

That Dizzy Height of Wisdom: Augustinian Vision and Kynde's Mountain in *Piers Plowman* B XI

Sebastian I. Sobecki (Bochum)

This essay proposes that Will's view from Kynde's Mountain in *Piers Plowman* B XI is a sapiential vision in the Augustinian sense, dependent on and conditioned by the topographical circumstances in which it is experienced. In the case of Will's survey of Middle Earth, an elevation is required to attain exposure to wisdom and the mediatory manner in which it is attained determines the mode of representation. Besides strengthening those approaches that seek to establish an Augustinian and, to some extent, anti-intellectual context for the work, this reading explains the central importance of the mountain vista to the trajectory of the poem whilst lending additional support to the central role of Passus XI in the context of the whole work, especially since this Passus closes the A-Text in a number of versions.

Writing on the *modus argumentativus* in Scripture, Aquinas carves out an ambitious and radical role for Scholastic discourse in theology: "One ought to [employ] arguments in the defence of faith and the finding of truth in the questions arising from the principles of faith."¹ His claim is simple: applied to Scripture, human reason serves the double purpose of shielding faith with rational arguments and informing speculations that have as their aim the contemplation of divine truth. Some have taken this notion even further, claiming a *modus scientialis* for particular books and sections of the Bible.² I shall call this approach of applying reason to Scripture in pursuit of discovering divine truth 'inductive'. This process, from the human to the divine, is, I suppose, cognate with the similarly inductive Pelagian and semi-Pelagian notions of reaching salvation through works rather than by means of grace alone. Both

I would like to thank James Simpson and Luuk Houwen for their invaluable comments and suggestions. A substantially longer version of this article was presented at the SEM VIII Conference in Munich in March 2006; I am indebted to the conference participants for their helpful feedback.

("Ad defensionem fidei et inventionem veritatis in quaestionibus ex principiis fidei, oportet argumentis uti" Aquinas 1929, I, Prologue, question 1, art. 5, ad 3. See Simpson 1986:8.

² Ulrich von Strassburg's *Liber de Summo Bono* is one such instance (Simpson 1986:8-9).

Thomistic Scholasticism and Pelagianism assign a considerable role to human knowledge and its ability to discern divine intentions. Although these teachings do not necessarily have to coincide in one and the same person or school of thought, in both cases the movement is from the particular efforts of beings capable of reason to the attainment of sanctity and thus merits the adjective ‘inductive’.

On the fertile soil of scepticism and resistance to the perceived equal value of a manmade, rational methodology on the one side and the divine endowments of belief and grace on the other, there emerged sometime in the fourteenth century a revived interest in the teachings of Augustine, sometimes referred to as ‘Augustinian renaissance’ or ‘neo-Augustinianism’.³ Of course, for something to be called ‘neo’ it must have been old at one time, but Augustine can hardly be said to have ever been out of fashion in the Latin West. His teachings were very much ubiquitous during this period, so much so that even Aquinas’s mature writing takes an unashamedly Augustinian view on grace (Oberman 1978:83).⁴ Yet despite Augustine’s formidable presence in all matters theological, his standing as the Church’s leading authority, being first among the four *doctores ecclesiae*, had been compromised by the arrival of Aristotelian Scholasticism.⁵ In a number of areas, the new inductive approach clashed with certain Augustinian and neo-Augustinian teachings that I will, by analogy, characterise as ‘deductive’.⁶

Bonaventure, one of the principle thinkers who wrote in the deductive tradition, concedes in the Prologue to his *Breviloquium* (1257) that reason has a place in Scripture and that it can neutralise

⁴ Alexander Murray recognises a recurring pattern (particularly) in Dominican thinkers who appear to take a more contemplative approach in the later stages of their careers (Murray 1978:250-51).

⁵ Augustine shared the title *doctor ecclesiae* with the three other principal Fathers, Gregory the Great, Ambrose and Jerome, since 1298. Aquinas only became a Doctor of the Church in 1568.

⁶ I use the terms ‘inductive’ and ‘deductive’ to define the two principal noetic tendencies in the orientation of doctrinal systems (these are not to be confused with ‘inductive’ and ‘deductive’ theology where the terms establish different starting points for proving God’s existence). Essentially, the two terms are extensions of the Aristotelian *propter quid* and *quia* (*Posterior Analytics*, Bk 1, Sec. 13), that is, demonstration *a priori* and *a posteriori*, respectively. These terms were widely used in Scholastic terminology, though mainly with reference to epistemology, and their meaning is narrower than that which I propose for ‘inductive’ and ‘deductive’. All Scholastic thought presupposes God’s existence prior to any discourse, be it inductive or deductive, and therefore cannot be regarded as strictly *quia* in the Aristotelian sense. Broadly speaking, the terms are analogous to a Platonic/Aristotelian dichotomy.

