted in accordance with our previous inquiry. Whether that is the heaven, however, being made now which soars above all the spaces of the air and all its height, where the lamps and the stars are set on the fourth day, or whether the air itself is also being called the solid structure, is a question that can properly be asked.

2. Many people, you see, insist that these waters by their very nature cannot be above the heaven of the constellations, because their proper specific gravity dictates that they must either flow and float over the earth, or be carried up as vapor into the air that is nearest the earth. Nor should anybody try to refute them by appealing to the omnipotence of God, for whom all things are possible (Mk 10:27), and saying we just have to believe that he can cause even water, as heavy as what we know by our own experience, to spread over the substance of the heaven or sky in which the stars have their place. Our business now, after all, is to inquire how God's scriptures say he established things according to their proper natures, and not what he might wish to work in them or out of them as a miracle of his power.

Yes, to be sure, if God wished oil to remain sometimes under water, then it would; but that would not mean that we remained ignorant of the nature of oil, that it had been made such that if it were poured out underneath some water, it would seek its proper place by breaking through to place itself above on the surface. So now therefore what we are inquiring into is whether the fashioner of things, who arranged all things in measure and number and weight (Wis 11:20), allotted not just one proper place to the weight of the waters round the earth, but also another on top of the heaven or sky which was solidified after being poured out round the outer limits of the air.1

3. Those who maintain that this is an impossible position to hold base their argument on the weights of the elements,2 maintaining that the sky cannot possibly have been solidified up above into a kind of paved floor capable of sustaining the weight of the waters, because such solidity can only belong to things of earth, and anything of that sort is not sky or heaven, but earth, the elements being distinguished not only by their places but also by their qualities, so that it is in virtue of their specific qualities that they are allotted their specific places. Thus water's place is above earth, and even if it settles or sinks under the earth, as in caves and hidden potholes, it is still being held up by that part of the earth which it has underneath itself, not by that part which is above it. After all, if from the part of the earth above it any piece falls down, it does not remain on top of the water but breaks through its surface and sinks and goes down to the earth at the bottom; there it rests as in its own place, so that water remains on top, earth underneath. From this one concludes that even when it was above the water it was not being borne up by the water, but being held together by the compactness of the earth, as can be demonstrated from subterranean tomb chambers.

A problem raised by Psalm 136:6

4. Here it occurs to me to repeat the warning I gave in Book I about the mistake of relying on the evidence of a scriptural text against those who produce these subtle arguments about the weights of the elements,3 and quoting perhaps what is written in the psalms: who founded the earth on the water (Ps 136:6), because such people do not acknowledge the authority of our literature and are ignorant of the way in which that was said, and so they are more likely to poke fun at the sacred books than to repudiate what they have come to hold by reasoned arguments or have proved by the clearest experiments.

One acceptable way of taking that verse of the psalm is to treat it as said figuratively; so since by the names of "heaven" and "earth" it is often the spiritual

1. This answers in some degree to the picture the authors of Genesis had of the firmament, as a kind of brazen dome over the world; in creating it, did not God, Augustine is wondering, act like a foundryman pouring molten brass into a mold to make bells. The Hebrew word, however, suggests a slightly different craft; that of a coppermith beating out a sheet of metal into the appropriate shape.
2. The four elements of ancient chemistry: earth, water, air, and fire.
3. See Book I,19,39.
and the fleshly-minded members of the Church respectively that are signified, the psalmist would have been showing that the heavens refer to the serene understanding of the truth, where he says, _who made the heavens in understanding_ (Ps 136:5), while earth refers to the simple faith of the little ones, a faith not built unreliably on fables and misguided speculations, but most firmly on the teaching of the prophets and the proclamation of the gospel, and given solidity through baptism. And that is why he went on to add, _who founded the earth on the water._

Or else, if someone obliges you to take the verse literally, it can be applied not unreasonably to the heights of the earth, whether on continents or islands, which soar up above the waters, or to the roofs of those caverns which overhang the waters with rock-like solidity. Accordingly, nobody may understand the literal sense of the words, "who founded the earth on the water" in such a way as to conclude that the weight of the waters was placed under the weight of the earth to support it as if that were the natural order of things.

_Air by nature, being lighter than earth, lies above it_

2. 5. Air, however, lies naturally above water (though it also spreads over the dry land because of its wider spaciousness); and this is proved by the fact that no bottle can be filled with water when pushed into it mouth downwards—a clear indication that air by its nature seeks the higher or upper place. The bottle, you see, seems to be empty, but is proved to be full of air when it is pushed mouth downwards into the water. Because the air can find no way of popping out through the uppermost part, and its nature will not allow it to go downwards under the water trying to rush in, it keeps the water at bay by its own filling presence, and refuses it entry.

When, though, the bottle is so put into the water that it does not have its mouth downwards, but is put in sideways, the water comes in at the lower edge while the air goes out by the upper one. Again, if the mouth of the bottle is open to the sky, when you pour in water the air goes out upwards by the parts where you are not pouring in and room is made underneath for the water to come in. But if the bottle is pushed down with greater force, so that water flows in suddenly from the side or from the top and covers the mouth of the bottle completely on every side, the air bursts through the water as it struggles upwards, to make room for the water at the bottom. And it is the air bursting through like this that makes bottles sob or gurgle, while the air escapes bit by bit, unable to do so all at once because the bottle’s mouth is too narrow.

Thus if air is forced to get up on top of water, it thrusts aside even converging flows, when the water being driven in starts bubbling under the impetus of the air leaping out, and lets it escape with exploding bubbles as it hurls to its own proper place and makes room for the water falling down to the bottom. But should you try to force it out of the bottle under the water, wanting it to give way so that the bottle can be filled when pushed mouth downwards right to the bottom, the bottle will be sooner covered with water on every side than a single tiny drop will gain entrance to it from the bottom.

_Fire likewise lighter than air, and so lying above it_

3. 6. Now that fire, as it leaps up to the heights, wishes to soar above even the nature of the very air we breathe, is something, surely, that everybody can perceive. I mean to say, if you hold a burning torch head downwards, its crown of flames will struggle up to the upper parts. But because the fire is then straight-away extinguished by the dominant pressure of the air all round and above it, and so being defeated by the excessive quantity of air is straight-away changed and converted into the same thing, it is unable to last out and leap up beyond the atmosphere’s highest altitude.

