

ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

One of the decisive developments in the western philosophical tradition was the eventually widespread merging of the Greek philosophical tradition and the Judeo-Christian religious and scriptural traditions. Augustine is one of the main figures through and by whom this merging was accomplished.

Augustine asserted that Christians should be pacifists as a personal, philosophical stance. Nonetheless, he asserted, peacefulness in the face of a grave wrong that could only be stopped by violence would itself be a sin. Defense of one's self or others could be a necessity. While not breaking down the conditions necessary for war to be just, Augustine, in essence, argues the pursuit of peace must include the option of fighting to preserve it in the long-term. Such a war could not be pre-emptive, but defensive, to restore peace

For Augustine, the individual human being is a body-soul composite, but in keeping with his Neoplatonism, there is an asymmetry between soul and body. As a spiritual entity, the soul is superior to the body, and it is the province of the soul to rule the body. This presents a fairly positive conception of the soul-body relation, one that clearly runs counter to the Manichean picture of the soul's entrapment.

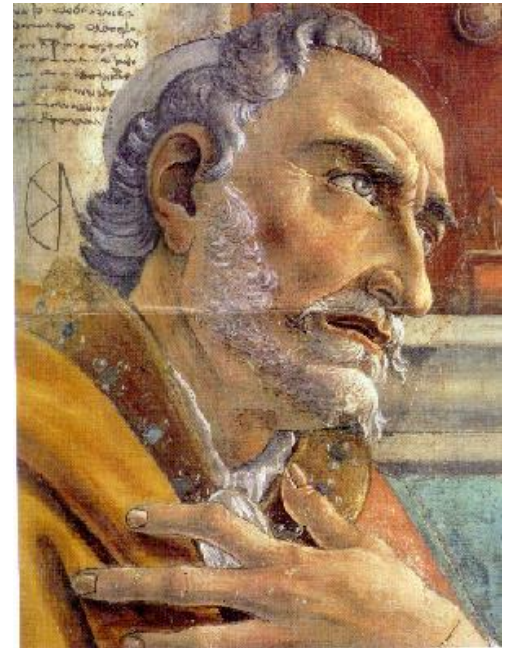
Augustine originally believed in premillennialism, namely that Christ would establish a literal 1,000-year kingdom prior to the general resurrection, but later rejected the belief, viewing it as carnal. He was the first theologian to expound a systematic doctrine of amillennialism (which is disbelief in a 1,000-year kingdom).

With respect to questions about specific instances of natural and moral evil, he is rather subtle. Natural evils are attributed to the partiality of our perspective, a perspective that is often the result of our myopic materialism and tendency to focus upon our own self-interest. Understood within the larger context – both the underlying order of the appearances and the providentially governed moral drama within which they appear – natural evils are not evil at all. With respect to the moral evil which is the product of human agency, these are the culpable products of a will that has become attached to lower goods, treating them as if they were higher. Moral evil is, strictly speaking, not a thing, but only the will's turning away from God and attaching itself to inferior goods as if they were higher

He saw the human being as a perfect unity of two substances: soul and body.

Augustine rejected both the immortality of the human race proposed by pagans, and contemporary ideas of ages (such as those of certain Greeks and Egyptians) that differed from the Church's sacred writings. Augustine took the view that everything in the universe was created simultaneously by God, and not in seven calendar days like a literal account of Genesis would require. He argued that the six-day structure of creation represents a logical framework rather than the passage of time in a physical way – it would bear a spiritual, rather than physical, meaning, which is no less literal.

Augustine first attends to the question of the soul's origin in a manner that focuses upon particular possibilities. Two of the four hypotheses require the soul's existence prior to embodiment. On the first, the soul is sent by God to administer the body (henceforth the “sent” hypothesis); on the second, the soul comes to inhabit the body by its own choice (the “voluntarist” hypothesis). In later presentations of these hypotheses, Augustine treats the voluntarist hypothesis as involving both a sin on the soul's part and a cyclical process whereby the soul is subject to multiple incarnations. The other two hypotheses, the “traducianist” and the “creationist,” do not involve pre-existence, but there is nonetheless a significant contrast between them. On the traducianist account, all souls are propagated from Adam's soul in a manner analogous to that of the body, thus linking each soul to all previous ones by a kind of genealogical chain. On the creationist hypothesis, however, God creates a new soul for each body, thus creating a kind of vertical link between God and each individual soul. There is a puzzle at the heart of Augustine's philosophical anthropology, however, that raises serious questions about how we are to construe the human condition. Depending on which of the four hypotheses one were to choose, our condition can be regarded as a divinely ordained exile and trial (the sent hypothesis), the consequence of sin conjoined with an almost immediately self-inflicted punishment (the voluntarist hypothesis), or as some kind of relatively natural habitat (the traducianist and creationist hypotheses). In the latter case, there remain questions about how to construe the soul's creation in relation to God's activity (traducianism) as well as about how at home the soul is in the realm of nature.