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criticism and promote one's understanding of biblical truths, but he maintains that Scripture appeals to the will and not to reason:

[...] we should become good and redeemed, and this is not achieved by deliberation alone, but rather by a disposition of the will. Therefore, Holy Scripture had to be handed down to us in whatever way would dispose us best [to goodness]. Our affections are moved more strongly by examples than by arguments, by promises than by logical reasonings, by devotions than by definitions. Scripture, therefore, had to avoid the mode of proceeding by definition, division, and inferring.⁷

Or, as Nicholas Watson puts it: "Scripture aims to give its readers *experientia* of the truths it articulates, and rewards those who look at it for wisdom rather than merely for knowledge" (1991:23). Bonaventure is even clearer on the relationship between reason and faith in his *Commentary on the Sentences* (c. 1248):⁸

If our intellect is to be well ordered in its belief, it must have a deeper faith in the supreme Truth than in itself; it must bring itself to the obedience of Christ. It must believe, then, not only what is accessible to reason, but even what exceeds reason and contradicts sense experience; otherwise it would fail to show due reverence to supreme Truth.⁹

Whereas the inductive process tends to enlist academic learning in the service of faith, the deductive approach relies on affective knowledge and prophetic visions. Bonaventure's thought documents that 'inductive' and 'deductive' must be understood as tendencies: despite his *ex cathedra* condemnation of Aristotle, he was not completely indisposed to the Greek philosopher and his Thomist amalgamators.¹⁰ Both inductive and deductive do not stand for poles or ideals; they are noetic tendencies that can determine the epistemological direction particular doctrines take.¹¹ This is an

⁸ I follow John Marenbon in the dating of Bonaventure's *Commentary on the Sentences* (Marenbon 1999:175), although this assumes that Bonaventure had completed the work before he began lecturing on the *Sentences* in 1250. See also Kretzmann and Stump (1988:169).

⁹ *Sententiarum libri quattuor*, Bk 3, Dist. 23, a 1, q. 4 (Dulles 1994:32).

¹⁰ To Bonaventure, Aristotle was as the "beast of the apocalypse," a view he shared by Peter John Olivi (Lohr 1982:92). However, this was not the only angle to Bonaventure's theology: *The Cambridge History of Late-Medieval Philosophy* dedicates a sub-chapter to "Bonaventure's Aristotelian Augustinianism", p. 450ff.

¹¹ Many of these inductive and deductive tendencies have developed into poles during the theological disputes of the sixteenth and seventeenth century which have been subsumed by the descriptors 'Reformation' and 'Counter-Reformation'.

important distinction when it comes to teachings on grace and Scripture. Whilst the *sola gratia* of the Augustinian tradition confidently assumes an extreme position, its antagonist, pure Pelagianism, would have been exceptionally rare in the fourteenth century. Similarly, the notion of *sola scriptura* is a radical teaching that would not have found much support at the time: the allegorical interpretation of Scripture (be it typological, anagogical, eschatological or even simply figural in an Auerbachian sense) was not really at stake; it was the role of reason that was questioned. In other words, it would be more accurate to think not so much of a clash between a ‘Thomistic’ or an ‘Augustinian’ *Weltanschauung* or an Aristotelian/Platonic opposition, but about the varying ratio of inductive to deductive teachings, often *within* the writings of a particular thinker.

Yet despite the many footprints of Augustinian thought in the fourteenth century we are still waiting for an examination of its bearing on literature outside the elusive paradigms of ‘Humanism’ or ‘Renaissance’.¹² This is all the more surprising given that far more contentious developments in, say, philosophy such as the protean ‘Nominalism’ (which continues to be indiscriminately applied to all forms of opposition to Scholastic universalism) have found ample attention among literary scholars and even art historians working on the fourteenth century.¹³ There have been occasional glimpses of an interest in Augustinian positions but these tended to be ancillary to literary arguments or have isolated aspects of it, such as affective knowledge and its contribution to the cluster of developments referred to as ‘popular piety’.¹⁴ Circumstantial evidence for a rising literary interest in deductive Augustinian writings is not hard to come by: there is, for example, the explosion of vernacular French manuscripts of the *City of God* in the fourteenth and fifteenth century following Raoul de Praelles’s 1375 translation.¹⁵ In a recent chapter on the reception of Augustinian thought in the fourteenth and fifteenth century, E.L. Saak

¹² One recent example of this use of Augustinianism is Gill (2005).

¹³ Richard Utz and Terry Barakat (2004) list a number of happy and less successful treatments of Nominalism and medieval literature. Starting with White (1947), a number of art historians have associated artistic verisimilitude with the rise of Nominalism.

¹⁴ I am thinking here, for instance, of Minnis (1984, chapter 4), and Watson (1991, in particular pp. 22-24). There is, of course, a fair supply of work on Petrarch and Augustine, such as Carol Quillen’s discussion of Petrarch’s Augustinianism in Quillen (1992 & 1998).

¹⁵ This is of course a vernacular development that applies to an aristocratic and secular readership.

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lists among the areas most heavily affected by this Augustinian renaissance “the language of vernacular religious literature, the philosophical discussions of divine illumination, divine knowledge and fruition; and the political doctrines of hierocratic theory, just war and the dominion of grace” (1997:371-72). However desirable such a study of a neo-Augustinianism stimulus may be, this article cannot hope to redress the imbalance. But to do some justice to the claim that literature has not been left untouched by this intellectual development, I would like to read the vista of Middle Earth offered to Will in Passus XI of the B-Text of *Piers Plowman* in the context of this fourteenth-century ‘rediscovery’ of certain aspects of deductive Augustinian teachings.

Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century applications of the work of Augustine are wide-ranging (not all of which are concerned with deductive teachings, of course) and I will concentrate on the significance of Augustine’s teachings on wisdom, or *sapientia*.¹⁶ At its simplest level, then, my argument proposes that *Piers Plowman* contains a sapiential vision in the Augustinian sense that is dependent on and conditioned by the topographical circumstances in which it is experienced. In the case of Will’s panoramic view in B XI, an elevation is required to attain exposure to wisdom and the mediatory manner in which it is attained determines the mode of representation. My observations may not vastly skew existing responses to the poem, but they will hopefully strengthen those readings that seek to establish an Augustinian and anti-intellectual context for the work, besides explaining the central importance of the mountain vista to the trajectory of the poem. I do think, however, that my reading may lend additional support to the central role of Passus XI in the poem, especially given the fact that this Passus closes the A-Text in a number of versions.¹⁷

Study’s admission in Passus X of the B-Text of that she is “dymme,” or weak-sighted, despite her knowledge (B X, l. 181) echoes the teachings of Augustine and Bonaventure on divine illumination.¹⁸ She lacks what Scripture and Theologie possess, namely the divine light, or *illuminatio specialis* in the Augustinian tradition, required

¹⁶ For a fuller discussion of Augustine’s teachings during this period, see Saak (1997).

