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James Wetzel

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In this study James Wetzel details the emergence of Augustine's concept of will out of his reflections on virtue, grace, and the good life. Other studies have acknowledged Augustine's role in the creation and transmission of an essentially new concept of will, foreign to classical philosophy, but they have tended to apply to his work an anachronistic distinction between theology and philosophy. Wetzel argues for continuity between Augustine's initial philosophical interests in human freedom and virtue and his subsequent focus on the nature and necessity of grace. By setting Augustine's doctrine of grace in the context of his Platonism, Wetzel is able to provide a philosophical assessment of his concept of will as it takes shape first in response to pagan philosophy and second in reaction to Pelagian theology.

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AUGUSTINE AND THE LIMITS OF VIRTUE

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To my students

Tu autem bonum nullo indigens bono semper
quietus es, quoniam tua quies tu ipse es. Et hoc
intellegere quis hominum dabit homini?

Conf. XIII

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Death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death.

If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present.

Our life has no end in just the way in which our visual field has no limits.

Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* 6.4311

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Preface

I tend to approach philosophy theologically, and so it is not surprising that I am drawn to Augustine. His was the greatest attempt in late antiquity and perhaps of any time thereafter to find in the greatest philosopher of antiquity, Plato, a theologian *manqué*. But I was not able to appreciate the ingenuity and profundity of Augustine's Platonism until I was able to appreciate Platonism. For that I have to thank Iris Murdoch and Martha Nussbaum, whose portraits of Plato in *The Sovereignty of Good* and *The Fragility of Goodness* respectively converted me to Platonic philosophy. Murdoch is a fellow Platonist but not a fellow theist; Nussbaum is neither Platonist nor theist. I doubt whether either philosopher would find the Platonism I ascribe to Augustine very congenial. Anyone familiar with their works will nevertheless recognize their pervasive influence on what I have written.

Augustine's Platonism led me to consider in particular his conception of will. The theme of willing and limits to willing runs throughout his writings, not as a constant fixed by a set of definitions, but as an increasingly intricate web of connections between knowledge, virtue, grace, and the philosophical quest for happiness. In my attempt to reconstruct this web and display its marvelous coherence, I found it impossible to maintain a sharp distinction between interpretation and reconstruction. This is likely to bother only those who see philosophy and the history of philosophy as two entirely different preoccupations. My excuse for mixing them here is that I could not make sense of what Augustine said without sometimes having to consider what he was trying to say, what he

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might have said, or even on occasion what he ought to have said. I have no general theory to offer of the role of philosophy in history or vice versa, and therefore my style of analysis must stand or fall on its particular ability to illuminate Augustine's thought.

This book began as a dissertation, and I would like to acknowledge the readers on my examination committee. Richard Norris, Charles Larmore, Robert Somerville, Herbert Deane, and Wayne Proudfoot read my work carefully and critically, pointing out places of infelicitous expression, obscure argumentation, and dubious translation. I have benefited from their encouragement and from the seriousness with which they took their task. Wayne Proudfoot, my principal adviser, has been a good friend and mentor, and over the course of my graduate career at Columbia University, he helped me to hone my skills as a philosopher of religion. And were it not for my compatriots David Wisdo, Eric Brandt, and Ava Chamberlain on the one hand and for the Charlotte Newcombe Fellowship Foundation on the other, my graduate career would have seemed and been longer than it was. My compatriots filled my time at Columbia with fellowship and conversation, and Charlotte Newcombe funded a year of writing.

In the trek from dissertation to book, I happily incurred further debts. I have learned a great deal about Augustine from J. Patout Burns and William Babcock, with whom I have corresponded since 1987, when we met at a conference at Trinity College, University of Toronto. My understanding of Augustine's theology of grace would have been much impoverished without Burns, and I have come to approach Augustine's early work largely through Babcock's questions. Jerry Balmuth, my colleague in Philosophy and Religion at Colgate University, displayed an unsettling ability to see what I was saying before I had even thought of saying it, and I am in his debt for some of the connective tissue in my argument. Maude Clark, also a colleague, kept me honest with her Nietzschean skepticism of Augustine. Many of my revisions of Augustine were first tested on my students in Medieval Philosophy, much to their bemusement, I fear, but I thank them none the less.

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My editor at Cambridge, Alex Wright, who heard me promise to meet one deadline after another, and my wife, Pamela Biel, who read my typescript and disentangled my prose when she could, impressed me greatly with the virtue of patience. Pauline Marsh, my congenial copy-editor, impressed me with her prudence.

Academic etiquette has long recognized a form of Augustinian wisdom. We claim our vices as our own and share the credit of our virtues with others. I have come to understand and value this wisdom over the course of having written this book.

Abbreviations

INDIVIDUAL WORKS

<i>Ad Simpl.</i>	<i>De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum (Responses to Various Questions from Simplician)</i>
<i>C. duas ep. Pel.</i>	<i>Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum (Against Two Letters of the Pelagians)</i>
<i>C. Fortunatum</i>	<i>Contra Fortunatum (Against Fortunatus)</i>
<i>C. Iul. op. imp.</i>	<i>Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum (Against Julian (the unfinished work))</i>
<i>Conf.</i>	<i>Confessiones (Confessions)</i>
<i>De beata vita</i>	<i>(The Blessed Life)</i>
<i>De civ. Dei</i>	<i>De civitate Dei (City of God)</i>
<i>De corr. et gr.</i>	<i>De correptione et gratia (On Correction and Grace)</i>
<i>De doct. chr.</i>	<i>De doctrina christiana (On Christian Education)</i>
<i>De dono persev.</i>	<i>De dono perseverantiae (The Gift of Perseverance)</i>
<i>De duab. an.</i>	<i>De duabus animabus (The Doctrine of Two Souls)</i>
<i>De gr. Chr.</i>	<i>De gratia Christi (The Grace of Christ)</i>
<i>De gr. et lib. arb.</i>	<i>De gratia et libero arbitrio (On Grace and Free Choice)</i>
<i>De lib. arb.</i>	<i>De libero arbitrio (On Free Choice)</i>
<i>De mor.</i>	<i>De moribus ecclesiae catholicae (On the Conduct of the Catholic Church)</i>
<i>De nat. et gr.</i>	<i>De natura et gratia (Nature and Grace)</i>
<i>De nupt. et conc.</i>	<i>De nuptiis et concupiscentia (Marriage and Concupiscentence)</i>
<i>De praed. sanct.</i>	<i>De praedestinatione sanctorum (The Predestination of the Saints)</i>

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<i>De spir. et litt.</i>	<i>De spiritu et littera (The Spirit and the Letter)</i>
<i>De Trin.</i>	<i>De Trinitate (The Trinity)</i>
<i>De ver. rel.</i>	<i>De vera religione (On True Religion)</i>
<i>Propp.</i>	<i>Expositio quarundam propositionum ex epistula ad Romanos (Exposition of Selected Propositions from Letter to the Romans)</i>
<i>Retrac.</i>	<i>Retractationes (Reconsiderations)</i>
<i>Sol.</i>	<i>Soliloquia (The Soliloquies)</i>

EDITIONS

CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
OSA	Œuvres de Saint Augustin