Despite its dualistic overtones, the overall unity of the picture is central to its ability to provide a resolution of the problem of evil. The sensible world, for example, is not evil, nor is embodiment itself to be regarded as straightforwardly bad. The problem that plagues our condition is not that we are trapped in the visible world (as it is for the Manicheans); rather, it is a more subtle problem of perception and will: we are prone to view things materialistically and hence unaware that the sensible world is but a tiny portion of what is real, an error Augustine increasingly attributes to original sin

That something more is provided by the doctrine of illumination, the thesis that God plays an active role in human cognition by somehow illuminating the individual's mind so that it can perceive the intelligible realities which God simultaneously presents to it. Augustine is notoriously vague as to the precise details and mechanics of this divine illumination

For Augustine, as for many classical thinkers, language is a kind of third realm entity. Belonging neither to the world nor to mind, it is an instrument used by minds to communicate about the world outside them, and direct acquaintance is what explains its ability to do so. It is important to note the plausibility of some of the assumptions that underlie it: (a) language is an instrument that mediates our relation to the world and to other minds; (b) there is a distinction between signs and what they signify; and (c) our relation to the sensible world is based on direct experience.

In the books of the Platonists, Augustine encountered an ontology in which there is a fundamental divide between the sensible/physical and the intelligible/spiritual. In spite of the dualistic implications, this is clearly not intended to be a dualistic alternative to the moral dualism of the Manicheans and other gnostics. Instead, the divide is situated within what is supposed to be a larger, unified hierarchy that begins with absolute unity and progressively unfolds through various stages of increasing plurality and multiplicity, culminating in the lowest realm of isolated and fragmented material objects observed with the senses. Thus, for Augustine, God is regarded as the ultimate source and point of origin for all that comes below. Equated with Being, Goodness, and Truth, God is the unchanging point which unifies all that comes after and below within an abiding and providentially-ordained rational hierarchy.

For Augustine, the evil of sexual immorality was not in the sexual act itself, but rather in the emotions that typically accompany it. Augustine contrasts love, which is enjoyment on account of God, and lust, which is not on account of God. For Augustine, proper love exercises a denial of selfish pleasure and the subjugation of corporeal desire to God. He wrote that the pious virgins raped during the sack of Rome were innocent because they did not intend to sin. Similarly, he defended the ever Virgin Mary as the Mother of God, who, because of her virginity, is full of grace. Likewise, he affirmed that the Virgin Mary "conceived as virgin, gave birth as virgin and stayed virgin forever".

Another, related, feature of Augustine's epistemology is his willingness to accept that much of our belief about the world must as a matter of practical necessity rest upon trust and authority. According to him, we cannot hope to verify all our beliefs about history and even many beliefs about the present are a matter of trust. Here as elsewhere, he emphasizes the role of belief as opposed to understanding, pointing out not only that we must believe many things that we cannot understand but also that belief is a necessary condition of understanding

Augustine taught that Original sin of Adam and Eve was either an act of *foolishness* followed by *pride* and *disobedience* to God or the opposite: pride came first. From this, Augustine expanded on the consequences of Original Sin. He refused to agree that libido wounded human will and mind, insisting instead that the human nature was given the power to act, to speak, and to think when God created it. Human nature cannot lose its moral capacity for doing good, but a person is free to act or not to act in a righteous way.

Augustine taught that some people are predestined by God to salvation by an eternal, sovereign decree which is not based on man's merit or will.

Augustine took the view that the Biblical text should not be interpreted as properly literal, but rather as metaphorical, if it contradicts what we know from science and our God-given reason. While each passage of Scripture has a literal sense, this "literal sense" does not always mean that the Scriptures are mere history; at times they are rather an extended metaphor.

Against certain Christian movements, some of which rejected the use of Hebrew Scripture, Augustine countered that God had chosen the Jews as a special people, and he considered the scattering of Jewish people by the Roman Empire to be a fulfillment of prophecy. Augustine, who believed Jewish people would be converted to Christianity at "the end of time," argued that God had allowed them to survive their dispersion as a warning to Christians; as such, he argued, they should be permitted to dwell in Christian lands