¹⁷ I am grateful to Vincent Gillespie for pointing this out to me.

¹⁸ I use the B-Text as my main source since it is the only complete version of the poem. All references to the B-Text are to Langland (ed. Schmidt 1995).

to understand spiritual substances.¹⁹ “Dymme” in the cognate sense of darkness are also the tracts of Hell in Passus XVIII: When Christ in his attribute as “the light” orders the gates of Hell to be opened, he commands the “Dukes of this dymme place” to “undo thise yates” (B XVIII, l. 320). That the translation of pagan knowledge into spiritual darkness or blindness, evocative of Dante’s *cieco mondo* of which Limbo marks only the first stage, does not depend on the Harrowing of Hell in Passus XVIII, Study demonstrates herself by already having included the pointers “Plato” and “Aristotle” at ll. 175-76. Name-dropping secures her affiliation not only with Scholastic rationalism (Aristotle) but with pagan thought in a wider sense (Plato), and she is now able to consolidate her tribute to Theologie:

Ac Theologie hath tened me ten score tymes:
 The moore I muse therinne, the mystier it semeth,
 And the depper I devyne, the derker me it thynketh.
 It is no science, forsothe, for to sotile inne.
 [If that love nere, that lith therinne, a ful lethi thyng it were];
 Ac for it let best by love, I love it the bettere,
 For there that love is ledere, ne lakked nevere grace.

(B XVIII, ll. 182-88)

Her capitulation to Theologie amounts to an admission of her own spiritual bankruptcy; a bankruptcy that is rounded off by the pun on “devyne”: peering into divinity is not only not her forte but also none of her business: ““And the depper I devyne, the derker me it thynketh”” (l. 184).

At this stage, Will has already understood that his epistemological journey towards “Dowel” will take him to Clergie and Scripture (ll. 149-54), but this self-deconstruction of Study, enacted between blindness and vision, between mortal knowledge and divine wisdom, establishes the binary terms for Will’s subsequent cognitive progression

¹⁹ One of the central inspirations for theories of divine illumination is John 8:12. Here, Christ’s light is said to cure the implied blindness: “iterum ergo locutus est eis Iesus dicens ego sum lux mundi qui sequitur me non ambulabit in tenebris sed habebit lucem vitae” [Again therefore, Jesus spoke to them, saying: I am the light of the world: he that followeth me, walketh not in darkness, but shall have the light of life]. I use the following edition of the Vulgate throughout: *Biblia Sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*, edited by Robert Weber; revised by Roger Gryson, fourth edition 1994; originally published 1969, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft). All translations are from *The Holy Bible. Douay Rheims Version (Challoner’s Revision)*, 1971, (Rockford, IL: Tan Books).

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from Study over Theologie to the complex visions that will perplex him in Passus XI. James Simpson reads the encounter between Study and Will, quite rightly, I believe, as the juxtaposition of the quintessentially Augustinian notions of knowledge, expressed as *scientia* and *sapientia* (1986:3).²⁰ In this tradition, *scientia* denotes rational knowledge whereas *sapientia* corresponds to divine wisdom:

If this is the correct distinction between wisdom [*sapientia*] and knowledge [*scientia*], that intellectual cognition of eternal things should pertain to wisdom, but rational cognition of temporal things to knowledge, then it is not hard to judge which is to be ranked above and which below.²¹

Augustine does not view the two terms as unrelated; rather, he believes that the study of human knowledge can be a preparation for receiving divine truth, a concept that was expanded by later writers to a programme of spiritual education (Simpson 1986:2), the manual of which became Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*.²² Although a role for reason is acknowledged in this model, such a programme of study differs sharply from employing *scientia* in the pursuit of understanding divine wisdom, proposed by Aristotelian Scholasticism. This *scientia*, inductive approach to Scripture (and theology) is the object of Will's invective against all learning later in Passus X. Unsurprisingly, it is here that we find a simultaneous praise of Augustine:

The doughtieste doctour and devinour of the Trinitee,
Was Austyn the olde, and heighest of the foure,
Seide thus in a sermon – I seigh it writen ones –
“Ecce ipsi idiote rapiunt celum ubi nos sapientes in inferno mergimur”²³
–
And is to mene to Englissh men, moore ne lesse,
Arn none rather yravysshed fro the righte bileve
Than are these konnynges clerkes that knowe manye bokes,
Ne soner ysaved, ne sadder of bileve

²⁰ Simpson shows that *sapientia* is a concern elsewhere in the poem, too. On 'kynde knowynge' as *sapientia*, see Davlin (1981).

²¹ “Si ergo haec est sapientiae et scientiae recta distinctio, ut ad sapientiam pertineat aeternarum rerum cognitio intellectualis; ad scientiam vero, temporalium rerum cognitio rationalis; quid cui praeponendum sive postponendum sit, non est difficile iudicare” (*De trinitate*, Bk 12, Sec. 15, 25). Both text and translation are from Serene (1982:499-500, n. 16).

²² This has already been pointed out by Richard Southern (1987:164).