And so the sky or heaven above the air is said to be pure fire, from which, so they suppose, the constellations and the great lamps are made, through the nature of that fiery light being squeezed and molded, that is to say, into those forms and shapes and patterns which we now observe in the sky. Now just as both air and water give way to the weight of particles of earth, so that they drop down to the earth, in the same manner air gives way to the weight of water, so that it drops down either to earth or to water. From this they want it to be understood that it is necessary in the same manner for air too, if anyone could release a particle of it in those loftiest regions of the sky, to fall by its own weight, until it reaches the airy regions underneath. From all this they conclude that much less is it possible for there to be any place for water above that fiery heaven, since air, though much lighter than water, cannot remain there either.

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4. See 1 Tim 1:4:7. His implicit identification here of the "carnal," the fleshly-minded, with the little ones is not entirely characteristic of him, I think. But underlying it is his assumption, almost certainly justified, that the uneducated are likely to be literal-minded in their understanding of what they read or hear.

5. Reading _exileus_ with two manuscripts, thus qualifying the air. Both Maurist and the CSEL text, read _exileies_, making this word refer to the water (plural in the Latin). But the water is not getting out of the bottle, it is being pushed in. I suspect some copyists would have written this less likely variant thanks to an unconscious memory of Jn 4:14 or 7:37—of the sense of those passages, that is to say, not of the actual words.
exhalation of moisture in the form of still tinier droplets can be spread out even above that highest heaven, and not be compelled to fall down by its weight.

They themselves, as a matter of fact, put forward the most subtle arguments to show that there can be no material particle, however minute, which cannot be further divided, but that all bodies can be divided, *ad infinitum*, because every part of a body is a body, and every single body necessarily has a half of its quantity. For this reason, then, if water, as we observe, can be broken up into so many tiny drops that it can be carried up as vapor above this air which is by nature lighter than water, why could it not stay also above that still lighter heaven in the form of even tinier droplets and even lighter vapors?

The coldness of the planet Saturn

5.9. Some of our people also set out to refute in another way those who assert that there can be no waters above the heaven of the constellations on account of the weights of the elements; they argue from the qualities of the constellations themselves and their courses. The same people, if you see, assert that the star which they call Saturn is the coldest of them all and takes thirty years to go through the circuit of the signs of the zodiac, just because it moves on a higher and therefore much more extensive orbit. The sun, after all, completes the same circuit in a year, and the moon in a month; the course being the shorter, so they say, the lower the orbit, so that the length of time taken corresponds to the space covered.

And so our people ask what it is that makes that star so cold, since it ought to be all the hotter, drawn along as it is through the loftier heaven. I mean, there can be no doubt that when a spherical mass is driven through a circular motion, its inner parts go more slowly, its outer ones faster, having to cover more ground while going through the same number of revolutions; and the faster they go, then of course the hotter they get. Accordingly, this aforementioned star should be hotter rather than cold. For while by its own motive power it takes thirty years to travel through its whole circuit, the distance to be covered being so vast, nonetheless by the movement of the heaven in the opposite direction it is made to

7. Whoever these secular physicists were, they were not the heirs of Democritus, one of the early Greek natural philosophers, who put forward the earliest atomic theory, that the material world consists of indivisible particles or "atoms"; Aristotle accepted his theory. Just possibly it was rejected by the Academics, the degenerate heirs of Plato's Academy, whom the young Augustine had briefly gone along with after parting company with the Manichees. Saint Thomas, in his article on the work of the second day (Summa, I,68,2) following Aristotle, says that no natural or physical body is infinitely divisible, but only what he calls a mathematical body.

8. Ours, or their pagan opponents? Grammatically it could be either; but from what follows in the next few paragraphs it is clear that he means the latter.

6. The CSEL editors refer to Basil of Caesarea, in his *Hexameron* III.8. See also Saint Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae*, I,68,1. Saint Thomas in this volume (questions 65 - 74 of the first part of his *Summa*) is contrasting throughout Saint Augustine's exegesis of Genesis 1 with that of Saint Basil, and other fathers like Saint Ambrose, who gave what we nowadays would call a more literal (quasi-fundamentalist) interpretation of the text—certainly a less sophisticated one!
rotate all the faster; and because it has to experience this every day it is thus, so they tell us, that each single revolution of the heaven unravels a single day, it ought to have generated greater heat from the more rapidly spinning heaven.

Indubitably, therefore, what makes it cold is the nearness of those waters set in place above the heavens, which these people refuse to believe who argue in the way I have summarized about the movement of the sky and the constellations. It is by drawing such inferences that some of our people meet those who refuse to believe there are any waters above the heavens and still insist on the coldness of that star whose circuit is nearest to the highest heaven, thereby forcing them to conclude that the substance of water is held up there not in the fine form of vapor, but in the solid form of ice. In whatever form, however, waters may be there, and of whatever kind, let us have no doubts at all that that is where they are; the authority of this text of scripture, surely, overrides anything that human ingenuity is capable of thinking up.

How the persons of the Trinity are indicated in the text

6, 10. But it has been remarked by some people—and it is a good point which I for my part do not think should be ignored—that after God had said, *Let a solid structure be made in the midst of the waters, and let it be a division between water and water,* it did not seem sufficient to continue, *And thus it was made,* without also adding, *And God made a solid structure; and God divided between the water which was above the solid structure, and between the water which was below the solid structure* (Gn 1:7). Now the way they understand it is to say that the person of the Father was indicated by the text, *And God said: Let a solid structure be made in the midst of the waters, and let it be a division between water and water; and thus it was made*; and then, so that the Son may be understood to have done what the Father said, so that it should actually be made, they reckon that it went on to say, *And God made a solid structure, and God divided,* etc.

11. But when we read first, *And thus it was made,* by whom are we to understand that it was made? If by the Son, what need was there to go on to say, *And God made and the rest?* But if we are to understand the words *And thus it was made* as meaning that it was made by the Father, it is not now the Father saying and the Son making, and it means that the Father can make something without the Son, so that the Son then makes, not this thing, but something like it, which is against the Catholic faith.