²³ “Lo, the unlearned themselves take heaven by force while we wise ones are drowned in hell”, Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk 8, Sec. 8 (Langland 1995:164, note to line 455).

Than plowmen and pastours and povere commune laborers,
 Souteres and shepherdes – swiche lewed juttres
 Percen with a *Paternoster* the paleys of hevne
 And passen purgatorie penaunceless at hir hennes partyng
 Into the blisse of paradys for hir pure bileve,
 That imparfitly here knewe and ek lyvede.

(B X, ll. 452-65)

Mastering *scientia*, then, is a matter of following a course of study (as long as it does not become a surrogate for faith), but how does one attain *sapientia*?

It has been pointed out that Augustine's most frequent metaphor for knowledge is vision.²⁴ In Book 12 of *De genesi ad litteram*, Augustine identifies three types of vision which will inspire and baffle subsequent thinkers alike:²⁵ physical sight (*visio corporis*), visionary experience (*visio spiritualis*) and divine illumination (*visio intellectualis*). *Visio corporis* is natural sight, prone to the limitations of rational thought, whereas *visio intellectualis* cannot err; it communicates divine truth and is imageless. This does not mean that sensory data does not play a role in the *visio intellectualis*. What matters is not so much the nature of the visionary 'input' but the manner in which it is evaluated. In contrast to physical sight, the *intellectus* interprets the sensory input during a *visio spiritualis* by comparing the data of sensory perception to intellectual forms.²⁶ *Visio spiritualis* is a blend of the two, therefore still subject to human error. But this is really a dichotomy for, as Barbara Newman points out, the intermediate stage, visionary experience, is "too bizarre to be altogether trusted" (2005:7). If, for Augustine, cognition is defined as visual and the acquisition of knowledge is an epistemological concern, then this dichotomy of vision must correspond to his proposed dichotomy of knowledge. True knowledge of eternal substances (*sapientia*), therefore, can only be received and assimilated in the form of intellectual visions (*visiones intellectuales*).²⁷ Not so much a metaphor then, Augustine's highest form of vision, *visio intellectualis*, is a noetic interface solely attuned to receiving spiritual substances.

²⁴ See, for instance, Serene (1982:499).

²⁵ Augustine is both regarded "as the foremost theologian of vision" (Hahn 2000:170) and also as the source of much confusion in this area, see, for example, Serene (1982:500).

²⁷ Augustine's *visio* is a mode of seeing but I will employ this term also when referring to instances of *visio intellectualis* and *visio spiritualis*, that is, as 'visions'.

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Smarting from Scripture's rebuke, Will breaks out into tears at the beginning of Passus XI: "Tho wepte I for wo and wraþe of hir speche / And in a wynkyng w[o]rth til I was aslepe" (ll. 4-5). Whilst his "wo" and "wraþe" lull him to sleep, leading to the first of two visions in this Passus, the emotional transition from dream to dream-within-a-dream strongly suggests that this cognitive foray into Will's *intellectus* is borne out of a need to impart affective knowledge to the dreamer.²⁸ A corollary of the distinction between *scientia* and *sapientia* in Passus X, the two visions in Passus XI reconstitute this dichotomy in the form of two very different perceptions of the world, one hosted by Fortune's mirror (ll. 6-319), the other by Kynde (ll. 320-404). The first, delusory and morally shallow, is Fortune's fast-forward vignette of what *scientia* or human knowledge can amount to (or could amount to should Will choose to pursue it), complete with temptations, pitfalls and false rewards. It culminates in the cameo appearance of Trajan, the virtuous pagan *par excellence*, who confirms this vision as one of *scientia*: "'Lawe withouten love,' quod Troianus, 'ley ther a bene'" (B XI, l. 170). But there is a didactic admixture of divine truth in this vision, for Trajan was saved retrospectively by the baptism of Gregory's tears, a testimony to the potency of affective knowledge which does not recognise the restrictions imposed by time or mortality. This blend of the fallible and the eternal brings this vision nearer to Augustine's compromise *visio spiritualis*, or visionary experience. Physical vision, *visio corporis*, can be ruled out here as the inner dream removes the object of Will's gaze by yet another layer of dreamwork. A truly sapiential vision is subsequently granted to Will by Kynde but before I turn my attention to it, Fortune's "mirour" requires me to pause for a moment.

Recently Barbara Newman has called attention to the rich tradition of the *speculum* in her discussion of visionary theory and practice (2005:15-16). Newman reminds us that two biblical passages, 1 Cor. 13:12 and Rom. 1:20, triggered the subsequent development of this tradition.²⁹ Building on 1 Cor. 13:12, many writers at the time associated with seeing through a *speculum* a visionary mode that amounted to seeing "through a mirror in a mystery" (Bernard of

²⁸ For Augustine's understanding of *intellectus*, see below.

²⁹ "We see now through a glass in a dark manner; but then face to face" [videmus nunc per speculum in enigmate tunc autem facie ad faciem], 1 Cor. 13:12; "For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made" [invisibilia enim ipsius a creatura mundi per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspiciuntur], Rom. 1:20.