If however the thing about which it says *And thus it was made* is the same as what is being made when it goes on to say, *And God made,* what is to stop us understanding that the same one who said that it should be made is making what he said? Or is it even that they wish to pass over the text *And thus it was made,* and understand the persons of the Father and the Son only in the words, *And God said, Let it be made,* and then later in the words, *And God made?*

12. But we can still ask whether we ought to take it as the Father giving a kind of order to the Son in the text, *And God said, Let it be made.* But why did scripture not bother also to indicate the person of the Holy Spirit? Or is the Trinity to be understood like this: *And God said, Let it be made; And God made; And God saw that it was good?* But it is hardly consistent with the unity of the Trinity, that the Son should be understood to have made something as if under orders, while the Holy Spirit freely saw that what had been made was good, without anyone giving him orders.11

With what words, in any case, would the Son be given orders by the Father to make something, seeing that he is himself the Father's original Word, *through which all things were made* (Jn 1:3)? Or is it the case that as regards the text *Let a solid structure be made* (Gn 1:6) this very utterance is the Word of the Father, his only-begotten Son, in whom are all created things even before they are created? And anything that there is in him is life, because *whatever was made through him is in him life* (Jn 1:3-412), and of course creative life, while under him life is a creature. So then, the things that have been made through him, because he governs them and holds them together, are in him in one way, while the things which he himself is are in him in another. He, after all, is life, which is in him in such a way that it is he himself, since he, the life, is the light of men.13 So then, nothing could be created, whether before time (which does not mean co-eternal with the creator), or from the start of time, or in any particular time, of which the

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9. Like a small cogwheel being spun round by a bigger one rotating in the opposite direction.

10. Augustine's text, following the Greek Septuagint, puts the refrain "And thus it was made" ('And it was so' in the usual translation) before the longer statement, "And God made" etc. Throughout this creation narrative the Septuagint text is more uniformly consistent than the Hebrew text from which our modern versions (as also the Latin Vulgate of Saint Jerome) are taken.

11. It is surely the equality of the divine persons that this view would compromise, rather than their unity.

12. See Jn 1:3-4. Where most versions that most people are familiar with read these verses like this: "All things were made through him, and without him was not made anything that was made. In him was life" (so RSV), Augustine reads them as follows: "All things were made through him, and without him was made nothing. What was made in him was life." The most modern editions of John's text follow this reading, as also the Jerusalem Bible.

13. See Jn 1:4. The thought here does seem very confused. There appears to have been no particular reason for him to bring in the reference to life here; it has nothing really to do with the main line of his thought, that all things made through the Word pre-exist in the Word in their rationes, their ideas. It was probably the case that as he was dictating, he got carried on to quote Jn 1:3-4, a little piece of "stream of consciousness" thinking.
the Son that the water was collected together on the third day, because it does not say there And God made the waters to be collected together, or “God collected the water”? But even there, in fact, after saying, And it was made thus, he then repeated himself to say, And the water was collected together which was under the heavens (Gn 1:9).

Again, was the light also not made through the Son, where the writer made no repetitions at all? There too, you see, he could have said, “And God said, Let light be made; and thus it was made; and God made the light and he saw that it was good”—or at the very least, as in the collecting together of the waters, without saying, And God made, he could still have reiterated, “And God said, Let light be made; and thus it was made; and the light was made, and God saw the light that it was good.” But without any kind of repetition at all, after stating, And God said, Let light be made, the only thing he added was, And light was made (Gn 1:3); and then he went on to tell about the light giving pleasure and being divided from the darkness and each of them being given their names, without any repetition.

The uncreated Wisdom of the Word impressed as a created light on the angelic intelligence

8, 16. So what then is the meaning of this repetition in the other cases? Is it a way of showing that on the first day, on which light was made, the setting up of the spiritual and intelligent creation is being announced under the name of light—the nature of this creation being understood to include all the angels and powers? And the reason he did not repeat the making, after saying, And light was made, is that the rational creation did not first come to a knowledge of its being conformed to the Word, and then after that get formed, but in the very act of its conformation it came to knowledge of it, that is, in its being enlightened by the Truth, to which it turned to be formed. With the rest of creation however, which is lower in the scale, things are so created that first of all they are made in the knowledge of the rational creation, and then in their concrete specific kind.

For this reason light was first fashioned in the Word of God in terms of the formula by which it is fashioned, that is, in the Wisdom co-eternal with the Father, and next in the actual fashioning of light in terms of the nature which was fashioned. At the first stage it was not made but begotten: here in the second stage, however, it is made, because formed out of formlessness. And the reason God said, Let light be made; and light was made (Gn 1:3), was so that what was


15. I have added “to the Word,” which is not in the Latin; but Augustine’s shorthand would be puzzling in English. The reader is referred back to Book I for the background to what is being said here about the “forming” and “conforming” of the spiritual creation: 3,7; 5,10,11; 9,17.
there in the Word might be here in the actual work. The fashioning of heaven, on the other hand, or the sky, was first in the Word of God in terms of begotten Wisdom, then it was made next in the spiritual creation, that is, in the knowledge of the angels, in terms of the wisdom created in them, and only next after that was the heaven made, so that the actual created heaven might be there in its own specific kind. And the same applies to the separation, or the specific creations, of the waters and the lands, applies also to the nature of trees and herbs, applies to the lamps of heaven, applies to the animated beings sprung from the waters and the earth.

17. Angels, after all, do not see these sensible material things just by the senses of the body, as animals do; but even if they do make use of such senses, it is rather a case of their recognizing such things, which they have a better knowledge of inwardly, in the very Word of God, by which they are enlightened in order to live wisely, since there is in them that light which was the first thing to be made, if we understand it as a spiritual light that was made on that day. So then, just as the formula or idea on which a creature is fashioned is there in the Word of God before it is realized in the fashioning of the creature, so also is knowledge of the same formula or idea first produced in the intelligent creation which has not been darkened by sin, and only then is it realized in the fashioning of the creature.

Angels, you see, did not progress like us to the gaining of wisdom, to behold the invisible things of God by understanding them through the things that have been made (Rom 1:20). No, from the moment they were created they have been enjoying the eternity of the Word in holy and devout contemplation; from there they look back—over their shoulders, as it were—at these material things, and according to what they see within the Word they either approve good deeds or condemn sins.