Clairvaux) and permitted glimpses of the “face-to-face vision of the blessed” (Newman 2005:15), perhaps not unlike Augustine’s *visio spiritualis*. Rom. 1:20, on the other hand, encourages the contemplation of the book of Nature which is capable of revealing divine truths. The synthesis of these two biblical passages is expressed, for instance, in Alan de Lille’s adage *Omnis munda creatura / Quasi liber et pictura / Nobis est et speculum*.³⁰ That the faculty of the mind receptive to these insights is the *intellectus*, emerges from Richard of Saint-Victor’s explanation of this process:

When it is written that the invisible things of God are seen by the intellect from the creation of the world, through the things that are made, this plainly means that reason would never rise to the knowledge of invisible things unless its handmaid, imagination, presented to it the form of visible things.³¹

To Augustine, *intellectus* is “that activity of the soul or mind by which the soul perceives, understands and judges intelligible things in the divine light of eternal truth” (Breyfogle 1999:452). In *De anima*, Augustine elevates the *intellectus* above *ratio*, in the same way in which he elevates *sapientia* over *scientia*.³² And so, just as *scientia* is the provenance of *visio corporis*, and *sapientia* of *visio intellectualis*, it is with the ‘intellect’ that the mirror of Nature communicates. That such a vision, as Richard says, should exceed *ratio* and require the mediation of imagination (the *vis imaginativa* or, in *Piers Plowman*, Ymagynatif) only augments the gradually increasing ‘intellectual’ quality of the inner dream in Passus XI.³³ If Fortune’s *speculum* assumes the mode of the Augustinian middle vision (*visio spiritualis*), then the component that appeals to the *intellectus*, the affective account of Trajan’s salvation, grooms Will for Kynde’s sapiential vision of Middle Earth at the end of this Passus.

Despite constituting a turning point in the poem, a satisfactory reading of Kynde’s vision has been hampered by what seems to be a

³⁰ *De incarnatione Christi*, PL 210, col. 579A. A point made by Newman (2005:15-16).

³¹ “Item, cum scriptum sit quia inuisibilia Dei, a creatura mundi, per ea quae facta sunt, intellecta conspiciuntur, inde manifeste colligitur quia ad inuisibilium cognitionem nunquam ratio assurgeret, nisi ei ancilla sua, imaginatio uidelicet, rerum uisibilium formam repraesentaret,” *Benjamin minor* 5 (Châtillon, Duchet-Suchaux and Longère 1997:102). The translation is from Newman (2005:15). See also Augustine’s definition below.

³² *De anima* 27.53.

³³ On Ymagynatif and Richard of Saint-Victor, see White (1986).

minor discrepancy between the B- and the C-Text. I am thinking here of Kynde's "mountaigne that Myddelerthe highte" in the B-Text and her "myroure of Mydelerte" in the C-Text.³⁴ In short, discussions of Kynde's vision in the B-Text tend to ignore the quality of her vision as a *speculum* in the later redaction and those of the C-Text gloss over the fact that it occurs on a mountain in the B-Text. Even Steven Kruger's perceptive discussion of the two mirrors in the C-Text assigns the mountain in the B-Text no space, something which is more difficult to justify in studies of the C-Text than of the B-Text, assuming common authorship.³⁵ But there is a further set of departures from the B-Text in the wording of Kynde's distinction. The C-Text introduces Kynde in the following passage:

Thus Rechelesnesse in a rage aresenede Clergie
And Scripture scornede þat many skilles shewed,
Til þat Kynde cam Clergie to helpe
And in þe myroure of Mydelerte made hym efte to loke,
To knowe by vch a creature Kynde to louye.

(C XIII, ll. 130-32)

If, for a moment, I pretended to be ignorant of the existence of the B-Text, I would say it is Rechelesnesse who is made to look into the mirror so that he could "knowe by vch a creature Kynde to louye". About to receive a lesson that will reveal the love of God in every creature, Rechelesnesse, the dreamer's capacity for "careless reaction" (Langland 1994:203, note to C X, l. 195), does not appear to be all that receptive: he is made to look into mirror repeatedly ("efte to loke").

An altogether different picture of Kynde emerges in the B-Text. Here, Will is lifted onto a mountain where he is granted a vision that appeals to all of him and not just to an undesirable attribute of his:

And slepyng I seigh al this; and sithen cam Kynde
And nempned me by my name, and bad me nymen hede,
And thorough the wondres of this world wit for to take.
And on a mountaigne that Myddelerthe highte, as me tho thoughte,
I was fet forth by ensamples to knowe,

³⁴ XI, l. 323 and XIII, l. 131, respectively. All citations from the C-Text refer to Langland (ed. Pearsall 1994).

³⁵ Kruger (1991:75, note 6) concedes in a footnote that "[t]he B Version contains only one of the two mirrors" and that the mirror of the C-Text "is, in the B-Text, the '*mountaigne* that Mydelerd hy3te'" [Kruger's emphasis].

Thorough ech a creature, Kynde my creatour to lovye.

(B X, ll. 320-25)

This Kynde is conciliatory: she addresses Will by his name and encourages him to “take” wit, to understand divine truth through the “wondres of this world”. Essentially, this is the same *speculum* as Alan of Lille’s *omnis munda creatura*, and it teaches “by ensaumples to knowe”. The hindsight with which Will interprets Kynde’s vision is bewildering: not only does he understand her aims, as in the C-Text, but he is also aware of her methodology. Throughout the vision one can see how he, partially at least, fails to process its spiritual substance, pointing his finger at Reason. Yet here Will comprehends the vision and spells it out, stating that Kynde will not explain love in rational terms (never a good idea) but will demonstrate it through examples: She will show divine wisdom *in actu*. “By ensauple to knowe,” therefore, accords with the deductive principle, since God’s wisdom must be seen by the *intellectus*. As I have already shown above, this is precisely the operating mode of Scripture contoured by Bonaventure: “Our affections are moved more strongly by examples than by arguments, by promises than by logical reasonings, by devotions than by definitions”.³⁶