18. Nor is it to be wondered at that God should first show his holy angels, formed in that primal fashioning of light, what he was going to create from then on. Nor, to be sure, would they have known the mind of God unless and to the extent that he himself had displayed it. For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who was ever his counselor? Or who first gave to him, and was repaid? Since from him and through him and in him are all things (Rom 11:34-36). So then it was from him that the angels learned, when knowledge was produced in them of creatures to be made from then on, and after that these were made in their own specific kind.

16. That is, of the solid structure, called heaven, on the second day; he is not referring back to the first verse of Genesis.

17. Augustine, and most of his contemporaries, thought of angels—and demons—as having bodies of a sort, bodies even finer than air or fire, and if bodies, then bodily senses.

18. This is the translator's amplification of the text, to make the image more vivid.

19. So therefore, once light has been made, by which we understand the rational creation formed by the eternal light, whenever we hear in the creation of all the rest And God said, Let it be made, we should understand that scripture is turning its gaze back to the eternity of God's Word. When, though, we hear "And thus it was made," we are to understand that in the intelligent creation knowledge is being produced of the formula or idea, which is in the Word of God, of the creature to be fashioned; so this creature, in a certain manner, was first made in the kind of being which by a certain previous movement towards the very Word of God first recognized it as due to be made. So finally, when we hear And God saw that it was good, we are to understand that God in his courtesy took pleasure in what had been made, so that it might remain in being in the manner proper to its kind, seeing that it had been his pleasure that it should be made, when the Spirit of God was being borne over the water (Gn 1:2).

On the shape of the sky

9, 20. The question is also commonly asked what we have to believe, according to our scriptures, is the shape and form of the sky. Many people, you see, have given arguments about these points, which our authors with greater good sense passed over as not holding out the promise of any benefit to those wishing to learn about the blessed life, and, what is worse, as taking up much precious time that should be spent on more salutary matters. What concern is it of mine, after all, whether the sky encloses the earth like a globe on every side, with the earth held level as the diameter of the total mass of the world, or whether it covers it on one side from above, like a lid? But because the trustworthiness of the scriptures is here in question, this, as I have reminded readers more than once, has to be defended from those who do not understand the style of the divine utterances, and who assume when they find anything on these matters in our books, or hear them read out from them, which seems to be contrary to explanations they have worked out, that they should not place any confidence in the scriptures, when they foretell or warn or tell them about other useful things.20 It

19. I have added quodam mota in ipso Dei Verbo, a certain movement in the very Word of God, to quodam mota in ipsum Dei Verbum. Augustine will in due course go on to describe the "movements" of the angelic mind first to the Word of God and then to creatures in themselves, which he will term respectively the angelic "morning knowledge" and "evening knowledge." He would never talk about movement in the Word of God. Assuming that he was dictating this work, or in any case that in the course of its transmission it was dictated to copyists, we must never forget that ipso Verbo and ipsum Verbum would have been pronounced in almost exactly the same way.

20. See note 3 above, and book 1,19,39.
must be stated very briefly that our authors knew about the shape of the sky whatever may be the truth of the matter. But the Spirit of God who was speaking through them did not wish to teach people about such things which would contribute nothing to their salvation.

21. But, says somebody, how are these people, who attribute to the sky the shape of a sphere or globe, not contradicted by what is written in our literature: who stretched out the sky like a skin (Ps 104:2)? Certainly let it be contradicted by that, if what they say is false; this, after all, is true which has divine authority behind it, rather than that which is the guesswork of human weakness. But if it should happen that they can prove their case with evidence and arguments beyond any possibility of doubt, then it has to be demonstrated that what is said here among us about a skin is not contrary to those explanations of theirs. Otherwise, in any case (if you are going to be crassly literal-minded23) it will also be contrary to another place in these very scriptures of ours where the sky is said to be like a suspended dome.22 What, I ask you, could be so different and opposed to each other as a skin stretched out flat, and the hollow curve of a dome? But if we are obliged, as indeed we are, to understand these two expressions in such a way that they are found to agree with each other and not to be in the least contradictory, then we are also and equally obliged to demonstrate that neither of them is opposed to those explanations, should they happen to be shown by rational arguments to be true, which inform us that the sky has the shape of a hollow globe all round us—provided, once again, it can be proved.

22. And even if that comparison on our side with a dome is taken literally, it will make no difficulty for those who say the sky is a globe; it is reasonable to assume that scripture wished to talk about the shape of the sky with reference to that part of it which is above us. So if the sky is not a globe, it is in one part—the part which covers the earth—a dome, while if it is a globe, then it is a dome all round. But as for the text about a skin, that is rather more serious, because it may seem to be opposed, not to the globe, which may just be a human fabrication, but to our own dome. My treatment of this in terms of allegory may be found in the thirteenth book of my Confessions.24 So whether the sky being stretched out like a skin is to be understood allegorically in the way I suggested there, or in some other way, still to satisfy the tiresome people who persist in demanding a literal explanation I will say what in my opinion should be obvious to anyone

of sense. Each term, no doubt, that is both “skin” and “dome” can be understood figuratively; but what we have to see is how each can be explained literally. Well, if it is not only a curved but also a flat ceiling that can be called a dome,25 then assuredly a skin for its part can be stretched out round a curve as well as on a flat plane. After all, both wine containers and footballs are skins.

Whether the heavens rotate or not

10. 23. Some brothers and sisters also raise the question of the movement of the sky, whether it stands still or rotates. Because if it rotates, they say, how can it be a solid structure? But if it stands still, how is it that the constellations, which are generally held to be fixed in it, go round from the east to the west, with the northern ones making shorter circuits round the pole, so that the sky would seem to be rotating like a sphere or globe, if there is another pole, hidden from us, at the other extremity, or like a discus if there is no other pole? My answer to them is that these matters require many subtle and laborious calculations for their investigation, if the truth is to be definitely established whether this or that is the case; and that I have no time now for going into them and discussing them, and nor should they have any either, these brothers and sisters whom I am keen to instruct in this work for their own salvation and the benefit needed by the Church.

This at least they should know, that on the one hand the name of “solid structure” does not oblige us to think of the sky as stationary—it is permissible, after all, to understand that it is called solid, not to indicate immobility, but purely and simply solidity, or its being the impassable boundary between the upper and lower waters. And on the other hand, if the truth convincingly shows that the sky is stationary, this does not rule out the circuit of the stars, or make it impossible for us to explain this. And in fact it has been established by those men who have indulged their idle curiosity by devoting their leisure to the study of these things, that even if the sky remained motionless and only the constellations moved, all the things that have been observed and recorded in their revolutions could still occur.

21. Translator’s parentheses again.

22. See Is 40:22, according to the Greek Septuagint, which Augustine’s Latin version followed.

The Hebrew is less contrary to the “skin” of Ps 104, having “like a curtain.” The word I have translated as “dome” is camera, which is just a slightly incorrect transliteration of the Greek.

23. Chapter 15, section 16. In the volume of the Confessions in this series the word I have translated “dome” is rendered by “vault,” and there is no reference to the text from Isaiah.

24. But he is engaged in a Literal Commentary on Genesis! This remark here is very revealing about his real intentions, and his thoroughly “anti-fundamentalist” understanding of the literal sense. Both those comparisons of the sky, or the heavens, to a skin stretched out and to a dome

or vault are clearly poetic, metaphorical, not intended by the author to be taken as literal descriptions in the narrow sense. It is people who insist on ignoring metaphor that Augustine rightly regards as tiresome.

25. Which it scarcely can be in English; nor could it properly be the case with the Latin camera; but in words by Tacitus and Suetonius this had been transferred to signify flat-bottomed boats with a kind of domed or vaulted superstructure. However, what Augustine was more probably thinking of here was the extension of the word to mean any ordinary room or chamber—our English word that in fact is derived from camera.
When were earth and water created?

11. 24. And God said, Let the water which is under the heavens be collected together into one collection, and let the dry land appear. And it was made thus. And the water which is under the heavens was collected together into its collection, and the dry land appeared. And God called the dry land earth, and the collection of water he called sea. And God saw that it was good (Gn 1:9-10). We dealt sufficiently with this work of God in our previous volume, because it was involved with another matter that had to be investigated. And so here let me briefly advise any who are not worried by the question of when the specific natures of the waters and the lands were created, simply to take it that the only thing done on this day was the separation of these two lowest elements.

Some people, however, are worried by the question why light and heaven or sky were made on particular days, while water and earth were made outside the count of days or before any days at all, and why those things were made at a word from God, with God saying, Let it be made, while these two were indeed separated at a word from God, but are not found to have been made at a word from God. Well, they do have a way of understanding it that accords with the faith, and here it is: what was said before any counting of days, that the earth was invisible and shapeless, here scripture was just setting out what kind of earth God had made, because it had just said, In the beginning God made heaven and earth, and only meant to suggest with these words the formlessness of bodily material. The author chose to give them more familiar names rather than obscure technical ones, afraid that if scripture were to distinguish basic material and specific form in so many words, the thought might creep into slower minds of attempting to separate them also in time, as though first came basic material and then later, after an interval of time, specific form was added to it. In fact, on the contrary, God created them together and established formed material, while scripture first stated its formlessness with the more familiar names, as I said, of earth or water. Earth and water, you see, even while presenting themselves to our sight as what they are with their specific qualities, are still closer to that formlessness, because of the ease with which they are broken down, than are the heavenly bodies.

But now with the numbering of the days all things formed out of the formless are being counted, and the author has already told of how the sky or heaven was made out of this bodily basic material. So because the sky’s specific nature is so very different from that of earthly things, when he comes to what remained to be formed from the basic material in this lowest part of the cosmos, he was unwilling to insert it into the order of things created with the words, Let it be made, since this residual formlessness was not going to receive any such specific form as the sky had been given, but a much inferior and fainter one, closer to the original formlessness. So it was by the words Let the waters be collected together and Let the dry land appear that these two elements would receive their proper specific appearances, so well known to us, and manageable by us, water so unstable, earth so stable. And that’s the reason the former is told to be collected, the latter to appear, because water is a slippery fluid, earth a stable solid.

Why the production of vegetation is included in the work of the third day

12. 25. And God said, Let the earth sprout grass for fodder-bearing seed according to kind and according to likeness, and fruit trees making fruit, whose seed is in it after its likeness on the earth. And it was made thus. And the earth produced grass for fodder having seed according to its kind and according to likeness, and fruit trees making fruit, whose seed is in it according to kind on the earth. And God saw that it was good. And there was made evening and there was made morning, a third day (Gn 1:11-13). Here we should note the skillful touch of the one who put the text into shape; because grasses and trees are sorts of creatures quite distinct from the specific form of the lands and the waters, and thus cannot be counted among the elements, they are spoken of separately as coming from the earth, and separately given the usual phrases, so that it says And it was made thus, and then what was made is repeated; it is also separately indicated that God saw that it was good. But all the same, because being fixed there by their roots they are continuous with the soil of the earth and entwined in it, he wished these things as well to belong to the same day.

How the first three days passed before the lamps in the heavens were made

13. 26. And God said, Let lamps be made in the solid structure of heaven, in such a way that they may shine upon the earth and may divide between day and night, and may be for signs and for times and for days and for years; and may be for brilliance in the solid structure of heaven in such a way that they may shine upon the earth. And it was made thus. And God made the two great lamps, the greater lamp for the beginning of the day and the lesser lamp for the beginning of the night, and the stars. And God placed them in the solid structure of heaven in such a way that they might shine upon the earth, and might be for the beginning of the day and the night, and might divide between the light and the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was made evening and there was made morning, a fourth day (Gn 1:14-19).

Coming now to this fourth day, what we have to ask is what the meaning might be of this arrangement, whereby water and earth were made or separated and earth sprouted plants before the heavenly bodies were made in the sky. And
we cannot say, you see, that the better things were chosen to give a more ornamental touch to the ends and the middle of the series of days, the fourth of course being the middle one of the series of seven. It immediately occurs to us, I mean, that on the seventh day no creature was made. Or does the light of the first day, perhaps, correspond rather to the resting on the seventh, so that with the two ends of the series balancing in this way, the pattern could be perfected, by weaving the outstanding lights into the middle?

But if the first day balances with the seventh, then the second in its turn should balance with the sixth. In what way, though, is the solid structure of heaven at all like man made to the image of God? Or could it be this, that as the heaven occupies the whole upper part of the cosmos, so to man has been granted the right to lord it over the whole of the lower part? But then what are we to make of the cattle and the wild beasts, which the earth produced in their various kinds on this same sixth day? What comparison can there be between them and the heavens?