A potent expression of the second vision’s superiority, the mountain both facilitates this *visio intellectualis* and allegorises Will’s cognitive quantum leap. Art historians and anthropologists have long since developed an awareness of mountains in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century art that can clarify the implications of the “mountaigne”. “In the late medieval imagination [...],” writes Simon Schama, “the high mountain slopes were imagined as a cloud-wreathed borderland between the physical and the spiritual universe” (1995:417). Schama is thinking here, first and foremost, of the literary accounts of Mount Eden, Dante’s *Purgatorio* and Petrarch’s *Ascent of Mount Ventoux*, but he adduces other, visual examples, too. That his observation is only part of a larger, transhistorical tradition, is shown by Mircea Eliade’s broader anthropological brush-strokes:

Mountains are the nearest thing to the sky, and are thence endowed with a twofold holiness: on [the] one hand they share in the spatial symbolism of transcendence – they are ‘high’, ‘vertical’, ‘supreme’ and so on – and on the other, they are the especial domain of all hierophanies of

³⁶ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, Prol., § 1. See above.

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atmosphere, and therefore, the dwelling of the gods (1996:99).

Their proximity to divinity makes them an ideal place at which to receive divine illumination, an understanding that is grounded in the various celebrations of Mount Sion, the "mountain of the Lord," and Psalm 42:3: "Send forth thy light and thy truth: they have conducted me, and brought me unto thy holy hill, and into thy tabernacles".³⁷ Augustine was very clear about the place of mountains in the hierarchy of divine illumination:

And as when the sun rises, it first covers the mountains with light, and thence the light descends to the lowest regions of the earth, so our Lord Jesus Christ, when He came, first illumined the height of the Apostles and enlightened the mountains, and thus His Light descended to the valley of the world.³⁸

In his study of European mountain symbolism, Jacek Woźniakowski distinguishes two influential views of mountains, the empirical of Jerome and the allegorical of Augustine (1987, chapter 2 passim). The much commented on manicheistic vein in Augustine's thought also appears to inform his concept of mountains in Scripture: "Therefore, there are good and bad mountains: the good mountains are spiritual greatness; the bad mountains are the growth of pride".³⁹ Among the good mountains, Augustine talks of "montes amabiles, montes excelsi, praedicatores ueritatis, siue angeli, siue apostoli, siue prophetae".⁴⁰

Augustine allegorises not just mountains *per se*, but also their ascent. The crucial source for this reading of mountains, pertinent, I think, for *Piers Plowman*, is Isaiah 2:3:

³⁷ "Emitte lucem tuam et veritatem tuam ipsa me deduxerunt et adduxerunt in montem sanctum tuum et in tabernacula tua".

³⁸ "[E]t quomodo, quando oritur sol, prius luce montes uestit, et inde lux ad humillima terrarum descendit, sic quando uenit dominus noster iesus christus, prius radiauit in altitudinem apostolorum, prius illustrauit montes, et sic descendit lux eius ad conuallem terrarum," Dekkers and Fraipont (1956), commentary on Psalm 35, § 9. All subsequent references are to this edition.

Even Aquinas spoke of theologians as mountains because, among other aspects, they were "enlightened by the rays of divine wisdom" (Aquinas 1998; for the original, see Aquinas 1954, vol. 1, pp. 435-39).

³⁹ "Ergo sunt montes boni, sunt montes mali: montes boni, magnitudo spiritualis; montes mali, tumor superbiae", *Ennarrationes in psalmos, commentary to Psalm 97, § 9* (Woźniakowski 1987:75). There are also *montes Dei* and *montes saeculi* in Augustine's commentary on Psalm 45, § 7.

And many people shall go, and say: Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall come forth from Sion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.⁴¹

In his commentary on Psalm 45, Augustine glosses this passage: “What is ‘Come and let us go up?’ ‘Come’ means ‘Believe’; ‘Let us go up’ signifies ‘Let us profit’.”⁴² The hermeneutic frame of reference is anti-Pelagian: spiritual ‘work’ consists not of climbing the mountain but of believing, whereas the laborious ascent equals the reaping of faith’s rewards. In the case of Will, the rapidity of his ascent is proportional to his cognitive growth, as his eyes are opened all of a sudden. Since this movement toward Will’s illumination is facilitated by Kynde’s agency, it can be described as deductive: when Kynde places Will on top of a mountain, his *intellectus* is elevated not by his own ability but by divine will.

Elevations are noetically privileged places, giving rise to the mountain vista as a figure of visual cognition. In the fifteenth-century alliterative poem *Mum and the Sothsegger*, for example, the dreamer climbs the “highest hille” in the region and receives a panoramic vision of creation in his search for knowledge.⁴³ Once on the mountain, Will is granted a vision of creation. Physical sight is superficial; it cannot see ‘meaning’; it cannot know ‘intellectually’. But Will’s sight operates on a different noetic level: in line with the cognitive mechanics of Augustine’s *visio intellectualis*, the sight unfolding before his eyes allows him to discern divine wisdom in the mirror of the world. Equipped with this analytical vision, he surveys this vista in terms of behaviour not appearance, matter not accident, time rather than space:

I seigh the sonne and the see and the sond after,
 And where that briddes and beestes by hir make thei yeden,
 Wilde wormes in wodes, and wonderful foweles
 With fleckede fetheres and of fele colours.
 Man and his make I myghte se bothe;
 Poverte and plentee, both pees and werre,
 Blisse and bale -- bothe I seigh at ones,
 And how men token Mede and Mercy refused.
 Reson I seigh soothly sewen all beestes

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In etynge, in drynkyng and in engendryng of kynde.