27. Or since the first thing made under the name of light is understood to have been the formation of the spiritual creation, did it not rather then follow that the bodily creation too should be made, that is this visible cosmos, which was made in two days because of the two main parts of which the universe consists, namely heaven and earth? In terms of this comparison of ideas by which the total spiritual and bodily creation is often named heaven and earth, so that this globe of more turbulent air is ascribed to the earthly part—it gets “bodified,”28 after all, by damp exhalations, while if there is any stillness of air in which windy and stormy movements cannot arise, it belongs to the celestial part, it would follow that after the construction this total bodily universe, which is all in the one place in which the cosmos is located, it should be filled inside the whole with those parts that could be moved around from place to place with appropriate movements.

Now grasses and trees are not things of that kind. They are of course fixed to the earth by their roots, and although they have the movements involved in their growth, they still for all that do not move from their own places by their own efforts, but are nourished and grow wherever they have been planted. For this reason they belong more to the earth than to the kinds of things which move about in the water and on land. And so because two days were allotted to the establishment of the visible world, that is, of heaven and earth, it remains that for these movable and visible parts which are being created within it, the remaining three days should be set aside.

As the sky or heaven was the first part to be made, so it is the first to be furnished;30 so on the fourth day the heavenly bodies are made to illuminate with their shining the lower habitable level, and thus save its inhabitants from being introduced into a dark and gloomy habitat. And because the feeble bodies of the denizens of the lower habitat need to recoup themselves with rest and quiet after their constant moving around, that is why arrangements were made for them to be able to alternate sleeping and waking with the alternation of day and night as the sun goes round and round on its course. This night, however, was not to remain without its own d’ècor, but with the light of moon and stars was to give both comfort to those people who are often obliged to work at night, and sufficient time to meet the needs of some animals which cannot bear the light of the sun.

Problem of the luminaries being for signs and times

14, 28. As for the words, however, And let them be for signs and for times and for days and for years, who can fail to see how problematic is their implication that times began on the fourth day, as though the preceding three days could have passed without any time? What mind, therefore, is capable of penetrating the mystery of how those three days passed before times began, times which are said to have begun on the fourth day—or of whether indeed those days passed at all? Or is it with respect to the specific nature of the thing made31 that day was named, and with respect to the absence of it, night, so that the basic material not yet formed by any specific nature, but from which all the other things were to be formed, was called night, just as the formlessness of matter can be understood, from their very liability to change, even in things that have been formed; it is not, after all, to be distinguished from their specific forms as being either remote from them in space or as being anterior to them in time. Or rather, was the

27. Reading finis with two manuscripts, instead of the singular finis of the CSFL and the Maurist texts.

28. His line of reasoning is obscured, almost derailed in fact, by his bringing in the spiritual creation here: His concern is only at the moment with the material "heaven and earth."

29. Corpora, a word very possibly coined by Augustine. Lewis & Short gives only one reference, to a work of Claudianus Manetius from the end of the fifth century, two generations or so after Augustine.

30. Reading ordinandum with one manuscript; and the Maurists instead of ordinandum, to be set in order, with the CSFL text. The consistent patristic tradition, set out clearly by Saint Thomas at the beginning of his treatment of the days of creation, Summa Theologiae, Ia,45, divided the divine creative acts into three kinds: actual creation, on 1:1-2; distinction, on 1:3-10; adornment or furnishing, on 1:11-25; the creation of man falls outside this classification. So far in this work, however, Augustine has often spoken of order, and used the words ordo and ordinaries, and not, so far, the word ordinare. So some copyists, or even some of his scribes, may quite easily, and subconsciously, have heard ordinandum when ordinare was read out.

31. The specific nature (species) of the spiritual creation is what I think he must mean here, because “day” and “night” are only mentioned in the work of the first day, when God said, “Let light be made.”
that are measured by the whole\textsuperscript{34} circuit of the sun from the east and back again to the east, while years, at least these familiar ones, are marked by the sun’s shifts of orbit, not from east to west which happens every day, but when it goes round to the same places in the constellations of the zodiac, which it only does by completing three hundred and sixty-five days and six hours, which is a quarter of a whole day; it is this part multiplied by four that obliges us to add a whole day every leap year,\textsuperscript{35} to keep the calendar straight. Such shifts of orbit also mark greater, less noticeable “years,” which are said to be completed by the sun’s passage through other constellations. So if that is the way we are to understand “times, days, years,” nobody doubts their being produced by the constellations and the lamps. It is in fact put in such a way as to leave it uncertain whether the words, “Let them be for signs and for times and for days and for years,” apply to all the heavenly bodies, or whether signs and times refer to the rest, while days and years are the business of the sun alone.

**Question of the phase in which the moon was made**

15. 30. Many people also inquire, with endless chatter, in what phase the moon was made—and if only they would chatter away in a merely inquisitive spirit, and not in an attempt, as in fact is the case, to teach others! They aver, you see, that the moon was made at the full on the grounds that it would not have been fitting for God to make anything imperfect among the heavenly bodies on that day on which it is written that these were made. Those who object to this, on the other hand, say, “So that should be called the first day of the month, not the fourteenth. Who, after all, ever begins to count like that?”\textsuperscript{36} As for me, I stand in the middle between these two opinions, asserting neither of them, but definitely saying that whether God made the moon at its first phase or at the full, he made it perfect.

God, after all is the author and founder of things in their actual natures. Now whatever any single thing may in some way or other produce and unfold by its

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\textsuperscript{32} That is, the signs that astrologers claim to observe.

\textsuperscript{33} A kind of time machine which, I think he is suggesting, would be a necessary condition for the predictions of astrologers to have any validity. But the sequence of his thoughts in this whole passage is not in the least straightforward. In the next sentence he may be supposed to allow the possibility of such a time machine, by rejecting any suggestion that there was no time before the heavenly bodies were made—this on the authority of the text giving us three whole days before they were made. And then he goes on to talk about times in the sense of periods of time, days and years, being controlled by the heavenly bodies, though earlier he had seemed to confine the meaning of “times” to the seasons of the year. But all this only serves to remind us of how tentative his whole approach is to the interpretation of the text—little more than a tissue of questions. With such a procedure a straightforward sequence of thought is not to be expected.

\textsuperscript{34} Reading totur with one manuscript instead of the totos of the text, which would give, at the beginning of the sentence, “all days” instead of “the whole circuit.” In rendering “From the east and back again to the east” I am following the Masoretes, and what they claim are the better manuscripts, instead of the CSlE text which has “from the east as far as the west” with other manuscripts.

\textsuperscript{35} What he actually writes, translated literally, is: “which requires the insertion of a whole day which the Romans call the hissexas,” literally “the twice sixth,” the day they inserted after what we call 24 February, but they called the sixth day before the kalends of March.

\textsuperscript{36} Just possibly the ancient Hebrews! We have, after all, the words of PsR1:3: *Blow the trumpet at the new moon, when the moon is full, on our feast,* This does at least suggest that at one time it was the moon at the full that was regarded as new, not what we now call the new moon. But of course that was not in the mind of the advocates of the moon being created at the full.
natural development through periods of time that are suited to it, it contained it beforehand as something hidden, if not in specific form and bodily mass, at least by the force and reckoning of nature, unless of course a tree, void of fruit and stripped of its leaves throughout the winter, is then to be called imperfect, or unless again at its origins, when it had still not yet borne any fruit, its nature was also imperfect. It is not only about the tree, but about its seed also that this could not rightly be said; there everything that with the passage of time is somehow or other going to appear is already latent in invisible ways. Although, if God were to make anything imperfect, which he would then himself bring to perfection, what would be comprehensible about such an idea? But you would be quite within your rights to disapprove if what had been begun by him were said to be completed and perfected by any other.

31. These people do not complain about the earth, which God made when in the beginning he made heaven and earth, that it was invisible and shapeless, and is only later on the third day rendered visible and licked into shape. So why do they wrap themselves in the darkness of their questions about the moon? Or if they understand what was said about the earth, not as meaning any interval of time, since God created things simultaneously with their basic material, but as said to put it in the form of a story, why in this case, which is something that can be seen with the eyes, do they not notice that the moon has a complete body, perfect in all its roundness, even when its light is shaped like horns, as it begins or as it ceases to shine on the earth?

So then, if the light in it waxes and wanes, it is not the lamp itself but what is lit in it that varies; if, however, it is always shining out of one side of its globe, but seems to wax while it gradually turns that side toward the earth until it has turned it completely, which happens from the first to the fourteenth day, it is always full, but does not always appear so to the inhabitants of the earth. The same is true even if it derives its light from the rays of the sun; you see, even in this case it cannot but appear with shining horns when it is next to the sun, because the other side, which is being lit up in its whole orb, is not turned towards the earth so that it can be seen. This only happens when it is opposite the sun, so that the whole side that is reflecting the sun’s light is visible from the earth.

37. Ratone naturae; this difficult word ratio again, now, one may say, at the lowest end of its scale. At the highest the rationes of things are in the Word; at the middle level in the understanding of the spiritual creation, the angels; at the lowest in the nature of things, themselves.

38. This is on the theory that the moon has in itself its own source of light, that it is rather like a lighthouse with a revolving shutter, one half of its globe being blazed out, the other transparent. There can be little doubt, I think, that Augustine himself accepted what contemporary astronomers knew to be the case, that the moon’s light is reflected from the sun, as he goes on to describe.

32. There are not wanting those, all the same, who say that they do reckon that the moon was first made by God halfway through the month, not because we have to believe it was made at the full, but because the words in God’s own scriptures go like this: the moon made for the beginning of the night (Gn 1:16). But it is when the moon is full that it is seen at nightfall, while in its other phases it begins to be seen during the day before it comes to the full, and later and later in the night the more it is on the wane.

But if you understand that “the beginning of the night” in fact only means dominance over it, in fact the Greek word used here, where it has archen, suggests this more obviously, and then in the psalms it is written more plainly still, The sun with authority over the day, the moon and the stars with authority over the night (Ps 136:8,9), you are not obliged to count from the fourteenth of the month, and to believe that the moon when first made was not beginning its first phase.

On the relative brilliance of sun, moon and stars

16, 33. A question also commonly asked is whether these conspicuous lamps in the sky, that is, sun and moon and stars, are all equally brilliant, but because of their different distances from the earth appear to our eyes for that reason to vary in brightness. And about the moon those who take this line do not hesitate to say that its light is in itself less than that of the sun, by which they also maintain it is illuminated. Many of the stars, however, so they boldly assert, are equal to the sun, or even greater, but they seem small because they have been set further away. And for us, no doubt, it can be enough to know that whatever the truth may be in this matter, the stars were fashioned by God as their craftsmen, although we must hold to what was said with the apostle’s authority: One is the glory of the sun and another the glory of the moon and another the glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory (1 Cor 15:41).

But they can still say, even if they are not deliberately disagreeing with the apostle: “They do indeed differ in glory, but to the eyes of people on earth”; or else, because the apostle said this as a comparison with those who rise from the dead, who will not of course be one thing to the eyes of others and another in themselves: “The stars do indeed differ in glory in themselves as well; but all the same there are some which are even greater than the sun.” So that being what they say, let them see for themselves how they can attribute such great primacy to the sun that they say it checks by its rays, or even turns back from their proper courses some of the stars, and those the principal ones, to which these people show the greater devo-

39. He doubtless had Ps 8:3 in mind: When I see the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you established. The Hebrew text of the psalm seems to picture the heavens as a vast piece of embroidery into which God deftly sewed the moon and stars.
tion. It does not, after all, make likely sense that the sun should be able by the
violence of its rays to overcome greater stars, or even its equals.

Or if they assert that the higher stars at least of the northern zodiac signs are
greater, those that undergo no such aggression from the sun, why do they pay
more reverence to those that make a wider circuit through the signs? Why do
they acclaim them as mistresses of the signs? Even if anyone, you see, were to
maintain that these backward movements of the constellations, or should we say
their slowing down, are not produced by the sun but by other obscure causes,
these people nevertheless in their extravagant absurdities, in which wandering
far from the truth they suspect the hand of fate everywhere, still attribute
the chief power and influence to the sun, as is certainly evident from their books.