(B X, ll. 326-35)

Will follows the mating habits of animals and their subsequent abandoning of their “makes” (l. 343). Racing through time, he measures the meaning of his vision with his mind.

Will's ‘intellectual’ vision rises above reason. And all goes smoothly until Will begins to question this. Many readings treat this turn as initiating a ‘problem passage’ in the poem. Kruger, commenting on the equivalent passage in Passus XIII of the C-Text, is disconcerted by the inclusion of fallen humanity: “Still, the inclusion of humanly generated disorder within the second mirror of Middle Earth remains disturbing” (1991:87). The framework of a sapiential vision can, I believe, explain the presence of this disorder and demonstrate that, to some extent, Will copes rather well with this second vision.

Having realised that reason is a gift to the animal kingdom but not to human beings, Will changes his “mood”:

Ac that moost meved me and my mood changede –
That Reson rewarded and ruled alle beestes
Save man and his make: many tyme and ofte
No Reson hem folwede [...].

(B XI, ll. 368-71)

“Mood” is of course a loaded term here, and it can mean many things in Middle English: mind, heart, character, manners, wish, courage and anger.⁴⁴ And even ‘mind’ is not satisfactory as it stands, since the *Middle English Dictionary* gives a range of possibilities for ‘mode’ under its first meaning, ‘mind’: For instance, it can mean ‘mind’ (as opposed to body), or ‘the mind as governing instincts, thoughts’, or even ‘the seat of man’s spiritual life, religious beliefs, moral consciousness’.⁴⁵ Will’s change of “mood” is affective; he is “meved” by what he perceives to be an injustice committed by Reason against humankind. I doubt therefore that he is changing his mind in the modern sense of changing one’s opinion. “Mood” here must be a function of emotionality. Will is not changing views rationally; he emotionally registers an injustice that affects his religious beliefs

stirring his moral consciousness into action. The manner of his rebuke of Reason makes this clear: “I have wonder of thee, that witty art holden, / Why thow ne sewest man and his make, that no mysfeet hem folwe?” (B XI, ll. 373-74). This is not a rational argument and there is no juxtaposition with the animals’ relative bliss. Will’s outburst is one of pity, of bewilderment. After all, much is at stake during this crucial stage in Will’s spiritual development. He is given a peek behind the screen of Middle Earth, a rare glimpse of God’s love, yet man’s miserable confusion troubles him.

Theologically, at least, Will’s attack on Reason makes sense. I cannot agree with the reading that “to reason with Reason is evidently not a very reasonable thing to do” (Langland 1994:230, note to l. 190). In its allegorical form in the poem Reason is not so much a rigid absolute but the principle of rationality, the typification of a mode. The only way to communicate with Reason is rationally but this is not what Will does here. He argues emotionally against Reason and drags Reason into that side of the *speculum* which reflects the fallen world of humanity. A driving force throughout Passus X and XI and a rationale for this conversation is that it is not reasonable to reason with wisdom, that reason or the discipline it feeds, *scientia*, cannot explain God, and it will certainly not be of much use in understanding humanity’s enslavement to sin. A better approach, and one for which Will is ready now, is to turn to Scripture. Its wisdom teaches “suffraunce,” the patient enduring of hardship (B XI, ll. 375-83). What emerges in the last section of Passus XI is far from a failed vision. Will has been receptive, he has surveyed Middle Earth with his *intellectus*, perceiving this vista affectively. And he has learned by his own “ensaumple” that the appropriate mode for “knowynge” God’s love is not reason, which stands for *scientia*, but “suffraunce,” an instance of *sapientia*. And, to return for a moment to Richard of Saint-Victor’s opinion that “imagination” is required to unravel the “invisible things of God,” the first line of Passus XII opens with the confident announcement “I am Ymaginatif,” who then swiftly moves to help render the “invisible things” in the form of “visible things”. “Quem diligo, castiga’,” he adds in line 12, squeezing the wisdom of Kynde’s vision into an aphorism. The two visions in Passus XI, then, moving from the *visio spiritualis* to the elevated *visio intellectualis* on the mountain, expose Will emotively to the insights that have been introduced to him rationally in the previous Passus.

Yet Will's vision is not private. There is no face to Will; he is the narrative enactment of a spiritual desire. The reader sees what Will sees, measuring the experiential distance between himself or herself and Will, the surrogate Self. As readers of *Piers Plowman*, we rarely observe the observer; the reader's and Will's lines of sight frequently converge, creating an epistemological congruency that encourages us to see with his eyes and grasp with his mind. This interlacing of surrogate Self and reader – expedited beyond easy recognition by the B-Text's consistent use of the first-person narrator – makes Will's vision a mediatory one, obliging the reader to assume Will's persona and consider the poem through his affective progression.

Simpson notes that the poem creates movement “out of epistemological or cognitive limitations” (1986:2). This is by no means exclusive to *Piers Plowman*. The very same dynamic propels Petrarch's *Ascent of Mount Ventoux* forward as it does Augustine's *Confessions*. In fact, every story of conversion creates movement out of cognitive limitations. But how does one compose a narrative of conversion in an already converted world? The conversion must lead to a better form of Christianity, a higher, sapiential faith. And this is the story of Will, who moves from limitation to limitation only to realise emotionally – like Augustine in the *Confessions* and the Petrarch-persona on Mount Ventoux – that grace can spark spiritual growth out of one's cognitive confinement. This movement, which relies on divine impetus every time human knowledge fails the subject, is deductive: although the starting point may reside with the individual, the transition to the next stage is solely enabled by divine impulse.