34. But let them say what they like about the heavens, those who are strangers
to the Father who is in heaven. As for us, though, it is not our business to inquire
more precisely into the size and the spacing of the constellations, spending time
on such things that is needed for more important and worthy matters. We even
think it more worthwhile to attend to those lights that are greater than the rest,
which scripture draws to our attention as follows: And God made two great
lights, which for all that are not equal. It goes on to say, you see, after putting
them ahead of the rest, that they differ from each other. It says, I mean: the
greater light for the starting of the day, and the lesser light for the starting of the
night (Gn 1:16). Let them at least grant this to our eyes, after all, that it is obvious
that they shine more brightly than the rest upon the earth, and that it is only the
light of the sun that makes the day bright, and that even with so many stars
appearing, the night is never as light when there is no moon, as when it is being
illuminated by its presence.

Against astrology and divination

17, 35. As for any of their clever talk whatsoever about fate, and the so-called
proven results of their astrological calculations, which they call apotelesmata, let
us reject them as utterly injurious to the health of our faith. They even try, you
see, to deprive us by their arguments of any reason for praying, and by an
impious perversity, instead of the human criminal they put God, the author of the
constellations, in the dock for evil deeds that are very properly condemned. But
that our souls are not subject by nature to bodies, not even heavenly ones, they
should learn from their own philosophers.

But that those heavenly bodies are not more potent than earthly bodies as
regards the effects which these people themselves study, they should sooner or
later come to realize at least from this; when many bodies of different species,
either of animals or herbs or shrubs, are sown simultaneously at one point of
time, and at one point of time a countless multitude of living forms springs up
from them, then not only in different regions of the earth but in the same places
there are so many variations in their development, in the things they do and the
things they undergo, that these people, as the saying goes, may say goodbye to
their star-gazing if they but turn their starry gaze on these facts.42

36. What though, I ask you, could be more senseless, more obtuse than to say,
when these things have been conclusively demonstrated to them, that the fate-controlling secret of the stars is concerned only with subjecting human
beings to their influence? Yet even here the case of twins proves them wrong,
living different lives, differing in their good luck and their bad, dying different
deaths, but still for the most part given the same constellations, because even if
there was some interval between them as they emerged from the womb, still in
some cases it is so small that it could not possibly affect these people's calculations.

The hand of Jacob, as he followed, when those twins were born, was found to
be holding the foot of his brother going ahead of him.43 They were indeed born in
such a way that it would seem to have been one unusually long infant born
double. The so-called constellations of these two could certainly not have
differed in any way at all. So what could be more totally unlikely than that an
astrologer, gazing at these constellations in the same horoscope, in the same
moon, would say that one of them would be loved by his mother, the other not? I
mean, if he said anything else, he would thereby be saying something false,
while if he did say this it would indeed be true, but he would not be saying it on
the basis of the silly little jingles of his books. And if they refuse to believe this
story, because it is told in our books, can they eliminate as well the very nature of
things? So then, when they claim that they are never wrong if they can ascertain
the hour of conception, at least let them not be too proud, as men, to consider
the conception of twins.

40. It may seem strange to us that he here begins an attack on astrologers—and on Christians who
consulted them—when he has been all the time discussing matters of astronomy. But we must
remember that in the ancient world the distinction between these two approaches to the study of
the heavens was by no means so definite as it is with us. My impression is that while Augustine
admitted the validity of astronomy as a rational science, he did so halfheartedly, suspiciously,
because it was nearly always tending on the brink of astrology.

41. Literally, "completions"; the apotelesma of the month is the full moon. The astrologers used
the word to signify the fulfillment, the verification of their predictions.

42. A feeble effort to echo, at least, the Latin pun or word play: perdius sidere, si ista considerent;
literally, "they can lose the stars if they pay attention to these things." But the verb considero
was possibly even coined as meaning primarily "put the stars, the sidere, together"; hence to
observe, to pay attention to things.

43. See Gn 25:25-27.
37. And so it is that we have to admit, whenever anything true is said by these people, that it is said under some hidden prompting which human minds can experience while remaining entirely unaware of it. When this happens in order to ensnare people, it is the work of treacherously deceitful spirits, who are permitted to know some true things about temporal matters, being informed partly through the acuteness of their fine-spun senses, because they thrive in more fine-spun bodies; partly through the craftiness gained by experience, thanks to the enormous length of their lives; partly through holy angels revealing to them what they themselves learn from almighty God, and doing so at his command, as he distributes through his genuine but inscrutable justice to human beings whatever they deserve.

Sometimes, however, these same unspeakable spirits predict, as if by means of divination, what they themselves are going to do. For this reason, good Christian, you must be on your guard against astrologers and anyone impiously practising divination, especially when they say things that are true, lest your soul should be ensnared by consorting with demons, and thus entangled in their nets by some deed of covenant and association.

Whether the luminaries of heaven are animated, living beings or not

18, 38. The question is also commonly asked whether these visible luminaries are solely and simply bodies, or whether they have their own kind of spirits to direct them; and if they do, whether they are also “enspirited” by them into living beings, as fleshly bodies are “ensouled” by the souls, the animae, of “animals,” or without any such mixture are just directed on their courses by the presence of them alone. Although nothing can easily be grasped on this point, I am persuaded that the same that in the course of our study of the scriptures more suitable places may occur, where it will be permissible for us at least to form an opinion according to the rules of our sacred authority, even if we cannot demonstrate anything for certain. 44

44. He does not return to this subject in this work, at any rate. Aquinas in his Summa Theologica, Ia, q.70, a.3, lists the various opinions, both of the philosophers and the Christian fathers. Some, including Plato and the Platonists, followed among the fathers by Origen and Jerome, held that the heavenly bodies are living beings, “ensouled” or “enspirited” by intelligent spirits. Others, above all Aristotle among the philosophers, followed by Basil and John Damascene, held that they are directed or governed by intelligent beings (gods for the philosophers, angels for the Christians), and in this they were followed by Aquinas. He said that Augustine, and here he was almost certainly correct, continued more prudently to sit on the fence; and not only that particular fence, but also the one dividing both these ancient opinions from the more “materialist” one which we all take for granted today, and which had a few advocates even then, that the motions of the heavenly bodies can all be explained by purely physical causes, and do not indicate the presence of any intelligent “mover”—other than that of the creator himself.