I have hoped to demonstrate that in a spiritual system where affective knowledge is valued, *visiones intellectuales* enjoy prominence and significance. Unlike the rational arguments of Scholastic philosophy, visions of *sapientia*, of God's workings in the world, profit from the panoramic scope provided by spiritual elevation. Thus, the mountain is the ideal *locus* to host such visions and becomes, at the same time, their allegory. Deductive doctrines stress the spark of divine illumination, the moment of grasping “kynde knowynge”. How can this be achieved better than through a mountain vista overlooking creation? Not only is the mountain nearer heaven and can therefore yield a clearer vision of divine wisdom, but it is also the most appropriate allegory for deductive teachings, which, seeking to restore all theological sovereignty in God, value the view from the top over the labours of the ascent.

But what are the implications for existing approaches to *Piers Plowman*? My local reading of B XI gains in significance if applied to the A-Text, which comes to a close at precisely this stage (although some manuscripts of the A-Text supplement the poem with Passus XII from another version). As I have shown above, in Passus XI the topography of Will's dreamscape as well as its theological exploitation elevate the dreamer's affective progression at the expense of book learning. The ensuing observations on the imagery and structure of this Passus would seem to strengthen the trajectory of the A-Text, which, according to A.V.C. Schmidt "[affirms] the dangers of learning and the value of a simple faith for salvation" (Langland 1995:lix). Read against the traditional theory of seeing the A-, B- and C-Texts as reflecting the chronological order in which the poem was revised, the degree to which Passus XI is permeated by the *sapientia / scientia* antithesis goes some way to confirm the assumption that at one stage in the writing of *Piers Plowman* the poet must have seen this Passus as a suitable conclusion to the poem.⁴⁶ Paradoxically, Jill Mann's unorthodox reading of the A-Text as an executive summary of the poem, compiled for a nonclerical audience (Mann 1994), could also profit from an 'empowered' final Passus XI. Whichever way one chooses to read the A-Text, it would appear that Passus XI confirms its textual unity.

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About the author

Sebastian Sobecki is a lecturer (*Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter*) at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum. He holds a BA, MA, MPhil, and PhD from the University of Cambridge and a PGCE from the University of Buckingham. A monograph based on his 2005 doctorate, *The Sea in Medieval English Literature*, is forthcoming from Boydell & Brewer. The book will explore the literary formation of an insular "Englishness" from the earliest Anglo-Norman romances to Shakespeare's *Tempest*. His articles have appeared in *The Review of English Studies*, *Neophilologus*, *Mediaevalia*, *Neophilologische Mitteilungen*, *The Seventeenth Century*, *Notes and Queries*, *Al-Masaq* and others. His fields of interest include late-medieval intellectual history, political writings, the interplay of law and literature, theories of reading and writership as well as ideological uses of landscape and geography.

Sebastian I. Sobecki: That Dizzy Height of Wisdom: Augustinian Vision and Kynde's Mountain in Piers Plowman B XI. Franziska Scheitzeneder: «For myn entente nys but for to pleye». On the Playground with the Wife of Bath, the Clerk of Oxford and Jacques Derrida. Nicole Nyffenegger-Staub: Subjectivity and Crisis in Fourteenth-Century English Historical Writing. Kathrin Prietzel: Treachery and Betrayal in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: The Incident of 1051. Thomas Honegger: Romancing the Form: Alliterative Metre and William of Palerne. Winfried Rudolf: Seven Diverse Loans in Middle English Alliterativ Thesis: I assert that the Augustinian concept of memoria (usually translated memory) is vital for ongoing dialectic between 'science' and 'philosophy' in pursuing scientia (knowledge) and sapientia (wisdom), while cultivating beata vita (blessed life) by promoting peaceful interpersonal relationships. That Dizzy Height of Wisdom: Augustinian Vision and Kynde's Mountain in Piers Plowman B XI. By Sebastian Sobecki. The Double Truth Question and the Epistemological Status of Theology in Late 13th Century Debates at Paris. By Andreas Speer. Bonaventure contra mundum? The catholic theological tradition revisited. By Kevin L Hughes. The Doctrine of the "Intelligible Triad" in Neoplatonism and Patristics. By Alexey Fokin. Download file. 1. Fisherman's Wharf, Ghirardelli Square and Pier 39 are all in San Francisco. True. False. True. False. 2. The Golden Gate Bridge is the shortest suspension bridge in the world. True. False. 8. Space Mountain is the name of one of the hotels in Disneyland. True. False. The best study guide to Piers Plowman on the planet, from the creators of SparkNotes. Get the summaries, analysis, and quotes you need. Both allegorical works also center on religious quests that are undertaken by everyman figures—Will in Piers Plowman, and the aptly named Everyman in Everyman. Similarly, Piers Plowman also bears resemblance to the 1961 children's novel, The Phantom Tollbooth, which also centers on a quest and contains allegorical characters, such as the princesses Reason and Rhyme, and places, such as the Kingdom of Wisdom. Langland's Piers Plowman and Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales also contain several similarities. Piers Plowman appears, and briefly explains the way to the Tower where Truth dwells. Friars do not preach the way to St. Truth, and though Piers will serve as guide to Truth's Tower, a pardoner and a prostitute decide to make their way there by means of indulgences. Passus VI: The Half-Acre. Inset dream: Kynde shows Will the whole of God's creation. Sexuality of animals. Will complains that Reson (here, divine oversight) does not govern man's affairs closely enough. Grace appoints Piers Plowman his own procurator and reeve, his registrar to receive that which is owed (i.e., restitution), his purveyor and plowman. Piers will plough with 4 oxen (the Evangelists), and harrow with 4 horses (the Latin Doctors).